

“The Lefsetz Letter” by Bob Lefsetz

Subject: The House Concert

“The hardest part of looking back is the mistakes are all your own

It’s harder to say that in those letters home”

“Letters Home” – Wendy Waldman

I thought about going to Coachella. But there was a dearth of e-mail and phone calls. The buzz of the last two years was absent. So, when Wendy Waldman told me her house concert was just about sold out, I made a commitment, not wanting to be left out. Then, realizing a no-show at a \$15 a head event would make a difference, that blowing off the gig would make me look like an ass, the deal was sealed. No Coachella for me this year. Since that took care of Saturday night and Sunday evening I had to be in town for my KLSX show.

Have you ever been to Agoura Hills? Sounds exotic, I know. Like a ranch community out in the highlands, where stoners escape the fast lane and smoke dope. But in reality, Agoura Hills is just another bedroom community, with a longer commute from downtown L.A., or wherever it is in town you drive to every day. But if you want a part of the American dream, if you want to own your own home, if you want your own piece of land, you plunk your roots down in these far-flung enclaves. You don’t want to live worse than your parents. You convince yourself that things are working out. That your life is going in the right direction.

Exposure to mainstream media would give you the illusion that we live in a land where Britney and Lindsey and even Bono rule. That they’re all everybody thinks about. That we all watch “Entertainment Tonight” hoping to catch a glimpse of Hollywood royalty. But this is not true. The Internet has not only made celebrities fodder for ridicule, it has allowed all the supposed marginal people to band together and not only express displeasure at what the dictators say they should believe, but form new scenes. Reading the mainstream press you’d think that that’s all people are interested in, the mainstream. But the mainstream means less than it ever did before.

I’d like to tell you that the Bodie House was a giant spread. The kind you envision when you think of the New World, i.e., California. But the Bodie House was closer to one of those cookie cutter edifices from “Knot’s Landing”. Not even in the category of “Desperate Housewives”. But the building doesn’t matter, but who lives inside. Inside lives Renee. Who is PASSIONATE about music. She told the story of going to some conference in Texas where singer-songwriters plied their wares 24/7. I couldn’t listen to wannabes for a fraction of that time, but Renee believes. Which is probably why she was holding this show in her home. It certainly wasn’t for the money. That all went to the performers.

My name was right there on the list. Thank god I attended.

And after laying down thirty bucks for Felice and myself, Renee’s husband whispered we should get seats, because the show was going to sell out.

The performance space was their living room. The kind of place that normally held a

couch and a TV. Row after row of fold-up chairs were laid out. Eight wide. With less leg room than you find on Southwest Airlines. We claimed two seats in the second row and laid down our accoutrements. In the real world I'd be worried about theft, but not in the Bodie House.

And then we went into the kitchen/dining room. They said bringing refreshments was optional, but most people arrived with a dish. I was confronted with enough desserts to keep a small child high on sugar for two years. Much of which was still waiting to be consumed when we left almost four hours later. In an era when water is five bucks a bottle and the food at shows is close to inedible, this was quite a head-turner. Oh, there was water and wine too. In endless supply.

And after relieving myself, having followed the computer-generated signs to the bathroom, the lights flashed and we took our seats.

Now you've got to get this. How far are we from the stage? Five feet?

Well, not a stage. A performance space. A small cleared area at the front of the room.

Wendy squeezed by, and believe me, there wasn't an inch to spare. And her buddy Kenny Edwards slinked his six foot plus frame through too. And then, while he sat on a chair and accompanied her, Wendy stood up at the mic and sang the above song, "Letters Home". God, I'm getting a shit-eating grin just thinking about it.

The first time I saw Wendy Waldman, at the Bitter End, back in 1974, after a song or two she said "There's a guy in the second row who knows every word." That was me. I was worried about being exposed again, so I tried to keep my mouth from working, but I couldn't.

Wendy Waldman had a five album run on Warner Brothers in the seventies. Then she made one record for Epic and another for Cypress, distributed by A&M, in the eighties. That was DECADES ago. But I still play her music. Because it touches me. It reeks of honesty in a land where that word doesn't figure. Where Presidents lie, never mind people who run record companies. There's no authenticity in a world where it's truly impossible to fake it. There's a major disconnect. To the point where people sign off, figuring they don't fit in. But, like I said, these people are now bonding together via the Internet. Maybe not in Coachella numbers, but there's a scene. And it's based ONLY on music.

You know how you go to the show and they play none of the music you want to hear? This was not that kind of gig. Not only did Wendy play "Vaudeville Man" and "Mad Mad Me", she played stuff like "Back By Fall" and "Waiting For The Rain". It was as if she visited me in my bedroom, when I couldn't fall asleep, and played my favorite tracks, just for me.

But it wasn't just for me. It was for about a hundred people. They didn't look anything like those in the magazines. They were my generation. And we're getting old. The high school babes now have lines in their faces. Looks are no longer where it's at. It's solely who you are inside. Who you are is all that counts.

I was stunned just shy of an hour in when Wendy said she was gonna take a break and then

come back for a SECOND SET! In an era when you pay ten dollars plus for a shitty ninety minute movie I was going to get two hours of music for FIFTEEN BUCKS?

And when the lights flashed again, and we sat down, we were regaled by not only Wendy and Kenny, but Dan Navarro, cousin to the famous Dave, but known by students of music as one half of Lowen & Navarro. How sweetly he sang backup vocals on such numbers as the Wendy co-written "Save The Best For Last".

But they weren't saving the best for last. The whole show was the best.

VH1 would have you believe, or DID have one believing, when it used to be about music, in the last century, that music is about fame. The light burns brightly briefly and then you pack your dreams in a trunk and become like everybody else, a working stiff. This is true for some, but then there's this category of person known as a "musician". This person doesn't play for money, or fame, but because they HAVE TO!

Dan Navarro gave me a ride home from some club in West L.A. ten years back. He was driving a Prelude past its prime. This was AFTER Pat Benatar covered his and Eric Lowen's "We Belong". What was he living on NOW? But if you saw him in this house in Agoura Hills he looked happier than Fat Bastard from Exxon who netted close to a billion dollars in salary. Because life isn't about money, but experiences. It's not how you look, but how you FEEL! And these musicians playing so close to me, despite being on the downhill side of life, they felt GREAT! And although there might not be that much sand left in the top of their hourglasses, they're making the most of what's left. They're wiser from the experience. They've got things to do, things to accomplish.

Well, there was a similarity to the people playing on arena stages. Sitting in the audience you had a burning desire to be THEM! But not because of the fame, but the TALENT! And because they have a community. In an era of loneliness, the musicians, the players, they're there for each other. They might not be rich in dollars, but in friendships, they're BILLIONAIRES!

When the show was over, Wendy told me it was happening. Her old discs were moving. There was more interest in her music than there'd been in eons. All because of the Internet. She was more excited about music than EVER!

When we walked out into the brisk West Valley air just shy of midnight Felice and I were laughing. Not believing the experience we'd just had. Wanting to tell everybody about it, but knowing they'd never really get it. Because they had no frame of reference. Music had grown so far beyond this. It's them versus us now. It hasn't been about togetherness for oh-so-long. It's about visuals, not sensations. But there's no sensation like having your heart warm up as you involuntarily start singing a song. The rest of the world falls away. It's just you, your best self, reveling in how fucking great it is to be alive. In this world with so many delights.

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