

Rolling Stone

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EXCLUSIVE

Paris Breaks Her Silence

**Michael
Jackson's
Daughter
on Family
Secrets
and Her
Father's Pain**

Run the Jewels

**Hip-Hop's
Most Intense
New Truth-
Tellers**

U2 Revisit 'The Joshua Tree'

**HOLLY THROSBY
LAURA MARLING
HOLY HOLY
THE SHINS**





TALKING POINT
John Oliver
photographed
in New York on
January 8th,
2017. Page 64



RS785

“All the News That Fits”

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ON THE COVER Paris Jackson photographed in Los Angeles on Dec. 12th, 2016, by **David LaChapelle**.

Correspondence

Love Letters & Advice



Ultimate Revenge

I ALMOST CHOKED ON MY Cereal when I read Emma Stone's interview [RS 784] – more specifically, the part where she said she'd been told she was hindering the process of making a movie by voicing her opinion. How on earth could the opinion of a strong, confident woman be dismissed in such a way? Oh, that's right, I forgot – it happens every day, in every corner of the world. Her success is the ultimate answer to all the chauvinist pigs who've treated this incredible actor in such a disrespectful manner. May their careers be over soon.

Carla Bettens
Mona Vale, NSW

Separated at Birth

COULDN'T HELP BUT NOTICE when looking at the front cover of the Feb issue just how much Ryan Adams looks like Jason Bateman (or is it the other way around). Surely if a biopic is ever made of the great singer/songwriter, then Bateman should be ready for the call.

Gary P
Kyneton, Vic

Animal Cruelty

THANK YOU FOR HIGHLIGHTING the vile "trade" in millions of suffering dogs in 'Puppy Mills' [RS784]. It happens all over Australia too. Please check out oscarlaw.org for excellent info and resources on fighting the puppy mills/farms both here and overseas. Really appreciate the article.

Avalon Sperring
Forestville SA

Lives Well Lived

LOVED THE WORDS OF WISDOM section with fascinating people featured [RS 784]. Phil Collins and Yoko Ono are proven survivors having experienced extreme highs and lows. They're both certainly wise. It's true that life's lessons are often

learnt the hard way. What Collins and Ono show is that true talent will always triumph.

Carol Nathaniel,
Riverview, NSW

Bowie Lives

I'VE BEEN A BOWIE FAN FOR years. When it was first released I wasn't that enamoured with *Blackstar* – surprising considering I actually quite enjoyed *Tin Machine*. Thanks to your 2016 Albums of the Year piece I gave the album another go and have to say I'm blown away by the production values and melodic nuances. Tony Visconti deserves as much praise as the man himself for this collaboration. Thank you for showing me something old-ish that's new again and keeping the music fresh.

Drum Sound Nerd
Pahran, VIC

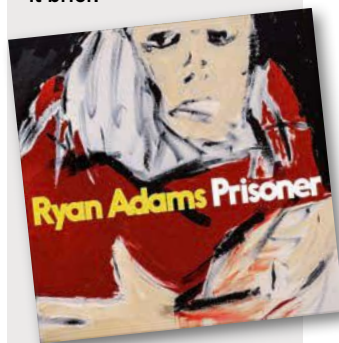
Metal Gods

SO THE GRAMMYS PLAYED A Metallica song as Megadeth walked to the stage to accept their award. Poor Dave Mustaine – will he never escape his past? The Gods of Metal have a wicked sense of humour!

Patrick Dawson,
Cronulla, NSW

Write to us and win

Every letter published will win a copy of Ryan Adams' new album, *Prisoner*, with thanks to EMI Music. Write to us and tell us your thoughts on the magazine or life in general. But please, keep it brief!



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LISTS

5 THINGS WE LEARNED HANGING OUT WITH PARIS JACKSON

Michael Jackson's daughter shares some extra takeaways from cover-story interview



GALLERY

IN THE STUDIO WITH TIRED LION

Perth quartet bunker down with Violent Soho's Luke Boerdam to work on their debut LP.



Chappelle

COMEDY

BEST COMICS IN HISTORY

From Louis C.K. to Joan Rivers, Dave Chappelle and Jerry Seinfeld, we rank the greatest comedians of all time.



EXCLUSIVE

LIVE AT THE RS OFFICE

We host a stripped-back performance from hip-hoppers Horrorshow, plus White Lung stop by for a solo set.



Kim Gordon

MUSIC NEWS, AROUND THE CLOCK

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"A GREAT
NIGHT OF
CLASSIC
SONGS FROM
AN ICONIC
PERFORMER"

- SEATTLE MUSIC NEWS

DON HENLEY

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JEWEL



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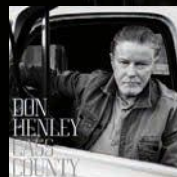
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RandomNotes

U2's Special Delivery

The Edge performed U2's "Pride (In the Name of Love)" at the Women's March in L.A. Five days earlier, Bono (pictured with wife Ali Hewson at Paris Fashion Week) also displayed his humanity by sending pizzas to fans in Dublin waiting all night for tickets to the *Joshua Tree* tour.



Monáe's Moment

Janelle Monáe stepped out in L.A., where she's on the awards-show circuit for her roles in *Moonlight* and *Hidden Figures*. But she's not giving up music: "There will be a new album. I don't know when."



PUCKING UP
Justin Bieber took to the ice during a celebrity hockey game in L.A.



Isbell Cranks the Volume

Jason Isbell's dark 2015 album, *Something More Than Free*, was one of the best alt-country LPs in years. But he wants to have more fun on the follow-up, which he's been recording in Nashville with producer Dave Cobb (right). "The driving force was more of a rock & roll influence," Isbell says. "You might shed some tears, but for once there's a chance you might also dance a little."

CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM RIGHT: NEIGHBORHOODS APART; GETTY IMAGES, 4



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Rock & Roll

IN GOD'S COUNTRY

Larry Mullen Jr.,
Adam Clayton,
the Edge
and Bono

How U2 Got Back to 'The Joshua Tree'

After the rise of Trump, the band decided to bring
its first masterpiece back to life with a huge tour

BY ANDY GREENE

MIDWAY THROUGH 2016, U2 FACED AN UNCLEAR FUTURE. They had cut their highly successful Innocence + Experience Tour short in order to work on their next album, *Songs of Experience*, which was nearly finished. But they eventually decided that the material they had recorded didn't properly address the chaos of current events, from the rise of Donald Trump to England's separation from the European Union. "We realised that we needed to put the album on ice for a minute to really think about it," says guitarist the Edge. "The world is a different place now, and we needed the opportunity to reconsider everything."

[Cont. on 12]

[Cont. from 11] Instead, U2 decided to mark the 30th anniversary of 1987's *The Joshua Tree* – the album that catapulted them from arena act into the biggest band in the world, featuring hits like “Where the Streets Have No Name” and “With or Without You” – with a massive stadium tour. *The Joshua Tree* was U2's first album directly influenced by American music and politics, taking aim at the Reagan administration's support of bombings of Central American countries (“Bullet the Blue Sky”) and at silence about mass slaughters by the Chilean government (“Mothers of the Disappeared”). “Those were difficult, dark times, and it feels like we're right back there, in a way,” says the Edge. “We've never given ourselves the chance to celebrate our past because we've always looked forward. But we felt this was a special moment and this is a special record.” In an interview posted on U2's website, Bono added, “It's quite an opera.... I've sung some of these songs a lot, but never all of them.... It's gonna be a great night.”

The *Joshua Tree* 2017 tour will launch in Vancouver in May, before moving on to the United States and Europe. It sold more than a million tickets in a day, with extra shows immediately added in L.A., Chicago and East Rutherford, New Jersey. The run will also include U2's first major U.S. festival appearance, at Bonnaroo in Manchester, Tennessee, where they'll headline alongside current hitmakers like the Weeknd and Chance the Rapper. “We did a lot of festivals early on,” says the Edge. “I always remember them very fondly. There's a kind of gladiatorial aspect to a festival, which always keeps you on your toes in a good way.”

The tour marks the first time U2 have ever played a complete album live, a format most recently used by Bruce Springsteen on his *River* tour, which became the most successful tour of last year, grossing \$268 million. U2 might take a different approach and avoid playing the album in sequence. “We may not want to start with Track One, ‘Where the Streets Have No Name,’” says the Edge. “We might need to build to that moment.” Adds bassist Adam Clayton, “We might bundle some of the songs together with other ones that are thematically similar [from other albums]. We're going to experiment until it feels right.”

For hardcore fans, the show will be an opportunity to hear deep cuts like “Exit” and “Trip Through Your Wires,” which the band hasn't played since the 1980s. “Red Hill Mining Town” – a moving ballad about the 1984 strike by the National Union of Mineworkers in England, which was originally going to be the album's first single – has never been played live. “It fell into the midtempo malaise,” says Clayton. “Now, I think we can figure out ways to get around that.”

I WILL FOLLOW
The Edge and Bono live in 1987.



“Those were difficult, dark times,” says the Edge of 1987. “It feels like we’re back there, in a way. We’ve never celebrated our past.”

Willie Williams, the band's longtime concert director, who has designed its stages since 1982, says the tour's production will be far sparer than U2's last stadium run, 2009-11's 360 Tour, which featured a spaceship-like stage, one of the largest in concert history. “This has come as a get-out-of-jail-free card for how to follow U2 360,” says Williams. “That really was the stadium show to end all stadium shows.” Williams is taking inspiration from the primitive 1987 tour production but incorporating new ideas, including a B stage shaped like a tree. “Expectations are stratospherically higher than they were 30 years ago,” he says. “But there will be nods to how it was back then.”

The tour will inevitably invite criticism that U2 are cashing in on nostalgia. The very word causes Clayton to let out an agonized groan. “It's not something we would be interested in,” he says, calling the tour “a starting point [about] what the last 30 years have done to us all.” He adds that the shows are a chance to redo a difficult time in U2's history: “The original *Joshua Tree* tour should have been an extraordinarily joyful opportunity. But it was actually quite a tough time trying to deliver those songs under the pressure of growing from

an arena act to a stadium act. I, for one, don't remember enjoying it very much.”

After the tour wraps in August, the group plans to resume *Songs of Experience* and then eventually pick up the Innocence + Experience Tour, which never played outside major markets. That show featured a set heavy on new songs and a revolutionary stage with a wall of video screens that the band performed within. “We feel like that tour wasn't finished,” says the Edge. “We'd love to finish it. That's the working assumption at the moment, but things can change and nothing's written in stone as of yet.”

U2 are still figuring out how to navigate their place in popular culture after the disappointing rollout of 2014's *Songs of Innocence*, which was heavily criticised when it appeared on iPhones everywhere, whether users wanted to hear it or not. “We are somewhat swimming against the tide,” concedes Clayton, adding that he's confident U2 can buck current musical trends. The band emphasises that its embrace of the past is temporary and that it's eager to get back to new music. “We all very much feel like [*Songs of Experience*] needs to be out by the end of this year,” says Clayton. “In some ways, the experience of playing those *Joshua Tree* shows inevitably couldn't help but have some impact on what that record ultimately becomes when we finish work on it.”

One major challenge will be to find the right way to distribute the album. “My plan now is for Bono and I to sneak into everyone's house and put a CD under their pillow,” says the Edge with a laugh. “But unfortunately, that doesn't seem to be getting much support from the rest of the band.”

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Tim Rogers will be speaking at Brisbane's Rock & Roll Writers' Festival in April.



Tim Rogers' Top Five

The Rock & Roll Writers' Festival returns to Brisbane on the weekend of April 1st and 2nd, bringing with it some of the world's best authors, songwriters and lyricists. You Am I frontman Tim Rogers will be speaking, and to mark the occasion here he assembles some of his favourite writers, books and lyricists...

Jeffrey Bernard

Jeffrey wrote a column called "Low Life" in the British *Spectator* magazine from the mid-Seventies. I came to him via the Keith Waterhouse play *Jeffrey Bernard is Unwell*, though to be true, more because my hero Peter O'Toole played him in



Bernard

the original stage version. Though they've been described as "suicide notes in weekly instalments" I find his anecdotes from a life among the demi-monde of London's Soho district to be like the skin of fat on the top of a neglected stew. The suety gloop is the succulence and squander from a life fully lived. He can be boorish but never a bore. His tales from the gutter were often lit by the stars and gave more to me

than a hundred grandiloquent social commentaries. The column is the perfect form for him. Heavy drinkers share a flaw with those with a heavy intellect – they often fail to realise when folks have stopped listening.

Lorrie Moore

Bark. Like everything wonderful in my life, I was given this book. Short fiction was only two or four Nabokovs, Dorothy Parker and Salinger's *Nine Stories* until these past years. Then Barry Hannah, Nam Le, George Saunders and Lorrie came over and I'll keep cooking as long as they stay. After each story in *Bark* I'd gasp as if being punched in the gut or a love walked through the door unexpectedly.

Julia Jacklin

Like other songwriters I adore, I have to take her lyrics in little instalments, then walk away, a little lighter, let the different scenes swim in my thoughts until normal weight is resumed. I'll sit with the image, the scene, listen to the song again and start the process... again. She pulls focus, then goes for the close-up in a way that has structure, but doesn't feel manipulative or laboured. This year as well the lyrics and delivery of Camp Cope's record flays me. Again to me I receive the songs

cinematically. More Hal Hartley than Bruckheimer. The Lowlands from Canberra, too. A friend suggested that I was so drawn to these performers because I have a teenage daughter. I disagreed.

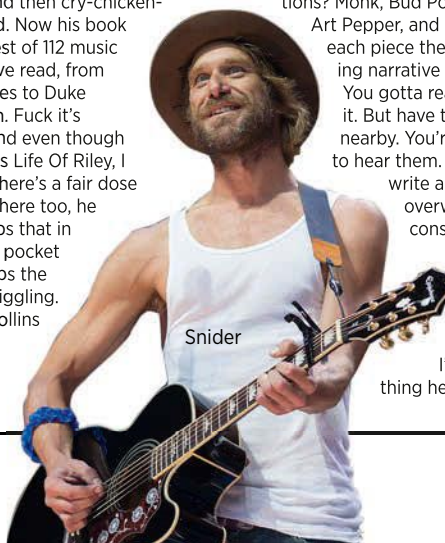
Todd Snider

He's been making records for 20 years and I didn't notice until I was in Fort Wayne, Indiana, and an old friend gave me two of his records, his book *I Never Met a Story I Didn't Like* and keys to a car to get me to Cleveland. Though I mistrusted his handsomeness, he writes songs that can be choke-on-a-chicken-bone funny and then cry-chicken-soup sad. Now his book is the best of 112 music books I've read, from the Eagles to Duke Ellington. Fuck it's funny, and even though I envy his Life Of Riley, I reckon there's a fair dose of hurt there too, he just keeps that in his back pocket and keeps the crowd giggling. Henry Rollins tells this story of meeting

Hubert Selby Jr. and asking for advice. Hubert says "keep yer dick off the page" or somesuch. Pretty sure he wasn't referring directly to the fleshy pulp. Todd's a great storyteller. And still handsome as hell. So while I'll follow him to Hades, he can fuck right off.

Geoff Dyer

But Beautiful. Me talking about writing about jazz is like painting a gardening about dancing about Architecture in Helsinki. Geoff Dyer has the chutzpah to not settle for writing critically or scholarly pieces about *giants* of jazz but short fictions? Monk, Bud Powell, Mingus, Art Pepper, and inbetween each piece there is a continuing narrative about Duke? You gotta read it to believe it. But have the records nearby. You're gonna *need* to hear them. How he can write about this overwhelmingly consuming music without shibboleth is mystifying to me. While you're at it, I'd get everything he's written.



Snider



HEAVIER THINGS
Mayer at Capitol
Studios in 2014

Mayer's Heartbreak Diary

Following a breakup, John Mayer bought a Porsche and some Brioni suits, and recorded like it was 1977

BY JENNY ELISCU

THE ONES THAT DESTROY ME are the ones I like best," says John Mayer, sitting next to a massive recording console at Los Angeles' Capitol Studios. He just blasted "Still Feel Like Your Man", one of more than 30 songs he wrote beginning in late 2014, during a period of "intense sadness". He had recently split up with his on-again, off-again girlfriend Katy Perry and was going through some deep soul-searching, which yielded his most emotionally revealing music yet. "It's beyond a breakup record," he says of *The Search for Everything*. "It's about me. Proudly, it is, as my therapist says, a study into the metaphysics of absent love."

Mayer says he was looking for a change after 2013's *Paradise Valley*, the second in a pair of more low-key Americana albums.

"I wanted to make a record that was big from the outset," he says. "I wanted my Seventies rock album." So he started writing songs from scratch at Capitol, inspired by lavishly produced and famously expensive albums like Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*. He bought a Porsche and hired a driver to take him to the studio every day, arriving in a Brioni suit, to maximise the feeling he was making a "1977 roll-to-the-studio-in-a-suit record".

In 2015, Mayer took a break and joined Dead & Company for a pair of highly successful tours. "That band taught me how to be a piece of something," he says. He returned to record with bassist Pino Palladino and drummer Steve Jordan, a rhythm section he's played with since 2005.

Inspired by Drake and Rihanna, Mayer is avoiding a traditional release plan. In-

stead, he is putting music out in "waves", a few songs a month (the first four came out in January) until a physical LP this autumn. "It forces me to finish the songs," he says. The process also allows him to tweak according to fan feedback; in late January, he was working on "Helpless", a guitar-heavy jam – the kind of song fans noted was absent from the previous set. He was also finishing "Emoji of a Wave", a heartbreak ballad with harmonies from the Beach Boys' Al Jardine and son Matt. "I've never in my life been crying and writing at the same time," Mayer says. "I've been trying to make this record for the longest time."

Even once the LP comes out, Mayer plans to continue releasing small batches of songs. "This record is alive and being made all year," he says. "*The Search for Everything* is over when I tweet it's over." 🎸

Horrorshow

Sydney hip-hop duo flirt with death and dancefloors on 'Bardo State'

1 Old School

Rapper Nick Bryant-Smith (aka Solo) and producer Adit Gauchan, both 29, go all the way back to high school. Recently they travelled to Nepal, the home country of Gauchan's family. "We literally handed in the master of the album to the record label the day before we left," says Gauchan.

2 Stuck in the Middle

Their fourth album's title, *Bardo State*, is a reference to the Bardo Thodol, aka the Tibetan Book of the Dead. "I learned about the Buddhist concept of 'Bardo', which relates to an intermediate state of being," says Bryant-Smith. "Without realising it, a lot of references on the LP apply to that concept, and I definitely feel like I'm stuck between states in my own life right now."

3 Dance, Sucka

Horrorshow want fans to exercise their brains and their booty with *Bardo State*. "We've been running these day club parties called One Day Sundays, which Adit and a bunch of our

crew DJ at," says Bryant-Smith. "Being around dancefloors so much, there's been a desire to make music that'll work on a dancefloor that you can move to, but also it still being important for me to communicate something more intricate with my lyrics."

4 On the Road Again

Horrorshow will be hitting the road in a big way in 2017. "There's gonna be heaps of touring around the country," says Gauchan. "We'll have a whole album of new songs to play that are fuckin' sick and I can't wait for people to hear them."

5 Proud as Punch

"I feel proud, we worked really hard on the album," says Bryant-Smith. "Not in a laboursome way where it felt like hard work, but in a way where we put everything we had into this record and really tried to step things up in terms of our songwriting and production and singing. Our skillset has gotten a lot stronger since our last record and we wanted to bring all that to the table and pour it into this record."

JAMES JENNINGS



OH THE
HORROR

Gauchan (left)
and Bryant-
Smith

Avery has just released his "really crazy-sounding, cinematic album".



Cameron Avery's Sonic Adventure

Tame Impala's bassist reveals solo album

BY BARNABY SMITH

CAM AVERY HAS FRIENDS IN HIGH places. Not only does he remain a central cog in such acclaimed bands as Tame Impala and Pond, since moving to the United States he has developed close friendships, and musical partnerships, with in-demand producer and singer-songwriter Jonathan Wilson, as well as Alex Turner of the Last Shadow Puppets and Arctic Monkeys.

Yet on his first solo album, Avery is indelibly his own man. A startling exercise in restraint, *Ripe Dreams, Pipe Dreams* sees the multi-instrumentalist, as he puts it, "step out from behind the distortion" of those other bands and his own collective the Grownl, towards an aesthetic inspired by Lee Hazlewood, Serge Gainsbourg and the Rat Pack. The result is a mellifluous set of songs that recalls Nick Cave's gothic croon and the introspective wit of John Grant.

"It's less produced and has more nostalgic sounds than the stuff Kevin [Parker, Tame

Impala] is doing," says Avery. "It was about capturing the emotive content through lyrics and chords."

The album is proof that the fabled Perth psych scene, of which he was once part, is far from homogeneous, with members taking increasingly diverse artistic paths.

"Everyone's got their own shtick now, and that comes with age. The separation of us all over the world [Avery lives in New York] makes us become individuals, making it redundant to say we all walk and talk the same and make the same kind of music."

The LP was recorded over two years as Avery snatched studio time between touring as a means of processing two failed relationships. Needless to say, the project snowballed.

"I thought that if nothing else happens with my solo thing, at least when I'm old I can look back and say, 'Remember when I was 27 and I made a really crazy-sounding, cinematic album?'"

"It was about capturing the emotive content through lyrics and chords."

Fight the Power: The Best Anti-Trump Protest Songs

Dozens of artists have already released scathing indictments of the new administration. Here are some of the most powerful



Billy Bragg

'The Times They Are A-Changing Back'

The British folkie rewrote Dylan's anthem as a call to resistance, adding lyrics about "Mexicans, Muslims, LGBT and Jews".



Carole King

'One Small Voice'

"The emperor's got no clothes on," King sings in a new take on her classic ballad that balances its indignation with a sense of radical purpose.



Fiona Apple

'Tiny Hands'

Cleverly sampling the P-Grabber-in-Chief himself, Apple chants "We don't want your tiny hands/Anywhere near our underpants" over a marching beat.



Ryan Adams

'Karma Police'

Adams' live acoustic cover of Radiohead's anti-authoritarian anthem strips it to its core of raw desolation.

JOHN DOLAN



EX MARKS THE SPOT
Georgia Mooney,
Katie Wighton, Elana
Stone, Hannah Crofts
(from left)

The Power Of Four

All Our Exes Live In Texas put four solo careers on hold to combine their country-folk superpowers

BY BARRY DIVOLA



THEY COULD JUST AS EASILY HAVE been called You're the Reason Our Kids Are Ugly or Dropkick Me Jesus Through the Goalposts of Life. After taking up the challenge in 2013 to form a country-folk group to play a handful of songs from *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* at a show, four jazz-trained Australian musicians started scratching their heads about a band name.

They googled "best/worst country song titles". After a slight tweak to George Strait's "All My Exes Live In Texas", they had a winner.

For Elana Stone (accordion), Katie Wighton (guitar), Hannah Crofts (ukulele) and Georgia Mooney (mandolin), who had all learned classical piano, this was uncharted territory. With only four weeks until the performance, three-quarters of the band had to find their way around new instruments. But it worked and everyone marvelled at the way their voices sounded together.

Three years later, All Our Exes Live In Texas have a debut album called *When We Fall* and four solo careers on the backburner.

Sitting under a tree in a Newtown cemetery in Sydney's inner-west, Stone and Wighton recount the unorthodox path they've taken to this point. For example, few groups can say they have played with both an AC/DC tribute band and the Backstreet Boys. Of their stint on the latter's 2015 Australian tour, Wighton says, "Well, Jesus, that was just about the coolest thing in my entire life."

They put their name forward almost as a joke, thinking there was no way a little known group would get a look-in with the biggest boyband of the Nineties. Then three days before the tour, they got the call. It was happening. "We got all this online trolling from Backstreet Boys fans saying, 'Why didn't we get Jess Mauboy?' and 'We wanted Guy Sebastian!'" says Wighton.

"My favourite was 'I'll be at the bar getting UDLs when you're playing!'" says Stone.

But as the tour progressed, they won over audiences with their stirring harmonies, tales of heartbreak and endurance, and wry onstage patter. They even bonded with the Backstreet Boys and can report that Howie is the sweetest and chattiest of the bunch.

The four women have their own soccer team, called Such Good Friends, so when it came time to make the video for their single "Tell Me", they knew exactly what they wanted. Drafting in Grinspoon's Phil Jamieson, comedian Lawrence Leung, *Home & Away* actor Jackson Gallagher and Stone's brother Jake (ex-Bluejuice) to play their ex-boyfriends, they intercut scenes of the break-ups with a comically violent soccer match between the two sexes.

"I'm clumsy and I tend to fall down a lot when we play soccer," says Wighton of her on-field skills. "Elana's really fast and her tactic is to run straight at other players and scream at them."

"They call me The Butcher," says Stone.

The quartet feel they have different strengths within the group, too.

"I'm older than the other girls, so I feel very confident in the sphere of music and performance," says Stone. "But the worlds of administration and IT and business elude me quite strongly. And these guys are whiz kids at all that stuff. For

example, Katie's our accountant and bookkeeper."

"Hannah works at Music NSW and she's just a gun when it comes to management and industry stuff," says Wighton. "And Georgia has an incredible aesthetic and she's a perfectionist. She slaved over the graphic design for our album cover and she'd never done that before."

"It's a lot of work when you're promoting yourself as a solo artist and it feels a bit narcissistic and navel-gazey," says Stone. "To have three other women who are equally invested and have other skills that you don't have is a complete relief. We're like this problem-solving force with Exes. It feels a bit like a superhero thing."

"We're like this problem-solving force with Exes," says Stone. "It feels a bit like a superhero thing."

I'VE ALWAYS ANNOYED PEOPLE," says Lena Dunham. "I was the girl in third grade where everybody was like, 'This girl is so annoying – like, leave.'" But Dunham has done a whole lot more than freak out critics on the left and right for the past five years: In addition to her best-selling memoir and her smart feminist newsletter, *Lenny Letter*, HBO's *Girls*, which began its sixth and final season in February, has been consistently hilarious and innovative, even as a fair number of people could never stop confusing Dunham's sometimes clueless character, Hannah Horvath, with the woman who created and portrays her. "People never gave us the benefit of the doubt that the show was actually a self-aware commentary on privileged white womanhood," says Dunham, who has a collection of fiction out next year, and plans to direct movies. "When a guy plays an antihero, nobody's like, 'I think Bryan Cranston's really promoting drug use.'"

What do you make of the fact that some people are actually, somehow, blaming you for Hillary Clinton's election loss?

It's amazing. I'm like, "Why don't we check in with Russia, you guys?" I think it tends to come more from the right wing. No one is more studied in the art of the right wing planting a story and liberals eating each other alive over it than I am. Do people want me to go, "I don't think I'm really good for this. I'm gonna bow out"? I wouldn't see any use for celebrity if I wasn't fighting rabidly for what I thought was right. I backed Hillary Clinton when a lot of people in my age group were on the Bernie train, so I was getting shit from the right for being a "libtard" – and getting shit from young people for supporting what they saw as a corporate candidate.

On the flip side, your friend Taylor Swift took a lot of heat for not speaking up. Is that unfair?

I just think everyone has to do it their way. When I was lesser known, I was like, "Who could *not* share their opinion?" Then I found out that when you talk about politics, people straight up tweet you the floor plan of your house and say they're coming to your house. You have to fucking watch it because people are nuts.

Will you keep acting after *Girls*?

I have mixed feelings about it. Obviously if the Coen brothers were like, "We've written this role for you", or Andrea Arnold was like, "I want you to come play a complex mother in the North of England", I'd say, "Of course."

Q&A



Lena Dunham

On the end of '*Girls*', getting blamed for Hillary Clinton's loss, and her 'whole other career as a rock-star housewife'

BY BRIAN HIATT

But I have no interest in doing it for the sake of doing it. I really started by accident because I didn't know who else could play this sort of specific archetype, and I've had an amazing time and amazing luck with it. My dad still laughs: "How the fuck did you win a Golden Globe for acting? You were cast as a bouncing ball in your school play and you wouldn't stop waving at your mum and me." So I don't think that that's really where my future lies. Maybe I'm retired.

Your boyfriend, Jack Antonoff, is often making music in your Brooklyn apartment. What's it like being close to that other kind of creativity?

He's in the back of my apartment right now recording with two artists. I have a whole other career as a rock-star housewife, making tea for musicians. I really love how private and emotional Jack's work is, and how he's super-public when he goes on tour or when he's promoting something, and then he goes back into the hole for three years. That's really appealing to me. He can be very secretive. If he's working on something with Taylor, he'll tell me I can't hear it, which makes me crazy!

How did you grapple with the challenge of making a series-finale episode?

The ninth episode of the season is sort of the more traditional finale, and then the 10th is almost like a short-film epilogue. We did it a little bit of a different way. The show's never been about that traditional connection, where it's four best friends who just can't get enough of each other. So to do a traditional everybody-gets-their-happy-ending finale didn't feel right, but at the same time we wanted people to have the satisfaction of closure. I think we found kind of a creative way to do that. We'll see if other people feel the same way.

What did you make of Adam Driver as Kylo Ren? He told me you'd never seen a *Star Wars* movie before.

I had a lot of catching up to do because I didn't know who anyone was or what they were doing. I was like, "What the fuck is a lightsaber?" But it's really exciting to see your friends in an action movie, slaying people and doing supernatural things. It's not an experience you get every day. And I love the fact that he's not going to be known as [*Girls* character] Adam Sackler. If he has one role like that in his life, it's going to be Kylo Ren. So I appreciate not being the person that gave him the role that's going to, like, haunt him until his death, but I also thought he was awesome!

COURTESY OF HBO



AT HOME WITH

KINGSWOOD

We drop in on the Aussie rockers' HQ,
known affectionately as Kew House.

When you think of a house where a rock band live, rehearse and party, chances are you're perfectly imagining Kew House, the sprawling, dilapidated headquarters of Melbourne band Kingswood. Graffiti-covered walls, amps and guitars litter every piece of surface area, including a basketball half-court and even a motorcycle workshop under the house.

When we turn up Kew House at 10:30 in the morning, the place is a hive of activity. Upstairs in the control room, guitarist Alex Laska, singer Fergus Linacre and drummer Justin Debrincat are working on potential set lists for their upcoming tour, pausing intermittently to jam out tracks in the big live rehearsal room. Kingswood certainly make great use of the property, using it for work and play in equal measure. "When we're all in the house we're [either] rehearsing in the main tracking room, or playing basketball or working on motorbikes. Whatever we're doing, music's always playing," says Linacre. Laska adds, "It's weird when you go from making music to complete silence. I very much enjoy having music on in the background of pretty much everything that I do."

Kingswood listen to music through a Sonos PLAY:5 in the rehearsal room where they wrote most of their new album, *After Hours, Close To Dawn*. In their bike workshop they have a PLAY:3 pumping out the Black Crowes, and scattered throughout various rooms they have a string of PLAY:1s.

While we're watching the band rehearse, an older gentleman in a pale suit sidles up and introduces himself as Trevor, Kingswood's landlord. Of course we had to know what



led him to rent his childhood home to a bunch of hard-partying rockers. "I met Alex when he came into my audio store and he convinced me he was a lovely person so I said, 'Look, I have a house down the road. It's empty, it's not being used very much, you're welcome to have the house because you've got to pay all those recording costs.' So they came down and checked out the place and loved it. They set up right in the loungeroom here where I played as a five-year-old, and I'm just happy that they found it perfect for what they wanted to do."

For more info visit sonos.com and rollingstoneaus.com for Kingswood's Apple Music playlist and to see video of Kew House.

IT'S A BIT UNFAIR, REALLY. FOR many artists, the album cycle is a relentless beast forcing creativity under duress. But so breezily prolific is British folk singer Laura Marling that she has to wait to put out her next record so as not to detract attention from the previous effort. *Semper Femina*, her sixth album, was completed 18 months ago and written while she was touring 2015's *Short Movie*.

