

# NEO-COOL

subHuman

Prague 26.9. - 1.10.2007



An e-mail popped up in my inbox from the inscrutable Igor Dvorsky. “What do you think?” I said to Robert Schilling, Recoil’s co-ordinator at Mute Records. “Oh, he’s a good guy and will put on a great event” came the reply.

And so, some 6 weeks later, I found myself on a plane, accompanied by my wife and PA Hepzibah, en route to the Czech Republic and the beautiful city of Prague. 5 days later and admittedly, after a few too many Pilsners, we came away more than impressed - not just by the charm of the city but mainly by the warmth of our hosts and of course, the many people we met along the way.

It was indeed a great event.....thank you to all who made it happen.

Alan Wilder

















## **Lost In Translation / by Hepzibah Sessa**

### **Wednesday**

As confirmed ‘nervous flyers’, Alan and I were delighted to arrive, intact, at Prague airport where we were accosted by the wonderful Igor Dvorsky (our host and party organiser) and whisked into a VIP area while our bags were collected. Accompanying Igor was Franta (a man of great stature but few words), Ivana (Igor’s lovely wife and photographer) and Peter (film cameraman), who would capture Alan’s every move. Following the thrill of Prague’s rush-hour, we finally arrived at our randomly-chosen hotel - somewhere more akin to a Holiday Inn but with a distinctly brown/beige slant. What is it with ‘design hotels’ and their obsession with brown? Does the guest achieve a better night’s sleep when surrounded by the colour of shit? It also doesn’t help when the suite is a duplex and therefore split over two floors. Sounds great but the reality of breaking a leg as you try to find the bed after 10 tequilas always fills me with dread.

Our disappointment was further compounded by the fact there was no facility to play music whatsoever, in spite of this being the finest suite the hotel had to offer. This omission always throws Al first into a state of extreme anxiety, then furious anger, followed by a very male compulsion to ‘fix the problem’. And so, armed with a selection of unusual plugs and cables (purchased from a one-of-a-kind ‘Unusual Plugs and Cables’ shop in Berlin’s Turkish area) he proceeded to remove the entire TV from the wall and jab at it with a screw driver. I’m afraid that on this occasion he did not succeed in routing the music from his MacBook and through the TV speakers so we had to listen to weedy sounds for the rest of the trip - either that or MTV.de, which transmits almost continual teenage EMO bands or ringtone ad’s at deafening volume. I might add that this attack on the television is just part of an H.R.R.R. (Hotel Room Reorganisation Routine) that Alan must perform before he can feel settled in his temporary home and is something he has perfected after years on the road. This includes shoving all superfluous or offensive furniture out of the door and into the corridor and ensuring that the porn channel is on when someone from housekeeping comes up to bring us some extra hangers (they don’t tend to bother you unnecessarily after that).

So we headed out into the Prague evening to find a restaurant, armed only with a trusty TimeOut guide and a tourist map. Unfortunately it was getting dark so the map was discarded and I put myself in the capable hands of Alan’s finely-tuned sense of direction. “I’m a bloke and I always know where I’m going” he boasted. Unfortunately his radar wasn’t the piece

of precision engineering he thought it was because I got a tour of Prague’s back alleys and roadworks.

I can imagine there must be nothing funnier to the locals in any city than the site of two bickering tourists trying to find out where they are. And this is doubly amusing if the language is as frustratingly difficult to understand as Czech. It tends to go somewhat like this:

“We’re not on fucking Skolvsk....skooklyf....sklllookvy fucking street. We’re miles away and my fucking feet, fucking hurt.”

“Oh, shut ya face you miserable old cow. I’ll get us there. Have I ever let you down before?”


Well, you have led me to one or two long-abandoned places and I’ve seen my fair share of the more salubrious parts of major cities in our travels, my dearest...

We did eventually find a restaurant - not the one we’d booked - and enjoyed a very nice meal and a couple of bottles of fine wine. The night finally ended with a hair-raising taxi ride back to the hotel - where I couldn’t get TimeOut’s warning of dodgy cabbies and a possible re-enactment of ‘Hostel’ out of my mind - and the sweet sounds of My Comical Romance to lull us to sleep.

