

# STOREREPRESENT



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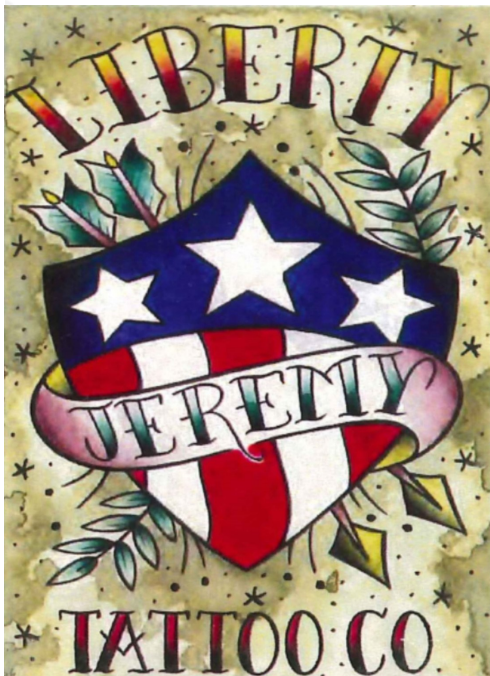
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for the discerning dirtbag.**

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Ronald Reagan once quipped, "The nine most terrifying words are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help." Anti-federalist Grover Norquist turned that into an ethos. "I don't want to abolish government, I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the tub." Republicans have placed this point of view in the bedrock of their political platform. We have seen this philosophy fully ripen with the emergence of the Tea Party in the first decade of this century and the presidency of Donald J. Trump. Our president doesn't really believe in this ethos, but he does believe in dismantling everything his predecessor, Barack Obama, created or stood for, and Trump has been used by those who saw this opportunity to ride Trump's worse demons into DC and set fire to the federal government. When your country is robust it can withstand this sort of fooling around. When a full blown pandemic crisis has taken over suddenly it reveals what a government looks like with all the underpinning removed, all the safety features deleted, and all the stockpiles raided. Suddenly the basic services provided by a federal government are revealed to be ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL. Except America voted for a non-believing anti-federalist to its helm. And now all hell has broken loose.

The federal government at its very basis provides certain services to its many nation-states. Its job is to provide oversight and to coordinate response in times of national crisis. Many would automatically assume that is set up for national defense or relief from natural disaster. It is also comes into play in the event of a pandemic like what we face right now. When Trump came into office he liked to lie often about how Obama had defunded the military to the point of having no ammunition and that Trump restored the military to its former glory. What is interesting is that the very thing Trump has accused Obama of doing Trump did himself to the Center for Disease Control and to his own policy cabinet. Trump dismantled the National Security Council's Pandemic Unit in 2018. He has continued to rely on acting department chairs rather than Congressionally-approved candidates, and that's just in the cases of departments that have any sort of head at all. Stockpiles of protective medical gear were sold for next to nothing to China last year because those supplies were believed to be wasted sitting around. Meanwhile, the states have been left to fend for themselves in obtaining much needed medical supplies such as protective gear and respirators, forcing the states to negotiate sometimes against one another on the open market to obtain these supplies. The president uses his afternoon press briefings for propaganda screeds and misinformation campaigns, while one after the other doctors and scientists come to the podium to very carefully debunk most of the things the president said only minutes before. At this point listening to anything the president has to say about the pandemic has become not just ill-advised, it has now become dangerous.

# THE BIG GOVERNMENT LIE

It took the Trump administration several months into the growing pandemic to admit that there was a problem. Trump and many of his advisors wrongly told talk show hosts and reporters that COVID-19 was overblown, was only a Chinese disease, was no worse than a new flu strain, and that anyone who says otherwise is a Democrat plant trying to make something out of nothing to make the president look bad. Follow that logic forward to groups of anti-quarantine protestors in Ohio, Michigan, and other states who have gathered to implore the states to end the quarantine lockdowns and reopen businesses, schools, and parks, all at the behest of the president, who lobbied tweets imploring citizens to "LIBERATE" their states. That seems like table scraps tossed out to energize his political base, harmless. Except that some people took that as permission to roll up to their state capitols, armed and angry, to demand that the quarantine be lifted. That is also dangerous.

At the very base of this unrest are the platform planks of: government is bad/government is too big; the government will some day try to take away all your liberty/freedom/rights/guns; and experts/doctors/scientists/professors are overeducated shithheads that don't know what they are talking about. The COVID-19 pandemic and the nation's response to it encapsulates the argument of right versus left in this country and ties it up with a neat little bow on top.

The left believes that the government is not inherently bad and that capitalism, if left to its own devices, will act in its own self-interests and not the people's. Capitalism doesn't understand why the nation would need to be able to produce its own PPE product or medical equipment. It costs too much to make it just to sit on it. A federal government would create the market for that product, purchase it and then sit on it for when (not if) a crisis occurs. Then that federal government would oversee distribution of that equipment to the states who need it most. A National Science Foundation with robust funding would have labs all over the country well-equipped to study the virus and how best to combat it and, once isolated, to produce a vaccine that would help mitigate the symptoms that would be distributed at no cost to citizens. Capitalism, not seeing a profit to be made, slows down the response and ultimately makes it more costly to health care providers and ultimately citizens. A federal government can also use wartime policies to have companies divert resources to making medical supplies if the engines of capitalism aren't responding properly. Trump waited long into the pandemic to enforce this rule and only selectively.

A federal government would advise states on quarantine response, allowing states to make the best decisions for the amount of infections and where those infected individuals are located, allocating resources as necessary to help the states figure it out for themselves, and defending the states' rights to enact those policies. Right now states are not being supported at all by the federal government, so states have to make it up as they go

along, thanks to the provision of the United States Constitution stating that whatever it is the federal government does not explicitly provide or deny the states can then do so at their own discretion. This has both piqued and energized Trump. He has alternately declared that he as the President has the ultimate authority to enact states' policy (he does not) and has also at the same time left the states to not only deal with the actual crisis but also the political fallout from any mistakes made during the response. And some states, Michigan in particular, have made mistakes in its enactment of social quarantine.

Most Americans, regardless of political persuasion, have had a hard time connecting personally to the pandemic. The effects most of us experience are to the response to the pandemic rather than the pandemic itself. We are still, at this writing, at less than 50,000 deaths. It has affected mostly the elderly, people in urban areas, and African-Americans. I still have no direct connection to someone that has tested positive or has died from COVID-19. But I know lots of people laid off, unemployed, going out of business, can't pay they mortgage/rent/car note, etc. If one lacks the empathy for what those who have had to deal directly with the tragedy of the virus one needs not imagine an empathy for what the quarantine has done to the economy. One has to believe that the pain of the cure is still better than the pain of the virus itself. Cover that with a steady diet of denying the extent of infection and America's inherent issue of balancing freedom and safety and this is where you wind up.

Whenever I've written about gun laws in the wake of another stupid mass murder tragedy I always bring up America's weird balancing act of managing freedom versus safety and that in America often liberty wins out. It is what makes our form of government and society unique. But it also sometimes makes our form of government vastly under-equipped for dealing with national disasters effectively. The state telling you that you can't go to church because you might get a virus that isn't any worse than the flu and no one you know has it because you don't live in New York City or Seattle sticks in one's craw, especially if that person is already politically conditioned to have a knee-jerk reaction to that sort of response. We know the quarantine is working so far *precisely* because most of us do not have a personal connection to the virus. But there's only so much lack of freedom that Americans can abide. We will see this become even more of a problem as we begin to disquarantine this month. It will happen in fits and spurts and there will be times that parts of the country will regress as the virus spreads out. We may go through another national quarantine before this is over, especially if we come out from underneath the first one too soon. Who do you believe? Your president or Dr. Fauci? Rush Limbaugh or the CDC? Sean Hannity or Andrew Cuomo? Where you lie on the political spectrum will dictate that answer, and your answer will dictate how you and the rest of us make it through to the other side of 2020. — KELLY MENACE

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*This is the first time since 2008 that a May has passed in Bryan/College Station without a LOUDFEST. Atarimatt, Niki Pistols, Wonko Zuckerg, and myself started LOUDFEST in 2008 and the first year we did LOUDFEST on July 5 at Zapatos on Northgate. From 2009 on the weekend between TAMU/Blinn graduation and B/C/S high school graduation belonged to the best local music festival ever assembled in town. We will certainly be back at it in 2021 provided the world hasn't ended. To tide you over in your grief the 979rep staff brings you our favorite LOUDFEST memories from years past.*

