



The Slackers Newsletter

Rude. Reckless.

Better Late Than Never: The Official Newsletter of The Slackers Issue #33

APRIL 4TH • HARRISBURG • STAGE ON HERR	MAY 4 • ALBANY • LARK HALL
APRIL 5 • PITTSBURGH • MR. SMALLS	MAY 5 • PROVIDENCE • ALCHEMY
APRIL 6 • CLEVELAND • Grog SHOP	MAY 16 • STUART • TERRA FERMATA
APRIL 7 • DETROIT • MAGIC BAG	MAY 17 • MELBOURNE • DEBAUCHERY
APRIL 8 • BUFFALO • REC ROOM	MAY 18 • SANFORD • WEST END TRADING CO
APRIL 10 • KITCHENER • THE HUB	MAY 19 • TAMPA • HOOCH AND HIVE
APRIL 11 • TORONTO • VELVET UNDERGROUND	JUNE 7 • EDMONTON • STARLITE ROOM
APRIL 12 • OTTAWA • OVERFLOW BREWERY	JUNE 8 • CALGARY • DICKENS PUB
APRIL 13 • QUEBEC • L'ANTIBAR	JUNE 9 • WINNIPEG • BULLDOG EVENT CENTER
APRIL 14 • MONTREAL • CAFÉ CAMPUS	JUNE 14 • NEW YORK CITY • ROCKS OFF CONCERT CRUISE
APRIL 26 • BALTIMORE • OTTO BAR	JUNE 16 • BOSTON • ROCK ON CONCERT CRUISE
APRIL 27 • SAYREVILLE • STARLAND BALLROOM	JUNE 21 • VICTORIA • VICTORIA SKA REGGAE FESTIVAL
MAY 3 • PHILADELPHIA • 118 NORTH	

Spring Tour 2024

The Slackers have started our touring season and completed our first five gigs. I'm writing this at an Airbnb on a day off in Buffalo before we head up to Canada tomorrow. In the background, some band and crew are playing pool and listening to the James Brown live at the Apollo album.

We just had a feast like we do on off days when we have access to a kitchen. Jay and Dave made BBQ Chicken, Fried Chicken, Grilled Eggplant, Grilled Squash, Spinach and Turnip Greens with Garlic and Olive Oil, Rice and Black Beans, and Avocado with Olive Oil and Balsamic. It was mix of styles and food traditions that is similar to what we do with music. Taking classics and giving them the Slackers' twist.

This year of 2024, we hope to offer you a feast of Ska music both live and on record. We have completed the first five shows and we have 85 more to go.

Thank you for all the love and support.

See you on the road in 2024

#weareslackers

#youareslackers



Gregory Lee 1970-2024 Rest in Power



This march, we lost Greg Lee, a good friend, and a passionate fan of Jamaican Ska music who became an icon of the American Ska scene. Greg was the lead singer of Hepcat from its start in 1989 until his untimely death on March 19, 2024.

Hepcat was known for playing Ska music that was steeped in its Jamaican roots and also dabbled with Latin, Jazz, and RnB influences. It was smooth but from the heart. Greg told me that he started Hepcat because he was enjoying the old Ska the djs were playing before shows more than the music of the live Ska bands in California in the 1980s.

I first met Greg at a Toots and the Maytals show at the Hollywood Bowl in around 1990. Well, I didn't meet him officially until a couple months later, but at the show, Toots called everyone to come down and dance in the front of the stage during his classic "pomps and pride." A bunch of us rushed past the bouncers and crowded the stage. Arms linked we were leaping up and down in front of Toots. I remember being with this tall thin Black dude arms linked beside me. Apparently, Alex Desert was on the other side of

Greg. We didn't know each other yet, but we were united in love of music.

I was in Hepcat with Greg Lee from 1990 – 1992. I watched as he developed into a confident front person and one of the leaders of the band. He had an unbounded passion for Ska music and his heroes like the Skatalites, Toots Hibbert, Justin Hines, the Blues Busters, and Leroy Sibbles. This passion was contagious and the band slowly developed a following.

After Hepcat, we became better friends if anything. I would go hangout with him in LA as part of my vacations away from the East Coast. He always encouraged me to quit the Graduate School thing and come back to Ska music. He was very supportive of the Slackers and both bands always felt a kinship in style and passions.

