

# 979 REPRESENT



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in memorium: harold ramis - the eloquent john ashbery - the spiteful  
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**979represent is a local magazine for the discerning dirtbag.**

**editorial bored**

kelly minnis - kevin still

**art splendor**

katie killer - wonko the sane

**folks that did the other shit for us**

mike l. downey - jessica little - william daniel thompson

**on the interwebz**

<http://www.979represent.com>

emails to

[redchapterjubilee@yahoo.com](mailto:redchapterjubilee@yahoo.com)

materials for review & bribery can be sent to:

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15530 creek meadow blvd. n.

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## FACILITY FEES ARE FUCKED UP

Some time last year I started to hear rumblings about Temple-based healthcare provider Scott & White beginning to sneak in "facility fees" for "outpatient services" onto bills for unassuming B/CS patients. These fees began to appear on bills right after the opening of Scott & White's new hospital on TX6 and Rock Prairie Rd. Many of its services that were once located in the clinic at TX6 at University were consolidated into the Rock Prairie clinic, including my sons' pediatrician. The early word I was reading about this issue...it seemed that it wasn't widespread and that Scott & White was aware it was a problem and they were working on it.

Turns out that they were only working on how to make this fee more pervasive and widespread. Some people who are used to paying their copays for regular menial routine services are now seeing bills for hundreds, even thousands of dollars for treatment that once only cost the \$25-\$45 copay. Oh hell yeah. Even if you know to ask about the facility fee that S&W is adding onto everyone's bills (and I mean not just Blue Cross Blue Shield customers...they are also charging their own insurance) you have to ask VERY specific questions about it, and most just don't know about it to ask even vague questions, let alone the right questions.

If you are unaware of the history...for as long as I've been employed at Texas A&M University (some 7+ years) Scott & White Insurance was a choice provider for the university system. I included myself as one of their customers, buying their coverage for my family until last year when our family eventually had to switch over to Blue Cross Blue Shield. That is because the A&M system accepted a weaker bid from Blue Cross Blue Shield to be the system's preferred provider. See, A&M is actually self-insured, but it uses the services of other health care providers to handle its billing and paperwork and such. For years, that provider was Scott & White. Even though S&W bid lower than Blue Cross Blue Shield for that contract, A&M decided to go with BCBS instead. Many believe the facilities fees are revenge against A&M. I don't think that is the true reason behind these fees, but it certainly strikes that nerve, as many of A&M's employees were not pleased that they had to change insurers in the first place.

No, the blame comes down on a byzantine health care system in this country that is TRULY FUCKED UP without any real hope of ever being sorted out. In 2013 *Time* magazine printed an astounding article about health care billing in this country that sure opened my eyes to the problem at hand. Unlike when you go to most retailers, you never see the bill for service until after you have been served, and then you have to then wait to see what your insurance will or will not cover. So it is difficult enough to figure out what you should pay. It is even worse when hospitals' paymasters routinely charge whatever they feel like for care without any standardization of prices. It is like going into McDonald's and, based on how the cashier feels at that time, arbitrarily changes prices. "Oh, you look rich, \$100 for that Big Mac. Hmm, I think I'll only charge the cute lady a nickel though." There is a thriving business in this country for agents who can be hired to argue with hospital billing to demand a more realistic bill for services rendered. It is sad that consumers themselves have so little power in this equation.

I am hoping that this becomes a huge public relations nightmare for Scott & White, forcing them to at least be upfront about all ticky-tack fees like this, if not to do away with them entirely. Unlike some other communities, B/CS consumers have other choices. There could be a mass exodus of patients running to St. Joseph's or the Med, both systems recently announced that they do not charge facilities fees. Scott & White, responding to a real ugly story in *The Eagle*, already shows signs of realizing that they have made a blunder that runs the risk of costing them more money by running half their B/CS clientele away. Please Scott & White, stand up and do the right thing for your customers! - KELLY MINNIS

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## UKRAINE: FEBRUARY 2014

This is a month and a year to remember for Ukraine. The small poverty stricken country has captured eyes all across the world, and has inspired the small and oppressed to rise and fight for a better life; a better future.

A peaceful protest that began in November 2013 has become deadly in the last three months. Over 70 people have died and 1,000 have been wounded. An "end to violence deal" was signed and broken all within a week when shots fired from Kiev police crazed the protesters of Ukraine, causing chaos in the city beyond comprehension. Thursday, February 20, 2014 was the deadliest day for political mayhem in Ukraine since the independence from the Soviet Union; that was more than two decades ago. Bodies of wounded lie on the soot-covered ground, burning barricades illuminate Independence Square as people chant and scream for change; they demand it. The dead are laid under a tent that has been transformed into a make-shift morgue. The once white stone and gold city is now ash. Trash, soot, bricks that were once buildings now cover the streets along with burnt city buses, vehicles, and billboard signs; as if the apocalypse has come too soon. Also, president Viktor Yanukovich has fled his home due to the chaotic mess that surrounds his house, which is located about 10 miles away from downtown Kiev. Members of an opposition group called "The 31st Hundred" have seized the president's home Saturday February 22. Standing guard of the mansion that includes: a zoo, golf course and botanical garden, are the men of the 31st Hundred armed with bats, guns, and lead pipes; ready for whatever may come, they speak words of hope and new beginnings.

These protesters and anti-government radicals all want the same things: for President Viktor Yanukovich to resign and for the country of Ukraine to be a part of the European Union. Simple words, but complicated tasks have paid off. A vote has been taken for re-election, and current president Viktor Yanukovich will have until May of 2014 until he is replaced.

Although this is inspiring, it is tragic. This revolution is contradictory for emotions. On one hand, you applaud the revolutionist for standing steady and having every ounce of their soul into the change of their future. On another, you can't help but feel as if peace is a better way. Was it necessary to kill for political change or political stance? Would there have been the same attention or change if this political collision didn't happen in the violent way it did? The burning and chanting, the deaths and wounded is exactly what was needed to get the attention of the world. No one cares about peace anymore, no one cares about speaking. What the world is interested in is destruction and force. It's funny how people are interested in destruction, but it inspires more than anything else. So, this raises another question. What about the rest of the world?

It seems as though Bangkok is on board, along with Venezuela. But, what about the United States? What will tip us over the edge and cause our own revolution? I'm not talking about pockets of protests, or cute petitions, I'm talking about our entire nation standing in the capitols of each state and demanding a change. But what kind of change do we really want? How about fair government and health care? What about women's rights, or an end to greed and debt within our economic system? What would you want to stand for? What would you be willing to put your life on the line for? America's problem is the lack of passion and determination. We tend to get sidetrack easily and lose interest when quick results aren't quick enough.

