

BALL

SKATEBOARD CULTURE

beastie boys

back to the beat

mofos
snaps back

art for skating's sake:
beautiful losers



\$4.50 US / \$6.95 CANADA



Tim Kerr will probably be embarrassed by this introduction. He's a humble lifer in the truest sense. In the late '70s, he began playing guitar in one of the most brazen, non-limiting bands of the era, the Big Boys, pushing, crumpling, and overcoming the roadblocks which would capture and sterilize so many other bands. The Big Boys broke up in the mid-'80s, but Kerr never gave up. He continues to tirelessly promote participation over adoration, actual work over any sort of star system, and face-to-face dialogue over faceless stadium shows.

Yes, he's been a life-long skater and surfer. Sure, he's an indefatigable musician who's played in Bad Mutha Goose, Poison 13, Jack O'Fire, the Lord High Fixers, and is still playing in Monkeywrench and Total Sound Group Direct Action Committee. He's produced leagues of bands, including the Riverboat Gamblers, Throw Rag, and Sugar Shack. He's also recently rediscovered the fun of getting paint out and slinging it all around. Yet, to hammer what he does into these little slots misses the point. Actually, it fractures the whole picture. You've got to take Tim Kerr as a whole. It's all connected. He's nothing less than a total example of what can happen when a human being walks the walk, lives life without pretense, and remains constantly engaged.

BY TODD TAYLOR
PORTRAIT BY DOUG COHENOUR
LIVE PHOTOS BY CALBEE BOOTH

PUNK LUMINARY TIM KERR TALKS ABOUT GETTING OLDER, GETTING WISER, AND GETTING IN THE VAN WITH TONY ALVA

Just to get some scope: you started playing in a band in '79?

It gets debatable, but I'm still sticking to '78. We were at the end of the original punk rock wave. Hardcore hadn't started yet. There wasn't any kind of division between new wave and punk, it was all the same thing and under one big umbrella.

XTC, Clash, Jonathan Richmond . . .

Yeah, all that stuff was a whole bunch of crazy weirdoes in the eyes and ears of the majority of people around you.

You started skating when?

Urethane wheels or steel wheels? I started skating, probably, in the early '60s when skateboards came out. I lived in Texas on the Gulf Coast. I was born in '56, so I was pretty much a kid through that whole "'60s" thing—The Munsters, Outer Limits, and all that kind of stuff. I had a Fifteen Toes wooden skateboard; it had steel wheels, not the roller-skate clay wheels. I pretty much skated up and down the driveway all the time if we weren't going to the beach. I started surfing really heavily in late junior high and all through high school. If the waves were good, we didn't go to school.

In the summer of 1974, I graduated from high school and went with a friend, who everybody called Bear, up and down the West Coast surfing. Localism was pretty bad if you had Texas plates. We surfed a lot at Malibu and Leo Correo State Park. You definitely couldn't go to San Diego. Any further south than that, you definitely got your tires slashed.

We were in Huntington Beach where that pier is, and I saw a sidewalk that came down and a pretty big bank attached to that sidewalk. There were three guys hitting that thing like total waves on skateboards. Urethane wheels just came out and I was pretty mesmerized by that. I was going, "Man, that's great."

