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A COLLECTION OF WRITING
ABOUT MUSIC DEDICATED TO
SURVIVING THE PANDEMIC

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Introduction

Josh

To introduce myself, my name is Josh. I am a black 24 year old from Virginia, and I use he/him pronouns (though I have no preference). This past May I graduated from a standard public university, in the midst of the covid pandemic, with a bachelors of music with a focus in sound recording technology. Due to the lockdown, I didn't have a graduation ceremony or send invitations so my family and friends were mostly notified through my mom's Facebook posts. It has been probably the loneliest year of my life but I am grateful because it certainly could be worse. Supportive people like my girlfriend, to an extent my family, friends (via text & occasional facetime) are keeping me a bit of company. I haven't gotten sick and almost nobody in my immediate circles has either. None of my friends/family have lost their homes over the financial instability this pandemic has brought on us. Materially I have been very lucky and I do not take any of it for granted. Despite all of these things, it has still been a hard year and my mental health has certainly taken a beating. Music has been something that has really helped me get through this time. I have been playing music for the better part of a decade and I think the most rewarding thing about it is how communicative it is. In school they would always tell us "music is a conversation" and they usually meant with other musicians with whom you perform a piece, but I've found the conversations you have with yourself while creating are equally if not more rewarding. Music, like all art, is always personal even if you make an active decision to distance yourself from what you're creating. When I play or write music it always starts as an internal dialogue that I am attempting to transcribe via sound. Emotions and thoughts being evoked and developed, then vocalized with the way I strike a key, pluck a string, the way a big reverb bathes a sound and gives it new depth, etc. My emotional and mental state affects my listening habits as well as my creative process. This year I've listened to all types of music but what has been resonating recently are sounds that are more thoughtful and introspective. "Agony" by Yung Lean, "Replica" by Oneohtrix Point Never, "Phone Won't Charge" by Ivan Ave are all tracks that have stuck with me this year and made me feel less alone. To me these tracks feel like reflections on conversations with yourself and how the events in your life impact you emotionally. This year more than ever I have been very in my head. creating, playing, and

listening to music has been crucial for working through all of the knots of thoughts and emotions and understanding myself on a deeper level. All in all, I see music as a means of self expression, but also as a means of introspection that follows intuition rather than logic or process. Being able to listen to myself better helps me speak to myself better, and getting to know myself this way has been and continues to be one of the most rewarding experiences I have had in life.

I'm still wondering if there's time to rewind
"California Daze" by Peace

Melody Wang

The familiar tune, aptly named,
eases me into a "California daze" —
such a welcome break from anxiety-laden hours
chasing one another in a rat race with no winner

I should have been born in a different decade.
The world moves far too quickly for me:
moments are fleeting while lifetimes pass
and yet — this song, this song is unapologetic
in its unhurried state, luscious intention
coming to fruition in its own time

The portal is thrown open again, flooding me
with nostalgia for a time that wasn't mine,
lemony sunlight reflecting a wistful longing,
the possibility of love deepening
with a forgotten guitar refrain
aching to come to life again

Reel Life

Mountains by Radical Face

Melody Wang

That wistful longing is offset
by measured bars, loveless repetition.
Somewhere in the distance, a heart breaks
and is forced to march on, militaristic
bugles marking cruel ticks of time

A forlorn tale of fathers, mothers,
and the ghosts that refuse to leave us
or perhaps it's the other way around.
I do not know first-hand
how war changes someone
the losses, not all corporeal,
on battlefields reawakened
in shrapnel-sharp flashes.

I do not know what it means
to be denied quiet moments, to have
the loveless carousel of a reel replaying
a lifetime of jagged regrets, to be forced
to swallow another's sorrow
while drowning in my own.

Sensitive souls will always
feel it more deeply, haunted
by stories we've not lived.
I continue to seek solace

in strange recurrent dreams —
perhaps that is enough for now.

