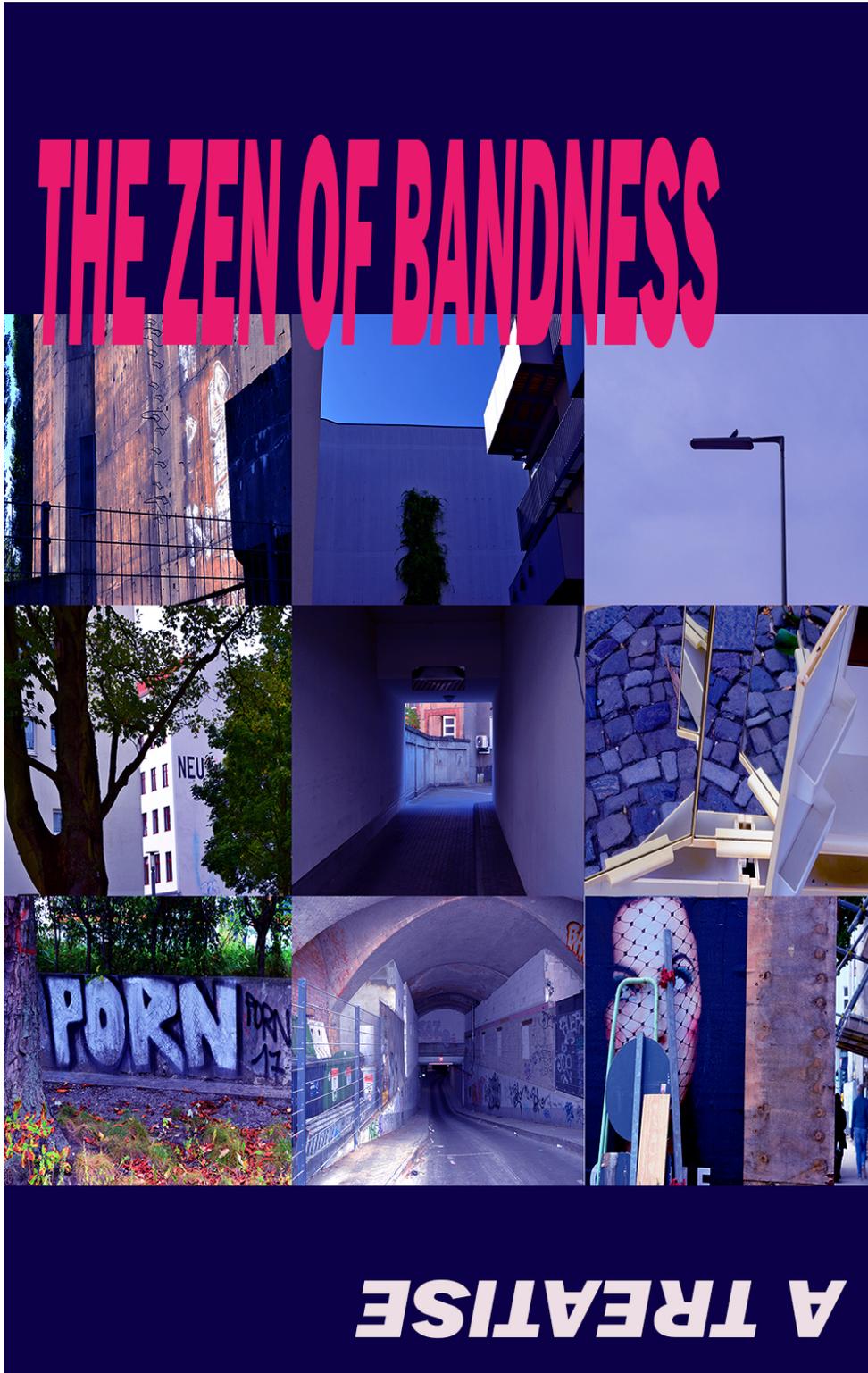


THE ZEN of BANDNESS:

