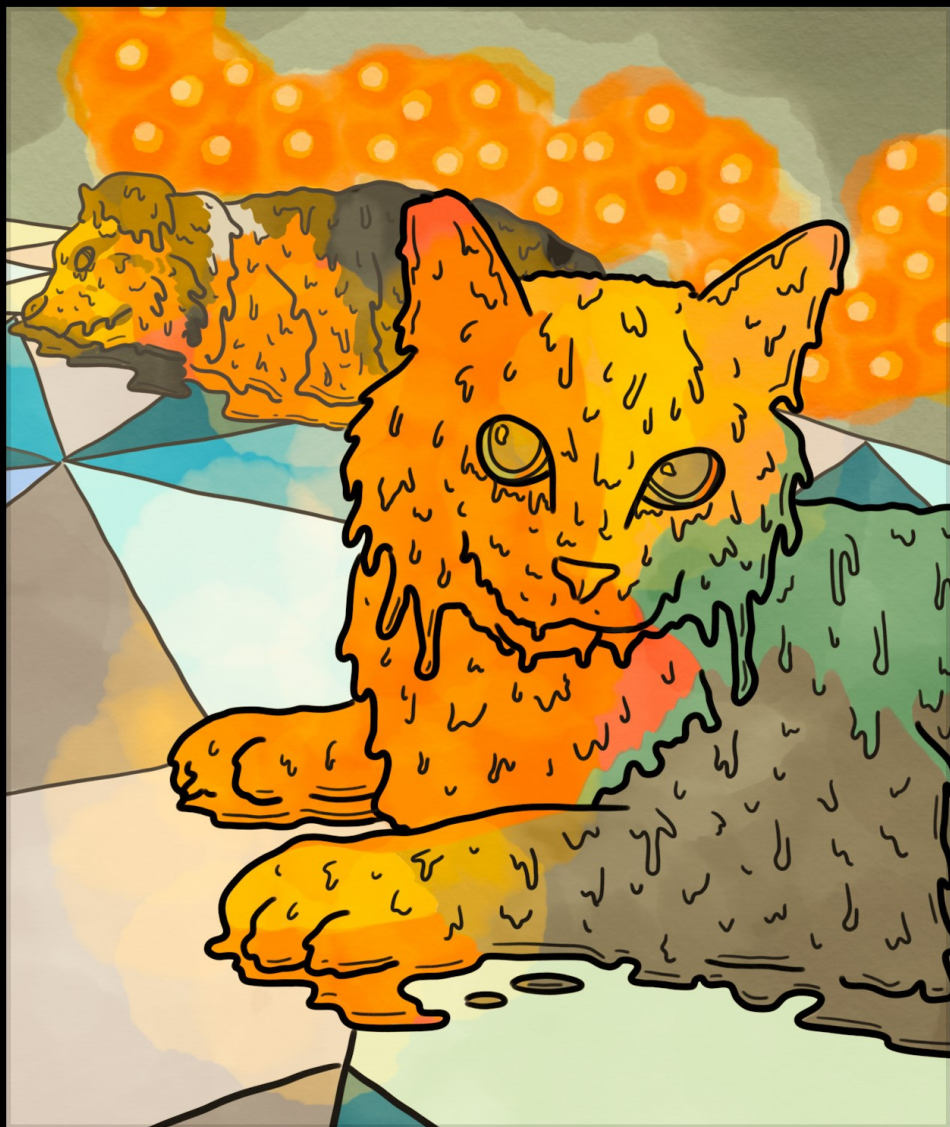


STOREREPRESENT



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inside: unwelcome to aggieland - texas as told by texans who don't care about texans - letting things be - anarchy from the ground up - hydrogen jukebox - salacious crumbs - rented mulevies - nice white parents - screen time - what is art anyways? - pedal pushing - record reviews



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for the discerning dirtbag.**

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folks that did the other shit for us

creepy horse - mike l. downey - jorge goyco -

todd hansen - rented mule - haley richardson

- pamalyn rose-beeler - henry rowe -

starkness

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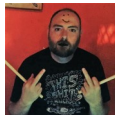
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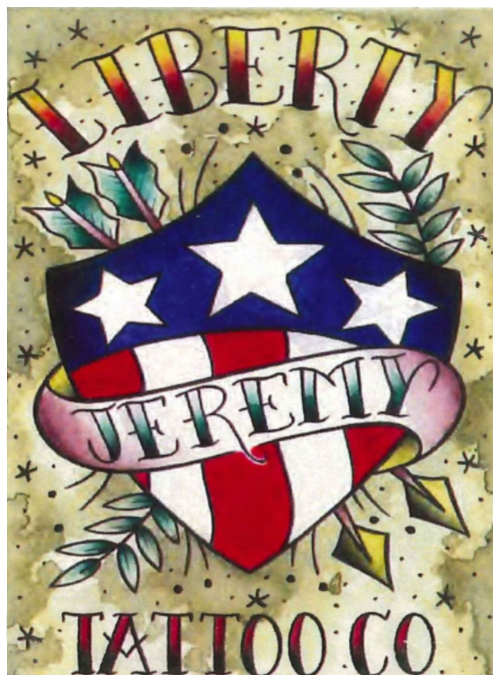
UNWELCOME TO AGGIELAND?

This is the spot where for the last dozen years or so I would roll out the red carpet to new Texas A&M and Blinn students to welcome them to our twin towns, give them the lay of the land, and encourage them to find their own place within this very unique period of their lives when they are adults but can generally experiment and fuck things up without as many adult responsibilities and consequences. But then a funny thing happened on the world's casual march towards the spring of 2020. I speak, of course, of the global COVID-19 pandemic and America's subsequent inability to deal rationally with its communicable spread.

So instead of telling you all the rad places to go around B/CS or the places where one can find kinship of thought and purpose, I will instead tell you that you need to where a mask when around other people, maintain the proper social distance, and for Pete's sake DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPIDLY SELFISH. Going away to college is generally about taking oneself out of the culture one was born and raised into and immersing oneself into an ocean of varied personalities, backgrounds, creeds, and cultures. You are going to find a LOT of people in Bryan/College Station that are quite different from the redneck assholes you grew up around. Sure, B/CS isn't Austin and TAMU ain't no bunch of UT teasips, but the 2020's version of TAMU is not your father's Aggie experience and certainly not your grandfather's TAMU. But sadly, most of the things you might have been told you need to do, like go to First Yell, kiss somebody at Midnight Yell, pack yourself along with another 100,000 people into Kyle Field, accept the hospitality of random Aggies at gameday tailgates, play dominos at the Chicken, or more subversively, go to Revolution or Grand Stafford and get some of the BCS dirtbag beer sweat on you at a punk or metal show...you will not really be able to do any of these things safely this year.

So instead I ask for your patience and empathy instead. I ask you to be cautious, make sure you wash your damn hands, wear a fucking mask, don't be an idiot and think that your entitlement to the same college free-for-all experience as everyone else in previous years is more important than perpetuating a deadly virus that will ultimately get your semester shutdown with you hastily packing a walk-of-shame morning-after bag to rush back to Frackville, TX with your tail tucked between your legs and without a refund from the college for your troubles.

I get that this sucks for you. It sucks for all of us too. No bar, no loud live music, no parties, etc. Maybe entering your college years on a somber note, open to the idea that delaying one's pleasure for the sake of making your community safe, can be just as radical and dad-angering an idea as losing your virginity on the Military Walk. Shit, making life choices at the individual level that increase the wellbeing and mortality of the greater commonwealth...that's downright COMMUNIST. And there's nothing that gets Texan parents and the rest of the family more hot-and-bothered than discovering their little Aggie went off to College Station and came home with red shoes to go under their beds. Really, all this fun will still be waiting for you once the danger of COVID-19 has passed. Be safe. —KELLY MENACE



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SCREEN TIME

The protective foam case around the tablet is cracked, but its thickness makes the tablet easier for Grace's arthritic hands to grasp as she searches for the power button.

The tablet is slow. It was an old model when she bought it for Steven over fifty years ago. It's a miracle it still connects to the net at all.

"He's three," she had told the shopkeeper. "He doesn't need anything fancy."

"Three?" The shopkeeper, barely out of his teens, smirked. "Kids understand technology better than we do. Digital natives, right? He'll need an upgrade within a year."

She had stood frozen with indecision between rows of tablets. Experts had lifted restrictions on childhood screen time the previous year. Before that, too much tech was mentally and emotionally damaging. Now they expected her to embrace the next generation's technological fluency? "No. Just the basics."

The store owner was right, though. Steven quickly grew frustrated with the device. He wanted something faster and with more features. His discarded tablet became Grace's main screen. She'd never needed much.

The screen comes to life with a familiar chime. There's Steven. Green light. Always online. She taps his avatar.

"Mama!" He wears his six-year-old smile.

Six had been a lovely year. Full of hugs and garden slugs. But the face on the screen is wrong. A bit around the ears. A twitch of the lips. Only a mother would realize it isn't him. "Can you change your face, dear?"

Years pass on the screen and he settles into the body of a twenty-year-old man — clean shaven and optimistic. "This better? How are you? It's been a long time!"

Time passes differently for Steven. He explained it once: a day was an eternity, but an eternity was no more than a second. It was too confusing for her to understand.

"The doctors say I'm not well. I'll be passing on soon."

"No. Mama. Come here instead."

She runs her finger over his face, never aging past twenty-six. He had been in the first wave, when the technology was still uncertain. Those trusting digital natives. "It's not right for a human to live forever."

"Isn't that what you think your soul does? You'll leave your body, but your soul will carry on?"

"It's what I hope."

He sighs and shakes his head — actions carefully curated for her understanding. "You wouldn't be lonely here, Mama. You'd be connected to every mind."

"Not every mind." Not yet. There are still a few of them living in rotting bodies, speaking with slurring mouths, and loving with warm-blooded bodies.

His lip trembles. "You'd be connected to me."

"Could I hold you and know for certain it was you—really you—in my arms?"

His face falls, flashing back a few years before stabilizing. "Well, no."

