

STOREREPRESENT



august 2021
vol. 13 issue 7



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for the discerning dirtbag.

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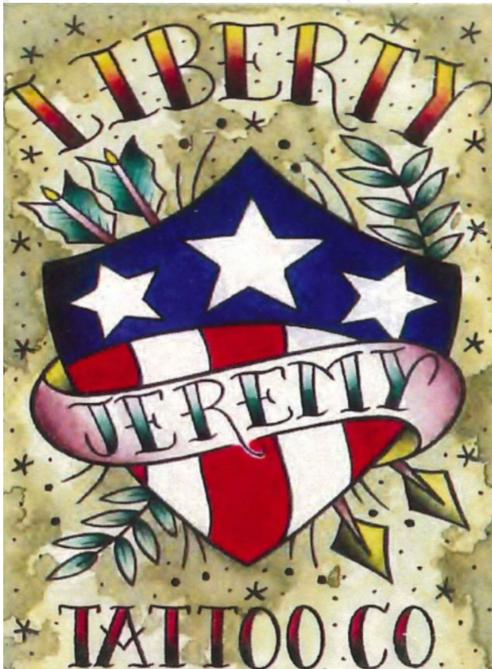


THE MESSCAN VIRUS

I'm a little iffy on my geography these days. For the past 15 months former president Donald Trump has been telling the nation all about the Wuhan Virus.

Sometimes he calls it the China Virus. But the last time I checked both Wuhan and China (Wuhan is actually *in* China in case you didn't know) were both on the other side of the world from Texas. So why in Selena's name is Texas governor Greg Abbott worried that Texas is seeing an influx of Covid-19 cases coming up illegally across the Rio Grande? Let me quote the man for you: "The dramatic rise in unlawful border crossings has also led to a dramatic rise in Covid-19 cases among unlawful migrants who have made their way into our state."

Hmmm. So we are no longer worried about them Chinese dirty bombing us with their filthy kung flu. Instead we gotta worry about them Messcans bringing the Covidiocy into Texas on their slightly damp backs. Hmmm indeed. Pretty sure Texas's recent spike in Covid cases is coming from the dumbfucks who refuse to get vaccinated because of freedom or muh rights or some other stupidity and because masks are snowflake liberal propaganda WAKE UP SHEEPLE and people refuse to wear them. But I have to admire the shuffle step Abbott is taking here to shift the blame away from his absolute inability to put the lives of Texans before his political aspirations. This is very smart messaging, showing that he is still aligned with Trump's failed southern border wall project (the project that Abbott is still actively crowdsourcing funding for) and placing the blame back on liberals, though in an indirect sort of way. This is not an instance of personal responsibility, y'all. This is a matter of them sneaky people bubbling up like crude from south of Laredo.



Let's get to the other half of Abbott's statement: "We must do more to protect Texans from this virus and reduce the burden on our communities." This is where Abbott falls completely apart and without even the small speck of humor that makes the first half of his statement so quotable. This is the part where Abbott stops playing politics and just bareface lies to you. He is not interested in the least in doing more to protect Texans. If he did he would personally tell Texans to get the vaccination. Everyone knows he's had his jabs and is still alive to talk about it and has probably stopped glowing at night by now. If it didn't kill him or turn him into an avocado toast eating nonbinary cuck then it probably won't do the same to anyone else. He could wear a mask every time he is in public. He could listen to the stories of Texans lost to Covid and he could honor the memories of those we've lost. He could help those still unemployment find a safe way to get back to work. He could light the beacon for other southern ass-backwards states to follow in his "brave" lead by following public health protocols. Instead, he is hoping that by playing on the fears and prejudices of an ever-shrinking base he can fool you into believing that he knows what's really wrong and it ain't the CDC or Anthony Fauci or Sanjay Gupta that knows anything worth knowing. So he and his Trump-fellating party will continue to gamble with your life, my life, your family's lives, your friends' lives, and your fellow Texans' lives for political gain. Maybe the preposterousness of the joke really isn't all that funny after all. He cares less for Texans and the millions that voted for him. He cares about one person, and it ain't #1. It's the #2 we flushed out of Washington that's somehow still stuck in the sewers of South Florida that just won't wash away. — KELLY MENACE

SALACIOUS CRUMBS



Hey Crumbs! Do you ever feel like it's too hot to turn on the oven? You're in luck! Turn on the grill instead! It's only a fiery pit of coals and gas, outside on your sweltering, mosquito infested patio!

You didn't ask for it, so here it is! Salacious Crumbs's mediocre guide to vegan grilling!

First off, you gotta try grilling a Beyond or Impossible burger. They're great from a cast iron pan inside, but with that char and smoke flavor from the grill, they're omni-flipping. Your uncle who owns a mega-compassionate farm (every omni seems to have one) where he hugs and kisses each and every cow before he lovingly removes their life from them without their consent will be fooled (but he won't feel like a meat-sweaty turd after dinner!).

Corn? Do you like a delicious roasted corn? Cut off the top bit of flowy silk and pop that guy on the cooler, non-coal side of the grill and let it go until the outside is nice and charred on all sides, and you smell that tell tale roasted corn smell (lots of cooking is about smelling, when baking, if you smell it, it's done!). Do a little hot hands dance, peel off the husk and silk, toss it in butter and any spices you like, and put it back on the grill, hitting all sides, until there's a little bit of char. Eat using the family corn holders!

Got some homegrown tomatoes (no, you don't, that's a June thing around here)? Toss them on the grill and let them smoke! Let the coals burn until they're just smoking, with no flame, and toss your tomatoes on the grill, and let them go until they're dark, a teeny bit shriveled, and smoky. If they're cherry tomatoes, you can put them on a skewer so they don't fall into the fiery pit.

Got some serranos or poblanos? Roast em! Smoke em! Homemade smoky roasted sweet peppers are fantastically amazing, and you can make your own hot sauce out of smoked spicy peppers.

Vegan smoky bacon! Take some hydrated soy curls or tempeh, toss them in your favorite vegan bacon

then put them in a grill safe pan over the non-coal side of the grill. Let them smoke until they've absorbed most of the marinade, tossed every 10-15 minutes. If they're burning, let the coals die a little bit!

Vegan BBQ! This is pretty much the same thing as the bacon, but with BBQ rub-esque spices and your favorite BBQ sauce. Toss some hydrated soy curls in your favorite BBQ rub and BBQ sauce, and put them on a grill safe pan over the side with no coals. Let them hang out there until most of the sauce has reduced and been absorbed and they're nice and smoky, tossing every once and a while. This could be 30 minutes to an hour, so make sure you have an ice cold Topo Chico or beer to help you keep track of the time.

Okay, I'm not very good at grilling, and I've lost many a hunk o' veggie in the depths of the grill. But heck, no one else around here is grilling and smoking that kinda stuff, what's a hungry lady supposed to do?! I had to travel all the way to Houston to get some great vegan BBQ – from the Houston Sauce Pit. It's a totally vegan BBQ food truck, fitted with a charcoal pit and a killer menu. A friend and I went splitsies on a chopped BBQ "veef" sandwich, a BBQ links sandwich, elote, and every side on the menu. The standout was this incredible smoked mac n cheese (no funk, no sweetness, no sticky vegan cheese thing!), and I was particularly partial to the smoked B sprouts, and DANG their buns are good! The elote was amazing, and you could see others walking away with it in their bags, big dry corn husks poking out. They also have BBQ nachos, BBQ burritos, smoked wangs (NO! NOT THOSE KINDS OF WANGS!), baked potatoes, and loaded brisket mac. It's an amazing collection of smells and flavors that you probably rarely get to indulge in if you don't eat meat and it's definitely worth the wait in the sweltering heat and humidity.

