

The 5th Annual Roky Erickson Psychedelic Ice Cream Social: Celebrating Electroshock Survivors

March 15, 2007

An incredible lineup of musicians! An amazing piece of art! An inspiring collection of psychiatric survivors and other activists challenging and calling for an end to the use of psychiatric electroshock on creative artists and on all citizens of Austin, of Texas, and the world! People of all ages enjoying the music, enjoying the ice cream, and often moved to tears by the inspiring presence and touching stories of the survivors!

All of this came together in a historically unprecedented event on Thursday, March 15th, at Threadgill's World Headquarters in Austin, Texas. The event was sponsored by the Roky Erickson Trust (www.rokyerickson.net), the Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas (CAEST)(www.endofshock.com), and Families who Rock (www.familiesrock.com). It is a tragic fact that creative artists and others have been stigmatized by being labeled "mentally ill," called names like "paranoid schizophrenic" and "psychotic" and then being incarcerated against their will or duped into agreeing to "outpatient treatment." At this 5th Annual Roky Erickson Psychedelic Ice Cream Social celebrating Electroshock Survivors, musicians and artists joined forces with activists and survivors to celebrate life and to honor the spirit of survival and re-emergence of those who have been hurt by electroshock.

The music was absolutely awesome. Sumner Erickson, Robyn Hitchcock and Peter Buck, Powell St. John, Black Lips, Tommy X Hancock, Stuart Braithwaite and Spoon were among the incredible artists who entertained the hundreds of listeners blessed to be there. Three featured Austin music world legends had all suffered from the effects of brain-damaging electroshock. Townes Van Zandt was represented by his musician son, J.T. Van Zandt. Van Zandt is a beautiful singer/songwriter who chose to share songs that moved the heart. He shared his thoughts on his father's electroshock, letting the crowd know about the profound memory loss that caused him to forget the mother of his children. J.T. also said that electroshock should be abolished: "Is it necessary that human beings destroy all things which they do not understand, including the unique mind of the artist. Would it be possible to examine our past, learn from the mistakes we have made and actually make positive changes in our behavior. How long does it take to discontinue practices that have been proven to be absolutely detrimental to society and produce only negative consequences? Let us unite to put an end to the barbaric practice of shock therapy."

Legendary Austin music artist, Jim Franklin, created the poster for the event (see www.endofshock.com). By his creative genius, Franklin was able to design a poster featuring an original painting that radiated the loving presence of Roky Erickson right through a clear, symbolic representation of electroshock. The M.C. for the event, Jack Blood, radio host of *Deadline Live* (www.jackblood.com), referred to Franklin as "the Michelangelo of Armadillo art." Franklin was honored, along with Roky Erickson and Townes Van Zandt, in a Texas state legislative resolution passed on March 14th about the historic event and honoring the artists and the effort to bring greater awareness to the activist efforts to ban electroshock in Texas. The resolution (HR 601) was sponsored by Representative Dawnna Dukes, co-authored by

Representative Elliott Naishtat and strongly supported by Representative Senfronia Thompson, all of whom have been leaders in past efforts to ban shock in Texas. In presenting the resolution to the House, Dukes honored Roky Erickson, Townes Van Zandt and Jim Franklin, as well as J.T. Van Zandt and Sumner Erickson, and John Breeding, Lee Spiller and Mike Rupp of the Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas. She spoke passionately of the legacy and actions of those challenging electroshock in Texas, and strongly believes the procedure should be banned. As to Jim Franklin, a man of sardonic wit, he said, "I had an elaborate statement prepared in my mind, but in 1965 they erased it with an electric eraser."

Michelle Shocked was magnificent. Not only is her music terrific, but her presence is intensely alive and passionate. I was moved to tears when she engaged onstage with Leonard Roy Frank, and shared a little of her story about being forcibly incarcerated in a psychiatric institution and repeatedly injected with Haldol, one of the worst of the psychotropic drugs. Shocked accurately described Haldol as a "mental straitjacket." Michelle strongly supports our effort to stop electroshock, but she and Leonard also made it clear that for every electroshock survivor, there are hundreds of people hurt by brain-disabling psychiatric drugs.

