

WEIRD SCENES INSIDE THE CANYON

petri dish brimming with a lethal biological weapon that could be unleashed in meticulously monitored increments. Indeed, many of Laurel Canyon's rock 'n' roll idols had former incarnations steeped in the world of military/intelligence operations. Jim Morrison, aka "the Lizard King," was one such example. Mr. Mojo Risin' didn't much like to talk about his parents and was even known to tell reporters that his parents were dead. But as it turns out, Lizard King, Sr. was not only alive and well, he just happened to be the commander of the US warships that allegedly came under attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats in the Gulf of Tonkin, sparking America's napalm-fueled bloodbath in Vietnam.

Frank Zappa, another major mover and shaker of the Laurel Canyon scene, was certainly the raddest of the rad, so surely he couldn't have had any connections to the military/intelligence complex... right? Not exactly. According to various accounts collected by McGowan, Zappa was a pro-military autocrat who didn't really resonate with the counterculture's peace and love vibe. Like the Lizard King's dad, Zappa, Sr. was a cog in the intelligence community's dark machinations; Francis Zappa was a chemical warfare specialist with a top security clearance at Edgewood Arsenal near Baltimore, Maryland. Some readers might recognize Edgewood as the location of ominous mind control experiments conducted by the CIA under the rubric of MK-ULTRA.

Guilt by familial association has the potential to be an ill-fated formula for speculation, but McGowan relates accounts of Laurel Canyon luminaries whose own hands were possibly awash in the blood of the military/intelligence complex. Consider, for example, "Papa" John Phillips, who penned the smash hit San Francisco (Be Sure to Wear Flowers in Your Hair), imploring thousands of runaways to make bacchanal-laced pilgrimages to the City by the Bay. The son of a Marine Corps captain, Phillips was among the more prominent fixtures of Laurel Canyon who had a particularly interesting interrelationship with the military machine.

Rock superstar Stephen Stills was the cofounder of two Laurel Canyon dynamos—Buffalo Springfield, and, of course, Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. Surely then hippie icon Stills couldn't possibly be enmeshed in the military-intelligence complex? Maybe, maybe not. The progeny of yet another military family, Stills spent chunks of his childhood in El Salvador, Costa Rica, and Panama, where the US has a history of spread-

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ing a genocidal form of “democracy.” And McGowan has sifted through accounts of Stills actually confessing to running around the jungles of Vietnam in the early 1960s—anecdotes generally dismissed, as the author notes, as drug-fueled delusions.

Tales of drugs, unbridled debauchery and full-tilt depravity are often populated by ethical eunuchs whose elite deviance yields to particularly malignant appetites, and the people calling Laurel Canyon home were no exception. McGowan introduces us to aging beatnik Vito Paulekas and his “Freaks,” a dance troupe of Dionysian goddesses who accompanied Vito to the LA nightclubs where the fledgling Laurel Canyon bands were playing their early gigs. In addition to saturating the dance floors with sultry young nubilees for emerging bands, Vito was also a purveyor of teenage girls for the up-and-coming rockers. McGowan also comments on Vito’s swift exodus to Haiti, for reasons explained herein.

Vito Paulekas certainly isn’t a household name, but he was far from being a fringe player on the Laurel Canyon scene, where he and his Freaks mingled freely with rock ‘n’ roll’s burgeoning royalty. McGowan collects anecdotes suggesting that Vito may have played a key role in the formation and early success of the Byrds—though his name is conspicuously absent from the autobiographical tome of Byrds co-founder David Crosby. We also find Vito in a string of low-budget films, and in a cameo appearance on one of rock’s first concept albums: Zappa’s *Freak Out!* Vito’s parental skills, however, left a lot to be desired, as evinced by the very mysterious and bizarre death of his young son, Godo.

Further excavating the idolatry of his youth, McGowan encounters Laurel Canyon fixture Billy Bryars, a male madam and gay porn entrepreneur. Bryars was investigated for trafficking child pornography in the 1970s, whereupon his stable of male hustlers began coughing up the names of frequent flyers at his bordello, the most notable among them being super freak G-man J. Edgar Hoover and partner Clyde Tolson.

The 1960s was a “revolutionary” epoch not only in music but also in Hollywood, and McGowan discusses the symbiosis between the Laurel Canyon music scene and Hollywood’s “Young Turks,” with the box office phenomenon *Easy Rider* providing a salient nexus between Laurel Canyon rockers and Hollywood upstarts. Many of those upstarts, including Warren Beatty, Peter and Jane Fonda, Jack Nicholson, Candice Bergen, Marlon Brando, Roman Polanski and Sharon Tate, Peter Lawford, Den-

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nis Hopper, Ryan O’Neal, Mia Farrow, Peter Sellers, and Zsa Zsa Gabor, were among Papa John and Mama Michelle Phillips’ circle of friends.

