

Introduction

For as long as I can remember, I've always been a fan of music (my earliest musical memories are of Neil Diamond 45's and Willie & Waylon 8-tracks of my parents). It also seems as if I have always worked too (that actually started at age 16 as an electrician's helper). While I've had numerous jobs, this story is about one very special job that I held for a few brief periods. In many ways, it was a dream-come-true. I ended up working for my favorite band.

We are all products of our time and place. For me, my time and place began in 1970 in Long Beach, California. For better or worse, I grew up under that very unique American musical period of the 1980s. The band that I came to devote a significant portion of my time to was Oingo Boingo. Boingo was a big item in Southern California and definitely had plenty of national attention as well. Today, people are more likely to recognize the name of film composer Danny Elfman than the band that he used to front.

This is my story of having seen 52 Oingo Boingo concerts in ten years exactly and working as their drum technician for 19 of those shows (it may have been a few more than 52, ticket stubs are easy to misplace and I don't know of a Boingo concert database). I got to know Johnny "Vatos" Hernandez (drums) and John Avila (bass) through their side-project Food For Feet (a power trio with Mike Tovar on guitar). I ended up seeing around 68 FFF shows (and set up the drums for the majority of these). In 1989 alone, I worked 11 Boingo and 31 FFF shows. Here's my story...

The Early Years

I remember hearing Little Girls on the radio in the early 80s. I had the Only A Lad album at one point too, but seem to remember trading it to Matai Sessions for an AC/DC (or was it Ozzy?) album. My big sister Tammy starting taking me to concerts in 1984. My first concert experience (apart from those at the many county fairs that I used to attend and an Animotion show at Magic Mountain) was Berlin. Yes, Terri Nunn and company, June 28, 1984 at Ben E. Lewis Hall/Raincross Square in Riverside (Talk Talk opened). Next, was Wham! at Santa Anita Race Track (Katrina and the Waves opened). Remember, we're products of our time...

It was the third concert that Tammy took me to that really had an impact. It was Boingo's 1985 Halloween show at the Pacific Amphitheater (I invited Bobby Delligatti to come along). I was hooked—got Dead Man's Party and the earlier stuff soon thereafter. My high school pal Chris Huneke and I became the "Boingo Boys" and followed all things Boingo. We'd call in to KROQ regularly during Poorman's Instant Requests and eventually got him to give us a tour of the station. The next Boingo show was May 10, 1986 at the Orange Pavilion (a lovely airplane hangar in San Bernardino). We were both too young to drive. My ever-supportive mom dropped us off around 3pm or so. It was general admission and we had to be up front. There were probably a dozen people that had beat us there though.

By the Summer of 1986 I was street-legal and ready to roll. I met Deena Malone in Mrs. Bitterolf's 10th grade English class. She thought of me as the class clown, but did leave her number when it came time to sign yearbooks. Our first date was seeing a Tom Hanks movie, *Nothing in Common*. Within a month or so, I asked her out to a Boingo show. On September 13, 1986 we saw them at the Forum in Inglewood. This was followed by their Halloween show

at Irvine Meadows. I remember having to miss their New Year's Eve show (their last?) because we were away for a ski trip at Mammoth.

By this time I was an official member of the Oingo Boingo Secret Society. I remember getting a phone call soon after the 1986 Halloween show (probably from Laura Engel) inviting me and a few friends to see a free Boingo TV performance. Now that was a cool phone call! I was so excited that I was confused as to whether we would be watching a performance on a movie screen or live. At that point it didn't matter. Fortunately, it was a live performance for broadcast on some college TV network. That November 12, 1986 show was at the Beverly Theatre. Next came a couple of shows at the Hollywood Palladium on December 27 & 28, 1986.

Oingo Boingo had some seriously devoted fans. Boingoloids would usually go to every possible show (the band's touring was most heavily concentrated in Southern California). While it was no Grateful Dead-type scene, fans did arrive early in the parking lots and hang out. Some of us would arrive early enough to try to meet the band and hear the sound check. A few guys had personalized license plates demonstrating their commitment to the band. I knew this was my next step. California plates allowed a maximum of seven characters and the obvious ones (OINGO, BOINGO, OBOINGO) were already taken. Since it seemed like I was often on my way to Boingo's shows, I chose 2BOINGO. The first time I met Danny (before a Greek Theatre show in 1987?) I had him sign the back plate. The front one got stolen off my truck at an Orange Pavilion show (let me know if you've seen it!). A while later I reported both of them stolen and ordered my OINGO ED ones.

The first time I met Johnny "Vatos" Hernandez and John Avila was when they made a promotional visit to KROQ's old studios (in Glendale?) This must have been some time in 1986. I remember meeting Hernandez before one of the 12/86 Palladium shows too. In March 1987 they released the BOI-NGO album. There was a great turnout at the KROQ-sponsored listening party with the band at Tower Records on Sunset Boulevard. There was TV news coverage too and Huneke's head and my 2BOINGO plate made the broadcast (I have the videotape somewhere, perhaps I can post it down the road...).