In the meantime, Laura Marling the solo artist has been enjoying a rare break. "It's given me a really nice amount of time to work on other things and not give away other bits of creativity that I could have used on myself," she says.

Those other things have included a score for the Almeida Theatre Company in London, where Marling has returned after a stint in Los Angeles, and collaborating with Mercury Prize-winning producer Mike Lindsay (Speech Debelle) on his new electronic project.

In the past year she's also launched a podcast, *Reversal of the Muse*, in which she interviews female musicians such as Dolly Parton and HAIM on femininity and creativity in the recording studio. It's a project that ties neatly into *Semper Femina* (taken from Virgil's epic poem *Aeneid*, the Latin translation is "always a woman"), an album themed around femininity and featuring a female muse. It's somewhat of a surprise, then, that Marling enlisted a male, Blake Mills (Alabama Shakes, Conor Oberst), to produce.

Marling: "What I get from music and literature is thought provoking."

"What I got out of exploring femininity for so long was a real appreciation of masculine influence, and how vital that is, which exists in balance in everyone anyway," she explains. "I learned you need both. I'm sure a lot of people would call this very reductive but you need a solid strength and a watery womanhood. You need them both to wash up against each other."

These qualities coalesce beautifully in *Semper Femina*, a tough and tender record that resonates with Marling's description of "conjuring vulnerability" while Mills "steadies the ship."

It's also a return to a mainly acoustic sound for Marling, 27, who flirted with electric guitars on *Short Movie*, informed by her time living in L.A. The city's influence and its destabilising effect on identity continues to be felt on *Semper Femina*.

"It creates a really interesting crowd but a very confused one," says Marling.



Laura Marling's Full-Hearted Return

The British folk singer examines femininity in all its complexity on sixth album

BY ANNABEL ROSS

"I met a lot of very confused people in L.A., of which I was certainly one."

Marling lived there for four years, constituting something of a "second adolescence", but making real friends was difficult. "Especially for me, I don't go to parties or anything and I don't like drinking, so I'm immediately not anyone's first choice. But I met an incredible gang of bizarre people over that time, and women in a similar position to me who were on their travels somehow and doing their thing, their solitary thing. I found that inspiring in a reflective way, I guess."

Marling was also drawn to the work of Lou Andreas-Salomé, the late-19th century Russian psychoanalyst and muse and lover of Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke. "I ended up just reading everything I could get my hands on about her, she was this extraordinarily forward-thinking woman," she says.

Believing her sexuality to be the font of her creative power, Andreas-Salomé abstained from sex until her late thirties (at which point she made up for lost time). "For someone in the 1800s to be thinking about the link between sexuality and creativity is just phenomenal."

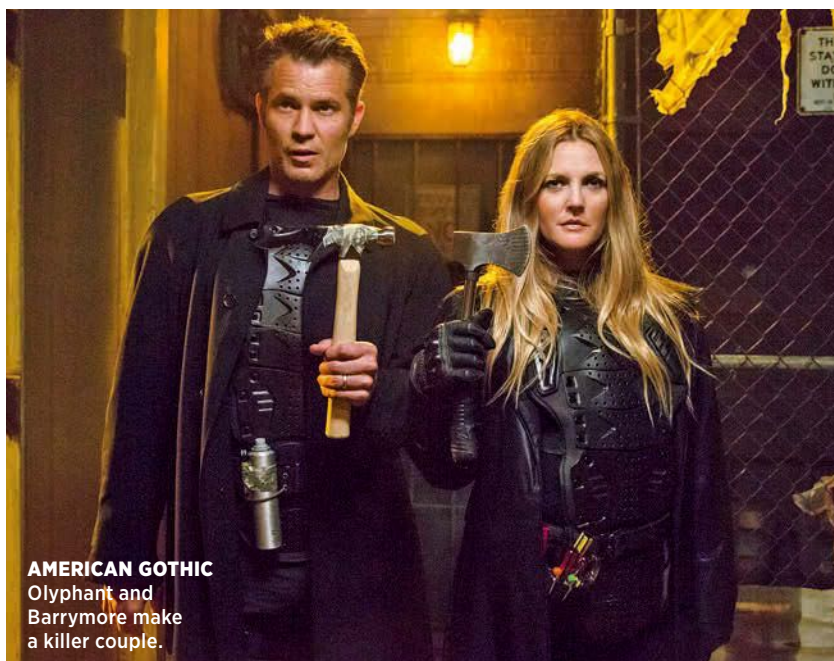
That Marling's reflection on femininity has emerged when the leader of the free world celebrates grabbing women by their genitals is not lost on her. "The timing is insane, all this fucking shit going on with Trump, at least it's part of that time, it's got some contextual relevance now," she says.

It's a backdrop that, along with maturity, increasingly compels her to make music that can be "of practical use". "I don't know – not that I'm sure this [*Semper Femina*] is the appropriate manifestation of that thought," she says, "but it does feel... what I get from music and literature and art is thought provoking, so at the very least, I hope to provoke thought."

When she was younger, music was "an entirely self-involved pursuit in some ways".

"Not that I'm that kind of person," she's quick to add. "But creativity is a vanity in a funny way... actually it is, it's inextricably a vanity, it's a desperation to express 'you' in whatever way."

Back in London, where, when not making music, Marling enjoys cooking and has a new passion for making cheese ("I'm quite plain in my pursuits"), she's given "almost no thought" to the album that will follow *Semper Femina*. "I'm not touring, it's not presenting itself," she says. "I've done it enough to feel quite safe that it will happen whenever it's ready." **CS**



AMERICAN GOTHIC
Olyphant and Barrymore make a killer couple.

Drew Barrymore's Brilliant Zombie

Playing a desperate housewife with a taste for flesh is the role she's been waiting for

MEET SUBURBAN ZOMBIE Drew Barrymore – she's just another sun-kissed California girl, except she's got a nasty habit of feasting on human flesh. When we first see Barrymore in *Santa Clarita Diet*, the excellent new Netflix comedy, she's selling real estate outside L.A., living the low-key minivan life with her husband, Timothy Olyphant, and their teen daughter. Then one day, something weird happens – she starts puking toxic waste and gets an insatiable lust for the taste of dead people. At first, she just munches on the occasional foot, sweet-talking the local undertaker into giving her body parts. But soon, she transforms into a killing machine, making blood smoothies out of her victim's internal organs. Before you know it, she's complaining, "I'm almost finished with the guy in the freezer. It's just thighs and giblets!"

Santa Clarita Diet is a dark, modern take on the classic *Bewitched* template: Here's a nice, normal blonde mum with a spooky supernatural life she keeps as her little secret. Created by Victor Fresco (*Better Off Ted*), the show also has the

suburban-dystopia vibe of *Breaking Bad*, except played for laughs.

Barrymore soon recruits Olyphant into helping her murder, and he's happy to assist, especially since Zombie Drew is also an insatiable sex inferno. All the neighbourhood mums are jealous of her increased pep – when they ask how she does it, she smiles and says, "I'm just straight-up addicted to these smoothies", taking a swig from her sippy cup full of human entrails. It's a clever allusion to the desperate-housewife "Mother's Little Helper" theme, right down to the way she has to cope with her sassy teenager, Liv Hewson.

Santa Clarita Diet needs a few episodes to get rolling, but it takes off as Barrymore starts hitting bloodthirsty heights, with great cameos from Portia de Rossi and Patton Oswalt. Yet so much of it comes down to the uncrushable Drew Barrymore charm – like Winona Ryder in *Stranger Things*, Drew gets her mojo back with a little help from the twilight zone. It's her first high-profile performance in years, so it's a treat to see her sink her teeth into something this meaty. *Bon appétit.*

ROB SHEFFIELD

Year of the Rat

With a Number One record in the bag, Dune Rats have proved that the kids will know bullshit when they hear it

DUNE RATS ARE NOTHING IF NOT the real deal. If they seem like a bunch of hard-partying, nihilistic Brisbane punks, it's because they are, and don't know how to do it any differently. Over breakfast beers in Sydney's Newtown (that's right, brekky beers), they talked us through their take on the process of making their sophomore effort, *The Kids Will Know It's Bullshit*.

"It took us nearly three years to write the fucker," says bassist Brett Jansch. "We'd work a song into our set and then scrap it. You're stuck with them like kids if you record them." When asked if those songs will resurface later, he scoffs, "I don't know why we'd go back to an old song. It's kind of like we've chopped the baby's head off and let them die in the gutter."

Singer/guitarist Danny Beus almost spits his beer out. "Oh shit, the Dune Rats talking about chopping baby's heads off. What a great start to an interview!" Taking the conversation away from infanticide and back to the album, we ask how this process differed from recording their 2014 debut. "The first album we just banged together because we needed to write an album," says Beus. "Whereas this one, we just slowly started writing songs and the sound was the biggest thing we tried to work on. Obviously having Zac [Carper] involved helped with all that."

Carper is the guitarist/frontman of L.A. punks FIDLAR, who spent the best part of 2016 working with Dune Rats on their new album. Jansch says Carper helped them focus on what was important. "He's a really



RAT & ROLL
Beus, Jansch
and drummer
BC Michaels

good producer, he was very much like, 'Get off the couch and fuckin' do it!' And there's that sound of urgency on the record. There are definitely bits on there where I think I could have done it better, but why would you do that? What was recorded was the real deal that actually went down."

Beus says having an American perspective helped them make a uniquely Aussie-sounding record. "He thought 'bullshit' was so funny, that we used it as a good term. He was like, 'Write about that.' Things like

'Scott Green' and trying to get weed. He thought that was fucking hilarious. It's that infatuation with our stupid stuff and vice versa. By the end he almost had a bloody Aussie accent."

When asked what the album says about being a young Aussie male in 2017, Jansch shrugs. "It's cool to write songs that just mean something to us. We love the record. I know people always say that, but we genuinely think that if cunts don't like it they can go get fucked."

MATT COYTE

EDUCATION



Holder

Inside the Mystery of the Music Business

A new online summit aims to educate those seeking a career in the music industry

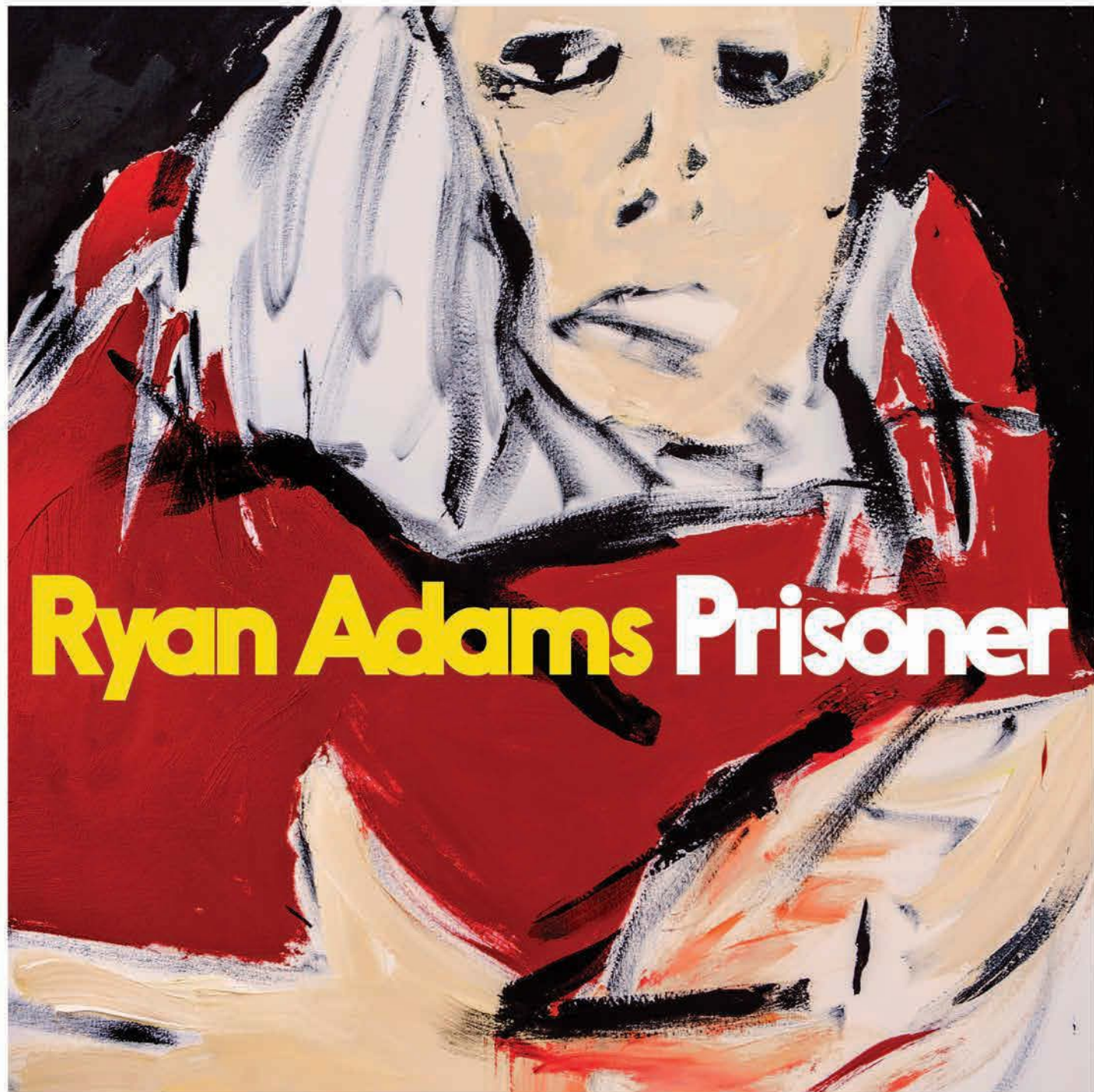
Having spent 30 years playing drums in Canberra metal legends Alchemist, Rod Holder has witnessed the ups and downs of the music industry. It's one of the reasons why, in addition to his current position as Music Business Coordinator at Southbank Institute of Technology and host of the Music Business Facts podcast, he's organised the MusicBusinessFacts.com

Online Industry Summit, presented by APRA/AMCOS. "It's exactly like going to a physical industry conference except it's free, and you can attend no matter where you are as long as you have an internet enabled device," he says. "Anyone who wants to advance their music or music business ambitions can attend and learn from a variety of high level experts."

From April 3rd to 13th, artists such as Josh Pyke and Devin Townsend, as well as myriad publishers, songwriters, managers, promoters, licensing experts and more, will speak at the Summit. "The idea is to strip away the mystique and hype about the business to reveal the realities on just how to make a career in the music business actually work," explains Holder. For more information, and to register, head to www.musicbusinessfacts.net/summit.

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New Album Out Now



Ryan Adams Prisoner

Touring May 2017

Tickets On Sale Now

Tim Carroll
(left) and
Oscar Dawson



The Rise of Holy Holy

From humble beginnings, the duo's new album is set to solidify their standing as one of the country's best bands

BY ROD YATES

IT STARTED, LIKE ALL GOOD STORIES do, in a smoky Berlin cafe, about six years ago. Having just haphazardly wheeled a bass amp stacked high with guitars and bags through the cobbled streets of Neukölln, Oscar Dawson and Tim Carroll entered the Gelegenheit cafe and prepared to play their first-ever show together.

They weren't yet called Holy Holy, but the songs they'd be performing – tracks they'd written during Carroll's regular visits from his then-base of Stockholm to see his friend in Germany – would go on to feature in Holy Holy's repertoire for years to come.

"[The cafe] was like something out of a movie, cos it had wooden tables and chairs and candles, and there was a small bar in the corner," recalls Carroll today, sitting in what he calls "a funny little cabin on the side of a lake" in Tasmania – aka his home – where he moved roughly two years ago. "The bar guy was an older gentleman with

a big silver moustache, and he had an ash-tray on the bar and was smoking away. There was no stage. You pulled back a curtain and there was a recess into a wall, and that was where the artists would stand and perform."

Regardless of the low-key setting, the act of playing internationally was, admits Carroll, "thrilling".

It wasn't, however, as memorable as the duo's first official show as Holy Holy in 2013, having both settled in Australia following their European adventures. On this quiet Sunday evening, Dawson's duties included not only playing guitar, but operating the venue's smoke machine, blanketing Brisbane's Black Bear Lodge in regular plumes of fog.

"We were this new band, lurching through this set, with not quite enough people in the room to be comfortable, and then between songs, as the smoke started to dissipate, Oscar would do a little shuffle to the back of the stage, and then you'd

hear 'pffffffffffff', and all this smoke would flood onto the stage," laughs Carroll. "It must have looked so ridiculous."

Fast forward to last April, and Holy Holy are sitting in their dressing room at the 8500-capacity River Stage – spitting distance from Black Bear Lodge, but a figurative world away – preparing to support Vance Joy. At which point, something like stage fright started to kick in. "I was like, 'Oh my God, how did I get into this situation?'" cackles Carroll. "I was terrified."

A week earlier, on the first date of the tour at Melbourne's Margaret Court Arena, the duo – who are joined in Holy Holy by drummer Ryan Strathie, bassist Graham Ritchie and keyboardist/producer Matt Redlich – marked the recent passing of Prince by covering "Nothing Compares 2 U" in front of the 7,500-strong crowd. "We played the song, and I opened my eyes and looked out and there was just this fucking [sea of] people with their phone torches on, blazing in our eyes," recalls Dawson,

BENJAMIN KNIGHT

calling in from his home in Melbourne. "When something like that happens, you think, wow, that's pretty cool."

There were, of course, several significant steps between their first shows and these supports, one being the release of Holy Holy's acclaimed debut album, 2015's *When the Storms Would Come*. It was a record the duo started crafting without even knowing it; some of the songs created in Dawson's Berlin apartment served as a backbone of the LP. "When we first started recording that we didn't have a band name or all the members locked in, we didn't have management, didn't have a label, didn't have an agent," says Carroll.

When the Storms Would Come debuted at Number 11 on the ARIA charts, followed by months of heavy touring. Today Dawson refers to the period as "an ever changing fog". Part of the haze is due to the duo's activities outside the band – Carroll founded Tasmania's A Festival Called Panama four years ago, hence the move there; Dawson is an in-demand songwriter and producer who recently finished working on full-lengths by Ali Barter and Ben Wright Smith – but largely it's down to their rigorous schedule supporting their debut, in which they navigated Europe and the UK on three separate occasions, on top of multiple laps of Australia. For a duo who live in separate states, spending so much time in a confined space must have created its own set of challenges.

"We kept it together," chuckles Dawson. "I wouldn't say it's ever plain sailing, but I think sometimes it's supposed to be hard. That's where you get the best stuff from. I'm not saying we're at each other's throats... but we have to almost bump up against each other a little, and that's a good thing."

Ask the duo what they have in common, and Dawson says: "I think we make good music together. I don't know if that's a thing in common. I guess that also means we have complimentary differences. Cos if we had too much in common to make music with, then it wouldn't work out. We do enjoy speaking about ideas, we definitely argue about ideas. We share a



CALM BEFORE THE 'STORM'

Dawson (left) and Carroll at their first-ever gig in Berlin's Gelegenheit cafe. Soon after they'd settle on the name Holy Holy.

sense of humour, too. We laugh a lot." Carroll thinks they're both "pretty sensitive people", and are "both communicators. We've been able to navigate [any] challenges by talking it through. And I think we both perform music in a way that's very much related to an intrinsic feeling within us. That's how we're constantly judging sounds and making sonic decisions."

While the pastoral mood of their debut drew critical praise, one piece of feedback stung Dawson badly. "I remember someone whose opinion we cared about said,

'You've released a record that's really not in keeping with the times.' And I took that to heart. I was horrified: 'Oh God, are we that daggy?' I thought 'fuck, we can't do that again'."

With that in mind, Dawson and Carroll set about crafting album number two, *Paint* [out now]. With a few exceptions, the majority of the LP was compiled over the past nine months, with song sketches traded by phone and e-mail and made full whenever the band came together.

"There are a lot of things that I am really proud of with the first record, I think it sounds genuine and warm and live," says Carroll. "But I think we wanted to step away a bit from the nostalgic Americana sound and push into something a bit more crisp and interesting and challenging, and also push the band a bit more in terms of the way we play and see what results would come."

All of which explains the new album's expanded sonic template – from the wild, freewheeling prog-rock of closer "Send My Regards" to the Eighties-styled pop of the gorgeous "True Lovers", while drum machines and various synthetic elements are evident in album opener "That Message". "We were just giving ourselves a bit more latitude to create a sound, as opposed to just letting it be what we are," explains Dawson.

Were there moments where they asked themselves, "Can we even do this?"

"Definitely," says Carroll. "When we started working on 'That Message', with an electronic beat and the kind of phrasing that references a bit of an R&B tradition, that was a big step. But there's nothing to be gained from sticking to a style. I don't know how many records we'll have the opportunity to make, so I'd rather try different things and take risks."

NEW BOOK

John Darnielle's Midwest Video Nasty

Mountain Goats frontman transforms life experience into unnerving story of loss

John Darnielle confesses he "didn't have a plan" when he began work on what would become his second novel, *Universal Harvester*, the follow-up to his acclaimed debut, *Wolf in White Van*. He started by simply documenting a typical conversation between two fishermen in Iowa, to which the author – who lived there for seven years after moving from California, and



Darnielle

is best known as the lyricist of long-running indie-band the Mountain Goats – added his own observations of the area to pen a haunting story centred around early-20s video store clerk Jeremy, who discovers someone has been inserting eerie home video scenes into various movie rentals. "You always try to understand a place that you've lived and sometimes you understand it better when you're no longer there," says Darnielle of his decision to set the novel amidst the "older rhythm" of the Midwest. While the placid setting plays an integral role within each of the interwoven stories, Darnielle doesn't see geographical knowledge as a prerequisite. "The story is about grief, that's something nobody is going to miss," he laughs. "Everybody is going to get a chance to grieve, right?"

JONNY NAIL

Shania's Hard Road Back

After losing her voice and divorcing her songwriting partner, Shania Twain is plotting her first album in 15 years

BY ANDY GREENE

DO YOU RECOGNISE MY VOICE?" Shania Twain asks, leaning forward on a hotel-room couch on a frigid New York afternoon. "It still sounds like me?" Twain – who sold more than 85 million records in the Nineties and early 2000s with country-pop hits like "You're Still the One" and "That Don't Impress Me Much" – is discussing her first album in 15 years. Due in autumn, it also marks her first recordings since she was diagnosed with dysphonia, a vocal-cord disorder that causes hoarseness and trouble speaking. The issue kept Twain out of the studio for years as she received voice therapy. She eventually found a timbre that's recognisable, but deeper than before. "I'm a different singer now," she says. "There was a lot of coming to terms with that. It's been one of the obstacles in my life I've just had to learn to live with."

Twain believes the illness stemmed from stress – one source of which was her divorce from Robert "Mutt" Lange, which was finalised in 2010. Lange, a music-business veteran who crafted major albums by Def Leppard and Céline Dion, produced and co-wrote Twain's post-1993 catalogue, including 1997's *Come On Over*, which remains the bestselling country album of all time. Their partnership ended in 2008 when Twain discovered Lange had fallen in love with her longtime friend Marie-Anne Thiébaud. The story became a tabloid saga in 2010 after Twain revealed she was engaged to Thiébaud's ex-husband, Frederic, effectively swapping spouses with her closest friend. "I've learned a lot about myself," she says. "It's scary to learn how vulnerable you can be."

She tells the story on new songs like "Who's Gonna Be Your Girl?" – a mournful ballad about "accepting that you're not the most important thing in a person's life," says Twain. Others, like "Life's About to Get Good", celebrate finding new happiness. "I knew there was going to be a lot of pressure on me now after all those years of working with Mutt," she says.

That pressure increased when Twain decided to write all the music herself. "It needed to be really pure and my own story and my own emotional journey," she says. "I was now alone all of a sudden, and I didn't want to shy away from it. And that's



STILL THE ONE
Twain at her home studio in January

not a collaborative thing; it's a very personal thing."

For Twain, songwriting was a struggle in the years following 2002's *Up!*, an ambitious double LP that failed to meet the expectations set by *Come On Over*. She focused more on raising her son Eja, 15, at home in Switzerland. "I wish like crazy that I had new music by now," she wrote to fans in 2009. "It's been hard to put [my writing] all together into song format." She decided to ramp up her songwriting after launching her Las Vegas comeback show, *Shania: Still the One*, in 2012, which was followed by a successful 2015 arena tour. Twain built tracks on GarageBand before taking them to producers including Jake Gosling (Ed Sheeran, Lady Gaga) and Ron Aniello, who produced Bruce Springsteen's last two albums. "I told anyone getting involved musically to forget about my other records," she says. "I didn't want it to be related to Mutt's productions at all. I wanted a more organic

approach." The resulting material is less poppy than her Nineties hits. "I was reflecting on the darkness," she says.

Twain is aware that she's returning to a different country-music landscape – one that has caught up with her forward-thinking pop instincts – and an industry that doesn't bank on CD sales anymore. "It's been so long," she says. "It almost feels like another lifetime." Discussing music streaming, she adds, "I've already adapted as a listener. The fun thing is more people actually hear your music."

Twain is not looking to return to the road anytime soon after her marathon arena tour, aside from a one-off appearance booked at the Stagecoach Festival on April 29th. Instead, she wants to get started on another album; she calls writing "therapy". "It helped me come to terms with a lot of things emotionally," she adds. "It's sort of like when you finish crying. When you're done, you're done and you move on." **TS**

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Frank Iero

In an Australian exclusive, the singer-guitarist talks about surviving the horrific accident that almost claimed his life in Sydney last October

BY ROD YATES

I'M IN THE PROCESS OF MOVING AS I LEAVE FOR tour," offers Frank Iero when he picks up the phone. "It's kind of nuts." Whatever the chaos, it would pale in comparison with the scene Iero faced on October 13th last year, while on tour in Australia with his band the Patience. The former My Chemical Romance guitarist, his manager and bandmates were unloading their van outside the Twitter offices in Sydney in preparation for a performance and live chat, when they were hit from behind by a Sydney bus. The open door at the back of their van acted as something of a barrier that narrowly prevented two of them from being crushed to death, while Iero's enormous backpack protected him from a similar fate. Now, with the guitarist/vocalist preparing to return to the road – as you read this he'll have just completed a European tour with Taking Back Sunday; a U.S. summer jaunt supporting Deftones will follow – he opens up about the accident and its fallout, and his fear of returning to the road. Sounding weary and more reserved than the man who stood chatting happily in the ROLLING STONE offices only hours before the accident, it's clear the past few months have taken a heavy toll.

In your own words, what happened after you arrived at the Twitter offices on the 13th?

Myself, my brother-in-law Evan [Nestor, guitar], our manager Paul and our drummer Matt [Olsson] got out of the van and we went around and opened the hatch, and started to take some gear out. I grabbed my pedal board, put it down on the curb next to me, and I turned to say to them that I was just going to take out a couple of things, and as I opened my mouth to start speaking, it felt like [I got] tackled. At the moment I didn't know what it was. I got hit under the arm and it knocked me down into the gutter and somehow I got lodged underneath what I then realised was a huge city bus. All I could see was this white and blue bumper above me, and glass just raining down, and my brother-in-law and Paul were sandwiched in between the bus bumper and the bumper of our van.

As the bus hit us it crashed into the back and then continued to plough through and drag me for I'd say about 10 feet. And then, when I started to realise what was happening, I kept thinking to myself, "He has to know he hit us, why isn't he stopping?" When I realised he wasn't I was like, all right, the tyre's going to come at some point, that's what's next. And as I started to think where the tyre would hit me first, that's when everything stopped. And as it stopped I could hear Paul and my brother-in-law, so I knew that they were alive. They screamed for [our publicist] to pull the van forward so that we could get free. And when they did that, my brother-in-law collapsed into the street and Paul collapsed into the back of the van, and I was able to get unloaded and crawl out from underneath the bus. Immediately the cops started to work on us in the street, we were taken to St Vincent's Hospital and we stayed in the hospital for about two and a half weeks.

What was the extent of your injuries?

Multiple surgeries on both Paul and Evan, their legs had extensive lacerations. Paul's were down to the bone. My brother-in-law has nerve damage in one of his legs now, and we're hoping this last surgery might be able to rectify that, but there's no guarantee. He had to have a nerve graft in his left leg. I had tendinitis in my shoulder and I had some pulled and torn ligaments in my foot, so I've been getting steroid treatment in the shoulder. Slipped discs, I got a bulged disc in my neck. We've been going to physical therapy three times a week and trying to strengthen ourselves to the point where we can do this again. It's a whole lot of unfun, basically.

You were in the Rolling Stone office only a few hours before this took place, and you had the biggest backpack I've ever seen. I remember you being teased about it, but is it true that ended up saving your life?

That was the backpack that fucking saved me. I swear to God. I still have it with me, I carry it everywhere I go because I'm scared shitless not to have it. But it still has bloodstains on

it from the accident. Somehow it ended up being this turtle shell that slid along the gutter. There's like 85 straps on it, and one of those hooked onto that bumper and saved my life. No doubt in my mind.

Four months on, have you been able to process how all this has affected you?

That's a good question. I don't know. I think about it every day. There's not a day goes by that I don't re-live it a little bit. Some days are better than others. It's

strange to go through something like that. The only way I can really describe it is, I'm in my house right now, right? You can probably imagine that there's a doorway and a couple of walls and maybe some stairs, and you know that because you've been in a house before, you've experienced that. But you've never been to my house, you don't know what it smells like, you don't know what the air's like in there, you don't know what the carpet feels like under your feet, you haven't lived that reality. But you think you can kind of understand. And I feel like that's the same way when we experience death through other people, people around us; we know that eventually we're all going to die. It's just a fact and we're aware of it. But when you see it, and to know that eventually I'm going to have to meet that again, to meet this frailty again, is terrifying. It's a new realisation I've come to, an experience that not many people have had. And that's one of the things that is still hard to process.

In the minutes after the accident, were you able to contact your family, or did they find out through second hand sources?

I was able to get in touch with my wife at the accident site, because we were all coherent enough to know how bad it looked. They helicoptered in a doctor because no one thought that someone could survive what just transpired. And I knew how bad that looked, and I knew what was going on, and we were very worried. I could see Paul's injuries in the aftermath of it, and I didn't know if he would be able to keep his leg, but thank God the cops there tied a tourniquet on him immediately. But it was impor-



CLOSE CALL

"I'm a different person now than I was before this happened," says Iero.

tant that I got in touch with my wife and her family, and Paul's wife. So I called my wife as soon as the paramedics showed up, and had to tell her that there was a big accident and you have to get in touch with certain people and let them know we're alive right now but we're going to hospital and this is where we're going to be.

You cancelled the remainder of your 2016 dates, and I had read that for a while after the accident you considered quitting tour-

ing altogether. At what point did you decide to carry on?

It's strange. I wasn't sure if I was ready, and the act of touring kind of scares the shit out of me. But the best thing for me is, when I find something that really scares me I throw myself into it. Full on. And so, when it came time to start with Taking Back Sunday and other offers came in, I just said yes to everything.

I didn't want to just discount ever doing this again, even though there was part of me that was like, that's it. I think I'm done.

How strong was that urge?

Here's the thing. I know that I'm a different person now than I was before this happened, in a lot of extreme ways. I don't think I'll ever be the same again. And that's not to say it's good or bad, it's just different. I just didn't know what to do. It got me thinking about how much of a part of me this is, it's always been – playing music and creating has almost really defined me in a lot of ways. And to feel like that's been taken from you is a horrible feeling. So I think maybe a part of me decided, I just want to stop on my own terms, so it's at least a decision that I made. But I was wrestling with that for a long time. Do I do this again? Do I put my family through me being away again? Putting myself in situations where anything can happen and you're a million miles away, how much do I need that? And then I started to just feel like, I need to try. I need to be sure if I want to do this or if I want to stay home and do something else. And the only way I'll know is if I do it, and doing it scares the shit out of me.