Review: “Both Sides, Now,” by Joni Mitchell

Christy Hall

“Rows of flows of angel hair, and ice cream castles in the air, and feather canyons everywhere, looked at clouds that way.” - Joni Mitchell

Do you recognise that brace of couplets? They’re pretty exquisite, even typed, let alone sang right out loud. Indeed, most song lyrics don’t stack up on the page, but then these were penned by Joni Mitchell and she knows her way around the written word. These are of course the opening lines from Joni’s (we’re on first name terms for the remainder of this piece) eponymous 1967 composition “Both Sides, Now,” a song which has been covered in one guise or another a staggering 1,000 times, and counting. This is the song which I associate with her the most, and adore her for. It had its first outing as a recording by Judy Collins, and has gone on to be given the reworked treatment by artists as diverse as Bing Crosby and Carly Rae Jepsen. The two standout versions of the song by the composer herself were committed to vinyl in 1969 and the year 2000, respectively. It’s an extraordinary journey in under ten minutes to listen to both and compare and contrast her vocal dexterity from two periods so far apart. Her wide-ranging, blue-bright yodeling from the sixties and early seventies (think “California” and “Carey”) have been replaced by a hushed, seductive force by the turn of the century. The passing of the years shaped her vocals into an operatic sturdiness; think Doris Day but with a dose of Ritalin thrown in. I trust you to listen to both versions and conclude, like I did, that the version from the millennium year is far superior and powerful. In part this can be attributed to the award-winning arrangement on this recording; the music glides, squeaks with flute and slowly erupts into an understated glissando, keeping you gripped as effectively as Joni’s husky overtures do. This later version leaves you pinned to the back of your rocking chair rather than teetering on the edge of your seat - it’s all the better for doing so.

Lockdown and day-dreaming are the order of the day and as tempted as I was to simply discuss clouds here, à la Bart Simpson and co. in “The Telltale Head” episode, there’s more to explore. I must confess, my introduction to “Both Sides, Now” came not through Joni, or Bing, but by

another American icon of the sixties and seventies - Neil Diamond. His version is a wholly different cocktail to Joni's, but a swashbuckling tonic nonetheless, all rolling chords and "Sweet Caroline" pop vibes. As kids of 6 and 8 or 7 and 9, myself and my sister would spend our summer holidays in Devon or Cornwall with our Grandparents. You know the kind: Grandparents collect scrappy paper coupons from tabloids and over the course of a year, their dedication would be rewarded with discounted trips to West Country caravan parks. A British institution which I suspect has been lost or has faded dramatically.

These were the great British Summers of New Labour, of my favourite football team finally becoming relevant, of Ken Doherty halting Hendry's domination at The Crucible, of first girlfriends, of cheating at apple-bobbing and of the promise of UK sun for a mighty seven days - if you were willing to make the 6-hour car journey from Yorkshire - which of course, most loving Grandparents are. So off we went, to mysterious places, called Bude and Truro and Fowey. Towns as exotic sounding as anything we'd ever known - having not yet succumbed to the cheapo-Spain option for the few family trips we could afford. In the back of Grandad's silver roof-racked Proton; the 400-mile journey outlined by burning rubber foot mats causing nausea. But there was music too, and lots of it: the aforementioned Neil Diamond, Herman's Hermits, Peter and Gordon, The Cascades, John Leyton and lots of Johnny Cash. Nothing as predictable or as bland as The Rolling Stones or The Beatles, thankfully. This bounty of cassette tapes was our earliest musical education, and it remains by our sides to this day. Since 2020 the sharing of a song on Spotify or social media tagging pertaining to a certain band, can kick up memories which require no further explanation. On shorter, less glamorous journeys with our parents, Dad set about introducing us to The Clash, The Sex Pistols, Buzzcocks, The Stranglers, Elvis Costello and endless Thin Lizzy. Contrasting styles - perfect pop and the golden age of punk - sat wonderfully alongside each other for many happy years and car journeys, until it was time for us to carry the baton forward ourselves, into our mid-teens and CDs and Walkmans. Middle of the road, throwaway music was never going to suffice.

Back to clouds. Looking towards the sky now in the tiny porch we're fortunate to have at the front of our flat, I can't look up to the sky to make out shapes representing anything of great importance. I certainly can't look up and see or talk with my late Grandad, but it is a glorious

April day full of sun and wispy white blotches. If I look to the West I can see the beginnings of Hove in the form of rows of white houses, and further than that along the coast come Hampshire, Dorset, Devon and finally Cornwall. And although we're bound to our front doors and bankrupt of so many things for now, I am rich in reflection. And Joni has just come on the speakers.

“Well something's lost, but something's gained, in living every day.”

Elements of Me: A Monoku Sequence

John Mayer, Continuum

Silk~

tomorrow the piercing gaze of a blue fairy wren

sunrise a boat-tailed grackle at the tip of the bough

fallen oak after a storm - neighbors making amends

night falls a broken lampshade shedding the same light

mineral moon elements of me trickling away

The Cure: A Monoku Sequence

John Mayer, Continuum

Silk~

not the code but the cure morning dew

fear of falling

ghost apples in the orchard

lakeside moon contemplating the light in me

misplacing things: the autumn sky's fallen stars

trickling between rocks the paths we take

brittle sky: slowly piecing our lives back together



Nights at The Gasoline Pony

Ormila Vijayakrishnan Prahlad

Back then, the warm southern evenings thrummed
with the voices of friends. Beneath the dusty beams
of the old cafe, the smoke machine's mouth pursed
and blew fluorescent clouds into rooms that
rumbled like a genie's belly as musicians
crooned under halogen lamps.

