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TALES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CACOPHONY SOCIETY

COMPILED & EDITED BY EVANS, GALBRAITH & LAW

FEATURING...



ZONE TRIP #4 BLACK ROCK!



GIANT MARATHON SALMON!



THE DOGMINICAN ORDER!



SPAWN OF THE SUICIDE CLUB!

FOREWORD BY CHUCK PALAHNIUK

EVANS

TALES OF THE SAN FRANCISCO CACOPHONY SOCIETY



Edited by
Kevin Evans, Carrie Galbraith, John Law



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Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society

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Tales of the San Francisco Cacophony Society

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Dedication

To Tara Evans, Barbara Phillips-Jewett and Willa Mae Phillips.
Thank you for your never ending support of my creative path.

— Kevin Evans

To my sister, Holly; my lifelong protecting angel and closest friend.
To Lucija, Susan and Amelia X; loyal friends through thick and thin.
To my nieces, nephews, friends, and students around the world.

May your creativity be limitless.

— Carrie Galbraith

To my son Sebastian James Law, the brightest spirit I have known,
and to his guardian angel, Gary Lee Warne, the man who gave Sebastian his name.
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— John Law



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— Kevin Evans

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— Carrie Galbraith

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— John Law



When Giblets Filled the Air: My Introduction to Cacophony

Chuck Palahniuk

My first time was at The Alibi, a Polynesian-themed bar in North Portland. A friend had found a flyer stapled to a telephone pole. “Free Voodoo Weddings,” it said. “Tiki-Con.” The flyer promoted a night of retro-jungle music, nothing racist-racist, just the brooding fantasy music you’d hear in the soundtrack of Tarzan movies from the 1940s. Luau music with chattering monkeys and screeching parrots mixed in the background. The Alibi seemed the perfect place for it, a bar built to cater to Greatest Generation service men returning from the Pacific Theater, all plaster-of-Paris volcanoes and papier-mâché hula dancers glowing, lurid, under black light. I kid you not, the salad bar is a repurposed wooden lifeboat. Picture Trader Vic’s but in the wrong neighborhood.

Whatever this Tiki-Con was, it sounded like zany fun. People in Berlin have an old saying: “Berlin runs by many clocks,” meaning they have lots of nightlife options. Maybe in Manhattan you could dress as a slutty chicken and boogie, suspended inside a go-go cage at the Limelight, but you’d be surprised how few choices people in Portland, Oregon had on a Friday night in 1993.

So we went to The Alibi, and we went early and claimed a big booth in the middle of the action and ordered drinks that arrived in life-sized ceramic skulls. Drinks that smoked with dry-ice fog, like a mad scientist had mixed them. I wore a Hawaiian shirt. I wore a puka shell necklace that I’d bought before they were ironic, back when the best way to get laid was to look as much as possible like Christopher Atkins in “The Blue Lagoon,” back when white people still dreamed of going native.

The people who’d organized Tiki-Con: the Cacophony Society, they called themselves. They looked like they didn’t care how they looked. Like they never went to the gym or counted calories. When they tried to dance, it was even worse. They flailed, and not in an angry-mosh-pit-punk-rock way. They spun their record albums of weird

Hollywood paradise music and hopped around flapping their arms or they puckered their lips and pretended to be tropical fish. They danced like Special Olympics. These Cacophony people, they were so un-cool they made even me look cool. Goodness, they were pitiful.

So my friends and I, we drank our Blue Hawaii’s, and for an hour we were the cool people at least in comparison to the people who were hosting the party. But then the actual cool people began to arrive – late, like they always do – and they wore miniskirts or Jordache jeans and sneered at everything, like they always do. They took over the dance floor. They took over everything.

All through high school I only pretended to cheer at pep rallies and football games. While the crowds roared, I merely gaped my mouth open and shut, fake-cheering, like someone choking to death on a fish bone. If that makes me a misanthrope – not being thrilled to adore and applaud the people whom the culture already adores – so be it.