The aching in her arms can be mistaken for arthritis. But it started as soon as Steven left. Now, finally, she can find relief. "I just wanted to say goodbye, my love." She cradles his old tablet, missing the body she created. As her eyes close, the image on the screen reverts to the six-year-old boy, tears wet on his digital face. —
STARKNESS



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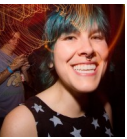
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LETTING THINGS BE

SALACIOUS CRUMBS



There are many things that should not be "let be", but in my opinion, it's the attitude that is the defining factor for mental health. Why is mental health so important to me at 49? Probably a ton of reasons. Whatever the reason, it's important. My wife's mental health is always important to me (as shows by my attempt to figure mine out and understand her preferences). My kids' mental health is also important, but they are teenagers....they are super loopy right about now. Super interesting and curious for sure, and keeping a careful eye on their words and actions is something I feel like I need to do, just in case there's something that pops up to be concerned about.

Sometimes I feel like a hippy, accepting and cool with everything, and sometimes I feel like a psychology nerd, wondering what wounds still need healing and where my emotional intelligence is. But there seems to be a huge truth for me at the moment in figuring out how to chill.

Sometimes I feel like maybe I'm just in the process of losing my marbles, but if that's in my gene's or because I took acid a few times in high school...not much I can do about that.

My newest music project this month (from my side project Me, Extinct) is all about not letting things get to me. I know, I know, I just released a project last month, but I'm pretty certain it hasn't gotten many listens, and that's 100% fine. I don't need stroking or encouragement. I know if not amazing, I also know it's not terrible, so I'm good. Music is just in me. It's something I love. I NEED to make music. You would probably get a strange look on your face if you knew how large my original music catalog is. Mostly only a handful of people have listened to it.

It's your job to decide if you wanna listen to this new one or not. Either way is fine. The points that I'm making are stated in this article. The music is just a distraction with riddles. Just don't expect radio quality if you actually listen.

I was walking my dog in an unlit area of my neighborhood...you know, the type of area where any little sound gets your fight or flight imagination going. This is why I talk to my dog while we walk. Sure, I'm processing thoughts and remarking on what a good dog he is for his cute little shitting position, but I'm also using him to reassure myself that it was just a possum or rabbit or whatever. (Not an animal that's been stalking me or a madman that's gonna run up to me and stab me.) Truth is, he's not always helpful. Sometimes he lunges at stuff that I haven't noticed and it scares the shit out of me. Like toads. I think he hates toads...or loves them. I can't tell.

I've turned this into a metaphor for how I personally deal with life stuff. See, he can't help himself when he sees a toad. He lunges, bites and shakes it up violently. Then (he forgets) the toad pees in his mouth. Actually, it might not be the pee, but rather a toxin secreted from

glands. Whatever the case, it makes him foam and drool and cough and gag. It looks very terrible. He's never happy about it, but it doesn't stop him. He's even tried a second time on the same walk before. Silly boy. The uncomfortableness lasts about 15 minutes. It throws him, but he keeps on walking.

The metaphor goes thus: I react to things despite my knowing better...and I don't want to do that.

One of the songs on the new album says, "I know you/ you wouldn't/ You couldn't/ Would you/ Could you/ Wouldn't you". On my walk with the dog (in that dark, spooky, unlit area), I was distracting myself trying to boil down how to explain what this song meant to me, and here's what I came up with: Be vulnerable, don't have expectations, forgive. Oh, the forgive part is later when the chorus says, "It doesn't matter/I'll deal with it". This feels healthy to me. We have to own our part in all of it. We have to take responsibility. Maybe even a little more, just so the "bettering" scale tips a little. Like a good manager taking blame even though it wasn't him that messed up. How many times have we been critical about being disappointed by someone we are in a relationship with? What if we just go, "Well, that's who they are." Obviously this does not apply to abuse, and I would be wrong to not also apply this to toxic people who manipulate and lie and have no intention of bettering themselves. Those people are bad for us. Also, love is complicated.

I guess I'm just learning to be ok with who/how people are and try to work on me being healthy. We all have people in our lives that are difficult, and that's cool, but we gotta be ok with us FIRST, to be able to have a healthy spot for them to snuggle into one of our brain wrinkles. Maybe it's a parent who thinks you are going to Hell, maybe it's a child who can't admit mistakes, maybe it's a friend who takes teasing jokes too far, maybe it's an old friend who gaslights your every question, maybe it's someone you've known for years who still doesn't remember you like dark chocolate and not milk chocolate, maybe it's a pal who never asks your opinion, maybe it's the dude who keeps arguing on the side of the cops killing black people (or people in general) and seemingly doesn't even try to see the other side...you know, the side where everyone is still alive and every human doesn't have a learned fear of cops and how anything you might do might upset them? We are daily faced with decisions about how close we stay, but definitely they are made easier if our self identity is solid.

I feel like at this point you might be thinking that I am thinking I am an authority on this stuff, with all this advice and self indulgent insight and shit. I'm not. I'm just voicing opinions and relating stuff I'm dealing with. Stuff I've been learning. Looking at myself and not being super pleased. Maybe this is just me dealing with this stuff at this moment and doesn't have anything to do with where you are at this moment in your life, but it seems like a lot is pointing to this being pretty

important...to me anyway. On the other hand, I can definitely see the benefit of distractions and ignoring and not caring about this stuff. Brains are weird. We are weird.

Anyway, the rest of the album deals with things that I always hope others can relate to. One song is about not "losing my smile today". One is about wishing I was "easier" to deal with (but also low key not really), one is about being a survivor after the end of civilization and seeing it coming. Yup, I'm still thinking about that too.

This world is still cray, with no end in sight. There is talk of things "going back to normal", but normal is not ok. I mean, it shouldn't be. If normal is that racism is still systemically oppressing people, no. If normal is a government that doesn't represent the people, no. If normal is police doing more than they are trained to do and killing people in the process, no. If normal is pollution and famine and poverty and not having a solid plan to fight a pandemic, no. Shit's still broken. I don't want normal. Do I want Hunger Games or Mad Max or Fallout 4? I don't know. Maybe.

Either way, if you choose to listen to my newest music adventure, cool. It's got The Rentals/band-with-Moog type synths in it this time. And no, my vocals aren't any better than last time. But, if it makes it any better, I recorded vocals in my hammock again. It's uncomfortable. The neighbor was outside working in his yard. I'm sure he was like, "Why does he keep yelling 'We are here?'" And yes, after I recorded it, I realized that the lyric, "We are here" was used in the movie *Horton Hears a Who*. Truth is, that movie is about identity and feeling heard and being represented and finding a champion and the reality that more is going on under our consciousness than we realize unless we notice and care. So I don't mind the relationship. Finding a sound effect of a screaming crowd for that post-apocalyptic song was fun though. The one I used is cell phone footage from a crowd of mourners in Paris at a memorial where something sparked a panic and the person filming ran into a bar along with a bunch of other people. Turns out the cause of panic was false, but caused a crazy scene nonetheless. Also I made it sound all dark too.

The point of this article/ new album? Take some quarantine/bars-are-closed/isolation/social-distancing time to look at yourself. Could I be reacting better? Could I be happier and healthier? Do I have expectations that are just shitty and oppressive? What do I like and don't like? Do I need people to be a certain way for me to be mentally stable? Do I have prejudices and anger and frustrations that don't serve me? Can I be happy (mentally healthy) despite everything? Can I let things be...or don't. It's totally fine if you don't want to think about these things. Truth is, people actually like you just how you are, some people love you. You are super. Just keep swimming.

<https://shoobiedoobies.bandcamp.com/album/letting-things-be> — JORGE GOYCO

The world is a dumpster fire, hellish ghouls reign supreme, and you sweated through your zestfully clean pair of undies before you finished reading his sentence. And to top it all off, Taco Bell has decided that nah, people don't like potatoes. Especially vegetarians and vegans. They REALLY don't like potatoes. Let's get rid of 'em!

Remember when you used to get a bean burrito, no cheese, add potato? The old standby that was easy to order without confusing anyone? GONE. Now you just get a pile of mushy beans in a bread tube. Oh, you used to add Fritos to it? MERNGH! No more Fritos! You gotta stop by the corner store on your way home and grab some if you want them, but like, who goes into places anymore?

Remember the friendly potato soft taco, a nice, cheap lil snack, filled with fried russet goodness to soak up all the horrible feelings in your soul? The ONE taco you could get? Hasta la vista! Can you really call it Taco Bell if there's no taco there for you? More like Taco Hell!

Remember the value menu? Remember eating an entire feast for \$3.24? Remember eating tostadas, everytime you went to Taco Bell for THIRTY YEARS? Tostadas are dead, and no amount of guac, onions, jalapenos, or fire sauce will bring them back. Triple layer nachos, no cheese, extra beans, with guac, onions, and jalapenos for when you're really feeling sorry for yourself? Better learn to deal with your feelings or eat 'em, because they only nachos you're getting now are big enough to feed a quarantined sorority house.

Their explanation for demolishing their menu is that they're making way for an Impossible or Beyond meat substitute...next year. Taco Bell, the most vegetarian and vegan-friendly fast food joint in the country, thinks that people want fake meat instead of POTATOES. Who doesn't want potatoes? What kind of monster are you?! In the game of stocking the thing that will get ordered and will make you money, the cheap lumpy potato totally wins out against the weird, lab perfected creepy meat. C'mon!! Remember when Taco Cabana had Beyond Meat, and half the time it was disgusting, grey, undercooked cat food? Yeah. That's what they think should be on our tacos instead of delicious, salty, fatty, golden, fried potatoes.

And the worst part? THEY HAVE POTATOES AT BREAKFAST STILL BUT THEY REFUSE TO SERVE THEM THE REST OF THE DAY. By now, you probably know that I am anti-breakfast food times restrictions. Why can't we have waffles, scramble, and hash at lunch? Or at dinner, when the food coma those types of food inevitably put you in is appropriate? What Republican mayonnaise man came up with that? If someone doesn't get excited about breakfast for dinner, are they really alive? If animal-murderer Joe can get a Whataburger at 8 AM, why can't I get some breakfast potatoes at noon? WHY ARE YOU TAUNTING US, TACO BELL?!

