

# MAXIMUM ROCKNROLL

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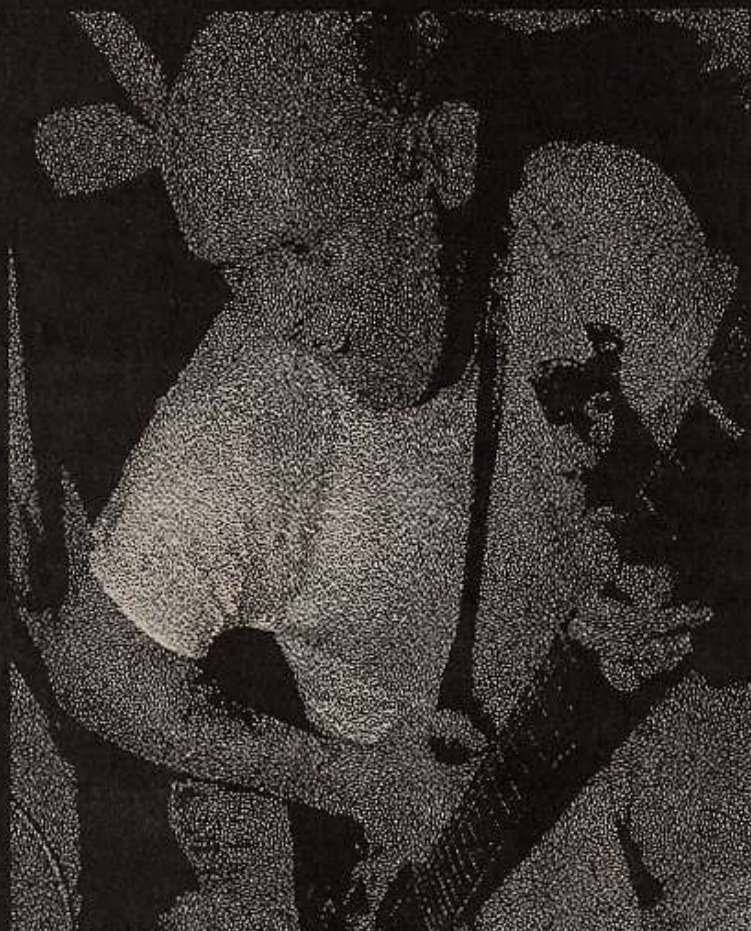
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INTERVIEWS

# THE TIM KERR INTERVIEW

Former Guitarist With BIG BOYS & POISON 13 Talks About Past, Present, And Future With His New Band, BAD MUTHA GOOSE.



Tim Kerr has been around a long time. The first band for this Texan was the late Big Boys, who lasted many years, had much vinyl and earned many fans. From there he went on to Poison 13 for a while, and is currently working on Bad Mutha Goose. The interview is by Mike LaVella, an obvious fan.



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**MRR:** Let's start at the beginning, how old are you?

**Tim:** You know what? I honestly can't remember. We were trying to figure out the age span of the group the other day, and we knew that Mike was youngest at 23, and we figure I'm the oldest but I couldn't remember my age. I was born in 1956, you figure it out.

**MRR:** You're 32 I guess...

**Tim:** Yea, but like it's irrelevant. You know when you're with a bunch of people and someone is really acting like a fool and everything, and everyone says, "That's ok, he's only 18." Well, that's bullshit 'cuz I met kids who were 15 who acted older than I do. So it's really an individual thing.

**MRR:** What was the first band you were ever in?

**Tim:** The Big Boys!

**MRR:** When did that all start?

**Tim:** Back in '77-'78 when like punk/new wave first hit, we kept hearing about it. Then we started getting into things like Elvis Costello and The Clash. Meanwhile, Biscuit (Randy Turner, Big Boys singer) hair kept getting shorter and shorter. Then Raul's club started having shows and we would all go. We all thought "Hey! we could do that" so we did. All this happened in about 2 months.

