

THIS STORY STARTS IN 1978... by Ray Amico

This story starts in 1978; it basically represents my entire life and how I became the person that I am. And it is all centered around a band. DEVO.

My name is Ray Amico. I grew up in Queens, NY and was born in 1968. While growing up my hero and role model was my cousin, Mark Reichert. He was 5 years older than me so at 10 years old he was my 15-year-old cousin; the coolest guy into the coolest things. I used to hang out with him as much as possible and he exposed me to things that had a huge influence on me and still do.

In 1978 I had seen just a glimpse of DEVO on TV, playing on Saturday Night Live and everything about them gave me chills. The uniforms, the mechanical look, even the philosophy started to creep into my consciousness – because my consciousness was literally being developed right there and then. My cousin Mark first exposed me to the band DEVO. It was enlightening. It wasn't just that I hadn't seen anything like this before – I hadn't seen ANYTHING before. I was 10 years old, fer chrissakes. My only exposure to anything was that I had started taking piano and guitar lessons, I was being taught Scott Joplin Ragtimes by my piano-playing grandfather and the music of DEVO was the first “new” music that I heard.

None of the kids my age understood what I was talking about but the older “guys” that my cousin hung out with did. I started to hang out with the older crowd more than others my age just because of this. Over the next couple of years my cousin introduced me to more of his friends. One in particular was Kurt Stenzel. Kurt's family were very good friends with the Reicherts so Kurt and Mark had been friends since the cradle. Kurt was into to DEVO just as much as Mark and I were as well as being completely addicted to the band JETHRO TULL, which he got me into as well. These two bands became my two favorite bands and later on became completely intertwined in my life.

Over the next two years I would come to learn more about music and life from my cousin Mark. He exposed me to new things; he introduced me to stuff that I would have no reason to see at that age. I was interested in other things as well such as going to baseball games (and developing one of my other lifelong passions – the NY Mets), going to see hockey and soccer games with Mark and taking guitar and piano lessons. During that time DEVO released a second album, *DUTY NOW FOR THE FUTURE* but it would be almost another year before I would REALLY hear what DEVO was doing.

In 1980 DEVO had come out with a new album, *FREEDOM OF CHOICE*. The song *WHIP IT!!* had now brought them into the mainstream and their characteristic red ENERGY DOME hats were easily recognizable anywhere. But it wasn't *WHIP IT!!* That first hit me, the first song that I remember and really got me going was *FREEDOM OF CHOICE*. I would ask my cousin to play it over and over again. The intro with the drums, the whole concept of freedom of choice is what you've got, freedom from choice is what you want – it all was sinking in.

Mark, Kurt and I would spend our weekends taking the subway into Manhattan to the lower east side and we would hit every record store we could find looking for rare DEVO and JETHRO TULL records. I was only 12 years old but as long as I was with my 17-year-old cousin I was able to come along. I would spend my entire allowance on ANYTHING I could find about DEVO. Records, singles, bootlegs, pins, shirts - anything that had DEVO written on it. DEVO's popularity because of *WHIP IT!!* meant that I was on the cutting edge at 12 years old, I had a full collection of DEVO items and being in school or out in the street with these shirts and pins meant that I was in on something before anyone else. I was cool.

The next year in 1981 DEVO released their next album, *NEW TRADITIONALISTS*. They took their signature look and came up with something completely different and amended their philosophy, developing it along the same lines but now went deeper into the concepts of a devolving society, of devolving standards and standard-bearers. Again it was incredibly influential on my 13 year old, fertile mind.

I would spend hours in my room singing DEVO songs into a hairbrush. I wouldn't leave my room, I would take my acoustic guitar and I would try to play along with the albums. I was also getting into comedy records at the time and making recordings. I would spend hours taking *Steve Martin* and DEVO records and record individual words from each and try to make sentences out of them. It was my first foray into recording and mixing.

That year DEVO announced they were doing a midnight Halloween show at Radio City Music Hall. I had never been to a concert before and even though my cousin Mark and Kurt were going my parent's would not let me go. I was devastated. Halloween that year was spent eating candy and waiting until the next day to ask my cousin all about it.