Leonard Roy Frank was our special guest for the Ice Cream Social. Leonard In 1962, Leonard was incarcerated by his family and a cooperative psychiatrist, and subjected to 50 insulin coma shocks and 35 electroshocks, destroying memories of a period of 2-1/2 years of his life. After a few years of recovery (from the shocks), Leonard became a leading activist against psychiatric assault and the brutal physical methods of treatment, especially electroshock. He is the editor of *The History of Shock Treatment*, and many other books, including the *Random House Webster's Quotationary*. His *Electroshock Quotationary*, perhaps the best single resource on the subject anywhere, may be downloaded free of charge at the CAEST website, www.endofshock.com).

Leonard spoke eloquently to the crowd about his experience and about electroshock. He was honored at the event, along with fellow electroshock survivors, Roky Erickson, Townes Van Zandt and Jim Franklin. It is an astounding thing to consider that if you add Michelle Shocked to these four, then you had five incredibly competent and outstanding individuals, all of whom psychiatrists regarded at one time as being very severely mentally ill. What a wakeup call to all who today are so thoroughly conditioned by the incessant propaganda that leads us to believe—as if it were a proven scientific fact (NOT)—that so-called schizophrenia and other serious "mental illnesses" like clinical depression and bipolar disorder are genetic defects, and biologically based brain diseases and "chemical imbalances."

A major theme of this concert was to celebrate and defend the beauty and gifts of artistic creativity. It is no coincidence that creative artists are often hammered by psychiatry, which has as one of its primary functions the task of enforcing "normality" by stigmatizing and punishing people who step beyond the bounds of normality. Real art is by its nature edgy and uniquely eccentric, and its practitioners are vulnerable to those who enforce social norms or propriety and productivity. Roky Erickson, Jim Franklin, and Townes Van Zandt are in the company of fellow electroshock survivors like writer Ernest Hemingway, actor Judy Garland, Peter Green (of Fleetwood Mac), musician Bud Powell, actor Frances Farmer, actor Vivien Leigh, French playwright and actor Antonin Artaud, actor Clara Bow, singer Connie Francis, Naomi Ginsberg (Allen Ginsberg's mother), Australian pianist David Helfgott, poet Bob Kaufman, writer

Seymour Krim, pianist and actor Oscar Levant, poet Robert Lowell, actor Jennifer O'Neill, baseball player Jimmy Pearsall, writer Robert Pirsig, poet Sylvia Plath, composer Cole Porter, poet and lyricist Dory Previn, songwriter and performer Lou Reed, singer/actor and human rights leader Paul Robeson, writer William Styron, actor Gene Tierney, British writer Simon Winchester, Australian singer Stevie Wright and singer Tammy Wynette. It is an awesome experience to witness artists, who as a group have been oppressed by society's normality enforcers, revolting against psychiatric oppression and standing up for freedom of creative experience and expression.

A very long list of artists hurt by psychiatric drugs could be made to follow the name of Michelle Shocked—to name just a few, consider Kurt Cobain, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, Dell Shannon, Phil Hartman and Brian Wilson. It is inspiring and it generates hope that after years of abuse at the hands of psychiatrists, the Roky Erickson Ice Cream Social marks a historic moment when musicians and artists begin to fight back. They are determined to end this kind of mistreatment, and make the world safe from psychiatry not only for themselves, but for all of us.

We were deeply moved as well by opportunities to honor other electroshock survivors who have been active in the CAEST campaign to make Austin a shock free zone. As we work to convince Austin's Seton Shoal Creek and St. David's Hospitals to stop inflicting this horrific procedure on our beloved brothers and sisters, we are proud and grateful to stand shoulder to shoulder with brave individuals who suffered electroshock and, like the artists of the Ice Cream Social Concert, want to protect others from similar suffering.

We had the spirit of Dianna Loper in our hearts and minds. Dianna is an electroshock survivor who tragically lost the memory of her own new baby boy when she was electroshocked in Houston. Her moving story may be seen in the video archives of the CAEST website: <http://www.endofshock.com/videopage.htm>. Dianna is a CAEST steering committee member, founder of the World Association of Electroshock Survivors and a key leader of the successful 1993 effort to ban electroshock for young people under age 17 in Texas, and the 1997 success in providing a little extra protection for elders whom psychiatrists want to shock.

We honored another great musician shock survivor in absentia, guitarist and songwriter Don Erickson, who was hurt by 10 electroshocks at Seton Shoal Creek in the summer of 2005. Don has become a key activist in the CAEST coalition, singing and speaking at one of our rallies, and speaking to the Austin City Council. You can see and hear Don in the CAEST video archives at <http://www.endofshock.com/videopage.htm>.