NO POTATOES, NO PEACE! — KATIE KILLER



ANARCHY FROM THE GROUND UP

Have you ever tried to persuade a child that the knowledge you hold as an adult, truly is the best advice? For example:

Listen kid. You should really eat XYZ because your body needs nutrients to sustain your quality of life. Have you ever spent the duration of a hot meal, turning tricks in your words, spoiling their ears with bribes? Do you buy stock in ranch and ketchup because it's the only way to get your kid to eat even a banana? If you answered, yes to any of the above, take a pickle shot!! You deserve it! If you answered no, then I am really jealous of your dog/cat/praying mantis.

If you had the pleasure of indulging in any of my summer specials, you know that they aren't for the faint of heart and especially not for my children. Here's a list of delicious ideas and recipes that I like to prepare because I AM A GROWN ASS ADULT and I can eat a healthy array of fruits and veggies and grains and sauces with *gasp* SPICE!!!

I'LL BE DAMNED (hatch chile jam)

This jam was a 2018 Granny Moon Farm experiment when I found 12 lbs of hatch chiles on the discount produce shelf. It was hotter than hell in high summer and there was no way I was going to turn the oven on. So I built a fire in our pit, slowly roasted the chiles over the course of a full day and canned everything outside with our propane burner. There's something about those charred flakes of smoky goodness that make my panties fall on the floor.

To be served:

Stuffed into a baked potato

Smear on top of hot cornbread with butter

Slathered along some bread on a yummy Cuban sandwich

Suckled off the breast of some sweet babe

Breakfast (to burn your asshole):

Bagel - toasted to preference

Cream cheese - or spread of your choice

Egg - scrambled, fried, omelete

Hatch chile jam

HELLISH (squash) RELISH

This is my Aunt Meredith's recipe and since I was a small child, I would sneak her chef's spoon off the stove and run away eating every dribble I could. I beefed up the spice a whole hell a lot over the years! I didn't have ghost peppers for this batch but I will again some day and you better bet it'll be hellishly delicious.

To be served:

Piled on top of buns filled with wieners (DUH)

Spooned into tuna salad

Dalloped on top of chili

Furiously gobbled by the fork full in the middle of the night, illuminated only by the spectral glow of the fridge

COWBOY CAVIAR

Black eyed peas

Black beans

Fire roasted corn

Black olives

Jalapeno peppers

Red onion

Green and red bell pepper

Avocado

A shit ton of Hellish Relish

Mama Cried (candied jalapenos)

We grew more jalapenos than we knew what to do with one year on GMF. Our cousins grew too many jalapenos. Our neighbors grew too many jalapenos. And even the bus driver dropped off bags and bags for me to "do something with". I guess everyone had takin' a likin' to all my curious creations that came from my kitchen. So I tried my hand at cowboy crack!

To be served:

Stir fried in a wok with veggies

Scrambled into eggs

Pristinely placed on top of cream cheese and a cracker

Smashed between bread with pimento cheese

MAMA CRIED FOR CORNBREAD

2 c buttermilk

4 T butter, melted

2 eggs, beaten

2 tsp baking powder

1 c flour

2 c cornmeal

1 tsp salt

1 c brown sugar/molasses

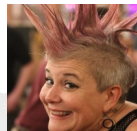
1 c chopped candied jalapenos

Combine buttermilk with melted butter, well beaten eggs and salt. Sift baking powder with flour and mix with corn meal. Combine the liquids with flour mixture and add sugar/molasses. Bake in a greased/floured cast iron pan for 20-25 minutes at 375.

— HALEY RICHARDSON



STEALING BACK SOME SANITY... ONE MOMENT AT A TIME



It's not a huge secret that for most of us 2020 has thus far been a shit show par excellence. Whether you've lost your job, are trying to homeschool while working full time, have been involved in protests, lost a loved one, argued to the point of frustration on social media, have had to cancel travel plans, have celebrated a socially distanced birthday, or are just simply trying to make it through the days ... the fact is, there have been better years.

And knowing that it is a raging dumpster fire of a year doesn't seem to make it any easier to get through. Most people can get through anything so long as they can see an end in sight. But right now all of the yuck seems never-ending and anything resembling normal (which, let's face it, was never really the greatest of shakes ... but still) can't be given a return date.

Those who struggle with mental illness are struggling extra hard right now. Those who usually don't are beginning to wonder if this is what the struggle feels like for those who do. Wherever you place yourself on that spectrum, it's been rough. I know because I've been living through it too. My "bad" days in any given week often outnumber the good, there are days when I wish Canadian citizenship wasn't almost impossible, sometimes I just curl up under my covers and cry.

The thing is, though, I don't like the bad days, I don't particularly want to move down the block, much less to Canada, and all day cries leave me congested and puffy. So, what to do? Lately, I've hatched a plan to grab moments of happy ... simple seconds of sanity that help to remind me that sure, it sucks, but it's not all shit. I'm sharing not to virtue signal or to suggest that if you're unhappy you're just not trying hard enough, but as a way to hopefully jumpstart some ideas that might help you to be a sanity thief too.

Love always. Love all ways.

If you have folks in your life who mean something to you ... tell them. Often. Even if you're 100% positive that they already know. Family, friends, associates ... if you can say even one positive thing to at least one of them today, do it. Then tomorrow, say it again or to someone different. I can pretty much guarantee that if you do this

Sanity is a valuable possession; I hoard it the way people once hoarded money. I save it, so I will have enough, when the time comes.

— Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

connected in some remarkable ways.

Pay It Forward

Doing good generally makes you feel good. I'm the worst at burying presents in advance and then saving them for holidays and birthdays. Giving presents ... especially ones that I think are perfect ... makes me happy, so once I have the gift, I don't want too wait. And, the best presents are those that are unexpected ... not for a birthday or a holiday ... just because. You don't have to break the bank or go on a huge shopping spree to make it happen. Picking up a meal at a drive thru? Ask the cashier how much the next person's order is and pay for it. Can't afford a whole meal? How about the next person's coffee order? If you have the means, let your cashier at the grocery store know that you need cash back and then have them use it towards the next person's total. Can't spend any money right now? Some cut flowers from your yard can be left on an unsuspecting doorstep. Take some cookies to a neighbor. Write a note to someone who needs a lift. It won't make all of the horrible stuff go away, but it will make it feel less shitty for more than a hot minute. I promise.

Do the Nature Thing

This one is particularly Pamalynian, so if this doesn't do it for you ... find something that does. Go for a nature walk. Find little treasures that amaze you. Check out the veins in a leaf or how a smooth rock has been worn down over time. Watch a bee move from one flower to the next ... even if the flowers are just dandelions. Find something that amazes you, makes you marvel, fills you with joy and give thanks to the universe for such wonders.

You and I may not create the COVID vaccine, none of us is going to single-handedly put an end to the civil unrest in our country, and we're probably not going to convert anyone to our point of view on social media ... but, every day we can steal back some moments of sanity for ourselves and others ... and maybe, just maybe, the world will seem a little less crazy at the end of the day.

— PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER



TRUMP'S GOEBBELS

A recent poll suggests that more than 80 percent of Americans have already decided who they will vote for in the presidential election. The scariest part of that poll is that nothing will sway them to change their votes, no amount of facts, nothing.

That means that Trump supporters will continue to accept his bullying and lying, his demonizing of opponents, his hatred of women, his subservience to Russia, his mean-spirited narcissism. No matter how ugly he is—and he will get even more repulsive the closer he gets to losing in November—Trump supporters will accept and justify his immoral behavior.

Adolf Hitler had his propaganda minister in Joseph Goebbels as the Nazis wrecked what was a strong democracy in Germany following the country's comeback after the disastrous First World War. Goebbels brayed against Nazi opponents, liberals and intellectuals (read: science) as well as being virulently anti-Semitic. Trump has leaned on two Goebbels-like toadies at Fox News over the past four years. However, Tucker Carlson has emerged over Sean Hannity as the leading Trump bootlicker with his rancid braying over a number of issues. Carlson equates any foe of Trump as being a foe of America, the same rhetoric that Goebbels used for those who opposed Hitler. Carlson, likely a closet Nazi, has coddled White supremacists for years on his show. He's incapable of pronouncing Kamala Harris' name correctly since that would be showing her respect he's incapable of realizing.

The McCarthyism that ran rampant through America during the early 1950s is defined as the following: "the practice of making accusations of subversion or treason without proper regard for evidence." The key word here is "evidence," something all of the blustering from Trump lacks, always. While tens of thousands of Americans were unjustly damaged by McCarthy's Communist accusations, America as a nation is being unfairly ruined

by Trump's wild-eyed harangues.

Covid-19 has revealed just how incompetent Trump is as president and how empty he is as a human. As Wade Davis wrote in his superb "The Unraveling of America" last month, "The nation that defeated smallpox and polio, and led the world for generations in medical innovation and discovery, was reduced to a laughing stock as a buffoon of a president advocated the use of household disinfectants as a treatment for a disease that intellectually he could not begin to understand."

It is hard to realize that only four years ago, this country was led by a Black man, a leader that exuded dignity and intellect and managed to raise two daughters while in the White House. Remember the summer book reading lists that Obama released each year? Remember when you learned those sort of things from official White House channels and not through grammar-challenged tweets? What was the last book Trump recommended? Right, something one of his toadies wrote that he never read. Trump tends to support anything on the fringe of reality like the so-called doctor who believes in alien DNA.

Finally, a last point from Davis' piece on the demise of the United States during the pandemic where he spreads the blame around: "Those who flock to beaches, bars, and political rallies, putting their fellow citizens at risk, are not exercising freedom; they are displaying, as one commentator has noted, the weakness of a people who lack both the stoicism to endure the pandemic and the fortitude to defeat it. Leading their charge is Donald Trump, a bone spur warrior, a liar and a fraud, a grotesque caricature of a strong man, with the backbone of a bully."

Register to vote, encourage others to do so, and vote is all one can do at this point. — MIKE L. DOWNET

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ASK CREEPY HORSE



I have recently been vindicated and although it's great to be Capt. Fucking Right on the SS I Told You So in the sea of wrong, it's not completely a situation I wanted to be right about.

Last year I was introduced to a new person in the punk scene through some friends I had made. This individual was a Juggalo fresh out of prison that was telling everyone he had been put in prison for making meth for his foster family and got busted and had to fall on the sword. Of course this person had a "crush" on me. Why wouldn't he?