In July, 1987 I saw three shows. One at the Orange Pavilion (7/25) and two at the Greek (7/29-30). The Orange Pavilion show was one of the best I ever saw. The band X opened the show and they were another one of my favorites. Boingo often played "evening with" shows (that is, no opening act). They tended to play fairly long (2+ hour) concerts. I remember hanging out early at one of the Greek shows and meeting several members of the band. Leon Schneiderman (saxophones, percussion) pulled up in his beige compact wagon with Danny sitting shotgun. Little did I know that six months later I'd be on the guest list for after-show passes (and plenty of access to my favorite band).

Food For Feet Emerges

Shortly after this run I heard about an in-store performance by the "Johnnies." It was some music store in Hollywood (maybe Nadine's where Tovar worked?). Hernandez did a bit of a drum clinic. Avila played bass, Sam "Sluggo" Phipps (tenor saxophone) was there too and played some sax, and Mike Tovar was introduced on guitar. I think the main thing was to promote Food For Feet (though I don't remember how Sluggo got dragged into the ordeal). I

definitely remember FFF playing Tequila with Phipps sitting in. FFF pitched their upcoming show at the Palomino.

On August 8, 1987 we (it must have been Ruben Angulo and I and the rest of the gang came later) arrived at the Palomino in North Hollywood early. Unlike the Boingo scene, there was nobody around. I think Hernandez was surprised to see us when he pulled up in his white van. We introduced ourselves and offered to lend a hand as he had started unloading his gear (drummers always need help moving stuff!). Both Hernandez and Avila were very down-to-earth and enjoyed chatting with everyone. The show was great, superb musicianship. FFF was a much better vehicle for the guys to show off their chops. Unlike the extreme choreography of Boingo shows, FFF sets were loose. Each member soloed for extended periods. I had never seen Hernandez or Avila play like that before. Tovar's guitar work really blew me away that show too. I don't remember talking to him that much though, he probably rightfully dismissed us as young Boingo punks.

The Palomino was an all-ages venue, so the fact that we were 17 didn't matter. However, as I soon learned, a lot of the clubs FFF played were 21+. Fortunately, I had recently obtained an alternate identity. Sorry, Mom and Dad, but yes, I did have a fake ID (don't blame Jimbo or Jon, all worked out well anyways!). I worked with and hung out quite a bit with my older neighbor Jimmy Stewart. Through him I met Jon Summers who was born in 1966 (perfect for me in 1987). Jon and I looked quite a bit alike and he gave me his driver's license (what a gift!). That ID worked for me until I turned 21. Shortly after turning 21 I remember we went to Bull N Mouth (near UC Riverside) and I ceremoniously passed it on to our younger colleague Stewart Mawyer (who immediately got it confiscated!).

Back to Food For Feet. I went to their 8/20/87 show at Club Lingerie, 8/31/87 show at the Coconut Teaser, and 10/9/87 show back at the Lingerie. All these clubs were in Hollywood (75 or so minutes from my home in Norco). Jim LaMarca was John's drum tech for Boingo and was around for the FFF stuff too quite a bit in those days. I continued to help carry equipment and they got used to seeing me around. When Jim wasn't there I was helping John load in and load out after the show. At some point John starting giving me some cash and asked me to come regularly. Jim faded from that scene and stuck with the Boingo stuff.

Soon enough it was Halloween time. We saw Boingo on 10/30 and 10/31/87 at their now annual Irvine Meadows bash. A week later FFF was back at it and I was lugging cases and amps at their 11/5, 11/13, and 11/19/87 shows. By this time I was getting to know them fairly well. I remember when John gave me his home number (I was in the circle of trust!). Better yet, I can remember the first time my Mom said "John Hernandez is on the phone for you."

A few times at FFF gigs there were way too many John's. At 21+ shows Hernandez would some times call me Jon and the guest list would say "Jon Summers" (to play along with my ID). The alternate identity always worked though, I never got booted out.

Going “Backstage”

Boingo was gearing up for some shows in January and Hernandez offered me a pair of free tickets and after show passes to the show of my choice. That was 1/24/88 at the San Diego Sports Arena. To say the least, I was quite stoked about my first “backstage” passes.

There are a number of different types of passes. These were after show passes that get you into the post-concert gathering. Sometimes this was in a big room or tent with bars and catered food, other times it was a make-shift space behind the stage with some tubs of beer on ice.

Occasionally (particularly with the larger after show gatherings) Danny didn’t even make an appearance. I always remember seeing all the other members of the band around though. After show passes usually had the initials of the band member who gave them to you written in the corner. During the last shows at the Universal in 1995 they would only let those with the “DE” designation into the separate room where Danny was hanging out. Band members had all access passes that allowed them to take other people any place. Crew members had all access passes that got them anywhere, but it was usually very difficult to bring anybody else along with that type of pass.

I went to three other shows on that run (1/28 and 1/29/88 at the Palladium and 2/19/88 at the Orange Pavilion) and I was on the list for after show passes for each of them (John and John were always very liberal with the after show passes, it was tickets that they were more limited on). The Palladium shows were always exceptional—great place to see a show. Once again, FFF was busy again within a week after the Boingo shows. They played two shows in San Diego. The 2/25/88 show at the University of San Diego was like a frat party, good turnout and lots of kegs flowing. A local band called Borracho Y Loco played too. The next day (a Friday) they played a mellower, outside afternoon set at UC San Diego.