So we were booth hogging at the Alibi, and the perfect people flooded in and turned a wacky Friday night into just-another-boring-beauty contest. They posed and preened. The Cacophony people got squeezed into a smaller and smaller corner, but they persevered. The jungle music kept playing, but you couldn’t really hear it. Not even the trumpeting elephants, not anymore. As advertised, someone began to officiate “voodoo weddings.” A voodoo witch doctor wearing a necklace of animal teeth stood above the crowd and chanted mumbo-jumbo. Men married women. Women married women. People married themselves.

Not that the milling hordes of beautiful people even noticed. No, they’d arrived and kept on arriving, turning Tiki-Con into just another banal mating ritual. Really, isn’t that what everything devolves to for those people? Just

another showcase for hook-ups? A hipster shop window for flaunting clear skin and thick, glossy hair. Biceps and boobs. Boobs and biceps. Pose, pose, posing.

That's when the impossible happened. The room was packed beyond fire codes, every molecule of breathable air displaced by a fog of Giorgio and Polo, and not even the servers could squeeze through to replenish our Singapore slings and zombies. Just when it seemed as if we'd be hemmed in forever by these tedious breeding rites... the witch doctor stopped his gibberish sermonizing and threw a handful of something over the heads of the crowd. This clump of something scattered into a cloud of wet mini-things that rained down on the perfect rockabilly haircuts. The witch doctor threw another handful, and more mysterious somethings splattered the scenerster crowd. A profane anointing.

One of the soft fragments went splat on our table. And there it was: A wilted, blue bowel. A loopy length of wet intestine. Next to that landed a tiny lung. A gizzard splashed into a friend's Rum Collins. A bloody heart plopped into a Long Island Iced Tea. Real blood in our fake skulls.

It was chicken guts. Giblets filled the air.

It was that movie, "Carrie," only in reverse. Instead of the cool kids putting the spastic on stage and pelting her with gore, this was the social reject delivering the offal. The thatched-roof, South Sea ambience was filled with screams and slaughterhouse odors. Another detail you never get from movies and the Internet is how things in real life smell. It smelled awful.

It was a hipster stampede. The formerly chill'n play-ahs, they climbed and clawed over each other in their fight for the exit.

The outsider misfits had baited and successfully sprung their voodoo trap.

There was a lesson here: Homemade entertainment versus store-bought. Actual cool versus the appearance of being cool.

Finally, the misanthropes had won. The football stars and cheerleaders were routed. It was Cacophony, and I was hooked.

Here was an escape from the treadmill of always looking good and always looking good and always looking... In the Cacophony Society you could embrace the terrible. Today, I see a little of this same genius in the zombie culture, where people lurch around with their insides on the outside, but in 1993 we didn't have zombie walkathons and zombie conventions. In 1993 we had Tiki-Con. Here, you could propose an idea, any scary, ridiculous stunt – What if we dressed as Mad Hatter characters and played croquet with bowling balls and sledge hammers? What if we rode kayaks through the sewers? – and days later, people would create that scenario as a new, short-lived reality.

It was a laboratory for experimenting with the culture. And for experimenting with ourselves. In so many ways, it was my inspiration.

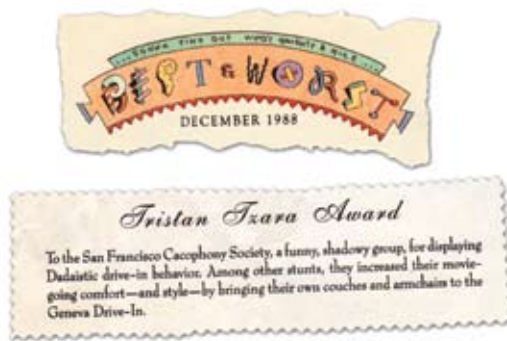
You don't say anything because fight club exists only in the hours between when fight club starts and when fight club ends.

Still, as my mother used to warn me, "It's always fun and games until someone loses an eye."