Me, I was put off by this Juggalo living in a tent that seemed to have all these problems that none of which he had actually caused and in every instance was somehow miraculously always the victim. I did not like him. He was filthy. Trashy. Gross. And dumb as a rock. He would try to hug me and act like my best friend. I was utterly repulsed by him.

I was asked by others why I was such a bitch to him. Told time and time again he was a "nice guy". If I had nickel for every time I ever heard this guy was a "nice guy" I would've been able to buy ear plugs so I didn't have to hear it anymore. I ended up losing the friend that introduced us to one another for not reciprocating his "nice".

Upon reflection, despite the overwhelming feeling that this guy was no good, I couldn't understand why I was so nasty to him and should give him a chance. I reached out, being the better person and apologized for my actions and the next time I saw him walking the streets of Houston, I offered him a ride. We had drinks at a shit dive bar and I dropped him a block from his home as he requested.

I'd run into him and we'd chit chat or talk. He quickly became very flirtatious with me and drunk or not there was never going to be a chance there. I'd let him down. I don't believe in stringing someone along and also I believe in planting strong boundaries.

He continued to flirt and send me messages. Then one night when I was at a bar and heading home he asked me for a ride home. I was fine with that. He jumped in the backseat of my car. I asked if he thought this was "Driving Miss Daisy or some shit" he said no and to take him to a back street and jump in the backseat with him. He wanted to fuck my brains out once and for all. I was fucking appalled and my recoil was very evident. I told him I'd take him straight home or he could go ahead and

get the fuck out of my car right now. He literally pretended to fall asleep. He hadn't been drinking. He'd been at work. This motherfucker say in my backseat like a dead weight and pretended to be asleep. So I took him to where he normally got dropped off at and told him to get out.

The next day he began messaging me dick pics and telling me he wanted to fuck me in a stall in the movie area of a porn shop. I was fucking sickened. I responded with a tongue lashing and blocked him. A couple days later, I'd find out he had a kid and a baby mama he lived with that was very much in love with him. My heart sank for her. I was done with this person.

I went to a show weeks later and was watching the band when someone grabbed me from behind, pulled me into them and very saliva-y kissed my neck. No one I know should ever do this so I took to kicking and pulling away to discover it was him. I decked him and pushed him away screaming at him. Told him never ever to fucking touch me. He's gross and disgusting and I never wanted to see him again. He continued to tap my shoulder and ask if we could talk and if he could get me a drink. I ended up leaving because he wouldn't leave me alone and had told friends what had "happened" and now they were smacking into me in the pit.

Months later it'd be my birthday. He pulled the same shit. This time in front of my ex and a mutual friend. I fucking hit him, shoved him away and in front of everyone screamed at him that he was gross and never to fucking touch me. I had hands come up to me and tell me I was being overdramatic. He wouldn't stop standing next to me and looking at me and after I was confronted several more times by strangers defending this "nice guy" I fucking left. My own birthday party. Fuck em.

I had nothing to do with him or those associated with him.

Then all hell broke loose. Someone broke the news that this guy we all knew as "Trace Vanzetti" didn't exist. He was really Blake or Blane Austin Miller and he had gone to prison for kidnapping and raping a child. He was never in foster care, he didn't have 8 sisters and it's questionable if he even ever had a kid as later he'd garner sympathy by telling folks his infant child had died. These were all lies. He was grooming teenage girls and calling them his sisters.

He's been run out of Houston. But keep your eye out for this predator. — CREEPY HORSE

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First off, I kinda like this because I can't get argued at when I say this next statement: You can be an artist.

I feel all those arguments. I can't draw, I wouldn't know what to draw, I can only draw stick figures, I don't have art supplies, etc. Those are fine, but they aren't good enough. I'll start with what I think you will need.

Go to Michael's or Hobby Lobby and buy a multi pack of assorted brushes. Should be about \$8 or so. Cheap ones. Get the ones that say "all purpose" or something like that. Then get a sketchbook. My suggestion is that you get one that has 100 or so pages, and is fairly small, like maybe 5 or 6 inches or so. I've found that size is less daunting than a bigger one. Should be somewhere around \$5 or so. It needs to be "all purpose" not "watercolor" or anything that looks specialized (although watercolor paper is really nice to paint on, it's just more expensive and could make you feel like your art doesn't deserve this type of paper...it's weird).

Next you need acrylic paint. Look for the little bottles that are about 4 inches tall. CraftSmart or CraftPaint are fine brands. I would buy black and white for sure, try to find your skin color, then some primaries (red, green, yellow, blue, purple, orange, pink, etc.). Oh, and then a paint palette thingy. I have one that has 6 little circle indentations. You just squirt a little paint in there, then you can peel the remainder out easy. You will also need a cup for water to wash off your brush between colors, and a paper towel to dry off your brush after washing.

That's it. Maybe a pencil, but that could complicate things.

Ooh, and playlists to paint to. It's super fun to paint and listen to music.

Next you gotta change your thinking. You might be thinking that you are supposed to paint something that looks like something. But you don't. Think of it like this: Art is mostly process. Yes, you get a product, but if you can start with a very general or loose idea, then your product will be good, and maybe even surprise you. It's all about the attitude. For example, if you are wanting to draw your dog and it ends up looking like a blob of colors and a nose. If you had the idea that you were gonna end up with a precise depiction of your pupper, then you're gonna be like, bumder. But if you start out thinking, I'll just see what happens, then your blob with a nose will be perfect, and it will make you smile, because it's an impression of your doggo, and that's perfectly cool.

Then you are gonna have to change another belief, and that is that there is a such thing as "bad"...or "good" for that matter. There's not...well, not really. It mostly depends on your audience and your expectations. If your audience is just you, then it's all good. If your expectation is high, then it's all gonna be bad...at first anyway. Remember, it's a skill that needs to be worked at to get better at. And by "better" I mean being able to depict what you have in your mind. I personally don't even try. I just have an idea, then let my limitations

WHAT IS ART ANYWAYS?

direct the process and final product.

Next you gotta understand this: If you have not been making art, you can't really expect it to look like it does in your mind. This goes back to expectations as well. If you expect nothing, then it's all good. If you expect stuff you've seen at museums and shit, then you are gonna fail for a while. That's not a terrible thing, but it's hard, especially if you are just starting out.

Truth is, there's a ton of really great art that looks very untechnical and unskilled, which I think is awesome. It has a feeling, a style, an impression, an idea, or it's just color. All fine.

First painting suggestion: a dick. This might make it so that you won't want to show people your sketchbook. Again, if you haven't been painting, it's very easy to get discouraged when you show people your art. OK, I'm kinda kidding about the dick (unless you need to trick yourself). My actual suggestion is a self portrait. And not a self portrait where you are looking in a mirror and trying to make it look photorealistic. I'm talking about making an egg shape, then add hair, eyes, a mouth, your goatee, your glasses, your lashes, your makeup, nosering, etc. Stuff that's specifically you. Also, use a medium size brush. Not a small one. I suggest not getting too detailed, at least at first.

Sometimes you are gonna have to stop painting to let what you've done dry so you can add colors on top (like white if you didn't leave the white paper showing through). Sometimes you will want to experiment with not waiting and you will end up mixing colors on the art itself. You will see that it's very easy to get "brown". Brown happens when a bunch of colors mix. This will take some practice to figure out when to "stop". Stopping is a big skill, but you will get it. Remember, you can stop "for now" and then go back in later. Which is actually one of my favorite things: to come back and look at your art after an hour or so.

A challenge might be to make art quickly. My paintings only take a few minutes. A couple song lengths...only because I don't want to get too detailed. I also use a quarter inch brush. Makes it hard to get too detailed.

Another skill is being OK with whatever you did. Sure, you can be critical, just refrain from going to "this sucks". Remember, you making art is good. There is no bad. Bad art is subjective, which means it doesn't exist. As an art student, I've seen art that I'd consider shit that's in museums. Some of it is because it moved into the "history and culturally relevant" area. Shrug.

Showing people your art is terrifying. This is something that most artists never get used to. So I would suggest not showing people for a while...unless you've got some super supportive people in your life. The type of people who love that you are painting, and love that you are showing them. Truth is, a good idea might be doing this whole thing along with someone else.

Sofie (my 16 year old daughter) decided to fill a sketchbook. It's such a crazy project. I was like, dang. Then I was like, man, I

wonder if I could do that. Yes, I've made tons and tons of art, so, yes, I've filled my share of sketchbooks, but not with acrylic paints. It's not my preference. But it's getting me making art. I like it way more than I did.

My issue has been inspiration. Your issue might be deciding what colors to use, or if you are gonna write words or what words to write, or if to do animals or people, or use only one color. There's all sorts of decisions you will be making and mulling. It's all good.

My issue, being "what to paint" has become a fun challenge. I had to change my attitude about that. Instead of going, "Shit, what am I gonna paint", I'd go, "What happened today that was interesting or different?" What did you see that caught your attention? What thought did you have that scared you that you might turn into a glob that has evil eyes? What video game are you playing that has a cool item in it? What is a shape you noticed that would look super kawaii if you put little eyes on it?

It can be easier than you think. Easier than you have been making it out to be. Seriously. I'm trying to paint one a day. Sometimes I do a second one. I leave it to dry in our painting area and come back to it throughout the day just to look at it. Sometimes I like it, sometimes I don't, but I don't let that make any decisions. Also, I am not tearing anything out of the sketchbook. There are no mistakes. If it gets "brown", then I let it dry and paint on top of it, using the brown. Seriously, two big circles with little black dots in them make any blotch look interesting.

When you show someone (if you show someone), you will be diving into an ocean of emotions. Just warning you. Are they just being polite? Do I care? Why am I showing them? Do I trust them? Is this the best I can do? Can they do better? All that shit. And it's all shit and all fine. Just depends. If it shuts you down, then don't put yourself in that situation. Or go ahead, just be ready to feel crappy, and then get over it. Again, depends on who you surround yourself with, and who you show.

What do I hope you get out of this article? That you can. That there is no "bad". It's enjoyable and productive. You can do it any time of day and under any sort of intoxicating influence. Also, be ready to deal with thinking it's terrible, but then also get past that. In fact, put it in your mind that you are making terrible art on purpose. You will see in time that it's not.

