

FOREWORD

Travis Edward Pike's Odd Tales and Wonders: 1964-1974 a Decade of Performance is not a casualty story of a failed entertainer, shunned by the music record business. Nor is Pike's performance world a bitter ramble of management rip offs, liquor and drug addiction of the sort cited far too often in musician's memoirs. To read Pike's account of what he now calls his "Act One" is to discover a man whose performance career was built on talent, principles and loyalty.

When the January 26, 1968 issue of *Newsweek* proclaimed that the Boston Sound is "what's happening" in the music business, reporter Jim Morse in the *Herald Traveler* speculated, "The next combo to be snapped up by a big label will be Travis Pike's Tea Party. It took eight months to put this outfit together and six months of rehearsals to learn the 80 original songs the group performs." The Beacon Street Union, Orpheus, and the Ultimate Spinach made the Boston Sound roster, but Pike's Tea Party never did and to understand why, I think I'll have to start at the very beginning.

In Boston, Massachusetts, on August 2, 1944, Travis Edward Pike was "born with a veil," in his case, en-caul, literally born inside the embryonic sac, thus neither born nor unborn, or mystically speaking, neither entirely of this world or the other. It is widely believed that people so born are

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destined for great things. His parents claim he was named Travis for one of his father's WWII buddies, and Edward, for his mother's cousin who was killed in the attack on Pearl Harbor. Pike smiles. He suggests he may have been born with his name predetermined, mystically conveyed to his parents who rationalized it as reported above. "'Travis' means 'of the crossroads' and 'Edward' means guardian," he says. "Hence, my name means 'guardian of the crossroads,' the sentry between the worlds." He named his house "Otherworld Cottage" and its motto is "The world without is not the world within." I should mention that some of his songs and rhymes are delightfully spooky, too.

A straight "A" student in grammar school, Pike was admitted to prestigious Boston Latin School in 1956, but when his family moved from Roxbury to Newton Center, he was enrolled in the Newton School System. By the time he graduated from High School, he had already performed in a rock band, written a number of short stories, the first draft of a screenplay for a feature length cartoon (complete with songs and character sketches), and done animation for National Sales campaigns for Hasbro Toys, Duncan Yoyo, Milton Bradley and Parker Brothers Games. But in 1963, after losing his car, license and truck driver job, with no clear future in sight, Pike joined the Navy.

He had a facility for language, so Pike was assigned a post in Germany, spending his off-duty hours in the picturesque Kleinstadt of Lütjenberg. When the locals learned he used to sing rock 'n' roll, he was promptly introduced to the bands in the dance bars. The crowds loved

him and if he sang with a band, their stock went up, too. When club owners started asking to be introduced to the American rock star, “Teddy, die Twistsensation aus USA” was born.

Still in the U.S. Navy, Pike could only schedule performances when he was off-duty, but that didn’t dissuade club owners. In fact, he became so popular that one weekend he was accidentally booked into two different clubs, several miles apart. Both clubs, rather than lose him, arranged to have him driven back and forth between them so he could do his shows at both! After that wild night, it was decided that “The Teddy” should have a band of his own.

In May, 1964 with Pike fronting for the International Show Band, The Five Beats, his manager reported interest from Polydor and Phillips Records. Pike couldn’t sign a recording contract without permission from the Navy. Before a waiver could be processed, an automobile accident ended the “Twistsensation” part of his career and sent him stateside for reconstructive surgery.

During his recuperation, Red Cross volunteers wheeled him from ward to ward to entertain the wounded back from Vietnam, which, incidentally, prepared him for his later career as a coffeehouse singer and storyteller.

Returned to civilian life, Pike managed a small recording studio in Jamaica Plain during the day and played coffeehouses at night. The studio was small, but state-of-the-art. Ray Fournier, a blind recording engineer from Nashville, in Boston to record a live show by a country star performing at one of Boston’s nightclubs, came by to try out

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the new mixing board and 4 track sound-on-sound facilities at the studio. Needing to record something to check out the equipment, he asked Pike to sing a few songs. Pike sang a half dozen of his original ballads, and while still in the recording booth, Ray called legendary Nashville music publishing company, Acuff-Rose, and told them about his discovery. When he got off the phone, he said he wanted to take Pike back to Nashville with him. They were looking for another Marty Robbins. Fournier still had to record the live shows, so Pike had a couple of days to think it over.

Pike told me what happened when Fournier returned. “I played him my parody of *Long Tall Texan*,” Pike says. “I called it *Short, Squat Bostonian*. In the song, my ten gallon hat looked ridiculous on the short, squat Bostonian trying to pretend he was a country-western artist. Ray laughed, gave me his card and said if I changed my mind, I knew how to reach him. We parted friends and I kept that card for years.”

In the July 30, 1967 edition of *The Boston Sunday Globe* in his Sound in the Round column titled “The Beat Goes On,” music journalist Ernie Santosuosso listed the Lovin’ Spoonful, the Siegel-Schwall shows by Richie Havens and a mention that “Travis Pike and the Boston Massacre will be introduced on a Mass. Bay Lines boat cruise that August. Pike, an American, fronted the ‘hottest band in Europe last year.’” In fact, it was a few years earlier, but who’s counting?

Pike’s band changed their name to Travis Pike’s Tea Party. They were featured in a short-lived TV series and shared high-profile club bookings with Moby Grape and

Spirit, but they were effectively “banned in Boston” when Boston’s radio station politics got in the way of record airplay and a relocation to Southern California was in order.

The book covers the group’s migration from Boston to West Covina. They knew the music and record industry had come to Hollywood and West Covina was only 30 minutes from Hollywood, which made it a lot closer than from Boston to New York City. At The Posh dance club in Pomona, they drew college crowds from CalPoly and Mt. SAC, but to land the gig, they had to agree to a 50-50 ratio of top 40 tunes to original tunes in their sets. Going from a headlining concert group to an everyday club band put a strain on the band members that ultimately led to their break up.

One thing that became obvious to me as I read the book, was Pike’s loyalty, the idea that integrity was more important than personal gain. I asked him, point blank, about one of the offers he had turned down. “A lot of the talented people who worked with me were ‘walking wounded,’” he said, “screwed over by life, by relationships or by the music industry. I suppose I was one, myself. So when I made a promise, I kept it, even if it meant turning my back on an apparent opportunity.”

Pike continued to get contract offers as a single act, but none were accepted. He explained, “I understood the power trips and temptations . . . no end of wannabees who would do anything to get a contract – not only willing, but eager to prove it. I was appalled. It was time to move on.”

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In what he calls Act Two, the period of his life from 1974 to the present, he did exactly that. He didn't abandon his music or his writing. He switched to writing for the movies, screenplays that featured his music, and fantasy-adventures that provided an outlet for his mystical explorations.

Read his book and listen to the soundtrack from the First Act of the life now being revealed by this multi-talented Hollywood multi-hyphenate. Discover his music and poetry, once heard live by thousands, preserved in memory and notebooks, and finally, for the first time, arranged and recorded for this generation in *Odd Tales and Wonders: Stories in Song* and *Odd Tales and Wonders: Stories in Rhyme*.

---Harvey Kubernik
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