The trouble was my friends didn't laugh. They couldn't see anything beyond their ruined drinks and the stains on their clothes. They saw no benefit in having their innards on the outside, even if it was just for a couple hours.

The good news is that I made new friends.





Introduction

The Cacophony Society was a collective comprised of rabid individualists who would never join a collective, a Chautauqua of kooky non-conformists, a potlatch for outsiders; it was a movement that moved in any or all directions, though rarely in the same one—in pursuit of a common goal, as stated in the monthly newsletter: a pursuit of shared experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society.

Cacophony was not conceived as an art movement. Many members would not self-identify as artists, although there were some noted artists among the members, and many Cacophonists and their fellow travelers would go on to successful careers in the arts. Others would find that their identification with the unselfconscious creative nature of the group and its actions would lead them inevitably to a life in some form of the arts.

Neither was Cacophony political or spiritual, although some of the better-known events hinted at a political agenda, and the experiences of the group had consequences that surely lifted the human spirit. Certainly, it could never be classified as a business; it was far too mystifying a concept for any single ego to claim and too slippery a legacy for anyone to actually own; it never offered the slightest tangible profit, although its intangible profit was vast.

This loose aggregate of personalities definitely came together to play, in ways as ingenious and unprecedented as possible; Cacophony brought the concept of playing in the world as adults into mainstream consciousness, through hundreds of events organized by members over twenty years. Cacophony also partnered with other groups of pranksters, performers, and artists, sometimes for one event, or sometimes to produce an annual event over time.

Cacophony championed a creative philosophy of fun, stretching the parameters of what could be seen as entertainment, with a basis in unorthodox ideas and

direct engagement with the world and people in it. What constituted fun was left entirely to each member's generally vivid imagination. Event ideas were posted in the newsletter, *Rough Draft*, and others played or not, depending on their own predilections. Some invitations to play captured the group's fancy to such an extreme that the huge turnout at an event was almost its undoing; sometimes a lone participant, or none at all, would show up at the appointed time and place.

There were many kinds of events, some so bizarre as to defy a category. Others fell into discernible types or combined different kinds of activities in the creation of a single event. Pranks, urban exploration, literary events, theatrical or musical endeavors, costumed parties, urban games, and the mysterious Zone Trips were just some of the categories to inspire collaborative play. Some event agendas included preliminary meetings to make props or prepare a chosen location for the group activity to come; other activities were not premeditated, but happened spontaneously when friends gathered and had nothing to do that night.. Some sub-groups of Cacophony concentrated on specific goals, like The Billboard Liberation Front's clever improvement of advertising messages in the urban landscape.

Pranksters executed ideas with such finesse that they could fool mainstream media; one notorious prank was the *Fantasia* Protest, which gathered faux protesters to object to aspects of the famous Disney film. *Time Magazine* featured the prank in an article about the growth of whining as a national obsession. Groups were invented to march in the annual parade in Berkeley, like a pro-carnivore posse called People Eatin' Them Animals, or the Undead Homeowners' Association. The Salmon Run pranked the city's annual Bay-to-Breakers marathon with people in salmon costumes running upstream against the other runners. Let Them Eat Cake gathered fantastically costumed 18th century French aristocrats to give away cake—to the homeless and other willing recipients—in front of City Hall on Bastille Day.

The Cacophony Society is a randomly gathered network of free spirits united in the pursuit of experiences beyond the pale of mainstream society. We are the punctuation at the end of hypothetical sentences, words in the prose of technological satire, grammarians of absurdist syntax and our numbers are prominent in the flat edge of a curve. You may already be a member!

Rough Draft

Issue #75, December 1992

The Official Organ of the San Francisco
Cacophony Society.

No Christmas in July
Saturday Dec. 5th, 2:00 P.M.

A group of concerned citizens, elves and Santas will gather downtown to circulate what will appear to be a genuine petition to get Christmas decorations, music and TV and radio commercials banned except in December of each year. The idea is to enrage the merchants of the city and to sympathize with the visually and aurally assaulted shoppers in what seems to be becoming a year long shopping season.

