

STOREPRESENT



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979represent is a local magazine for the discerning dirtbag.

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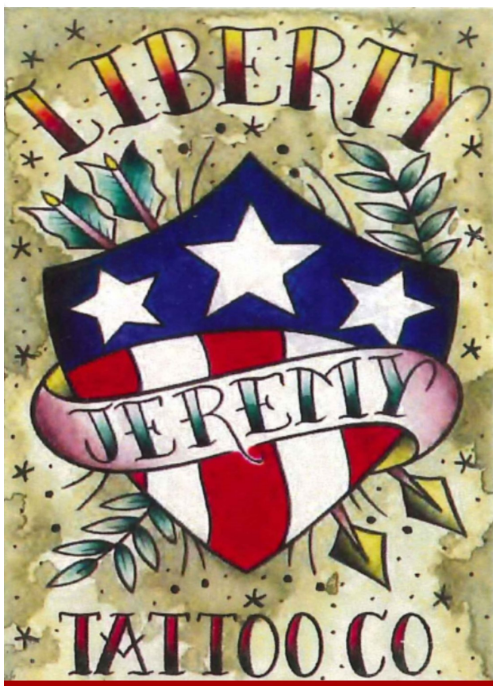


TERRIBLE TIME TO BE PASSIVE

I hate arguments. I'm not very good at them. I don't want to win more than anything. I don't want to talk just to hear myself speak. I am not full of the sort of facts that win arguments, nor can I instantly recall them and stream them from my mouth non-stop as if I really know what I'm talking about. But it seems right now everyone is in an argument with someone over something. And usually that something is very important, like #blacklivesmatter, defund the police, wearing a mask in public, the meaning of confederate symbolism, and trans women versus women, just to name a few. America is yelling at each other at full volume and for introverts that is often a sure sign to duck our vulnerable heads back into our shells and let those more capable and willing to do battle have at it. The times are too important to not participate in these arguments, and honestly, it is important to be seen participating in them lest your lack of an opinion define you as much as an opinion itself.

We have come to the point in our public discourse where not participating has become as harmful as being on the wrong side of the argument. Silence is complicity. The ability to choose to ignore it all is a perc of white privilege. Apathy doesn't really look good on anyone no matter what Generation X may have thought 30 years ago. Pursuing that ignorance as a shield to protect oneself from having to actually have an opinion is even worse. Reading as many credible sources as possible is the best place to start. There are tons of good documentaries on many of the big issues if you are not a reader. Google is your friend here. The goal here isn't for you to become a master debater overnight or a crusader against the neckbearded edgelords. The goal is for you to understand the issues and become a more informed and more empathetic human being.

Perhaps the biggest problem in our society is that we have no idea how to converse with one another about these issues. I was taught from a young age to never talk politics or religion with strangers. It also did not help that my parents were apathetic to both so I had no guidelines to go on. I know I am a get-along kid. I don't want to argue, I want to act upon commonality rather than be hampered by what divides me and others. Sadly, this ethos has perpetuated our systemic problems. So how do you or I get past this? Really, just start by being honest. Start by letting your empathetic heart lead the way. It's important to remember that arguments are at their very core two people speaking about their points of view with the intent to persuade the other to their reasoning, with a combination of facts, passion, and hyperbole. This is the idealized version; in reality, it is often so the person who disagrees with you can wear you down, beat you up, dominate you, and score a win. The goal isn't to win arguments but perhaps to feel confident asserting your own beliefs in what is right, what isn't, and have the facts to back you up. We can no longer hide behind apathy or comfort nor can we merely try to get along for the sake of getting along. There's too much at stake to let the status quo continue. It's time to remove our heads from our shells and do what we can to help. As my hero Neil Peart once wrote, "If you choose not to decide you still have made a choice." — KELLY MENACE



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DEFUND THE POLICE



So... When people call to Defund The Police... it's complicated. The first thing you need to know is that cities and states have a very fixed budget, unlike the federal government they can't borrow endlessly and they can't print their own cash, when the money runs out they're out of options. Keep that in mind.

The first, and most logical solution, or at least most current, culturally logical decision is that we have a problem in the police force and we need to fix it. Generally speaking that means things like:

- More and better training
- Body cameras
- Computers to store body camera footage
- Staff to oversee and review body cameras
- Civilian oversight boards
- Mandatory reporting of use of force
- Hiring better qualified officers
- Hiring more officers in general
- Better coverage for mental health care
- Better access to "less-than-lethal" arms
- Better access to body armor

Let's look at a hypothetical training program for the Bryan, TX police department as a quick example. In the FY2020 budget there are 125 officers, 23 sergeants, and six lieutenants on the payroll. Let's round to 150 people needing additional training. Let's say two weeks training is needed, so we're talking 80 hours per person. Police officers make about \$25/hr on average in Bryan according to indeed.com. 150 people x 80 hours x \$25/hr equals \$300,000 for one approved and needed training session for all officers. And that is only talking about the man hours spent in that one training, it doesn't take into account hiring the trainers, the logistics of adding staff or overtime to keep policing, it doesn't take into account any added equipment/armor/cameras/oversight. You can easily get to \$500,000+ for a single training program for the Bryan, TX police department.

Now here's the counter argument: Many of those interventions I listed above might not achieve much of a return on investment. Retraining doesn't work very well, body cams don't reduce use of force that much, hiring more officers seems to have diminishing returns, and quality candidates are kind of hard to come by. This isn't to say that they don't achieve anything, just that the cost/benefit ratio isn't really there. Know what does have a really good cost/benefit ratio? Funding for public health care, funding for mental health care, funding for public housing, funding for drug rehab facilities, funding for public works jobs, funding for education, funding for the arts, funding for extracurricular activities, funding for public broadcasting... like, there's a ton of evidence out there that these interventions have a real and appreciable impact on crime rates, and a hell of an economic return on investment as well. Like seriously, think about what the Bryan Animal Center could do with half a million dollars. For FY2020, they have a budget of \$1.1 million. The one hypothetical training program would increase the animal shelter's total budget by 45%, when it is 2% of the total police budget.

Here's the crux of the problem: We've given the police too much responsibility in our society. When somebody is too drunk or high we send in the cops. That is a problem that could have been prevented with public rehab and treatment facilities before it ever occurred, drug and alcohol abuse isn't a policing problem, it's a public health problem.

When some kid is loitering and playing with a toy gun we send in the cops. That is a problem that could have been prevented with better access to education or after school activities before it ever occurred, bored teenagers isn't a policing problem, it's a public welfare problem.

When someone with a mental illness is having an episode we send in the cops. That is a problem that could have been prevented with better access to mental health care before it ever occurred, when someone isn't well it's not a policing problem, it's a public health problem.

The police are used to solve problems that they aren't trained or qualified to resolve. This is not a slight against the police. Many police deal very well with a variety of situations that they were never trained or qualified to resolve, and most of the time they do a half-way decent job.

The catch is that state and local budgets don't have any other solutions to fall back upon, because many programs are debilitatingly underfunded already, this leaves cities and counties with only one real, and actually funded solution to their problem: The police.

"When all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Most local governments only have a hammer.

This raises the question: With limited state and local budgets, is it smarter to invest in more police, or is it smarter/more effective/more pragmatic to redirect those funds to other programs? If a 10% increase in funding for rehab centers results in a 15% decrease in drunk driving arrests, and a 10% increase in funding to the police results in a 15% increase in drunk driving arrests, which is the better deal? So goes the argument in favor of defunding the police: That money can do more good elsewhere. Another funding example — the Bryan library system for FY2020 is \$1.5MM. If you cut 2% of the Bryan PD budget and add it onto the library system, you're adding 33% to the budget of the entire Bryan library system.

We're talking about making the police force a scalpel rather than a machete, shrinking the police down and giving them more specific, and better suited, tasks. "Defund the police" is a scary thought to a lot of people. The message is very easy to defend against — "they want your police so that thugs can take your daughters and no one can stop them. They're all so soft on crime, and us people who earned their living and play by the rules suffer." It's overtly racist. It makes us libtards look like we're ashamed or doing wrong in the first place. But we need to keep pushing the envelope because it's impossible to compromise from an already compromised position. Defund the fucking police. — *STARKNESS*

TRIVIAL PURSUIT

ALL ARE
CREATED EQUAL



*People are people so why should it be
You and I should get along so awfully?*

— Depeche Mode

The purpose of no purpose isn't such a bad thing at all. There's no one to really disappoint but yourself, and even then you always know you'll live. There's no need for false hopes or soapboxes. It seems so many have it wrong, when so many only have so long. Their lives mere little blips on the cosmic scale. The most significant thing anyone could ever do would be to get along with others and be at least mildly considerate, but people being generally hollow selfish beings tend to prefer more self-centered less practical grandiose dreams — like being a Yelp critic. Dreams of new solutions to problems we intend to invent for ourselves, occupy the headspace of many. As the hippies would say "Take a chill pill, man." Perhaps they were right. So many of our problems only exist because we decided to perpetuate many of the sociologically practices from more primitive times indefinitely on a global scale while essentially changing only boarders, names, and clothes. The ancients once knew they had the purpose of no purpose and they celebrated it with open arms. They sang to the heavens, and danced in the rain welcoming the knowledge of their purpose, content with their role in the cosmic scheme. Be good unto others. That seems purpose enough. Forget the become a hot shot this or that to impress this person who thinks they're a hot shot and who others generally agree is pretty hot stuff? You're damn right. Smile, wake up at noon, and lounge around till the sun comes up again in the company of good people or total isolation? Fine by me. If the 9-5 grind makes you honestly happy — congrats, but I like to be delusional and believe that most people dream of alternate social possibilities. What if we just stopped playing the games our ancestors started? After all, no one who started any of this is still around to even tell us if we're doing it right, but I digress — because it really doesn't matter unless it matters to you — then it might matter to someone else. I'm not saying it's right, but that's how it works. It's all so very trivial in the grand scope of things.