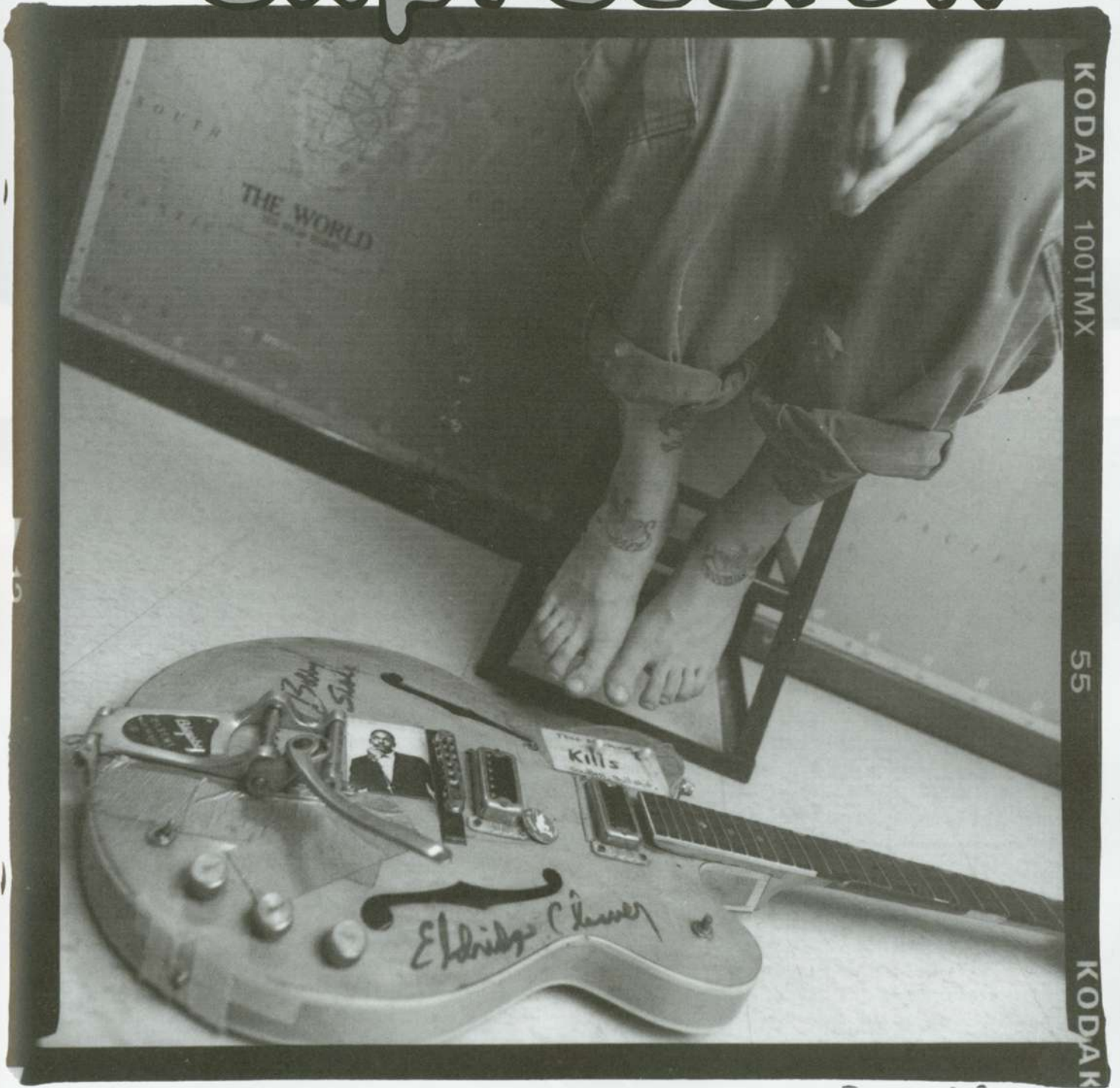
I had looked at surfing magazines, but I just didn't pay that much attention, so I thought, sunny California! I didn't bring a wetsuit; I didn't think the water was cold. We got to Malibu really early in the morning and it's pretty cold. Everybody's in hooded sweatshirts. Victor, the guy who we all called Bear, was like, "Oh, well, I brought my wetsuit. You can wear it." I thought, *cool*. He literally walked out into the water about ankle deep, turned around, came back and put on the whole wetsuit. I'd never, ever seen this guy in a wetsuit. Holy shit!