### **Thursday**

The day started with an early morning interview courtesy of Radio Express and the dulcet tones of Septic ex-pat Dr. Robert. As usual, Alan slipped effortlessly into interview mode, sounding cool and calm, throwing in a few humorous comments and totally belying the fact that he’s been out of the promo. loop for 7 years. By contrast, I sat there dribbling and prising my eyelids open Tom & Jerry-style with two matchsticks. This consummate professionalism continued at the Retro Music Club cocktail bar for the official press conference attended by a roomful of hacks, radio and TV, and followed by a succession of further interviews until late afternoon. I do have to admit that the grumpy bastard can really pull out all the stops when he wants to - or has to.

Later that evening, Igor arranged a gastronomic Czech extravaganza consisting of about 13 courses at ‘La Degustation’. Yes, there were 13 courses but each one consisted of a single



mouthful of some delight or other, accompanied by a different wine. The meal was quite stunning and a great introduction to Czech cuisine. Naturally, we wanted to continue the night in true Prague-style so we left the restaurant in search of Pilsner, now joined by the chef. I confided the intimate details of my Bouillabaisse and he told me the secrets of his Tafelspitz (if you're confused, google it) before we crawled home in the wee small hours and up the stairs to bed, limbs still intact.

### Friday

With a free day there seemed nothing better than to pound the streets of Prague like true tourists and cruise her multitude of watering-holes. It is an incredibly beautiful, if somewhat chocolate-box city, which would leave you Septics with mouths aghast. This is the REAL Disneyland and not a talking mouse in site. We wandered through the old town and crossed the Charles Bridge (Karlův most) towards the castle, stopping at appropriate moments to whet our whistle and watch the people go by. 'Spot the nationality' is always a good game and you too can play it at home, kids. Just remember the basics and you're on your way to a whole afternoon of fun.

White sox, sneakers and LOUD voice = American

Long black hair, black sunglasses, designer handbag (men too) = Italian.

Ginger mullet with matching handlebar moustache, over-tight, stonewash jeans and blue leather jacket (women too) = German

Ben.Sherman shirt, pasty complexion and pissed = English.

I will resist the temptation to mention the national dress of our Czech hosts, suffice to say, that unisex Suzie Quatro haircut has got to go.....

### Saturday

Saturday saw the final nail hammered firmly into the coffin when our room service coffee took more than 45 minutes to arrive - and then without the requested hot milk. Now I'm not a demanding person and I have no time for 'diva' behaviour but it is best not to trifle with me in the mornings if I haven't ingested a substantial quantity of caffeine, and his Lordship is even worse. Thursday's enormous cup was stone cold, Friday's was miniscule and tasted like mud and it appeared that Saturday was not going to be a case of 'third time lucky'. Never mind, we'd forgo our fix for now, hope no-one pisses us off in the meantime and find a nice cafe for breakfast.

With caffeine-equilibrium achieved, we joined the convoy of tourists and wandered through the Petrin Hill park snapping photos of the superb city views. At the bottom of the hill a new stereotype appeared across the road. "Mode fans at 11 o'clock" said I, and sure enough, as soon as they recognised Alan, my suspicions were confirmed. We were pleased to see the official uniform had not been corrupted in any way: Black jeans, black t-shirt, Dave flat-top circa 1985 and large black bag containing entire Depeche Mode collection.

I have to say I was quite surprised to see them, especially as the sun was shining strongly and by nature 'Modesters' are nocturnal creatures, rarely venturing outside in daylight, preferring the cloak of darkness so as not to sully their complexions. I took a photo of the gang (who had travelled from Poland) with Alan and we continued on our way back to the hotel to prepare for the official release party.

To thank them for their considerable efforts in furthering the Recoil cause, we invited a few people to a private Meet & Greet with Alan in our hotel bar, prior to the official party. True to form, the hotel bar was blessed with revolting overhead lighting which illuminated every conceivable blemish and made its occupants look like showroom dummies. Oh, how I despise Halogen spots. The inventor, and anyone who dares to include them in their design spec, should suffer a long, slow, painful death in my book; preferably in the similarly-illuminated hotel lift, whilst being forced to look at enlarged pictures of themselves taken on a cheap mobile phone camera. Digital hell on earth.

Just before 10pm, Franta drove us to the Retro Music Hall, up onto the pavement and into a frenzy of fans awaiting Alan's arrival. Whisked through next door's restaurant, we were shunted through a labyrinth of tunnels and into the bowels of the building ("Hello Cleveland, raack 'n' roll!"), stopping off briefly in our dressing room (where we encountered suspiciously Spinal Tap-esque sandwiches) to eventually emerge in the VIP area. Situated on a balcony above the main hall, one could look down on the action below and watch the masses dancing. Alan meanwhile, settled into an area nearest the entrance and the stairs began to fill up with fans keen to meet him and have their bits and pieces scribbled on (literally, in some cases). The signing extravaganza that ensued merely cemented my belief that he is a very special type of artist. Let's face it, I think most of us would find it mind-numbingly boring, not to mention exhausting to hang around for 3 hours continually signing our names and posing for photographs.