Wear: Santa suits, Elf attire and tasteless Christmas scarves, hats, sweaters, bells or whatever you have and a clip board if you have one.
Meet: Union Square, at the base of the statue.
Sponsored by: Kimric & Heidi

A Call to B.A.R.C. / A Farewell to Armaments
Sunday Dec. 6th, 9:30 A.M.

Come join our Thompstonesque gathering in the mist of an East Bay morning to discharge firearms and tell heinous lies of long forgotten battles. Bring pictures or photocopies of your most detested peevs and turn the morning into

a psychotherapy session. Unfortunately there will be no bears at this event as they are not indigenous to the region anymore. Please NO alcohol, drugs, automatic weapons or explosives (the authorities that be have but a small sense of humor.)

Where: Richmond Gun Club, 3155 Goodrick Ave. (off Parr in the city of Richmond.)
Bring: Firearms, ammo \$5 per person range fee and lies or favorite firearms/war related readings.
The un/poorly armed are welcome, but please RSVP so we can anticipate needs.
Your hosts: J.D. Boggmann and associates -- RSVP ()
Directions to the range ()

Non Event
Wednesday Dec. 9th, all day.

Dress like you always do. Do what you normally do.
Object of the event: See if you can pick out the other participants. This was a really big event last year. Let's see if we can do it again!

Sponsored by: The Bureau of Objective Reality.

Seattle Pilgrimage
December 10th thru 13th.

The first union of San Francisco and Seattle Cacophony will take place when we accompany baby Jesus on a journey northward to the sunless city of espresso, garage bands and spawning ground for the new rock of ages. A full agenda of events is planned. We'll be leaving Wednesday morning in rented vans and return Sunday night. Share transportation and lodging costs, aprox \$60 person. Food extra. Call if you are interested in spending 16 hours or more traveling in a small metal room getting to know your fellow Cacophonists.

White Christmas
Saturday Dec. 19th, 7:00 P.M.

Advance reservations are mandatory; space is limited. We're dreaming of a white Christmas in the extreme. We're hosting a grand, formal solstice celebration at which every thing -- the decor, the food and the guest's clothing will be white. As a symbol of the triumph of light over darkness, a bleak, gray urban environment will be transformed into a magical white room of light and festivity. We'll feast on all-white food, drink white wine and listen to musical selections from "White Christmas" to "White Room."

To attend you must: 1) Send \$5 materials fee (in cash or a check made out to "cash") to White Christmas, P.O. Box , S.F. 94142 before December 15. You'll receive written instructions about when and where to meet; 2) Bring a grand poduck meal which is white; 3) wear all white clothes (this is man-



