Cedargate Records Interview

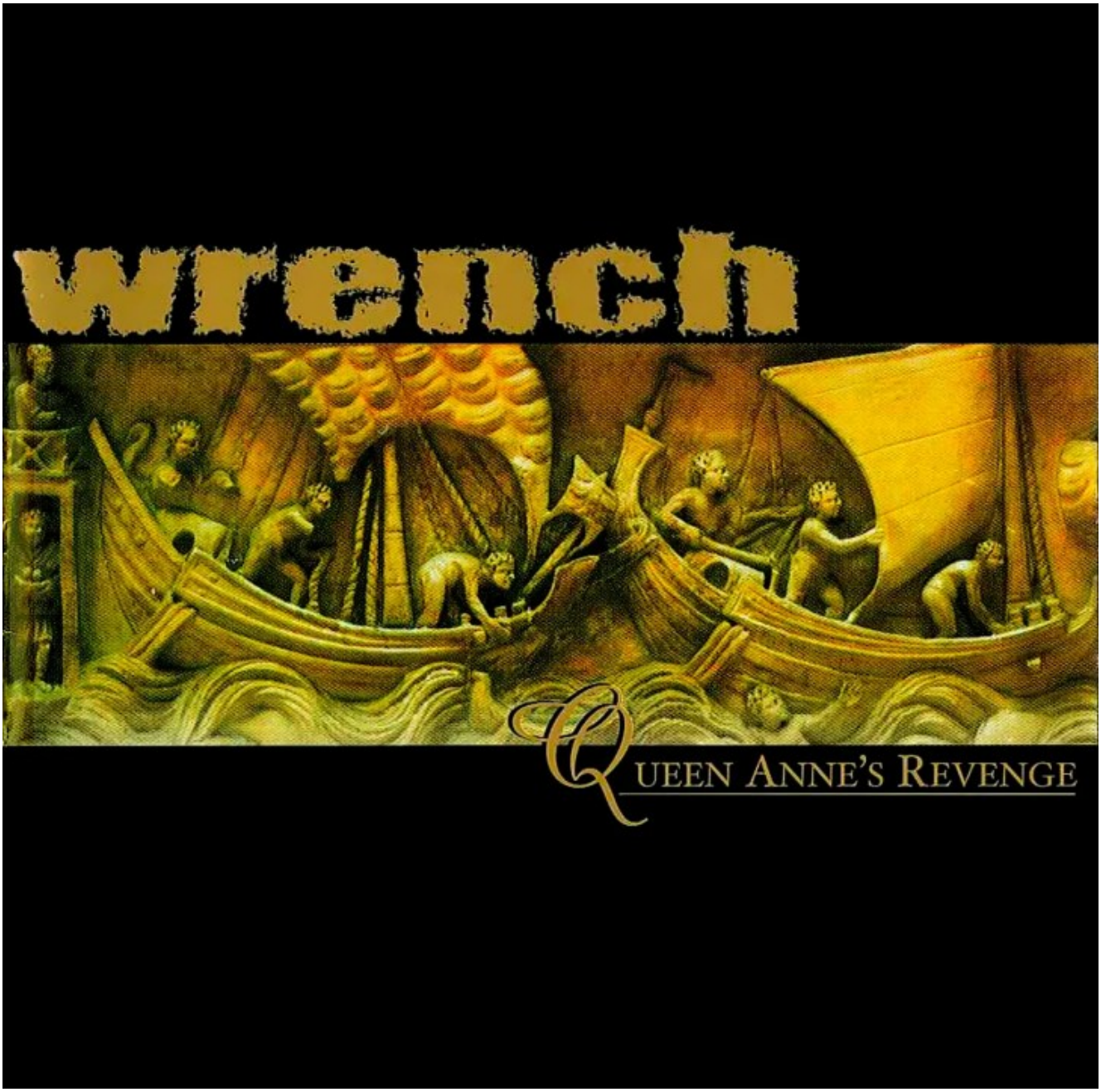
Cedargate Records was an independent record label from Southern California active in the late 90’s and early 00’s. The label has notably worked with Eighteen Visions, Wrench and The Angel Element and was operated by Zachary “Z1” Phelps (who played in Wrench, Eighteen Visions and more bands discussed below).