In all, I believe American will take the same road as Ukraine if nothing changes for us. I believe once we've had enough bullshit, a tidal-wave of built up animosity will overflow into the intentions of American citizens. Call us crazy for our romantic ideas of revolution, but what else would we fantasize about? - JESSICA LITTLE

## ON WHICH I WAX ELOQUENTLY ABOUT JOHN ASHBERY



You really should read John Ashbery. He's the only poet you can say "I don't get it" and you'd be 100% correct. Not getting it is the point. At least I think it is, even though to make such a statement would be to make a point. He's eclectic like that. Like wind wearing a birthday suit. He's there and not there. He's images stacked in lexicographical photo albums. You can't make heads or tails of it—even he says he can't either—so you just read on and feel good about yourself for being smart enough to read an important poet that pisses people off. Drop that at the next dinner party. "I read John Ashbery and he didn't piss me off!" People will think you're brilliant. They'll invite their friends from other tables to meet you or they'll Facebook an entire status about you: "Just met the person I want to be when I finally stop caring!" Everyone loves the idea of poetry more than poetry anyway, so why waste your time with meanings. Did you know Ashbery won the Pulitzer for Poetry? Only one person a year does that. It's like hosting the Oscars, but people won't debate your clothes. There was a time when I liked poetry that said something, that aimed to billow the edges of flags and block bullets and suckle baby pigs and eat plums from the ice box. But talking about Ashbery makes me sound smart without needing to say anything so I'll never look back. When you're talking Ashbery, you can't get it wrong. You could say he's a woman and he'd say, "Maybe". You could accuse him of being Chinese and he'd say "Probably".

I just drank water from a coffee-mug featuring a typewriter. I ate a dozen saltines slathered in diagonal pattern of yellow mustard. I checked my Twitter three times. All while writing this. I'm multitasking, looking for the next image to stack, the next emotion to bend, the next flag to un-billow. I probably should sleep but I cannot. When is the end? After everything? But when is that? Three times this week I thought I might die. Can you believe that? 36 years old with dogs and a wife who doesn't mind my flabbiness and I'm thinking it's all over. My chest felt funny. My breathing got off kilter. What is that? A panic attack? Do people really have those? Maybe I did and maybe I didn't but I'm still alive and I'm sizing up every way to get more done without actually doing any of it. So I've given up John Steinbeck and I've taken up John Ashbery. In Steinbeck, they kept moving west — "Westerling", he called it—until they hit the ocean and then they had to stop. God, I thought I hit the ocean three times this week. Thought my wagon had jumped it's wooden wheels. I wouldn't blame an Indian for deciding not to take my scalp. The hairline's not sufficient. Then again, they might take it as the punchline to an old scalping joke about Customer Service situations. I can't begin to imagine how all that worked back then. Hell, I barely know what to do when I buy a shirt I realize later I hate. But back to Steinbeck, who has time for all that Westerling? All that ocean bumping? Not me. So I've chosen the quicker mental path: "One must bear in mind one thing. It isn't necessary to know what that thing is."

Two lines there from Ashbery. See? You can't screw that up. It's already tits. Already banging hard enough to wake the neighbors straight off the page. I can't get enough. Just can't swallow enough in one handful. Words like blueberries and my constitution's getting stronger. I like that about being alive. I'll miss it, you know. I'll miss that part the most. That finding of the little things. That finding of something you wish you could climb completely inside like Luke curling up in the Tan Tan—life can be so much snow, so much Hoth. I won't miss that. But I could if I figured out a way to capture it down on paper so I could look at it again and feel something true about it. I guess that's the kind of poem I would write if I wrote poems. The kind that helps other people remember the thing you were most afraid you'd forget. I guess that's the least we could ask of any poet, right? I can't remember what they told us about that. They told us something. Maybe back East. Who can remember anyway? Dear God.—KEVIN STILL

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# IN MEMORIAM: HAROLD RAMIS

I remember thinking after seeing *Animal House* when it opened that my college days were never that rowdy and funny — no “Toga! Toga!” for me. It wasn’t Harold Ramis. I laughed at then—it was John Belushi—but I later came to see the late Ramis for his ability to construct laughs and get the best comedy out of others, notably Bill Murray. *Meatballs*, *Caddyshack*, *Stripes*, *Ghostbusters*, *Groundhog Day*—it was Murray that drew the laughs, but it was Ramis who often wrote the words, set the stage, and coaxed the brilliance out. And all those others who delivered great lines in movies many of us still quote today—Ramis had a hand in giving them careers, in many cases. Ramis also first tapped the comic side of serious actor Robert DeNiro. It was one of Ramis’s gifts to generously spread the comic largesse around and to juxtapose the serious with humor. We’ll mourn his loss, but I wonder what comic twist he would find in his death. After all, he famously said after a long-time friend died of an accidental fall off a cliff: “He was probably looking for a place to jump.” - MIKE L. DOWNEY



definitely up there for me, easily on my Top 10 of Favorite Movies of All Time, where they have been banging around for 25 years or so and no matter what other fantastic movies I’ve seen since then, these movies are timeless for me. Last summer I took my oldest son to see a rescreening of *Ghostbusters* at the theater and it was amazing for me to see it again, not only as a handing down of the torch to my son (we saw this before sneaking over to see the 2nd Percy Jackson movie — three guesses which movie my knuckleheaded son preferred) but because it was interesting to hear what folks laughed at the most (turns out I wasn’t the only one who really dug Rick Moranis’s character the most) and to revel in a community of other folks who had seen this movie so many times and knew the script by heart. You could see their lips moving silently with every joke. Harold Ramis’s movies are a part of our very lexicon, how men my age relate to one another.

I had an older brother and two uncles that weren’t much older than my older brother, so I was exposed to their cult of comedy at a young age. Being this was 1980 that cult of comedy was anything that had to do with *Saturday Night Live* and any of its alumni, or anything Mel Brooks created. So I discovered the comedic genius of Harold Ramis through his association with *SNL* actors Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd and John Belushi. The movies Harold Ramis wrote, acted in and/or directed profoundly shaped my nascent world view. My interactions with people were punctuated with his lines. “We are not homosexual but we are willing to learn.” “Print is dead.” “I collect spores, molds and fungus.” The entire cult of Bill Murray can almost single handedly be attributed to the work of Harold Ramis, as Bill was often overshadowed as an *SNL* cast member, and who could fault that, considering what an overload of talent was rammed into that first couple of casts? Murray’s sardonic wit and rubber face found the perfect foil in Ramis on and off screen. “Egon, your mucus.” “Whoa, nice shootin’, Tex!” “Chicks dig me, because I rarely wear underwear and when I do it’s usually something unusual.” Sigh. Harold Ramis filtered through Bill Murray is the archetype for Generation X humor. Dark, sarcastic, whipsmart, world-weary, the ultimate slacker who’s found his racket for world domination...or at least towards getting a date with a higher class chick. Having recently seen George Clooney’s war movie *Monuments Men* I have seen what a bad script with wooden dialogue can do to Bill Murray, and he could not transcend it. But Harold Ramis could make even Bobby De Niro funny! And I mean *really* funny, as *Analyze This* is probably one of Ramis’s few underappreciated movies, or at least not held in as high of esteem as the many we will all certainly remember the most.

