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wartan koumrouyan
Echoes

"THE ONLY THING THAT CAME OUT OF ENGLAND was the Beatles and Pink Floyd, that's all." he said.

This is an Indian Sikh we came to visit in his cabin near the Electric Station on the coast.

For some reason, they were employed by the government to work in the station, but were regarded as less important than other workers who had better lodging conditions, like the Egyptian who worked mainly at gas stations and bakeries in Lebanon during the war period.

I don't remember how it happened that we became acquainted, but there we were in the cabin near the station on the coastline at night, with the smell of dampness and sea tang nearby, and the half burned wood in a bucket meant to be a heater, with the smell of charred wood doused with water and extinguished.

They were three turbaned and bearded men, with big silver rings on their fingers, and a strange smell on them, not that of sweat or perspiration accumulated for the lack of shower, but that of their oily skin, I presume, as they were not baptized as Christians, the ritual that absolve a person from previous and future sins, or so it was believed.

I wonder how this man came to appreciate the Pink Floyd or had known of them, but in Lebanon, the band was quite famous and had a niche of followers, a hard core fans, limited in number, of the most tenacious convictions that they were the best band in the entire rock and roll history, and Live at Pompeii was the only album that will go to posterity as the Goldberg Variations of Bach, a testimony of excellence at the right time, the right place, and the exact instinctive expression and tempo never to be equaled.

I didn't know of these things at that time, but for this turbaned man warming himself in this cabin with these half burned pieces of wood, to be so assertive, he must have absorbed the Pop scene all his life and in the know about Wish You Were Here and the mystery surrounding the song, at that time, when no social media existed, to come to this conclusion. How he might have understood, for example, the beginning of Echoes, "Overhead the Albatross stand motionless upon the air" with the guitar shredding, cymbal shivers, and a spartan bass line, the bubbling of the Vesuvius and the letter Pliny the Younger describing how it happened in the year it erupted, killed his uncle, and buried Pompeii under the ash in 79 AD.

Clealy, this album was a world wide phenomena, people will still remember in two thousand years, like the eruption of Vesuvus.

I took it for granted as if those moments were natural, and every now and again, we would have a new LP by the Beatles or Pink Floyd for the rest of our lives, or at least, to get us through the war. We were listening to these cassette recordings in the car unbeknownst of the grandeur of the band, of the other rock groups that we were fond of, and I should say, we

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outright admired and waited for the arrival of the post office to deliver our mails and the orders we placed in libraries, of books and new releases of records.

I, for instance, ordered *Of Mice and Men*, *of Mystery Train*, *of Men and Fields*, and was happy to find records randomly sold in shops, such as *Blue*, *Court and Sparks* and *Higera*, and was content with what I had.

Harry on the other hand, went to great lengths writing letters to the programmes on the BBC, requesting to hear such and such song, and ordered Georges Harrison's books from London and waited weeks upon weeks for the delivery, taking me along to the post office in Bourj Ham-moud where he had a poste-restante box, on the first floor of an ill-lit bureau, when there was electricity in the area, as there never was anyone else but us and the employee, to whom Harry asked unconditionally every time « when? ».

When will the post be delivered? Knowing that the airport was being bombed and the « Barbir » crossing between East and West Beirut was closed, and any possible passage from side to side had to be through the ruins of the coastal "Manar" road along the harbor, through the « Saifi » area and the Karantina Camp, where the front line had been established and static for most of the war, midst pockmarked buildings and the ruins of the old town, and there had to be a willing person who cared to deliver our books and records in these conditions.