WORDS on PLAYS
INSIGHT INTO THE PLAY, THE PLAYWRIGHT, AND THE PRODUCTION

Rock ’n’ Roll

BY TOM STOPPARD
DIRECTED BY CAREY PERLOFF
AMERICAN CONSERVATORY THEATER
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The Piper, by costume designer Alex Jaeger
CHARACTERS, CAST, AND SYNOPSIS OF

ROCK ’N’ ROLL


CHARACTERS AND CAST

THE PIPER
The rock musician Syd Barrett
Nicholas Pelczar

ESME
Max and Eleanor’s daughter; 16 at the beginning of the play
Summer Serafin

JAN
A Czech graduate student of Max at Cambridge University, university lecturer, and journalist; 29 at the beginning of the play
Manoel Felciano

MAX MORROW
A Marxist professor at Cambridge University and diehard Communist; nearly 51 at the beginning of the play
Jack Willis

ELEANOR MORROW
Max’s wife, a classics professor; in her early 40s and suffering from breast cancer at the beginning of the play
René Augesen

GILLIAN
Eleanor’s student
Natalie Hegg

INTERROGATOR
A middle-ranking bureaucrat in the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia
Anthony Fusco

FERDINAND
A Czech dissident and Jan’s friend; about the same age as Jan
Jud Williford

MILAN
A representative of the Czech regime; tries to get Max to spy for him
James Carpenter

MAGDA
First Jan’s, then Ferdinand’s, girlfriend in Prague
Natalie Hegg
LENSKA
A Czech student at Cambridge, girlfriend first of Jan and later of Max, and Eleanor’s student; 29 when she first appears

NIGEL
Esme’s husband, a journalist; about 30 when he first appears

ESME (OLDER)
René Augesen

ALICE
Alice’s boyfriend

STEPHEN
Summer Serafin

CANDIDA
Marcia Pizzo

PUPIL
Natalie Hegg

WAITER
James Carpenter

SETTING

SYNOPSIS

A CT 1. SCENE 1. Shortly after August 20, 1968. The Morrows’ garden. Night. The Piper sits on the garden wall and plays the tune of Syd Barrett’s “Golden Hair” for 16-year-old Esme. As 29-year-old Jan enters from the house, the Piper vanishes into the dark. Jan tells Esme he has come to say good-bye to Max, because he is leaving school to go home to Czechoslovakia. Uncertain about his return to England, he plans to leave all of his belongings, except his records, with the Morrows. Esme asks Jan to come see her before he leaves, as she wants to “give [him] something to take,” and exits into the house. Max enters, and he and Jan argue about the recent Soviet crackdown. Max defends his idealistic faith in the fundamental principles of communism and blames the Czech leadership for betraying those principles and the driving force behind them: the workers. Jan, more of a pragmatist and a nationalist, defends Dubček as a reform Communist and leaves.
Scene 2. End of August 1968. The Morrows’ garden. Afternoon. Eleanor tells Max that a Czech named Milan, claiming to be Jan’s friend, came to collect Jan’s belongings, as he will not be coming back to England. Eleanor and Max discuss Eleanor’s loss of a breast to cancer. Hounded by the press to defend his continuing faith in communism in the face of recurring Soviet aggression, Max exclaims: “I’m down to one belief, that between theory and practice there’s a decent fit—not perfect but decent: ideology and a sensible fair society . . . and I won’t be . . . shamed out of it. We have to be better.” As he exits, Eleanor receives Gillian, a student, for a tutorial. They analyze a Sappho poem, and when Eleanor disagrees with Gillian’s analysis, the student rushess out, nearly in tears.

Scene 3. End of August 1968. An office in Prague. Jan is interrogated about the “socially negative music” in his luggage (which has been confiscated), his personal history, and his motives for returning to Czechoslovakia. He replies that he has come “to save socialism.” Jan learns that informants helped the government compile a thick file on him during his
time in Cambridge, and is asked why his own reports about the activities of others were so vague. Jan wants to know when his music records will be returned to him.

**Scene 4. April 1969. Jan’s living room in Prague.** Jan has his records back, and Ferdinand is going through the extensive rock-and-roll collection with envy. Ferdinand is collecting signatures for a petition against the government, but Jan believes that Ferdinand is an alarmist, that everything is basically fine in Czechoslovakia, and that the country’s enlightened socialism is holding its own despite Soviet aggression. Ferdinand vehemently disagrees, citing the closing of the newspaper Jan writes for (which he does while also teaching) as evidence of the regime’s increasing authoritarianism. Jan reminds Ferdinand that the paper was reopened—but only, Ferdinand points out, after agreeing to self-censor themselves. Jan refuses to sign the petition, and Ferdinand angrily walks out.

**Scene 5. February 1971. The exterior of Jan’s Prague apartment. Evening.** Max and Jan, reunited for the first time since Jan left Cambridge, go into Jan’s apartment. Jan tells Max that he has just been to a lecture on Andy Warhol that was “illustrated” by a local rock band, The Plastic People of the Universe, who, as a result of the “undesirable elements” they embody, have lost their professional license to perform in public.

Max updates Jan about his family: Eleanor’s cancer has returned, while Esme, now 19, is pregnant and living in a commune. Max has brought Jan a present from Esme: Syd Barrett’s album *The Madcap Laughs*. Jan tells Max that, as a result of his refusal to sign a loyalty pledge, he lost his position at the paper and his teaching job and now works in a kitchen. While Jan plays the “Golden Hair” track on the album, they discuss worsening government censorship; Jan says he would have emigrated to Germany if it weren’t for the underwhelming state of German rock music. Max grows angry at Jan’s flippancy and carries on about the world’s negative view of communism; he laments that the basic principles of the movement have never truly been realized. Jan confesses that he prefers the individual freedom of English society—with all its
failings—to living under the repression of a totalitarian regime. Enraged by his former student’s betrayal of the communist ideals Max believed Jan to hold, Max leaves.

As he exits Jan’s building, Max encounters Milan, who has been waiting for him to ask about Jan. Max, we learn, supplied Milan information in 1968, but he refuses to give Milan any more.

**Scene 6. Summer 1972. Jan’s Prague apartment. Morning.** Jan has been to the police station to serve as a witness for Ivan Jirous, the artistic director of The Plastic People of the Universe, who was arrested during a fight outside one of the band’s concerts. Magda shows Jan a petition that Ferdinand has left for him to sign, asking the new Czech leader, Husák, to release three intellectual prisoners. Jan says he won’t sign it and dismisses the petition as “moral exhibitionism” intended more to draw attention to the petitioners than to help the prisoners in any practical way. During the discussion Jan discovers that some of his records are missing; Magda tells him that Ferdinand borrowed them. Magda exits as Ferdinand enters with the missing albums, clearly surprised to find Jan still at home—Ferdinand and Magda are apparently having an affair. The two men talk about Syd Barrett and Pink Floyd, and Jan relates Esme’s supposed encounter with the Piper—who might have been the real Barrett—in Cambridge. Ferdinand asks Jan to sign the petition. Jan refuses.

**Scene 7. Spring 1974. Jan’s Prague apartment. Night.** Jan tells Ferdinand about a recent underground concert by The Plastic People of the Universe that was cut short by police brutality: when the police caught wind of it, they stopped the concert, swept the fans into a tunnel, and beat them. Jan asks Ferdinand to get his dissident friends to sign a petition in support of the young people arrested at the concert. Ferdinand refuses, calling The Plastic People insignificant. He accuses Jan of hypocrisy and wonders how Jan’s petition is different from the petitions he has tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade Jan to sign in the past. Jan replies that Ferdinand’s causes are in defense of active dissenters who have gone out of their
way to challenge the government, whereas Jan is defending ordinary individuals who just want to be left alone. Jan argues that the government is more threatened by The Plastic People of the Universe than “important” intellectual dissenters, because the dissenters, by engaging the government in political discussion, validate the government’s existence and dominance in the game; at the same time, the ordinary populace agrees to be bribed with jobs, education, and a comfortable lifestyle. The Plastic People, on the other hand, are so indifferent that the government fears they can never be controlled. We learn that Magda has left Jan for Ferdinand.

**Scene 8. Autumn 1975. Jan’s Prague apartment.** Jan and Ferdinand, who has just been released from prison, are in Jan’s apartment with Milan and a policeman, who now follow Ferdinand everywhere he goes. After the officials leave, Jan confesses to Ferdinand that he is afraid of prison and resents the self-righteous heroism that got Ferdinand sent to jail. Ferdinand tells Jan that while he was in prison he met Ivan Jirous, who helped him understand that the band members’ refusal to compromise and obey the government’s orders to cut their hair and change the band’s name is an important act of political protest. Jan asks Ferdinand how Magda is doing, but Ferdinand doesn’t know. They share a moment of mutual sympathy.

**Scene 9. May 1976. The Morrows’ dining room and garden.** Nigel, Esme’s husband, sits with Max and asks him if he is still a Communist; Max replies that he is. Nigel asks him why. Eleanor, still struggling with cancer, moves in and out of the house tending to her five-year-old granddaughter, Alice. Lenka, an old flame of Jan from when he lived in England, arrives for a Sappho tutorial with Eleanor. Nigel exits and Max, despite Eleanor’s strenuous objection, sits in on the tutorial. The discussion veers from Sappho to a passionate but playful debate between materialism (championed by Max) and consciousness (championed by Lenka). A spark between Max and Lenka is apparent. Esme arrives to pick up Alice and Nigel,
and Lenka prepares to leave. She tells Max that Jan was arrested with The Plastics and is in prison; Max is shocked to discover that Jan is among the dissidents intended to benefit from a petition Max recently refused to sign. After Max leaves, Eleanor tells Lenka to keep her hands off Max until after she’s dead; Lenka’s tutorial ends with her running in tears from the house. Eleanor and Max continue the debate about the relationship between the body and the consciousness, in which Eleanor insists to Max that she is not her body, so much of which has been lost to surgery and radiation.

**Scene 10.** November 1976; Jan’s Prague apartment. Summer 1977; Prague exterior. Jan returns to his apartment after being released from prison to find his record collection smashed by the police. Ferdinand arrives with a homecoming gift for Jan: a Beach Boys album, which was spared destruction because Ferdinand had borrowed it while Jan was in prison. Jan thanks Ferdinand for helping to get him and the band members released. Jan now believes that “everything’s dissident except shutting up and eating shit.” Ferdinand asks Jan to sign Charter 77. Jan does so.

Simultaneously on stage, but half a year later, Max and Milan talk. Max tells Milan he has left the Communist Party. He tried to do it quietly, telling only his family, but Nigel was having an affair with a coworker at his newspaper, and the secret became a matter of public scandal. Esme and Nigel are trying to work things out despite the affair, and Eleanor has died. Max asks Milan to go easy on Jan and help him find a job.

**Act II. Scene 1.** Summer 1987. The Morrows’ garden. Esme sits outside smoking a cigarette, as she and a now 16-year-old Alice talk about an encounter they had earlier that day with an older, bald Syd Barrett, whom Esme still remembers as the mysterious and beautiful Piper. Max is now on crutches, recovering from a broken leg, and Esme (now split from Nigel) tells Alice they will have to move into the house in Cambridge to look after him. Alice, who, despite her young age, is about to start a gap year because she skipped grades, does not want spend the year “hanging about Cambridge” without her friends before matriculating.
at the university. Max offers Alice the option of starting Cambridge a year early, however, and she agrees. Max is upset that the conservative prime minister Margaret Thatcher has been elected for a third time with less than 32% of the vote.

**Scene 2. 1987. Outside Jan’s Prague apartment.** It is 11 years since we last saw Jan. Nigel, in Czechoslovakia to write a story about dissidents during Gorbachev’s visit, meets with Jan, who now works at a bakery, to ask him for a lead. He delivers to Jan some tapes from Esme, tells him that he and Esme have split, and shows Jan a picture of her with Alice. Jan tells Nigel that there are no stories in Czechoslovakia, that the years of censorship and Soviet rule have resulted in cultural banality. He mentions that the Plastic People have broken up.

**Scene 3. Summer 1990. The Morrows’ garden.** As Alice helps her mother, who is taking her A-levels because she never finished high school, study Sappho, Stephen arrives. The family is expecting Nigel and his new wife, Candida, for lunch. Max enters and reveals to Alice that he has forgotten all about the event and invited Jan, who is visiting from Prague, where he now teaches philosophy, to lunch, as well.
A discussion between Max and Stephen about the dissolution of the Communist Party becomes heated as Max interprets a comment by Stephen as a suggestion that he has devoted his life to a mistake. Meanwhile, Stephen warns Esme to hide Candida’s newspaper from Esme, as it contains a searing condemnation of the mental state of Syd Barrett (calling him a “drug-crazed zombie who barks like a dog”), whom Alice now idolizes.

Jan arrives, to Esme’s surprise. The two share an awkward conversation, in which Jan reveals that Lenka will also be joining them. It is revealed that Lenka and Max did have a brief relationship after Eleanor’s death. They talk about music, and Jan mentions that The Rolling Stones are scheduled to play a concert in Prague in the next few days. Esme leaves to save lunch.

Jan gives Max a file that the secret police compiled on him, which he got from Magda, who is now a lawyer. It comes out that in 1968 Max spied for Milan. We also discover that it was Max who was responsible for shortening Jan’s prison sentence and getting him work at the bakery. Jan reveals that, while he was Max’s student, he was asked to provide the government with a character study of Max, which he eventually did in order to get his seized albums back from the police. Max forgives him.

**Scene 4. Later that day. The Morrows’ dining room and garden.** The group lunches with Nigel and Candida, and a discussion of the political and social climate of the 1960s ensues. Max holds firm to his strict views of worker-run communism, while Lenka and Jan agree that the cultural movement towards peace and love were more important than the communist principle calling for the workers to unite. Meanwhile, Esme disappears from the party, agitated by Jan’s attention to Lenka. The conversation turns to the relationship between politics and the media, with Candida and her column on the hot seat. As Nigel prepares to leave what has become a playfully hostile environment, Alice, who has discovered the Barrett article, attacks Candida with the newspaper. After Nigel and Candida leave, Max tells Jan that Lenka has decided to move in with him.

As Jan prepares to leave, Esme returns with a copy of Barrett’s album *Opel* for him. Jan exits, forgetting the album. Esme learns that Lenka and Max are together, and she welcomes her into their home. A few minutes later, Jan returns and asks Esme to come back to Prague with him. She agrees without hesitation.

**Scene 5. August 1990. Alternating between the Morrows’ garden and a Prague exterior.** In the Morrows’ garden, Lenka tutors a pupil on a passage from Plutarch lamenting the death of Pan. Back in Prague, Jan introduces Esme to Ferdinand as the three prepare to go to the Rolling Stones concert. Esme, however, fully enamored of Jan, couldn’t care less about the concert. The play concludes with the three of them in a crowd as The Rolling Stones strike their first chord.
DIRECTOR CAREY PERLOFF

We’ve been thinking about this play for a long time. Like all of Tom’s writing, it brings together so many threads. When I asked Tom how to talk to you about it, though, he said, “Oh, Carey. Just tell them it’s a love story.” Which, of course, it is, among so many other things.

The play starts with Tom’s own childhood. He’s from Zlín, Czechoslovakia, and his father was the surgeon at the Bata shoe factory. When he was four and his brother, Peter, was six, they were evacuated and sent to Singapore, where his father ended up being killed by a Japanese gunboat. His mother met an English colonel called Stoppard, who said that he would marry her and take the boys to England and raise them as English children, on the condition that they never spoke Czech again—that they never talked about their past, and that they became English people. And so that’s what happened. In a way you can say it was a great gift, it was certainly a great gift for all of us in the English-speaking world, that this extraordinary mind was given the gift of English as his second language. So Tom became this quintessential Englishman. He loves English landscape and he loves terrible English food and he loves English rock and roll. He married a woman called Miriam, and in 1968 when the tanks rolled into Prague he had just had a big success with his first play, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, he had a baby, and he was very happy. He said [she reads]:

In 1968 I was living the good life with my first wife and my first baby in our first house on the swell of my first play and I was beginning to be noted by my peers as someone who was politically dubious. It was to be some years before a well-known left-wing director asked to typify a Royal Court play replied that it was a play not written by Tom Stoppard. But I was already conscious of a feeling in myself which detached me from the prevailing spirit of rebellion. What bliss in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was to be where it was at. The feeling I refer to was embarrassment. I was embarrassed by the slogans and postures of rebellion, in a society which, in London as in Paris, had moved on since Wordsworth was young and which seemed to me to be the least worst
system in which to be born. The open liberal democracy whose very essence is the toleration of dissent. . . .

You don’t need to be a qualified psychoanalyst to work out that in England in 1968, 22 years after I arrived, I was much more disposed to champion my adopted country than to find fault with it. For all I knew to the contrary, if my father had survived the war he would’ve taken his family back to my birthplace in Czechoslovakia in 1946 and I would’ve grown up under the Communist dictatorship that followed two years later. I was just as aware as most people were that not everything in the garden of the West was lovely, and of course we didn’t know the half of it. But when in August 1968 the armies of the Warsaw Pact invaded and occupied Czechoslovakia, an act which was simply the ongoing occupation of Eastern Europe, my embarrassment at our agitprop mummers of revolution in England turned into revulsion.

He then began to think about the difference between standing on street corners of London with slogans, and living through something as horrific as what his family would have lived through had they stayed in Prague. Ten years later when Charter 77 was signed, he finally went to Prague and became part of a writers’ bloc that helped support that shift. He got to know Václav Havel very well. This play is hugely based on Havel’s writing. Not so much Havel’s plays, but particularly a collection of interviews that Havel did after he’d been in prison called Disturbing the Peace, which are amazing essays about living through that period of incredible change. And oddly, even when Tom went back to Prague, it took him a long time . . . I think he felt overwhelmed and humbled and fascinated by the experience; I don’t think he felt it particularly personally; he still hadn’t really met his family yet. Finally, only in the last six years or so did he actually finally encounter his Czech relatives.