Bill Murray and Harold Ramis had a falling out during the filming of *Groundhog Day* in 1990, one that their friendship never recovered from. Upon learning about Ramis’s passing, Murray said “Harold Ramis and I together did *The National Lampoon Show* off Broadway, *Meatballs*, *Stripes*, *Caddyshack*, *Ghostbusters*, and *Groundhog Day*. He earned his keep on this planet. God bless him.” I could not say it better than that.—KELLY MINNIS

Whether you know it or not, Harold Ramis has bettered your life. With his passing earlier this week, I felt most saddened to hear person after person say “Harold who?” when I shared or discussed the news. These same people brightened quickly, before their faces dropped upon realizing the great loss as I listed titles from Harold Ramis’ career. His filmography is impressive. Even more impressive is the number of truly funny, talented people Ramis pushed forward into more name-worthy careers. But even this is to Ramis’ credit. He was a gentleman. He was a true comedian. And although the material was his, the jokes forming in his unique curly-headed brain, he always gave the best laughs to another man. Take Bill Murray, for example. Look at *Stripes*, *Ghostbusters* and its sequel, *Groundhog Day*, even *Meatballs* and *Caddyshack*. Lord, I don’t know the whole story between those two. Who knows the truth behind any story starring Bill Murray? But behind all those classic Bill Murray deliveries was a Harold Ramis script. The truth is that Harold Ramis knew comedy. He knew what was funny and who was funny. And he stepped to the side, into the alcove far too often, to let another voice deliver his material. Harold Ramis was one of the good guys. A fellow with a perpetual smile. A unique talent. An unfortunately stoic snottal-balled voice. A man with a beloved fan-base of millions, many of whom never knew his name. God bless Harold Ramis for the laughter he shared, the brilliance he challenged, the humility he personified. And God bless his people.—KEVIN STILL

It is hard to pick a favorite, but *Ghostbusters* and *Stripes* are

# A PLACE FOR PETER & ACE

I am a huge fan of the rock&roll band KISS. For Christmas 1979 I received KISS albums and a Gene Simmons doll under the tree and have been a lifelong fan ever since. I stuck with the band throughout the lean 1980s when, let's all face it, KISS was terminally uncool. They did not fare well in the non-makeup years, though there were still some decent songs during that era. And I lost them entirely in the first half of the 90s when I was off listening to other stuff. But I rediscovered my intense fandom in college when I met other KISS Army peoples who shared unreleased demo recordings, studio outtakes and live cassettes with me. At about the same time, the original Peter, Paul, Ace & Gene lineup announced it would tour *in makeup!* Sooooo excited. But I was unable to see any of that tour's shows, nor any subsequent tours' shows (I had tickets to see them with Poison in 2004 but the concert was canceled last minute).

Fast forward to the now. KISS is still in the makeup...but without founding members Ace Frehley and Peter Criss. The folks who now play lead guitar and drums (Tommy Thayer and Eric Singer, respectively) wear the makeup and character designs once used by Ace and Peter. This is not like when Peter left in 1980 and was replaced by Eric Carr (rest in peace, fella), whose character was called The Fox, nor when Vinnie Vincent replaced Ace Frehley in 1982 and wore the Egyptian ankh makeup for his Warrior character. Tommy and Eric, although fantastic players, are merely playing a role already coined by two other people. I refuse to see this version of the band for this reason. Had these two created new characters I would've had no problem with it. But...there are many other reasons complicating my intense fandom for the band.

KISS, aside from The Beatles, is probably the first band to truly take advantage of merchandising and licensing the band's image to the ultimate degree to maximize income and public exposure. This means there are KISS coffins, KISS toilet paper, KISS condoms, KISS guitars, KISS whatever you can think of. (I hear Mel Brooks' Yogurt from *Spaceballs* in my head as I type this.) You may have also seen Gene Simmons' family's reality show *Family Jewels*, yet another way to capitalize on the band's notoriety to earn more duckets for the coffers. The band has leveraged itself in such a commercialized fashion, and is so eagerly (and in such an uncool way) after maximizing profits that it makes it hard for me to think the band has any love for making music anymore. I understand profit motive for musicians...hell, I'd LOVE to make money playing music. But KISS makes it hard for me to feel clean about being a fan.

Now, the latest kerfluffle. KISS, after many years of eligibility, has finally found itself nominated for the 2014 Class of the Rock & Hall of Fame. Next month the band will be inducted into that

hallowed group of musicians, songwriters and other key individuals responsible for great music. If you are expecting perhaps a reunion of the four original members of the band though, you will be sorely disappointed. Paul and Gene have had a long quarrel with Ace and Peter over money, drugs, alcohol and the very public nature of their disagreements (both Peter and Ace have written tell-all autobiographies that don't portray Gene or Paul as good people). To be fair, Peter was asked to leave due to substance abuse issues, some of those Peter still dealt with well into the '90s. His departure from the reunion in 2004 was over contract issues. Ace left in 2002 when his contract was not renewed. This is a band we are talking about, people, not a fucking baseball team! Both Paul and Gene have said that it is due to the pair's unreliability due to booze and drugs that KISS will no longer perform with all four members. I can understand that for the long term. But both Gene and Paul also state that KISS will not reunite to play the induction ceremony.

Son of a bitch.

Listen, you two. I can understand that Peter and Ace are a real pain in the ass with work with. You have so much water under the bridge, failed expectations, lost money, lost time, etc. that it makes it very unsavory for you to paint on the clown white next to those two other clowns. But let me tell *you* something. Part of what made KISS great was the easy swing of Peter Criss's drums and the gruff soulful Otis Redding impersonation he pulled off on vocals. The other part was the loose, devil-may-care fleet-fingered guitar work of Ace Frehley, not to mention his crucial songwriting ("Cold Gin", anyone?) or his turns at vocals...OR that his KISS-sanctioned solo record in 1978 yielded the only hit out of the band's failed experiment with four solo album releases at

once ("New York Groove" was a #1 smash). Ace is a crucial part of what made the band remembered well enough to be inducted into the Hall of Fame in the first place. These guys are so well thought of that you can't even bear to put new makeup on the new guys, that you have to dress up the new guys in Ace and Peter suits and have them play and sing exactly like the other two guys that you can't bear to mount a stage with! If Ace and Peter were not so important to include in this ceremony *then make the other two dudes take the makeup off and be their own people.* At this stage KISS is no better than Rain or 1964 or any other well-dressed tribute band. Maybe you continue KISS without them, but for chrissakes dudes, please respect their contribution to your history. The fans that voted for you, raged with the RNR Hall of Fame people for a decade to win you this nomination...they deserve your respect too. Get over your butthurtedness and reach out the olive branch to Peter and Ace. Do the right thing, fuckers. If Page & Plant could do it, if Harrison, McCartney and Starr could do it, then so can you.—KELLY MINNIS



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# MORAL STREET JUSTICE

Things all inevitably must come to an end. One that either truly marks an end, or one that merely marks a change in direction. Yet again, I find myself about to reach an end. There is no other way to put it. An end does not necessarily mean "the end", more simply merely "next chapter" in this case. Before turning the proverbial page so to say, I've decided to a nice little rant to be in order. They're good for the soul and entertaining reads when written correctly, so bare with me as I attempt to do both. We all have our crosses to bear and I do my best to see things from a multifaceted view. This I believe is the "Christian" thing to do; not that I consider myself a Christian either, but that's just something people tend to say in place of "moral" and I think it has a nice ring to it in that context—although I suppose if one were to look at the written history of Christianity it would cease to be "moral" and tend to lean much more towards tremendously horrendous oppressive acts committed in the name of preserving "morality". Anyhow, I sometimes—even after taking in my multifaceted view—still cannot help but remain rooted in my initial view. After all I mean it is my own, is it not?

