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## Lost Generation II? Rockers in Paris

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PARIS — Elliott Murphy plays "post-Dylan wave" rock 'n' roll in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and Scandinavia when he's not writing novels and short stories that have been published in several European languages, none of them English. His feature stories have appeared in The New Yorker and Newsweek. He wrote a column in the French Rolling Stone and lives near the banks of the Seine with his French wife, Françoise, and his young son, Gaspard.

There comes a time when expatriates decide to go back or can no longer go back. After more than four years, he figures that time is past.

Mike Rimbaud, American despite a French name, wonders if one day he and Murphy and their fellow American rockers-in-Paris will be remembered like the writers in the '20s and '30s, some sort of Lost Generation Part II. The line goes from Jim Morrison through Johnny Thunders by way of, stretching the definition, T-Bone Walker.

Murphy, who is 44, produced "Red Light" (Boucherie), the 29-year-old Rimbaud's top-notch new CD recorded in Paris. Many jazzmen and rockers come to Paris after getting nowhere in America. Rimbaud skipped the middle somehow. He sent a tape to the independent label Boucherie, they put it out right away, he moved to Paris two and a half years ago and even toured the Soviet Union (before the aborted putsch in 1991) before touring the United States (one of the songs on the album is "KG Baby").

Are they sorry they left New York?

"They don't want you to succeed over here, that's for sure," Murphy began. A lively discussion followed. When it turns out that a musician can make a living and be a respected creative artist in this land of 300 cheeses, good cheap wine and Continental women, forget about making it in New York. They are still stuck there, we are considered rats who deserted a sinking ship. Our success is their failure.

"They're definitely jealous," Rimbaud said. "When I was coming to live in Paris, a lot of people in New York said, 'Oh, you're so lucky. I have songwriter friends over there who have been struggling for years. Maybe they put out a record or two, but they mostly get day gigs to pay the rent. I haven't had a day gig since I got here.'"

Murphy, who has recorded 16 albums and has a solid if not mass reputation, worked as a legal secretary for a New York music-business law firm before he left for good in 1989. Tired of the struggle to make a living from music, he was thinking of becoming a lawyer. Clients would come in



Mike Rimbaud (front) and Elliott Murphy: the best of both worlds.

and say to the partners: "Isn't that Elliott Murphy typing out there? What's he doing that for?"

"The good thing about coming to Paris from New York," Rimbaud said, turning the cliché around, "is that Parisians are much less rude than New Yorkers. It's like you're already in shape."

The major record companies spent millions trying to break Murphy, but not much happened. If you don't make it the first time around, you're a "loser." (Rimbaud says that's one nice thing about France, they like losers.) Murphy was dropped. He still bears "a lot of resentment against the entire American music business" for the way he was treated. In the late '70s, he had a hit here with his song "Anastasia." He started coming over regularly. He "really loves France," loves going on the road by the TGV high-speed train through beautiful France. Just think, he could have had a hit in Des Moines.

Rimbaud bears a resemblance to Jim Morrison without the pout: "I did a 12-day

tour in two weeks with my sack and my guitar and rode the TGV from town to town. No airports. No hassles. It's so much easier. But actually I miss the energy of New York. I'd like to go back and forth."

"I'm not a Communist," Murphy laughed. "I'm not a terrorist. I'm not anti-American. But the last time I was over there I got stuck in the Pittsburgh airport and looking at the other people there, the way they were dressed, I felt like a Martian."

"Yeah, but New York is different," Rimbaud sounded defensive.

"You want the best of both worlds, Mike," Murphy observed. "New York night life and Parisian women. Actually, since I stopped drinking, New York has lost a lot of its allure for me."

When Murphy plays The Bottom Line in Greenwich Village, about twice a year, he always makes the announcement: "It's terrifying to be performing for an audience that understands everything you're saying." When he plays France, he tells them — in French: "Everybody's worried about immi-

grants coming over and stealing your work. You may not realize it, but you're looking at one up here on stage. I took one of your women and I'm up here polluting your culture with American rock 'n' roll."

"There's no way me or Elliott are stealing anything," Mike objected. "People want to hear us because they like our songs. In my opinion we add to the culture. I learned French because it's a beautiful language and I love it, but I sing in English. These people grew up with the Rolling Stones too."

Murphy makes the analogy that "for the French to listen to rock in English is like Americans listening to opera in Italian. English is the language of rock 'n' roll, the French accept that. It's got nothing to do with cultural imperialism. But there's no doubt, I've seen it happening in the past year, Americans are becoming the enemy again. It comes from the top, from the bureaucracy, not rock fans. There are a lot more American rock musicians in Paris than people realize. But they're so integrated nobody even thinks of them as Americans any more."

"It usually has something to do with a woman," Rimbaud added.

Bruce Springsteen, who is a "sort of friend," told him his music seems more European than American. Murphy agrees: "I think there are Americans who have that sensibility in them, living abroad builds on it. There's a whole world out here. Once you've left, you can't go back again. I mean spiritually."

"You can't sing cowboy songs again, that's for sure," Rimbaud added.

Murphy laughed: "There are more cowboy boots and Harley Davidsons in Paris than in New York."

"Yeah. And Johnny Hallyday's got half of them."

Murphy said that he likes Hallyday's hit "Quelque Chose de Tennessee," and was surprised when he learned it was about Tennessee Williams, not the state: "Imagine a hit about Tennessee Williams in America? Unbelievable! Actually, I've thought about singing it in English."

When Murphy first came to Europe, he was busking in the streets of Rome. He can ride a horse and he tried to get a role in a Sergio Leone movie. But they were filming in Spain and he ended up with a bit part in "Fellini Roma." When he performed there earlier this year, he sent Federico Fellini a copy of his latest CD. The filmmaker wrote him a letter saying thanks but unfortunately age had weakened his memory and he did not remember Murphy's "incisive performance" but he'd listen to the album and good luck anyway.

Murphy framed the letter: "For me, that moment in Fellini's movie is what started my magical European musical experience."