Cedargate Records’ complete discography is:

cg.1 Wrench “Torture of Restlessness and Vague Desire” CD, December 1998

cg.2 Eighteen Visions “Yesterday Is Time Killed” CD, March 1999

cg.3 The Angel Element “Letters in Dead Languages” CD, July 2000



cg.4 Wrench “Queen Anne’s Revenge” CD, August 2001

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Cedargate Records logo

-Hello Zach, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview about your label! First of all, where were you born? Have you been living in California your whole life?

Thank you for the opportunity. Yes, I have lived in California my whole life, born and raised in the Inland Empire.

-How did you get your nickname "Z1"?

The nickname was given to me while I was attending aviation school. We would have fun on the pilot headset's and that was my call sign.

-Can you recall your first hardcore show? Where, when and who was playing?

It was a hardcore/punk show with Sick of it All, Agent Orange, and Biohazard at Spanky's Café in Riverside, California, around the early 90's.

-What was your introduction to the California hardcore scene? What were some of your favorite bands back in the 90's/early 2000's?

Growing up with Spanky's Café in our backyard and later

moving down the road to Corona as Showcase Theater, my friend Jerry Hernandez and I had the accessibility to see our favorite bands come through.

In the early 90's my playlist consisted of Youth of Today, Uniform Choice, Agnostic Front, Integrity, 7 Seconds, Chorus of Disapproval, Gorilla Biscuits, Judge, and Chain of Strength. As the dynamics of the music progressed just before and during the 2000's, I found myself intrigued by what was being produced locally in Southern California with bands such as; Enewetak, Cain, Burial, Eighteen Visions, Adamantium, Unbroken, and Wrench. Of course, I think the common denominator for all of us was the Misfits.

-How old were you when you first started to play an instrument? How did that evolve into you playing hardcore music?

My father had an old acoustic Washburn Dreadnaught. At age 14 I was drawn to the power of the hardcore scene by their display of brotherhood, how advanced their thought process was, networking globally (prior to internet), their will to fight for what they believe, the talent being expressed in music, and fueling it all was a dedication to the cause. It was something powerful to belong to and so I was inspired to pick up and learn how to play.

-Can you talk about the various bands you've played in over the years?

Roughly between 1993 & 2003, I played for the following bands in this order and the line up during that time…

Refuge – Zachary Phelps (vocals), Scott Danough (guitar), Brandon Ortiz (bass), Marc Jackson (drums).

Burial – Chad Ronillo (vocals), Zachary Phelps (guitar), Doug (guitar), Scott Gibson (bass), Jason Welsher (drums).

Eighteen Visions – James Hart (vocals), Dave Peters (guitar), Brandan Schieppati (guitar), Zachary Phelps (bass), Ken Floyd (drums).

Sever – Zachary Phelps (vocals), Scott Danough (guitar), Josh Welsher (guitar), Darrell Wilson (bass), Jason Welsher (drums).

Daggers – Zachary Phelps (vocals), Scott Danough (guitar), Brandon Conway (bass) Derek Youngsma (drums).

Wrench – Jacob LaValley (vocals), Zachary Phelps (guitar), Lance Hunt (bass), Marc Jackson (drums).

cg.1 Wrench “Torture of Restlessness and Vague Desire”

CD, December 1998

-How did you end up starting a record label? Was it only yourself from the start or was it originally a collaborative band (Wrench) effort to put out the debut EP?

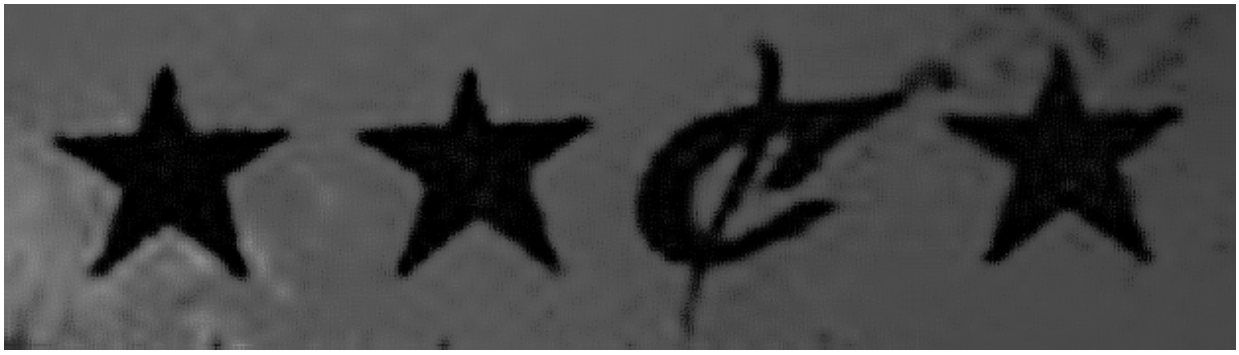
We knew the musical direction we wanted to take Wrench was not the popular route for labels, but it was the direction and style we wanted to pursue and enjoyed playing. At the time I was living in Orange County and with the drive to the Inland Empire for practice, I had a lot of time to think it through. I decided it would be a fun project to engage in and allow us full control.

