

## QUIT YOUR DAY JOB: THE NEW YEAR

For this back to school Quit Your Day Job, I spoke with Matt Kadane, who with his brother Bubba, has been making gorgeous music for the greater part of the past two decades, first with the perfectly named Bedhead (1992 - 1998) and then the New Year (1999 to the present). Like the New Year's previous work, this self-titled third collection's a quiet gem filled with richly understated, instantly memorable melodies and smart, emotionally naked lyrics. The songs take their time, painting with dusky colors, quietly building to crescendos, until the album explodes with its final track "The Idea of You." The brothers Kadane's guitars/vocals are again deepened by third guitarist Peter Schmidt, bassist Mike Donofrio, and on drums by ex-Codeine/Come member and solo artist, Chris Brokaw.

I'm a longtime fan, but they're here today because, Matt spends time in a classroom in upstate New York as a history professor at Hobart and William Smith Colleges. After our discussion of his recent courses, blogging as "one of the consequences of this long process of decriminalizing the self," a successful "Radical Religion" seminar, and earning chili peppers on RateMyProfessor.com, you can take a listen to *The New Year's* lonesome, uplifting "The Company I Can Get."

**STEREOGUM:** How's your book [on "the diary of a Leeds clothier and dissenter Joseph Ryder"] coming along?

**MATT KADANE:** Pieces of it have it appeared in article form in various places, and now I am trying to make all the pieces fit together. I am hoping this will get easier after some research I finished this summer.

**STEREOGUM:** It's an interesting subject. I like this from the book's description on your [faculty page](#): "the decriminalization of self-interest, diary-keeping, spiritual despair..." Ripe for the blog age. I'm not joking.

**MATT KADANE:** You're right. Blogging is one of the consequences of this long process of decriminalizing the self. The first English-speaking diarists, who were essentially writing to monitor their behavior for the sake of their salvation, were not supposed to be too interested in themselves and could write things like -- my favorite line from a seventeenth-century diary -- "I desire to loathe myself" in order to drive the point home. But this is the great paradox of this early age of the diary. All these people, who so often found distinctive and therefore individualistic ways to express self-abnegation and a longing for self-effacement, also wrote increasingly neater pages in what over time came to look more like the polished, bound books that only serious authors were supposed to write. So in one sense the diary may have been the ideal format for intense self-scrutiny for this higher moral purpose of attaining salvation. Who better to watch your every move than you, as long as you can internalize the necessary discipline. But diary writing also naturally encouraged self-appreciation. And here we are now in the blogging age, where there are no worries about page limits or running out of ink, where if you've got even a rudimentary computer you can offer the world the most intimate and trivial details of your life for free, and where, centuries beyond condemning self-interest, we consider self-promotion one of the great cultural survival skills. Don't count on the number of bloggers as a percentage of the population falling off anytime soon. But in any case I agree that this stuff is connected, and how you get from point A to point B is part of the story I'm trying to tell.

**STEREOGUM:** How did you arrive at this subject? You mention "undertaking a larger project on it in the near future." Any ideas what that'll be?

**MK:** I've had a general interest in this subject for as long as I can remember, but things came into focus when I came across a two and a half million word diary written at a key moment in the eighteenth century, right before the industrial revolution and as religion was losing some of its intensity in western Europe, or I guess you could say right in the middle of the shift from self-loathing to self-interest. Part of what I do next will depend on what I am unable to deal with adequately in this book. That may involve a set of questions about religious heterodoxy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or it may involve what exactly friendship meant in an age of increasing commerce, when the line between relationships sought out for camaraderie and for business may have been unusually blurry.

**STEREOGUM:** I couldn't tell from your faculty page -- are you done your Ph.D. or is this work on Ryder your dissertation?

**MK:** I got the PhD in 2005. My dissertation was on the same subject that I am now trying to turn into a book. This is pretty standard for PhD's in the humanities. The dissertation is essentially a first draft for the monograph that you're expected to produce in the first few years beyond getting the degree.

**STEREOGUM:** What was the focus of your coursework?

**MK:** I took my exams in British history from 1500 to 1800, in European history in the same period, and the history of science up through the early 1800s. My focus has always been more thematic than national, so more interesting to me, for example, than Britain itself is what happened there in these years -- political revolution, the emergence of modern capitalism, religious war, and so on.