The world doesn't care if you go to an ivy league college or graduate from the "School of Hard Knocks", so much as you're generally a decent person. Meaning you are generally polite, cooperative, morally centered to some regard, and are essentially pleasant most of the time. No one in the real world is required to have or make money — that's just one of the many lies you've been sold. Food does grow on trees. The real world doesn't

require you to keep up with The Jones, or to constantly compare yourself to anyone. Once again these are just more lies we've all been sold for thousands of years, and you'd think with at least some of these "modern miracles" we as a people would finally just be like "Well, busting our asses for a small minority for millennia was fun for a while, but let's try something different this time around where we all just be chill and do what we want and co-exist happily. Turn the machines on open all the schools leave the people to learn all they want and encourage each other to create new ways to simplify the burdens of existence, until we as a species can just coast and fulfill our predestines of the purpose of no purpose. Mass mellow, with everyone only working where they want to work, you get bored — learn something else, do something else. People aren't going to crash and burn immediately like so many would lead you to believe. Yet another lie we've all been sold. We are global citizens — period. So many politicians and religious "leaders" have no interest in seeing peace manifest itself or people to unite happily. Like they say right "If peace sells, no one's buying"? Perhaps that's the case in the "real world."

The "real world" so many talk down to others about, isn't in fact real in anyway other than we collectively imagined and agreed to rules and practices separate from the rules of nature, giving us the false hopes of purpose and self-importance. It would seem the more self-aware we became the less we could stomach having so little purpose other than to live and be happy. No that would be too much. We couldn't leave well enough alone, we needed distractions from our emptiness after committing to modern game of society — today we watch millions of programs to distract us from the lack of fulfillment we get from our day to day lives, because well frankly — this isn't what anyone really wanted. This is just yet another way for those in power to push their ideas on us and to perpetuate the commerce culture. "You can only ever be happy, loved, and accepted by friends and family if you buy the things on the screen or live your life like the fake two dimensional characters on your favorite sitcoms.

Sure we all have the potential to go into provoked and unprovoked fits of rage at times with little to no warning. Awesome, that's human. Embrace it if you must, humiliate yourself, laugh about it later and move on. Break all

of your stuff if you must — it's only material wealth anyway — it literally is not going with you when you take that bullet train to the afterlife. Just leave other people out of it. Because if you don't and you harsh our collective mellow — you will most likely be hopping that bullet train to the great beyond much sooner. Remember NOBODY asked to be born, and MANY are born into less than favorable situations, but still manage a smile just fine. So if you're fortunate enough to be in a good place in your life or to come from a perpetual land of entitlement, don't take it out on others who may be going through some rough patches and might not be so fortunate. Nobody asked for this, remember? And since there is NO PURPOSE but to BE GOOD TO EACH OTHER AND THE WORLD, what does it matter what I decide to do with my time? Why is it so important that we limit our potential to the rules of an obviously broken system that was designed long ago to only benefit those more fortunate? That just sounds out dated and convoluted.

The world's leaders and media would love for nothing more than for the people of the world to once again be extremely divided by race, because at least that will still enable many of them to remain in power. But what they fear most is what is already most definitely already underway — CLASS WAR. This is only happening because people want so badly for their lives to have this larger than life convoluted meaning. These dictators and evangelists want to be seen as living deities because their egos demand such nonsense, and they set out to make things as confusing as possible just to keep others from following their slimy trails. But the only way they can stay in power is if we allow ourselves to continue to believe they actually hold any power over us. They don't. There are far more of us than them. So just keep that in mind when you start stressing out. Any day can be a holiday, you don't need to explain yourself to anyone, just be happy as best you can, and be a general decent human person. The universe made you, and it'll take you when it's ready, in the meantime enjoy this stroll through conscious light and sound before returning to the dark voids from which we came. Let's not waste any more time on what others want from us, but instead on what we can offer the world whole heartily while being the best us we can be.

Cheers fellow life lovers. — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

I was originally going to write about the Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock v. Clayton County, Georgia*. Legally, it is an incredibly interesting case and decision, the full text of which can be found here: https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/17-1618_hfci.pdf

Essentially, the majority opinion, written by Justice Neil Gorsuch, relies on the 1968 language of Title VII off the Civil Rights Act which prohibits workplace discrimination on the basis of "sex." Gorsuch, known to be a strict textualist, argues that we need not discern what the original creators of the law intended the word "sex" to mean in the legislation for it to be extended to LGBTQIA+ individuals because regardless of intent, the language must be applied to LGBTQIA+ persons.

The decision has been hailed as a major victory for the LGBTQ community ... and in many ways it is. That victory should not be under-appreciated as it protects LGBTQIA+ employees from being fired or discriminated against on the basis of their sex.

But in light of this issue and other human rights issues that the US is currently wrestling with, i.e., BLM and defunding the police, one has to wonder how a strict textualist such as Gorsuch would have ruled had Title VII used any other language. As interesting as the decision is, from a legal perspective and as impeccable as the majority opinion is logically, it is still troublesome that LGBTQIA+ people are protected from discrimination based on sex, rather than on the fact that they are people.

By now we're all familiar with the Black Lives Matter/All Lives Matter trope. And it seems obvious, in my opinion, that if all lives really mattered in our country, there would be no need to call out specific lives that matter. However, it is precisely because black lives and trans lives and women's lives and [insert any marginalized group here] don't matter in the same way as white lives or cis-het lives or men's lives or [insert dominant culture here] lives, that these issues even come up.

Our very democracy is founded on the revolutionary concept that all are created equal. But the language of the Declaration of Independence doesn't actually say that, does it? No. It says that all *men* are created equal ... and we've been arguing about who falls into that category since our nation's founding

If it is indeed self-evident that we are endowed with certain inalienable rights by virtue of our very existence as people, then those rights must belong to all of us or they belong to none of us. The question comes down to are women really people? Are un-landed white men really people? Are *people* of color really people? Are trans *people* really people?

Until we decide that all people have certain rights, not just as an exercise in language or strict textualist interpretations, but in our laws, systems, and communities, then there will continue to be the need to insist that #BlackLivesMatter, #BrownLivesMatter, #TransLivesMatter, #WomensLivesMatter, #DisabledLivesMatter, #NativeLivesMatter, #NonBinaryLivesMatter

Until all of those lives matter in reality and not just in theory, then the claim that #AllLivesMatter is a falsehood that belies the very principles upon which our nation was founded. — PAMALYN ROSE BEELER

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THE LAST TIME...IS THERE A NEXT?

Everything is spiraling outwards. From order to chaos. Yes, it is true that there will always be "natural" things getting worse. That's the chaos part. Things can not stay the same. Change keeps happening. Change is truth. I mean, yes, so are actual events that happened, it's just the bias or whatever when it's recorded that messes me up. That's the part that should bother all of us. We can't actually know everything, and we probably shouldn't trust some of what we know. Some seem like manipulation. That's a terrible thought. I should give humans the benefit of the doubt...but I can't...most of the time.

As I watch things unravel, I feel that there has to be an ending.

I guess everyone would probably "hope" for a bell curve type scenario. Where 1) it's "fine", then 2) little by little gets worse, then 3) It gets really bad, but then 4) It gets better (but different), then 5) there's a new normal for the survivors. It's either this scenario, or an abrupt, holy shit, that's the end, kinda thing. Just 'boop'. Because the new normal, at some point is going to be that humans are no longer the biggest influential species on Earth. Yup, that's what I think. It may be a while from now, but no one knows the future.

Maybe I'm nihilistic (except for the "hope it happens" part), but it just seems most probable. From a few humans, to a bunch of humans, to a few humans.

Ok, so, the other side of the scenario is humans actually thriving, but what we have at the moment is unsustainable. We are either gonna need to invent some amazing things, or deplete what we've got and go away. And BTW, everyone is gonna have to get along.

At the moment, it really seems to be falling apart. I mean, no, I don't know everything, but it just doesn't look that good. And I boil it all down to humans being selfish and non-empathetic.

Humans are not (for the most part) others focused, and that's the problem. We are self serving, prejudiced and always looking for convenience. These are the things that will ruin us.

This whole COVID-19 has really changed a lot of my ending points. Like, you think about something, like a plan or a hope, then maybe you think about what you are gonna do about that thought in the future, then you think about why you realize you can't plan for the future at this point in time, then COVID-19. Not all of my thoughts go there, but all of the ones about the future. This is so weird. For all of us. The thing that it's done for me is put a microscope on society and democracy and government and leadership and global disunity and how broken it is.

I'm reading a book called *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari. In it he talks about the process that civilizations go through, and points out that we are in a transitional time where small things make big impacts because of a number of things, including population, beliefs, availability of resources, and the

pace of change. Super interesting and eye opening.

Things are fucked up right now. Broken and breaking. Not able to plan for the future. So many people and a limited amount of resources, power grabs, ideological disagreements. As humans, I feel we've failed...are currently failing.

We are racist, discriminatory, excluding, self-serving and power hungry. Well, I don't mean all of us, but the ones who have made their way to leadership for sure.

Look at America's main system of rules:
- Executive: We vote, and it is revealed that the country is split. When people vote for the coolest stuff that is promised, the system is broken. Bipartisanship breaks the system. Campaign money breaks the system.
- Judicial: Police brutality, lawyers, minimum sentencing, war on drugs, non-rehab focused prison system, all break the system.
- Legislative: Lobbying breaks the system.

