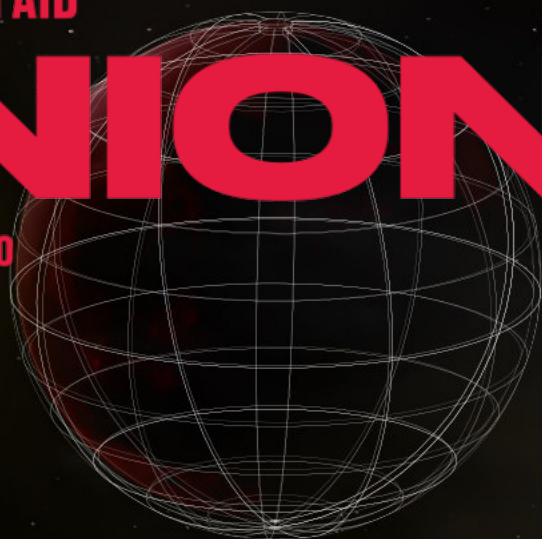


HEARING AID

REUNION

ISSUE 20



REUNION



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FORWARD

PATRICK DENVIR

Over the past few months, I have found myself reuniting with some of my favourite music from my youth. Alt-J's *An Awesome Wave*, in particular, is an album which I had all but forgotten in the wake of the seemingly relentless barrage of new music to be consumed. Returning to it recently has given me a reminder of, and a new perspective on, my early adolescent mind-state at the time of its release. With the release of Adele's new album, *30* (on which Hearing Aid made a minizine recently – check it out!), I have revisited *21*; now that I am that age I can attempt to understand the nuances of her experience far more than I ever could when I was twelve. It's not just intrapersonal reunion that has been apparent; with the gradual return of live concerts, artists such as Billie Eilish, ABBA and Ed Sheeran have clearly released albums for the exact purpose of interpersonal reunion (with varying degrees of artistic success). Meanwhile, Silk Sonic and Magdalena Bay have embraced a reunion with the past on their respective albums. And of course, perhaps most importantly, the end of lockdown has meant that Hearing Aid can release print issues once more - enjoy!



