

RUN WITH A NIGHT OF performances by Thurston Moore, Beck, and the latter's younger brother, Channing Hansen. *New York's* Ethan Smith recently hosted a conference call between Beck's new South Pasadena digs and Ono's Dakota apartment.

Known by music fans on a strictly first-name basis, Beck Hansen is revered for his singularly poetic lyrics, collagelike production, and penchant for transmuted the dorkiest sounds in the world into the dopest. Beck inherited his Duchampian found-art leanings from his grandfather, Al Hansen.

A collagist, bon vivant, and performance artist, Al Hansen (who died in 1995, at age 67) is perhaps best remembered for his penchant for throwing pianos off buildings in the name of art. A central figure in Fluxus—a genre-busting movement that sought to combine Dada's scattershot absurdism with Zen's more rigorous brand of spontaneity—Hansen spent the sixties hobnobbing with a group that included Nam June Paik, John

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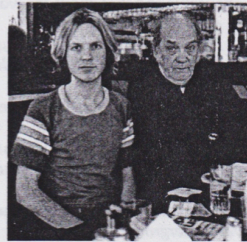
Ethan Smith: I wanted to ask a little about Al Hansen's work. He seems somewhat underrecognized, even within Fluxus.

Yoko Ono: Well, I don't think so. His work was very known amongst us. Fluxus was very unique—a those-who-knew kind of movement. And in that crowd, of course, everybody knew his name.

Beck Hansen: When we had a memorial for Al three years ago in New York, a lot of the Fluxus people came out. And one of the things I heard was that Al was the glue for that scene—the connection between people who were doing music and those who were doing film and theater

something, making both music and art wouldn't be strange. It would be very normal.

Y.O.: I think one reason Beck is big is that he's got this element



A family affair: Beck and Al Hansen.

that is slightly kind of *not normal*—you know? And I think that comes from his grandfather [laughs]. God, I just hate to say Al Hansen's a grandfather. Does that mean I'm old enough to be Beck's grandmother? Anyway, Al was very Fluxus—he was innately rebellious.

From what I've read, it seems

was really cool—young artists could come and put on a show within two days if they liked. Or spontaneously do performance art, or—

Y.O.: Well, Beck, did you feel that you had a kind of partnership with Al, or did you sense that he was the young spirit in your dialogue?

B.H.: If anything, Al really treated me like a contemporary. He never talked down or said, "Here's how you do it." He was like a room with open doors, and you'd just kind of come in and be a part of it.

Did you ever visit the Ultimate Academy?

B.H.: Oh, yeah, yeah. I lived there for a while. It was very free. Somebody would get the idea after lunch to start a band, and that night we'd be performing on the radio, and there'd be a local news crew interviewing us.

I've read something about Al's having been involved in the L.A. punk scene when you were growing up, Beck.

Re:Fluxology

Beck and Yoko Ono sound off on found art, family ties, and flying pianos. By Ethan Smith

Cage, La Monte Young, and Yoko Ono. In fact, he named his signature performance piece *Yoko Ono Piano Drop*. Hansen grew up in Queens (next door to Jimmy Breslin, who devoted a full-page column to eulogizing his childhood neighbor) and spent his adult life shuttling among Los Angeles, New York, and Europe, where—unlike in the United States—his art enjoyed a degree of popularity.

Though Beck is most famous for his cut-and-paste music, as a visual artist he has created a sizable body of work that draws more directly on his grandfather's legacy. This Tuesday, "Beck and Al Hansen: Playing With Matches" arrives at SoHo's Thread Waxing Space, after an earlier stint in Los Angeles, with a benefit shindig co-chaired by Ono and Beck's mother, Bibbe Hansen. Comprising dozens of collages and drawings by Hansens senior and junior, the exhibition opens its six-week

stuff. He was kind of a Renaissance person. He turned the art people on to the music and the music people on to art.