Is it power that motivates? Money? I don't know. I am one of the ones who have "turned on and tuned in", and I know many of you readers are as well.

Yet it is apparent that many, many people are ready to forget stuff and go back to status quo. The news cycle controls us, and that shouldn't be. I am hoping so hard that stuff changes big time. Like BIG TIME changes. And sure, that may mean revolution and suffering and death and hiding and speaking out and being uncomfortable and helping others and putting others before ourselves.

Putting others before ourselves. If everyone did that.

This is not a good simulation. This one will get shelves and labeled as "fairly good for a while, loads of potential, but a lot of bad shit happened."

It's oddly comforting (to me) to think that one day we will all, or mostly, be gone. And by "we" I mean all of these fucked up systems and rules and brokenness. There are so many good stories about that moment. Think of all the stories and movies about Earth and the people on it that go through some shit in the future. It's intriguing.

Scene: Pockets of people in a place where it looks like a lot of bad shit happened, but their little village has a passed down origin story about the days of old during the "Human Bigness".

Of course, much of the archive was destroyed being mostly digital, so only small amounts of knowledge is passed down anymore.

None of it is relevant now anyway. End scene.

Heavy, right?

Some people will survive, and those survivors will reproduce to survive after the terrible events. Maybe they are the ones that feel the need to let the memories fade and

not tell the new generations anything of what happened. Hopefully those "leaders" will be able to guide in love and care and peace. But as with any story like this, there is sure to be bands of outlaws bent on taking rather than giving.

Book of Eli, Hunger Games, Mad Max, Horizon: Zero Dawn, Fallout, Alita, Walking Dead, In Time, Handmaid's Tale, Children of Men, WALL-E, Matrix, Elysium, Terminator, The Day After, I Am Legend.

The Walking Dead comic books ended with one particular idea that I thought was interesting. It jumped I think 30 years in the future for the last part, and there was one character, who was a kid when it all started (the zombies), who had a side-show type travelling thing where he had a few zombies captured, and he would have people pay to see them live. Then one of the zombies escapes and gets "killed" and the dude that shot the zombie is sued for destroying property.

Awesome story. Read the comics. The comic book story is way better than the show story.

But that's what I'm talking about. We are potential relics in a distant future.

Here's my craziest really bad scenario: electricity suddenly turns off. Why? I don't know, but it goes out. So much of our lives rely on electricity. We are vulnerable because of it. If it goes away, we are fucked. So much of our lives rely on the interwebs, and that relies on electricity. Also, refrigerators.

That's my big one. It would be one of those all of a sudden end that I was talking about in the first part of this writing.

Also, as an aside, there should be a way for us to figure out how to archive things so that the future would be able to have a bigger knowledge of us, but sigh...everything is a lot. So what do you choose to put in that place where the future can't miss it.

I vote that there is a poop Emoji plushie put in there. Oh, and a Taco Bell taco (does anyone remember what this is a reference to?). Oh, and some Shoobiedoobies merch. Then the Shoobiedoobies can be ancient icons, revered, and the subject of so many inspiring and mysterious stories, loved by romantic and child alike.

"The Shoobiedoobies loved us. We can tell because their messages were to be kind, to be held by someone, and that they gave so much fucks."

Either way, I personally think there can be peace and cooperation by all people on Earth, but it's gonna be a bad speedbump. It stems, in my mind, with forgiveness, non-selfishness, and shrugging, which is basically being ok with not having (y)our way all the time.

Also, I have no idea what I'm talking about. I don't know everything. I just wish things were different. A bunch of things. — JORGE GOYCO

ECHOES OF A HOLLOW HEAD: HOW TO EAT THE RICH

Want to be like all those fancy schmancy people tucked away in their isolated cubby holes looking down on us peons while throwing bread crumbs of cash and care wherever and whenever the cameras are rolling? It's simple. Don't just let them have all the fun, let them be the fun! The joy of the hunt is only the beginning! The best part is actually sinking your teeth in a billion dollar or million dollar steak. Mmmmm sounds delicious doesn't it?

With all the health scares around and gross and obvious wealth inequality and mismanagement it's quite easy to see that if you really want to stay fit and up your flavor game, one must acquire a taste for the finer things. And since there is actually no specific banishment in the holy texts against cannibalism. So I say, EAT THE RICH! Let them have their cake. Eat it, and hoard all they want. Once they get comfortable, that's when they are all lushed and tucked out, POUNCE! Be sure to have your general hog hunting gear ready as most of these folks are shear swine anyways!

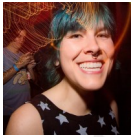
The best part?!? It's not illegal! How could it be?!? These folks are literally above the law! And as such there is absolutely no need for fear of ANY legal repercussions! Hunts are great for bonding with friends and relatives as well! — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

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SALACIOUS CRUMBS

You might not have noticed, but **Granny Moon Farm's** pickle lady, Haley Richardson, and I (**Salacious Crumbs**) have a collective called **979 DIY or DIE**. It's our community outreach and snack slingin' venture at the **Brazos Valley Farmer's Market**. We've participated in a total of **ONE** market this year, the first weekend of March, and it was super rad to meet a whole bunch of new people. Unfortunately, we were slammed with COVID-19, and neither of us felt particularly safe doing the market. We had planned a grand return with a Fuck America theme on July 4th, but selfish Texans had other plans. Instead, we're both doing pop up shops, and I wanted to share some of the ways I like to use Haley's pickles and kim-chi!

Straight into the gullet My favorite pickles are the **Better Than Bread & Butter** or their spicy sisters, **Better Off Dead**. They aren't super duper sweet like a regular bread and butter, and I think they're made with ACV, which makes them super awesome. Eat a pickle. Take a teeny bite of habanero. Decide, pffft, this pepper isn't so bad! Down the habanero. Regret. Wash it all away with spicy pickle juice. Recipe complete!

Buffalo tempeh BLTs with Dill Pickles I fucking love BLTs. BLTs were the grossest thing when I was an omni. Bacon? GROSS! Tomatoes? Not in ketchup? EW! Lettuce? Who am I, Bunnicula? And how am I supposed to dip this thing in ketchup?! But as a vegan, the BLT format is a lot more exciting. Bacon is always bacon flavored, but tempeh can be ANYTHING!

Makes 2 BBLTs

- 1/2 package tempeh
- 1/4 c Frank's Red Hot
- 1/2 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 tsp liquid smoke
- Garlic powder, chili powder, etc, however you like to zhooosh your buffalo sauce
- Glob of vegan butter or coconut oil
- Lettuce
- Tomato
- Vegan Ranch (see June 2019 issue for recipe) or mayo
- Granny Moon Farm Dill Pickles
- 4 slices of Texas toast (ButterKrust is vegan!)
- More vegan butter

1. Heat a 2-slices-of-bread-sized pan over medium heat, and melt some vegan butter in it. Toast up the bread on one side to your desired toastiness.
2. While those are toasting, butcher your tempeh. Cut the plank in half, and cut that into 1/4 slices, you should end up with around 10-12 thumb sizes tempeh planks.
3. In a little bowl, mix the Franks Red Hot, soy sauce, liquid smoke, and any other accoutrements together. Splash in a 1/4 cup or so of water.
4. When the bread is done, toss the tempeh and the buffalo mixture into the pan. Let this guy simmer away while you slather your bread with ranch and prep your lettuce and tomato.
5. When the buffalo liquid is nearly all reduced, dollop in some vegan butter or coconut oil and give everything in the pan a little swirl. The fat will keep the tempeh from sticking during the last bits of cooking, and it will also help temper the acidity of the buffalo sauce and be a flavor carrier.
6. Let the tempeh cook for another minute or so – it

will be juicy since you added the fat, but not drippy.
7. Load up your BBLT – tempeh, lettuce, tomatoes, and dill pickles, cut on a diagonal. This is also awesome with sliced avocado!

Medicinal pickle tonic! Take one part vodka and one part cold pickle juice (**Spicy Dill** juice rules here) in a teeny glass and swirl them down to cure what ails ye! Great for the night out and the morning after! Bonus points if you get some little celery seeds in there!

Kim-chi, Tofu, and Udon Noodle Soup I've been making this even though it's a million degrees out. It's always soup weather inside when you live with a man! This soup is lightly spicy, with a super delicious broth and will make use of those stupid chives that have totally overtaken your herb garden! Throw in some frozen edamame if you got it!

Makes 1 quart, or 4 big bowls

- 1 15-16oz package firm tofu
- 1 Tbsp sesame oil
- 2/3 - 1 c Granny Moon Farm kim-chi, roughly chopped
- 2/3 c peeled and julienned carrots, about 2 small carrots
- 1 Tbsp sesame oil
- 1 Tbsp soy sauce
- 1 Tbsp seasoned rice vinegar
- 2 Tbsp gochujang
- 1 Tbsp miso
- 1 Tbsp maple syrup or something sweet
- 2 scallions/green onions, thinly sliced
- 5 cups veggie broth
- 3 oz or about half a package of udon noodles

1. Drain the tofu and cut it into 1/2 inch cubes. Put these cubes on a kitchen towel, and lightly press them to remove the liquid. Preheat a **LORGE** pan or your big soup pot over medium high heat (cast iron is awesome for this).
2. Add the tablespoon of sesame oil to the pan, and sprinkle it generously with sea salt. This seems to doubly keep the tofu from sticking, and seasons it at the same time.
3. Toss your tofu cubes in. **DON'T TOUCH THEM**. Let them sit for 4-5 minutes, and flip one over. If it flips easily without sticking, toss the pan. Let the tofu sit again. Continue flipping until your tofu is as crispy as you'd like it. Season with salt as you go.
4. While the tofu is cooking, prep your veggies, and mix the soy sauce, rice vinegar, gochujang, miso, maple syrup together in a small bowl.
5. Take the tofu out of the pan when it's done and set it aside. Turn the heat down to medium.
6. Toss the other Tbsp of sesame oil into the pan, and when it's hot, toss in the carrots and kim-chi. Let those go for about 3-5 minutes, until the carrots have just softened.
7. Toss in the green onions and the liquid mixture, stir to combine, and let that cook for about a minute.
8. Add the tofu back in, along with the veggie broth, and stir to combine everything. Let it come to a boil, and then simmer for about 10 minutes.
9. Toss in the udon, and let it cook for 5 minutes more, or until your udon is soft. Soup! Top with more green onions and a healthy squeeze of sriracha!