When you hear about BBQ, you think meat. Which is dumb, because BBQ isn't meat – it's smoke and time. If it was meat, everything meat would be called BBQ! I wanna taste the heat, not the meat! Sweet, smoky, saucy dreams! – *KATIE KILLER*



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REMEMBERING YOUR FIRST KISS

I'm here with my teenaged-to-adult kids, interviewing them about their first kiss. One is recent, the others happened a bit ago. Within the past year, I think. But first, let me tell you about mine.

It was with the girl in the class who bloomed first. How did I end up in that situation with the big boobed girl? I have no idea. How was the kiss? Great. A bit sloppy, but I thought it went well. I still claim that I learned how to kiss from watching the soap opera *General Hospital* with my mom during lazy summer days in the base housing in Torrejon AFB in Spain.

I knew how to tilt my head, and how to move my jaw. Actually, I really have no idea if it was good for her or not. Or if I got better after that. I'd like to think I did. I'm thinking I'd like to get on that train again soon.

I did a "speech to text" thing for their answers, and then cleaned it up, so, just read it like you are listening to teenage girls talk. Also, permission was given to me to write this.

How do you feel like your first kiss went?

Ruben: The first couple of days after it was awkward to think about, and it was embarrassing, cuz it was like I didn't really respond much during the kiss, because I didn't know what I was supposed to do. So it was like he was doing all the work and it was just weird. But now that I think about it, I'm like, it's kind of awesome, but I do need to learn how to do better.

Echo: It was a kind of terrible, but not like in an awkward way. It was just a lot more mouthy than I was expecting it to be, and I didn't know what I was doing. The thing is, is that (different from Ruby, who only kissed once and then that was it) with my first kiss, we kissed a bunch of times, so I had already sort of figured it out by the end of us hanging out. So I didn't have days to think about it being awkward, because I had already figured it out and left a good impression.

Ollie: It was awkward. It just feels weird. It's a weird thing because you're just like touching someone else's lips with your lips. It's a fucking awkward thing. But I mean, it was cool, but mostly weird.

Is there something you learned? Something you will do differently next time or have done differently?

Ruben: So, I think I'm going to try to be more present in the moment and feeling what the rest of my body is doing too, because all I could feel was my mouth and his

face on my face. I was like: I don't even know what even even is happening! So I'll focus on being more present next time, and I will try to be more responsive, cuz I don't remember very well, but I'm pretty sure it was like "dead fish". Yeah, trying to be more present.

Echo: What I learned was, well, less of learning, but like: the more you do it, it feels less weird. But then what I learned was that you watch how the other person reacts to different things and you can figure out what they like or you can ask them what they like, and then you just do that. But definitely what I had to really focus on learning was actually doing stuff with my hands, because it's hard to focus on two things at once, like moving your mouth and moving your hands. So it takes a lot of brain power, so I had to learn how to do that.

Ollie: Something I would do differently or something I've learned is that I will not try to be like the one that's controlling it. Especially like adding tongue, or whatever, cuz that was so weird. When she was like: hey do you want to try adding tongue, and I was like: yeah, and she's like: okay. And then I tried and she fucking laughed at me. I was like: okay you try, and it was so awkward and weird. I still don't know how to do that. I think that I need to just kiss someone who has experience so they can take charge and I can learn from that. Otherwise, I don't know.

What were your hands doing at the time?

Ruben: Nothing, actually. I think cuz we started with snuggling. We were cuddling, and I was hugging him, and then he started to kiss me. I think my arms they were just still wrapped around him. I hope they were not flopped to my side. I don't remember though.

Echo: I don't really remember exactly what position we were in. I think I was probably just holding her face or something, which is what I did for a long time, until I figured out that you actually have to do other stuff than that. But it's hard to remember. I don't think I was dead fishing. I think I'm too anxious to let myself do that. I just have to do something a little bit less awkward, but still awkward.

Ollie: I don't even remember. I feel like they were just around her waist or something, cuz she was sitting on top of me. Making out is what I'm talking about, but just kissing is fine, cuz I've kissed lots of people. Just kissing, you just kind of like hold their face. Just kind of like grab their face and kiss them, or grab their waist. Otherwise, I don't know what to do with my hands, except for like those two places, or like the main place.

Was it weird at all?

Ruben: Yes, it was very weird. It was not like all that I've been imagining what it was going to be. It's not like that at all. It just felt like another mouth on my mouth. Soft and squishy. I thought it would click and fit together like two mouths were supposed to fit together, but it was like two masks on top of each other.

Echo: Yes it was very weird, and not really comfortable. And it's not like in movies or in books and stuff. In movies and stuff, it's always like this big, "Oh my gosh, like fireworks!" Like it's a "nice moment" and it's "so bonding" and like, "Oh my gosh, I like this person so much!" and you feel it, and you feel all sparkly and it's like: the room...just...everything fades away. But it's just a mouth and it's really like several different textures, and all of them are too familiar, but also not. They don't belong to you and it's just really weird, yes.

Ollie: It's so awkward and terrible, but it's also fun.

Is there anything you would like to tell first timers about what to expect?

Ruben: Although I am still a first-timer, I would say: don't beat yourself up too much about it being embarrassing, because all first kisses are going to be awkward. It doesn't matter if just one of you is a beginner or both of you are, it's going to be awkward, and you're going to have to push through. And don't think the other person hates you just because it was awkward as fuck.

Echo: Just don't expect too much, and don't expect that you're going to know what to do, because you won't, and you don't, and you can't. But you will figure it out. You have to just allow yourself the time and the knowledge that it's going to take time and knowledge.

Ollie: I feel like movies and stuff kind of make it out to be amazing, like sparks! And it's going to be your first time, that it's just incredible, and you're going to just fall in love, and it's amazing fireworks. That it's just a beautiful thing...but it's not. Not at all. It is the most awkward shit, and it's weird. Don't think that it is going to be amazing, just think: I will learn while I go. Because your first kiss is not going to be great, but as you get more comfortable with the person, and you learn more, and you kiss more, it'll be fine. It'll be better.

So, there you have it. First kiss experiences can be good or awkward, or good AND awkward.

Or just wet. — JORGE GOYCO

TEN BULLETS

I left the bar when the sun started to dip under the horizon. The humidity hit me like a jealous lover and threatened strangulation.

My black oxfords clicked on the cobblestone roads of the French Quarter while cold beer and warm whiskey moved my feet. I wandered like the wide Mississippi.

Called home. Needed to lock myself up tonight since I'd have one hell of a hangover tomorrow.

Unfortunately, the buzz had me feeling too good, and I slipped into a dark alleyway a few blocks from the house.

The metal on metal sound of a pistol slide being racked perked my ears right up.

"Don't ya get any funny ideas, Pops."

Guns sober me up good, so I reached for the sky.

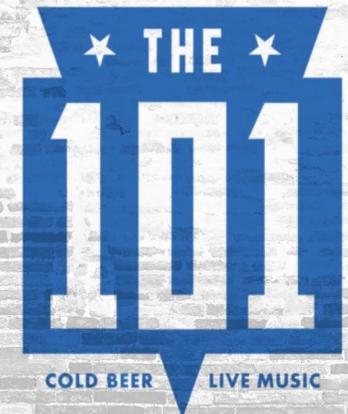
"I won't. I'm not the creative type, friend," I said.

"*Bon.* I got ten bullets in this pistol, and they all point at 'chu. Jus' gimme dat gold watch, Pops. Don't be afraid to gimme somthin' for *lagniappe*. Den I leave ye be."

I looked up past my raised hands and saw clouds floating across the night sky. The full moon glistened. It called to me. It pulled to me. I started to shake with anticipation with what the full moon does to me.