In March, April, and May of 1988 I worked a series of 11 shows at their usual haunts (The Palomino, Belly Up Tavern, Club Lingerie, and Coconut Teaszer) and on 4/30/88 they opened for the Untouchables at UC Riverside. They usually headlined these club appearances and were often billed as “members of Oingo Boingo” (which was always a sore spot with Tovar). It wasn’t unusual to hear Boingo songs requested from the audience, but they never played one in the 54 shows I saw. There would usually be sound checks for the gigs which meant that we would have to arrive early (5pm or 6pm). Their club sets would begin late (after midnight some times) and they usually closed out the clubs at 1:30 or 2:00am.

I remember Ruben and I driving back from one of these late nights at the Belly Up Tavern in Solana Beach (about an hour and a half from our homes in Norco). It was raining a bit and one of my back tires blew out. I had a spare and we got out the jack, but my truck was too low (remember those cool 4 inch blocks Dad?) to get the jack under it. Fortunately Avila drove by soon thereafter and spotted us. His jack worked out fine. He used to cruise in a cool 1960s ride (can’t remember the make or model though). I would come to have quite a few road trips in that car as well as Hernandez’s white van (Avila’s car was an easy drive, but that van was another story...).

By this time I was well-integrated into the FFF operation. Norco High School’s class of 1988 was set to graduate in mid-June. Somehow I convinced both Food For Feet and my parents that I

needed a combination 18th birthday/graduation party. My folks rented out the Norco Lion's Club around the corner from our house and the guys made the trip out to the Inland Empire for the Saturday night, June 4th party. Hernandez forgot his hi-hat stand so I had to find a replacement quick (Ashley Phillips' friend came through with a loaner). There was a great turnout and we took collections at the door that yielded some cash for the band. I spiked my Mom's punch with a bottle of everclear (compliments of "Big Guy" Brian?) and a good time was had by all. For some reason, classmate Skid Thomason ended up head-butting and putting a big hole in one of the walls (that turned out to be the last time the Lion's club rented out their space for private parties). I was pretty nervous for much of the night, but it was quite a success, very memorable. Many of my classmates were thrilled to see members of Boingo performing in our hometown (Boingo was playing some shows at the beginning of July and some were having the Johnnies sign their tickets).

A few days later FFF was back at the Lingerie. Club Lingerie was the place where I saw the most FFF shows (11). Tovar worked lights there on some nights, so he had an in that must have helped the band booking-wise. They'd often headline there. I remember Jimmy Wood and the Immortals opened for them once. It's a small world in the music business. Jimmy was married to Laura Engel (Boingo's manager) and DJ Bonebrake (of X) was the drummer at that time. In any event, Lingerie had a great stage, probably 5 feet high. It did make it difficult to load though. Nonetheless, the Coconut Teaser (I set up 8 shows there) was the worst for setting up. First, all the equipment had to be taken up that rounded exterior staircase to the patio. They also always had several bands on the same bill so you'd have to stash the equipment wherever you could (the stage was too small).

John had always played DW Drums and Sabian cymbals. He had a nice Collarlock rack that made life somewhat easier. Once I assembled the rack it was quick and easy to hang the toms and cymbals. There were two other shows in June 1988. One at a place called Crayons (their only performance there) and another at The Music Machine.

After those, Boingo appeared July 1st and 2nd at the Greek Theatre. The Greek is a fantastic outdoor amphitheatre that isn't too big (it's about one-third of the size of Irvine Meadows). Deena and I ended up seeing quite a few shows there over the years. On 6-21-92 John Avila and I went to see Santana and on 9-21-92 we saw Neil Young do a solo acoustic show there. Avila was into all kinds of music and liked going to shows. I worked for a ticket agency at one point and was able to get good seats (at face value or sometimes even free). At the Neil show John got our name on the list for the pre- and post-party. There were a bunch of people. We ran into Laura Engel and Chopper Borges (Boingo production manager). I saw Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love sitting at a table. Most vividly though, I remember Avila saying hi to Flea (bass player of the Red Hot Chili Peppers). Flea was there with three other guys and was pissed. He had lost his wallet somewhere and was pretty angry about it. So, needless to say, we didn't hang out with him very long. Unfortunately, Neil never showed up to the party at his own show. John and I never made it back there after the Santana show. He had either forgotten or was unable to get us on the list, but he thought he'd know the doormen, though it turned out he did not. I spent some time outside of Food For Feet with Mike Tovar too. We went to see Bob Dylan at the Pantages Theatre on 5-13-92.

After Boingo's Greek shows in July 1988 I worked FFF shows on August 5th at Lingerie and August 11th at the Music Machine. I knew that I would have to slow down a bit on the FFF gigs since I was moving to Santa Barbara in September to begin my freshman year at UCSB. Boingo did two shows on Labor Day weekend at SDSU's Open Air Theatre. Those shows were always pretty wild. It's a nice, small outdoor theatre on campus. They used to allow you to bring in one plastic container of any beverage (this must have surely stopped). You would see quite a few one gallon milk jugs full of beer. I also went to one FFF show in September. It was a futuristic place called Club Postnuclear in Laguna Beach.

