

Do You and Your Friends Have Interesting Conversations?

Consider taking your act on the road.

By Rebecca Bates (@re.beccabates)



Title TK “playing” at Dia:Beacon in 2013.

Title TK is a band that doesn’t play music. At every show from 2010 to 2014, Cory Arcangel, Howie Chen, and Alan Licht stepped out in front of the crowd, held instruments, and then just... talked. They chatted as any group of friends does when every member has a similar nerdy, niche passion, with an enthusiasm so lively and infectious they were able to attract audiences to venues like the Whitney Museum, Dia:Beacon, and the Pop Montréal festival.

“We’re a talk-rock band.”
—Alan Licht

Of course, individually each member of Title TK has their own draw: Arcangel is a technology-based artist (he once modified a Super Mario Bros. cartridge, erasing everything but the game’s clouds), Chen is a curator, and Licht is an experimental musician and composer. If a band’s onstage banter is an art form, and it is, Title TK brings this chatter into a genre all its own, discussing everything from Drake’s sincerity to Carrie Brownstein’s performances on *Portlandia*, and whether Kanye West is the Neil Young of our time.

With transcripts from their shows now compiled into the collection *Title TK*, the band talks to Sweet about what it means when musicians don’t make music.

First, how would you classify what Title TK is?

Cory Arcangel: Oh, absolutely a band. Though, with that said, soon we will be a podcast. The book documents the years we were active as a touring band.

Alan Licht: A talk-rock band.

“We take kryptonite and make lemonade.”
—Howie Chen

How did you guys all meet each other?

CA: Well, we were around the New York art scene, but it was while we were all chatting before one concert—a release party for the band XXX Macarena—that the idea came up of us starting a band.

Howie Chen: I think we came up with the idea while talking to each other while the the other band was playing. In a way, maybe we were drawn to each other because we were talking rather than listening at the time.

AL: One of the things we talked about was how oversaturated with bands the world is, that it seems like everyone is in a band, and I made the joke that just the three of us talking like this could be a band. Cory said, “I’m going to write this down, and I’ll look at it again in two days and if I still think it’s a good idea, can we talk about doing it?”

CA: Also, probably worth noting, we decided to do no outreach—websites, mailings, etc. We took all the annoying stuff out of being in a band.

It seems like Title TK takes banter, which can be kryptonite for bands, and uses it to expand what is often a really uncomfortable space.

CA: I guess that’s what makes it fun, not exactly knowing what you are doing while you are doing it. Though, as we played more and more shows, we were eventually able to at least recognize what made certain performances better than others, and we got better and better at playing. I think the book documents that. By the time we got to our show at Dia:Beacon, we were a well-oiled machine. That show was a killer.

HC: We take kryptonite and make lemonade.

AL: In a way, it’s like making music out of something generally undesirable, like feedback, which people usually try to eliminate from microphones or other elements of electric sound. Or a TV show about nothing, like *Seinfeld*.

Title TK once compared the Black Eyed Peas to the Village People. As I type this question, I’m currently listening to a Spotify curated playlist called “Throwback Party,” and a Black Eyed Peas song from the year you made the Village People comparison just came on. What purpose do groups like the Black Eyed Peas and the Village People serve? Is there an act that you think has taken over this role in 2017?

HC: I guess both dance groups had that something-for-everyone possibility; there were different personalities to identify with, and they had interesting looks. Spice Girls and Wu-Tang had that. But today, Young Money crew? Metallica with Lady Gaga?

CA: Or Metallica with Lou Reed? Skrillex/Diplo/Bieber?



A minimal set, for a minimalist band.

What instruments did you typically bring to each show?

HC: It depended on our mood. I usually brought my fluorescent yellow Charvel with an early Floyd Rose bridge. I got it in high school for \$35 when a classmate needed to sell all of his stuff to buy weed. Alan would switch it up—my favorite of his was the seven-string Gibson Flying V. Cory would sometimes go electric, and sometimes acoustic.

Is Kanye West the Neil Young of our time?

HC: Wow. You want to jam with TK sometime?

AL: Kanye’s nightly 10- to 15-minute rants on the *Yeezus* tour were incredible, and I remember one where he said he was the Walt Disney, the Michelangelo, etc., etc., “of my generation,” but I don’t think Neil Young made that list.

Title TK, \$20, primaryinformation.org.