Like Al Hansen, both of you have one foot in the avant-garde world and one in the—

B.H.: In the music world. It's rare, and it shouldn't be. If we were all coming out of Italy or

"Pawnshop brain": Beck's *Special Police*, on view at Thread Waxing.



like it would be kind of absurd to ask you to define Fluxus—

Y.O.: Well, I wouldn't say it's absurd, but it's a very loosely organized movement. Fluxus didn't want to formalize things. It wasn't like twenty artists got together and said, "Well, now. What shall we do? Shall we create this movement?"

B.H.: Fluxus is more reflective of life. As formal art in the last half of this century became less a part of our daily lives, Fluxus reflected how we were oriented in our society.

Isn't it a bit odd to take art that's meant to be ephemeral and of the moment and create a retrospective out of it?

B.H.: Al really wasn't thinking about documenting his art; he was living it. So it is a little difficult to come up with some show that summarizes everything he was about. He was always surrounded by younger artists. He started a school [in Cologne] called the Ultimate Academy. It

B.H.: He was very involved. He managed a few bands: the Screamers and the Controllers. Infamous L.A. punk-terrorist bands. He loved that world—the aesthetic, the attitude.

Y.O.: But there was also this formalistic side of him. He went to art school, studied with John Cage; he was connected with Leo Castelli gallery and all that. There was a wide range of interest and taste.

Did he take you to see these punk bands play?

B.H.: No, I was too young. But I definitely remember them around the house. When I was very young, he lived in the garage for several years. This was probably about '77, '78.

Y.O.: You know, there's another connection here that you might know, you may not know. But my son [Sean Lennon] is a musician, and he's pretty good. He adores Beck, and respects him and everything.

(continued on page 74)

Photograph: top, Pietro Pellini. Artwork: bottom, Beck.

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Smith *continued from page 41*

B.H.: Yeah, we toured recently. Sean is one of the sweetest young men I know. It's really refreshing.

Y.O.: [Laughs] When Al and I were talking about this and that about the world, we never expected all *this* to happen.

I've read various things about Al Hansen and Andy Warhol and that whole Factory scene.

B.H.: He actually ran into Valerie Solanas as she was on her way out of the Factory from shooting Warhol. He made a book about it called *Why Shoot Andy Warhol?* It's really beautiful.

And wasn't there something with the Velvet Underground?

B.H.: Oh, yeah, right. He actually came up with that name. It was a few weeks before their first gig, and they were calling themselves Falling Spikes or something and desperately looking for a better name. Al had this semi-pornographic book called *The Velvet Underground*, and he was having lunch with their manager one day, and he said, "Well, this is a good name. Why don't you use it?" The manager ended up taking credit for the whole thing and said it was *his* book.

Y.O.: But that was Al for you: He would share anything with anyone.

Your brother, Channing, reenacted the Yoko Ono Piano Drop at the Santa Monica opening of "Playing With Matches," right?

B.H.: Yeah, he did. I was really taken aback at how moving it was. First, there was this huge sound of the piano hitting the ground. There were 400 people there, and as soon as the piano hit the ground they were swarming around it, ripping it apart, giving pieces to Channing to sign. And there were all these sounds of the hammers and the strings and the keys being ripped out of the piano. I wasn't expecting that at all.

Is he going to do it again in New York?

B.H.: No. There isn't really any place to do it there. You know the way this piano thing got started: When Al was stationed in Germany at the end of World War II, he became obsessed with this bombed-out building that had an apartment on the fifth or sixth floor, with a piano just sort of dangling on the edge of this room. He became so obsessed that one night he snuck out of the barracks and went up and pushed the piano off. And the sound of it and the whole experience was the starting point for his interest in performance.

Fluxus seems to tread a line between destruction and creation—

Y.O.: I should point out that we *never* did anything that would have hurt someone. We didn't kill animals or anything.

B.H.: That whole shock-value thing came later, in the eighties.

Y.O.: With Fluxus, there might have been a hint of danger, but Al made sure no one was ever standing underneath the piano. ■