On the wooden benches by the corner
you mingled with your gaggle of dreamers.
The wire sculptures were magical talismans and
the walls with their steampunk posters yawned like
portals to freedom. Beneath a rusting horseshoe
you scrawled the draft of a poem that
would lead you to an accolade.

Bonds burgeoned - you remember the pale outlines
of a mate's ink-stained hands adjacent to yours, the tell-tale
tendrils of grey in their hair, the paisley motifs on
a friend's tunic glowing psychedelic in the muted light.

You recall with amusement the lusty finger snaps
of the boisterous audience slicing through your
stage fright, your eyes red-rimmed as you quaked
during the open mic. Your reading hiccupped as 747s
thundered overhead, their landings on the tarmac
awkwardly punctuating your lines.

The lull has chipped at your trajectory and
distance has pillaged from your memories
one pixel at a time. Your nights at the Gasoline Pony
are a frayed mirage - dead cinders of the fire with
which you wrote again after years of hiding
in the dark. And here you are now, bargaining for
a chance to relive the past once more.

*The taste was sweeter. The nights of wonder. With friends surrounded. **

** High Hopes, Pink Floyd, Division Bell (1994)*

Feed Your Head

After Jefferson Airplane, “White Rabbit”

Matthew Schultz

A woman waiting for the B Line train at Union Station smashed some kind of mushroom between her teeth. It had the shape of a space capsule. She watched as a troop of black army ants congregated at her feet. The woman spooned out dollops of honey from a jar she had bought that morning at the farmer’s market in Santa Monica. It pooled on the cool concrete platform where the ants had gathered—first one and then another until the entire colony was there to drink from some God’s ambrosia fountain. The woman gave each of the ants a name. And the ants loved the woman spooning out dollops of honey.

Crowds of people filed past the woman waiting for the B Line train to North Hollywood. Each one had a head like a comet. As the trains sped away from the platform, they smeared the landscape as if it were made of wet paint. The woman thought that they must be traveling faster than the speed of light. The ants looked to her like constellations in the night sky. When a voice announced the arrival of the B Line train to North Hollywood, the woman put away her spoon and screwed the lid onto the jar of honey. She bent down to scoop the ants into an oyster shell she had found earlier that morning while walking on the beach. The woman then ate the ants so that she could know what it would feel like to swallow the stars.

CRYING ON THE PENNSYLVANIA TURNPIKE WHILE LISTENING TO DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE'S "I'LL FOLLOW YOU INTO THE DARK"

Robin Gow

I.

I would trade all my memories of the ocean for a glide back
into your shotgun. Snow slathered peaks. Old man trees.
Love me in a forever transit of our making.
The mountains part like fins of the last stone sharks.
Sprawl bed-fallen stuffed animals:
count five dead deer on the side of the road. In high school
my boyfriend and I sang songs to each other
on a now defunct voice recording app.
We sang so many I found myself Googling
"most romantic songs" to try and find new ones.

II.

I'm trying to not make this about us or our parents
or their final faltering. Heaven and hell sound like
two hotels on the side of a graveled small-town Pennsylvania road.
I live with all the landscapes instructions to "get softer" and "get louder."
Let my voice erode. Move, like a guitar pick,
in and out of lovers who lyrics could be about.

III.

I've built too many miniature churches
where I pry open the ceiling in search of your old sound.
The only thing more romantic than breath
is purgatory. Audio files radio waving goodbye. How could I not
rupture? How does anyone let a road travel them
from one door to another? I could keep
one hand on the wheel. We could make
a second insular life. The Faultline speaks a language
or infinite proposals. *Love of mine. Love of mine.*
Love of mine.

A Reflection on Sundays. Review: *Sundays*, by Tanukichan

Dominic Pierre

Sundays, the debut album from Tanukichan (Hannah Van Loon), was released July 13th, 2018, and produced by Toro y Moi's Chaz Bear. The mood set forth on the album cover shows Hannah laying across the hood of a car, looking somewhat sleepy or lost in a haze, which I would describe in this project.

The obscurity, of course, comes by way of reflection, given the title. Sundays. A day often associated with relaxation, nothingness, but somehow smeared with apathy for what's to come and lethargy. All themes in which seem to spread over this album.