Have you had to find a new guitarist while Evan recuperates?

He actually got cleared by the doctors two days ago. It never crossed my mind that we would play with anyone else, so I just thought maybe we'd try and do it as a three-piece. To play these shows and not look over and see him [would have been] heartbreaking. Now that I know he's going to be there makes me feel a lot better.

Given that your new album *Parachutes* came out weeks after the crash, the timing couldn't have been worse...

That was the saddest couple of months for me. It's probably the most proud I've ever been of anything I've ever made, and to just kind of not give it its shot, that was horrible. And I felt like I owed it to myself and to the record to try. It's kinda funny to have something like this happen on a record like *Parachutes*, where the songs are about having things happen for you instead of to you and taking those issues and using them as fuel. And maybe this is the ultimate parachute. Everything happens for a reason. **2**

Kingswood Recalibrate

The new model Kingswood is such a radical departure that some suggested rebranding. But under the hood, the same soul burns.

BY MICHAEL DWYER

THIS PROPERTY IS CONDEMNED. The triple-storey weatherboard anomaly with vintage motorbikes in the basement and much evidence of rock & roll behaviour within is visibly sagging between towers of steel and glass just off one of Melbourne's busiest intersections.

"You've caught it in its ugliest state," says Kingswood guitarist Alex Laska, weaving through a kitchen lined with Sixties rock posters. Demolition of the band's rented HQ keeps being postponed, but in the aftermath of sessions for a stunning second album, *After Hours, Close To Dawn*, "it's become a shambles," he confesses. "I mean, we don't even know where the keys are."

A depleted rack of guitars occupies a dusty alcove under the stairs. Singer Fergus Linacre pauses to single out one vintage sci-fi plank with ironic affection. "You know what's probably had the biggest impact on the record? This \$200 Epiphone Thunderbird bass."

"Definitely," Laska concurs. "That is the soul of the new record."

Soul is the key word here. You can feel that smouldering bottom end slithering like a gun-packing pimp under the slow groove of "Golden", the second single from an album destined to polarise fans of Kingswood's guitar-heavy 2014 debut, *Microscopic Wars*.

Sure there was a restless musical spirit simmering inside that album's mostly metallic road case. But after intense, experimental sessions here and in Nashville, not even those in the band's inner sanctum knew what to make of the first playback of *After Hours, Close To Dawn*.

"The record label thought we were playing a joke on them," Laska grins, settling into the living/studio control room with a packet of Iced Vo-Vos. "They thought we needed to change our name. Then they said I needed to go over the record with a heavy, distorted guitar. We were just like, 'Nuh.'"

Linacre happily admits to the heavy rock roots that bonded him and his Melbourne Grammar school buddies Laska and drummer Justin Debrincat. But Zepelin, Aerosmith and AC/DC were eclipsed for this album by an even more hallowed quartet. Staring us down from a poster above are the Beatles in their late Sixties pomp. "The premise of our first discus-



A NEW DAWN
Debrincat,
Laska, Linacre
(from left)

sion with Ed [Spear, Nashville-based producer] was that we wanted to make something that would rival *Abbey Road*. I know it sounds insane, but if you don't strive for that kind of thing, what are you doing?"

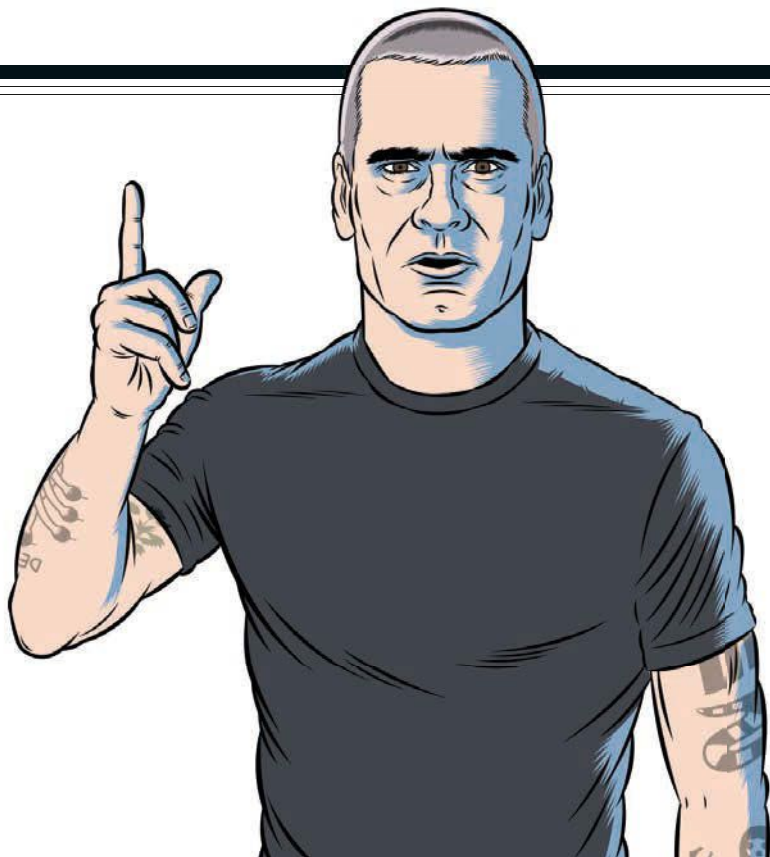
Defining the timeless quality of the Beatles' studio swansong of '69 is an esoteric business that has songwriter Laska physically reaching for flamboyant metaphors in the ether. "Think of the feeling you get when you listen to that bass on 'Come Together'," Laska enthuses. "How do you encapsulate that? So we tried to get moments like that on this album. What is the magic and the madness behind that?"

The quest led to studio methodology that was highly technical, and sometimes just bizarre. Like the 60-odd vocal takes of "Looking For Love" that peaked only after Linacre was rendered almost legless on bad whiskey. Or the time he got stuffed into a sleeping bag to nail the airless anxiety of "Alabama White".

The lonely, 4am thread of the project was fuelled, Laska confesses, by the emotional wrench of a long-term love relocating to New York. But it's a sign of rare personal chemistry that Linacre was able to channel those emotions into such a – that word again – soulful experience.

"I was really pleased," the singer says, "because for ages he was like, 'Man, I can't write songs at the moment because life is so good. I'm so happy. Girlfriend's going well, band's going well... I got nothing.'"

Career-wise, the pair agree that Kingswood's bold recalibration might well result in some audience attrition. Then again, says Linacre, "we have complete faith in our fans. People who love the band will jump on board and they'll get it. But really, it's not anyone's choice. This is the music we make. People will love it or they won't. What we're really excited about is the people who have never heard us before."



A Fan's Notes

HENRY ROLLINS CELEBRATES HIS BIRTHDAY

IT'S MY BIRTHDAY AS I'M WRITING THIS. I'M now 56. It's been six years since I really cared about my age. I was in New York City when I turned 50 and for a few minutes I thought about the fact of that, but soon enough, the real world and my usual predatory schedule came crashing in and it was back to schedules and the weight of obligation and expectation.

When I'm off the road, I live in Hollywood. Age is a big deal to a lot of people here. Hollywood, the industry, is to a great extent, youth obsessed. Many people, due to the nature of their work, have a "use by" date stamped on them. On this level, men suffer far less than women. On screen and in real life, you often see a man with a woman who could be his daughter, romantically linked. Of course, this happens all over the world but I have never seen it more routinely than here.

A long time ago, I decided that I was going to live a work and event oriented life and that my age, not being anything I could help besides taking good care of myself, was not important to who I was. I figured eventually you die, so you might as well decide what you want to do and do it.

Whether I like it or not, a lot of my work is result oriented. If no one shows up to check me

out, I have no job. My choice is either to go for it and live with the consequences or try to second guess my audience and hope my stealth will go undetected. I have chosen the former. This has simplified things, to say the least.

Today, I'm going to spend a few hours in Redondo and Hermosa, two small beach communities a little south of the Los Angeles International Airport. This is the area

I lived in over 30 years ago while I was a member of Black Flag, the band that allowed me to do all the things I get to do now, including write this.

Why retrace these old steps? I think it's a good idea to return to overgrown paths now

and then to get a reference point for going forward. It is not a sentimental journey but a geographic reality check. Since I'm not getting any smarter, I need to be stronger.

At my age, it's only action and deed that interests me. I want to be someone who gets it done. Who thinks it up, plans it, hits the marks and only pauses to storyboard the next epic.

What has been true all my life now burns more brightly than ever: I have nothing to lose. I exist in an almost constant state of dissatisfaction. I don't want anything you have but I want mine to be better, more memorable. I live to impress and defy. No to compromise. Yes to life. ☺

"I'm now 56. It's been six years since I really cared about my age."

MY LIST



Mike Campbell

Songs About the State of the World

The Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers guitarist is gearing up for the group's upcoming 40th-anniversary tour.

The Rolling Stones "Street Fighting Man"

There's something about the lyrics and energy that make you want to get up and fight somebody for what you believe in. It's a joy from start to finish.

Jimi Hendrix "All Along the Watchtower"

This sounds like it's about the world and how it could be better. It's a sloppy record with odd production, but somehow it's beautifully perfect.

Bob Dylan "Knockin' on Heaven's Door"

Every time I hear this, it just stops me. I feel so moved by it. It's on the edge of death and despair, but there's hope.

The Clash "London Calling"

This has that apocalypse kind of vibe, like the world is coming to an end but maybe we'll make it through.

Neil Young "Rockin' in the Free World"

This has hope and fear, so it definitely still applies today. The music is just pure adrenaline. God bless Neil Young.

James Mercer

The Shins frontman on punk rock, new wave and breaking hearts

BY JONNY NAIL

The Song That Reminds Me of Growing Up

Burl Ives *"There's Always Tomorrow"* 1964



"It's just a really sentimental, lovely song. I would make up songs at that age, around seven or eight. Really wistful, weird shit like [*singing*] 'There's always tomorrow'. I loved that, super melancholy, even as a kid [*laughs*]."

The Song That Makes Me Cry

Bonnie Raitt *"I Can't Make You Love Me"* 1991



"I associate it with the girls I broke up with [*laughs*]. That sounds so egotistical or something, but it really makes me feel bad about breaking up with girls. It fucking kills me."

The Song That Reminds Me of My First Crush

Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark *"If You Leave"* 1986



"I was living in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and she was a new-waver. She really loved Cyndi Lauper and actually shaved a checkerboard into the side of her head. Her dad played in a band, her parents were successful hair-stylists, hence her awesome style in every way. She was just cool as shit, you know? And she was my first real crush. That song was just everywhere during that time."

The Song That Made Me Want to Be a Musician

Echo and the Bunnymen *"The Killing Moon"* 1984

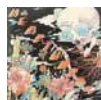


"All through high school, you know when you're trying to find an identity, I just really loved [the album] *Ocean Rain*. When I would listen to it, I was utterly in the dark

as to how they could've created such an awesome thing. I didn't understand anything about guitars, I didn't know what they did. There's some really strange songs on there, but then there are some really dark, beautiful songs. At that time I was also listening to U2's *War* and [the Smiths'] *The Queen Is Dead*. Those were the three records that I was really stoked on, but there was just something about *Ocean Rain* that really grew on me. As for what made me really think I *could* play guitar, that was punk stuff. Me and my friends really loved the Sex Pistols' [*Never Mind the Bollocks*]. It sounded really current and cool. You could just sit there and play the chords and it kinda fucking sounded like it. That kept me playing guitar. For me to try and do what they did on *Ocean Rain*, that's hard to do when you're just starting out."

The Song I'm Most Proud Of

The Shins *"Rubber Ballz"* 2017



"It has this weird 3-4 or 6-8 thing. In the beginning, it starts off with this [*taps a beat*], and then it crashes right into the song that changes meter. The chords are sort of accidents that just happened. I just heard them and thought, 'Woah, that's really neat.' And for us, it has really novel chord progressions. If I was speaking to a songwriter I'd be like, 'Here's some stuff I can do, what do you think of this?'"

The Song I Wish I Hadn't Recorded

The Shins *"Fighting In a Sack"* 2003



"I more have regrets about the way it was recorded. We had been playing it live, and I had been doing it in E, but when we went into the studio, I was struggling to reach E in the vocals, so we dropped it down to D. It just lost all the energy. It was one of the songs we had to re-record with Phil Ek and we were under duress to get the album out. It was just too late. I walked away from it and immediately regretted it. I should have just somehow ploughed through."

The Song I Wish I Wrote

Angel Olsen *"Shut Up Kiss Me"* 2016



"It's really touching. It's the perfect song. It also kinda feels like the type of thing I might've been able to pull off. There's other new acts that I really love, like Ariel Pink, but I just don't write that way. I love some of his pop jams but they're so odd and different."

The Song That People Wouldn't Expect To Find On My iPod

Carl Perkins *"Honey Don't"* 1956



"I always get lumped in with certain bands like Death Cab For Cutie and the 2000s 'indie thing', but I actually listen to a lot of old country music. Maybe that wouldn't be so surprising, because some of my songs are just me trying to be that [*laughs*]. My dad was a country singer in nightclubs the whole time I was growing up, so I was always exposed to that world."

The Song With the Greatest Lyrics

Cass McCombs *"County Line"* 2011



"I really love that song and I think the lyrics are a big reason as to why. For years, every time I'd meet someone who knew Cass McCombs we'd say, 'Why isn't he huge, what's going on?'"

The Song That Makes Me Homesick

Jim Glaser *"The Lights of Albuquerque"* 1983



"I've lived in Portland for 15 years, but home is still with my folks in Albuquerque. There's not much around for miles so when you're coming home, the first thing you see is this weird glow above the desert. Me and my buddies would always play this song when we're flying into Albuquerque after being away for a while."

“
I actually
listen to a
lot of old
country
music.”



Van Halen Storm the Palace, 1978

Photographed by
Fin Costello

At the end of Van Halen's first UK tour, on which they supported Black Sabbath (and blew them off the stage), the response was so great that they hastily put on a show at London's legendary Rainbow Theatre," recalls snapper Fin Costello. "They packed the place out and confirmed that they were going to be one of the biggest bands of the time.

I had been recommended to them by Gene Simmons, having done the Kiss *Alive!* cover a few years earlier, at the time when he was mentoring and supporting them. With that recommendation they were up for doing anything I asked them to do. They came to my studio for a photo session which worked out very well, and a few days later, backstage at the Rainbow, Dave [Lee Roth, vocals] was asking me where was the best place to go in London for a party on a Monday night. Eddie [Van Halen] suggested we go back to my studio with some of their fans and entourage rather than to a club as the night was nearly over. As the party went on, Dave discovered the prop box, which had all sorts of stuff in it. He came across a Guard's bearskin helmet and uniforms which had been used for another act some days earlier. This led to some hilarious shots with some of the fans – particularly with some of the girls there. By the time the party had finished we had decided they would dress up in the Guard uniforms and stage a raid on Buckingham Palace for a publicity stunt. This idea probably had more to do with 'party consumption' than common sense.

The next afternoon we pulled up outside the Palace and they rushed through the gate hoping to get arrested, only for the policeman on duty to greet them and ask if they were on holiday. I met Eddie many years later and we joked about how easy it was to do that kind of thing back then, which would be impossible with all the minders and managers they had now."





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FOR FANS OF: Bon Iver, James Blake, Gotye

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY

ATTENTION: Melbourne musician Mark Zito grew up as the youngest of four siblings, with his eldest brother Andy a singer and multi-instrumentalist, inspiring Zito to make music. ("There were always instruments laying around at home, so I picked up a guitar as a teenager and learned 'Wonderwall' as my first song, which I assume was everyone's first song," jokes Zito.) Formal piano lessons followed, as did many hours spent locked in his room learning to play guitar. The 27-year-old only began using his voice four years ago when the bluegrass band he played bass in needed some back-up vocals, inspiring Zito to sing more and start writing music to match his voice. Zito chose the moniker 'Fractures' (not-so-fun fact: he had to cancel a show in 2013 after he slipped and fractured his neck), releasing a well-received self-titled EP in 2014. After an appearance on Set Mo's club track "Comfort You" last year, Zito has just unveiled his debut album, *Still Here*.

HE SAYS: "The album title was meant to be 'still' in the adjective sense, like 'no movement', but there was always going to be a double meaning, like 'I'm still here'. I haven't poked my head out in a while, so I suppose it's a little tongue-in-cheek thing to say, 'Hey, I'm still around and doing stuff!'"

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Lowcast", where Zito's multi-tracked voice is pleasingly paired with gently driven guitar pop.

JAMES JENNINGS





Code Orange

SOUNDS LIKE: Grimy, brooding, arty hardcore

FOR FANS OF: Converge, Nine Inch Nails, the Dillinger Escape Plan

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: In the lead-up to the January release of their third album, *Forever*, the band earned praise from aboveground outlets including NPR as well as fellow adventurous headbangers such as the Dillinger Escape Plan and Deftones, who nabbed Code Orange to open for them. "The super positive feedback is an unreal cherry on top for us," says drummer-vocalist Jami Morgan.

"I feel it's a record that has something for a lot of different groups of people, but you never know if that will be picked up on or not."

Formed under the name Code Orange Kids when the band members were just 14 and 15 years old, this Pennsylvania quartet dropped the "Kids" in 2014, foreshadowing the darker, deeper, more diverse sound. *Forever* seamlessly juxtaposes mosh-fuelling crushers like the title cut with industrial downward spirals ("Hurt Goes On") and flannel-shrouded alt-rock ("Bleeding in the Blur", which cracked Spotify's Viral 50 chart).

THEY SAY: Code Orange made headlines in the metal press last year, first when the band shared a video of Asking Alexandria on Facebook and called them out for their "fake rockstar mentality", and then in December, when Morgan was quoted saying that his group didn't want to tour with "bargain bin fucking deathcore bands".

"I feel some of what I've said has been misrepresented, and in the case of the only band I ever spoke the name of, it had nothing to do with their music as I've never heard it," Morgan says now. "I do think that bigger artists

that play to 12 year olds have some level of responsibility not to intentionally implant horrible human values in those children's heads. And when it comes to heavy music, most of what's considered close to 'mainstream' simply doesn't appeal to us, and we offer an alternative. I think people are going to find that alternative."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: Guitarist Reba Meyers – one of Code Orange's three vocalists – takes centre stage on grungy *Forever* standout (and the band's poppiest song yet) "Bleeding in the Blur".

BRANDON GEIST



Beachheads

SOUNDS LIKE: Classic collegiate guitar-rock with just enough muscle to make it big on Nineties modern-rock radio

FOR FANS OF: Hüsker Dü, the Vines, Local H

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Vidar Landa (guitar) and Marvin Nygaard (bass) from Norwegian metal band Kvelertak came up with the idea of chasing their power-pop fantasy, and hooked up with a hard-hitting drummer and former synth-pop vocalist Børild Haugom. Their self-titled debut sounds like a metal-loving version of Sugar, or the Foo Fighters on a Big Star bender, or vintage Teenage Fanclub if they spent more time at the gym than the record store.

THEY SAY: "Beachheads" implies a bunch of songs about gurls and beer, but Haugom's lyrics touch on deeper subject matter. "The first time I met up with Marvin and Vidar to test out vocals on some demos was in November 2013, a month after my father had passed away," he says. "It was after that I started writing lyrics, so it has definitely impacted my lyrics a lot. It's been a way for me to put it all into words and has helped me in processing the massive amount of thoughts that were lingering in my head in the months and years after his passing."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Moment of Truth" is bright and resiliently heart-heavy.

JON DOLAN

Judah & the Lion

SOUNDS LIKE: Jaunty alt-folk abetted by heavy beats, fuzzed-out synths and gigantic choruses

FOR FANS OF: Mumford and Sons, OneRepublic, Imagine Dragons

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Beginning as a relatively traditional folk-rock group, Judah & the Lion have recently broken out in a big way following the release of their third album, *Folk Hop N' Roll*. The name of that record pretty much says it all: Rather than stowing their banjos and mandolins completely, the group incorporated drum machines, overdriven guitars and laser-like synths to create a hybrid unlike anything else going.

They've just wrapped up a tour supporting Twenty One Pilots in front of sell-out crowds in basketball arenas around the U.S. "Obviously [Twenty One Pilots] are at a way, way more massive level, but as far as the unortho-

doxness of the sound, for whatever reason they kind of marry each other really well," says singer/guitarist Judah Akers.

"I think [their fans] are accepting of people making honest music that's true to them."

THEY SAY: The jump from the traditional folk-rock aesthetic of 2014's *Kids These Days* to a more eclectic sound was quite natural amongst the members of the band. "The older you get, the more you discover about yourself," Akers notes. "Just as

being a band, travelling, and being together more, that self-discovery started happening, and we discovered more about each other and our identity as a band." He adds, "All of us love hip-hop music. We like good, strong beats,



but we also like the banjo, and we love the mandolin. We love the uniqueness of that and how no one is really doing that right now. With this last record, and even moving forward with new songs that we're writing now, it seems

like that self-discovery is giving us more of an identity as to who we are, and we're really, really excited about it."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Take It All Back" is the big single.

CORBIN REIFF



Sarah Belkner

SOUNDS LIKE: Expansive pop that undulates beneath reverent melodies

FOR FANS OF: Kate Miller-Heidke, Peter Gabriel, Kate Bush

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:

For Sarah Belkner, there was never any question that she'd be a musician. Growing up in a musical household that valued James Taylor as much as it did Bach, the Sydneysider's path to her debut album, *But You Are, But It Has*, was one spent fighting to discover the kind of music she wanted to make. Having studied composition at university, sung in

choirs and arranged instrumental pieces, her repertoire is extensive. In creating her debut, Belkner felt she needed to step away from the clutter of musical influence and find her own voice.

"It came at a time in my life when I felt very stuck," she says. "I didn't really know how to move from where I was. I started to make a lot of space in the arrangements, I was going for distilled lyrics – it's like building your own little orchestra, and that set a parameter straight away." Throughout the LP, layers build from sparse bass lines to complex

intersections of choral groups, clarinet solos and swelling piano synths. But the record's strength lies in its subtleties – the arrangements never crowd the songs, nor do they placate any emotional integrity. What's left is the feeling that something's always brewing, an underlying ambiguity to offset the striking simplicity of Belkner's lyrics, and a groundswell of support that gives rise to her timeless voice.

SHE SAYS: "I think for any musician, myself included, there's a period where you're wanting permission. I really got over that

on this record. Nothing else has changed except that I've given myself that permission now. I spent years looking for that externally, looking for someone to give me permission to make exactly what I wanted. And that's also got to do with not being scared about who you are, there has to be a part of you that is comfortable with yourself to do that."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Cellophane" is peppered with lustrous Eighties moments, while "John Lennon" is an upbeat, laid back tune that dwells between pop and rock.

LUCY SHANAHAN



Julia Michaels

SOUNDS LIKE: The distilled, unfiltered version of the emo dance-pop she's written for other artists over the years

FOR FANS OF: Selena Gomez, Hailee Steinfeld, Dido remixes

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: At 23 years old, Julia Michaels has already built one of the music business' most enviable résumés, writing songs for Justin Bieber, Selena Gomez and Britney Spears, among others. The fact that she finally released her debut solo single, "Issues", is only the cherry on top.

Michaels has spent her whole life writing poetry and songs, and at 17 years old she reached a mainstream breakthrough with a co-writing credit on the theme song for Disney's *Austin & Ally*. "My dad was actually pressuring me to go to college," she recalls. "But I was like, 'No, I think I'm good at this!'"

From there, with mentors and co-writers Joleen Belle and Lindy Robbins, she began writing songs for artists like Demi Lovato and Fifth Harmony. She later linked up with "song husband" and Semi-Precious Weapons frontman Justin Tranter, beginning a hot streak of writing hits like Bieber's "Sorry", Hailee Steinfeld's "Love Myself" and Gomez's "Hands to Myself". The pair have also caught the attention of Gwen Stefani, John Leg-

end and Ed Sheeran. Like all her other songs prior, "Issues" began as part of a songwriting camp for another artist's album, but upon hearing the demo, she knew it was too personal to share.

"I didn't understand why I was so affected by [this song]," Michaels recalls. "I ended up crying in the bathroom for two hours. [Justin] knocked on the door and said, 'Honey, I think you're denying yourself something that you really want because you're scared of it.'" Michaels is preparing for her debut EP in between writing sessions for other artists.

SHE SAYS: "I think that women are afraid to be vulnerable because they think it makes them look weak. It's ingrained in people's minds that it's a typecast and a stereotype that women are just emotional and crazy. If you listen to the radio it's all men who are emotional and women who are sexual. There's nothing wrong with that! It definitely should be the case, but it makes me sad that women are afraid to be emotional because it makes them look weak. There is so much power in vulnerability, and I am proud to be that typecast."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: The personal, soul-bearing "Issues" is as catchy as it is tender, and her soft delivery helps her stand out from the pop crowd.

BRITTANY SPANOS

Maggie Rogers

SOUNDS LIKE: A 21st-century folk music makeover

FOR FANS OF: Lorde, Feist, Sylvan Esso

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: Last year, the internet caught a video of Pharrell Williams being bowled over by "Alaska", the skeletal debut single by then-NYU student Maggie Rogers. Rogers, who grew up on a farm and played banjo in her youth, blends folk-inspired vocal melodies and heady beats in a way that wows: The full-fledged videos for "Alaska" and its follow-up single, the swirling "Dog Years", racked up streams and landed on year-end best-of lists. Last month, Rogers released her debut EP, *Now That the Light Is Fading*.

SHE SAYS: "I'm a college graduate. Dealing with anxiety or feeling overwhelmed in this whole new world is both incredibly unique to my own situation and incredibly general to the world that all of my classmates and I are in. But I felt a sigh of relief when 2017 came. 2016 has been a year that's marked on my calendar since I was born, since it was the year I would graduate college. 2017 just feels incredibly exciting because it feels new, like anything can happen – and now I feel incredibly grounded. I feel like I can handle everything. I feel good about the work I'm doing; and I feel so grateful that I get to wake up every morning and think about music. I feel really prepared and really present, and it feels good."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "On and Off" combines an urgent beat with folk-inspired vocal harmonies and a dizzying piano riff.

MAURA JOHNSTON



FROM TOP: MEREDITH TRUAX

Rolling Blackouts Coastal Fever

SOUNDS LIKE: Nostalgia-inducing Aussie guitar pop played with propulsion and purpose

FOR FANS OF: The Go-Betweens, Dick Diver, the Ocean Party

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY

ATTENTION: The Melbourne five-piece boast three singer-songwriters who alternate lead vocal duties: Fran Keaney, his cousin Joe White and Tom Russo (bassist Joe Russo and drummer Marcel Tussie complete the unit). Keaney, White and Russo had played together in various acts over the years, before settling on their current moniker

and adding the rhythm section. With a more fully-formed sound ("We've always played with a bit of a country twang and a bit of a punk edge and a mid-Eighties English pop influence, but we were able to articulate our vision a little better after a bit of life experience," says Keaney), the band's 2015 EP *Talk Tight* gained a stellar review from online music bible Pitchfork and a coveted record deal with Sub Pop. Latest EP *The French Press* arrives as the band continue to write and demo for their debut album, due early 2018.

THEY SAY: "The plan was to just play here and there, record here and there and make songs that we were happy with," says Keaney. "People seemed to enjoy what we were playing, which is great, and that culminated in getting a record deal which we had never anticipated happening. It was a surprise for us, but we thought, 'Oh well, let's have a good go at it.' So we're at that stage at the moment where we're

taking it more seriously, but at the same time trying to preserve what was always there. We came

at it with the right spirit, which was just to write songs we enjoyed playing in a band together."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF:

"Fountain of Good Fortune", from *The French Press* EP, which sounds like an Australian coast-to-coast road trip with your best friend: both intimate and expansive.

"We're taking it more seriously, but trying to preserve what was there."

JAMES JENNINGS





Khalid

SOUNDS LIKE: Coffeehouse soul shot through with hip-hop and romantic befuddlement

FOR FANS OF: India.Arie, Bryson Tiller, Donell Jones

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION: His single "Location" – co-produced by Syk Sense, who also has a credit on the Drake anthem "Know Yourself" – has had 35 million Spotify streams, plenty of airplay on Mainstream R&B/Hip-Hop stations, and the support of Kylie Jenner, who enjoys plugging young artists on Snapchat. Khalid's mother sings in the Army Band, so music was a constant presence in his life

despite frequent moves. When he relocated from Germany to upstate New York, he discovered bearded folksters – Grizzly Bear, Father John Misty – and found they sat easily next to the R&B his mother loved. All that remained was to start writing songs, which he did when he moved again, this time to El Paso, Texas. "It's just vulnerability, literally throwing it all out on the table," he explains. "This is what I went through during high school: heartbreak, love, all the clichés – but not necessarily in cliché format."

HE SAYS: "Syk Sense flew me to Atlanta. We had this long ses-

sion, and he asked me, 'Do you want to end the session or do you want to continue?' I'm like, 'I want to continue.'

He played the 'Location' loop. I made the chorus there, then I had to go back to high school. I waited for my next vacation, which was spring break, and I recorded the rest. My mum helped me out with the harmonies of the song, I released it a couple weeks before prom, and I won prom king. Now I'm singing 'Location' and everyone knows the words.

"After every show I talk to every single fan who stays after."

"After every show I talk to every single fan who stays after. I'm telling them, 'Thank you for coming' – that's the core group.

The people who come to your first shows are going to support you forever. I at least want to thank them on a personal level

before things get too crazy."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Reasons" slows the bassline from 2Pac's "Do For Love" to a pensive creep. "Evade my intellect," Khalid sings. "Feed into my introspect."

ELIAS LEIGHT

Hazel English

SOUNDS LIKE: Mellow folk-pop that cools like a sea breeze on a warm summer's evening

FOR FANS OF: Highasakite, Waxahatchee, Whitney

WHY YOU SHOULD PAY ATTENTION:

Hazel English's debut EP, *Never Going Home*, is a record of subtle tensions – the groove sways and bounces, melodies rise and fall and lyrics melt from confident statements into ambiguous turns of phrase. Although polished with a digital finesse, the record has an analogue feel, one that nods to the bands that shaped English's musical upbringing. From listening to B.B. King in the car with her dad, to Fleetwood Mac playing in her parents' North Sydney home, to learning covers of the Cranberries and the Smiths on guitar, English brings elements of each artist into her work: "Albums and bands that are really timeless, they're probably the ones that have the most influence."

Inspired by her move from Melbourne to Oakland, California – minutes from the San Francisco Bay Area – *Never Going Home* is an EP that moves forward, though it dwells in self-conscious idiosyncrasies. While her voice floats over buzzy guitars and spacey synths, English's lyrics zone in on intimate and introspective moments – often lifted straight from her diary. Most songs are threaded together by notions of control. "Figuring out when's good to let go, and also figuring out when you should take a stand and when you should take more ownership – that's a theme I keep coming back to."

SHE SAYS: "I guess I felt like I'd finally got to a point where I was proud of the music I was making and I wanted to share that with people. If it's gonna be bearing my name I want it to be something that's true to me, a true reflection of who I am. For me that's really important because honesty is everything to me and I want people to feel like I'm giving them something real. I don't want to be disingenuous."

HEAR FOR YOURSELF: "Control" is thoughtful and upbeat, a track that tackles some of the album's more poignant themes.

LUCY SHANAHAN



MICK THOMAS

The former Weddings Parties Anything frontman talks about writing a memoir, living above pubs and being a St. Kilda fan.