By the next year (1982) I was 14 years old, there was little that my parent's could do anymore to keep me from going to concerts and I finally went to my first: JETHRO TULL, playing at the Brendan Byrne Arena in New Jersey. It was loud, it was large, and it was spectacular. Later that year DEVO released another album, *OH NO! IT'S DEVO!!* and there was the announcement I had been waiting for: DEVO was playing at the Palladium in New York City. Finally I was going to see the band that for had dominated every part of my life.

When the tickets became available Mark and Kurt had already bought tickets in the front row (those bastards!!) but I was able to buy a ticket only 10 rows behind them. The drive from queens into Manhattan to go to the show felt like a pilgrimage, it felt like something too important was about to happen. I had chills going down my back as we walked up to the theater and saw the big letters "D E V O" on the marquee. When we went inside the venue and I saw that they were selling red ENERGY DOMES at the merch table - I just had to have one.

As the lights went down a video screen on stage came alive. A deep, low tone shook the building as images started to appear. A large three-dimensional "D" came flying from a digital horizon on the screen. Then an "E" - then a "V". Each passed the edge of the screen with a screeching sound like a strafing fighter jet. Suddenly on the digital horizon appear five unrecognizable figures in the distance. As they got closer it was possible to see what they were: each member of DEVO, with a rotating potato as their body.

The potatoes morphed into bodies and as each member of DEVO turned and walked off the screen the real person walked onto stage. Something happened, it might have been the appearance of my first erection. The video screen became completely integral to the show, with backup vocals, visual elements from the videos, it was a complete presentation and it drove me crazy.

As Mark Mothersbaugh, the lead singer of DEVO walked out onto stage wearing his red ENERGY DOME he took it and threw it into the audience like a Frisbee. The dome flew in a perfect spiral, hovering over the crowd. Standing on my seat I jumped what felt like 20 feet in the air and caught the edge of the dome in the tips of my fingers, landing back down into the crowd of people. I couldn't believe my luck and turned down offers of what seemed like thousands of dollars from the people around me.

During the show I ran up and joined Mark and Kurt on the edge of the stage, over towards to large stacks of PA. During the song *MONGOLOID* Mark Mothersbaugh ran in front of the PA and directly in front of the three of us. Clutching at his shoes and screaming into each other's faces we exploded into the chorus: "and he wore a hat and he had a job..." By the end of the show, during the *DEVO CORPORATE ANTHEM* I jumped up on the stage directly in front of the PA, sticking my head in the boxes and standing at attention as the anthem played. It was the greatest thing I had ever seen.

Afterwards the three of us went outside behind the venue to where the stage door is. We were not expecting anything, just hoping to get a glimpse of them when a woman came out of the door, wearing a backstage pass. I asked her if I could have her pass, just as a collector's item. Looking at me she must have taken pity because she slapped it on my chest and said "go on in." I was in shock. Kurt and Mark were jealous as hell.

I went through the door and proceeded down a long hallway. I wasn't sure where I was going but I started to hear a bunch of noise and conversations going on. I wasn't sure what to expect at all, I had never been in this situation before. I turned a corner and suddenly I was in the middle of a party, and there were all 5 members of DEVO!!! HOLY SHIT!! I went up to each of them and got an autograph but was really too petrified to say or do anything else. I pointed out to Mark Mothersbaugh that I caught his *ENERGY DOME* and he said "great kid" in a very Mean Joe Green kind of way. This was my first exposure to the backstage of live music – and I was completely affected.

Over the next several years DEVO released another album, *SHOUT* and yet again changing their look, coming up with continuations of their original theme and philosophy. Their music remained the most important thing in my life. At the same time my friend Kurt had started a band in high school called *THE SIX AND VIOLENCE*, a unique expression of music, humor and there was definitely a DEVO influence in there. After only a couple of shows they needed a guitar player and I wanted in. I learned all the material and played my first show with them in 1985.

As we played over the next couple of years we gained a bit of notoriety because of our uniqueness. We had two percussionists, not a single drummer. One guy stood up, playing a floor tom, two regular toms and a snare but no kick drum - the floor tom was used in place of the kick. The other percussionist next to him just played cymbals. Together they formed a rhythm section that nobody had seen before. We played rambunctious live shows with props, go-go nuns, a gorilla on stage – anything we could think of that would set us apart from any bands that we were played with. All 10 of our fans ate it up.