It's been really hard to adjust to the reality that he is gone. I just saw him 3 weeks before he died. We got together at a bar in LA and just talked about life. Shared funny road memories. Made observations about people we knew in common. Talked about being a Dad and our kids. When I left, I had no idea it would be the last time I would see him alive.

I try to remember the good times we had. He had a smile that always got over on me, even when I was pissed at him. He was always ready with a warm greeting hug and a story.

This is the last one I'll share. Greg was an avid scooterist. So one day he was driving one of his Vespa's in the Hollywood Hills and a car completely cut him off. His scooter went into the car while he was ejected directly up in the air. He told me he had an idea of starting to run while he was still midair. So he started moving his arms and legs and somehow landed his feet and jogged along the road, until he decelerated. I totally believe Greg did this stuntman level feat. He had cat like reflexes. He was telling me this story and all I could think was "of course you did." He made the impossible possible.

Gregory Wendell Lee, Rest in Power.



Vic Ruggiero on 'The Art Teachers': Part 1



The Art Teachers.

i was an artsy kid i guess , but i didn't wear it much... it as an identity i mean. i dressed vaguely punk, tho i was more just a mess in a long army coat and greasy hair... i was good with art and music class, and i spent my time avoiding the world in those rooms as much as possible... plus the guys who taught those classes liked me. Mr Bates the art teacher didn't mind me sitting in any of his classes when i was free and even invited me to skip other classes if i wanted to catch visiting guest artists and events.

The band teacher actually gave me pre-signed hall passes practice whenever i wanted, (on the condition i wouldn't skip tests)

Those guys would even get me outta trouble, or at least keep my punishments in the jurisdiction of their classrooms... Bates, the art teacher commuted my in-house suspension once saying "you let ME have him! After all he disrespected MY art room! "

He laughed with me later, admitting that my 11x17 portrait of a human sized erection wearing a polo shirt which read "Ardsley High School Students Make the Difference" was so funny he wanted it for himself.

It wasn't my fault that someone grabbed it from my art locker and taped it on the front door of the school on a PTA conference day!

When he asked me i told him honestly i wouldn't do that, especially for his sake cuz i seriously appreciated the sanctuary of the art room and wouldn't want to do endanger that.

I was more than happy to clean paintbrushes and scrape dried clay and acrylic off the floors if it kept me out of High School Gen-Pop.

one of those days cleaning up, a drummer and tap-dancer buddy of mine named Jeff dropped in.

Us two and Bates got talking about creative moments when everything just clicks. Like when, in a flash you're better than you should be; unthinking, on auto pilot, watching it happen in front of you almost as a spectator. Practice and experiments morphing into a flash of unexpected mastery.

it was a great conversation.

i loved that we all knew this creative rush whether dancing, playing or painting... it wasn't attached to a particular art form.

We all 3 experienced the same thing, and Bates being an adult and teacher made it more profound...it was in fact the first time i realized he was a painter AND a teacher.

I asked when he discovered painting,
(and here, it begins)

He said he'd been in Medical School...

"MEDICAL SCHOOL!!", i thought., "wait.... whattt??!!"

the pinnacle of all societal expectations, the coveted Doctor ALL families want! BATES??

He continued, "i was almost finished actually, i had a few classes left, some humanities electives, which this school considered necessary to produce a 'well rounded doctor' haha... you could take photography, or poetry, so you could

be like e.e. cummings or something, yknow, Doctor Poet!", he said exhuberantly, "so anyway, i took a painting class! it sounded interesting, aaand...", he drew out the word long and shrugged and waved his hand, "i just LOVED IT! i mean, i felt like i was ALIVE! I took another painting class, and then one outside in town and... i just realized, Fuck this Doctor bullshit! hahah!! and that was it... i left!!"

Wow!! Now THIS... this was... a... REVELATION!!! a BLASPHEMY!!! MADNESS!!

Never had i heard of such a thing! Passing up prestige, wealth, family expectations for...

what?? ...HAPPINESS?!! MEANING???!!!

Feeling ...ALIVE??

i related , perhaps i only felt alive when playing piano...