◆ By Barry Divola ◆

IT'S HIS BIRTHDAY, BUT HE'S WORKING. So it goes with Mick Thomas, who fused poetic folk storytelling and sweaty pub rock for 15 years with Weddings Parties Anything in the Eighties and Nineties, and has been doing his own thing ever since. He's spent the past year completing *These Are the Days*, a revealing memoir that uses the stories behind his songs to tell the tale of his life as a musician. There's also a companion 23-track double-CD called *These Are the Songs*. And, of course, he's hitting the road again. He no longer lives above pubs, but he still spends a lot of time playing in them.

Happy birthday.

Thanks. I'm 57 today. Same age as Prince when he died.

Are you feeling healthier than Prince?

Well, you'd want to feel healthier than Prince. I feel pretty good and I think I'm going all right. I'm still out and about.

So, you've got a memoir and a retrospective album. Is 57 an age where you start looking in the rearview mirror at where you've been and what you've done?

I guess so. The whole project came out of me having a whole lot of records that were being deleted and falling out of print. I wanted a record with a bunch of that stuff on it that I could still sell at gigs, because that's my bread and butter these days. And to make that a warranted kind of project, with the whole physical side of records diminishing, I wanted to put a book with it to make it substantial for people. Plus people can't stream a book.

Is it true you're not at all fond of the way the debut Weddings album *Scorn of the Women* turned out?

None of the Weddings are comfortable with the way that album ended up sounding. It was the Eighties and they were recording music a certain way and we certainly got off to a really bad start with our recording career. It was a weird time for technology and music and it was a bit of a pity. But then again, I just bought the Natalie Merchant album where she re-recorded her first album. I love her music, but God, that's 25 bucks I'll never get back. Re-do-

ing your old songs can be fraught. So for all my misgivings about that first Weddings album, it was what it was.

Weddings have done reformation shows over the years. It's usually football games that provide the impetus, right?

You're right. The first time was the Community Cup in Melbourne in about 2007 and it felt good. We played Grand Final Eve in Melbourne for a few years, but then to keep it going every year would rob it of expectations a bit, so we stopped. We played *Scorn of the Women* at the Enmore Theatre and we played our last show in 2012 at the EG Hall Of Fame induction, which is a big deal in Melbourne. And if that's it, then I'm happy to leave it with that. Never say never, but it's pretty unlikely we'll play again.

You've written a clutch of songs about football and I know you follow St. Kilda. Is there anything more frustrating than being a St. Kilda supporter?

Being a Richmond supporter, I reckon [laughs]. It was pretty tough watching Footscray [the Western Bulldogs] sweep all before them last year. Although it does prove that you can come out of nowhere

“AT A CERTAIN POINT IN YOUR LIFE, LIVING ABOVE A PUB IS FANTASTIC.”

and do it, so there's hope. For me the bottom line is knowing that your club is not run by a bunch of dickheads who make bad decisions. As long as they don't do that you've got to keep supporting them.

You wrote “Step In, Step Out” at the Hoptoun Hotel, and you've lived at different times above the Hoptoun, the Annandale and the Punters Club. Have you found it generally a good idea or a bad idea to live above pubs?

I think at a certain point in your life it's fantastic. By living there you get to observe people and witness their lives and see them

behaving in a certain way. It totally worked for me in those periods of time. If I would have had to live above the Punters Club 365 days a year I would have gone mad, but the Weddings were touring pretty heavily, so I spent about 100 nights a year above that pub for a couple of years. All the rooms are above the stage, so I remember coming home and going, “Oh fuck, the Cosmic Psychos are playing tonight and all I want to do is go to my room and watch a video.” But after the bands finish you can just go downstairs at 11:30 and have a couple of late ones and afterwards you're already home.

“For a Short Time” is a song that often closes your shows and it holds a special place for both you and your fans, doesn't it?

Yeah, but I try not to do it all the time. It gets in there at the second encore if we get one. People have to earn it, otherwise it just becomes a meaningless ritual. I think the reason people get so much out of that song is that it's a tribute and testimonial to comradeship. It's about the person who's not there, the person who has passed on, so I see why people attach emotion to it. But I won't be badgered into doing it as a fait accompli.

Do people come up and tell you what the song means to them specifically?

Oh yeah. Also, I do private gigs quite a lot now. Older fans want me to play in their backyard for a 60th birthday or 40th wedding anniversary. There have been a couple of nights like that where you become aware you're playing for someone who's not going to be there very much longer.

Their friends say they want us to play “For a Short Time” and I realise we're playing for someone who has pretty much been given the sentence and I ask, “Are you sure you want me to play it?” And they say, “We are fucking so sure. You have to play that song.” And so you play it and you watch people losing it and it means so much to them, so you can't deny them. It can be very confronting at times, but it's nothing but an honour for me that people make something I've written a part of their lives. 🍷

Thomas's tour dates include April's Gum Ball festival in the Hunter Valley.





Paris Jackson's Family Secrets



In her first-
ever in-depth
interview,
Michael's
daughter
discusses her
father's pain
and finding
peace after
addiction and
heartache

By Brian Hiatt

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DAVID LACHAPELLE

P

ARIS-MICHAEL

Katherine Jackson is staring at a famous corpse. "That's Marilyn Monroe," she whispers, facing a wall covered with gruesome autopsy photos. "And that's JFK. You can't even find these online." On a Thursday afternoon in late November, Paris is making her way through the Museum of Death, a cramped maze of formaldehyde-scented horrors on Hollywood Boulevard. It's not uncommon for visitors, confronted with decapitation photos, snuff films and serial-killer memorabilia, to faint, vomit or both. But Paris, not far removed from the emo and goth phases of her earlier teens, seems to find it all somehow soothing. This is her ninth visit. "It's awesome," she had said on the way over. "They have a real electric chair and a real head!"

Paris Jackson turned 18 last April, and moment by moment, can come across as much older or much younger, having lived a life that's veered between sheltered and agonisingly exposed. She is a pure child of the 21st century, with her mashed-up hippie-punk fashion sense (today she's wearing a tie-dye button-down, jeggings and Converse high-tops) and boundary-free musical tastes (she's decorated her sneakers with lyrics by Mötley Crüe and Arctic Monkeys; is obsessed with Alice Cooper – she calls him "bae" – and the singer-songwriter Butch Walker; loves Nirvana and Justin Bieber too). But she is, even more so, her father's child. "Basically, as a person, she is who my dad is," says her older brother, Prince Michael Jackson. "The only thing that's different would be her age and her gender." Paris is similar to Michael, he adds, "in all of her strengths, and almost all of her weaknesses as well. She's very passionate. She is very emotional to the point where she can let emotion cloud her judgment."

Senior writer BRIAN HIATT wrote the Rolling Stones cover story in RS 782.

Paris has, with impressive speed, acquired more than 50 tattoos, sneaking in the first few while underage. Nine of them are devoted to Michael Jackson, who died when she was 11 years old, sending her, Prince and their youngest brother, Blanket, spiralling out of what had been – as they perceived it – a cloistered, near-idyllic little world. "They always say, 'Time heals,'" she says. "But it really doesn't. You just get used to it. I live life with the mentality of 'OK, I lost the only thing that has ever been important to me.' So going forward, anything bad that happens can't be nearly as bad as what happened before. So I can handle it." Michael still visits her in her dreams, she says: "I feel him with me all the time."

Michael, who saw himself as Peter Pan, liked to call his only daughter Tinker Bell. She has FAITH, TRUST AND PIXIE DUST inked near her clavicle. She has an image from the cover of *Dangerous* on her forearm, the *Bad* logo on her hand, and the words QUEEN OF MY HEART – in her dad's handwriting, from a letter he wrote her – on her inner left wrist. "He's brought me nothing but joy," she says. "So why not have constant reminders of joy?"

She also has tattoos honouring John Lennon, David Bowie and her dad's sometime rival Prince – plus Van Halen and, on her inner lip, the word MÖTLEY (her boyfriend has CRÜE in the same spot). On her right wrist is a rope-and-jade bracelet that Mi-

living anymore." She had been self-harming, cutting herself, managing to conceal it from her family. Some of her tattoos now cover the scars, as well as what she says are track marks from drug use. Before that, she had already attempted suicide "multiple times", she says, with an incongruous laugh. "It was just once that it became public." The hospital had a "three-strike rule", she recalls, and, after that last attempt, insisted she attend a residential therapy program.

Home-schooled before her father's death, Paris had agreed to attend a private school starting in seventh grade. She didn't fit in – at all – and started hanging out with the only kids who accepted her, "a lot of older people doing a lot of crazy things", she says. "I was doing a lot of things that 13-, 14-, 15-year-olds shouldn't do. I tried to grow up too fast, and I wasn't really that nice of a person." She also faced cyberbullying, and still struggles with cruel online comments. "The whole freedom-of-speech thing is great," she says. "But I don't think that our Founding Fathers predicted social media when they created all of these amendments and stuff."

There was another trauma that she's never mentioned in public. When she was 14, a much older "complete stranger" sexually assaulted her, she says. "I don't wanna give too many details. But it was not a good experience at all, and it was really hard for me, and, at the time, I didn't tell anybody."

"I was crazy," Paris says of her mid-teens. "I was actually crazy. I was going through a lot of teen angst."

chael bought in Africa. He was wearing it when he died, and Paris' nanny retrieved it for her. "It still smells like him," Paris says.

She fixes her huge blue-green eyes on each of the museum's attractions without flinching, until she comes to a section of taxidermied pets. "I don't really like this room," she says, wrinkling her nose. "I draw the line with animals. I can't do it. This breaks my heart." She recently rescued a hyperactive pit-bull-mix puppy, Koa, who has an uneasy coexistence with Kenya, a snuggly Labrador her dad brought home a decade ago.

Paris describes herself as "desensitised" to even the most graphic reminders of human mortality. In June 2013, drowning in depression and a drug addiction, she tried to kill herself at age 15, slashing her wrist and downing 20 Motrin pills. "It was just self-hatred," she says, "low self-esteem, thinking that I couldn't do anything right, not thinking I was worthy of

After her last suicide attempt, she spent sophomore year and half of junior year at a therapeutic school in Utah. "It was great for me," she says. "I'm a completely different person." Before, she says with a small smile, "I was crazy. I was actually crazy. I was going through a lot of, like, teen angst. And I was also dealing with my depression and my anxiety without any help." Her father, she says, also struggled with depression, and she was prescribed the same antidepressants he once took, though she's no longer on any psych meds.

Now sober and happier than she's ever been, with menthol cigarettes her main remaining vice, Paris moved out of her grandma Katherine's house shortly after her 18th birthday, heading to the old Jackson family estate. She spends nearly every minute of each day with her boyfriend, Michael Snoddy, a 26-year-old drummer – he plays with the percussion ensemble Street Drum Corps – and Virginia na-

PREVIOUS SPREAD: OUTFIT AND SHOES BY MARC JACOBS. BELTS AND CHOKERS BY POSERS HOLLYWOOD. DIAMOND EARRING BY ICEROCK DIAMONDS. EAR CUFF BY HOUSE OF EMANUELE. GLOVES BY MAJESTY BLACK.



Growing Up Jackson

- (1) Michael Jackson, with Prince and Paris (holding his hand) in 2005. (2) Paris spoke at her father's memorial, saying, "Daddy has been the best father you could ever imagine." (3) Paris with her grandmother Katherine, who took custody after Michael's death.



to earn her own money, and now that she's a legal adult, to embrace her other inheritance: celebrity.

And in the end, as the charismatic, beautiful daughter of one of the most famous men who ever lived, what choice did she have? She is, for now, a model, an actress, a work in progress. She can, when she feels like it, exhibit a regal poise that's almost intimidating, while remaining chill enough to become pals with her giant-goateed tattoo artist. She has impeccable manners – you might guess that she was raised well. She so charmed producer-director Lee Daniels in a recent meeting that he's begun talking to her manager about a role for her on his Fox show, *Star*. She plays a few instruments, writes and sings songs (she performs a couple for me on acoustic guitar, and they show promise, though they're more Laura Marling than MJ), but isn't sure if she'll ever pursue a recording contract.

Modelling, in particular, comes naturally, and she finds it therapeutic. "I've had self-esteem issues for a really, really long time," says Paris, who understands her dad's plastic-surgery choices after watch-

ing online trolls dissect her appearance since she was 12. "Plenty of people think I'm ugly, and plenty of people don't. But there's a moment when I'm modelling where I forget about my self-esteem issues and focus on what the photographer's telling me – and I feel pretty. And in that sense, it's selfish."

But mostly, she shares her father's heal-the-world impulses ("I'm really scared for the Great Barrier Reef," she says. "It's, like, dying. This whole planet is. Poor Earth, man"), and sees fame as a means to draw attention to favoured causes. "I was born with this platform," she says. "Am I gonna waste it and hide away? Or am I going to make it bigger and use it for more important things?"

Her dad wouldn't have minded. "If you wanna be bigger than me, you can," he'd tell her. "If you don't want to be at all, you can. But I just want you to be happy."

tive whose dyed mohawk, tattoos and perpetually sagging pants don't obscure boy-band looks and a puppy-dog sweetness. "I never met anyone before who made me feel the way music makes me feel," says Paris. When they met, he had an ill-considered, now-covered Confederate flag tattoo that raised understandable doubts among the Jacksons. "But the more I actu-

ally got to know him," says Prince, "he's a really cool guy."

Paris took a quick stab at community college after graduating high school – a year early – in 2015, but wasn't feeling it. She is an heir to a mammoth fortune – the Michael Jackson Family Trust is likely worth more than \$1 billion, with disbursements to the kids in stages. But she wants

AT THE MOMENT, PARIS lives in the private studio where her dad demoed "Beat It". The Tudor-style main house in the now-empty Jackson family compound in the L.A. neighbourhood of Encino – purchased by Joe Jackson in 1971 with some of

the Jackson 5's first Motown royalties, and rebuilt by Michael in the Eighties – is under renovation. But the studio, built by Michael in a brick building across the courtyard, happens to be roughly the size of a decent Manhattan apartment, with its own kitchen and bathroom. Paris has turned it into a vibe-y, cozy dorm room.

Traces of her father are everywhere, most unmistakably in the artwork he commissioned. Outside the studio is a framed picture, done in a Disney-like style, of a cartoon castle on a hilltop with a caricatured Michael in the foreground, a small blond boy embracing him. It's captioned "Of Children, Castles & Kings". Inside is a mural taking up an entire wall, with another cartoon Michael in the corner, holding a green book titled *The Secret of Life* and looking down from a window at blooming flowers – at the centre of each bloom is a cartoon face of a red-cheeked little girl.

Paris' chosen decor is somewhat different. There is a picture of Kurt Cobain in the bathroom, a Smashing Pumpkins poster on the wall, a laptop with *Against Me!* and *NeverEnding Story* stickers, psychedelic paisley wall hangings, lots of fake candles. Vinyl records (Alice Cooper, the Rolling Stones) serve as wall decorations. In the kitchen, sitting casually on a counter, is a framed platinum record, inscribed to Michael by Quincy Jones ("I found it in the attic," Paris shrugs). Above an adjacent garage is a mini-museum Michael created as a surprise gift for his family, with the walls and even ceilings covered with photos from their history. Michael used to rehearse dance moves in that room; now Paris' boyfriend has his drum kit set up there.

We head out to a nearby sushi restaurant, and Paris starts to describe life in Neverland. She spent her first seven years in her dad's 2,700-acre fantasy world, with its own amusement park, zoo and movie theatre. ("Everything I never got to do as a kid," Michael called it.) During that time, she didn't know that her father's name was Michael, let alone have any grasp of his fame. "I just thought his name was Dad, Daddy," she says. "We didn't really know who he was. But he was our world. And we were his world." (Paris declared last year's *Captain Fantastic*, where Viggo Mortensen plays an eccentric dad who tries to create a utopian hideaway for his kids, her "favourite movie ever".)

"We couldn't just go on the rides whenever we wanted to," she recalls, walking on a dark roadside near the Encino compound. She likes to stride along the lane divider, too close to the cars – it drives her boyfriend crazy, and I don't much like it either. "We actually had a pretty normal life.

Like, we had school every single day, and we had to be good. And if we were good, every other weekend or so, we could choose whether we were gonna go to the movie theatre or see the animals or whatever. But if you were on bad behaviour, then you wouldn't get to go do all those things."

In his 2011 memoir, Michael's brother Jermaine called him "an example of what fatherhood should be. He instilled in them the love Mother gave us, and he provided the kind of emotional fathering that our father, through no fault of his own, could not. Michael was father and mother rolled into one."

Michael gave the kids the option of going to regular school. They declined. "When you're at home," says Paris, "your dad, who you love more than anything, will occasionally come in, in the middle of class, and it's like, 'Cool, no more class for the day. We're gonna go hang out with Dad.' We were like, 'We don't need friends. We've got you and Disney Channel!'" She was, she acknowledges, "a really weird kid".

Her dad taught her how to cook, soul food, mostly. "He was a kick-ass cook," she says. "His fried chicken is the best in the world. He taught me how to make sweet-potato pie." Paris is baking four pies, plus gumbo, for grandma Katherine's Thanks-

youngest brother, Blanket, with his darker skin, is the subject of less speculation). Paris' mum is Debbie Rowe, a nurse Michael met while she was working for his dermatologist, the late Arnold Klein. They had what sounds like an unconventional three-year marriage, during which, Rowe once testified, they never shared a home. Michael said that Rowe wanted to have his children "as a present" to him. (Rowe said that Paris got her name from the location of her conception.) Klein, her employer, was one of several men – including the actor Mark Lester, who played the title role in the 1968 movie *Oliver!* – who suggested that they could be Paris' actual biological father.

Over popcorn shrimp and a Clean Mean Salmon Roll, Paris agrees to address this issue for what she says will be the only time. She could opt for an easy, logical answer, could point out that it doesn't matter, that either way, Michael Jackson was her father. That's what her brother – who describes himself as "more objective" than Paris – seems to suggest. "Every time someone asks me that," Prince says, "I ask, 'What's the point? What difference does it make?' Specifically to someone who's not involved in my life. How does that affect your life? It doesn't change mine."

Paris is certain Michael Jackson is her biological dad: "He would point his finger at me and say, 'You're black.'"

giving – which actually takes place the day before the holiday, in deference to Katherine's Jehovah's Witness beliefs.

Michael schooled Paris on every conceivable genre of music. "My dad worked with Van Halen, so I got into Van Halen," she says. "He worked with Slash, so I got into Guns N' Roses. He introduced me to Tchaikovsky and Debussy, Earth, Wind and Fire, the Temptations, Tupac, Run-DMC."

She says Michael emphasised tolerance. "My dad raised me in a very open-minded house," she says. "I was eight years old, in love with this female on the cover of a magazine. Instead of yelling at me, like most homophobic parents, he was making fun of me, like, 'Oh, you got yourself a girlfriend.'"

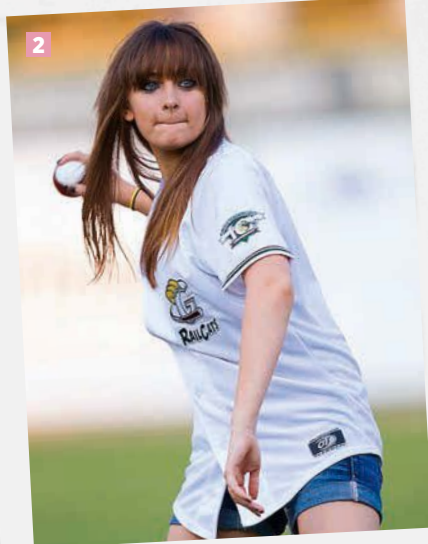
"His number-one focus for us," says Paris, "besides loving us, was education. And he wasn't like, 'Oh, yeah, mighty Columbus came to this land!' He was like, 'No. He fucking slaughtered the natives.'" Would he really phrase it that way? "He did have kind of a potty mouth. He cussed like a sailor." But he was also "very shy".

Paris and Prince are quite aware of public doubts about their parentage (the

But Paris is certain that Michael Jackson was her biological dad. She believes it with a fervency that is both touching and, in the moment, utterly convincing. "He is my father," she says, making fierce eye contact. "He will always be my father. He never wasn't, and he never will not be. People that knew him really well say they see him in me, that it's almost scary."

"I consider myself black," she says, adding later that her dad "would look me in the eyes and he'd point his finger at me and he'd be like, 'You're black. Be proud of your roots.' And I'd be like, 'OK, he's my dad, why would he lie to me?' So I just believe what he told me. 'Cause, to my knowledge, he's never lied to me."

"Most people that don't know me call me white," Paris concedes. "I've got light skin and, especially since I've had my hair blonde, I look like I was born in Finland or something." She points out that it's far from unheard of for mixed-race kids to look like her – accurately noting that her complexion and eye colour are similar to the TV actor Wentworth Miller's, who has a black dad and a white mum.



You Are Not Alone

(1) Paris with boyfriend and constant companion Michael Snoddy. (2) Throwing out the first pitch at U.S. Steel Yard in 2012.

(3) Paris's mother, Debbie Rowe, who's battling breast cancer, in 2013. Paris didn't get to know Rowe until after Michael's death.

At first, she had no relationship with Rowe. "When I was really, really young, my mum didn't exist," Paris recalls. Eventually, she realised "a man can't birth a child" – and when she was 10 or so, she asked Prince, "We gotta have a mum, right?" So she asked her dad. "And he's like, 'Yeah.' And I was like, 'What's her name?' And he's just like, 'Debbie.' And I was like, 'OK, well, I know the name.'" After her father's death, she started researching her mum online, and they got together when Paris was 13.

In the wake of her treatment in Utah, Paris decided to reach out again to Rowe. "She needed a mother figure," says Prince, who declines to comment on his own relationship, or lack thereof, with Rowe. (Paris' manager declined to make Rowe available for an interview, and Rowe did not respond to our request for comment.) "I've had a lot of mother figures," Paris counters, citing her grandmother and nannies, among others, "but by the time my mum came into my life, it wasn't a 'mummy' thing. It's more of an adult relationship." Paris sees herself in Rowe, who just completed a course

of chemo in a fight against breast cancer: "We're both very stubborn."

Paris isn't sure how Michael felt about Rowe, but says Rowe was "in love" with her dad. She's also sure that Michael loved Lisa Marie Presley, whom he divorced two years before Paris' birth: "In the music video 'You Are Not Alone', I can see how he looked at her, and he was totally whipped," she says with a fond laugh.

PARIS JACKSON WAS around nine years old when she realised that much of the world didn't see her father the way she did. "My dad would cry to me at night," she says, sitting at the counter of a New York coffee shop in mid-December, cradling a tiny spoon in her hand. She starts to cry too. "Picture your parent crying to you about the world hating him for something he didn't do. And for me, he was the only thing that mattered. To see my entire world in pain, I started to hate the world because of what they were doing to him. I'm like, 'How can people be

so mean?" She pauses. "Sorry, I'm getting emotional."

Paris and Prince have no doubts that their father was innocent of the multiple child-molestation allegations against him, that the man they knew was the real Michael. Again, they are persuasive – if they could go door-to-door talking about it, they could sway the world. "Nobody but my brothers and I experienced him reading *A Light in the Attic* to us at night before we went to bed," says Paris. "Nobody experienced him being a father to them. And if they did, the entire perception of him would be completely and forever changed."

I gently suggest that what Michael said to her on those nights was a lot to put on a nine-year-old. "He did not bullshit us," she replies. "You try to give kids the best childhood possible. But you also have to prepare them for the shitty world."

Michael's 2005 molestation trial ended in an acquittal, but it shattered his reputation and altered the course of his family's lives. He decided to leave Neverland for good. They spent the next four years travelling the world, spending long stretches of time in the Irish countryside, in Bahrain, in Las Vegas. Paris didn't mind – it was exciting, and home was where her dad was.

By 2009, Michael was preparing for an ambitious slate of comeback performances at London's O2 Arena. "He kind of hyped it up to us," recalls Paris. "He was like, 'Yeah, we're gonna live in London for a year.' We were superexcited – we already had a house out there we were gonna live in." But Paris remembers his "exhaustion" as rehearsals began. "I'd tell him, 'Let's take a nap,'" she says. "Because he looked tired. We'd be in school, meaning downstairs in the living room, and we'd see dust falling from the ceiling and hear stomping sounds because he was rehearsing upstairs."

Paris has a lingering distaste for AEG Live, the promoters behind the planned *This Is It* tour – her family lost a wrongful-death suit against them, with the jury accepting AEG's argument that Michael was responsible for his own death. "AEG Live does not treat their performers right," she alleges. "They drain them dry and work them to death." (A rep for AEG declined comment.) She describes seeing Justin Bieber on a recent tour and being "scared" for him. "He was tired, going through the motions. I looked at my ticket, saw AEG Live, and I thought back to how my dad was exhausted all the time but couldn't sleep."

Paris blames Dr. Conrad Murray – who was convicted of involuntary manslaughter in her father's death – [Cont. on 88]



**A GIRL'S BEST
FRIEND**
Throsby and her
dog, Jones.



Holly Throsby's Restless Mind

To make her new LP, the singer had to fall in love with creating music again

By Rod Yates

HOLLY THROSBY'S FAVOURITE MOVIE as a child was *The NeverEnding Story*. When she sees it now she can't quite fathom why – "That movie is so fucked up; the themes are just awful" – but as a youngster growing up in the inner-Sydney suburb of Balmain, she'd watch the 1984 fantasy epic a couple of times a week. This, let's not forget, is a film that features a gratuitously disturbing scene in which a horse drowns. The main protagonist, meanwhile – a boy called Bastian, who's just lost his mother and is bullied by his father and at school – is drawn into a fantasy world

where he faces off against a swirling cloud called *The Nothing*, which effectively represents the very void of non-existence. It's one of those WTF? kids' movies that only fails to scar generations because they're too young to truly comprehend the horrors unfolding in front of them. "I can't imagine the effect the film had on me," Throsby chuckles, swirling a straw around her Soda, Lime & Bitters in the beer garden of an inner-Sydney pub on a warm February morning.

Continue talking, though, and a pattern soon starts to appear. Though her first albums were soundtracks to films such as *Stand By Me*, *Dirty Dancing*, *The Big Chill* and *Pretty Woman* – her earliest musical memory is watching her mother, ABC broadcaster Margaret Throsby, swooning to the soundtrack to *Sophie's Choice* in the driver's seat of their Mazda 323 – as she got older and started to dig deeper, she found herself "drawn to music that scared me". In Year 7 Throsby loved Led Zeppelin (and still does), but she found Pink Floyd and, in particular, a song like "Good-bye Blue Sky" terrifying. And though she'd obsessively cut pictures of her teen crush, Corey Haim, out of *TigerBeat* magazine and stick them around the house, she'd also collect newspaper articles about stories that frightened her. "My mum said when I was a really little kid, I did a drawing of a scary monster, and that I scared myself so much I ran away from it!" she laughs. "I had a lot of imagination."

Though Throsby studied English and Political Science at university and had visions of a career as a journalist (she still subscribes to the print version of the *Sydney Morning Herald*), given her fertile, fantastical imagination it's not overly surprising she ended up in the arts, first as a singer-songwriter and then, last year, as an acclaimed novelist following the publication of her debut book, *Goodwood*. She got her first guitar at the age of eight – she found it – and wrote her first song at the age of 10 – it was about traffic lights – and spent her high school years writing songs and recording them on cassettes. "I had a friend called Dylan, he was my boyfriend in Year 12, and we used to play music together, and just having someone to connect with musically was really nice," she offers.

Quite what she'd do with this talent wasn't initially clear. Prior to the release of her debut album, 2004's *On Night*, she

hadn't gigged solidly – "I played at the local pub in Balmain, but it was not professional in any way. Those early performances, I was just shit scared. I had no idea what I was doing" – but she did know that she wanted to make a record. Early jobs in a video store, a book shop and programming music for various airlines' in-flight entertainment helped her accumulate the \$3,000 she needed to make *On Night* with producer Tony Dupé. It was a partnership that lasted three albums, and to this day Throsby credits the producer with encouraging and nurturing her talent. "I don't know how much I would have done if it wasn't for that," she says. "I definitely needed encouragement in my life."

When *On Night* was completed, she sent it to her two favourite Australian labels, Trifekta and Spunk, eventually signing with the latter. The contract was drawn up on the back of a poster for Canadian band the Unicorns, and signed on the spot. "I still have it," Throsby smiles. "Aaron [Curnow, label head] wrote the splits that we'd do and the advance, which was \$1,000 or something."

Four solo releases followed in relatively quick succession – 2006's *Under the Town*, 2008's *A Loud Call*, 2010's *See!* (in which she dipped her toes into the world of kids' entertainment with a collection of original children's

songs) and 2011's *Team* – and for a while there Throsby assumed her career would continue in the cyclical nature of a professional musician: record, release, tour, repeat. But then, somewhere in 2012, she picked up her guitar, and the inspiration was gone. It would be another five years before she'd release a record.

IT'S NOT AS THOUGH THROSBY was idle during this period. Shortly after the release of *Team*, she joined with Sarah Blasko and Sally Seltmann under the Seeker Lover Keeper monicker and released a self-titled album. In the touring that followed, she suffered severe stage fright. "It was really scary for me, and really messed me up for a little while. I think it's because it wasn't my show. If it's my own show and I really can't do it, I would just say, 'I'm really sorry, I'm going now.' [Laughs] I'm prepared to do that. If everyone needs to get their money back, that's fine, and I'd just say sorry. But when I was doing stuff like Seeker Lover Keeper, or the Crowded House tribute, They Will Have Their Way,

then it was like, there were other people I was accountable to."

A bout of pneumonia while touring the UK in support of *Team*, followed by her contracting appendicitis upon returning home, left Throsby feeling "very depleted", and once all the touring was complete, she spent much of 2012 "not really knowing what to do with myself". She had demos of new songs, little skeletons ready, but just wasn't motivated to finish them. "Music really disappeared from my consciousness for a long time. I still listened to it, but I wasn't interested in creating. And it wasn't a good feeling, I felt quite lost. I would get the guitar and sit down to write and feel upset that I didn't like it. And I didn't know what I wanted to say musically. I really liked *Team*, I was really proud of it. And for a long time I thought, I don't really know what else to say, because the album said it.

"[I was] really questioning everything," she adds. "I had a new partner, and we were thinking about having a baby, so there was a lot going on in terms of life change. I wrote lists: what do I want to do? What do I want in my life?"

One of the answers came in *Goodwood*. A mystery set in the small fictional Australian town of the same name, it essays what happens to a tight-knit community when two of its residents disappear, as narrated through the eyes of its 17-year-old protagonist, Jean. (It's since been shortlisted in the Best Debut Fiction category at the Indie Book Awards.)

"Writing the book became more and more interesting to me, and once I went into that world I just stayed there for a couple of years until it was finished," she offers. "I really enjoy writing. It suits my kind of sensibilities and lifestyle and personality to write for several hours a day and not have to go away from my family too much. And I also enjoyed how long it took, I enjoyed that it was such a big thing."

Throsby had been published before. She'd written film reviews for *Blunt*, and the odd profile for some airline magazines. And in 2013 she wrote an opinion piece for the *Sydney Morning Herald* about the debate surrounding same-sex marriage. Inspired in part by former Katter Party Senate candidate Bernard Gaynor and his comments that he wouldn't let a gay person teach his children, she wrote: "You get a thick skin with so much homophobic content in the world, but reading that, I cried on the newspaper."

Not only was Throsby's piece an insightful and entirely logical questioning of Australia's reluctance to legalise same-sex marriage, it was also the first time she publicly acknowledged she was in a same-sex relationship.

"I'd never spoken about it before, and I had my own reasons for that," says the 38-year-old. "I was so pissed off by that

"I still listened to music, but I wasn't interested in creating. It wasn't a good feeling."