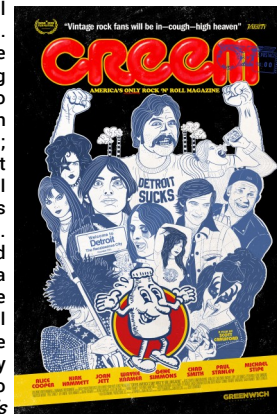
Also be ready to feel really great about yourself. And be surprised by the ideas and process and evolution you are gonna have. Let it happen. Try different things. Get art in front of your eyes (but only for inspiration, not to copy).

Want to see our painting area? Message me. Want to see some of Sofie's or my sketchbook art? Message me. I'll send you a couple pics. — JORGE GOYCO

RENTED MULEVIES



Given the current pandemic, I didn't think movie theaters were showing movies. When I saw the Cinépolis movie theater was showing the Creem documentary, I was more than a bit skeptical. A packed movie theater seemed like a social distancing nightmare. Having bought a movie ticket and not reading the fine print (I had to actually show up in person to get a refund; fuck all who does that in the internet age?), I drove to the Woodlands to get my ticket refund. Upon arrival, I realized that I had arrived to a practically empty movie theater. With that I decided to see the movie. I was the only one in the theater to see *Creem: America's Only Rock and Roll Magazine*.



If you liked rock and roll in the 1970s-1980's, reading Creem magazine was a necessity. While there were other rock and roll magazines out there — Rolling Stone, Circus, Hit Parade for instance — no magazine covering rock and roll at the time was as passionate and snarky about rock and roll as Creem magazine. While the likes of Rolling Stone were getting really excited about Fleetwood Mac and Jackson Browne, Creem were covering The Clash and Sex Pistols. Don't think that bands Creem liked got a pass. At times, Creem insulted bands they liked more than bands they disliked (a contemporary example of this would be the Your Favorite Band Sucks Facebook page); not so much to be assholes but as a statement of how ridiculous rock and roll stardom is. With that being said, Creem had excellent taste in bands. Creem harkens back to a time when rock and roll critics were informed, passionate, and excellent at getting this passion across in print. In their heyday, Creem liking a band was an opinion you could absolutely rely upon. How the mighty have fallen (this review for instance).

A slogan repeated in this documentary was "If you don't get the joke, then you are the joke". This summarizes the documentary and Creem magazine perfectly. If you don't know who record critics Dave Marsh, Lester Bangs, or Robert Christgau are will pretty much be lost watching this documentary. Even celebrity endorsements from the likes of Michael Stipe, Wayne Kramer, Alice Cooper and Suzi Quatro don't lighten this learning curve. This documentary is a love letter by fans of Creem magazine for other fans of Creem Magazine. Boy Howdy! — RENTED MULE

Creem Movie Documentary website:
<https://www.creemmovie.com/>

HYDROGEN JUKEBOX

It's 1993. Fall semester. My first as a college student. I am also a part-time theater tech at the local performing arts center, a recent addition to my small Kentucky town's downtown waterfront. I have been at this job for the past year, and in that time I have come to meet many of the area's theater companies. This October night I am hanging out at a wrap party for a play produced by one of the three colleges' theater troops. While the play was performed in the municipal performing arts center some of our part-time staff also helped with the production of this play. I was invited as a friend of a friend, so to speak. The person who stage managed the play was also a long-time high school friend. This night stands out in my memories for two reasons: this is the night that my high school friend and myself crossed over the line from friends to something a little bit more; and this is the first night that I heard PJ Harvey's *Rid of Me* album.

I recall sitting on the floor beside a couch. The person whose apartment we were partying in had one of those super sexy racks of black Sony stereo components. Blue LED lights aglow with digital displays. The CD player ticked off the minutes and seconds and the waist-tall speakers delivered the crankiest of good-time party records I had ever heard. The music had a gigantic range of dynamics. By then we'd all been accustomed to the Pixies via Nirvana LOUDquietLOUD thing. But this album had an absurd range of ultra quiet with the loud parts blasting out. The album had the same room sound as that first Breeders album and the just-released new Nirvana album. The band twisted and turned in weird time signatures. The drummer in particular played some bizarre polyrhythmic parts over the rest of the band. And the woman singer moaned, purred, and shouted, sometimes all in the same song. I had never heard music like this before. I *had* to find out what we were listening to and I didn't care if it made me look like a dullard for not already knowing what this music was. I asked the party's host what we were listening to. He showed me the jewel case. I had no idea who PJ Harvey was. I bought my very own copy of *Rid of Me* as soon as I could. A couple of years later I was able to replace that CD copy with an import vinyl copy that I sadly sold in a forced complete liquidation of all my music in 2005.

Last month I was able to replace that vinyl copy with a brand new reissue of *Rid of Me* on a hubcap-thick slab of 180g vinyl. It is a superior pressing in comparison to the 1995 release (it was mastered too quiet in my opinion). It gave me a chance to revisit this album, which I still think is the pinnacle of PJ Harvey's musical career (though she has gone on to make other great albums that are in a different vein). At the time the music sounded completely alien to me. With a few decades of listening research since I can hear the influences that PJ and company were so proudly on their chests: the avant blues minimalism of Captain Beefheart and his Magic Band, the dark Chicago blues moan of Willie Dixon and John Lee Hooker, the admitted Pixies-esque penchant

for dynamic tension, the theatrics and whimsy of '80s British goth and post-punk, a musicianly almost prog-rock delight in using polyrhythms and odd time signatures, and the confrontational sexual politics of the riot grrl movement, all bundled up in a bass/drums/guitar power trio. "Lick my legs and I'm on fire/Lick my legs of desire" she screams in an almost cartoonish voice over the outro of the title track. "I'll rub it til it bleeds" she hollers over the band at full syncopated throttle in "Rub Til It Bleeds". It is a sound so powerful, raw, filthy, and hyper-realistic that PJ Harvey would close the chapter on this approach and, with rare exception (moments of 2004's *Uh Huh Her*) she would flee towards guitar pop, glam, atmospheric ghostly piano-based music and in recent years a Tom Waits style Salvation Army band on acid approach (with PJ largely forsaking guitar for blowing tenor sax). While the music remains minimalist blues, the guitar rock theatrics have been laid aside.

That makes *Rid of Me* seem almost like a period piece. Distorted guitar and loud drums was the lingua franca of the rock mainstream at the time. Kurt Cobain and grunge was a living entity. Women were a strong undercurrent holding up the crossover alternative rock scene. Liz Phair's sexual confessionals, the cathartic ragings of Hole and Babes in Toyland, the coy arch politics of Sonic Youth...PJ Harvey wrapped all of this together and delivered it with an authority that has not been matched. If one craves an even bloodier and more dire version of *Rid of Me* one can pick up *4-Track Demos*, the companion album to *Rid of Me* consisting of, you guessed it, PJ's cassette 4-track demos for her forthcoming album. Organs screech, her vocals saturate the tape, and the guitars beat out the rhythm in messy and ugly grandeur. The demos are not necessarily an improvement over the final album but it goes to show that even the shock of *Rid of Me* had actually been tamped down somewhat from the demos.

Oh, and how did the rest of that night play out for me? As I hinted earlier, a line was crossed. But it did not end

the way I expected it to. My friend turned lover was embarrassed by our activities of the night and she fled in a different direction. We have never talked about that night again, though we still remain friendly to this day. My love for *Rid of Me* has certainly been the lone part of that night that endures. — KELLY MENACE



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It's 2000. Mid-summer. My first post-college season. I am driving away from Kansas City after a three-day reunion and music festival with summer-camp friends. During our last night, I shared a pillow on the floor of a closet with a friend who will one day be my wife. How could we have known? We were so chaste even the pillow seemed licentious. Driving away from Kansas City, far later into the evening than anticipated, I am listening to a CD by a lady whose name I heard for the first time that day. Sarah and Jesse, who I trusted implicitly, told me to listen to *this* woman, but be sure to listen to *this* album. So I stopped at Best Buy, bought the disc, and tossed it in the player somewhere south of town beyond the peripheral distortion of city traffic. What I experience audibly over the next 42 minutes rewires me. I played that album on loop seven-hours to Central Arkansas. It is the only album I listen to the next month, often intensely, sitting cross-legged between speakers with a coffee in hand, my thumb and index finger cupping my jaw in elbow-propped concentration. I had not heard anything like it before. I will not have another audible experience like it again for 18 years. That album was Patty Griffin's *Living With Ghosts*.

Fast forward. It is 2018. Texas winter. I am driving to meet my wife at her friend's house because I do not yet claim these people. On the way, I grab a CD from a box of random discs gifted by my buddy Matt. Shuffle, shuffle, grab. Here. What is this album? The cover-photo is crude and minimal. It's the kind of photo that makes the girl-part of me ache. P.J. Harvey, it says. Okay. Sure. I am 41 years old, and I have never heard PJ Harvey. She and I lunched in different courtyards during the '90s. I toss the disc into the player and immediately think my

speakers have gone kaput. A quiet guitar riff whispers. I maybe hear a tapped snare. Then a voice. It's quiet, but then lifts slightly. What's she saying? I increase the volume. The voice shifts to a weird squeaky falsetto. Something is building. I lean in and BAM — the track explodes with electricity and kick-drum — but then back to quiet, back to BAM, and now she's chanting, like Rage Against the Machine but way better, and now she's squealing "Lick my legs, I'm on fire. Lick my legs of desire". The whole thing is hideous. It's back-handed ugly. But it's also that weird dental pain that feels kinda good. The track is over, and I nearly pull the damn car over. Who told PJ Harvey she could do this? I fake my way through dinner, thinking only about getting back to that album, which I do promptly when the pleasantries end. I proceed to sit in my car for the duration of the album. It's the only album I listen to for the next month, often while sitting in my car in parking lots, my thumb and index finger cupping my jaw in elbow propped concentration. I have not experienced music like this — so ripped raw and blood-scrap visceral — since driving south out of Kansas City nearly two decades ago.