Musical entertainment was supplied by various DJs, including Igor Cech, Igor Dvorsky and DJ Peter2. (Thanks Pete for playing the Bill Bit remix of 'Walking In My Shoes' for me.) However, I can't move on without remarking on the 3 superb Dave look-a-likes who kept us amused for much of the night. Sporting identical tattoos and haircuts to Mr Gahan, I resisted the temptation to show my appreciation in the style of the World Ice Dance Championships by holding up score cards as they vied for attention on the stage, gyrating their hips in a display that I'm sure would have impressed the man himself.

Once the final CD cover had been signed, Al's hand had completely seized up, lockjaw was setting in from all that smiling and he was half blind from over-exposure to flash bulbs, we decided it was time for Elvis to leave the building and head for a less Recoil-related environment. Leaving Igor and Peter 'squared' to wrap up the party, we searched for a late-night bar, stumbling out into the night trailed by a gaggle of reprobates.

Now, the details of the next 4 or 5 hours are somewhat of a blur to me ("I'm afraid I was very, very drunk") but I do know that Alan said he was going home around 6am and I apparently insisted it was far too early and refused to leave the club, enlisting the help of Big Pete Harper (friend and security) to see me home safely. I arrived back at the hotel an hour later, dragged myself on my knees, step by step, up the lethal slippery open-tread staircase and found the old man face-down on the bed, snoring into his pillow (although I did hear him mutter the words 'dirty stop-out'). After that - oblivion.

### Sunday

Waking up the next morning (er, wasn't it morning when we went to bed?) with a stinking headache and an frighteningly indecipherable taste in my mouth would not be rated as a highlight of our trip to Prague but I had to atone for the previous night's debauchery and keep my grumbling to a minimum. All the two of us could manage for the day was to don our darkest sunglasses and get some air by jumping on a tourist boat and floating up the glorious Vltava river. It was strangely soothing to hear a softly-spoken female voice giving a commentary on the architectural delights of the riverside in several languages and it had the desired effect, lulling us both to sleep for a while. We wandered along the river, enjoying a gentle 'hair of the dog' glass of red followed by a suitably chilled eating establishment. 'Nostress' turned out to be absolutely perfect with big, comfy leather club chairs (to rest our

war-weary limbs), an Asian fusion menu (to cleanse our battered livers) and relatively dark, serene decor (to keep the heebie-jeebies at bay).

### Monday

I began packing early on Monday morning because I knew it would involve a degree of military precision to accommodate all the extras we had acquired over the past 5 days. These included t-shirts and posters from the actual release party, gifts from fans and a couple of pressies for our kiddies. "I just want to be beamed up" Alan says to me every time we get to this stage in the proceedings as he jumps up and down on the suitcase to force it shut. We checked the room one last time to be sure we hadn't left anything, then hauled our luggage down to reception. I don't know who the two people were in the lift because I didn't recognise them. They seemed to know us though because when we grimaced, they did the same thing.

Alan had one more radio interview to do with Radio Wave which was in a part of town we hadn't visited before and situated behind a block of flats and across a piece of waste ground ('Hostel'!!!). Then, with 5 hours to kill we took our hosts out for lunch at Kampa Park to thank them for taking care of us so well and celebrated the success of the trip with a bottle of Moet.

And that, my friends, was pretty much it. I won't bore you with the details of the journey to the airport or the flight home although I should remark on the surreal signing session that took place in the short-stay car park. Why our dear friends waited until this final moment to produced posters, CDs and stacks of vinyl for Alan to autograph is still a mystery to us but then again, I'm sure they're baffled as to why we drink so much.

We'd like to thank Igor and Franta for organising everything so expertly and bowing to our every whim. Also, Ivana and Peter for documenting the whole affair, all the fantastic DJs and Big Pete. However, the biggest thanks goes to all the fans who stopped Alan in the street to ask for autographs, attended the party and have left so with so many warm memories from these few special days. I know that Alan really appreciates the fact that so many of you believe that "that bloke who left DM 12 years ago" is still worth turning up for.





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# RECOIL

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photo and concept

**Ivana Dvorská**  
dvorska@photo5.cz