FORWARD

MAIA RAKOVIC

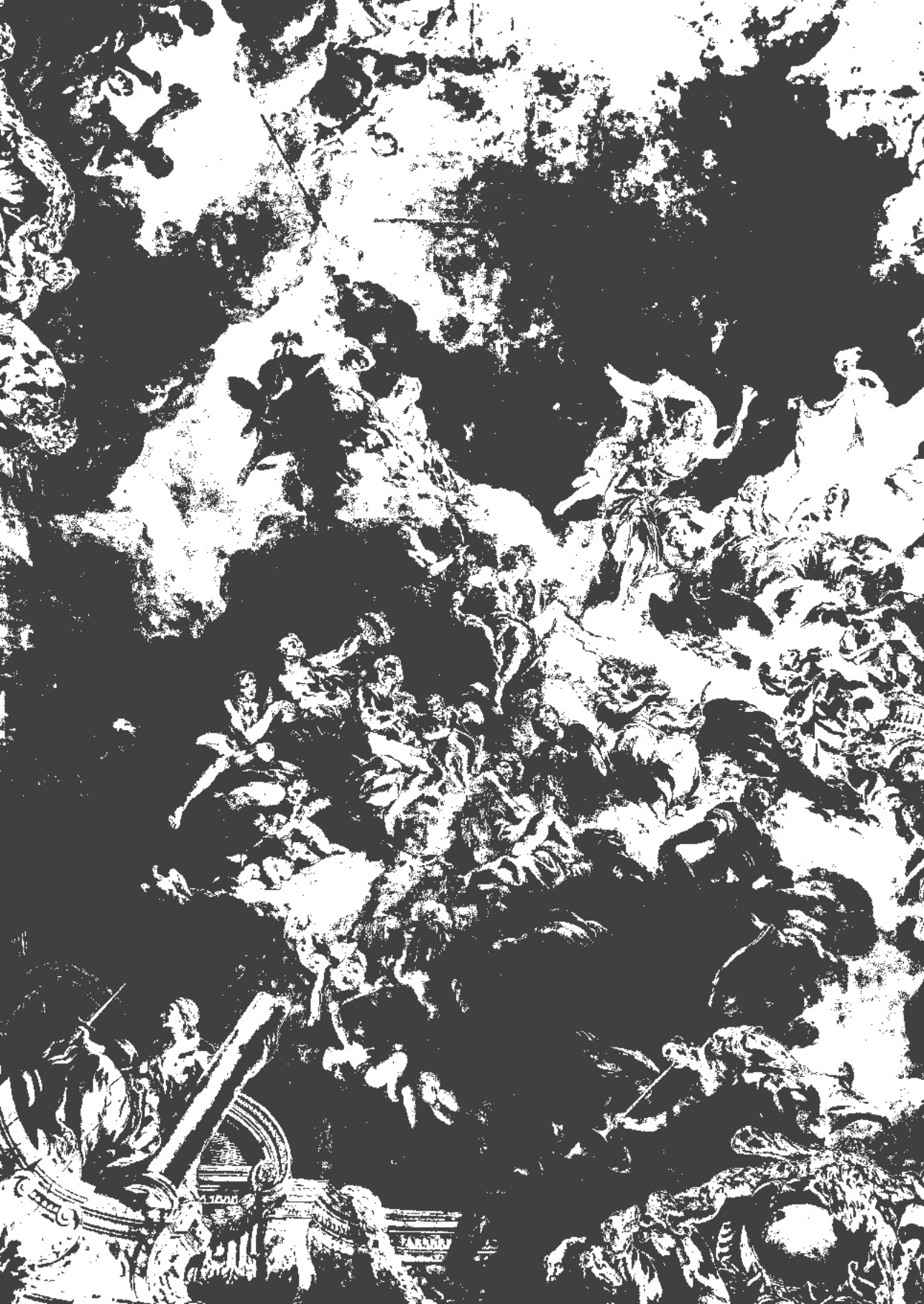
Being one of the Hearing Aid co-editors this year has already been a strange experience; and the year isn't even halfway done yet. After wading through the fuzzy depths of the global-catastrophe-that-shall-not-be-named, it's felt strange trying to return to some semblance of normalcy as if nothing ever happened in the first place. I think that's part of what inspired this issue's theme -- the drive to acknowledge that things are, indeed, kind of uncanny right now. If you looked at life today without a magnifying glass, you could easily mistake it for the life we had a couple of years ago. But when you look closer, you start to see all the dirt and baggage collecting in the corners. It's nothing a vacuum and a dusting can't fix, but it's there and I think it's worth writing about. Has this extended metaphor gone on too long? Anyway, this issue we have the (often taken for granted) privilege of launching the print in the company of our contributors, peers, and friends. Hearing Aid is, as always, a labour of love, and we're very excited to share all of the words, illustrations, emotions, caffeine, and negative PCR's that helped make it a reality. I hope you enjoy and take care of yourself.



FORWARD

ELI THAYER

Are you exhausted? I sure am. For all the talk about coming back and rejoining this shared space we inhabit together, I think I forgot the downsides. Being stuck at home was often miserable—crushingly claustrophobic, draining of all optimism—but there was time. Time to do coursework and relax on the weekend. Time to cook and give attention to people you care about. Time to listen to music and hone whatever it is you love to do, without someone or something constantly pulling you away. Now that I'm back, there's always something to do, each day growing increasingly hectic as the commitments pile up. This new routine is insane and more stressful than travel planning in a pandemic, and I'm enjoying (almost) every minute of it. That could change—good feelings rarely last forever—but for now, there really is something magical about living in this beautifully chaotic world I've made here. Savor this reunion, and let the novelty extend a little longer. And if you do manage to find some spare time, sink into a Hearing Aid magazine and savor that moment, too. They don't come around often.