Patty Griffin and PJ Harvey both do this one thing that, as I said, rewires me: they eschew beauty for truth. *Living With Ghosts* is not a pretty album. It records a woman slicing herself open with an acoustic guitar. She wails. She peels. She strips buck nude vocally. And then she releases it to the public. I've heard people wail and peel and toss their clothes onto the mic in some wild tactic of rock-n-roll fancy plenty of times. But, until I heard Patty, I had never encountered such intimacy. Not like that. Not like that or again until PJ Harvey — who exalts the ugly truth like a snake in the desert. Harvey, more than Griffin, hollers and squeals as if the yank of her bladed voice through her throat were the entire goal. Also, neither woman records another album that blistering again. They both will write good albums and fine songs — albums and songs that are even "better" musically than *Living With Ghosts* or *Rid Of Me*. But nothing either of them do again reaches so severely into me and twists an open fist. I'm actually good with that.

When I heard that *Rid Of Me* would be reissued on vinyl, I immediately pre-ordered my copy. It arrived on a Friday recently when I just happened to be home alone. I tossed it on the table, cleared back a space between the speakers, and sat down for the show. It sounded good. And I was glad to sit that afternoon and soak in Harvey's grotesqueness fully. But something was missing. Something in all that space felt jarring and void. It was the car. It was the lack of claustrophobia in that glass and metal enclosure pressing me and Harvey together like bony limbs in a forbidden crawl. Some voices — Patty and PJ, but also Linda, Roberta, Dorthia, Coryn, Mon Laferte, Alicia Bognanno — reflect something I work to pack tight. So I prefer their presence in cramp solitudes. I'm no singer, so I'm grateful for voices who crank a vicarious valve. — KEVIN STILL

TEXAS AS TOLD BY A TEXAN WHO DON'T CARE FOR TEXANS

JAMES CRUMLEY'S NW AUSTIN NOIR NOVEL, *THE FINAL COUNTRY*

Who was James Crumley? "He did cocaine six days a week," said fellow author Thomas McGuane. "Ate five times a day. Drank a bottle of whiskey every day. He said, 'This is how I like to live. If I live 10 years less, so what?'"

Tons of booze, tons of drugs. And a grumpy libertarian's fascination with weaponry. Picture a Hunter S. Thompson who served in the Philippines rather than Ft. Walton Beach, who preferred quiet Missoula to noisy Aspen, and who picked up craft at Iowa Writers Workshop instead of dropping tabs with Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters — and you get a sketch of Mr. James Crumley.

At Charlie Baumgartner's regulars-only downtown joint, across the river from the University of Montana, Crumley's barstool is now permanently reserved.

"Alcohol was not invented by accident. It was invented by people who needed a drink" (Crumley, interviewed in Paris, 1988).

And drink they do, in *The Final Country*. Shiner and Lone Star. Tecate, Negra Modelo and Bohemia. Cases of Coors. Herradura, Cognac, Absolut and Jack. A touch of the Turkey, a tip of the Crown. Macallan and Lagavulin, Haut Médoc and Chardonnay. Bloody Mary's for breakfast, flutes of Veuve Clicquot for lunch, shot of Frangelico at coffee. And that's just the first 100 pages. Crumley's crew is out to collect the whole set.

"When you drink with Enos Walker, man, we don't allow no sippin'."

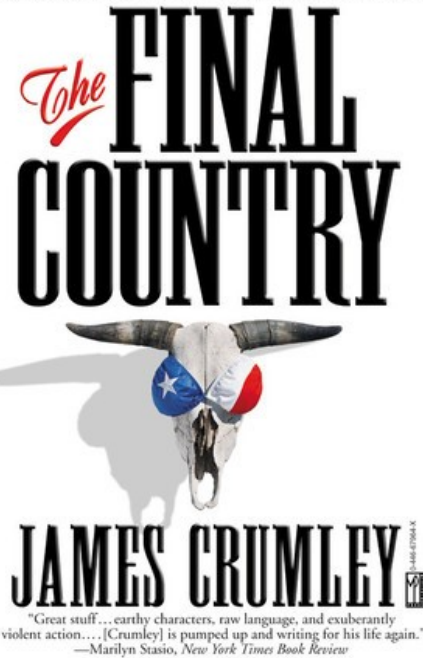
Codeine and Cocaine. Yes, his P.I. Milodragovitch also likes pills. Gaw-gobbed like handfuls of jelly beans. Paired with prodigious quantities of blow. Astounding amounts of blow. For medicinal purposes, of course, because Milo is a professional. To make it through stakeouts, to get out of bed, to argue with girlfriends, to escape a hitman. Or to fix a fight-pulverized broken nose — by cramming so much in there it holds it in place like silly putty.

"She probably chattered like a monkey when she talked in her sleep."

What are Crumley's ties to Texas? Crumley's adopted home may be up north but his roots are all Texan. He was born in a hardlife smalltown called Three Rivers, halfway between San Antonio and Corpus, graduated from what is now TAMU-Kingsville, had family in Johnson City and Dripping Springs. Came back for a stint as creative writing prof at UT-Austin.

"Houston seemed to be the world's largest construction

A NEW YORK TIMES NOTABLE BOOK OF THE YEAR



site combined with the world's worst traffic jam, among as many shacks as tall shining buildings, all buried in an uncommon grave under a humid, shallow sea."

The Final Country is the only Crumley book set in Texas. Out by Lake Travis & the Balcones canyons, where wasteland scrub rubs up against cliffhug mansions. He uses a made-up name — the town of "Gatlinburg" in "Gatlin County" — but locales like the Oasis, the Lake-way Resort, and Pedernales Falls almost certainly served as specific inspiration for key scenes.

"[She stood] with her head cocked like a fairly bright chicken..."

And, though it's one of his last, this isn't a coming-home novel. Rather, it reads like a settling-scores novel. Settling scores with his birthplace, which he swaps here (I believe) for the equally depressing Stairtown, Texas. And settling scores with a slew of Lone Star stereotypes — the moneyed and power brokers and social climbers of Austin's early boom years in particular. But frankly Crumley doesn't seem to like Old Texas much more than New Texas, poor Texas any more than rich.

Why have we never heard of James Crumley? Crumley is known as a writer's writer, which is, as always, a nice way of saying that authors who got rich from their books feel guilty that the talented Crumley did not.

The lack of fame isn't only bad luck, though. Crumley makes no effort to seduce. His narrator is abrasive and his characters nasty and selfish, ethically empty. Violence is nonstop, with someone getting the shit kicked out of them on virtually every page. I'm not saying that Crumley "is" Milo — just that the author comes across as scoring very very low on the human empathy meter. There's a take-it-or-leave-it attitude that wants to dress itself up as Rocky Mountain "rugged individualism" — but really just smacks of rightwing nihilism.

"All great fortunes start with small crimes."

To be clear, Crumley's views are nothing like those (for example) of neo-fascist Lee Child (of the Jack Reacher novels). There is no racism here and, if anything, Crumley gives benefit of the doubt to those fighting uphill battles. He strikes me as a right-leaning libertarian, insisting on all the rights while recognizing none of the obligations. The novel thus inverts the usual relationship of state and individual and the all-important notion of "monopoly of violence." Crumley, for instance, comes out strongly against the Death Penalty — for him, the State will only get it wrong and kill innocent people — but his narrator has no compunctions against using lethal force himself. Similarly, Milo is outraged when he thinks the government has him under illegal wiretap — yet he has a hacker on retainer who invades fellow citizens' privacy every way possible. The government for Milo is only corruption, incompetence, and anarchy, and only the actions of individuals can somehow provide the basis for a "natural" order. (I don't have the patience to explain the libertarian confusion between what is "social" and "natural.")

"Well, keep in mind, old man, you're not as young as you used to be."

"Hell, I never was."

So what then *is* Crumley's appeal? This is a writer with a remarkable command of plot mechanics. Lures, layers, linkups. Small things swirling into bigger, big things owing roots to smaller. I found myself laughing a couple times at how deftly he pulled off big moves in this book. It's highly entertaining and suspenseful, complex and clever.

"Some people are harder to find than a whole peanut in a pile of elephant shit. You just gotta know how to ask the right question." — HENRY ROWE

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PEDAL PUSHING: BEHRINGER MS-1

Behringer has nearly redeemed its reputation as a serial copier of existing technology manufactured more cheaply (in price and quality) with its line of synthesizers. For the most part, these products are *also* copies of other manufacturers' synthesizers, except in this case the synthesizers Behringer are copying and re-releasing out into the world haven't been in production for decades. Their \$300 rack-mounted clone of the classic MiniMoog was a smash hit and has released the floodgates on other notable clones such as the Wasp, Pro-One, Octave Cat, MS-20, ARP Odyssey, and the Roland x0x series, including this month's *PP* subject, the Behringer MS-1, a near-clone of the Roland MS-101.

First off, I must admit I am not usually a big fan of the single oscillator monophonic synthesizer. I was raised on prog rock and I need that two oscillators beating against each other synthesizer sound. This is why I own a Moog Grandmother. I employ two monosynths in my live rig. For most of the last decade I used a tiny two-octave Arturia Microbrute as my second synthesizer. It was super small, easy to use, and has an onboard sequencer that allowed for me to have one instrument to cover all my bases for live use. But recently I had begun to struggle with the limits engineered into the Microbrute and wanted something similar but with a greater set of features and a more robust sound. Enter the MS-1. It is a single voltage controlled analog voice with the ability to blend simultaneous oscillator waveforms, a noise generator, external audio, and a sub oscillator through a 24dB voltage controlled filter, and a single ASDR voltage controlled amplifier. Pretty much everything one would need to make single note lines. This is not much different than the Microbrute. Ah, but what IS different is what sold me.

For starters, the MS-1 has a fairly accomplished onboard sequencer. 32 steps with 64 memory slots plus the ability to add "stutter" notes with each step. Say you have programmed an 8-step 8th note sequence. The sequencer allows a burst of notes per step at a faster tempo. So step 1 may have a 16th note or 32nd note burst on that step while the other seven steps are 8th note. A stutter can be programmed on each of the 32 steps. The sequencer can also program ties, rests, glissandos, and can also swing. Most important for me, using the hold function can then allow the user to use the keyboard to change the overall key of the sequence on the fly. When not in sequencer or arpeggiator mode, that hold function can act like a VCA bypass, allowing

the synthesizer to drone at the last held note. While the MS-1 isn't entirely what you see is what you get and some menu diving is necessary, at least everything one needs to program and play is located onboard and does not require the keyboard to be plugged into a computer to access the secondary functions. Along with onboard

USB, MIDI, and control voltage connectivity the MS-1 allows for incorporation into most modern studios and live rigs. It is a little short on CV patch points but it does offer basic interfacing with most Eurorack setups. And to be fair, the original had no CV connectivity.

