Utilitarian Records Interview

I had the great pleasure to interview James Marks regarding the record label that he operated during the mid to late 90’s, Utilitarian Records. Throughout the labels’ time, he got to work with many Michigan bands, including Small Brown Bike, Thoughts of Ionesco, Quixote, Lovesick, Cleons Down, Voglio Capirlo, This Robot Kills, Madison, Keleton DMD, Pressgang, The Middletown Project, The Little Rock Nine, M’Sagro Wen and Phillip Rizzi. James has also been the owner of multiple businesses and venues, including The Vegetarian Grocer, a vegan food store and music venue that welcomed hundreds of bands during its short span.

The full Utilitarian Records discography is:



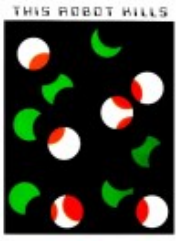
ECP-001 Cleons Down 7″ (June 1996). First sleeve



ECP-001 Cleons Down 7″ (1997). Second sleeve



ECP-002 The Little Rock Nine 7″ (1997)



ECP-003 This Robot Kills 7″ (January 1998)

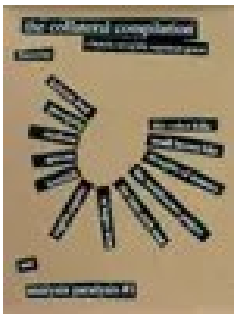


Phillip Rizzi “Patch

(An Open Letter)” book (August 1998, with C.A.S.S. Works)



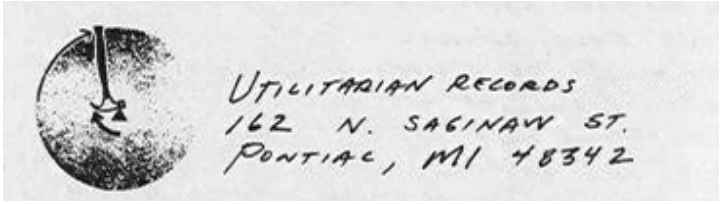
ECP-3.5 Small Brown Bike “(And Don’t Forget Me)” 7″ (September 1998, with Salinger Press)



ECP-005 “The Collateral Compilation” CD/Analysis Paralysis zine (February 1999)

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- ECP-3.5 Small Brown Bike “(And Don’t Forget Me)” 7″ (September 1998, with Salinger Press)
- ECP-004 Voglio Capirlo demo tape (March 1998)

- ECP-005 “The Collateral Compilation” CD/Analysis Paralysis zine (February 1999)



Utilitarian Records logo

-Hello James. Thank’s so much for taking the time to talk about Utilitarian. First of all how long has Michigan been your home? Were you born there?

I was born in Michigan and lived there until I was 33. A few years ago I moved to Berkeley, CA, near San Francisco. Michigan can be a tough place because of the economy and weather. I felt like I had to stay until I could cope with both, and finally felt like I’d slayed those particular dragons.

-What was your first hardcore show? How do you remember getting into the hardcore scene?

Not sure that it counts strictly as Hardcore, but my brother took me to see Jawbox at St. Andrew’s in Detroit, maybe ’92 or ’93 when I was 14 or 15. There were punks with mohawks at a time when that was very rare. Skinheads, too. It was a whole new world. My brother was 5 years older and into the straight edge scene, so I was inheriting a lot of that.

He didn’t take me to many shows, but the hardcore scene was huge in my mind because of him. I didn’t have a lot of friends, and the idea of acceptance, brotherhood, self publishing… all of that was magical to me. My brother took me to see Avail in Louisville around then, Falling Forward opened. So many kids. Crazy energy. I was blown away.

My interests morphed a bit as I entered high school, the macho-ism of the straight edge scene didn't make sense to me. They had more in common with jocks than punks. There was an undercurrent of kids who were straight edge but nerdier, more arty. There were more ladies, the music was more personal. More fragile and exposed. That was my scene. The word Emo started getting thrown around, but that meant something different to everyone.

-How did you first become involved in the Michigan hardcore scene? Can you list all the different implications/business ventures you've had over the years?

There were a couple of record stores in Royal Oak, MI that we'd make the trip to in high school. You'd see flyers for shows, and at the shows, there'd be flyers for more shows. Somehow through that I made a few friends, including Phil Rizzi. He was a few years older than me and we started going to all the shows together.

Equal Consideration Printing
1995-1996. Our first attempt at a screen printing shop. Phil, myself, and our friend Jana chipped in and bought a 4 color manual t-shirt press for $600. Mike Warden from Conquer the World Records lent Phil some money to buy the rest of the stuff we needed, the idea being we'd work off the loan in t-shirts for bands on his label.

Phil ran it for a while out of Hamtramck House, and then somehow I ended up with the equipment in my dad's basement.

Generic Jewelry
1996-1999. Phil was a piercer by this time, and making his own jewelry. He needed help, so I started making a few things but my involvement never amounted to much.

Utilitarian Records/Utilitarian Press
1996-2000. I was working 3 jobs while I was in high school and living at home; I scraped enough money together to put

out a few records.

The Vegetarian Grocer
1997-1999. I opened a vegan grocery store in Pontiac, MI and in the back we sold records and zines. There were also a handful of us living in the back and basement, and we had printing equipment setup, we were making piercing jewelry. The idea was for this punk-rock utopia, so we pretty much did every idea we could think of.

Prior to this I'd been planning on moving to CA, but Martin from Los Crudos was talking between songs at a show, and it was about putting effort into your own community, finding the difference you can make locally.

