

## David Byrne's Journal: [10.23.2008: Cleveland](#)

### Highway Robbery

In an interview with The New York Times, Eminem reveals he rides a bike. See you on the streets of Detroit in a few days, Marshall.

We have a day off here in the Land of Cleve, so a group of us hailed 2 taxis to take us to a movie theater in Shaker Heights to see W. I ride shotgun and when we tell the driver we're going to see a movie, he volunteers that the last movie he saw was Last Tango In Paris. Hmmm. We ask the driver for his number so we can call him for a drive back and he hands me a card, saying, "This is MY number."

We arrive and the fare is a little over \$18, so I pull out my per diems from my pants pocket and give him \$100 and two singles and ask him for \$80 in change. He takes just the 100-dollar bill and puts it near his crotch and begins to fumble with his change purse. After a bit of this, I remind him that he doesn't have to make change — just give me \$80. He then says to me that I never gave him the \$100. I say I did, and he points to the remains of my per diem in my other hand and says, "There's your hundred right there, this one is mine." I say, "No, I definitely gave you the \$100." He repeats, "That's your hundred in your other hand." Oh, man.

This goes back and forth a couple of more times and soon Ray and Kaïssa in the back seat both say, "We saw him give you the \$100," which gives me the assurance to keep pressing. If it were just me in the car, I might have started to doubt myself at this point...which is how these scams work. I say calmly to the driver, "Don't do this, don't go there," but he keeps at it. A couple more calm exchanges, and then I snap. I start screaming at the top of my lungs at this guy, and remind him that "I've got your number in my back pocket and if you don't fucking give me the money, I'll call the cops, right now." I have my hand on the door handle. He still hesitates and I continue to scream at him, "Alright, I'm calling the cops, you fucker." I begin to open my door. He hands over the money and I give him a 20, plus a 2-dollar tip. Why in the world did I tip this guy?

My adrenaline is now sky high and Kaïssa and Ray help calm me down as we wait for the others to arrive; THEIR cab driver got lost! And this is not an obscure place, but a major intersection with shops all around.

The next day in the afternoon, I ride out to a camera store to replace a lost charger. **I go east on Euclid Avenue, one of the main drags of Cleveland.** Or what used to be the main shopping street. For about a mile, I pass building after building, boarded up, abandoned or empty. Beautiful buildings too, with lots of character. It seems like this was, not too long ago, the main shopping street — a bustling area filled with folks buying and selling. Big department stores and offices. Some of these buildings are in the midst of renovation; their facades partially ripped off, scaffolding here and there, but the work seems to have stopped midway, for lack of funds I suspect. And given the economic earthquakes of the last few weeks, they'll stay that way for a while. One boarded up building houses a child care center on the ground floor; another — this one not boarded up — is a center for monitoring child support. Ads on the bus stops remind young men that dads are important.

It's all too easy to connect the dots in the scenario painted by these institutions, or lack of institutions. One passes block after block of empty buildings and shops and asks, "How was it allowed to get this far?" Granted, lots of towns still have vibrant centers, and parts of Cleveland are still active — the clubs in the warehouse district and the fancier suburbs like Shaker Heights. But when encountering a place like Euclid Avenue, one thinks of the Mayan temples that were already being abandoned before Cortés even arrived.



What kind of people lived here? What did they make? Why did they leave?



This was always a factory town, full of immigrants, mostly from all over Europe. Poles and Greeks, Italians and Ukrainians. The lovely greenway I biked, along Martin Luther King Boulevard from the art museum to the lake, was dotted with statues and terraces commemorating each immigrant group. The Azerbaijanis pulled out all the stops. So, while Chicago may have the Anish Kapoor Cloud Gate in Millennium Park, Cleveland has this:



There's an inscription nearby, just in case you don't get the point, which says, "Azerbaijan, land of eternal fire, ignites the imagination, warms the spirit and kindles the soul."

The sons and daughters of these immigrants made for a legendary Rock and Roll audience in this town. Hard workers and hard partiers. They lay claim to the first Rock and Roll radio show and Allen Freed claims to have coined the phrase, though I suspect a "race" record used it way before that. So, there is some justification for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum being located here. Hard to bottle the manic release associated with that music and its audiences and the loopy creativity of the forerunners of self-made popular music in a respectful museum setting. Hard bordering on impossible. Like most of these places, the organizers kind of throw up their hands and end up exhibiting a bunch of outfits and artifacts — my old big suit being one of them.

I was tipped via an e-mail sent by a man named Tim Rossiter to my office. Tim wrote: "I've got to tell you about a special Cleveland treasure, Glenn Schwartz. Glenn started the James Gang in the 60s, then moved to California and was in the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. He flipped out soon afterward and was in religious communities. He's had a rough life and is tortured and crazy...Now Glenn is 67 years old and plays in a blues trio for free late every Thursday at a small bar called **Major Hooples**. There are typically 20-30 people there and he is jaw-droppingly amazing to see. His playing is like electric bolts straight from his psyche. He jumps off his amp and plays guitar with his teeth. And he often preaches fire and brimstone between songs. It's something very special and you won't see anything like it except on Thursdays in Cleveland."

Well, Tim didn't exaggerate. The place was a low-key little dive and at one end, not even on a stage, was Glenn, his brother and a drummer, all playing at full volume.

Sure enough, between amazing and inventive Hendrix-like solos, he would admonish the audience and prophesize “blood on the moon and War in America.” He may have lost his mind but his fingers are firing on all cylinders.

The bartender told Natalie that if you wanted him to stop playing you just had to dance. Well, see for yourself. Apologies for the mostly lousy sound quality; Glenn’s playing deserves better, but you’ll get the idea. As Tim said, only in Cleveland.



<https://www.vimeo.com/6595731>

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