

**Singer-Songwriter Travis Edward Pike and Harvey Kubernik discuss the 49-year long saga of the 1967 *Alma* Recording of "If I Didn't Love You Girl," a recording that never made the charts, but has appeared on two overseas compilation albums of sixties psychedelia. The song was recorded again in 2003 by the Syrups for their album of that name, and again in 2014, by Travis and his brother, Adam, (formerly of The Syrups), for the album, [Travis Edward Pike's Tea Party Snack Platter](#).**



*HK: Your song "If I Didn't Love You Girl," originally recorded almost half a century ago by Travis Pike's Tea Party, has enjoyed an amazing and ongoing journey. I've seen it on lists of rare records where collectors have paid in excess of \$600.00 for an original pressing. How, where, and when did you write that tune?*

TP: Songwriting is harder to describe than it is to do, so how is difficult to explain. I was 23-years-old, unattached, a singer-songwriter with a really good band, for which I composed 99% of the songs in our entirely original repertoire. I was musing on the journey all young men undergo in search of that one, special girl, considering my teenage misadventures and then current, unfruitful search for a mate, recognizing the need to expose one's own vulnerability to win that mate, and the spirit-crushing gloom, when one's attentions are rejected. While contemplating all that, I was no doubt, diddling on my guitar. At some point, the two activities merged and a new song was born. As for where, I suspect it was in my apartment on Commonwealth Avenue in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, in 1967.

*HK: Who are the musicians on the track?*

TP: In describing Travis Pike's Tea Party, at that time, all the original members were there. Two requested that when I write of them I am to use their stage names. So, "Uncle Phil," (ex-Navy band), was the drummer, and "Mikey Joe"

played bass. George Brox, now long gone, played rhythm guitar and sang harmonies, Karl Garrett played lead guitar and sang harmonies, and for that song, I sang the lead vocal, joined the others in the clap track and may have played tambourine.

*HK: Where was it recorded?*

TP: It was recorded at *AAA Recording Studios* in Boston.

*HK: Tell me about the studio.*

TP: It was, at that time, one of the oldest, largest and busiest recording studios in the area. It was there that Arthur Korb recorded the *Demo Derby* title song performed by the Rondels in 1963, as well as the thematic for that film. Later, he recorded the ten songs I wrote for the movie *Feelin' Good* there, eight with me and the Brattle Street East (aka Oedipus and His Mothers), and two, including the title song "Feelin' Good," with the Montclairs. Travis Pike's Tea Party recorded the music for the *WBZ-TV* show *Here and Now* there and then, which led to our contract with [Alma Records](#) and recording of "If I Didn't Love You Girl." One of the major attractions at AAA was that by then, they had two, four-track, sound-on-sound Scully recorders, which meant you could lay down your rhythm tracks, and bring in strings, woodwinds, and brass sections to play your arrangements. All were readily available, classically trained musicians moonlighting from the *Boston Pops*, and others, more jazz and pop oriented musicians from *Berklee*.

*HK: Talk to me about where you lived and where the band members came from.*

TP: I was born in Boston, and living on Commonwealth Avenue in a basement apartment in the Brighton neighborhood of Boston. Mikey Joe was from Natick, Massachusetts, and Karl Garrett was originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, but at the time, both shared an apartment in the same building in Brighton, up on the third floor. George (Juris) Brox was born in Riga Latvia, but had grown up and lived in Boston. I only saw him on gigs and at rehearsals and never actually visited his home. Uncle Phil lived somewhere in Natick, but, like George, I'd never been to his house.

*HK: Was "If I Didn't Love You Girl" featured in your stage repertoire?*

TP: Yes, both before and after we recorded it.

*HK: You were in the middle of a new psychedelic audio world in 1967, and you were a 23-year-old Navy veteran, not a teenage hippie, but you performed at some pretty trippy psychedelic-themed venues.*

TP: We did. Apart from college gigs, they were among the largest and best-paying venues for rock bands, and we were Travis Pike's Tea Party. We took our name from the pre-revolution Boston Tea Party, and our "Very Merry Unbirthday" break song from the tea party sequence in Disney's



**Travis, performs one of his ten songs in the 1966 feature film, *Feelin' Good*.**

1951 production of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, (1865). Tea is a popular euphemism for marijuana, and by definition, psychedelic connotes a relationship to LSD and other hallucinogens, with the expectation of expanded consciousness, but as far as suggesting the existence of alternative realities, program music had been doing that for at least two centuries without the drugs.

The terms program music and symphonic poem are usually reserved for purely instrumental works (pieces without singers and lyrics), and almost exclusively applied to works in the classical music tradition, particularly those from the Romantic period of the 19th century. However, Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990), described Berlioz's *symphonie fantastique* (1830) as the first music expedition into psychedelia because of its hallucinatory and dream-like nature.

