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Pop Eye
Cochrane has kept humble

Pop Eye By Adrian Mack
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Nature studies have shown that four out of five tufted titmice prefer to nest in Tom Cochrane's hair over abandoned woodpecker holes.

command of the situation lingered. It was an impressive moment from a man who has proven himself to be compassionate and sincere, particularly in his humanitarian efforts over the last 18 years or so.

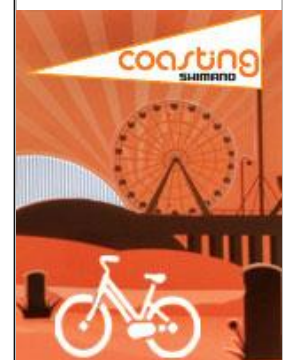
Speaking to the Straight a little later about those efforts, which have taken him to Africa a number of times, Cochrane comes off as warm and earnest. He talks about being surrounded by death in Somalia, Rwanda, Malawi, and Ethiopia. He recounts being shot at by guerillas in Mozambique, where he helped in the "wet tents", the last stop before death by starvation. Cochrane has certainly gotten his hands dirty, in other words, while humbly claiming, "I have no presumption I'm doing any of the heavy lifting... We're like voyeurs. We go in for a couple of weeks, come out, and the people are left there doing the hard work."

Further to his credit, Cochrane is prepared to address the considerable backlash that tends to accompany celebrity do-gooding. In an editorial for Huffington Post about Madonna's adoption of a Malawi child, Karen Finley wrote, "[He] is leaving his heritage, his people, his language, his family. Yes, he is poor. But now he is also impoverished. The soul of the motherless child is co-opted for Adoption Vogueing. Sounds like colonialism to me."

Cochrane balks. "Colonialism? That's a ridiculous analogy," he snaps, with visible distaste. "I fail to see the comparison on any level. It sounds really cool, and it lets a lot of people off the hook that might be



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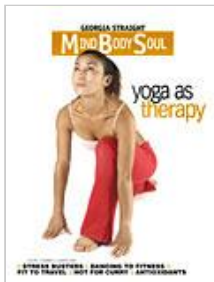
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cynics, but it's a lie. And if Madonna's just grandstanding, who cares? It's about time that continent was in vogue."

You don't have to look far to find more concrete criticism, however. Left-wing journalist John Pilger memorably savaged Live 8 in an article for The New Statesman in 2005. Noting the conditions quietly appended to the G8's debt-relief package, Pilger called it a "fraud" and "actually a setback to reducing poverty in Africa". Pilger is getting at the deep politics of the situation, wherein George Bush and Tony Blair will happily join Bono for a photo shoot while the rapacious western interests they represent implacably tighten their grip. Cochrane, who cites Bono, Bob Geldof, and superstar economist Jeffrey Sachs as "inspirations", is a little gloomier about Pilger's case.

"I can't argue with that," he says with a sigh. "But I think you have to go over there and spend some time in different countries and communities before that stuff holds any water. Academics can write all they want about forgiveness of debt, and I question his [Pilger's] figures, but things take a bit of time."

In turn, it's hard to argue with the weight of Cochrane's experience on the front lines, even if more than two decades after Live Aid and nearly four since the Concert for Bangladesh it feels as though the West's relief efforts amount to a case of running to stand still.

"Hey, it's an imperfect science, and it's just never gonna be alright," Cochrane says with a shrug. "But what's your solution? Are you just gonna sit back and let people die?"

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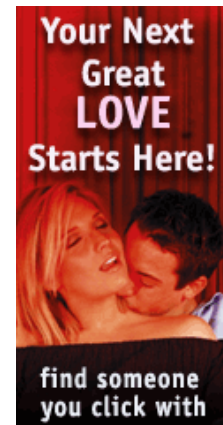
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