



***Van der Graaf Generator – NYC '76***  
***(Background, How It Came Together, And All That...)***  
**by Jim Christopulos**

Van der Graaf Generator played in the U.S. only once in the '70s: at New York's Beacon Theater on October 18, 1976. I first heard part of that show in 1983 after borrowing some VdGG vinyl from a clerk at Rigoni Music in Waukegan, IL. I was 17, and in a band with a few of my high school buddies, and we'd buy drum sticks, guitar strings, etc, at Rigoni. The clerk was a slightly older guy named Brad who was into '70s European bands like VdGG, Roxy Music, and Can. Of his VdGG albums, he loaned me *Godbluff*, *World Record*, and a bootleg called *Montreal '77*—a bit misleading, since it wasn't recorded in Montreal or in '77. Otherwise, great title... I later realized that two of the album's tracks ("La Rossa" and the first half of "Meurglys III") were from the Beacon NYC '76 show. Peter Hammill's guitar was a bit out of tune and he was shouting more than singing in parts, but the rawness drew me in, and eventually I came to love it.

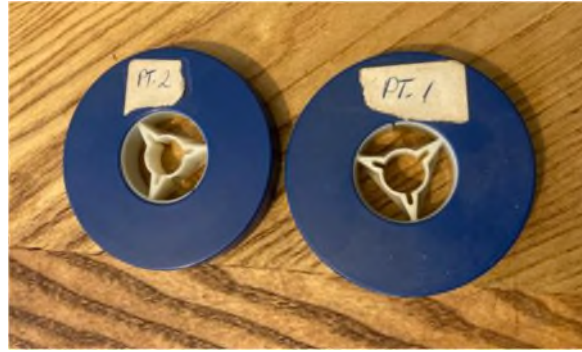
A few years later, 1986, while I was in college at Northern Illinois University, I managed to score the whole 2 ½ hour NYC Beacon Theater '76 gig on two cassettes. It was a revelation. I loved how chaotic and off-the-chain the band sounded. I'd go to classes, come home, and sit in my room for a few hours listening to the gig from start to end. I did that a lot. To this day it's still my favorite live recording of VdGG (or anyone).

Flash forward a few decades. I saw the reformed VdGG in New York, 2012 (The Concert Hall, NY Society for Ethical Culture). In the lobby before the gig, some fans were talking about rumors of silent footage, given to Peter Hammill by a fan, that consisted of VdGG's NYC '76 show. I asked Peter about that a few months later and he confirmed that he was given two reels of film some years back by an anonymous fan, but he'd not digitized them. He didn't seem that interested in doing so.

Flash Forward even more to last year (2025). I was able to acquire silent footage of VdGG's 1976 gig in Toronto, courtesy of Michael Boyce (who filmed the show as a young teen). I married the 10 minutes of footage to audio of the gig and this represented the only known live footage of VdGG during their '76 *World Record* tour. Truly historical. Peter was pretty happy with this development and, a few months later while we were emailing about something unrelated, he ended one of his emails with, "Meanwhile..."

I let that "Meanwhile..." slip by me at first, but luckily went back to that email and noticed Peter had sent an attachment. The attachment was a photo of two Super 8 film reels. I immediately knew what they were, and wrote him back, "Dude... is this what I think it is?????" Lol. He wrote back, "If you're thinking it's the NYC Beacon Theatre '76 show, you're right!" Impressed by the Toronto film, Peter decided, after all these years, to finally digitize the Beacon Theatre footage; he then sent it to me. Phil Smart and I were in

contact with Peter throughout this and when I saw the footage, I was floored. It was shot from the balcony and looked utterly fantastic. Thank you, Anonymous Fan!



Phil and I talked about how I'd approach the NYC '76 film. We decided that I could marry up the snippets of film with concert audio and, in order to make a nice presentation of it, fill it out with taped interviews I had done with the band re: the '76 NYC show (which were for the VdGG book Phil and I wrote years before). Phil also sent me over a hundred photos from the gig which, of course, proved invaluable. At that same time, I noticed a comment on a VdGG YouTube video. The commenter alluded to silent footage he'd shot of the NYC '76 gig. It turned out to be a fan named Bill Wilson, who attended the '76 show as an enthusiastic fourteen-year-old. I contacted Bill and he agreed to digitize his footage and send it off to me. So now, I had two sources of silent footage, which seemed miraculous.

But it got even better. At one point, Bill wrote me that he attended the concert with a friend of his named John Adams, and John had also shot footage of the band that night. My jaw dropped when I read that. *Three sources of film* for the NYC '76 show. While John was initially hard to track down, I finally made contact and we arranged to have his footage digitized. When I eventually saw it, I was floored and I knew we had the potential to put all this footage together for a truly special, magical little film.



