



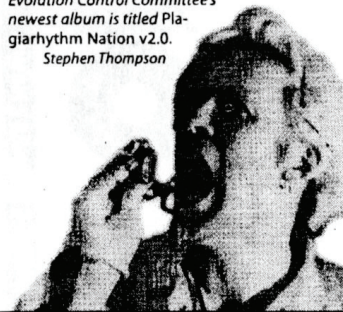
justify your existence

Evolution Control Committee

The Onion: Why should anyone buy your record?
TradeMark: [submitted via e-mail] You should buy our CD because of the creepy-looking caricature of Dan Rather looking like he's about to deck you, though fans of sample-heavy, plunderphonic-style, mash-up, "plagiarhythmic" music might like the tunes, as well.
O: Do you think your record will help people?
TM: Like all releases of the Evolution Control Committee's varied departments, it is designed to help navigate the future. Our *Plagiarhythm Nation v2.0* should be viewed as a roadmap for the future of music.
Mike: Are there roadmaps in the CD booklet? I'm driving to Vanuatu soon.
O: Do you think your record could save lives?
Pantshead: If it's mapless, it'll save Mike from trying to drive to an island on the Pacific Rim.
TM: As the RIAA has stated time and time again, countless lives have been lost to peer-to-peer file sharing and Internet music piracy. Yet few people know that RIAA is an acronym for "Really, I Am Alive." The balance between anonymous life and asynchronous death is delicate. To stop the RIAA before they kill

again, listen to our CD. Tragedy will be delayed by 52 and a half minutes.
O: Is this record your ticket to heaven?
TM: One man's heaven is another man's 7-11. We recommend that each listener start the CD playing, close their eyes, and imagine heaven. Imagine the pearly gates swinging open for you. You waltz inside, walking past the serene, smiling faces of your deceased relatives and loved ones. As you approach a golden throne, you kneel reverently and peer into the face of God. As you study the face, you realize that it is the face of Jamie Farr, from the TV show *M*A*S*H*. And he has a big zit on the side of his nose that you can't stop staring at. "I'm just filling in," he says soothingly. "Do you have to stare at my nose like that?"
M: In heaven, everything is fine. Maximum fine \$500.

Evolution Control Committee's newest album is titled *Plagiarhythm Nation v2.0*.
 Stephen Thompson



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The Resistant Language

Dusted Features

Dusted's Ben Tausig reacts to and interacts with Plunderphonics Evolution Control Committee and discusses the nature of sampled sounds.



The Resistant Language

In Columbus, Ohio, home of shopping malls and college football, the Evolution Control Committee (ECC) make audio collage with homemade equipment and a caustic, aware sense of humor. They may be out of place amidst 711,470 Buckeye fans, but their musical approach is familiar to anyone within 20 miles of a freemium radio station: spent cartridges of aural miscellany, coercive radio jingles, great songs, terrible songs, soundbites, interviews, 99-cent bin records, field recordings, and noise? In short, anything audibly perceptible is ground up into tiny units, letters perhaps, and then rearranged to form words and sentences in the language of pastiche audio composition. ECC, like most groups working under the rubric of "plunderphonics," tend to use this language critically. The corporate media in particular are singled out for criticism, and the recontextualization of aural output (commercials, monologues, the evening news) is meant to mockingly highlight both the beneficial and destructive potential of mass media. Ever in this vein, ECC's most recent album, *Plagiarhythm Nation*, is available now on the Seeland label. In a recent conversation with tradeMark G, co-founder of the music division of the ECC, we discussed the group's artistry, humor, and political goals.

Briefly: Mark and the Evolution Control Committee seek to provoke outrage, attention, laughter, and frequently legislation through the intelligent and unsolicited use of trademarked material on their albums. This combination of techniques is broadly known as

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music, art and culture in Columbus

ECC mixes a new future for MUSIC

17 Latin American Gothic Actor/farmer Luis Guzman in strictest "Confidence"

23 ACME Moving Co. Stairport Short North gallery picks up stakes

32 Dixie Chick-od Men: McCarthysm stamps on American freedom



SPINNING A NEW FUTURE ON OLD MUSIC: THE EVOLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE

THE EVOLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE MIXES A NEW FUTURE FOR POPULAR MUSIC

BY STEPHEN SLAYBAUGH

Constructing its music out of samples from a wide range of sources, making electronic instruments out of thimbles and kitchen appliances, and continuing to conduct activities in the face of adversity, the Evolution Control Committee has been exploring the future of popular music in relative secrecy, sporadically releasing its experiments upon an unsuspecting world.

Not really a band, the group that releases music under the ECC moniker is actually the music division of a larger worldwide operation that, unbeknownst to most, seers the evolution of politics, art and human kind in general.

The music division is a fluid organization of an unknown number of members with varied specialties and which operates out of an undisclosed location in Columbus. (For this interview, I was taken to the ECC's reception area, but was not allowed into the main headquarters.)