I have already cited Disney's *Alice in Wonderland* as the source of our break song, but it also provided source material for the 1967 release, "[White Rabbit](#)," listed among *Rolling Stone's* "500 Greatest Songs of All Time," on the *Surrealistic Pillow* album by the Jefferson Airplane, a counterculture psychedelic band. Disney also explored classical program music in his 1940 film, *Fantasia*, in which he featured his creation, Mickey Mouse, in the role of [The Sorcerer's Apprentice](#), scored with the [Paul Dukas 1897 symphonic poem](#) of that name, based on Dukas' musical interpretation of the original poem "*Der Zauberlehrling*" ("Sorcerer's Apprentice"), a ballad in fourteen stanzas composed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1797. Small wonder that Disney's 1969 *Fantasia* reissue was embraced by the new psychedelic generation.

Like psychedelic rock, progressive rock was a mid-to-late sixties musical evolution with roots in program music. Travis Pike's Tea Party was still very much a rock group, but the Side B of "If I Didn't Love You Girl" was "The Likes of You," a lyrical love song to a goddess, for which we required musicians from the *Boston Pops* to play the strings and woodwinds. "The Likes of You" has now been incorporated into [Morningstone](#), the evolved 1987 version of my mid-70s rock opera, *Changeling*.

"If I Didn't Love You Girl" is a good dance tune on its own, arranged for live performance by the band without the need of additional musicians, and in the original recording, the pronounced dissonance in the rhythm guitar underscores the cognitive dissonance of the lyrics and vocal performances. The lead vocal claims "I wouldn't cry all night, If I didn't love you, girl," but the concurrent backup vocals loudly proclaim "I didn't love you, girl!"

According to psychologists, one attitude should eventually triumph over the other, but the modulation in my song indicates the rising tension until finally, unresolved, it self-destructs (the final explosion). So while not, of itself, psychedelic, it deals with an almost schizophrenic desire, coupled with a desperate fear of rejection (frequently observed in adolescents), neither of which require the influence of drugs to plague the unconscious.

I may be the only person in the world who knows what my program was supposed to represent, but it is definitely a head trip. Progressive rock tunes tend to demand a little mental effort, but for Boston audiences, I think that was a good thing – or maybe they just liked the beat.

*HK: What do you remember about the initial record release in 1968? Did you garner regional airplay? Did you have a working band at the time just before you moved to Southern California?*

TP: It was terribly disappointing. We were the house band for a new WBZ-TV show, and [WBZ Radio, with DJ Bruce Bradley \(8 p.m.-11:30 p.m.\)](#), and [DJ Dick Sommer \(11:30 p.m.-6 a.m.\)](#) was one of the hottest contemporary rock stations in New England at the time we recorded it, but by the time the pressings were in hand, the TV show had been cancelled, WBZ had changed its format, and WRKO was the new Boston rock powerhouse. WRKO had even [hired Arnie Ginsberg away from WMEX](#), which meant they were suddenly the biggest game in town. Worse, the previous year (when we were still calling ourselves Travis Pike and the Boston Massacre), we had been featured in a big promotion for then emerging WRKO, and their programming director decided our TV show stint on WBZ was a betrayal and refused to play our record.

We sold a few copies at gigs, and it showed up in juke boxes, but that was about it. As for having a working band, we were still together, but since this all happened at the beginning of the summer, when the TV show cancelled, all

the summer venues had been booked. We were suddenly out of work, and frankly hadn't any prospects until the Fall semester, when the college crowds come back to town.

HK: *The recording found a place in a compilation album, Sixties Rebellion, Vol. 7, The Backyard Patio released on both a vinyl LP and a CD by Way Back Records, a sub-label of Music Maniac Records. What year was that?*



TP: 1994

HK: *27 years after its initial release?*

TP: That sounds about right.

HK: *But Travis Pike's Tea Party wasn't rebelling against anything.*

TP: Yes we were! We just weren't rebelling against the same things everybody else was.

HK: *Had you stayed in contact with German fans and record companies ever since 1964?*

TP: No, and as far as I know, no one ever made the connection between Travis Pike's Tea Party and the [Teddy, die Twistsensation aus USA](#).

HK: *Something must have been going on over there, because in 1995, the song appeared again, this time on a UK recording, Tougher Than Stains, vinyl, LP, compilation put out by London Fog. It's a collection of 16 mid-60s punkers from various cities in the U.S.A. You were never a punker. How do you explain this sudden interest in "If I Didn't Love You Girl?" The original label was defunct and the band had broken up 25 years earlier.*