Editor ROD YATES wrote the Ryan Adams cover story in RS 783.

stage, and I was so over it. The whole debate around it became more and more upsetting. And this is the problem with having a plebiscite. When it starts to become debated and there are letters to the *Herald* every day and there are people on the radio talking about how it links to bestiality, by that point I was like, fuck this.”

In the piece, she wrote that she'd been “supported by the people around me”, and today says that coming out in this fashion wasn't the big moment one might imagine. “They're just strangers out there, if some people care or don't, that's fine. If it was the moment of sitting down at the dinner table and telling my family, which I never had that moment, that would have probably been more momentous. But no, personally, it wasn't. It was more just a feeling of anger at the situation, the state of the political and social conversation around it.”

WHILE Throsby was writing *Goodwood*, she was pregnant with her first daughter, Alvy, to her partner Zoe. One of the songs on her new album, *Mountain*, with its lyrics “I'll be mountain/I'm the first place to get the rain”, was inspired by the now two-and-a-half-year old. “It's a song about that huge feeling of responsibility when you first have a child and... about vowing to assume that role whether I was feeling confident about it or not. And luckily I really enjoy it, I really like being a mum. And I think personally I'm better if I have to step up. I tend to respond better than if I'm allowed to collapse. If I'm in a position of having to cope, and being expected to cope, I actually cope well.”

After a Time – titled in part because there's been such a gap between albums – became a reality when Throsby's excitement for making music returned after finishing the first draft of *Goodwood*. The sense of sadness she felt about leaving that fictional world was replaced by the excitement of moving on to her next project – in this case, her sixth solo record. Assembling a band consisting of drummer Bree van Reyk, Dirty Three guitarist Mick Turner,

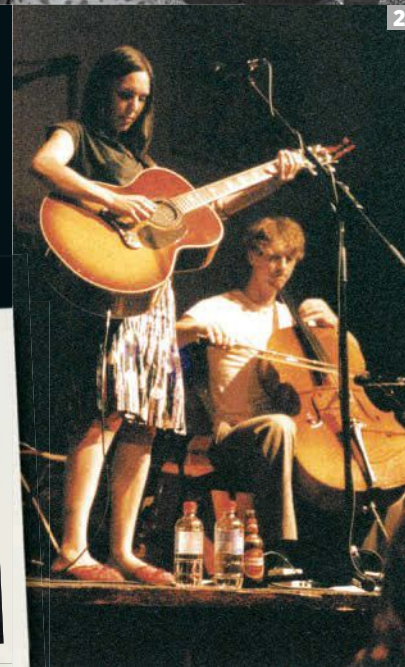
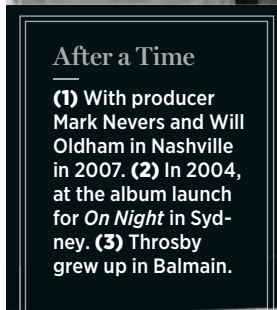
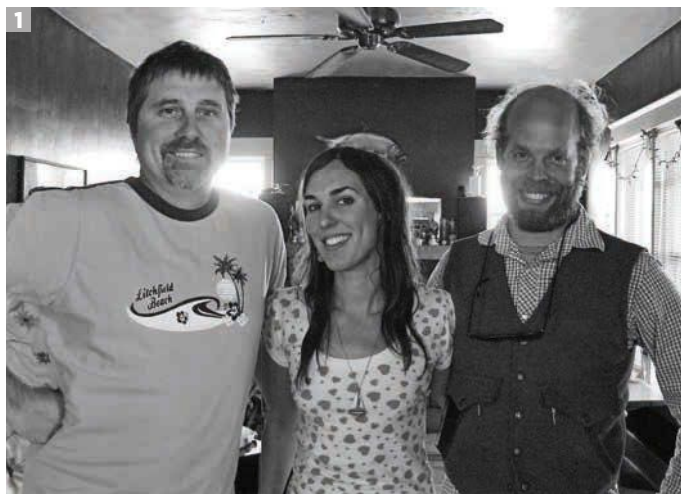
and guests such as Marcus Whale (Collarbones), Mark Kozelek (Sun Kil Moon) and Jens Birchall, Throsby co-produced the album with Tim Kevin (Youth Group, the Singing Skies). The majority of the songs were written in the months-long gaps between drafts of her book, and as a collection it broadly reflects the changes in Throsby's life in the years since *Team*. “My

the recording done live. Though sonically a step removed from its predecessor, Throsby does see a throughline connecting all her work, even if it's in part cosmetic. “My intention has never really changed in terms of what I was trying to do. So all my albums have the same font on the cover, they have the same border that's the same width and the same colour; aesthetically there's a real throughline. And I'm not interested in [having] some kind of breakthrough new sound every time. I think a lot of artists are driven by sonic innovation, but it's not anything I'm interested in.”

The kind of aesthetic meticulousness Throsby applies to her artwork has been a trait for years, from her early days obsessively cutting out every picture she could find of Corey Haim to the way in which she describes her favourite past-time while working at the video store. “I was a bit OCD. And I have to challenge myself to not go there. OCD thinking is essentially a catastrophising way of thinking, which I still definitely have, but I try very, very hard to keep it in check, in terms of the way I categorise things in my brain. Like when I worked at the video store, it was a specialist store and we had everything in directors' sections. But then I started making more and more sections; I just became this really obsessive section maker. [Laughs] So I had my ‘Hard Hitting Drama’ section – that's what the actual tag said, I made the laminated tag – and then there was the ‘Sexual Perversion’ section – sex with your brother, sex with your sister, sex with your mother – and I had my ‘Dance-Drama’ section. Sections within sections was my favourite thing in the video store. So I definitely am particular. You kind of have to be to write a novel; you have to have a sort of organised brain to do that.”

The beauty of music, then, is that it allows her to switch off that side of herself when she's creating. “The thing I like about music, in terms of arrangement, is it's so loose. A song like ‘Being Born’ [off *After a Time*] is really chaotic in its arrangement, and I will always go for that. I love that freedom in music.”

She smiles. “You can kind of let it all go.”



After a Time

(1) With producer Mark Nevers and Will Oldham in Nashville in 2007. (2) In 2004, at the album launch for *On Night* in Sydney. (3) Throsby grew up in Balmain.

favourite albums are always the ones that capture something across the whole [record], it feels like a moment in time,” she offers. “That's why I can't listen to my first few albums, because I was a different person then. And it's nice to perform some of those songs, but some of them I'm like, I don't relate to that person anymore. And if I don't relate to that I don't think I do a very good performance of the song.”

In contrast to *Team*, which was “95 per cent acoustic wooden instruments”, *After a Time* is a more electric album, with much of

When a New York
cult hero and a
Southern scene-stealer
teamed up as Run
the Jewels, they became
hip-hop's most intense
new truth-tellers -
and befriended Bernie
Sanders in the process

COMBAT RAP

BY JONAH WEINER

EL-P WAS RIDING THROUGH a downtown L.A. intersection, shotgun in Jonah Hill's Audi, when another car materialised seemingly out of nowhere and - bam! - T-boned it. The Audi's entire passenger side was destroyed but, amazingly, everyone emerged OK. "I'm a believer in air-bags," El-P says three days later.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER YANG





**RUN AGAINST
THE MACHINE**
El-P (left) and
Killer Mike in L.A.
in December.

At the time of the accident, he'd just met Hill, who is a big fan of Run the Jewels, the furiously inventive, critically beloved hip-hop duo that El-P formed in 2013 with his friend and fellow MC Killer Mike. Right before the crash, Hill and El-P grabbed a bite and "talked about working on some shit", El-P says. "Possibly a video." They ate at Philippe's, a venerated spot downtown, and so the collision, El-P adds, wasn't without a bright side: "I had a really good sandwich."

As El-P tells this story on a brisk December afternoon, he's smoking a cigarette outside a Hollywood rehearsal space with Killer Mike, who's smoking a joint. "The fact that you did not make TMZ – you're fucking Batman," Mike tells him. "I'm so happy I did not make TMZ," El-P replies. Online tabloids covered the crash, but El-P remained unidentified. "I'm 'other man,'" he says. "I was like, 'Yes! I'm Keyser Söze!'"

El-P has spent most of his career below the radar, so he's comfortable there. A veteran of the New York underground rap scene, he was a member of the mid-Nineties cult trio Company Flow before pumping out a string of beloved indie-rap classics as a solo MC, indie-label boss and producer: spitting dense, dystopian raps and crafting gritty, hammering beats for himself and like-minded oddballs. Killer Mike, for his part, is an Atlanta native who made his name as a member of OutKast's Dungeon Family, delivering scene-stealing guest verses on *Stankonia* and Jay Z's *Blueprint 2* before making solo albums.

Both had enjoyed success, in other words, but no major breakthroughs when, a few years ago, a mutual friend suggested they collaborate on Mike's fifth studio album. At the time, El-P was recovering from the demise of his label (money trouble), grief over the death of a dear friend (cancer) and bouts of self-destructiveness ("I was doing a lot of fucking drugs, trying to escape," he says). Mike was in search of an escape too. He'd suffered demoralising label headaches over the years – executives overly interested in hits, prolonged release-date purgatories – and came to associate sales with self-worth. He had his own hurtful impulses, which largely took shape as substance abuse and infidelity to his wife – or, as Mike puts it, "depression, drugs and bitches."

Working together, however, reinvigorated El-P and encouraged Mike "to be to-

tally free and honest, free in pushing my style, free of the expectations of radio or a record company." The resulting album, *R.A.P. Music*, came out independently and established Mike as an expert bomb-hurler in the charismatic tradition of Ice Cube, with Mike spitting thundering but dexterous lyrics about police violence, Ronald Reagan's legacy and *Lord of the Flies*. El-P, masterminding the beats, struck on a dazzling digital-age update of the Bomb Squad's incendiary sound.

They soon decided to form a duo, inspired by legendary two-man outfits they adored, like EPMD, UGK and OutKast. They called their project Run the Jewels – casting themselves as scrappy stickup kids, poised to mug the mainstream – and their lyrics combined leftist politics with stoner hedonism, bound together by the palpable pleasure the two took from sharing a mic. "When you listen to this shit, it's like, 'Yes, these guys are in the room together,'" El-P says. "That's the lifeblood of what I love about rap music to begin with: that badass interplay." Their 2013 self-titled debut and its 2014 follow-up, *RTJ2*, sold hundreds of thousands of copies; their concerts sold out and spanned the globe. Suddenly, decades into their careers, both were more success-

ful – and happier – than ever. "It's pretty cool being 40 and having your blow-up moment," says El-P.

They head inside to rehearse. They are under a month away from releasing their excellent third album – *RTJ3* – and they're in L.A. to handle a bunch of release- and tour-related business. Mike, who stands well over six feet and currently weighs "about 370" pounds [160 kilos], sits on a stool behind a music stand, consulting printouts of

his lyrics. "I write in the booth and memorise in rehearsals," he explains, snacking on a bag of Doritos – a momentary lapse in willpower, since he's been trying to lose 100 pounds. He notes that Travis Barker, who has drummed with Run the Jewels, "put me on to this app that tells you all the vegan restaurants that are nearby."

"If you lose 100 pounds, I'm not gonna speak to you anymore," El-P says. "Because the dynamic of this group relies on it being a fat guy... and a less-fat guy." They cue up their new single, "Legend Has It". As they rap, they face each other from about five metres off, El-P smiling as Mike rises to his feet and throws his elbows at the music

stand like a boxer toying with his opponent. When the track's done, El-P looks down to discover that he's bound up his legs with the microphone cord. "I walk around in circles until it's all in tangles – which is a good metaphor for my life," he says. Then he points at Mike: "And at the centre of the maze, I meet this cuddly bastard."



EL-P AND KILLER MIKE first met "in Nebraska", Mike says. "In a cage match," El-P notes. They are kidding: stoned and fucking around. The real story is that Mike was born Michael Render. His mother, who gave birth to

him at 16, had an artistic streak that manifested, for a time, in a job as a florist. It was through this job that she found a sideline selling cocaine. "It was the same clientele," Mike says. "Rich white ladies. They asked, 'Could you get me some?' She thought about it, and she could."

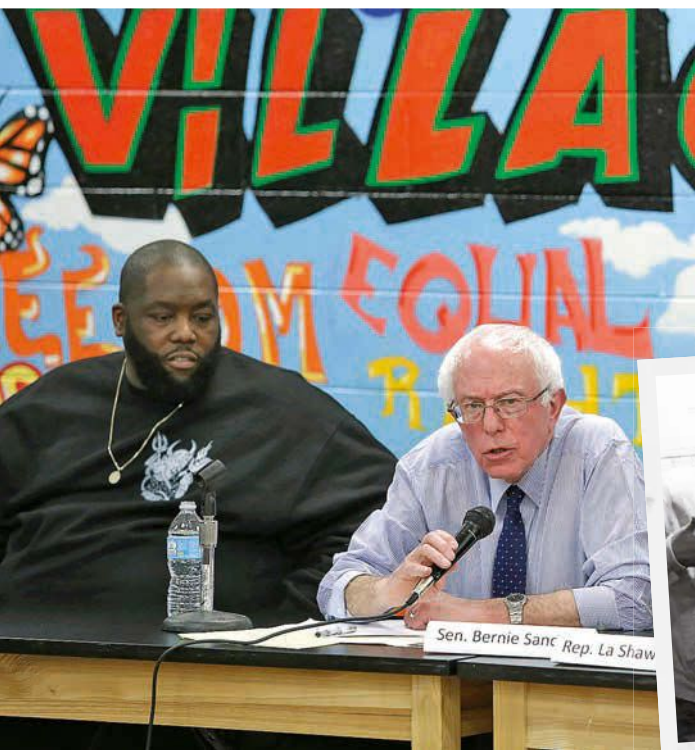
Mike was in fourth grade when he told his teacher Ms. Ealey that he wanted to be a rapper, "like Run-DMC. She told me, 'You should be a pilot,'" he recalls. "She was the first teacher to tell me that I was smart." (He went on to get his pilot's license, too.) Mike was raised in large part by his grandmother, a nurse, and his grandfather, who once drove trucks for the Chattahoochee Brick Co., "which used prison labour as slave labour during Jim Crow", Mike notes (his skull is brimming with such history). It was through his grandfather "that I started to understand class versus race; I often had more in common with working-class whites than with the Southern liberals my grandma looked up to, or with the blacks of means who lived over in Collier Heights." That neighbourhood, he elaborates, "was the result of planned gentrification: Democrats actually bought land out from under poor whites in order to bring blacks to the party."

His father was a cop, his uncle a guy who made money "in the streets", Mike says, giving him role models on both sides of the law. Mike dealt drugs briefly, and on the Run the Jewels track "Crown", he raps about the deep regret he still feels for having once sold cocaine to a pregnant woman. "Working with [El-P] makes it safe for me to get out some of the darkest, most tumultuous, guilt-ridden thoughts I have," he says, welling up at the memory. "I sold cocaine, and there's days where that shit fucks with me, because I knew, even at that age, how wrong I was. But everybody sold cocaine! Everybody sold and did cocaine!" He begins crying, wiping tears from his cheeks. "That verse just poured out of me – I didn't give a fuck if it made the album. I gave a fuck that it was finally out of me."

A thoughtful, engaged kid, Mike spent time in high school as an anti-violence me-

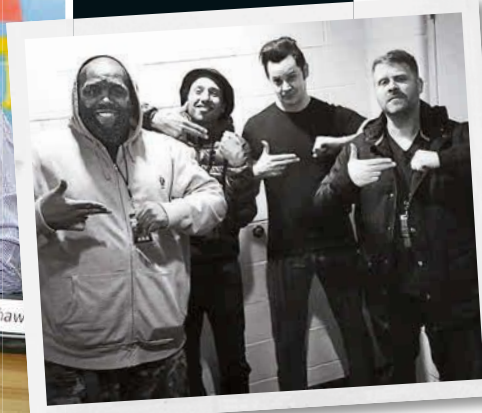
**"WORKING WITH
EL-P MAKES
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I HAVE," SAYS
KILLER MIKE.**

Contributing editor JONAH WEINER wrote about Emma Stone in RS 784.



Rebel, Rebel

Left: Mike was a prominent Bernie Sanders supporter, frequently joining him on campaign stops. Below: Mike, Zack de la Rocha of Rage Against the Machine, Jack White and El-P in New York, 2015.



diator with a group called Black Teens for Advancement. He fell in love with Fred Hampton and James Baldwin and enrolled at Morehouse College – a storied black school whose alumni include Martin Luther King Jr. and Spike Lee. There, Mike studied philosophy and religion. “I wanted to understand man,” he says. “I was raised a black child in the South, where you’re indoctrinated into a religion that an oppressor gave you. That left all types of fucked-up questions in me.” He kept rapping, too, and through a classmate, he met OutKast’s Antwan “Big Boi” Patton, who rewarded Mike’s raw talent with a record deal. Radicalism coursed through his early work, but he also strove for commercial success, at times in ways he now deems hollow: Mike’s breakthrough single, a bouncy sex jam called “A.D.I.D.A.S.,” reached Number 60 on the pop charts, but he disavows it. “It’s an OutKast song that I was instructed to release,” he says. “I hate it.”

El-P, meanwhile, was born Jaime Melrose and grew up in Brooklyn. His dad was a jazz musician with a Wall Street day job he hated; he encouraged Jaime never to work solely for a paycheck. His mother, who raised him and his two sisters largely by herself, was an ad-agency copywriter. Jaime’s mother allowed him to attend a school to focus on music production, and by the time he was 15, he’d landed the same manager as Mobb Deep. In addition to hip-hop, he loved Steve Reich, John Carpenter scores, Gary Numan and Devo. A fantastic, proudly unconventional producer, El-P developed an aesthetic that mixes sci-fi synthesizers with frenetic percussion

– something like a boom-bap Vangelis. To celebrate his success with Run the Jewels, El-P recently shelled out \$25,000 for a Yamaha CS-80 – “the synth that Vangelis used for *Blade Runner*”. They’re exceedingly rare, but Eddie Van Halen turned out to have one for sale, and El-P decided to splurge on it – its cosmic sounds are all over *RTJ3*.

Co-founding Company Flow in his teens, El-P specialised in abstract brags, but he had a thematic breakthrough on the song “Last Good Sleep”, deciding to rap about how his stepfather viciously beat his mum. “I didn’t think anyone wanted to hear that shit – like, ‘Boohoo,’” he recalls. “But after that song, people started coming to me with tears in their eyes.” The track reflected El-P’s ingrained mistrust of corrupt authority figures, which continued into tracks like “Patriotism” – a sneering assault on capitalism and imperialism – and, from there, into Run the Jewels.

Not that the duo don’t leave room for plenty of dick jokes, oddball non sequiturs and rhymes about how much iller they are than everyone else. “The majority of our shit wasn’t really at all civic-minded,” El-P notes. “It’s a celebration of rap and the shit that made us smile when we decided we wanted to be rappers, which is just the fun and the skill of the whole thing. Then we found out that we could get in a room and make each other cry, too.”

With *RTJ3* – which they recorded last year at a studio El-P bought in upstate New York – they dig deeper into that duality. “Legend Has It” is a raucous brag-fest, but defining political phenomena of

2016 come into their crosshairs, too: On “Talk to Me”, Mike snarls at “all-lives-matter-ass white folk” and refers to a “devil” who wears “a bad toupee and a spray tan”. Over the years, Mike and El-P have taken aim not only at the right but also at centrist liberals. In a 2012 song, Mike called Barack Obama “just another talking head telling lies on teleprompters”. In the video for Run the Jewels’ “Lie, Cheat, Steal”, the duo don rubber Bush and Obama masks and throw their arms around each other jovially – a creepy sight gag suggesting that the presidents are more cronies than true ideological foes.

During the election, Mike was a prominent Bernie Sanders surrogate, stumping for him on TV and the campaign trail. When one reporter asked what drew him to Sanders, Mike’s response was priceless: “Smoking a joint, reading his tweets!” In an interview with Stephen Colbert, Mike praised Sanders’ commitment to social justice and called him an heir to Martin Luther King Jr.: “We can directly elect someone who cares about poor people, cares about women, gays, black rights, cares about lives that don’t look like his.” Mike invokes King again when I ask for his thoughts on the antipathy so many Democrats showed toward Sanders. “I think a lot about what King said in Letter From Birmingham Jail: ‘I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in the stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Council or the Ku Klux Klan, but the white moderate.’” (He’s still in touch with Sanders: “We were texting just the other day.”)

Run the Jewels have collaborated repeatedly with Rage Against the Machine’s Zack de la Rocha, and cite Public Enemy as heroes. (Chuck D, in turn, has called Run the Jewels a recent inspiration to him.) I ask if they see themselves carrying on that radical-pop lineage. “I could never be as dope as Rage and P.E.,” says Mike. “To me, they’re braver than any of us: overtly leftist, Marxist, political. But I’m inspired by them to be a truth-teller.” El-P, who identifies as a cynic to Mike’s optimist, describes his ethos as one of extreme misfit defiance: “I wanna give kids who listen to our shit the same shit I got from my rap heroes, which was an attitude, a way to approach life from a badass stance that isn’t about having the same things, or being as in-control, as the people that would subjugate you or that would look down on you.” He frowns. “It’s about having a swagger in the face of fucking doom.”



"With Trump,
you're dealing
with a human
wrecking ball."



John Oliver

THE ROLLING STONE INTERVIEW

Can the sharpest
voice on TV win the
war on Trump?

By Brian Hiatt

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK SELIGER



N THE WALL FACING JOHN

Oliver's desk, on the eighth floor of an office building so far on the West Side of Manhattan it's practically floating in the Hudson River, are 30 blue index cards. Each represents an episode of the 2017 season of *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*. And each and every one of them is blank. That's one reason Oliver is already arriving at the office before 8:30 a.m. each day, though he has weeks until the February 12th kickoff of the show's fourth season. But he and his staff also have a near-impossible task ahead of them: planning a season's worth of television's smartest, sanest show in the dumbest and craziest of times. ★ Oliver just wants to do his show, to continue using the extraordinary creative freedom granted by HBO to keep diving into what's been aptly dubbed "investigative comedy," which means devoting a huge chunk of every episode – or sometimes the entire half-hour – to lengthy, improbably hilarious, fact-stuffed explorations of arcane

topics, from debt-collection laws to the racist history behind the disenfranchisement of U.S. territories like Puerto Rico. But there is the small matter of President Donald Trump, who is throwing off everyone's plans, Oliver's among them. Appropriately, a book currently sitting on his desk is titled *A World in Disarray*: "A little on the nose," he says.

In the face of a fact-challenged presidency, the work of the most thoroughly fact-checked comedy show in the history of television seems sorely needed. Though he largely focused on other issues, Oliver did deliver some of the campaign's most memorable critiques, observing in July that Trump has said "thousands of crazy things, each of which blunts the effect of the others. It's the bed-of-nails principle: If you step on one nail, it hurts you; if you step on a thousand nails, no single one stands out, and you're fine."

But again, Oliver is a reluctant combatant. "I hope we'll be able to protect the majority of the show from the president," he says, noting that the in-depth packages they're preparing have little to do with

Trump, and that, in general, he tries to go beyond "party politics". "We're trying to build foundations of incredibly complicated stories that we know are basically timeless." That said, when we meet again two weeks later, this time just a few days after Trump's inauguration, Oliver has conceded that the new president will likely dominate the first show, at least.

Oliver is wearing jeans, Asics sneakers with black socks, and a plaid shirt with sleeves rolled up to reveal ferociously hairy forearms. He's grown some facial scruff that somehow only emphasises his acknowledged resemblance to Bart Simpson's friend Milhouse. "It's like getting some control back in your life, or wrestling back control of your face," he says, pondering the beard-growing habits of off-duty TV guys. "You just feel like a kind of shaved gibbon all the time."

Oliver is effortlessly, casually funny in conversation, like a guitarist running scales. At one point, he launches into a miniskit about a ROLLING STONE writer fighting Trump-induced malaise while interviewing a band – Imagine Dragons, he specifies. "What's the point, then, guys?" he moans, playing the part. "What's the point? What's it like fiddling while Rome burns?"

How was your mood over the holidays?

Oh, pretty bad. We had one show to do after the election.

That was the one where you did the now-famous "Fuck 2016" segment, which ended with you blowing up a giant 2016 sign set up in an empty stadium?

We'd already planned the demolition, because it had already been a really bad year in many ways. It had been a fucking awful election campaign, humanity at its worst. And Prince died, and everything else. It was supposed to be a separate story after whatever we did at the top of the show, but it turned out to have direct connective tissue, so we did one story for 30 minutes, and then blew it up and walked away.

The morning of Election Day, we went through all the safety stuff, and the guy had said, "Hey, you're standing, like, in the blast radius." Like, "This wave is gonna come through you, through your ribs, and it's gonna move your heart." And I'm a natural coward, with all the self-preservation skills of a coward, which is flee and flinch.

But you looked stoic as hell in the final clip.

We did the actual explosion the day after the election. I was so dead inside emotionally that I didn't flinch – because I didn't really care [*laughs*]. "Hmm, maybe a piece of something smashes into me and kills me. Would that be the worst thing?" I mean, he'd been elected less than 12 hours ago, so you'd think, "Yeah, I'd like to blow something up and see if I feel anything." So it wasn't bravado, it was total nihilism.

Right after Brexit, you stated on air that this could happen in America. And you were visibly upset about Brexit itself.

Yeah. I was furious. So I was not that surprised. At the moment when those first election returns came in, it was like muscle memory of watching the Brexit results all night thinking, "I know how this story ends. I think I know where we end up."

Way before this, you had mentioned seeing xenophobia in small-town England – you said people were ranting about Bulgarians.

That's why calling a referendum was such a myopic decision. That was an incredibly reckless, arrogant, self-serving move, to call a referendum and then not to energetically campaign to find a way to avoid what you've just set in motion. Not to have any sense of the depth of either xenophobia or resentment for European bureaucracy. It was a terrible idea from the get-go, as is proved by the fact that [David Cameron] is not prime minister anymore.

Was it especially frustrating after you looked into the camera and begged the U.K. voters not to do it?

I had my producers and researchers trying to find any argument to the contrary,

Senior writer BRIAN HIATT wrote the Paris Jackson story in this issue.



INVESTIGATIVE COMEDIAN

- (1) Oliver hosting *Last Week Tonight*.
 (2) With Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*. "I'm happy to be in his shadow," Oliver says of his mentor. (3) As a young comedian (centre) with the Cambridge Footlights in 1998.

to work against my prejudice of going into this thinking, "This is a terrible fucking idea." And the researchers – who are incredibly nuanced in their thinking; very rarely does anything come back in black and white from them – returned saying, "There's really nothing there. This is jumping off a cliff blind." It was clear it would be a catastrophic decision for Britain and anyone in its immediate vicinity. To have that knowledge, and then to watch six hours of electoral returns come in through the night, just watching your country set fire to itself – it was pretty bad.

What did that vote reveal for you?

It's hard to unpack the general shift toward the right in America and in certain parts of the world. The moment in that pathetic Brexit campaign that seemed to resonate most afterward was [conservative member of Parliament] Michael Gove saying in an interview, "People in this country have had enough of experts." And that turned out to echo throughout the year, especially in the U.S. You can understand, right? Being lectured is annoying, when you're a kid and throughout your life. But it turned out there was less collective investment in facts than people thought.

Did you share the general shudder when Kellyanne Conway introduced the idea of "alternative facts"?

It's just a framing device, an ear-catching phrase, but it's nothing new. The content of what she's wrapping a bow on is



“Normally, you would think, ‘I’m not going to get deported.’ But believe me, that’s something wrapped around my head.”

something that everyone has been bearing witness to. We've had 18 months of feelings over facts. The only thing that's remotely new about it is the location that it's coming from.

Is interviewing her essentially pointless?

In general, it's very dangerous to keep the old campaign architecture around with this presidency, to have an eight-person panel on CNN debating whether or not he said something. "Did he or did he not do this thing we watched him do?" There's actually serious harm in that discussion. And, yeah, I really don't see the point of talking to Kellyanne Conway because her language jujitsu is so strong. You know she can look you in the eyes

and tell you the opposite of what you just saw happen, and she will be more confident in her answer than you are in your question.

The White House press corps seemed stunned by "alternative facts", and by Sean Spicer's haranguing them with falsities.

That's absurd. There's nothing to be stunned about. Trump and everyone around him have been consistent to a fault in their behaviour.

There's this sense that, well, D.C. is the dominant gene, and anyone who goes there will have to kowtow to how things are done there. But you're dealing with a human wrecking ball.

Is it going to be harder or easier to do a current-events-based comedy show in what appear to be seriously dark times?

Yeah, um... harder? Certainly harder than I think people might imagine.

How so?

The main thing I tend to hear from people, in a well-meaning way, is, "Oh, wow! Your show's set", and, like, "You're gonna be fine for the next four years." But whenever these... I was gonna say these *kind* of administrations, but this may be a different level. But just for comedy alone, it can be more difficult because there is so much low-hanging fruit. Especially with someone like him. The old W. Bush days were not halcyon days for comedy in lots of regards, unless people really fought to find some more substance in what was going on. If you're just making fun of personalities and sound bites, then you're just attacking the window dressing, and there's only shallow satisfaction in that.

That is a philosophy of comedy that Jon Stewart put forth to everyone on "The Daily Show", right?

It's what I liked most about *The Daily Show* – that Jon would really try and reach beyond just the fun sound bites. You could absolutely have fun with them, but that was the dessert. Those are the things that you could use to get people to listen to the main thrust of what you're saying.

You joked on the show that you fear you'll always be in Jon's shadow.

I don't think that's a fear, and I don't even have a problem with it. I'm happy to be in his shadow. I think that is only appropriate.

Jon has managed to be relatively quiet lately, other than popping up with Stephen Colbert.

Yeah. We'll see how long that goes on for. You've gotta be able to do a year off. After you've worked at the pace he has, you just physically have to be able to do a year. I mean, he's working on things. So he's publicly quiet, but he's not privately quiet. He's using his brain and working on stuff right now.

Do you have any similar ambitions of directing movies, writing movies...

No! [Laughs] This is so all-consuming. Not only can I only do this, I only really see this, 'cause I can't really think that far ahead. I can only think a few weeks at a time, just because there's always pretty big calamities ahead that we need to avoid.

So when you have the president of the United States, in his inaugural address, echoing a passage from a speech that the Batman villain Bane delivered in "The Dark Knight Rises"...

Yeah, that would be the low-hanging fruit. Those are kind of the responses that Twitter can give you. The easiest jokes have kind of been told. The carcass will have been picked pretty clean. So we've gotta do something else.

What were your overall thoughts on the inaugural speech?

The American carnage? Again, I don't know what people were really expecting. But there was definitely something jarring about a speech that negative, and that clunky, considering it's an inauguration speech. You know, the kind of speeches that are sometimes carved in marble on the side of a wall? I'm hoping that some marble-carver is not chiselling out "American carnage."

My favourite part was the "and the crime and the gangs and the drugs" bit. It had a nice cadence to it.

That's right, yeah. He's got bars [laughs].

There's this endless debate over whether the use of his Twitter account is strategic or whether they're tantrums. Where do you fall?

Is Trump strategic, or is he sophisticated enough to know the power of the kind of linguistic hand grenade that he has become? Because even if he isn't, it's a classic

magician's misdirection trick, isn't it? Is he sophisticated enough to understand the power to distract people from what you're doing with ridiculous behaviour? And the party he nominally belongs to is definitely sophisticated enough to know that. They could get a lot of shit done while people are gasping over the things that Trump has said. You could do hard legislation in the shadows, because if a magician comes on-stage and releases a chimpanzee into the room who starts throwing faeces at people, it's going to be pretty easy for him to make a couple of moves and end up with a woman sawed in half [laughs]. They could get an incredible amount done while people are distracted by just the volume of nonsense.