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I don't necessarily have one great LOUDFEST story. Each LF has been a chaotic delight in its own way. Each one different than the last, but there are iconic people and things that pop in mind when my most favorite holiday comes around. The people flood my mind. The people like those **A Sundae Drive** dudes who are so goddamn sweet and who I can always expect to be at LF. I think of **The Hangouts**, even if they're aren't together, I think of Niki Shea yelling at all the boys to take their shirts off in a fashion only she can flaunt. I think of **Atarimatt**, and all the dudes from **ASS** and how fucking amazing their closing set was. I think of Joe Chipuk and how much I fucking love **Boy Wonder**, and how I get to share that deep love with Tattoo Jerm. Remember that one time where Kevin Still broke a window at Rev with his butt? I think of Cynthia and Kiri, Katie and Michael, Josh and Frank. I think of Steph and Khrystene, Chelsie and Kelsey, and how much fucking fun they are. I think of John and Amanda, and her rad fucking Blot Thrower vest. I think of my friends that I chose to be my family, and all the love our community has for each other. Despite where you are or how long you've been gone, our friends are there to surround you in an embrace I miss more than I thought I would at this point. I could make a list of 100 people who *are* LOUDFEST, easily. But, there's one person who stands out in mind; little Jess. There was a point in time where I couldn't stand to be around her. She was crass, loud, and all around obnoxious. She still is in my memories, but that's what I actually have come to love about her. The last LF she was alive, we had an unexpected moment in the bathroom of a house I'll keep nameless. She had blow and I had to pee bad enough to share this space with her. I also wanted blow. So, we sat on the bathroom floor at 3 AM sharing bumps and actually talking. She wasn't loud, she wasn't seeking attention, but rather she was sad. I'm not sure why, but she shared her sadness with me and it was there I that finally saw her stripped down and vulnerable. Her secret was also my secret and in that moment of truth we both weren't alone in our blunder. Maybe it was the copious amounts of cocaine, but I held her and we cried in the most cheesy, Lifetime special, hallmark moment way. After that she became someone that was still obnoxious and overly crass, but also beautifully raw and authentic. She died about a month and a half later. I wasn't her best friend. I wasn't some significant person in her life after our own blow ball in the bathroom. But, I did care about her in my own way. She was the girl to push her way in front to listen to whoever was playing. She was the girl to not care how people perceived her as she whipped her dreads around in whatever fashion she pleased. She stood maybe 5 feet 2 inches, but she was bigger and brighter than most of the people in a room. She burned bright, and she's the first person I think of when I think of LF memories. It's people like her who make the holiday

# MISSING LOUDFEST

worth having. It's the 100 people on that list that make LOUDFEST what it is. It's a passion for creativity shared as a mass made of people who aren't afraid to be their authentic self. — JESSICA LITTLE

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For more than a decade, I have looked forward to the local music festival LOUDFEST in May. I've always loved the opportunity to hear as much music as possible in one place, and LOUDFEST has never disappointed me; it's always been enormously entertaining. During one of the bleakest times in my life, just seeing the LOUDFEST list of bands posted was a promise of light during days and days of gray.

That the festival will not be held this year is an uncomfortable hole. I have to hope that LOUDFEST will return to be just as enjoyable as it has been since 2008.

Here are a few LoudFest memories in no particular order:

- Hearing Modern Convenience for the first time — Mike Bibbs is deranged live; I'd never been that close to someone playing like that. I'm pretty sure he was at Stafford in 2010.
- When Mike the Engineer did a Beach Boys cover that my daughter recognized — she thought that was the coolest thing ever, also at the Stafford. She and I saw the Beach Boys in Houston on their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary tour.
- The unhinged performance by Babylon Breakers from Japan — full-tilt rock and roll at Revolution inside. I stick in the CD, and I can still see the lead singer pouring himself into every song.
- Enjoying my daughter and her best friend from college watching Stout City Luchadores perform — primal punk in Mexican wrestling masks. They ate it up inside Rev's after four years in Laramie, Wyoming. Still have that Cd on my jukebox.
- The astonishing professionalism of A Sundae Drive year after year — no matter the venue, no matter the time of day, no matter the year, A Sundae Drive, one of Texas' musical treasures, brought their A game to LOUDFEST.
- Feeling the goofy glee that seemed to run through everyone whenever The Hangouts were playing — Niki, Matt, Kelly, and Marty, later Michael. A LOUDFEST Hangouts show is everything live music is supposed to be.
- Seeing the iterations of The Ex-Optimists perform over the years — Kelly and Michael, the stalwarts, as the group evolved from a bass-less trio to release record after record of thoughtful rock and roll, but what's with that volume level?

Here's to turning it up at LoudFest in 2021. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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For LOUDFEST 2019 I brought my oldest son with me. He was 16 at the time. He'd grown up around a lot of the folks who make LOUDFEST happen but this was the first time he attended every hour of all three days. On our long drive home he turned to me and said, "Wow, you got a LOT of hugs this weekend." My response was, yeah, I did. These are all my friends. To me that is really what is at the heart of LOUDFEST. Sure, there's awesome music but it's just a really good time with my very best friends. I love that bands don't come to play LOUDFEST and then bounce. They stick around all weekend just to hang, meet new people, hear new sounds, and rock out with old friends. Aftershow hangs at the Shea house and Wonkakatiez is nearly as important. Sitting on the roof drinking and bullshitting, throwing empties out onto the lawn. Making hallway happen. Seeing who can make it til the sun comes up. Lifelong friendships were made this way. As much as I miss hearing new bands and playing with my own, it's missing the LOUDHUGS, the LOUDHALL, the LOUDFEAST...that's what I think makes our little festival so special.

But lately those lifetime friendships have been cut short. We've lost a lot of folks in recent years who are missed sorely when we are all together like this. I miss Little Jessica Ramirez the most. The rooms don't seem right without her goofy ass grin and her scratchy dreadlocks flailing away while she banged her head. Big Mike, the drummer from **A Sundae Drive**, found the most appropriate way to bring Little Jess's presence back to LOUDFEST X after she passed on: Mike emblazoned his bass drum head with her photograph. What none of us could say outloud, Mike said for all of us. LOUDFEST still seems almost all the way right but still not quite. I pretend to see her jamming away somewhere in the middle of the room and it all seems right again. — KELLY MENACE

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Every one of my favorite LIF memories includes my kids and Little Jess. When I was first introduced to our local music festival, we had just started Brazos Valley Roller Derby. Every derby girl had signed up to work the door or merch booths. I had no idea how I was going to spend three days getting trashed, smashed and bashed around with my greatest girlfriends and still have enough life left in me to supervise three children responsibly. That's when Little Jess was like, "Fucking bring them, dude." And I was like, "WHAT?! That's crazy." And she was like, "Whatever. I'll bring Delilah." And that's how Half Pint Punk Camp got started!! We coordinated arts and crafts, face painting, graffiti and general debauchery for all the littles whose parents really, really, really needed to scream into a mosh pit for a minute. Jess would take the kids on scavenger hunts while I chugged three beers. Then we would switch so she could body slam a dumb boy in the pit. My brightest memories include my girls two stepping in the courtyard. Permanent marker tattoos on every child's forearm. Matt Shea lifting kids up on his shoulders to see over the crowd. Kool-aid in Jim Beam bottles. Tagging the back of the dumpster with zombie stencils. Watching Little Jess teach tikes to head bang with her epic

dreads. Morgan's arms wrapped around Sailor, protecting her fiercely from the crowd. Every adult stopping by long enough to draw a butt or bewbs or ASS logo with a bit of chalk before they moved on to the next band. Crying during **The Ex-Optimists** set when Wonko gave my nephew, Landon, his guitar and let him shred for a solid five minutes. Then seeing the joy explode out of the entire crowd. Little Jess and I raised our kids on LOUDFEST like we were raised on corn flakes and MTV. And I could not pick a more rad crew of misfits and dirtbags to share these memories with. Here's to next year! — HALEY RICHARDSON

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Picture it! Bryan, a sweltering summer Saturday in 2018 and I'm sitting in a living room feeling my fingertips go numb as I hold up my fourth liberty spike. Liz has spent hours sculpting and blow drying my hair into the most delightful Mohawk I've ever had. I can feel the molten glue dripping down the back of my neck while I try to do my makeup, inevitably stabbing myself in the eye with a shadow brush, and I've never been more stoked. Flash forward six hours and too many shots later and I'm hand banging to Mutant Love, inadvertently stabbing the people behind me with my weaponized hair. I can still feel the wobble if I shake my head hard enough. — TEGAN ALLISON

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Whether I spent the weekend watching some of my favorite bands and people play, or playing bass with my band, **Tenino**, a fun and drunken time is *always* had at LOUDFEST, but my absolute favorite LOUDFEST memory was LF 2015. My best friend and love, Ed, was playing drums with the Ex-Ops at the time. While preparing to close out their set (with my favorite Ex-Op song, I might add), Ex-Ops sans Ed played a way dreamy intro so Ed could surprise me by getting down on one knee and asking me to marry him after which, he kissed me, hugged me, and then went to go beat on them drums, leaving me floating away on cloud 9! — STEPH HEATH

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I remember there were a few consecutive LOUDFESTS (or LOUDSFEST) when the closing band on Saturday night was always **The Hangouts**. Additionally, it was a near-requirement for dudes to have their shirts off for the Hangouts' set (Grant was one of the ringleaders of this), so everyone's already sweaty t-shirt would go on top of the speaker at the end of the Revs bar. Then in the midst of light-and-friendly moshing there was a continuous procession of crowdsurfers. Doing my part to lift these folks and transport them towards the back of the room, at some point I decided it was finally



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my turn to glide through the air. I got to the front, readied myself, and jumped into position. Rather than being met with the physical (and emotional) support I needed, moments later my two feet were back on the ground, the others' arms too weak to lift me. This attempt took place exactly one time.