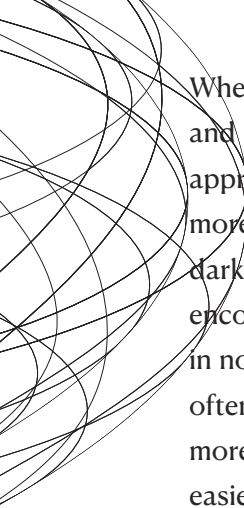
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A Reunion with Past Artists

Eleanor Pitt

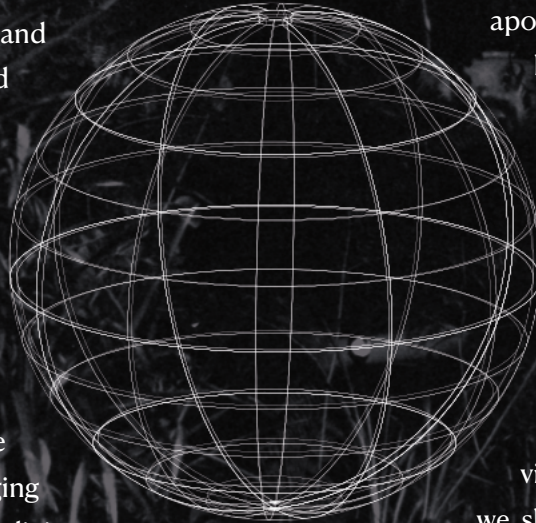


When the days start to get shorter and colder, and Christmas approaches, nostalgia becomes a more familiar feeling. The early darkness and drop in temperature encourages me to stay indoors, and in not communing with the world as often, I want to indulge in memory more, to connect with myself. The easiest way to do this is to listen to the music I grew up with. For me, music is the way I can most easily connect to my younger selves. And I think it's important to do this – to acknowledge the people you once were with respect. So today I want to write something for all of them – the girls of various ages who make up my musical taste. I'm going to write about their very favourites, the artists and music I don't listen to as much anymore, yet still has formed a large part of my personality.

As a kid, I didn't listen to a lot of music. Very-little-me liked Disney songs, and musicals, and the classical music my dad would play in the car. As I got older, I liked a lot of cover artists on YouTube – one that comes to mind is 'adrisaurus' whose version of 'The Hanging Tree' from The Hunger Games was what I chose to sing for my school's talent show. I like this kid, she doesn't give a shit.

But the first musical artist I turn to, in reunion with my younger selves, is Marina, or Marina and the Diamonds as 13-year-old Eleanor would have known her. I was obsessed with her album *Electra Heart*. The layers of meaning to that album, as well as her online presence and music videos, struck my imagination at that young and impressionable age. That album changed my life. The commonly presented archetypes of woman-housewife, teen idol, primadonna and homewrecker- that she draws on helped me to understand and recognise these archetypes in myself and the other women I saw around me, on TV, in advertisements. It was my introduction to any kind of feminism, and the way she embodied the character of *Electra Heart* completely - blurring the lines between performativity and real life - spoke, I realise now, to how I felt I had to perform to embody some aspects of typical womanhood. I still carry her loud, excitable, emotional proclamation.

This was also when I started really getting into Gaga – but who ‘gets into’ Gaga? When you start listening to her, it feels like she’s always been there. She expresses through her strange but starkly emotional lyrics how I have always felt. When I listen to the tinny hollow beats of The Fame Monster, or the pulsating rhythms of Born This Way, I am transported back to being 13, in my cold but colourful room, feeling safe in the grey afternoon light. Her abundance of references to pop culture and the Hollywood characters she wrote about comforted me. She knew what it was for pop culture to be personally important while also acknowledging its phoniness. Religious motifs, sex and groupie culture being referenced in the same song and music video just makes sense to a girl who grew up in the 2000s. The tabloid explosions, the constant barrage of images, the celebrity becoming at once more available and less and less attainable. This atmosphere woven into the



patchwork of my childhood and early adolescence was and is as real to me as the influence of any religion. Both Marina and Gaga stood out to me as weird women who still embraced pop culture and femininity in ways that were just as deep as any male ‘greats’ or auteurs.

And now comes 14, 15. MAJOR discovery here. David Bowie. In high school, I loved him so much that when he died people whom I did not