From the use of soul-tingling basslines, psychedelic/distorted guitar riffs, dreamy tone meshed with apathetic lyrics, Tanukichan closely encapsulates the Sunday feeling. The fuzziness grows and exists alongside laziness, loss, longing, and undertones of sinking into the in-between space between reality and a dream.

Sundays scratch the head of all who exist sleepily or are caught in a haze of disenchantment, providing a sort of uncertainty that simultaneously exists as a comfort, knowing that lingering lethargy and apathy don't last forever.

It's nearly impossible for me not to go a day without listening to my favorite song from *Sundays*, "The Best." Throughout the pre-chorus of this gem, Hannah sleepily sings, "This feeling sits inside my soul/ I don't know when it took control." and when looking at the last two years in review, there's no other way that I could explain it, aside from that.

The 3-song string of "Bitter Medicine," "Hunned Bandz," and "Natural" is another highlight because of the way it continues to showcase the myriad of emotions. A chunk of them being: longing, lack of control, and acceptance far beyond these times, as I now know them to be. In short, they are temporary and exist only to pass as the days I tend to believe are everlasting. On the days where mentally and emotionally I'm bogged down, I turn to "Bitter Medicine" as a way to grapple with the inevitable longing the human experience guarantees, as well as the understanding that we grow and (hopefully) learn from bad times. Perhaps, that is the bitter medicine.

The opening to "Hunned Bandz" begins with a brief sample of a woman saying, "Everything is Color, everything, you know is, Oh it must be to do with an orange." and serves as an introductory into the song's drug theme. From the psychedelic guitar riffs to Hannah's soft voice throwing the listener into a trance, asking, "Am I too high?" before the chorus reminds you of how little control you have, "Damn, you look like you had a bad time/You look like you don't even know why," Hannah sings graciously.

Immediately after, "Natural" comes on and carries a more upbeat tempo that feels nearly impossible not to bob your head to. The feeling that "Natural" provides is like daydreaming

mid-afternoon, where the cloudy weather subsided, and the sunbeams slowly rise on your skin while you're hanging around friends.

Sundays often serve as the emotional balance beam, where we walk cautiously in fear of falling off and plummeting into yet another mental breakdown.

Organisms are Airships

After John Ghost, *Airships are Organisms*

Mike Ferguson

Unable to trace a mystery of my inversion over the original tease. Sublimely rather than subliminally. Location of the root in a lineage of jazz. An aerostat propelled by the properties and rhythms of life. Is it possible this can become the review? Mine is a deconstruction too, deferring on the notion of adoration beyond composition and playing. Percussion slows then bursts like the trajectory of sternutation. To embody is to live. Organisation of time-travel by drones. Dirigible by the virus that has driven me these past two weeks. Musically speaking, ambience is fused with loop and the percussive, sounds with nomenclature dancing like rabbits. And all jazz is cloning.

A Syncopated Cha Cha
(a dance to Prince's "Raspberry Beret")

Emma Lee

Raspberry is the colour of the subversive.
She's a glittery, gum-chewing, bohemian mystery
whose easing into character as a brash New Yorker
was helped when a broken hearing aid left
her unable to gauge how loud her voice was.
Her syncopated steps: swivel, check, replace,
side, belie a quiet control under the impression
of casualness: the outfit that took several hours
to throw together, wild waves still governed
by a tide. Some shades of raspberry are blue,
a reminder of their undertone of tartness.
An excellent teacher knows he is a catalyst
cheering from the sidelines as his pupil shines.
Unseen hairpins keep the beret in place.
Some things are practised not until the dancer
gets it right, but until she can't get it wrong.

Caught in a Song that Describes my Life

Emma Lee

Why do I call it hers when her house is empty?
It's not the lyric but close enough. It's only
stuck in my head because she and I share a name.
I drift, listless. My normal cave, the record shop,
is shut. I'm not a high street girl: too much colour.
I'm in the market looking at clothes I dare not
buy. Music I can sneak in. A outfit's harder.
If I buy anything, I'll be told it looks wrong,
it's horrible, whatever was I thinking?
Only because it's not a hand-me-down,
not been sanctioned with mother's approval.
I imagine the song girl's house bland
with mismatched second-hand furniture.
A place you could walk out of and never return.
Maybe there's a stray hair, a trace of dust,
a fading scent. More than I'd shrug off
when I leave for a place of my own.
The song girl and I share that too.

a sad day

Tahlia McKinnon

// there was a hurtgirl playlist on repeat, the final time that you broke up with me. but perhaps that's not quite fair – there would have to be something to break, after all.