Another favorite LOUDFEST memory was some time ago at Wonko's old house for an typical afterparty of hangs and stories. As usual the kitchen was the place where most people congregated, despite it being the smallest gathering room in the house (it does, of course, provide the best access point to the beer). Gradually as the night drew on people would go to retire to whatever couch, chair, or other space was left available, and pretty soon Kelly and I were the last ones standing. Our long conversation came to a break in the action, and we looked out the window to notice there was now daylight peaking over the backyard trees. Kelly said something like "Well, I guess I should go home", and then I found a nice piece of living room floor to get a few hours of sleep. — *TODD HANSEN*

One of my favorite things about LOUDFEST is that it's a weird bunch of introverts who, for one weekend a year with booze and rock music as social lubricants, do our best to be extraverts.

Looking back, and doing the math, I have played five different instruments for five different bands that played LOUDFEST — including the first LOUDFEST. But, that almost didn't happen.

A gnarly and ill-timed scheduling conflict that first LOUDFEST in 2008 meant only Wonko and I were in town to play in **The Flak Jackets**, meaning we didn't have a vocalist, bassist, or rhythm guitarist. This was the first band Wonko or I had ever started — so, we were pretty excited and committed to playing LOUDFEST regardless of our situation. We pulled together a few last-minute practices with Jessica Sorenson playing drums and David Pate playing bass. This didn't entirely solve the problem of not having a vocalist, but I figured I could step in and belt something out. It's not like we were a scream band. And besides, I was a great shower vocalist, and had honed my skills during many two-hour

drives back and forth from Austin.

Here was the main issue — I was originally our drummer and I didn't really know the lyrics to our songs, and Wonko didn't really either. So on the way to LOUDFEST I just wrote words to all these songs we were about to play. Live. In front of all of Northgate. Also, I had never played guitar in front of a crowd. Up to that point, I was always able to hide behind the rest of the band with my drumkit. It's a completely different world being front and center!

But this was LOUDFEST! Everyone was excited to see us play, and I knew that there was nothing I could do that was going to squelch that excitement. If we played poorly, I didn't know it. Jess and David picked up the songs super quick, especially considering our last-minute practice schedule. Wonko made space noises on the guitar, which everyone loved.

It was the first and last time I ever fronted a band, and it's also my first memory of LOUDFEST. — *TIM HOM*

I have lots of favorite LOUDFEST moments, and most of them happened at the house during the after parties. There was the time when someone snapped a picture of a bunch of us passed out on the couch, using each other as pillows like little tipped over dominoes. There was the time I was showing Little Jess how I made cinnamon rolls after getting back from the bar and accidentally put cumin on them instead of cinnamon. There was the time that a bunch of people were in the hammock, and Nasim climbed in, and took down the whole tree. There was the time Frazier threw a plastic chair into the tree, and it stayed there for months. There was the time Lee Buckner made a tofu scramble breakfast for everyone staying at the house, planting the seed for LOUDFEASTS to come. There was the first LOUDFEST I played with **Girlband**. There was the post-LIF Sunday brunch where everyone was lounging in kiddie pools in the atrium. And there was the one time Michael asked on the Facebook for help spraypainting LIF flyers, so I hopped on my bike, rode over, helped, and that's when we first started to for-real hang out. — *KATIE KILLER*



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# ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP

Community, y'all.

That's what I keep talking about. Except suddenly, we have all found ourselves isolated from our communities. IT SUCKS. This is LOUDFEST month. This should be the much anticipated return of our family reunion when we knock each other around in the mosh pit, break our bff's nose and spill more beer than we can drink. I'm not coming here to write about the saddest shit we all know though. I'm here to write about how despite the isolation, the trauma of a pandemic and the turmoil of not seeing my friends, I have found strength and love within my community in such wonderful ways since all this shit began to go down.

If you haven't already, you should read Amanda Palmer's book, *The Art of Asking*. In several hilarious and boldly-told life stories, she explains how asking for help has been the number one success in every turn of her life. From penny change in her top hat as a street performer to the first person to raise one million dollars on GoFundMe, Amanda Palmer has mastered the art of showing up authentically, daring to ask for help and reaching out her hand to say "I can't do this without you." And she has taught me how to do that as well.

When the shit hit the fan and I was laid off temporarily, we needed to move into our new house. My roommate bailed. I thought surely I should just give up. There's no way I can pay double the amount I was budgeting for with no motherfucking income. Maybe I could just catch it all on fire and go live in my van parked behind Rev? I asked for help instead. A simple FB post about another pop-up pickle shop was shared almost 100 times and I sold more pickles in one month than I have in the last year. Guess what, y'all? I paid my rent this month AND next month because I support the habit of every pickle addict in town. I love y'all. Thank you for supporting me and my small business and my family and our new home. I would not be here without you.

When my thirteen year old decided she hated the apocalypse and most importantly hated me and didn't want to live in my house anymore, I made the choice to let her leave. As a mother, to watch your child be displaced from your home, your safe space, during a world wide crisis, goes against every instinct to keep them alive and well. I lost my mind to rage and fear one day and called a friend to help. "Get in your car. Drive to the park. I'll meet you there." What could have been a downward spiral into self sabotaging hell, turned into park beers under the trees and puppy kisses. I walked away from self-harm that day because someone showed up and cared. I fucking love you, dude. Thank you for being there.

Speaking of that missing child, I realized she would be leaving sooner than our scheduled Front Porch photo session and I called Josh up and asked if he could squeeze us into his schedule in, oh, I don't know, less than 12 hours. He totally did! BEST. FAMILY. PHOTO.

EVER. I love him.

When I lost my favorite Charm Bomb shirt and couldn't even do basic daily tasks like get outta bed or brush my teeth without it, I cried and cried and cried. I finally messaged Katie and was like, "Friend. \*sobbing\* Do you have any more tanks? I'll trade you pickles and things and insert more \*sobbing\* here." Within a few days, I did a porch trade and got a bag of consolation cookies too!!! Katie, I LOVE YOU!!!

The day before my pickle deliveries were scheduled, my van didn't start. Fml. You know? Just bend me over and give it to me hard and fast and fucking just finish already because fuck you motherfucker. Goddammit. Just goddamn. Fuck. This time I didn't cry. I took a deep breath and called a friend. By delivery day, I had a 1999 Saturn sedan with expired tags, an oil leak and two bad tires. I zipped and whipped all over town and delivered every last jar of pickles and kimchi. Everyone should buy Christine Peth a beer the next time I bring her to Rev. She saved y'all from pickle withdrawal. And buy Abby a beer (or three) too because she rode shotgun and navigated the entire trip thru B/CS from her fancy space phone. I love y'all so much!

I traded pickles for my van repair. I traded pickles for pickle art. I gave kimchi away to my neighbors when they helped me move my couch across the street. I mailed pickles to my favorite band in Lancaster, PA and received a fair trade of band merch in return! I even paid for therapy with the last jar of Habanero Dills last week.

"Asking is, at it's core, a collaboration." — A. Palmer

Just ask, y'all. Don't be ashamed to beg, borrow, trade or barter. Desperate times require creative solutions. Collaboration includes compassion and grace, for ourselves and our fellow humans. We have to work with one another and not against each other. Our greatest ancestors built community this way. We can too. DIY or DIE!

This is community. In moments like the ones I have shared with you or in times of crisis that we are all experiencing now, there can be connection. Right when we think we may begin to fail, we can choose to reach out our hand and just ask. Ask for grace. Ask for support. Ask for love. Ask for a friend. I'd rather make it through the apocalypse with all of you, holding hands, lifting each other up through life the way we lift each other up through a poorly anticipated crowd surf. It seriously takes a dirtbag village.

In honor of LOUDFEST, I love you all. Consider this the massive huge hug I would have squeezed out of you for at least 20 seconds because that's how long it takes for oxytocin to release. Find ways to connect to your community. Collaborate on rad projects! Create a resilient tomorrow. Remember to be kind, do good, share love and eat pickles. I'll see you on the other side of the





# RESTAURANTS & OTHER PLACES

The first weekend of the pandemic we are unsure of the safe option for getting dinner someplace, though we are definitely freaked out enough to not dine in at a restaurant. We decide to do take out at

one of our favorite and most frequented places in Houston, a traditional Italian pizza and pasta spot called **Pizzeria Solario**. Normally the interior is part of the optimal experience, small and scenic without being kitschy, good for a spontaneous and subtly fancy dinner. There is one group of tables with an annoying server that we tend to get stuck with, so we looked at take out as an opportunity to avoid him. When we arrive the restaurant is nearly empty of customers, though there are a few that have opted to sit outside. No one is wearing masks, as that formal guidance hasn't been issued yet. I walk in and ask about our order, which still had a few minutes to go, so we wait outside and watch one person work out in an otherwise empty gym inside the adjacent condos. Our order is ready, but on the way to the car we noticed an item was missing, so I go back careful to only touch the door. When we arrive back home we both wash our hands and hope we hadn't just done something dumb to get us both sick.

