



THE
UNLIKELY
AND
OVERDUE
ASCENSION
OF
REGGIE
WATTS.

AN
AFRO

IN THE COSMOS

BY

ANTHONY BOZZA



"Getting the Conan gig was a game changer for me," says Watts. "A lot of people saw who I am."



"If time travel were possible, I'd like to be able to order oatmeal that was from 1866." Of course.

Reggie Watts's Afro is a marvel, as wispy, intricate and far-out as the universe itself. Like the stream-of-consciousness flow of his ideas, his nimble multi-octave, pan-percussive voice, his gift for vocal imitation and his fiercely intelligent, absurdist comedy, Watts's Afro is in a class by itself. It surrounds him like a wizened halo and enters a room of its own accord as if bristling with cosmic ideas. As he walks into the Roebling Tea Room in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, Watts is hard to miss, even in a part of town known for colorful characters. Aside from his hair and equally healthy wild beard, he is wearing giant sunglasses, a striped sweater and suspenders attached to pants pulled high above his waist. They are rolled up to reveal brightly colored socks and short black sneaker boots. He is carrying a folded-up vehicle with a large front tire—something between a bike and a Razor scooter. He is every bit a benevolent imp from the land of make believe.

Watts personifies the offbeat genius that is typical of Williamsburg, and in his case, that genius is getting its close-up. In the past year Watts was handpicked by Conan O'Brien to open O'Brien's live comedy tour *Legally Prohibited From Being Funny on Television*, and he released a Comedy Central special called *Why \$#!+ So Crazy?* as a CD/DVD combo pack. He has maintained a nonstop international touring schedule that shows no sign of letting up, and he is a thoroughly modern comedian, in touch on



Twitter and at home on YouTube, where much of his best material can be found. Whether baffling engineers at Google for the first half of his set by speaking to them in the voice of a hoary BBC announcer (see "Musicians@Google: Reggie Watts" on YouTube) or creating orchestrally complex, witty songs using only his voice and a looping machine in his apartment or on national television, Watts is nothing short of brilliant. His is a career on the cusp, and it's been an unconventional journey, but it's as much a compliment to our collective consciousness as it is to his vision to say that the world is now ready for Reggie Watts.

"I don't prepare anything aside from watching and looking and hearing and logging and registering things," he says. "When I go onstage those things may come out or may not, and other things will happen during the performance. It's really up in the air. I do have things

I return to time and again, though, like messing with my microphone stand or the cables. I also like to face the wrong way. Those are recurring mechanisms, but even though I use them often, I always try to improvise within them differently each and every time."

Those visual touchstones aside, the rest of any of Watts's sets are unlike anything you've ever seen. First and foremost they are driven by sound—noises, voices, echoes—and a deep love of the possibilities of language. He may open with a nonsensical melody sung in a Munchkin-on-helium voice or a professorial tone, or begin a discourse on an imaginary course addendum that will feature special guests with names like Barbara Fensvorrough and Snage Snarfstersten. None of it makes sense, but it doesn't need to. The humor is in the way he bends language, polishes pronunciation and topically changes channels. His genre bending isn't random just for the sake of it; it's evidence of a higher power at work. When he bursts into song in the middle of a seemingly rambling riff, it all comes together as his multifaceted talents truly coalesce. In the first few minutes of *Why \$#!+ So Crazy?* he launches into a hip-hop song in which he raps as if there is a short circuit in his microphone, controlling his voice and delivery so well that only bits of words come out. The glitch corrects itself in time for Watts to tell a story of a shared pastry. The chorus of that song, if you can call it that, is

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"Nobody need a whole croissant." It is followed by a hilarious riff about a girl named E. Claire who is a Google hooligan. Once Watts is rolling, topic be damned, it's impossible to avoid being drawn in.

In conversation, Watts has a knack for relating stories with an abundance of academic wordplay, but he's never pretentious; rather, his method gets to the essence of communication in an enthusiastically engaging yet detached way. His humor is observational and joyous, at once awed by the possibilities but keenly aware of the parameters. Watts is a Renaissance man for the now: a musician, a comedian and an unabashed pop-culturally aware technology geek. He takes in the new and regurgitates it, with humor, in real time.

He is also truly grateful to be doing what he does, because it's not an act; it's just an extension of him. "Getting the Conan gig was a game changer for me," he says. "A lot of people saw who I am and then did extraordinarily generous things for me. Conan is like the benevolent Mafia: If you get to work with him and you do good

things, he'll always find a way to pay you back triple. It's an honor that he and his people are even interested in me in the first place because they've been doing what they do for two decades, and that means a lot."