So in a way this play is for him, “There but for the grace of God go I.” What would have happened to him if in 1947, instead of staying in England and being raised there as an English schoolboy, he had gone back to Prague?

But what he is really interested in is our relationship as individual people to enormous shifts in history. Where do artists change the direction of history? How do we receive what’s happening to us in our own time without feeling like pawns in the process? As Max argues in the play, does one’s place in the economic structure create consciousness? Does consciousness change politics? And what actually changes consciousness?

Tom in his writing loves to give himself all kinds of different characters to argue all sides of an issue, so he can figure out what he thinks. The great thing about Tom is he’s
not an essay writer and he’s not didactic, so his plays don’t have an answer—there’s never a solution, he just wrestles with things. He poses a lot of questions.

This play is a collision that takes place in Prague and in Cambridge. On one side of the collision is a Marxist professor in Cambridge, who is sort of the last dinosaur, the only guy—even though he knows about Stalin and the purges and the gulag—who still believes that between theory and practice there maybe is a decent fit and that it’s possible that the political movement to which he has dedicated his life will bear fruit. He encounters a Czech graduate student, Jan, who has been in Cambridge a year when the play begins, in August 1968. It’s so weird, when you watch those Russian tanks driving down the street in Georgia, to think that that must be what it felt like on that morning almost exactly 40 years ago to encounter those tanks in Prague. Jan finds himself caught in England. In order to earn his keep with the Czech government, he has been spying on Max—albeit loosely, not very effectively. The Czech government wants him to stay, but he doesn’t, because he wants to go back and save his mother and rock and roll. And that’s where the other thread of the play comes in.

Tom, who has been accused of looking like Mick Jagger, is a rock-and-roll junkie, and in a way he wanted to write a play about all his favorite music. The songs in this play are very carefully calibrated, not only to show you the passage of time, because the play goes from 1968 to 1990, and to let you listen to this odd Czech band The Plastic People of the Universe, who become important drivers of social and cultural change, but also to give you the emotional underpinnings of the story.

So to go back to the play being a love story, it all starts with this Syd Barrett track called “Golden Hair.” The original transaction that expresses love between Esme and Jan is when Jan leaves in 1968 and Esme gives him something that’s very precious to her, a Syd Barrett album. Esme and Jan love the same music, and she sends him music all the way through the play. The lyrics to a lot of the songs heard in the play become important to what’s going on emotionally in the journey of the characters. Sometimes the songs are place markers for a time period, but sometimes they’re

Alice, by costume designer Alex Jaeger
just telling you, “Wouldn’t it be nice?” We hear a Beach Boys tune at the saddest, most difficult part in the play, and you feel what it must have been like for people to listen to those California surf-rocker guys singing that song, what it must have meant to people who couldn’t imagine a life like that. And the play ends with this famous Rolling Stones concert that happened in 1990 in Prague in the very stadium where the Communists had held their mind-numbing exercises in the years before.

One of the things Tom is interested in is, Why rock and roll? What role did it play in cracking a culture that just didn’t look like it was ever going to crack? The particular irony of the play is that the culture is cracked by a band that wasn’t a dissident band, that wasn’t singing political songs, that wasn’t trying to make a point, but was simply so indifferent to the laws of authority that they humiliated the authorities they flaunted and ended up in prison.

The play weaves those threads, the music of these rock and roll–loving people, this family in England over a period of time. It’s a wonderful time-travel play with a great conceit: the same actors play different characters as they get older as the play goes along. So it’s a wig and costume nightmare [laughter], but it will all become clear. And it looks at a particular moment of political history.

I think for us the interesting thing is this: We live in a city that is still shaped by the events of 1968. We’re at an interesting moment right now, maybe because it’s 40 years since all that happened. All around the world the issues of 1968 are back in the news. What were those student revolutions about? What did it all mean? Where have we come, what happened to the youth movement of the 1960s? So this play is also about cycles of history and the passage of time and how we can never actually predict where history is going to go and how we live within it.

Those are the broad strokes. This will be the first American production that will happen with an American company—it was done in London and then it was done with a British company in New York—and Tom is so thrilled about all of you. I’ve sent him everything, all the designs. He has done a lot of tweaks and writing as we’ve gone along. He has continued to work on various things in the play that are still puzzlements to me. And we’re going to make some changes to the end; I’ll tell you all about that when we get there.

SCENIC DESIGNER DOUGLAS SCHMIDT
The challenge was to set the piece in a surrounding that is in some way evocative or symbolic of the faceless bureaucratic collectivism of the period. We were inspired by a photograph that we found of an airshaft in Prague, which has a great sense of this kind of
secretive life going on behind the windows, with people watching you or watching what’s going on on the street. We felt that was really germane to the society of the time.

The real challenge, though, was to then become specific, to make the two principal scenes, the Cambridge house and Jan’s apartment in Prague, quite detailed. So we have edited down the necessary locations for this show to basically three. One lives stage right, one lives stage left, one lives stage center, and the evening involves moving these back and forth to bringing them on.

We’re using projected text, rather than images, to help us with the chronology of the play, which is very complex. It can jump ten minutes from one scene to the next, or ten years. I always felt reading it that we needed something to clarify that, and this technique of projecting the dates and locations is going to help us with that. It will also help to confuse the eye, so we’re not just looking at scenery moving and people changing clothes onstage.

**CP:** At the end of act one there is a very upsetting moment that was completely lost on me both times I saw this play, which is the moment that the lights come up and you realize

*perfectly blue,* by Agata Jablonska (2007). This image inspired, in part, the scenic design of A.C.T.’s production of *Rock ‘n’ Roll.*
that the police have smashed all of Jan’s records. So we are going to open up a skylight and the records are going to all fall to the stage.

We forget (well, us middle-aged people don’t), in this age when you can just get your music off iTunes or YouTube, what it was to get a vinyl record, particularly if you didn’t live in the West. The value of having the Velvet Underground and Nico album with the Andy Warhol yellow banana on the cover was incalculable; that album was gold, and you were careful with it. If it got scratched, that was it. The police come specifically to smash Jan’s two thousand records, everything he’s ever collected, and the only thing he cares about. That’s partly what pushes Jan to get involved and sign Charter 77. I really want us to see that—so the records will fall to the ground and smash and we’re going to play the scene in that rubble.

ds: It’s also the one moment of uncontrolled violence in the evening. There’s a lot of talk in the play about the revolution and reference to what went on, but this is the one time where there’s a real visceral response to it and you get to see the destruction.

cp: One of the things that Doug did great research on is the Lennon wall. We’re going to tweak the last scene so it all takes place in front of the Lennon wall, until the moment the concert starts. I don’t want to go back to that café [depicted in the London and New York productions] and deal with furniture when it should be something else.

ds: This is in fact a wall that, on the death of John Lennon in 1980, became a rallying point, a kind of spontaneous memorial to him. And it has continued to this day. It has gone through many political movements, from flower children to the “Me Generation,” but everybody has left their mark on this wall and it’s absolutely a fascinating artifact. It goes on for an entire city block, and it’s always got people there and it’s always got stuff going on in front of it. We’ve taken images that were closest to the period when the events of the play take place, the mid ’80s through 1990, and we’ve tried to keep it in the period.

cp: The divine Robert Wierzel is lighting this production. He lit ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore and Travesties for us, so he’s great with this kind of material. There are times when all those windows should glow and you know that there are people watching everywhere. And there are times when it should be very lyrical and dappled and beautiful in Cambridge, and you should feel that memory Jan has of his English country summer. And the transitions should be wild; you’ll see dates, so you’ll know where you are, but it will also keep moving, so that wherever you’re sitting in the house you’ll travel through it. Also, for those of you who saw this play in New York, we’re not going to drop the scrim and list the credits of who played bass on which tune. We want to make it all new.
**SOUND DESIGNER JAKE RODRIGUEZ**

I know that this show isn’t just about rock and roll and being obsessed with music and your record collection, but, as a sound designer who is obsessed with music and his record collection, it’s kind of hard not for me to lean on that particular theme. As Carey was saying—especially now when the act of collecting music is this little wrist action [of clicking on an icon that says], “download now,” and the act of listening to and sharing music is the same thing—I think it’s important to stress what a record collection means to these characters. It’s like people who ask to be buried with their books. When these characters are sharing music back and forth, they’re sharing this one piece of vinyl—there is no copying music. Or at least it’s not common. So this one piece of vinyl is something to be obsessed over and something to be cared for. The act of playing music was that you had this one square piece of artwork that opened out—and I don’t mean to talk in the past tense, because I have a huge record collection myself—but the vinyl is a thick piece of vinyl that you have to care for and might get damaged, and the machine you play it on is a large thing with moving parts that you also have to care for and might get damaged. The songs in this show are a lot of familiar tunes we all know, but I think it’s important for the music not to be just sentimental, that we don’t just hear it and think, “Oh, I know that song. I remember hearing that song. I know the emotional attachment I have to hearing it.” I think it’s really important that we treat the music in this show with the importance it has to these characters. So it’s integrated into the show in a way that we understand why music was so important to them, and to any of us.

**COSTUME DESIGNER ALEX JAEGGER**

There are 50 or 60 costumes in this show, so, as you can imagine, there are a lot of challenges in designing this show. One of the things I really want to do is make it seem authentic and not “costumey,” which is difficult with ’60s and ’70s stuff because we all have that Brady Bunch image of what the ’70s looked like. Real people didn’t always dress that way, especially in Prague. Yet we’ve got this

*Ferdinand, by costume designer Alex Jaeger*
jumping around of time period, and I need to help identify what the time period is, so the clothing as to be recognizable as '60s, '70s, '80s, or whatever, without screaming that, and still be character driven. Also, there are many occasions [in this play] when you don't have time to change pants from 1968 to 1978, so we have to get things that can bridge those gaps and then maybe change a top for something that is period specific.

We’re trying to get a lot of authentic vintage clothing. I live in Los Angeles, so I’ve been shopping there and shipping a lot of stuff up. We did some shopping here, too, and found some things that are kind of beyond the imagination.

Interestingly, for somebody not from England, England in a play would generally represent for me the cold and rainy. But in this play it represents utopia and the sunny summer. So that’s kind of a switch. So the other thing we have to deal with is, How does England feel and look different from Czechoslovakia? And we’ve got winter and summer and jumping back and forth. So Carey and I sat down and plotted all of this and tried to make it as easy as possible for you to change clothes and seasons.

One thing we talked about was that Jan has to be a little bit nondescript, because he goes from world to world trying to fly under the radar. Ferdinand is a chance for us to be a little more groovy.

cp: Wonderful Deb Sussel is doing dialects with us, which is something Tom and I have been talking about a lot. This is a challenging play on the dialect front, because there are such different worlds. Obviously in Britain they sound English, and when the Czechs are talking to the British they’ll speak with a Czech accent. The really tricky part is when the Czechs are alone together [and presumably speaking Czech, but we hear the dialogue in English]. In other words, when it’s neutral. For Tom, the neutral would sound British. But if we do the neutral as British, I think it’s going to sound, well . . . British [laughter], which is not necessarily what we want. Tom feels strongly that we should just do those scenes with an American accent, that it should sound like our own voices—that’s how they did *The Coast of Utopia* in New York, they just did the whole thing in American accents except where there was a Russian talking to a German or whatever. So when Jan and Ferdinand are together, he doesn’t want us to be distracted, wondering, “Why do they sound English?” I’m not positive about that until we actually hear it. Tom is willing to get rid of some of the Anglicisms in those scenes in order to make it flow. I think that’s what we’ll try. But it might be more distracting for us to wonder why they sound American. We have to figure out whether it feels real and neutral to us as an American audience to hear American or British voices in those scenes. So Deb has her work cut out for her, and we’re just going to have to see, and it will be a very interesting preview process.
In the first draft of *Rock 'n' Roll*, Jan was called Tomás, my given name, which, I suppose, is still my name. My surname was legally changed when I was, like Jan, unexpectedly “a little English schoolboy.”

This is not to say that the parallels between Jan’s life and mine go very far. He was born where I was born, in Zlín, and left Czechoslovakia for the same reason (Hitler) at much the same time. But Jan came directly to England as a baby, and returned to Czechoslovakia in 1948, two years after I arrived in England having spent the war years in the Far East.

The two-year overlap was the basis of my identification with Jan, and why I started off by calling him Tomas. His love of England and of English ways, his memories of his mother baking buchti, and his nostalgia for his last summer and winter as an English schoolboy are mine.

If that had been the whole play (or part of a play I’d often thought about writing, an autobiography in a parallel world where I returned “home” after the war), Tomas would have been a good name for the protagonist. But with *Rock 'n' Roll* the self-reference became too loose, and, for a different reason, misleading, too, because I also had in mind another Tomas altogether, the Tomas of Milan Kundera’s novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*.

The most important sources for the “Czech arguments” in this play are the essays, articles, and letters written by Václav Havel between 1968 and the 1990s. I’d had most of them on my shelves since publication but had been lazy about reading them properly. (An exception was a speech, “Politics and Conscience,” read out in absentia in Toulouse when Havel was awarded an honorary doctorate from that university but prevented from travelling there to receive it. At his request I represented him on that occasion.) When I did read them all within the space of a few weeks in 2004 I was left with an overwhelming sense of humility and pride in having a friend of such bravery, humanity, and clear-sighted moral intelligence; who, moreover, was as clear even in translation, was as complex and subtle in his long paragraphs as he was adroit in his dialogues. The open letter titled “Dear Dr. Husák” (1975) and the long essay, 90 pages in my edition, called “The Power of the Powerless” (1978) were influential in their own time and place, but transcend both and will continue to be important where “living in truth” requires not merely conscience but courage.

*Rock 'n' Roll* manages to allude to only a tiny fraction of Havel’s writing. The Toulouse speech by itself is a mine of timely reminders of the need to put morality above politics,
and nature above scientific triumphalism; to return life to its human scale, and language to its human meaning; to recognize that socialism and capitalism in their selfish forms are different routes to global totalitarianism. . . . The assertion that Czechoslovakia’s need is deeper than a return to Western democracy is one of a hundred striking moments in “The Power of the Powerless.” It is in the same essay that Havel observes that “living in truth” could be any means by anyone who rebels against being manipulated by the Communist regime: it could be attending a rock concert.

**Havel and the Plastics**

Even if *Rock ’n’ Roll* were entirely about the Czech experience between the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution, it could only hope to be a diagram. Yet, a diagram can pick out lines of force which may be faint or dotted on the intricate map of history that takes in all accounts. *Rock ’n’ Roll* crystallised around one short essay by Havel, “The Trial” (1976), and a few pages in a book-length interview from 1985. (Havel worked on the transcript, which became the first samizdat book to be legally published in post-Communist Czechoslovakia. Translated by Paul Wilson under the title *Disturbing the Peace*, it was published in England by Faber and Faber in 1990.)
The interviewer, Karel Hvizdala, asked about the origin of Charter 77. Havel’s reply began like this:

For me personally, it all began sometime in January or February 1976. I was at Hradecek, alone, there was snow everywhere, a night blizzard was raging outside. I was writing something, and suddenly there was a pounding on the door, I opened it, and there stood a friend of mine, whom I don’t wish to name, half frozen and covered with snow. We spent the night discussing things over a bottle of cognac he’d brought with him. Almost as an aside, this friend suggested that I meet Ivan Jirous. . . . I already knew Jirous; I’d met him about twice in the late 1960s but I hadn’t seen him since then. Occasionally I would hear wild and, as I discovered later, quite distorted stories about the group of people that had gathered round him, which he called the underground, and about The Plastic People of the Universe, a nonconformist rock group that was at the centre of this society; Jirous was their artistic director.

Havel goes on to explain that Jirous’s opinion of him “was not exactly flattering either: he apparently saw me as a member of the official, and officially tolerated, opposition—in other words, a member of the establishment.”

Havel and Jirous met in Prague a month later: “His hair was down to his shoulders, other long-haired people would come and go, and he talked and talked and told me how things were.”

Jirous played Havel songs by the Plastic People on an old tape recorder. “There was disturbing magic in the music, and a kind of inner warning. Here was something serious and genuine. . . . Suddenly I realized that, regardless of how many vulgar words these people used or how long their hair was, truth was on their side; . . . in their music was an experience of metaphysical sorrow and a longing for salvation.”

Jirous and Havel went to a pub and talked through the night. It was arranged that Havel would go to their next “secret” concert in two weeks’ time, but before that happened Jirous and the band were arrested along with other members of the underground.

Havel set about getting support for the prisoners, but among the people who might have helped almost no one knew them, and those who did tended to think of them as layabouts, hooligans, drug addicts. They were at first inclined to see the case as a criminal affair. But for Havel it was “an attack by the totalitarian system on life itself, on the very essence of human freedom and integrity.”

Somewhat to his surprise, his contacts quickly got the point: the “criminals” were simply young people who wanted to live in harmony with themselves, and to express themselves
in a truthful way. If this judicial attack went unchallenged, the regime could well start lock-
ing up anyone who thought and expressed himself independently, even in private.

The Plastic People affair became a cause célèbre. The regime backtracked, and started releasing most of those arrested. Ultimately, Jirous and three others came to trial in Prague in September 1976. Havel attended the proceedings and wrote about it in “The Trial.”

**FINDING A SPACE FOR MUSIC AND “LIFE ITSELF”**

Milan Hlavsa, who died in 2001, formed The Plastic People of the Universe (he took the name from a song by the American rock musician Frank Zappa) in September 1968 when he was 19. The fact that the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia had occurred in August was not immediately relevant: “We just loved rock ‘n’ roll and wanted to be famous.” The occupation by the Warsaw Pact armies was background, “the harsh reality,” but “rock ‘n’ roll wasn’t just music to us, it was kind of life itself.” Hlavsa made the point more than once in his interviews. The band was not interested in bringing down Communism, only in finding a free space for itself inside the Communist society.