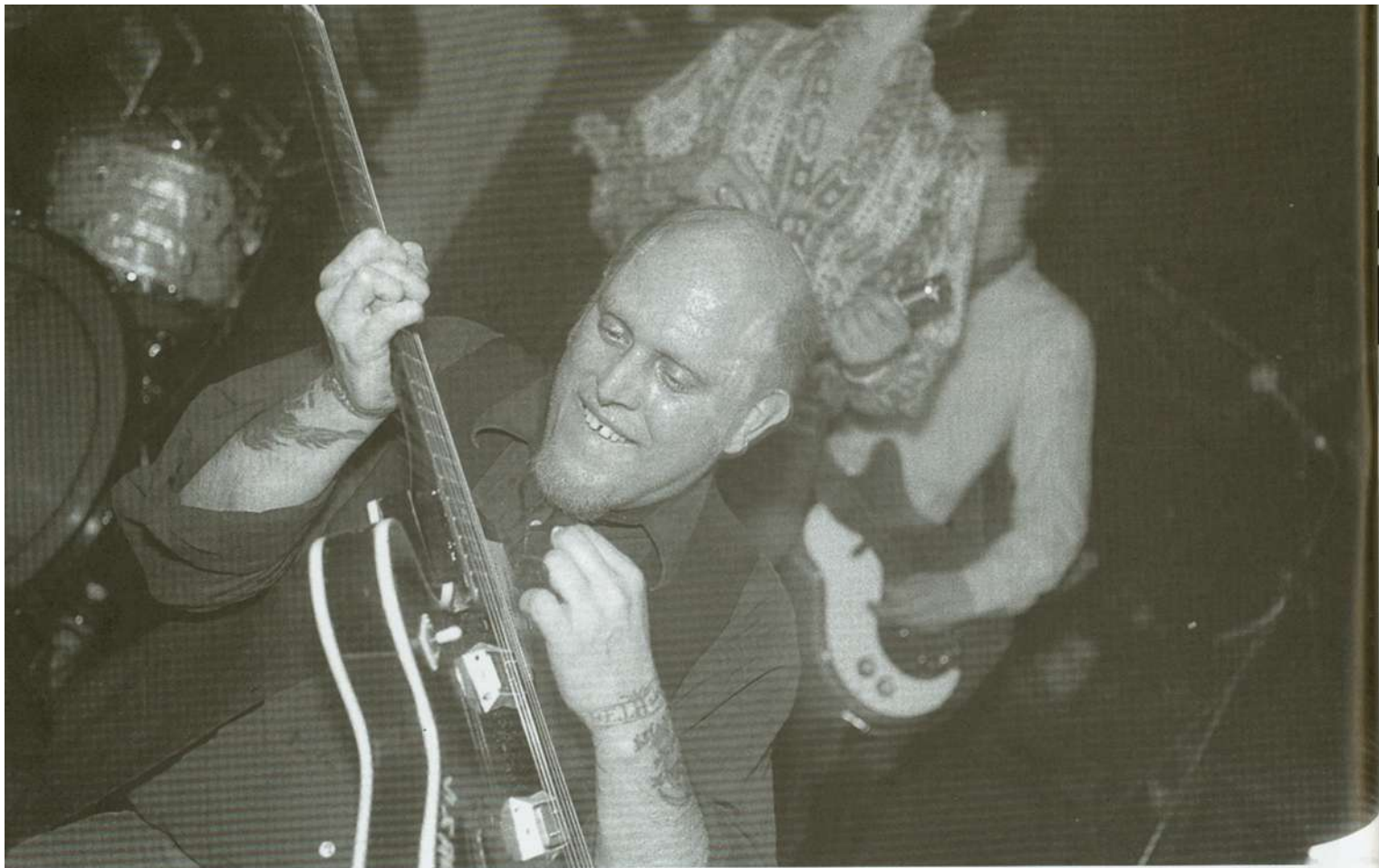
I had brought enough extra money to buy a surfboard, but instead I spent the money on a wetsuit so I could surf while we were there. I only had enough money left over to buy a skateboard with urethane wheels.

I came up to Austin to go to school pretty much at the end of that trip. Austin's about three and half, maybe four hours, to the Gulf Coast where me and Beth [Tim's wife] both grew up. I couldn't surf all the time, so I just skated. There's lots of hills here, so I got pretty heavy into skating as a substitute for not being able to surf.

Looking at the overlap between skaters and punk rock, Tony Alva ended up getting "in the van" with the Big Boys on your first Southern California tour. Did you know who he was before that?

reward is self expression





The first time I met Tony was in Dallas. There was a big contest and we played on the ramp there. I'm pretty inspired by a lot of people—but it's not like an *oh my god* kind of thing; I'm not starstruck with anybody. I think it's great when people are doing stuff, and I definitely want to let them know that, but with Tony Alva, I kinda was starstruck. [smiles]

So, here he was, Tony Alva, and I'm trying to think of what I can do that's not just exchanging names. So, I finally get up the nerve and I walk up to him, but before I can say anything, he's like, "Oh man, Tim—you're in the Big Boys!" I was completely thrown off course—"I want to talk about Dogtown. I don't want to talk about the Big Boys."