Watts also caught the eye of several music icons this year. He was chosen by LCD Sound-system founder James Murphy to perform a song with the band during its weeklong farewell concerts in New York, and White Stripes impresario Jack White hosted an evening of comedy featuring Watts at his Third Man Records in Nashville, a performance, photography and recording production emporium established in 2009. Third Man features state-of-the-art sound recorded to analog high-fidelity reel-to-reel tape and then pressed onto vinyl. "Aesthetically it's such an advanced setting, and that's a reflection of Jack White, who has really great, excellent taste," Watts says. "I did two 24-minute sets, because that's how long they can record on one reel, and I went off in between, and the whole time Jack was doing the lighting himself. He was so creative about it. He'd put this small follow spotlight on me, and when I was at the piano all you'd see was my head, in a pink, blue or yellow light."

Everyone who attended Watts's show received a 12-inch of it as part of their admission price; it's a well-engineered memento of today captured via yesteryear. "At the end of the night I followed the engineers up to the sound booth to hear some of the set," Watts says, growing genuinely wide-eyed. "They have that room so well miked. It was so incredibly warm. They pressed PLAY on that two-inch tape machine, and out came holographic audio. I felt as though my voice was floating in space with the audience murmuring all around it. It was beautiful. It inspired me to do music again if I find the right people to work with."

The waitress passes by our table, saying she'll be back in a moment to take our order. "I think I'm going to have the oatmeal," Watts says, scratching his beard. "It's steel-cut whole grain with raw brown sugar on top, which is the way they made it in the 1800s. If time travel were possible and anybody could have it, I'd like to be able to order oatmeal that actually was from 1866, and I'd like to be able to eat that in a restaurant. If our waitress were able to go back in time and get me a bowl of oatmeal from 1866 and serve it to me, that would be so *authentic*." He smiles a grin that could crack a pro cardplayer's poker face.

He pulls a small brown bottle from his pocket. "I need to take my medicine," he says, squirting an eyedropper's worth of misty tincture into his water. "Do you want some vitamins?"

"Sure," I say. "What kind?"

"THC. It boosts the immune system."

"Yes, please. I feel like I'm coming down with something."

Over the next eight hours, which go by in an instant, Watts holds forth on music, comedy, science, science fiction, physics, technology, time travel and his past, present and future. He is entirely engaging, enthusiastic, informed and hilariously demonstrative. He slips in and out of voices, accents and languages (he speaks English, French and German fluently) easier than most people do their slippers. He is a vessel for the ideas flowing through his mind and the metaphorical ether, yet he's never so far-out that he forgets his context. He takes to conversation with improvisational glee, be it as expository as detailing his upbringing or as conceptual as grasping at the meaning of life. He often says things like this:

"I'm so interested in what this fucking thing is." He makes a cartoonish, guttural noise that should be in a quote bubble beside his head: "Urr! What is this *thing*? What is experience? Oftentimes you'll find more fantastic descriptions of what this thing could be through physics than any fantasy book or sci-fi movie. Listen to a physicist describe the simple things, like what dark matter is or if there is an origin of the universe or if we are just part of a never-ending, pulsing, collapsing, expanding whatever this is. All their theories are so imaginative that your mind just explodes into a myriad of ideas, much more so than it does while reading a book that says, 'Zeldock was a tall man, but his laser pistol wasn't.' Anything you can dream of is possible within physics on some theoretical level because the people involved are neutral. They're math philosophers. It's pure imagination, though physicists don't



—DAVE COVERLY—

think of it that way. Ask a theoretical physicist about invisibility. He'll say, 'Yeah, that's possible on some level, and here's why, theoretically speaking.' That is magic to me."



Reggie Watts was born Reginald Lucien Frank Roger Watts in Germany, the only child of an African American father and a white French mother. The family lived in Italy and Spain until he was four, then moved to Great Falls, Montana in 1977. "I was a total latch-key kid, and I loved that," he says. "I would race home so I could have extra time alone before my parents got home from work." Watts took violin and piano lessons for nine years and participated in drama at Great Falls High School. "It's funny. A lot of what I did in drama class in high school informed the origins of my comedy, once I started using a loop pedal. I went back to what I used to do in order to evolve. It was a form of regressive evolution, or something like that."