"and that was... IT." i shrugged and said flatly, as if to punctuate, or affirm... but, also to gently push for more.

"There's other things than money i guess!", , he continued,

"there's... THIS hahah" pointing at himself flamboyantly.

"Of course my parents were a little upset... ha! but, yknow, they got over it"

There were other details... did his girlfriend leave him too? Maybe he met his wife in a painting class?

Whatever it was, painting set his life on course, and that course had made left him not rich, but happy... an art teacher.... (even though he often looked frustrated in

classes) i saw this was the truth he told. He spoke confident and inspired, and it just ...blew my mind. Passing up being a doctor??... for ART!! ??

We 3 sharing this conversation added weight too. I sensed he talked to us as equals somehow, (or at least potential equals.)

His tone said, "you are doing something honorable... it **DESERVES** respect."

well, Jeff, always practicing, i could understand, but me?

Yes, was giving me respect for playing music and being a decent artist.



i had never experienced this from any adult. No one saw my musical or artistic ability as anything but novelty. Bates had even told me i could work as an illustrator...

"Hmmm..." Something had been introduced to me, but i didn't know what to make of it.

Ara on Hotel Mornings





Hotel Morning. Reading in the dark with my little book light attached to this amazing biography of Jack Bruce, drinking all the coffee and trying not to disturb the snoring Vic. In about an hour I'll have to gently shake his bed and say, "Rise and shine, Billy Joel!" But for now, peace, darkness and the morning after feeling of a satisfying show the night before.

New Tshirt Designs and Other Merch

It's springtime and we have some new tshirt designs for you. Check out these options!



We also have an unprecedented amount of vinyl at the merch table these days. We have Red Light, the Question, Wasted Days, Peculiar, Self Medication, and Sunlight in stock. Soon we will have a reissue of Close My Eyes and a new single of new original music is planned for the fall.

Get your merch direct from the band
at www.theslackers.com/store

History of US Ska Episode 9



By the 2010s, there were a myriad of ska bands and lots of little ska scenes throughout the USA. The reflexive hate and resentment against ska in the early 2000s began to subside. For many bands, 'ska' became just another music you could dabble in. For example, Vampire Weekend, a band classified as 'indie rock' had several songs that showed a ska influence. [Vampire Weekend- A Punk \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VampireWeekend-A-Punk) And Ted Leo wrote 'where have all the Rude Boys Gone?' with overt

references to the Jerry and Terry (of the Specials). [Ted](#)

[Leo/Pharmacists "Where Have All The Rudeboys Gone?" \(youtube.com\)](#)



Despite such moments, as far the larger American psyche was concerned, Ska remained on the fringes, but being on the fringes changed dramatically as social media came into its own.

Unlike the 1990s with its email lists and fanzines, the Ska underground of the 2010s was existing online in the new social media of Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. It made every band into a DIY publicist. You could tell people all around the world about your music and your concerts at a moments' notice. Initially, this was a very powerful tool.

The good part of social media was that it strengthened Ska communities around the world. It was easy to keep in touch with each other. You could promote a whole tour on facebook and have people know about it. You could share footage from a show and thousands of people would see it.

The downside was the end of journalism and the end of promotion. As social media blew up, old standbys like the Village Voice and LA Weekly shrunk and then disappeared. Local promoters also got used to not making flyers and posters and building communities themselves. They figured

the bands' social media would take care of everything....until it didn't. Without other forms of promotion, when people got burnt on social media and stopped using it, they just stopped knowing about shows.

As the 2010s wore on, it became clear that social media was not a level playing field. Band flyers were squashed in the algorithm. People who signed up to follow a band did not end up with that band in their feed. You ended up with videos of scantily clad girls doing dance routines and pop star gossip you didn't ask for. By the late 2010s, the only way on Facebook that you could get your followers to reliably see your posts was to pay for ads.



King Stitt - Fire Corner rare clip

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But the community aspect of social media was great. All those obscure 45s from King Stitt that you could never find in the early 1990s? They are now on Youtube. And... you can find someone online who will argue with you about which one is the best one. You can even see a live performance by King Stitt doing 'Fire Corner!' https://youtu.be/dqgEAH04qjg?si=BADh9E_6PGgnp11D

Of course with all this knowledge at your finger tips, most people just use it to find the lowest common denominator. A facebook page like Hornpub would host hundreds of posts about 'is this ska?' Apparently it has something to do with checkerboards, horns, and mozzarella sticks. Yeah, mozzarella sticks. To this day, I'll admit, I don't get what mozzarella sticks has to do with Ska. I'll just say that it seems to be shorthand for a lot of things that I hate being associated with Ska.