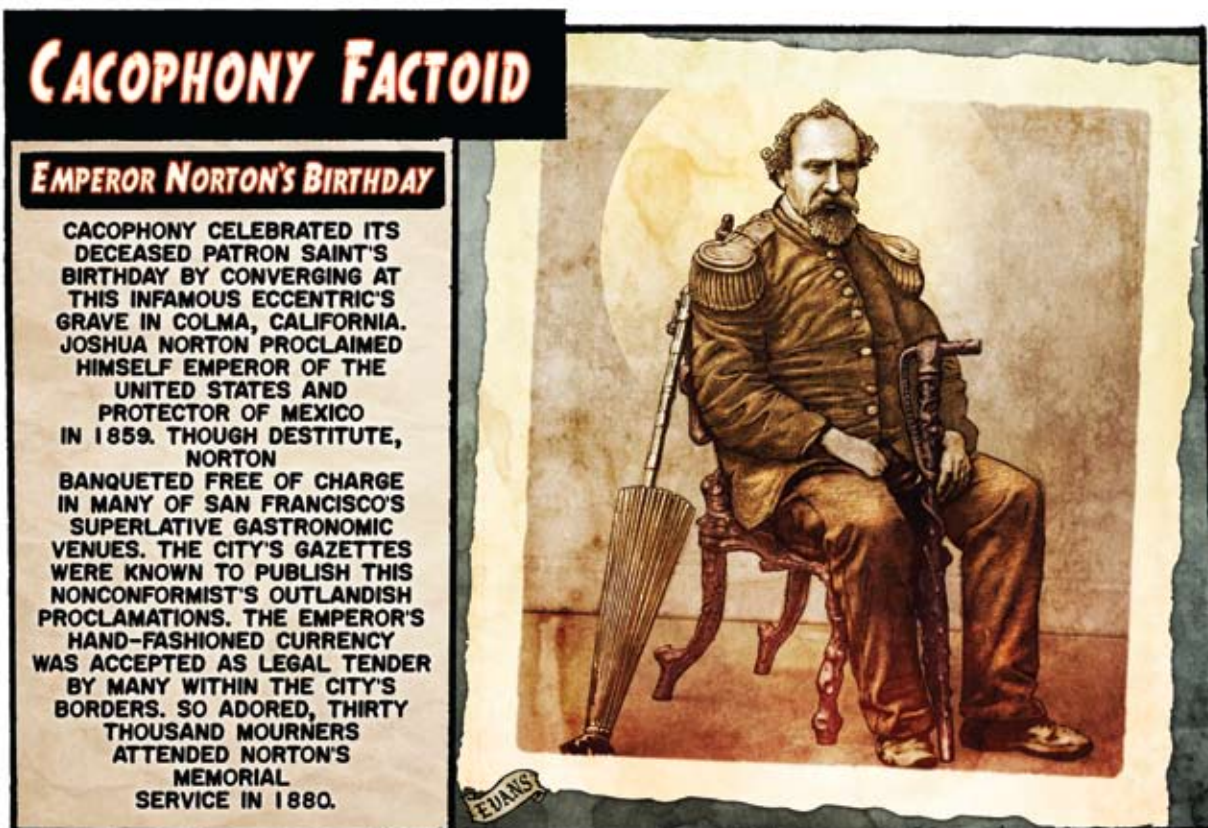
The city was Cacophony's playground, and urban exploration plumbed its options. Some events, like the late-night walking tours of the area's sewers and storm drains, plumbed quite literally. "Enter the Unknown" newsletter entries and calls for Midnight Walks summoned interested parties to meet at a designated place for a guided ramble through undisclosed terrain. A huge empty warehouse on the bay at the end of 20th street was the central location of the Seceadarean Odyssey, which offered canoe rides through hidden underground canals leading to the bay and other adventures spread through this colossal space.

Literary events were highly popular and took many forms. Poetry Breakfasts appealed to early risers who liked to greet the sun, in incongruous locales, reading from seminal verse. Tippling With Kipling combined two greatly favored activities, reading and drinking. Dark humor pervaded some events, like the Suicide Note Writing Workshop. The Marcel Proust Support Group gathered frustrated fans of serious literature to plow together through one of their most daunting challenges, at the sensible rate of 10 pages a day, meeting regularly in fin-de-siècle venues for moral support. In a gesture of affectionate nose thumbing at the circle of Proustitutes, the Charles Bukowski Support Group met at the race track or seedy Tenderloin bars and read from the works of their particular master. Sometimes Midnight Walks

had a literary theme, featuring readings from poetry or novels at various stops along the way. For those who just liked to read and discuss, there was a marginally conventional book club that met and read a different book each month.

Some events had a distinctly theatrical flair, and at some of these, the only witnesses to the production were the players themselves. The annual Exquisite Corpse revived the Dadaist concept of the audience writing the play, each writer seeing only the line written before, and utilizing a set batch of props assembled for inspiration; a finished page of text was rushed to the stage, where others acted it out. The Atomic Café brought people to an elaborately decorated bunker for a post-apocalyptic swap meet and storytelling of the end of the world as they had known it. Other events, like the Operatic Banquet, offered musical jest.