// it was you who told me that twigs was my namesake. you gave me that. you wore her face upon your shirt the night we met. the same night the world was plunged into pandemic threat. the same night we all lost our footing. and fuck, i lost my footing. you unnerved me, slightly. you unravelled me, quietly. and how humbling it must have been; to watch me fall apart for you.

// *magdalene* became the soundtrack of that summer. it filled the empty space between fucks. echoed the long ghost sounds that grew to be our love language. hands and mouths where words should have been. my self-loathing a sticky manilla heat that soaked the sheets.

// we'd trade thoughts on art and astrology. and once, looking into your deep-set piscean eyes, i told you that sometimes i was convinced you could read my mind - for you knew my body better than i ever had. as if i were a lyric, or a hymn - or a fucking psalm itself.

// and now she triggers me, twigs. every time i hear her voice, i think of you, and the way her face clung to your chest as we sipped whiskey sours at the bar. the way she lay on my hardwood bedroom floor, collecting dust between her teeth as we spent that fateful weekend swimming in each other's skin. you took that from me. you claimed her as your own. and now her voice becomes your voice becomes the voice in my head that tells me that you will never, ever, ever *make a wish on my love*.

“City Sidewalk Christmas Eve 2020”

Mark Blickley



Image by Jana Hunterova

*"In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing
About the dark times."
Bertolt Brecht*

Do my squeaks and squeals sound like frightened cries of hopeful breaths crushed inside a fabric of society that brings exhaled warmth to my facing known yet unseen dangers as I squat before an empty street of holiday cheer fear echoing in each pluck and glide of string, an aural gift of homage to missing loved ones and the magical realism of an old fat white man swathed in red bringing joy to sleeping, uncaged children dreaming of parental oversight and charity down chimney slides into cabin fevers hopefully void of dry coughs and a lack of taste that ignores the seasonal celebration of a poor babe who just three calendar months later will become a thirty-three year old who is humiliated, tortured and brutally slain because of a passionate call for change that replaces hate with love and fear with joy, so I sit on this bleak, frigid sidewalk accepting and resisting the pain of an unraveling Christmas present and uncertain Christmas future with a sweet memory of Christmas past offered up by frozen fingers fiddling musical notes I pray may tender a bit of hope and comfort as glorious attendants fight to save strangers inside the brightly lit hospital across the street.

dirt by kendall :3 retunes your ears. Review: *dirt* by kendall :3

cleo maxwell

what are you waiting for? the second track off *dirt* from kendall :3 keeps you in anticipation until it fully breaks down in the second half.

it starts off as something resembling bon iver's recent output and then throws you with a cinderblock on your ankle into pop-punk territory. the last few seconds reach a fever pitch. she starts screaming, and you — reasonably — get scared. then she leaves you alone. the song ends. it's a running theme. kendall :3 wants you to understand her but she's okay with you tolerating her.

like she says in the next track, "i'm just such a good team player."

the album gestures towards hyperpop. it makes sense to compare her to 100 geecs. but they're extravagant while she's expressive. obsessively so. you can feel her tweaking each drum & synth hit in ableton, getting the autotune just right, designing every aspect for maximum effectiveness. and that attention to detail also informs the emotional aspects of the album. "do you like my playing when you know i'm pissed off?" she asks in "team player."

she wonders if we can see the big picture "like you know me, like you showed me" in the next track, "pin."

kendall :3's skills on the piano are displayed throughout, but you get the sense that she can do it all. there are ripping guitar riffs and electronic glitches and affective vocal performances throughout.

ultimately, *dirt* comes across as an intensely personal journey through the mind of someone who wants to impress their current and ex lovers. someone who wants to be everything to you and an absolute nothing at once.

the peaceful instrumentals give way to frantic evocations of lust, loneliness and listlessness. the screeches and blips come straight from the heart.

if you want enter and exit a relationship at the same moment, take a listen to kendall :3 and understand that you're not alone.

Verse, chorus, verse

Sidney Dritz

With any luck
time travel will stay in fiction
where it belongs.

It's bad enough
when that song comes on

the radio, with the person
I was this time
last year
still caught between the notes.

It's not the being then
that's the problem,
not the yearning
tied into knots, netting

the space between one rib
and the next,
emotional macramé
into a web of conviction

that this moment
which has passed, this moment
still can last, no,

the trouble takes
its first breath
in the space

after the notes die,
the trouble
is not the travel to

a former self,
just the vertigo

of getting back.