Your "Make Donald Drumpf Again" segment, complete with hats, was great at

== 66 ==
**It's a magician's
misdirection
trick, isn't it?
You can get a lot
done while
people gasp
over what
Trump says.**
== 99 ==

first, but it seemed to get out of control. I would almost compare it to when a cool band has a hit song that becomes way too big.

That is exactly how it felt. That got out of hand. We did that the night of the Oscars, right? So that was not supposed to be that big of a deal, because of the Oscars. And not just the Oscars, the Chris Rock Oscars. Good Oscars, right? We were not doing that with the sense that it would become bigger than our show normally is. And, yeah, the prevalence of it, after the fact, became a bit dismaying. It kind of slightly ruins the memory. But the idea of the Drumpf thing, I think, is really funny outside of what it became – to try and separate the brand from the man.

And my favourite part of it was the link back to the attack on Jon Stewart, when Trump thought it was somehow discrediting to him to reveal that his original last name was Leibowitz.

Yeah, exactly, and I'm really proud of that.

Which was blatantly anti-Semitic, by the way.

Oh, yeah! There's only one thing that is, and it's anti-Semitic [laughs]. If it's not anti-Semitism, I don't know what it is. Yeah, I'm really proud of the way that whole thing linked together. It was supposed to be just a joke, like everything we do, not a stick to hit people with. It was supposed to be a much more nuanced, argumentative piece than the reductive end that we put on it. So just to see people using it as a shorthand was pretty dispiriting in the end.

And there are always the people who are still doing the Drumpf thing two months later, and you're just begging them to stop.

Yeah, of course. That joke became old for us very quickly. There's a reason we didn't use it again. It really is the song I skip past. It's "Creep". It's a good song, Thom Yorke! It was a good song when he wrote it.

Well, at least you don't have to go on-stage and have people demanding you do "Drumpf" for them.

"Do it! You are going to do it, right? Do it. Do it! Sure, you can encore with it, but you're fucking doing it, right? And don't do a slow version."

It's OK, now you're the "Fuck 2016" guy.

[Laughs] That's right. I'll just bury it with something else. That's the key thing – you don't want to stop, in a way, because you don't want the last thing you do to define you. It's just that we're not supposed to be that popular. Our show is not supposed to be [laughs] that relevant.

You've made it clear you're similarly irritated with the meme "John Oliver eviscerates; John Oliver demolishes..." whatever subject you're addressing.

Of course. But that has nothing to do with us. Our purpose was never to eviscerate or disembowel.

If real crisis starts to break out – war, mass deportations – won't the show have to change, and move away from some of the less immediately topical long-form segments?

It's a bit challenging, right? You have to look at *The Daily Show* during the most ferocious parts of the Iraq War. I don't know if the show changes, or the tone might change. I don't know. I'm cognisant of that, though, as we're going into this year. Does this show need to change at all?

Assuming you are not, yourself, singled out and deported, that is.

Again, normally, you would think, "I'm probably not going to get deported, presidents have big jobs, they're not that petty."

You are, in fact, a United States citizen now, though?

No. No, I'm on the green card.

Oh.

So, believe me, that is something that is wrapped around my head.

What an insane thing to have to contemplate.

It's amazing, yeah, and, again, normally you could curtail the paranoid part of your brain with logic. And you can't do that with the same ferocity because that logical part of your brain now tells you the chance is nonzero.

On the other hand, the greatest episode of all time...

[Laughs] But it's not in the studio, it's from JFK on my cellphone.

They did want to deport John Lennon.

[Looking faintly alarmed] They did?

I believe there was the pretext of an old drug bust.

Yeah. They had something on him! They got nothing on me. Nothing! [Laughs] I have a week and a half now to basically go through my office and apartment [laughs] and flush everything. We'll see. There's a chance someone rappels down and kicks in the window and grabs me. That's not usually how immigration enforcement works, but he doesn't play by the same rules. And Trump's verbally Bane-esque – why not use the fun side of Bane as well, which is like crash-landing out of planes?

That requires a certain fitness level.

He's a 70-year-old man, but he said he feels 39. He couldn't even say, "I feel 40." Hold on – I am 39, and I feel 70!

I sort of feel that if, say, "Saturday Night Live" got cancelled right now, it would signal a national emergency.

It would not!

Well, Trump was kind of suggesting that he'd like it gone.

He can't do that. I think market forces would protect *Saturday Night Live* in particular. I think it must be weird for them to know that he is probably watching, in part because he hosted that fucking show. I don't think we are really on his radar.

You probably go well beyond his attention span.

That's true. *SNL* is nice and punchy.

The only thing keeping you in this country is the sheer complexity of your show.

[Laughs] That's true. We don't have Miley Cyrus singing twice just to break it up.

Deportation aside, do you have apocalyptic fears right now?

Most of the time you can be confident that it's not gonna happen. Not with this president. We'll see if we're dancing on a pile of flaming rubble at any point in the future.

Your wife gave birth to your first child in 2015 – how has being a dad changed you?

Even when something like Brexit happened, I guess there was an extra level of sadness attached to that. Because when he was born, I thought, "He's really lucky. 'Cause he can have a British passport, which is a European passport as well, he can live and work anywhere in Europe. He has that freedom of movement." Like, what a massive privilege to give to someone. And he can live in America, too. And as an immigrant, I know how difficult it is to come to this country, even with all the support of working on a TV show. It's not easy to navigate the American immigration system, or any immigration system. And, so, I guess what made me extra-sad about that was I could feel his horizons contract and he wasn't six months old yet. And that just seemed heartbreaking.



AN ENGLISHMAN IN NEW YORK

Oliver with his wife, Kate Norley. They welcomed their first child in 2015.

And I guess I was lucky in that I haven't had to explain to him what this election was. I skipped all that because he's less a human being now than he is a high-maintenance houseplant. So there is not the complexity of having to frame it in a way that he understands, especially if Trump winning runs counter to some of the things you want to teach kids. That, I imagine, was very difficult for people. I'm quite glad I didn't have to deal with that, on top of everything else.

When you got married, it seemed like you were starting to learn how to not devote 100 per cent of your being to work. Now you have something else pulling you away. How is that working for you?

I've been, like, painfully, slowly, trying to introduce the components of being a fully functional human being. It's really hard. Yeah. I get the sense that the healthy work/life balance is something that is pretty elu-

sive, if it's existent at all. I don't know. It's really – it's really tough.

Did parenthood crack you open emotionally, as it does for many people?

Definitely. Definitely. Definitely – and I'm British. So you're cracking a pretty dormant volcano [laughs]. He had a pretty difficult time, and it was not the easiest pregnancy as well. It was a level of trauma throughout his gestation and birth, and in the aftermath. So, yeah, it did feel weird doing a comedy show during some of that. And you probably feel things more keenly. I guess I've generally done that through other people.

How did that manifest itself?

[Somberly] I think that's why I found Trump's treatment of Khizr Khan and his wife [after the Democratic National Convention] – the parents of a soldier who was killed – I found that so heinous. That's probably through my [Army veteran] wife, right? So that's having some skin in the game with the military, or knowing the military through my wife. I found that so appalling that it was the only time last year I couldn't think of a joke. And we went around and around and around on finding a joke to get out of that segment, because it was going to be the last part of that story. We could never come out with a joke that didn't feel too glib. So we ended up just saying something that sounded like a joke but wasn't. And that feels like a failure, to be honest, because I think it's our job to put jokes on things. I think I was too personally offended by it. But that's a failure. I don't think that's an excuse. I think that's not doing your job properly.

You should probably resign.

Well, it definitely kind of sticks in my throat. We did come up with loads of jokes, just nothing that I felt like I could say.

It's hard for anyone to work in the face of something like a difficult pregnancy – doing comedy must be even harder.

I think what happened with me is that I would – I guess this is from the ninja skills of repression that British people have – that I would flick the switch: OK, this. Now this. Now this. And now you can compartmentalise everything. And then, once your baby is born, you fall in love with it and realise, ah, that probably doesn't fucking work anymore. Like that switch is broken [laughs]. And that's a big thing – a big thing with something that has been one of the foundational ways that you got through life. That is a huge thing to lose. I'm going to have to work out how to deal with that.

Is it possible that having your son in your life might make for better work somehow?

I fucking hope so. Otherwise, I'm going to be really angry with him – it's all his fault! [Laughs]

[Cont. on 89]

THE RADICAL CRUSADE OF MIKE PENCE

As governor of Indiana, he trampled on the rights of women, the LGBTQ community and the poor. Then there's the incompetence. Meet, quite possibly, the next president

BY STEPHEN RODRICK

ILLUSTRATION BY DANIEL ADEL

THE OPTICS WERE GOOD. About 100 Carrier factory workers in Indianapolis sat in folding chairs awaiting President-elect Donald Trump, who had announced, via Twitter, he'd saved their jobs. Well, not all their jobs – 730 were saved while another 550 were heading to Mexico – but that was a small detail. (Trump also kept saying he had saved air-conditioning jobs, though the factory makes furnaces.) After a while, a silver-haired man resembling the guy on top of a wedding cake strode to the podium.

"It is great to be back home again in Indiana," said Mike Pence in the stentorian voice honed during a seven-year career in talk radio, where he described himself as "Rush Limbaugh on decaf". "The state of Indiana is very proud. We are a proud manufacturing state. We are home to low taxes, sensible regulations, great schools and roads, and the best workforce in America."

His voice grew sombre as he talked about the day last winter when Carrier announced it was moving more than 1,000 jobs to Mexico.

"We met with the leaders of the company back in March, and try as we might to

make the Indiana case, it was clear that the die was cast," Pence said. "The simple truth was that policies coming out of our nation's capital were literally driving jobs out of this country."

Much like the distortions and obfuscations that Pence used while defending Trump during the vice-presidential debate, this wasn't remotely true: Carrier was moving the jobs because it could pay Mexican workers \$6 an hour. Critics say Carrier was now staying because it likely feared its \$5 billion in federal contracts could be in peril under a vengeful Trump regime. Oh, yeah, and then Pence kicked in \$7 million



in state tax breaks. Even Sarah Palin decried it as “crony capitalism”.

Pence introduced the man of the hour: “It is my high honour and distinct privilege to introduce to you a man of action, a man of his word, and the president-elect of the United States of America, Donald Trump.”

Then a strange thing happened; well, not that strange, since it was Donald Trump. He spoke of his huge victory, and then admitted that his constant campaign talk of saving Carrier jobs had been bullshit. It was not until he saw a Carrier worker talking about Trump saving his job on television that the president-elect decided to act.

“And then they played my statement, and I said, ‘Carrier will never leave,’” said Trump with a rich man’s version of a laugh.

The media began tweeting furiously. The president-elect had just admitted he’d spaced on a major campaign promise and had only been reminded by a chance encounter on the nightly news!

But one man didn’t bat an eyelash. That was Mike Pence. Resplendent in dark suit and striped tie, he remained ramrod-straight, a proud smile frozen on his face.

Ten days later, dozens of Carrier workers and family members gathered at Mount Olive Ministries church in west Indianapolis as an icy rain pissed down outside. They lit candles and said prayers for the hundreds of jobs that were not being saved.

Sitting in a pew was Chuck Jones, the local United Steel Workers president. He tried to muffle his smoker’s cough and bowed his head. Jones, a gruff man with neat grey hair and a moustache, had become a folk hero since the Carrier spectacle, when Trump attacked him on Twitter for having the audacity to question the jobs Trump didn’t save.

But tonight, Jones’ wrath was for Pence. I grabbed Jones coming in from a smoke break and asked about Pence’s role in the Carrier deal.

“He did absolutely nothing,” said Jones.

I reminded Jones that he had met with Pence in March. Jones smiled a sad smile.

“Let me tell you about that,” he said.

In March, Pence met with Carrier’s parent company’s executives. Jones was there at the Statehouse with some union members carrying KEEP IT MADE IN AMERICA signs. As the cameras rolled, Pence invited him back for a meeting. Pence blamed the factory loss on Washington regulation, and Jones blamed it on corporate greed.

“Why haven’t you responded to our request for a meeting?” asked Jones.

“I never got one,” responded Pence.

When Jones got back to the union hall, he looked up the letter he sent requesting a

meeting and saw that someone in the governor’s office had signed for it. He communicated that back to Pence’s team. They promised a follow-up meeting. It never happened. (Pence declined to comment for this story.)

“I know he doesn’t like unions,” said Jones. “But this isn’t about unions – it’s about human beings losing their livelihoods.”

Jones wanted to head back into the service, but he had a parting shot: “You let Joe Schmo open up a tyre shop and hire two people, Pence was knocking people down to get in front of the cameras taking credit for it.” He shrugged his shoulders. “But for us, he did nothing.”

DURING MY TRAVELS ACROSS THE SELF-proclaimed Crossroads of America, I learned that Mike Pence had once paid his mortgage with campaign funds, dragged

PENCE IS A CHRISTIAN warrior, opposing gay rights, Planned Parenthood, and declaring global warming “a myth”.

his feet during an HIV epidemic and a lead-poisoning outbreak, signed an anti-gay-rights bill that nearly cost Indiana millions of dollars, lost his mind on national TV with George Stephanopoulos, and turned away Syrian refugees in an unconstitutional ploy laughed out of federal court. And he ended his gubernatorial term unpopular enough that his reelection bid in a Republican state seemed dicey at best.

Pence is the nation’s 48th vice president. Nine vice presidents have assumed the presidency as a result of death or resignation. That’s a 19 per cent ascendancy rate. Between Trump’s trigger-happy Twitter persona, the ethical nightmare of his business empire, his KFC addiction and possible entanglements with Vladimir Putin, I’d say the chances for Mike Pence are more than 50-50.

So what do we know about Pence? The governor benefited greatly from the wall-to-wall “Trump is a crazy monkey throwing feces” media coverage during the campaign, in that his record was uncovered,

but it’s out there and suggests that his impact as vice president will screw African-Americans, women, the poor and any other square peg in round America. His concerns for the parts of Indiana outside his comfort zone toggled between disinterest and disdain.

And here’s the frightening thing: Unlike his boss, Mike Pence has an actual ideology. Pence proclaimed at the 2016 GOP convention that “I am a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order.” However, his actual record – including turning down up to \$80 million in federal pre-Kindergarten [pre-K] funding – is the antithesis of Jesus’ “whatever you do for one of the least of my brothers, you do for me” theology.

HERE’S A QUICK STORY. While Mike Pence was governor, his relationship with the Democratic minority in the legislature was crap. Someone on his staff suggested having the Democratic leaders over to the governor’s mansion for dinner. The table was set for 20, but there were only around seven in attendance. One unlucky legislator stuck next to Pence tried to make conversation, but found even at dinner she couldn’t shift Pence off his talking points. Gov. Pence shouted to his wife, Karen, his closest adviser, at the other end of the table.

“Mother, Mother, who prepared our meal this evening?”

The legislators looked at one another, speaking with their eyes: He just called his wife “Mother”.

Maybe it was a joke, the legislator reasoned. But a few minutes later, Pence shouted again.

“Mother, Mother, whose china are we eating on?”

Mother Pence went on a long discourse about where the china was from. A little later, the legislators stumbled out, wondering what was weirder: Pence’s inability to make conversation, or calling his wife “Mother” in the second decade of the 21st century.

Pence was raised in the Sixties as a nice Irish-Catholic boy in Columbus, Indiana, a quiet bedroom community where, Pence likes to say, he “grew up with a cornfield” in his backyard. He was named after his grandfather, who emigrated from Ireland and became a Chicago bus driver. Mike was one of six children, and his dad ran a chain of gas stations. An astute altar boy, Pence genuinely seemed to want to serve his community. The local paper tells a story of Pence befriending two kids with muscular dystrophy and later serving as a pallbearer at each of their funerals.

He stayed close to home and went to Hanover College. There, he became fascinated with evangelical Christianity and had a re-

Contributing editor STEPHEN RODRICK wrote about *Sting* in *RS* 783.

FAILING UP
At the convention
with Trump



ligious epiphany at a Christian music festival in Kentucky. His conversion reportedly caused consternation among his family, especially for his mother. He met Karen at church while he was studying at Indiana University Law School. Karen carried a gold cross with the word YES on it in her purse in anticipation of the moment when Mike would propose. Their faith deepened together, and they were wed in 1985, eventually having three children. Pence reportedly calls Karen the “prayer warrior” of the family.

Pence went to work at an Indianapolis law firm, where he began each day in prayer with a colleague. In 1988, at 29, he made his first bid for Congress, capturing attention by riding a bicycle across the district. He lost, but the campaign was seen as a dry run for a 1990 campaign against Democrat Phillip Sharp.

The race was initially close. And then Billy Linville, Sharp’s campaign manager, swung by the Statehouse to pick up Pence’s financial-disclosure forms.

“It was clear upon observing his expenditures that he was using campaign funds for personal use,” Linville told me. “He was making his mortgage payments. He was making a car payment for his wife. He was making payments for his personal credit card, and he was even spending money for his family groceries.”

While this was not an illegal practice at the time, there was a delicious irony, since

Pence’s main campaign plank was that Sharp was beholden to special interests, and here was Pence buying spaghetti with his donors’ money.

Pence’s campaign entered a death spiral. Revealing a pattern that would rear its head again when he was a governor and a vice-presidential candidate, Pence doggedly repeated his campaign talking points no matter what reporters asked. Meanwhile, he doubled down on smear tactics. He sent out a mailer with a picture of a razor and lines of cocaine, suggesting Sharp was soft on drugs. He had campaign volunteers call voters and tell them Sharp was going to sell his family farm to a nuclear-waste facility, which wasn’t true. But the most infamous tactic was a cheaply produced television ad with an actor portraying an Arab sheik that suggested Sharp was in the pocket of foreign oil. The ad was denounced by editorial boards and Arab-American groups as low-class and sleazy. Pence lost the race by 19 points. After he lost, Pence wrote an essay about his political disaster. He called it “Confessions of a Negative Campaigner”.

U NDAUNTED BY DEFEAT AND A gifted speaker since high school, Pence took his golden voice into talk radio. His show had a conservative bent, but was congenial enough that Democrats felt comfortable stopping by. Still, the 1990s marked the schism between the folksy in-

person Pence and the Pence who bullied from the pulpit.

He became president of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, a conservative think tank, and began publishing his thoughts online. He wrote some real doozies, like coming out as a climate-change denialist (“Global warming is a myth.... There, I said it”) and a cigarette denialist (“Despite the hysteria from the political class and the media, smoking doesn’t kill”). He became a board member of the Indiana Family Institute, an anti-abortion, anti-gay organisation that pronounced the protest movement that formed after the brutal 1998 murder of gay teen Matthew Shepard to be homosexual-activist “propaganda”.

Just as disturbing was his use of reckless rhetoric, which prophesied why he would become so popular with the Tea Party. He decried the 1991 Clarence Thomas confirmation hearings, declaring that Thomas’ opponents were engaged in the same tactics as the KKK, and criticised Indiana senators Dick Lugar and Dan Coats for “standing by while Clarence Thomas is being lynched”.

In 2000, Pence made another bid for Congress. He checked the GOP boxes for cutting taxes while increasing military spending, but he also made it clear he was a Christian warrior, stating, “Congress should oppose any effort to recognise homosexuals as a ‘discreet and insular minority’ entitled to the protection of anti-

discrimination laws." He also argued that the AIDS resources bill, commonly known as the Ryan White Care Act, should be renewed only if resources were "directed toward those institutions which provide assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behaviour". While Pence has argued that providing assistance to those seeking to change their sexual behaviour meant abstinence groups, many gay activists heard code words for "conversion therapy". In 2006, he spoke in favour of a constitutional amendment defining marriage as between a man and a woman, arguing that "societal collapse was always brought about following an advent of the deterioration of marriage and family".

Pence fought against the pro-choice movement with vigour rare even by right-wing standards, introducing a bill to defund Planned Parenthood year after year he was in the House. The death of a woman after taking an abortion pill led Pence to the House floor, where he spoke favourably of *Lex Cornelia*, a collection of ancient Roman laws, including one detailing how providers of abortion potions were sentenced to work in the mines.

His agenda was so radical that exactly zero of Pence's bills became law. But he'd laid down markers that would be appreciated by the hard right who vote in presidential primaries.

The record of presidential campaigns launched from the House of Representatives is abysmal – perhaps that's why Pence decided to run for governor in 2012. It would give him executive experience and allow him to run as a Washington outsider. According to *Indianapolis Monthly*, he gathered friends and advisers to hash out the details. The main decision was that Pence would stress economic and educational issues while downplaying his social extremism. "Mike made the decision that the major issues in the campaign for governor in 2012 should be and must be jobs and education," longtime adviser Van Smith told the magazine.

Pence won with 49 per cent of the vote. It didn't take him long to lose his way.

IN 2013, BILL OESTERLE, CHAIRMAN of Angie's List and a veteran Republican insider, had several conversations with Pence. He'd donated \$150,000 to Pence and run the 2004 campaign of Mitch Daniels, Pence's popular predecessor. State lawmakers were considering an amendment banning gay marriage that would have to pass through the legislature before it could be put before Indiana voters. Pence remained silent. Oesterle says he advised the governor that throwing himself behind an amendment pushed by far-right Christian groups wouldn't do him any favours.

"You're going to have to reach out to the centre," Oesterle recalls telling Pence. "This is your chance to reach out to them."

"I get that," he says Pence responded.

A few weeks later, Pence announced his support for the anti-gay-marriage amendment, and his relationship with Oesterle deteriorated.

"That's when I think I really realised that Mike Pence had other interests ahead of Indiana," says Oesterle with a sigh.

Moderate Republicans began sensing that Pence's goal as governor was checking off conservative bona fides as he looked toward the Iowa and New Hampshire primaries in 2016.

This became increasingly self-evident in late 2014. Pence had had a relatively good year: He accepted federal Medicaid

PENCE'S BUNGLING suggests slow reflexes, a blemish for a congressman but a fatal flaw for a potential president.

expansion – a conservative taboo – by requiring those living just above the poverty line to pay some of their monthly income toward premiums, and adding penalties if they made "inappropriate" emergency-room visits.

On the education front, state workers and academic experts were putting the final touches on a federal-grant proposal that would make Indiana eligible for up to \$80 million in pre-K funding, an enormous sum for a state that came in 35th nationally for educational spending. Then, the day the application was due, a Pence underling announced via e-mail that the state wouldn't be applying for the grant after all. Whispers began to spread that the religious right was leaning on him heavily about the federal government getting its fingers on the hearts and minds of preschoolers. In its place, Pence OK'd a small \$10 million state pre-K pilot program. "He wasn't thinking about 'What can I do to make this pre-K program work and what can we do to serve the rest of the people?'" says Scott Pelath, the Indiana House minority leader. "He was thinking, 'How am I going to be perceived now that this is done?'"

WITHIN POLITICAL CIRCLES, the coupling of ACLU activist Katie Blair and Republican consultant Megan Robertson represents a symbol of Indiana stepping out of the Paleozoic Era. I met with Blair and Robertson at Lockerbie Pub, a dingy but homey place in downtown Indianapolis. Both are from rural parts of the Midwest, but on opposite sides of the aisle. They got to know each other in 2013 as Blair worked to kill the state amendment prohibiting gay marriage alongside Robertson, then-director of Freedom Indiana, an LGBTQ advocacy group. (They were married in November.)

"We had no idea that Mike Pence was about to blow up the state," says Blair.

As 2015 began, a court case legalising gay marriage loomed before the United States Supreme Court. Sensing it might be passed, Indiana Christian-right leaders including Curt Smith, head of the Indiana Family Institute, where Pence was once a board member, got behind the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a bill that essentially would allow business-owning Hoosiers to discriminate against gay customers. It had widespread GOP support, and Pence saw it as a consolation prize, since the Supreme Court was likely to make the right's quest for an anti-gay amendment pointless. He told opponents the bill wasn't anti-gay, merely pro religious freedom.

And then the photograph came out. It featured Pence signing RFRA into law surrounded by monks and nuns in habits, and the three men of the Indiana-right apocalypse: Indiana Family Institute's Smith, Micah Clark of the American Family Association of Indiana, and Advance America's Eric Miller. The press was not allowed. Smith has said homosexuality is outlawed in the Bible, along with adultery and bestiality; Clark once was a proponent of gay conversion therapy; and Miller claimed that ministers and priests could be imprisoned for preaching against homosexuality. The photo was so egregious that when a Democratic state representative began circulating it, colleagues complimented him on his Photoshopping skills.

"I was upset about RFRA, and then the photo came out and I was just like, 'What the hell?'" says Robertson.

Blair was less circumspect: "There are few times in my life where I've been that angry. It was stupid and offensive."

Within days, an economic tsunami crashed down on Pence. Oesterle and other local leaders stated they were unlikely to add workers to their Indiana businesses as long as RFRA remained in place. Conventions began pulling out hundreds of thousands of dollars in business like they did when North Carolina passed similar-

ly phobic legislation, a figure that could grow significantly higher over a year or two of cancelled conventions. The NCAA, headquartered in Indianapolis, proclaimed its displeasure. As the story went national, Pence was invited on *This Week With George Stephanopoulos*. His advisers counselled against the appearance, and Pence agreed. But somewhere along the line, Pence changed his mind.

What followed was one of the most embarrassing performances by a politician on national television this decade. Stephanopoulos asked a simple question: "So yes or no, if a florist in Indiana refuses to serve a gay couple at their wedding, is that legal now in Indiana?"

Pence responded, "George, this is where this debate has gone, with misinforma-

That Tuesday, *The Indianapolis Star*, not a liberal paper, published a block headline screaming **FIX THIS NOW**. There was fear Indiana was on its way to becoming, like North Carolina, a convention dead zone. The civic leaders of Indiana called two meetings: one featuring Oesterle and other business leaders, the other starring local politicians. Pence was not at either meeting. That week, the legislature passed a revised bill that weakened the anti-gay language enough that the conventions came back.

And Pence's role? Nonexistent, as recounted in the charmingly titled *Deicide*, a book published last year by Pence's Christian ally Curt Smith: "I heard his chief of staff comment, 'Governor, I don't think we have any opportunity to negotiate.'"

Pence's bungling of RFRA and other is-

medical help and is pressured into carrying her baby to term and given no immediate medical treatment. The program had to be suspended in 2016 when Real Alternatives was investigated on billing-overcharge claims, a crime it was already under investigation for in Pennsylvania when Pence granted the contract in 2015.

But HB 1337 took his abortion obsession to a new level. Aspects of the bill included forbidding a woman from aborting a fetus that had life-ending chromosomal damage; requiring fetal burial; and a clause that could allow doctors providing these services to be charged with wrongful death. After HB 1337's passage, Hoosiers founded a movement called Periods for Pence, where through social media and a calling campaign they let the governor know the

status of their menstrual cycle to protest how intrusive the legislation had become.

Blair had to calm Robertson down over the bill, explaining the one thing they had going for them was the fact that the bill was clearly unconstitutional.

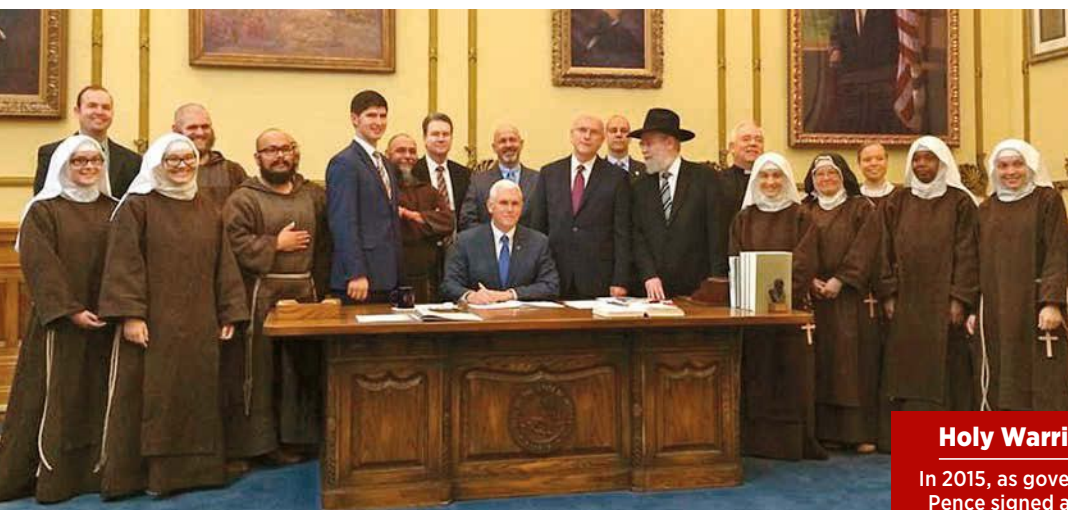
"I was appalled," says Robertson. "But Katie was like, 'It's going to be fine.'"

Blair was right: On June 30th, 2016, a federal judge stayed the law, citing that it would likely be declared unconstitutional.

None of this mattered to Pence. He had burnished his anti-choice credentials once again. When Trump needed a VP nominee with a career-long reputation for being virulently pro-life to balance his own abortion flip-flops, Mike Pence was the answer to all his political prayers.

Holy Warrior

In 2015, as governor, Pence signed a bill that allowed discrimination of the LGBTQ community, with local religious leaders by his side.



tion... The Religious Freedom Restoration Act has been on the books for more than 20 years. It does not apply, George, to disputes between individuals unless government action is involved."

Stephanopoulos pointed out RFRA supporters were stating the law would protect Christian florists from having to sell flowers to a gay wedding.

"Governor, is that true or not?"

Pence danced some more. "The issue is, 'Is tolerance a two-way street or not?'" he said.

Pence never answered the question and passed up two chances to say he was not in favour of discrimination against gay people. The interview ended with Pence insisting he would not be revising the law.

Back home, lawmakers and staffers despaired.

"I thought, 'He has just ended his career,'" says a prominent lobbyist. "And the state was going to get creamed to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. The situation that we were scared of before he went on TV just got exponentially worse. The city was burning."

issues suggests a politician with slow reflexes – a blemish for a congressional backbencher, but a horrifying flaw for a potential president. Oesterle and other GOP leaders began hearing from Republicans that they should primary Pence in 2016. Pence continued to stumble along, issuing an executive order effectively banning Syrian refugees after the 2015 Paris attacks. It was laughed out of federal court, but not before a family was diverted from Indiana to Connecticut, where Gov. Dannel Malloy welcomed them personally. Malloy eventually won a Profile in Courage award. Pence did not. Oesterle commissioned a poll that showed Pence's approval ratings in the thirties, and signs began sprouting up around Indiana reading **PENCE MUST GO**.

The year after the RFRA debacle, Pence continued his social holy war by signing into law House Bill 1337, one of the nation's most stringent anti-abortion laws. Previously, Pence had allocated \$3.5 million to Real Alternatives, a Pennsylvania company running abortion crisis centres, a.k.a. places where a woman goes for

ALL THE FAILED CRO-MAGNON legislation and his blustering from the House floor made Mike Pence tiresome. But actual power made him a danger to all Hoosiers who didn't share his worldview. Transfer his Indiana stewardship to federal policy, and the implications are devastating.

I drove down to Austin, Indiana, a town Pence seems to have avoided. I met two nurses at the town's one-stop shop for HIV treatment and needle exchange. We piled into an SUV and drove to a nearby neighbourhood. This wasn't Pence's fabled Indiana. There was a family living in a garage, and a trailer with a Nazi flag in the window, and another one with a black SS flag on a pole snapping in the wind. The neighbourhood is the epicentre of an HIV outbreak that happened on Pence's watch.

We pulled up to one garage-house, and a man piled out of a Jeep he was living in. He looked two decades older than his thirtysomething age. "I got no heat in my Jeep – that's rough," he said. He returned some used needles and took a box of new ones. He circled back to retrieve four or five packages of Narcan, an anti-overdose drug. His hands were gnarled and yellow. "Thank you kindly," he said.