"Ten bullets?" I asked. "Any of them silver?"

Turns out that none of them were, and neither one of us made it to the house that night. — STARKNESS



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MIKE READS REAL GOOD

Who hasn't seen the Academy-Award-winning movie *Forrest Gump* starring Tom Hanks that launched a host of pop culture icons? Some of you may have even eaten at a Bubba Gump restaurant or seen the Lt. Dan Band led by Gary Sinise that honors disabled veterans.

Show of hands – who read the book by Winston Groom? That's what I thought. Of course, it came out in 1986, so that's a good enough excuse.

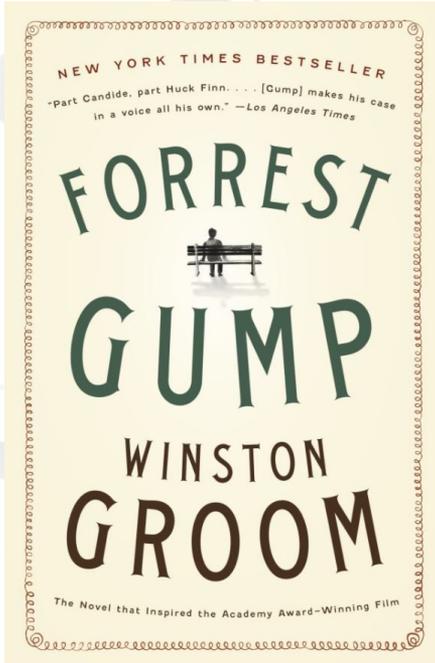
I knew it had been a book when the 1994 Oscars were held that the movie did so well at, and I have to admit I was disappointed in Hanks and company during the televised ceremony that no one acknowledged the writer of the book that actually created the character. That's a Hollywood thing, I know.

Anyway, I finally decided to read the book after seeing the movie again, and in honor of Groom who died last year.

A bit about Groom – he wrote a number of novels and was even nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. A Vietnam veteran, he wrote fiction and non-fiction about his time there as well as other works. He even wrote a sequel to what became his most famous novel called *Gump and Co.*

For those of you who have seen the movie and have the characters and the history and the music fixed in your heads, I won't repeat all the stuff you know. I'll just mention some of the things about Forrest the movie-makers chose to excise for whatever reason. One was his size – Forrest in the book was over six-foot and a couple hundred pounds, which makes his running ability even more amazing. He played football in high school, but only one year in college since, well, he wasn't very smart.

Forrest Gump was also a math whiz, a savant. He ended up being hired by NASA to serve as a human computer,



went on a space mission with a female astronaut and an orangutan named Sue, crash-landed in Africa, and lived there three years among cannibals. Gump also played harmonica, was in a band with Jennie for quite some time. Remember all the drugs Jennie took? Forrest took them first. He was not the innocent as portrayed in the movie. Jennie left him due to his drug use. He was also a pro wrestler who wore a dunce cap and a diaper in the ring. Jenny left him all over again for that one too.

Oh, he learned how to talk to Sue the orangutan too. They reconnected when Forrest became an actor in Hollywood performing in a movie with Raquel Welch. Sue was in several Tarzan movies. Raquel doesn't come off so well in her time in the book.

Lieutenant Dan is not his commanding officer in Vietnam, but someone he meets in the military hospital. Bubba is his friend in Vietnam, and his death does impact Forrest though.

Overall, the book is much darker, and Forrest, who does narrate the entire book, complete with mispronounced/mis spelled words, seems much more aware of his life than the character Hanks played in the movie version.

For what it's worth, the book sold about 10,000 copies when first released, not that great at the time. After the movie, it sold a million. Groom became quite rich as he had a percentage of the movie profits – of course, he had to sue to get that since Hollywood's creative accounting maintained that *Forrest Gump* the movie didn't make any money.

The bottom line is this: if you liked the movie, stay with that. This is another example where the movie is better than the book, sort of like *The Legend of Bagger Vance* in that regard. And I don't think you're going to see sequel-crazy Hollywood filming the second Forrest Gump novel any time soon. – MIKE L. DOWNEY

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ADVICE WITH RUBEN & OLLIE

LONG DISTANCE RELATIONSHIPS

Long distance relationships and friendships are honestly so much fun. Learning about people's different lives is so fascinating! But distance is also really hard.

Wanting to hug, kiss, just BE with that person, but they are thousands of miles away, especially when you can't drive :) suuuckksssss!

It's a really great experience though. Some of my best friends live so far away but we're still extremely close!

Long distance relationships are kinda messy though. When you're in a relationship you want to be with that person 24/7, and when you can't it physically hurts so bad.

But don't get me wrong, if it's the right person it can go incredibly! It's just hard to differentiate actually awesome people with people faking who they are and hiding behind a screen.

I haven't had the best luck :) We've got the weird dudes being cringey simps, the manipulative assholes just wanting to get some puss, the narcissistic toxic people, and the people who are genuinely so perfect but distance is too much for them. (may or may not have talked to a guy in Scotland)

ANYWAYS

Another aspect of long distance friendships is the harshness of being too far away to help.

(trigger warning: suicide)

Since I was about 13 I've had friends struggling with suicidal thoughts. Trying to talk them out committing. The awful feeling when you're texting and they're talking about how they can't do this anymore, they are done trying to live in this fucked up world, then suddenly they stop answering. All you can think is "That's it. They did it. They're gone." The amount of nights I've spent sobbing thinking my friends committed. It's not something a 13 y/o should deal with. It's not something ANYONE should have to deal with. I feel so helpless being so far away. There's literally nothing I can do.

That's definitely the hardest part of long distance relationships and friendships. Anything could happen and you can't do shit. All you can do is just wait and be scared and worried. It's the worst feeling.

BUT it's the best feeling in the world if you're ever able to meet them irl. People are fascinating. I love talking to different people and learning about them. — OLLIE

DO PEOPLE LIKE YOU?

Here is my personal advice on how to make people like you: be ok with everything, be open, willing to learn. This means to have open ears, listen and have no opinion if you can. People usually aren't looking to fight about what they think, so don't oppose them.

Be optimistic, have a cheerful outlook: when you are bright and in a good mood the other person will automatically feel a little brighter too.

Be kind, polite, and grateful: compliment them on their shirt if it's cool, jewelry, makeup, or hair. Thank them if you get complimented back, don't deny it or say they are wrong, take the compliment politely regardless of what you think.

Be confident about the small weird details about yourself, if you tell them something they've never heard they will become interested.

Listen to them and ask questions about specific things they say. Pay attention to details of what they say, ask how things work, ask how they specifically take care of things, ask if they've ever done X Y Z.

Hint: everything can be interesting, so find the loophole where you can be interested in whatever they are talking about, even if it's boring.

If you have to start with questions from nothing, ask creative questions that will make them think, it's engaging and will be different for them. Making them think will pull them out of the small talk mindset, so you can really get to know them.

Hint: people love to talk about themselves, if you show interest they will become more into talking to you. If they really like talking about themselves, enough that

you can actually tell, keep making it about them as much as you can. Speak clearly and pay attention, people hate being misunderstood or misunderstanding things.

WARNING: this is to be used ONLY with strangers or people who you may not see often!

People can be trained, and so they can be trained to keep making everything about themselves because you taught them that that's what your friendship is. Some people could become attached to the attention you give directly to them and not even realize that you need attention too, because if you've kept it consistent, and constantly made it about them, they don't know you need attention back.

If you want it to bloom into a real friendship: as soon as you realize they are someone you want to befriend, be yourself and be kind. You all make friends differently so I can't tell you how to do that.

Energy matching is something I have found to work really well, see how they react and slightly mimic them.

