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loud blues and soul music. Though the small club was quickly filling with people and their din, we found Alan still onstage, sacked out behind the drum kit. He awoke, moved, and slept for another hour in an equally noisy loft above the stage, then woke up about 30 minutes before set time, only to endure a particularly frustrating performance.

In order to travel light, Bob and Alan planned to borrow amps for each performance, and Brad an entire drum set. The downside of unfamiliar equipment is that it doesn't always perform as expected. Brad's borrowed bass drum kick pedal didn't work for the first song, and he had to improvise a quick fix. Alan couldn't get the vocal sound he wanted out of his borrowed amp. And everything else about the set—especially Alan himself—seemed tense and uncomfortable.

The Spitz was packed with a crowd of 250 middle-class kids who, like the hundred in Amsterdam earlier, or the 1,500 who would show up later in Tongeren, Belgium, were attentive but dispassionate. While they enjoyed the music, their response was nothing like the fervor of a Black-Eyed Snakes audience in Duluth, who maniacally stomp through "Smokestack Lightnin'," "Hey, Bo Diddley," and the rest of a Snakes show. To top it off, when we walked back to the parking lot, Alan found a £50 parking ticket (just shy of a hundred bucks) on the rented van.

But it would get worse. Tongeren—notable for being Belgium's oldest city, if for nothing else—was the tour's final stop. Three songs in, Alan had to ditch his Telecaster guitar after its volume knob went haywire. A couple songs later, he broke and replaced a string on his backup Gibson as the crowd—and his mates—waited tensely. After a few more songs, Bob fell off his chair and broke the cord jack on his own Gibson, the only guitar he'd brought.

We stayed up past 3 again that night,

watching Belgian MTV, hoping (most of us, anyway) to see a Low video, and eating snacks left over from the band's dressing room at the venue.

The next morning, we all overslept by two hours, and Alan was enraged. His brother Justin was leaving early to get back to work and was in danger of missing his flight home. Our lurching, Mach-speed, three-hour ride that morning to Schiphol Airport was oppressively dark. We all sat still, as kids do when Dad is impatient and mad, escaping into books or music. Resentment was building toward Alan's dangerous driving and selfish anger, even as we tried to sympathize with whatever it was that was torturing him.

In our hotel room the next night, sometime after midnight, as a group session of stoned, intimate conversation was tapering into silence, Alan lay back on a day bed, stared at the vaulted ceiling, and worried aloud about his wife's journey to join him for the Low tour.

"Mim and the kids are probably somewhere over the ocean right now," he said. "I feel pretty guilty about being here, having fun, while she's doing all that work alone. Flying with kids can be really hard." After a deep pause, he added, "Man, do I miss those kids."

A few hours later, Alan hugged us all tightly, took a taxi to the airport, and climbed on a big, black tour bus. None of us could have known—though Alan himself must have had an inkling—that a few weeks later, one day after the *Fresh Air* interview aired (where Alan made public his mental struggles and their effects on Mimi over the years), Low's website would announce "Tour dates canceled for health reasons." Alan would post a characteristically heart-on-his-sleeve letter in the site's community section, informing fans and friends that he had "not been very mentally stable for the last while" and that "it is too much to ask those around me to have to put up with that anymore."

**INTERNET REVIEWS** of Low shows just before and after the Black-Eyed Snakes tour include descriptions of Alan looking angry or distracted onstage. Some postings refer to disappointing performances—unusual given the reverence of Low's followers and the integrity of the musicians involved.

"I need to get healthy," Alan wrote in his open letter, citing post-traumatic stress disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, bipolar disorder, suicidal depression and anxiety, paranoia, laziness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and "good old-fashioned two-faced asshole-ness," as some of the ills he's been diagnosed with or speculates he may have. "It's apparent that something about touring right now is doing more damage than good," he wrote.

On May 6, one day after the cancellation announcement, Alan and two friends filled in for Low's slot at the Homegrown Music Festival in Duluth, unleashing an emotional set of mostly cover tunes. "This last song is by one of my favorite bands," he said before playing a new, still-unnamed song by Low. Later that day, the Black-Eyed Snakes played a better show in Duluth—for a much livelier audience—than any they'd played in Europe. The Snakes are currently scheduled to play the Green Man Festival at Spirit Mountain in Duluth on July 16.

Alan closed his online letter—which says nothing about Low's future—by repeating his apology for the canceled concerts, then offering alternative activities: "I suggest that instead of going to the Low show, go for a walk with a friend or two that day—somewhere where there's trees or rocks and dirt or plants. I plan to do the same, each of those days, right here in beautiful Duluth." ■■

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