The next weekend we decide to do takeout from **Cultivate Pizza & Garden**, a restaurant that usually doesn't take reservations and takes an hour wait before a table for two is available. It's a nice wait, with an outdoor garden area and cocktail service that gets added to your bill once you get called. We look over the slightly limited menu online and call in our order, with most of our favorites still available. I drive over to pick the order up and am surprised to find a parking spot right next to the building, usually having to park somewhere in the adjacent neighborhood while making sure you won't get towed. When I open the front door and walk in the weight of the change that has occurred in a week's time comes over me. All of the chairs in the dining room are stacked to against the far wall, a set of tables next to them holds tall stacks of folded pizza boxes, and center row of tables remains to prepare takeout bags of call in orders. The visible open kitchen is busy at work with a full staff, and the staff in the main room wear black gloves to match their uniforms. I get our takeout bag, sign the check on the bar near the entrance, and leave wide-eyed. After dinner we decide to make takeout feasts a weekly thing in order to break up any monotony and support local places.

Prior to the third weekend we had seen a post from **Golden Bagels & Coffee** that they would be doing pickup

orders on Saturday for orders placed ahead of time. Normally they do not have online ordering, one of many restaurants trying to adjust to the tightened restrictions while still paying the bills. We order a dozen everything bagels and a couple of small-sized schmears. On Saturday morning we arrive to find around twenty people somewhat spaced apart from each other outside of the side porch area of the building. We correctly assume that these are other customers waiting for their orders, though there is no one from the staff present at first. Then every few minutes a staff member runs outside with a bag and calls out a name. Every once in a while one person tries to walk up to the hurried staff and ask about their order, which the staff person assures will be ready soon, but mostly some of folks ask each other how long they've been there or when their pickup time was scheduled. One guy has been there an hour (understandably he is a little annoyed), but no one expresses anger towards the workers like they would in a normal situation. It's clearly the first time the restaurant has tried this service model, desperate to do something in these new weird times. We wait patiently for a while and look at the dogs some people had brought with them. Eventually our name is called and instinctively raised my hands into a victory pose, a small silly win for the morning. The bagels are very fresh and tasty when we get home. Later that evening we order takeout from **Tiger Noodle House**. When I park to pick up the food Rice Boulevard is nearly empty from automobiles. The restaurant has the to-go orders ready at the front counter right in from of the door while both sides to go to the tables in the restaurants are roped off. Both staff members are wearing masks, one handles the phones while the other shuffles to find my bag. Without the backdrop of the restaurant behind them I had essentially walked up to an efficient food kiosk.

The fourth weekend we decide to get takeout from **Pondicheri**, a delicious slightly upscale Indian restaurant that's good for both planned evening dates and midday drop-ins. Instead of parking in the shopping center garage as I normally would I pull up alongside a row of five other cars in front of the restaurant. The weather is a little cold with the slightest drizzle, so most people stay in their cars, while two people stand far apart from each other in the outside eating area. I opt to stand outside as well with the slightest drizzle in order to avoid having to roll my window down and run my engine. An employee occasionally comes out with a large bag and says the order name, sometimes walking up to a couple of the idling cars. One customer is told she needs to substitute an item as they had run out of the one on their ticket, but she doesn't seem to mind too much. An older woman

approaches the restaurant side door, either obvious to the new system or aware but not caring, to ask about ordering food, politely rebuffed by the staff member that she will have to wait outside. My order comes out, bulky to carry, and I sign the check at a nearby table that another patron slightly backs away from. Luckily they had not run out of the desert we wanted, and everything is tasty as usual.

The fifth weekend we're craving Mexican food and place an order with **The Original Ninfa's Uptown**. It feels a little lazy to order from the newer location rather than going with the OG, but Uptown is much closer and the food will be fresher for dinner. We're told to call when we arrive, but when I pull up there is already a staff member waiting at a pop-up tent in front of the entrance. They first bring me the check in its usual black sleeve to my car and hand it through the window. Then they go retrieve a box of food – we had ordered one extra entrée but didn't realize they would also give us a big ziplock bag of chips and accompanying tubs of salsa. The to-go margaritas are perfectly apportioned in plastic cups when we mix them at home with the airplane-sized tequila shots, making the meal complete.

The sixth weekend we decide on **Common Bond Café & Bakery** to get some flatbread pizzas and deserts. The menu is pretty limited by the time we order, as we're within fifty minutes of the new adjusted closing time, so most of the breads and baked goods are already gone. We put together an order of good stuff and I call the main number when I arrive. The staff member comes out with a mask on and hands me our bag through the driver window. I accidentally brush their hand when I grab the bag handles, but neither of us comments. The restaurant seems to be plenty busy with other orders.

The seventh weekend we're craving pizza again and call in an order **Vinny's** in East Downtown, a relatively newer but delicious entrant to the pizza options in Houston. They do not have their pizza rolls on the menu or their signature square crust, but we're still able to place our usual custom order and ask for another pizza with the brisket on the side. I park on an empty St Emanuel St. and put on my paper mask, then walk up to the front entrance. They have a similar temporary set up as I saw at Tiger Noodle House, with the rest of the restaurant roped off, and they have a high-top table with cups for cleaned and used pens. All employees are wearing masks, and a chef comes over to tell me he put the brisket in a separate container, advising me to heat it up for about thirty seconds. Back at home we enjoy our favorite pizza as we would any regular night, fortunate to be able to do so safely. — **TODD HANSEN**

## STEP DOWN MR. TRUMP

The painful truth being played out on national television during the COVID-19 crisis nearly daily is that the president is seriously ill and should resign for the good of the country now.

Feeling pity for Mr. Trump is not something the vast majority of Americans probably ever expected to feel. However, seeing his ghastly appearance beginning with his dreadful March 11 COVID-19 Oval Office address and his alarming performances since, one has to pity such an obviously seriously ill man, who is both physically and mentally debilitated.

Only someone with severe mental instability would propose killing Americans in order to save the economy (aside from the Texas Nazi lieutenant governor). Open up the ovens to save the economy. Only someone completely deficit of cognitive function would suggest medical professionals are stealing surgical masks. Only someone totally lacking in moral fiber would brag about his ratings while thousands of Americans are dying. Who fires people in the middle of an epidemic like it's some sort of demented reality show while ignoring the plight of Americans? This is not a stable lifeform.

These are not the actions of a well man. Something has gone horribly wrong with our president. Why does he continue to lumber about in press conferences when he obviously has nothing coherent to add? Others have the medical information and leadership that Americans so desperately are seeking. Step down, Mr. Trump. You are unwell. Let the vice-president take over. America has seen how governors across America have risen to the challenge of this unprecedented viral disaster to lead their states. Leading from behind with lies is not what America needs. Mr. Pence was elected and served as a governor – he knows how to read, how to delegate, how to listen. He also served in Congress; Mr. Pence knows how the federal government works.

Mr. Pence is not perfect. Certainly, why he continues to be a Trump toady is the largest pustule on his character, but Mr. Trump's declining faculties warrant action now. The country will be in better hands, and Mr. Trump can get the help he so feverishly needs. Worrying about how this will affect November's election is a trivial matter, compared to saving American lives.

At the time of this writing, nearly 48,000 Americans have died as a result of COVID-19, a deadly virus that Mr. Trump dismissed for months. The president can't really be blamed for those deaths, acting without the full use of his faculties as he obviously has been. However, if he continues to stay in office, that can't be said. If he continues to berate Americans doing their jobs during this crisis, whether the press or medical professionals or governors who won't lick his boots, the blame will fall on him. All those Americans who have died in the time it takes to have this read to Mr. Trump, their blood will be on his hands as well as the blood of all those who die from COVID-19 as long as he continues as president.

Step down for the United States, Mr. Trump. Otherwise, that MAGA slogan will need adjusting to "Make America A Grave." — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

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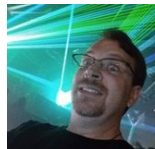


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# MY SEPARATION ISSUES

One day I ate something that made me feel like throwing up. My 16 year old daughter has Emetophobia. That's a fear of vomiting or getting vomited on or seeing vomit or hearing vomit or in my daughter's case, being in the same room as someone who might vomit. So I got up and had a little gag, mentioned something about feeling like I was gonna throw up, and her eyes got all buggy and her whole body got tense. I made my way through time and space to the kitchen trash can, but by the time I got there, the feeling had subsided. I took a few breaths and felt better. Sofie didn't feel better. In fact, she was freaking out. She couldn't be in the same room with me. I assured her I didn't throw up and wasn't going to, but that didn't matter. For the next couple hours, while she calmed herself down, she had put an impenetrable wall between us. She couldn't look at me, much less hear me trying to assure her. She was so far away that I couldn't reach her. There was a chasm between us. It was terrible. She got over it (yay!), but it messed with me pretty bad. Got me thinking about the shit that's going on in my head, which I think is important to do, but this one is a big one for me.

My nightmares don't have monsters or people hurting me (usually), but more like, that my wife is ignoring me or my kids have been taken. Maybe that's normal for people, but I'm building a case here.

My dad has Alzheimer's. He's had it for about six-ish years, so he's pretty gone at this point. To be honest, he wasn't really the greatest dad, but I miss him nonetheless. And in that vein of thought, is my separation stemming from my relationship with him? It might be. He was always very much at arms length, not super intimate or emotional or forthright with love and care and affection. But does that translate to separation issues? I mean, ok, for most of my teenage years, I avoided him, and was very much looking forward to the time when I wasn't under his thumb, so I can see that translating. After some time, our relationship did in fact get better, and I was able to throw away the axe, and I guess (I don't actually know) he was able to stop seeing me as a snot-nosed little shit that embarrassed him and was a pain in his ass. I was...it's true.