'Blackbird singing in the dead of night'
after Lennon/McCartney.

Alison Lock

In the undergrowth, the sub-songs hang
their sadness for the hurt of broken wings.

On blackest nights, we hear the rouse
of medieval hours within a pie baked blind.

Behind the scaffold of a pastry trap, they wait,
as diners clap to see those four and twenty beaks
break through the crust – their flight wings
open-flung to find a dish of dainty fruit.

Again, I listen to the intro, how four chords
dwell in undergrowth, how sub-songs hang
their sadness for the hurt of broken wings.

Review: *Spirit World Field Guide* by Aesop rock

Madison Fay Ford

The hypnotic absurdism of Aesop Rock's lyricism in *Spirit World Field Guide* lends itself well to the psychedelic experience, something that creates an emotion and narrative that are loosely understood while deeply felt. Serving as both album and guide, *SWFG* is long, well thought out, intelligent. It is what it says it is: a guide for the spirit world.

SWFG wavers between uncannily familiar and something weird enough to be not quite of this world, not quite something that vibrates at the same frequency as we do. The beats are unexpected but not off, unique while still being something you can bump along to. His exploration into the psychedelic doesn't fall flat because Aesop Rock has already cultivated such a dedication to uniqueness and strangeness that it's not much of a leap. The psychedelic is really the spiritually strange. *The Impossible Kid*, his previous full length album, was the personally strange, the personal unique. *SWFG* is the spiritual unique, the psychedelic. The difficult to understand. The dense and hypnotic. Trance inducing.

The rhythm of his lyricism throughout the album but especially in the song "Button Masher" creates a spiral fractal of excitement and fear. This song seems to signal Aesop Rock's return to the game as much as it signals his distance from it and everything: "I ain't really seen land in a minute/ AWOL spaceman wave to the Mrs./ Faint transmission after nothing for the summer/ I have never seen so many colors." This is psychonautica: taking a literal trip, a vacation, traveling somewhere above or below or between land. He's isolated, alone, receiving faint transmissions, but he can't help but stop to see the colors. This is a warning that it does not take long to get lost in the spirit world, and once lost, one is lost for a long, long time.

The guide also warns us that spiritual tourism and psychonautica will result in a permanent and increasing discomfort at being in a human body, forever changing the relationship between body and pain. Pain feels personal now, especially in the song "1 to 10": "'rate your pain level on a scale from one to ten'/ I said, 'well doc, I tell you, I feel like I lost a friend.'" Here, the lyrics suggest that physical pain becomes emotional, experiential pain. His lower back hurting becomes existential, as everything does in the psychedelic realm. The lighthearted and comical beat on this track stands out among the rest, but it's not out of character for Aesop Rock to throw in a masterfully mixed short track.

Another short track with a twist of humor, "Dog at the Door" is this album's bad-trip song. Riddled with paranoia and self-talk, this all too familiar feeling is evoked through Aesop's back and forth, his doubting and contradicting himself as he questions who or *what* is outside the door

making his dog bark. The short track works to make the moment extend far into time, a classic psychonautica moment in which time outside moves normally and time inside moves like molasses. The trap that awaits Aesop Rock in his psyche appears to the listener, via the lighthearted beat, as a comical manifestation of paranoia.

Paranoia seems to come with spiritual exploration in this album, as it's also present in "Gauze," in which Aesop Rock tells us what to bring with us on our journey to the spirit world. "A million feet of rope" seems like a lot, to say the least. That, with the hook "you know we're being watched" tells us that the paranoia is justified and there is no preparing for a journey like this one. Here, Aesop Rock begs us to ask the question of what the real difference between paranoia and preparation are. But then again, how does one prepare to leave the realm in which everything they know resides?

Taking a turn down "Pizza Alley," we see all that preparation come to a head. This song is a beautiful example of magical realism, present in much of Aesop Rock's work. Amphibians in a blender, a purple Christ, a bindle full of crystal skulls, this song has magic and wonder. As the song shifts, you feel as though you're turning down a yet darker alley away from this small, strange, magical part of the unknown into somewhere stranger yet. Where "the river boils when it sees me/ The river boils when it sees me." This feels like a chant, a connection, a kind of psychedelic thought that gets stuck in the mind while tripping. This magical realist moment, in which a normal circumstance elicits a magical response, feels like the spiral one goes through upon realizing their power in the astral, psychedelic, or upper realm.