When we recorded our first album we had the treat of having Ian Anderson from *JETHRO TULL* play on two tracks on the album, a coup that was made possible by Kurt's lifelong personal story of his relationship with Ian, very similar to this story of me and DEVO. We were honored as this was the same year that *JETHRO TULL* had won a grammy for "BEST METAL BAND", of all things...We even had a song that started to get college radio play, particularly on WNYU, the largest college radio station in NY. Several times we played live on the air and became one of their most requested return acts.

In 1988 DEVO returned with a new album, *TOTAL DEVO* and were going to do an interview on WNYU radio. The Program Director at WNYU was a good friend of *THE SIX AND VIOLENCE* and knew that Kurt and I were big DEVO fans. He called us up and said that on Thursday night Jerry Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh from DEVO were going to be doing an interview on WNYU and asked if we wanted to come up and watch. Kurt and I jumped at the chance.

We arrived at WNYU at the same time as the guys from DEVO did. We all went into the small control room where the interview took place. It was mesmerizing that here I was sitting in a room with them while they went into detail about the philosophy which now inspired my consciousness. My developing cynicism about the world was a direct cause of DEVO, along with listening to Jello Biafra from DEAD KENNEDYS.

After the interview was done someone from WNYU's college magazine asked if they could take some pictures for their next issue. They asked if Kurt and Ray from THE SIX AND VIOLENCE could be in it as well. I still have a pile of copies of that issue and picture, with the caption underneath reading "Jerry Casale and Mark Mothersbaugh from DEVO, with Ray Amico and Kurt Stenzel from THE SIX AND VIOLENCE all stopped in at WNYU RADIO..."

At this point Jerry Casale told Kurt and I that DEVO was going to be filming a video for one of their new songs, *DISCO DANCER* at a club called *THE WORLD* on Saturday and that they were going to go down there to check it out. Kurt and I looked at each other and both knew that we had to go there. I was 20 and Kurt was 21 and half of our lives had been dedicated to DEVO. This was a major happening.

We drove my car (a 1976 Plymouth Volare) downtown to the club and waited on line to get in. It was around midnight and the line was packed with downtown punks, freaks of every kind... the kind of crowd you would expect at a club on a Thursday night on the lower east side of Manhattan. When we went inside we were told that the theme for the evening was "ROCK AND ROLL TRANSVESTITE NIGHT" and it definitely was.

Around 2 am Kurt and I both knew that it was time to leave so we tracked down Jerry Casale and thanked him for everything. He said that he was going to leave as well, that he was going to catch a cab back to his hotel closer to midtown. Kurt and I looked at each other and said "well, we have a car if you want a ride?" and shockingly he said "sure." Holy crap. Here we were, two humongous DEVO fans, driving Jerry Casale to his hotel. We both suffered from "shock and awe".

When we dropped Jerry off at the hotel he thanked us and said "if you guys come by the hotel tomorrow morning I will leave some passes for the video shoot Saturday night". Kurt and I both knew that we would be back in the city in a couple of hours to get those passes.

Around noon on Friday we drove into the city and parked near the hotel. We walked into the lobby and to our surprise we found all the members of DEVO sitting in full uniform in the lobby of the hotel. We went up to them and asked what they were doing and they said that they were waiting for a taxi to come and take them to the club so they could start setting up for the video. Kurt and I once again looked at each other and said "well, we have a car – do you want a ride?"

So there we were: Kurt, myself and the members of DEVO, in full costume, squeezed in my Plymouth Volare sitting in midtown traffic on the way downtown. This was insane, things like this don't happen. But it was. As we drove we were afraid that we would get pulled over by the cops for having not only so many people shoved into a car, but the oddity that they were in full uniform as well. When we arrived at the club there was just a janitor there to let them in. It suddenly occurred to Kurt and I – they were there to set up the video themselves. They did it all, they paid attention to and took care of every aspect of their project. This blue collar, working-man ethic was always part of their philosophy and it had a very big effect on us, it amazed and inspired both Kurt and myself.

We spent the next several hours helping them set up, getting to ask every question about every little thing I had been wondering about for the past 10 years of collecting everything I could find of theirs. It was at this time that the next shocking thing happened. Jerry came up and said that before they filmed the video tomorrow they were going to have a karaoke contest with members of the audience singing a DEVO version of Elvis Presley's *DON'T BE CRUEL*. Whoever won the vote from the audience would win a chance to perform live with DEVO. Jerry asked if I was going to enter the contest and of course the answer was yes. He then said "well, we need to check out the PA system to make sure everything works... you want to try right now?" Right now? You mean after singing DEVO songs into a hairbrush for years you want me to get up on stage and do it for you right now? The answer again and of course was yes.

