

For a man who loved conspiracy theories, **Stiv Bator** left behind a mystery with his last recording. Sadly there is virtually no accurate information available and even the tapes of the sessions, previously released as *The Last Race* doesn't provide a true record of what was originally intended. The title mooted for the recording was supposed to have been 'Do You Believe In Magyk?' with a nod to **Aleister Crowley** who added the letter K so as to differentiate between stage magic and sorcery with Stiv giving it his own spin with the letter 'Y'. Intrigued by the weird and wonderful, **Stiv** also dropped the letter 'S' from Bators when he became interested in numerology. By altering his surname, he was distinguishing the past from the present, and taking control of his own destiny.

At the time of the recordings, **Stiv** was based in Paris, living in a duplex apartment on Rue St Honore, with his French girlfriend, **Carroll**, and their two cats, Satan and Dumbfuck. **The Dead Boys** were the stuff of fond memory and although **The Lords of The New Church** had gone their separate ways, **Stiv** was on tentative speaking terms with them. Nonetheless, he was looking for a new project to get his pointy teeth into. In September 1989 **Stiv** had played a one off gig at the Opera on the Green in London's Shepherd's Bush. Billed as *'The Return of The Living Dead Boys'*, the line-up featured bassist **Bryn Merrick** from the **Damned**, former **UK Sub's** guitarist, **Alan Lee Shaw** and **Vom** who had previously played drums for **Doctor and The Medics**.

Stiv had first met **Vom** whilst on a **Psychic TV** boat-ride on the Thames and the two of them had hit it off. By the autumn of 1989, **Vom** had formed the **Brotherland**, with guitarist **Kris Dollimore** who had made his debut with **The Godfathers** and become a player of some renown. **Stiv** had already confided to **Vom** that he wanted to record an album mainly comprising of covers but the plan didn't begin to crystallise until early in the New Year. Having booked into a rehearsal studio in Hammersmith, London, **Stiv** started sifting through potential material as **Kris Dollimore** recalls: "He had this carrier bag full of cassettes of songs and he was very animated about choosing material for the album, frantic almost. He was playing a bit of one song and a second later he'd be playing something else. It was during one of those sessions that I first heard a rough demo of **Dee Dee Ramone's** song *'Poison Heart.'* It was very basic but I thought it was great and told **Stiv** I thought we should pursue it further. From the beginning, **Stiv** had wanted to get **Dee Dee** and **Johnny Thunders** involved. He had this idea of forming a super-group called **The New Lords of The New Church**'; he was joking about the name of course and was a fan of Spinal Tap. **Carol Clerk** who was the news editor of Melody Maker wrote a little piece about it announcing the band." The good humoured **Clerk** who always championed the musicians she loved could not have resisted being the first to break the news and initially all looked rosy.

Visiting his parents on the Isle of Sheppey for afternoon tea, **Kris Dollimore** received an unexpected phone call: "One of the most surreal experiences of the whole thing was when I went to see my mum and dad. They were what you'd call old fashioned. I was in the kitchen with my mum and she's slicing up cake and making tea when the phone rings. She goes 'There's someone called **Dee Dee** for you.' While I'm talking to him discussing what tracks we are going to be working on, my mum's in the background going 'Would you like a cup of tea, dear?'"

Team **Stiv** was finally falling into place. **Dee Dee Ramone**, at least long distance, sounded upbeat and keen to play bass, whilst **Neal X** from **Signe Signe Sputnik** had been asked to engineer the sessions. Although **Neal** hadn't yet had any contact with **Dee Dee Ramone**, he was already familiar with **Johnny Thunders** having been introduced to him by fellow **Sputnik**, **Tony James**, who had toured Europe with the guitarist. Whilst **James** had no direct involvement in the **Stiv** project, his influence loomed large as a songwriter. Having composed *'Russian Roulette'* for the **Lords of The New Church**', he also wrote the title track *'Magyck'* specifically for **Bator**, knowing of his love for the spooky-side. Although it might seem that **Stiv's** last album was an ad-hoc idea, it had been brewing for some time, as **Neal** recollects: "**Stiv, Tony** and I did some demo recordings at **Tony's** home studio in Pindock Mews. **Tony** wrote *'Magyck'* for him and we also did another number *'The Leader of The Brats.'* **Stiv** was looking for something new to do and did the recordings with us and really liked it. As well as being able to play guitar and bass, he liked that I could also work the board; he'd suffered in the past from people working in the studio, twiddling the knobs, who didn't understand his world and so he asked if I wanted to get involved."