John Adams (center, w/poster); Bill Wilson (right, w/poster).  
Train station after the VdGG concert, October 18, 1976

I contacted about 20 - 25 people who had attended the show (they'd mentioned it on Facebook and elsewhere) and asked them to record some recollections. Seven of those fans came through for me, and another gave me a nice written recollection. I'm extremely grateful to these eight fans as I feel it added so much to the film.

The *Van der Graaf Generator – NYC '76* documentary was put together by my then 17-year-old son, Luke, and me. Luke could care less about VdGG but he was a real trooper for the 4 – 5 months we worked on it. (He'd also helped out on the Toronto '76 video a few months before, but this was even more elaborate/difficult) We used a program called DaVinci Resolve. While I can fake my way around DaVinci now, I couldn't last summer and it was up to Luke to do everything as I dictated it to him. Try doing that with a teen who'd rather be at the golf range with his buddies, or online playing some game with them, all while my wife is letting us know that dinner is ready and it's going to get cold if we don't come out to the dining room...

I was amazed at how well the film was coming along. We'd work on it, get about 5 – 10 minutes done at a time, and at night I'd review the film up to where we were and what we had so far, and realize that in spite of me sort of bumbling forward and making the whole thing up as I went along... a real vibe was being created and there was a certain magic here. But the strangest, almost unnerving, thing about it is how perfectly the various footage all slotted in together. For instance, the Anonymous filmer (Peter H's source material) might have footage from a section of "Gog" that cut off after 10 seconds, but John Adams' footage would start up at that end point. When John's 8 seconds ended, the Anonymous footage would start back up. It was almost creepy (in a good way, maybe 'creepy' isn't the right word), almost like an invisible hand was at work. John and Anonymous didn't know each other, but it's almost like they were in contact at the gig 50 years before about who should start/stop filming so that their footage could compliment each other. Same thing in "Still Life"; once the band kicks in for the rocking middle section, all three filmers are at work. But their footage rarely overlaps! The three sources compliment each other and fill in the gaps. So weird, and when I realized this, it was almost unsettling... but at the same time, I was like, "Yes! Perfect!"

Once the film was completed, I popped it onto YouTube. It went "live" on September 17, 2025 and as of this writing it has over 17k views. Not bad. And, Anonymous has since come forward. Turns out his name is Chris Previti and he'd had a correspondence with Peter Hammill in the early 70s (which PH still remembers, amazingly!).

I asked all three filmers (Chris Previti, Bill Wilson, and John Adams) to share some recollections about the NYC '76 concert:

### **Chris Previti ("Anonymous")**

"I was in the balcony and I shot two rolls. I had it transferred to videotape and when Peter came to Philly years later and played the Theatre of the Living Arts, I gave the rolls to him (we had corresponded for a few years in the early 70's) but didn't speak with him as there were too many fans gathered around him. So glad to see it having its time in the light of day. I remember that night. I tried to shoot as much as I could where all four guys were in the shot. I especially wanted to get that wacky little part in "Sleepwalkers". I figured Peter was going to do something interesting and I wasn't disappointed. I'm also so glad I got Jaxon doing his thing at the end of "La Rossa". I thought the job you did on the Toronto show was really great, but how you synced up some audio with the Beacon footage was masterful... I'll be honest, watching the Beacon video actually made me a little misty at times. One of the last comments in the video hit me. Someone said that no one had seen any video of the band before that night so no one knew what to

expect. I hadn't thought of that. I think that's what made the performance even more powerful. My God, what a night!"

## **Q&A with Bill Wilson & John Adams**

### ***How did you get into VdGG? How old were you when you saw the show in October '76?***

**Bill Wilson:** *I was almost 14 when I went with my friends John Krawczyk, Marc Shok, and John Adams to the Beacon Theater to see Van Der Graaf Generator. We all lived in Connecticut, so it was a two-hour train ride into the city. I had just started listening to the band in 1976 and fell in love with Still Life. This tour was for World Record. This particular group of friends were about five years older than me so they were about 18 or 19 and they knew of the show probably from a trade publication, but we heard about it and I know I said I am going.*

### ***You took a train from Connecticut! How far away was that, how long did it take? The concert was on a Monday night; did you take time off school (was there any issue with getting permission from parents, etc)?***