WARNING: only do this if it isn't too intense of an energy, some people are balls of fire with their personalities, those will exhaust you if you try to mimic them, and it's not always needed so choose carefully.

All of this is debatable, this is just my way of doing it. I can't promise it will work, some people are super people pleasers and will fight the conversation to make it about you instead. Some people won't want to talk, their replies will be short and not engaging, don't push it too hard.

This is how I talk to people for the first time online. I don't get out often so when I meet people on the internet this is how I first interact with them.

The warnings are stuff I've experienced. I've seen a bunch of different reactions to this method and interacted with lots of different personalities. I have just found that across the board, if you don't plan on talking to them for long, you'll still be able to have a pleasant conversation, and they will like you. — RUBEN



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SEPARATING THE ART FROM THE ARTIST

We have learned over the years, either by reading about it online or from first-hand experience, that people who create amazing art are oftentimes completely trash as human beings. Murderers, rapists, gaslighters, thieves, racists, out of touch bumlbers, fascists, nationalists, misogynists, bigots, zealots, anti-semites, pedophiles, groomers, not very good people, etc. This is especially true the farther one goes back from contemporary society when many of these points of view and activities were not as frowned upon and/or were easier to cover up by people who were willing to look away and by the general absence of a constant media presence. Recently Wonko and myself were talking about the myth of the tortured genius and how many people line up on both sides of the argument about what one is to do with the art that a shitbag creates when it is discovered that said genius is indeed a shitbag of some degree. In our current social media fueled "cancel culture" one is often tasked with taking sides immediately when it turns out that an artist or celebrity media figure turns out to be problematic. It turns out that, like many other problems these days, it's not so binary and not so easy to digest an argument on social media or in a magazine headline. It turns out the answer as to what to do with a big ol' talented shitbag is pretty complicated.

The first thing to unpack when trying to figure out what to do in such a situation is to figure out who actually owns a creative work. I don't mean who gets to profit from it but who does a song truly belong to once it is released into the wild. It has long been known that the meaning of a particular piece of work often diverges depending upon whether you ask the creator of the work or the consumer of the work. I have learned this over the years from befriending semi-popular songwriters as well as becoming a nearly semi-popular songwriter myself. I have learned that my interpretation of what a song is about is usually not what the song is about. I have also learned that what I wrote a song about isn't always clear in translation and that the people who have bought my records or listened to them or seen my play the songs live often times have an entirely different impression of what the songs are about than what I intended. Not to mention that also as a performer of these songs that the meaning of the songs is often fluid and can evolve as I evolve as a person and a songwriter and as the context of the times change around me. Some artists understand this phenomenon and if not truly embrace it at least reconcile themselves to it. Some, like say George Lucas and Steven Spielberg, still believe that their creations still belong 100% to them and are mutable for improvement. If you have ever found yourself trying to find versions of *Star Wars* movies that George Lucas hadn't fucked with yet, then you are on the side that believes that the work belongs to you and you don't want the original creator ruining your relationship to the art by changing it. This would suggest you are somewhat able to separate the art from the artist.

The next question to ask oneself is if you truly believe that a piece of art is entirely autobiographical, that an artist's work is 100% representative of the soul, outlook, and ethos of the artist. I believe most people would believe that slasher movie producers are probably not mass murderers, Jimmy Buffett is definitely not a pirate, goths haven't managed to kill themselves yet (for the most part), and there are lots of non-lawyers writing fictional legal thrillers. We understand that someone with a creative mind can imagine themselves and their audience in a fictional situation with fictional characters that perhaps bear a certain percentage resemblance to

true life or historic events but aren't necessarily true. There have been many instances in recent years of artists (especially of cis male white variety) being called to the carpet for writing insensitively about other sorts of folks who are not cis male white. The idea is that a white person should not write fictionally about the black experience or that perhaps readers should find work by people of color writing about people of color instead of work by white people imagining people of color. That argument is for another day. For the most part I think we all can understand that an artist can create a work entirely from outside of one's experience and that the art does not exactly reflect the experience of the artist. This is complicated even more by people like Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Little Jimmy Dickens, Minnie Pearl, Andrew Dice Clay, and (arguably) Bob Dylan who created a character for themselves to inhabit and spent most (if not all) their careers portraying that character. Minnie Pearl was a school teacher of upper class upbringing named Sarah Cannon; Ramblin' Jack was the son of a Jewish doctor in New York, etc. It is not often widely known until well into such an artist's career that they are not all they seem to be, but in most cases fans love the work so much they are willing to look past it and separate the performer from the work.

Where this all becomes problematic is when the work seems autobiographical. Woody Allen has made the same sort of film for over 50 years with characters that embody a New York Jewish nervousness at dealing with age and sex. Films such as *Annie Hall* are held up as important pieces of 20th century cinema. It has long been rumored of Allen's moral ambiguities. It is now downright impossible to watch one of his movies or read about them without an acknowledgment that Woody Allen is likely a complete shitbag and one has to come to terms with that before consuming or admitting to liking his work. It is problematic. The same can also be said for singer-songwriter Ryan Adams, whose stock and trade has been largely autobiographical stories of love won and lost. It turns out that Adams is a groomer of underage girls and, like Allen, that allegation is public record. How does one reconcile a love for the work and acknowledging its profound impact upon a consumer with the artist's admitted shitbaginess? Generally people do one of two things. They either boycott the work and try to excise or minimize its personal impact or they very quietly if uneasily still consume the problematic artist's work, often times not admitting it publicly. There are points along this spectrum and often times a consumer is not consistent about who one will boycott and who one won't, what one artist can be forgiven for and another cannot, what behavior can be overlooked and what cannot. Most find themselves as profound hypocrites in this situation. Ryan Adams is a pedophile shitbag and I can't listen to his music anymore because of it, but I will still listen to Led Zeppelin, whose guitarist once sought to become the legal guardian of his 14-year-old girlfriend (with her parents' permission) so she could travel across state lines with the band.

Another complication is the context of the times in which the artist lived and created in that also must be considered. It is not brave to walk around downtown Seattle wearing a Black Lives Matter t-shirt, but it could be deemed so wearing that same shirt while walking around Snook. Is there anywhere in America where wearing that slogan openly 100 years ago would be as acceptable or at least not as dangerous as it is today? Exposing domestic abuse is a noble act these days but for a good portion of the 20th century people were expected to mind their own business. Men dated and married women (girls, really) significantly younger than them and the females were often underaged, some barely pubescent. Homosexuality was considered a medical condition. Considering the context of the times, anyone considered an ally now would have been absolutely heroic in 1961 but now such a person is more commonplace. To be an abolitionist in New York in 1858 was one thing, to be one in Charleston or Montgomery was far more dangerous. It is hard for us to look at behaviors in the context of their times, because the context of our times is entirely different. Slavery is one that is harder to argue away because even in the context of the times it was much harder to explain away if one had actually read the Bible. Considering how the 14th Amendment was used to create the prison industrial complex one could say that there is a difference between being pro-abolition and pro-African but that is, again, another conversation for another day.

The last complication is trying to figure out just how much the artist means what they say in interviews or do in public. A statement made off the cuff or meant in one context but mistakenly taken in another is different than whether the person is an accused rapist or a KKK card carrier. I use John Mayer as an example. Mayer says some really dumb shit in interviews, claiming that he has a hood pass because so many black women love him. Does that make him racist? I dunno. Does it make him insensitive? Absolutely. Has he apologized for it? Yes. Has he said other weird and insensitive stuff since that apology? Yes. It's hard for me to take him seriously because he doesn't understand this far into his career that while being glib will certainly bring you publicity it may not be *good* publicity, and there is certainly such a thing as bad publicity. These days reporters and fans know that John Mayer is prone to saying dumb things in interviews and he should be graded accordingly. For some that's a dealbreaker, for some it's not. Eric Clapton has made some famously racist statements that for decades he has largely been able to dodge, blaming the statements on his drug abuse at the time. Turns out he's also an anti-covid vaxxer which lends me to believe that perhaps his drug abuse is just an excuse and shitbag is his default setting. Even Elvis Costello, a forthright anti-racist, has been quoted using the "n" word in an effort to get under the skin of someone else. He admitted that it was a mistake and he didn't mean to use the word as slander, only to piss off Stephen Stills. Based on his decades of work since that comment was made there is at least some reason to believe that he probably didn't

mean what he said.

