

# Moe Berg bids Troc '59 goodbye — say hello

by Nate LaRoi

After nearly five months in limbo, Moe Berg's Troc '59 has resurfaced with a new bassist - Blaine Vanstone - and a new name - Facecrime. The new name is drawn from George Orwell's 1984 where "facecrime" was a facial show of emotion punishable by death. The three piece band (guitarist Berg, bassist Vanstone, and drummer Dave Gilby) makes its performing debut at RATT March 3, 4, and 5. I talked to Moe Berg - one of Edmonton's finest singer/songwriters - over coffee Saturday afternoon.

**Gateway:** How does it feel to have a band again?

**Moe Berg:** It feels great. It was very difficult without the group. It's very hard for me to be motivated a lot of times if I don't have a band. My whole attitude changes.

**Gateway:** You went through about a dozen auditions for a new bass player. Can you tell us about your new bassist, Blaine Vanstone?

**Moe Berg:** He used to play with ID, who were around last summer. He's just a young guy. He hasn't been in 20 bands around the city or anything.

**Gateway:** Why the name change from Troc '59 to facecrime?

**Moe Berg:** We wanted a fresh start. We've got a new bassist, of course, and we've got a lot of new songs. Not much has happened with Troc '59. Troc '59 has been around for two years and maybe if people have a new name to associate the band with, it'll revive more interest in the group. The last band with Bob (Drysdale) and Dave (Gilby) was the best band I've ever been in, but last year was probably our most dismal year - gigs, acceptance, popularity-wise.

**Gateway:** You once said "it's useless to do a lot of roadwork without some product to promote". Now that you're gigging again, are you planning on putting out another single (last single was 'Theresa's World', 1980)?

**Moe Berg:** We're aiming at a 12" EP. We definitely want to put something out. We've tried to get some label interest and haven't been very successful. If no one's going to make records for us, then I think the onus is on us to make our own.

**Gateway:** How much does it cost to put out a decently recorded single?

**Moe Berg:** It depends. You can put out something that won't sound fantastic, that won't sound like a Billy Joel record, like 'Theresa's World' for about \$1,500. That's recording it, pressing it, and distributing it yourself.

**Gateway:** 'Theresa's World' sounded very much designed with live performances in mind. There's only one guitar part and very little actual over-dubbing....

**Moe Berg:** One reason our recordings have sounded a little sparse is because we were attempting to get a live sound. At the same time, budget restrictions didn't allow for a lot of experimentation. All things considered, though, I was happy with 'Theresa's World'. At the time, it was some sort of representation of what we were, although I'd hate to put out a record like that now. It wasn't done at a high budget studio and we were fairly inexperienced. I think the next recording you hear from facecrime will be more experimental, more produced. The more you're in the studio, the more you realise what a creative process it is. It's much more creative than playing live.

**Gateway:** Your guitar has always been the focus of your music. When did you start playing?

**Moe Berg:** My earliest memory was playing the guitar, being involved in music. It's been the center of my life ever since I can remember. I fooled around with the guitar, although not knowing what I was doing, as early as four years old. I took some lessons when I was ten. It wasn't until I was a teenager that I started playing seriously.

**Gateway:** When did you get your first real band together?

**Moe Berg:** The first band of any note that I was in was the News (with Bobby Drysdale and Kim Upright) in 1979. The News became The Modern Minds. Same members.

## I wasn't born kicking and screaming and listening to Johnny Rotten in 1977.

**Gateway:** Was there a stage before that when you were just playing heavy-metal covers? Like Led Zeppelin, Deep Purple....

**Moe Berg:** Oh yeah. I wasn't born kicking and screaming and listening to Johnny Rotten in 1977. When I was in junior high and high school, we were just playing whoever we were listening to at the time. And even when the News and the Modern Minds started we played a lot of covers, more new wave/punk style covers though....

**Gateway:** You have a song called '(I Want to See Some) Punk Violence', you used to do 'Blitzkrieg Bop' and 'I Fought the Law', you use a lot of distortion on your guitar, and do a lot of two minute songs. I'm wondering if you listen to a lot of punk and new wave?

**Moe Berg:** I don't listen to any punk. As far as I'm concerned, the only good punk music came out at the source, 1977 to 1979. The (sex) Pistols, the very early Clash, the

early Ramones. I can't stand listening to any of the new (punk) stuff coming out. The stuff coming out of LA, for instance....