**MRR:** So Raul's club played a big part in the Big Boys forming?

**Tim:** It seems funny now, but the whole goal of the Big Boys was to play Raul's club once.

**MRR:** I'd say you got a little further than you first thought you would...

**Tim:** Back then we just did whatever we wanted to. I would have never never guessed at the time that someday someone would be interviewing me or that anyone would ever care about what we did. To us it was just a big family, audience included. When we played there was no separation

between the band and the audience. It was always more like a big party.

**MRR:** How did the first 7", "Frat Cars", come about?

**Tim:** At the time everyone was doing 7's so we figured "What the hell, we played Raul's we may as well put one out". We went into this little studio in Austin, and there was this Willie Nelson idiot-guy engineer. He couldn't figure out what we were trying to do. But when it was finished, we kinda liked it. We were all "We got a record" and everything. Then the tape started getting played on the local college radio and everyone said "This isn't you guys" So we went back into the studio, but this time we took John Burton from The Huns to produce it. He made us turn everything up and it came out much better. It's really something considering that we had such beat up old equipment at the time. I still think it's the best thing we did 'til Fun Fun Fun.

**MRR:** Who did the artwork?

**Tim:** We all took part in that. I think Biscuit did the front cover. I did the back cover and the labels and Chris (Gates, Big Boys bass player) did the insert. Then we had a party and we all colored them and numbered them.

**MRR:** So, what happened next?

**Tim:** The scene in Austin was growing, lots of good bands were playing around then. The original guys who booked shows at Raul's, Joseph and Bobby, who were great guys, stopped booking when the club was sold to Steve Hayden. He was the guy who put out the Big Boys/Dicks split LP. He had the idea that the Dicks' side would be rated X and the Big Boys side would be like PG, and get airplay and everything. That's why the song "Authority" isn't on the record. At the beginning of the song, Biscuit says "Fuck authority, let's play" and we went right into the song.

There was no way they could edit out the word fuck so they took the whole song off the record. That's why it's not on there, even though it lists the first song as "Authority".

**MRR:** That's really weird...

**Tim:** Well, he pulled a lot of things like that. That's why our first full 12" is called Industry Standard, because that was Steve's easy way out answer for everything. "It's industry standard guys". He was real sly, it was like until he fucked you over, you didn't know.

**MRR:** Let's talk about that record.

**Tim:** Every song has a story behind it. The song "Split" was about a club in Houston called Split. The way it was set up was that the bands would play one 30 minute set. If the crowd liked you, you could do another 30 minute set. When we came on, the whole place stopped. It was, you know, like a stupid new wave club, they had a chain link fence around the band, so of course Biscuit just stared at us. No one drank. It was like they never saw anything like us. Anyway, since people didn't drink, they wouldn't let us do another set. The crowd really wanted us back, but the owner wouldn't let us play. It was real frustrating. The song "Complete Control" is about Hayden.

**MRR:** Where was it recorded?

**Tim:** We went to Houston to do it. A friend of ours named David Bean, who was in a cool band called The Judys, knew about our problems in the past so he said, "Come up to Houston to record." Oh yea, the reason it's also called "Where's my towel?" is because one time a friend of mine was going through my drawings naming them. When he got to this one, he stopped and stared at it and said, "Where's my towel?" I laughed so hard, I still do when I think about it. (chuckles a few times) I guess you had to be there.

**MRR:** So were you happy with the record overall?



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Tim: I don't think we got the real sound we were looking for. My wife likes it.

**MRR: The Fun Fun Fun EP was a lot of people's first introduction to the Big Boys. Were you happy with it?**

Tim: Yes! It's my favorite of all the Big Boys records. At that time we were ready to make another record, and we were through with Steve Hayden and we really didn't have the money to do it ourselves. We were approached by Moment who were real into us at the time. After talking to them a lot, we figured that it would be ok to do it with them if we had complete artistic freedom. They asked us who we wanted to produce it, and we all said Spot, because we liked everything he did with Black Flag, and the Minutemen and everybody. He's real good at getting a band to sound on vinyl like they do live. So they brought in Spot. We were really happy. I still think "We Got Soul" is the coolest Big Boys song ever.

