

Joshua Camp (2003) on trying to sell Waits a Claviola, ca. 1995: "I was in a band with a guy whose brother was Sparklehorse, essentially. He [Mark Linkous] has a band but it's just him. Lone genius in the studio. And he got a deal with Capitol records and he became the critics' darling, everyone thought he was a genius. This was around 1995. And I got to know him fairly well because they were really close brothers and every now and then, before his fame, he would come play bass or whatever with our band. And of course all of us are huge Tom Waits fans and I think somehow, through his manager here in New York, he was trying to get in touch with Tom Waits now that he was gaining popularity. Or maybe it was that his manager gave Tom Waits his CD, and somehow it got back to him that Tom Waits really liked the Sparklehorse CD, so maybe that was what gave him the courage to ask. Or whatever. So roundabout that time we got the claviolas in, and I was excited about this crazy weird instrument and I told [Mark Linkous] about it because I knew he would think it was really cool, too, and he said, [very excited fan voice] "Wow, man, maybe I'll send this literature to Tom Waits!" And I'm like "OK, sure." And that's really what happened. He sent the standard literature they send out to record stores to Tom Waits, 'cause he got his address from his manager. So it was probably a couple months later, and I get this hand-written letter from California. And inside is this letter saying, "I've heard of this instrument, the claviola. Where can I purchase it in the northern California area? Tom Waits" With his phone number! And it's in pencil! And I'm like, it can't be THE Tom Waits. And as my job, I answer all the letters that come in. Product inquiries, et cetera. So Mike and I debated. And I was like, "Do you think it's really him?" And he's like, "Man, you gotta call." And I was like, "No, can't do it!" And finally I think I waited three days until I finally got the courage. And I said, all right, I'm going to dial the number. I'm just going to do it, it's my job, I have to do it anyway. So I call and it's a girl on the answering machine saying you've reached this number, so I start to leave this message, "I'm from Hohner, blah blah blah, claviola," and suddenly the phone picks up and he goes [JC does dead-on Waits growl] "Yeah, this is Tom Waits." And I was like "Oh My God!" It was all I could do to just keep my shit together and be all business-like and explain the claviola. I mean, I was literally on the phone for fifteen or twenty minutes with him... He just asked the questions anyone would ask, like what's the range on it. But then it got more interesting. Apparently he was working on "Mule Variations" at that point, and [he asked me if it would sound good if you ran it through an amplifier, and I said yes.] And then I was trying to find ways to describe it. And I was saying "Yeah, it sort of has a flute quality to it, a mellotron flute." And he said, "Oh, does it sound kind of like this? OOOoooh" And I was like, "Well, kind of. But it has sort of a reed-y clarinet to it quality as well." And he said, "Oh, you mean more like, AAAaaahhhh" And then I was like, "Well, Tom--because we were on a first-name basis at this point--do you want me to just play it over the phone?" And he said, "Oh, Josh, could you do that? It would be so wonderful if you could do that." So I immediately ran to get a claviola and then I had to debate in my head: should I play a song? Because at this point I hadn't really let out that I was a Tom Waits FREAK. And I didn't know if that be a little too much. So I just played something vaguely minor and circus-like. Like One Ring Zero [laughs]. And he said, "Oh wow, that's really interesting." And he wanted to know the price. And at that point I had to go ask our manager, what the price would be for Tom Waits, you know, who's famous, and if he could get a deal. And at that point [the claviolas] were new. The ones we eventually got were after they had discontinued them and they were supercheap. But originally they were 1400 dollars. And the endorsee deal at Hohner is just half price. Even Bob Dylan has to pay half

price. Neil Young, all those guys. Even though nobody would be playing those things if it weren't for them. And my manager said we could give him 700 dollars. So I came back and said "Tom, we can give you a claviola for 700 dollars." And there was a long pause. And then he goes, "Josh." And I'm like, "Yeah." "Is there any reason why it's 700 dollars?" And I was completely bullshitting at this point and said something about 'fine German engineering.'... No, he didn't buy it. But he lingered on the phone for awhile, he was very interested. I told him I was a musician and played accordion and knew Mark Linkous and he was like "Oh, tell that boy that all of us love his record, we play it all the time, the kids love it." He actually mentioned his kids a lot. I told him at one point that the claviola sounds like a Melodica and he said "Yeah, I had one of those but I think my kid lost it."(Source: "Surgery of Modern Warfare" January 6, 2003. The Day Tom Waits Called the Hohner Warehouse: an interview with One Ring Zero's Joshua Camp)