After high school Watts moved to Seattle, where he briefly attended the Art Institute of Seattle before studying jazz at the renowned Cornish College of the Arts, one of the top institutions in the country for the performing and visual arts. Watts grew as a musician, and in his jazz voice classes he developed his versatile vocal abilities. "My heroes vocally are Bobby McFerrin and Michael Winslow, who is best known for his role as Motor Mouth Jones in the *Police Academy* films. Michael can do anything with his voice, and what's crazy to me now is that I'm friends with him." Uncannily, an hour or so later, Winslow calls Watts from his home in Florida to chat.

After college Watts dove into Seattle's rich early-1990s music scene, devoting his ample talents as a keyboardist and singer to a wide variety of projects. The collection of bands he was in is telling of the times and entertaining in list form alone: Hit Explosion, Swampdweller, Action Buddy, IPD (Irony Pads Definitely), Chiarrscuro, Clementine, Smell No Taste, Wayne Horvitz 4+1 Ensemble, Das Rut, Synthclub, Elemental, Eyvand Kang Seven Nades and Free Space. He spent the most time in Synthclub and Maktub, a band with whom he made five records. These bands ranged from punk rock to Afropop, to heavy metal to house music to drum and bass to jazz. Watts started beat boxing as well, making tracks from scratch for a number of hip-hop acts. "Musically I really love everything," he says. "I like the potential realities of the various worlds of each genre of music, and I loved being in all of those very different bands at that time. It felt like time traveling. I'm very big on time traveling."

He plants a forearm on the table, leans forward for emphasis and with that launches into another of the asides that make watching Watts onstage or encountering him in any form so spontaneously entertaining. "I'm very caught up with the concept of what it would feel like to actually be in another time period and be aware that you are not from there. I thought of this one day while walking all the way from Chelsea to the Lower East Side during a New York transit strike. I was crossing Union Square, which was full of people with luggage in a kind of gridlock, and as I looked at that giant clock with the numbers that never stop running at the south end of

the square, I got this feeling that if I had a realization that I was in an extraordinary time period, maybe that feeling was just me in the future recognizing this moment as an important event, so in essence, at that moment, I felt I was time traveling to a certain degree. I called up my friend and collaborator Tommy Smith and asked him, 'If I feel like I'm in the middle of an extraordinary event right now, does that mean I'm aware of this event from a different time period and perspective?' Without hesitation he said yes. I said, 'Okay, thank you.' And I hung up."

Watts's musical agility is the result of a very diverse and refined palate. Before diving into comedy full time in 2003, Watts released *Simplified*, a solo music album that bridges electronic funk, R&B and lush alternative rock. He has a soulful voice with many cadences, and on the album he's a different being from song to song, ranging from Prince to Rick James to hybrids of everyone from Lenny Kravitz to Trent Reznor. Whatever style he chooses, be it a comedic exercise or not, Watts's music is always decidedly funky, and on that level his CD/DVD makes complete sense: Listening to the audio is an experience apart and equally interesting as watching him. His comedy songs are, in and of themselves, really great tunes. "I owe much of my musical taste to my friend John Thomas, which is an unfortunate name to have if you live in the U.K. John listened to the weirdest, coolest music in the 1980s. He got me into Danzig, the Smiths, the Smithereens, Hugo Largo, the Art of Noise. He was the guy with the trade magazines. He knew everything that was on college radio. From there I got into Siouxsie Sioux, Peter Murphy, jazz, industrial and punk rock. The thing I think kids today don't appreciate is the fact that the Top 40 back in the 1980s was very diverse. You'd have Rick Springfield, Pat Benatar, Whitesnake, Gary Numan, Men at Work, Twisted Sister and UB40 in the same chart. There used to be a lot of choice. You'd listen to Casey Kasem count down the Top 40 and you'd hear Crowded House and then Guns n' Roses. Everything on the charts today may as well be the same backing track with different singers. It's harder to judge what talent is."

Using this palette as the basis for his imitation, Watts mastered a wide octave range. "Olivia Newton John's 'Let's Get Physical' is where I developed my falsetto. It's at the very top of my range, and I kept singing it until I got it. Pat Benatar, too."