**Bill Wilson:** *[We did take] a train. And when the show was over, we made our way to Grand Central. The last train had already taken off, so we went to Penn Central and literally slept on the bench there for a couple of hours until we were kicked out and moved back to Grand Central. I remember crossing the street in the middle of the night to get to Penn Central and a man wrapped in nothing but tire tubes came up to us and said, "I see you have your laser beams on tonight!" Needless to say, we crossed the street and made our way into the train station. I must've been in the eighth grade, which is middle school or junior high school as it used to be called. I did miss that day and the next day because we got home too late. My household consisted of my mother and brother, my dad passed away two years earlier. Unfortunately, for my mother, that meant she had very little control over me. Luckily, I grew out of my rebellion, but I had to go to the show.*

### ***Although they'd started out in the late 60s, VdGG had never played N America until you saw them in '76. It seems extraordinary that, in the days before you could easily spread the word via the internet, people from all over the country knew about a Monday night gig in NYC by a British cult band. How did you find out about the VdGG concert?***

**Bill Wilson:** *I'm going to have to say that I believe it was in a trade publication. Either Trouser Press, The Advocate (which is a Connecticut publication), or some rock music paper. I know that they advertised it because somehow, we found out about it. I still remember what it was like going into the building and seeing the World Record poster on the wall. I bought one and put it up in my bedroom. I have no idea where that is today. But what a cool souvenir.*

### ***When you got to the theater and saw fellow fans, how exciting was that? What was the vibe surrounding the gig?***

**Bill Wilson:** *Progressive rock has some super die-hard people. I would say it was mostly men and that is to no one's surprise. But the crowd loved the band and the band fed off the crowd. It's not like any other kind of concert because it is so incredibly strange how they portray themselves on stage. To be able to pull off a song like Still Life in the theater is remarkable.*

## **How was the gig? Was the band as good as you hoped?**

**Bill Wilson:** *I thought they were great, and it is my favorite lineup of the band. One of my friends, John Adams, was perturbed at Peter Hammill for what he termed “screaming too much.” He was starting to develop sort of a punk kind of sound ...more of a scream than a gentle singing voice. I guess John liked the ‘Pawn Hearts’ version of Peter better than the ‘World Record’ Peter.*

**John Adams:** *I think Peter Hammill is a genius but I liked the earlier Van der Graaf albums, they were a tighter band. When I saw them at the Beacon, Hammill was not singing, he was mostly screaming. It was almost like punk. I’m really particular about singing and was pretty disappointed, I didn’t enjoy the show. I enjoy his early singing, his sense of melody. He’s operatic, and he reminds me almost of Mozart, the way he writes and constructs his songs. Genius. But I didn’t enjoy his presence on stage that night, nor the way he sang. I wanted him to actually sing the way I knew he was capable of. Thankfully, he did return to that after ’76 on later albums.*

**Bill Wilson:** *I myself really dug it. I remember after the show we went out back and the band kind of fast walked right past us into a limousine. John sort of yelled at the entourage, “Tell Peter Hammill to stop screaming!” It might have been a weird thing to say, but we were all happy and young and silly.*

**What possessed you to sneak a Super 8 camera into the gig? That's pretty gutsy, weren't you afraid of having it confiscated or being caught? From a historical perspective, it's obviously great that you decided to bring it!**

**Bill Wilson:** *I credit me taping so many concerts in the 70s on my silent super eight camera to John Adams. He had done that for a few years before I was even able to go to my first concert. A benefit of him being older for sure. He had such great concert films and I had the movie camera and the projector, so I figured let’s hop on that bandwagon and get all of our favorite bands. We got a lot of great concert films in the 70s.*

**John Adams:** *By the time of the Van der Graaf concert, I’d filmed several bands: Jethro Tull, Yes, Queen, ELP, tons more. So, I wasn’t afraid. I knew how to get the camera in and it was looser then. Not long after, probably around ’77, it tightened up a lot. I remember having first row to a Queen concert in ’77. I had my camera in my bag and a security guy came up to me and said, “If you even get it out, we’ll take it from you.” I was in the first row, there was no way I could hide it.*

**How surreal is it to have had that silent footage for almost fifty years, and finally have the corresponding audio married up to it? Any final thoughts on the completed vid?**

**Bill Wilson:** *It’s completely surreal to watch the film that we shot synced up to the actual sound from that day. So many wheels in motion to make that happen. To your credit Jim, you did a fantastic job in this documentary. I don’t think it could’ve been any better. Hats off!*

**John Adams:** *It’s like a dream. It’s something I’d always thought about and it’s amazing to finally see it done. I have so much other footage I’ve shot of other bands, I’d love to see something done with it all.*