

been happy never writing a song.... But there was sort of a tacit assumption seven years ago that the next record would have to be all original.

FS: Assumption? By you? The band members? [Pink Martini manager] John [Brodie]?

TL: Yeah...I don't agree with it necessarily, but for us to get any sort of attention by *Rolling*

FS: Was there one track that particularly vexed you?

TL: All of them. All of them were so confusing...[but] I would say that at the height of it, "U Plavu Zoru," the song in Croatian, was definitely the most vexing. At one point we had like four trombones coming in...I literally had no idea what I was doing. I was so confused and so lost and had no idea how I was

the rest of the song....

[Then] it was days and days of different combinations, and eventually it came down to a new piano introduction, a full string section, a harp, brand new percussion and eventually a chorus of 75. It was frankly torturous.

FS: What's the story behind the album title and cover picture?

TL: [The title is] based on an ad for Hunt's Ketchup. The cover photograph is my father.

FS: Is that you he's throwing up in the air?

TL: It is.

FS: How old were you?

TL: It was just last year. [He laughs.] I must have been 1 or less than 1, like 6 months maybe. I found it going through old family photographs. I had no idea what to use for the cover. Here's the original ad. [He opens an old *Life* magazine to an advertisement depicting a tomato dangling from a vine.] It's really sort of sinister, don't you think?

FS: [Reading the ad copy] "Die to become the tomato that people will never forget." Eww.



Lauderdale considered running for mayor last year



Lauderdale rehearses with Pink Martini lead vocalist China Forbes in his downtown loft

Stone or the pop audience, we couldn't be a cover band. It certainly wasn't my instinct, so I can't even defend it.... At times it was lots of fun. It was fun to have all of these drag queens from New York City in town for a week scandalizing the West Hills matrons, and then simultaneously working on a song during the daytime on the deck of Bluehour.... It was really about building a community through songwriting.

FS: So many of these songs are about love....

TL: Isn't that the only thing there is in the end? I think we all want love, we all want to feel understood, we all want to feel like we understand. We all hope for love, realize that there's so much of it that's fleeting, so much of it that's accidental.... And it's the thing which continually makes us get up in the morning. Is there anything besides love?

FS: That would make sense if you were writing an album of traditional love songs, but so many of them are about love lost.

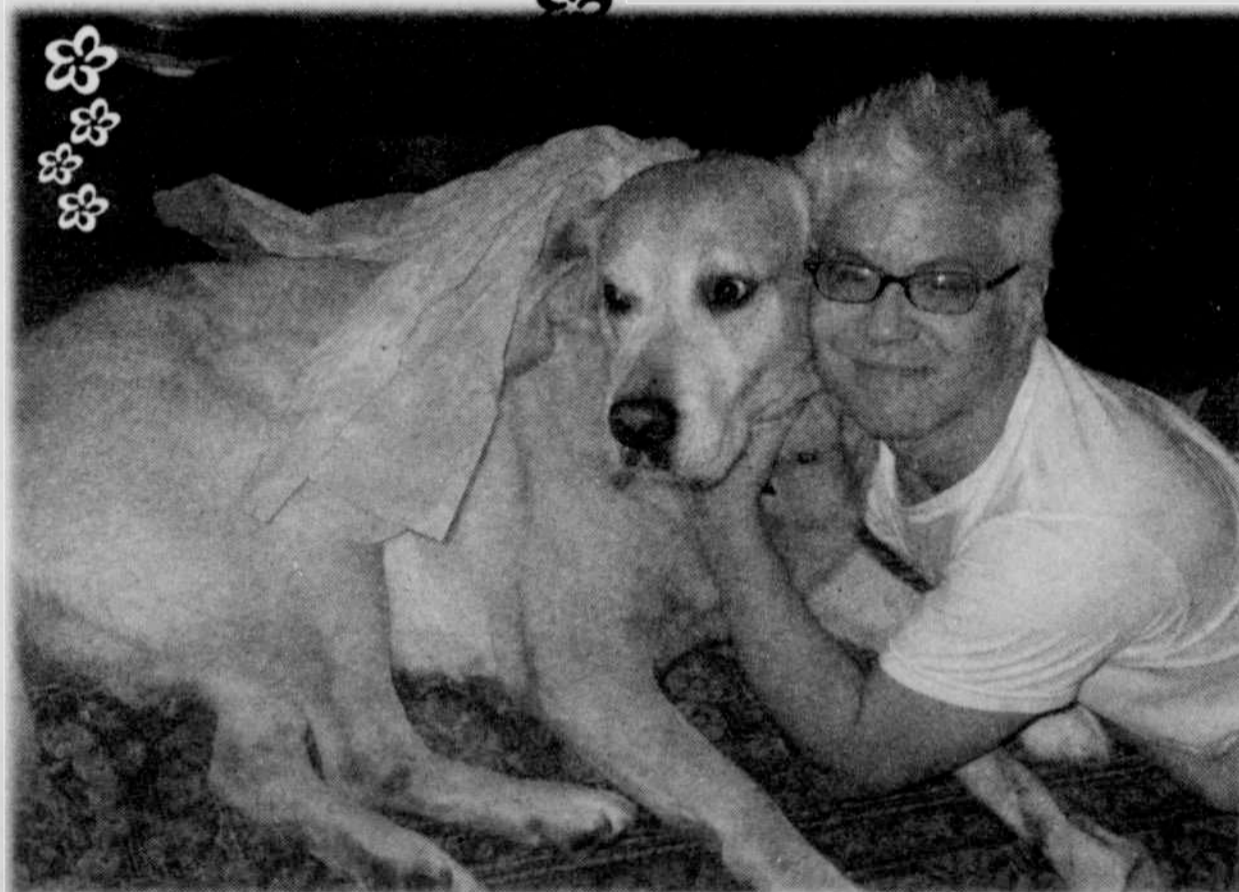
TL: Really?

