



# CROSSED PATHS



## DESPERATION SQUAD AND THE AGE OF FORTUITISM



# KEVIN AUSMUS



*Crossed Paths: Desperation Squad and the Age of Fortuitism* by Kevin Ausmus

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#### *Front Cover*

- *top photo of Mr. P at the Wckr Spgt tribute show 2010 by Andy Whitson*
- *untitled painting by Bob Jones, 74 by 33 in., acrylic on found panel, 2014*
- *SX70 photo from Arts Building, 1984, photo by Art DiLion*
- *Panda Man photo by Dylan Skrab, manipulation by Kevin Ausmus*

#### *Back Cover*

- *SX70 photo of Mr. P at the PVA by Dave Alvin, 1986*

Photo of Courtney Love © Bob Gruen / [www.bobgruen.com](http://www.bobgruen.com)

*Layout and design by Mark Givens*

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# HE GREEN DOOR

In early 1986, Pat Bacich was hunting all over the San Gabriel Valley for a new concert venue that could showcase local bands as well as bring in an occasional big-name headliner. The Fandango bar was a long-time C&W dive that was headed towards oblivion, sharing a valuable piece of real estate across from the Montclair Plaza with a rundown and mostly vacant motel and a roller rink. A match was made.

Though Desperation Squad had played a gig there with The Flamethrowers and Rik L Rik in February, the "Grand Opening" of the Fandango in March featured L.A. glam band extraordinaire Poison and The Unforgiven who were at that moment recording their first LP for Elektra Records, **In October, the Fandango changed its name to the Green Door**, evoking visions of cheesy 70s porno, and for the next five years the Green Door in Montclair was ground zero for the Pomona Valley/Inland Empire music scene. It was an incredibly eclectic



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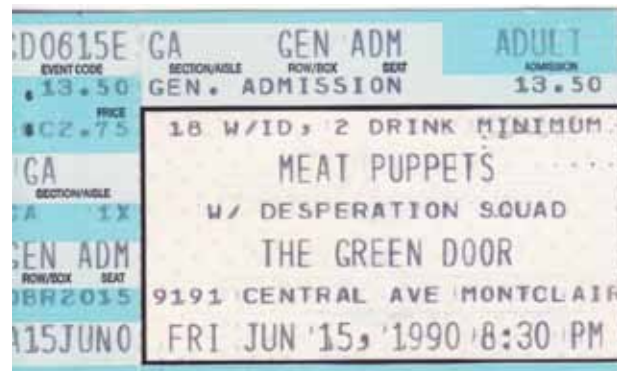
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place where rock legends (Bo Diddley, Blue Cheer), indie stalwarts (Camper Van Beethoven, They Might Be Giants) and regional up-and-comers (The Honky Tonk Angels, Rozzi Lane, Psych 201, Rude Boy) all mingled together in a wildly popular milieu that was vibrant, vital and enduring. Bacich had a knack for attracting viable headliners and a soft spot for breaking new bands.



Quite often a Green Door bill would feature four seemingly mismatched local acts that somehow fit. Before pay-to-play decimated the L.A. rock scene, Green Door was notable for loyal, entertainment-starved kids who would arrive early, leave late, and consume lots of alcohol. Desperation Squad was remarkable in that their sound was almost completely impervious to stereotyping - they weren't a roots band, a punk band or a metal band, yet their good-natured wackiness allowed them to get placed on any bill and fit in. They were equally at ease with Poets in Distress as



# THE GREEN DOOR



they were with The Flys, or The Minutemen, or Bad Religion. Very quickly, Desperation Squad became the Green Door's "fun" band, dazzling the crowds with dopey/intense songs like "I Died In An Auto Accident", "Breaking Nobody's Heart" and "Great Big Boogers Of Love". Of all the band members, it was singer Becky Hamm, whose strong pipes and virtuoso hand-truck banging commanded the

most attention, and allowed D-Squad to transition from club favorites to the next Big Thing, a band who could get away with playing weird music for normal people.





One night in late fall 1986, Mark Givens took Mr. P over to his parent's house in Claremont and, as they stood in the garage, gave him a present, something given to him by Bob Fritz, something Mr. P could use on stage: a handcrafted Panda mask. Mr. P thanked Mark for the wonderful gift and tried it on. It was an odd fit. It was made of heavy fabric, with no air holes for the nose, just a large opening at the mouth. Wearing it for more than five minutes would be next to impossible because of the

discomfort. Yet, the mask was adorable. It could and would be incorporated into the act in some fashion.

Panda Man was born.