-How did you fund the startup of this label? What about the rumor that you inherited money?

Unfortunately that's not what my bank statement reads. I did the research and knew the investment would give me an even or positive return while getting the music out at a low cost.

-How did you come to using the name "Cedargate Records"? What does it reference? Can you remember any other names that were considered?

Cedargate was the only name I considered. As a child during the summer and winter months, I would spend time on the Phelps Farm in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The name was to honor my Grandparents.



Cedargate Records logo

-Who came up with the idea of the Cedargate logo (the C with a bar through it)?

I wanted something unique, so I sought out Josh Welsher of ‘To Die For’. He’s a talented artist who has an original style.

-Can you remember any labels that really influenced you during the early years of Cedargate? Labels that made you want to start your own label or that you looked up to?

Actually, I admired all who were giving it a shot and having fun with it. In a way we were all entrepreneurs at a young age doing business with Fanzines, Bands, Record Labels, Clothing, or Promoting Shows.

-Wrench always listed their address as “Grand Terrace, CA”, yet the label address was listed as “Huntington Beach, CA”. Did the label start out in Grand Terrace before moving?

I wanted to keep Wrench separate from Cedargate as far as location and mail. Since I was living in various places in Newport Beach and Huntington Beach, I decided to locate the label in Orange County.

-How did Wrench form? How did each of you meet each other?

I took a short break to pursue some personal goals. The whole time I was itching for that adrenaline of playing fast, loud, and heavy. By this point I had the opportunity of previously playing and learning with three of the greatest guitar players; Marc Jackson (Known as a drummer, but multi talented), Scott Danough, and Dave Peters. So I called Marc to see if he wanted to jam. Marc invited his friend Lance who was amazing on the bass. The music flowed seamlessly with what we were each trying to achieve. Down the road we invited my friend Jake to try out

for vocals and everything seemed to be the perfect combination.

-How long were you guys a band before you recorded the EP "Torture of Restlessness and Vague Desire" ? Was this the first recording session from the band or was there a demo prior to this?

Just under a year and this was our first recording.

-How many copies were pressed of "Torture of Restlessness and Vague Desire" and can you recall exactly when it came out?

1,000 copies pressed on CD. It was recorded in October and released in December of 1998.

cg.2 Eighteen Visions "Yesterday Is Time Killed" CD, March 1999

-What was your role in Eighteen Visions? What's your most memorable moment while with them?