In conjunction with **Philippe Baia** of Bondage Records who was bank-rolling the album, the band were booked into the cavernous EMI Studios Paris for five days where both the **Stones** and **The Beatles** had recorded. Sparse and old fashioned, the studio had kept some of their 50's valve microphones in use. The London contingent, **Vom, Kris Dollimore** and **Neal X** were booked on the same flight to Paris and were met by **Stiv** at the airport holding a welcome banner that said 'Spinal Pap'. Despite the cheery greeting, however, there had been ructions at the Rue St Honore apartment. By the time the UK faction arrived, **Dee Dee Ramone** was already on a plane home, leaving a trail of carnage in his wake.

The **Johnny Thunders/Dee Dee Ramone** incident has become the wrecked fabric of wild rumour with a multitude of differing accounts. **Neal X**, perhaps more enlightened than most given his proximity but not direct involvement recalls what little information he gleaned in the immediate aftermath: "I heard that **Stiv, Johnny** and **Carroll** went out and when they came home, **Dee Dee** had cut up all of **Johnny's** clothes, pissed in his suitcase and smashed his guitar to pieces, then fucked off. What was it over? I don't remember, but it was petty, some kind of junkie business." **Johnny** fled the knife wielding **Ramone** and went to stay with his friend, **Octavio Cohen-Escali**, for two days. All he had left of his possessions were the clothes he was wearing. He did attempt to fix his Les Paul junior but the combined damage of bleach as well as **Dee Dee's** efforts to set fire to the instrument rendered it irreparable. **Octavio** recalls **Johnny** going to Pigalle to get another Gibson but there was an issue with the pick-ups.

Although the fracas had been traumatic for all concerned, the band pushed on with the album. Studio time was ticking and there was a record to make as **Kris Dollimore** recollects: "**Stiv** was really great to us and determined for it to be a good album. He was such a lovely guy, so passionate about his music and he loved conspiracy theories. I never saw a dark side to him, he was always accommodating and very encouraging in the studio but I do remember him being very stressed about The Incident'. I visited the apartment afterwards and do you know what was spooky? There were all these child-like drawings and slips of paper lying around the apartment that said stuff like That junkie **Thunders** is dead.' Of course **Stiv** was upset about it but we had to get on with it."

'*Magick* gives no concessions to the aftershock, the combo of **Stiv, Dollimore, Vom** and **Neal X** who deputised on bass providing a defiant power pop charge. As a coda to **Dee Dee Ramone's** sudden departure, the band recorded a potent version of '*Poison Heart* as **Neal X** explains: " **Stiv** had this song that **Dee Dee** had written for the **Ramones** called '*Poison Heart* which **Joey Ramone** hadn't wanted to sing on so he left it with **Stiv**. We worked out a completely different arrangement. **Kris Dollimore** was on fire, he was a really accomplished guitarist and he and **Vom** were astounding together. '*Poison Heart* was the first song we did and it sounded fantastic. **The Ramones** recorded it later on and their version sounds like ours. The majority of the songs on that album were covers. We also did **The Weeds** '*You Must Be A Witch*' **The Tombstone's** '*I Ain't Got Nobody* and **The Young Rascal's** '*Good Lovin*'."

The charming marriage of the spooky and kooky working in conjunction with more melancholy themes is an apt reflection of where **Stiv Bator** was at in the late spring of **1990**. Notably, he'd been quoted in the press saying that he wanted to be The thinking man's **Eric Carmen** evoking his appreciation of pure pop. Although song writing credits for the album usually acknowledge **Bator** for all of the tracks only '*Yesterday* and '*Don't Go Away* are directly attributable as **Vom** notes: "I seem to remember that **Stiv** wrote '*Yesterday*.' I remember him talking to **Neal** in the studio about it, saying that it was about his dad going off in the army and that '*Don't Go Away* was about **Jimmy Zero** from **The Dead Boys**. I might be wrong; it's all a tad hazy now!!"

Whatever private angst **Stiv** might have endured, he gave himself over to the camaraderie of the sessions, turning in an upbeat performance according to **Neal X**: "He was very positive, singing really well. He and **Carroll** were madly in love, they'd found each other and had a home they loved to be in. **Carroll** was around every day. I remember there was a moment when they were canoodling when he should have been singing and he missed his cue; we got **Stiv** on tape saying 'I'm getting a blow job.' It was funny, touching. **Carroll** was very supportive of him."