Urban Games used the city streets, hotels, and other locations to stage games usually reserved for more logical turf. The Urban Iditarod and Urban Golf gave new meaning to old sport. Variations on Capture the Flag such as Capture the Dummy played out in a wide variety of locations, and games with dubious names, like Assassin and X-Files Investigator, were held in a variety of venues to the absolute confusion of the general public that happened to be in the way.





Almost all Cacophonists loved costume parties and wouldn't settle for limiting them to Halloween. The Gothic Nouveau Winter's Ball invaded the rotunda of the Palace of Fine Arts in the wee hours of a typically very cold night. Victorian Croquet, the Black and White Bowl, clown events, and the White Trash Family Picnics demanded a considerable variety of looks and props. The Betsy Ross Sewing Circle and Terrorist Society, which met on Flag Day, combined a costume event with the purpose of creating an entirely new national flag. White Christmas, a holiday banquet in a bunker painted white, called for costuming, food, plates, tablecloths, and other props entirely in snowy monochrome.

No category could possibly cover some offerings, like The Cave Shaman Meets the Marshmallow Roast, at which people came in the shamanistic garb of invented cultures and spoke in tongues, the Guerilla Sweat Lodge, or The Journey Across the Waters of Oblivion to the Temple of the Living Dead, a vampire event. A workshop that dismantled toys and reassembled the parts in unlikely combinations also defies categorization, as did Fair Play For Rabbits or Cyberpunk in Sector Four.

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During slow months, when the newsletter had little to offer, the editor for that issue might insert intriguing fake events. Dave's Snake Hunt, Eat the Dead, Vigilante Justice, and Swim the Farallones were unlikely to draw much response. Duct those Suckers proposed slapping duct tape over the mouths of hipsters on Haight Street. Sometimes these fake events parodied traditional ones of

well-established organizations, like the Initiation Into The Knights of Columbus, or the Cremation of Care, the somber ceremony at The Bohemian Grove.

Perhaps the most mysterious of the events were the Zone Trips, calls to venture to a distant and unknown location for an undisclosed purpose. Adventurers willing to show up might find themselves on a tour of California missions, invading a convention of people who believe they're in contact with aliens, or in a place like Los Angeles or Covina. Perhaps the most famous of Cacophony's Zone trips was The Adventure of the Burning Man, which took Cacophonists to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada, where, over time, it would grow into an international event attended by

thousands of people each year.

While Cacophony played for its own amusement and with little self-consciousness, its ideas live on in its progeny. Burning Man is the most visible and successful pop culture phenomenon that was developed with Cacophony know-how. This massive event still claims a philosophy that has its roots in Cacophony's mores, such as "Leave No Trace" and "No Spectators."

The antics of the Billboard Liberation Front (BLF), beginning in 1977, set the standard for billboard art and advertising pranking for years to come. The BLF encouraged the improvement of billboards with a how-to-manual and manifesto, and inspired the evolution of the phenomenon of "culture jamming," a concept further polished by *Adbusters* magazine, which in turn would inspire the Occupy movement.

Cacophony's urban exploration events would also encourage adventurers in other places to examine the little-known corners of their own cities. Urban Exploration (UE) has also grown into a global phenomenon, with the development of groups like New York's Dark Passage, which was founded by East Coast Cacophony transplants. The Cacophony Society's promotion of other groups, which offered early examples of proto-machine art, helped foment an already growing international fascination with the art of the machine and robotics. Some of these groups included Survival Research Labs, SEEMEN, and PeopleHater.

Cacophony “lodges” developed in other cities, each with a particular local flavor. In San Francisco, a fresh generation of pranksters and other event organizers sprang up, following the lead of their predecessors. This iteration of Cacophony ideas is known affectionately as Cacophony 2.0.