But of course there was no such space, and the story that *Rock ’n’ Roll* is telling is that, in the logic of Communism, what the band wasn’t interested in and what the band wanted could not in the end be separated. There were dozens of rock bands in Prague, and elsewhere in Czechoslovakia, who were “not interested in bringing down Communism,” and they prospered according to their lights, in some cases because the ground rules entailed no compromises on their part, in other cases because the ground rules did. The Plastics were among a small number of musicians and artists who wouldn’t compromise at all, so the space for their music and for “life itself” became harder and harder to find until it was eradicated.

The Plastic People of the Universe did not bring down Communism, of course. After the trial, Husák strengthened his grip on the country until the end came 13 years later. What could not be separated were disengagement and dissidence. In the play Jan tells a British journalist, “Actually, the Plastics is not about dissidents.” The reporter replies, “It’s about dissidents. Trust me.” And he’s right. The rock ‘n’ roll underground, as Jirous said, was an attack on the official culture of Communist Czechoslovakia, and in case he didn’t get the point, the regime sent him to gaol four times during those 20 years: culture is politics.

Jirous is one of the most interesting and least-known personalities in the story of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic between the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution. He is not a musician; he was trained as an art historian. He joined up with the Plastic People in April 1969 in the brief period before they lost their licence, and he took over
as their impresario and artistic director on the long bumpy road from professional status to amateur to outcast. It was his own integrity which made the distinguishing attribute of the band, and he managed to see their travails as an enviable fate compared with the “underground” in the West,

where . . . some of those who gained recognition and fame came into contact with official culture . . . which enthusiastically accepted them and swallowed them up, as it accepts and swallows up new cars, new fashions, or anything else. In Bohemia the situation is essentially different, and far better than in the West, because we live in an atmosphere of complete agreement: the first [official] culture doesn’t want us, and we don’t want anything to do with the first culture. This eliminates the temptation that for everyone, even the strongest artist, is the seed of destruction: the desire for recognition, success, winning prizes and titles, and last but not least, the material security which follows.

This comes from Jirous’s “Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival,” written in February 1975, a year before he met Havel. It has an epigraph which might have been written by Havel: “There is only one way for the people—to free themselves by their own efforts. Nothing must be used that would do it for them. . . . Cast away fear! Don’t be afraid of commotion.” In fact, it was written by Mao Zedong; a long stretch. In Rock ’n’ Roll, Max the Marxist philosopher says that he is “down to one belief, that between theory and practice there’s a decent fit—not perfect but decent.” The equivalence of theory and practice is nowhere harder to achieve than in “living in truth” in a society which lies to itself. In the Czechoslovakia of 1968 to 1990 a rock ’n’ roll band came as close as anyone.

Excerpted from the introduction to Rock ’n’ Roll, revised edition, published by Faber and Faber in 2006. © 2006 by Tom Stoppard.
Tom Stoppard worked as a freelance journalist while writing radio plays, a novel (*Lord Malquist and Mr. Moon*), and the first of his plays to be staged in England, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, winner of the 1968 Tony Award for Best Play. His subsequent plays include *The Real Inspector Hound*, *After Magritte*, *Jumpers*, *Travesties* (Tony Award), *Every Good Boy Deserves Favour* (with André Previn), *Night and Day*, *The Real Thing* (Tony Award), *Hapgood*, *Arcadia* (Olivier Award, New York Drama Critics’ Circle Award, and Tony Award nomination), *Indian Ink*, and *The Invention of Love*.


Stoppard’s translations and adaptations include Lorca’s *House of Bernarda Alba*, Schnitzler’s *Undiscovered Country* and *Dalliance*, Nestroy’s *On the Razzle*, Václav Havel’s *Largo Desolato*, *Rough Crossing* (based on Ferenc Molnár’s *Play in the Castle*), and Gérald Sibleyras’s *Heroes*. He has written screenplays for *Despair*, *The Romantic Englishwoman*, *The Human Factor*, *Brazil* (coauthor), *Empire of the Sun*, *The Russia House*, *Billy Bathgate*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (which he also directed and which won the Prix d’Or for best film at the 1990 Venice Film Festival), *Shakespeare in Love* (Golden Globe and Academy awards, with coauthor Marc Norman), and *Enigma*. Stoppard received a knighthood in 1997.
By 1977, when *Travesties* opened at A.C.T., Stoppard had become a favorite with A.C.T. audiences: *Rosencrantz* had played in the company’s repertory for three seasons, followed by *Jumpers*, another big success. Stoppard himself felt so at home at A.C.T. that he could joke, “I am the house playwright!”

**STOPPARD AT A.C.T.**

1969  *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, dir. William Ball  
1970  *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, revival  
1972  *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, revival  
1974  *Jumpers*, dir. William Ball  
1977  *Travesties*, dir. Nagle Jackson  
1978  *Travesties*, revival  
1981  *Night and Day*, dir. Elizabeth Huddle  
1987  *The Real Thing*, dir. Edward Hastings  
1990  *Hapgood*, dir. Joy Carlin  
1995  *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, dir. Richard Seyd  
1995  *Arcadia*, dir. Carey Perloff  
1999  *Indian Ink*, dir. Carey Perloff (u.s. premiere)  
2000  *The Invention of Love*, dir. Carey Perloff (u.s. premiere)  
2002  *Night and Day*, dir. Carey Perloff  
2004  *The Real Thing*, dir. Carey Perloff  
2006  *Travesties*, dir. Carey Perloff  
2008  *Rock ’n’ Roll*, dir. Carey Perloff
No playwright can enjoy such success as Tom Stoppard has had for more years without agitating some jealous detractors and having certain censures harden into perennial criticisms. So it is natural that as Stoppard has gained consensus admiration as the primary champion of wit and ideas in contemporary English-language theater, there has been lingering dissent that his work is too smart or too clever, that its intellect is not matched by its depth of feeling, and that he lacks a personal terrain—like, for example, August Wilson's Pittsburgh—to explore more and more profoundly.

Tracing Stoppard’s output over the decades reveals, however, not just an author who has brought unmatched imagination to his work, but one who has usually tackled important subjects in his plays, and one who has been motivated by a growing impulse to connect to his own roots and context. Rock ‘n’ Roll represents the most emphatic example yet of these inclinations.

Stoppard has shunned explicit personal autobiography, and he has frequently encouraged the world to believe that he doesn’t take himself too seriously by insouciant comments (his often-quoted reply to a questioner: “I tripped and fell against a typewriter and the result was Rosencrantz and Guildenstern”) and by such personal traits as affection for cricket and a rather dandyish taste in dress and tousled long haircuts.

He has then sometimes been Wildean, spinning brilliant epigrams and paradoxes, but he has seldom wished to seem entirely earnest. Yet behind a screen of flippancy, much of his writing can be perceived by those who care to look closely as extremely sincere. The fumbling hero of the comedy Jumpers (1972), a professor of moral philosophy, is almost heartwrenchingly courageous and idealistic as he strives to uphold ethical values in a society of gymnastic ideological relativism.

I first encountered Stoppard’s work when as a young critic on professional development leave from the Minneapolis Star I attended the London premiere production of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead at the Old Vic Theatre the week it opened triumphantly, in April 1967. The next day I flew to Prague for my first visit to a country behind the Iron Curtain. I had no reason to connect the two experiences, but 41 years later they seem to me linked in an emblematically Stoppardian way, given what is now well known (and central to Rock ‘n’ Roll) about Stoppard’s ties to the former Czechoslovakia (now divided into the Czech Republic and Slovakia). But there was no hint of the playwright’s being what he later called a “bounced Czech” in R&G’s program. His biography merely stated:
Tom Stoppard began his career as a journalist in Bristol, subsequently freelancing in London. He started writing for the stage in 1960. His first play, *A Walk on the Water*, was produced on television in 1963. . . . Tom Stoppard was born in 1937; is married with a one-year-old son; lives in London.

London in 1967 was a city full of excitement, energized by the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, and the many other British bands sweeping the world. Carnaby Street and King’s Road were centers of youthful fashion. Although stiff-upper-lip English reserve had hardly disappeared, London felt new and free.

To get off the plane in Prague was to arrive at a place that felt old (the city center was not bombed in World War II), cold and dark (there wasn’t enough money for heat or light), and repressed (there were soldiers and police everywhere). Yet, as one explored, however timorously, one could sense a spirit of rebellion, satire, and hope, again and again. That spirit was, of course, brutally crushed (but not killed) by Russian occupation in 1968, the year in which *Rock ‘n’ Roll* begins.

The years between 1967 and 1975 were a transitional time in Stoppard’s career. Five years passed before he created a full-length new play to succeed *R&G*. Especially until *Jumpers*, and for some until his third hit, *Travesties* (1975), doubters wondered if *R&G* (which could be seen as just a reworking of Shakespearean materials) was only a one-off fluke. During this time, as well as participating in many lucrative productions of *R&G*, Stoppard created one-acts, film scripts of variable success, and translations (including one of Sławomir Mrożek’s *Tango* in 1966, prophetically foreshadowing his relationship to Eastern European writing). What kind of writer he would ultimately prove to be during the rest of his life couldn’t be guessed confidently.

One crucial development of this period, in retrospect, was that he became increasingly aware of the opposition in postinvasion Czechoslovakia and came to identify with Václav Havel, whose 1938 birth made him within months Stoppard’s nearly exact contemporary, and to whom *Rock ‘n’ Roll* is dedicated. More and more, Stoppard came to feel that his own roots were important.

Gradually the world found out that Stoppard was English not by birth but by emigration; that he had been born in Zlín, Czechoslovakia; that to avoid the war his family, including a brother, had moved to Singapore, where his father died; and that his mother had been evacuated to India, where she eventually married an Englishman, who took his new family to Bristol when the future playwright was nine. If things had worked out differently, the British playwright, originally named Tomáš Straussler, might have very possibly died or been taken back to Czechoslovakia and been brought up in the Communist
society in which Havel, whom Stoppard did not actually meet until 1977, was raised. It might entirely plausibly have happened that way, but for chance. And so might his life have resembled Jan’s in *Rock ‘n’ Roll*.

Stoppard’s plays since the seventies have had remarkable variety, but piece by piece his key values and themes have emerged, even though his subjects range from India during the British Raj (*Indian Ink*, personal because he was a boy there for four years) to landscape gardening in the Romantic era (*Arcadia*). But he also addressed the Soviet treatment of political foes (*Every Good Boy Deserves Favour*). He translated Havel’s *Largo Desolato*. He frequently lent support to Havel and allies when they were in trouble with Czech authorities before the success of the Velvet Revolution that led to the long-time political victim being proclaimed president in Prague in 1989. And with *Rock ‘n’ Roll* he has written what we can now see as an inevitable play, the capstone of a career that, while other important work will no doubt follow, completes a central arch.

No work in his canon brings together so many key Stoppardian elements, just as *Rock ‘n’ Roll* is quintessentially Stoppardian in its double narrative form, similar architecture having been notable in the overlap of 1917 Zürich and *The Importance of Being Earnest* in *Travesties* and in the blending of the age of Byron and our own time in the same country house in *Arcadia*.

For example, Stoppard, who never attended a university, has repeatedly mocked academe, from the ruthless careerism skewered in *Jumpers* to the pedantic racing for a marketable scholarly scoop that spurs *Arcadia*.

Pop music has been another recurring motif for the playwright. Henry in *The Real Thing* is preoccupied by what selections he should declare for the radio program *Desert Island Discs*. Despite knowing that he would sound more impressive if he said he loves classical music, he admits he really loves the Crystals singing “Da Doo Ron Ron,” says that Callas at Covent Garden bored him as “a sort of foreign musical with no dancing,” and states that the Righteous Brothers’ singing of “You’ve Lost That Lovin’ Feeling” is “possibly . . . the most moving noise ever produced by the human spirit.” So Pink Floyd and The Plastic People of the Universe in *Rock ‘n’ Roll* reflect a longtime inclination and deeply held attachment to pop bands as challengers of establishment order more sympathetic than revolutionary slogans.

A crucial point is Stoppard’s attitude to doctrinaire Marxism. While many playwrights of his era have made their popular way asserting their solidarity with the working class and attacking British capitalism (and particularly Margaret Thatcher), Stoppard has refused to hold a party card. Lenin certainly has his moments in *Travesties*, but Stoppard’s heart in that play lies more with the Dadaist Tristan Tzara and others. And the stubborn loyalty of
Max Morrow in *Rock 'n' Roll* is portrayed as misguided, not giving enough priority to the revolutionary right to individual happiness.

In all these respects, *Rock 'n' Roll* is a play with heart and passion, as well as a drama forceful in its presentation of the strength of love, however messy the relationship, as well as aging, bereavement, and the pain of cancer.

The great critic Kenneth Tynan, in a 1977 profile that remains among the best portraits written of Stoppard, quoted the playwright as saying: “I burn with no causes. I cannot say that I write with any social objective. . . . [I have] an absolute lack of certainty about almost anything.”

So *Rock 'n' Roll* does not provide us with answers that will end questioning about our bewildering world. But as a presentation of experience in our time and consideration of forms of expression that matter, it is a big play, vigorously committed to life and the individual.

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Peter Altman is the recently retired veteran of a combined 25 years leading the Huntington Theatre Company, Boston, and Kansas City Repertory Theatre and has been a frequent collaborator with A.C.T.
Here’s Looking at You, Syd

How did one of pop music’s epic breakdowns—that of Pink Floyd’s dashing, mentally ill, drug-addled frontman, Syd Barrett—find a place in a drama about Communist Czechoslovakia? The author recalls the genesis of his most recent play, Rock ’n’ Roll.

By Tom Stoppard (November 2007)

At a certain street junction in Notting Hill in London there is nothing to memorialize what turned out to be one of the defining fractures in the story of rock music. I think about it every time I pass that way. Forty years ago come January, an old Bentley carrying three-quarters of Pink Floyd, plus a new recruit brought in to cover for their hopelessly zonked-out front man Syd Barrett, was en route to their 242nd gig when . . . well, here is Tim Willis telling it again in Madcap (2002):

As they crossed the junction of Holland Park Avenue and Ladbroke Grove, one of them—no one remembers who—asked, “Shall we pick up Syd?” “Fuck it,” said the others. “Let’s not bother.”

There are people, says Esme, a 60s-going-on-90s flower child in Rock ’n’ Roll, “who think Pink Floyd have been rubbish since 1968.” Barrett, the voice, words, and spirit of the band’s first album and of two solo albums after the split, does that to people, some people, like my friend Charlie, who—years ago now—would groan and shake his head over my constancy to what he called the “lugubrious, pretentious” post-
Barrett Floyd and try to convert me to the “lost genius” who’d retired hurt to cultivate his
garden in Cambridge.

I didn’t get it, but what I got was the shimmer of a play asking to be written. I like pop
music (which is a genus; rock is a species) and I could see and hear the ghost of a play
set in a suburban semi (which in England means half a house in a street of houses halved
as symmetrically as Rorschach blots and occupied by people who are definitely not rock
gods), and here, in my play, the reclusive middle-aged “crazy diamond” would … er, do
what, exactly?

Charlie lent me a couple of books about Barrett, and I got hold of a couple more. Books
about Barrett go from acid hell to nerd heaven (engineers’ reports detailing overdubs and
so on), but as for writing a play about any of it—well, you’d have to have been there.

There was another little problem too: I have no understanding of music, none at all.
Much as I love the noise it makes, I can stare for hours at a guitar band and never work
out which guitar is making which bit of noise. Also, my brain seems incapable of form-
ing a template even for sounds I’ve heard a hundred times. You know how it is at rock
concerts when half the crowd starts to applaud the first few notes of what’s coming? My
brain is like a two-year-old playing with wooden shapes: sometimes I’m still looking for
the right-shaped hole when the lyrics finally kick in, and it turns out to be “Brown Sugar.”
Me and music. So I put Syd aside, wrote plays about other matters, and listened to a lot
of rock and roll as the years went by.

With each play, I tend to become fixated on one particular track and live with it for
months, during the writing—my drug of choice, just to get my brain sorted. Then I’d
turn off the music and start work. I wrote most of The Coast of Utopia between listening
to “Comfortably Numb” on repeat. With another play, Arcadia, the drug was the Rolling
Stones’ “You Can’t Always Get What You Want,” and since that play ends with a couple
waltzing to music from an offstage party, I wrote the song into the ending and stayed high
on that idea till I’d finished. It was inspiring. When, in rehearsals, it was pointed out to
me that “You Can’t Always Get What You Want” isn’t a waltz and that, therefore, my
couple would have to waltz to something else, I was astonished, uncomprehending, and
resentful.

These somewhat humiliating confessions do more than enough to explain why the Syd
Barrett play never got started. To explain how Syd then got enmeshed in a play, Rock
’n’ Roll, which is partly about Communism, partly about consciousness, slightly about
Sappho, and mainly about Czechoslovakia between 1968 and 1990, is first simple, then dif-
ficult. It was because of the photograph of a 55-year-old man wrapped up warm in muffler
and gloves, on his bike.
When you take away everything plays think they’re about, what’s left is what all plays—all stories—are really about, and what they’re really about is time. Events, things happening—Ophelia drowns! Camille coughs! Somebody has bought the cherry orchard!—are different manifestations of what governs the narratives we make up, just as it governs the narrative we live in: the unceasing ticktock of the universe. There is no stasis, not even in death, which turns into memory.

Barrett died, 60 years old, a month after my play opened, 5 years after that photograph of him cycling home with his shopping from the supermarket. When I first saw the photo—in Willis’s book—I found myself staring at it for minutes, at the thick-set body supporting the heavy, shaven potato head, comparing it with images of Barrett in his “dark angel” days, like the shot on this story’s opening page. “He was beautiful,” Esme says. “He was like the guarantee of beauty,” and, high-flown though it might be to apply Virgil’s untranslatable chord “there are tears of things,” *sunt lacrimae rerum*, to a snatched photo of a burly bloke with Colgate and Super Soft toilet paper in his bicycle basket, that’s what came into my mind in the long moment when I understood that it was this play, the one about Communism, consciousness, Sappho, and, God help us, Czechoslovakia, into which Syd Barrett fitted. The tears of things are in mutability and the governance of time.