I needed to get out of the suburbs where I grew up, but I decided on Pontiac because it was close and as a city, it definitely needed help.

The Bastard
1997-1999. The show space in the basement of The Vegetarian Grocer.

VGKids
2000-current. After the grocery store closed, I kept the domain name we'd been using, vgkids.com, and focused on printing full time. This was more successful than anything I'd done prior. It was my first 'real' company, in that we had employees, paid taxes, etc. Its grown into a healthy business and I've passed management to a trio of the best employees with the most experience.

Wolf Eyes
I also managed the band Wolf Eyes for a year around 2003/4 when they signed to SubPop. That's a whole scene in itself though.

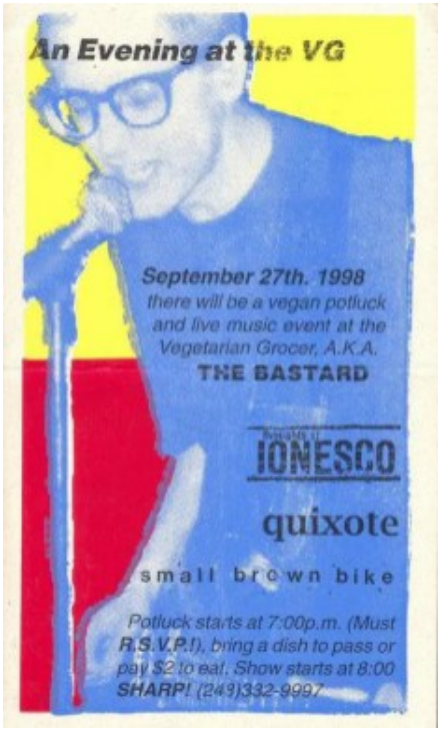
SPUR Studios
2009-current. I passed this building every day on my way to

work, it hadn’t been occupied in 8 years. I made a deal with the owner to convert it into practice spaces for bands and artists, and it was crazy– people flocked to it. That was 5 years ago and its stayed pretty much full the whole time.

Whiplash
2010-current. Through VGKids I’d become friends with the tour manager for Modest Mouse, and we started Whiplash to run the Modest Mouse webstore. It morphed into a software company that ships online orders for record labels, clothing companies, and just about everybody else.



Thoughts of Ionesco, Small Brown Bike, Dead Season, Malakhai and Voglio Capirlo performing at “The Bastard” on February 27th 1999



Thoughts of Ionesco, Quixote and Small Brown Bike performing at “The Bastard” on September 27th 1998

-What has been your implication in the vegan, vegetarian and straight-edge scene over the years?

> Adolescence is hard; you’re trying to figure out who you are, what’s important to you. I was straight edge since before anyone I knew was smoking pot or whatever, so it was just this known thing– I don’t do drugs, so don’t ask. It gave me a way to stay clear of that stuff and be proud of it. It was part of my identity– I was *cooler* than those kids, as opposed to weak or scared or being obedient to my parents. That was huge.
>
> I’m not straight edge anymore (if you’re not now, but were– you totally were), but it was a huge part of my life and I’m glad for it. The downside is that I was very judgmental for a long time, and it was difficult to be more open minded when I realized that the world can’t be divided cleanly into good/bad people.

I went vegan when I was about 13, and still am, 20+ years later. Decisions like that are harder to make later in life, I'm glad I was exposed to it when I was.

-What bands or clients did you have at Equal Consideration?

There were some shirts for Morning Again, Cold as Life, Broken Hearts are Blue (ex- Current), Mainspring, Empathy. It was short lived.

-You mentioned that Mike Warden helped finance/equip Equal Consideration Printing. Did he help out with anything else for Utilitarian over time?

That was the only time Mike financed anything I was involved with. He was a great resource though– he knew how to press records at a time when those ropes were harder to learn.

-What's your funniest Mike Warden story?

I was never super close with Mike, but I remember the end of the Hamtramck House was not pretty– everyone had moved out except Mike, and this guy Jason. The electricity had been shut off because they weren't paying the bill. In the kitchen the refrigerator was stuck hanging halfway out of the back door, the doors open and rotting food spilling out. Mike was just like, "It was starting to smell so we tried to throw it out, but it got stuck".

I liked Mike though. He has this charm that lets him get away with sometimes brilliant but often very bad ideas.

-Were you a musician as well? If so what bands did you play in, played with live, and recorded with? Can you mention approximately how long your association with each band lasted and give a brief bio of each of them?

The Little Rock 9
1996-1997. Myself, a friend of mine from high school, Grace from More Than Music fest in Columbus, and Jay from This

Robot Kills. We played a handful of shows and put a 7″ out. It never amounted to much, but I ran into Grace a while ago and she said kids were listening to the record. At the time, we weren't on the map.

Voglio Capirlo
1998-2000. I played guitar and sang, Sarah Zeidan from This Robot Kills played bass, and a friend of a friend, Greg, played drums. We played maybe 25 shows and sold 200 hundred copies of a demo tape. A few people liked us. It was amazing.

Lovesick
2000-2001. They added me as 2nd guitar and I did their last tour with them. I'm glad I got to be a part of it, but I can't take credit for the awesome legacy they left behind.

-At what point did you decide to start a record label? Was the Cleons Down 7″ the first release planned for the label or were there previous plans that fell through?

I think Cleon's Down was the first record I wanted to put out. Somehow I became friends with Jay Navaro, who was a local superstar because his band Suicide Machines was selling out St. Andrew's and getting radio play at the time. Probably through Phil.