While Cacophony encouraged others to expand their horizons of creative play, it too had influences that made it what it was. Principal among these was the legendary Suicide Club, which developed in San Francisco in the 1970s. A secret society, The Suicide Club eventually suffered from insularity and an inability to draw in new members. When it disbanded, former Suicide Club members missed the innovative source of play and reorganized under the new and inclusive umbrella of Cacophony.

The society also found influences and ideas in countless other sources. Novels, movies, history, myth, family stories, urban legend, and folk tales all influenced the group and provided ideas that became events, when filtered through the imaginations of the members. They also found inspiration in historical figures, people who would become beatified in the eyes of many Cacophonists. Two of the “saints” in Cacophony’s cosmology were Emperor Norton and Alfred Jarry.

Emperor Norton, San Francisco’s best-known eccentric, lived a rich, tumultuous, and mythic life. Joshua Norton was a successful businessman in the years following the San Francisco gold rush of 1849. He lost his fortune when he attempted to corner the rice market and failed. Mentally unhinged from his fall from the heights of society, Norton declared himself Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico on September 17, 1859. Clad in a grand and colorful uniform, Norton ate and drank for free in numerous city establishments and was celebrated by the press and his fellow citizens.

Although he may have been crazy, he was also prescient. Among his imperial decrees was the demand to build a bridge across the bay, which would be realized 63 years later. He also produced spontaneous bits of street theater; in one famous incident, he stopped a hostile group from attacking poor Chinese immigrants by standing between the mob’s pitchforks and torches and their ostensible victims, reading poetry aloud and praying. Emperor Norton would have been welcome at any Cacophony event.

Alfred Jarry was the visionary fool who invented the philosophy of Pataphysics, which elevated the mind above the mere concept of metaphysics, and would inform the Dada and Surrealist movements; much later, it would inspire The Church of the Sub-Genius, Discordianism, Cacophony, and countless other fringe and underground groups.

Jarry launched a frontal assault on the bourgeois sensibilities of Parisian society in the 1890s. He produced only one play in his lifetime, and the first production ended in a riot. The first actor on stage uttered the first word of dialogue, “merde,” French for “shit,” and the audience went mad and tore the theater apart. He was seen all over Paris on a bicycle, flaunting a dueling pistol on each hip. When annoyed by a neighbor’s unruly children, Jarry offered to shoot them, claiming the ability to reconstitute the urchins through pataphysical methods. Not surprisingly, he developed a mesmerizing sway over the Parisian avant garde. He continued to have a similar effect on Cacophony, nearly a century later.

Like its heroes, the Cacophony Society espoused behaviors thought slightly mad and questioned the values of the bourgeoisie, the ever-burgeoning power of industrial and manufacturing giants, the power of advertising to employ classic conditioning in the shaping of human choice, and the increasingly mediated society that wallows in passive entertainment, lulled into complacency before a screen. And, as with real life as opposed to that depicted on the flickering screen, Cacophony was not merely fun and entertaining. It could be scary, dirty, dangerous, and even exceptionally stupid at times.

Cacophony rose to the challenge of the mediated life and encouraged others not to ignore the potent power of play. Unconsciously, it reflected the wisdom of philosophers from ancient Greece to contemporary America. Plato wrote, “Life must be lived as play.” The 20th century American philosopher George Santayana said, “To the art of working well, a civilized race would add the art of playing well.” And Carl Jung wrote that “The creation of something new is not accomplished through the intellect, but by the play instinct.” Through its championing of play for adults, Cacophony played a vital role in turning the consciousness of contemporary culture away from passive entertainment, and toward a more vital, creative, and innovative concept of what it means to be entertained.

This book, like all the other joint adventures of the Cacophony Society, is a work written, illustrated, designed, and assembled by its members.

Cacophony, never the most competent of “organizations,” remains, to this day, primarily a philosophy, steeped in the tradition of Dada, and geared to living and playing in a world created, in part through the collective fantasies of its members. There is nothing stopping you. You hold in your hands a how-to-manual of sorts. Atop each Cacophony *Rough Draft* newsletter was a reminder to readers: “You may already be a member.”