Perhaps it was because Barrett dropped out of sight for decades that time seemed not merely to connect the two images in the usual commonplace way (he used to look like this, then later he looked like that, so what?), but also to sever them. A person’s identity is no mystery to itself. We are each conscious of ourselves and there is only one person in there: the difference between this photo of me and that one is unmysterious. But everyone else’s identity we construct from observable evidence, and the reason I was so fascinated by Barrett on his bicycle was that for a mind-wrenching moment, he was—literally—a different person.
This is not completely fanciful, and barely a paradox. Barrett himself colluded with it when he answered someone who doorstepped him, “Syd can’t talk to you now,” and long before he was photographed on his bicycle he reverted to his real name, which was Roger. I don’t doubt that in the first instance he was just trying to get rid of an unwelcome caller, and in the second instance he was simply putting his old days and ways behind him: it’s not necessary to infer a dislocation of his self-consciousness. The collusion was with the way we adjust our idea of who he is, who anyone is. And this is partly how drama works, through constant adjustment of our idea of who people really are under the labels, the “Communist academic,” the “Czech rock fanatic,” the “wife dying of cancer,” and the others.

The realization that this was Syd’s play, too, is not as bizarre as it might seem. The lineaments of the unwritten play included a Czech rock fan and an outlaw band, the Plastic People of the Universe, so rock and roll was already part of it. As for the English Communist professor, Cambridge would do nicely for him. Syd’s last gig, in 1972 at the local Corn Exchange, was reviewed by Melody Maker: “A girl gets up on stage and dances; he sees her, and looks faintly startled.” So let’s give the professor a daughter who was that very girl, and let’s see why Syd looked faintly startled. Willis’s short, exemplary book recounts, too, how the student daughter of Syd’s first real girlfriend was walking to lectures one day, wearing one of her mother’s Barbara Hulanicki coadresses from 30 years before, when “this bald man on a bike pulled up to the curb.” The man said, “Hello, little Lib.” “Hello,” said the girl and moved on. It was a few seconds before she realized that the man had called her by her mother’s name, and when she turned round, he’d gone. So while Czechoslovakia is going from Prague Spring to Velvet Revolution, let the Cambridge professor’s flower-child daughter have a daughter who grows up and . . .

And also between the Prague Spring and the Velvet Revolution, in another part of the wood, at some unknown moment, so it seems to us, the beautiful, undamaged young man in velvet and silk who sang, “I’ve got a bike, you can ride it if you like / It’s got a basket, a bell that rings” turned into a very ordinary-looking bloke called Roger, who lived alone, never spoke to the neighbors, tidied his garden, and died from complications of diabetes. In both identities, he stepped out of a stillborn attempt at a play all about himself, and without difficulty entered the dance of made-up characters in a made-up story, which, like every story, made-up or otherwise, like his own, is secretly about time, the disinterested ongoingness of everything, the unconditional mutability that makes every life poignant.

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SYD STAYS IN THE PICTURE
Tom Stoppard talks about the rock legend Syd Barrett’s presence in his latest play, *Rock 'n' Roll*.

INTERVIEW BY KEENAN MAYO (OCTOBER 9, 2007)

In his first contribution to *Vanity Fair*, “Here’s Looking at You, Syd,” the acclaimed playwright, author, and Oscar-winning screenwriter Tom Stoppard explains his fascination with Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd’s original frontman, who is a recurring figure in Stoppard’s most recent play, *Rock 'n' Roll*. A broken-down drug casualty by the time he left the band in 1968, Barrett went on to live a quiet, reclusive life in Cambridge, England, until his death, in 2006. As Stoppard writes in his *Vanity Fair* essay, this “beautiful, undamaged young man in velvet and silk . . . turned into a very ordinary-looking bloke called Roger”—his real first name—“who lived alone, never spoke to the neighbors, tidied his garden, and died from complications of diabetes.” It’s this personal metamorphosis that connects the mythic, damaged music legend to the play’s larger themes of political, cultural, and social transformation.

In usual Stoppard fashion, *Rock 'n' Roll* explores a wide range of seemingly disparate themes: music, political dissent, “the science of consciousness,” writings by the Greek poet Sappho, and other heady topics. The play is set against the political turmoil in Czechoslovakia from 1968 (when the Prague Spring was crushed by Russian tanks) to 1990 (the year following the Velvet Revolution), as well as the academic milieu of Cambridge. It focuses on the impact of a famous Czech rock band, The Plastic People of the Universe, and the political views and complex personal life of a Marxist professor at Cambridge University. Throughout the play, characters make references to Barrett’s unusual charisma and sad decline.

In this conversation, Stoppard explains why he chose to involve Barrett in his latest narrative, why popular music has never had a significant political impact in the West, and why, despite Barrett’s prominence in his new play, he prefers Pink Floyd’s post-Syd incarnation.

YOU WRITE IN YOUR *VANITY FAIR* ESSAY THAT *ROCK 'N' ROLL* WAS LARGELY INSPIRED BY A SINGLE PHOTOGRAPH OF SYD BARRETT, MIDDLE-AGED AND IN FULL PAUNCH, RIDING A BICYCLE.
Well, the photograph is one of the points of origin of the play. It’s not by any means the point of origin for the whole play, but it’s the point of origin for Syd Barrett’s inclusion
in the story. I’ve been involved with Czech affairs for a while, and there is a bit about the classical, textual scholarship on Sappho, the Greek poet. Also, this play is kind of a hangover from another play I wrote called The Invention of Love, about a classical scholar. Similarly, the academic job for the professor in Rock ’n’ Roll has to do with the science of consciousness. It has to do with the argument over what consciousness consists of, where it comes from, and how you can account for it. I thought at one point I’d write a play about the mystery of consciousness, and this is just vestigial evidence of that old instance. The photograph of Barrett very much had to do with how I saw him fitting into all of this.

HOW DOES BARRETT FIT INTO ALL OF THIS?
He fits in because the photograph very much made me think about how time and the constant mutability of everything is really the underlying story for all of the stories we write. None of them are possible without this ceaseless, continuous change, which is going on all the time. So that was one thing. But I was writing a Czech rock-and-roll fan and a university professor. Syd Barrett lived in Cambridge, and 1968 [the year of Barrett’s breakdown that led to his departure from Pink Floyd] was the year the Russians occupied Czechoslovakia. So this was absolutely the crux of Barrett’s life. His life as a singer was merging into a recluse. It wasn’t bizarre to me that these things belong together in some way.

It’s the fundamental story of the charismatic and public young man turning into a kind of hermit, turning his back on everything, and just going into himself in that way. I think, probably, that Barrett’s life was slightly more interesting than the outside evidence indicates. For example, he did occasionally continue with his painting, as he began his career as an art student.

YOU’RE CZECH BY BIRTH. TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES COME INTO THE PLAY, POLITICALLY?
Marginally. I just happen to know quite a lot of what happened in Czechoslovakia between 1968 and the fall of Communism. I was there in 1977, but apart from being there, I knew a number of the people involved in Charter 77, though not intimately. I would count myself as a friend of Václav Havel. It was all there for the using.

SINCE THE PLAY IS TITLED ROCK ’N’ ROLL, PLEASE TALK ABOUT THE MUSIC AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE DISSENT DURING THIS TIME
Well, to give you a slightly simplified answer: there was a certain amount of rock and roll tolerated by the Communist government. It wasn’t by any means unconditional: they
weren’t allowed to use English lyrics or English names for a band, and they had to get a license from the state to be any kind of performer at all. You didn’t just start up a band. You couldn’t live off music except as an employee of the state. The state would provide instruments for bands, and so forth. You had to have a license to call yourselves a band. Either it did or did not require a compromise on their part. There were bands that didn’t need to compromise and that were middle of the road, and there were ones who were frustrated with compromise.

**WHO WERE THE PLASTIC PEOPLE OF THE UNIVERSE, THE BAND IN YOUR PLAY?**

The Plastic People of the Universe emerged from this scene as the only group of musicians that was not interested in making a deal with the Communist government. What they were interested in was ignoring everything and making a space for themselves in which they could play their music. The man who started the band did so within weeks of the Russian invasion in 1968, but the events were in no way connected in his mind. He just loved rock and roll, and it wasn’t an act of opposition or dissent to play rock and roll. The Plastic People of the Universe took on this identity of being an opposition because they acquired in those days an artistic director, Ivan Jirous, who attached himself to the band—or attached the band to him—and became their kind of guru. He was a highly political person, and he understood that the band was indeed a political fact and not just an aesthetic fact. In a Communist, totalitarian society you cannot separate those two positions. In different words, you are either with us or against us. There is no space in the middle.

Tacitly the band was saying, “We’re simply not interested. We don’t care. So leave us alone.” But for someone to say that is an act of defiance. It is rather irritating to the police, for example. The government tended to think they could be ignored, since they were unimportant, and, in fact, when the government did come down on them, they were completely astonished by what a fuss it made. The authorities thought that nobody would care about these long-haired musicians. But everybody did.

**DO YOU THINK THAT ROCK AND ROLL OR POP MUSIC IS RELEVANT ANYMORE?**

I don’t think it was ever particularly relevant in the West as a political tool. I think it was a cultural force. There are people who would say that in a liberal democracy, culture and politics are aspects of the same thing—but I don’t think so. [In his 1975 “Report on the Third Czech Musical Revival”], Jirous, the guru, wrote: “[In the West,] where . . . some of those who gained recognition and fame came into contact with official culture . . .
which enthusiastically accepted them and swallowed them up, as it accepts and swallows up new cars, new fashions or anything else. In Bohemia the situation is essentially different, and far better than in the West, because we live in an atmosphere of complete agreement: the first [official] culture doesn’t want us, and we don’t want anything to do with the first culture. This eliminates the temptation that for everyone, even the strongest artist, is the seed of destruction: the desire for recognition, success, winning prizes and titles, and last but not least, the material security which follows.” So what he was saying was, in a kind of perverse way we were luckier because we were never in a position to be tempted away, to give up our integrity. So he felt that his band came out untainted, with its integrity intact.

They still exist—and they’re a much better band than they were at the beginning, by the way. They were pretty rough at the beginning.

**HAVE YOU SEEN THEM?**
I saw them in New York about a year ago, actually, when I was there with my last play, *The Coast of Utopia*.

**MANY STAUNCH PINK FLOYD FANS BELIEVE THAT THE ONLY PINK FLOYD IS THE ONE AT THE BEGINNING, WITH BARRETT. DO YOU TAKE A SIDE IN THIS ROCK-SNOB DEBATE?**
Yeah, I do. I like the band that it became. I got into Pink Floyd long after Barrett left. My experience with the band and its history worked in reverse: I didn’t start listening to them until my kids started listening to them, which was a good ten years after they became a big band.

**BUT ROCK ’N’ ROLL IS “SYD’S PLAY”!**
I know. I’m fascinated with Syd Barrett, but it is his play for reasons that don’t depend on a passionate attachment to his songs. I don’t play Barrett’s solo albums very much as I’m driving around in my car. But I do have various Pink Floyd tapes on compilation.

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A ROCK ’N’ ROLL TIMELINE

1965

1966
music: Andy Warhol’s Exploding Plastic Inevitable, with The Velvet Underground and Nico, appears at the Fillmore Auditorium. On August 29, The Beatles perform in Candlestick Park in San Francisco; it is their last public performance together.

1967

1968
music: In January, Barrett performs with Pink Floyd for the last time. In June, Pink Floyd releases the single “Jugband Blues,” by Barrett. The Beatles release The White Album. Milan Hlavsa forms The Plastic People of the Universe. czechoslovakia: The Communist Party’s Central Committee votes out Antonín Novotný as first secretary and

Czech protestors try to stop Soviet tanks, August 21, 1968 (photo © Libor Hajsky / epa / CORBIS).
replaces him with Alexander Dubček on January 5. Dubček’s appointment is the beginning of the “Prague Spring,” a period of liberalization that lasts through August 21, when the Soviet Union sends several thousand Warsaw Pact troops and tanks into Czechoslovakia to halt the reform. In October, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union sign an agreement to allow Soviet troops to remain “temporarily” in Czechoslovakia.

**World Events:** In the United States and Britain, anti–Vietnam War sentiment builds and war protests increase. Martin Luther King, Jr. is assassinated on April 4. In May, there is a general strike and protest in Paris, and thousands of students and workers fight the police in the streets. In the United States, Britain, and France, students take over university buildings, demanding curriculum changes, peace, and civil rights. Robert Kennedy is assassinated on June 6. Richard Nixon is elected president.

**1969**

**Music:** The Rolling Stones give a free concert in Hyde Park. Barrett releases his single “Octopus/Golden Hair.” The Woodstock Music and Art Fair is held in Bethel, New York. The Rolling Stones perform at the Altamont Speedway near Livermore, California, after
they are denied the use of Golden Gate Park; one person is murdered during the show; the show marks the end of the San Francisco rock era.

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** On January 16, student Jan Palach sets himself on fire in Prague’s Wenceslas Square to protest Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia. Czech journalists agree to self-censorship to end their conflict with the new government. On April 17, the Soviets replace Dubček with Gustáv Husák, and Communist “normalization” begins; the Czech Central Committee adopts hard-line policies and begins to purge reformers. On June 17, The Beach Boys play in Prague’s Lucerna Palace (built by Václav Havel’s grandfather), becoming the first American rock band to perform behind the Iron Curtain.

**WORLD EVENTS:** In November, thousands of people participate in a peace march in San Francisco, and 20 American Indians seize and occupy Alcatraz Island. Nixon begins “Vietnamization.” The u.s. military begins a mandatory civilian draft.

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**1970**

**MUSIC:** Barrett releases his solo albums *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*. The Beatles officially break up. The Plastic People of the Universe lose their government license due to “nonconformity” and go underground. Jimi Hendrix dies.

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** The Communist Party announces loyalty checks and Dubček is expelled from the party.

**WORLD EVENTS:** On May 4, during a protest against the u.s. invasion of Cambodia at Kent State University, four students are killed, nine wounded by National Guardsmen.

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**1971**

**MUSIC:** Warhol’s *The Velvet Underground Featuring Nico* album is released in the United Kingdom. Jim Morrison, singer and lyricist of The Doors, is found dead in Paris.

**WORLD EVENTS:** The Pentagon Papers are published in the *New York Times*. The People’s Republic of China joins the United Nations.

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**1972**

**MUSIC:** Barrett performs in the King’s College Cellar and Dandelion Coffee Bar in Cambridge. On February 24 he performs live for the last time, at the Corn Exchange.

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** The Czech Journalists’ Union announces that 4,096 Czech journalists have been dismissed since August 1968 for not following the government line.

**WORLD EVENTS:** In June, five men are arrested at the offices of the Democratic National Committee at the Watergate Hotel in Washington, d.c., for attempting to plant listening devices and photograph confidential papers. Nixon is re-elected.
1973

MUSIC: Pink Floyd releases *Dark Side of the Moon*.


1974

MUSIC: In March, The Plastic People of the Universe perform a “secret” concert, which is broken up by the police. Many audience members are beaten and arrested. The Plastic People secretly record their first album, *Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned*. The Ramones form and begin the era of punk rock.

WORLD EVENTS: Nixon refuses to surrender subpoenaed tapes and documents to the Watergate committee; the House of Representatives Judiciary Committee opens impeachment hearings. Nixon resigns and Vice President Gerald Ford becomes president.

1975

WORLD EVENTS: In the United Kingdom, Margaret Thatcher is elected Tory leader. South Vietnam surrenders, ending the Vietnam War.

1976

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: On September 23, two days after the trial begins and six months after they are arrested, seven members of the Czech underground, including four members of The Plastic People, receive prison sentences for spreading anti-Socialist ideas. Seven Czech writers, including Václav Havel, sign a letter appealing for solidarity with the rock musicians on trial. The letter later comes to be known as Charter 77.

WORLD EVENTS: Jimmy Carter is elected president of the United States. In China, Chairman Mao Zedong dies.

1977

MUSIC: Elvis Presley dies.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: In January, Charter 77—accusing the Czech government of violating human rights that it agreed to uphold by signing the Helsinki Agreement—is published, first, after an unsuccessful presentation to the authorities, in four European newspapers, and then in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*. Havel and others of the 240 people who signed are arrested.
1978

**Czechoslovakia:** “The Power of the Powerless,” by Havel, rekindles dissident debate in Czechoslovakia. The Czech *Asanace* (“sanitation”) program resorts to threats and harsh interrogation to intimidate the Charter 77 dissidents and force them to leave the country.

**World Events:** The Camp David Accords are signed between Egypt and Israel.

1979

**Music:** *Rapper’s Delight*, by the Sugarhill Gang, becomes the first commercially released rap record and is a surprise hit, ushering in a new and revolutionary style of music.

**Czechoslovakia:** In May, eleven leading Chartists, including Havel, are arrested; six of them receive prison sentences of two to five years.

**World Events:** Thatcher is elected prime minister of Britain. Brezhnev and President Carter sign the *Salt II* agreement. Iraqi President Hasan al-Bakr resigns and is replaced by Vice President Saddam Hussein. Iranian radicals invade the U.S. embassy and take 90 hostages, 52 of whom are American. The Soviet Union invades Afghanistan.

1980

**Music:** The “Spring Rhythms Tbilisi-80,” held in the capital of the Georgian s.s.r., is the first official rock festival in the Soviet Union; it is considered a major turning point in Soviet and Russian rock music. John Lennon is assassinated on December 8.

**Czechoslovakia:** Shortly thereafter, the Lennon Wall is established in Prague.

**World Events:** In response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, President Carter signs a proclamation requiring 19- and 20-year-old males to register for a peacetime military draft. Ronald Reagan defeats Carter in the U.S. presidential election.

1981

**World Events:** Iran releases the 52 American hostages. The Center for Disease Control reports the first five cases of what will later be determined to be AIDS.