On the last day of recording, **Stiv** managed to coax **Johnny Thunders** down to the studio but he wasn't in the best shape as **Kris Dollimore** recalls: "He looked grey, his fingers were swollen. What is sad is that people glamorise heroin and **Johnny** was great, fantastic, but he couldn't find a way out of it. He did play on a track, a **Lords of the New Church** outtake called *Two Hearts*' but he was too ill to play properly. He saw my mother of pearl handmade Zemaitis guitar and was quite taken with it. He put it on and played it. Although he was unwell, what he did play was very haunting. He turned everything up on the amp, the reverb, so you had a cacophony of guitar sound but whoever mixed the track didn't use it. Those tapes were tampered with."

At the end of May, **Neal** returned to EMI Paris where he was booked into a smaller studio for a further 5 days. Working with **Stiv**, they laid down overdubs, additional vocals and made plans to gig in the US, including a date at the Whisky in L.A, tentatively scheduled for July 4th. With the album virtually completed save for a final mix, **Neal** left for London optimistic about the future of the project. **Stiv** meanwhile was considering contacting **Bob Clearmountain** to add the finishing touches. By **1990**, **Clearmountain** was deemed a world class producer but he'd started as a tape-op, working on the **Dead Boy's** debut LP '*Young, Loud and Snotty* and possessed the skill to make the album sound both raw and polished. **Neal** had been hoping to return to Paris for the summer when he received some unexpected and devastating news: "**Carroll** phoned, I was expecting her to be confirming arrangements. It took her twenty minutes to tell me what had happened. It was the worst phone call of my life. She just sobbed. The worst had happened. I never made it to the funeral, I was too shocked and upset to go."

On June 3rd, whilst out shopping with **Carroll**, **Stiv** was hit by a taxi and bumped his head. However, he resisted **Carroll's** suggestion that they seek medical help, claiming only to have had a slightly odd feeling which he likened to an out of body experience. Later that night, he died in his sleep from internal bleeding. Broken beyond repair, **Carroll** told me shortly after **Stiv's** death: "It's so fucking unfair to go at a time when everything was so perfect. He was so proud of the record; things were so wonderful between us."

As a testament to **Stiv's** memory, **Carroll** endeavoured to get the album released : "I feel confident that I know exactly what **Stiv** wanted for the album. I know all the details for the sound, for everything. There are two things he would have done. One of them would have been either to work with a big producer but he's not around to direct it so I would never take the chance. The other would have been to work with people like **Chris Stein** or **Joey Ramone**. He got along with them, they wouldn't betray the sound. They knew **Stiv** well enough. There are a couple of songs on the album that are accessible to a bigger public. It's a great album, he sang better on this than he ever sang before. '*Magyck* reflected exactly what **Stiv** was about at the time. It's a very magic, mystic song." And like *Magyck*, it was ephemeral, a spell cast before mid-summer but never completed.

Neal recalls meeting with **Philippe Baia** from *Bondage*, in London: " He asked me what we needed to finish and I told him 'A really great engineer,' I priced it up, it wasn't a huge amount of work and then I never heard from him again. Who knows what happened. I imagine what was later released as '*The Last Race*' (**Bondage Records 1996**) was taken from one of the rough listening versions. It doesn't sound like how I remember it. It sounds as if someone's added synths but we didn't have any synthesisers in the studio. It's a shame that it's not what it should have been, a complete testament to **Stiv**. When the tapes aren't under your arm, anything can happen. The masters, the 24 tracks are long gone, they could be anywhere "

Post script - Numerology

The dates of the deaths of the three main protagonists of '*Magyck*' possess a strange correlation. **Stiv Bator** died on June 3rd, **Jesus** prayed three times in the Garden of Gethsemane before his arrest. He was placed on the cross at the **3rd** hour of the day and died at **3 pm**. **Stiv** was portrayed on the cross in the sleeve artwork for the **Lords of the New Church 45** '*New Church / Livin for the Livin*' **Johnny Thunders** had a tattoo of the number **13** with a skull above it. Three weeks before his death, he had a final tattoo done of Christ on the Cross in Thailand. Dates as follows - June **3rd (1990)** - **Stiv Bator**, April **23rd (1991)**-**Johnny Thunders**, June **5th (2002)** **Dee Dee Ramone = 13**. In the tarot deck, the **13th** card symbolises death or new beginnings. There were 13 apostles at the last supper.