**STEREOGUM:** I see you have a bit of past teaching experience. When did you start at Hobart and William Smith? And how long have you been teaching in general? Maybe you can discuss what courses you started with and how you got to where you are today.

**MK:** I taught my first course in 1995. A historian of economic thought named Robert Heilbroner asked me to teach with him at Eugene Lang college in Manhattan. Heilbroner had a big influence on me, and I still think part of what I'm trying to write is a response to some of the questions he made me ask myself. After that I was briefly a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania before what amounted to a nervous breakdown. Teaching three sections of a course there on the Third Reich didn't help, although I liked the guy I taught for. At Brown, where I did eventually get my degree, I also mostly taught outside my main area of interest. And then in 2000 I started teaching more specifically what I wanted to at Harvard. I eventually ended up in the History and Literature program, which was run by an American historian named Steve Biel (who incidentally helped [Brown's student-run-and-operated WBRU] transition to an underground rock station,

which made it virtually unique at the time, is still a big music fan, and had a lot of understanding when it came to my outside pursuits). I stayed there until 2005, when I took a tenure-track job at HWS here in upstate New York.

**STEREOGUM:** What most recent courses have you taught?

**MK:** My rotating courses are on the Enlightenment, early modern Europe, Tudor-Stuart Britain, the history of Puritanism, and the history of the individualist self. Last year I also taught a first-year seminar called "radical religion" and was really kind of surprised by how much I enjoyed it. I think most of the students who signed up expected a course on radical Islam, so it was good to shatter those expectations by instead looking at the unrivaled violence that has been committed in the name of Christianity. We think of the twentieth century as Europe's bloody century, and it was. But the English civil war, a war fought over competing versions of Protestantism, led to a greater percentage of deaths among the inhabitants of the British Isles than World War II did. The Thirty Years' War, Europe's last great war of religion, killed something like one in three people in what's now Germany. And then so many Europeans who fled these various conflicts came here, even more convinced that the version of religious truth they fought over was the right one. All this violence is really the prologue of the story of the white settlement of North America, and it's sobering to realize how few American students know anything about it.

**STEREOGUM:** You received a chili pepper at RateMyProfessor.com. Does that feel at all odd to be considered "hot" by your students?

**MK:** I can't take that website seriously.

**STEREOGUM:** According to the website, you also expect a lot from your students and assign "A LOT of readings." Are you a taskmaster?

**MK:** I might assign slightly more than the average amount of reading, but I also try to explain that the key to reading extensively is learning to know when to skim and when to pore over every word. I think the internet actually encourages this skill, but students don't always apply what are probably now their instinctive reading habits to, for example, an early eighteenth-century work on politics, which at least initially they tend to see as more intimidating than a website. Maybe what I'm really trying to say is that I am a taskmaster.

**STEREOGUM:** When you first started teaching I imagine you weren't much older than the people you were teaching .... and then that shifts (obviously). What's that like?

**MK:** I was in my mid-'20s when I started doing this. I had a sizable beard, and people in that general zone of the late teens to mid-'20s see a lot of meaning in the yearly increments of aging, but even so I don't think I did a convincing job of separating myself from them. That made me feel like they realized how small the degree was to which I knew more than they did. But of course you're told to create a sense of separation between you and your students when you're young and look it, and then when the separation no longer needs emphasis you wish it didn't exist.

**STEREOGUM:** Are the students aware of your music? Your peers?

**MK:** I guess some of them are, but that would only be because of the internet search. I don't talk about it.

**STEREOGUM:** Does your music at all feed off of your research?

**MK:** The content of my research probably doesn't have anything to do with the music. I could never write a history song. "In seventeen thirty-three/this dude starting writing his diary..." It doesn't work. Or if it does and I don't see it, copyright. Maybe some of the self-examining I do in music helps me relate to some of these self-examining diarists, even if I don't share their religious outlook. I guess it's fair to say that in the process of making music I do also think about my life, which includes working as a historian, so, indirectly, being a researcher might figure in.

**STEREOGUM:** You're on sabbatical for tour in the fall. This is definitely a benefit in academia. Is it part of what led you to it? I mean, the flexibility in regards to your band, etc.

