

disappears when he explains where he finds his lyrical inspiration.

"Ah. Let's see. From the newspaper, I guess," he deadpans. "The Internet, places like that. A lot of e-mail." He pauses. "How 'bout you?"

I confess that I don't write songs, and he pauses again and asks me where I get ideas for interviews. We discuss this and decide that sleeping in and riding the bus is a good way to write songs and to prepare questions.

Since Beat Happening, Calvin has played in Dub Narcotic. He's done solo work. He's run K. He 'discovered' Beck. He produced a Jon Spencer Blues Explosion album. He's played in the Halo Benders, a collaboration with Doug Martsch of Boise's Built to Spill. Calvin says that it's slow going, but that a new record might be out next year. He's quick to point out, though, that the new songs aren't any good, and that I shouldn't bother buying the album when it comes out.

He seems almost bothered that anyone is interested in his bands, or in him, and keeps shifting the conversation to other topics. Like books. He's reading a Faulkner novel.

Calvin explains how great a time he had in Seattle during last November's protests of the World Trade Organisation, how he

played a protest show and otherwise "made some noise." Dub Narcotic's appearance at Rock for Choice also shows his, and the band's political leanings.

During the set that night, as Chris and Heather keep playing, Calvin stops to deliver a speech about the importance of women's right to choice. He sounds confident and passionate, then explains how he didn't actually make up the pro-choice slogan he recited to the crowd. He saw it on a t-shirt. He's not being funny this time, he's just explaining things.

The politics of independence are central to K Records, which has put out records by a range of bands such as the Make-Up, Marine Research, and Black Anger, as well as Calvin's own projects.

"We keep our prices lower than the average record label- [but] I made a decision a couple years ago that it was a priority to me that the bands get paid, compensated for their efforts, and the band is the entity that gets short-changed when the price is really low. The pressing plant's gonna get paid, the print shop's gonna get paid, the distributor's gonna get paid, so where does the money come from - from the band. So I want the price to be at least high

enough that band gets paid money for the work they do."

Although bands he has worked with, such as Modest Mouse and Built to Spill, have signed contracts with major labels, Calvin doesn't begrudge them. "They do what they have to do," he says. At the same time, he has no such plans for himself, or for K. "We're still there, I don't know, that's all I can say - just

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keep doing it - somehow it's happening."

And Dub Narcotic still plays all-ages shows. Calvin asks why there are so few under-19 shows in Vancouver, and explains that in Olympia, "we've stockpiled enough all-ages venues that there could be several disasters before it becomes a crisis."

Chris jumps in and points out that there are always basements to play in as well. Calvin agrees. "Basically most shows have so few people at them anyway you might as well be playing in a house."

The music scene in Olympia is strong. Heather explains how there's a real supportive atmosphere

among the local musicians.

But despite this, Calvin sees a lack of enthusiasm for live music.

"I don't think watching bands is something that's enjoyable to most people. Seems to be phasing out of our culture as something that's enjoyable," he says. "Like even last night we played at this supposed party but it was just... it just seems like people are just waiting for the band to end so they can have a good time - it seems pretty common."

At the Rock for Choice show, a lot of people are having a good time listening to the bands. Then Dub Narcotic sends a good chunk of the crowd to the lobby for beer, or back to their seats for a break from dancing. On stage, Calvin wears his Gretsch Electromatic high, tucking the guitar tight under his arm, peering out into the room as he plays.

Every so often, he turns around to kick his amp so that it reverberates, distorting the sound. Chris dances to his own basslines and Heather sticks her tongue out with effort as she hits the drums. Not many people get it. Puzzlement again. Up on the stage, Dub Narcotic is just doing what it does. And they're having fun.

As the interview winds up, it becomes

clear that Calvin was only partly joking when he said he had all the time in the world. As the band poses for photos, Calvin still looks bored, and my friend, who is taking the pictures, asks what the everyday Calvin Johnson expression looks like.

"That's what I got right now," he answers, his face not changing in the slightest.

He wasn't particularly bored, I don't think. And he didn't mean to be rude when he wandered off. And he wasn't being facetious when he said that he'd rather eat the mashed potatoes that someone brought him cold.

Do you get it? Do you understand Calvin Johnson?

A couple of hours after the interview, Calvin appears in the lobby, looking around for something to do before Dub Narcotic takes the stage.

He spots us, and comes over. The conversation isn't forced, it's just slow, with lots of pauses. We discuss the evening's show.

"I'm having a great time," says Calvin, his face impassive, before lighting upon his next distraction. "Hey - they have tea," he points out, getting excited again. "Well, I'm going to refresh myself. I'll see you later." And he wanders off again, his dirty blond hair sticking straight out from his head. □