**MRR: The lyrics to the song "Fun Fun Fun" are so great.**

Tim: Chris wrote that one. Part of that song is about the big club in Austin called Clubfoot. That was the place where like U2 played on their first US tour. Gang of 4 played there. Bands like that. We were banned from there because every time we would play, people would be stage diving and everything and the management would get all excited. They always missed the point that we weren't there to hurt anyone. We were there to play and have fun. They knew we had a big draw and they kept wanting us though. But we always ran into the same problems. Eventually, we said look, we'll play but on our own terms, which were: low door price, all ages, we have all our own security people, and then we even went so far as to say that certain people who worked there couldn't be there, even the owner.

**MRR: And they went for that?**

Tim: Yea, they did. It's a good example of sticking to your guns and not letting anyone push you around. The other part of *Fun Fun Fun* has to do with the division that was happening in the punk scene at the time. At first everyone got together but after a while the hardcores and the more "new wave" types were clearly separated. So that's what "I Like Joy Division and Public Image Too" is about. That dividing line wasn't so drawn in Texas, and we still got all kinds of people at shows.

**MRR: The Big Boys were famous for wild shows, crazy outfits...**

Tim: I remember one time Biscuit came out with all these sandwiches in plastic bags pinned all over him and during the set he threw them out into the crowd. The funny thing is, we were playing another show about 6 months later, and someone threw one of the sandwiches back at him.

**MRR: How do you know it was the same sandwich?**

Tim: 'Cuz it was still in the same bag, only it was all green and stuff.

**MRR: That's funny...**

Tim: Yea, and another time Biscuit came out with Christmas lights wrapped all around him. He was up there singing, and the lights were blinking on and off and everything, and the kids were jumping on him and he fell and was dangling off the stage. Right below him was a big puddle of beer and water. I'll never forget the look on his face as he scrambled to get back up before he got electrocuted.

**MRR: What made you guys decide to cover "Hollywood Swinging"?**

Tim: When Steve Hayden was running Raul's he decided to start this rule that no band was allowed to play covers and...

**MRR: Wait a minute! Why?**

Tim: Well, clubs have to pay a certain amount of money to BMI and ASCAP and whoever else because of the groups playing covers there. So to get around paying this fee, he said no band could play covers. "It will make you better" he would say. So as soon as we found out about that we learned as many covers as we could. Our attitude was "Let's see how far we can push it tonight." We would be up there and Chris would say "Here's another one we wrote..." and we would go right into a cover. "Hollywood Swinging" was one we learned about that time.

**MRR: On the song "Apolitical"; what does "spot on Jello" mean?**

Tim: We knew the record would be going all over so we put that on there knowing that Jello would hear it and get a kick out of it. All it means was Spot (the person) on, or imitating Jello. And if you listen you can hear him in the background doing his Jello voice.

**MRR: After Fun Fun Fun you signed with Enigma.**

Tim: Well, there's a story behind that too. Things were happening real fast for us at that point, and Moment couldn't handle everything. The deal with Enigma was set up by Moment. We never even had a meeting with them.

**MRR: Does that bother you?**

Tim: I think about Enigma selling the records and us not getting paid, but to tell you the truth, I have no regrets about anything. We never kissed anybody's ass, that's the important thing.

**MRR: Where did the title "Lullabies to Help the Brain Grow" come from?**

Tim: There was an old fanzine that a friend of ours, Dixon, did called *Idiotime*. There was this drawing of a skeleton playing guitar and it said "Lullabies to help the brain grow." Biscuit thought it was cool, so we used it.

**MRR: Were you satisfied with that record?**

Tim: I remember being happy at the time, but now looking back, I think we could have done it better.