Also making the rounds in Laurel Canyon was America’s favorite psychopath, Charles Manson. And Charlie and his “Family” weren’t just a peripheral flock of crazed killers among the Laurel Canyon sovereigns; to the contrary, the Family mingled with many of the Canyon’s rock stars. Manson even laid down tracks in Brian Wilson’s home studio, stunning the likes of Neil Young. “He had this kind of music that nobody else was doing,” said Neil of Charlie. “I thought he really had something crazy, something great. He was like a living poet.” Charlie also impressed Terry Melcher, the Byrds’ first producer and a major force in sculpting the Laurel Canyon music scene. Melcher also recorded Manson, finding him to be a much more amicable character than David Crosby.

Manson’s homicidal lieutenant Bobby Beausoleil also had some impressive moves as a guitarist—and an occultist. Beausoleil played in a number of forgotten bands that had an occult topspin, one of which even opened for Buffalo Springfield. Bobby eventually landed a gig as a rhythm guitarist for the Grass Roots, which later transmuted into the Laurel Canyon band Love.

McGowan also touches on the grisly “Four on the Floor” or “Wonderland” murders, which left notorious drug dealer Ron Launius and three of his gang bludgeoned to death on the floor of a house on Laurel Canyon’s Wonderland Avenue. Launius dealt drugs to Laurel Canyon’s aristocracy, as well as to porn star John Holmes, then in the twilight of his career. Holmes also befriended LA crime boss/club owner Eddie Nash, who he then betrayed, with fatal consequences.

Truth be told, the Manson and Wonderland Murders were merely spatters on Laurel Canyon’s blood-drenched tapestry. In the pages of this fascinating book, McGowan chronicles tale after tale of suicide and murder, while delivering readers to a web of sinister synchronicities. Ultimately, it is up to the reader to decide whether Laurel Canyon, in its heyday, was the counterculture haven portrayed by other chroniclers of the era, or whether it was the epicenter of intrigues whose ripple effects are like the aftershock of a nuclear bomb.

Nick Bryant
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“I think these days, especially in the States, you have to be a politician or an assassin or something to really be a superstar.” Jim Morrison

Before he was the Lizard King: US Navy Admiral George Stephen Morrison and his son, James Douglas Morrison, on the bridge of the USS Bon Homme Richard, January 1964.

This book is dedicated to all those whose blood still stains the canyon floor.

PREFACE

IT BEGAN INNOCENTLY ENOUGH.

In my normal, everyday life I spend a fair amount of time researching corruption and criminality in the realms of politics and law enforcement. Much of that research has taken me down some very dark and twisted paths. But this was going to be different. I was, after all, going to be vacationing in a lush, tropical paradise and I really just wanted to turn my brain off for a couple weeks and forget about all of that.

Not long before this much-anticipated break from reality, my eldest daughter had given me a copy of Michael Walker's *Laurel Canyon: The Inside Story of Rock-and-Roll's Legendary Neighborhood*, which chronicles the Los Angeles music scene of the late 1960s through the 1970s. It seemed like the ideal escapist entertainment that would undoubtedly conjure up many fond memories of the music that provided the soundtrack to my formative years. What could be further removed from my usual reading material?

As is often the case though, things didn't work out exactly as planned. Alarm bells started going off in my head soon after arriving at my destination and diving into the book. What was this about secret underground tunnels connecting some of the iconic Laurel Canyon properties? And what about all those mysterious fires that wiped away the homes of a number of prominent singers and musicians? And why were there so many violent deaths so closely associated with a scene that was supposed to be all about peace and love? And what of Walker's throwaway mention of a "secret fortified" military installation sitting right smack-dab in the middle of hippiedom? And why did at least a few of America's new minstrels seem to come from career military families and from the world of covert intelligence operations? And how exactly do the casual allusions to pedophilia fit into this increasingly curious scene?

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While Walker had done a decent job of telling the Laurel Canyon story from a mainstream perspective, there seemed to be a much more intriguing story hidden in the details that he tended to cast aside as interesting but largely meaningless incongruities. Before I was even halfway through my sorely needed rest-and-relaxation time, I was champing at the bit to get back home and dig deeper into this story. And immediately upon my return, I began devouring everything I could find that had been written on the subject.

Although I am regarded by many people as a ‘conspiracy theorist,’ which is more often than not utilized as a pejorative term, I do all of my research through very mainstream channels. I am a big believer in the notion that ‘the truth is out there,’ but don’t expect it to be delivered to you in a tidy package by any mainstream media outlets. Finding it involves assembling a jigsaw puzzle of sorts, with the goal being to gather up all the bits and pieces of information that other writers tend to present as throwaway facts and/or interesting anomalies. Sometimes those bits and pieces end up being no more than interesting anomalies, but past experience has taught me that if those divergent facts are properly assembled, a new picture often begins to emerge that is strikingly at odds with what is widely accepted as our consensus reality.

At the end of the day, it is really all about pattern recognition. If, for example, just a few prominent Laurel Canyon musicians happened to come from military/intelligence families, then we could probably safely write that off as an interesting but largely inconsequential aberration. But if an uncanny number of the leading lights of the Laurel Canyon scene grew up in such an environment, then that is clearly a meaningful pattern. And if a few of the new breed of stars happened to have violent death intrude upon their personal lives, then that would be a tragic but largely inconsequential fact. But when it becomes clear that violent death surrounded the entire scene, with whole families at times dying off under suspicious circumstances, then that again is a distinguishing pattern—and one that has been all but ignored by other chroniclers of the scene.