I was learning how to print and do graphic design, so as much as anything it was a chance to try those skills out. And I felt like with Jay behind it, we could at least sell a small pressing. Jay Navaro, btw, is one of kindest and most gracious people I've ever met. I'd consider myself lucky to be half as gracious as he was at the peak of Suicide Machine's popularity.

-What labels inspired you to start a label of your own?

Ebullition, Council, Vermiform, File 13. They'd put a lot of work into the packaging, and into the experience. You felt

connected to the scene and things were important when you interacted with their records. There was a sense of gravity that drew me in.

-Was the label started by only yourself and has it remained only yourself over the years?

Pretty much. We put a book out Phil had written, and that was more his project than mine. My friend Mike Palm and I put the Small Brown Bike record out, and I definitely couldn't have done that on my own. He brought the connections together, I helped with the production, packaging, etc. Small Brown Bike were in the process of signing to No Idea, so we'd send the order to the pressing plant, and No Idea would be like, "How many are you pressing? Ok, we'll take that many".

-What's the story behind settling on "Utilitarian"?

I liked the idea of things being stripped down to what was necessary; very spartan. At the time I was especially aware of the comfort that the upper middle class was in compared to the lower classes. Many things we take for granted above the poverty line struck me as unnecessary.

It gets contradictory though; is beautiful packaging on a record strictly necessary? It is if its going to convey meaning and feel important. But was the record itself strictly necessary? The lines get difficult to draw.

-What was 6583 Maple Drive, Clarkston, Michigan? Was it your parent's house where you operated the label from originally? At what point did you move the label to Pontiac, Michigan?

That was my dad's address. When I opened the grocery store in 1999, the label came with me.

-How were you supporting the label? You mentioned having multiple jobs that helped you finance it?

Mostly because I was living with my dad and working part-time jobs. I worked at a print shop after school, and then a 6-11 shift at a newspaper after that. In the winter I also worked at a ski-lift. It was a brutal schedule, but I loved being around printing and making zines and record jackets when I could. For a year when I was 17 I was also getting social security from my mom’s passing when I was younger.



ECP-001 Cleons Down 7″ (June 1996). First sleeve

-Were you the one who approached Jay to put out Cleons Down’s first release? What exactly was proposed, negotiated and agreed upon?

It wasn’t very formal, I don’t remember who approached who. We’d heard bands usually got around 20% of the pressing and we all thought it sounded fair, so we did that.

-Did you help finance their recording session at SVR Studios in Southfield, Michigan with Matt Pons? Or was the material already recorded at the time that you approached them?

I think they’d already recorded– they managed and paid for it, whenever it happened.

-The catalog number for this first release was “EC-001” (as seen on the matrix of the vinyl). What did that stand for, as the label initials are nothing like it?

I must have been planning on using Equal Consideration when the plates were made, and changed it Utilitarian by the time the art for the jackets was done. There may have been other names I was considering… I think some of the This Robot Kills and Little Rock 9 records have ads for Halcyon Printing, which I don’t think existed for longer than the night I made the flyer and stuffed the records.



ECP-001 Cleons Down 7″ (1997). Second sleeve

-According to the back cover of one of the versions of the Cleons Down 7″, the record was initially released and pressed by Equal Consideration Printing. But after the business went under, you apparently re-issued the record with a new layout under the Utilitarian name. I've seen different colors of of sleeves from the Cleons Down 7″ (some with green ink, some with pink ink). What were the difference between the layouts? Was it still the same pressing of vinyls or did you repress those as well?

I recall that the first version of the record had all this die cutting and different pieces that fit together. That first run of jackets had so many issues with the printing and die cutting that we ended up short. It was my first offset printing job I ran myself from start to finish, so there were some quality issues. After I ran out of the pieces to make those, I pared it down and simplified it just to get the damn thing done. We eventually made more covers to finish assembling the records. There was only one pressing of the vinyl.

-When in 1996 would you say that this record came out? How many copies were pressed in total and were they all on gold vinyl?

Around June 1996. It was 500 copies, I believe all gold.

-In 2001, the band compiled all their songs into a discography CD titled "I Got a Plan". Were you long sold out of the 7″'s by then and were you approached about this coming together? If even to get the original DAT tapes?

This is the first I've heard of it. Or maybe they contacted me for the DAT and I've forgotten, I really don't remember. I probably had a few of the 7″s left when I dropped out of

the scene in 2000. I had a crate of misc. Utilitarian leftovers at VGKids for a long time, and at some point it was destroyed.