What is known is that ECC's music division was founded in 1986 by tradeMark Gunderson, his brother Mike and a deity then known as John Phillips Suicide but who now goes by DJ Pantshead. The larger ECC organization instigated the construction of the division out of a desire to answer the question, "What's next for music?" Gunderson and his cohorts have been trying to answer that quandary ever since.

The group has focused on splicing together old recordings to create new music, an answer that's been given greater credence recently with the rise of mash-ups. juxtaposing elements from popular songs to create new works, mash-ups have become popular in England in particular.

"The Whip Cream Mixes" came out as a seven-inch single released by [the label] Erie Materials in 1996," Gunderson recalls of an influential ECC recording. "The tracks are very simple really; it's just the a cappella vocals of Chuck D from Public Enemy over the instrumental music of Herb Albert and the Tijuana Brass from the classic *Whip Cream and Other Delights*. It worked well enough—I think Erie Materials did five pressings of the record. It's been cited as the record that started mash-ups. So that's a pretty good confirmation that at least we were right on the money for that one as being the predictor of the future of music."

Gunderson, who came to the organization from a background in computer hacking, sees a correlation between his past work and what he's doing with the ECC.

"One of the measures of success of someone's hack had to do with the elegance factor," he explains. "The elegance was how easily one could do the hack in as few keystrokes or as few actions as were needed, and with hopefully the most results." The Whip Cream Mixes is in a way a show of this sort of elegance. It was something that was executed with the minimal amount of work with the maximum amount of effect.

But like computer hacking, not everyone sees the aesthetic value in assimilating copyrighted works as elements of new pieces. In 1998, the ECC released "Rocked by Rape," a single featuring samples of newscaster Dan Rather saying violent words mangled to AC/DC's "Back in Black." CBS television threatened legal action if the group didn't take the song out of circulation.

As the single was pressed in a limited number, it was soon a moot contention, though the group elected to include it on *Plagiarhythm Nation*, its recently released full-

length on Seeland Records, the label run by Negativland, another group who makes sample-based music and that has seen its share of legal threats over the years.

"We think that sample-oriented music may have come to the point where it's not as much of a risk as it once was," Gunderson says. "Obviously it is a risk because we did get a cease and desist letter from the lawyers of CBS about this. But now we're seeing things like bastard pop and mash-ups becoming much more popular, and this may be paving a path towards the style of music being seen, if not as legitimate, then on its way. I don't view the word 'legitimate' as being a bad word—I think it's perfectly fine—it's just evolution."

Another way the ECC sees music evolving is the extinction of recorded music. With the proliferation of file sharing on the Internet, Gunderson feels that the CD will go the way of the eight-track, only not to be replaced by a new format, but with a greater emphasis on live performances.

As such, the ECC is developing new instruments to perform this music. "For us, the impetus was seeing many musicians, like say Kid 606, who were very talented at doing laptop music, but showed up on stage with just the laptop. It just isn't very interesting to watch," he says. "When we were playing shows in Australia, we heard the term 'tax preparation artists,' because they all looked like they were preparing their tax returns. I couldn't agree more. It really is the most boring thing to watch."

"To us, there hasn't been a good way to present electronic music," Gunderson says. "We're going to arrive at a point where it's going to be necessary and we don't want to see electronic music left in the cyber dust. It would be very ironic that the ones whose music has become so possible because of the Internet's growth could be the ones left out of music's future because they have no way to participate in it."

To that effect, the division has already created the Dumbbass, an instrument com-

sisting of two gloves with thimbles at the end of each fingertip. The thimbles send electronic impulses to circuitry, triggering tones, samples or loops. "An audience can actually watch and understand how it is working and see the music performed while at the same time be hearing an electronic music concert," Gunderson explains.

The ECC is also working on converting kitchen appliances into instruments, dubbing the project the "kitchen of the future."

"The kitchen of the future will be all kitchen appliances that will be more or less be MIDI controllers. To get performers who can go on stage with that, we are looking at people who are more like Emert than a guitar soloist. We need people who are going to be familiar with kitchen appliances rather than guitars or synthesizers."

The band will be taking its odd instruments on the road in support of *Plagiarhythm Nation* next month. The record is the band's first proper full-length and has been long in the making. While not a concept record, it presents a certain point of view, not only of popular music but of society.

Such larger messages are not something the ECC is necessarily consciously developing. Nonetheless, a song like "Rocked by Rape" is a biting piece of social commentary, one that seems especially fitting in these times of nightly war coverage. More important to the ECC is the idea that music need not rely on new developments for new sounds.

"One of the basic tenets that we are trying to put forth is that new music doesn't have to be about new technology and new sounds," Gunderson points out.

"You can make new music and provide some very interesting new directions with some very old things. We actually have this whole notion going of recycling everything: old appliances, electronics, rebuilding old computers into this custom circuitry, recycling old sounds into new songs. You can use very old stuff and get very interesting new results if you spend the time to explore them to the fullest."

THE EVOLUTION CONTROL COMMITTEE will celebrate the release of "Plagiarhythm Nation" when it returns to its home base on May 17 at MadLab.