

# BATTLE OF THE BANDS

*Bert Vogelstein*

They're two famous scientists with a secret life. One is renowned as a cancer researcher; the other for his work in molecular biology and immunology. Both have long lists of honors. But Bert Vogelstein and Richard Flavell share something else: They both play in rock bands that blend science with music.

Vogelstein's band, Wild Type, has played gigs from the National Academy of Sciences to charity events at crowded bars in Baltimore, where Vogelstein is an HHMI investigator at The Johns Hopkins University. He is the keyboardist for the seven-piece group whose drummer, Ken Kinzler, is his frequent collaborator in studying cancer. Flavell, an immunologist who is an HHMI investigator at Yale University, plays lead guitar and writes songs for the Cellmates, who've rocked biology gatherings at places like the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.

Wild Type plays standards like "Johnny B. Goode" and newer songs from performers such as Fiona Apple and the Black Crowes, as well as originals like "Grant Writing Blues" by band members Bob Casero and Pat Morin. "I wrote myself a grant," that song begins, "I sent it on down; Now the study section 'ciding; Whether I'm gonna stick around."

The Cellmates, who also blend familiar and original songs, are surely the only group ever to sing, "It's a prion you can rely on." Flavell's tune "1-800-Kits-R-Us," about postdoctoral fellows who want their principal investigator to buy them easy-to-use laboratory kits, concludes with: "And, if perchance this gel's a bust; Why, there's no need to make a fuss." His "Molecular Millionaire" celebrates discoveries that can lead to riches.

Both bands are composed mainly of scientific colleagues—and they take their music seriously. You can hear them at the HHMI Web site, [www.hhmi.org/bulletin/bands/](http://www.hhmi.org/bulletin/bands/). **H**



## Q&A: Darwin, Elvis and More

*Your musical hero?*

**Flavell:** Jimi Hendrix.

**Vogelstein:** Ray Charles.

*Your scientific hero?*

**Flavell:** No heroes, but biggest influences are Charles Weissman and Piet Borst, for whom I worked as a postdoc.

**Vogelstein:** Paul Erdos.

*Were you first interested in science or music?*

**Flavell:** Science, but only just. I got turned on to chemistry at the age of 15 and started in a rock band at 15 ½.

**Vogelstein:** Science.

*The song people request of you most often?*

**Flavell:** "Mitosis," by our bass player Ira Mellman. It's a reggae song to which people frequently do the limbo.

**Vogelstein:** "Freebird." We don't play it.

*What characteristics do rock and science have most in common?*

**Flavell:** High intensity and energy level.

**Vogelstein:** Both rock musicians and scientists can count.

*Least in common?*

**Flavell:** Rock is easy; science is hard. For example, rock has mostly three chords, while science uses quite a few more.

**Vogelstein:** Scientists don't smash their equipment after successful experiments.

*The biggest similarity and difference between a lab and a band?*

**Flavell:** Good moments in both labs and bands involve multiple people contributing to create something new through synergy. The biggest difference is, as soon as scientists become musicians, they start *acting* like musicians: they are always late, throw tantrums and don't want to lift heavy equipment.

**Vogelstein:** As our bass player Bob Casero notes, both have an excess of opinions but a lab has more sinks.

*The current music star who most reminds you of a scientist?*

**Flavell:** Eric Clapton. In his formative years, he was a meticulous student of blues licks, and he learned to synthesize those into something of his own.

**Vogelstein:** The artist formerly known as Prince.

*Whom would you rather meet: Darwin or Elvis?*

**Flavell:** I have no interest in meeting Elvis, but there are other musicians I would enjoy meeting. I have, however, visited Elvis's grave, standing next to numerous weeping fans. I held back my tears.

**Vogelstein:** Chris Torrance, our backup guitarist, suggests that we mate them. What evolves would definitely be worth meeting.

*Richard Flavell*



HAROLD SHAPIRO