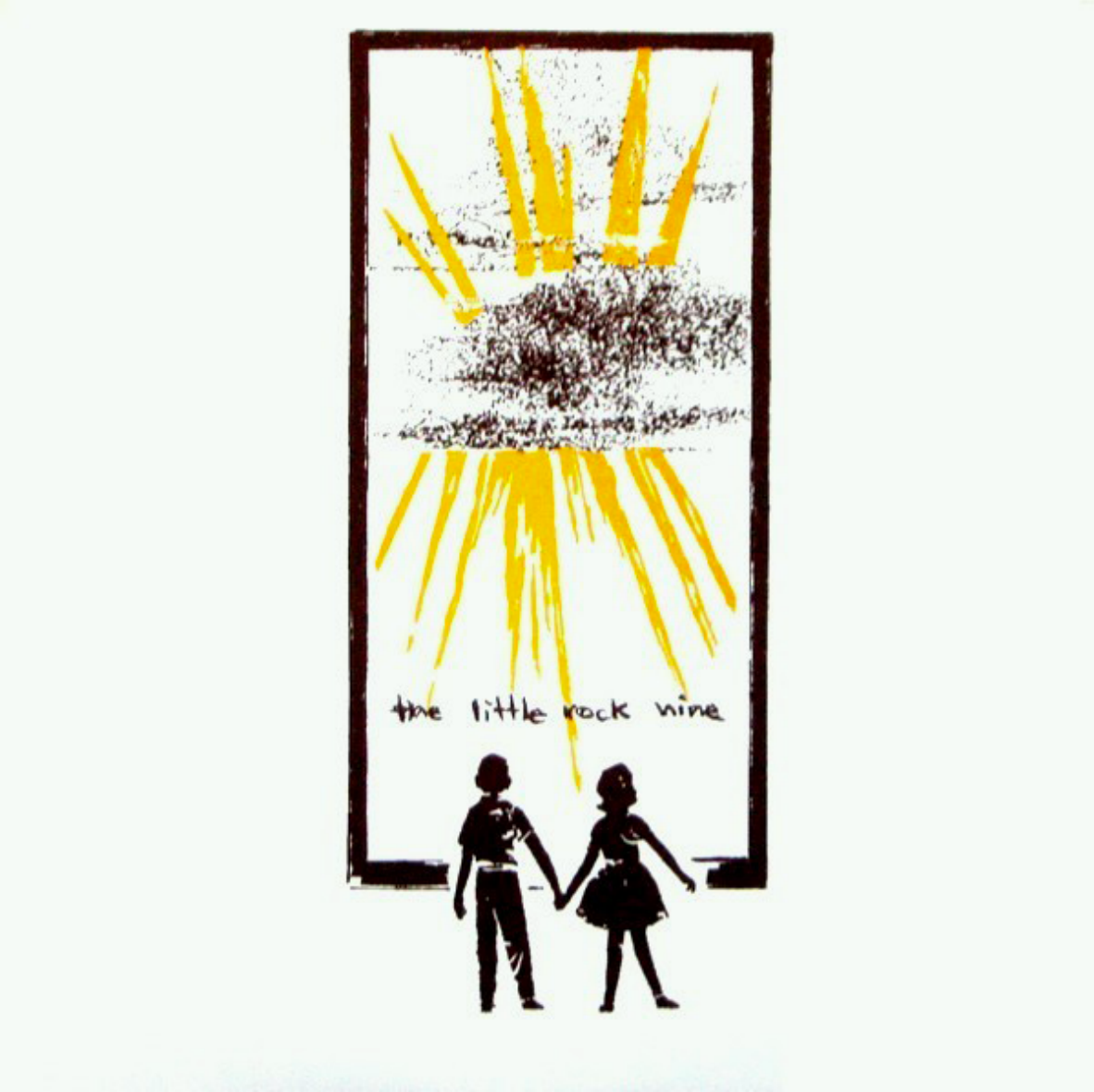
When the grocery store closed, I was frustrated with the scene, or at least what I thought it should be. I felt like what I thought it was had never existed. I had unreasonable expectations… I moved to Ypsilanti to be with my would-be wife. Shortly after that Sarah and I decided to disband Voglio Capirlo, and shortly after that, Sarah was killed in a car accident. I played with Lovesick for a moment, but that was falling apart as well, and personally I was a wreck. My involvement with the scene was over.

-You continued using the catalog designation for Utilitarian as "ECP", although you had already changed the name. Why was that?

Just my own OCD. I didn't want the catalog numbers to be inconsistent and the first was ECP, so… I also like to leave traces of prior projects in new ones. Like how VGKids, though it was an entirely new thing, was named after the Vegetarian Grocer.

-Would you have self-released The Little Rock Nine recordings had you not started the label earlier that year for Cleons Down?

Probably. I was hungry for projects to publish.



ECP-002 The Little Rock Nine 7″ (1997)

-How did Little Rock Nine form, who approached who and were there ever any changes in the lineup or trials with other musicians that didn’t stick?

I think Jae was playing in Roosevelt’s Inaugural Parade and I started seeing him at show’s. A drummer was the critical missing ingredient, and Jae was always in high demand because of it. Matt was a friend from school and Grace had moved to my dad’s house with me while I finished school. It was a little weird being back in suburbs after living in Detroit, and Little Rock 9 was the product of that time.

-How was the financing of The Little Rock 9 7″ distributed?

Was the recording, mixing, mastering, printing and pressing all paid for by yourself or was it split between each of the band members?

> I'm guessing I paid for most all of it, we may have chipped in on the recording. I'm sure I paid for the mastering, pressing, etc.

-The songs were apparently re-recorded and re-mixed multiple times from the fall of 1996 through to 1997. What's the behind the scene story?

> They were remixed at least once. I thought the first mix sounded too produced, I called it the 'Def Leopard' mix because the sound was so huge and polished. I felt like it betrayed the heritage that I was trying to honor, and I was distraught that the guitar tracks weren't quite in tune with each other. I remember bringing the Chino Horde 7″ into the studio for a reference on the remix. Also I was embarrassed the two guitar tracks weren't in tune with each other, so I think I redid the 2nd one on a couple songs where it was pronounced.

-How many copies were pressed, was it ever repressed, and were they all on black vinyl?

> There was just one pressing, on black vinyl. 1,000, I think. We sold a few hundred at best.