We got uber religious for a while, and that was definitely something that brought connections and closeness with people. That part was cool, until my eyes were opened to the bullshit. People flailing around and cold reading and manipulating and shame and lies. At that point I was fine with not "fellowshipping" with those people. They always talked about the same thing, and it wasn't something I was into anymore. Being in that religious sphere made me feel separate from the "world" that was not uber-religious, which felt good for some reason. Now I see the foolishness and conceitedness it created. Seems like that could be a likely candidate for my weird separation issues. Maybe partly because I had to ultimately separate myself from that world (and those people) as well.

At this point, my brain has become confused as to whether I'm an introvert or an extrovert. Pretty sure I've always been a closet Introvert who can pretty

convincingly step into a persona. I am happy being an introvert, but as some people might think an introvert doesn't need people, we actually do. Just differently than extroverts. My handful of relationships are pretty important. I mean, everyone can say that, I realize that. We can all agree relationships are complicated.

The episode with Sofie really got to me, and has made me really dig deep. My issues with separation are dangerous, because all four of my kids are teenagers. Teenagers can flip their attitudes toward parents so quickly. For the most part, I'm not a dick to my kids. I respect them, and they mostly respect me, but they are teenagers. They are gonna be offended by something I say or do. I'm gonna get angry at them and take away their video games because they figured out a way to cheat on their Homeschool Math for 12 weeks.

So, it's actually unhealthy for me to be stepping anywhere near codependency with my kids... (or with my wife, but that's a whole different thing altogether). It's just very easy for me to be super fascinated with my kids, and also let them become my safe place...my safe people. Sofie and Livie in particular are my safety people when we go to parties and play Shooobiedooobies shows. When I get nervous and awkward, I can find them and all is well. I love the Shooobiedooobies! But even with the Shooobiedooobies, there's a codependency (in my brain) with you guys, the audience, the fans. You guys make us cool. Without you guys we are "Meh"! Codependency is an excessive reliance on other people for approval and a sense of identity. Ew. Dangit. But yeah.

Psychoanalysis therapy would say my separation (or codependency) issues are because of my relationship (or lack of) with my dad. I can see that. But I want to break free. I wanna be like, "Hey, whatever, I'm fine," and also, "Hey, dude, I need you right now." and maybe also, "So, I gotta go."

I can get a little paranoid sometimes, and it stems from the possibility of my close people shunning me. And with this COVID self isolation thing going on, that's a bit wrenching. Mostly I just have to not over-analyze tones, expressions, actions, perceived motives or jump to conclusions...or at least not accuse anyone according to my crazy thoughts. What's nice is that we've fostered communication at our house, so mostly everyone says what they think/feel. Mostly. Not always. It's pretty nice being able to talk to my kids and really get what they are dealing with. I know it's not what everyone gets to experience. I am enjoying it while I can...while it's still here.

It's my job to NOT be an asshole and risk my peeps shunning me. That's my part. I have so much love for them and their opinions and thoughts and their potential, and I don't so much need their approval, but a connection. Maybe it's not "separation" issues, but more like "connection" needs. Being human is weird.

BTW, the "cure" for Emetophobia is exposure therapy. Sofie isn't ready for that at the moment. — JORGE GOYCO

# DEAR SENIOR BURNS



*Goal: to write more. Process: simple and free. Step 1: Choose a topic. Step 2: Write topic on first line of a Word doc or piece of paper. Step 3: Scribble or type till the bottom of the page. Write any and everything that comes to mind. No stopping! Follow every wild hare. Explore every cognitive loop and creative vortex. Afterwards, look back. Is it poetry? Is it bologna? Irrelevant. You achieved the goal. You wrote. You are different now. The world is not necessarily a better place, but you are a better person. Now, hark, go forth and repeat.*

=====

Dear Senior Burns, the squirrel keeps coming back. On the fence. He comes in the morning like clockwork. Like the frayed edges of burnt caffeine withdrawal. He comes and twitters his whiskers, whisks his tail like and egg beater into thin air, churning trouble with his beady little eyes and no good maniacal laugh. And my pugs just lose their damn minds. Behind the glass doors they holler and bay and cuss. Their eyes protrude further than usual. Out to the edge of this snout. Out where the glistening spray shoots forth with each snort. At the squirrel, even their tails uncurl and drop like punctuation digging into the dirt. Not to stop a sentence, but to start a new one. A new one that begins, "Die, motherfucker." Meanwhile the squirrel decides to chance it. He shimmies down the fence like a mid-price dress after a cheap dinner. He shimmies down the fence and grabs an acorn. Then he turns towards the door, fully facing my pugs squealing like a wrestler circling the ring, and he just eats the acorn. Takes his time with it, too. He bites the rind. Peels it back. Tosses it to the ground like he's at the damn Texas Roadhouse. Then he scoops out the orange meat with his bare paws. I watch him. I've seen him eat the sperm of a dozen pin oaks in a single sitting. His tail never pausing. Waving like surrender. My pugs eat the image of him. Their snot and saliva laying thick on the glass door like glaze on a donut. I can't blame them really. I hurt for them really. So I help them out. Throw them a bone, metaphorically speaking. I sneak over to the glass door, unbolt the lock, tell them to be quiet, and then I throw the door open. Slide it like the whoosh of total exoneration. And they launch from the doorframe fully enraged. Dirt and rocks and acorn husks whirling around their pitifully small feel — a strange anatomical design, those legs and feet of the pug-dog — in a cartooned haze of Tasmanian Devil disaster. The squirrel rescues the fence. Doesn't even grab his wallet and keys. He's just up the fence and out of there. But he'll be back. We'll repeat this display a few more times today. Before noon. Never after noon. He's a brunch squirrel. A real caucasian son-of-a-bitch like that. He brunches on drama, my dogs' fury the double espresso shot in the latte of their churned frothy-mouth ire. I don't like the squirrel. To be honest, I just don't like him. In the parlance of public education, he is a "bully". In the lingo of the streets, he's "a cockroach." A bottom-dweller. Munching on the acorns of my back patio as well as the humiliation of my dogs. Not that they are much smarter. They can't seem to catch on to his game. I pull them aside later. I try to reason with them. I wait until they are laid out prostrate, snoring a little, forming new eye boogers like ocular Play-Doh crafts. I say, "Listen, why do you let him get to you like that?" Their giant eyes roll around in their oblong heads. I say, "You're too good for that. You were the palace jester in the Ming Dynasty. You danced for royalty, before the yin was even translated to paper, you were the gargoyle of the Imperial City." They huff. Have you, Senior Burns, seen pugs breathe in their almost sleep state? Their ribs expand

and recoil. Expand and recoil. They balloon out and then shrivel back. It's not beautiful or peaceful. Watching pugs sleep — or try to sleep — is not like sneaking a peek at the domestic cat curled in on itself like a satisfied pillow. No, pugs are more like piles of heaped fabric in grandma's sewing kit. They just mound up wherever they land, and then the breathing starts. It's COVID-19 incarnate. It's the failure to catch breath. They are perpetually at the end of several decades sucking three packs of butt-less Lucky Strikes. They are asthma and emphysema and the sympathetic guffaw at a bad joke all rolled into one. So this is what I'm reasoning with here about the squirrel. I'm talking to the ass-end of a broken inhaler, and the face wheezes the sound of farts at me through flat noses. I say, "He'll be back tomorrow, you know. He'll climb right back up there on the fence and taunt you a second time." (They don't have the cultural vocabulary for a Monty Python reference but, c'mon, Senior Burns, sometimes we talk to hear ourselves more than to actually communicate. See what I'm doing here typing all this?) And sometimes my eldest pug — he's fawn color, if you want to take this situation into the racial sphere — will twist his head and feign to listen closely. But I don't believe that's what is happening because, even though I talk all this at him, reasoning with him like with a child who has prematurely learned that rebellion is the coolest damn thing on the planet next to Tommy Lee used to inhaling a cigarettes *through his nose*, I know this pug doesn't speak English. Really, you should hear the things I say to these animals when no one is around. I won't even repeat them here because they sound sexist and racist and, even worse, classist. I mean, they're not. But they could be taken that way. So I won't say anything here. Let's just say that when the FBI releases the tapes recorded of my home by my neighbor's Amazon Alexa (our walls are thin), people will hear what I say to my pugs when no one is around, and they'll say, "See? I knew it. I knew he was a [insert common Communist insult of the day]". But, listen, the point is that I just talk at these dogs and I parent them like real people and they just look at me with a grand sympathy because they realize, in the pitiful way that a child who realizes their parent is actually the dependent in the relationship, they realize that, "Wait, oh shit, he gets off on the squirrel situation as much as we do. He opens the door for his own entertainment as much as ours. And now he's trying to talk us out of our rodent-rage in an attempt to appear diplomatic and reasonable about the whole thing. Oh Dog, I have to get out of here. But, dog-damn, the kibble is so good." So we get one another. Me and my pugs. We see the balance in this weird force here. But what they don't know, and what I will tell you because this platform is so wickedly private, is that the joke is on them. You see, I have a deal with the squirrel. And the way I keep him coming back is that — check this — I just don't clean my back yard. That's it. I'm not lazy. I'm not a sloth. I just need assurance that the squirrel will come back. That our mornings will erupt with a wet snort of normalcy. So I leave the acorns there. Piled as God intended. My yard a catch-sock for the tree's seed. And I do it for the pugs. Who explode for the squirrel. Who returns because I ask him, too. Because I love knowing that he can give them what I never could: the wispy mania of a feathered tail tickling the wind. Look at their eyes bulging out to him like prayer. They never look at me like that. I can never be their entire Ming Dynasty. But I try. Today and again tomorrow. Say, do you need me to pick up any creamer for the morning? —

KEVIN STILL

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## THE URINE TEST



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IF THE GUY WHO PEE'S ALSO IS WEARING PANTS, THE PEE STAYS WITH HIM AND YOU DO NOT GET WET.