We'll see you again once we feel safe at the market, but for now, wear a mask, eat your pickles, and tear down the racist patriarchy! — **KATIE KILLER**

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HYDROGEN JUKEBOX

THE FAILURE OF AMERICA'S PASTIME

"Where have you gone, Joe Dimaggio?/The nation turns its lonely eyes to you" – Paul Simon.

Recently I was told that I was a bad person for liking Ratt records. This happened inside a private Facebook group dedicated to folks who collect vinyl LP's, CD's, cassettes, 8-tracks, reel-to-reels, what-have-you. If you are listening to physical media of some sort you take a photo of said physical media and share it with the group. It has been a fairly fun experience for me. I've learned about a lot of interesting albums that I may not have picked up on otherwise, especially obscure jazz fusion, progressive rock, private press new age, coldwave, and punk rock titles. I've also felt the boost of having semi-celebrities like Keith Morris (Circle Jerks/Black Flag/OFF!) and Bob Fay (Sebadoh) like or comment on my posts. BUT from time to time I also have to deal with the holier-than-thou *Hi Fidelity* 90s indie record store jerk that can't be content letting someone like what they like. To this kind of person one has to like what it is okay to like. And it's not okay to like it because the artist has become problematic for extra-musical reasons (like, say, Ted Nugent because he is a batshit crazy right wing gun nut or Ryan Adams because he is allegedly a pedophile) or because, well, the music is not cool. I've seen folks go after people who post Red Hot Chili Peppers records because it's never been less cool to like RHCP or Nickelback or people that buy showtunes vinyl.

Recently I found myself on the flip side of some gatekeeper dude's ire because I defended a hapless person he went after for posting Ratt's *Invasion of Your Privacy* album. The attack dog's point was that how could anyone listen to such misogynistic drivel in the Woke '20s when we all know that all those hair bands were anti-woman to the point of criminality. My response was that he should ease off and let people like what they like for whatever reasons they like it. This is pretty much my standard stock response to anyone who likes "questionable" music because I think people should like what they like no matter what. Life's too short to have your tastes be setup for public (dis)approval. And that was the end of our "argument". But I was troubled, and have given this a fair bit of thought. I'm not entirely sure I was right to dismiss his point of view outright, but I'm not convinced I was entirely wrong either.

I go back again to another stock argument base, the importance of context. We often hold up music, film, books, etc. as being important to our lives not just because what those works of art say to us but what they say about that time in our lives, often functioning as a sort of shorthand for explaining a finite point in our experiences. For instance, let's say I want to revisit 1994 and a particularly difficult period of my life. Easy. I'll pull down *The Afghan Whigs' Gentlemen* album off the shelf and it instantly reminds me of that particular context. Or watching *Saturday Night Live* reruns or *Monty Python & The Holy Grail* instantly recalls my high school times and the dog-eared VHS tapes I recorded them on. Sometimes the content means less than the context. The vice-versa can also be true when the context shifts behind immutable content. You could love a band but literally cannot listen to them anymore because they remind you of someone, some place, or some time



else that you no longer recall fondly. And, in the case of the Ratt record that led us here, the times can change, shifting the context by applying a different era's mores to the immutable content.

My mother used to watch Al Jolsen movies on public television when I was a child in the '70s. Nowadays blackface is considered to be racist and highly offensive. While my mother would not have considered Al Jolsen singing "Mammy!" in blackface to be offensive the greater culture at large 40+ years later does consider it to be offensive. And therefore it has been shunned. In the 1980s the culture at large objectified and sexualized women. Sophomoric b-grade movies like *Porkys* and *Revenge of the Nerds* are problematic in our post #MeToo culture. Many of the hair metal bands of the 1980s toyed with the same imagery on their album covers and videos and often in the lyrics to the music itself. Objectification sometimes bled over into date rape-y imagery. While Ratt is perhaps barely guilty of this and mostly from association with the context of the times (who can tell one hairsprayed prick in spandex from the other?) they are not entirely guilt-free. On this album, the protagonist of "Lay It Down" doesn't seem like he intends to take no for an answer before crawling into the sheets. While it isn't nearly as bad as Guns & Roses' "It's So Easy" that doesn't change the fact that a certain subset of society in the mid '80s made life very dangerous for young women and that one might could have had that particular approach to women bolstered by the "soft porn" of hair metal.

I maintain though that if you are a person that is readily influenced by an artistic statement in a song, book, or movie that you were already leaning in that direction to begin with and the artist isn't the reason why you made shitty choices. Millions of people have listened to gangster rap without murdering a single cop; millions of

people watched *Silence of the Lambs* without eating a single person with fava beans and a nice bottle of chianti. Millions of folks, myself included, have date-raped someone no matter how many times I've listened to Def Leppard, Ratt, Poison, or whatever. But it doesn't stop one from understanding that the context shifted underneath the music, for the better in this case, and that one can now recognize there's something problematic that the 1985 version of you didn't recognize. It doesn't change your love for it or its place in your context, but it does mark the change of time and morality in culture.

One could make the argument that it's not as bad as Band X or so-and-so that was far worse. I hate moral equivalency arguments because it shifts responsibility away from the topic at hand and slides it away to something else. While there's nothing outright problematic about *Invasion of Your Privacy* it does often refer to women the way one might refer to a difficult level of a video game. Women are obstacles to be conquered. Climbing into a woman's underwear for the night extent of the lyrical depth, aside from how lonely and cold the streets are when said woman won't let dude into her underpants. The cover isn't particularly sexy or sexist, but it is a photo of an attractive woman mostly unclothed in a bedroom. Not bad but also not entirely not guilty. My verdict overall is that listening to this album is mostly harmless. I did say mostly, not completely. Perhaps one should listen cautiously.

It is not a wasted exercise to examine the things you loved and took for granted in a previous time and examine it with the eyes of the current times. Especially as we all post-George Floyd have started to talk about abuse on a systemic level rather than just on an individual level. Was the '80s a systemically hostile environment to women? As a non-woman I may not have thought that before, but something as seemingly harmless as a stupid Ratt record can help bolster the case to be made in favor of that systemic abuse. The sexism is soft and flies mostly below the radar, enough so that one could be lulled into thinking it's not there. But it was there and, taken with other cultural landmarks of the time, helped to perpetuate certain harmful stereotypes. An album that once gave me so much joy to listen as become troubling and problematic.

We've seen this same approach recently applied to *Gone With the Wind* which glorifies some very troubling stereotypes and also to *Sixteen Candles* which now in the post-#MeToo era asks troubling questions about the normalizing of date rape. I like that we are having these conversations now and are able to understand a bit better what influence these subtle and sometimes not-so-subtle images of racism and sexism in our mass culture can have. Can one still listen to hair metal or watch meathead 80s comedies and still be a good person? Yes? No? I cannot say either way. I feel like I can, but at the same time I feel like I may be a hypocrite. The times are troubling when even the love for a Ratt record can call into question one's beliefs and values. I will continue to monitor this conflict. — KELLY MENACE

The appalling greediness of major league baseball players and owners during the worst crisis to ever hit the sporting world, the nation, and the globe is disappointing, to say the least. Perhaps it was naïve to expect that baseball would be the sport to come back during Covid-19 to give Americans something to rally around. The sport has done that throughout history, but sadly that ability may be in the past.

During World War II, President Roosevelt had baseball continue to give America hope. Following 9/11, Americans united around baseball, particularly the New York Yankees, spontaneously singing "God Bless America" at live games across the nation. Baseball is still uniquely American even as football and basketball have become more popular.

Personally, baseball always has been paramount even though I'm far from a fanatic like many out there that can recite games, players, and statistics like their shoe sizes and their children's birthdays. I played Little League, collected baseball cards (still have those), and followed professional baseball zealously. In sixth grade, I watched most of the World Series in my teacher's home with the other boys in my class (don't recall what the girls did). My daughter played softball with some degree of skill up to high school. I had luckily discovered early on that she, a natural righty, could hit very well from the left side of the plate. My son lost interest during his first T-ball season after breaking his arm in an unrelated playground accident. However, all three of us share a love of live baseball games of any level: high school, college, minor league, professional.

I believe some of that appreciation of baseball is embedded in all Americans just like the sport is entrenched in our language: "Play ball" "Two strikes against you" "Out in left field" "Switch hitter" "Off base" "Right off the bat" "Hit a home run" "Get to second base."

I was initially aghast that a 90-year-old couple went to the opening game of a local minor league baseball team this week. However, the more I thought about it, the more it made sense. They have a shared love of the sport; they are outdoors; physical distancing is stressed; most people have masks on. A vaccine is likely a year away, and we are only guaranteed this day. Why not be at the baseball park?

Baseball always has had the potential to bring people together partially due to the nature of the sport that mimics real life: lots of standing around punctuated by random action. We can see human beings who aren't so much different than us. They are not as massive as football players or as tall as basketball players. Yes, they are certainly more gifted and often larger, but only soccer has players that look like most of us, and America still hasn't taken to that sport despite some inroads.