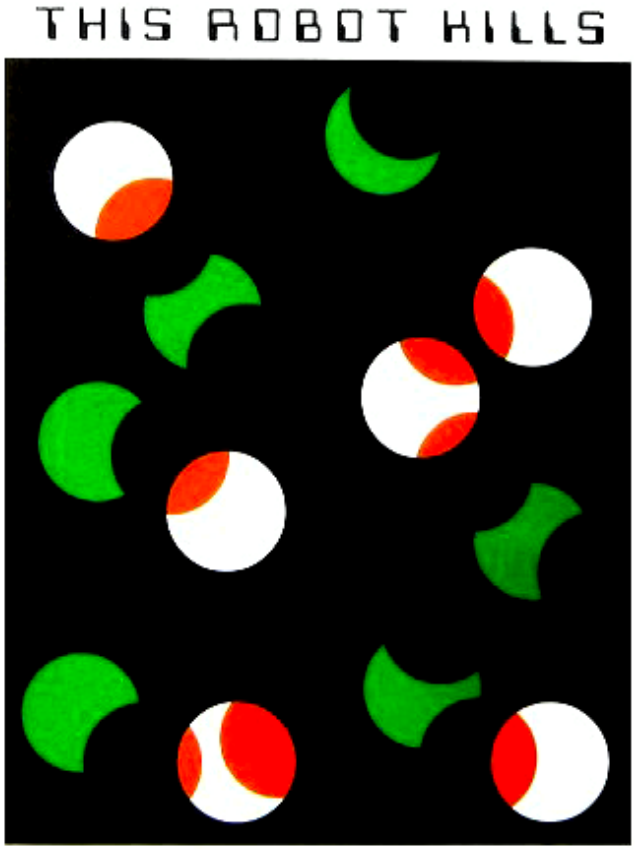
-Apart from the four songs on this 7″, the song on "The Michigan Compilation" and the song on "The Collateral Compilation", did Little Rock Nine record or release anything else?

> Nope, it was just those 5 songs. The song from Collareral was after we'd been broken up for over a year. I was trying to fill out the comp and came up with this scheme to really quickly write a song with Jae, Matt and I, and book studio time in Chicago where Grace was living. So we went to

Chicago, picked Grace up, played a tape of the song for Grace in the car on the way to the studio, and did two takes of it.

-Why did this band end?

I think Jae got distracted with other projects, and Grace and I were dating since before it began. When she and I broke up for our own reasons, the band just sort of disintegrated.



ECP-003 This Robot Kills 7″ (January 1998)

-How did you first hear about This Robot Kills? What was your first impression of them?

Funny story– Jae (later in Little Rock 9) invited me over to play music with him and his friends Zakk and Ron. We played once and it didn't quite click, and Jae told me that band broke up. A few months later I went to this house show, I don't remember who I was there to see, but there's this band This Robot Kills, and its Jae, Zakk and Ron. Its the same fucking band I practiced with, except this girl is playing bass instead of me. I couldn't believe it. Eventually I became goods friends with all of them but I didn't want anything to do with them that first night.

-This was going to be your label's third release so did you handle this band differently? Did you finance the recording session? Apparently they recorded a lot more songs than the 6 that were on the 7″.

The concept of a label funding a recording hadn't even occurred to us. Matt (Little Rock 9) really wanted to build a studio in his mom's basement. He bought this giant 16 channel mixing board from the 70's, the thing was like 4 feet across. We built walls around his mom's washer and dryer and a window into his bedroom where the board was jammed in. He recorded the This Robot Kills stuff and we were all just psyched to be figuring out how to record our music.

This Robot Kills was prolific in a way that bands I was in never were. They could just crank out song after song.

-The band recorded in September of 1997. How long after this do you think the 7″ came out?

Probably 3-6 months. I don't remember huge delays, but we were all in school and working.

-How many different colors were pressed and how many copies of each? Has it ever been repressed?

Just on green and black vinyls, maybe 500 of each, I really

don’t remember. Mike Warden had this idea that you could sell 1,000 of anything, it didn’t matter what it was. So I was hanging around that number. Maybe Mike could do that, but I soon discovered I couldn’t. It’s never been repressed.

-Who’s idea was it to have the patterns on the vinyl sticker? Who handled the layout for this 7″?

That was Zakk or I, or both together. We screen printed the mask posters in my dad’s basement in a million different varieties, with the idea that we’d cut the sheets into 4 and everyone would get a mask from a different sheet, so even though they were only 3 color prints, you’d get 4 that were totally different from each other.



Phillip Rizzi “Patch (An Open Letter)” book (August 1998, with C.A.S.S. Works)

-How did you first meet Phillip Rizzi and what made you two connect so well?

I think it was a show at the Grounds Coffee House, on University of Detroit campus where Eric Z. used to book shows. We were both from Waterford originally, both vegan, both skated, both into hardcore. That's a pretty narrow segment. Later we figured out I had skated his mini-ramp years prior but we never met back then. We were both entrepreneurial and loved coming up with the next project.

Phil and I were so close my family thought we were gay and started excluding us. I had to go to my Dad, and be like, "I'm not gay and its fucked up that I have to tell you this to make you feel better."

-How did he get the idea to write a book on his personal experiences? Did you have any part in his undertaking to write?

That was all Phil's deal, I proofread near the end. I think he was taking an english class and had to do a paper, but he and I are over achievers. He couldn't leave it at just writing the paper, he had to publish a fucking book.

-While he was writing/putting this together, did he receive any offers to release it, or did this only come once it was finished? How did you end up becoming part of releasing this book? How did you guys end up collaborating with Cascade Records' publication division C.A.S.S. Works?

He didn't seek any other offers, he knew from the beginning it would be self released. We were so into making our own stuff, we didn't think in terms of finding other people to do it. Somehow Phil wrangled me into printing the interior pages for him. We both worked at this local print shop, and we could go in after hours and use the equipment. It was actually the last thing I ever offset printed– I decided I sort of sucked at it, and just needed to never do it again.

