Rage, Reborn
The latest act of rock guitarist Tom Morello ’86
by MAX SUECHTING

GUITARIST Tom Morello ’86 was watching CNN one day in 2016 when a peculiar headline caught his eye: “Donald Trump Rages Against the Machine.”

The chyron cheekily referenced Rage Against the Machine, the 1990s rock band whose pioneering synthesis of hip-hop’s rhythmic lyricism and heavy metal’s guitar-driven pyrotechnics Morello helped to define on Rage’s airwaves-incinerating first record in 1992. Morello was furious at the comparison drawn between the Republican candidate’s pledge to “drain the swamp” and Rage’s anti-authoritarian and socialist ideals. So, he says, “I did what any self-respecting pissed-off person would do: I wrote a snarky tweet about it.”

Then he called some friends—his former Rage bandmates Brad Wilk (drums) and Tim Commerford (bass), as well as emcees B-Real and Chuck D (the vocalists behind legendary hip-hop groups Cypress Hill and Public Enemy, respectively)—to propose a collaboration. Their previous projects were all expressly political; by performing those songs again, Morello hypothesized, perhaps they could alert audiences to the dangers they perceived in a possible Trump presidency. And so the all-star touring machine Prophets of Rage was born.

Morello doesn’t identify with the president’s particular brand of populism, but he does have a window into its appeal. He grew up in Libertyville, Illinois, a town near the Wisconsin border that he morosely describes as Trump Country. He remembers “feeling totally politically impotent in a small town where the options were trying out for the wrestling team or working at Dairy Queen—all while apartheid raged in South Africa and government death squads killed nuns in Central America.” Music was “a tether,” something that “made me feel like I wasn’t alone in my worldview or in my small town.” By the end of high school, Morello, then a self-described “Spandex-wearing metalhead,” had developed both a love for the guitar.
and what he describes as “a great revolutionary fervor” to raise awareness of distant social problems and arm people with both the desire and knowledge necessary to make change.

At Harvard, this passion led him to concentrate in social studies—an honors program that he didn’t initially realize required significant academic effort. Balancing schoolwork and mastering an instrument posed “serious time-management challenges.” He often wondered if he was “wasting my time in the stacks of Widener Library when I should be spreading the message, playing barrooms across Ohio.”

Gradually, however, this contradiction began to appear more like a harmony. Music, Morello felt, was a natural vehicle for the political ideas he was honing in class. As he devoted long hours to the guitar—polishing his technique, gigging with cover bands, and beginning to write songs—academic work felt less like a distraction than “a way to arm myself intellectually.” Now, he chuckles at the memory of “practicing guitar for four hours a day in a stairwell, trying to read Max Weber at the same time.”

After graduating, Morello headed for Los Angeles, where he played in several bands and worked in the offices of U.S. senator Alan Cranston before forming Rage Against the Machine with Wilk, Commerford, and vocalist Zack de la Rocha in 1991. His adopted hometown has been huge cultural components of Los Angeles’s music history. But you can also hear rage, punk rock, hard rock—all of which are huge cultural components of Los Angeles’s music history. But you can also hear...

Facebook’s recent admission that tens of millions of users’ personal information had been repurposed for political ends dramatizes concerns about digital-era privacy. But long before the Internet, “privacy was the language of choice for addressing the ways that U.S. citizens were—progressively and, some would say, relentlessly—rendered knowable by virtue of living in a modern industrial society,” writes Sarah E. Igo ’91, in The Known Citizen: A History of Privacy in Modern America (Harvard, $35). Igo, associate professor of history (and of political science and sociology and law) at Vanderbilt, uses all those disciplines in a sweeping overview that manages, fortuitously, to be especially timely and engagingly written, as the introduction, excerpted here, attests.

In a sardonic poem of 1940, composed just after his migration to the United States from Great Britain, W. H. Auden memorialized an “Unknown Citizen.” Written in the form of an epitaph for an “unknown” and yet all-too-knowable citizen, the poem offers a capsule biography of an unnamed individual from the point of view of the social agencies charged with tracking and ordering his affairs. The citizen…is identified by a string of code similar to a U.S. Social Security number…and his life amounts to a compendium of details gleaned by employers, hospitals, schools, psychologists, market researchers, insurers, journalists, and state bureaus. The poem’s final lines point simultaneously to the hubris and the limits of society’s knowledge of this man. “Was he free? Was he happy? The question is absurd: Had anything been wrong, we should certainly have heard.”