Another beautiful soul, Evelyn Scogin, was honored at the Ice Cream Social, along with her sister, Kathy Scogin, who has become a great activist in our effort to abolish electroshock. Evelyn was electroshocked 34 times at Seton Shoal Creek between September 2005 and June 2006. As is common, Evelyn suffered serious memory loss. At one of our protest rallies at Seton Shoal Creek, Kathy said of her sister, "As a result of electroshock, my sister is now unable to work and is currently on disability. Seton Shoal Creek Hospital has stolen our lives. They have got to stop using electroshock on people." At the Ice Cream Social, Evelyn told the deeply

moved crowd about how she was not given authentic informed consent when she agreed to be electroshocked.

A very special moment was the entry of shock survivor poet and activist, Mimi Greenberg, who has been featured on Austin access television in interviews and in protest rallies at Seton Shoal Creek. The day of our celebration also happened to be Mimi's 80th birthday and she radiated pure love as she was greeted and honored by one of her own heroes, Leonard Roy Frank, and the crowd joyfully sang "Happy Birthday to Mimi!" John Breeding also read one of Mimi's poems about her electroshock nightmare, called "Don't Close That Door Yet." The poem can be read, along with a piece by Kathy Scogin in the summary of the November 1, 2006, CAEST protest rally at Seton Shoal Creek Hospital. (<http://www.endofshock.com/Summary%20of%202011-1-06%20CAEST%20Electroshock%20Protest%20Rally%20at%20Seton%20Shoal%20Creek%20Hospital.doc>)

The headliner for the event was, of course, the one and only Roky Erickson, psychedelic rock n' roll pioneer extraordinaire. Just prior to his performance, his mother, Evelyn was honored and acknowledged for her devoted lifelong commitment to her five sons. Sumner Erickson played his moving song, "It Burns My Eyes" as shock survivors and activists joined him onstage. On the steps in front of the stage, a group of young people from "Families who Rock" held signs celebrating lyrics from Sumner's song, which has a refrain that "you are the...*luckiest, smartest, brightest, most beautiful*, etc...person in the world." A glorious experience.

Roky himself has a lot to celebrate. Not only is he in the midst of perhaps the greatest rock n' roll comeback ever. Not only is he completely free of all drug use, including all psychotropic drugs. Not only has his health continued to improve dramatically, but as of Feb. 23, 2007 the guardianship of his brother Sumner, set up in June 2001, has been dissolved. Roky is back, a free agent and the rock n' roll muse he was born to be.

(<http://www.harpmagazine.com/news/detail.cfm?article=10959&SearchWord=roky%20erickson>)

About electroshock, Erickson said: "I wish I hadn't had it and it didn't help me." His performance at the concert was absolutely awesome. Here is what HARP magazine had to say:

... at the Roky Erickson Ice Cream Social, we were treated to a solo acoustic set by Mogwai's Stuart Braithwaite, a show (and a personal story of institutional psychiatric hell) by Michelle Shocked, and a hot performance by Spoon before Roky and his band the Explosives took the stage to thunderous applause and shout of "We love you, Roky!" They crushed it—hard. Roky looked completely in his element, thriving on the reaction to set closer "You're Gonna Miss Me" and the encore "I Walked With a Zombie."

(<http://www.harpmagazine.com/news/detail.cfm?article=10999&SearchWord=roky%20erickson>)

The 5th Annual Roky Erickson Ice cream Social celebrating Electroshock Survivors was a day to remember, a celebration of life and a call to end the false enchantment causing people to believe, without any real evidence, that problems in living are caused by a brain disease. From this, then, it somehow becomes acceptable to call people names like "schizophrenic" and it somehow

becomes necessary forcibly or otherwise “treat” people like Roky Erickson and Townes Van Zandt and Leonard Frank and Jim Franklin and Michelle Shocked with brain-damaging drugs and electroshock. Think about what you see in these five inspiring individuals—and then examine whatever conditioning remains in your head about such ideas as schizophrenia and mental illness. You may never think that way again. Hang out around performers like this and you will be greatly aided in the ongoing life task of never going back to sleep. Perhaps these words from writer Antonin Artaud (1896-1948), quoted in Leonard’s *Random House Webster’s Quotationary* will also help: “There are circumstances which have to do with simple human honor. No matter the risk. To resist and not surrender.”

John Breeding, PhD

Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas (CAEST)

www.endofshock.com