

EVERYTHING IS PERFECTLY TERRIBLE.

A CONVERSATION WITH THUNDERCAT



PHOTOS + WORDS BY:

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Thundercat and I were meant to chat over a few games of Ms. Pacman. But holding court at Blipsy's Barcade didn't smack of quite the genius I first thought it might. Stephen Bruner, also known as bass phenomenon Thundercat, is a notorious videogame (and videogame music) lover with a cartoon moniker born of the same era as that lovable yellow pie chart. In arranging our rendezvous I thought the pairing would be an inspired animated union, perhaps the beginning of recurring fireside chats with the Misses and me. Unfortunately, I forgot to account for one factor: my old friend is now famous, and does famous guy things like attend sea-faring celebrations for the release of his collaborator/friend/label owner Flying Lotus' newest record, the very same day as our would-be hangout. My ship did not come in. However, a text with an image of a 3-armed Stephen donning a sailor's cap and holding the same number of red Dixie cups against the backdrop of deep blue waves did. Stephen is Big Time now, lest I forget, this was my reminder. There I sat, just Ms.Pac and me... but she would be gone soon too, chasing after some edibles. Stephen has an imagination that stretches to depths some folks just can't fathom. Check out his twitter feed on any given day and bear witness. But where his star shines most bright is when that same imagination is funneled and focused through his music, via his voice and any one of his magical basses. His silliness congeals into a vulnerability, and the listener is left with something passionate and raw. One can't help but wonder if Thundercat's persona masks this deep-rooted capacity for feeling. What's sure is that music is his vehicle for sharing this passion with the rest of us. For all his shenanigans, Stephen keeps busy. Currently, he's juggling the completion of his 3rd full-length album and an innumerable amount of features working with other talented musicians in just about every genre. But the Cat is no stranger to a full workload, having toured with Suicidal Tendencies from age 15 until just recently; he's never not working, or moving. Just back from a show with Erykah Badu in Japan and currently on tour with Flying Lotus across the US, we eventually made time to catch up with each other over facetime. We managed to cover topics ranging from porn to Miles Davis to music videos to setting a trend in fine millinery. But first porn.



So you went to school with Havana Ginger... and decided to put her in your music video for "Walking"?

She's the most amazing porn star. She's done everything. Like literally everything. I didn't think she would do it.

She'll do anal on camera and you didn't think she'd walk down a street in your video?

I asked her to be in the video and she was like hell yea. I found a bunch of my friends on facebook back when facebook was super poppin'. And it was the elephant in the room.

'So...porn! yea...so.... Uh, I play bass...yea....tour!...'

I was kind of shy. I didn't want to exploit our friendship. It was also based on me explaining the premise of the video, 'it's kind of like you're my girlfriend and *everything is perfectly terrible*. And we're wearing matching shirts'. And she told me I was really corny. And I was like 'aww. I'm a grown man, I have uh... aspirations.' I didn't know what to say.

I really loved the video that Hiro Murai did for Lotus' "Never Catch Me ft. Kendrick Lamar". You have a brief cameo in that. As far as the track, your solo has the presence of another vocalist. What was the creation of that like?

That video's a tear-jerker a bit. That's how intensely we wrote the music, too. That song... sometimes between me and Lotus some things will start at different points, it may start with drums, sometimes you may hear me playing a melody or something, but with this song he started the beat and I started playing on it. As I was soloing he was like "oh that's perfect". Even before Kendrick got on it, it was like, that was the track. So when Kendrick got on it, seeing as how Lotus has been working with Kendrick a bit, and I've been working with Kendrick a bit, it fit like a puzzle. He started



Check this out. I show Stephen an advertisement for a Halloween costume that consists of what looks to be the hat from a Canadian Mouty outfit, above it the title "Because I'm Happy". We both get a good laugh over the simplicity of this merchandising scheme, and Stephen adjusts his camera to show me the full view of his own hat before saying:

This is the hat that started it all. Noa, you know, I took Erykah to the place that makes those. I would take all my friends there. Gunner (Fox of Schaeffer's Garment Hotel) says people will walk in and ask for my hat. When the first album came out I sat in the shop with him. He says 'do you mind if I do my own thing?' And I was like 'I don't really care. I want to see exactly what you think of me.' I was actually playing bass and he literally made my hat until maybe 4 o'clock in the morning and I just sat with him I was knocked out. I remember I woke up and it was done and he says, 'here you go man'. And he gave me this hat and I tripped out. Ever since then it's become this whole thing. Every last person who's seen the hat... like Wiz (Khalifa), I took Wiz to him. He told me this one story of Kanye walking in and asking for a hat that's like this, and Gunner was like 'oh you mean like Thundercat's' and he goes 'I'm like above that, I'm like a bigger artist'. He was so floored by how stupid that was that he just trolled Kanye the whole time he was there and didn't make him a hat. I take it more like flattery, and at the same time I didn't start shit, I just reminded people of stuff.