**MRR: What's the story behind "Brick Wall"?**

Tim: The Bad Brains had been staying at my house after a show in Austin. I had to go to work and shortly after I got there, my wife Beth called me at work crying. So I rushed home and when I got there the Stains (M.D.C.) and the Bad Brains were having this shouting match in my front yard. It had gotten to the point where neither side was listening anymore. They may as well have been screaming to a brick wall.

**MRR: What were they fighting about?**

Tim: It was a fight about their religious beliefs mostly. It was one of



those subjects where there is no right or wrong, you have your own opinion and that's that. My attitude has always been "live and let live" in other words I might not agree with you but - it's like whatever, you know? The fight never should have gotten so out of hand. Both bands should have realized that the other was no longer listening.

**MRR: Moving right along, you did the cover for the Cafeteria LP**

Tim: That was a painting that I did specifically for the cover of that LP. The title "No Matter How Long the Line is at the Cafeteria, There's Always a Seat!" was a line my dad said a lot when I was growing up. I was glad I finally got a chance to use it. Funny thing about the painting - I never got it back!

**MRR: Who has it, Enigma?**

Tim: It's probably hanging in someone's office!

**MRR: What does the term "Going all city...state" above your signature mean?**

Tim: That's a graffiti artists' term. I'm still really into graffiti. I used to get stuff from all over. This one guy from Baltimore, whose tag was Vold, was real good. Anyway, when kids paint trains they know that their piece is going all over the city, so that's where the term "all city" comes from. I knew our album would be going all across America so I took the term further "All city...state"

**MRR: The song "I Do Care" is one of my all time favorites, what inspired that?**

Tim: That was written when there was a lot of tension in the band and



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basically, it's about putting up with shit, and you want to say "I don't care" but at the same time you do care. The gun means "I quit". We were all ready to say "I quit" but we never did.

**MRR: Why did you break up?**

**Tim:** We really never decided to "break up" it just happened. We had been on a 2 month tour and it got to be exactly like being in a station wagon with mom and dad with your brothers and sisters. You know, like when you're little? Lots of tension and everything.

**MRR: What caused all this tension?**

**Tim:** A number of things, I think a lot of the kids who were coming to

We used to play with lots of people you probably wouldn't imagine. Like Grace Jones, the Go-Go's, the Plasmatics.

**MRR: Do you wish the Big Boys were better remembered like, for example, the way the Misfits and Minor Threat are now?**

**Tim:** Kids seem to have the right idea of what we were all about. Actually it's cool to be in the company of those bands 'cuz we never intended that to happen. There's no BS built up around us and that's cool.

**MRR: What's the story with the "Wreck Collection"?**

**Tim:** That all started with Glenn (Danzig). He wanted to put it out, but he got too busy, so Spot took over the project. The tape has been selling real well and will be on vinyl soon.

**MRR: So he... did Poison 13 form?**

**Tim:** Mike (Carroll - singer for Poison 13) used to be the Big Boys roadie. He was with us on that last long tour, and he kept saying he wanted to be in a band, but the guy is real shy. He was a real good friend and I wanted to see him get things rollin' so I said "Ok, when we get back to Austin, we'll start a band and play one time to have a big party." Mike and Charlie Sexton were real good friends, like before all the hype (Charlie was later signed to a major label and produced a top teen hit) he was always hanging around the older guys like the Fabulous Thunderbirds and their crowd, and Mike introduced him to the punk scene. He thought it was great that so many kids his age were involved. Anyway, besides playing guitar, he was drumming in a band called the Little Kings. So Mike figured we could get Charlie to drum for our band. When we got back though, Charlie was real busy and couldn't really find time to practice. So we did it without him.

**MRR: So basically, it was your and Mike's band.**

**Tim:** Yea, when Chris (Gates) wanted to join, we were like "Well...I don't know" because we felt that if we played out everyone would be like - "this is the new Big Boys" or whatever, and remember the Big Boys were supposed to be taking some time off. So we sat around and talked and after a while it was like "What the hell, join" So we started to practice. At first we laughed more than we played.