VIP Guests

Boingo's Halloween run in 1988 began for us at the Santa Barbara County Bowl on 10-26. The Bowl is another great outdoor venue (day shows are the best there). Deena made the drive from Norco (about two and a half hours) with six passengers (Chris Huneke, Lynette, Katie, Heather, Amy, and Judy) in her Sentra (four in the back and three in the front!). I don't know how they managed that. We had a few after-show passes, but not 8! A few of us went in, took off our passes and got them to the others. Eventually we all got back there, it was a fun night. Keith Stoskopf's (my roommate) and my dorm room was quite full that night.

Two nights later, the party was at Irvine Meadows where we attended the 10/28 and 10/29 shows. I think Vatos must have told me something about VIP parking and that he would put me on the list. When you entered Irvine Meadows there was a quick left (I think the sign said for deliveries only) that put you on the far left side of the parking lot. We drove down the road and came to the guard shack. Just past the guard shack there were a couple of make-shift parking lots. This VIP area was free and much closer to the stage. I told the guard that I was on the list for VIP parking. Apparently I wasn't on any list so he called back stage. A couple of minutes later he said that we were all clear to go back. To our great surprise, the traffic director waved us on past the parking lots and motioned us onward. If you ever went to Irvine Meadows then you know about the long road you had to walk down after they took your tickets at the gate. A couple of traffic directors actually stopped all the foot traffic (those walking up to the stage) and escorted us all the way to the parking lot immediately behind the stage (where the band parks). Clearly, there wasn't supposed to be any vehicles on the road at that point. I never quite figured it out, but somehow we got the super-VIP parking. We never got searched so it was no problem sneaking the camera in that night. Someone learned about all of this and the next night they had us park in the regular VIP lot past the guard shack. This was the pinnacle of my relationship to the band as a fan. I had close connections with Hernandez and Avila and other members were beginning to recognize me. These were the largest after-show parties I can remember. There was a big enclosed white tent that they had set up. Boingo Alive had been released earlier in September and there was a lot of promotional material around. As was typical with these shows, many fans dressed up.

Boingo took an extended break after that. In December 1988 I did a few FFF shows and then came 1989, my busiest year with FFF and first one on the road with Boingo. In January there was a Coconut Teaszer show and then FFF played a private party at what appeared to be an empty art gallery in Laurel Canyon. It wasn't a wild show as was often typical with FFF, but it was a special set since the guys played a lot of classics and Vatos sang a number of them (Used to Love Her, Love Me Two Times, You Really Got Me, Twist and Shout, and La Bamba!).

FFF's repertoire was pretty wide, but they had several covers that they regularly played: Red House (with Tovar on vocals and blistering guitar, Avila usually took an extended bass solo on this one too), Superstition, Come Together, Whittier Blvd., Hispanic Depression (a twist on Jimi's Manic tune), and perhaps the song that they were best known for—Tequila.

FFF had a quite a few original tunes that did not appear on the EP (released in 1989) or on Order (released in 1991). These included songs sang by Tovar (Where's Your Money and Dirty Books), Avila (You Say, Neck Blue, Won't Be Coming Home, Other Side, and Vice Raid), and the only song that Hernandez regularly sang (I Don't Want It).

On March 8, 1989 they played The Lighthouse Cafe in Hermosa Beach. They only played there a couple times and there was a bit more excitement given its history. Vatos must have loved it since he was still living in Redondo Beach at the time. His next door neighbor there was Walfredo de los Reyes, Jr. (Santana's drummer in the early 1990s) who I met once before one of their shows. I had a little pocket tape recorder that I'd often take to shows. At the Lighthouse I remember asking the sound guy if it was OK if I set it on his booth (arguably the best sounding spot in any concert). On the way home I popped the tape into my car stereo and was immediately surprised at the quality. It turns out he took the tape out and put it in his own deck to give me a soundboard recording. At some point after FFF stopped playing I took my best tapes over to Avila's and we listened to a bunch and he ran them through some processors and transferred them to DAT. We had envisioned assembling a live FFF compilation disc and releasing it independently, but that never went anywhere (what happened to that idea John?).

A few shows stick out from the many they played that year. On April 28, 1989 they played an outside set at Claremont College. There was a lot of energy (and drinking) going on there. Someone threw a beer on Avila. They stopped playing and Vatos was hot. Avila didn't get too upset though and they continued. On May 14, 1989 they had a gig at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. I was in Santa Barbara so Avila, Tovar, and Rob Parker (Mike's occasional guitar tech) picked me up on their way up there (Hernandez usually drove separately with all his equipment). We hung out in my dorm room for a bit and then drove up to the show.

I don't recall exactly when Food For Feet recorded their EP, but they invited me to Silverlake Studios when they were working on it. I found the process fascinating, it was the first time I had been in a recording studio. I remember Tovar overdubbing a guitar solo from the control room, he plugged directly into the soundboard. After this I started thinking about becoming a studio engineer. At one point Hernandez even set me up with a second engineer gig at Silverlake Studios. The timing wasn't good though, I had to focus on college and a regular commute to L.A. wasn't appealing. A bit later Boingo's live sound engineer, J.D. Brill, told me enough horror stories about studio engineering to change my mind.

Roadie Promotion

It was at some point in May 1989 that John asked me to set up for him at the upcoming summer Boingo tour. I was ecstatic and immediately accepted. I never heard exactly what happened to Jim LaMarca (if he was no longer interested in doing the drums or was not asked to return). Later down the line, someone (Sam Phipps?) had told me that John had a long history of firing

drum techs. It helped that I knew him well and had the FFF experience. Still, there would be a few stressful times that his temper would flare...