Watts utilized the full extent of his abilities in his many bands, but while recording with Maktub he learned how to process his vocal harmonies via a Roland Space Echo RE-101. That piece of gear allowed him a range of reverb, echo and delay that lent his delivery a variety of meaning. From there he moved on to a Line 6 DL4 delay modeler, which he used to replicate those recorded harmonies live. "I was looking for a weightless, more maintenance-free version of the Roland Space Echo RE-101 tape machine that I used on the record," he says. "They had just come out with this pedal that had an emulator for the Roland RE-101. You'd scroll to a page and it had all the settings for the knobs to basically make the pedal become that machine." On tour with Maktub, Watts learned the pedal's capabilities,

and along with a simple mixer and looper, began using it to manipulate the many voices and sounds he can create into cohesive sonic tapestries. He continued to collaborate with various groups, but outside of his musical adventures he began to add comedy to his repertoire. His performance became a hybrid of the two, and while some of his friends and peers got it and supported it, the pairing didn't always go over so well.

"I was on tour with [funk jazz trio] Soulive when I'd just started bringing comedy back into my life, and we were in Philadelphia, playing at the Theater of the Living Arts. I would sing a few songs with them and I would also open the show with a half hour of comedy. That particular night there was a whole hour to fill, and I had never done that before." Watts came out and started his act, and all was well until he took a perilous detour. At the time the Philadelphia Flyers were doing very well in the NHL, so he decided to compliment them in his own special way.

"I kept calling them the Lions. And people kept shouting, 'The Flyers! The Flyers!' I kept saying, 'I know, I know, I hear you. So yeah, what I particularly love about the Lions is that they have these little manes embroidered on the back of their jerseys, and they have a little embroidered cock that goes down the inside of their legs. I know, guys, I know it's just a simulation, but I think it shows the virility of the team.'"

Everyone started booing. Then they started chanting for him to leave the stage. Then they threw pennies and empty bottles. "Whenever audiences are adversarial I just drag it on and on," Watts says. "It's a weird compulsion. Even though I'm scared shitless this weird adrenaline takes over. My inclination becomes, 'Okay, fine, deal with *this*, fuckers!' Not the best reason to do it, but whatever."

The situation continued to disintegrate until Watts informed the crowd that even if he left, the band would not come on any sooner. They didn't care. He then chose the loudest heckler in range and brought him onstage to ask him personally why the guy wanted Watts to leave the stage. "'I just want you to stop,' the guy said. 'The band is not coming out any sooner,' I said, 'so why do you want me to stop?' He had no idea why, other than he just wanted me to stop. So I led him offstage, and then after a few more minutes of people yelling at me, I said to the audience, 'Just so you guys know, you will never ever see me on this stage here, tonight, again.' And they all cheered."

After Soulive took the stage, four songs into their set, they introduced Watts and brought him out to sing a few songs with them. "It was as if everyone had forgotten what had happened. There was no negativity at all. That was the weirdest performance experience in my life. I just loved that setup—'You'll never see me again,' and then there I was four songs later."

Through the early 2000s Watts continued to focus on comedy when he wasn't working with a band. As he spent more time onstage alone, he began to incorporate his MacGyver'ed blend of a loop pedal and a mixer with effects more prominently into his act. "I started to get into the sketch-comedy scene in Seattle, which was kind of a return to what I was doing in high school, when I was

competing. In Great Falls, Montana you could compete in drama against other schools. We'd get on a bus and go to another town and compete against another school in dramatics. So I started doing my own one-man battle of the bands with this loop pedal thing."



Watts's comedy really came into its own when he moved to New York City in 2004 and, with the encouragement of local legends Eugene Mirman and Michael Showalter, began performing at such venues as Riffi in the East Village, the Upright Citizens Brigade in Chelsea, Comix in the Meatpacking District and the Bell House in Brooklyn, where some of *Why \$#!+ So Crazy?* was filmed. "Eugene to me is the godfather of alternative comedy," Watts says. "If it started with Andy Kaufman in the 1970s and then continued with Louis C.K. and David Cross as the second wave through the 1980s, well, then Eugene is the perfect baby that came from all that."

Over the past seven years, Watts has come into his own and found his voice—or rather his many voices. Among his repertoire of ever-changing characters and sounds are a few regulars. He learned his ivory-tower English accent from watching hours of PBS as a child and listening to people as he walked the streets of London. "To me doing anything on the BBC or associated with it in any way is a true honor. It's such an institution." He also has a recurring gay voice, a thug rapper and an overly earnest hippie, which weave themselves in and out of his delivery, regardless or often deliberately in spite of—for reasons of contrast—context.