**MRR: Why?**

**Tim:** Because Mike was so shy, but when he got that microphone in his hand he went wild. It was funny, he was normally so shy—except on stage.

**MRR: So what were you guys trying to do with Poison 13?**

**Tim:** Our philosophy was to get as drunk as possible and play. Cuz like, we all could play you know? It was like a challenge. We tried to sing about stuff that no one would follow. After the experience with the Big Boys becoming popular and quoted a lot and everything, we just wanted to play and have a good time. It was a return to the "fuck it" attitude.

**MRR: The first Poison 13 album is great. Did you guys like it?**

**Tim:** Of everything I've ever played on, it's my absolute favorite. It's the only thing I listen to that I'm on. I've made tapes of it to listen to in the car. I pretend that I'm not on it, I enjoy it more that way.

**MRR: What's the deal with the video?**

**Tim:** It's for the song "One Step Closer". It was done in the garage where we practiced. We were all "stinko the clown" drunk. It's filmed in black and white, which I think is real cool, cuz it looks like an old horror movie.

**MRR: What about the second record *First You Dream*?**

**Tim:** I don't know...it's not mixed right. At first it sounds good, but then it all starts sounding like one song. Also, I think we could have done other songs on it.

**MRR: I like the Mose Allison cover, "Parchman Farm".**

**Tim:** Me and Mike were both into Mose Allison. I always like that Johnny Winter "National steel guitar" sound, and always wanted to do something like that.

**MRR: You play dobro on that Dicks record.**

**Tim:** Yea, on the Dicks *Kill from the Heart* LP. "Anti-Klan pt. II", that was fun too.

**MRR: So Poison 13 broke up, reformed, and broke up again. Now you're dedicating all your time to Bad Mutha Goose.**

**Tim:** Actually Bad Mutha's been going for a couple of years now. I was in both bands for a while. Like when we played with you all (referring to when Half Life played in Austin with Poison 13 in July 1987).

**MRR: So where's Mike Carroll now?**

**Tim:** He was in Band From Hell, which was like the Ramones vs. Kiss. Right now, he's between bands, he'll do something again.

**MRR: What about Chris being in Junkyard?**

**Tim:** He's doing what he wanted to do when he left Poison 13, so that's cool. They're good, but personally I like trashier stuff.

**MRR: How did Bad Mutha Goose get together?**

**Tim:** The day I quit Poison 13, I was at some show at the Liberty Lunch. I can't remember who was playing. Anyway, Billy approached me about doing a funk band. Now, I can't make this clear enough, Billy is a legend in Texas. He was in one of the very first Texas punk bands called Boy Problems back in '77. Later he was in the Inserts and the Jiffers. He's as well known in Texas as the Big Boys were known nationally. So I knew if we got a band going it would be cool. So I said "Yea, I'll do it, but it's gotta be straight funk. No punk funk or funky rock." He said "Ok" and that was that.

**MRR: So you always wanted to do straight funk?**

**Tim:** I was either gonna do that or like have a real wild American blue-



shows at that point weren't there to start fanzines or bands or really participate. They were coming just to be entertained. So it seemed like all of a sudden we were rock stars or something.

**MRR: That makes you feel uneasy?**

**Tim:** Well, yea. When it stopped being like a big party and everyone being friends and all, it put a strain on us. To me, friendship is the most important thing in the world. Much more important than money or anything. So we were doing ok, making money and everything, but things had changed. The money wasn't important to me, but different people have different feelings about things. We were being pulled in different directions, and I thought it was more important to stay friends even if the band couldn't continue. We didn't know when we decided to take a break that we wouldn't ever play again. We never had a "last show" or anything like that.