Where the MS-1 really shines is its basic tonal qualities. Critics of the Roland MS-101 have claimed for years that its basic sound is "thin". It is not a MiniMoog. But there is plenty of low end to be found in this synthesizer, especially if the user blends in a touch of triangle wave and sub octave. The sawtooth and square waves sound as they should. The pulse width of the square wave is controllable via fader, envelope, and LFO which also helps to thicken the sound. Where the MS-1 differs from the SH-101 is the addition of frequency modulation. The MS-1's oscillator can be applied as a modulator to itself, allowing for tones that vary from thick distortion to hollowed out, clanging bell tones. The effect can be subtle or it can be over the top. Between the LFO and FM can get complicated but its strengths lie in bread-and-butter analog tones.

What I don't like much is Roland's modulation control interface. Instead of using pitch/mod wheels it implements a multi-direction lever. This is something I don't care much for on my Juno 106 and it takes some getting used to on a monosynth, especially when one is used to mod and pitch wheels. But there are far worse pitch levers (ahem, Korg). The synthesizer, while being made of plastic, has some heft to it and the keys feel solid and the action is quick. It is not soft and light like a Casio or some other inexpensively made synthesizer. They also come in fun colors (blue and red as well as the boring gray I bought) and ship with a kit to use the MS-1 as a *keytar*... strap buttons, a strap, and a small handle with some modulation controls. Awesome! Who doesn't love a keytar! Except that Behringer did not make the MS-1 battery-powered, like the Roland SH-101 was. That immediately limits mobility for keytar action. To be fair, Roland charged extra for the keytar kit in the '80s and if one wanted to strap it on and rock out *Revenge of the Nerds* style one could put one of the rechargeable pedalboard power devices like a Volto into use to power the MS-1 without being wired in.

All toll, I am enjoying the "upgrade" from the Microbrute to the MS-1. At roughly the same price, the added function and the more traditional analog tonal structure of the MS-1 makes for a small and capable monosynth. —
KELLY MENACE



NICE WHITE PARENTS



Over the last month my fiancée and I have been listening to the podcast “Nice White Parents” by Chana Joffe-Walt. It was an easy sell to both of us, having such a perfectly provocative title and created by one of her favorite reporters. The program takes listeners inside the world of the competitive New York City public school system, using a single public school in Brooklyn as a case study for the problems of influence that white parents have on curriculum, leadership, and performance. The first episode sets up the central conflict of parent groups: the group of white parents whose kids have been shut out of the three best public middle schools in the borough, and the group of parents already at the school the former choose to invade.

What begins as a desire to start a dual language program turns into a struggle for the soul of the school, calling into question where the benefits of funding and improved educational offerings are going, and why change only occurs when those with the most powerful voices ask. In subsequent episodes, the podcast leaves the present day and digs back into the history of the case study school and the district as a whole. The research uncovered shows that efforts by white parents to improve the school stretch back many decades prior, both before and during the period of white flight. A recurring theme emerges that school administration so often aims to appease the demands from parents of coveted white kids while placating those from the kids already enrolled. Throughout the years, the school district is unable to recognize the purposeful segregation it perpetuated previously, and the subtle segregation still perpetuated through systems of school choice and academic achievement in their public schools.

“Nice White Parents” is published by The New York Times through the Serial brand, following some of the same beats and presentation-style that the latter popularized. But Joffe-Walt has the interesting position of coming at the subject matter with some level of overlapping experience, being a white person with a child in a New York City school. At moments during the stories, she steps into the center of the frame and relates her first-person perspective from similar crossroads faced by the parents and educators in her interviews. This nuance saves the podcast from being solely an indictment of privilege and adds a level of understanding about people’s motivations and feelings in trying to do

what’s best for their kids, even if they don’t realize the negative effects being created in the process.

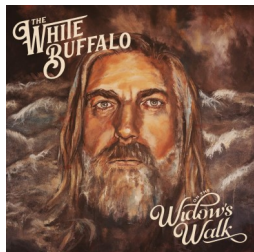
At one point my fiancée remarked that her family had never toured any of the public schools she was zoned into, or thought to consider other options for schools to attend. I suppose this is true for most kids and their families, particular those from either lower socioeconomic backgrounds without the political weight to bend schools to their will, or kids in suburban school districts where parents predetermined the choice for them. My experience growing up was the opposite – I went to only private Episcopalian schools from 1st through 12th grade. We looked at different schools at multiple points, including the public high school nearby. I went on tours, did interviews, and took admissions tests. At my school, kids that came from public school (regardless of race) seemed to have a different aura about them, like they were more worldly than us sheltered, private-school lifers.

I had nice white parents, who cared both about my quality of education and having a supportive religious community. We knew most of the student body and their parents, I played sports that were supported by the booster club, and my mother served on the school board for multiple years. Fortunately my school was actually pretty diverse, and the classes were so small there were not separate tracts between different groups of students. I wouldn’t have had the opportunities or the foundation I gained otherwise, which I eventually tapped into once I grew up. But this also kept myself away from being influenced from and being an influence on students I would have been with at the local public school.

This podcast is short run of five episodes, each divided into different focus areas or time periods and suitable for either bingeing or week-to-week listening. Joffe-Walt does excellent work breaking down the exterior language and actions to reveal the true motivations and fears of the real-life characters featured in the reporting. The last episode does result in a happy ending for the setting, which can hopefully stick through COVID-19 as the traditional notion of school has been turned completely on its head. Regardless, the show will give some listeners a gut check on their true beliefs and level of support for equitable public education. — TODD HANSEN

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The White Buffalo On the Widow's Walk

When I'm not listening to metal, I am throwing on outlaw country, folk, alternative rock, classic rock or even 90's country. Among artists I listen to most, The White Buffalo (a.k.a. Jake Smith) is definitely on the top of my list. The man is a true artist, a singer-songwriter from the old school, and one whose lyrics and musical compositions comprise everything from light-hearted and chipper, comedic and laughable, to haunting and depressive. If I had to describe Jake's musical approach, it'd be like if you started with the heartfelt personality of Mumford & Sons, threw in the lyrical cynicism of Johnny Cash, mixed in a healthy dose of Waylon Jennings' Southern groove and melody and then melded it in blender made of Bob Dylan's songwriting formula.

After five fairly successful albums, many of the songs of which were featured in television shows like *Sons of Anarchy*, *Longmire*, *This is Us* and Netflix's *The Punisher*, Jake has put out another record, after a three year gap, titled *On the Widow's Walk*. For this release, the White Buffalo teamed up with Shooter Jennings (the son of the late, great Waylon Jennings, no less!) for production. Jake has indicated in several reported interviews that his budding friendship with Shooter helped to bring out his darker side in his lyrics and songwriting. This was exciting news for fans, such as myself, as it felt like the last two releases tended to steer further away from the darker material of the first two records. The release of the grimly, dark single titled "The Rapture" signaled a return to form with *On the Widow's Walk*...but is it really?

On the Widow's Walk opens strongly with an indie rock track known as "Problem Solution". It's an instantly likable song, and is very upbeat, with nothing really dark about it other than the idea that the daily struggles of life "are gonna break your balls". From this point, the second track slows things down with a drunken folk contemplation that is something of hybrid between a country song and an acoustic blues ballad. The third track, "No History" segways into another upbeat, albeit mediocre, indie rock track. The listener is then given another ballad with

"Sycamores", which is melancholic in the sense missing the good ol' days and spending time with an old flame, but not depressive in the least. Track five and six are also slow ballads, which offer nothing that listeners haven't heard before, from this or previous records, but it's not nearly as good as previous material by any stretch of the imagination. The seventh track, "Faster than Fire" is yet another upbeat indie rock song with nothing much else to say about it.

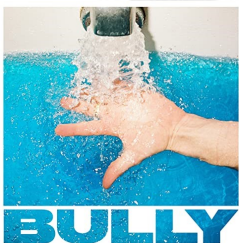
One real problem, besides the repetitive pattern, of the first seven songs is the lyrical choices of some songs that makes me want to grind my teeth. For example, "Sycamores" is sung with a real sense of purpose, but the lyrical execution makes it die stillborn. I mean, for a song that gives off the vibe of man looking back at the love he lost, the chorus lyrics start off as being something maturely poetic, "I miss the sound of the breeze through the leaves of the sycamore/Wading in the waves to my knees on the sandy shore", but then ends with "The birds and the bees and your panties on the bathroom floor". Seriously? This lyrical approach kills the vibe entirely, as if a teenager with suppressed sexual angst wrote the latter half of the chorus. "Come on Shorty" is just altogether weird, and honestly the worst song on the album. The last lyrical stanza is "So I can finally say fuck you"; to be honest, this song is boring enough, but the attempt to assert the word "fuck" simply feels like Jake was trying to live up to the song in the last few seconds.

So where is all the "dark side" material that Jake spoke about in his interviews? Well, the listener finally gets it starting on the eighth song, which is the title track. This is the Jake I know and love! This song is haunting, depressive, and very memorable as it features his signature vocals, the limitations of an acoustic guitar, piano, drums, the reserved use of an almost gospel-like organ for the chorus, and a very catchy chorus. Less is truly more for the title track; and it is done extremely well. The following ninth song, "River of Love and Loss" is a yet darker song dealing with regret and suicidal thoughts, which is reminiscent of "Last Call to Heaven" from *Love and the Death of Damnation* in mood, but distinct as its own song. The listener then gets to the single, "The

Rapture" which is, without doubt, the darkest song ever composed by Jake. The melody is sinister, and the lyrics are macabre and unrepentant; in all seriousness, the song could be the theme for a werewolf or a serial killer. Brilliant, and metal as a non-metal song can get! The last song, "I Don't Know a Thing About Love" is definitely dark, but more in the sorrowful sense. The mood of this song is created very well with the violin and guitar, and Jake's voice is composed in such a way that I can't help but feel that he was crying as he sang this track. Simply beautiful.