I once heard Ska described as "what plays in a 13-year-old kid's head when he gets extra mozzarella sticks" and nothing in this world is more accurate.



In the 2010s, there were some people under the age of 30 starting ska bands and trying to find their way to new stuff. Jer, who was born in 1995, the year 'ska made it', started Skatune Network in 2014. They started making a name for themselves doing covers that showed their roots in 1990s Ska. More on Jer in the next and last chapter.

The Interrupters came up in the 2010s. They started as Tim Armstrongs' backing band and that has always been in evident in their sound. The Interrupters sound like a cross between Rancid and the Selecter. If Rancid did a whole ska set, as opposed to 2-3 songs, it would sound like the Interrupters. In an era, where Ska was mostly absent from the charts, the Interrupters proved that with the right package, Ska could easily be back in the charts again. The

Interrupters - https://youtu.be/qEVTRsNuLNM?si=ZQNMKPFSC09_0xNo



Further away from the suits and vintage looks, there were plenty of bands that were so far away from 1990s 3rd Wave to pose the constant debate question, 'Is this ska?' Streetlight Manifesto is a case in point. They certainly have a lot of horns on occasion. It can be very orchestral even. The vocals tend to be shouted and somewhat cryptic. Does it sound like the Skatalites? Not at

all. Does it sound like the Specials? Vaguely. Fishbone? Not too much. Maybe there is a starting point in 1990s 3rd wave ska only vaguely. Maybe the sing along choruses of 1990s pop punk? Do you like it? I'll let you be the judge as to what you think of it.

["We Will Fall Together" by Streetlight Manifesto Official Music Video \(youtube.com\).](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)



Jeff Rosenstock is another person who does Alternative Rock with a little ska influence. I remember other Slackers telling me about this 'ska' band, Bomb the Music Industry. Then they opened for us around 2010? I was a bit puzzled by the Ska label on them because I didn't hear any Ska or Reggae influence at all. It had a confessional style of song writing. Like reading your diary through a microphone. Poetry. Sometimes it sounds like the Talking Heads? Or Pop Punk. And maybe even some Emo? (gasp!) And yeah, every 20 minutes or so an upbeat or guitar skank can be heard. But the influence is not primary to the music. Again, this analysis puts aside whether its good or not. Again, I'll leave that up to you.

["I LOOK LIKE SHIT" by JEFF ROSENSTOCK \[2012\] \(Full Album\) \(youtube.com\)](#)

The sounds were popular in the southwest, Texas, south Florida, and to a lesser extent. Basically, anyplace there was some sort of Latino population in the US, there was a ska band. This is an Inspector crowd in Los Angeles in 2015.



The East Los Angeles scene probably was the biggest ska scene the country in the 2010s. (Maybe, it still is?)

Underground Ska festivals would regularly draw 1000s of people. Ska Wars – Los Angeles is one of these festivals that has continued up to the present day. Here is its 2018 lineup.

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This is not to say that bands influenced by Jamaican music of the 1960s and 1970s disappeared in the 2010s. The Slackers stuck around. We kept on working on our songwriting what Vic had coined 'imaginary Jamaican RocknRoll.' We did crowd funding for the Radio, the My

Bed is a Boat EP, and our self titled Album. We began regularly selling out around 15 medium sized venues around the US every year. Whether we could get anyone outside of our scene to believe that we did it was another story. At least, we got a record label again with Pirates Press and we kept working our developing our little music cult. The Slackers The Boss <https://youtu.be/Ut3NvoDKnxU?si=DEoLVV90aqzbUYVa>



The Aggrolites were also around. They had spawned a legion of imitators with 'aggro', 'lites', 'ites', and 'ians' in the name. The Aggrolites themselves remained very close to

their source material. Occasionally the funky reggae would verge on just being funky but mostly you could still hear the sounds of 1968-1973 Jamaica in their music. Los Angeles also had bands like the Delirians and Steady 45s that picked up where the Aggro and Hepcat had left off.