I come at this particular topic because of Ryan Adams. I loved Whiskeytown from the first time I heard them in 1996 and followed Adams' work as a solo artist, as well as the solo works of Phil Wandscher and Caitlyn Cary. Many of my long-time friends know of my superfandom. There were many signs over the years that Ryan Adams was a douchebag, based on how he reacted to having a name one capital B away from that of a certain '80s guitar pop star. Ryan Adams would often throw temper tantrums and leave the stage when folks would heckle him to "play 'Summer of 69'" in concert. When his marriage with pop singer turned actress Mandy Moore began to fall apart publicly, it was rumored that Adams was verbally abusive to her. Then, in an earthshattering expose, the New York Times revealed that the FBI had been investigating him for having a grooming-style relationship with an underage female, not to mention that he had a habit of finding female artists to protégé, trying to sleep with them, and then often holding their recordings and promotion of their careers hostage if they refused. I lost the ability to see the emotional honesty in his best work. Now I only see that the artist is a weak and deplorable human being. The songs cannot mean anything to me now. It does not help that Adams has not made any real efforts to apologize or make amends and has spent countless hours bellyaching on Instagram about his plight, most recently begging for a record label to help him release his music because he is close to losing his house. He has made a sort of blanket near-apology but has not reached out privately to any of the artists whose careers he derailed out of whimsy and butthurt.

Recently a long-time friend told me he was listening to Adams and it made him think of me. I responded that I can no longer listen to Adams' music. His answer was "if the songs were made before we knew about (his bad behavior) then it's okay". This, from one of the most actively feminist men I've ever met. I understand his conundrum. The music meant a lot to me at one point, and the truth of the matter is I may one day be able to come back to it once more after time and the context has separated me from his bad actions. I do agree with my friend that I will absolutely not listen to anything that has been recorded after the NY Times article and will not attend any of his concerts. Sometimes what an artist does is so bad that there's no way to separate the art. Pedophilia is one. Or like in the case of fantasy writers David and Leigh Eddings, whose *Belgariad*, *Mallorcan*, and *Elenium* series were incredibly important to me as a teenager, who it was recently discovered had gone to jail for keeping adopted children in cages in the late '60s. That bit of information did not become public knowledge until recently, even though the authors did not use pen names and there were newspaper stories about the abuse and conviction at the time. These are both definite deal breakers for me.

I recognize there are no hard and fast rules about any of this, that an individual has to decide for themselves where to draw the line. It is important to have the discussion and to give some thought to it and whether you can separate the art from the shitbag artist. There are enough artists who are not shitbags that are looking for support in this Spotify no-money-for-artists world that perhaps discarding the zero and getting with the hero has a glorious dual purpose. Perhaps that is the better effort than trying to work logistical and moral acrobatics to make it okay to enjoy a shitbag's work. — KELLY MENACE



MONOTONY & THRILLS

You know what? Sometimes I like getting fucked up, and I will not apologize for that.

End of the day there really isn't anything worth anything other than feeling the moment to its fullest potential.

Nothing changes the past, planning the future is mostly pointless, and none of the things we think will make us happy ever really live up to our expectations.

So I mostly attempt to simply enjoy the experience of the now.

Drink, smoke, fuck, cry, scream, laugh, fight, love.
Drink, smoke, fuck, cry, scream, laugh, fight, love.
Drink, smoke, fuck, cry, scream, laugh, fight, love.

But sometimes that just isn't enough. Somedays I just lay there staring at the ceiling because there isn't a single thing I can do that doesn't seem ultimately pointless.

wake up, exist, sleep.
wake up, exist, sleep.
wake up, exist, sleep.

I alternate following these routines for around a week each, back and forth, over and over again experiencing the thrill of the now and losing myself to the pointlessness of my own existence.

There is nothing we can do but accept it and move on, but even after that we eventually forget and end up right back at the beginning.

One thing that makes it easier to bear is someone who understands, someone to hold you when you feel the wave of cold lonely dark wash over you.

Someone who can reset your brain just by pressing their face into your chest and filling your nose with the smell

of their shampoo, the feeling of warmth telling you "everything is ok".

When you turn down every offer from every friend to hangout just to stay in bed staring at the ceiling fan, this one person can send a single word message with a question mark and you immediately get up, reply "omw", and leave the house on some adventure.

Unfortunately connecting deeply with people like that can be rare, and they won't always share the sentiment.

Without them life goes back to normal monotony, and to do anything seems pointless.

So back to the ceiling fan.

wake up, exist, sleep.
wake up, exist, sleep.
wake up, exist, sleep.

Doing nothing is boring.

So back to the now.

Drink, smoke, fuck, cry, scream, laugh, fight, love.
Drink, smoke, fuck, cry, scream, laugh, fight, love.
Drink, smoke, fuck, cry, scream, laugh, fight, love.

This is all a distraction, an illusion I use to keep myself from thinking about the reality that is life.

So back to the ceiling fan.

wake up, exist, sleep.
wake up, exist, sleep.
wake up, exist, sleep.

This will never end, drink about it.

— CAVAN THEISS



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POVERTY POINT TO SUN STUDIO



The key mound at Poverty Point in northeast Louisiana just looks any other gentle hill ... until you learn the story behind it.

Native Americans moved up to 50 million cubic feet of earth in woven baskets – in just three months for the key mound – not long after Stonehenge was constructed around 1700 BC. It's the largest manmade mound in North America.

These hunter-gathers weren't like anyone else. They apparently banded together in this area for some 400 hundred years, thousands living together where a few dozen marked most villages of the time. They also traded extensively all over what is now the eastern U.S., reaching as far as the Great Lakes near Canada.

In what is now a World Heritage Site, the Poverty Point natives built complex earthen structures consisting of mounds, ridges, and other formations scientists haven't figured out yet. In fact, plenty of mysteries still abound at Poverty Point, named for a plantation that once occupied the land.

Why did the inhabitants build the mounds? How was the key mound built so quickly? What are the ridges for? How did so many people stay together in one locale for generations when the norm was small groups? Large holes in circles once held massive wooden posts dozens of feet high – what were the circles for? Why did the natives take the posts out when they left? Why did they leave after 400 years? Where did they go?

To the casual observer, Poverty Point is just some odd-shaped hills, probably why it was the 20th Century before humans figured out what it was. It's what we know happened here that imbues this historical place with its importance, its significance, its relevance.

Switch to something more modern: Sun Studio in Memphis, Tennessee – the birth of rock and roll music. Sam Phillips launched the Memphis Recording Service and Sun Studio in the Fifties, released more rock and roll records than any other label, and recorded some of the most iconic artists in American music history. Everyone who picks up a guitar from that era on owes a debt to Phillips and Sun Studio.

If you haven't heard the names and the history of Sun Studio, you haven't been paying attention. Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Roy Orbison, Jerry Lee Lewis, Howling Wolf, B.B. King, Ike Turner (of Ike and Tina Turner fame or infamy), and Carl Perkins (who sold a million copies of the song he wrote – "Blue Suede Shoes" – before Elvis recorded it) are some of the original artists who recorded there.