My first experience of being part of the Boingo enterprise was at rehearsals at Boingoland. Boingoland was the rehearsal and storage place for the band. It was basically a warehouse-style room (with sound insulation) with a loading dock on the back of an office building that still shares a parking lot with Tomy's Burgers at 2347 Sawtelle Boulevard in Los Angeles (near the corner of Pico with the 405 freeway overhead). I had been there at least once before with John to work on a kit. That first time a big chunk of the space was occupied by Danny's newly-acquired Balinese Gamelan set. These are huge percussion ensembles and make incredible music (years later I was a member of UC Riverside's Javanese Gamelan Ensemble). Those familiar with Boingo know that Danny was a big percussion fan. I don't know if he ever put together an ensemble or used it that much. The only Boingo recording that sounds to me like a few of the bells are used on is "Glory Be."

The summer 1989 Boingo tour consisted of six shows. To my knowledge, the band never toured all that extensively, they weren't on the road for months at a time. It was such a huge operation, I'm surprised they didn't book more shows for each run. John told me what time to be at Boingoland on June 12, 1989 and to call the Boingo line there when I arrived. I wonder who owns (213) 473-5183 now and if they know who Oingo Boingo was? I was a bit surprised when Steve Bartek opened the front door for me and said "Hey Ed." John introduced me to those who were there at that point. I had just turned 19 and was often asked how old I was.

John was walking me through all the cases, drums, and hardware. He had been using an electronic kick setup for several years. He gave me a draft set list and I started making notes on which kick sound would be used for which song. I was feeling a little bit overwhelmed, inundated with information at that point. Shortly thereafter, Danny walked in and the first thing I remember him saying was "Where's your bass drum John?" Though he hadn't given John any heads up, Danny wanted to go back to a real drum. John seemed a bit put off and it became immediately clear who ran the show. So, the electronic kick was forever scrapped.

The next day (6/13/89) there was another rehearsal at Boingoland. These two rehearsals were in preparation for three days of full-fledged professional rehearsals at Culver Studios. The fact that they did five days of rehearsals for six concert performances is a good indicator of the complexity of the Boingo machine (and Danny's obsession with perfection). One of the big issues with Boingo was their use of prerecorded tracks on many of the songs. While I had never noticed this as a fan, most of their songs (the majority of the post-1984 material) on the tours I worked had some background sounds that were prerecorded (ran through one of those little one-piece Mac computers). Danny basically wanted to reproduce the album sound. In most cases these were percussion, string sounds, or strange effects that were difficult to produce live. In a couple cases there were some background vocals. On *When the Lights Go Out*, the whole drum part was prerecorded and John would play it live simultaneously so that it was extra beefy. When you saw that song performed live John was not playing the first measure, the computer started it off (that's why the stage was dark). On many songs (think *Dead Man's Party*), the crowd could hear the four-count click track before the band would begin.

There were three of us that were in charge of the equipment. Jesse Loya was the guitar tech and David Cragin was the keyboard tech. David was in charge of the computer and John would usually signal him when he was ready to start the song. Then, with a click of the mouse, David would launch it.

My job was fairly straightforward as drum tech. The packed equipment would be loaded into the tractor-trailer and then unloaded at the gig. The venues had stage hands that would help (or sometimes completely) unload the equipment and set up the three risers (for drums, horns, and keyboards). I would start by assembling the rack and then get out the drums. John had me put new heads on his main snare and toms every show. I'd change the secondary snares and bass drum heads after two or three shows. I don't remember ever changing the heads on the roto-toms, but probably did that at some point too. I would put on the heads, stretch them out and then tighten them back up again. John did his own tuning though. Occasionally he'd have me polish the cymbals (my least favorite job) or just wash them in soapy water (like dishes).

After all the drums were set up the sound guys would mic them and we'd start testing them all. Sound checks could go on for close to two hours. I remember during one Danny walked out to the middle of the amphitheatre and was complaining about the bass drum sound. John went out there and had me kick on it and it was eventually resolved. In addition to the house sound, a good portion of the sound check involved tweaking the monitors on-stage (what the musician's hear is controlled by a separate sound board and engineer). Two speaker wedges sat on the back of John's riser, pointing at each ear.

Right before show time the house engineer would often have me pop certain microphones to make sure they were live. Then the lights would go out and we would hold flashlights to direct the band to their positions. Laura wanted us to wear black (though this wasn't enforced and Jesse rarely did it) so that we wouldn't be noticeable on stage. During the show I would attend to all of John's needs. I'd be on the right side of the stage past the horn section.

The monitor levels needed to be adjusted fairly regularly. We had a number system at one point, but for the most part he'd point at someone and indicate whether he wanted them louder or softer in his mix. I'd relay this on to the monitor engineer who would listen to what he was hearing and then make the adjustment. I'd usually have to go on-stage to the kit at least once a show. With so many parts, things like cymbal boom arms and microphones would come loose or move around. It was always a challenge for me to figure out what he wanted me to fix while he was playing. It was so loud on stage it was difficult to hear anything he'd say. Of the 19 shows I worked, there was never a major drum catastrophe. We had to swap out his main snare in between songs at one show, but that was fast.

