

## Interview with Cantinero (a.k.a. Chris Hicken)

1. Firstly, so our readers don't get confused, Cantinero isn't your real name. What is it and more importantly, why Cantinero? My real name is Christopher Lee Hicken. I always thought it was a rubbish stage name (You got C and you got Hicken, put them together, and you have a lifetime of fun). I have bartended in NYC for 8 years; my Ecuadorian work mate always used to me Cantinero, which is Spanish for bar owner/bar tender. I am the singing bar tender guy. 2. Does New York hold any significance for you, i.e. do you have family there, or is it just a base for your wanderings? I have 2 dogs a wife and a studio, accumulated over my 11 years here. This place is an emotional boot camp, by that I mean it is very unforgiving, and there is no safety net, which as well as being terrifying, is ultimately liberating, if you can survive it. I lead a very different existence from 'the musician on the dole' lifestyle I had in Birmingham. 3. Do you miss England at all? Yes. There are things I love about England, and always will. At some point, I will return. 4. Pancakes or donuts? Pancakes & Whole-wheat banana/peach.. Fantastic 5. Who are the most known band you've played alongside? The Buzzcocks/UB40. 6. I would (try to) describe your music as something akin to Ben Folds Five and maybe a little flavour of something Blur like. What are your main influences that you notice in your own songs? I like to think I have a rather healthy curiosity, my taste tends to reflect that, and is in itself rather disparate. As I produce as well, I tend to take different things from different artists. I refer to my stuff as either Electro acoustic or 'Slipper Core', its background music that slowly and hopefully moves to the foreground. \* (below is a list of records I was listening to when making the record.) 7. What was the first song you wrote? I was 15. it was about a girl who used to wait at the same bus stop. It was better to write the song, than actually ask her out and see if she would have sex with me. 8. Have you ever stormed off stage? Nope, I am not a prissy Queen. I was once attacked with turf, flattened soda cans and bottles of urine, but I did not allow it to stop me singing the cheesy pop I was hurling at the time 9. Did you ever write a song for a girl (or a boy... we're quite liberal here!)? Absolutely, love/lust is wonderful for focusing the mind, especially when mixed with rejection. 10. What was the strangest / dirtiest / most scummy venue you've performed in? Played a show in the Mid west. As I have a semi -shaved head, and I used to sing/perform with a degree of intensity, it seemed to strike a chord with a section of the crowd, who were as it turned out, members of the KKK. They were trying to engage me in conversation, especially on the merits of the UK's very own Screwdriver. It not only scared me; it made me feel sick. This venue subsequently sticks in my mind as being scuzzy in the extreme. 11. What was your first band called? Kustom Servanna. 12. Are you playing much while you're over here? (that's your chance to plug your gigs) We are in the process of booking a European tour. I want to do a tour of England's finest cabaret clubs, because the dressing rooms are nicer, and they tend to have velvet back drops. I can't wait actually, having not played for 6 years, and then doing 2 shows in a week, I have rediscovered my love for showing off.

(Check out [www.cantinero.com](http://www.cantinero.com) for gig info) 13. Do you suffer from groupies, or is that the part that keeps you wanting to be a rock star? I used to, but then it all becomes a bit ridiculous. I had more groupies as a bartender than I ever did as a performer. You realise its all about power, and you merely represent an archetype. Its all a little hollow, but then, its nice to have this empirical knowledge. 14. Kurt Cobain, genius or git? A Very talented fella. 15. Who would you list as your favourite band of all time? Everyone can name one or two to be right up there! I genuinely can't answer this, because my mind is always changing. 16. If you had your own jukebox that everyone could listen to, what 5 albums would you put on? & And no, you can't put 5 of your own on ;- ) OK, right Now. Tripplets of Belleville soundtrack/ Granddaddy - Life under the Western Freeway/Smiths greatest hits/Day One-Ordinary Man/High Llamas-Hawaii. 17. I can't think of a 17's question, can you? Yes I can actually. Why is everyone so obsessed with a quite good footballer and an anorexic/ below average talented singer (Posh and beck's)? ? (I dont feel qualified to answer that without expletives -Ed) 18. Your album 'Championship Boxing', is it a debut, and why the title? It is a debut for Cantinero, which is me now. Championship Boxing was written on the side of a 2" tape in a recording studio I was 'hanging out' in. It just struck me as a great title, and it neatly sums up the content of my record, which tends to deal with inner and external conflict, as experienced from the vantage point of the man that servers the drinks, and listens. 19. Were there any songs you discarded that are still floating around there? Many. I tended to go with the songs that sang the loudest in my head at the time of recording, working on the principle, that you pay attention to the songs that beg to be noticed, at the time of recording. 20. Who floats your boat in the unsigned world out there? Definitely, Say Hi to your Mom. A New York Band with top tunes. Check out: - [sayhitoyourmom.com](http://sayhitoyourmom.com) 21. And lastly, but not leastly, apart from UB40 (and you may as well tell us that story while your here), who else of note have you been seen hanging out with? UB40 we knew fairly well from Birmingham. They were about to embark on a world tour (This being at the tale end of there US success) playing arenas. To warm the band up, they were doing smaller venues of 1 to 2000. We (We being my old band Bigmouth) decided that that's where we would support them. So we turned up in New Haven with rented gear, a one way van rental and practically no money. When we arrived at the venue, it was immediately apparent that no one knew about us, and our idea of opening for the band. After some negotiation/begging it was agreed we play that night and we subsequently brought the house down (Or so I remember). After that, UB40 got together and gave us a thousand Dollars, so we could then do the next 7 dates. Having pulled it off, I naturally assumed we would be huge, but, it didn't turn out that way.