know came up to me and

apologized for my

loss. David was

culturally

intelligent

and very

weird, like

Gaga, but

listening to

him and

watching his

videos I often felt

we shared the same

brain. The first time I heard

him it was like falling in love at first

sight. In his earlier work, his specific

frustrations, takes, the way he played

with gender, were all the same as

mine. In his later work, his reflective

nature on youth and disgust with

commercialism and the music

industry spoke to my maturing

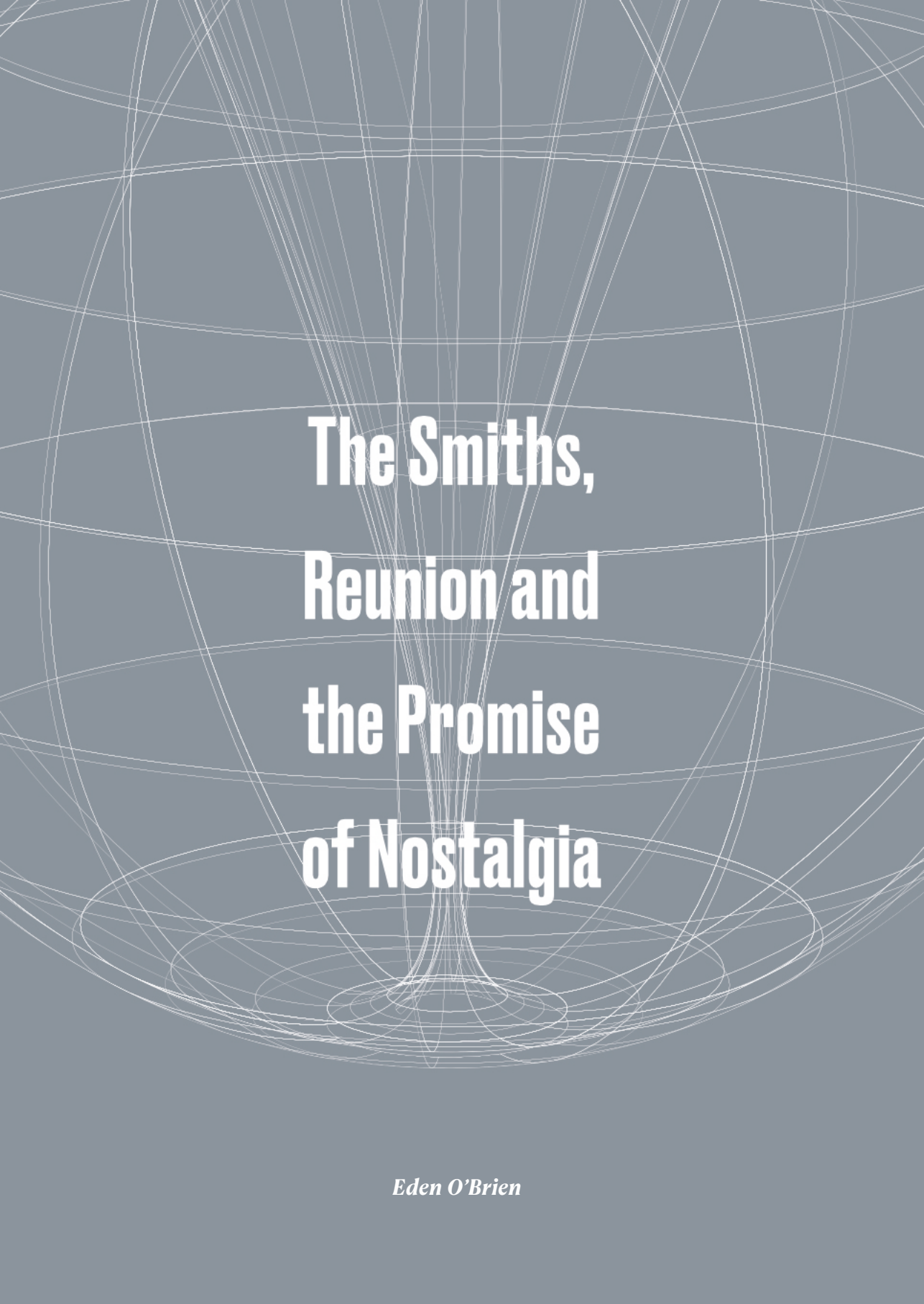
thought) brain. Living far from my school and my friends, I covered my room in pictures and posters of him, maybe to feel less lonely. Still, I was always more into his music and imagery, not so much him as a person. It was a true artistic connection. I don't listen to him much anymore, but when I do I feel her come back to me – the lonely, awkward teenager who loved his music. With me and the music to look after her, she's okay now.

Through the rest of high school, there were other artists I liked, other genres that were important to me, but none of them were very significant. And then I got to university. Being around other students meant I started to listen to what was current. I discovered the Girls: Ariana Grande, Megan Thee Stallion, Doja Cat, Kali Uchis, and some older icons like Britney, Mariah and Whitney just to name a few.