I got up on stage with the members of DEVO and Kurt being my only audience. I belted out the tune with all the gusto that you would imagine someone in my position would. When I was done they applauded and said that it was great, that my voice reminded them a lot of Jerry's voice (which of course I was mimicking).

Saturday night came and we arrived at the club. There was a large crowd assembled and it was definitely a great vibe – a mixture of concert, party and in my case, religious experience. The club was run by the defrocked owners of the old Studio 54 who wanted to keep the drug party going into the late 80's – there is a great picture of the guys in DEVO being surrounded by naked guests in the orgy room. Guests like Henry Rollins and Lou Reed were there because it was the place to be. Kurt and I had an extra pass and of course we took my cousin Mark, the man responsible for getting me here in the first place. Getting to introduce my cousin to Mark Mothersbaugh is something that I will never forget.

As the karaoke contest drew near I started to get very excited. I had known beforehand that I would be the first one called. In such a situation where the audience votes on who wins there is almost never a circumstance where the first one in the contest gets remembered so I wanted to do something that would be memorable, something to make my performance stand out. Before I left the house I put an extra pair of underwear in the front of my pants.

As I belted out the lyrics to *DON'T BE CRUEL* I paced the stage, once again mimicked my heroes and at the crescendo of the song I reached down the front of my pants and pulled out my underwear in one piece and held them over my head - The crowd went nuts!! Later on a very nerdy guy got up and did a very spastic version of the song and got a huge ovation from the crowd. At the end of the contest he was declared the winner and I came in second. Jerry from DEVO came up to me and congratulated me, telling me that I did great, too bad I came in second. It was a great consolation prize just to have him come up to me and say something. The video shoot was amazing, a live version of DEVO playing with the crowd going crazy. In the final edit of the video there is a straight shot of Kurt screaming his head off. It was fantastic.

Several months later DEVO returned to NY to play a show at THE RITZ. Kurt and I contacted DEVO's manager at the time, Dee Anthony and he invited us to be his guests at his reserved table. We went down and had an amazing time. We were private guests at DEVO's table. This was the highest honor either of us had had in our lives. Towards the end of the show Dee Anthony leaned over to Kurt and I and handed us two passes, saying that there was a secret party after the show in a room above the PALLADIUM, where I had seen DEVO for the first time 6 years earlier. After the show Kurt and I made our way over to the PALLADIUM and found ourselves in a room with a relatively small amount of people, not more than 50. Looking at the far end of the room there was a small stage set up with some musical equipment set up. Both Kurt and I wondered what this was.

At 5 am after the party had been going on for about a couple of hours the members of DEVO got up on the stage and performed songs that they had written back in college, almost 20 years earlier. This was stuff that appears on old bootlegs and home recordings of the band and I had only heard these tunes on the bootlegs I collected over the years. I still have a copy of the set list that they handed out. It was more than fantastic.

DEVO returned to the area later that year to do a show at a dinner theater in New Jersey. Kurt and I both went down to this as well and caught up with the guys. They said that after the show they were going to head back into the city to go see BUTTHOLE SURFERS appearing at THE RITZ. We of course tagged along again.

After this DEVO went on a hiatus and their members went on to do different projects. Kurt and I would find ourselves doing other things as well. While Mark Mothersbaugh started to concentrate on scoring movie soundtracks and TV shows, Jerry Casale was directing music videos (as he had done with all of the DEVO videos over the years) for other bands and doing TV commercials. Kurt moved out to San Francisco to become a zen-keyboardist / telemarketer and I concentrated on working in the music industry. First as a studio engineer and then as a Tour Manager / FOH sound engineer. It was also at this time that I got my first tattoo: the bar code from DEVO's second album, *DUTY NOW FOR THE FUTURE*, my favorite album of all time – on my ass.