For the first little-over-half of the album, there is too much indie rock for my liking, a musical direction which was apparent in the previous release of *Darkest Darks Lightest Lights*; also, the ballads are not very memorable. The first seven songs had me scratching my head with thoughts of, "What in the world are you doing, Jake?", but then when the remaining four songs finally kicked in, my thoughts radically shifted to "Yes, Jake! This is what you are good at!" With all the talk of Jake bringing out his dark side, and the release of the single title track pointing fans in the direction of the White Buffalo's first two releases, the finished product is not what was expected. However, I cannot deny that I liked the opening song and the track titled "Cursive", it is the last four songs that are the best of the record, but sadly, these songs feel like an apology that comes way too late. Overall, *On the Widow's Walk* is a mixed bag; for that, it gets a 2.9 out of 5. — CALEB MULLINS

set of the Ramones for the *Rocket to Russia* album in 1977 at the height of their powers. *It's Alive* amounted to a Ramones live greatest hits album. Despite being such a great album, *It's Alive* was only available only as an import; not impossible to find but finding it took a bit of work. The 40th Anniversary Deluxe edition, adds three additional live sets from previous nights as well as a remastered double album of the previously released live album. The set list for all the nights is nearly identical; the same songs in the same order with nearly the same in between song banter. The only difference between the sets is the song "I Can't Give You Anything" is substituted for "Havana Affair" for two nights. The additional sets show that the original recording of *It's Alive* wasn't a fluke and wasn't doctored too much later in the recording studio (a time honored practice of double live albums in the 1970's). The Ramones were really that good. So, given four nearly identical Ramones live sets, how much of a good thing is too much? In the case of *It's Alive*, it isn't enough. Keep the reissues coming. — RENTED MULE



Bully SUGAREGG

Kevin texts me and says "I just got the new Bully LP." It's the album of the year! Whaddya think?" My response: it's good but it's not as good as the last one. Kevin: "Huh. I think we need to tag team a review on it." So this is what you get.

For starters, I made that comment to Kevin after listening to the album exactly once. After Kevin called me to the carpet about my opinion I went back and listened to both 2017's amazing *Losing* and *SUGAREGG*, the band's brand-new album, back to back non-stop. And I still stand by that claim. Well, okay. I'd say it's REALLY good, but there are some key



Ramones It's Alive: 40th Anniversary

The reissue of Ramones *It's Alive* begs the question: How much of a good thing is too much of a good thing? *It's Alive*, originally released as a double album, captured a live

REVIEWS

MICHAEL MARTIN MURPHEY



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Michael Martin Murphey *AustinoLOGY*

Michael Martin Murphey was one of the first Texas songwriters that brought the state's prowess at creating songs and original music mixing folk, rock, country, and blues to the forefront in the late Sixties and early Seventies. He even penned the quintessential anthem naming it all: "Cosmic Cowboy." That Texas sound would later evolve into the outlaw movement primarily led by Waylon Jennings and Willie Nelson. *AustinoLOGY* is Murphey's paean to that era. The songs are by Murphey and many of the Texas artists from that time, several who join Murphey and sons on the tunes, along with a few current performers they've influenced. Murphey also saw this as an opportunity to improve on the recording quality of his songs first released nearly a half century ago.

The 16 songs on the disc include "Texas Trilogy" written by Steven Fromholz (actually three tunes) and "The Outlaw Medley" composed of excerpts from five songs popularized/written by the late Jennings and the still-spry Nelson. All the music and performances are impeccably recorded. However, that perfection also can be a fault as many renditions are a bit too reverential and could have used a little dusting up. Despite the veneration, it is hard to go wrong with these full songs from Murphey, Guy Clark, Jerry Jeff Walker, and Townes Van Zandt. I would have liked to have heard more vocals from Bruce Robison and Kelly Willis—even Gary P. Nunn—but that's quibbling. My favorite cut is "Cosmic Cowboy" that features Nelson, Walker, Lyle Lovett and other Americana stalwarts on the verses and choruses. It's a whimsical classic: "Riding the range/And acting strange is where I want to be." Next is pretty much everything else, but especially "LA Freeway" and "Geronimo's Cadillac" (with Steve Earle). Murphey's "Backsliders Wine" and "Drunken Lady of the Morning" (with Lovett) are exquisite versions.

Hearing Murphey return to his roots after decades of reviving cowboy songs and doing his Christmas shows (that played in BCS in 2013) is a welcome pleasure to the ears. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

differences between *Losing* and *SUGAREGG* that will dictate where on the album review spectrum each will fall. There is a definite "noisy band gone pop" feel about *Losing*. The song's are catchy, have super pop melodies that blend so well with the contrast of sweet little girl vocals and abandoned screaming that Bully principle Alicia Bognanno wields so effectively. With *SUGAREGG* the pop smarts are still there and the vocal contrasts are still there but the album is mixed differently. *Losing* puts Alicia's vocals WAY out front, making them the main attraction. As a result it was easy to focus on what Alicia was singing about. The overall tone of *Losing* was about coming out the other end of a dumb relationship and regaining a positive perspective. Mantras of "I'm trying to stay focused", "I try to keep my distance, it kills to be persistent," "been six months since you turned 30/quit smoking and cleaned up the worry," "I'll admit it I get anxious too". Not exactly harrowing but it comes across to me as someone trying to get their shit together and doing so with an intensity lent wings by Bognanno's admittedly impressive instrument. *SUGAREGG*, on the other hand, has an intentionally blurry mix. Guitars are pumped up, beamed up significantly. Part of the difference is that Bognanno, who is also an acclaimed recording engineer, mixed and recorded *Losing* but decided to allow someone else to mix *SUGAREGG*. Also, very important to note, Bully was still a band when *Losing* was recorded. In the interim years the bassist and drummer quit and the lead guitarist was kicked out. Bognanno plays all the guitars and most of the bass guitar on *SUGAREGG*. Are the guitars pumped up to show off Bognanno's playing? Do they reflect where her sound is these days? Do they perhaps obscure the messier feelings she portrays in the song's lyrics? I think it's combination of these things.

On Tradition she sings "You say my mind is gonna change one day/but I felt this way forever/Some things stay the same/I stay the same" and on "I don't know where to start with you" on the song of the same title. This is about as 'relationshipy' as the lyrics get. In a recent New York Times article Bognanno revealed her struggles with treating Bipolarism and it seems the messiness of the mix mirrors the messiness of the

lyrics mirroring the messiness of Bognanno's last handful of years. The songs are faster, some such as "I Don't Know Where To Start" are just as catchy but there is something a little more challenging about getting under the hood of *SUGAREGG* that I didn't have with *Losing*, which forged an immediate connection with me. I may not always feel this way. Record reviews are required when an album comes out, not necessarily when an album has soaked in. It can take years for some music to resound. While I don't think this is the case here with me and *SUGAREGG*, we are really talking the difference between I LOVE THIS and I REALLY LIKE THIS. I LOVE *Losing*, I really like *SUGAREGG*. — KELLY MENACE

I heard Bully for the first time while playing YouTube jukebox with Kelly Minnis in my living room. We were swapping the TV remote, slamming beers because I still did, and he says, "Ah, yes. You like female vocals." Then he played the video for "Running" from Bully's sophomore album *Losing*. The recommendation took. I owned *Losing* less than a week later.

The thing I instantly liked about *Losing* was the nostalgia it contained. The album felt a time-capsule of 90s sensibilities. The production. The muted, twisted guitars and trigger-thumpy bass lines. Bognanno's riot grrrl vocals. Even the video for "Running" (minus the cell-phones) looks like something that would make a young Noah Baumbach lose sleep. *Losing* feels like a love-letter to a bygone, younger era. It's a solid record, one I turn to when it's too hot for a flannel AND a cardigan but I still don't want to give a Gen-X level shit. It's quaint in a pissy kinda way. And for this reason, I really like *Losing*.

But late this summer Alicia Bognanno released a single — "Every Tradition" — under the Bully moniker that sounded and felt different from Bully's prior work. I didn't know what was going on here, but Bognanno's voice held a new texture, and not in the mix. There was a story here. A confession. Lines about "pressure to have a baby when I don't want one in my body" and "disassociation with every tradition" tipped me off that this lady was refitting herself, via her music, into solidly chosen spaces. I was intrigued. I preordered

Sugaregg from Bandcamp that day.

More singles. "Where to Start" features layers of tender to hollered pop sensibilities that swirl grizzled choruses around candied verses. It's slightly angry but mostly fun. "Prism" slips in like a sleepy Sunday morning. Bognanno sings from beneath the covers, peeking through the doorway into rooms she's working up courage to enter about "just a mess tied in sheets and covered in tears" and "your ghost in my kitchen". It's damn-nerd cheesy, deliciously so. However, it was, and still is, "Hours and Hours" that ruined me in my pre-release lists. There's that classic Bully bass intro. Signature vocals that begin soft, then peel back the lid, only to crawl back under, and then peel open full vulgar again. "Hours and Hours / Nothing stands up / Feels like it took a lifetime / Man, I'm sick of this stuff ... But I'm not angry anymore / I'm not holding onto that." I don't know Bognanno's story here, but I know mine: weary of so much deconstructive psychobabble that holds back truth. Praise be — this song felt anthemic at just the right time.

My blurb for *Sugaregg* on Bandcamp reads, "Bully's first two records rock aplenty, and years in still deliver. But *SUGAREGG* is an emotional juggernaut on the upswing — Bognanno's guitar-and-holler psalmody of uncouth prayer. I'm glad for it. Amen and hell yeah. Favorite track: Hours and Hours." *Sugaregg* feels chock full of feels to me. It's an emotive testament, more than *Losing* or even its predecessor *Feels Like*. Bognanno admitted in interviews to the confessional nature of this album, to the solo writing and recording of it, to the devil-may-care let-it-all-hang-out personal and professional captured-in-process rough draftiness of it all. Referring to *Sugaregg* as my AOTY thus far (a fruitless claim to those unaware of its contenders), I refer to feeling these things in the record, to its "emotional juggernaut" aspect and the way it feels like secularist prayer. Putting on this record, for me, dims the lights and pulls the shades. Bognanno made a record here that draws hidden bits of me out of bed and into open spaces, bits even I'm not ready to dance with. But that's the power of a woman unafraid of her process or her art. And that's why I love this *Sugaregg*. — KEVIN STILL

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