Continuing with magical realism and psychedelia, the language in "Jumping Coffin" is exemplary of the kind of figurative language Aesop Rock uses that connects two entirely different scenes to create disconnected understanding, a kind of feeling rather than knowing: "sugar in his coffee like a seance in the TV room." In affect, sugar in his coffee is like a seance in the TV room. There is a connection, one that is perhaps incommunicable, that is either there or it isn't. Perhaps in the emotional realm, perhaps in smell. Who knows. It feels like the strange threads one weaves between unfamiliar concepts while enjoying LSD or psilocybin, those moments that get reduced to nothing as soon as they are communicated.

One thing that is difficult to communicate about the psychedelic experience that Aesop Rock does well in "Sleeping Car" is that it is a terrifying experience, top to bottom. He says "got lost got found/ got a feeling I should lose it all again," which says clearly that it fucking sucks here, in this reality, and even if it's scary over there, in the psychedelic realm, it's way cooler, too. It's a fear that one learns to chase, a fear that is illuminating in its experience. He's saying it's worth it, the fear.

From fear to comedy, absurdism to magical realism, this album covers an array of experiences, feelings, and affects that all in some way seem to relate to a psychedelic, spiritual, or enlightening experience. One that comes with a slight toll and requires preparation, but is worth it nonetheless. In this way, the content of the album reflects the mission, the listening experience reflects the experience being told. The album is a lot to wade through: it's long and intimidating lyrically. At the same time, listening is rewarding and enlightening; the album is an artistic experience in keeping up. In short, *Spirit World Field Guide* is a trip of its own.

We Choose Our Ghosts

Boo! Human,

Joshua Jones

I'm sick of debating definitions of time with ghosts

And machines demanding their own language

It's the clocks riding the horizon

Something Kind

Tim Melina Theo Bobby

Joshua Jones

In between the body and the mind lives the voice

We each agree our dreams define us

Distinguishes creature from being

Another role where the movie ends nice

Let's just face it, the ending is where they all die

Blade of grass you left behind, in the dawn of something kind



Morning Glory's Lament

Stella Envers

Elevator music is blaring over this meadow
Of sweet grass and a riot of
wildflower flash dance

thundercloud reads yesterday's news
reweaves your pillow with rosegold threads of wild love
and silver threads of savaged light

I'm not afraid to be here
just tired to meet today with half-wasted salutations and stale pleasantries

For want of explosives
For want of heart-thump and dusklust
For want of beat and breath and pulse
For want...

[because god knows how much I'd miss the sound of laughter]

There has always been stardust cast over our shadows
Desires held magically afloat
skimming the surface of this mountaintop lake

I'll be a rowboat to take you to the otherside

You have to jump in, I'm afraid
Into your most human condition
Your skinsuit sewn with fight-tooth-and-nail (awaits you)

This wholly worrisome about tomorrow
This quiver and shake and fret about
[All the who's it and what's it
Questions without end]
And still the forever-more-dare-to-risk-dare-to-dare!

This b-side track on repeat
...skip...
...skip...
...skip...

Review: *Downtiming* by Camp Trash

Hunter of 3AM

The first time I listened through *Downtiming*, I didn't expect to fall in love with it. I was immediately impressed with the polished, cohesive sound and the forward vocals, but after the four song EP ended it hadn't stuck in my head. I save albums and EPs to playlists, and rotate through them for a while to give everything a few chances. As I listened through *Downtiming* a few more times, and familiarity started to set in, my respect for the EP built dramatically; I couldn't stop coming back to it. On *Downtiming*, the effortless sounding poppy good vibes are a disarming veneer over complex and well-crafted songwriting that gets better the more you listen.

The vocals are refreshingly up front and audible. The delivery and style reminds me favorably of Blink-182 (an apt comparison in general for the album) and Mansions' Dig Up the Dead. Forward, strong, but with the ability to make an emotional connection. The lyrics are a nice break from usual emo subject matters, at times presenting concrete imagery ("*Bobby put your shoes on...Let's go crash your trans-am*") and at others more abstract and open to interpretation in a stream of consciousness style:

*"Seeing visions of you beating the shit out of your neighbor's dog
There's three boys dead out on your front lawn
And their voices calm me down
They stopped reaching out ever since you stopped to notice them
Do you think I really understand how?"*

Once I started listening closely, I kept being surprised by the diction. There are entire stanzas without rhymes. I'm so conditioned to expect rhymes everywhere that this draws me into the lyrics. The style pays off, as the stanzas are more interesting in their imagery not being hemmed in by the requirement to rhyme, and it makes the lines that do rhyme pop even more via the contrast.