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# STREAMING PARTY TONIGHT

*Anti-Nowhere League: We Are the League* is a documentary about the punk band The Anti-Nowhere League. Hailing from the sleepy town of Tumbidge Wells, England, the Anti-Nowhere League formed a punk band in 1980 for the right reasons – boredom, to get girls, and get free drugs and drink. They met and exceeded these goals in spades. Consisting of a biker as a vocalist, a skinhead on bass, a music nerd on guitar, and a Persian on the drums (which caused no small amount of headaches with immigration when they toured abroad), the Anti-Nowhere League reveled in chaos, cheeky irreverence, and a not give a shit attitude. Their fans loved them for it. Getting a leg up in the music business by bribing the Damned for an opening slot (new meaning to pay to play), the Anti-Nowhere League were soon off and running. Their first single “So What” was deemed so offensive by the British government that copies of the single were confiscated by the police at the pressing plant. All this did was vastly increase the profile of the band.

Their first album *We are the League* is a classic album of UK street punk. After the 2<sup>nd</sup> album *Live in Yugoslavia* (which apparently was actually recorded live in Yugoslavia) the sex, drugs, and rock and roll started taking their toll. Strongly encouraged by their record label to put out a more “commercial” album, the end result was their third album *The Perfect Crime* which is a textbook of 1980s overproduction – keyboards, arena rock sounding drums, and a band that now sounded like a feistier version of Big Country/The Alarm (though I have to admit that I might be the only person who would admit to liking that album). After that album sank, the band realized the gig was up, had their “final farewell” show and called it quits in 1989.

Never say never in Rock and Roll. Metallica covering the Anti-Nowhere League song “So What” generated sufficient interest in the band for the band to reunite. They are now on the punk rock reunion circuit doing what they do best (but with only one original member – the vocalist). The stories the band tells in this documentary – band members being arrested, being banned from venues and the “Top of the Pops” TV show – are hilarious mainly because they have a healthy sense of self-effacing honesty and humor about their career. The Anti-Nowhere League are better musicians than they would give themselves for being. Long live the League.

*Jay's Longhorn*. Documentary – The Longhorn was Minneapolis's first punk club. Started in 1977 it became fertile ground for local punk/post punk acts such as the Suicide Commandos, The Suburbs, Curtiss A, NNB and (later on) Husker Du and the Replacements. Honestly, this documentary is rather pro forma as far as rock documentaries go – some old photos, a very small amount of vintage footage (probably because there isn't much or if there is they couldn't get the rights to this footage), and stories from almost famous band members and veteran local scenesters from “back in the day”. *Jay's Longhorn* gets off to a shaky start when three (at that point anyway) unidentified people walk into what used to be the Longhorn but is now a warehouse. It almost becomes Spinal Tap level farce as these talking heads point to empty spaces and say stuff like “That's where the stage used

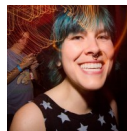
to be.” If they are making a sly joke about how silly some of these documentaries can be then it is a dry joke well made. Note to movie makers – identify your talking heads early if the audience isn't going to know who they are (except for Dave Grohl – just don't have him in your documentary at all).

The movie picks up once we get names with the faces and the narrative of which band did what and when takes off. The Major Strength of “Jay's Longhorn” is the strength of the bands. All of the bands, even the ones that never made it out of Minneapolis are shockingly good. About 45 minutes in I found myself thinking that if it would have been my first exposure to new music – as it was to many of the participants in the movie – I would get misty eyed and nostalgic over it. The obligatory “this changed the world” hyperbole all of these documentaries have is plausible once you hear the bands; especially the Suburbs and Suicide Commandos. If you don't have Amazon streaming and don't want to pay for a DVD of *Jay's Longhorn* stream a copy of “Big Hits of Mid America Volume 3” which has most of the bands in this documentary.

I thought I was holding up fairly well during pandemic confinement until the bright idea to watch this hit me. Finally the cabin fever got to me.....

*Cats* – Maybe a documentary. Some movies are so bad they are genius – *The Room* comes to mind. Some movies are so genuinely terrible and unaware of their awfulness they hit good from behind with cheesy ridiculous movies such as *Xanadu*, *Grease 2* (sorry Creepy Horse) and *Can't Stop the Music*. Other bad movies serve as cautionary reminders that knowing when to quit is great idea – for instance the last six *Star Wars* movies or *Godfather III*. *Cats*, however, is so terrible movies as dark matter is to physics. Like dark matter, *Cats* cannot be described but exists and can (unfortunately) be experienced. This doesn't mean it NEEDS to be experienced. The wafer thin plot revolves around some annual cat ball in which one “lucky” cat is chosen to go to cat heaven. The female lead of the film – Francesca Hayward – has the same bewildered “What the fuck was I thinking” look I had when I was watching it. Rebel Wilson does a dance routine with a chorus line of dancing cockroaches. The talents of Sir Ian McKellen and Judi Dench do nothing for this film. If anything, they are a painful reminder of how dreadful this film is; sort of like a Picasso painting in a crack house. Taylor Swift gamely tries to revive the lifeless mess with her musical number but is sort of like the last heartbeat before the corpse goes cold.

It is hard to believe that Andrew Lloyd Webber, who wrote the likes of *Jesus Christ Superstar*, wrote the play that “inspired” this movie. Allegedly this play was one of the most successful plays in the history of Broadway but it doesn't translate onto the big screen. Even the costuming looks like some bad “cute” phone app that gives a person cat ears. This isn't the first time that allegedly strong source material (The movie *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* comes to mind) has led to a horrible film but *Cats* is one of the worst examples of this in recent (or not so recent memory). I've watched it so you don't have to. You're welcome. – RENTED MULE



# SALACIOUS CRUMBS

This time every year, I start planning out a massive three-day brunch bender called Loud!Feast, to coincide with bands and friends staying with at the house for Loud!Fest. It started small, and last year, I fed 40 people on the Sunday after the last night of L!F. I get to see all of you over the course of the weekend, in a much more subdued and personal setting than the loud, crowded courtyard of Rev. We have actual conversations and we don't have to yell. I like it. I might like it better than being at L!F. And this May, there is no Loud!Fest, so there is no Loud!Feast, so I thought I'd give you some recipes from Loud!Feasts past, so you can throw your own at home three-day brunch bender!

I learned how to make tofu scramble from Creepy Horse, the queen of vegan cooking, one year when she stayed with us. She was making us vegan chicken and waffles when the sky opened up, dumped all of its water into the backyard, and flooded our house on a L!F Saturday. Everyone staying at the house jumped to attention to throw down towels and man the Shop-Vac and dry the house out as fast as possible. Little Jess ran around the house boosting morale with mimosas and micheladas.

## THE BEST Tofu Scramble

- 1 14-16 oz block of tofu (firm or silken, it all works)
  - 1 cube Edward and Son's Not Chicken Bouillon (you CANNOT skip this, it's the secret)
  - 2 tsp garlic powder
  - 6 Tbsp nutritional yeast
  - 1/4 c vegan mayo
  - 1/2 tsp turmeric
  - 1/2 tsp black salt
  - S&P
1. Crumble those tofus into a pan over medium heat. Think scrambled egg sized curds. You don't need to drain it.
  2. While those are heating up, mix a cup with water with the bouillon cube, nutritional yeast, garlic powder, turmeric, and half of the nutritional yeast. Pour it over the tofu, and mix everything together.
  3. Let this guy hang out for 7 minutes or so, stirring occasionally. The liquid should reduce.
  4. When there's just a little bit of liquid left, stir in the rest of the nutritional yeast, the black salt, and pepper until the nutritional yeast flakes are dissolved.
  5. Stir in the mayo and season to taste!

I remember the year I made BBQ jackfruit sliders and vegan mac. Jerome Riddle lovingly halved every. single. slider. bun. And then fixed our faucet that decided to spew water all over the kitchen in the middle of Loud! Feast by jamming an old pencil in it. I think Michael is cursed, because I've never had so much water trouble before I met him. You guys go bananas for these sliders, so here's the recipe (mostly) so you can make them at home since I won't be bringing them to any potlucks at the Shea house anytime soon. You can get jackfruit at the Asian market, and it's half the cost of the stuff at Village Foods.