A bit of trivia – obscure pianist-singer Rosco Gordon Jr. had a number one hit with "Booted", recorded at the Memphis Recording Service. His piano playing style influenced Jamaican musicians in the Fifties as reggae was being born, earning Gordon the moniker: "Godfather of Ska."

Yes, it's just a room, but U2 wanted to record there and did. Beatle Ringo Starr and the late Tom Petty were drawn to record there. Artists as diverse as Beck and Def Leppard recorded there. Elie King, Margo Price, Matchbox Twenty – the list goes on and on. If it's just a room, why are these musical artists recording there when studios exist around the world that offer better facilities, better equipment, better amenities?

It's simple: the rich history of Sun Studio gives the place its importance, its significance, its relevance. Without the knowledge of the jaw-dropping musical talent who played in that studio, it is just a room. However, knowing the massive creative talent that worked in those four walls, all that makes it more.

Consequently, knowing the history of Poverty Point opens the mind to the awe-inspiring questions about those Native Americans thousands of years ago instead of it just being another gentle hill. It's what we know about our world and its places that makes us better able to learn and move forward by building upon that splendid past.

Will we ever learn why the Poverty Point natives did what they did? Is it important to try? Of course. Is ignorance better? Should we dismiss the saga of Sun Studio? So many musicians are choosing not to – it's a working studio once more. Maybe it can capture lightning in a bottle. Maybe not. Both places enrich us if we let them. What more can we ask? – MIKE L. DOWNEY





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I DON'T GOT FRIENDS, I GOT FAMILY

The Fightin' Texas Aggies and the Texas Longhorns will soon be reunited under the same Southeastern Conference roof. [Oh, yeah, and Oklahoma'll be there too.]

There were so many amusing ways to approach this topic.

I love it. I love the chaos. I love the professional-wrestling silliness. This is worthy of the bad movie-preview voice guy, "A decade ago, money and ego tore them apart. Now, money and ego will bring them back together!" This is worthy of one of those silly Jay-Z heat-check intros where he's feelin' himself a little too much.

"You crazy for this one, Rick!"

[Jay will later ask for you to turn the music up in the headphones.]

Actually, the most appropriate Jay-Z ramble/boast intro would be from his first studio collaboration with long-time New York rival Nas. After a decades-worth of beef and a battle for the title of best rapper alive, Nas and Jay were now under the same roof, and on Nas' first Def-Jam record, *Hip Hop Is Dead*, the duo came together for the terribly mediocre cut, *Black Republican*.

I know you could feel the magic baby

Turn the motherfuckin' lights down

Esco, what up?

What up, homie?

I mean

This is what you expected ain't it?

Let's go

Turn the music up in the headphones

Yeah, that's perfect

[Jay proceeds to talk for the first minute of the song before they get to the forgettable hook of the song]

But, I'm not going to go through this college football drama with Jay rambles. No, no, we need something stronger. So, let's explain the Aggies and Longhorns' big-brother/little-brother dynamic and the impact of UT and OU joining the SEC with *The Fast and the Furious*. Because nothing is stronger than family.

Let's start with a little background.

"I'm so sorry that you ripped my family apart."

The Aggies and Longhorns have long been conference-mates from the Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Association (1903-08) to the Southwest Conference (1915-1996) to the formation of the Big 12. However, politics, money and UT's desire to *run shit* soured several of their fellow Big 12 schools. In 2010, Nebraska and Colorado left for other conferences, while A&M and Missouri followed suit a year later, joining the SEC. Texas, OU, Texas Tech and others also looked for homes, but were unsuccessful. UT and OU's recent departures signal the end of the conference as we know it.

"You killed my family."

The remaining Big 12 teams will now be renamed The Irate Eight.

"This is your family. This is my family."

The Aggies — or at least Aggie fans — always seem to have a chip on their shoulder. There's a big-brother/little-brother dynamic between UT and A&M. Moving to the SEC and experiencing immediate success sparked by future Montreal Alouettes quarterback Johnny Manziel would allow A&M to build their own brand and identity independent of UT and the Big 12.

"We need to stop him before he does anymore damage to our family."

Probably how Aggie fans felt upon hearing the news of UT and OU moving into their new home.

"You're gonna turn your back on family?"

The Aggies thought escaping the Big 12 and the *Longhorn Network* minions would end their entanglement with the Longhorns. They were wrong. Both schools reference each other in their fight songs! They are inseparable! To quote Rob Gordon from *High Fidelity*, "This is fate! This is destiny! This has nothing to do with me!"

"Now, I know you guys are a family. So, I'm offering you a chance to make that family whole again."

"Family just got bigger."

"Look at our family now!"

The SEC was already the premier conference in college football. Adding Oklahoma and Texas — *Hey! Texas is back!* — makes the nation's toughest conference even tougher. It will be interesting to see how the conference structures its schedule and divisions going forward, AND what this means for the potential expansion of the College Football Playoff.

"More importantly, you and your family don't go to anymore funerals."

Wowwee! UT and OU moving from the Big 12 [RIP] to the SEC has so many tentacles slithering across the sport, it leaves myriad questions about conference alignment and the CFP. Is this the end of the Big 12 — the same way college football killed Big East hoops? Will some of the Irate Eight teams form an alliance with the Pac 12? How much do these schools value the American Conference's TV deal with ESPN? Why don't we play a 162-game schedule like baseball? What's for lunch? It'll be interesting to see how this shakes out over the next few years.

"But, what's real is family. Your family."

At the end of the day, I am about this move. It revives one of the fiercest rivalries in college football, and I am hoping that the conference shakeup leads to some much-needed reform across the sport. — JOSHUA SIEGEL



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IN MEMORIUM: DUSTY HILL

PEDAL PUSHING

Last week out of nowhere broke the news that Dusty Hill had gone on to the great gig in the sky. It was a huge bummer to learn, not because I had any deep connection with him individually, but because of he was a pillar of one of my all-time favorite bands. One of the earliest bands I can remember listening to was ZZ Top; riding around in my dad's car they were played on 92.5 KZPS all the time, and I got into them and other classic rock artists while my peers were listening to Blink 182 and Eminem. In high school I would often roll up in the student parking lot blasting some ZZ and let the song finish with my windows down and sunglasses equipped, feeling bad and nationwide. For me they were coolness in a band; there were many other bands that rocked harder, but they had a combination of style and sound that was unmatched while not taking themselves too seriously.



Dusty Hill never comes up in conversations about great bass players, he was never one that stood out either on stage or in performance. Instead he was locked in and perfectly in step with whatever the song needed to move and groove, perfectly fine with letting Billy shine as a soloist. In comparison to his band mates, Dusty Hill seemed to have a happy-go-lucky attitude about him. Frank was an enigma, often without an expression behind the drum kit, Billy is of course the epitome of cool, but Dusty had more of a goofy character to him. Maybe it was just that big smile he would frequently flash in performances, it seemed like he was always having a good time. With that said, listening to their 70's records there are still moments of surprise where his tone and runs pop out, giving the tune just that little bit of extra flair.

When it was his turn to lead, Dusty always wanted to sing the blues. From covers like "Dust My Broom", to boogies like "Hi-Fi Mama" and the legendary "Tush", the songs he sung/wrote usually are simple 12 bar blues in structure but are nonetheless standouts on their respective albums. Dusty's voice was always higher, louder, more buoyant than Billy's; a Dusty song coming on would make you perk your head up at the new spark of energy that had been injected into your ears. On occasion they would masterfully deploy trading off lines to rev up tunes like "Beer Drinkers & Hell Raisers" or "Heard It On The X", songs that sound like an 18-wheeler going 90 miles an hour down a two-lane highway. Frequently in live performances of "Cheap Sunglasses" Dusty would swoop in and punctuate the song title at the end of the verses, making it sound like there was something mischievous or taboo about getting yourself some big black frames.