Austin is in rural Scott County, which has a population of roughly 20,000 people and almost 200 cases of HIV infection. Extrapolate that to New York and that would be 80,000 cases for 8 million citizens. Here's the thing: It didn't have to happen.

There was one Republican legislator who saw it coming. I met Ed Clere in New Albany, just over the bridge from Kentucky. A real-estate broker, Clere is a big man with a self-deprecating way. Until about a year ago, he was chairman of the Indiana House Committee on Public Health.

In 2014, Clere saw the opioid crisis laying waste to rural Indiana, just as it was ravaging the rest of small-town America. There was a new scourge: Opana, a potent painkiller. The drug's manufacturers changed the makeup of the pill in order to make it harder to snort. But junkies are a resourceful group. They figured out if the pill was melted down into a liquid, an addict could get high by injecting it in fractions, often more than 10 times a day.

This meant a staggering rise in the use of dirty needles in Indiana. Clere noticed this and supported legislation in 2014 that would allow needle exchanges, to prevent the spread of hepatitis C and HIV. The committee watered down the bill, asking for a mere study. It passed the House, but the Senate ignored it.

The legislation died without any action taken, almost exactly a year before Scott County began reporting a slew of HIV cases in January 2015. First, it was three cases in December 2014, and then the number quickly grew into double digits. The administration finally acknowledged the crisis in a February 25th press release, but still didn't take any action. Pence's office made it apparent to Clere that Pence would veto any bill that legalised needle exchange. "There was no willingness to engage or to work collaboratively on a solution," Clere told me.

So Clere planned a massive public hearing for March 25th at the Statehouse in Indianapolis, featuring doctors, local officials and activists. That morning, a strange thing happened. Pence announced he would be holding his own hearing an hour

earlier, down in Scott County. Late to the game, Pence clearly was now trying to upstage Clere. In Scottsburg, a tiny town a few miles from Austin, Pence listened to community leaders and told his audience that he would pray on the situation. Meanwhile, his deputy health commissioner testified before Clere's committee that the administration was still opposed to needle exchanges in general, but was considering a limited one for the county.

On March 26th, Pence issued an executive order allowing for needle exchanges in Scott County that would have to be renewed again in 30 days. But soon, draconian restrictions were tacked on: There would be no new state money provided



National Stage

Pence at a presidential campaign stop in Cleveland, Ohio, with his wife, Karen

for the program. As for additional counties, potentially equally at risk, needle-exchange programs would have to be approved by both the state and county health boards, and would be given no funding.

Over the next year, the needle-exchange program in Scott County proved effective, and the HIV crisis stabilised. The total number of HIV cases crested at 191, a number that would have been undoubtedly smaller if Pence had taken quicker action.

Meanwhile, nearby Clark County spent more than a year trying to organise and raise funds for its own needle exchange. The county is finally getting a program – one day a week for six hours.

And Ed Clere? While Pence was still governor, Republican leadership stripped Clere of his committee chairmanship mid-term, allegedly for his rudeness toward committee members. No one could remember this happening before in Indiana.

THE MONTHS BEFORE DONALD Trump picked Pence off the political garbage heap were not easy ones for the governor. While Oesterle and others eventually declined to challenge Pence in a GOP primary, his approval ratings remained under 50 per cent, and he was even with a Democratic challenger in head-to-head matchups. He did gain experience in being booed that would serve him well at a performance of Broadway's *Hamilton* in November. In the aftermath of the RFRA fiasco, Pence was lustily booed at the home opener for the AAA Indianapolis Indians. "This is Indiana, not New York – we don't boo anyone," says Michael Leppert, a Democratic lobbyist. "It's just not done."

Then rumours of Trump's interest began to spread. At first, Indiana politicians were incredulous and wondered if anyone had actually looked at Pence's record. But then it began to make a certain kind of sense: Trump was down in the polls, and no one from the GOP elite was interested in joining his train wreck. Pence looked downright statesmanlike when compared to the other possible choices: the Bridgegate-plagued Chris Christie, the thrice-married stegosaurus Newt Gingrich and noted crazy man Rudy Giuliani.

Leppert saw a transformation in Pence beginning with his speech at the Republican National Convention.

"If you watch his State of the State addresses, he seemed disinterested and low-key," says Leppert. "But once he got on the national stage and could start pontificating on policy issues, it was like a light went back on."

There was one other twist: The robotic repeating of talking points that buried him with Stephanopoulos proved an asset in a national campaign. He talked about Trump having faith in his heart. If you listened carefully, you could almost swear Pence believed it.

PENCE'S BOAST THAT "WE ARE a proud manufacturing state" echoes in a dyspeptic way as I walk the streets of the West Calumet Housing Complex, as a winter storm descends on East Chicago, Indiana. Northwest Indiana – including East Chicago, Hammond and Gary – is the chronically damned part of Pence's Indiana. Because of lax regulations, the region has become a belching industrial outpost for Chicago. The people? Forget them – the predominantly Latino and African-

American East Chicago votes Democratic, meaning their requests fall on uninterested white ears.

It is just before Christmas, but there are few lights or plastic Santas in the 350-unit public-housing project. That's because half the residents have abandoned their homes. They didn't have a choice: The complex has been declared contaminated due to off-the-charts lead levels. About 1,100 residents need to find new places to live by April. In retrospect, it shouldn't have been a shock: The complex was built in 1973 in the footprint of an old smelting factory and near at least three other industrial facilities. Many residents of East Chicago live in danger because their subdivisions were filled in with soil from contaminated slag heaps. I meet a group of citizens at an East Chicago diner, and the gathering features more than its fair share of cancer patients, parents of sick kids, and men and women who have lost all hope in their government. One woman presents me a list of the more than 20 medications she is on to deal with heart and respiratory problems.

At the diner, I find Akeeshea Daniels, a round-faced woman with a big smile and three sons. She's been a resident of East Chicago her entire life, and she moved into the West Calumet complex 13 years ago. Since then, she's had a hysterectomy at 29 and migraine and sinus problems that have left her on the couch listless and without energy. But she worries mostly about her 12-year-old son, Xavier, who was a month old when they moved into West Calumet. He's been diagnosed with ADD, is allergic to almost everything and suffers from severe asthma – potential warning signs of child lead poisoning.

"They don't understand our health is failing," Daniels tells me. "I have rheumatoid arthritis, and I've lost 55 per cent of my bone mass since 2006. We're all dying."

According to internal governmental e-mails obtained by ROLLING STONE, the Pence administration became aware of the seriousness of the East Chicago tragedy on the same day Pence was chosen to be Trump's running mate. A July 15th e-mail from the EPA to Carol Comer, head of Pence's Indiana Department of Environmental Management, underlined the deteriorating situation: "We have become increasingly concerned about exposures to lead from the soil, especially for children living in the public housing..."

Pence's administration said nothing publicly. In late July, an e-mail was circulated among Comer and other senior Pence aides, providing links to newspaper stories about the lead issue. Again, Pence kept quiet.

This was particularly curious because Pence had made a beeline to 97-per cent-white Greentown, outside Kokomo, when the town had a lead scare last February.

"I know this issue can create anxiety because of the situation in Flint, Michigan, we all have been following," Pence told the Greentown community.

His staff tried to do damage control behind the scenes. On August 12th, Matthew Lloyd, Pence's deputy chief of staff – and de facto lieutenant while Pence campaigned across the country – sent out an urgent e-mail demanding that the communications staff reach out to Chicago's CBS affiliate, which ran a story about a mother who waited more than a year for results from the Indiana State Department of Health for her two-year-old daughter's blood test for lead poisoning. Lloyd wanted a correction on a story to address "inaccuracies [that] need to be corrected ASAP so other outlets do not pick up and report the same". (CBS did not correct its story.)

"THERE WAS ALWAYS AN altar boy trying to be more pious than the priest," says an Indiana state pol. "That's Mike Pence."

Pence continued to crisscross the country as his senior staff circulated e-mails noting an East Chicago pastor's demand that Pence visit the city. Twelve days later, Pence visited a disaster site in Indiana. But it was tornado victims in predominantly white Kokomo.

By August 30th, the lead crisis had been written up in a dozen Indiana papers and in the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times*. After the *New York Times* story, Pence personally responded, with a tweet: "Proud of our team. I appreciate the efforts to help families of East Chicago. We will continue to be there for them."

During the crisis, Pence never visited the city. (In September, he wrote a letter to the federal government asking for financial assistance for resettlement.) Lloyd told me, "We were working quietly and effectively behind the scenes with the EPA."

Shortly before my visit, East Chicago Mayor Anthony Copeland asked Pence to declare a state of emergency in East Chicago, freeing up funds to assist residents who were facing huge difficulties finding new public-housing accommodations.

Pence declined to do it, with his counsel writing on behalf of the governor: "The issues described within your letter are being addressed without the need for a disaster emergency declaration."

"If he came just for a minute to show he cared, that would be something," Daniels tells me a few weeks before Pence's term expires, trying not to cry. "Or an hour. Anything that brought attention here would help us."

On January 8th, Pence delivered his farewell address. He proclaimed, "We worked each day to fulfill the trust you placed in us."

WHAT MIKE PENCE'S role will be in a Trump White House is like everything else dealing with Trump: It is an enigma wrapped in a riddle held in the tiny hand of a serial liar with his thumb on the nuclear button. Trump choosing Pence was an explicit move to protect his flank with the Christian right. It seems likely that Pence will have immense influence over social issues, like repealing Obamacare, gutting abortion rights and keeping the LGBTQ community in its place.

It was too late when people began to take notice. Once he was elected vice president, thousands made donations to Planned Parenthood in his name as a "fuck you". When Pence moved into temporary digs in Washington during the transition, several houses in his neighbourhood flew rainbow flags in protest. An LGBTQ dance party was held on his street 48 hours before his inauguration.

Pence's favourite movie is *The Wizard of Oz*, and he is poised to be the man behind the curtain. His influence could be far-reaching, from judicial selection to leaning on Pence's old cronies on Capitol Hill.

But at what price? During the campaign, Pence said he and Trump were actually very much alike: They both liked to pray, and Trump claimed to be a good Christian. His old colleagues in Indiana shook their heads and wondered if he had sold his soul.

State Rep. Ed DeLaney was Pence's representative back in Indianapolis. Like Pence, he grew up in a Catholic house.

"There was always an altar boy trying to be more pious than the priest," DeLaney says while sitting in his cubicle at the Statehouse. "That's Mike Pence." He paused for a moment as a band struck up for one of Pence's farewell ceremonies. "Now, is this altar boy that pious, or is he just pretending that 'cause it's working for him?"

DeLaney wasn't sticking around for the hoopla, so he put his coat on and headed into a bleak Indiana afternoon.

"That's something that only Mike Pence can answer."

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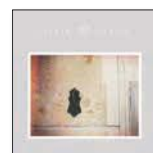
Reviews

"You always say you love me most,
when I don't know I'm being seen.
Well maybe some day when god takes
me away, I'll understand what the fuck
that means."

—LAURA MARLING, "Wild Fire"

Laura Marling's Femme Powered Folk

British folkie returns to
her roots on
effortlessly enchanting
sixth album



Laura Marling

Semper Femina

More Alarming Records/Kobalt



BY ANNABEL ROSS

Laura Marling gives the impression of being more comfortable when she's not talking about herself. Still just 27 and onto her sixth album, she's famously reticent in interviews and has always been an obtuse songwriter, though she dropped her guard on 2015's *Short Movie*, inspired by her youth-reclaiming hiatus in California. It was, she said, the first time she'd tried to write from her own perspective rather than the "something other" that comes more naturally to her, something she's returned to in this effortless collection of songs concerned with femininity and named after an old tattoo of Marling's, an abbreviated line from Virgil's epic Latin poem *Aeneid*, translated as "always a woman".

She focuses on an unknown muse throughout, positioning herself as a friend (and possibly a lover) prone to startling obser-



Reviews

ventions such as “Wouldn’t you die to know how you’re seen?/ Are you getting away with who you’re trying to be?” set to sinewy strumming, mellifluous melodies and vocals to match. See “Wild Fire” for the most breathtaking confluence of all four qualities, a deceptively simple ode to a woman just out of reach in Marling’s best, most sweetly bruised vocal performance to date.

Off-kilter deviations keep things interesting – the smoky, swaggering “Soothing” might be a Roisin Murphy offcut – and producer Blake Mills (Conor Oberst, Kid Rock and Lana Del Rey) provides an unobtrusive, swelling backdrop, from the sun-drenched strings of “The Valley” to the barely perceptible clip and plinking piano of “Next Time”.

While *Short Movie* saw Marling embrace electric guitars, *Semper Femina* is in the main pure folk. But Marling is adept at making the traditional sound sublime, as per sad-eyed lament “Always This Way”, which sees her in unusually sentimental form; “stare at the phone try to carry on, but I have made my mistake”. In finale “Nothing, Not Nearly” she lays herself bare again, couched in bluesy organ twang. “The only thing I learnt in a year/Where I didn’t smile once, not really/Is nothing matters more than love/... not nearly.” Elsewhere, she defiantly clings to a version of femininity not hitched to frills and fragility, recalling a rough-and-tumble outdoorsy childhood. “Well, you are wild and/You must remember/You are wild/Chasing stones.” Championing a woman’s right (and her prerogative as an artist) to be whatever she damn well wants, in “Noel” Marling elaborates on that line from *Aeneid*: “a woman is an ever fickle and changeable thing” and owns it throughout the record, abandoning the American twang she affected on *Short Movie* as she flits between spoken word and celestial lilt. In reverting to “something other”, Marling sounds like she’s reconnected with herself. **CD**



The Waifs Celebrate a Milestone

Twenty-five years into their career, the Waifs go long with a double album

The Waifs *Ironbark* Jarrah/MGM ★★☆☆



It’s been 25 years since the Waifs busted out of a dusty Kombi on the Western Australian coastline to become one of the nation’s most-successful folk bands, and now is as good a time as any to take a breath and reflect. *Ironbark* is the Waifs’ celebration: of their endurance, of their relationships, of their deep and unwavering love for their fanbase. As befits a 25-year celebration, it unfurls languidly over two discs and 25 tracks – but don’t mistake *Ironbark* for an intimidating listen. Rather, it is blissfully unhurried and comfortable, the pure distillation of the grown-up folk that the Waifs have been gently perfecting for a quarter of a century.

There are moments of utter loveliness (the wistful “Long Way From Home” and “Shiny Apple”) and darkness too (the timely subject matter of “Syria”). After 25 years together, the strength of Vicki, Donna, and Josh’s relationship is palpable, and for the first time ever they join all their vocals on the twisting opener and title track.

Releasing a double album is ambitious and fraught with danger, and where *Ironbark* fails to satisfy is for the same reason most fail: there is simply an excess of filler tracks. Their desire to stretch to 25 tracks is understandable, but *Ironbark* probably could have been served better if pared back to a single disc.

JULES LEFEVRE



All Our Exes Live In Texas

When We Fall ABC ★★☆☆

Sydney folk-pop quartet deliver on debut

When We Fall is the vision of four singularly-accomplished singer-songwriters who, together, simply gel. Trading lead vocals, variously opening up and teasing out their honeyed four-part harmonies before weaving them into a silken, gauzy web once again, AOELIT eschew Carter Family country crackle and the rough-hewn folk shades of the McGarrigle Sisters in favour of more polished tones. They span the ominous and atmospheric (“The Devil’s Part”), deliciously drowsy weepers, and irresistible vocal-pop (“Tell Me”), traversing so many ill-fated romances while needling gender roles at every turn (“Oh Lover of Mine”). **GARETH HIPWELL**



Milky Chance

Blossom Universal ★★☆☆

The German folkies have undergone undeniable growth

In 2013, Milky Chance’s “Stolen Dance” was inescapable, a slice of nu-folk electronica characterised by Clemens Rehbein’s distinctive, throaty whine. Fans of it will find plenty to like on LP two – it’s filled with more of the mid-tempo, Euro reggae-folk tracks that marked their debut, albeit more elaborately furnished, from “Firebird”, with an appealing instrumental section and vaguely Spanish guitars, to “Doing Good”, with arpeggiated guitar chords and layered harmonies. Lyrics are occasionally woeful enough to suggest a language barrier, but those partial to Rehbein’s divisive vocals and the odd harmonica will appreciate the band’s progress. **A.R.**



The Jesus & Mary Chain

Damage and Joy ADA/Warner

★★½

Seventh album fails to reclaim past glories

They may have practically invented shoegaze, but on their first LP since 1998, the Jesus and Mary Chain have been stoned and dethroned: so many bands have mastered their distortion-meets-Phil Spector pop shtick in the interim that JAMC now sound like a just-passable knock-off of themselves. Although never revered for insightful lyrics, *Damage and Joy* hits new lows: hearing a 55-year-old Jim Reid sing about fast drugs and fast women ("I can't find a hole/to put my erection") isn't pretty. "War on Peace" channels some old-school JAMC cool, but much here would benefit from being obscured by thick distortion.

JAMES JENNINGS



François & the Atlas Mountains

Solide Mirage Domino ★★★

Dark themes veiled by chirpy French indie-pop

Musically, François & the Atlas Mountains' fourth album is colourful and fun, from the catchy twangs of "Grand Dérèglement" to the soothing, tropical "Apocalypse à Ipsos". But beneath the vibrant melodies, *Solide Mirage* contains confronting political commentary. Deeply impacted by global political chaos, particularly after touring a post-Arab Spring Middle East, François Marry and his bandmates felt a responsibility to address political issues through their music. While the language barrier may pose a challenge, the musical juxtaposition makes for an engaging, layered listen – should you choose to look beneath the surface.

LAUREN ZIEGLER



Greg Graffin

Millport ANTI- ★★★½

Bad Religion frontman gets old-time folksie on third solo LP

Much like Greg Graffin's first two solo records – released 10 and 20 years ago, respectively – album number three is no acoustic Bad Religion record. No, *Millport* sees the aging punk team up with Social Distortion's Jonny "Two Bags" Wickersham, Brent Harding and David Hidalgo Jr. to help him commit his Americana-flavoured folk songs to wax. There's still dissent ("Amen – no religion can help this time of need," he croons gospel-like on "Time of Need"), but it's not the main event. In fact, Graffin sounds so relaxed and assured at times, you could almost forget he's spent nearly 40 years singing about being pissed off.

OLIVER PELLING



Conor Oberst

Salutations Nonesuch ★★★★★

A country-rock exploration of Oberst's recent one-man album

Last year Oberst released *Ruminations*, a stark one-man album that reflected its gestation in a snowbound house in Omaha. This companion piece serves up those songs with a full band and adds seven new tracks, with appearances by alt-country/rock royalty including Gillian Welch, Jim James, M. Ward and the Felice Brothers. There's a woodsy sound that's equal parts Dylan, the Band and Neil Young, with Oberst's quivering vocals and poetic storytelling to the fore and fiddles and harmonica in the mix. If *Ruminations* was his *Nebraska*, this is his *Basement Tapes*. Of the newer material, "Overdue" stands out for its hazy feel and tale of beautiful losers.

BARRY DIVOLA



Jens Lekman

Life Will See You Now

Inertia ★★★½

Clever Swedish songwriter tells some enjoyably bizarre stories

Singer Jens Lekman has always revelled in quirky, whimsical storytelling, sort of like the indie-pop inverse of Tom Waits. His fourth LP has a bizarre cast, featuring a Mormon missionary seeking the meaning of life, a pair of friends joyriding on a hot-wired Ferris wheel in the middle of the night, and a man curiously examining a 3D printout of his own tumour. The disco-y "How We Met, the Long Version" goes back to the Big Bang. Lekman's voice sometimes sounds like Morrissey doing a Kermit the Frog impression, but his sharp songwriting makes this much more than a clever novelty. K.G

Shins' Indie Confessions

Regrets and reminiscences of the long distance indie rocker

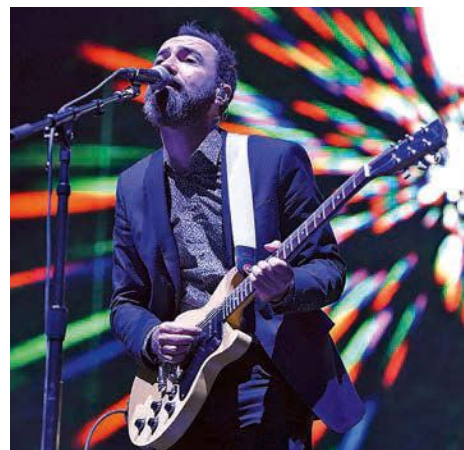
The Shins *Heartworms* Sony

★★★



This time it's personal for James Mercer. Album five from his reliable indie-pop sugar rush is as convoluted as ever in thought and melody, but the "heartworms" of the title seem to feed on the inevitable reflections of middle age.

"Fantasy Island" spells out dreams of an attention-seeking schoolboy in a cocktail of chagrin and melancholy. "I don't want to show you my feelings," he sings at the edge of sweet falsetto that remains his default pitch, "I just want to crash through the ceiling/Before it gets too real." The folkie road movie "Mildenhall" is more literal still: dewy reminiscences of a fateful cassette passed in class, those first Eighties bands down at the Corn Exchange, cautious chords on his dad's guitar – "and that's how we get to where we are now".



It's not all as straightforward. "Painting a Hole" is more Bosch than Beatles, its "magical violence" cluttered with sonic ideas that are less effective, in the end, than the simple Cars pastiche of "Half a Million".

"There's half a million things/That I'm supposed to be/A shelter in the night-time/A punk running free/And if it gets too deep/I reach for my guitar," is the confessional insight from that one. He settles on the night-time vibe in the parting loneliness of "The Fear", but you can bet the heartworms are still turning.

MICHAEL DWYER

Reviews



Alison Krauss

Windy City EMI ★★½

Americana stayer mines the past on first solo album in 18 years

A departure from 2011's rustic nu-grass LP with Union Station, *Paper Airplane*, the 14th studio outing from Krauss revisits the classic songs of by-gone decades. *Windy City* takes in the broad sweep of the Nashville sound's ascendancy – bold piano lines, strings, chattering pedal steel, and well-deployed BVs from Jamey Johnson and others – while reprising country/bluegrass tunes from the Fifties, Sixties (a chic take on 1964 Willie Nelson tune “I Never Cared For You”) and Seventies, along with soaring mid-century Broadway (“River In the Rain”) and Hollywood melodrama (“All Alone Am I”). Krauss' spellbinding vocal makes for engrossing – if inessential – listening. **G.H.**



Horrorshow

Bardo State Elephant Traks

★★★½

Fourth LP from Sydney rappers tackles the big issues

In nine years Horrorshow have grown from earnest young hip-hop prodigies to veteran performers, and *Bardo State* reflects the confidence that comes with experience. Single “Push” is as big and sincere as they've ever been, but tracks like “Non-Stop” and the menacing “Ceiling Fan” reveal a fresh swagger and some serious One Day crew vibes. Guests like Omar Musa, Turquoise Prince and teenager Taj Ralph are only a few of the collaborators Horrorshow have brought into the mix but the set is stacked with talent, and on a record that's about transitioning between states they help elevate Horrorshow's sound to a higher plane. **DAN FINDLAY**



Spoon's Boogie Nights

The lauded Austin, Texas band venture onto the dancefloor to strut their stuff

Spoon Hot Thoughts

Matador ★★½



What to do when, according to Metacritic, you're the most consistently highly-rated band of the 2000s? Apparently you get horny and go dancing.

Although strong traces of Spoon's DNA remain, with their ninth record something else is happening. Specifically, band leader Britt Daniel is writing and singing from the hips – and at times, the groin – rather than the head. “Could be a hot scent mixing with mine, you got me uptight, twistin' inside,” he moans on the title track, his words sliding over electro handclaps, clucking guitar and shivering strings that nod to Barry White.

Although nominally an indie rock band, Spoon's music has always been based more on grooves than chords, a rubbing together of wiry rhythms and sputtering riffs to create a spark that will catch alight. But they've never been so overtly keen to shimmy onto the dancefloor. “First Caress” is unashamedly dance-pop, the rolling beat and bloopy keyboards soundtracking a story of passion overriding judgment. And if “Shotgun” isn't deliberately using Kiss's “I Was Made For Lovin' You” as a template, then I'll eat my copy of *Dynasty*.

Of course, Spoon being Spoon, there's no simple overarching narrative here. Check out the backwards looped vocals of “Pink Up” or the breathy, brooding sax of closing track “Us”. But then, this consistently lauded band is consistently confounding. **BARRY DIVOLA**



Hurray For the Riff Raff

The Navigator

ATO/Liberation ★★★★★

Puerto Rican-American roots music traveller's homecoming

The Navigator sees New Orleans transplant Alynda Lee Segarra return home to the Bronx, the political verve of *Small Town Heroes* (2014) intact. The way-faring Nuyorican singer-songwriter weds Caribbean rhythms to her favoured rustic Americana (“Finale”), while navigating doo-wop (“Entrance”), jangling folk-rock (“Living In the City”), and rollicking fairground-roots (“Life to Save”). Defiant off-Broadway tune “Nothing's Gonna Change That Girl” is a standout moment, while Segarra summons her most fervent vocal performance to date in “Pa'lante”. At a time of hair-trigger identity politics, *The Navigator* is a stirring manifesto. **G.H.**



Nadia Reid

Preservation

Spunk ★★★★★

Elegant, moody folk-pop from gifted New Zealander

If Nadia Reid's sumptuous 2015 debut *Listen To Formation Look For the Signs* explored vulnerability amid love gone wrong, her second LP is a compelling statement of defiance and empowerment. The acoustic guitar and other folk elements of *Listen To Formation* have mostly been jettisoned in favour of thicker, more adventurous arrangements that reach a fabulous peak on “Richard”, with its droney electric guitar and effortlessly emotional vocals. The lo-fi indie of Juliana Hatfield is a point of comparison, while Reid has matured considerably as a songwriter and lyricist, as evidenced by “The Way It Goes”, which drips with melancholy resolve. **BARNABY SMITH**



Circa Waves

Different Creatures Dew Process

★★★★

Big, brash second dose of radio-friendly indie

While Circa Waves' debut *Young Chasers* sparkled with a brash youthful restlessness, *Different Creatures* brings in co-producer Alan Moulder, steps in a heavier, more focused direction, and broadens their ramshackle indie-pop appeal in a similar way to their Liverpoolian forebears the Wombats. While Kieran Shudall making sense of life in a band and a changing world isn't breaking new ground, it's charmingly honest, and their indie-punk spunk is still happily present, if expanded. The life can feel sucked out of the bigger, brasher moments, but the intimacy of "Old Friends" is terrific.

JAYMZ CLEMENTS

Holy Holy's Broad Palette

Duo demonstrate sonic daring on confident second album

Holy Holy *Paint* Sony/Wonderlick

★★★★



The temptation when writing a follow-up to a successful album – in Holy Holy's case, their 2015 debut *When the Storms Would Come* – is to repeat the formula to consolidate that success. In keeping with the chaotic James Drinkwater painting that adorns the cover of their second record, Holy Holy have chosen a far more interesting approach.

There are enough familiar signposts to their past not to alienate their fanbase, but they're largely derived from inherently organic elements the band can do little to change: Tim Carroll's placid, soothing voice, for example, and the way in which it works with Oscar Dawson's fluid guitar work. Largely, though, *Paint* sees the duo embellishing the at-times pastoral



sonic landscape of their debut, incorporating vague R&B elements ("The Message"), strident pop-rock (the wonderfully catchy "Elevator" and "Amateurs"), progressive rock ("Send My Regards") and pure Eighties soft-pop ("True Lovers"). That *Paint* pulls this off while still sounding like the work of one band, let alone the same band that released their debut less than two years ago, is a testament to the songwriting prowess of Dawson and Carroll. Clearly they have an inherent understanding about what Holy Holy is, and more importantly, what it can be.

SIMON JONES



The Magnetic Fields

50 Song Memoir

Nonesuch ★★★★★

This wry musical autobiography is a 50-song marathon

Stephin Merritt's 1999 masterpiece, *The Magnetic Fields' 69 Love Songs*, was exactly what the title said. For *50 Song Memoir*, he wrote a song for each of his 50 years on earth. It's a marathon that can prove exhausting, but he's got the material. Some tracks reference his childhood with a mother who lived on communes and had a series of bad boyfriends. Everything from his teenage obsession with English synth-pop to his history of living in New York is dissected with a mix of deadpan humour and razor-sharp wordplay, delivered via his deeper-than-Atlantis vocals and everything-and-the-kitchen-sink instrumentation.

BARRY DIVOLA



The Blackeyed Susans

Close Your Eyes and See

Teardrop ★★★★★

A masterful comeback from a yesteryear supergroup

The Blackeyed Susans work wonders on their first LP of new material in more than a decade. Originally conceived in 1989 as a casual detour for members of the Triffids and other fine Perth bands, the ensemble now highlight the considerable gifts of vocalist Rob Snarski and bassist/songwriter Phil Kakulas, among other members. There are loving echoes of the Everly Brothers ("Dream On") and the Velvet Underground ("Lover or the Loved"), while the electronics-flecked "I Asked My Mother" tips its hat to Leonard Cohen. "I Don't Dance (Anymore)" could pass for Tindersticks. These songs slow the pulse and nourish the soul.

DOUG WALLEN



Sarah Belkner

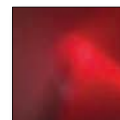
But You Are, But It Has

MGM ★★★★★

Enchanting debut from Sarah Blasko/Olympia tour mate

You may hear several clear touchstones on the debut album from Sydney-based singer-songwriter Sarah Belkner. There are touches of Kate Bush and Tori Amos to her voice and arrangements; there's a daring sense of musicality that suggests an allegiance to Bowie and Peter Dinklage. Satisfyingly, though, on *But You Are, But It Has* Belkner emerges as a singular artist; she is very much her own person, rather than an amalgam of her influences. Created over a three-year period, a song such as "Chance" dazzles with instrumentation and cascading rhythms, but Belkner also knows the value of space, something she employs with expertise.

S.J.



Meat Wave

The Incessant

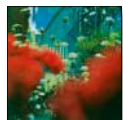
Cooking Vinyl Australia ★★★★★

Chicago band deliver brilliantly discordant art-punk

The follow up to 2015's *Delusion Moon* is a snarling, twisted, discordant indie-punk gem, full of brilliantly bare riffs and sweet and sour melodicism. Blessed by the production presence of Steve Albini, there's minimalist, plaintive bleakness ("No Light"), no-wave shredding ("Killing the Incessant") and scatter-brained riffage ("Glass Teeth"), and if the Crips were raised solely on deep-dish pizza and Cubs fatalism the biting "Run You Out" might be the result. Best, though, are the drunk Gang of Four intertwined discordant guitar lines that disintegrate into a Mars Volta-y cacophonous mess on "Leopard Print Jet Ski".

J.C.

Reviews



Pulled Apart By Horses

The Haze Caroline ★★½

Leeds punk-metal troublemakers throw down on fourth album

PABH always sound like they're either soundtracking a four-day bender thrown by a bunch of desert tweakers hellbent on ruination, or they are them. *The Haze* is covered in an oily, sweaty sheen and underpinned by a riotous, sneering meth-punk energy, with neck snappers like "The Big What If" and "Prince of Meats" sitting alongside the psychedelic curl of "Lamping" (like if Refused did shitloads of 'shrooms) where the usual throat-shredding shit PABH are on is nicely tempered. Their metal edge devolves into Vinesy party-punk on "Dumb Fun", "Flash Lads" and "Hotel Motivation", but it makes for a raucous bareknuckled punk throwdown unafraid to get loose. J.C.