A TREATISE



by **Steven Augustine** (former leader of too many bands to mention, including *DaVinci's Lips*, *Debby's Emotional Problem*, *Pop Detox*, *Sumo Speedo*, *The Opposite of Elvis*, *Zagreb Fling*, *TinTinTinTin...* )

# PREFACE

This treatise is not meant for everyone. It's not meant for the very young or for the very old music-hobbyist. It's definitely not meant for all those Nuclear Physicists and well-paid Lawyers who play "the blues" in well-equipped Dad Bands in immaculate pubs in Chicago and San Francisco on the weekends. No, you well-heeled Dadbanders and your worldview are Fucking Kryptonite to the True Spirit of Bands and contemplating your banal goals and your modest returns is enough to put any Band Dream into a coma, if not directly in The Grave.

I do not encourage Hobbyists to dabble in Bands. I encourage all hobby-types to take up pottery or stamp collecting or Irish dancing and all that. Do people generally choose Exorcism as a hobby? Of course not. Then why choose Bands? Bands and Exorcism are closely related. Both involve ancient purification rituals and The Devil. One should dabble in neither.

This treatise is not for Dabblers and it probably isn't for musicians, either, because most musicians are illiterate, or semi-literate (with really bad taste in shitty books). This treatise is probably written for the literate *friend* of a musician, a friend who cares enough to pass its wisdom on to his or her bewildered chum in IQ-appropriate paraphrase. So, yes, please buy \* this treatise because you can afford it (unlike your musical friend) and read this treatise because you can read (ditto) and pass this wisdom on, quietly, in a softly-lit room with a nearby crystal chalice of snacks.

Help your musical friend to stop fucking up, with his or her Band, in all the traditional ways... *heroin, bad table manners, irresponsibility, disorganization, suicide, pop...*

\*"Buy" is a joke. This Treatise is not for sale. It is priceless.



**But if you want to pass the pathetic busking hat...**

## WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, HOW, WHY and WHY NOT?

Unfortunately, many citizens decide to have a go at being in a band because they see bands as an escape from the pressures that come with a 'real' job: the need to be reliable, methodical, maintain focus, communicate well with co-workers, not get shit-faced drunk or high at the workplace, avoid treating said workplace like a garbage bin/ toilet and resist the temptation to tell racist and/or sexist jokes. Too many citizens are under the mistaken impression (fostered by wonderfully dishonest movies and music videos) that being in a band means taking a sweet vacation from worrying about such responsibilities when, in fucking fact, being in a band means having to be ten times more methodical and sober, and so on, than one would have to be if one worked in a bank. Unless one worked in a bank that was built into an old white van that drove from town to town in a desperate search for customers.

A 'real' job usually means being snug in a nondescript cubby near the bottom of a corporate pyramid that will function with or without your optimum service. Even on the level of working as a cashier in a mom-and-pop bordello, your failure to show up for work on time or count the change properly won't result in the bordello closing... you'll just get yourself fired and end up looking for another shitty job to dishonor as soon as your delusionally self-righteous rage wears off.

Fuck things up in a band, on the other hand... **unless it's one of those satanic retro disco-hits extravaganzas that comes with a giant lighting rig and its own 18-wheel truck with a mural from Saturday Night Fever painted on its side...** and there's a very good chance you'll fuck up the band. If not kill it.

A band is a four or five-seat bicycle where everyone has to pedal and everyone has a steering wheel. This bicycle is on a super-highway of such bicycles, tens of thousands of them, and some are going very fast and smoothly and some are dithering in jerky circles and more than a few are crashing into random walls and bursting into flames, but you can't see most of the other bicycles because I forgot to mention that the highway is smothered in fog. It's a thick fog that smells suspiciously like something out of *Alice Cooper's* filthy old original smoke-machine (or burning cum-socks) and you can't see all those hatefully well-coordinated five-seaters zooming with power and grace right past you, just as you can't see the twisted, rusty frames and bandanna-wearing skeletons littering the highway's shoulder. The scary thing is how many of those skeletons had talent.