I saw ZZ Top exactly three times, all when I was in my twenties, and I think they started with frequent opener "Got Me Under Pressure" at each show. By that time they had become a well-oiled machine of entertainment, playing the hits and keeping the tour going, but every show was still so much fun. The first time saw ZZ Top was in

the Fall of 2007 for a live taping that would become the *Live In Texas* concert film. The show was also at a venue in my hometown, which made me doubly excited to buy tickets immediately after announcement and make the drive from College Station. I got a group of seats for my high school friends, up in the back balcony section of the theater. I bought a shirt that was one size too small and had dates for different set of tour dates on the back, but looked dope with three members in all black and Billy holding his red custom Bo Diddley Gretsch guitar. The boys came out with the stage lights flashing big and bright, and we stood up and rocked out from way in the back. We were the only teenagers in our section, and a few songs in the old folks behind asked us to sit down. It was bizarre and unheard of to me (at that point) being seated during a rock show, but we still managed to have a good time for the rest of the night. For me it was a rock'n'roll dream come true.

The second time should have been at Kyle Field in 2009, when A&M announced that ZZ Top would be playing in conjunction with the spring Maroon and White game. The concert was part of a series of shows at different colleges for some kind of NCAA spring kickoff event. Naturally there was no one on campus more excited than me about these fortuitous circumstances. I messaged friends and family to get a group together and bought tickets immediately when they went on sale, ending with a set in one of the lower section rows on the student side around the 45 yard line. Then a few weeks later it was announced that the show was cancelled; apparently the NCAA was getting fidgety that the concert series they'd planned might get challenge as a violation of rules to involve amateur student athletes with a revenue-generating event (which of course is an absurd thing to write given everything). I was pissed.

Fortunately, I didn't have to wait long for the next time. ZZ Top played the Houston Rodeo that same Spring, and

a friend at KANM was also a big fan and had family on the Rodeo Committee (to this day I still have no idea what that means). He was able to bring me and a buddy into NRG Stadium (or whatever it was called at the time) in for free, though we had to go in one at a time through separate entrances. The day started with bull-riding and then ended with the show, perhaps the perfect Texas combination. At one point in the show Billy asked if the crowd would like to hear a country song. Me and my buddies got really excited as we thought they were going to go into "Mexican Blackbird", but it was just a cover of "Ring of Fire" instead. The show was brief and an assistant tossed Frank a can of Tab as they descended the stairs from the rotating stage.

In my personal Top Five list of tours I wish I had seen, somewhere in there is the Worldwide Texas Tour in '76-'77, with the band in high gear and putting together an elaborate stage production complete with a southwestern panorama and live animals including longhorns, bison, vultures, and rattlesnakes. The documentary on the band (naturally titled *That Little Old Band from Texas*) has great footage and interviews about how they put it together, and it sounds like it was a one-of-a-kind experience. I bought a reproduction of the tour shirt immediately after watching the doc.

The third time was at the Super Bowl Live party in Houston in 2017 (at the time it was January, with no idea that Harvey would be coming later that year). We pre-gamed at Grant's apartment while listening to his *Rio Grande Mud* and *Tres Hombres* LPs, back-to-back in full, then rode the Red Line up to downtown and walked over to the Super Bowl party grounds. Before this I had no idea about the level of spectacle that was meant behind "the Super Bowl is coming to town", but they had basically blocked off a quarter of downtown on the east side to stage these concerts and places for vendors. There were three or four nights of bills, with in-the-moment artists from all over Texas such as Hayes Carll, Solange, and Leon Bridges. In comparison to the younger performers, ZZ Top was one of the few legacy acts billed, but they took the stage like heroic conquerors and delivered a fun night like always. Even though you know it's coming, the initial punch of "Jesus Just Left Chicago" immediately following "Waiting for the Bus" still hits like no other song can.

I use "saw" in the past tense because I hope that ZZ doesn't continue to play shows even though they certainly are (according to reports, Dusty had expressed desire for his guitar tech to take over his spot). Billy Gibbons has always been the engine and deservedly the focal point of the Top, but it couldn't possibly be the same without his trusty sidekick Dusty next to him, walking over at the exact right time to rock back and forth with their guitars (the perfect level of choreography), then going back and bringing out raucous cheers from his side of the stage. — TODD HANSEN

I recently convinced myself I needed a Univibe, as one does in the middle of the night when they can't sleep. Mostly, it's because I'd spent the better part of the afternoon listening to the great Jimi Hendrix and his name is pretty much synonymous with the Univibe effect. What effect might that be, you may ask. You would be forgiven for mistaking it for phase shifting, because that's pretty much what it is. Phase shifting occurs when a signal is doubled and the second signal is then flipped 180 degree from the original signal. Then some other signal, be it a low frequency oscillator or an optical signal (blinking lights, usually), "shifts" the position of the flipped signal in relation to the original signal. A Univibe does this in an oblong sort of pattern. Think of an oval where the "highs" are at the top of the oval, then the tone rushes downward towards the low end, then rushes back up. A Univibe has a low end throbb to it. You have heard the Univibe's watery sound on Jimi Hendrix's records as well as on *Dark Side of the Moon*. A phaser usually has a rounder shape and is often more intense than a Univibe but with less pronounced low end. You have heard the ubiquitous MXR Phase 90 on hundreds of recordings from Waylon Jennings to Van Halen to Guided By Voices and beyond. Good phasers are super easy to find in the wild, but good Univibes are not.



I recently took on my very first Univibe, a Lovepedal Pickle Vibe. It is in essence an analog phaser in a miniature enclosure that has been tweaked to mimic the throb of a classic Univibe, rather than a true optical Univibe circuit. There is a single pot for LFO speed though there are internal trimmers that allow for tweaking the speed range and intensity. One light indicates on/off and the other flashes at the speed of the LFO. Simple to use. Well, I was super underwhelmed with it. The low end on this pedal is very exaggerated. If you own amps that accentuate low mids (like I do) it is too much. Adjusting the trimmer for intensity did not help. I was surprised, considering how well-reviewed the Pickle Vibe is online. Makes me wonder if people aren't going 100% after the Hendrix thing and playing Strats into Marshalls. There's a definite push towards upper mids with such a rig and perhaps the Pickle Vibe would work better with such an amp.

It occurred to me after shooting and missing with the Pickle Vibe that perhaps I should try a 2-stage phaser, such as a Phase 45 or a DOD Phasor, as those also offer the more subtle, watery phase sound of a Univibe but without the pronounced low end. I traded the Pickle Vibe to someone for a Phasor and that was what I think I should have done from the start. That said, the Pickle Vibe is built well, is exceptionally small for what it does, and is analog (if not 100% authentic). Lovepedal has discontinued the Pickle Vibe but it is easy to find used for around \$100. Might be a good spot for someone to test out whether that phaser sound they are hearing in their heads is a Univibe or not. — KELLY MENACE

RECORD REVIEWS



Times of Grace *Songs of Loss and Separation*

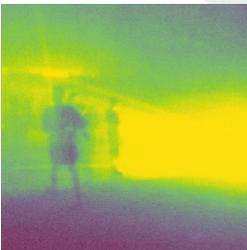
Picture a young, energetic college kid who's a big fan of Killswitch Engage (KSE) in the year 2011. He stumbles upon a Facebook article stating that KSE's original vocalist, Jesse Leach, and Adam D are starting a side project named Times of Grace (ToG). The album, titled *The Hymn of a Broken Man*, is later released and has that early 2000's metalcore vibe like KSE, but also alternative rock, folk, and blues influences, and an air of positivity filled with uplifting themes, poetically meaningful lyrics, and a passionate delivery that cannot be matched. The record's playthrough is less like a typical metalcore album and more like a melodically epic poem which baptizes the listener in chaotic seas of adversity and suffering, allowing the listener to come up with the renewed hope of a breath of fresh air. It's not just a good album; it's a masterpiece! The college kid, of course, is me.