1983

**Music:** Ozzy Osbourne and heavy metal bands Metallica and Judas Priest are taken to court by parents who accuse them of including subliminal prosuicide messages in their music. Michael Jackson’s music video “Thriller” is broadcast for the first time; it will become the most famous and oft-repeated music video of all time. Sony introduces the CD.
1984

**WORLD EVENTS:** Indira Gandhi, prime minister of India, is assassinated. President Reagan and Vice President George Bush are reelected.

1985

**WORLD EVENTS:** Mikhail Gorbachev becomes the leader of the Soviet Union. Gorbachev and Reagan meet in Geneva for the first time.

1986

**MUSIC:** After leaving Pink Floyd, founding member Roger Waters sues to keep David Gilmour and Nick Mason from continuing to use the name; Waters loses.

**WORLD EVENTS:** In Ukraine, one of the reactors at the Chernobyl nuclear plant explodes, immediately killing 31 people and exposing countless others and vast territories of Ukraine and Belarus to radiation.

1987

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** On December 18, Husák resigns his party leadership but retains the presidency. The Czech leadership refuses to publish Gorbachev’s perestroika (reconstruction) speech.

**WORLD EVENTS:** Gorbachev announces perestroika and greater “control from below.” Warhol dies. Thatcher is re-elected, and she and Gorbachev meet in London.

1988

**MUSIC:** *Opel*, a Barrett compilation album of previously unreleased songs, is released in the United Kingdom on October 17. Shortly after the release of the album, *News of the World* publishes an article describing Barrett as “a drug-crazed hermit who barks like a dog.”

**WORLD EVENTS:** The Soviet Union commits to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. Bush defeats Michael Dukakis for the U.S. presidency.

1989

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** On May 18, Havel is released from prison. On November 28, following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Czech communist leadership resigns. In December, the U.S.S.R. and four other Warsaw Pact countries jointly condemn the 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia. On December 10, the first non-Communist Czechoslovakian government for 41 years is sworn in by President Husák, who resigns immediately afterwards. On
December 29, the Federal Assembly, under Dubček, who has been re-elected chairman, unanimously elects Havel president of the republic.

**WORLD EVENTS:** The Loma Prieta earthquake strikes San Francisco. The Communist government of East Germany falls. Bush and Gorbachev release statements indicating that the Cold War may be coming to an end. In South Africa, the apartheid regime ends.

**1990**

**MUSIC AND CZECHOSLOVAKIA:** American rock musician Frank Zappa is appointed Czechoslovakia’s representative of trade, culture, and tourism. The appointment is later rescinded as “overenthusiastic.” Havel meets Gorbachev in Moscow to agree to the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. In August, the Rolling Stones play a concert at Strahov stadium in Prague.

**WORLD EVENTS:** The Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party agrees to give up its monopoly of power, and the Soviet Union collapses.

**2006**

**MUSIC:** On July 7, Syd Barrett dies, aged 60.
The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.

Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guild-master and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.

In the earlier epochs of history, we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank. In ancient Rome we have patricians, knights, plebeians, slaves; in the Middle Ages, feudal lords, vassals, guild-masters, journeymen, apprentices, serfs; in almost all of these classes, again, subordinate gradations.

The modern bourgeois society that has sprouted from the ruins of feudal society has not done away with class antagonisms. It has but established new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle in place of the old ones.

Our epoch, the epoch of the bourgeoisie, possesses, however, this distinct feature: it has simplified class antagonisms. Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other—Bourgeoisie\(^1\) and Proletariat.

From the serfs of the Middle Ages sprang the chartered burghers of the earliest towns. From these burgesses the first elements of the bourgeoisie were developed.

The discovery of America, the rounding of the Cape, opened up fresh ground for the rising bourgeoisie. The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development.

The feudal system of industry, in which industrial production was monopolised by closed guilds, now no longer sufficed for the growing wants of the new markets. The manufacturing system took its place. The guild-masters were pushed on one side by the

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\(^1\) By bourgeoisie is meant the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labour. By proletariat, the class of modern wage labourers, who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour power in order to live. [Engels, 1888 English edition]
manufacturing middle class; division of labour between the different corporate guilds vanished in the face of division of labour in each single workshop.

Meantime the markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising. Even manufacturer no longer sufficed. Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry; the place of the industrial middle class by industrial millionaires, the leaders of the whole industrial armies, the modern bourgeois.

Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way. This market has given an immense development to commerce, to navigation, to communication by land. This development has, in its turn, reacted on the extension of industry; and in proportion as industry, commerce, navigation, railways extended, in the same proportion the bourgeoisie developed, increased its capital, and pushed into the background every class handed down from the Middle Ages.

We see, therefore, how the modern bourgeoisie is itself the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange. . . .

The bourgeoisie, historically, has played a most revolutionary part.

The bourgeoisie, wherever it has got the upper hand, has put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations. It has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his “natural superiors,” and has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous “cash payment.” It has drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervour, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the icy water of egotistical calculation. It has resolved personal worth into exchange value, and in place of the numberless indefeasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom—Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. . . .

In proportion as the bourgeoisie, i.e., capital, is developed, in the same proportion is the proletariat, the modern working class, developed—a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital. These labourers, who must sell themselves piecemeal, are a commodity, like every other article of commerce, and are consequently exposed to all the vicissitudes of competition, to all the fluctuations of the market.

Owing to the extensive use of machinery, and to the division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack that is required of him. Hence, the cost of production of a workman is restricted, almost entirely, to the means of subsistence that he requires
for maintenance, and for the propagation of his race. But the price of a commodity, and therefore also of labour, is equal to its cost of production. In proportion, therefore, as the repulsiveness of the work increases, the wage decreases. Nay more, in proportion as the use of machinery and division of labour increases, in the same proportion the burden of toil also increases, whether by prolongation of the working hours, by the increase of the work exacted in a given time or by increased speed of machinery, etc.

Modern Industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the industrial capitalist. Masses of labourers, crowded into the factory, are organised like soldiers. As privates of the industrial army they are placed under the command of a perfect hierarchy of officers and sergeants. Not only are they slaves of the bourgeois class, and of the bourgeois State; they are daily and hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overseer, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacturer himself. . . . Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class. The other classes decay and finally disappear in the face of Modern Industry; the proletariat is its special and essential product.

The lower middle class, the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant, all these fight against the bourgeoisie, to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class. They are therefore not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history. If by chance, they are revolutionary, they are only so in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests, they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat. . . .

All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority. The proletariat, the lowest stratum of our present society, cannot stir, cannot raise itself up, without the whole superincumbent strata of official society being sprung into the air.

The first communist program was defined in feudalist England in the 1500s, by Thomas More, in his work *Utopia* (1516). It was a nostalgic and idealistic approach to primitive communism, seeing those social relations as far superior to the feudalist system of gross inequality and extreme oppression. With the idea of a utopian society, early communists believed that they needed only to convince the aristocracy of the possibility of this world, and it could be achieved. Over the next two hundred years communist practice slightly evolved; instead of demanding solely for the political rights of the oppressed, utopian communists focused on science a little further, and began to demand a change in the existing social conditions of humanity.

By the middle of the 1800s, a materialist conception of communist practice was created by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Arising from the outstanding advances in science and technology, which had created the very beginning of the capitalist world system, Marx and Engels could see that history is the movement of class struggles and class cooperation. Marx and Engels explained that workers must unite to be able to achieve a worldwide revolution against the bourgeois class, and thus establish a socialist society.

In the later years of Engels, while the writings and ideas of Marxism were really just beginning to spread throughout the world, communist practice was not advancing as rapidly. Social democracy prevailed as the leading method of socialism in most countries, i.e., a compromise with bourgeois [property-owning] governments to achieve reforms for the proletariat [laborers] through existing bourgeois institutions. Notable leaders of social democracy were August Bebel and Karl Kautsky, the latter of whom, after Engels’s death, was considered the leading proponent of Marxism in the world.

The outbreak of the First World War became a defining moment for communists throughout the world. The social-democratic movement took a social-chauvinist position, supporting their own governments in fighting the workers of other nations. A small minority of workers stood up not only in opposition to the war, but preached that soldiers take their rifles and use them on their own governments—thus was the practice of the communists, militant parties in support of the interests of the working class as a whole. The leading communists of this period were Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, and Vladimir Lenin. Thereafter, the ranks of social democracy would quickly dwindle, while the number of communists around the world slowly began to grow.
After the success of the October socialist revolution in Russia, led by the Bolshevik Party, communist practice gained international renown. In 1918 the Bolshevik Party changed their name to Communist Party, the first political organization to do so since the Communist League. In 1919 the Communist International (Comintern) was founded, and as a precondition for membership all national sections of the Comintern (Germany, Austria, Hungary, Italy, Spain, etc.) had to change their name to “communist,” thus moving towards distinguishing themselves from the crumbling social democracy (and the Second International) of the past.

Around this time, other groups were also using the term communist. Throughout Europe and Russia after the Russian revolution, various groups called themselves “left-communists,” “council-communists,” etc., and remained outside the ranks of the Comintern.

For the majority of communists following the Russian revolution, communist practice changed in adherence to the particular conditions of the early 20th century in Russia. The main, but short-lived, principle of this communist practice was the creation of a socialism based on “soviets,” locally elected councils that for a short period ruled the Russian government. With the onset of war, however, Russian communist practice became much less democratic and instead a dictatorship of the Communist Party in order to suppress counterrevolutionaries. At the end of the Russian Civil War, due to Lenin's steadfast struggles and lucid understanding, the government greatly relaxed its repressive controls, once necessary during the Civil War, allowed many political parties into the government, and introduced the New Economic Policy (NEP), allowing small businesses to operate for profit, while the state continued to control banks, foreign trade, and large industry. A great many communists, however, saw these moves as compromises to capitalism, and believed from their experiences in the Civil War that the dictatorship of the proletariat meant the dictatorship of the Communist Party above all others, both in times of peace and in war.

After the death of Lenin in early 1924, the consolidation of Stalin's faction inside the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and Comintern started taking place. This reaction started to reverse and eventually smashed altogether the internal democracy of the Communist Party; soon almost all the party leadership that had made the 1917 revolution were arrested. The understanding was that since the Communists support the working class as a whole, there is no need for “so-called” democracy, no need for freedom of speech or the press, because the Communist Party knows all and does all that is good for the working class. Simply stated, the Soviet Communist Party, and its major counterpart the International Left Opposition, set up sectarian principles of their own, by which they shaped and molded the proletarian movement.
**ANARCHISM**
The aim of anarchism is the creation of a communist society. Anarchists stress the importance of achieving individual liberty and social equality for the working class, through the abolition of authority. Within the socialist movement itself, the anarchists represent the viewpoint that the war against capitalism must be a war against all institutions.

**COMMUNISM**
The theory of communism can be reduced to the phrase: to each according to his needs, from each according to his ability. Within a communist society, nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity, but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes. Society regulates general production, thus making it possible for someone to do one thing today and another tomorrow: hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, and rear cattle in the evening, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, or herdsman. Communists actively support the interests of the working class as a whole and live to unite workers as they struggle against any attempts to divide them along the imaginary lines of gender, nationality, race, and ideology.

**FASCISM**
Fascism is a political philosophy that exalts nation and often race above the individual. It stands for a centralized autocratic government led by a dictatorial leader, severe economic and social regimentation, and forcible suppression of opposition. The origin of the term comes from the Italian word *fascismo*, derived from the Latin *fasces*—a bundle of elm or birch rods containing an ax, once a symbol of authority in ancient Rome.

**MARXISM**
Derived from the teachings of Karl Marx (1818-83), Marxism is the theory of dialectical materialism based on communist practice. Dialectical materialism is the practice of understanding the material world (the world outside the consciousness) holistically in terms of movement, change, interconnection, and contradiction. Marxists argue that the material world is the foundation and determinant of thinking, especially in relation to the question of the origin of knowledge.

**SOCIALISM**
What is usually thought of as socialism is actually the first phase of a communist society. It is the organization of society in such a manner that any individual finds at birth equal means for the development of their respective faculties and the utilization of their labor. It is the organization of society in such a manner that the exploitation by one person of the labor of another would be impossible, and where everyone would be allowed to enjoy the social wealth only to the extent of their contribution to the production of that wealth.

**NAZISM**
Nazi is an abbreviation of the German *Nationalsozialist*. Under Adolf Hitler, the fascist principles and practices of Germany’s National Socialist Workers’ Party came to be known as Nazism. It is the ideology of racist nationalism, national expansion, and state control of the economy.

Excerpted and adapted (with the exception of the definition of Nazism) from the *Encyclopedia of Marxism*, published by the Marxists Internet Archive, Andy Blunden, editor, http://www.marxists.org.
CZECHOSLOVAKIA AFTER WORLD WAR II

Czechoslovakia first gained independence after the fall of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in October 1918. A parliamentary democracy was established, and for its first 20 years the country enjoyed one of the strongest economies in the world. Then on March 15, 1939, German troops marched into Prague and, meeting no resistance, took over the Czechoslovakian government and began a six-year occupation. The Czech people would not truly regain control of their own government until the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

During World War II, exiled Czechoslovakian President Edvard Beneš gained international support, and by the summer of 1940 he had established a “government-in-exile” that was officially recognized by both Russia and the Western Allies. In order to gather momentum for reinstating a Czechoslovak republic after the war, Beneš signed a treaty of friendship in 1943 with his closest neighbor, Josef Stalin. This treaty would eventually lead to the Soviet liberation of Czechoslovakia in May 1945. Also in this treaty was a provision that required the admittance and integration of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) into the postwar political system.

President Beneš returned to a largely shell-shocked and terrified mass of Czechs who were glad to have him back, but eager to turn the page on one of their nation’s darkest times. When election time arrived in 1946, they were ready for a sense of security. Klement Gottwald, premier of the KSČ, promised to provide this security. As a result, not only was he elected prime minister of Czechoslovakia, but his party earned 114 seats out of a 300-seat Constitutional Assembly. Beneš was elected president, but most of the other key ministries, including the Ministry of the Interior, were now under Communist control.

For about a year, the new coalition government was able to work together in relative harmony, despite the fact that the economic plan it had formulated was clearly Soviet influenced. The major turning point came in the summer of 1947, when the United States invited Eastern European nations to join the Marshall Plan, an economic reform program which promised to rehabilitate the economies of nations ravaged during the war. President Beneš’s first impulse was to accept the invitation and establish Czechoslovakia as a bridge between East and West. This move, however, interfered with Stalin’s plans for his neighbor. He ordered Gottwald to use his veto power to block it, and Gottwald complied.
This left the country economically on the fence, teetering between Beneš’s reborn republic and Gottwald’s fledgling Communist state, until 1948 when a successful and nearly entirely nonviolent coup d’état—supported by mass working-class demonstrations—put the government in Gottwald’s control. Over one million people joined the Communist Party to help Gottwald complete the coup. President Beneš rejected the Communist-ruled cabinet, but he had no power and was forced to resign.

A period of economic growth and significant increase in the availability of goods and personal consumption followed. But with the KSČ now in control, the government adhered to the Leninist concept of democratic centralism: power was concentrated at the top, and compliance and conformity were expected. It is telling that more than 60,000 clubs and associations had existed in Czechoslovakia in 1948, but by 1967, there were closer to 700, all under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. Censorship became pervasive, and control throughout the country was maintained through the repeated arrest and imprisonment of dissidents, who could also be punished with unemployment and housing restrictions. After 20 years, the Czech people grew weary of this system.
PRAGUE SPRING

The beginning of 1968 in Czechoslovakia was marked by a relaxation of censorship laws and an upsurge in the importation of Western art, music, and fashion. Young men wore their hair long. Women wore miniskirts, velvet boots, and fishnet stockings inspired by Parisian trends. New clubs opened where jukeboxes played American music. Theater made a comeback. Travel was open to anyone, and many chose to make pilgrimages abroad, including Václav Havel, who spent the summer as a playwright in New York City. Film crews also took advantage of unrestricted travel to document the views of ordinary people and investigate corrupt officials. Freedom of the press was reestablished; national minority associations and human-rights movements surfaced. There was even a revival of interest in alternative forms of political organization such as the Social Democratic Party.

Responsible for this uncharacteristic freedom were the newly installed reformist politicians led by Alexander Dubček, who in January had become first secretary of the Communist Party. This group was determined to confront the old Communist guard and demand a faster process of democratization. In the socialism they envisioned, the KSC would have to maintain their role in the government through free elections. In April, pressure from Dubček and his followers resulted in the inception of the Action Program, which promised industrial and agricultural reforms, a revised constitution that would guarantee civil rights and liberties, and the complete rehabilitation of all citizens whose rights had been infringed in the past. The promise of the Action Program was akin to a declaration of autonomy from the Soviet Union. This caused concern in Moscow. The Action Program also guaranteed equality among Czechs and Slovaks, which was an unprecedented demonstration of unity. Slovaks had traditionally been considered and treated as subordinates to the Czechs, who were divided themselves into Moravians and Bohemians. Now, it seemed that the Czechoslovakian people regarded themselves as one. This too caused concern in Moscow.

In Russia, Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev grew wary of the Czechoslovakian reform movement. He demanded that the Czechoslovakian and Soviet legislatures meet in Moscow. Dubček refused. The Russians finally settled on meeting in the Slovak town of Cierna on July 30, 1968. At the meeting, Dubček promised that, despite the reforms, he and his countrymen were ardently committed to socialism and loyal to the Soviets. The Soviets, in turn, promised they would not invade. On the night of August 20, however, Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops marched into Czechoslovakia and removed Dubček from office in what they called a “fraternal response to an appeal by Czechoslovak Party and Government leaders . . . [who had] fallen under heavy attack from counterrevolutionary forces and forces hostile to socialism.”
SOVIET CONTROL AND CHARTER 77

August 21, 1968, marked the end of the Prague Spring and the beginning of a new era of Soviet-dominated “normalization” in Czechoslovakia. With a certain degree of widespread indifference, Czechs returned to the life of censorship, paranoia, and repression to which they had grown accustomed in the years following World War II. In April 1969, Dubček’s position was filled by hard-liner Gustav Husák, who called for the reversal of a number of his predecessor’s reforms and purged the KSČ of its liberal members and the government as a whole of noncommunist parties. In 1971, Husák repudiated the Prague Spring, declaring, “In 1968 socialism was in danger in Czechoslovakia, and the armed intervention helped to save it.”