When we went up there on that tour, he pretty much latched on with us and rode with us the whole time. That's when we met Mondo and all these crazy characters. We all just felt real comfortable with each other.

The only brag I'll tell people about happened at that dish in San Francisco that used to be one of the only free community cement skate spots; it was in a really, really bad part of town. We all went up there—the *Thrasher* crew, Mondo and MoFo were there, all these different people. I came around that dish, going really fast and Tony and Mondo were sitting on the edge of it. When I got up to where they were, I just took off and slid, like I was spraying them, like I was surfing, and went around them. When I got off the board, I was just sitting by them and Mondo and Tony were talking—not to me, just talking loud. Mondo goes, "You know, if I didn't know Tim was from Texas, I'd think he's from Santa Monica.

He looks just like all the Dogtown guys, he's got that style." Because I grew up surfing. Tony's like, "Yeah, he does. He looks just like all those guys." So I'm sitting there, and on the outside, I'm just sitting there saying, "Oh yeah, that's cool," but I swear to god, inside—and inside for about two or three months—I was like, "Hell yeah!"

The Big Boys were known for being pretty brash. There is a picture of you guys dressed in KKK robes with Izod alligators painted on the fronts on a split with another Texas band, the Dicks. What happened there?

It's really funny that you're even bringing that up. For some reason, everybody who has seen that photo thinks that we were trying to dress up like KKK. Hardly anybody gets that it was Kappa Kappa Kappa—it was a slap at a fraternity for being racist and just a bunch of fucking assholes. That's why the Izod 'gator was painted on the robes.

There was a period when the Big Boys were playing at this place called Raul's. Different fraternities would initiate their freshmen by making them come into the bar for one night. I'm not sure what the initiation was, like were you supposed to pick up a girl or start a fight or whatever. And I remember really vividly that one night when we were playing, all these frat guys came in. At first, they were kinda there and nothing was going on, then you saw one look at another one—an "Oh, wait a minute, we need to start some shit here," kind of thing. Somebody poured beer on one of the members of the Dicks, which is, like, wrong—you don't do *anything*

like that to those guys—and the fight started. I distinctly remember stopping whatever song we were playing and going straight into “Frat Cars.” “OK, this song is about you fuckin’ assholes,” I said. The whole crowd, 50 people maybe, pretty much circled the whole fraternity crew, just singing the words at them. It was really, really amazing and fucking great. We never played that song after that night. It was, like, there it is. That’s exactly what we wrote this for.

Beyond your music, you’re also a painter. Are there any artists who have deeply affected you?

I can tell you stuff that I remember catching my eye. Van Gogh is really great because the paint is sticking off of the canvas and it doesn’t look like something glossy out of a magazine. That really affects me, just to be able to see the paint. Graffiti affects me. Ads affect me. Life in general affects me.

I have a philosophical question . . .

Do something. Participate. *That’s* philosophical.

You guessed my question. No, really, why do you keep on doing what you do?

I’m in it for the people you meet, the experiences, the community of it. It’s mainly that. It’s really funny: you don’t make a shitload

pile of money doing any of this stuff. I guess you could if you had a different attitude about it, but to me, Beth and I have the biggest extended family all over this world and that’s great. I can’t even begin to say how honored I am, we are, just from that statement alone. But that’s just being a human being and that’s *participating*. I’m not saying participate like, “Be political.” If that’s what you want to do, fine. I’m just saying *live*. Be *aware*. Be aware of your friends. Be aware of things that are going on around you. All of that stuff. I have realized that karma isn’t really some weird, mystical thing that’s going to happen to us after life. Karma’s like if you, Todd, had been an asshole to people, no one would want to talk to you. The same thing with Beth and I. If we hadn’t been treating people like we want to be treated, we wouldn’t have this huge, extended family. This huge, extended family is basically the karma, if that makes sense. The older you get in life, you’re either going to have a huge family or you’re going to die fucking alone and bitter. I’m not doing it because of that, but it’s just the realization of that.

This hardcore band I really like, Out Cold, said, “You know, most people are just genre fans. They’re not music fans. We’re not going to limit what we listen to and it’s going to come into what we play.” That struck a chord with me.

That’s a fuckin’ great way to put it. ■

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