No one knows how professional and college sports will recover from the Covid-19 crisis. Will there be college football in the fall? Is the NBA really going to play this month? Are those 60 major league baseball games actually going to happen? The one thing that is sure is that Covid-19 is not going away this year, and sports will have to deal with it, one way or the other.

Another thing that is sure, and that is that baseball missed its opportunity to step into the sporting void. Instead, it retreated into the ugliness of billionaires and millionaires bickering over money while millions of Americans are unemployed. Baseball sadly continued its retreat into irrelevancy. Say it ain't so, Joe. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP

When I was a kid, summers in the country were filled with early morning farm walks, piles of puppies or kittens, a baggie full of dry cereal and a piss-poor pocket knife that I stole out of the house before any adult could wake up from their wine dream. I could sneak out of any house I was ever raised in but the screen door on the Big House was louder than the rooster's cry at dawn. I had to cut the screen one day and crawl through the bottom to avoid getting caught by the ear and told to do some repugnant morning chore like cooking breakfast for the boys.

I could escape into the hay barn and say good morning to the cats, as they spent an extra long time stretching each limb into a sunbeam, yawning big cat yawns and pouncing on flies. I marched over the abandoned pile of bricks that someone's uncle's cousin had dumped there three generations ago. I cut clear across the pasture, greeting each cow by name with a pet and a scratch, feeding bits of dry cereal to my favorite girl, Mauve, and receiving a kiss every time. And then, right before my Nanny would step out onto the porch and holler out my name, I would fade quietly into the woods.

This is where I spent my summer days, lost under the elms and sweetgums. By summer solstice, the creek beds would be bone dry and I could walk it's winding trail all day through each neighbor's back fence property and never see another human. I would see coyotes and foxes. I would say hello to wrens, robins and jays. I could damn near shoot me a coat with all the squirrels. Deer were always darting off through the yaupon thickets as I cursed a scratch from another briar vine. And the creek kept curving. Another bend was just beyond the way and if I could keep up, the promise of a grapevine would be revealed.

There was this one time though that I didn't wake up early. I reckon I had a wild night of Mountain Dew and MTV, too much microwave popcorn and maybe some static porn on the satellite dish at 3 am. I was curled up on the couch and every cousin in the county was piled up around me, the recliner, on the second couch and a few more were shuffling in through the door. None of us were ready to start the day. None of us could get comfortable. None of us could agree on a cartoon channel. We had clearly slept through breakfast and before too long none of us could get along.

I'm sure we were three crying babies and a black eye into a proper and decent fist fight before my step dad, Lewis, opened the door and observed the room. He was the absolute best person to find us in truth. Any other adult would have took up to swinging a paddle in a room full of fist fighting kids and surely someone would have been sent to the doctor for a broken something or

another. But Lewis was calm. Lewis was quiet. He stood there and watched with a silent smile as each one of us tuckered our wild hearts out and stopped fighting long enough to catch our breath. Then he said, "Y'all wanna go for a ride?"

Hell yes we did! Ridin' the back of the truck was every child's wet dream. Hot wind against your face. Shouts and screams so loud no one could hear. An abandoned road no one remembered anymore. And almost always a soda pop from the country store we passed along the way. We all scrambled onto the handbuilt wooden flatbed that Lewis had fashioned onto the back of his '67 Ford, babies in the middle, big kids dangling our legs off the side and we took off. With all my adventurous traveling, I had a pretty clean map of the county built into my head, but that day Lewis got me lost. We bumped and laughed our way down country roads I had never seen before. The sun was high and it baked the red dirt dust right onto our skin. And then, right when we were all beginning to sway to the rhythm of that old Ford, Lewis turned into a pasture and drove a little more.

We ended up under a mighty old pecan orchard that had been consumed by muscadine vines. Lewis stopped the truck. I noticed immediately that I could barely see the sun piercing through the upper canopy and the shade felt like a dip into a cold spring. Boy, what a dream! From out of nowhere, a ladder appeared and Lewis propped it carefully on top of the truck and just like that we scurried up into the trees. He tossed buckets into our outstretched arms and instructed us to pick the grapes of the muscadine vines that had declared their territory centuries ago. And we got to work. Each cousin on a different limb. Children hanging like monkeys to reach the ripe fruit. All of us, too consumed by our task to remember who or why we swung the first fist early that morning.

I was an expert grape picker and tree climber and having my handy dandy pocket knife made me the first cousin to fill my bucket. I climbed carefully down from the canopy to the bottom limb of that old pecan tree ready to present my hard work to Lewis and that's when I realized he was gone. That sonuvabitch had drove off. We were too busy picking, too busy laughing, too busy climbing to notice him leaving out. He was generous enough to leave one gallon of water and a stick of deer jerky that the ants had already started eatin' on.

From that day on, I never slept in again. I made sure I went to bed proper. Got a decent night's sleep. And I rose early every summer morning, slipped out the back screen door and packed a peanut butter sandwich so I didn't have any reason to come back and get conned into picking grapes for Grandpa Bruce's wine — *HALEY RICHARDSON*

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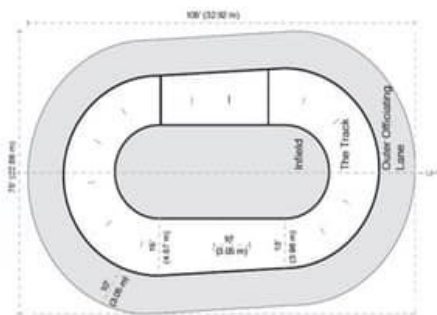
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WAKEY WAKEY

I studied the Russian language in college. The Spanish and French classes were more popular, so I chose the language class with the fewest number of students. That would be Russian. My teacher was a little spit-fire from Moscow named Irene Trofimova. I loved her. She hated me. She called me "Kee-van" and told me frequently, "You will go into the world, and you will die."

One day, when only the two of us attended class, she said to me, "Kee-van, what is this word, this 'hanging-out'". As she said the word, she threw her hands in front of herself like a farmer sowing seed. I said, "It just means to spend time together. Like you and me, right now, we are 'hanging out'". She blushed and waved her hands in the air. "Stop it, Kee-van. Do not say such things!" I asked where she had heard this phrase — this "hanging out". After more blushing and hand-waving, she finally said she'd heard it in a movie. A prostitute had said it to a client. She invited him to re-prostitute with her. They could "hang out" again soon, the prostitute had said. Mrs. Trofimova ended class early that day. She often ended class early. I spent three years and six semesters with Mrs. Trofimova. I earned a Minor in Russian language. And today I speak as much Russian as I did when I graduated: none.

My first year in Irene Trofimova's Russian class was my best. I spent long hours in the dorm laundry room across from my own room, away from my roommate's VHS marathons of Linda Carter's *Wonder Woman*, memorizing and translating and listening to pronunciation tapes. Learning a language requires obsession as much as smarts, and I at least possessed the former. And then, half way through my second semester, something strange occurred. I began dreaming in Russian. I woke often having had long, elaborate Russian language conversations in my dreams that I could not have in real life. I told this to Mrs. Trofimova. She said, "It means you are learning!" She had hope for me. I had hope for me. But the Russian language dreams stopped when summer hit and I stopped studying Russian. Trofimova lost her hope in me after that. I never dreamed in Russian during my second and third years in her class. Trofimova, recognizing the decline of my language skills, used as much of our time together learning the slang terms of American cinematic sex workers — "What is this, a 'John'? Who is this 'John'?"

I tell you this story because I want to understand why I so often wake with music playing loudly in my head. After all, I am not a musician. Michael Scarborough kindly attempted to make me a musician. He loaned me a bass a few years ago. Told me to learn the entirety of AC/DC's *Back In Black* or *Highway to Hell*. Maybe both. I started good and strong. Found YouTube videos with practice tips for strengthening my wispy tulip stem fingers. But it wasn't long before I would grab the bass, pluck for 20 or so minutes, and then get interrupted by an idea for a poem. That spring when Michael gave me the bass I wrote a ton of poems. Mostly bad. Most of them written with his bass guitar sitting across my lap, my skinny arms reaching over the neck and body to scrawl out some nonsense about dying on a hill in some state where I'd never even bought a cup of coffee. Eventually, realizing he was earning no royalties off of me anytime soon,

Michael asked for his bass back. I wrote more poems. Most of them terrible. And most of them still about dying young out of the gaze of the universe.

As many nights as I wake hearing music in the silent dark I also wake with the need to write down words and images. Here's something I wrote a few nights ago — "*the mind wanders on feet made of spider silk until it catches up with itself.*" WTF, melatonin! But that same night I woke with Ronnie James Dio warning me "*Don't go to the edge of rainbows!*" You got it, RJD! I don't feel so bad about my random midnight musings after considering Dio's lyrics.

I call it my "Wakey Wakey" playlist: the place where I collect the songs streaming through my mind in the predawn. Most of the songs are not surprising. The list below reveals my recent kicks with Khruangbin, The Ramones, Iron Maiden, and Dio. But there's also a few random bits thrown in as well. White Lion? Haven't heard them since last summer. The Go-Gos? I had forgotten "Vacation" was even their song. Trisha Yearwood? Lord, I think that song followed me to three different HEB grocery stores in the course of a single week. Nothing much surprised me here except that I only woke to 20 unique songs over the course of 30 days. (I woke to Sade's "Smooth Operator" nearly every morning for a whole week. And that is not a bad thing.) Here's the past month of mornings faithfully recorded.

