

THIS ROCK CAN TALK is a rock'n'roll comedy adventure set in today's fast-paced music business. Basil Ghoston writes the popular "Rock Grok" column for SoundProof magazine, bible of the biz. Basil turns rock detective - "private ear" - for a ruthless, visionary rock manager who will stop at nothing to make sure The Coolies, the new punk-rock sensation from China, make it to the top of the SoundProof charts. A hip, funny rock romp.

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The background of the entire poster is a dramatic volcanic scene. In the upper left, a red drum set with chrome hardware floats above a dark, rocky terrain. In the upper right, a red electric guitar with a sunburst finish and gold hardware floats. The center of the image is dominated by a large, bright orange and yellow lava flow that appears to be erupting from a dark, jagged volcanic crater. Two more electric guitars, one white and one red, are shown floating within the lava flow. At the bottom, a vintage-style microphone is positioned as if it's speaking into the lava. The overall color palette is dominated by the fiery oranges and reds of the lava, contrasting with the dark greys and blacks of the volcanic rocks.

"By far the best rock writer America has to offer."

THIS ROCK CAN TALK

The Musical Adventures
of Rock Critic Turned
Private Ear
Basil Ghoston

ED OCHS

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For more information e-mail: rockofthecoast@yahoo.com

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1

THE CLOCK STRUCK midnight when Basil Ghoston, sitting by the window in his room at the Rock of Ages Retirement Villa in Santa Monica, California, noticed a sudden change in the weather, a change that suddenly made him break out in a cold sweat.

“That devil wind is blowing again...” he said aloud to no one, his voice shaking, “*just like it did back then.*”

A howling late December gale was sweeping off the Pacific, across Santa Monica Bay, over the beaches, palisades and palm trees, over the rooftops of this bustling seaside town just outside Hollywood.

His antennae up, Basil felt the devil in the wind and instantly made the connection: It was the same wind that years ago had blown him far off course, leaving him stranded on this deserted island of his life, waiting to rescue himself.

Along the way, during his tour of duty in the music business, something happened to Basil Ghoston, former rock music editor of *SoundProof* magazine—“*bible of the music business*”—and author of the once-popular “Rock Grok” music column, the most widely read weekly feature in the music business for years.

“Back then,” he recalled, “the music was everything. It was in the air. It was everywhere. There was always the music...”

It excited him to talk of the old days when rock ruled his world.

“The music took you places,” he said, “places you’d never been before.”

Emotional, he paused to collect himself, his eyebrows knitting together to form one long, dark cumulus cloud in search of lightning.

Distracted, he glanced out the window just in time to see a high-flying seagull cross the winter moon. It seemed to be barely moving, flapping its wings double-time just to stay aloft.

“Am I that bird?” Basil asked himself. But he couldn’t say with any degree of certainty whether he was or wasn’t that bird. He was totally unable to agree with himself on whether he was going nowhere fast or slowly, had already crash-landed, or was on his way somewhere he couldn’t see yet, his journey still unfolding.

Basil wasn’t quite sure about anything, which is why he was where he was. In his confusion, all he knew for sure was that the winds at that height were treacherous. They were wreaking havoc on the ground, too. He listened to the wind whistling a shrill, mournful tune as it smashed through the eucalyptus trees outside his window. When he looked up at the moon again, the gull was gone, nowhere to be seen, as if it had dropped from the sky.

“Looking back,” Basil appeared to confide to the face on the moon, “maybe it wasn’t such a curse after all, getting sidetracked by the music. It just looks that way now because I can’t quite seem to figure out where the music ends and I begin, even after all this time.”

From his window on the second floor of the two-story building on 15th Street—15 blocks from the ocean—the only room in the entire building with a light still on, Basil had a clear view of the

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parking lot below. It was late Sunday night and drop-dead quiet on the street.

“The ‘well’ part of me doesn’t want to talk about it anymore,” he debated himself, or someone who wasn’t there. “I won’t get over it until I stop talking about it and *thinking* about it. Yet the ‘weller’ part of me says I’ll be better when I *can* talk about it and don’t get so upset anymore. Maybe by talking about it I can get it out of my system once and for all...”

Dressed in a light-blue terrycloth bathrobe covering crinkled pajamas, he didn’t look like he would be getting whatever it was out of his system any time soon.

Unshaven, jailhouse-pale, hunger-strike gaunt, shoulder-length rusty-brown hair falling uncombed over haunted eyes ringed with dark circles, Basil looked much older than his 33 years.

2

Through the wind Basil heard the unmistakable sound of gravel crunching under car wheels coming from the parking lot. He opened the window and looked down just as a black car with its headlights off was crawling into the lot. The car parked and two young men got out, rudely slamming their doors practically beneath the windows of sleeping residents.

The passenger gripped a shiny aluminum attaché case. The driver suddenly stopped in his tracks and quickly looked up at Basil's window. Basil jerked his head back and held his breath. Then he cautiously peeked out again as the two men disappeared under the Villa awning and through the front door of the building.

