

# RESONANCE

HEADPHONES  
NOUVELLE VAGUE  
DUB GABRIEL  
JAMES KOCHALKA  
THE PLANET THE  
ROADTRIP NATION

EVOLVING SOUND + VISION ISSUE 46

**miranda july**  
debut filmmaker  
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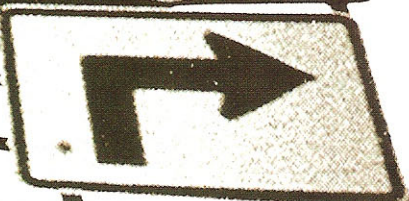
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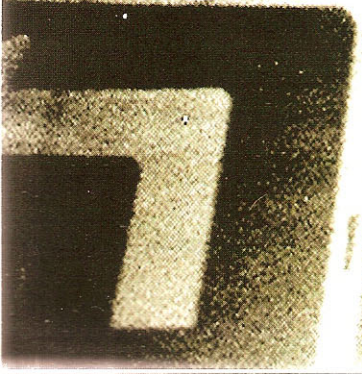
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# CHARMERS OF THE HIGHWAY STRIP

**THE ROADTRIP NATION PROJECT HAS BOOKS, TV SHOWS AND MORE TO EXPLAIN IT. BUT, ACCORDING TO ONE OF THE GROUP'S FOUNDERS, ALL THEY REALLY WANT IS FOR YOU TO GET OUT THERE.**

It's a most American story: Three friends, unsure what their lives mean, hit the road, and like so many before them, find some meaning out there. The difference here is what happens after the road. The three who left, fleeing the storied real world in a fit of post-collegiate anxiety, return home to find that the road was more real than the lives they'd planned on, so they proselytize and build a business. They travel to college campuses. They write books—most recently *Finding the Open Road*—and produce PBS shows. And they're staying on the road. Not a bad outcome for something born out of the universal question, "What the hell am I doing with my life?"

"It was very much leading with our hearts," enthuses Mike Marriner about the genesis of the ever-evolving Roadtrip Nation project. "It sounds cheesy, but [we approached] it from that angle because everything had been approached from the exact opposite angle our whole lives." Apprehensive about joining the workforce, Marriner and his college buddies, Brian McAllister and Nathan Gebhard, took off in 2001 on the first of many trips. Marriner's voice betrays his Orange County upbringing and his passion for surfing—punctuated with words like "awesome," and "totally," his breathless speech rolls along fueled by genuine excitement. He wants others to know that they can live the life they want, even if they're too caught up in the world of work, school, or other obligations.

On the road, the trio had interviewed notables (politicians, CEOs, artists) and fascinating not-so-notables (a Maine lobsterman) about their lives. The topics covered in the interviews differed but rotated around deceptively simple themes. The friends wanted to know how those living fulfilling lives had achieved it. So they asked outright and, surprisingly, found many forthcoming answers—answers that suggested lines of thinking they'd never considered.

"There's no system for engineering creativity at all," Marriner says of the education he and his friends had grown up with. "It's a system for getting people to do what they're told." The rigid confines of academia clashed with what they learned on the road. When they returned home, old plans of law school, med school and accounting made little sense. But a funny thing happened before the trio was able to get on with their lives as they'd expected.

While on the road, word of the trip had spread. Local, and soon national, media caught on. The travelers were invited to talk shows, interviewed for papers and the evening news. "We just let go of everything and followed our noses," says Marriner about the attention that the trip received. Capitalizing on that interest, they wrote a book, and turned their video account of it into a documentary. They decided to start telling their

STORY BY JAMES BARNES



Left: *On the Road*, RV style. Above top: The Roadtrip Nation battlecruiser. Above bottom: Some guy named Paul Frank contributes his Hancock to the RV's well-autographed innards.

story in hopes of inspiring others to take similar journeys. The roadtrippers formed alliances with colleges around the country, setting up clubs to send students on trips of their own that would allow the same kind of self-discovery. All of these threads are woven through the movement its originators cast as Roadtrip Nation.

It all proceeds from a worldview distilled in the "Roadtrip Manifesto." A line from the manifesto like, "As a generation, we need to get back to focusing on individuality. Self-construction rather than mass production" may inspire smirks from readers with a few more years under their belts. And the realization that maybe college doesn't prepare students for the world won't seem that revolutionary. The techniques suggested—interviewing successful people, brainstorm-

While Roadtrip Nation casts a wide net, Marriner hopes most strongly to reach those who are not in progressive environments. He acknowledges that people who live in big cities may be the five percent who, through exposure to unconventional lifestyles, have been able to create more unconventional lives. But Marriner asks pointedly, "What about the other 95% out there? Those people will never learn about this, but inside, they're already feeling it." Reaching the "other 95%" explains the project's goal to use all available media. Marriner notes that "most TV pretty much sucks, but with public television you can keep it independent. If we can keep getting these stories out through that and through books and maybe through our website ... actually using

**"It's for the 25-year-old girl who's a waitress, and at night she's writing a screenplay, but she's feeling bogged down because it's so fucking hard. The generational thing is like, 'look, you're not alone.'"**

ing one's passions before making a plan—will also seem familiar to anyone who's ever leafed through one of myriad books purporting to aid in selecting careers. And what of the oddly prescriptive pleas for a generation of individuals? "The point is to look at it on an individual level," Marriner clarifies. "Sometimes we step out of it and look at it on a generational level because we want to give people hope ... It's for the 25-year-old girl who's a waitress, and at night she's writing a screenplay, feeling really passionate about it, but she's feeling bogged down because it's so fucking hard. The generational thing is like, 'Look, you're not alone.'"

the media and PR is an awesome way to get messages out to people everywhere."

It all has a quixotic ring to it, but evidence that the plan works lies in every young person who takes the advice and hits the road—and many have. Even those who've fallen into a daily grind may find inspiration in these stories. Choosing a better life is possible. It may just take the earnestness of a community like Roadtrip Nation to remind us of that. So, cynics, step off for a moment. How many hours have you clocked at the office this week? Maybe you should get out there, too. □