The "Wakey-Wakey" playlist from June 1-June 30:

"Lady and Man" -- Khruangbin
"Bastard Steel" -- Smoulder
"Vacation" -- The Go-Gos
"All is Quiet on the Easter Front" -- Ramones
"Midnight" -- Khruangbin / Leon Bridges
"-7-11" -- Ramones
"Wait" -- White Lion
"Smooth Operator" -- Sade
"Die With Your Boots On" -- Iron Maiden
"She's In Love With The Boy" -- Trisha Yearwood
"I Want You Around" -- Ramones
"Still Life" -- Iron Maiden
"I Want It All" -- Colony House
"Dream Evil" -- Dio
"Bodies" -- Smashing Pumpkins
"Foreverman" -- Traveler
"Naked In The Rain" -- Dio
"Breakaway" -- Kelly Clarkson
"Holy Diver" -- Dio
"Time (You and I)" -- Khruangbin

July finds me excited about the new Ex-Optimists 7", the new collaboration between Bell Witch and Ariel Ruin, and the new album with actual vocals from Khruangbin, and the arrival of Haunt's *If Icarus Could Fly* recently purchased on splattered vinyl. I'm predicting heavy doses of each in my July "Wakey-Wakey". But, then again, yesterday a Jeep Wrangler passed by blasting a Vince Gill ballad and a driver playing solo karaoke. He sounded terrible, but I loved his heart, spilling out like a drunken shrill off the coasts of Nashville. Wait, you say, Nashville doesn't have a coast! Buddy, you haven't seen Nashville in my dreams. — KEVIN STILL

IF HILLARY HAD WON

I'm no fan of uchronia (alternative history) literature (because I think it too often resides in a simplistic notion of how history happens— more on that below), but in the present context the question is interesting because there are so many big decisions that have needed making in these last years.

How would things be different right now if Hillary Clinton had won the presidency and been firmly ensconced into the White House three and a half years ago? I'm not going where you probably think I'm going with it. Yes, I believe Khashoggi, Heather Heyer, and the Capital Gazette journalists would all still be alive, that oil would not have crashed, and of course that the pig Brett Kavanaugh would not be on the Supreme Court. And that public service and science in many domains would be alive and healthier. Perhaps even Brexit would have never gone through.

But I don't think, for instance, this President Clinton would have done much to keep black people from being murdered by police, for instance. And while she would have undoubtedly taken a much more responsible approach to Covid19, I cannot see our immature American public having handled that well at all regardless of president. In short, while nothing will ever allow her to get over the fact that, based on her qualifications, knowledge, and on Trump's utter lack of any qualifications, she should have won, she probably would be the most reviled woman in America right now. (I do not believe that Hillary lost because the election was stolen by Russia; I believe she lost "fair and square" in the electoral college because America in fact does have too many assholes and idiots ready to vote for a pig like Trump rather than "endure" a woman president after having "endured" a black president.)

Being a public official in charge of Covid19 response — governor, mayor, health official — is one of the most thankless tasks ever. If you go strict, you are blamed for economic devastation and everything that comes with it. If you go lax, you face heartbreaking body counts. And in our global society, you cannot stop the virus from taking its tour of the planet — you can only control the conditions under which it unfurls.

All of the public officials who have taken science-based prudent adult positions on Covid19 are dealing with intense responses from a small but significant portion of U.S. society. Egged on by the president, it's true, but I think they would have got there on their own regardless. Death threats, endless insults, impeachment and repeal

campaigns, noncooperation, etc. A number have left their jobs to protect their families. In Maine, Gov. Mills is "that Nazi bitch" and the official Republican party is posting signs to impeach her.

Hillary Clinton, inspiring as she does a primeval loathing in many Republicans, would have almost certainly adopted a course that would have driven America's pigs and idiots insane. While I don't personally like her very much, she would have almost certainly dealt with rabid hatred and opposition, much of it ignorant and possibly dangerous. And in November we would almost certainly be looking at the return of a Republican president, probably something not much more savory than Trump. America would have been immeasurably better off without Trump, but I can't see how Hillary Clinton could have "enjoyed" her presidency given the hand that history has dealt the world's current leaders.

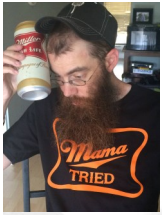
In short, I believe that the world would have been better off with a Democratic president handling the American response to 9/11 — we would not have tortured, we would not have given into bloodlust, and so many things would arguably be different now. I'm not sure, however, that Hillary Clinton had routes open to her that could have allowed her to politically survive Covid19. The U.S. is just too immature and anarchic right now.

To put it another way, what's significant about Trump as president isn't so much Trump as the fact that there was an American population — and elected officials — ready to let Trump be Trump. THAT is the true tragic legacy of this period, and one which will make life next-to-impossible for adults in many positions of public responsibility.

(As for not being interested in uchronia, I believe that most of it wants history to be something that happens because important men make good or bad decisions, or because one single event happens rather than another, and I don't believe that's a compelling model of how history happens. It fails to answer the question of why Hitler GETS TO BE Hitler in the first place. The "what if Hitler had been assassinated" question ignores that Stalin was already well on his way to massacring much of his own population and that Mussolini had already installed fascism — in short, that independent of Hitler the world was already swinging to murderous rightwing extremes and gleefully exterminating populations. So yes, killing Hitler would have undoubtedly saved hundreds of thousands of lives, probably millions, but I don't know that it would have "changed history" the way many imagine.) — *MAYNARD HONEYCUTT*



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SHELTER IN RACE: AN UN-AMUSEMENT

Two conversational topics, we are told, should never enter the workplace: religion and politics. You might as well add to that list "mortality" — people work too hard making a living to be reminded of their death. We don't talk about these things because they get sticky. After all, we might disagree. We might have varying opinions. You might want to give more weight to something than I want to give weight to it. What happens when the weight you feel outweighs the weight I don't feel? See? It's too tricky. We might even decide we don't like each other as much as we thought we did when we both agreed that all these schmucks ruin their black coffee with vanilla flavored liquid PVC. Man, those were the days! Back when you and I agreed on what mattered most! Pure black coffee without the frou-frou nonsense! But that all had to get spoiled when I found out you think / believe / want / pray (or don't) for and to _____. And now my coffee doesn't taste the same around you. My coffee is tainted with *you*-flavored PVC. Why'd you have to do that? Why'd you go and ruin both my work-place and my coffee? To avoid as much, we drink more and say less, even while yapping endlessly about nothing at all.

2020 has been — how you say? — an interesting year. Between our bodies forced to stay home and then, just as suddenly, our conscience forced outside, long hidden topics emerged. Major 2020 headlines assured Americans that religion (how we hope) and politics (how we treat people), even mortality (how long we dance with — or around — the first two), refuse to remain hidden. Pretending we have nothing significant to discuss is no longer an option. Pretending we have nothing more to learn is absurd. Pretending, in and of itself, has become an amusement, one we can no longer afford.

The word "amuse" is a funny word. We think of the word "amusing" as synonymous with "entertainment". We are "amused" when something effortlessly holds our attention. "Amusement" feels good. It feels right in many moments. And we approve — even gravitate — towards conversations sparkling with "amusing" anecdotes. But "amuse" is born from a strange etymology. From the Old French "amuser", the term meant "to avert attention, to beguile". Adopted in English, it offered the opportunity "to divert from serious business." Passed through time, "amuse" became a commonly trivial term that bore a strong — though unknown — indictment against the "amusement" seeker: to be "amused" literally means to look away from an important thing. So it's safe to say that overly seeking amusement is a way to stifle personal responsibility, perhaps even curiosity. As the idiom

suggests, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." Amusement is lovely for assuring we've got nothing to fix. 2020 is the year America grappled with her love of amusement. Hollywood shut down. Concert venues, big and small, locked their doors. Sports took an indefinite time out. Bars issued a "last call" and meant it. Comfort food grew scarce. Streaming and gaming and Zooming grew repetitive and dull. Travel, even to the corner store, was banned. And, inevitably, we found fewer places to spend money in ways that scratched the itch of inadequacy. Our amusements, as a result, dried up like a God-damned dust bowl famine. And nothing burns America's burger more than a failed amusement.

It was cute at first. We rediscovered nature. Rekindled old hobbies. Cleaned one thing and refurbished another. Checked in on so-and-so in an old fashion telephone or postage stamp kinda way. We stretched something other than the thing we normally exercise. We even found an old jigsaw puzzle or board game in the closet, and, for a moment, the people in our spaces felt less threatening long enough to share a plate of cookies without a need for earbuds. Hey, this wasn't so bad. We might actually get through this. Home was not as foreign as many of us had feared.

But then shit got real. Serious business and important things demanded our full listening attention, even if we were out of practice giving it.

Folks died. People out there — not real ones in our cell phone — expired under a viral weight. The numbers increased until they did not so much. So, per advice or spite, we ventured back into the street. Toes felt less threatening long enough to share a plate of cookies without a need for earbuds. Hey, this wasn't so bad. We might actually get through this. Home was not as foreign as many of us had feared.

And, just like that, all our avoidance of revealing topics in favor of amusing anecdotes left us dumbfounded and gobsmacked. We became all reaction and response and reTweet, righteous indignation curled up and floating out like chemical burn. And, sadly, even as we droned on and shouted louder, we were actually very much without words. Even worse, without the ability to listen. We had either forgotten how or maybe never learned; our hearing long tuned to a favored set-list of "Amen" and "Selah" and "Fuck Off". Outside, the streets filled.