Technical difficulties at Boingo shows were fairly regular. If Danny started yodeling the problem required a few minutes to fix. The biggest drum problem I had seen as a fan was a hi-hat problem (I know John remembers this). He used to have his hi-hat stand incorporated into his rack, it served as one of the legs. The main part of the stand is the inside rod that goes up and down with the foot pedal (the clutch holding the top cymbal attaches to it). That rod is not continuous, it screws together inside in the middle of the stand (so it can collapse further). At that show the rod came unscrewed inside the stand. To screw the two pieces of the rod together you have to take the top part of the stand off. However, Jim couldn't easily take that off since it

was connected to and holding up the whole rack. So, that took five or so minutes to fix. Needless to say, the hi-hat stand was never part of the rack again. That was a good lesson for me. I checked and rechecked every wing nut and bolt on the kit each show.

I had a couple of other small jobs during the concerts. I set up John Avila's baliphones for Grey Matter. We had it marked out on the stage where they went. So, I'd run them out there and then plug in the mic cable. Sam and Leon also played a fair amount of percussion so I'd hand them the stands and take them down once they were done.

The First Tour

The rehearsals at Culver Studios ran from June 19-21, 1989. On June 22, the crew would catch a plane to Santa Clara for the first show on June 23 at the Redwood Amphitheater (at Marriott's Great America). These were full-fledge rehearsals with the lights and everything. They were using a new type of light system, Varilites. These required a ton of programming. Each light was motorized (to move to different positions) and had built-in lenses for different colors and custom stencils of different shapes (such as Elvis the smoking cowboy) that could be projected on the back screen. The light show was very impressive.

The band played through the majority of the set a few times across those days. A couple of the older songs on the list (Only a Lad and On the Outside) were not rehearsed. Danny, Steve, and David Cragin spent a good deal of time fine-tuning the prerecorded tracks. Boingo's sets were very tight. After one song ended they would start the next song almost immediately. The set lists did not change much from show to show. The whole show was pretty tightly choreographed and not terribly flexible. The problem with the prerecorded tracks was that they could not deviate one bit from those songs. That was one frustration I came to have with the band's live shows. They were all incredibly talented, but the musicianship was constricted by the production. On most songs, Steve couldn't extend a guitar solo for an extra measure if we wanted.

A typical set for that tour was 23 songs: Dead Man's Party, Home Again, Dead or Alive, Private Life, Help, My Life, Winning Side, Cinderella Undercover, Sweat, Gratitude, We Close Our Eyes, Grey Matter, No One Lives Forever, Only Makes Me Laugh, Just Another Day, Not My Slave, Stay, Elevator Man, Who Do You Want To Be, Wild Sex, Nothing To Fear, On the Outside, and Only a Lad.

Toward the end of the rehearsals Laura asked Danny if there were other songs that may be potential encores that they should rehearse. They talked about a few and then Laura mentioned Weird Science. Danny was adamant and said there was no way in hell that he would ever perform that song again. Laura jokingly pushed him a bit, but he reinforced, "never." There wasn't a lot of spontaneity in the live shows. Once in a while a song might get dropped from the set and skipped. I remember Danny saying they hadn't planned on playing Goodbye Goodbye at their last show in 1995. That one shouldn't have required much planning! Danny's teleprompters at those shows was a big source of discussion after the show. Since they were being taped he wanted to make sure he got his own lyrics right (which often he did not).

After we packed everything up and concluded the rehearsals on June 21, I was off to LAX the next night for the flight to San Jose. The light guys loaded in at 9am on June 23 for that show in

Santa Clara. It took a while for them to assemble the rig and get it up. The sound guys were scheduled to load in at 11am and we were to bring in the band gear at Noon. The band was flying in that afternoon and sound check was at 3:30. The show went well and the next morning we were headed back to Los Angeles. I remember how odd it was to see the band dispersed throughout the coach cabin. I don't know if people were purposely separated or not, but it seemed like we were all sitting alone. Danny was sitting in some middle seat surrounded by two strangers, like any other traveler...

The following day was the first gig of two at SDSU's Open Air Theatre. I was really excited about this one. We had been there a couple times nine months earlier to see the band. This time, I got Deena and Linda tickets and after show passes. The last three shows of that run were at the Universal Amphitheater. The back of the Amphitheater was part of Universal Studios' tram tour and gawking tourists could see us loading in. You could hear the narrator saying something about Oingo Boingo. The last show was on July 2, the end of a three-week period.

My 1989 calendar says "Boingo-studio" on August 15. I can't remember exactly what this was, but I did set up drums for John twice in studio situations with other members of the band. One of them was for a movie Danny was doing the music for and they did some instrumental tracks. Danny seemed a bit stressed and it was a tense environment. I also found an old check stub in my stuff from July 20, 1991 for drum tech studio work (not sure what was being recorded though).

Food For Feet played nine shows that summer. The last two were notable ones. On September 24, 1989 they played a set at Knott's Berry Farm as part of some "Endless Summer" party (Ocean Blue played it too). Then on September 26, 1989 they played The Roxy. Boingo was gearing up for another short Fall run. We did three days of rehearsals at Schubert Systems Group in North Hollywood from October 14-16. There was supposed to be six shows on the run. However, on October 17, 1989 at 5:04pm the Loma Prieta earthquake (7.1 magnitude) damaged the Santa Cruz Civic Center where the band was scheduled to play on October 22. So, there were only five shows.