- 2 cans jackfruit
- Lots of BBQ seasoning
- Some oil
- Half a big onion, sliced thin
- Half a red bell pepper, sliced thin
- A bunch of chopped garlic

- 1 bottle BBQ sauce
  - 2 capfuls liquid smoke
  - S&P
  - Mustard
  - Chopped red onion and pickle
  - Hawaiian slider buns (Sara Lee or Orowheat are vegan)
1. Drain and rinse the jackfruit. Using your hands, shred it and toss it with the BBQ seasoning. If you come across tougher bits like the seeds or the core, toss it in a food processor and chop it, or run a knife through it. It'll soften up while it cooks.
  2. Heat some oil in a pan over medium-high heat. Add the jackfruit, onion, pepper, and garlic, and cook it, stirring frequently, until the jackfruit, peppers, and onions get a little bit of a sear.
  3. Add about 3/4 of a cup of BBQ sauce to the pan, along with about 1/4 c water and the liquid smoke. Stir occasionally, cooking until the jackfruit is soft, and the BBQ sauce mixture has reduced so that the jackfruit is juicy, but not wet. Season with S&P. It's done!
  4. Split open that slider bun, slather the bottom bun with mustard, put a healthy 1/4 of jackfruit on top, and give it a dollop of BBQ sauce and a sprinkling of chopped onion and pickles. Eat this, and make sure to tell me how you don't usually like mustard or onions on your BBQ sandwich, but that it works here. I KNOW. THAT'S WHY I MAKE IT THIS WAY.

I've done breakfast nachos or breakfast tacos a couple of times, and people always rave about the queso. This is also the queso I used on the famous birthday nachos (ok, they're only famous to like six of us, but I still hear about those nachos!). You guys ALWAYS ask me for the recipe. And sometimes I send it, but most of the time I don't so HERE IT IS! Don't ask me for it again, because officially, it lives here now and I release myself from the responsibility of finding it, sending it to you, and never hearing that you've made it. I want you to make it!

## The Best Vegan Queso

- 3/4 cup cashews, soaked overnight
  - 1 1/4 cups vegetable broth
  - 1 tablespoon miso
  - 3 tablespoons nutritional yeast
  - 2 cloves garlic
  - 2 teaspoons cumin
  - 1/4 teaspoon salt, plus a pinch
  - 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
  - 2 teaspoons oil
  - 1 onion, diced
  - 2 jalapeños, diced
1. Blend the cashews, veggie broth, miso, nutritional yeast, garlic, cumin, salt, and lemon juice in a blender until it's smooth and not grainy.
  2. Heat a pan over medium-high heat, and toss in the onions and jalapeños. Cook until the onions are translucent and the peppers get a little bit of char.
  3. Lower the heat to medium-low, and pour the cashew mixture in. Stir for a couple of minutes until the queso is thickened. EAT IT!

Do a curbside order, down too many Lone Stars while listening to Mutant Love way too loud, and hangoveredly make some delicious food the next morning for your own personal Loud!Feast. — KATIE KILLER

# PEDAL PUSHING

Why do guitar amps gotta be so goddamned loud to sound good? It's a problem players, engineers, sound people, and manufacturers have been dealing with for decades. In an earlier column I talked about the sorts of lengths I had gone through to figure out how to record my amps at home without having them disturb the rest of the household and my neighbors. I used a sort of kludge pieced together from a Weber Mass attenuator to load down the speaker out and to line out to a reamp box that padded the line out signal down to instrument level, then out from the reamp box to a Mooer Radar speaker cabinet IR pedal, and then out to my DAW interface. It worked, but the more I recorded signal that way the more I became dissatisfied with how congested the tone was. It was compressed in the high end in a way that accentuated the fizzy by-product of the passive attenuation. Although the Weber Mass has a speaker coil in it that helps it to react more like a speaker load it really was not meant to be attenuated down to near silent. So I needed to come up with another solution, like a silent load box.

There are several load boxes on the market. They are usually more expensive than attenuators. Some, like the UA OX and Boss Tube Amp Expander, cost well over \$1000. Some units are just attenuators with a direct out, like those made by Fryette and Rivera. Suhr makes two of them, one that is just a load box and one, the **Reactive Load IR**, that is a loadbox and IR speaker cabinet emulator all in one. At \$599 it comes in a little bit below the median price for a reactive load.

**Reactive.** What exactly does that mean? It means there's a bunch of resistors and capacitors inside that safely dissipate the power from an amplifier while emulating the impedance curve of a speaker cabinet. It requires a little more technology inside to do this rather than a resistive (passive) load like an attenuator, which normally absorbs power with resistors and then passes off the excess energy as heat. The signal is then either passed through an EQ bank that simulates speaker cone EQ or is processed through a choice of speaker cabinet IR's. In the case of the Suhr Reactive Load IR it takes an 8 ohm amplifier from the speaker out and absorbs up to 100w of energy silently. Instead of then plugging the amp into a speaker cabinet, one lines out from the back of the Suhr into a mixer, a recording interface, a powered speaker, etc. Anything that can take a line source. You can either send a dry out signal or a signal affected by a choice of 16 pre-loaded speaker IR's.

Let's go backwards a bit and explain what an IR is. An impulse response is a frequency analysis of a given audio signal. One can analyze the response of a room's reverb decay and then apply it in real time to a reverb algorithm. In this case, a speaker IR is created by running a sine wave through a speaker and analyzing the frequency response of the speaker's output. Then an amplifier's dry signal is processed through that impulse response to emulate the response of that speaker's sound. There are many factors at play with a speaker IR: what type of speaker was used; what mic was used; what position was the mic in relative to the speaker cone; what type of cabinet was the speaker in; what

length in milliseconds is the IR; and what digital resolution was used to capture the IR. All these factors determine how realistic an amp running through an IR is in comparison to mic'ing that amp through the same speaker cabinet. If done correctly, speaker IR's should sound nearly identical to hearing that same speaker cabinet mic'ed up in another room or soundproofed booth like at a recording studio. Most guitarists with experience playing an amp through multiple speaker cabinets can attest to how one amp can take on many different qualities just based upon speaker choice.

The Reactive Load IR comes loaded with 16 IR choices, all from Celestion speakers loaded into Suhr speaker cabinets, such as Greenbacks, Creambacks, GT-65's, and the like. The stock IR's mostly sound fine with my Fender and Mesa amplifiers. In my case I was missing Celestion Blues for my Vox amp and a vintage alnico Jensen 12 for my 5E3 tweed Deluxe clone and I was able to load my own in there, as the 16 IR's are rewriteable with any other 48K-24 bit impulse. I was able to plug the RLIR into my computer via USB and very easily exchange IR's. But first, I had to download the manual. This is the first negative for the RLIR. No manual in the box. And while plugging in the RLIR to USB is easy enough there is a small trick to getting the RLIR to recognize your IR's after loading that only the manual explains. Other features of the RLIR are a headphone amp, a simple on/off low pass filter, a pass-thru 1/8" aux in, and a +6 dB boost. There is also a non-IR line out for routing a signal directly from your amp to a power amp or such.

In practice, the RLIR does exactly as advertised. I've used 12w to 100w tube amplifiers into it without causing either amp or reactive load to sweat. However, I have noticed that one must get used to what your amp sounds direct. If one is not careful with levels you can make the RLIR distort. There is a pot for D.I. level on the SLIR that helps to pull down the volume and decrease clipping. Judicious use of the boost will help to bring up levels when going for clean tones, as an amp will naturally be at lower volume for clean sounds. It sounds more "open", less compressed and less fizzy than my previous setup. It sounds more like the amp does at similar settings into a speaker cabinet. It also behaves a lot like a speaker cabinet. It picks up RF noise and amplifies bad power and wiring more than the Mass/reamp/Radar setup did. Humbuckers squash most of that, but if you do Fenders or P90s then you will have noise like you would in a room with a live amp. It helps to move the RLIR farther away from the guitar. Most people won't track in the same room three feet from a 100w amp on full tilt so the same common sense applies to using the RLIR as using a speaker cabinet. The headphone amp drives my cheap cans quite nicely. The only real complaint I have about the RLIR is that a.) 16 IR slots is kinda meager. It would be nice to have at least twice that amount of storage; and b.) I really wish for multiple impedance selection. I can't use my 2 ohm Bassman with it. Otherwise the Suhr IR has been a very effective solution for silent recording with real amps. —

KELLY MENACE

# RECORD REVIEWS

## Jay Satellite Singles Collection

For the sake of full disclosure, Jay Satellite does not have a singles collection. However, the longtime Texas band led by Jason Clark — and frequent guest at Revolution (whether full band or solo) for more than a decade — does have a number of singles issued over the past few years.

This arbitrary baker's dozen compilation, drawing mostly on 2019 releases, is an intro to Jay Satellite for those who shy away from the album medium, like those who prefer short stories to novels.

"Honey Moon" is a simple rocker from 2019 with buried and intertwined vocals from Clark and wife/bassist Marigold Clark that pleases for "Come home soon/Honey Moon." Supported by guitarist Camaron Taylor and drummer Andrea LaGrone, the tune (and the following) is a good initiation to Clark's lead guitar and wordplay as well as the full band's sound.

However, "Better Before" (2019) is an even more accessible rock tune with an earworm guitar riff. Even more catchy is 2014's "Hearts on Our Sleeve" that is an effortless rock and roll paean about how much alike we all really are. "Hearts" is a B-side to "Cool Kids," which is yet another beguiling rocker (great handclaps) about fitting in.

"Find Yourself" (2019) kicks off with a captivating drum/guitar intro. The lyrics implore one to "find yourself until you lose it all." Again, great guitar dominates.