The feet stomped. The signs waved. Trucks streamed waving flags. Statues chipped and fell. Cars blazed in high tongued flames. Gasses clouded our view and our path. People sat at home transfixed by the images, rubbing their jaws, shaking their heads. The news cycle spun on and on and on and on like a sweaty seated Peloton. From their vantage points, my father said one thing and your father said another while George Floyd's kid entered downtown Bryan, Texas on a Sunday night to hear his father's final words called out en masse as chorus. What did it sound like to Floyd's son? So much breath declaring the opposite. So much volume announcing a silence. Afterwards, what more is there to say? If we're not careful, we'll think of something too quickly, not allowing these days to seep quietly into our skin and embolden our bones. It is amazing to consider our current day. To recognize old prophecies in action. To witness creaky hinged closets shaking loose their bones. To realize that Americans have pushed hard to keep their biggest haunts — Hope and People, even Death — at bay, only now to drown in their inescapable shadows. The grand mission before us is not to make an amusement of one another's plight. To not see the smoke filled street as a staged tragedy we might assess as entertainment. Many of us, beguiled by diversions, will. After all, we are Americans. Our blood runs back to more blood running down backs like butter over popcorn. We thrive in the tickle of such consumption, most significantly of each other. We signed as much into our national identity.

But we were not designed this way. Long before we learned to consume one another as spectacles, we began together as a story. We were born as breath. Given breath to give names. Named ourselves as characters. Intermittently recalled as syllables in the pulmonary squeeze and gust of a single oral history. Ask the scribes: our world is no library. Ask the seers: the nations are not separate channels in the streaming service of time. From the prelude bang to our present world to the whimpered end, everything that has breath provides a word. Some become full sentences. Who's to say what flourish or neutrality a life might add? But do not think for a moment that your dissatisfactions — grumbled over your coffee with others preferring similar genre tropes as yourself — means we've all lost the plot. Not a chance. We haven't lost it because we're smack dab in the middle of it. So hurry up and hush already. Stop your yapping and listen. Pages are turning here. The spine is taking new folds and creases while the day dawns with a great clearing of the throat, rumbling like bird song and ocean crash and wind wild whether we notice or not. So listen. Seriously, you do not want to miss the plot. — KEVIN STILL

A PROMETHEAN PIT



Last summer's woodpecker was an omen. He hollowed out holes in one of the elm branches in my side yard, so many holes that the lantana plants below were covered with sawdust. Bird-made saw dust. We removed that one limb and hoped the tree would endure. This June, the entire elm had to come down. Its lopsided shade is no more. But its trunk chunks remain.

After the tree crew hauled the many branches and stems and leaves and pieces onto my neighbor's yard for bulk pick up, and she complained, we had to haul the same gigantic pile from her curb to our curb. In the midst of that endless hauling, I had the thought to roll the elm stumps to the backyard for a fire circle. I told my young adult son, "Hey, just roll those back there," suggesting with a brisk wave of my hand that the task would be simple and he should get right on it.

He tried. And failed. And pointed out to me that the stumps weren't perfectly cylindrical and wouldn't roll. I went over to one of them to demonstrate what I imagined to be perfect rolling form and found out that he was right. The things wouldn't budge, at least not with pushing alone.

It had rained the day before and again that night and swamped up the yard enough that the next morning, the stumps were standing in four inches of water. My husband and I rolled a dolly (we had found a tool!) into that standing swamp water and wrangled the obstinate stumps to the backyard.

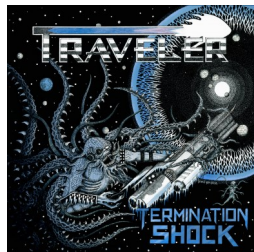
It was dark by the time we were done, but there was a deep sense of accomplishment, as though we had felled the tree itself and conquered a forest instead of just maneuvering the poor elm's remains behind the house where we placed them around the fire pit made earlier that day, a \$32 Pinterest project of stacked pavers and pea gravel.

It rained some more that night, thoroughly soaking our pit and our elm stump seats, but we were undeterred from our vision of dancing flames and roasting marshmallows.

The next morning, like cut rate Prometheans, we procured fire, but not by stealing from the gods. Nope. I bought a paper sack of charcoal briquettes and a jumbo-sized bottle of lighter fluid and my husband picked up a plastic bag of BBQ wood chips at the gas station, just in case. And then, at dusk, when it was too overcast for even Zeus to see what we were up to, my husband and daughter lit the first fire in our swamp-wrangled circle. Lit might not actually be the most precise verb, but they definitely smoldered the heck out of those cedar chips, then dumped in half of the recycling bin contents in hopes of finding something flammable that hadn't been soaked by the week's storms.

"Fire is the voice of god, speaking in tongues," writes essayist Thomas Lloyd Qualls. Our first attempt in the fire pit was less divine utterance than tongue-tied sputtering. But when the flames licked the folded down cereal boxes and crumpled printer paper and the smoke billowed upward toward Mount Olympus, we felt proud, like Titans, like ancient beings who had lived before and who would burn again. — ERIN HILL

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Traveler *Termination Shock*

To say the least, the New Wave of Traditional Heavy Metal (NWOTHM) is, perhaps, one of the single most critical music revivals for metal in the last few decades. Like all metal subgenres, there are certain bands that lead the way—Eternal Champion, Visigoth, Night Demon, Riot City, and Smoulder, not withstanding—but another rising leader in the genre is the five-piece band from Alberta, Canada known simply as Traveler.

Having only released their self-titled premiere album in 2019, Traveler quickly garnered fan attention, as well as significant metal media outlets like BangerTV, who highly praised the record. A year after their debut, Traveler has cranked out their sophomore offering titled *Termination Shock*.

To say the least, I am typically not impressed when bands release an album yearly. I feel this way is because I believe bands should take the time for the music to breathe and achieve its full flavor, like a good wine, and allow for fans to drink in the sound, for better or worse. Though it may be a gamble, sometimes it does pay off to release early. Has Traveler's ambitious move paid off? Let's see!

The first thing which pleases me about *Termination Shock* is that the album artwork and the overall sound are consistent. What I love about Traveler is that they straddle an impressive balance between heavy metal and rock n' roll, creating speed, melody, and altogether addicting hooks which permeate the record in such a way that one cannot help but sing along and/or head-bang. The artwork of their signature Lovcraftian alien creature traveling the cosmos is incredible and lets listeners know that there will be more sci-fi lyrics to grace their awaiting ears as on their previous release.

Termination Shock opens with the incredible "Shaded Mirror", followed by the hide-speed ripper that is the title track. The third track truly is the charmer on this record with a stellar title known as "Foreverman"; believe me when I say it is an instant classic! Traveler even gives the listener a semi-ballad with "Diary of Maiden". "Stk" and

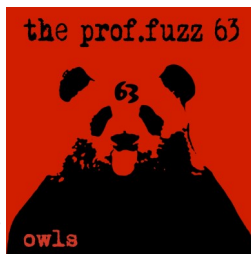
RECORD

"After the Future" are mid-tempo songs, while "Deepspace" is the fastest song on the record with a near power metal-esque sensibility coupled with sci-fi lyrics. The last track, "Terra Exodus" is another mid-tempo song, with a perfectly appropriate gang chorus.

Unlike many bands, what Traveler does correctly is to make each song on *Termination Shock* truly unique. In other words, though some songs are certainly superior to others, there are no fillers on *Termination Shock*; after several listens, the listener knows exactly what the song is by its riffs and chorus. The galloping riffs show a definite maturity not seen in many young bands that is on par with the likes of Iron Maiden and Judas Priest; what's more is that Jeanne-Pierre Abboud's pipes are simply remarkable; be it baritone, low-tone, or soaring near-tenor tones, there is really nothing he cannot achieve, and he uses his talent to the fullest affect with each and every song.

The downside of *Termination Shock* is that unlike its predecessor, the overall catalog of songs is less memorable. That is not to say this album is bad; it's good, VERY good, in fact! It's just that if it came down to choosing between the debut and the sophomore record in terms of musicianship, the debut takes the edge. For traditional heavy metal bands like Traveler, the strength of the songwriting lies in mastering the melodies and catchy sing-along choruses; with that in mind, the debut album simply did this better, if even slightly.

As mentioned previously, *Termination Shock* is a very good album, but it's not perfect. My own hypothesis is that putting out a second record so quickly after the first might have had an impact on the songwriting in such a way that it resulted in the tracks being of slightly inferior to the first [emphasis on SLIGHTLY]. Nonetheless, the production for the record is perfect, the band has stayed true to their sound with zero compromise, and they have created an instant classic with "Foreverman" that will certainly be a permanent song on the band's set list for the rest of their career. For that, *Termination Shock* gets a 4.5/5. — CALEB MULLINS



The Prof.Fuzz 63 *Owls*

I posit that The Prof.Fuzz 63 is the AC/DC of Richardson, TX. This statement may make your head cock a bit and wonder what's wrong with my ears. AC/DC is a stupidly loud righteous blues-based rock band that have managed to make two dozen albums over 45 years with a myriad combination of the same 5 or 6 cowboy chords and lad-ish tongue-in-cheek(s) sexual innuendo. The Prof.Fuzz 63 is, of course, not a lad-ish blues rock band. They are a righteous British Invasion Nuggets informed post-Velvet Underground noir garage band. Like AC/DC, the band is formed from family members. Like AC/DC you know *exactly* what you are going to hear when you drop the needle on one of their albums, like *Owls*, the 63's brand new platter. Quirky songs about strippers and animals and punk rock legends and bizarre bar characters delivered with thudding drums, raspy telephone vocals, Peter Gunn guitars, and Steve Nieve organ. *Owls*, the band's fourth album, is no different.