Allow me to illustrate with the following hypothetical example. Say I am walking down a crowded street in a sprawling metropolitan area. I have just left a bakery where I purchased a few bear claws. I'll go with bear claws because they're as good as they sound fierce. Now say someone less fortunate—not knowing me or any situation which I myself may or may not be in at that point in time—witnesses the transaction via a window and proceeds to follow me a bit before deciding to play Robin Hood and snatch my bear claws to divvy up between him and his fellow street dwelling compatriots. Now let me take a step back for a second here, I can understand that he is probably really hungry and that more than likely if he's stealing bear claws—the chances are that it has probably been a good while since his last meal. I can understand that and even sympathize to a point, but that is it—to a point. I am no rich man myself, I have been swimming in debt for years now and it doesn't seem as though that will be changing any time soon either, but I still manage to retain my composure [albeit most of the time]. And those brief few years when I was well enough off to be debt free I was more than generous with my wealth—which may or may not have been what led me to my current state of financial affairs, but that's another story entirely. Even in the years that followed when I was homeless and drifting from place to place—odd job to odd job—I still acted as though I still had plenty and never refused to help if I could—even if it put me out. I never went and stole from a stranger's hands to grab a quick bite. If worse came to worse [and trust me it did at times], I would swallow my pride and ask someone—sometimes complete strangers for a little help, and usually they would assist me. Whatever help I did receive—no matter how small - was enough to tide me over. As for the "would be" thief, I don't care if it's raining and 20 below out, if he snatched my bear claws I guarantee you I would follow chase and if I caught him I would unleash a monster's rage. Not because he was hungry, and I'm greedy, but because I'm obviously hungry too or I wouldn't have bought the damn things. If he wasn't kind enough to ask me for one [in most cases I would share, unless

they're just rude as hell], then why should I be kind enough to let him get away with such unjust behavior? And as for the many compatriots who he might be aiding—let them get their own damn food. Now, I'm no moral warrior as anyone who's ever had the pleasure or displeasure of meeting me can confirm, but seriously I would look at the situation through their eyes first and then still ultimately act on my own. Does that make me a monster or just human? I would like to think maybe slightly more humane. I mean it's at least a little more thought put into an action then the most basic and popular of thoughts "that's mine and I want it back!" which there's no doubt crosses everyone's minds in such a scenario. But "humane" you say? Damn straight, it'd be a crime against mankind to endorse such uncivil primitive behavior, and it's humane to let someone like that live—I kid—well maybe a little. "Well why not call the police?", you ask. Over some doughnuts, are you kidding me? It would take weeks just filling out the paper work to get them to agree to hear me out, and by that time my precious bear claws will be gray and weathered; baking in the street somewhere in the remnants of sum bum's excrement while stray dogs lick away any remaining flavorful bits. No thank you. You can't count on the police for anything except blaming you if you're at the scene of any crime—damn bureaucrats will spend a week filling out paperwork just to take a shit. I digress of course, all I'm saying is it's a matter of principle, not rocket science. If you have to shit—shit, but out of the principle of respect do it in a sanctioned area if present or at least off to the side where no one can see you—unless you're protesting something, then by all means shit in the street. After all, it's a free country!

Sometimes, we just have to accept that no matter how "civilized" we are, we are still quite primal in essence. And it's just that nature mixed with our "civil" intellect that usually leads to our moral conundrums. I am not hating on morality at all, just most modern psychology. What I am saying is that sometimes our first instinct is the right instinct—that's why they're called instincts, and it's when we start questioning and re-re-acting would-be scenarios in our heads that we tend to truly fall. These days we are force-fed so much garbage through the media, academic institutions, and medical practitioners about how practically every natural human response is now a disease or a disorder. A friend recently informed me that "non conformity" is now considered a form of mental illness—a disease! Well, I just happen to think that perhaps the boogers spewing all this crap in the first place are the ones who are truly sick. If it weren't for non-conformity we wouldn't have most of the cool crap we have today. If everyone conformed we'd still be reading by torches at night, riding horses to and fro, using printing presses instead of copiers, wax cylinders would still be all the rage, I'd know who America's Next Top Model is, and Mark Twain would've penned non-fiction. Society's "elite" rule-makers seem to be the ones who are ill and it is "they" we should be worrying about, not ourselves. God bless you freethinking anarchists everywhere; watch your bear claws and god bless.—**WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON**





# INTO THE DRINK: THE SPITEFUL DRUNK

## BISHOP BARRELS & PRAIRIE ARTISAN

Towards the middle of last month, avid beer drinkers got the word that Houston brewery **St. Arnolds** was going to drop a few new **Bishop Barrel** beers. For those of you that don't know what the heck I'm talking about, St. Arnolds will barrel age certain beers in their lines. Barrel aging is the new trend in microbrewing. It is the polar extreme to the other long-time trend in microbrewing of overhopping. While the latter trend tends to make beer very sharp, dry, bitter and fragrant, the former trend tends to make beer more sweetish, alcoholic, and liquorish. I have never been a fan of hoppy beer. I don't mind having that sort of sharpness up top if there's a nice malty sweetness and gravity below it, but hops for hops sake drive me the fuck crazy. Microbreweries have, for years, tried to outdo one another by raising the bitterness level like a jock contest for brewers. Who can make the hoppiest beer? Yeah, no thanks. Hops were not meant as a flavoring agent, they were a preservative. An India Pale Ale had tons of hops in it to make sure the beer did not go bad on its trip around the Horn of Africa and back around to India.

Now, I feel as fond of barrel-aged beers as I do loathe superhopped beers. I like the whisky-ish alcoholic notes, the sweet and thick quality, the one bottle drunk...they are my beers. And I will try most anything barrel-aged (it is not a panacea for bad brewing...if your beer sucks before barrel-aging, it will suck after barrel-aging) but some fantastic beers have weathered the aging gaining a bit of extra awesomeness that was lying dormant waiting to come forth. I feel that way for sure about **Karbach** beers. St. Arnolds makes fine beers in the middle European fashion to begin with. They make our all time favorite beer around **979Represent: Pumpkinator**. So when word came out that they had aged Pumpkinator in rum barrels for **Bishop Barrel No. 6** we all had a good freaking out. For starters, these beers are limited and hard to get. Second, limiting them even farther, St. Arnolds only distributes Bishop Barrels to restaurants and bars. So you gotta go out to drink them. Street dates were mid February. And one Friday last month the Bishop Barrels made their debut around town. I went out the next afternoon hoping I could still find No. 6. Hell fucking no. Gone. Drank up. Sigh. I'm sure it was heavenly, manna, ambrosia, the elixir of the Gods (*Yup, all of the above, sucker! - Wonko the art dude*) So I had to make do with **Bishop Barrel No. 5**, a bourbon barrel aged ale with a staggering 13.5% alcohol content. It was every bit as beautiful as I thought it could be, with a rum-like quality and depth. But I rue missing out on what we now refer to as "Rumpkinator". I'm hoping I will get lucky and I'll just find one somewhere. I shall trust in providence.