In New York in the 2010s there was a first generation of bands with an interest in roots since the NYC Ska Mob era of the 1990s, the Forthrights, Sammy K, Maddie Ruthless, and most importantly, the Frighteners. Their sound even had a moniker, 'Brooklyn Rocksteady.'

Unfortunately, The Frighteners first album on Daptone records was tragically also their last. Dan Klein aka Brukkie Dan died in 2016 of complications from ALS. The music is a testament to the Forthrights abilities and producer Victor Axelrods' skills. "Nothing More To Say" – The Forthrights is a great album. <https://youtu.be/UQGOk2fmtFo?si=HYkfpnzSTwYa3HYG>



And so we are getting to the last chapter of my history of Ska in America. We are going to end up with the Trump Years, the Pandemic, Ska and Politics, and end with some ruminations on the many lives of the Skatalites.

A Note From Our Agent



As you are reading this, our fearless men are transversing the mighty Midwest and heading into the far North of Canada. I'll tell you this about touring bands – its difficult to be out on the road. Its tough to pack everything up and move every day, like a

nomad. To set everything up, to hope that the same denizens show up as they did in tours past, play your guts out, pack up and move on.

Being on the road is no joke – it's a non-stop parade of disconcerting situations – the planes don't run on time, the drives take too long, the numbers don't add up like you thought they would. And all the while, one constant emerges – the battle is singular. Your plans versus what the world has to offer. Your itinerary versus traffic and errors and foibles and rain and snow. We are never in control when we are on the road, and this sole axiom is humbling. It's wearying. It will break you down. You will stop walking in a straight line, due to drunkenness or exhaustion or the constant pummeling by forces that cannot be controlled.

And then, you rest. You have a cup of coffee. You center. You find solace. You do one of those mindfulness tricks that you learned along the way but thought you would never need to use. And you focus on the coffee you poured, and the ceramic cup that the coffee is in, and the way they painted the glaze and painted Miles Davis on your cup, and you wonder who made the coffee cup and what was Miles thinking when he made Sketches of Spain.

And you realize that this is all of our lives – what we plan, what we hope for, what we strive to achieve – all of this is pure speculation. The reality is that chaos exists. Exhaustion exists. Good people die, even those that inspire us and that carry a stronger semblance of the Good than we may ever reach. And that sucks.

And we move on. We have to. We have no choice. Europe is going to be amazing. Our December tour is going to be epic. We're focusing on great stuff, working on a new record, we got new tours. We're just some old dogs and we can only hope to have one more time.

If you want to book the Slackers for a club show, a festival, or a private party in your backyard email

John.pantle@onefiinix.com
Slackermusic1991@gmail.com



Tour Dates

We have announced all our shows through midOctober. We have around 30 more shows to announce for November-

December.
Hope to see ya at a show.....



April 26 Baltimore Otto Bar

April 27 Sayreville, NJ Starland Ballroom with Pietasters,
Catbite

May 3 Philadelphia 118 North

May 4 Albany Lark Hall

May 5 Providence Alchemy

May 16 Stuart, Fla Terra Fermata

May 17 Melbourne, Fla Debauchery

May 18 Sanford, Fla West End Trading Co

May 19 Tampa, Fla Hooch and Hive

June 7 Edmonton Starlite Room

June 8 Calgary Dickens Pub

June 9 Winnipeg Bulldog Event Center

June 14 New York Rock on Concert Cruise

June 16 Boston Rock on Concert Cruise

June 21 Victoria BC Victoria Ska Fest

Sept 13 Hampton, VA Supernova Festival

sept 19 Breda, NL Mezz

sept 20 Koln Gebaude 9

sept 21 Kortrijk, Wilde Westen

sept 22 Amsterdam Melkweg

sept 24 Brighton Arches

sept 25 London Underworld

sept 26 Glasgow Audio

sept 27 Sheffield Corporation

sept 28 Southampton 1865

sept 29 Bristol Exchange

sept 30 Swansea Sin City

oct 1 Boulogne Sur Mer Le Cave De Monseieur Guy

oct 2 Paris Glazart

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