"I can smell punks a mile away," Basil muttered. "They're Moolie's men! They're here!"

Two casually-dressed young men in their mid 20s stood at the reception desk talking to the night nurse who was wearing a light green uniform. You could hear their conversation bouncing off the walls of the empty, tiled lobby of the convalescent home.

"I don't think I can do that," the nurse was telling them firmly. "It's well after regular visiting hours."

"I don't understand what the problem is, nurse," the short, stumpy one, the driver, said. "He's expecting us. We have an appointment."

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“Not at this hour,” said the nurse. “You boys stay here. I’ll go up to his room and see if he’s still awake. What are your names?”

“He’s Brian Wilson ... and I’m, ah, Ted Nugent ... from UCLA. What’s your name?”

She walked out from behind the nurse’s station to where the men were standing. Her hospital badge identified her as Nurse Irene Donaldson.

“Goodnight Irene!” grinned Brian, blocking her way by throwing the old song title at her. “I mean, if he’s asleep, heck, he’d wake up for *us*. You don’t want to scare him, though...”

Nurse Donaldson eyed him with mounting suspicion. “What did you say your appointment was for?”

“We didn’t,” Ted, the tall one with the ponytail, interjected, “but since you’re his nurse I can tell you. Actually, we’re graduate students researching our thesis on rock history, and Mr. Ghoston was... is one of the world’s greatest authorities on the subject, you know, before he fritzed out. We’re here to interview him.”

The nurse screwed up her face in utter contempt. “OK, what are you boys really up to? Everybody knows there’s no such a thing as ‘*rock history*!’”

“Look,” groused Ted, squeezing the handle of the attaché case. “Granted, up to now, rock has been primarily a nonverbal medium. That’s because music is an aural experience. But we’re here to change all that. So why don’t you just give me the key.” He thrust out his hand. “What room did you say he was in?”

Nurse Donaldson clutched the key tightly to her breast. “I *didn’t*,” she crowed. “Mr. Ghoston is one of our ... regulars. We

don't allow them to be bothered here, not *at all*, not by *anyone*, especially not by strangers claiming to have a midnight appointment. Visiting hours end at 9 p.m.—it's right there on the sign. *Now outta my way!*"

She pushed her way between them, swinging her bulging hips, knocking them sideways like bowling pins, then began marching up the hall.

"Now hold your water!" Brian shouted, catching up to her. "I saw a light on in a room on the second floor when we drove in. Bet you it's his."

"We don't permit gambling here," she warned. "However, you can follow behind me if you want, but stay well behind me, and *keep quiet!*"

"What's he in this dump for anyway?" Brian said. "Premature old age?"

The nurse shot him an angry look that could melt granite.

"Don't get me wrong. I mean, it's a *nice* place," he added, his voice trailing off, "*to die.*"

The nurse stepped up her pace to get away from them. The two wiseguys followed, looking all around, stopping every few feet to make a joke of some kind.

"Do you know what they serve on the breakfast menu here?"

"No, what?"

"Chuck Berries."

"Oh, that's rich. With Cream or without?"

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“Do you know what they serve for lunch?”

“No. What?”

“Al Green salad ... with Cranberries.”

“Hey, have you inhaled this place yet? It’s got that sickly hospital smell to it. It’s awful.”

“Smells like a good old-fashioned overdose of rock ‘n’ roll to me.”

“Yeah. Don’t it just give you goose-bumps all over to know that when your rockin’ days are over you’ve got a place like *this* to call home?”

“Oh yeah. Chills of joy. Hey, what if the guy’s got amnesia and doesn’t remember anything that’s happened to him? Maybe he’s totally off his rocker... and talks in tongues. Or *can’t talk at all*.”

“Now wouldn’t that make a perfect ending to the movie!?”

Their cruel, callous laughter reverberated up and down the hallway.

Well past her boiling point, Nurse Donaldson stopped in her tracks and whirled around. “*Shut up!!!*” she commanded in her best prison warden’s voice. “Or I’ll lock up both of you in the basement, *permanently*.”

“*Sorrrr-reee, Irene!*” drawled tall Ted. “It’s nothing to get hot under the skirt about.”

That did nothing but throw gasoline on her brush fire.

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“*QUIET!!!*” she roared. This time her “*QUIET!*” echoed through every hallway in the building—loud enough to travel through walls, penetrate the subconscious of the deepest dreamers, and wake up even the most medicated.

Order temporarily restored, the three of them walked in forced silence down one long hallway, up a flight of stairs, then down another long hallway.

While the jokesters did manage to keep their mouths shut for a few minutes at least, their body language screamed otherwise, keeping up the mockery as they lurched up and down the halls like two fast-talking Frankensteins cruising for easy prey.

If they were really zombies, they had come to the right place.

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