I should also mention a few other fantastic barrel-aged beers from the **Prairie** brewery out of Oklahoma. I was introduced to their **Bomb!**, an imperial stout aged espresso beans, chocolate, vanilla beans and ancho peppers, at Revolution by their excellent beer buyer Cameron. It has the chocolate sweet/bitter combo with vanilla smoothness, and slightly bitter coffee notes. I could not taste the pepper in it. But boy, was this a deliciously complex beer. I have been able since to test out **Vanilla Noir**, another barrel-aged imperial stout, this time with just vanilla beans. It does not lose anything from being more straight ahead and less complex than Bomb! It is a fine, smooth sipper that surpasses my previous favorite vanilla, the **Abita Double Dog**. Just last weekend I had the pleasure of taking on a bottle of **Coffee Noir**, which is, I'm sure if you are following, similar to the other beers. The espresso bitterness comes forward and it is a fine brew as well, but I find my palate preferring the other two slightly. All three of the beers are hefty drinkers, weighing in all above 13%. Since **Prairie** is fairly close to Texas I'm hoping we will see better distribution of their wares down this way.

I should take a moment to also mention **Deep Elum Cherry Chocolate Double Brown Stout**. I am a big fan of the regular **Double Brown Stout**. It is my de facto drink when I'm out downtown. Revolution is the only place I've seen it (our groceries get other Deep Elum product but not that one). It is a stout that has more in common with the imperial stouts than the dry Irish stouts. So it is more sweet to begin with. Adding the cherry and chocolate to it makes it a desert treat! Though I get more of the cherry and little of the chocolate. Makes me want to bring down a pint of Blue Bell vanilla to make a stout float with it next time I'm out. Heck, I'm out later this week...gonna make that happen! — **KELLY MINNIS**

The air is thick and cloudy as I exit the bar. It's after midnight as I walk down the alleyway behind the bar. Only to drunkenly stumble home and pass out in my front lawn. After all, it is Sunday morning. It's not as though anyone goes to church anymore. Sometime around noon I awaken to the sun beating down on me punishing my eyes with each one of its rays of lights. Some how I managed to pull myself up and walk into the house. The TV's still on but nobody's home. Probably because I'm thirty-four, single, and I live alone. I stumble through the mess in the living room making my way to the bathroom; the aroma of rotten groceries strikes me and reminds me I'm alive.

Once I've successfully battled my way through the mess to my porcelain throne, I proceed to lessen the remaining contents of my bladder into that familiar shit stained bowl I've come to know so well. Atop my throne I notice the remaining half of a cigarette in a red bar ashtray I had taken the night before. A book of old matches rests conveniently beside it. The temptation is too much and I do not hesitate putting the two to use. Lucky for me there was one match left that worked like a charm.

With the contents of the night before flushed away, I make my way into the kitchen following the beautifully rotten smell. The cherry of my cigarette brightens to a glowing red as I inhale the cancerous smoke and stare blankly at the stench's origin. My table is a mess with empty beer cans and various body parts. Resting atop the strewn out clutter are two bags of groceries that have been sitting there for the past three days. The milk has gone bad and so have the eggs and meat. However, the bread's still good and so are the aspirin. Luckily, I spot a bit of gin still in the bottle from that night. I do my best to not think of it. The constant pounding of this hangover sees to it that that is not a problem. My thoughts switch to ending this brain pain.

Five days have passed since that night. At first there was this unsettling feeling of guilt that was soon followed by a sense of satisfaction that could only be well deserved. My teeth grit, as I wash three aspirin down with one swig of gin. My doctor tells me that I should stop drinking, something about "blackouts". I really don't remember. I really don't care.

My stomach growls so I cram a few slices of stale bread down my throat. Then it hits me, my laundry's still on the line. I think it rained last night or the night before. Either way it's been out there for days now and it's probably molded from the rain. So much for the fresh lemony scent of the detergent, I can't believe I bought into that scented hype.

My house has the look of being recently abandoned, but the only thing abandoned here seems to be my life. I have the strangest feeling I'm forgetting something, something important. The alarm on my alarm clock sounds that it's time for work throwing me into a panic frenzy. I dig through the heap of clothes on the floor of my closet for the cleanest smelling clothes I can find, splash some water on my face, spray on some cheap cologne and make my way out the door. Then I as make my way down the front steps it hits me. Today is Sunday—I never work Sundays. That and the vague memory of quitting my job Tuesday, I don't know why I did that. I guess I was unhappy with the line of work. Sanitation wasn't really my idea of a dream job. Though, being evicted for late rent isn't really ideal either.

The act of quitting was entirely spontaneous. Ten years of picking up after slobs who think they are better than you is enough to drive almost anyone with dreams of their own to look for a new career. Besides, I think I was about to become an expendable loss. Something about not being upbeat enough about my job. My boss was a spineless jerk. The kind that will chew your ass for any little thing just to make himself feel better, and anytime you go above and beyond what's expected he ignores you. After all, you're just doing your job. There was no room to grow, no way to move up the corporate ladder. I've hated his guts as I long as I can remember. That fat bastard, fat dead bastard. Just the thought of his life being snuffed out like a bad cigarette is enough to make me chuckle, that of course just makes my head throb more but I don't mind, since his passing is something I've waited so long to laugh at. Along with knowing that nearly an entire week has passed and no one, not the police, his money grubbing wife, employees, or his spoiled little brats had notice his



## <- CONT. FROM

disappearance. They all just went right along with things as though nothing had changed. Perhaps it's the thought of no one caring, along with the thought that any of these people would have probably done the same, but I feel content for the first time in a long time. These people just seem to be happy with the thought that someone had actually managed to make the miserable bastard go away. This thought brings a smile to my face that no crummy hangover could ever deprive me of. The question that plagues me now is should I invite those miserable fucks over to celebrate and bask in my accomplishment? Or just simply hoard the moment to myself as I have been doing? I dwell on the thought a bit before deciding that it would be in my best interest to keep this to myself.

I feel a celebration is in order, to reward myself for doing such a good deed for mankind. Maybe I'll even get a Noble prize for being such a Humanitarian? But that would mean I would have to come forth and I'm not sure I'm ready to do that just yet. I'm not crazy. Tomorrow, I tell myself, I'll clean up this mess and get back to my life. Tonight though, I boast the confidence of an Olympian athlete who has just won a gold medal for his country. The kind of confidence that only comes once or twice in a person's lifetime if they are lucky. The kind that leaves you feeling as though you have just served your purpose in this life.