After a few years of touring I was on the road with an English band called FAT. In 1997 they had just released their first album on A&M records and were getting close to filming a video for their first single. We were on tour in a van and trailer around the U.S. and found ourselves out in LA with a couple of days off. Since I was a kid and had started to record music, engineering and writing original tunes I had always wanted to give a resume to DEVO studios, now called MUTATO MUZIKA and I happened to be staying at hotel on sunset boulevard, not very far from where the studio is.

I took the opportunity one day to go down to the studio and ring the bell. A woman answered and asked very curiously if she could help me. I said that I was an engineer from NY and that I was in town with a band. I wanted to drop off a copy of my resume in case Mutato was ever looking for engineers. She buzzed me in and met me in the lobby. Taking my resume she thanked me and was about to show me the door when I asked her if she wouldn't mind taking me on a quick tour of the studio, that I was very interested in seeing their setup. She indulged me. As it turns out, the very nice lady who showed me around is Alison Mothersbaugh, Bob's wife.

Walking around the circular building she showed me into each of the live rooms, storage rooms, alternative mix rooms and then finally escorted me into the main studio room, which is in the center of the building. As she opened the door she realized that someone was in there and said suddenly "oh, and here are Mark and Jerry from DEVO!!" Since DEVO had not been that actively involved at the time it was a rare occurrence that they would both be there, but at the time they had just gotten offered some dates on that year's *LOLLAPALOOZA* tour and they were going over the contracts.

I introduced myself and asked if they remembered me from the *DISCO DANCER* video and all of the hanging out at WNYU. Shockingly Jerry looked at me kind of crooked and said that yes, he did remember me. I explained to him that I was now a Tour Manager / Sound Engineer and that I was in town with a new band. I went on to explain that this band was just about to film their first video and that it would be a perfect vehicle for Jerry's video direction. I then handed him a copy of their album and excused myself from their private meeting.

Several days later the band and I were back on tour and had made it all the way to the east coast, now in Atlanta. We were summoned into the offices of A&M records in Atlanta for a conference call meeting between the band, their management in NY and the video department of A&M records in LA. Being the Tour Manager my only responsibility was to get the band to the meeting but I hung out, sitting in the background while they had their meeting.

During the course of the conference call it was revealed that Jerry Casale was in the offices of A&M with their director of Video Production. Jerry said that he was interested in directing the band's first video. This was an honor to everyone involved and the question came up of how exactly did Jerry find out about this band? Through the "Charlie's Angels" type phone box on the conference table Jerry said that he was in his studio when the band's Tour Manager Ray Amico commando-raided his way into the studio and forced a copy of the new album into his hands. He liked what he had heard and was interested in the project. Sitting at the back of the room I then saw everyone's eyes turn to me – and a big smile crossed my face.

It was decided that Jerry would direct the video and that it would be filmed in an abandoned ship on a pier on the west side of Manhattan. Oh, and that the video shoot was scheduled for July 10th – my birthday. I told the band and management that I didn't care what anyone said, I was working on the video. I had been handling all of the band's gear and personal needs for a long time and I didn't need to get paid or anything, I just had to be involved. I phoned the production company that was filming the video and explained who I was. They told me that they appreciated my involvement but that nothing had been in the video budget for anyone else. I said that didn't matter to me, that I would be there either way.

The morning of the video shoot I left at 5 am in a van with all of the band's backline gear. I arrived on the dock and loaded all of their gear in to the ship by myself as the sun started to come up. I finished loading in around 6 am and I sat down on the edge of the pier to relax and wait. A few minutes later Video Director Jerry Casale came walking up to the boat and saw me sitting on the dock. He came over and sat next to me and said "Ray, I have to thank you." "Me? You have to thank me?" I said. Jerry said that yes, he had to thank me, that because of me he had gotten this job and that he was appreciative of my effort. I went on to then sit on the dock with Jerry and tell him everything of this story that you have read so far, showing him the tattoo on my ass and catching up on everything. It was a watershed moment in my life.

When DEVO appeared at LOLLAPALOOZA that year they performed with some of my favorite bands. It was surreal to fly out to San Jose California and see MELVINS on the second stage and then (in a row) THE RAMONES, DEVO, SOUNDGARDEN and METALLICA. It was as if someone had asked me which bands I wanted to see and that I was able to name the exact lineup that I wanted.