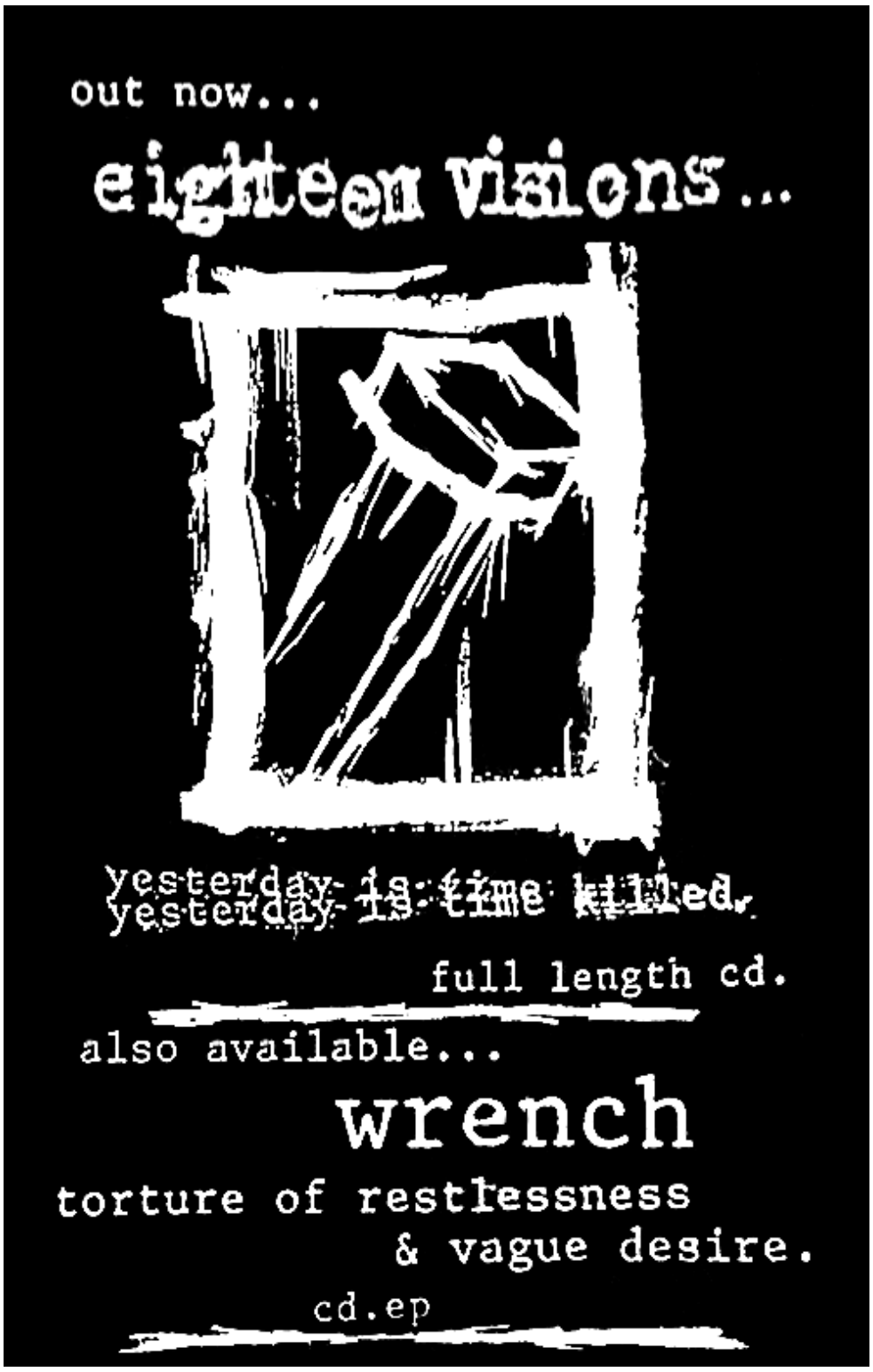
I played bass with them and I want to say it was before 1998. My most memorable moment was playing the Hardcore Formal in Costa Mesa, California. Burial and Eighteen Visions played that night and it was a low key show with good friends. I'm not sure who put it all together, but the whole concept I thought was a great idea.

-Between the release of "Lifeless" and "Yesterday Is Time Killed", some rumors of the band breaking up surfaced. Can you explain what was going on with the band? Can you remember the split with Deformity that never happened, for which two songs were recorded?

I think during that time some of the members wanted to go in different directions, but it ended up staying a strong unit between the releases. I'm not sure of the Deformity split.

-How did you end up getting to release Eighteen Visions' album on Cedargate? Were you still part of the band when you offered to put out the CD or did this come before or after?

When we agreed to do the album on Cedargate I was playing guitar for Wrench and no longer playing with them. They were looking to release something to catch the momentum of their rise and style. It was a good fit for Cedargate and Eighteen Visions to work together and capture the rawness of their heavy sound during this time.



Cedargate Records ad, circa 1999. Photo courtesy of Zac Phelps

-Did you contribute financially for Eighteen Visions to record at Doubletime Studio?

Yes, I did; it was another good opportunity on an investment and again I would be able to provide the music at a low

cost. I was never looking for the margin, but doing my part to get the music out. If someone couldn't afford it, I would often just give it to them for free. A couple of times at the next show they would pay up. Not that I expected them to, but that's the kind of respect we had in the scene.