Electric Guest

Plural

Universal/Dew Process ★★½

Sophisticated LA pop merchants deliver second album

Five years on from their charming, Danger Mouse-produced debut *Mondo*, Asa Taccone and Matthew Compton have significantly adjusted their expertly crafted 'thinking-man's pop'. The duo's one-time mellow catchiness has given way to a more mainstream, frankly less interesting production style. Several songs veer toward the accessible electro-soul of Justin Timberlake, yet unfortunately they lack JT's melodic appeal and sense of humour, although some innovation does emerge with "Oh Devil" and "Over". While *Plural* lacks edge, there is just enough appeal in this precise, textured synth-pop to warrant investigation. B.S.



Real Estate Firm Up Their Identity

Cosmic American vibes on fourth album from New Jersey crew

Real Estate *In Mind*

Domino ★★½



In 2015, Real Estate bade farewell to the considerable talent that is guitarist Matt Mondanile, who left to exclusively serve his other band, Ducktails. As a result, Real Estate's dissolution became a distinct possibility. However, Mondanile, while integral, was not the group's creative heart, with singer-songwriter Martin Courtney managing to reshuffle the five-piece's line-up to produce what may be their finest record.

The band's familiar essence is immediately recognisable on opener "Darling", a warm, shimmering affair adorned with the dreamy jangle of new guitarist Julian Lynch. His style is fuller and arguably more experimental than Mondanile's more minimalist approach, allowing these bitter-sweet, mournful songs a deliciously expansive, more woozily psychedelic atmosphere – here, they evoke long-time touchstone Beachwood Sparks more than ever.

That said, there is definite structure and discipline throughout. *In Mind* has tightened up where 2014's *Atlas* was a tad unfocused – as a songwriter Courtney has matured in terms of timing and restraint, exemplified by the exquisitely mellow "After the Moon". Another development is Courtney's full embrace of the old softly-sung, double-tracked, reverb-heavy vocals, to the point where he sounds uncannily like Elliott Smith on "Same Sun", an appropriately luscious track mimicking that deceased great. *In Mind* is a tribute and farewell to Mondanile and the foundations he helped lay, as well as a firm consolidation of a new identity. BARNABY SMITH



Fractures

Still Here Caroline ★★½

Debut LP has strong handle on moody, melancholy pop

The project of multi-instrumentalist Mark Zito, Fractures specialise in a form of melancholic pop that blends electronics and live instruments, all tied together by Zito's multitracked vocals that recall Bon Iver having a not particularly great day. It isn't all downcast moods and tempos: see the pacier "Alchemy", the light-at-the-end-of-a-dark-tunnel guitar pop of "Lowcast" and "Time Frame", which combines Eighties-Prince guitars and even Eighties-era drums for an effective dramatic pop number. The second-half doesn't offer the same kind of stylistic shifts, but that can't detract from what is a debut that boasts some undeniably accomplished songwriting. J.J.



Temples

Volcano Pias ★★½

British lads continue down paths well trodden

Temples' evolution between debut *Sun Structures* (2014) and this follow-up mirrors the maturation of Tame Impala from *Innerspeaker* to *Lonerism*. That is, the lean, compact approach to songwriting and production has been replaced by an expansive, spacy feel driven by synths and woozy effects. It makes for a mannered wall of sound that is pleasant enough though hardly original (think Eno and Berlin-era Bowie). The odd terrific tune does still emerge, with "Oh the Saviour" and "Strange Or Be Forgotten" seeing the band ease off on the elaborate psych motifs. Though Temples often get in their own way, there is substantial melodic charm to their best work. B.S.



Mick Thomas

These Are the Songs

Liberation ★★½

Front-bar-folkie takes stock with 23-song collection

Why Paul Kelly and not Mick Thomas? Thomas has always been the one singer/strummer who can cut straight to the weighty stuff ("Father's Day", his 1992 almost-hit with Weddings Parties Anything). This 23-tracker (a companion to his new memoir) is culled from two decades with the Sure Thing and solo. Such snapshots as "The Lonely Goth" and "Forgot She Was Beautiful" poke around in the world that Thomas knows best: everyday folks trying to make sense of the world. Not the sexiest subject matter, sure, but Thomas' signature, regular-bloke style adds flesh and blood.

JEFF APTER

Giddens Draws on the Past

Carolina Chocolate Drops mainstay delivers sophomore solo album

Rhiannon Giddens

Freedom Highway Nonesuch/Warner

★★★★



"Know thy history. Let it horrify you; let it inspire you," urges virtuosic North Carolina vocalist, multi-instrumentalist and ethnomusicologist Rhiannon Giddens. Where debut *Tomorrow Is My Turn* (2015) saw Giddens reimagining the songs of towering U.S. female artists from Odetta to Dolly Parton, this predominantly original follow-up centres on the African-American experiences that underpin and inform American music: from 19th Century slave narratives and the Civil Rights movement (Richard Fariña-penned Gospel-soul entry "Birmingham Sunday"), to Ferguson and beyond (smouldering R&B tune "Better Get it Right the First Time").

Aside from some bold and brassy moments (slinky Delta dance tune "Hey Bébé"), it's an of-



ten-brooding counterpoint to the string-band jaunts and rambles of CCD landmark *Genuine Negro Jig* (2010) – always rich and resonant, Giddens' old-time banjo parts are frequently urgent and ominous ("Julie"). Vocally, Giddens is a typically mesmerising presence throughout, proving a soulful stand-in for Mavis Staples in a deft take on the Staple Singers' locomotive 1965 anthem "Freedom Highway". *Freedom Road* is an immersive wellspring of era-defining sounds drawn up and into the fraught light of 21st Century racial consciousness.

GARETH HIPWELL



Methyl Ethel

Everything Is Forgotten

Dot Dash/Remote Control ★★½

Perth oddballs ramp up the rhythms – and songwriting

Methyl Ethel find more focus here than on their 2015 debut. Producer James Ford bolsters frontman Jake Webb's increasingly danceable vision, from gleaming hooks ("L'Heure des Sorcières") to percolating synths ("Drink Wine"). The combination of funky production and spacey falsetto can evoke Broken Bells, but Webb has stepped up his songwriting enough to stand on his own. "Ubu" is a worthy entry in the pantheon of songs lamenting a subject's haircut, and other tracks balance entrancing mantras with lively contrast just as well. A lingering creepiness haloes all the catchiness too, as in the excellent "No. 28".

DOUG WALLEN



Me and That Man

Songs of Love and Death

Cooking Vinyl ★★½

Behemoth frontman trades the Beast for the blues

As Me and That Man, Behemoth frontman Nergal, along with guitarist John Porter, swaps Polish death metal for storied Southern blues-folk. Like Behemoth, *Songs of Love and Death* is lyrically macabre and grim, focusing on Hell, Satan, death, blood, etc. Yet when paired with bluesy riffs, stomping rhythms and the odd country twang, it almost feels comical, not menacing. Nergal's typically violent howls give way to deep gravelly vocals (think Nick Cave meets Mark Lanegan), while track titles like "Nightride" and "On the Road" cement the swampy road trip feel evoked throughout. It's hardly challenging, but that's what makes it so fun.

LAUREN ZIEGLER



Kingswood

After Hours, Close To Dawn

Dew Process ★★½

Down decibels, up blue notes on hard rockers' radical reinvention

A 4am piano ballad called "Looking For Love" was not, to say the least, the most obvious opening gambit for Kingswood's second album. It's bold notice of a soulful departure from the twisted metallic edges of the Melbourne art-rockers' 2015 debut. The grunt remains in the filthy bass groove of "Creepin'" and the higher register intensity of "Library Books", and "Alabama White" picks up the space-rock thread in the back half. But the creamy electric piano and jazz harmonies of "Golden", "Belle" and "Why Do I Get Stuck When You Arrive" comprise the default pitch of an album that's more Steely Dan than AC/DC, and far more affecting for it. **M.D.**



Sleaford Mods

English Tapas

Rough Trade ★★½

British pair continue their anti-austerity plight

Those who've already adjudicated on Midlands punk-electro pair Sleaford Mods are unlikely to find much on *English Tapas* – their 10th full-length in as many years – to sway them. Vocalist Jason Williamson's stream-of-protest, Mark E. Smith-esque rants continue to hold court, on an LP that's mostly more of the same: fidgety bass-heavy minimalism backing street-level social commentary (with a side of smut). Shame the duo now seem stuck in this lecture-and-lager-spilling loop, as the occasional crooned chorus – and ballad "I Feel So Wrong" – highlights the benefits of unexpected variance on their distinct sound. **JONNY NAIL**

By Peter Travers



Johnny Galecki in *Rings*. You can never find the instruction manual when you need it.

Watch At Your Own Peril

Rings

Matilda Lutz, Alex Roe

Directed by F. Javier Gutiérrez
No stars

ONCE AGAIN, A CURSED VHS tape and lanky-haired ghost terrorise folks – but this D.O.A. movie proves the thrill (and chills) are gone

If crap movies carried penalties for inflicting torture on audiences, then *Rings* would merit a death sentence. This overdose of cinematic Lunesta takes the horror out of horror-show – and the show is lost as well, since Spanish director F. Javier Gutiérrez doesn't seem remotely interested in rousing anything in us besides all-consuming apathy.

Seriously, how do you screw up so bad when the source ma-

terial is so fertile? *Ringu*, the 1998 Japanese horror movie directed by Hideo Nakata, scared audiences on a global scale with its tale of a cursed videotape that killed anyone who watched it. Gore Verbinski directed 2002's American remake, which stayed true to the original version and offered the bonus of the terrific Naomi Watts as a reporter out to investigate the idea of VHS as a lethal weapon. I mean, you hit Play, take a look at stringy-haired ghost-girl Samara, and you're dead in a week? WTF! The great Nakata went Hollywood himself to direct Watts in 2005's *The Ring Two*, a follow-up that got in a few J-horror licks but buckled under the pressure to produce a safe PG commercial package.

Which brings us, a dozen years later, to this chance to reinvent the franchise for the age of file sharing. Not a bad idea, really. But what a botch job, heightened by demo-worthy awfulness in directing, writing and acting. Alex Roe is burdened with the lead role of Holt, a dude who leaves home for college, breaking the heart of his high-school sweetie Julia, played Matilda Lutz. (Lutz and Roe – it sounds like a shady law firm.) They can't breathe much life into these characters. But a webcam can, as we watch the lovers Skype every night to keep the hormones burning.

Holt is soon embroiled with Gabriel Brown (Johnny Galecki, of *The Big Bang Theory* fame), a professor who's been secretly studying the video in

question to unlock the key to immortality and offer up his students as human sacrifices. Galecki has a wicked glint that the script never allows him to put to use. Instead, we get the Attack of Nonstop Plot Exposition, a bore-you-breathless rehash about the urban legend of the ghost girl. Worse, precious little is made of new technology. A cameo from a slumming Vincent D'Onofrio as a blind cemetery caretaker doesn't so much advance the plot as confirm its senseless underpinnings. We're meant to devour this demented drool as a set-up for the next film in the *Rings* cycle – like that's gonna happen! The best review can be found in three words that Holt texts to Julia about the video: "Don't Watch It." Sound advice. **C-**

By Michael Adams

Let's Do the Time Warp Again



Arrival

Amy Adams, Jeremy Renner

Directed by Denis Villeneuve

★★★



Nocturnal Animals

Amy Adams, Jake Gyllenhaal

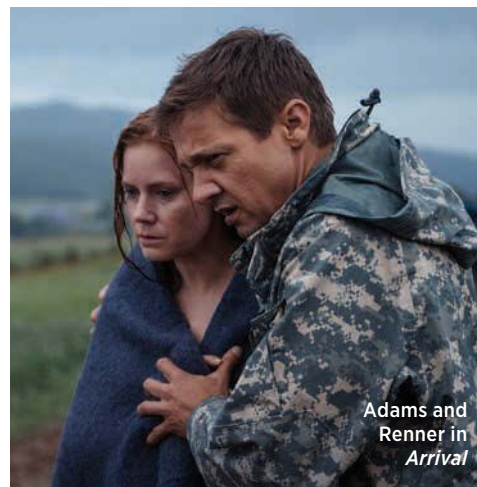
Directed by Tom Ford

★★★★

AMY ADAMS MUST HAVE ASKED HER AGENT TO prioritise time-tripping genre scripts with complex themes centred around female reproductive choices. How else to explain her two big 2016 films? But while *Arrival* was a box-office hit and awards season fave, it's *Nocturnal Animals* that offers richer rewards.

Directed by Denis Villeneuve, *Arrival* wants to be brainy sci-fi, with Adams wrenchingly good as a grieving linguist tasked with establishing contact with recently arrived aliens, who're giant squid-like beings in massive hovering obelisks. Battling global military tensions and gaping plot holes, Adams and underwritten co-boffin Jeremy Renner try to ensure cosmic unity and avert Armageddon. What's intriguing is the fragmented narrative, in which Adams mourns her dead daughter, and how this fits truly is a jaw-dropping revelation. But sadly it's not one that makes much more sense than other moments that undermine the far trippier received alien wisdom that says time exists simultaneously.

Nocturnal Animals similarly shuffles its time periods and storypieces. Here, Adams is an LA art dealer fascinated by her ex-husband Jake Gyllenhaal's novel about brutal crimes against women and its male anti-hero's path to revenge. Direc-



Adams and Renner in *Arrival*

tor Tom Ford's eye for composition is as superb as the almost unbearably tense action sequences that dramatise the novel-in-the-movie. Adams is understated and Gyllenhaal is raw as the estranged couple whose life is mirrored by his book, while Aaron Taylor-Johnson and Michael Shannon are brilliant as opposite ends of the macho-psychotic spectrum. **TS**



Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them

Eddie Redmayne

Directed by David Yates

★★★

'FANTASTIC BEASTS' IS A WORKMANLIKE Harry Potter expansion pack. Astoundingly, though, it lacks central characters we care about. While Newt Scamander ticks heroic boxes on paper, Eddie Redmayne's portrait of a Britgeek bringing magical creatures to NYC in 1926 is comprised of Stephen Hawking off-cuts. But the film is made truly charming by sidekicks Dan Fogler and Alison Sudol, whose comic romantic chemistry is a joy, recognised by filmmakers who even cede the final scene to these supporting characters.



Hacksaw Ridge

Andrew Garfield

Directed by Mel Gibson

★★★★½

MEL GIBSON DOESN'T DO SUBTLE and his first directorial effort in a decade is as cheese-and-meat filled as *Braveheart* and *The Passion of the Christ*. But, like those hits, this true story of WWII conscientious objector Desmond Doss bludgeons its way into our hearts and minds. After a cardboard prayer to Americana and clumsy indictment of military hazing, *Hacksaw Ridge* really hits its straps when boots hit the ground and Doss's remarkable bravery and survival come into focus. Just try not to be moved as the end credits roll.



Joe Cinque's Consolation

Maggie Naouri

Directed by Sotiris Dounoukos

★★★

THOUGH PATTERNED ON HELEN Garner's true-crime book of the same name, this adaptation eschews her courtroom scenes for a compelling if flawed re-enactment of events that led to the bizarre killing of Joe Cinque in Canberra in 1997. Maggie Naouri is terrific as Anu Singh, Joe's disturbed girlfriend, and the story is strong. But director Sotiris Dounoukos's staging is too often flat, the supporting cast sometimes founder and the script leaves the motivations of Anu's sidekick and social circle a mystery.



Office Christmas Party

Jason Bateman, T.J. Miller

Dir. by Josh Gordon, Will Speck

★★★

THE TITLE IS ABOUT AS APPEALING as an actual workplace yuletide function. But, just like the real deal, if you turn up you'll have a better time than expected. While the premise is as thin as home-brand Christmas paper, it's wrapped around comic talents playing to their shticky strengths. So buttoned-down tech manager Bateman and cool girl Olivia Munn try to land a big-fish client at a riotous party, with an assist from party geek Miller, kooky Kate McKinnon, angry Rob Corddry and ballbusting Jen Aniston. It's boorish and occasionally funny.

PARIS JACKSON

[Cont. from 55] for the dependency on the anesthetic drug propofol that led to it. She calls him “the ‘doctor’”, with satirical air quotes. But she has darker suspicions about her father’s death. “He would drop hints about people being out to get him,” she says. “And at some point he was like, ‘They’re gonna kill me one day.’” (Lisa Marie Presley told Oprah Winfrey of a similar conversation with Michael, who expressed fears that unnamed parties were targeting him to get at his half of the Sony/ATV music-publishing catalogue, worth hundreds of millions.)

Paris is convinced that her dad was, somehow, murdered. “Absolutely,” she says. “Because it’s obvious. All arrows point to that. It sounds like a total conspiracy theory and it sounds like bullshit, but all real fans and everybody in the family knows it. It was a setup. It was bullshit.”

But who would have wanted Michael Jackson dead? Paris pauses for several seconds, maybe considering a specific answer, but just says, “A lot of people.” Paris wants revenge, or at least justice. “Of course,” she says, eyes glowing. “I definitely do, but it’s a chess game. And I am trying to play the chess game the right way. And that’s all I can say about that right now.”

Michael had his kids wear masks in public, a protective move Paris considered “stupid” but later came to understand. So it made all the more of an impression when a brave little girl spontaneously stepped to the microphone at her dad’s televised memorial service, on July 7th, 2009. “Ever since I was born,” she said, “Daddy has been the best father you could ever imagine, and I just wanted to say I love him so much.”

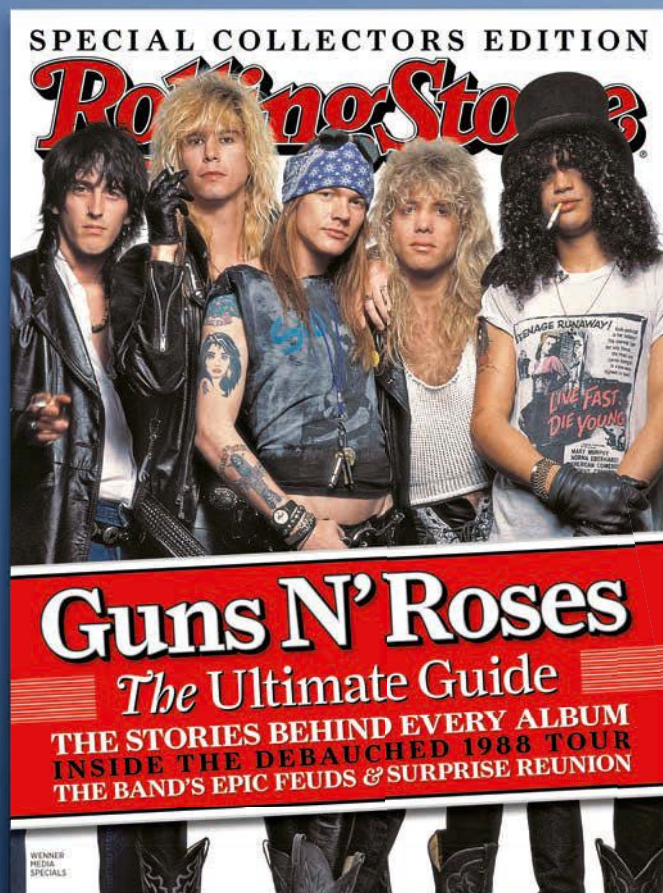
She was 11 years old, but she knew what she was doing. “I knew afterward there was gonna be plenty of shit-talking,” Paris says, “plenty of people questioning him and how he raised us. That was the first time I ever publicly defended him, and it definitely won’t be the last.” For Prince, his younger sister showed in that moment that she had “more strength than any of us”.

THE DAY AFTER HER TRIP TO THE Museum of Death, Paris, Michael Snoddy and Tom Hamilton, her model-handsome, man-bunned 31-year-old manager, head over to Venice Beach. We stroll the boardwalk, and Snoddy recalls a brief stint as a street performer here when he first moved to L.A., drumming on buckets. “It wasn’t bad,” he says. “I averaged out to a hundred bucks a day.”

Paris has her hair extensions in a ponytail. She’s wearing sunglasses with circular lenses, a green plaid shirt over leggings, and a Rasta-rainbow backpack. Her mood is darker today. She’s not talking much, and clinging tight to Snoddy, who’s in a Willie Nelson tee with the sleeves cut off.

We head toward the canals, lined with ultramodern houses that Paris doesn’t like. “They’re too harsh and bougie,” she says. “It doesn’t scream, ‘Hey, come for dinner!’” She’s delighted to spot a group of ducks. “Hello, friends!” she shouts. “Come play with us!” Among them are what appear to be an avian couple in love, paddling through the shallow water in close formation. Paris sighs and squeezes Snoddy’s hand. “Goals,” she says. “Hashtag ‘goals.’”

Her spirits are lifting, and we walk back toward the beach to watch the sunset. Paris and Snoddy hop on a concrete barrier facing the orange-pink spectacle. It’s a peaceful moment, until a middle-aged woman in neon jogging clothes and knee-length socks walks over. She grins at the couple as she presses a button on some kind of tiny stereo strapped to her waist, unleashing a dated-sounding trance song. Paris laughs and turns to her boyfriend. As the sun disappears, they start to dance. **2**



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**Inside
the
Illusion**

Were they self-destructing,
or were they just growing
up in public? An in-depth
report from the GNR jungle

By Kim Neely
Excerpted from EW.com, September 26th, 2015



JOHN OLIVER

[Cont. from 69] *Just prep his future therapist: "Why do you think your father was angry at you?"*

That's right. "He said he was pretty good at comedy before I was born, but I'm seeing a clip, and I'm not sure if he's right" [laughs]. "Who wants to watch 20 minutes on retirement funds?" [Laughs]

When you're in the middle of one of your long, complex pieces about an arcane subject, do you ever think, "This is it - they're gonna cancel us"?

That's normally around minute one. That's when you say, "And tonight, our main story's gonna be credit reports, or retirement funds." You think, "What the fuck?" You wonder whether there is anyone sitting in an office in HBO going, "What is this? Describe to me what this show is before I watch this." You know, but the harder, the drier the story is, the more we try and balance that with doing the stupidest thing you can imagine, either with part of that story or in the show in general. That's another thing. If you see something very complicated, you might be about to see something utterly infantile.

You seemed to love working with Billy Eichner on "Billy on the Street". Are you jealous of his brand of pure silliness?

Generally, I am jealous of him, yes, in terms of what he can shout at people, and his upper-body strength. But I like the balance between seriousness and stupidity. I think I would get depressed if I was gonna start doing just one of them.

Before "The Daily Show", funny news - for lack of a better term - hardly existed outside "Saturday Night Live". Now it's everywhere. What is it about it that works so broadly?

I don't know that there is anything fundamental about it. There's so many more shit versions than there were before *The Daily Show*, and there will be after it. It depends on the team that is producing each version of the thing.

What is needed to make it work, then?

It's exhaustingly hard work to do it well - it's way harder and takes longer than it probably should. 'Cause you have to make sure that your foundations are rock-solid before you start building nonsense on top of it. That takes a long time. You have to deconstruct it so you can work out what the components of the story actually are. Then construct the story as it actually should be, which is sometimes different than how it has previously been told, 'cause it's been misreported; then you need to break it apart again into comedic components. There are so many extra steps involved. You can also do it really quick and quite badly.

How do you choose the subjects for the long pieces?

Just whether it's something that's worth telling for that long, where we can show people things that they've never seen before. And whether it's interesting enough for us to *work on* for this long, let alone for people to listen to for 20 minutes. They fall apart if it turns out it's been misreported. Or if the story shifts to the point that we wouldn't be able to say anything definitive about it. It starts with, "This looks interesting", and then we all sign off that story to a researcher who will check the bones of it to see if it stands up. Then the footage producer will look to see if there is enough footage to tell that story on TV. Those would be the key stress tests.

Jimmy Kimmel called your show educational, and I was shocked that you didn't push back on that.

You're right, that is normally something that I would push back against heavily. I really like Kimmel. I'd never been on that show before. I probably trusted he was going somewhere funny, because he's a funny man. So I don't know if I was listen-

"The harder, the drier the story is, the more we try and balance that by doing the stupidest thing you can imagine."

ing to the middle of that sentence, or if I was worrying about where he was gonna make fun of me. And I certainly get really allergic to the sentiment that what we do is purely journalism, because I'm being defensive of people who actually are journalists. So we did a whole 20-minute piece this year about journalism. We need actual journalists doing their jobs so that we can take what journalism does and frame it.

You were on Kimmel's show the night after winning your Emmy. Were you able to take some validation from that prize?

[Laughs] No! No, you can't escape the fact you are an adult holding a trophy. And you're walking up there and it's Jon Snow, and there he is, like [Jon Snow voice], "Here's your trophy." Awards for comedy are very, very silly. The most fundamental barometer for whether or not something is good is people laughing.

There really seems to be almost no gap between your on- and offscreen personas. You're truly yourself on air. How do you do that?

I'm not much of an actor, so I can't really fake it. I think it helps, perhaps, not having that particular skill set, because it's just not

there as, like, a parachute to fall on. Yeah, and also by the end of the week, I'm so enmeshed in this stuff that I want to give it its best shot on the TV, because, again, you wanna honour how hard people have worked on it. And, you know, by the end of it, it's so densely written so that we want to have a joke on every single fact or clip or anything, that you're kind of diving for the finish line knowing that you've gotta get by on 29 minutes.

Just getting the words out is not a small thing.

I think that's why sometimes I'm physically, like, leaning, climbing over the desk. "No, you can't, please don't go! Don't go! You gotta hear this one more thing. I know chicken farming does not sound like it's worth it, but it is when you'll get it tonight."

You've said that right before you got the call for "The Daily Show", your career in England was failing. Why do you think that was?

I don't know. I was making something of a living, so I guess we've got to couch that concept of failure a little bit. They had just cancelled the two shows I was working on, so I was at a bit of a fork in the road career-wise when Jon Stewart hired me. And there was nothing suggesting there was anything big coming my way. I was often fighting [with executives] on any show that I was working on. There was often a lot of friction, because I wanted to do something that they didn't want to do. It was only under Jon Stewart that I had the cover to do everything that I wanted to do, because there was a kind of shared sensibility over there.

What would've happened if you never got that opportunity?

In the *Sliding Doors* version of this story, I'm guessing I'd just be doing stand-up in England to various degrees of apathetic respect.

Have you thought about how long you wanna keep doing this particular show?

Yeah... I don't know. I guess as long as it feels like it's still challenging, the learning curve is still there. The production of it is so ferocious. I don't think there is a way to do this in a less intense way. I think we need to do this very intensely or you don't do it.

And what would the aftermath look like for you?

Who the fuck knows. I'm guessing there won't be one.

It's hard to imagine early retirement.

I can't do that. No. I don't do well relaxing. I don't really know how to relax, so that does not suit me well. I've always got to find something that can stop me thinking.

From finding out what's going on emotionally?

Yeah. I'm British. Our lives are basically a marathon and a sprint of running away from ourselves.

Greg Graffin

The Bad Religion and solo singer on meeting Finnish ice hockey players and making guitar straps

The last time I did something for the first time

For the first time in 35 years of making music I actually made a guitar strap, because I decided to stand up and play the guitar instead of sit down. I've only ever played live with a guitar sitting down, and making one myself is more in keeping with my style. I don't consider myself a guitarist, I'm more a guitar stylist. My style of music is more of a home-brewed variety and I saw my friend was able to make a strap, so I just cut a pair of jeans down the length of the outside seam and then it's connected to the neck with a little shoestring. It's probably how Woody Guthrie would have done it.

The last time someone was rude to me

Unfortunately it happens every day, doesn't it? It's so common that you don't really register most of them. One of the rudest things that happened to me recently was a state employee was accusing me of not paying a fee, which of course was not accurate. I always pay my bills.

The last time I questioned my career choice

That question assumes that the people you're interviewing have a career. I consider myself very fortunate to be able to make a living from the things I do, but as you might be aware I've earned money in many different areas, from songwriting, to performing punk rock to teaching and writing books. In that sense you might look at me and think, "This guy's all over the place, he's always questioning his career." [Laughs] I've failed to commit to any of them as a full-time job.

The last time I cried

Probably a couple of days ago. It's not really a bummer though, because I tend to get really emotional when I write music and I wrote a really good song, and it was enough to bring tears to my eyes. Which usually is an indication that I'm on the right track. Songwriting is a sort of gift. A lot of people talk about how you can improve it, and hone your craft, but most of it is just distilling emotional expression and life experience into hopefully enjoyable listening material.

Greg Graffin's third solo album, Millport, featuring members of Bad Religion and Social Distortion, is due on March 10th.

The last time I was starstruck

Very few stars are that surprising to me. It does happen though. I've played hockey recreationally for many, many years. I don't know if you guys have ice down in Australia, but it's something that happens when it's less than 32 degrees [Fahrenheit]. Anyhow, back in the day Bad Religion had what we called the Bad Religion Hockey Club and we would put it out there that if we were in your town we would like to play against fans. It got well known in parts of Europe that we had this club, and we befriended some members of the NHL who played at that time for the Dallas Stars, and they invited us along when we were both in Helsinki to come and play with the Finnish national team. Which consisted of 20 of the most famous people, not only in Finland, but some of the greatest players in the NHL. These people are otherworldly figures to us amateurs. So I do remember feeling that this was amazing to be on the ice with these guys.

The last thing I do before I go onstage

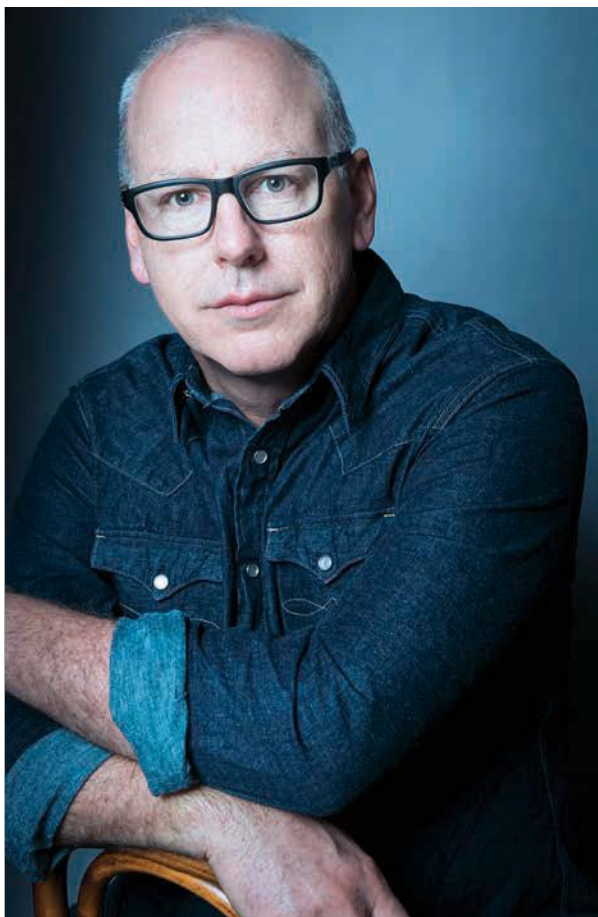
I don't have a ritual. I spend an hour stretching before I go onstage at a concert. Because everything is wireless now I definitely do a microphone check. It's ridiculous that I have to do that. In the old days you would just walk out on stage and your microphone would be plugged into a wire. Nowadays you've got to worry about frequencies, whether the batteries are charged – all this crap.

The last thing I'd do if the world was ending

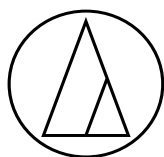
Nobody knows what they're going to do at the end. You could just get a really stupid answer

like, "Oh, kiss my wife and child." That's not interesting to anyone, that's just obvious. If the world was ending I would definitely take every last penny in my savings, load up the family in a Winnebago and drive to the national parks and just do a complete family road trip that is nothing but pure adrenaline and adventure. Not only visit the cool places, but do things together that we weren't able to do like bungee jumping, scuba diving with sharks and all of those things you want to be able to say you've done in order to have lived a full life.

MATT COYTE



"I wrote a really good song and it was enough to bring tears to my eyes. It's an indication that I'm on the right track."



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