On October 18 we flew to Salt Lake City, Utah for the Oct. 19 show at the Salt Palace. On the 20th we flew from Salt Lake to Oakland and arrived in the late afternoon. The band was playing the Concord Pavilion the next night. REM was playing that night at the Concord. At the hotel Laura asked if I wanted go over and check out the show with the band. Apparently she had been given 8 seats and Danny didn't want to go. So, I went with the other 7 members of the band. We went to the VIP hospitality area before the show and then worked our way out to the seats after they started. REM was a big item at the time, I was never interested in their music though. There was some heckling going on among the Boingo members—natural I suppose given the situation. We watched a few songs and that was enough for that bunch.

I mostly hung out with John and John in these social situations, but would talk with Bartek pretty regularly too. Steve was a nice guy and was interested in my college experience. He once told me a story about his indecision when he had to register for his first classes. He had planned on going to medical school, but music was his passion. Fortunately for us, he chose the musical route. An amazing guitarist with a great ear for sound. Sam had plenty of wise-cracks directed

at me and everyone else (perhaps Danny most!). Overall, I was always pretty quiet and low-key. I knew that if I became a nuisance to the band members that my days would be numbered. John had taken a risk by bringing a fan into the inside and I didn't want to put him in an awkward situation.

After the Concord Pavilion show on 10/21/89 we had a few days off before heading to Phoenix on 10/24 for a 10/25 show. This time, REO Speedwagon played the Arizona Veteran's Memorial Coliseum the night before Boingo. The monitor engineer Gary Sanguinet, Jesse, and I went to that show (maybe David too?). They put us in the second row. This was way too close and we had a difficult time behaving. I was ready to go, but Gary wanted to go the after show party to talk to his sound buddies.

On Thursday, October 26 we headed back to Southern California for the Irvine Meadows shows on 10/27 and 10/28. Laura booked the crew at the Holiday Inn and the band at the Four Seasons. Usually we would all stay at the same place though. However, crew members had to share rooms for the most part (I negotiated a couple of alternatives when Deena would come to the shows). I roomed with David mostly, but did with Sean Riley for a few shows too.

The Beginning of the End

After the Fall run, FFF did a couple shows to finish off 1989. On November 9 they played Cal State Fullerton. Then, in what I believe was their largest performance ever, they played the Universal Amphitheater on December 10. This was a KROQ Xmas Bash with four bands: The Call, Mary's Danish, FFF, and one other that I can't remember. The lead singer of The Call was sick, so they canceled right before the show started. This gave the three remaining bands extra stage time. I had heard some of Mary's Danish before, but their set really impressed me (particularly the Foxy Lady cover with the Dazed and Confused riff). Deena and I ended up following that band closely after that. FFF did one show that I worked in early 1990: January 12 at Club Lingerie.

After this FFF took a break as Boingo began work on the *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* album. I knew that they were going into the studio, but apparently John didn't need a drum tech. David Cragin was the only road crew member that was involved during those sessions as far as I know. I only saw the FFF guys once during that February through May 1990 period. Hernandez called me one evening and said they were in Claremont filming a video shoot. This was only about 20 minutes from my house, so I headed over. They were filming on a stage at Claremont College. There was a girl, a monster, and FFF. They lip-synched a few songs, but I have no clue whatever became of that footage. I do remember afterwards that the four of us went and sat in Avila's car. Hernandez had a tape from the recent Boingo sessions and wanted to play us a mix of the song "Skin." This was my first glimpse of the album and I was eagerly anticipating its release. Hernandez wanted us to hear the very end in particular. The song was over, but on the recording he did a drum fill to initiate another measure of the song. That part didn't make the album though. I did end up getting that album before it was released. A fellow Boingoloid (who'll I keep anonymous) had a contact at MCA who leaked a cassette copy. We were enjoying it for several weeks before it was officially released.

By Summer 1990 Boingo was ready to tour in support of the new album. This would be my last and longest tour with them, eight shows. Production Rehearsals occurred on June 23 and 24 at Schubert Systems (the Power Plant) in North Hollywood.

The typical set for this tour was: Dead Man's Party, Home Again, Dead or Alive, Help, Flesh N Blood, Runaway, Minnie the Moocher, Winning Side, My Life, Sweat, Cinderella Undercover, Skin, Out of Control, No One Lives Forever, Only Makes Me Laugh, Elevator Man, We Close Our Eyes, Not My Slave, Stay, Just Another Day, Who Do You Want To Be, Nothing To Fear, Wild Sex, On the Outside, and Only a Lad.

The tour kicked off with two shows at SDSU's Open Air Theater on 6/27 and 6/28. Next came a four-show run at the Universal Amphitheater (7/1 and 7/3-5). The tour concluded with two Northern California shows: 7/12 at the renovated Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium and 7/13 at the Concord Pavilion.

Back To School

After this tour I decided that I had to focus a lot more of my energy on school. My first year at UCSB didn't go well and I had moved back down to Norco and transferred to UC Riverside. I was still considering a career in the music industry, but knew I had to slow down on the Food For Feet and Boingo gigs. After two and a half years of working with FFF, I was starting to get burned out. I wasn't able to make enough money through that so I was working at a record store too. The Boingo gigs paid well, but were not regular enough. Also, the one Fall tour I did wreaked havoc on my school performance as I missed three weeks of the 10 week quarter. I knew John needed a reliable drum tech, so I called him and told him that I could help out here and there, but couldn't continue.