-How many copies were pressed of "Yesterday Is Time Killed" and can you recall exactly when in 1999 it came out?

1,000 copies pressed on CD. It was recorded in January and released in March of 1999.

-Did you tour with Eighteen Visions after releasing their record? How did you promote this release? Did it only start selling out once they got signed to Trustkill Records or did it do very well from the start?

I believe they did a couple of tours at that time. I didn't feel the need to promote it other then some flyers. James had a strong stage presence and the music alone promoted itself, so I allowed the sales to flow from that. It did very well from the beginning.

-Chase Corum from Prime Directive Records has claimed that he was supposed to release the vinyl version of this album in 1999. Can you remember anything about that and why it didn't happen? Would it have been a co-release between the two labels?

Chase Corum is a true gentleman and I do remember speaking briefly with him about it. I would have worked with him on that project.

"Straight Edge – Rise of a New Era", Breakout Records, 1999

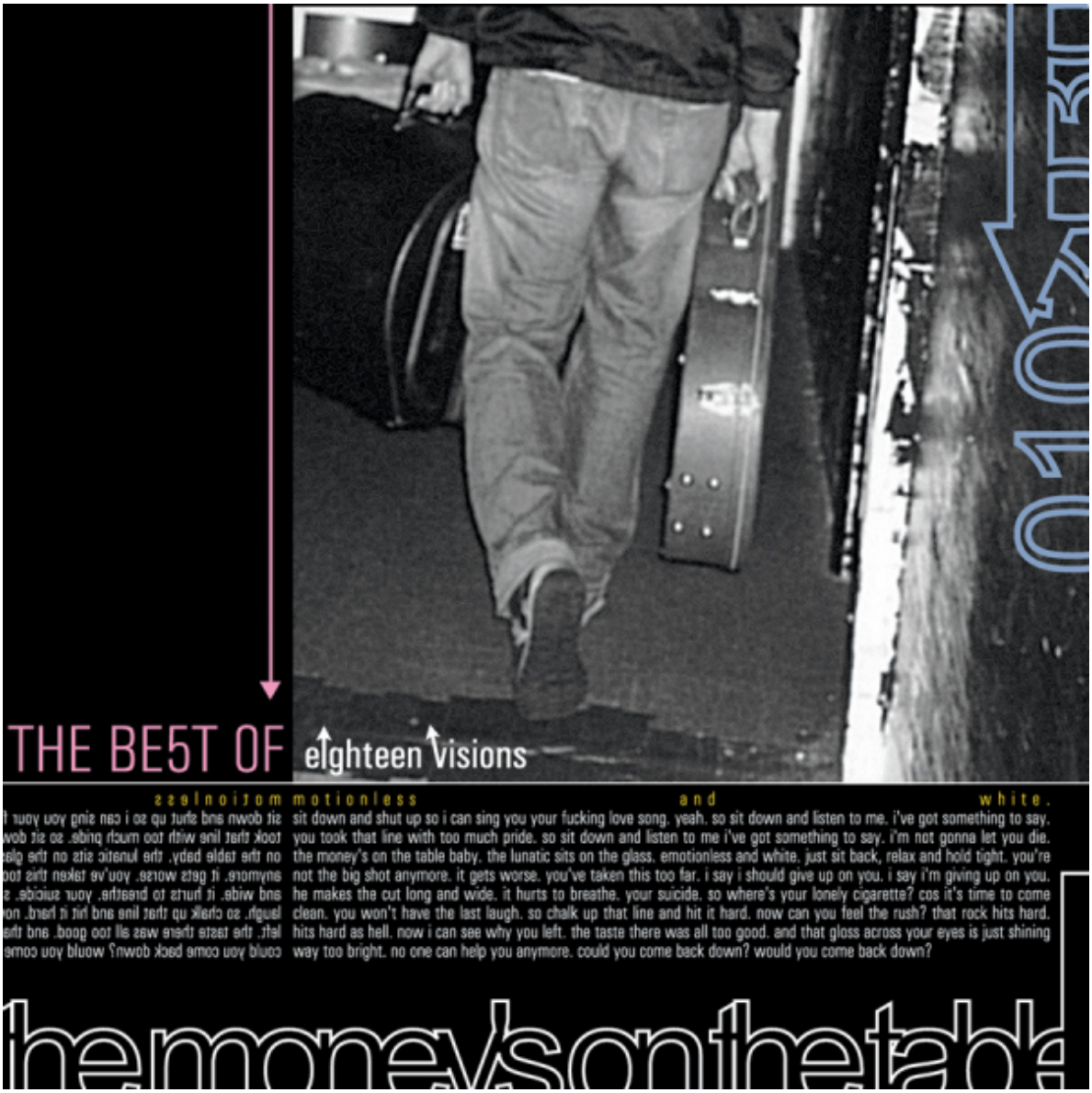
-Two of the songs from "Yesterday Is Time Killed" ended up on compilations in 1999. First, "The Satanic Thought that Satan Gave Jesus" appeared on "Straight Edge: The Rise of a New Era" by Breakout Records. In the booklet, it clearly mentions "courtesy of Cedargate Records". Did San Ramon contact you directly about using this song or was this all done directly with the band?

