

Today's crossword solution

G	A	F	F	A	H	E	A	D	C	R	U	Z
O	L	E	O	S	A	T	I	E	L	I	N	E
L	I	D	O	T	R	A	D	E	W	I	N	D
F	I	S	T	F	U	L	S	O	N	S	E	T
S	A	T	E	S	U	R	G	E	R	Y		
S	E	T	T	L	E	M	E	N	T	S		
A	R	I	E	L	V	I	E	T	T	A	D	
L	I	M	P	T	R	O	T	S	B	E	L	A
T	E	E	R	I	K	M	I	R	T	H		
M	A	N	A	T	E	E	A	I	R			
A	B	O	D	E	P	I	N	E	C	O	N	E
U	N	D	E	R	S	T	A	N	D	L	I	O
D	E	E	P	T	E	P	E	E	E	L	M	O
E	R	S	T	S	T	A	R	R	D	Y	E	S

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Rock writer changes beats

Richard Meltzer discusses his new book and long-time efforts of moving away from writing about rock 'n' roll

By Ryan Nyburg
Senior Pulse Reporter

Often considered the first rock critic in America, Richard Meltzer has been publishing books, articles and reviews for over thirty years. His new book, "Autumn Rhythm," which was released this month, is a collection of essays and poems dealing with aging, death and mortality. Meltzer will be signing copies at the University Bookstore on Oct. 23.

Emerald: How old are you now?
Richard Meltzer: I'm 58.

Emerald: You've been somewhat typecast as a "rock writer," yet your new book deals with other subjects. Is rock writing something you're trying to move away from?

RM: I've been trying to move away from it since 1975. How well have I done? My last book was a collection of rock pieces, that kind of took it back in the casting. But basically I got sick of writing about rock 'n' roll after I had written nearly a thousand reviews and pieces. How much more do you have to say after that? And that was almost thirty years ago.

Emerald: What kind of music do you listen to now?

RM: I listen to everything. I don't listen to very much that's current, because I don't now what's current. I listen to 1960s things, I listen to jazz, I listen to the blues, but I can only name you three or four current bands. I know Guided By Voices because I opened for them a couple times, doing readings. If not for that, I probably wouldn't know them.

Emerald: I've heard that you do other readings and vocal work.

RM: I'm currently the vocalist for a band called Smegma, which is the oldest band in Portland. They started out in Pasadena in 1972, something like that, and have been here since 1976. They do "improvised noise," you know, just free music: start, look at each other and get somewhere. About five or six years ago they asked me if I would like to be the vocalist, by which they didn't mean they wanted me to sing, but they want the sound of the human voice doing whatever I felt like using it for. So I usually read or I shout and if I get very drunk I try to sing. I do it sitting down.

Emerald: You've lived all over the country, New York City, Los Angeles. Why did you settle on Portland?

RM: I started out in New York and I was there 'til I was 30 and then I made the mistake of moving to LA. I'd been there a couple times as part of these rock-writer junkets. And

what you get to see under circumstances like that is not the real place. When I felt I had to get out of New York I moved to Los Angeles and quickly realized it was the cesspool of the universe. And I had this girlfriend who was an actress and she wouldn't leave. So years and years of staying there for that reason, I just came to hate my life. Los Angeles is not even a place — not even a bad place. It doesn't even stick to the planet. And so I had to move, and someone I knew told me that Portland and Seattle had once been similar places, but Seattle became something like a cross between New York and Los Angeles; it got big and crowded and rich. So he said, "go to Portland." So sight unseen I committed to moving here about nine years ago. I came up here and the sky was black, it was freezing and wet and I thought "this is for me." It's the first place I've ever lived where I feel like a citizen. I mean in New York I was branded anti-intellectual, whatever that means. Then when I moved to Los Angeles, and without missing a beat, I was branded an intellectual, which was even worse. Like being a leper. Here I feel like just anybody else.

Emerald: What do you feel has improved in your writing?

RM: It's like I don't waste time — I try to cut to the chase. I went through a period in the 1970s when I liked to piss off editors. I liked to write intentional run-on sentences and bad grammar and get back at my fourth grade teacher or something like that. I used to like to make a mess. I don't feel like I make such a mess now. It's gotten that more of the things I write, even things on assignment, are things that I want to write. It used to be that too many of the assignments I accepted were reviews of albums I didn't care about, or profiles of musicians I didn't care about. Half of what I was doing was fighting against the gig. These days, what I write for publications, for the gig itself, is closer to what I want to be writing.

Emerald: Do you feel it's more difficult to get published now than it was 30 years ago?

RM: As far as I know I'm the only person who was writing for the underground press in the very beginning who is still writing for the dregs of what's left. It's completely gone. I didn't count my lucky stars when I started, but it gave me an opportunity to get my chops. They would publish anything because they weren't really paying for it. I learned how to write by doing it every day of the week for all these years. But now there are no outlets at all; it's awful. All the old alternative papers are now just shoppers. People pick them up to look at the ads.

Emerald: In your book you have a whole diatribe against computer tech-

nology and the Internet. Do you think that this is a losing battle or do you think people will turn away from it?

RM: I think it's a losing battle. But you know, when the 1960s happened as such, there really was no preview, it just happened. So wouldn't it be nice to think that could happen again. You know, 100,000 kids just stop being obedient to it. But it's not going to happen; it's just gotten so effective at sucking people in. I mean the way that MTV and everything that followed became the means to prevent kids from turning off their televisions. I think the computer thing is already effectively just as addictive.

Emerald: What kind of articles do you do now?

RM: I had two separate employments doing "rock fictions." They were concert blurbs for bands I didn't know. I first did it for the San Diego Reader then for the Seattle Weekly. But then the music editor got fired a couple of months ago and they dumped me. I enjoyed doing that for awhile, but I realized that I didn't even have fictional ideas about rock anymore. It was hard to come up with even an imaginary rock 'n' roll that was any fun. I would do it again because it would keep my fiction chops active.

Emerald: You had a piece appear a few years ago in "The Rolling Stone Book of the Beats." How did the beat movement influence your work?

RM: Well, they were a late influence. I never read any of those people until I was almost 40. I thought there was some kinship there between my writing and theirs once I finally read them. I always liked the ideas of the Beats and their stories. But I would say that Jack Kerouac and also William Faulkner were the last people to have an influence on my writing because it was pretty formed by the time I was 40.

Emerald: What influences were there before that?

RM: Well it's interesting, I realized that the first influence on my writing was Muhammad Ali, because it was all exclamation points. I was looking through a book of writings on Ali and they had transcripts of interviews with him. I realized immediately that that's why I became a writer. Just that absolute bombast of expression. I would say that another influence on me was Jim Morrison. I just wrote a piece about him because I needed the money. But I do remember when that stuff mattered to me. Mainly my earliest influences were these philosophers who were just unreadable. In my first book, "The Aesthetics of Rock," I had no idea what a sentence was. I didn't really read for pleasure until I was well into my 30s, so I really didn't know what my options were. I just kinda winged it.

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