## THIS...

...is not a "how to" guide. This is a **Philosophical Code of Righteous Aesthetics and Proper Behavior**.

## I WON'T...

...refer to "bands," after this point, in this treatise, until one instance before the very end: I will refer to **BANDNESS**. A "band" is a false promise engendering a clueless sense of security and constancy. **BANDNESS** is a condition of perpetual becoming. And "**BANDNESS**" just sounds cooler than "**BAND**" to me. If you don't put **Coolness** near the top of your to-do List every fucking day of your Life, your **BANDNESS** will suck and I will despise you.

# THE ZEN COMMANDMENTS

1. **Great Bandness** combines Art and Charisma to create one-off **Zones of Enchantment** (aka Live Shows) and/or durable, portable, ageless **Zones of Enchantment** (aka Records): **DO** work diligently to understand the concept of the **Zone of Enchantment**. [The Zone of Enchantment to be addressed in greater detail later in this treatise].

2. Learn to play but avoid (at all costs) fetishizing technique. The Brits have developed a perfectly disparaging term for musicians who fetishize technique: **MUSO**. Quincy Jones, one of the elder statesmen of Musos, went on record disparaging The Beatles as "*no-playing motherfuckers*". In contrast, Quincy Jones considered a forgettably insipid, mega-schlocky act he produced (in the 1990s), *Tevin Campbell*, to be a "genius". **DON'T** be a Muso.

3. If you don't have **2,000,000** dollars to blow (or "big boobs"\*), a birth certificate that proves you're 18 and **1,000,000** dollars to blow) don't bother trying to **Sell Out**. Selling Out is prohibitively expensive. The sane, ecologically friendly and psychically non-destructive goal is to earn a living creating **Zones of Enchantment** for loyal fans. **Selling Out**, in contrast, means attempting to enter the haunted post-human halls of the treacherous Pop Economy: **DON'T**. \*[we will go into **TBR... The Boob Rule...** in greater depth, later: **do NOT skip to it**]

4. **All In or don't bother**: do you really think those 5,000,000 people in line ahead of you for World Fame and Riches (or, more sanely, a decent living) are fucking around? **DO** take your effort seriously.

5. What? You say *You're a Super-Unknown who Decided to draw a Random Line in the Sand and Refuse to Ever Do Anything Creative for Free* and Yet You're getting Less Known every minute and Ever Less Likely, to Ever Get Paid, for doing something Creative? I am Fucking Shocked. **DON'T** be precious, **DO** be flexible. You will do tons of shit for free until people actually consider what you do so valuable that they willingly pay for it. People who are forced to go to accredited schools for x-number of years before even thinking of creating a price list for a service in a not-super-saturated market have a better perspective on all that.

6. **DON'T** listen to some random friend's ignorant praise or critique, even when he or she justifies this praise, or critique, with a self-righteous "*After all, I'm the audience!*" Um, NO, No particular individual person is **The Audience**, Fuckwit. **The Audience** you're aiming for should be approximately **10,000 people with jobs**. The averaged-out opinion of these **10,000 people** should be the feedback you *occasionally* consider... but you won't get it until you're already successful enough to have a 10,000-person audience. *Catch-22 ... or Paradox?* Yes.

7. **DON'T** model your material or tactics on the material or tactics of your favorite Artist at the very peak of Her/ His career. This common error has destroyed many a **fetal act**. Whatever an Artist does AFTER they've penetrated the fortified walls of the high-security bunker (surrounded by a mile-wide moat of piranhas) of **FAME** has nothing to do with what it will take to get **you** a *crumb* of attention

locally. Lady Gaga can wear a meat-suit; **you** can't wear a meat-suit. The question is: *what did Lady Gaga do in order to get to the point, ten years later, that she could wear a meat-suit?* The problem: they rarely tell you the Truth about that. Was she a drug-dealer to a connected producer? Did she provide sexual favors to a mid-tier management gopher? Did her grandfather invent the meat-suit? You'll never find out.