After the initial purge, Husák concentrated almost exclusively on the economy, but to no lasting benefit for his people. The immediate fiscal achievements were modest, and by the end of the 1970s the country was suffering. As the market deteriorated, unemployment became a powerful weapon to wield against nonconformists and dissenters, especially among the intellectual and artisan classes. Many writers, composers, journalists, historians, and scientists found themselves out of work or forced into menial jobs. When they protested, Husák silenced them with incarceration in prisons, where they were kept under constant supervision.

Discontent erupted in late 1976 after the members of the underground rock band The Plastic People of the Universe were tried for spreading antisocialist ideas. In January 1977, seven Czech writers, including Havel, signed a letter appealing for solidarity with the musicians on trial. This document became known as Charter 77, a declaration championed by Czech dissidents opposed to the restrictive life under Husák’s regime. The charter refers to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, signed on behalf of Dubček’s government in 1968, and which Husák’s regime had “confirmed” by Article 19. Article 19 of the Covenant gives citizens the right to freedom of expression. Charter 77 makes the argument that the arrest of The Plastic People of the Universe was a clear violation of Article 19.

From this point on, the term “Chartists” was used to refer to signatories, like Havel, who believed that underground writing and the slow dissemination of knowledge within the country and internationally would result in social and political change. Although the Chartists did their best to appease and remain within the rules of Husák’s regime, their words were considered radical. They were denied work and education opportunities for their children. Many of them were imprisoned, as Havel was from 1979 to 1983. Even so, circulation of Charter 77 continued until the Velvet Revolution of 1989, when the Soviet Union itself began to break down under Gorbachev’s glasnost.
THE VELVET REVOLUTION

In November 1989, a trade union strike sparked a series of nationally observed demonstrations that ultimately brought about the end of communism in Czechoslovakia. The ensuing month and a half of rallies came to be known as the “Velvet Revolution,” referred to as such because of the peaceful nature of the protests. In many ways, the demonstrations reiterated sentiments of the Prague Spring twenty-one and a half years before. Only this time, the changes were lasting. Even before the protests began in Czechoslovakia, much of the Soviet Bloc had been rebelling against Moscow’s grip. The Singing Revolution in Estonia sparked riots near the Russian border, and on November 9 the Berlin Wall came down. Pressure for change from within Czechoslovakia was increasing, while the Soviet Union’s ability to maintain control was weakening.

On December 10, the first truly Czechoslovakian government in 50 years was sworn in by President Husák, who resigned immediately afterwards. On December 29, the federal assembly, under reelected Chairman Dubček, unanimously elected Havel president of the republic. The following year, Havel met with Gorbachev in Moscow. Gorbachev agreed to the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovakia. The people of Czechoslovakia had their country back.
In the Czechoslovak Collection of Laws, no. 120 of 13 October, 1976, texts were published of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which were signed on behalf of our Republic in 1968, were confirmed at Helsinki in 1975 and came into force in our country on 23 March, 1976. From that date our citizens have the right, and our state the duty, to abide by them.

The human rights and freedoms underwritten by these covenants constitute important assets of civilised life for which many progressive movements have striven throughout history and whose codification could greatly contribute to the development of a humane society.

We accordingly welcome the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic’s accession to those agreements.

Their publication, however, serves as an urgent reminder of the extent to which basic human rights in our country exist, regrettably, on paper only.

The right to freedom of expression, for example, guaranteed by article 19 of the first-mentioned covenant, is in our case purely illusory. Tens of thousands of our citizens are prevented from working in their own fields for the sole reason that they hold views differing from official ones, and are discriminated against and harassed in all kinds of ways by the authorities and public organisations. Deprived as they are of any means to defend themselves, they become victims of a virtual apartheid.

Hundreds of thousands of other citizens are denied that “freedom from fear” mentioned in the preamble to the first covenant, being condemned to live in constant danger of unemployment or other penalties if they voice their own opinions.

In violation of article 13 of the second-mentioned covenant, guaranteeing everyone the right to education, countless young people are prevented from studying because of their own views or even their parents’. Innumerable citizens live in fear that their own or their children’s right to education may be withdrawn if they should ever speak up in accordance with their convictions. Any exercise of the right to “seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print” or “in the form of art,” specified in article 19, para. 2 of the first covenant, is punished by extrajudicial or even judicial sanctions, often in the form of criminal charges as in the recent trial of young musicians.
Freedom of public expression is repressed by the centralised control of all the communications media and of publishing and cultural institutions. No philosophical, political or scientific view or artistic expression that departs ever so slightly from the narrow bounds of official ideology or aesthetics is allowed to be published; no open criticism can be made of abnormal social phenomena; no public defence is possible against false and insulting charges made in official propaganda; the legal protection against “attacks on honour and reputation” clearly guaranteed by article 17 of the first covenant is in practice non-existent; false accusations cannot be rebutted and any attempt to secure compensation or correction through the courts is futile; no open debate is allowed in the domain of thought and art. Many scholars, writers, artists and others are penalised for having legally published or expressed, years ago, opinions which are condemned by those who hold political power today.

Freedom of religious confession, emphatically guaranteed by article 18 of the first covenant, is systematically curtailed by arbitrary official action; by interference with the activity of churchmen, who are constantly threatened by the refusal of the state to permit them the exercise of their functions, or by the withdrawal of such permission; by financial or other measures against those who express their religious faith in word or action; by constraints on religious training and so forth.

One instrument for the curtailment or, in many cases, complete elimination of many civic rights is the system by which all national institutions and organisations are in effect subject to political directives from the apparatus of the ruling party and to decisions made by powerful individuals. The constitution of the Republic, its laws and other legal norms do not regulate the form or content, the issuing or application of such decisions; they are often only given out verbally, unknown to the public at large and beyond its powers to check; their originators are responsible to no one but themselves and their own hierarchy; yet they have a decisive impact on the actions of the lawmaking and executive organs of government, and of justice, of the trade unions, interest groups and all other organisations, of the other political parties, enterprises, factories, institutions, offices, schools, and so on, for whom these instructions have precedence even before the law.

Where organisations or individual citizens, in the interpretation of their rights and duties, come into conflict with such directives, they cannot have recourse to any non-party authority, since none such exists. This constitutes, of course, a serious limitation of the right ensuing from articles 21 and 22 of the first-mentioned covenant, which provides for freedom of association and forbids any restriction on its exercise, from article 25 on the equal right to take part in the conduct of public affairs, and from article 26 stipulating equal protection by the law without discrimination. This state of affairs likewise prevents
workers and others from exercising the unrestricted right to establish trade unions and other organisations to protect their economic and social interests, and from freely enjoying the right to strike provided for in para. 1 of article 8 in the second-mentioned covenant.

Further civic rights, including the explicit prohibition of “arbitrary interference with privacy, family, home or correspondence” (article 17 of the first covenant), are seriously vitiated by the various forms of interference in the private life of citizens exercised by the Ministry of the Interior, for example, by bugging telephones and houses, opening mail, following personal movements, searching homes, setting up networks of neighbourhood informers (often recruited by illicit threats or promises) and in other ways. The ministry frequently interferes in employers’ decisions, instigates acts of discrimination by authorities and organisations, brings weight to bear on the organs of Justice and even orchestrates propaganda campaigns in the media. This activity is governed by no law and, being clandestine, affords the citizen no chance to defend himself.

In cases of prosecution on political grounds the investigative and judicial organs violate the rights of those charged and of those defending them, as guaranteed by article 14 of the first covenant and indeed by Czechoslovak law. The prison treatment of those sentenced in such cases is an affront to human dignity and a menace to their health, being aimed at breaking their morale.

Paragraph 2, article 12 of the first covenant, guaranteeing every citizen the right to leave the country, is consistently violated, or under the pretence of “defence of national security” is subjected to various unjustifiable conditions (para. 3). The granting of entry visas to foreigners is also handled arbitrarily, and many are unable to visit Czechoslovakia merely because of professional or personal contacts with those of our citizens who are subject to discrimination.

Some of our people—either in private, at their places of work or by the only feasible public channel, the foreign media—have drawn attention to the systematic violation of human rights and democratic freedoms and demanded amends in specific cases. But their pleas have remained largely ignored or been made grounds for police investigation.

Responsibility for the maintenance of civic rights in our country naturally devolves in the first place on the political and state authorities. Yet, not only on them: everyone bears his share of responsibility for the conditions that prevail and accordingly also for the observance of legally enshrined agreements, binding upon all citizens as well as upon governments. It is this sense of co-responsibility, our belief in the meaning of voluntary citizens’ involvement and the general need to give it new and more effective expression that led us to the idea of creating Charter 77, whose inception we today publicly announce.
Charter 77 is a free informal, open community of people of different convictions, different faiths and different professions united by the will to strive, individually and collectively, for the respect of civic and human rights in our own country and throughout the world—rights accorded to all men by the two mentioned international covenants, by the Final Act of the Helsinki conference and by numerous other international documents opposing war, violence and social or spiritual oppression, and which are comprehensively laid down in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Charter 77 springs from a background of friendship and solidarity among people who share our concern for those ideals that have inspired, and continue to inspire, their lives and their work.

Charter 77 is not an organisation; it has no rules, permanent bodies or formal membership. It embraces everyone who agrees with its ideas, participates in its work, and supports it. It does not form the basis for any oppositional political activity. Like many similar citizen initiatives in various countries, West and East, it seeks to promote the general public interest. It does not aim, then, to set out its own programmes for political or social reforms or changes, but within its own sphere of activity it wishes to conduct a constructive dialogue with the political and state authorities, particularly by drawing attention to various individual cases where human and civil rights are violated, by preparing documentation and suggesting solutions, by submitting other proposals of a more general character aimed at reinforcing such rights and their guarantees, and by acting as a mediator in various conflict situations which may lead to injustice and so forth.

By its symbolic name Charter 77 denotes that it has come into being at the start of a year proclaimed as the Year of Political Prisoners, a year in which a conference in Belgrade is due to review the implementation of the obligations assumed at Helsinki.

As signatories, we hereby authorise Professor Dr. Jan Patočka, Václav Havel, and Professor Jiří Hájek to act as the spokesmen for the Charter. These spokesmen are endowed with full authority to represent it vis-à-vis state and other bodies, and the public at home and abroad, and their signatures attest the authenticity of documents issued by the Charter. They will have us, and others who join us, as their co-workers, taking part in any needful negotiations, shouldering particular tasks and sharing every responsibility.

We believe that Charter 77 will help to enable all the citizens of Czechoslovakia to work and live as free human beings.
A ROCK ‘N’ ROLL GLOSSARY

CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE
Jan received a doctorate from Charles University—also called the University of Prague—before attending Cambridge. It is a state-controlled institution founded in 1348 by the Holy Roman emperor Charles IV, making it among the first universities in central Europe. It would have been one of the largest schools in Czechoslovakia when Jan matriculated there. In the late 1960s, many students and faculty of Charles pushed for reforms and actively participated in the Prague Spring. Some have even compared it to UC Berkeley during that period.

CORN EXCHANGE
The Cambridge Corn Exchange is a concert hall located in the heart of Cambridge. Originally built in the mid-19th century as a building where farmers and merchants traded cereal grains, it was permanently converted to an entertainment venue in 1965. The auditorium holds just under two thousand patrons. In 1972, Syd Barrett played his last concert there. It was disastrous: the band was unprepared; vocals were mixed incorrectly so that Barrett couldn’t hear his own voice; an amp didn’t work properly so the bass kept fading out; Barrett even cut his finger open. As a result of the scathing reviews, Barrett slipped into a depression, never again to make a public appearance.

ALEXANDER DUBČEK
Alexander Dubček (1921–92) was born in Czechoslovakia, but lived in the Soviet Union from age 4 to 17. His political career began in 1949, and he spent 1955–58 in Moscow, where he became a supporter of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev. Dubček was appointed first secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in January 1968. His liberal reform program—called “Czechoslovakia’s Road to Socialism,” but also known as the Action Program—included greater freedom of expression, economic reforms, and a wide-ranging democratization of political life. These reforms were responsible for the period in Czechoslovakian history known as the Prague Spring, but they also angered the Soviets. Dubček attempted to persuade the Soviet Union not to intervene, but when the invasion came in August he asked the Czech people not to resist. He was expelled from the party in 1970. Dubček returned to prominence in December 1989 after the Velvet Revolution; on December 28 he was elected chairman of the Federal Assembly, and by 1992 he had become the leader of Slovakia’s Social Democrats. He died of injuries suffered in an automobile accident.
ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
Antonín Leopold Dvořák (1841–1904) was born in Nelahozeves, a small village 25 miles northwest of Prague in Bohemia. He was formally educated at the Prague Organ School and spent many years performing as a member of a local theater orchestra. His early compositions were somber and heavily influenced by the conservative German classicists of the time, but he came to deepen his compositions with the folk tunes of his childhood. This resulted in a style that wove the old-world melodies of the Bohemian countryside into a sophisticated, classical form and took on a festive spirit of nationalistic pride.

FHB
FHB, an acronym for the expression “family hold back,” is a term employed when guests have been invited to a meal for which the hosts may not have enough food. FHB means that the family should serve their visitors first to ensure that they are well fed, before taking any for themselves.

GAP YEAR
The practice of taking off a period of time—generally about a year, but possibly shorter—between completing high school and entering university is much more commonly practiced in Europe and the United Kingdom than in the United States. One popular choice for precollege students is to spend their gap year volunteering and traveling abroad.

GODOLPHIN
Founded in 1726, The Godolphin School, where Alice attends high school, is a private boarding and day school in Salisbury, England, for girls aged 11 to 18.

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV
Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev of the Soviet Union, born in Russia in 1921, served as the general secretary of the Communist Party 1985–91 and president of the Soviet Union 1990–91. Gorbachev launched a campaign of glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring) in 1986, which led to greater freedoms of expression and information and limited free-market mechanisms. His efforts to democratize his country’s political system and decentralize its economy led to the downfall of Communism and the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.
**Gottwaldov (Zlín)**
The small town of Zlín—renamed Gottwaldov in 1948 to honor Czech President Klement Gottwald, who held office 1948–53—is in Moravia, a region on the southeastern border of the Czech Republic. Both Jan and Tom Stoppard (formerly Tomáš Straussler) were born there.

**Hammersmith**
Hammersmith is a neighborhood in the inner borough of London, north of the Thames River and west of Chelsea, where Esme lives with Alice before they move to Cambridge to care for an ailing Max. It is one of London’s most popular areas, with attractions along the river bank and middle-class housing close by.

**Václav Havel**
Playwright, poet, political dissident, and former Czech president Václav Havel was born in 1936 and grew up in a well-known entrepreneurial and intellectual family closely linked to cultural and political events in Czechoslovakia. From 1962 to 1966, he studied drama by correspondence at the Faculty of Theatre of the Academy of Musical Arts, and by 1968 he had become resident playwright of the Theatre of the Balustrade. His internationally renowned dramas satirize the dehumanizing effects of repressive totalitarian political systems. Following the suppression of the Prague Spring and the invasion of the armies of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968, Havel stood against the political repression that characterized the following years of “normalization.” In 1975, he wrote an open letter to hard-line President Gustav Husák, in which he warned of the accumulated antagonism in Czechoslovak society. The culmination of his dissident activities resulted in his co-authorship of Charter 77, which embodied the character of the Czechoslovakian population as they silently protested against government oppression. He was arrested three times and spent nearly five years in prison (1979–83) for his activities on behalf of human rights. Due to his unyielding political stance, Havel became a recognized moral authority, and, following the Velvet Revolution of December 1989, was elected president, becoming Czechoslovakia’s first noncommunist leader since 1948. As the Czechoslovak union faced dissolution in 1992, Havel, who opposed the division, resigned from office. The following year he was elected president of the new Czech Republic and was re-elected in 1998. Barred constitutionally from seeking a third term, he stepped down as president in 2003.
GUSTAV HUSÁK
Gustav Husák (1913–91), born in Slovakia, joined the Communist Party in 1933 while studying law. Under party leader Alexander Dubček, Husák rose to deputy premier of Czechoslovakia in April 1968. As the Soviet Union grew increasingly alarmed by Dubček’s liberal reforms, Husák began calling for caution; after the Soviet invasion of 1968, Husák took over as the leader of the Czech Communist Party, succeeded Dubček as first secretary, reversed his predecessor’s reforms, and re-established close ties with the Soviet Union. In 1975, he also became president of Czechoslovakia. He held tight control over the government, purging the party of its liberal members and dissenters. In 1987 he stepped down as general secretary of the party when it became clear that his opposition to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev’s idea of perestroika was unpopular. When Communist rule collapsed in 1989, Husák resigned as president.

JAN MASARYK
Czech statesman and diplomat Jan Masaryk (1886–1948) served as secretary to Czech foreign minister Edvard Beneš in 1921. From 1925 to 1938, Masaryk was ambassador to Great Britain. During World War II, he was foreign minister of the Czechoslovak émigré regime in London. A leading spokesman for that government, Masaryk made wartime broadcasts to occupied Czechoslovakia—published in English in 1944 under the title Speaking to My Country—and became a popular figure at home. He retained the portfolio of foreign minister after his government’s return to Prague in 1945. Convinced that Czechoslovakia must remain friendly to the Soviet Union, he was nevertheless greatly disappointed by the Soviet veto of Czechoslovakian acceptance of the Marshall Plan. At the request of President Beneš, Masaryk remained at his post after the Soviet takeover of February 25, 1948, but a few weeks later he either committed suicide or was murdered.

MILTON ROAD ESTATE
Esme moves to Milton Road Estate with Nigel when Alice is born. It is a lower-middle-class area of public housing flats in the north London neighborhood of South Tottenham.