I'm likewise drawn into the instrumentals, where the musician's influences shine through but change seamlessly moment to moment. *Weird Carolina* opens with warm fuzz reminiscent of classic rock ala Neil Young's *Change Your Mind*, slips into quick-picked arpeggio that's a cross between Pinback and Blink, before embracing full emo-pop-punk warmth. The guitar on *Potomino* always catches my ear. I'm not sure if it was played on an acoustic-electric guitar, with both the strings and the amp mic'd, or if acoustic and electric guitar tracks were separately recorded, but either way the effect contributes to a pleasingly full sound.

At the time of writing this, I believe Camp Trash is working on their first full length album. I'm looking forward to hearing more upbeat and deceptively sticky hooks, and also interested to see

if they include anything slower or more melancholy. Regardless, I'm sure it will sound as deceptively effortless, and I can't wait to have it on my rotation!

5/5 bottles of Aspirin.

Review: *Spiritual Instinct* by Alcest

Sukanya Menon

A heavy mist settles gently upon the lightness of day, its fading arms slowly embracing the kingdom of the sun; its wispy breath engulfing concrete buildings in a curtain of ashen grey. I am at home, as I have been for the better part of the year. Lost in a prelude of instrumental blackgaze, I feel a voluptuous cascade of sentimental tunes overcome me. I imagine frontman Neige from the post-metal band *Alcest* breathing life into an otherwise bleak day, granting it the fleeting quality of something illusory.

I'm listening to their sixth album, *Spiritual Instinct*, which begins with the atmospheric 'Les Jardins de Minuit.' The melody is a poignant reminder of a devastating present. It speaks to me in blackened hues, stirring an ecstatic frenzy in the bones.

spiritual instinct
give me the strength
to embrace
the harshness of this world

sings Neige in French, in his midnight garden where time has stood still since the beginning. Just as this powerful opener dawns on me, the entire neighbourhood is enveloped in a haze, sunshine now streaming in through odd pockets. It seemed the music I was listening to had taken on a life and shape of its own: a black melody ebbing and flowing, a wave seeking the shore. 'Protection,' second in line, instantly lays my soul bare. Neige's raspy screams pierce my memory, summoning to the surface, meanings of certain French words I had long forgotten. The song revived that part of me which was lost to perpetual sleep; reactivating, in its wake, inner conflicts that cause extreme anguish. But the song also gave me the strength to rise above the struggle and embrace a fatally flawed world. The lyrical hook of *Protection* was a swelling sea protecting us from collapsing in on ourselves. My arms are dotted with goosebumps.

When 'Sapphire' begins, so do the flutters in my chest. Its delicate harmony slowly penetrates my skin, and I swear the hairs on my arms, they dance with rapture. 'L'Île Des Morts,' on the other hand, harbours a fluid affair of the instruments. The song is, at best, a question; an exploration; a spiritual journey through death and its aftermath. Despite being the longest song on the album, I am tempted to stick it out till the end. And just as it hauntingly fizzles out, I am

pulled into the next number: 'Le Miroir.' The symphonic beauty of this song reaches such heights as to leave me asomatous. Like an ever-flowing blackened stream joining with a fuzzy ocean, I am submerged in layers of instrumentation. This song, which means 'The Mirror,' forces me to look into one. It forces me to see beyond the reflected image, and into those inaccessible parts of my inner self.

The album ends with the titular Spiritual Instinct, a sonic narrative that lulls me to sleep, only I am not asleep but awake. I can feel the music with every fibre of my being. It is like a warm blanket that protects me from the cold, and in its end, leaves me craving more.

The album cover displays a sphinx, which symbolizes both the spiritual and feral sides inside all of us. Spiritual Instinct is just as strong as it is beautiful. The darker themes of the album are punctuated by dreamy melodies arranged in melancholic patterns. While it shies away from traditional metal roots, it retains a certain warmth and depth that a lot of metal lacks. It is ephemeral, but it is also eternal.

Six songs and a running time of 41 minutes, that is how long it took me every day to escape from an utterly chaotic world to a soft, shoegaze-tinged paradise. Alcest, for me, was an ethereal entity. It came to me when all else was lost. It beckoned me to look inside. It saved me, healed me, and exorcised the demons within me. The year 2020 was an eye-opener for many. Nothing was in its right place. Uncertainty wore the crown and hysteria reigned. Death and decay lay upon a tainted land. It felt like the end, truly.

Trapped. Isolated. Out of touch. I spent hours, days, weeks, months... at home. Locked in, so it seemed. But music was always the key; my best friend, my therapist, my ticket to self-exploration.





THANK YOU FOR READING