8. **DO** be rational, sane, well-informed, able to communicate, frank with yourself at all times and willing to turn **the metaphorical white-panelled kidnap van** around and drive it out of any cul-de-sac you may have inadvertently gotten yourself trapped in because you can't read a metaphorical map and you won't take off your metaphorical sunglasses and/or eye patch because that would ruin your look. In any case: **See that bridgeless canyon you need to cross in your metaphorical white-panelled kidnap van?** Only science, engineering, hard work and the proper materials, figuratively speaking, will get you across it. (White-panelled kidnap van or four-seat-bicycle or semen-coated skate board: it's all the same vehicular metaphor.)

9. **DON'T** confuse Ambition (or "passionate self-belief") with Capability. You may well Suck at Music. Develop the ability to tell the difference between **SUCKING AT MUSIC** and **THE WORLD NOT BEING READY FOR YOU**. Developing this ability (to tell the difference) may save your Life (or the 20 years you could have been training as a *Sous-chef* instead). On the other hand, 20 years of being **HAPPY** can never be "wasted" (though that doesn't guarantee that you aren't a stupid person who is easily pleased).

10. The pun of the title of this section required **Ten** entries.



## WORLDVIEW

1. No, Music is not your hobby, it's your obsession. You only call it a hobby so your friends won't mock you and your parents (with their heads hung low like dense little cemeteries of putrefying dreams) won't roll their eyes in defeated exasperation when you let your secret slip and mention the "cool rehearsal" you had yesterday. Stop calling it your fucking hobby. If you stop telling people

about it you can stop calling it your hobby. A secret well-kept grows in depth and force while an ill-timed confession stinks up the room and fades all too quickly (and is occasionally remembered only as a joke). It's You against the World and the Element of Surprise is your greatest weapon. No Revenge is sweeter than Surprise Success with an Obsession nobody even knew you had.

2. Your Day Job is a necessary evil. If you love your day job, you aren't a musician, but if you hate your Day Job, you're too drained, at the end of the day, to rehearse. Your Day Job is a whore you fuck respectfully and without resentment. But never with illusions, either. Use the whore to keep the pressure off your Beloved. Use your whore tenderly every working day of the week and write your Beloved courtly sonnets all night and every weekend and on all the national holidays.

3. No, Music/ Film/ Art/ Lit aren't all purely subjective pursuits and matters of personal taste with no objective standards: some shit sucks. Becoming an Artist means knowing why some shit sucks and/or why some shit sucks sometimes and not others and how far you actually are from making shit that doesn't suck. Don't agree? Go audition for the lead role in next year's production of the **Barber of Seville at the Met**. Be sure to let me know how you did.

4. Surround yourself with Similar Obsessives. Being an Unknown Musician in an Unheard-of Bandness is nothing to brag about, it carries no real prestige or protection, it leaves you vulnerable to psychic attack and sexual degradation. It's nothing to brag about, it's merely WHAT YOU ARE. Own it, live it, nurture it like a precious flame in a guttering lantern you've cupped your hands around in a lonely walk on windy moors. I mean: **surround your Bandness with hooded robes and secret handshakes and fancy ceremonial daggers**. Do Satanists hang out with Christian Scientists? Not usually. Learn from that.

## GIRLFRIENDS

This is the 21st century and nobody has a girlfriend any more. Nobody will believe you if you blame your broken-up **Bandness** on a "**girlfriend**". You will need another excuse.

## REHEARSAL SPACE

1. No, you're not there to help anybody out or do the singer/songwriter any favors. You're there to save your own Life, so start taking it seriously. Your half-assedness is a distancing technique. You get a trial period of no more than three rehearsals before your ambiguous signals regarding Total Commitment to the project become a slap in the face (with a sour dick) for everybody else in the Bandness. **All In or Don't Bother**. Why are you dithering on the doorstep?

A) Are you afraid of failure? Running from Failure is like running from a barking dog.