Deena and I did go to a FFF show on 9/23/90 at a place called Pepper's in the City of Industry. That was a nice show with a fantastic hospitality setup. On October 28 and 29, 1990 we went to see Boingo at Irvine Meadows. By this time, the magic was mostly gone for me. I wasn't listening to Boingo's music much any more and these sets didn't differ from the ones a few months prior. On February 20, 1991 Food For Feet played a show at the Barn at UCR. Hernandez had a conflict and couldn't play, so they had someone else sitting in on drums. I went to see them again a couple weeks later on 3/1 at the Strand.

At UCR they used to have Wednesday Nooner shows out on the quad. I had a class in a nearby building that got out at 12:15, so I'd always check these out. One day I heard through the walls what sounded like a great guitar solo and rushed out at the end of class. As I walked toward the stage I saw Tovar and then a big smile on his face. He was playing with this blues band called the Sundowners. We saw them that night at the Barn too, cool stuff. They started playing regularly down in Venice Beach and Deena and I went down there one Sunday evening and watched their set.

On Halloween 1991 we made the now annual trip to Irvine Meadows for the Boingo show. As Danny began doing more and more film scores the band really slowed down. Dark at the End of the Tunnel was old news and the future seemed uncertain. Deena and I were still going to a lot of concerts, more than ever actually. We got into jam bands and we're seeing the Grateful Dead,

Allman Brothers Band, Neil Young, and Santana mostly. We also continued to follow X and Mary's Danish.

On November 8, 1991 we went and saw Food For Feet play in Riverside at Spanky's. FFF's Order album had been released and they were now gigging with a keyboard and percussion player. To me, it felt like a whole different band. The shift away from a power trio is a big one (consider the contemporary example of Gov't Mule). After that, 7 months would pass before I would see the guys again. The last FFF show I saw was on June 7, 1992 at Goodies. I remember FFF slowed down at some point and then just stopped. I was out of the loop by then and still don't know exactly how the end came about. By that point they had been playing regularly for 5 years with minimal commercial success. I don't remember if Boingo played at all during 1992. If they did, we skipped the shows.

By this point I had become fairly political (the college experience finally started working!). I grew my hair out, joined the Peace and Freedom party, and became a vegetarian. I stuck with my Business Administration major since I was so close to finishing. A few years before I thought this would be the best choice for a career in the music industry. By Fall 1992, I knew that I didn't want to work in the music business. While I still loved music, the commercial aspects of the industry didn't appeal to me at all. I was becoming critical of all things corporate and at some point vowed to never work for a for-profit business. I was taking as many Sociology courses as I could and had completed all of my requirements for the Bachelor's degree in December 1992. I was finally really interested in education, but was nearly done! So, I decided to continue on through two more quarters and went back to UCSB on an exchange program and completed a Certificate in Global Peace and Security. There, my love of Sociology was further reinforced.

Boingo did a Universal Amphitheatre run in January 1993. Deena and I went to the 1/16 show and Jeff Himmel and I to the 1/20 one. When I went to pick up the tickets and passes for Jeff and I, they weren't there. I had asked Avila for them, but he got confused based on a conversation with Hernandez (who got the seats for Deena and I a few days earlier). He thought we were covered, but we weren't. I got the person in the ticket office to call Laura and eventually we got in (though we missed the opening song). Six months later they were back down at SDSU's Open Air Theatre and Vatos set us up with tickets for their 6/12 show. When we went back we heard that he had collapsed after the show. He eventually made it back there though and was in his usual fine spirits.

In 1994 Danny dropped the horn section and Oingo Boingo became Boingo and released the album of the same name. It was great to hear new music from the band, but I was put off by the dismissal of Sam, Leon, and Dale and the hiring of an additional guitarist. I heard about some upcoming shows, but decided not to go. Then, early in the evening on July 6, 1994 I high-tailed it to the House of Blues. I thought that this might be the last time I'd see them, so I went for it. The shows were long sold out, but I picked up a ticket near face value from someone out front. There were some cool moments, but I really missed the horns. Soon enough, I wouldn't have time to think much about music anyway. I started the Ph.D. program in Sociology at UC Riverside in September 1994.

A year later Oingo Boingo was reborn for their farewell tour. One of the Johns set us up again with tickets for their 10/20/95 show at SDSU's Open Air Theatre. Both Avila and Hernandez were very generous. We saw them play in their new band The Allstars (later known as Cid) several times, but I was rarely in contact with them anymore. My graduate school buddy Ralph Armbruster and I went to the 10/27 show at the Universal Amphitheater and got to go back to that huge after-show party (we almost broke down in Ralph's old Toyota on the way there!). I knew that their last performance on Halloween would be the most popular, so I didn't ask anyone for tickets. Deena and I went and got wristbands and stood in line. One of us got a good number and we ended up with open pit tickets, the best in the house. It was a perfect end to a decade with Boingo. It was great to see a new generation of slam-dancers up close. We didn't want to go to the after-show party that night, we just went as fans and enjoyed it like the other six thousand or so people there.