You came up playing jazz so I figured you'd appreciate this. Pannonica de Koenigswarter was a patron of jazz musicians in NY in the fifties. She kept a notebook and recorded the 3 wishes of many of her musician friends, the greats of the era. If you could have 3 wishes what would they be?

I wish this would hurry up and end, in regards to whatever is supposed to be coming in life, just get that in motion. I wish my dick got as big as the Eiffel tower so I can ... I mean I wouldn't know what to do... I'd just point it towards space, and there's no oxygen in space so maybe it would be like a suction cup. *making buzzing laser sound* Put your penis in space. I wish my intestines would get smaller so I could eat a lot more bullshit.

How does that make sense?

Pigeons, they have small intestines, so they can eat like anything, like pocket knives and rocks. And then the 4th one would be...

There's no 4, it's supposed to be 3 wishes ...

(Completely ignoring me): The 4th one would be for them to put the best technology out they have at the time, stop fucking around, you know? Just everything, just stop bullshitting, stop hiding from each other... haha. Like, every last one of us is going to die. Why are we hiding from each other? It's ridiculous.

All excellent choices. Let me show you Miles Davis' response in Pannonica's notebook.

(While I look for the page, Stephen is having a conversation with himself and making an esoteric jazz joke): Miles is like 'get the fuck out my face, I want Tony Williams'. 'That's not really an answer' 'I want Tony' 'You mean as a drummer?' 'I want Tony!' haha

Got it. Here, it's better if you read it.

And Stephen reads Miles' 1 wish response that says, "To be white." That is the perfect one. Miles wins.

You have some very talented siblings. Do you ever think you'll put together a Bruner brothers band?

Hell no. I've always been a firm believer that family and business are not always the best things. I just didn't grow up playing in a family band like that. We played together in different scenarios but it wasn't like 'oh, we always have to play together'. It was kind of like 'make your own path' a bit. I always have this conversation with a lot of my friends who actually have siblings that they play music with like HAIM or KING and I would talk to them, and I would ask them about the dynamic of working with your family so closely on a consistent basis. And they would say 'it's a lot of work but it's really cool. At the end of the day it's really cool.' I've been in different scenarios with my brothers; I just don't think that's the final answer. The final answer is not 'Bruner Brothers'. That's what everybody wants us to do because we all play instruments.

You've been playing professionally from such a young age. What artists would you say have taken you under their wings and which artists are you taking under your wing?

Stanley Clarke has definitely taken me under his wing a bit. Stanley was mentoring me and giving me an understanding of what it means to be a bass player and be in front. When I would play my music for him he would be very, very critical of it. But it was in a manner in which was very uplifting. He would say "You're not a bass player's bass player. You're not a guy that's making a bass album. You remind me of a guy like a Quincy Jones that would make music that you could put anywhere." And I was like 'wow'.



Lotus is chiming in on the conversation in the background. And Stephen says:

Don't do what?

Lotus: Stanley gives you advice, don't do what Stanley says.

We all laugh, but I'm not really sure why.

Naw just, Erykah gives me advice, gives me insight on how not to take offense to stuff, she would try to calm me down when I would get on my brother haha. And of course Lotus, I'm standing right in front of him. It's awkward...*in a funny voice* and this one time I was crying and Lotus held me. There's a few people I've been, I don't want to say mentoring, but I want to kind of say watching and add to their growth, groups like *The Internet*.

Your younger brother plays with them doesn't he?

Yea, I try and make myself available to them musically. Cause everyone is like this fish out of water right now.

What about the twins I met at your house? I liked their music, KING was it?

Ohshit, yea they're twins. Fraternal? Paternal? Shit, I forgot they're twins. Yea Mary Lou Laterno Twins. Fucking Batman twins. They're more like peers to me.

You had a viral sensation recently with the Eric André directed "Tron Song" video you put out. How do you feel about the response it's been generating?

It's been pretty funny. I'm happy. Everybody gets it. They get how stupid it is. But I didn't how they were going to take it. It's pretty absurd humor. I always gauge stuff off my family. At

first, my mom didn't complain about the video at all. Other than me shooting myself in the face at the beginning, she thought it was funny. You do something and go 'oh crap, do I really want people to see that side of me?' I guess you just have to do it. Wholehearted stupid. Wholehearted idiocracy. That's just how it really works, that's just really how I am. Shot myself in the dick 9 times.

We rounded out the chat sending love to our respective families, and each of us had to go. But no conversation with Stephen is ever complete without a non sequitur sign-off.

I'll probably facetime you drunk tonight.

Perfect. Perfectly Terrible.