If seldom as eloquently as Auden, contemporary Americans raised similar questions about those who sought to know them, whether for the purpose of governance or profit, security or convenience, social welfare, or scholarly research. Indeed, the proper threshold for “knowing” a citizen in a democratic, capitalist nation would become in the twentieth century one of Americans’ most enduring debates. How much should a society be able to glean about the lives of its own members, and how much of oneself should one willingly reveal? What aspects of a person were worth knowing—and to whom—and which parts were truly one’s own? Where and when could an individual’s privacy be guaranteed? As the century advanced, the questions became more insistent. Were private spaces and thoughts, undiscovered by others, even possible under the conditions of modern life? What would an even more knowing society mean for the people caught in its net—and for the individual liberties that Americans supposedly prized? To wit: Could known citizens be happy? Were they, in fact, free?

This book borrows the poet’s questions to pry open the contentious career of privacy in the modern United States.
Montage

a class tension in the music, where you see Lamborghinis rolling by homeless encampments on Sunset Strip.”

Morello’s ability to channel that tension into his guitar work is a large part of what keeps Prophets of Rage from becoming, in his words, “a nostalgia act.” Prophets of Rage, the album of original material the band released last fall, sounds less like a truly new work than a synthesis of the members’ previous groups: Rage Against the Machine’s raw heavy-metal power; the contemplative melancholia of its successor, Audioslave (which Morello, Wilk, and Commerford formed in 2001 with Soundgarden singer Chris Cornell); Public Enemy’s machine-gun lyricism; Cypress Hill’s dark, slinky funk. The songs mix hip-hop’s grooving tempos and syncopated backbeats with the simple harmonies and overdriven crunch of heavy metal, with Chuck D and B-Real delivering plenty of timely political observations (reflecting on LA’s homelessness epidemic, B-Real raps, “Living on the 110, four sharing one tent / Can’t afford no rent, forgotten by the government”). But although the album features somewhat less of Morello’s signature FX-driven experimentalism, his guitar is its strongest aesthetic anchor. The rhythmic swagger of “Strength in Numbers”—a paean to working-class solidarity—and the slithering, metallic anti-nationalist anthem “Who Owns Who” keep easy pace with his fiery performances on older tracks like Rage’s “Vietnow” and Audioslave’s “Set It Off.”

The smile is almost audible in Morello’s voice as he happily reports that a large percentage of their audience is too young to have been original Rage fans; he is excited to be attracting and, he hopes, converting a new generation of listeners. But more broadly, he continues, he thinks of the album as addressed to...well, everyone. “I hope the album is a clarion call to those who know in their hearts that the world is not owned and run by people who deserve to be owning and running it—and that there is a better way, a different way, to achieve a more decent and humane planet. And if you take that to heart, you can be the David to any Goliath.”

Next Steps

A dancer’s dual life
by SAMANTHA MALDONADO

On a Wednesday afternoon in April, members of the Paul Taylor Dance Company rehearsed Esplanade in their sunny, Lower East Side studio. Eight dancers leapt and crawled, paired up and drifted apart, and walked, ran, and slid across the floor—pedestrian movements made elegant.

As the smallest dancer, barely skimming five feet, Madelyn Ho ’08 stood out among her taller counterparts. She wore a green leotard with purple legwarmers pulled up over her knees and an unwavering smile—a resting grin face—that she made disappear only with seeming effort during darker, moodier parts of the choreography. Her steps were precise yet energetic.

Ho also stands out in her company for another reason: her dance career has been entwined with one in medicine. After graduating with a degree in chemical and physical biology and a serious love of dance, she joined Paul Taylor’s smaller company, Taylor 2, right out of college. In 2012, having auditioned for the main company twice without success, and feeling she’d learned all she could, she moved back to Boston to start at Harvard Medical School (HMS). Three years in, while looking up PTDC’s performance dates, she spotted an audition notice. She decided she’d try out a third time.

“It was this sort of immediate gut reaction,” she said. Until that point, she’d figured she was done with dancing. But she couldn’t pass up the opportunity to audition, just to see what would happen. She thought the outcome would give her some closure—a final confirmation that her dance career was in fact behind her. “I just didn’t have any expectations,” she said, “and so I felt like I was able to, in some ways, be freer.”

Ho made the main company. She broke her lease and started dancing full time in the spring of 2015, squeezing her fourth-year medical requirements into her professional schedule. Her schedule changed by the day, but in general, time off from rehearsals meant a full day in a clinic or hospital as part of her rotations, or work on her research project about the history of dance medicine. Sometimes she skipped company class to spend the morning on rotation, then joined her fellow dancers at noon for a