I have been through my New York celebrity phase, hanging out as one does, with the occasional movie/Rock star star, and snogging award winning actresses, but I was never cut out for it, and fortunately it never visited me. Celebrity is in my mind, a curse, especially if that's all you aspire to. Well Mr Hicken (Cantinero to you people out there), it's been a pleasure talking with you. We wish you all the best with your new album 'Championship Boxing', which is due for release on 27th May 2004. Good luck in the states, in the UK, and the world while we're at it! Peace out, The Gig Reviewer A little extra by Mr Chris Hicken 20 records I was influenced by, whilst making championship Boxing: 1.Boards Of Canada (Music has the right to children). This record mesmerized me; I love the use of hip-hop beats, with really organic samples. These guys are

from somewhere in Scotland, and they have captured that, well at least to my ears, I hear it. Great programming. 2. Granddaddy. (Life under the western freeway and Snow to signal Radio EP). I was originally drawn to them because of a photo I saw, plus I think the name is genius. I had a huge crush on this band for a while, his voice his lyrics, and the use of analogue synth's and guitars was just so fresh to me. He also has a wonderful sense of melody. One of those bands, not unlike the Pixies, that influence many bands, but never quite gets the recognition they deserve. 3. High Llamas. (Hawaii). Great use of classic instrumentation and programming. He is lyrically witty and melodically inventive. The sounds on this record really influenced my choice of instruments and arrangements. 4. The Walkmen. (Everyone who pretends to know me&hellip;.) Loved the sound on this record. The big use of natural ambience, and the Pianola were striking, and definitely informed my recording process. 5. Spoon. (Kill the moonlight) A band that has been around for like 5 albums, dropped a while back from I think Elektra. They really nailed it on this album, proving that bands can grow and mature, if they are left to their own devices. They have their own studio, and have developed their own style/sound, putting the records out on an indie. His voice is unusual, his lyrics insightful and smart, and the songs are really inventive in their arrangement, both structurally and sonically. 6. Dub Plates (Welcome to the elephant house). Brilliant blend of classic dub, and programming/samples. From my native Birmingham. The bass sounds they get, where something I spent a long time trying to emulate. I did actually call them up, as I know them from days gone by. Brian did help me out a little, pointing me in the right direction, in getting somewhere near to that warm deep-punchy-sub bass thing. 7. Lemon Jelly (Lemon jelly) Such a sweet record. Really melodic, and top draw use of samples. This had a big influence on me. Great sound. 8. Senior Coconut (Fil-Baile Aleman & Gran baile). Couldn't stop playing this in the bar. I am a big Kraftwerk fan, so to hear the songs re-interpreted in this fashion was mind-blowing, it also shows how strong the tunes are. I love the way he (senior coconut) blends programming with real classical instrumentation; this is a top record. 9. Elliot Smith (XO and Either/Or) What, an amazing singer/songwriter. He has that voice which sounds like he is recording in his bedroom, with his parents downstairs, making sure he keeps the noise down. He has fragility to him, which always comes across in his songs. He also uses well known chord structures, and then just when you think you know where he is going, he shifts gears and takes it somewhere else. I think this dude was one of the greatest singer/songwriters of the last 10 years. 10. Jim O'Rourke (Insignificance) This guy is nice and dark, but he also seems to have a sense of humor. Really talented, in that way which makes you scratch your head, in amazement that the whole world doesn't know of him. On this record he will go from classic electric guitar drums bass set-up, and then slip into completely different instrumentation for certain sections of a song. I totally ripped him off, great use of dynamics. 11. The Smiths (The very best of). Kind of speaks for itself. I never got the Smiths when they were around, but stumbled upon them when I first came to New York, courtesy of the alcoholic roommate (Who introduced me to them) I lived with, when I first came here in '93. I think it's safe to say that they really are the Beatles of their time. One of the few bands that actually deserve to be called genius. I have this feeling, that sometime in the future, there will be a huge Smiths renaissance. Morrissey is one of the great crooners. 12. Frank Sinatra (Greatest Hits). I grew up listening to Frank, as my parents were very big fans (They were older parents, the 60s being totally lost on them). This record especially. I love his voice, and his timing, which he ripped off Billy Holiday. I definitely aspire to this persona, only without the misogyny/bigotry, more the archetype, re-interpreted for a new era. 13. Steroid Maximus. (Ectopia) Basically music for a movie, that has yet to be shot. One of those records where you can't tell where the programming starts and the samples end. It's seamless, and showed me that it is capable to blend the two. I asked him (He was the singer in Phoebus) if he would be interested in producing my album. He never got back to me. 14. Massive Attack (Mezzanine) I was always a big fan, but this for me was the album where it all really came together. Fantastic sounding, great tunes and very very dark, but somehow unpretentious. 15. Flaming Lips (The Soft Bulletin) One of those records, which I think, is the sound of a band totally being in control of their craft. It sounds so original, and lyrically it plunges the depths of the psyche. It's one of those records that to me, sounds like the record you make, after you've had a nervous breakdown. 16. Mercury Rev (Deserters Song) I was listening to this at the same time as 15. Feel there is something connecting these two records together, certainly is for me. Both just top records. 17. Day One (Ordinary Man) One of those classic albums that hardly anyone has heard of. I think they had problems with the name, (Which is shit). The record is just so damn good. Great programming, and great songs. I fully intend to cover a couple of these tunes.

## About the Author

Gordon Tebbutt is lead singer of [Rubric](#) and one of the GigReviewer admins.

Source: <http://www.gigreviewer.com>