# PANDA MAN



If there is one universal image of Desperation Squad, it is Panda Man. Panda Man at the Limbo Lounge. Panda Man at the Green Door. Panda Man at the Wash. Panda Man on the steps of City Hall on Election Night. Panda Man on the Warped Tour. Panda Man at the Fillmore. Panda Man cavorting with Regis Philbin. Panda Man shaking his butt at Comic-Con. Naked Panda Man on the pages of the Los Angeles Weekly.

Panda Man was not around during the Arts Building days, true. And the idea of an iconic Panda Man took a while to develop. But the moment Mr. P put the mask on, he was no longer Mr. P, he was Panda Man, and Desperation Squad fans loved Panda Man.

The Panda “head” became the band’s logo, also created by Givens, and among the rare collectibles in the D-Squad universe are the Panda t-shirts made for the “Hot Diggitty Dogs” roll out.

There are two Panda masks. The original was used until 2001, when a newer, sturdier mask was taken on the Warped Tour (the original was in fragile shape and Mr. P was convinced that it would get lost forever on the road). The Warped Tour also saw a “junior” Panda mask for the crotch.

For 30 years Panda Man has been Desperation Squad’s mascot and best known figure. Long live Panda Man!



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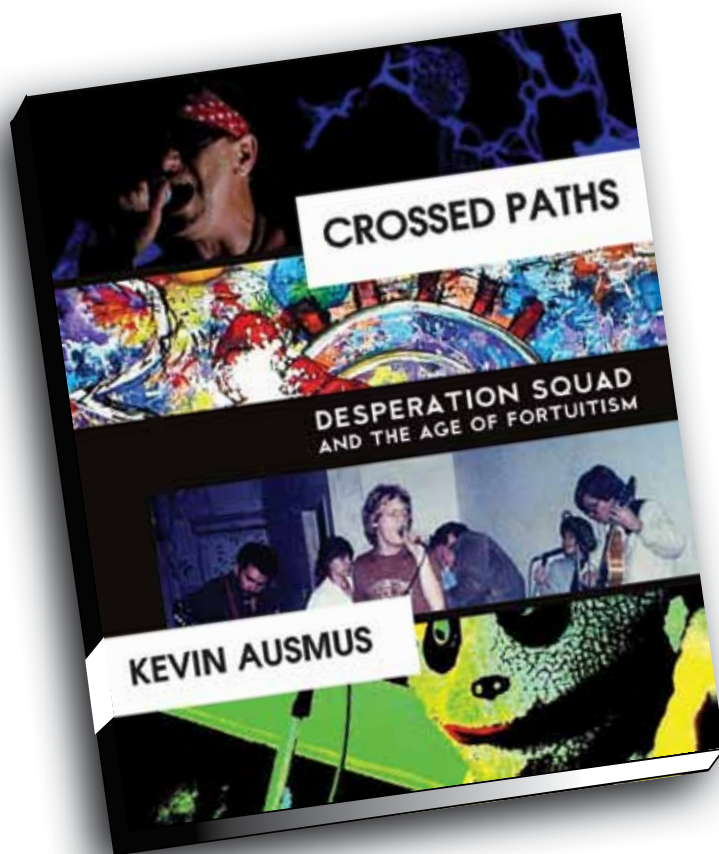
Art Show Opening

May 9, 2015

7pm

A landmark event documenting and exploring a slice of the underground art and music scene in the Pomona Valley, beginning in the early 1980s and moving into the 21st Century with a particular focus on The Desperation Squad.

Highlights include stories from The Warped Tour, America's Got Talent, and Mr. P's run for mayor of Pomona (the "Rock and Roll Mayor"). The show will feature photographs, flyers, music, handwritten lyric sheets, and plenty of legendary tales.



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## What is Fortuitism?

The lines that are drawn upon the globe, the signals zipping around from one node to another, the paths that cross every day, the people we meet, and the sounds we hear - these are pieces of the world we live in, the world we embrace, and the decisions we make. How we interact with the pieces—which pieces we touch, which pieces touch us—determines how we see ourselves moving through life. Some decisions are out of our control. Some decisions are the lesser of two evils. How we use the results of these decisions are ours, and interact to shape who we are and how we live.

Fortuitism allows for a certain amount of serendipity and spontaneity to enter the art we create. The decisions we make are the signposts along the path.

Fortuitism is a different way to tell a story. Create art, save things, find a venue. You need not be famous or even enduring. Rock and roll is everyone's story. If you are fortuitous enough, you can tell your story in a way that makes it great art as well.



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