Since the debut release of ToG, many were curious as to where the project was headed. With ten years gone by, many began to wonder if ToG was simply going to be a one-off, underground legend never to be seen again. Thankfully, this was not to be. After ten years of waiting, it's finally here! Since the release of *The Hymn of a Broken Man*, much has happened to Jesse and Adam D other than music. Both have aged a decade, gone through divorce, and experienced serious mental health problems, so the title of this sophomore release being *Songs of Loss and Separation* seems altogether appropriate. Those who have not yet listened to it should be forewarned that

they will not be getting the same experience as the debut. *Songs of Loss and Separation* is darker and much more emotionally weighty. In "Burden of Belief", the singer deals with an existential crisis, questioning his previously held convictions and wondering if he will ever find peace. "Far from Heavenless" deals with the hypocrisy that humanity brings to organized religion, but it is not the typically unintelligent "Meh! Fuck religion!" rant you get from many other metal bands; rather, it is a serious critique which sees the inherent goodness that religion can produce, yet is angry at those who'd use it to manipulate others. In "Medusa", the singer speaks into the bitterness of a toxic relationship which led to divorce, taking the imagery of the gorgon from Greek mythology and painting a disturbing picture of a person becoming accustomed to the coils of a snake choking the life out of him, and so enamored by the gaze of the demonic creature that his heart is turning to stone. "Currents" is probably the darkest song in which an afflicted person contemplates suicide as the answer to a dire problem; in response to this song, "To Carry the Weight" is the saddest song in which the friend of the afflicted person reaches out in attempt to offer help in any way possible, but is ultimately denied. Like I said, this album is DARK!

What is incredible about *Songs of Loss and Separation* is that the masterful melodies, rhythms, and harmonies are so well-constructed that they capture the message of each song in such a way that it almost makes the lyrics unnecessary. Speaking of lyrics, Jesse's and Adam D's complimentary harmonious clean vocals, with harsh vocals strategically placed throughout, are so moving that it's hard to resist to the album without getting emotionally "reset" first. While there are dark elements in the celebrated first record, small beams of light can be found everywhere in it, but this is not the case for the second record. *Songs of Loss and Separation* is a baptism that puts the listeners under the water, but there is no indication that they will ever come up.

The only obvious ray of hope this album offers is the song "Rescue You", which is the heaviest song and most reminiscent of *The Hymn of a Broken Man*, however, it is only the third song, and it does not carry enough hope to bear the terribly sorrowful weight of the others. In ten years, ToG has still retained their unparalleled passion in their musical delivery. I do not know that I'd call this album a masterpiece, but it is certainly something special. Musically, it takes a different direction than the debut: it is slower, less heavy, and less hopeful. While I do genuinely like *Songs of Loss and Separation*, it is likely not an album I will reach for frequently. It's not because it's bad—far from it—it's the toll it takes on me. If the songs had more light at the end of the tunnel, I could see myself reaching for it more often, but this may be one of those records I play when I need to process pain. It has a similar effect to listening to the unexpected masterpiece of 2018 that was *Mirror Reaper* by Bell Witch. All in all, I give *Songs of Loss and Separation* a 4.3 out of 5. A very good album, but an emotionally draining one. — CALEB MULLINS



Lesser Care *Palm/Acquired Taste*

The gothic underground is running *hard* these days. Every day I get targeted emails from post-punk.com, Slicing Up Eyeballs, and other websites telling me about some new gothic post-punk synth duo, or some female fronted drum machine/bass/guitar trio that is always worth the time to check out. I was kind of shocked though when the new single from Lesser Care was recommended to me. For starters, it's an actual band. Real drums,

guitars, some keys, vocals. The drums SNAP, the guitars and synths are whoozy, and the vocals appropriately broody. I looked up the band's Bandcamp page and noticed they listed West, Texas as their home town.

Wait a fucking goddamn minute here. There are bands in West?! And not just bands, but a super solid rad as balls *gothic post-punk band*?! Shock. "Palm" is their debut 7" single. There's an enormous debt owed to this side of the single to not just the '80s masters of darkness but also the '00s revival of tough goth. "Palm" bears more than a passing resemblance to Editors' single "Blood" at first, but then settles into racing tom-toms, gloomy male vocals, and overchorded guitar. There's no vocal hook, this is not a pop song. The guitars are the hook, the drums are the hook, the overall feel and atmosphere is the hook. It's also somewhat reminiscent of early A Place To Buried Strangers if they had eased off the noisier bits. Singer/guitarist A.C. occasionally mutters "I don't want to look/I just want to heal in the morning" then seems to wake up to that fact that he could maybe perhaps actually mean it and starts singing it as though his life depends on it.

Flip side "Acquired Taste" is more of a mid-tempo rocker with more melodic vocals. "I'd love to keep myself from drowning again" A.C. sings before the band sneaks in an honest-to-goodness postcore/stoner metal breakdown in the middle of the song but not done with double kick flourishes and downtuned massive gain guitars. It's a bro breakdown but how a goth rock band would do it. It's a stunning effect and makes me want to hear a band explore this territory more. Postcore but gothic, gothcore? Perhaps.

As of right now this single has sold out of its second pressing but you can download the single from lesser-care.bandcamp.com. The band is getting some attention, announcing a west coast tour for later this fall. Hopefully we can get Lesser Care out to LOUDFEST or such before they blow up and leave West, Texas far behind. — KELLY MENACE

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CONCERT CALENDAR

8/1—Big Gay Drag Brunch @ The 101, Bryan.
2pm.

8/6—Sneaky Pete Rizzo @ The 101, Bryan. 6pm

8/6—13th Hour @ Grand Stafford, Bryan. 7pm

8/6—Mad Rant, Skunk Money @ Murphy's Law,
Bryan. 9pm

8/15—Big Gay Drag Brunch @ The 101, Bryan.
2pm.

8/21—Leavenworth @ Grand Stafford, Bryan.
8pm

8/21—Sykotic Tendencies, Demonic Hen @ The
101, Bryan. 9pm

8/27—The Wilder Blue @ Grand Stafford, Bryan.
8pm

8/27—He Who Cannot Be Named, Heels, Mutant
Love @ The 101, Bryan. 9pm

8/28—12th Jam Music Festival feat. Cam, Day-
glow, Morgan Evans, Luna Luna, Montclair, 13th
Hour, Joe Major, Ben Goldsmith @ Kyle Field,
College Station. 1pm

8/28—Brandon Rhyder @ Grand Stafford, Bryan.
8pm

9/3—Yaupon, Desdimona, Mary-Charlotte Young
@ The 101, Bryan. 9pm

9/25—Colony House, Fleurie @ Grand Stafford,
Bryan. 7pm

10/15-17—LOUDFEST XIII feat. Antique Gardens,
Charm Bomb, Economy Island, Jay Satellite, The
Prof. Fuzz 63, Only Beast, A Sundae Drive,
SkyAcre, The Ex-Optimists, The School of Rock
Metal Show, Manther, Carnage Guisada, Sykotic
Tendencies, Electric Astronaut, Cop Warmth, Boy
Wonder, The Glory Holes, Rickshaw Billy's Burger
Patrol, Mutant Love, The Shut Ups, Peter Panties,
Roma, Yaupon, From Parts Unknown, Wisdom
Cat @ The 101, Bryan.



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