**MRR: Do you think there will ever be a reunion?**

**Tim:** No. Because I don't think there would be that total audience participation thing. There's been too much hype about the Big Boys since and I think everyone would come to see some big spectacle, and they wouldn't realize that they, the audience, were the something special that made those shows great. So it would be like "they see us" but not really, you know what I mean?

**MRR: What is your all time favorite Big Boys show?**

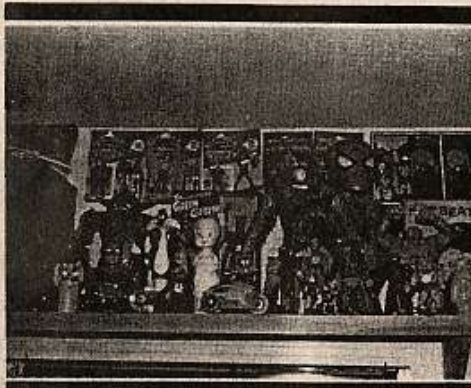
**Tim:** There were so many good ones...When the Misfits first played Austin—that was great. Any show with Minor Threat and Trouble Funk.



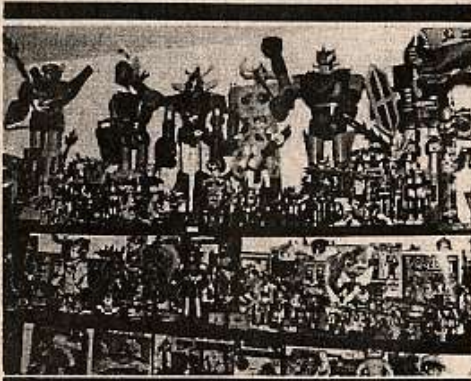
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Tim Kerr and an adoring fan



Mr. Kerr's bedroom ornamentation



Robots 'R' Us...



grass band, kind of like an American Pogues or a raw Poison 13. You know, play bluegrass standards in punk clubs and just have everyone go nuts. But, this thing just took off. Most of the people in Bad Mutha used to come to Big Boys shows. I remember seeing Alvin and thinking that he would be really good in a band. Ryan, our bass player, was in a band called China 9 (He's since been replaced by Sinclair Ridley - Denia's brother). Denia, who also sings, was a friend of Alvin's. Paul, who does all the sampling and stuff, actually came before Denia. We were going to practice one day and we got there and there's this guy with like a computer set up in the middle of the room. We figured "Oh well, no practice today" but here he had sampled congas and James Brown horns and all kinds of stuff. At first when we would play out, people would see him up there with the computer and say "What's that guy doing? Homework?" I guess Mike who plays percussion was the last to join. It just all fell together. Everyone was talking about the band before we ever played out. I remember Glass Eye were leaving on tour and they wanted to see us before they left, so we just got up there and played what we had at the time for our first show, and everyone went nuts. And it's been nuts ever since. No one is playing this kind of stuff with our attitude which is "You don't have to be the best—just get up there and play." and it gets everyone going.

**MRR: So you're real happy with Bad Mutha Goose?**

Tim: Oh yea, it's great. The music is classic funk, but what we are doing is as vital as any punk rock cuz we do exactly what we want. We are still making people question their values and are still very concerned about the audience.

**MRR: That goes back to the old Big Boys thing.**

Tim: Exactly, we use our big draw as clout, the same way the Big Boys did. We would rather try to help keep the door price down, so the kids can get into the clubs and things like that.

**MRR: You have two 12's out on Fable Records; who is that?**

Tim: Fable was an old Austin funk label owned by Jan, our manager's boss. They did the Steam Heat record. They were kinda like Tower Of Power. Anyway, the label doesn't give us any money or anything, we do it all ourselves. So Fable is us, but the label did exist before.