B) Are you hedging your bets? You're betting with nickels, don't bother.

2. Playing with more than two projects? You're not a "busy guy" or an "in-demand chick" you're a Slut with Musical AIDS who will end up killing most of the projects you fuck with. Bands should avoid you like the pestilent, bet-hedging dabbler you are.

A) Remember: Fear of Commitment is a Pathological Fear of Failure and the Pathological Fear of Failure makes Failure Inevitable. The harder you run, the harder that barking dog will bite when it catches you...

i) ...unless you're one of those brilliantly charismatic or talented Vampires who can find a Bandness that already put in the long hours and hard work and stick yourself to this Bandness right before or after they get a record deal (or a cool club residency) and coast across the (false) Finish Line with a parasite's repulsively opportunistic ease.

ii) ...unless you're under 23 and horrendously hot (see: **TBR**).

B) Drummers are by far the most guilty of this **Genocidal Crime Against Bandness** and for obvious reasons. I won't dignify Drummers by paying them much attention here. Drummers are all either **one of the 100 best drummers in the world or 30 million assholes who've spent 25 hours learning one shitty piece of music on the guitar with which to "casually" impress the rest of the Bandness during a break.**

Fuck me, I've already spent too much time talking about *fucking Drummers*.

3. The less (and less often) you contribute, the longer it will take, which makes it a punishable offense to bitch about *how long it's taking*.

4. Any riff you can't repeat never happened. I repeat: **ANY RIFF YOU CAN'T REPEAT NEVER HAPPENED**. No matter how cool it was. Create the part, learn the part, play the part until it makes you sick. **Repetition is the Heart of Music and the Soul of rehearsal and the Key to practising**. All members of a **Bandness** must embrace the **hypnagogic Zen of Repetition** and **Repeat** until the Bandness has a working **SET**, which is simply the layered accretion of looping hooks arranged into a coherent c. 45 minutes of not-wasting any listener's time and which shows solid potential for being polished into a **ZONE OF ENCHANTMENT**. If Repetition bores you, dabble in Schizophrenia instead of Music.

5. The only thing worse than farting in the Rehearsal Space (or Recording Studio) is doing it often and loudly and on purpose as a "joke". Anyone older than 17 who thinks farts are "funny" will eventually give you Hepatitis.



## TBR: THE **BOOB** RULE

BANDNESS as it has been historically practised is connected primordially to the heterosexual hard-wiring of the reproductive compulsion (**the Village People** notwithstanding) and can only truly be understood through the smeared lens of that voyeuristic worldview. The male gaze is most properly realized through a cultural peephole: the stolen image is the most arousing and the most (consequently) potent. Classical BANDNESS consists of four sexually desperate young men practising a kind of sympathetic magic by singing about the kind of women they hope to score by singing about them. Every subsequent configuration of Bandness is a Postmodern Variation (sometimes enhanced, sometimes diluted) on that original theme.

The male gaze of the audience (whether or not the audience consists primarily of females) instrumentalizes the phallic performance as a "stolen image" of Sexual Desperation in its most natural and unselfconscious setting (the theatricality of "authenticity" is a convention of suspended disbelief not unlike that of a 17th century carnival magician's audience). The human female **Boob** is the traditional 20th century synecdoche of **Human Female Sexual Allure** and, as such, is the implied subject of every song, be it a ballad or a virtue-signalling protest song, emitted by Bandness. When actual **Boobs** (literally naked or figuratively so\*) make an appearance onstage, or near the stage, or in the rehearsal space, or at an audition, or a guitar store's parking lot, a kind of **Irrational Synergy** ensues that functions to project a blinding **FATA MORGANA**: something great feels as though it is happening, or has happened, or will happen, and the net result can be puzzling, as it often amounts to *zero*. The BANDNESS (or the **ZONE OF ENCHANTMENT** the Bandness generates) may feel briefly elevated, the circumstances electrified, the audience or Bandness-members all *mind-blown*... but it's quite rare that the mammalian jolt a **Boob** can introduce, to the environment surrounding Bandness, leads, in and of itself, to Evolution.