There is little doubt in my mind that this book will not be warmly received by all readers. In our celebrity-driven culture, calling into question the character and motivations of so many widely admired and respected figures from the entertainment community is never a good

P R E F A C E

way to win popularity contests. And when those revered figures are overwhelmingly viewed as icons of various leftist causes, it is definitely not the way to win fans among those who consider themselves to be liberals, progressives or leftists. But while my sympathies lie solidly in the leftward flanks of the political spectrum, there are no sacred cows in either this book or in any of my past work.

I really have no agenda other than to seek out unspoken truths and better my own understanding of the world we live in. I have no political party affiliations and have never been associated in any way with any governmental or quasi-governmental entities. And for the record, I was not born into the world of military intelligence operations; my rather uneventful childhood was spent in a quiet slice of suburbia with two public school teachers as parents. I have never claimed to be in possession of any 'inside information' or to have access to any highly placed, confidential sources. My research and the views expressed in my work are very much my own.

While almost all of my past and present literary contributions are generally regarded as being quite controversial, the individual facts contained in this volume are not really controversial at all. All of them, as previously noted, have been mined from very respectable mainstream sources. It is only the way that I have presented those facts—in other words, the way that I have chosen to assemble the puzzle—that makes them controversial.

There will undoubtedly be those who will stridently claim that I have carefully cherry-picked my facts to paint an unnecessarily dark portrait of many of the iconic figures who make up the cast of this story. Anyone, so the argument goes, could be made to look bad through such a journalistic approach. I would strongly disagree with that assessment, however. Such criticisms, in my opinion, completely miss the point of the book—which is that when stripped of the usual spin that accompanies them, and when assembled so that they become part of overriding patterns, these 'anomalous' facts reveal truths that would not otherwise be visible.

Another criticism I anticipate is that I did not go out and attempt to speak directly to the people who made up the scene. True enough, but the primary reason for that is that there is very little chance that the aging rock stars and their handlers would have wanted anything to

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do with me. Other chroniclers of the era have gained access to those involved, but that access has come, or so it appears to me, with a steep price in journalistic integrity. The inevitable result is what amounts to puff pieces with a mind-numbing sameness, with the same tired anecdotal stories uncritically told over and over again in the very same way, even when those stories can't possibly be true.

I have no desire to serve as a publicist for the estates of Jim Morrison, John Phillips or Frank Zappa, nor do I have any interest in filling the pages of this book with the same apocryphal tales told by other scribes. There are any number of literary offerings listed in the bibliography that will provide that type of a reading experience. My goal here is to break new ground and open readers' minds to the possibility that other writers may have left out some of the most important elements of this underreported tale.

The story of the scene that played out in Laurel Canyon from the mid-1960s through the end of the 1970s is an endlessly fascinating one. It wasn't until fairly recently that the mainstream version of the tale was belatedly told, and even now it remains a story unknown by most of those who were not a part of it. Virtually everyone has heard of the Haight-Ashbury scene up north in San Francisco, but even most native Angelenos remain ignorant of the even larger music and counterculture scene that played out in the Hollywood Hills.

It seems a bit odd that, nearly a full half-century after the fact, the Haight is almost universally regarded as the birthplace of hippies and flower children, despite the fact that the Laurel Canyon scene preceded and largely inspired what became a parallel scene up north. Why is it that the Haight has been thrust into the spotlight for so long while so little attention has been paid to the scene that spawned it? Perhaps the Laurel Canyon scene was hiding so many dark secrets that it was better to just let it lie undisturbed.

And perhaps it is now time to shine a light into some of the darker corners of the canyon to see what kind of skeletons might be hiding there.

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VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED BY WAY OF AN INTRODUCTION

**“There’s something happening here /
What it is ain’t exactly clear”**

JOIN ME NOW, IF YOU HAVE THE TIME, AS WE TAKE A STROLL DOWN MEMORY lane to a time nearly five decades ago—a time when America last had uniformed ground troops fighting a sustained and bloody battle to impose some decidedly Orwellian ‘democracy’ on a sovereign nation.

It is the first week of August, 1964, and US warships under the command of US Navy Admiral George Stephen Morrison have allegedly come under attack while patrolling Vietnam’s Tonkin Gulf. This event, subsequently dubbed the ‘Tonkin Gulf Incident,’ will result in the immediate passing by the US Congress of the obviously pre-drafted Tonkin Gulf Resolution, which will, in turn, quickly lead to America’s deep immersion into the bloody Vietnam quagmire. Before it is over, well over 50,000 American bodies—along with literally millions of Southeast Asian bodies—will litter the battlefields of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

For the record, the Tonkin Gulf Incident appears to differ somewhat from other alleged provocations that have driven this country to war. This was not, as we have seen so many times before, a ‘false flag’ operation (which is to say, an operation that involves Uncle Sam attacking himself and then pointing an accusatory finger at someone else). It was also not, as we have also seen on more than one occasion, an