**MK:** Actually, yes. The curiosity that has led me to this research was there before I had any career plans, but I did look at the lives my college professors led, or the lives I thought they led, and I thought this would give me summers off, the occasional sabbatical, more free days during the week, and so on, and I wasn't totally wrong to think that. It has been easier for me to get away to tour this fall than it has been for almost everyone else in the band. I now also realize it was a misperception to think that professors are only working when they're teaching or in office hours. There is pretty tedious administrative stuff to do, then there's the grading, and then if you're invested in your research you've always got that on your mind. You work on it in the summer, at night, on holidays -- in really the same way I find myself working on music. But I try to keep that in perspective. It's hard to imagine a better day job than this one.

**STEREOGUM:** Is it difficult to imagine doing one and not the other?

**MK:** It would be hard to teach without making music, but it's not that hard to imagine making music without having to teach. If I could do that I think I would. I could still write what I wanted to, but not having to teach would give me the kind of time for making music I crave having. At least this is what I usually imagine. There's also part of me that thinks that because I'm accustomed to trying to do two things at once I may not know what to do if I were given a major surplus of time. At the beginning of the summer, about three weeks into what this year is a paid leave until 2009, I had rolled the cocktail hour back to noon. So I don't know. Maybe the tension staves off inertia. That diarist I'm writing about, Joseph Ryder, couldn't have been more evenly torn between his religious and commercial lives, and he lived what I think was a more than averagely agonized existence because of this double-mindedness. But it was also because of this tension that he wrote in his diary for thirty-five years, until just days before he dropped dead of old age, and however self-denying that writing may have been it was also a creative act. I don't know. Music and research may feed off one another more than I want to admit. There are days when I read through this diary and think I am this double-minded fucker. Not a very appealing thought, but it would be nice to be that disciplined and productive.

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[The New Year - "The Company I Can Get"](#) (MP3)

*The New Year* is out on [Touch & Go](#). You can hear more at [their MySpace](#). Also, they did a series of really pretty trailers: [one](#), [two](#), and [three](#). Because Matt's on sabbatical this fall, the guys are on tour:

09/18 - Dallas, TX @ Granada Theatre  
09/19 - Houston, TX @ Rudyard's Pub, Houston  
09/20 - Austin, TX @ Emo's Alternative Lounge  
09/22 - Albuquerque, NM @ Launchpad  
09/23 - Phoenix, AZ @ Modified  
09/24 - Los Angeles, CA @ The Echo  
09/25 - San Francisco, CA @ Bottom Of The Hill  
09/26 - Portland, OR @ Doug Fir Lounge  
09/27 - Seattle, WA @ Sunset Tavern  
09/29 - Denver, CO @ Larimer Lounge  
10/09 - Philadelphia, PA @ Johnny Brenda's  
10/10 - Brooklyn, NY @ Music Hall Of Williamsburg  
10/11 - Cambridge, MA @ Middle East  
10/12 - Providence, RI @ Living Room  
10/13 - Burlington, VA @ Club Metronome  
10/14 - Montreal, QC @ le Divan Orange  
10/15 - Toronto, ON @ Lee's Palace  
10/16 - Pontiac, MI @ The Pike Room  
10/17 - Chicago, IL @ Empty Bottle  
10/18 - Ames, IA @ Maintenance Shop #  
10/19 - Champaign, IL @ High Dive #  
10/20 - Cleveland, OH @ Grog Shop #  
10/21 - Washington, DC @ DC NINE #  
11/07 - Holland, Netherlands @ DB's  
11/08 - Liege, Belgium @ L'escalier  
11/09 - Nottingham, UK @ Rescue Rooms  
11/10 - Liverpool, UK @ The Kazimier  
11/11 - Glasgow, UK @ Nice n Sleazy  
11/12 - London, UK @ Luminaire  
11/13 - Paris, France @ Main D'Oeuvres  
11/15 - Castellon, Spain @ Tanned Tin Festival  
11/16 - Lyon, France @ Ground Zero  
11/17 - Dudingon, Switzerland @ Bad Bonn  
11/18 - Bologna, Italy @ Locomotiv  
11/19 - Vienna, Austria @ Chelsea  
11/20 - Munich, Germany @ Orangehouse  
11/21 - Berlin, Germany @ Magnet Club

# w/ The Uglysuit



[Matt's the second from the left.]