Phil brought Nathan Miller (Cascade) in, I don't remember exactly how. Nathan's band Thoughts of Ionesco played the

grocery store all the time and could consistently bring out 200 kids. So we were around each other a lot, but we were never close. I was closer with Nathan's sister Holly. I don't think we ever even discussed that we were working on Phil's book together.

-Has Phil ever written or published anything else?

Not fiction that I'm aware of. He had a band for a while, "Midori". They recorded some stuff, but I don't think it was ever properly released. He changed his last name to Renato, and it was Carrizzi for a few years. His work is published in the jewelry & art professional journals, but that's a different thing.

-How many copies of "Patch" have been made over the years? Has it ever been sold or distributed digitally yet?

That first run was about 300, I don't think any more have been made. I don't know about digital, that wasn't even a thing when we put it out.

-What was the reaction of Phil's book in the hardcore community? How about for his family and people that you and him were close to, how did they react to it?

It didn't make a huge splash, no big uproar. It was a quiet release, as I recall but it felt good to publish something we were proud of.



Utilitarian Press logo

-On the back of “Patch”, the Utilitarian logo is a U-shaped horseshoe. On the Small Brown Bike 7″, appears a different Utilitarian Records logo, featuring a circle with a hammer in it. Who made those logos?

The logos were mine or clipart I found in old books. I tended not to like things after I’d done them, so the logo was always changing.



ECP-3.5 Small Brown Bike “(And Don’t Forget Me)” 7″ (September 1998, with Salinger Press)

-Small Brown Bike thanked you in their first 7″ in 1997, “No Place Like You”, stating “We would especially like to thank

[…] James Marks for being directly related to the release of this record. Without them it would have never happened". You are also co-credited (equally to Mike Palm) for the cover concept, design and production. What exactly were your implications in making this record happen? How come Utilitarian Records is not credited as a label for co-releasing this one, considering all of your implications?

> Mike Palm (Salinger) and I met through a friend of a friend. He asked me to help design and print the 7″ covers for that first record. I'd never heard of SBB, and as you say, it wasn't really my style but I was happy to help. I was into graphic design then, and enjoyed working with things people weren't really doing– silver ink, paper that was different on each side. I enjoyed making the project special and SBB seemed genuinely appreciative. I wasn't involved with the release, more like a hired hand for the covers. I hadn't even heard them, or if I had, they didn't make an impression on me.

-How did you end up co-releasing their second 7″ "And Don't Forget Me"? Was it a natural agreement that after contributing so much to the previous release, that this one would be an equal division between Salinger and Utilitarian? What were Utilitarian's implications compared to Salinger's?

> By this time they'd played the grocery store a couple of times and we were all on good terms. I was happy to do more than art direction and help cover the pressing costs and do what I could to support the release. I'd been making friends with Ebullition so I felt like I could at least get a few hundred out there.
>
> Mike Palm would come over to the grocery store during the day and we'd hang out and plug through design ideas. Most of the stuff I wanted to do was over the top, one of the guys in the band felt like it was too pretentious, too arty. In the end we offered to make him one copy of a stripped down

layout, and the real release would be the full vision. Strangely, that arrangement was workable for everyone.



Ad promoting Utilitarian Records' most recent release, the Small Brown Bike 7″

-Were you present during their recording session at Woodshed Studio with Tim Pak in July of 1998? If so what was it like? Can you remember anything memorable happening?

I was passing through and I think I said hello, nothing special. It was always fun hanging out with Tim though, he's super laid back and set a good vibe. Starting around then Mike Palm ended up apprenticing with him and ultimately

working there.

-They seemed a big departure from the more screamo/noise-rock/post-punk music that Utilitarian had promoted previously. Obviously they were very successful, becoming one of the biggest band in Michigan hardcore. How many copies were pressed and how fast did this record sell out? Was it ever repressed?

I think it was a first pressing of 1,000 that was spoken for before the vinyl arrived. Maybe 1,500 after that, that also went pretty quick. Most went to No Idea and Ebullition, a few other distros too, I'm sure.

-Did you ever make any additional merch for them?

-I was screen printing out of the basement of grocery store, so yeah, we'd make shirts and stickers before a show. I think they even ordered shirts from VGKids later on.

-You mentioned that they were already talking with No Idea Records. What was Salinger's opinion on them signing with No Idea, as Mike Palm had initially created Salinger Press specifically and solely for Small Brown Bike?

If Mike was bitter I didn't pick up on it. No Idea being interested meant they could support the 7″ we were doing, but I can see how it cut Mike out of the equation. He'd been helping them since the very beginning, I never had that same connection.

-Did you consider co-releasing anything else with Salinger Press after this 7″?

Nope, it was strictly the SBB stuff.



Voglio Capirlo performing live



Voglio Capirlo performing live



Voglio Capirlo performing live

-So how did Voglio Capirlo come together? Who approached whom and how did you guys end up with that line-up?

Sarah Zeidan and I had been playing together, she was learning drums and we'd just jam. A guy from the Hamtramck House days, Steve Weller, introduced me to Greg, a drummer he knew from work. Sarah was actually a bass player and Greg was insanely good on drums, so that was that. While we were setting up and meeting for the first time, I had said something about doing a "project" together. Greg stops, and he's like, "I don't want to do a project. I want to be in a band." That was that, it was official. Sarah and I had practiced under the name "Dissection of a Martyr" but never released anything under that name.

-Who came up with the name and what does it mean?