It was another year or so before I would speak to Jerry again and when I did it was yet another moment in this story where things went from incredible to well, what's more incredible than incredible? Jerry called and said that DEVO was going to do several corporate events for Microsoft and asked if I would run the shows for them. This was the moment I had waited for my entire life. This promotional tour would be several dates on the west coast and the primary concern was just helping them accomplish them. As the schedule was developed things were whittled down to where it became just one show - in Silicon Valley, California. It wasn't really necessary for me to handle anything but they very nicely asked if I would come anyway. With Kurt living in San Francisco we both went down to the show and milled around the warehouse where the event was taking place. While standing around in the audience I noticed Jerry's girlfriend as she was coming out from backstage. She came over to me and said that Jerry asked if she could find me and for me to go backstage to talk to him.

When I went backstage I was escorted into their dressing room where I found all 5 members of DEVO with their family members and their small children. I hung out talking to Jerry as they got dressed and prepared for the show. Jerry said that he was sorry that things didn't work out for these shows but maybe at some point in the future I could be of some help. I hoped that that would happen someday.

Before they took to the stage dressed in their yellow suits and ENERGY DOMES I was the only one standing back stage with them as they were about to go out on stage. I watched the show from the FOH mix position and reflected on what had happened over all of these years. The influence was huge, but the story would not be over yet.

When passing through LA on another road trip the following year I phoned up Jerry to see how he was doing. He asked if I wanted to have lunch together. Of course I did. We decided to meet up at a restaurant in Santa Monica near the pier. I drove over to the restaurant, parked and then had lunch with the man who had had the largest influence on me as far as developing my thoughts, my ideas, my concept of the world and how things work. We sat together as associates and the weight of this sunk in on me. We spoke of what he was working on now, what type of things were bothering him and what kind of roadblocks he faced in his work. I related with my own stories of what I had been doing with the same depth. It was a very revealing meeting.

As I now have built up a very solid career as a Tour Manager, a Production Manager, as a Sound Engineer and Producer there is always a DEVO influence in what I do. I have worked with tons of different types of artists and no matter who it is I always think of DEVO and how their careers went, or how they were treated. There is always a touch of cynicism but with each different gig, with each different artist that I work with I always pay attention and decide that my reason for doing what I do has a basis in what I learned from observing; from applying my philosophy to what I am working on.

Just last year, in 2004 I got word that DEVO was going to play a show in Central Park at the SUMMERSTAGES. I had experience there and my schedule with the artists that I had been touring with gave me a window around the same time of the show. I would be coming back from a tour in Italy and would be at my apartment in NY, in July – which in touring time is very odd since this is the busiest time of the year for touring.

I called Jerry and told him that if he needed (and completely as a volunteer) that I would like to Production Manage DEVO at this show in Central Park. I told him that I knew much of the bureaucracy involved and that having me in DEVO's corner would insure that they show went off without a hitch. Jerry agreed and handed me over the reins. As I setup everything for the show I proudly called all of my friends, my family and told them all that I was going to be running my own DEVO show. Knowing what that means to me over all my life, everyone was thrilled for me.

On July 23rd, 2004 I walked into Central Park and introduced myself to everyone that I saw. Hello, I'm Ray Amico, I'm DEVO's PRODUCTION MANAGER. The words alone gave me goose bumps. This was my shining achievement after 26 years of being into the band, forming my own band, of becoming an engineer, working in the music business. This was it.

The forecast for rain had existed all day and the venue is not setup to really accommodate the elements. If it rains you are screwed. During the day of setup it poured several times but I remained positive. I took care of everything all day. The members of DEVO showed up and I got them to their dressing room, just helping them get everything they needed together for the show. I sat in the dressing room talking with Mark and Jerry for several hours as it rained while the opening bands played. Almost as a miracle the rain stopped and DEVO took to the stage. As they played I ran around the stage, making sure that everything was just right. For the encore I took Mark Mothersbaugh backstage and dressed him in his BOOJIE BOY costume.

As the band finished the show and walked off stage I rushed them into their dressing room. The sky that held out for the entire show erupted and poured like it hadn't done before. It held out just for me.

After all of this time, over two-thirds of my life, after building up one of the largest collections of DEVO material, after all of the influence and all the strange twists – it happened.

It is now the beginning of July, 2005. My birthday is in a couple of days and DEVO is about to play a month of shows as a U.S. tour from August to September.

And they have a new Tour Manager.

Ray Amico
Tour Manager, DEVO

