



### A FIRST NAME BASIS

#### Mad Lee's Union/Mutha Records

I can remember The Brighton Bar vividly in the early '80s when bands like Surfers From The Future, Holy Trinity, The Chronic Sick, Mode IQ, Fatal Rage and a ton of others ruled the scene. That was at a time when there was no shortage of in your face, live and vital music. Any night of the week was an exciting adventure, with the craziest flock of bands flying in every direction you could imagine.

Most of these musical founders can now only be found on The Brighton Bar's prestigious wall of fame. A few remain in different forms or functions, including writers, booking agents and bar owners, while others are no longer even with us. But one of the longest running, unchanged songwriters I know is Mad Lee.

I don't even know his last name and when I asked for it, he politely said, "Unless it is some sort of publication rule, I'd really prefer to keep my last name out of the paper. I'll tell you next time I see you in person." But that's Lee. He wasn't being difficult, it's just his way, and like his music, he says what's on his mind in a succinct manner.

His band, Mad Lee's Union is very much the same and has been quietly creating their own brand of psychedelic blues-based punk rock havoc from New Jersey for quite a while, releasing a killer CD and pretty much doing exactly what they want to do at places like The Brighton Bar, Asbury Lanes, Axis Lounge, Buddies Tavern and The Cup. They've opened for Ted Leo And The Pharmacists, Atomic Bitchwax, The Young Dubliners, Solace and others.

Lee was also the helmsman of another shore area pioneer, Lost In Aggression, and as a singer/writer with that group, he cut his style from historic influences of the times. Playing with the likes of Secret Syde and The Accelerators as well as The Wallbangers and Public Disturbance, they earned their place on The Brighton wall through glorious hard work. Lee has always been a mainstay at The Brighton Bar and can still be seen on any given night taking it all in, beer in hand, hanging out with Jack Monahan and watching whoever is up next.

Utilizing a stark and interesting style, Lee and crew burn through many a song set with intense enthusiasm, blurring the lines between free-form hard-core and avant-garde rock and roll. Lee's bandmates have also been fixtures in the music scene for some time. Will Rivera played in The Bandana Boys and Yellow Hasselhoff as well as having his own projects. Tim Tuna played in White Out, New Day, Holy Trinity and others.

When I asked about the new material and how it

was written, Lee explained: "Many of our early songs were new arrangements of songs I had already written, but during the last couple of years the band has stepped in and taken an active role as far as contributing. Ideas for new songs now come about through improvising at practices instead of someone saying, 'I have a song and it goes like this.'"

The CD, simply entitled *Mad Lee's Union*, consists of 13 gritty and unapologetic tunes, recorded for vintage vibe using analog eight-track gear, mix down two-track analog reel to reel and mastered straight to digital. The contents of the CD complement the recording process and has an authentic '60s reverbed edge, complete with chunky, swirling guitars, hypnotic drums and solid bass. Opening song "Crazy Bitch" is hilarious and done in the vein of Dick Dale meets The Seeds. Dark and ominous, the tune leads into The Shadows-like styling of "Your Wife," another brutally funny tune that's sure to make a certain grown man cry. Bloodier elements of early Husker Du, and The Replacements (Stinson days) come out of hiding on gems like "Reality" and "The Belly Dance." Out of the 13 songs, I didn't find one that I could do without on this CD.

The disc was produced with New Jersey's own infamous Mark "the Mutha" Chesley of Mutha Records, an institute for early punk that has continued to support and produce old school as well as up and coming groups here in the Garden State.

While this is the first CD for the current group, Lee's discography also includes a CD in 1999 titled *Mad Lee* and a CD in 1998 with Mad Lee & The Rough Mix. During his time in Lost In Aggression, he put out an LP on the Mutha label in 1986 and a cassette-

only release in 1988. Interestingly enough, Tim Tuna had been involved in some of these recordings as well. And apparently Lost In Aggression discs still sell briskly on eBay.

Lee sums it all up by saying, "We feel like we're playing pretty tight these days. We have been together now for several years and feel that we're accomplishing as much as we want to. We've been nominated for an Asbury Music award in the Avant Garde category the past few years and have gained a lot of new fans, and we are dealing with that." Speaking of fans, Lee said that anyone who might be interested in the CD should feel free to drop him a personal e-mail anytime and he'll be glad to respond as soon as he gets it. Or stop by The Brighton and talk to him in person, he'll be at the bar.

Mad Lee's Union is Mad Lee, guitar and vocals, Tim Tuna, drums, and Will Rivera, bass and vocals. Mad Lee's Union CD can be purchased at [cdbaby.com](http://cdbaby.com)

or just send them an e-mail via the website at [madleesunion.com](http://madleesunion.com). All of the songs may be purchased for downloads from iTunes, Napster and others as well.

#### The Working Musicians Series/The Brighton Bar/Long Branch, NJ/Jan. 20

Okay, here's the update on this upcoming working band series, whose focus and goals are to offer local bands and musicians professional assistance from industry bigwigs. Three panels during the day will include booking, promotion and artist development. The day will be taken up with industry tips and knowledge and the night will be one of music from some of the best groups around.

Headlining the event are two cutting edge groups, Philadelphia's own Zoosphere, and from Long Island, The Mercurial, as well as New Jersey-based Broken Trees, Above The Ambulance and Missiles And Markers. This is an important event so try to attend. For further information go to [info@bandseries.com](mailto:info@bandseries.com) or check out their website [bandseries.com](http://bandseries.com)

#### DAVID MCNAMARA—2007

I never knew Dave personally, but I did enjoy his broadcasts and just wanted to say that due to his visions and choices of music, I learned much about musical forms such as the blues and jazz as well as other compositional music important to just about every musician I know. He will be missed.

Dave hosted The Spectrum, Channel 18 daily from noon to 6 p.m., and Legends of the Blues, Wednesdays at 11 a.m. on Sirius radio, and the Sunday evening Box of Blues show on WBJB-FM 90.5 The Night, an NPR affiliate in central NJ.

Donations in Dave's memory may be directed to the American Cancer Society or Radio Station WBJB, Brookdale Community College. For info, go to [wbjb.org](http://wbjb.org)