The strange thing is I would be lying if I said I didn't feel the least bit patriotic for doing what I had done. I had finally reached the top of the mountain and all that I had left was a breath taking view and to eventually slowly start making my decent down to make room for the next person making that same perilous climb. As of tonight, I am enjoying the view for the third day in a row. Tomorrow, I tell myself, I'll start my journey down knowing I have not only successfully made the climb so many die trying to make, but that once I had I spent three wonderful days enjoying the view. Maybe, I think to myself, I'll even turn myself in, that way no one else can take credit for my glory, my golden moment. I laugh to myself, wipe the cold sweat from my forehead as I lock the door behind me and proceed to make my way to my favorite bar "The Spiteful Drunk". — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

## STILL DRINKING: POETRY

### ON THE OCCASION OF THE DAY I EARNED MY SALARY

Today was the kind of day

That drenches dry counties  
In pints of ratified Prohibitions,

That prompts fish to reconsider  
Evolutionary legs,

That leads the proverbial horse to drink  
The proverbial cow-pissed waters,

That makes dart-boards of day-calendars, fire-pits  
Of incidentally paced windows and mirrors,

That moves my metaphors to curl-inward,  
Tongue to tail, chewing their own tips

While snorting through gurgled juices  
A lyric unmired by presentation or precision:

"Ah, fuck it."

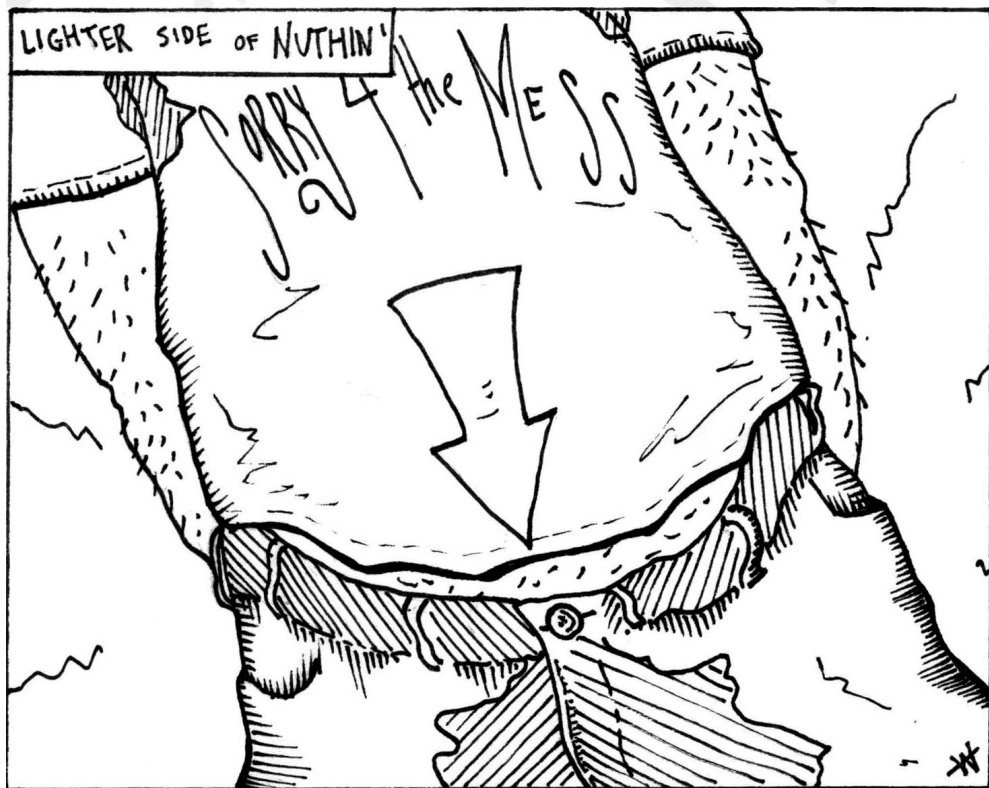
### ON WHY I AM A VEGETARIAN (dedicated to William "Carnivorous" Williams)

Meat  
Is a vegetable

Grown  
In the soil

Of a bone  
Garden.

— KEVIN STILL



# RECORD REVIEWS



**The Escatones**  
*So Long, Norman*

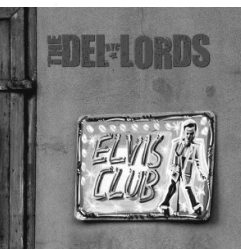
Connor Pursell plays a mean guitar, which is the saving grace of this 11-tune collection. The rowdy rock trio (JT Popiel on bass and Ken the Rented Mule on drums) range all over the place with competent rockers like "It's Not the Same" and "Ketamine Dream" to the folksy acoustic "Too Far Gone" to the quasi-Irish drinking song "Misery Town" (with the classic "Bottle's empty/But I'm not."). There's even an instrumental "Skye" that leads into the album-closing psychedelic "Raise Fire."

Pursell's gift for guitar melodies raises many a pedestrian tune to another level like the slowly-building "Electric to Your World (Snow Blind)" and the fast-slow dynamics of "(Red) This Velvet Ground". Lyrically, the album veers from the disturbing images in "Die for Me" to the cryptic "Get off your back and make a noose for me" in "I Understand". Maybe I missed something.

*So Long, Norman* doesn't boast—at least on the first few spins—the killer cuts immediately evident on the trio's sprawling *Slow Down Jackson*, but it's certainly still a fun listen. Check it out on Bandcamp.—MIKE L. DOWNEY

and reportedly to be very much in the vein of his serious work. So, after reading some glowing reviews from a few friends who had hit up the early preview stream through NPR, I decided I'd have an early listen too. On first impression I thought *Morning Phase* sounded like fantastic background music. And then I dismissed it. But I thought that I should give the album another chance, because I don't really like listening to albums streamed on my computer that much. I want to hear them on my iPod or my stereo at home outside of just staring at my work computer. So I downloaded *Morning Phase* and set to listening to it in other places; the car, walking the dog around the neighborhood and then ultimately back at my desk at work. And I started to hear little things that drew my attention. And I wanted to listen some more.

*Morning Phase* is a very California 1970 album. It sounds overexposed and sepia tone, like 1970s photographs of golden children running through tall grass in the sunlight. It is very much Brian Wilson influenced, from the bass harmonica bullfrogs and the plonking banjo on "Say Goodbye" through to the dark string-drenched melodrama of "Wave". Much has been made about how fantastic this album sounds, and in a way that is to dismiss the songs lack of strong hooks. Yeah, that is true to a certain extent (the lack of hooks part) but this album is a miracle of engineering. It could very well be the Steely Dan *Gaucho* for the next generation of stereo demonstrators. Few albums make me feel like I'd really like to own the 180g audiophile vinyl but *Morning Phase* definitely strikes me this way.—KELLY MINNIS



**The Del-Lords**  
*Elvis Club*

It's been nearly a quarter of a century since the Del-Lords released an album, so it's always chancy for fans to approach new music after so much time has passed.

The good news is the group doesn't embarrass itself, but it is disappointing that it's not better after such a respite. Granted the principals have cranked out a few solo albums (but only a handful). The Del-Lords were never popular in their heyday, essentially a critics' band, but like many of America's best unrecognized musicians, they are big overseas where their current tour is ongoing.

