

By Johnny Walker (Black)

## Rock Poets Society

**T**ime has not been kind to the rock poet. In a musical world where audience consciousness is formed by the quick-cut mentality of MTV, is the rock poet a hopeless anachronism?

Two new releases, *Gung Ho* by Patti Smith (Arista), and *Ecstasy* by Lou Reed (Reprise), provide a mixed answer to that question.

First, the good news. *Gung Ho* is a stunning return to form by the original punk poetess, after years of substandard work. After the deaths of her husband, Fred "Sonic" Smith of MC5 fame, her friend and ex-lover, photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, and her brother Todd, Smith's 1996 *Gone Again* and 1998 *Peace and Noise* were mortality-obsessed, as the singer blurred the lines between private and public selves. But while *Gung Ho's* cover features a photo of her recently deceased father, the album is more a celebration than a wake.

*Gung Ho* finds Smith taking on the role of social commentator, like her late mentor Allen Ginsberg. On the rockin' single "Glitter In Their Eyes," she scathingly critiques a society that has so easily fallen back into the "greed is good" ethos of the '80s. And in "Strange Messengers," Smith throws away the lyric sheet to go off on an extended improvisation, taking on the persona of a deceased black slave excoriating today's nihilistic street youth. *Gung Ho* shows Patti Smith in peak form.

Sadly, the same cannot be said for Lou Reed's ironically named *Ecstasy*. Reed has become so enveloped in himself, what with sanitized PBS documentaries, published collections of lyrics (the new *Pass Thru Fire*) and the like, that he is unable to do anything except regurgitate past versions of himself. *Ecstasy* is proof that, if you're gonna be a poet, it's best to have something to say. Only on the epic, free-form poem

"Like A Possum" do

we get any glimpse of the man who penned classics like "Heroin" and "Sister Ray." •

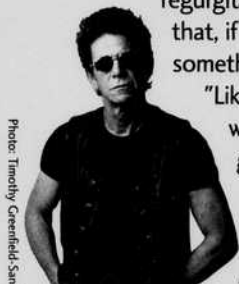


Photo: Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

Reed: Time to revitalize?



Patti Smith's father is pictured on the cover of her new CD *Gung Ho*.

For links to Patti Smith and Lou Reed fan clubs, label affiliations, chat groups, music reviews and more, log on to [www.steamtunnels.net](http://www.steamtunnels.net)

## Cheap Digital Cameras

### Three new models for under \$100

By Nick Montfort

**T**he new hobby of digital photography used to be expensive, but that's changed. A digital camera can be acquired for one picture of Ben Franklin, bringing them to budget-conscious artists.

Even the best of these ultra-low-cost cameras takes noticeably pixilated photos. (Not "grainy" photos; grain is a property of film.) If super-sharp reality capture is your aim, cheap digital photography may disappoint. But if you're experimenting with digital art, or just want casual snapshots, the under-\$100 digital cameras are for you.



Agfa ePhoto Smile

There are three cameras available for under \$100. The ixla **Photo Easy** hooks to USB or serial lines, stores 30 photos, but lacks an LCD display to view the pictures you've taken. A Mac version of the camera is in the works. The **Mustek VDC-3500**, with only a serial port, stores 8 photos. At lower resolution, 26 images can be stored. Finally, the **Agfa ePhoto Smile** can hold 16 photos and has a serial interface, but has been reported to burn through batteries.

At an even lower price, Polaroid offers the **PhotoMax Fun Digital 320 Creative Kit** for about \$60. Sans an LCD display, the camera has 320x240 resolution and 2MB of memory to keep about 15 images. Occasionally, great media systems are tucked away in the toy aisles, as when Fisher Price offered the incredible Pixelvision PXL-2000 video camera a few years ago. Now kiddies are being sold the flashless **JamCam**, which retails for about \$80, but requires long exposures to acquire its 640x480 images. Only steady hands (or a tripod) and bright outdoor lighting can bring decent results.

Besides the Jam Cam, there's **Matell Media's** camera (variously branded Barbie, World Wrestling Federation, and Nick Click) which can be had for about \$60. Polaroid plans to roll out a just-under-\$100 **I-Zone Pocket Combination Camera** later this year. This one will sell in other retail outlets as well as toy stores. •

If you're looking to experiment, or just want casual snapshots to serve as memorabilia, the under-\$100 digital cameras are for you.

For the complete look at cheap digital cameras, and more of Nick Montfort's articles on technology tools and trends, log on to [www.steamtunnels.net](http://www.steamtunnels.net)

## Soyouwanna... Avoid a ticket? Here's the inside scoop.

**N**othing can ruin your day like getting a traffic ticket. But if you take our advice, you'll see it's pretty easy to talk your way out of one. Avoiding a traffic ticket involves two things: not getting caught in the first place, and knowing what to do if you do.

The trick is not to draw attention to yourself. Dirty cars, bizarre bumper stickers, loud music and red cars all attract attention; make your car look as bland as possible. It also helps to know the ticket quota system in your neighborhood. It's true: traffic cops have a quota each month. The beginning of the month and the end of the month tend to be the heaviest ticket-doling times.

And find out from friends where they have gotten hit with tickets, and be careful around those streets. And if you're traveling, there's an online source that you must check out, [www.speedtrap.com](http://www.speedtrap.com), a state-by-state guide to speed traps, updated daily.

If you do get pulled over, two things help: Crying and begging. DON'T say that you or your passenger is sick (too much acting). A surprisingly effective story is "I really need to use a restroom. Could you please follow me to the nearest rest stop?" Officers will occasionally understand. If the officer asks you any questions ("Do you know how fast you were going?"), always play



dumb. A cop would rather give a ticket to a smart person who knowingly broke a rule than to a moron who made a mistake.

NEVER be a wise guy. Asking for the cop's badge number, trying to bribe him, asking to see the radar gun, trying to act like a big shot—anything that puts the cop on the defensive—is bad news. If you do get a ticket, fight it in court.

Not that we encourage you to speed, of course... •

For complete details on avoiding a traffic ticket, log on to [www.steamtunnels.net](http://www.steamtunnels.net). For how-to articles on all sorts of cool stuff, visit [www.soyouwanna.com](http://www.soyouwanna.com).