Yes, it was approved by both and I thought San Ramon did a good job on it.

"As the Sun Sets – A Southern California Hardcore Compilation", The Association of Welterweights, 1999

-The second compilation was "As the Sun Sets – A Southern California Hardcore Compilation" released by The Association of Welterweights, which featured not only "Raping.Laughing.Tasting.Temptation." from 18 Visions but also "Challen" from Wrench's debut EP. Do you remember meeting Graham Donath who put together this compilation? What's your memory of this documentation of California hardcore history?

I think our paths crossed once. We received a few copies of the finished product and I remember playing that CD about a thousand times. It was an excellent compilation.



"The Best of Eighteen Visions", Trustkill Records, 2001

-Once signed to Trustkill Records, one of the first plan that Josh Grabelle had for Eighteen Visions was to make available some of the earlier band material ("Lifeless" and "Yesterday Is Time Killed"). Initially Trustkill had announced an Eighteen Visions "Discography" CD, slated for a 2000 release under the catalog number TK28. This later evolved to an "Eighteen Visions Anthology" and finally came to be "The Best of Eighteen Visions" in 2001 as TK35. When this finally came out, Trustkill's description for the release went as such on their website "[…]When the band was signed to Trustkill, they had already released two CDs on smaller labels that quickly went out of press […] Instead of re-releasing the older CDs on

Trustkill, the band decided to re-record the songs and give it the new flavor that 18V has been known for as of late." Had the band (or the label) initially tried to re-release the original material or was it always a plan for them to re-record these songs? Were you ever asked to reissue the CD by the band, or offered to sell the rights to Trustkill? Was this ever brought up at all?

> I remember Trustkill announcing the discography and that it was slated for a 2000 release, but I was never approached prior to this. Eventually there was a correspondence by Trustkill, but by that time I simply declined.

-What do you think of the re-recordings? Which version of the songs do you like better?

> Eighteen Visions always executed well in the studio, but I prefer the rawness and original heavy form of the songs on Cedargate.

-In April of 2008, a Cedargate Records website surfaced (https://sites.google.com/site/cedargaterecords), where it mentioned that you had found 100 copies of Eighteen Visions' "Yesterday Is Time Killed" album, hidden in your vault. Did you create this website? Had you put these records away to begin with or had you really forgotten about a box and found it later on? What became of those CDs?

> Cedargate Records never had a website. I enjoyed corresponding through mail and keeping it personal. I'm not sure of the origins of this website, but it's not something that I did or approved of. However, it does look good though. There are many things in the vault, but I like keeping its contents masonic.

-Did you ever consider repressing the album when the band was getting mass media attention? Dan Gump from Life Sentence Records kept their first EP "Lifeless" in print well through the mid 2000's.

No I’ve never considered repressing the album. I’ve enjoyed the chatter of leaving it at a thousand and allowing it to become a rare item.

cg.3 The Angel Element “Letters in Dead Languages” CD, July 2000

-Who was The Angel Element and where did they come from?

The Angel Element was Justin Baird (vocals), Eric Golding (bass), and Jason Welsher (drums) from Orange County, CA.

-How did you end up working with The Angel Element on Cedargate? They were a huge departure from the super heavy metalcore that Wrench and Eighteen Visions had represented for

the label at the time. What kind of deal was made when you asked them to put out their release?