THE MORNING STAR
The Morning Star claims to be Britain’s only socialist daily. Until 1974 it was bankrolled by the Soviet government with direct cash contributions, and from 1974 to 1989 the paper was indirectly supported by daily bulk orders from Moscow.
NEWNHAM COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE

Lenka as a young woman attends Newnham College, a women’s college of Cambridge University. Founded in 1871 by Henry Sidgwick, it was the second Cambridge college to admit women. Writers A. S. Byatt, Margaret Drabble, Sylvia Plath, Iris Murdoch, and Germaine Greer, actress Emma Thompson, and anthropologist Jane Goodall are among Newnham’s distinguished alumnae.

OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The October Revolution was the second and last major phase of the Russian Revolution of 1917, in which the Bolshevik Party seized power in Russia, inaugurating the Soviet regime. Czar Nicholas II had been forced to abdicate in March 1917, ending more than 300 years of rule by the Romanov dynasty. A committee of the Duma (legislative assembly) appointed a Provisional Government to succeed the autocracy, but it faced a rival in the Petrograd Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies, made up of 2,500 delegates chosen from factories and military units in and around Petrograd. Between March and October the Provisional Government was reorganized four times, but none of the succeeding governments was able to cope with the major problems afflicting the country: peasant land seizures, nationalist independence movements in non-Russian areas, and the collapse of army morale among the soldiers fighting on the front in World War I.

Meanwhile, soviets (local, municipal, and regional councils) on the Petrograd model, in far closer contact with the sentiments of the people than the Provisional Government and increasingly dominated by radical socialists, were organized in cities and major towns and in the army. At the First All-Russian Congress of Soviets, convened on June 3, the Socialist Revolutionaries were the largest single bloc, followed by the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks. While the Provisional Government’s power waned, that of the soviets increased, as did the Bolsheviks’ influence within them. By September the Bolsheviks and their allies, the Left Socialist Revolutionaries, had overtaken the opposition and held majorities in both the Petrograd and Moscow soviets.

By autumn the Bolshevik program of “peace, land, and bread” had won the party considerable support among hungry urban workers and soldiers, who were already deserting from the ranks in large numbers. Although a previous coup attempt had failed in July, the time now seemed ripe. On October 24–25 the Bolsheviks and Left Socialist Revolutionaries led workers and peasants to revolt under the slogan “All power to the Soviets” and staged a nearly bloodless coup, occupying government buildings, telegraph stations, and other strategic points. The Second All-Russian Congress of Soviets, which convened in Petrograd
simultaneously with the coup, approved the formation of a new government composed mainly of Bolshevik commissars.

For more than 70 years, the Soviet government celebrated this event as a sacred act that laid the foundation for a new political order which would transform “backward” Russia—which became the Soviet Union in 1923—into an advanced socialist society. Officially known as the October Revolution, the event was regarded by the Bolsheviks’ enemies, however, as a conspiratorial coup that deprived Russia of the opportunity to establish a democracy.

**PAN**

Pan is a lesser, humanlike earth god from Greek mythology. According to Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*: “He was Hermes’ son; a noisy, merry god, the Homeric Hymn in his honor calls him; but he was part animal too, with a goat’s horns and goat’s hoofs instead of feet. He was the goatherd’s god and the shepherd’s god, and also the gay companion of the woodland nymphs when they danced.” He is a sexually charged god, under the rule of Dionysus, the god of wine and ecstasy; he is also a musician and a shepherd, playing on a reed pipe to his flock in the high hills.

Pan’s most apparent connection to Syd Barrett comes through the image of the reed pipe. *Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967), the only Pink Floyd album produced entirely under Barrett’s direction, takes its title from chapter seven of Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, in which the characters Rat and Mole spot the god Pan.

**PETROGRAD FACTORY COMMITTEES**

Petrograd—known as St. Petersburg until 1914—was the capital of Russia until 1918, when the Soviet government moved the capital to Moscow. After the overthrow of the czarist government in February 1917, the Petrograd Soviet—a council of workers’ deputies elected in the factories of the capital—was created. Similar soviets of workers, soldiers, and peasants’ deputies sprang up in major cities and towns throughout the country. By December 1917, Lenin viewed these factory committees as accomplices to delaying real revolution. His view, contrary to that of Marx, was that the government must control the unions from the top down before the proletariat could be released into utopia. One of the Bolsheviks’ first steps was to issue the “General Instructions on Workers’ Control,” which turned factory committees into powerless local union branches with mandates such as Article 7, which states, “The right to issue orders relating to the management, running, and functioning of enterprises remains in the hands of the owners.”
SERGEANT PEPPER COAT, CHELSEA GIRL

Candida recalls her more rebellious days when she wore a Sergeant Pepper coat from Chelsea Girl and was dating the cartoonist from the *Black Dwarf*. The Sergeant Pepper coat refers to a garment inspired by the flamboyant military-inspired, day-glo-colored satin costumes worn by The Beatles on the cover of their revolutionary 1967 album *Sgt. Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*. Beatles-inspired fashion—indeed any fashion inspired by pop music and musicians—became very popular in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s, especially among affluent young people in London known as “mods.”

Chelsea Girl, the first U.K. chain of fashion boutiques, was founded in 1948 as Lewis Separates. The company adopted a new name and identity in 1968, as the psychedelic movement extended into the suburbs, offering hip, casual clothing at affordable prices. Innovative in design and format, the stores used strong colors, bold fashion imagery, and pop music to create a hugely successful enterprise.

STRAHOV

In 1948 the Soviet-controlled government of Czechoslovakia expanded Strahov Stadium (originally constructed in 1926) into a gargantuan symbol of its own might. It was the largest stadium in the world—covering 15 acres and seating around 220,000—and is the second largest sports facility after the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. During the Soviet occupation, it was most often a site for nationalistic rallies and gymnastic competitions. Bands that have played there include Pink Floyd, *U2*, and Genesis. On August 18, 1990, Strahov Stadium housed a Rolling Stones concert with more than 1,000 people in attendance, including President Václav Havel.

TANKIES

“Tankie” is slang for a member of a communist group or a sympathizer who specifically subscribes to the political systems of the Soviet Union and other accredited states, even when other communists criticize policies or actions of these countries. The term derives from divisions within the communist movement that first developed when the Soviet Union sent tanks into Hungary in 1956. Tankies supported this act as well as the decision to send tanks into Czechoslovakia in 1968 and Afghanistan in 1979 (and, arguably, Georgia in 2008).

LUDVIK VACULÍK AND JIŘÍ GRUŠA

Ludvik Vaculík, a Czech writer and journalist born in 1926, is best known for his “Two Thousand Words Manifesto.” Published in four Prague newspapers amid the Prague
Spring, the manifesto was the first to openly criticize the Communist Party in many years. It called upon the workers to take an active role both in progressive reforms as well as in the resistance of the impending Soviet invasion, which Vaculík foresaw. Shortly after its publication, Vaculík was banned from publishing. Despite this, he remained active in the resistance throughout the Soviet occupation, both as a publisher of underground literature and signatory of Charter 77.

Jiří Gruša, a Czech writer and current Czech diplomat born in 1938, was banned from all literary activity in 1970. He published underground literature throughout the 1970s, and was a signatory of Charter 77. Following the international publication of his 1980 novel *The Questionnaire*, he was stripped of Czech citizenship and forced to relocate to Germany until 1989.

**ANDY WARHOL**

An American artist, filmmaker, and cultural icon, Andy Warhol (1928–87) was born Andrew Warhola, the son of Czech immigrants. He was an initiator and leading exponent of the Pop art movement of the 1960s. He was also actively involved in the pop music scene. In the mid 1960s, he adopted The Velvet Underground, making them a crucial element of his Exploding Plastic Inevitable multimedia performance art show. Warhol acted as the band’s manager, and in 1966 he produced their debut album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, as well as created the record’s iconic album art, featuring a peelable illustration of a banana. Warhol designed many covers for various pop music albums, including The Rolling Stones’s *Sticky Fingers* (1971) and *Love You Live* (1977) and John Lennon’s 1986 posthumously released *Menlove Ave*. 
Sappho was a Greek poet and musician who lived in the city of Mytilene on the island of Lesbos from about 630 B.C.E. It is not known when she died. She devoted her life to writing deeply romantic lyric (i.e., meant to be sung to the lyre) love poetry about both men and women, composing enough to fill nine books. Hellenistic poets even called her “the tenth Muse” or “the mortal Muse.” Because she wrote on papyrus, however, much of this poetry is lost and/or fragmented. Poets, scholars, and translators have been arguing about Sappho’s life and work for centuries.

Sappho’s themes are personal, rather than epic, usually concerned with private matters of concern to the *thiasos* (female community) that met under her leadership. The goal of the Sapphic *thiasos* was the education of young women, especially for marriage, under the guidance and inspiration of the goddess Aphrodite.

Sappho’s poetry is infused with intense emotions, especially those associated with the madness of love, desire, longing, and their concomitant suffering. Images often include flowers, outdoor scenes, incense-wreathed altars, and perfumes for the body and hair, all of which are elements of Aphrodite’s rituals. In the *thiasos* girls developed grace and elegance intended to enhance seduction and love. Singing, dancing, and poetry played a central role in the educational process.

The Sapphic stanza is a metrical form, made famous (although possibly not invented) by Sappho. It is four non-rhyming lines: three 11-syllable lines of trochee-trochee-dactyl-trochee-trochee, and one line of dactyl-trochee. A trochee consists of one long or stressed syllable followed by one short or unstressed syllable; a dactyl is one long or stressed syllable followed by two short or unstressed syllables.

The Sapphic poetry discussed in *Rock ‘n’ Roll* includes fragments 130, 88A, and 31. The following pages include Fragment 31, excerpted from *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*, translated by Anne Carson (Alfred A. Knopf, 2002).
Φαίνεται μοι κήνος ἵκος θεοίσιν ἐμμεν ὄνημ, ὅτις ἐνάντιός τοι ἰσδάνει καὶ πλάσιον ἀδι ψωνεὶ-ςας ὑπακούει

καὶ γελαῖκας ἵμεροφεν, τό μ᾽ ἤ μὰν καρδίαν ἐν στήθεσιν ἐπτοσισεν' ὡς γὰρ ἡ<ἐς> σ᾽ ἰδω βρόχε ὡς μὲ φώνη-
ς᾽ οὐδὲν ἔτ᾽ εἶχει,

ἀλλὰ καὶ μὲν γλώτσσα ἔαγε, λέπτον δ᾽ αὐτικα χρώι πῦρ ὑπαθεδρόμακεν, ὀππάτεςσι δ᾽ οὐδὲν ὁρμῆμ', ἐπιβρό-
μειςι δ᾽ ἄκουαι,

ἐκάδε μ᾽ ἴδρως κακχέεται, τρόμος δὲ παῖσαν ἀγρεί, χλωροτέρα δὲ πιοίας ἐμμι, τεθινάκην δ᾽ ὄλιγον 'πιδεύης
ψαμνοί' ἐμ' αὑτίαι.

ἀλλὰ πάν τὸλματον, ἐπεὶ καὶ πένητα
He seems to me equal to gods that man
whoever he is that opposite you
sits and listens close
to your sweet speaking

and lovely laughing—oh it
puts the heart in my chest on wings
for when I look at you, even a moment, no speaking
is left in me

no: tongue breaks and thin
fire is racing under skin
and in eyes no sight and drumming
fills ears

and cold sweat holds me and shaking
grips me all, greener than grass
I am and dead—or almost
I seem to me.

But all is to be dared because even a person of poverty
Countless rock bands have sung about rebellion. One of the few that can claim it spurred a revolution is The Plastic People of the Universe, who—starting with no political agenda—catalyzed democracy in Czechoslovakia.

The Plastic People of the Universe got started in 1968, a few weeks after Soviet tanks rolled into Prague and shut down the liberalization known as Prague Spring. The band was a gaggle of arty hippies who considered themselves outside politics. But in the mid 1970s the Plastics’ run-ins with an increasingly stifling Communist government spurred the Czech human-rights movement named after its petition and manifesto, Charter 77, which was a direct response to the trial and imprisonment of musicians. From a decade of resistance by Charter 77 came the bloodless Velvet Revolution that ended Communist rule in Czechoslovakia.

The Plastics’ dark, low-fi music is far better known to human-rights groups than to rock fans. It has appealed to downtown New York musicians with its angularity and intransigence, and the critic Ritchie Unterberger gave the band a chapter in his 1998 book *Unknown Legends of Rock ‘n’ Roll: Psychedelic Unknowns, Mad Geniuses, Punk Pioneers, Lo-Fi Mavericks & More*. A Czech label, Globus, has reissued the complete Plastic People catalog on CD, and most of the albums are available at tamizdat.org.

The Plastics started as fans, and mimickers, of iconoclastic American bands including The Velvet Underground, Frank Zappa’s Mothers of Invention, and the Fugs. Like other late-1960s rockers worldwide, they turned shows into happenings, collaborating with visual artists; the Plastics performed in wild makeup, wearing robes made of bedsheets. “We were just a band of freaks, playing rock and roll,” said Ivan Bierhanzl, who has worked with the Plastics intermittently since 1979 and is now the band’s manager and plays upright bass. “It was the problem of the Communist government and the party that they didn’t like us. They didn’t like our aesthetics because it was something from the West—longhairs, capitalism.”

The government revoked the Plastics’ credentials as professional musicians in 1970, taking away access to both equipment and official gigs. As they would for nearly two decades, the Plastics persisted, under conditions that make punk-rock look like a luxury cruise. “We were workers,” Bierhanzl said. “For us it was important just to play and listen to our music, and absolutely not to be some heroes.”
Led by the composer Milan Hlavsa, who died in 2001, the Plastics turned from imitating American songs to writing their own. They built homemade amplifiers from scrounged transistor-radio parts, and they rehearsed, quietly, in living rooms, perfecting the material they might find a chance to perform at semiprivate concerts once or twice a year.

The Plastics’ songs never sounded like party music. Along with the drone of the Velvet Underground, they picked up the dissonances of Eastern European music, added the counterpoint of instruments like bass clarinet and viola, and tossed in flurries of free-jazz saxophone. The vocals cackled and growled in Czech, singing gallows-humored modern poetry. The authorities called the music morbid and weren’t necessarily wrong. The Plastics defied ever-optimistic official pronouncements simply through their bilious, discontented tone.
The Plastics’ most celebrated album, *Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned*, had lyrics by the poet and provocateur Egon Bondy, like those in “No One”: “No one / Nowhere / Never / Ever / Got anywhere / Who me? / Such a fool / I am not.” The songs were recorded in 1974; tapes were smuggled out of Czechoslovakia and released as an LP four years later in France, and copies slipped into Czechoslovakia. Nowadays, as music easily whizzes around the world via the Internet, *Rock ‘n’ Roll*—with scenes of Jan and his fragile, irreplaceable collection of Western LPs—recalls how precious vinyl once was.

Plastics concerts were rare, clandestine events organized with sly humor. After the band’s credentials were revoked, it managed to perform at first under the auspices of its manager, Ivan Jiřous, an art historian. He would rent a hall for a lecture-demonstration on Andy Warhol and Pop art; then, after a brief presentation, the Plastics would “demonstrate” a full-length concert set of Velvet Underground songs. Under Czech law couples getting married could book their own wedding entertainment, so some Plastics friends and fans took their vows and held concerts of the “second culture”: one separate from both officially sanctioned art and the explicit opposition.

The Plastics didn’t set out to challenge the regime, but to ignore it. “Everybody else just collaborated a little bit with the regime because of work, of money, of studying and jobs and so on,” Bierhanzl said. “So everybody was a little bit in touch with the government but our crazy band. We were different.”

They were not ignored in return; crackdowns grew increasingly severe. In 1974 the Plastics arranged one of their underground concerts in the village of České Budějovice, but the government found out about it. Before it began, fans were shunted into a tunnel and ambushed by club-wielding policemen. All were photographed for police files, and some students were expelled, ending their academic careers.

At first the government took the Plastics more seriously than the opposition did. As *Rock ‘n’ Roll* recounts, there was little respect, on either side, between the politicos and the freaks. “The rock ‘n’ roll band didn’t think much of the intellectual dissenters, and the intellectuals didn’t think much of these dropouts,” Tom Stoppard said. “The idea was that dropping out was not in fact an adequate response: opting out, ‘Leave me alone.’ Everybody had a perfect right to do it, but it wasn’t opposition.”

The government took care of that. In 1976, after the Plastics and friends staged another festival of the second culture, 27 people were arrested.

Vratislav Brabenec, the Plastics’ saxophonist and sometime lyricist, and Jiřous were convicted of “organized disturbance of the peace” and imprisoned. “They made a big mistake with this trial,” Bierhanzl said. “Without it, maybe nobody would be interested about this
band, but the trial was big P.R. for us.” At the trial dissidents and dropouts found common ground and forged their alliance.

But it would be more than a decade before they prevailed. In the meantime conditions grew worse. Band members were repeatedly interrogated by the police and sometimes beaten. The Plastics stopped giving concerts after 1981, making music only in private. Brabenec emigrated to Toronto in 1982. Jirous spent years in jail. Hlavsa held the band together until 1988, and then split off his own band with some former Plastic People under a new name: Pulnoc (Midnight), which was allowed to perform in Czechoslovakia and the West. On the eve of the Velvet Revolution the Plastic People were gone. It was hard to tell if the government had finally worn them down or if—despite their conscious intentions—they had somehow served their historical purpose.

Topical protest music can rapidly turn into an artifact; the people involved are gone, the causes won or lost, the slogan grown irrelevant. By the 1990s reggae and hip-hop had outflanked rock as global protest music, although rockers like Bruce Springsteen still lead arena-size protest singalongs. Like much music written under authoritarian regimes, the Plastic People’s songs may well hold double-entendres and sidelong references that attentive local listeners could glean at the time. But their music is more a mood than a manifesto; its bitter, sardonic disquiet lingers.