The first cut, "When the Drugs Kick In", is the strongest tune that is both reminiscent of their strengths and forward-looking at the same time. "Everyday" is one of those casually-

classic love songs that are sprinkled throughout the group's catalog. Almost as good is the chiming-guitar classic "Silverlake". On the surface, "Damaged" is a great straight-ahead rocker, but it's the jaunty street-wise companion to Bruce Springsteen's somber ode to second chances at love: "Tougher than the Rest"

That's not to say the rest of the album is a wash. There's a nice yearning quality and harmonica on the mid-tempo "Flying" and some quality slide guitar on "Chicks, Man!" And "Letter (Unmailed)" is a heartfelt ballad. The others, though competent, just don't click. However, there is a great cover of Neil Young's "Southern Pacific" to close out the disc.

The obvious audience is the old fans, but hopefully the new release will spur younger listeners to seek out their early work. On a personal note, the Del-Lords' "Stay with Me" with its killer chorus enlivened many a drive to softball and soccer practice with my children a decade ago as everyone joined in. The lyrics didn't matter; the music was infectiously-incandescent. Check 'em out.—MIKE L. DOWNEY



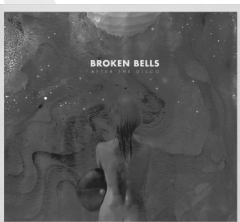
**St. Vincent**  
*St. Vincent*

I have devoted many a column inch to my love affair with St. Vincent's third album *Strange Mercy*, which has taken its throne as my favorite album of the 2010's thus far. There was an emotional connection to the solid 1980s-inspired art-rock that struck the right chord with me. This is her first non-collaborative album since 2011's *Strange Mercy* (last year St. Vincent principle Annie Clarke recorded a fine, overlooked album with David Byrne). *St. Vincent* finds the artist mining much of the same territory of *Strange Mercy* but in perhaps a more cultivated, worked-on and self-conscious fashion.

The flat, slamming drums, the atmospheric pads, the really fucked up lyrics sung in a very girly fashion and the art-damaged Fripp/Belew shards of guitar histrionics remain. The Judy Garland soundtracks on acid moments from her previous three albums are largely gone, replaced by a more stomping, undebely, more jacked-with digital sounds, and an overall more modern set of reference points. "Birth In Reverse" sounds like a Hitchcockian take on the *Revenge of the Nerds* theme song, complete with a reference to daily masturbation. "Huey Newton" has a funky Nasty Tribes late-80s hip-hop strut with prog rock synthesizer breaks and references to dreams before Clarke breaks it down with monster fuzz guitar, heavy metal drums and some big time hard rock posturing.

The single "Digital Witness" is definitely more familiar territory, with the punctuating staccato brass over four-on-the-floor drums, the Bowie *Scary Monsters* era coke-disco vibe with the refrain "People turn the TV on/It looks just like a window" sung in her best Prince-winking melody. For years I've been thinking that Annie Clarke reminds me so much of Wendy & Lisa's solo work, but I'm hearing Prince-produced Sheena Easton in this track. Either way, a great portion of St. Vincent's appeal to me is that she seems to explore the same territory as mid-80s period Prince mixed with British art-rock. "Regret", though, sounds almost like an organic rock song.

While musically I am enjoying this album, I'm waiting for the lyrics to make that connection that *Strange Mercy* immediately made with me. I could feel the sassy but cautious optimism, snapped to reality by the dark reality of the economy, with references to champagne years, cruelty, plastic surgeons and mild sadomasochism. *St. Vincent* isn't making that same connection yet. I wonder though. Recently Anne Clarke has started to play with her image, presenting herself with carefully-sculpted gray hair, clothing straight from the textile trailers of *Superman 2* and incorporating Klaus Nomi-inspired band choreography onstage. Perhaps Annie is becoming more arch, more self-conscious of her status as art-rock bon vivant and is playing with the detachment more. I'm not sure. *St. Vincent* is a fine follow-up album and shows growth and scratches many of the same itches as her previous work, but I'm not sure yet how it's going to hold up for me on down the line.—KELLY MINNIS



**Broken Bells**  
*After the Disco*

Well, this is a brand new experience for me. Upon dialing up "Perfect World", the lead off track to Broken Bells' latest LP, I hear a sound that has been pulled straight from one of my own albums. Well, that's not entirely true. What I hear is that producer DangerMouse has dialed up the same sequence preset on his Dave Smith Tetra that I have used in one of my own great unwashed luminaries songs. It is a feeling I've never experienced before. Usually I am copying other people's sounds from records. Not used to feeling like another artist's contemporary, especially not another artist that makes mostly electronic music. This is where the comparison ends, as what Broken Bells does with these pieces far outstrips anything I've ever done with the same tools.

Broken Bells consists of producer



**Beck**  
*Morning Phase*

I have at times in my life been a very huge fan of Beck Hansen, from his surreal country blues albums on K Records, his hip-hop pastiche from his early bread-winning DGC albums, and even most of his '00s work with Danger Mouse and other producers. But the "era" of Beck's music that has not connected with me so much has been the *serious Beck*, flaunted on previous albums *Mutations* and *Sea Change*. It is not that I find that side of the man's music to be insincere, I just find that aspect of his music to be thoroughly booooring. Give me the Earth Wind and Fire send up "Debra" or the twisted psychedelia of "Blackhole" and such over the rest. So I fully expected to hate *Morning Phase*, Beck's first album in six years

# CONCERT CALENDAR

**3/1**—Aaron Behrens & The Midnight Stroll, Nic Armstrong & The Thieves, The Happen-Ins @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm  
**3/1**—adults, King & Nation, Bad Cat @ Walker's House, Bryan. 9pm  
**3/1**—Mighrant Kids, Lightning Briefs @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/5**—Luca, King & Nation @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

**3/6**—Hed PE, Smile Empty Soul, Sunflower Dead, Signal Rising @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

**3/7**—Baskery, Brave Baby @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

**3/8**—Rock Away Cystic Fibrosis with Black Pistol Fire, Soul Track Mind, Andrew Duhon, Daniel Gonzalez Band @ Palace Theater, Bryan. 2:30pm

**3/8**—Sol Cat, Electric Astronaut, Dames @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

**3/9**—The Svetlanas, New Red Scare, The Sharp Lads, The Hangouts @ Revolution, Bryan. 4pm

**3/14**—Black Actress, The Hangouts @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 9pm

**3/17**—Mary Ocher, Neu Division @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/19**—T-Rexuals @ The Backyard, College Station. 9pm

**3/22**—Big Country Fest @ Wolf Pen Creek Amphitheater, College Station. 12pm

**3/22**—A Sundae Drive, Knights of the Fire Kingdom, The Ex-Optimists @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm

**3/23**—Brazos Valley Derby Girls open bout @ VFW, Bryan. 6pm

**3/23**—Electric Astronaut, No Such Thing, Isonomist, Inside Falling Skies, Made of Faith @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 7pm

**4/4-4/6**—Aggie Con @ Hilton Conference Room, College Station. All day.

**4/5**—Earth Day 2014 with Critical Misfire, Should've Been Cowboys @ Wold Pen Creek Amphitheater, College Station. 4pm

**4/5**—Hank Williams Jr. @ Chilifest, Snook. 7pm

**4/5**—Nirvana Tribute Night with Brand New Hearts, The Ex-Optimists, Galactic Morgue, Jay Satellite, Mike the Engineer @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm

## RECORD REVIEWS (CONT.)

Dangerhouse Brian Burton and Shins singer/guitarist James Mercer. The two craft solid pop smarts atop interesting retrospective music. Their debut album *Broken Bells* was very much downbeat and plangent. *After the Disco* has that same vibe lyrically but the pair have encased these songs in solid new wave and Miami disco firmament, giving the album a definite dancing with tears in your ears vibe.

