



Photo by Tessa Vanderhorst

MIKE ALVAREZ

By Dan Cook

Just like an acid trip, musician/entrepreneur Mike Alvarez is unique and unpredictable. Although he once described himself as "lazy," he is anything but. The founder of NRT Entertainment Group (Not Records Tapes and Verb Films), Alvarez has fronted, organized and played in a whole bunch of bands in a whole bunch of towns with a whole bunch of whoever happens to be on hand to play whatever. And through it all, he has remained a true disciple of pure independent rock n' roll.

Rather than lazy, Alvarez would be more correctly described as selfless. He had devoted many years of his many lives to keeping alive the legend of Roky Erickson, co-founder of the seminal psychedelic band The 13th floor Elevators ("You're Gonna Miss Me," "Fire Engine" among many wonderful tunes). Alvarez has produced a film (Demon Angel) and an EP featuring Erickson (Process, on Not Records Tapes), who is still very much alive in the physical world.

Born in Hammond, Indiana, just outside of Chicago and raised on the Texas-Mexico border, Alvarez grew up knowing two things: hard work and music. He has combined them all his life.

Alvarez hooked up with members of the Austin punk scene during his University of Texas college days, forming a band known as Max and the Makeups. Max and The Makeups would tour the Southwest for 3 years, opening for top acts such as Snakefinger, Joe King Carrasco, Oingo Boingo and others. The group soon headlined their own major city venues and spent many hours in the recording studio resulting in many, hopefully to be released in the future, music products.

In 1983, Alvarez unveiled the first Woodshock Festival in the hills outside of Austin, at the amazing Hurlbut Ranch in Dripping Springs, Texas. The festival would become the world's premiere alternative music festival for its time between 1983 & 1987.

In 1984, Alvarez founded Not Records Tapes and began to crank out recording sessions of dozens of unknown or little known punk and psychedelic bands. In the summer of 1984 alone he produced some 20 bands, some of which immediately went on to become major-label acts. Alvarez himself has preferred to go his own, independent way, asking for little from life outside of replacement guitar strings.

In 1988, Alvarez left Texas to take a job with Paramount Recording Studios in Los Angeles. Although the job turned out to be short-term, he found a support group of Texas transplants and hooked up with the Sony Corporation, where he honed his sound recording abilities and began developing his film production techniques as a result of Sony being located on The American Film Institute campus. Sony graciously allowed him to take "time off" to study business at Pepperdine University, located hard by the Pacific Ocean, where the evolving young man also studied surfing in what little spare time he allowed himself. His racquetball skills were also demonstrated to all comers, few of whom survived unscathed.

Did he sleep? No, he did not. Time flew by as he tried heroically to balance his many passions. What suffered in the end was his own career as a musician, since he rarely had time to devote to songwriting or playing clubs.

Alvarez lives today in Hollywood, Calif., where he resides with his beloved dog Edgar, his guitar and his amp. Older and doubtless wiser, he has begun to devote more time to songwriting and playing out despite his hectic life as a Hollywood-based film entrepreneur. The internet has allowed him to carry out his various missions on a grander scale, and what with film and television production, writing and recording music, maintaining various web sites and in general breathing life anew into independent music, Alvarez keeps up a pace that few could hope to sustain. Fueled by his love of his passions, he presses on unstintingly.