Bierhanzl said the Plastics now were “living in contemporary time.” The band reunited in 1997 for the 20th anniversary of Charter 77 and has stayed together, with some new members, since the death of Hlavsa. But ten years later it is still exorcising memories by performing at Prague’s National Theater [opening and closing the Czech debut of Stoppard’s Rock ‘n’ Roll]. Back in 1977, as the Charter 77 movement was gaining international attention, the Communist government summoned artists to that theater and pressured them to sign a denunciation of the human rights movement. Many were sympathetic to Charter 77’s goals and close to its members, but they had families to support and jobs to protect; they signed. “For us,” Bierhanzl said, “it’s some kind of satisfaction that now we can play in the same hall.” He chuckled. “But it’s history.”
THE COMPLETE AND REMASTERED RECORDINGS OF THE PLASTIC PEOPLE OF
THE UNIVERSE 1969–86, RELEASED ON 11 CDs BY GLOBUS INTERNATIONAL AND
GLOBUS MUSIC IN 2002
i. Muž bez uší (Man with No Ears), concerts 1969–72
ii. Vožralej jak slíva (Drunk As a Skunk), concerts 1973–75
iii. Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned, 1974–75
iv. Ach to státu hanobení (Oh Dishonour to the State), concerts 1976–77
v: Pašijové hry velikonoční (Passion Play) 1978
vi: Jak bude po smrti (Afterlife), 1979
vii: Co znamená věsti koně (Leading Horses), 1981
viii: Kolejnice dumi (Railways Rumble), 1977–82
ix: Hovězí porážka (Beefslaughter), 1983–84
x: Půlnoční myš (Midnight Mouse), 1985–86
xi: Trouble Every Day (concerts 1971–77, cover versions)

RECORDINGS FROM 1992 ON
Bez ohňů je underground (Underground Is without Fires), reunion concert 1992–93
The Plastic People of the Universe, reunion concert 1997; also on DVD
For Kosovo, benefit concert 1997
Líně s tebou spím / Lazy Love: In Memoriam Mejla Hlavsa, 2001
10 let Globusu aneb underground v kostce, 2000
Milan Hlavsa: Než je dnes člověku 50, poslední dekáda, 2001
The Plastic People of the Universe and Agon Orchestra: Pašijové hry (Passion Play), 2004
Do lesička na čekanou, 2007

Man with No Ears, Egon Bondy's Happy Hearts Club Banned, and Beefslaughter were also
released by British label Kissing Spell in 2004.

LPS
Egon Bondy’s Happy Hearts Club Banned (Bozi Mlyn and scopa Invisible Production,
France, 1978)
Passion Play (Bozi Mlyn Productions, Canada, 1980)
Leading Horses (Bozi Mlyn Productions, Canada, 1983)
Midnight Mouse (Freedonia, Great Britain–Netherlands, 1987)
THE MUSIC IN ROCK ’N’ ROLL

SYD BARRETT
Roger Keith “Syd” Barrett (1946–2006) was the founder and “original creative force” behind Pink Floyd. A remarkable singer, songwriter, and guitarist, he was responsible both for the band’s name and for the majority of their first album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (1967). Barrett was an unreliable live performer, however, and—probably due to experimentation with LSD—developed enough “personality problems” that he was kicked out of the band in 1968. In 1970 he released two solo albums, *The Madcap Laughs* (which includes the song “Golden Hair,” based on James Joyce’s “Poem V” from *Chamber Music*) and *Barrett*, both with the aid and support of his former band mates. Barrett gave a few more public performances, the last of which was a disastrous show at the Corn Exchange in Cambridge in 1972. In 1974 he moved back into his mother’s house in Cambridge and became, more or less, a hermit. Despite his withdrawal from the public view, the public remained interested in Barrett. Pink Floyd’s 1975 hit “Shine On, You Crazy Diamond” was a tribute to their former band mate, and biographers and paparazzi continued to hound him throughout his remaining years. In 1988, EMI Records released *Opel*, an album of Barrett’s studio outtakes and previously unreleased material; other compilations followed. Suffering from stomach ulcers and diabetes, Barrett died on July 7, 2006.

THE BEACH BOYS
The Beach Boys came out of Hawthorne, California, in 1961. They represented the original “California rock” sound, celebrating the youthful beach culture of southern California with easy melodies and playful vocals. At their historic June 17, 1969, concert in Prague’s Lucerna Palace—a beacon of Czech national pride designed and built by Václav Havel’s grandfather in 1907 and, for many years, the only space where big concerts could be held—The Beach Boys dedicated their performance of “Break Away” to recently deposed Czech leader Alexander Dubček, who sat in the audience. This concert marked the first performance by an American rock band behind the Iron Curtain.

BOB DYLAN
Bob Dylan is one of the most influential American rock musicians of the 20th century. Originally a folk musician and singer-songwriter, Dylan began to experiment with rock and roll in the early 1960s. He became known for his poetic lyrics and commentary on social and political unrest. Despite rejecting his role as iconic protest singer—he claimed to
be an artist, not a spokesman or a politician—many of his songs became anthems for the antiwar and civil rights movements. Politicians including Jimmy Carter and Václav Havel have cited his songs as influences.

**Cliff Richard**
Sir Cliff Richard is billed as Britain’s Elvis Presley. His career in British popular music spans five decades. Although considered the most successful artist in the history of British pop music, he never achieved the same impact in the United States.

**Cream**
Cream, a British blues-rock trio consisting of Eric Clapton, Jack Bruce, and Ginger Baker, formed in 1966 to create rock and roll’s first “supergroup.” The high energy and emotional intensity of Clapton’s playing redefined the solo instrumentalist’s role in rock. Cream disbanded in 1968, having sold 15 million records in two years.

**The Fugs**
The Fugs were primarily a rock-theater band active in the anti–Vietnam War movement during the late 1960s. Considered too politically outspoken and obscene for mass consumption, they epitomized the cultural transformation that was brought into the spotlight by The Velvet Underground. In the fall of 1968, during a European tour, the band attempted and failed to get into Czechoslovakia in order to, they claim, “lie down in front of invading Russian tanks as a protest against the invasion.”

**The Grateful Dead**
American rock band The Grateful Dead defined and embodied the improvisational, psychedelic music scene of San Francisco in the mid-1960s. They were also one of the most successful touring bands in rock history, despite minimal top singles or major hits. They notoriously cultivated a following of Deadheads, who were the epitome of the 1960s counterculture.

**Guns N’ Roses**
Formed in 1985 in Los Angeles, Guns N’ Roses gained stardom with the release of the album *Appetite for Destruction* in 1987, with sales of 17 million, the biggest-selling debut in rock history. Led by singer Axl Rose—who was raised in a working-class Indiana family and by age 20 had already been indicted for public intoxication, criminal trespass, and contributing to the delinquency of a minor—the band combined heavy-metal technique
with an outraged punk attitude to create a '70s-derived hard rock that recalled the early Rolling Stones. Guns N’ Roses was a highly controversial band, rebellious and hedonistic, and offended several groups with lyrics that disparaged gays, blacks, feminists, and immigrants. Rose continues to perform with a new configuration of supporting players under the band’s original name.

JOHN LENNON/ THE JOHN LENNON WALL

Born into and raised by a working-class family in Liverpool, England, musician/artist/activist John Lennon founded a skiffle band in 1955 that evolved into The Beatles, the most important musical group of the second half of the 20th century. One of the great rock rhythm guitarists, Lennon was also an alienated rock and roll rebel and irreverent provocateur. Lennon was shot to death by Mark David Chapman, a deranged fan, in front of his Manhattan apartment building on December 8, 1980. This event triggered a worldwide outpouring of grief. The Lennon Wall, located in Prague’s Grand Priory Square in Mala Strana, was originally an unremarkable historical structure. After Lennon’s assassination, young people set up a mock grave in a recess of the wall and began to cover it with Lennon-inspired graffiti and lyrics from Beatles songs, risking prison for engaging in “subversive activities.” The wall became a focal point for the expression of grievances by young Czech citizens, a memorial to Lennon and his pacifist ideas, and a monument
to free speech and the nonviolent rebellion of Czech youth against the repression of neo-Stalinism. The government repeatedly tried to whitewash over the graffiti, but each time new text and images would appear the next day.

**The Kinks**
The Kinks were one of the more important bands of the “British Invasion” of British rock into the United States between 1964 and 1967. Originally formed as a rhythm and blues band in London in 1963, The Kinks infused their music with sharp social observation and the theatricality of the British music hall. They became an English archetype and strongly influenced The Who, mid-1960s American punk, and early 1970s metal.

**Kraftwerk**
Kraftwerk is a highly influential techno-pop band based in Düsseldorf, Germany. It formed in 1970 and is most famous for its robotic man-machine image and repetitive, all-electronic music. They credit both The Velvet Underground and The Beach Boys as influences.

**The Mothers of Invention**
The Mothers of Invention were the brainchild of innovative composer/guitarist Frank Zappa, who dedicated himself to disturbing American complacency and exposing the hypocrisy of both the U.S. establishment and the counterculture that opposed it. Although the band was primarily active between 1964 and 1975, Zappa played an important role in Czechoslovakia’s Velvet Revolution. Seen as the epitome of Western decadence and depravity, the music of The Mothers of Invention was officially banned by the government and became identified with the underground dissident movement. Their song “Plastic People” inspired the name of The Plastic People of the Universe, which was heavily influenced by the music of Zappa and The Mothers. In 1990, Zappa traveled to Czechoslovakia at the invitation of President Václav Havel to find himself lauded as a symbol of freedom and hero of the revolution. Zappa even served for several months as that country’s trade, tourism, and cultural liaison to the West.

**NOW THAT’S WHAT I CALL MUSIC!**
The original *Now That’s What I Call Music!* compilation series was created by Polygram/EMI/Virgin Records in the United Kingdom in 1983, collecting 30 U.K. hit singles from that year on a double album. The series remains a way for music fans to acquire the latest hits all on one CD without discriminating among genres. Typically three volumes of *Now
That’s What I Call Music! are released in the United Kingdom each year; the most recent, volume 70, was released on July 21, 2008.

**Pink Floyd**

Under the leadership of Syd Barrett, Pink Floyd—formed in Cambridge, United Kingdom, in the mid-1960s—recorded their groundbreaking debut album, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*, in 1967 and became known as the Pied Pipers of the London underground scene. The band is credited with bringing psychedelic “space rock” to the U.K. music scene. After Barrett was pushed out of the band in 1968 for his erratic and unreliable behavior, Roger Waters made the group famous for its progressive music and sonic experimentation, social commentary, philosophical lyrics, and elaborate live shows and album cover art. Still one of pop music’s biggest acts, as of 2006 Pink Floyd had sold more than 200 million albums worldwide.

**Bruce Springsteen**

Bruce Springsteen, raised in a New Jersey mill town where his father worked as a laborer, developed his persona as the rock voice of the American common man in bar bands on the Jersey shore during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Working sometimes with his E Street Band and often as a solo songwriter-performer, Springsteen became known for blending folk, 1950s rock and roll, soul, and a working-class social perspective to create powerful anthems, romantic narratives, and rollicking good-time tunes.

*Born in the USA*, Springsteen’s seventh album, released in 1984, clinched Springsteen’s position as the preeminent writer-performer of his rock and roll age. Reaching #1 on the charts and producing seven hit singles, the album was one of his first attempts to bring the hardships of the American working class to a mass audience. The entire album features songs that explore the darker side of the American dream. Still, the cover of the album seems to indicate a kind of patriotic, romantic, American cowboy theme. Many listeners viewed the songs in this vein, misinterpreting them, particularly the title track, as patriotic anthems. Ronald Reagan publicly cited *Born in the USA* as in line with his political beliefs, aligning himself with Springsteen and “the message of hope” he heard in the rocker’s songs. Springsteen tried to rectify these misinterpretations by performing at benefits and meeting with civil rights and environmental groups in touring cities and promoting their work in concert. In the past decade Springsteen has become an open and adamant critic of the U.S. government, especially regarding the Iraq War, going so far as to participate in the 2004 Vote for Change tour in support of Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry, traveling solo on the plane with Kerry for the final week of the campaign.
ROD STEWART
Rod Stewart rose to rock and roll stardom in 1967 when he was enlisted as a vocalist for the Jeff Beck Group. Though he remained with Beck for a few years, Stewart’s heyday was undoubtedly the late 1970s, when he became known as a sex symbol and remarkable live performer. He is most recognized for his solo work, out of which came the hit single “Maggie May” (1971). When Candida writes in her column, “Wake up, Maggie, I think I’ve got something to say to you!” she is quoting the first line of “Maggie May,” a song about a young man who expresses his conflicting emotions about leaving home and school for an older woman. In 1990, when Candida writes her column, Stewart had recently moved on to his third wife, Rachel Hunter.

THE ROLLING STONES
The Rolling Stones formed in England in 1962. They soon began to call themselves “The World’s Greatest Rock & Roll Band,” and the hyperbole quickly became fact: by 1965 The Stones were second only to The Beatles in popularity in Britain. As the mood of society darkened after the turmoil of 1968, and the music world reeled from the deaths of Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison and the 1970 breakup of The Beatles, The Stones reached their creative and iconic peak by promoting their incendiary blend of sex, drugs, Satanism, and radical politics. Shortly after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, then-President Havel forged a friendship with the legendary rockers. This relationship resulted in a late addition to the band’s Urban Jungle tour of 25 European cities: The Stones became the first big rock band to visit post-Soviet Czechoslovakia, playing the enormous Strahov Stadium. “The tanks are rolling out, the Stones are rolling in,” read posters for the event. A crowd of 107,000 people showed up despite heavy rain. Havel was in the crowd sporting a Stones T-shirt.

SGT. PEPPER’S LONELY HEARTS CLUB BAND
Using a then state-of-the-art four-track tape recorder, The Beatles recorded more than seven hundred hours between December 1966 and April 1967 to create this opus, hailed by Rolling Stone magazine as “the most important rock and roll album ever made, an unsurpassed adventure in concept, sound, songwriting, cover art, and studio technology by the greatest rock and roll group of all time. . . . [It is] the pinnacle of The Beatles’ eight years as recording artists. John Lennon, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr were never more fearless and unified in their pursuit of magic and transcendence.” Upon its release on June 1, 1967, the album spent 23 consecutive weeks at #1 in the United Kingdom.
Writing in the *London Times*, prominent critic Kenneth Tynan described the album as “a decisive moment in the history of Western civilization.” Several of the album’s songs, however, were controversial (and in some cases banned from the BBC), interpreted as glorifying drug use and drug culture. Created by The Beatles as the expression of fictional characters—members of the eponymous band—with award-winning packaging featuring a collage of photos of 70 famous figures and a psychedelic inner sleeve, *Sgt. Pepper* was one of the first “concept” albums, influencing succeeding generations of recording and graphic artists. U.S. sales for the album total 11 million, with 30 million worldwide.

**The Velvet Underground and Nico**

Formed in New York City in 1965, The Velvet Underground explored such taboo topics as social alienation, sexual deviancy, and hopelessness. After seeing The Velvet Underground perform in a Greenwich Village club in early 1966, pop artist Andy Warhol became its manager and patron. He also introduced the band to Nico, a German actress and model, who joined the band as a keyboardist and vocalist. Unique in their intentional crudity and their sense of beauty in ugliness, the band—which never sold many records or had many fans, and more or less dissolved in the early '70s—was profoundly influential on the artists and audiences of its age and an inspiration to the punk and alternative punk music movements of the 1970s and 1980s. The Plastic People of the Universe, despite (or perhaps because of) the fact that the music was banned by Czech government censors, credit the band as one of their primary influences.

**U2**

Formed in Dublin in 1976, Irish postpunk group U2 had by the end of the 1980s become one of the world’s most popular and innovative bands. The band’s early records were characterized by an intense spirituality and commented on social and political issues with compassion and tenderness. In 1985, the band was asked by Jack Healy, head of Amnesty International USA, to join the Conspiracy of Hope tour to bring attention to human rights violations. Soon after, the band’s leader, Bono, toured Nicaragua and El Salvador with groups seeking to help the victims of violence and poverty, and he grew increasingly interested in the plight of people in the less-developed world. Since then he has become the archetype of the musical artist committed to effecting social change, dividing his time between fronting the band and meeting with presidents, prime ministers, economists, ministers, scientists, and philanthropists. In 2002 he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine with the caption: “Can Bono Save the World?”
1. What is the role of music in *Rock 'n' Roll*? What does it indicate about Stoppard’s views of the relationship between art and politics? What does music represent for Jan? For Ferdinand? For Esme?

2. Syd Barrett physically appears only once as The Piper. How does his presence affect the lives of each of the characters? What do you think Stoppard is trying to suggest by equating him with the Greek god Pan?

3. Does the play draw a definitive conclusion about communism as an ideology? Does the play alter your own views of communism? Why or why not?

4. A major theme of *Rock 'n' Roll* seems to be the inexorable alteration of an individual’s ideals. How do the ideals of Max, Esme, Jan, Ferdinand, and Lenka evolve and change over the course of the play?

5. How does the physical appearance of the characters change throughout the course of the play? In what way do the evolving costumes and hair styles help illustrate each character’s personal or political progression over the years?

6. What is the role of the women in the play? How does Stoppard integrate the characters of Esme, Eleanor, Lenka, Magda, and Alice into the greater political discussion? Is it different from the way he uses the male characters?

7. Consider the major romantic relationships that occur in the play: Max and Eleanor, Jan and Esme, Max and Lenka. What do they tell you about each of the characters? How does Stoppard reconcile each character’s political passions with their personal relationships?

8. Do you think a solid understanding of the sociopolitical issues discussed in *Rock 'n' Roll* is essential to your appreciation of the play?

9. Jan and Ferdinand initially disagree on the most effective means of protesting the government, but they eventually end up in agreement. What pushes each character to that point?

10. How does Stoppard integrate the discussion of language into the story? What role does the poetry of Sappho play in *Rock 'n' Roll*?
FOR FURTHER INFORMATION