Jason Welsher was a good friend and we had played in Burial and Sever together. Jason is a talented drummer and amazing at playing double bass drums, but this was a toned down melodic group with good vocals and had a solid following. Yes it differed from the previous Cedargate releases, but I was looking forward to testing the waters with something different.

-How many copies were pressed of "Letters in Dead Languages" and can you recall exactly when in 2000 it came out?

1,000 copies pressed on CD and released in July of 2000.

-"Letters in Dead Languages" actually featured a bar code on the back cover. What was the idea behind purchasing one?

It was an experiment that we wanted to sample.

-What happened to the band after the release of this CD? There is hardly any mention of them anywhere online!

They broke up about a year after the release to pursue individual goals. Jason Welsher, along with his brother Josh, own and run 'To Die For' clothing. They are excellent and smart business men and have given a lot back to the hardcore community. I knew when his business took off that he was going to need to devote more time to it.

cg.4 Wrench “Queen Anne’s Revenge” CD, August 2001

-Cedargate’s fourth release was Wrench’s album “Queen Anne’s Revenge”. Were you receiving any other offers for labels to work with Wrench? How did this album come together?

It was always the plan to do a full album on Cedargate. We liked how the first CD came out and we wanted to capture that same raw sludge.

-How many copies were pressed of “Queen Anne’s Revenge” and can you recall exactly when it came out?

1,000 copies pressed on CD and released in August of 2001.

-Apparently Wrench broke up shortly after the release of this

CD? Is that accurate or was there a bit of time before that happened? Can you talk about how the band broke up?

We had a good run at it and then we were on and off for a while. Wrench is still my favorite band that I had the privilege of playing for. Not just because of the music, but because of the individuals they are.

Cedargate Records ad, circa 2001. Photo courtesy of Zac Phelps.

-Over the span of the label, where do you remember advertising and distributing your releases?

I enjoyed selling them at shows more then anything, but I covered the local record shops, such as; Vinyl Records, Zed's, and Bionic. For distro I used Revelation, but when people contacted me via mail or in person about starting a distro, I always thought that was neat and would cut them a deal in bulk to help them get up and running.

-Apart from the 4 CDs that you released, did you ever press any shirts, pins, patches, posters, or anything else that might have featured the "Cedargate" name or logo? Did you press anything of the sort for any of the three bands signed to the label?

Yes, I had shirts and pins made for Cedargate Records. I also had shirts made for the first Wrench release and Eighteen Visions "Yesterday is Time Killed".

-Why and when did Cedargate Records end or die out? Was it a natural fade-out after Wrench broke up or did it end for a specific reason?

I felt Cedargate had done its job. We did not inherit the scene, but all of us developed it and gave it life in one way or another. Cedargate was my contribution. I believe the new generation will carry on and keep the brotherhood alive and in the hands of the underground. After Cedargate and Wrench, it was time to dedicate my energy to a new arena and begin my life's work.

-Can you remember any bands or releases that almost happened? Either an opportunity that might have been there or just that you wish you could have released on Cedargate Records?

Looking back, the two bands I would have liked to work with were Enewetak and Cain. Also, two individuals stood out for their musical talent, Javier Van Huss and Steve Parilla. I liked their style of playing and it seemed whatever band they were in, they would just give it that conquering sound.

-I found an old post dating back to May of 2002 about two bands, Adrastea and Amordeum, who wanted Cedargate to put out their split CD. Can you remember that ever coming close to happening?

> I remember speaking with them about it and would have liked to work with them, but by that time the tiler was at the door and I was locking it down.

-Did you ever consider reestablishing the label for either new releases or to digitally sell the four albums you put out?

> No, I've never personally considered reestablishing the label or digitally releasing the albums.

-Do you have any merch left over from anything relating to Cedargate Records?

> All Cedargate merch was sold or given out relatively fast. The only items that remain are in my personal collection.

-What are you doing musically nowadays?

Recently I have been doing an acoustical set called DW&Z1. It started off as a Junto, but ended up in us playing guitars. There's nothing out on it, but down the road we might throw some material on You Tube. I want to thank you again for the opportunity for this interview. I believe what you are doing Alex is great for the Hardcore Scene and I've enjoyed reading your Abridged Pause Blog's.