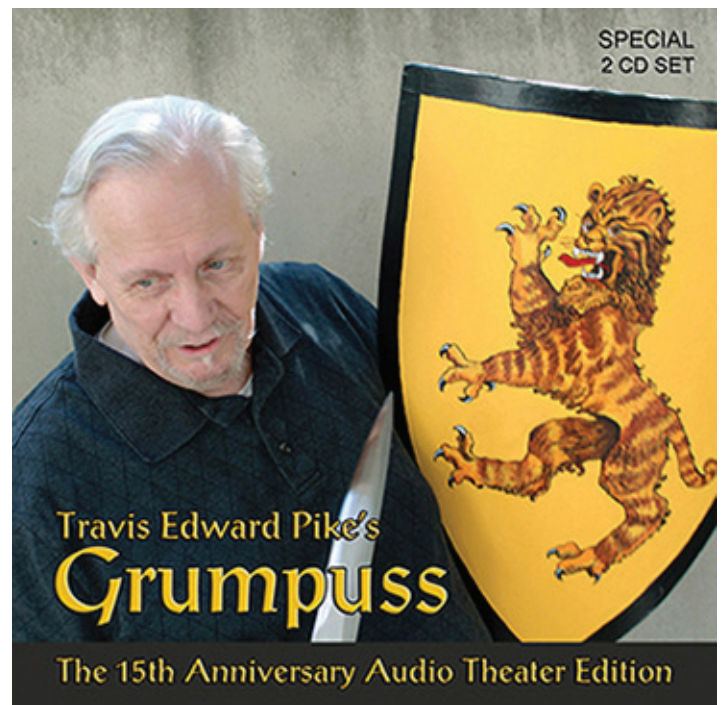
TP: I have no idea. Clean living, I guess.

HK: But didn't you own all the rights to the master and the music publishing?

TP: I didn't then. When Travis Pike's Tea Party migrated to the West Coast in 1968, we signed a release from Alma Records, so that we'd be free to pursue a new recording contract in LA. It wasn't until 2002, when my brother Adam wanted to record "If I Didn't Love You Girl" with The Syrups that I acquired the publication rights, so I could issue a mechanical license to Beck Records for their album, *The Syrups*, produced and engineered by [Geoff Emerick](#), who worked with the Beatles on the *Rubber Soul* and *Sergeant Pepper* albums, and solely engineered the George Martin produced *Abbey Road* album.

The first I heard of the foreign compilations was in 1997, when my wife, Judy, heard the original Travis Pike's Tea Party version of "If I Didn't Love You Girl" on the radio in the UK. We were in England for my world premiere performance of *Grumpuss* for the Save the Children Fund. Later, I looked the song up on the internet and that's when I first learned of the two compilation albums. I think doing *Grumpuss* for the Save the Children Fund might have had something to do with hearing the song played on the radio.

HK: *Tell me more about Grumpuss.*



"A Grumpuss is not like a dragon --  
Rather more like a large, surly cat,  
With tremendous paws and gigantic claws,  
And jaws that can crush armor flat."

TP: *Grumpuss* is an epic adventure in rhyme about a huge, wild, and dangerous cat, the dwarf who befriended it, and the knight sent to vanquish it. My live, world premiere performance was staged at [Blenheim Palace](#), a World Heritage Site, birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill, then home to John Spencer-Churchill, the 11th Duke of Marlborough,

located in Woodstock, Oxfordshire, England. His son, Jamie, then styled the Marquess of Blandford, now the 12th Duke of Marlborough, attended the soirée.

HK: How did you come to stage the world premiere in England?

TP: The tales of the knights of the round table are set in Britain, where to this day, especially in Wales, the bardic tradition is still honored, so it seemed to me to be the best place to stage the performance. As a poet-storyteller, I was virtually unknown in Britain, but a friend in England suggested that since Grumpuss had begun as a children's story, I should be able to get an appreciative audience if I did it as a charity gala for the [Save the Children Fund](#). Of course, it would have to be staged at an appropriate celebrity venue, and since it was the queen's charity, both the poem and me would have to be [vetted by Buckingham Palace](#) . . .

In 2013, Adam and I took my original 1998 audio performance of the award-winning epic narrative rhyme, substantially edited the music and effects tracks, and released a *Grumpuss 15th Anniversary Edition*. The rest, as they say, is history, a history best explored by visiting the Grumpuss website at <http://www.grumpuss.com>.

HK: Fair enough! Now, you've just released a new album, [Outside the Box](#) and have prepared and issued a [Feelin' Better](#) CD of remakes of recordings featured in the 1966 movie, [Feelin' Good](#). What else are you planning for summer and fall of 2016?

TP: I'll say this much. Music videos featuring clips from *Feelin' Good* are a possibility, publication of a book version of my musical fantasy, *Morningstone*, is another, and a new vinyl reissue of the original Travis Pike's Tea Party 45 rpm recording of "If I Didn't Love You Girl" is now pending.

- <http://www.oddtalesandwonders.com>
- <http://www.otherworldcottage.com>
- <http://www.travisedwardpike.com>
- <http://www.morningstone.com>
- <http://www.grumpuss.com>
- <http://www.long-grin.com>



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