"I can approximate a lot of things and I can come close to a few things," Watts says. "I can do robots. Give me anything robot and I'm totally there for you, man. I won't let you down. Anything from the pneumatic-pressure sounds to the angle at which a joint moves repetitively, I can do that. Robots are very specific, and I do feel good about that. Also, conversations with dark beings or master demons having conversations with other characters—I feel very confident about replicating those situations as well. If people will have me, I will do demonic voices all night. But I'm always afraid to go too far into that. I have a feeling that the multicharacter demonlord thing will alienate people." He grins.

Alternative comics may be the exception among comics, but even among alternative comics, Watts is an exception. Hypocritically, comedians are some of the darkest souls on earth, people who offset deep sadness and insecurity by giving laughter to others. They're often not who they seem to be onstage. Watts is not one of them. "My favorite comedians are very natural; they're the ones you see offstage and they're just very nice to be around," he says. "I appreciate that quality. No matter what your style, as a comedian you joke a lot, because that's how you generate material. Some people do that with their friends and turn that into an act. Some people just go in their office and come out with a list of jokes, which is very old school. But I will say this: Anytime you meet someone who is constantly joking, it is going to take forever to get to know that person. I speak about things sincerely, yet I like to joke (concluded on page 126)

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around a lot, which isn't very different from what I'm doing live. It's just more focused due to my awareness of moving things forward. As long as I do that, it's usually a good time. Other than that, me onstage is similar to how I am in everyday life—or at least how I try to be." He considers his last statement, then grins again. "Yeah, but it's like actors—people don't trust them. They say they're crazy and you should never date an actor or actress. I just want to point that out, just so you know. Those are the issues."

The sun is going down and the oatmeal has been eaten, but there is still so much more to learn about Watts. "Hey, do you want to come to my place for a bit and listen to some music?" he asks. I can't think of a reason why I wouldn't.

It's gotten cold outside, the kind of New York City cold that just feels unfair. "I'd trade winter in Montana for this any day," Watts says. "It's drier and fluffier. This New York wind can penetrate any zipper. You go outside and after a while you're just like, 'Oh, it's you again.' And you become another man taken down by drudgery."

We walk through the back door of a modern, new-construction green building that could easily be in Antwerp. Watts has spent the past three years on the road, and his new Williamsburg apartment is the first home he's had since his star began to rise. It's as designed and efficient as could be, from his eco-friendly memory-foam bed to the German-engineered, halogen-lit vaporizer that he turns on. On his desk sits a computer monitor, a small audio mixer, an effects box and an Xbox. He plays a few tracks by Stars, a lush, beautiful Canadian indie-rock band that he's into, then he does what he does best: He begins to make beats and sounds with his audio gear. He's got an audience of one, but it doesn't matter. I'm quite confident Watts would be doing this even if he were alone. It's wonderfully refreshing to see how organically what he does tumbles out of him.

He plugs in a new voice-loop pedal he's been sent that he's unsure about integrating into his live show. It's not quite his piece of dream gear, but he hasn't written it off. He isn't sure how quickly the effects on the box track to what he's doing in real time, say, if he changes between two styles of reverb midway through a loop. "That's using it in a way other than the manufacturer intended, but that's how I'd use it. That's how you'd get more interesting sounds. There are a ton of effects on this thing, though. Watch this." He flips a knob that turns his voice into a choral harmony. His normal speech sounds odd, and the effect isn't readily revealed, but intuitively Watts seems to know how to make the most of it. He begins singing in a high-lonesome country voice, which, through the machine, sounds like the Carpenters or Crosby, Stills and Nash beamed in from a radio station on the moon. "This thing is cool, but usually I reproduce that kind of sound by creating each part myself, not by letting a machine do it in one step. It's cool, but you can hear that it's fake this way."

This year Watts plans to expand his horizons. "I want to focus on sketches and acting," he says.

"I want people to realize I can do more." He takes a pull from the vaporizer. "The sketches on my DVD are just a taste of that. I want to focus on scripted wordplay and goofing around on camera. That's a priority for me."

If Watts has his way, the world at large will experience him anew in more ways than one. With one hand on the technological pulse and the other on the edge of every moment that goes by, if given *carte blanche*, Watts will blow our minds. In his ideal world someone will invent an iPad app that will allow him to loop six to 10 tracks of his voice, add effects and pan each individual track to various speakers around the room at will. "I'm hoping if I complain enough, somebody will call me and we'll design the perfect looping pedal," he says. "All my current machines do everything I want them to do—almost. If I had my ultimate gear, I could give people my ultimate show. I could control where my voice goes, and that's an evolution sonically. I'd also like there to be an evolution visually, and I'm working on that with some people at Berkeley. I'd like to do a show in which everyone sits in comfortable chairs, lying back, enjoying some visual nuances, like subtle color shifts projected onto the ceiling, while all around there are thrilling places of performance throughout the room. You will see me through the glasses in real time, but all around me will be a graphic overlay augmenting reality. That imagery will be controlled and fed into the screens on the glasses. The entire show will be all about immersion, and even if people fall asleep, lying back in those easy chairs, that will be fine. They'll be immersed in their own way. My intent is to bring the audience as inside my vision of experience as possible."

