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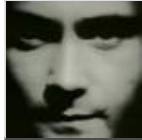

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## Ethan Gold's Art and Tragedy

Silver Lake singer-songwriter faces down the darkness, with only his music to see him through

By **Chris Walker** Thursday, Jan 26 2012Comments (5) [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)

Last January saw the release of singer-songwriter **Ethan Gold's** debut, *Songs From a Toxic Apartment*. The title wasn't a metaphor. His **Fairfax** abode was a literal cesspool, festering with flaking asbestos, decaying carpets, chronic gas leaks and mattress-occupying larvae. Gold originally was attracted to the place because of its low rent, but by the time the Department of Public Health stepped in, he had to wear a gas mask in order to retrieve his belongings.

*Toxic Apartment* is Gold's retrospective, using field recordings of the place's odd creaks and noises and featuring earthy indie rock and folksy ballads. It has received nods from outlets like *Pitchfork*. "I was dealing with toxicity in both a material and spiritual sense," Gold says of the work now.

Turns out the apartment stood for something larger than itself: It mirrored the dark patterns and troubled memories of his past. He speaks of the time his mother's boyfriend dangled him off the side of the **Golden Gate Bridge**. And then there was the death of his mother, who went down in a fiery helicopter crash with a different boyfriend, iconic Bay Area concert promoter **Bill**



PHOTO BY JENNIE WARREN

Ethan Gold with his TV-guitar and piston-keyboard, for use in an upcoming video

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Graham.

Gold has been trying for years to exorcise demons through his music. After graduating magna cum laude from [Harvard University](#), he avoided [graduate](#) school to pursue music full-time. He later spent a full decade working on a rock opera called *The Rise and Fall of CAP*, a satire of a metal band, something like *The Wall* meets *Ziggy Stardust*. The project grew to some 75 songs, dealing with topics ranging from child abuse and gang brutality to Nazism.

"It was like I was out to change Western man's entire [psychology](#) of civilization," Gold says. "It was insane."

He realized the work had spiraled out of control and crafted *Songs From a Toxic Apartment* to get his thoughts in order, self-producing it, recording all of the vocal, guitar and drum parts himself and mixing it on his home computer. He's now in the midst of what he calls the album's "phase two," which consists of filming and releasing music videos from the work. For them he's constructed a set of curious, handmade artifacts, including a medieval knight's armored suit covered in speaker cones and a series of miniature movie sets with intricate, doll-size furniture.

Gold continues to perform live shows as well, including Feb. 1 at the Que Sera in [Long Beach](#) and Feb. 3 at the Satellite. He's also thinking of turning *Toxic Apartment* into a play with the help of his twin brother, filmmaker [Ari Gold](#), who directed the award-winning short film *Helicopter*, about their mother's death, and is not to be confused with the *Entourage* character of the same name. It's all in an effort to reconcile with the haunted memories of his past.

**Straddling** a backward-turned chair in his new apartment, Gold fidgets, adjusting his square-rimmed glasses and unkempt, sandy hair. He squints in concentration as he tries to figure out how best to approach the subject of his biography. Unlike when he's discussing his music, which he does calmly and with passionate enthusiasm, he breaks off midsentence and apologizes for rambling. As his story unfolds, it becomes clear why he's having a difficult time. To hear him tell it, his troubles began even before his mother gave birth to him.

"I think [it] goes back to my twin brother getting most of the food in the womb," Gold says. "He got to go home when we were born, but I went to an incubator."

They were raised in San Francisco by a family that was constantly in the artistic spotlight. His

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mother, [Melissa Gold](#), was a member of the prominent East Coast Dilworths, who managed the [New York Metropolitan Museum of Art](#) and financially advised the Rockefeller estate. His father is renowned novelist [Herbert Gold](#), a Beat who was a close friend of [Allen Ginsberg](#).

They split when Ethan was 4, and he says he was victimized later by more than one of his mother's abusive boyfriends. There was the seemingly gentle doctor who held him over the side of the Golden Gate Bridge when he was 6, and made him stick his fingers into electric sockets. His mother later dated the patriarch of a trailer-park family of dubious values; one member beat him up, while others encouraged Gold's sister to date a neo-Nazi skinhead.

"Things were really dangerous," Gold recalls. "My friends weren't allowed to even come into the house."

At that time Melissa also was involved in a decades-long, on-and-off relationship with iconic concert promoter Bill Graham, the German-born founder of the Fillmore West and East, who helped popularize counterculture bands like [Jefferson Airplane](#) and the [Grateful Dead](#).

The relationship exposed Gold to the music industry at a young age. At 10 he was hanging out backstage at [Black Sabbath](#) concerts. In 1991 his mother and Graham committed to each other, and it seemed she had finally found happiness and a stable relationship. But that October tragedy struck: Returning from a [Huey Lewis and the News](#) concert in [Vallejo](#) in the midst of a windstorm, their helicopter hit a high-voltage tower, claiming both their lives and cutting power to more than a third of [Marin County](#).

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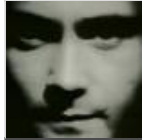
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...continued from page 1

"I had no idea how to make any fucking sense out of the whole thing," Gold says. "I was completely lost."

Then enrolled at Harvard, he began to feel out of place. To escape his studies — and the overwhelming media attention following the deaths — he'd steal moments to write songs at the piano. He began to realize that music was more than a hobby, it was a calling.

Not that there hadn't been signs before. An insomniac from an early age, Gold had long been imagining people singing to him in a state of lucid dreaming, including, once, [Bruce Springsteen](#). After waking up, he realized the Boss had been performing a song Gold had written himself. "So I had to ask myself, why was I getting songs delivered to me in the middle of the night if it wasn't my duty to follow them?"

"I must sound like a crazy person," he adds.

"Look, I do have a very rational brain. I just get spiritual when it comes to music."



PHOTO BY JENNIE WARREN

Ethan Gold with his TV-guitar and piston-keyboard, for use in an upcoming video

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It gets crazier. On his last day at the toxic apartment, a single-engine small plane crashed one block from his building, killing its pilot and two passengers. The similarity to his mother's death proved too much; Gold knew something needed to change. He'd been living in substandard conditions because he'd refused to use his mom's insurance money. This, he says, had the effect of keeping him mired in the past rather than moving beyond it.

Nowadays, Gold exercises his creativity from a suave, art deco pad overlooking the [Silver Lake](#) reservoir. *Songs From a Toxic Apartment* has proved to be a cathartic work, and its "phase two" is letting him continue the healing process.

He doesn't expect this period to last forever, however. His follow-up work is written and ready to record. "Don't worry," he says with a laugh. "This album will be a lot less heavy."

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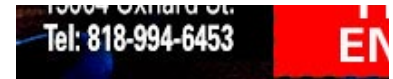
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**Nan** 3 months ago

Ethan is Gold. And I agree, this is a courageous interview. I love reading the truth. From your mom's friend in Santa Fe, Nan


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Great Album! Alway's listen to it when i'm stressed out and it calms me. "Why don't you sleep" reminds me of the day's my dad used to play piano for me as a child. That's special!


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**ÊüJěňě ŐăKděň** 3 months ago

The best music article I've read in ages. It takes bravery beyond cunning to be an artist of any sort. But to reveal it's scathed source for all to see is to truly love one's fans. Hearts on fire to Ethan Gold ... trialed over flames, turning darkness into light.

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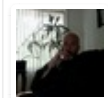
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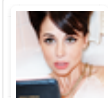
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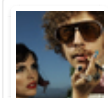
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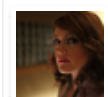


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