**The Boob Rule**, expressed mathematically:  $\text{Net Gain} = \text{Talent (minus) Distraction} \times \text{Professionalism} / \text{DSB}$ .

Great female Artists or **BANDNESSES** have had to possess proportionally formidable talent to actually *overcome* the paradox of **TBR**.

That said: nothing attracts second rate management offers like a strategically-deployed **Boob**.

\*All **Boobs** are great, but the smaller the **Boob**, the more naked it must be; the bigger the **Boob**, the more figuratively naked it is, no matter how many layers of fabric (even corduroy) clothe it.



## THE ZONE OF ENCHANTMENT

Have you ever walked out of a great movie, blinking in the sunlight, feeling utterly disoriented by the workaday world you've re-entered after fully investing in the *Engineered Imaginational Environment* of the movie? This means you have inhabited a **ZONE OF ENCHANTMENT**. Film Directors draw on budgets of hundreds of millions of dollars, and teams of dozens or hundreds of thoroughly-trained craftspeople, in order to create these painstakingly-constructed **Waking Dreams**. Historically speaking, most **Great Bandnesses** were required to produce the same effect with a budget of a few dollars and one disinterested soundman. In other words, these Bandnesses were comprised of **Super Humans** guided by a **Transcendent Being** (or two) and should, if the world were **FAIR** (*snort!*), tower a great and dizzying height above mere *Movie Stars* and *Film Directors* in the cultural hierarchy of the Performing Arts.

Brilliant Writers also create **ZONES OF ENCHANTMENT** but the variables involved are well within tolerable limits, casting the alcoholic tradition of Literature in a harsh, even snickering, "*first world problems*" light. The Brilliant Writer doesn't have to deal with the D-word (I promised to avoid talking about these fuckers, didn't I?) or the snooty, know-it-all *Sound Engineer* or the stressful magic of nurturing, focusing and channelling **BANDNESS** as it turns an **amplified clearing, surrounded by**

**Sexual Voyeurs**, into a **ZONE OF ENCHANTMENT** for no less than 45, and sometimes more than 120, minutes. Philip Roth had it easy.

There is an old, nearly pre-human structure in the brain that responds ecstatically to music, and a parallel structure that is prone to *Waking Dreams*, which is somehow adjacent to the capacity for *Hope*, and the interaction of the one capacity with the other proclivity can palliate the darkest Existential crisis. Elton John sang "*someone saved my life tonight*," and they saved uncounted numbers of actual human lives by singing it... [though *Bernie Taupin* did sort of ruin the grandeur of the effect with the off-putting addition of the words "*Sugar Bear*," which you will be far too young to know, in fact, refers to a cartoon character with a *Cracker's Voice* once used to advertize a brand of fucking *breakfast cereal* but oh well].

What are Dreams made of? Are they Communicable? Where and why do they taper off as Reality re-intrudes? Is there an instant of **Timeless Overlap** between these warring realms so powerful it comes as close, as anything can, to defying Death itself? Ask the audience members at **Wembley's Empire Pool, April 16th, 1965**, the night **The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, The Kinks, Them, The Animals** and **Dusty Springfield** were all on the bill. *I think I'm going to go jump off the roof of a two-story garage...*

The very first **ZONE OF ENCHANTMENT** probably involved a campfire and a grizzled pedophile telling spooky tales to a terrified tribe in the balmy, prehistoric, star-infested night. Things probably hadn't changed much between that **B.C. moment** and the legendary club shows of the 1960s, except for the roof, the WC and the cover charge. The differences between the 1960s and now, on the other hand, are *profound* and possibly upsetting and worth analyzing in diligent detail to the extent, perhaps, that forming a goddamn so-called "**band**" in the 21st century is discovered to be fucking useless. But I have to take a piss and it's late, so...

***Go now and make good on the unspoken promise, to me, you consented to by reading this.***