Mercer channels Glen Tilbrook and Richard Ashcroft on opener "Perfect World" while Burton bangs away like he's producing b-sides for A-Ha. "After the Disco" has the four-on-the-floor but sounds like Trevor Horn trying to make disco music. Lead single "Holding On For Life" sounds so much to me like *Nights On Broadway* era Bee Gees that it makes me want to call Barry Gibb's people and twist his arm into recording his own version. "Control" sounds like a Nilsson Schmilsson outfit filtered through *Sweets of a Stranger* era Squeeze. It is definitely not just a club banger from the band, and shows that the partnership has depth and a lot of back and forth. *After the Disco* is a fine second album. —KELLY MINNIS

AGAINST MEL  
TRANSGENDER DYSPHORIA BLUES



### Against Mel *Transgender Dysphoria Blues*

Alright, let's address the elephant in the room. Yes, *Transgender Dysphoria Blues* is the first Against Mel album to feature vocalist/guitarist/songwriter Tom Gables performing as Laura Jane Grace. Yes, Tom is a chick now. Yes, Tom's journey to become Laura Jane is explicitly addressed on this record (check opening two tracks and the closer). No, that is not why this

record is a front-runner for my favorite rock record of 2014.

If "controversy" alone determined the value of rock-n-roll, Miley Cyrus's *Bangerz* would be topping Lorde's *Pure Heroine*, which would be topping the new Beyoncé porn-package, which would be topping this new Against Mel! But we're adults here (sort of), so we should be enjoying the music for the music. And, in the *Transgender* case, I only needed one play through the snare-snappy, rolling-riffs, angry Tom Petty-esque opening title track — "You want them to notice/The ragged ends of your summer dress/You want them to see you/Like they see every other girl/They just see a faggot/Hold their breath not to catch the sick" — to lay my dollars down. I've had it in constant rotation since it's late January release.

Controversy and autobiographical journeys aside, this is good rock-n-roll. This is roll the damn windows down and let this record spin three times to Austin on a fine day rock-n-roll. This is curious, questioning, angry, fist and stiletto hells rock-n-roll. And it's solid cover to cover.

Confession: I've never been a die-hard Against Mel fan. I left all that sweaty band-sticker-on-my-dashboard love to my buddy Pepe. But this record took me back through Against Mel's discography, through records that felt familiar but still relatively fresh, and the experience won me over fully.

*Transgender* is a culmination record, capturing several different sounds Against Mel has charted and, at times, perfected. You like the *The Eternal Cowboy* and *In Search of a Former Clarity* brass-knuckle, bar-room, steel-toed era, you've got tracks like "Drinking With The Jocks" and "Osama Bin Laden As The Crucified Christ" and "Unconditional Love". You prefer the poppy, high-hat dance-ability of New Wave, you've got the title track and "True Trans Soul Rebel" and "Paralytic States". You fancy the stripped down arena rock of White Crosses, you've got "FuckMyLife666" and "Dead Friend" and "Two Coffins". Here's a ten track retrospective album, picking up various licks and sounds from a fluctuating career.

But the clincher track here for me, and the one that pulls the entire AM! canon

together and simultaneously pushes it forward, capturing Laura Jane's grittiest angst, is the closing "Black Me Out". Opening with a simple strum, Laura Jane chimes in calmly before the entire track erupts — "I wanna piss on the walls of your house/I wanna chop those brass rings/Off your fat fucking fingers/As if you were a king-maker/As if, as if, as if black me out". The message here being that we haven't heard the end or the even best from Laura Jane Grace, yet. There's more clattering about in this shifting soul. Great. Bring it on. I'm already pining for the next Against Mel release. —KEVIN STILL



### Indian *Guiltless*

Reviewing art affords a unique form of meditation. To communicate a personal interaction with a text—be it a book or film or record—the reviewer must turn inward to inspect the new path coursed by the text. In fact, I rarely feel I've engaged a text until I've reviewed it somehow, using concrete language to exercise my abstract interaction, which surely will change after a few new interactions, and then change yet again. Still, you gotta start somewhere.

Such meditations are particularly helpful with an album like *Guiltless* (released April 2011 on Relapse Records) from Chicago doom-metal maestros Indian because, after several dozen listens, I still don't know what the hell to think. I'm not even sure I like *Guiltless* as much as I feel oddly drawn to it, compelled to endure it, even to shut down the lights and fall either into it or into me—of which I'm convinced neither direction can be too healthy. Regardless, I can't

go more than a week without cranking *Guiltless* once again.

Here's one thing I do know: *Guiltless* scares the shit out of me. Even now I feel uneasy with the title track pouring through my eardrums into my body. (What else falls in alongside it?) I'm the only one awake in my house. The doors downstairs are locked. And as the guitars dig like rusty trunk keys and the vocals pierce like broken pipes (beginning of track 4: "Guilty"), I can't help feeling the urge to look over my shoulder into this (thankfully still) empty room. *Guiltless* is sinister, doom-metal murky-bottoms bizuto. A musically maniacal Frank Zito on a lady-scalping spree, for sure.

But there's something undeniably beautiful about this record, too. Maybe the honesty? The unencumbered anger? The sudden awareness of a distant light while trudging swampy clipped limbs away from an assailant's slow muddy-booted pursuit? It's there. Something is there that keeps calling me back despite my hesitations.

If it seems odd to review a 2011 record at this time, I do so to prepare my review of Indian's newest record, *From All Purity*, next month. I realized after a few listens of *From All Purity* that I needed to back the track up. Step in one stumpy toe at a time. And as I went backwards into Indian's discography, I found myself stuck on (in?) *Guiltless*. It's a demanding record that I do not recommend as much as urge you there with your happy reading face to experience. Take, for instance, the opening track, "No Grace", which begins with teeth bruising brutality, then simmers into a sludgy vat of churning vocals and fuzzy blasts, before masterfully ascending into a buzzard swirl of black, calculated riffs. Such distinctly fluid movements in a mere six minutes offer assurance that you've found something special, something worth noting. And right there, in those last few sentences, the review's meditation took hold: yes, I like Indian's *Guiltless*. And, it seems now, the gravity I feel to return here so often is an appreciation for someone else's expression of a personal conviction. Who knew? Maybe I didn't want to. —KEVIN STILL

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