**MRR: You guys have been approached by major labels...**

Tim: Yea, they never quite know what to make of us. White labels want more stuff like "Rev it up." Black labels like the music, but think we're too wild. That's why we don't have any pictures on our records, it would be so easy to throw us into the funk/punk category—because we look kinda wild and have such a crazy stage show. But if you close your eyes and just listen to the music, it really is like Parliament or Cameo or whoever—straight funk. We have a lot of people confused. It's kinda like when Sly Stone started, no one knew what to think.

**MRR: Are you happy with the Bad Mutha Goose records?**

Tim: I'm happy that we did them cuz we're moving forward, but we are much better live.

**MRR: What do you think of the Red Hot Chili Peppers saying "Funk is color blind"?**

Tim: That's great except that the people who really need to hear that never will. Because a lot of people who like classic funk consider the Red Hots rock. We are trying to reach everyone. We don't want to play to a select group. Funk is very broad-based music. People should be more open-minded. Racism works both ways. I tried to address that in a song we have called "Free Your Mind" It goes:

*Funk is colorblind, now that's been said before*

*You got a problem with that statement?*

*If you're racist there's the door*

*The question's not our color, the question is our sound*

*And if we get in the pocket*

*Then why can't you get down?*

**MRR: How's things in Austin?**

Tim: We try, as the Big Boys did, to help people get their own things started. We are trying to get the go-go/rap/funk scenes together.

**MRR: What bands from Austin should we look for?**

Tim: Loud Posse, Agony Column, Glass Eye are always good. Oh yea, Project Crew, they're a full tilt rap group that's coming up.

**MRR: So you encourage people who liked the Big Boys to check out Bad Mutha Goose.**

Tim: Well, the attitude is the same as it's always been. It's a big party. If someone comes to a show to cause trouble, it's the bands' and audience's responsibility to say "Hey, you're fucking up our good time". When you have the mike you can end stuff like that quick. It's like when you have hiccups in elementary school and the teacher says "Do that in front of the class" and you can't. So by drawing attention to the troublemakers, it usually makes them leave or at least mellow out.

**MRR: Besides the Big Boys, Poison 13 and Bad Mutha Goose, what other things have you been involved with?**

Tim: I did a piece for the sound track for "Drive-in Blues." It's a documentary on PBS about drive-in movie theaters. It's cool, if you get a chance to watch it.

**MRR: Is that something you would like to get into?**

Tim: When this band thing is all said and done, I would like to keep doing soundtracks. I want to do visual art and music. It's great how music changes the view in a movie. I think it's cool that music has so much power.

**MRR: What are your all time favorite bands?**

Tim: Minor Threat, Black Flag, Fugazi, Tar Babies, No Means No, Blast, Misfits, Samhain, ummm...as far as the older stuff goes, Undertones, Cockney Rejects. I'm into all kinds of stuff like early John Martin, early Bruce Cockburn, the first two Blue Cheer records, Cannibals, Chocolate Watchband, Beatles, Public Enemy, 7A3, Big Daddy Kane, John Coltrane, Johnny Winter, John Lee Hooker, Little Walter, we could go on all night.

**MRR: I get the picture. So you got married when?**

Tim: Back in 1978.

**MRR: 11 years, how do you account for that being such a success?**

Tim: Well, me and Beth went to the same high school and have been close friends ever since. We got married before the Big Boys started, actually Chris was at our wedding. I guess I'm lucky to have found the right person. It can be great when you understand each other. I hate it when I hear things like, you know, "So and so is cheating on him" and "He's doing this or that." It's like, forget it, don't get married. When you're with the right person you just know it. You know what I'm saying.

**MRR: Yea, I do. What else inspires you?**

Tim: Just doing stuff.

**MRR: Books?**

Tim: I read in spurts. Beat stuff is cool, but I'm more into reading about the authors than what they wrote. I like reading about the Black Panthers and MOVE, things like that. Every movement and religion has good and bad points to it. The key is to pick out what works for you and go from there.

**MRR: Your personal philosophy?**

Tim: I treat people like I want to be treated.

**MRR: Is that it?**

Tim: Yea. (big Texas grin) Now, go start your own band!