Watts gets up from his chair and walks over to a box sitting beside the door. He has just gotten a new foam pillow in the mail to match his new foam mattress bed. I've come to realize that though foam bedding conjures images of late-night Tempur-Pedic commercials, leave it to Watts to have found the ultimate alternative. "This company creates entirely organic memory foam," he says, tearing into the cardboard. "It's all recycled material, and it's infused with botanical aromatherapy oils to help you sleep. Here, smell it. I love the way these smell." Indeed, the pillow has a dainty, English tea party aroma, and it's molded to fit the human neck. It's a perfumed brace fit for nodding off.

"This bed comes with a special frame that has these heat sinks along the sides. It's ventilated all along the base to offset the density and heat retention that come with memory foam. I haven't slept on it in summer, but I'm confident it will be fine. I'm actually ready to try this out with an afternoon nap."

One week later Watts is in the greenroom at Studio 360, the weekly public radio program hosted by *Spy* co-founder and author Kurt Andersen. This week's show is called "Our Universe Goes to 11," and it's a debate on the nature of the cosmos between Watts and theoretical physicist Janna Levin, author of *How the Universe Got Its Spots* and the novel *A Madman Dreams of Turing Machines*. Without a doubt, Watts is the only comic of his generation capable of undertaking this conversation and actually adding wisdom to the dialogue.

In the greenroom he is downright giddy at the thought of discussing the nature of time. "In physics there are no absolutes, and I understand that directly as it pertains to me when I'm performing. Time expands when I'm onstage, because in those moments I see so many different options. I hear myself singing notes I'm not thinking of. It's the weirdest sensation as my sense of time expands and then evaporates. It's similar to athletes' recollections of the moments when they did something great. Or like Neo in *The Matrix*. It's slow-motion-bullet time."

The show that night is a mix of instructive demonstration, wittily disputed theory and musical interludes courtesy of Watts. In short, it is a brainy show-and-tell-style science class for grown-ups. Levin's theories and explanations are engaging, and Watts could not be a better foil. Hardly the clown, he reinforces her cosmic theses by transposing them into a melodic, Bill Withers-style song-rap about inconsistency and higher dimensionality.

Afterward, over drinks at the Room in SoHo, at a table with Levin and some friends, Watts thinks of the future. "I'm just so happy to actually have a home of my own after floating from place to place for so long," he says. "And since I made that choice to get a place, it seems like everything else has come together in some way too. I now have so many potential projects, which is great. I strive to have as much fun as possible while remaining connected with the people in my life." He takes a moment and peers off sidelong toward the floor. "I would love to find a girl I really dig, though. That would be awesome. It's cool, man, when you like what you do, but it's cooler when you then find somebody and you're like, 'Okay, let's hang out for a while...or forever.'"

"What else are you looking for?" I ask.

"The right looper pedal," he says without hesitation. "I really want someone to invent the right pedal. Technology is so important to performance today, no matter what you do. If you blend your capabilities naturally with it, you can create something amazing. If you mix them in a symbiotic way, then you're doing a whole new thing, and that's great. You're on a whole new adventure, along with your audience, in which you're trying to figure it all out together." Watts takes a sip of his sake and then turns to me, his face bearing the earnestness of a philosophy major. "That's what I try to do every time I perform. I try to get into a zone where I have to make something work that has to be entertaining for people. And while I'm trying to make that work, I try to make that process of figuring it out entertaining for people as well."

He takes a moment, not quite satisfied with what he just tried to communicate. "What I'm trying to say is that it's as if someone throws me a Rubik's Cube onstage every night and I'm up there trying to engage the people watching as I try to figure that puzzle out. I'm standing there, saying, 'Oh, hey, guys...look at me. Look at the way I'm trying to solve this puzzle!' I want to do stuff that people will think is cool. I just want to make cool stuff for people to like. Essentially that's the only reason I'm doing any of this. I'm motivated by a sense of 'Wait until people get a load of this thing. Wait until they see this whojamagadget!'"