"Ghosting" is a slower song from 2016 that deals with betrayal: "You're ghosting me again/I thought you were my friend." Also from 2016, "Read Your Mind" is a rocker about the challenges of communication: "You don't have to read my mind/I read it to you all the time."

The emotional turmoil of "Stray" is apparent even without lines like "Leave me so broken" and the cryptic "I knew you'd stray another way." The 2019 tune also boasts a unique guitar solo.

Jangling guitars and a steady downbeat kick off the pleading "Before You Go." The 2019 song is a weary attempt to salvage a relationship: "Words always escape me" and "You've heard it all before."

While "You Better Run" launches with persistent drums followed by steady guitars, the

2019 tune is ripe with foreboding and desperation with its lyrics of hiding and "they're coming for us too."

The abandoned rock and roll of "The Last Time" masks the rockiness of relationships in this 2016 tune. Also from 2016, "Time Will Bleed" features an acoustic guitar segueing into methodical rock which may be a façade for despair. "My life turns on extremes/Nothing is as it seems" hint at the difficulty of life. A shuddering guitar closes out the song.

"Driving All Night" is straight-ahead rock and roll about the simplest of American expressions: on the highway traveling to a loved one. The "spark of your embrace" lures the singer on in this 2019 effort.

Check out Jay Satellite on Bandcamp. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



**The Strokes**  
*The New Abnormal*

I think the Strokes might have finally figured it out. After early uber-success and then 15 years of mixed results and experimentation, The Strokes seemed to have figured everything out on their new record, *The New Abnormal*.

While there are lots of familiar Strokes staple chord progressions and those familiar guitar tones, the band has finally stopped trying to recapture the magic of *Last Night*, and settled into making music that doesn't feel forced.

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I wrote that [above] a few weeks ago when the record first came out, and avoided listening to it extensively for the sake of this review. Now that I have imbibed some lubrication, and just finished a game of Catan with some lovely gentlemen — Tim Horn, Jeremy Stark and Kyle Coffer — I'm going to throw this record on and see what comes out of my keyboard.

Annnnnnd awaaaaayyyy, we go!

I love this record's opener, "The Adults Are Talking." It sounds

very Strokes-y. The guitars and the picking are catchy. [If you like the Strokes.] It has a hooky chorus. Much like the rest of this record, it doesn't try to impress. I feel like a lot of the songs on this record take the best parts and successes of their last three outings and paste them together. You can hear things they tried on *Angles* and *Comedown Machine* here. The solo on here sounds like something off of *Angles*.

Also, the playful studio interlude before the second track, "Selfless," is a fun little snippet for us. "Selfless" is a mediocre song. But, I do enjoy the strong, Strokes-sounding guitar, and that Julian's falsetto finally sounds good and natural. I have always enjoyed his voice, but no matter how he goes about it, it finally feels real on this record and not cleaned up or amplified by some studio work. "Selfless" would have fit in on *Angles* or *Comedown Machine*. It probably would have been one of the better songs on those two. This record is not abiding by the "Rob Gordon" rules to make a mixtape, but this is a different sort of Strokes record.

Oh, goodness! Here we come with the intoxicating synths of "Brooklyn Bridge to Chorus." This is a solid track. It feels like a better version of everything they were trying to do on *Angles*. The chorus is fabulous and relatable, "I want new friends, but they don't want me // They're making plans while I watch TV // Thought it was you, but maybe it's me // I want new friends, but they don't want me." Casablanca seems to even be self-aware and — deprecating with one of the next lines, "And the '80s song, yeah, how did it go?" I felt like "12:51" was the first time I thought, "This sounds like something from the '80s," but I was also a freshman in high school when that came out. But, I feel like since *Angles*, the band has tried to capture an '80s sound. They do it in spots on this record without it feeling forced.

What makes a good Strokes song is honesty and simplicity. They have mastered the simple. The synth on this song, "Brooklyn Bridge to Chorus," sounds like a 5-year-old kiddo playing chopsticks or something on the piano for the first time — but it's good. Their riffs and hooks have never been complex. Anyways, back to the record. I can't keep passing. I got that work tomorrow.

"Bad Decisions" is probably the catchiest song on this record and the closest thing to a single. The chorus is instantly memorable, and has rendered

me stupid singing it around the house or in the car by myself. It's also impressive how Julian can finally [sing] and sing with confidence. His voice is clear. I always loved his mumbly voice and dragging out of words, and that's still there sometimes, but he doesn't sound awkward anymore when he drifts from that like on *First Impressions of Earth*. Good golly, "Bad Decisions" just oozes '80s gold. This is a great pop song. It takes the lessons learned from the previous three hit-or-miss records and puts them together with the pop sensibility of their earlier hits — or if you're super critical, "Under Cover of Darkness." If you take away the vocals, this actually sounds like a New Order song.

I felt like I wrote enough about this song, but then the chorus came back. So, I needed to tell you again how much fun it is to sing, "Making bad decisions! Oh, making bad decisions!" If that ain't the most Rev shit, then idk what is.

The next song, "Eternal Summer," isn't bad. It is also drenched in '80s feels. Julian goes to his falsetto most of the time, but then pulls out something that sounds like a drunk Mick Jagger yelling, which is also good, and again, the Strokes tried something, and it sounds fine. This record is not a classic or perfect by any means, but I feel like they have learned from previous mistakes, addressed those, and created some new things to address. I appreciate in this song that vocally, Julian seems to go from falsetto to drunk yelling to his regular Strokes don't-give-a-shit Lou Reed voice to saccharine-sweet chorus voice. [I just skipped the last 90 seconds because I have listened to that shit, and I have already said all I need to say]

Next up, "At the Door!" Wow-eeee! These synths to open! They're halting! They're the greatest Nintendo music that never got put on a game. It pushes along methodically. The synths mimic progressions that sound like old Strokes songs, until — no way! — the guitars come in, and they make noises that sound familiar to old Strokes records.

I am so I need to take a cigarette break! [Ok! We back]

Oh! Then there's this tempo change, and that's fun! And then there are some self-aware lyrics "Hard to fight what I can't see // Not trying to build no dynasty // I can't see beyond this wall // But we lost this game // So many times before." That's followed by a familiar guitar sounds, and then

# CONCERT CALENDAR

**5/21—Puente @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**5/22—Luke & The Lonely, Keith Michael Kallina @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**5/23—Dayeater, Stretch Panic, Electric Astro-naut, Transit Method @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm**

**5/29—Eyetooth, Shoobiedoobies, Wisdom Cat @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**5/30—Amber Eye, "Ganesha" @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**6/5—Rickshaw Billy's Burger Patrol, Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**6/6—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**6/13—Lagmind, Skunk Money, Jane Woe, Izabel-lazima @ Revolution, Bryan. 9:30pm**

Julian and the sound get back to being down and out. Honestly, a lot of these songs sound like they could have been on *Is This It* or *Room on Fire*, but they just have different production now. And, that's probably a strength.

The opening guitar and drums of "Sundays are so depressing" are encouraging and fun. [It's funny, I just went back to *First Impressions of Earth* because this song reminded me of something on there — and I always thought that record sounded so clean [and fuck that], but after trying to write about this, the production sounded close to those first records than I remembered.] Anyways, I couldn't find the song I wanted to reference. [I didn't spend too long looking for it. I'm almost out of whiskey and I need to grab two more beers from the fridge.] This is a good song too. And, I like the studio interlude after it. I guess I'm just really impressed with Julian's versatility with his voice. I've always enjoyed his voice, but he uses it in so many different ways well now.

Uhm, the second-to-last song, "Not the Same Anymore," is good, but not original or exceptional. I like it. Julian gets to show off his vocals. It's an alright song. The solo sounds like the Strokes.

The album closer is called, "Ode to the Mets," which made me

laugh when I first saw it because the Mets are an awful franchise, so I wondered, "What could this be?" It starts with what sounds like an out-of-place guitar that eventually takes control. I wish I knew more about music and music theory because I swear the Strokes just use the same things over and over. Oh, hey, there are good familiar sounds here! I have no idea what Julian is saying in his first few lines, but I could probably make up words that fit there too. Listen to this song and sing with me, "I miss Rev // Just glad I'm not dead // Fuck Greg Abbott // Yeah, ya know what I said." That shit fits perfectly with this. I like this song, and I like the way it finishes.

This is a good record. The Strokes started their career with two classics, and then kind of stumbled around through a few others. When they put out the three-song *Future Present Past* in 2016, I thought it was the best thing they'd done since *Room on Fire* and I was excited to see what was next. They did a good thing, and they seem comfortable. The "Last Nite" video and "Is This It" is almost 20 years old. Amazing. I'm glad these guys are still making music together.

I am going to sleep now, and I am going to be so productive working from home tomorrow! Don't ask me about it when we see each other in two months!  
— JOSHUA SIEGEL

**6/26—Altercation Scream feat. Mutant Love @ Revolution, Bryan. 9pm**

**6/27—Mangata @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**7/8—Conflict, Mutant Love, Sykotic Tendencies @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**7/9—Harbor Lights, Corusco @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**7/10—Colton French @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**7/17—Temptress @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**7/18—Dust In the Void, Iron Slut, Carnage Guisada @ Revolution, Bryan. 10pm**

**7/26—Salacious Crumbs Matinee with The Ex-Optimists, The Wheel Workers @ Revolution, Bryan. 4pm**



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