

# 30 Seconds Over CLE

Cleveland's godfather of underground rock, Pere Ubu's David Thomas, returns home. / BY DILLON STEWART /



» David Thomas, second from left, and Pere Ubu return to Cleveland to support their new album.

These days, Cleveland is just another airport for David Thomas. "It's not anywhere more special than anywhere else," says the lead singer of the proto-punk band Rocket From the Tombs and its aftermath, pre-new wave band Pere Ubu. But during the 1970s, Thomas found inspiration in the city's gritty disintegration and helped spawn an underground music scene that influenced bands from the Ramones to Devo to Nirvana. Ahead of Pere Ubu's show at the Grog Shop Nov. 22, we sat down with Thomas, who now lives Brighton, England, to discuss 1970s Cleveland and what it meant to the face of rock music.

**Q:** How did Cleveland influence your music?

**A:** We were savages living in the ruins of a great civilization of Rockefellers and Carnegies. Growing up, we owned downtown. Nobody wanted it. We roamed the streets like they were ours. The Flats was a place of deep mystery. It was our modern art museum. We would drive through the steel mills and within 20 yards of open blast furnaces. We weren't duplicating those sounds. Those sounds were showing us the way to change the narrative vehicle of modern music.

**Q:** Did you know you were doing something different at the time?

**A:** The analog synthesizer was making an impact as a new way of approaching language using abstract sound. We believed rock music was a continuum that could be traced from Elvis to Brian Wilson [of the Beach Boys] to the Velvet and that we were the future. That's the intensity we felt. People said to me, "We know you guys just take a lot of drugs and

get up onstage and bang on your instruments." This was utterly insulting, because we rehearsed more than they did. We were serious young men.

**Q:** Why are people today so interested in Cleveland's underground scene during the '70s?

**A:** Because of the quality and intensity. It was unparalleled for the strangeness, the revolutionary-ness and radicalness of it. It will probably never happen again. We don't live in that world anymore. It was possible because of the isolation and desperation of that time. Everything from Cleveland was doomed. So if nobody likes what you do and nobody is ever going to like what you do and you'll never be seen by anyone, you do what you want to do.

**Q:** Is it important to you that it's remembered?

**A:** No, because it can't be remembered. You don't know. We can sit here all day and try to describe it, but the intensity can't be described. It's like any shared unique experience. It's gone. So it's just as well that all the members of the scene die as quickly as possible so it's done with.



## KICK GAME

### SNEAKER COLLECTING'S

allure goes beyond rocking fresh kicks. Copping limited edition Yeezys or Air Jordans is about the challenge. The shoe is simply a trophy.

But Cleveland sneakerheads have a new game to play at the Restock, a Joe Haden-owned menswear shop downtown, and it doesn't include waiting in line or scouring the internet.

Among the racks of rare streetwear finds sits the Key Master, an arcade game ubiquitous in malls that typically spits out gift cards and off-brand MP3 players. Restock's Key Master, however, awards some of the sneaker world's most elusive prizes.

Stocked with shoes that range from \$500 to more than \$1,000, the \$5-a-turn machine might seem too good to be true. But that'll change when you actually try it, says David VanGieson, a buyer at Restock. To win, contestants must position a golden key to fit a rectangular hole, which knocks down sneakers such as Adidas NMDs and Don C Air Jordans. "It's very difficult to win," he says. "There's only one perfect spot."

Difficult, yes. But not impossible. VanGieson says there's a winner about once every two weeks. Most players spend between \$5 and \$20, while some shell out upward of \$200 — which is still less than the price tag on some much-less-rare LeBrons. A sneaker won through the machine can also be traded in for store credit if you don't want to sport those self-lacing Nike HyperAdapt 1.0s.

Whether you're a sneakerhead or a wearer of old, beat-up Converse, the opportunity to score one of the world's most sought-after sneakers for a fraction of the price is hard to resist.

"You're throwing a couple dollars away, maybe," VanGieson says. "You have a chance of winning a shoe that you're not going to see anyone else wear." // MICHAEL WU