I was working at a desk Phil and I shared and saw a note sticking out of a half-open drawer from his then-girlfriend, Ruth. Apparently they were learning Italian together and all I saw through the open drawer were the words "Voglio Capirlo: I want to understand it". It just struck me as poetic and beautiful.

Not related, Phil and Ruth broke up shortly after that. Ruth and I have been married since 2003.

-Where, when and with whom did you guys record your demo? How many songs were tracked and were all of them used on the demo tape?

We recorded with Tim Pak at Woodshed Studios. We did 4 songs at that time, all on the demo. I've got an early mix that's dated 2/14/98, I think we did the final mix the week after.

-What were some of the most memorable Voglio Capirlo shows?

My top 3:

With Bread & Circuits at The Vegetarian Grocer, and the next

day in WI. Mike Kirsch was a huge inspiration to me form his Navio Forge days, so hosting and playing with him was a big deal to me.

Little Rock, AR. outside in a park. We were in front of a concrete wall, with half the audience in front, and half sitting on top of the wall behind us looking down. Kids loved it, it was amazing.

Michigan fest

-Volgio Capirlo was attempting to tour to California in August of 1999. What happened to that idea/plan?

It happened! Some of the shows fell through at the last minute, but we did the tour. I closed the grocery store as we left, did the tour, and when I got home began the long process of moving out of the building the grocery store was in.

-Apparently Voglio Capirlo was getting ready to record a full-length before the accident with Sara. Although you stated earlier that the band broke up before she was killed? Can you remember how close you guys were to doing this? Had studio time already been booked? Had you started to demo the material? About how many songs were composed? Would you have released it on Utilitarian again or did you have interest from other labels?

We'd booked time and started recording at a new studio, I forget the name. The setup was awful, we couldn't hear or see each other and the vibe wasn't working. We started thinking we should break up after listening to the playback, and we left early. I have a CD of the song we did without vocals on it, its actually the best thing we recorded. I think about finishing it sometimes.

Later Sarah and I talked on the phone and decided to break it up. Some weird stuff had happened between her and Greg

very early on that we'd never fully addressed, and it felt like we'd made the wrong choice to ignore it at the time. So we disbanded.

Sarah and I were still good friends; we went to Paris together with Ruth and a couple others. We didn't make an announcement that Voglio Capirlo had broken up and only a few months had passed before the accident, so I can see how the accident was the end.

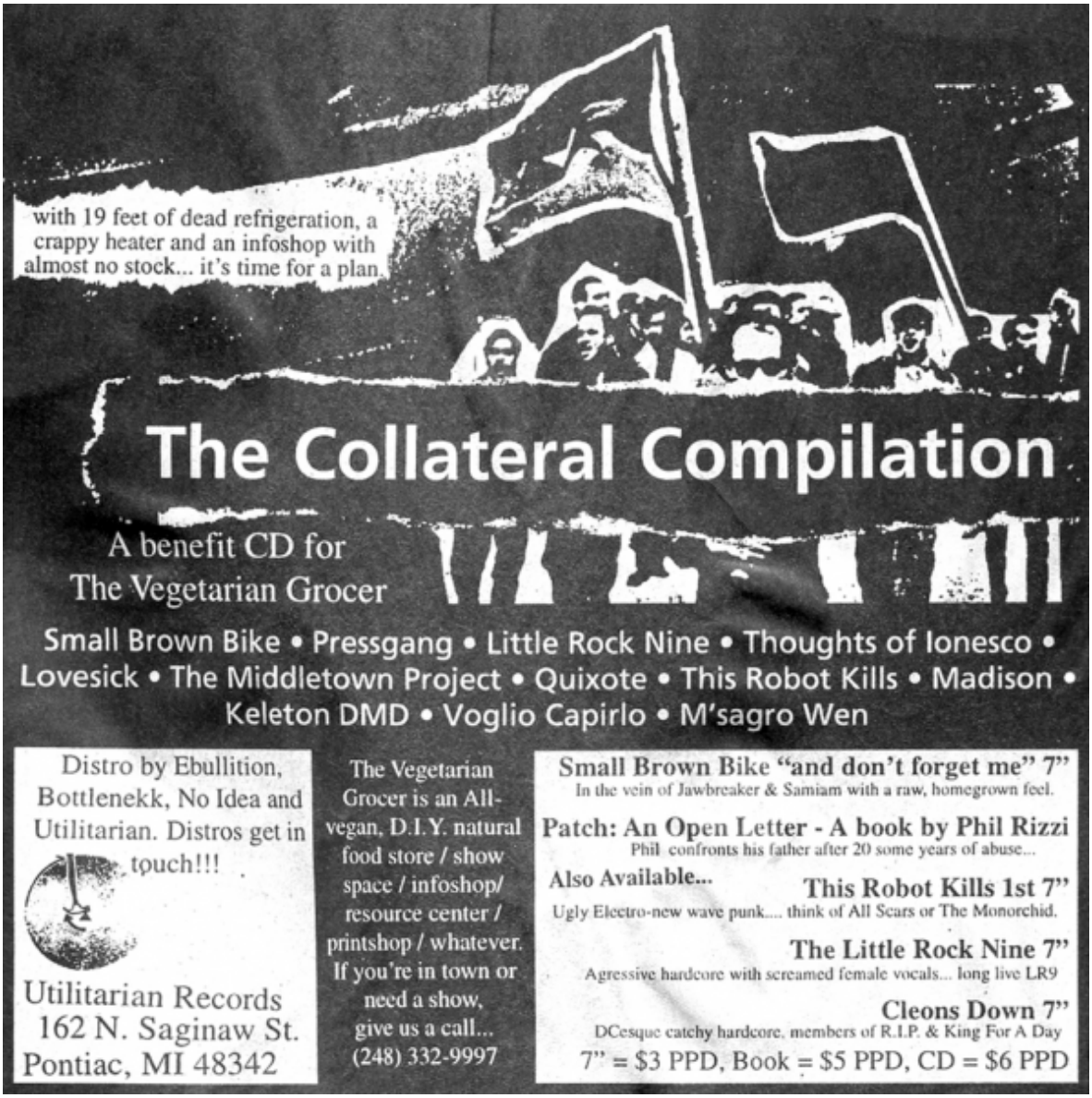
-What other bands did Greg play in?