FS: Yes, somebody leaving or the great love of my life who left me.

TL: I think it's not really about love going bad as this constant negotiation of the ongoing optimism and hope despite sad experiences, which I think everybody can relate to. Love is a constant series of negotiations, don't you think?

FS: Yes, I do.

TL: I started working on the record when I started going out with a boy named Larry. I paid so much attention to the record, and I didn't pay nearly enough attention to Larry. What I learned, I think, in the process of this record in a really sort of unpleasant and painful way—and sad way—is that when you have love, it is imperative that you take such good, amazing, incredible care of it, because if you don't, you're sunk. And it's disrespectful. I think I did not take good care of the love that he gave. As a result, at the end of the record I wasn't with him.



Pink Martini's independent label, Heinz Records, is named after Lauderdale's attention-hungry dog

going to get out of it. The challenge is to always approach it innocently, but the thing is that at a certain point I was far from innocent, and I was thinking way too much and not listening to my gut. I had lost sight of my gut instinct.

FS: Take us through the creative process.

TL: Well, with "Una Notte a Napoli," it started with a melody that [lead vocalist] China [Forbes] had kind of hummed in an airport one day. It started with this. [He plays a recording of the introduction.] We sent it to Alba Clemente, who was married to Francesco Clemente, the great painter. And so she and a friend came up with a chorus. She then came out to Portland for a crazy week of debauchery down at Dante's, which included [New York drag queen] Joey Arias giving blow jobs on the stage. It was absolutely mania. But during the day, on the deck of Bluehour, we sat and wrote

TL: The melody [for the title track] came first and then the lyrics came second ["Hang on, hang on to the vine/Stay on, soon you'll be divine"] and it was sort of a series of negotiations.... It literally took a year.... In terms of songwriting, instead of just churning something out, we really tried to be as deliberate as possible and craft things, which really takes time and is difficult.... I think that all the future records are not going to take as much time. Anything would be easier than this second record. Whether it's creating more records or running for office, or whatever it is, it's just going to be much easier.

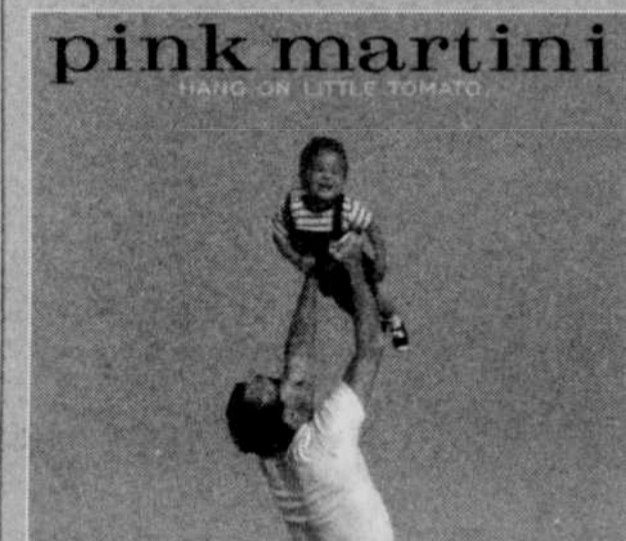
FS: Let's talk about things other than the band. Ten years ago, you wrote a gossip column for *Just Out* under the pseudonym of....

TL: Miss Betsy Hunt.

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Worth the Wait

Pink Martini's second album soars



In the music business, seven years is a lifetime; an act can come and go. And yet, Pink Martini's *Hang on Little Tomato* is so good that the seven-year wait between albums is forgotten—and certainly forgiven.

With an infectious blend of international musical styles and lyrics in English, Italian, Spanish, French, Japanese and Croatian, *Tomato* far surpasses 1997's *Symphonique*, a witty confection of cover tunes that set up the band as an international sensation, with its music appearing in films, television shows and commercials.

Of the 14 songs on the sophomore release, nine were written by bandleader Thomas Lauderdale with an international cast of collaborators, including friends as well as strangers he approached who became friends. For instance, "Una Notte a Napoli" was written with Alba Clemente, an Italian stage and television star in the 1970s, and Johnny Dynell, one of the founders of New York's underground nightclub Jackie 60. And in a reworking of the haunting Japanese "Kikuchiyo to Mohshimasu," Lauderdale collaborated with Hiroshi Wada, the slide guitarist whose group originally recorded and released the song 40 years ago.

Supplying the lead vocals is China Forbes, whose sultry, lyrical voice is perfect for these torch songs of unrequited love and life passed by. (Incidentally, she is working on her own song set now and certainly has the talent and range to exceed Norah Jones.)

There's a sprightly optimism to this album that comes through in the lyrics (the opening number is "Let's Never Stop Falling in Love") and certainly in the melodies, which get your body swaying and your feet moving. It's as if Lauderdale is saying yes, life is bittersweet, but that's no reason not to enjoy it.

Hang on Little Tomato marks Lauderdale's debut as a songwriter and his coming of age as an artist. It represents a clear vision and a triumph over his creative struggles. While my own greed calls for more, more, more, I'd happily wait another seven years for another outstanding album like this one.

—FS