**Gateway:** Like X?

**Moe Berg:** Yeah, I've got nothing against the band, it's just not what I personally like listening to. I have to admit that I was very influenced by punk and new wave. To start off with, we were doing twelve 2-minute songs in a set. We were playing like hummingbirds on speed. If a person in the audience took a drink of beer and turned to his friend, he could miss a song. A lot of times 3 songs would go by and I wouldn't even be conscious of it. In the new group the songs are longer. We didn't say "from now on all our songs have to be over four minutes". Longer songs were more like an evolution in my writing. My ideas have become a little longer. There's something to be said for taking an idea and developing it properly so a person can actually sit and enjoy it for a few minutes. The comparisons (to punk) are less obvious now. People will see that when they see the new group.

**Gateway:** What groups, what artists do you listen to?

**Moe Berg:** I listen to a lot of Earth, Wind and Fire. I listen to a lot of black music, a lot of funk. My music tastes are fairly diverse. I like Todd Rundgren, I like Manhattan Transfer, I really like Thomas Dolby. There's so little good new music out there you can't just say, "well I only listen to new wave" or "I only listen to rock" because if you're really looking for quality music, you'll only listen to maybe one or two (new) records a year.

**Gateway:** It seems like you're much more interested in the music itself rather than the imaging, as compared to, say, the Mods or Office....

**Moe Berg:** Our lack of image or lack of identification with any movement or trend has oftentimes hurt us. But if you peg yourself as a rockabilly revival band, a mod band, a new music band, a synthesizer pop band, you've pegged your audience too. When I think of my audience, I just want to play to music lovers, people who find something in my music, whether they be 35 year old accountants or 12 year old kids.

**Gateway:** Also, a lot of those trends sort of die out....

**Moe Berg:** Most trends actually don't really die out. They usually hang in there. You can't even say that disco is dead. Rockabilly never really died - it's just a little more popular now than it used to be. I don't think there's anything wrong with getting into a more narrowly defined style of music. It's just that my personal musical interests are more broad.

**Gateway:** You use a Hiwatt amp and Rickenbacker 330 guitar, standard early Who equipment. Do you consider Pete

Townshend an important influence on your music?

**Moe Berg:** On my music, I'd say so. I listen to a lot of early Who: everything up to and including Quadrophenia I really like. I think Pete Townshend is one of the greatest songwriters in the history of rock music; he's one of the best songwriters in music period. He's done so much to make rock more literate.

**Gateway:** On "White Pages On Air" (TV-C10), the Mods said that rock and roll doesn't have to have socially relevant lyrics. Do you agree with that?

**Moe Berg:** I agree. The ideal situation is to create art in music or lyrics. I don't think that's presumptuous. I know a lot of people who don't think rock and roll is art. That's their problem. A lot of bands write about political issues, trendy, political issues. There's not really anything artistic about that. A lot of bands are nothing more than newspaper reporters for people who can't read. There's one famous British band I'm thinking of. You can throw out a lot of political images without any real slant except maybe the anger in your voice and the power in your music. But if you start writing a lot of trendy political things, those songs date. Two years from now if you're singing them, you're going to sound like a fool. All those songs in the sixties about the Vietnam War are totally irrelevant now. You can write a song about war, fine. War is a timeless thing, you can write a timeless song about war. You can write about broad political issues like freedom and that's okay. But music is to be enjoyed and appreciated. Ultimately it should inspire others to have better lives, enjoy themselves.

## Society's preoccupation with slime is fairly sobering.

**Gateway:** Back on 'Theresa's World' you said "Theresa's world is a world I'll never live in". Your newer songs strike me as more optimistic....

**Moe Berg:** I hope so. There may be some songs that aren't optimistic, that are reverse romantic. You think of the romantic concept in literature: life as it should be, not as it is. I aim for that in my writing. Sometimes I write about life as it is or as it shouldn't be. But as a body I would like my work to be perceived as optimistic. I don't want people thinking that the world is terrible, that you can't improve your life. You don't have to be talking about death and pestilence and nuclear war.

**Gateway:** In 'My Favorite Books' you talk about Elvis Presley and how the media "cut him down to size"....

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