I think he was in the Crucifucks for a while, I'm not sure what else. He was friends with Jello Biafra, which was crazy and way outside our scene.

-How did you end up joining Lovesick?

I was first introduced to Fred through Zakk– I drove This Robot Kills to play a show in Columbus. Jae couldn't make it, so we picked Fred up on our way out of town. He'd never played with TRK, nor did he know how to play drums, but he was going to fill in.

After the grocery store closed I moved to Ypsilanti / Ann Arbor, and Fred was the only person I knew. He eventually invited me to join Lovesick, and we did one tour together. The idea was that I'd join and it would give the band a new spark, and maybe that worked for a bit. But the reality was that they were pulling apart before I got there and my joining wasn't enough to overcome that.



The Collateral Compilation ad in issue 22 of HeartattaCk zine, 1999. Courtesy of Dave Ensminger

-You then released "The Collateral Compilation" CD. What's the story behind the name of this compilation?

I don't recall how I came up with it, only that whenever Kent McClard (Ebullition / HeartattaCk), who barely knew who I was but would distribute some of my stuff, would always call it the Collateral Damage comp. His name is better.



ECP-005 “The Collateral Compilation” CD/Analysis Paralysis zine (February 1999)

-This was the first and only time Utilitarian released a CD. Why did you chose that format as opposed to vinyl?

Purely economic. It was an attempt to raise money for the grocery store, and CD’s are way cheaper to produce than vinyl. This is before mp3’s destroyed CD’s as a medium. It wasn’t as good as vinyl, but it was the lowest cost to get material out there.

-The CD came with a magazine. Can you explain what the zine was comprised of?

The zine was called Analysis Paralysis, it was a collection of my writings. Plans for the future, commentary on what the scene could be. Mostly personal.

-This was also a benefit for the Vegetarian Grocer? Can you explain how that worked out?

By that time the grocery store and Utilitarian were operating out of the same bank account, they were just different attempts at building the community I loved. I had made a cubby between the studs in the wall and covered it with a dry-erase board on hinges. I lined it with fake fur

as a joke, and kept cash there in different piles for the label, the grocery store, shows, etc.

Point being, putting the CD out as a benefit to the grocery store was fairly direct. I was having a hard timing paying the rent at the grocery store. I was working to try and keep it together, and then be up all night because I lived there and there'd be a show until 2 or whatever. It was exhausting, I couldn't keep it up for long.

-The CD compilation featured Keleton DMD, Lovesick, M'Sagro Wen, Madison, Pressgang, Quixote, Small Brown Bike, The Little Rock Nine, The Middletown Project, This Robot Kills, Thoughts of Ionesco and Voglio Capirlo. First of all how did you manage to compile this impressive roster?

I was just reaching out to friends; for a (brief) moment the grocery store was one of the best places to have shows in the area, so I had easy access to everyone. All of the bands fall into that same camp; they played the grocery store at least once, most of them several times.

-Where do these songs come from? Can you remember which were previously recorded but unreleased and which were recorded specifically for this compilation?

We tried to get original recordings and most were. The Small Brown Bike was a remix of a song that was or was supposed to on their demo that no one had really heard.

-Did you know this was going to be the last Utilitarian Records release when you put it out? Or had you maybe planned on working with some of the new bands on this compilation?

No, I didn't really think about the label ending. I was more aware that I was walking away from the scene and shutting myself off from the world, but it was never like, "this is the last Utilitarian release".

-Apart from the book, the compilation CD, the demo tape and the four 7″s, did anything else ever get pressed featuring the Utilitarian name or specifically for a band that was promoting a release that you put out? In other words, did you ever press additional merchandise for any of the bands that were on Utilitarian?

Nothing we haven't covered. In 2003 I started hanging out with Wolf Eyes and going to noise shows and did a few things there, but never under the Utilitarian name. And never to the same level of involvement I had in the hardcore scene.

-Can you remember any bands that approached you or that you approached, or that you even wish you had talked to, about working together for a release on Utilitarian?

There was supposed to be one last Utilitarian release. It was going to be a single sided 12″ of acoustic songs for my friend Danny Scales under the name The Maryanne. There was going to be an etching on the back. I *did* pay for that to be recorded, and while we were working out the art things got weird. They were breaking up after playing like 2 shows. It became pretty clear we were going to press these records and not be able to sell a single one. It just faded away.

It's not much of an answer, but there was a band from somewhere in the midwest I wanted to do a full length for. We played with them at a fest, maybe in Indiana and they blew me away. We traded letters for a bit but it never quite materialized.

Its not like I was scheming on bands to sign, it was more like a release would come to me that no one was going to do if I didn't, or in the case of Small Brown Bike, I was specifically asked to help. For example I loved Bread and Circuits, but they were on Ebullition. I had no interest in challenging that, I loved it as it was. But Little Rock 9… that wasn't going to happen if I didn't do it.