What is different this time is that the band has never sounded thicker, fuller, more confident, and *meaner* than they do here. One could set a clock to Mr. B's big, fat drums. There's an angrier buzz in the Prof's fuzz guitars this time around, and the Sleepy Redhead's organ sounds dirtier. This is indeed the *best* sounding Prof.Fuzz record to date. Another difference is that the band is starting to double down a bit on a darker tonality as well. "A Song For Sterling" has a definite droning dissonant Eastern vibe. The Prof beats his supermuffed detuned guitar a touch out of tune each time that open string is pounded. "Nadine Codeine" is like a *Some Girls* Stones disco song on narcotics. "Sacrifice" goes all reverby while the Sleepy Redhead's backing vocal has some of the

same creepiness of Lydia Lunch on Sonic Youth's "Death Valley 69" or nearly all the Hollywood shock stories from the early X records. "DEMANDING A SACRIFICE" and you can see the blank staring eyes leap from the vinyl. "Love Canal" has all that post-Velvet's as transposed through the key of L.A.'s Paisley Underground thing.

Of course, there's plenty of familiarity too. The title track fondly lauds an owl for being an asshole; Sheena the punk rocker grew up and became a suburban soccer mom; tales of barbarians pillaging and the Velvet Underground are there too. But it's not all character studies anymore. There's a bit of social commentary in "Love Canal". Taken all together *Owls* shows a sort of giant step forward for The Prof.Fuzz 63. No one's stepping away from the thing that they do that makes them so memorable but at the same time the band has figured out how to take those things and twist them slightly, make them sound both at once more vivid and murkier. Quite simply, The Prof.Fuzz 63 is evolving right in front of our ears. — KELLY MENACE

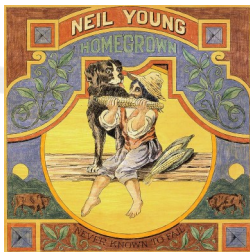


Network 23 *Calming Sounds For Troubling Times 3*

Network 23 is a British electronica duo that has released more than 40 albums exploring ambient and synthesizer sounds, often utilizing guitars as well. Covid-19 has found the pair — named for the TV network in the Eighties cult classic *Max Headroom* — sheltering in place in their individual studios, but still experimenting and staying creative.

Calming Sounds for Troubling Times 3 is part of a 2020 series under the same moniker. This version boasts four long instrumentals titled for the planets: "Jupiter," "Venus," "Saturn," and "Neptune." As expected, the tunes are lovingly-crafted

REVIEWS



Neil Young *Homegrown*

Forty-five years after its completion, Neil Young released his 40th studio album, *Homegrown*. It was worth the wait.

Homegrown was recorded sporadically in 1974 and early 1975 after the mother of his first child and then-girlfriend ran off to Hawaii with someone else. Over 35 minutes and 12 tracks, Young spills and reconciles in country- and folk-tinged twang with the pain of those events, while occasionally looking optimistically to the future.

I could continue trying to explain just what was going on and how Neil was feeling, but he does it better and in simpler words on the first two verses of the opener, "Separate Ways" — *I won't apologize / The light shone from in your eyes / It isn't gone / And it will soon come back again / Now we go our separate ways / Lookin' for better days / Shain' our little boy / Who grew from joy back then* — before looking toward better times in the future by the final verse: *I'm feelin' better now / I live more alive somehow / My eyes are opened / And my heart is pourin' through*

Much of the sound, feel and arrangements on the record are simple — acoustic guitar, harmonica and piano drawing on country, folk and blues influences. *Homegrown* sounds homemade. It's stripped down, honest, and raw without sounding angry. It's not as "big" as some parts of *Harvest*. It's not the kind of groovy thing you hang out with like *On the Beach*. And the guitars don't sound as plugged in as on *Tonight's the Night* or *Zuma*. But while *Homegrown* has its own sound, most of it would fit in right next to *Heart of Gold* from *Harvest* or *See the Sky About to Rain* from *On the Beach*, and its biggest rocker *Vacancy* would sound at home on *Zuma*.

Homegrown gives us a missing piece of Young's timeline plucked from the middle of his most prolific and successful period of his career. — JOSHUA SIEGEL

soundscapes that are indeed balm for these uncertain days.

While each tune clocks in at more than 22 minutes, Network 23 mixes things up a bit during the long explorations. "Venus" introduces a big bass note partway through as well as some squalling, but tasteful, guitar. "Neptune" becomes more insistent during the last third, riding to a rollicking and perky finish before the tranquil ending. "Saturn" probably most closely sounds like what one would expect an atmospheric space piece to resemble. The artful mix of high and low dynamics throughout the tune continues to engage the listener when simpler fare might have one drifting off. "Jupiter" is likely the most peaceful and calming composition on the album. The quiet chords weave a serene tapestry for the length of the piece, nothing too hurried, nothing too overdone: just an extended treat for the ear, a subtle masterpiece. "Pluto" is a 23-minute extra track (bringing the album to nearly two hours of music) that could be an inside joke since Pluto is not an official planet anymore, having been demoted to a dwarf planet. In any case, "Pluto" is similar in nature to "Jupiter" in that it maintains a comforting and reassuring pace during the entire sonic journey.

Check out Network 23 on Bandcamp. — MIKE L. DOWNEY



The Ex-Optimists *This Is Not A Ladder*

Although The Ex-Optimists have a distinct sound and stage presence, I never know what to expect from their new music. And I love this about The Ex-Optimists. For instance, 2012's *Bee Corpse Collector*, nearly a decade old and half a different band ago, pays homage to swimmy-guitar college-rock radio, while 2015's *Phantom Freight* opens with a 15 minute chime-infested soundscape of "True Evil" only

to be followed by 2018's angry AF full-fist, shoe-gaze rocker *Drowned In Moonlight*. Various splits and 7" releases along the way feature Ex-Ops playing post-punk thumpers (*Bee Corpse Thousand*), sweaty-stadium stompers (*Save Your Love*), and summer-love crooners (*Retruns from the '60s*). Listening through their catalogue is like reading a musical memoir of the band's influences and ideas. Life reveals itself in the progression of their recordings (2012 - poppy; 2015 - experimental; 2018 - pissed off), often telling their collective stories more through instrumentation than Minnis' relationally poetic lyrics. For all these reasons, I was tickled pickled-ginger pink when Wonko Zuckerberg handed over a copy of The Ex-Ops newest 7" offering, *This Is Not A Ladder*, earlier this week. Per usual, I found nothing usual here. Surprises abound with delights aplenty as The Ex-Ops, in the only move I've come to expect from them, defy expectations once more.

Before diving into the songs, a word directly from vocalist, guitarist, synthesizer fonder and lyricist Kelly Minnis about the title and cover: "When I was in town in October, we went to play music in Galveston. We stayed at a place Katie secured through Airbnb, an amazing historic register house. In what was the dining room there was a ladder with artsy stuff draped on it. On it was a sign that said 'This Is Not A Ladder'. In fact, that post-it thing that's on top of the cover is a replica of that sign. (Colin stole the sign)." While I did not ask, and Kelly did not say, I wondered if *This Is Not A Ladder* is a tribute of sorts to the adventure of live music before the COVID shutdown, before the cancellation of Loud/Fest and the refunds of all our summer festival tickets. The raucous energy of the album would suggest as much.

This Is Not A Ladder packs six-songs onto a 7", 33 1/3 speed vinyl. Two tracks here — "Song For Lou" (rerecorded with a bit more chutzpah from the *Bee Sides Collector* box-set) and "Walk Drunker" (a revamped Scarborough string-bender cover of Minnis' Invasion Boys "Drunk Walker", from the *Almost Lynnwood* album) — feel like quintessential Ex-Ops. The steady pacing, the dark space opening in the rhythm section past the four-minute crest for a live feedback breakdown, and the dank-streetlight

over a slow-drive or long-beer swig vibe from both songs remind me of nights that the whole of Revs and Rudyards swayed and hollered past last-call. Yes, that's the distinct sound of The Ex-Ops as I would describe it. Or as I've experienced it. Or both. (Enter sigh of nostalgia.)

Otherwise, The Ex-Ops squeezed in four voicemail message length bangers, a pair on each vinyl side. From Side A, "Supersonic Robots" blasts through a whiplash flicker of cymbal-encrusted head-bopper riffs, followed by the tender blush and rhythmic pluck of "Black Sabbath Towncar Driver", featuring a haunting background vocal swoon that I could float on repeat till the needle nubs thin. It's a strong close to Side A.

Side B opens with "Straight To Hell", another *Bee Sides Collector* re-vamp and a psychobilly punk chunker done right with Scarborough's engine revving guitar riffs throttled by Katie Killer's thickest bass lines to date. It's a loud Side opener, a fine side-flip balance act to "Black Sabbath Towncar Driver" and one that's easy to throw the needle back for instant sing-along replay. Album closer, "DeSoto Down", reminds me of a Ramones-ish lick that I cannot name. If you find yourself plagued by the same tip-of-the-tongue trouble, don't fault yourself. I asked Minnis about it. He said the Ramones-y spirit was intentional. "I wrote it the day I learned of Tommy Ramone's passage from the planet." Bingo. Do you like bananas?

Overall, my one and only complaint with *This Is Not A Ladder* is that it's not longer. Except, hark and oh wait! The Bandcamp download features a NINE track bonus EP. What was that? Yes, NINE tracks on top of the six from *This Is Not A Ladder*. You can dig into the bonus tracks per a name-your-price Bandcamp purchase on your own. I'll just say that if "Good Night Sweet Sparrow" was eleven minutes longer, I would gladly make it the soundtrack for my nightly bowl of Rice Krispies ritual. It's ASMR from a very un-ASMR-esque band. But, hey, like I said, the Ex-Ops never cease to amaze me. That's why they're so much fun to listen to. Thanks to each of them for that. — KEVIN STILL

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