This music was fun, and juicy, and feminine. It was played when we got ready for a night out, or when I was walking to a class or appointment that I was nervous for. I still love these artists for their confidence and feminine energy, but for my 17/18-year-old first year self, I see how listening to this music is a product of

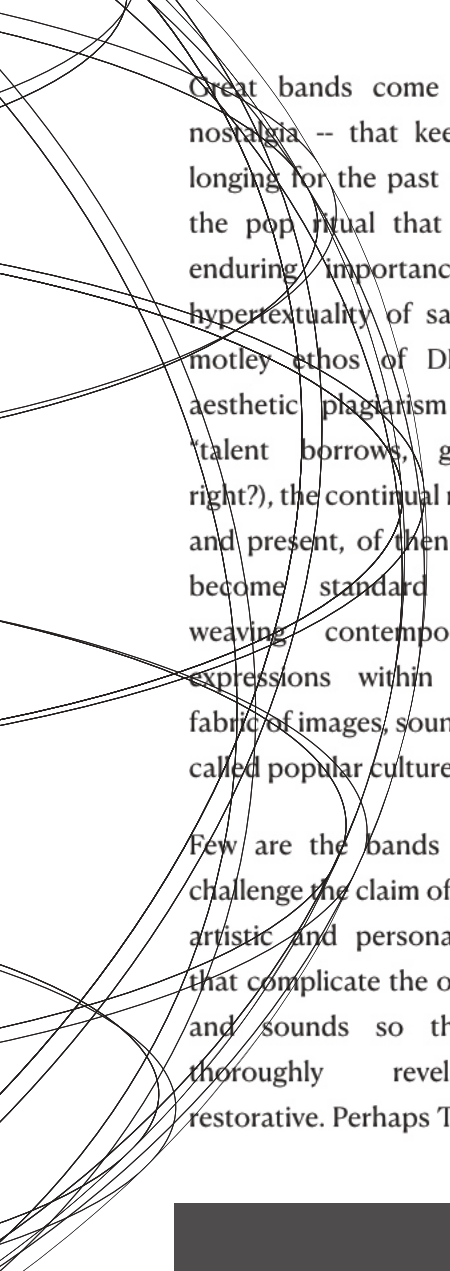
my need for a confidence boost, a hyper-attachment to the people around me and what they liked – and also part of a slight identity crisis I think everyone experiences when they move to an unfamiliar place, especially if they're a teenager. Mine took the form of wanting to be closer with other women, as well as wanting to connect with my own womanhood more. In continuing to listen to this music, I acknowledge the growth I experienced at this time, but I think I see it differently now. I use this music today to connect with myself, to have fun, not to drown out anxieties.

Listening to the music you used to love is a kind of self-care. Even when it is embarrassing, or reminiscent of bad memories, it forces an acknowledgment of how much you have grown, of the deeper parts of you, the people you used to be. In reuniting with these artists, I'm really reuniting with my inner voices, influenced by these great artists over the years. Try it!



**The Smiths,
Reunion and
the Promise
of Nostalgia**

Eden O'Brien



Great bands come and go, and nostalgia -- that keen and wistful longing for the past -- is a facet of the pop ritual that attests to its enduring importance. From the hypertextuality of sampling to the motley ethos of DIY to all out aesthetic plagiarism (then again, "talent borrows, genius steals", right?), the continual reunion of past and present, of then and now, has become standard practice for weaving contemporary pop-art expressions within the complex fabric of images, sounds, and stories called popular culture.

Few are the bands that seriously challenge the claim of nostalgia over artistic and personal significance; that complicate the order of images and sounds so that revival is thoroughly revelatory and restorative. Perhaps The Strokes did

just this in 2001 with *Is This It*, an 11-track blitz of rehashed riffs and Lou Reed-esque word-salad that injected New York and UK scenes with the urgency of 70's punk in the passing shadow of Nu Metal.

But fewer still are those acts that devise symbols that add to the pop lexicon. The Beatles did it; so did Elvis, Aretha Franklin, Jimi Hendrix, and the Sex Pistols. Maybe this is what the most divinely influential acts have in common: talent, drugs, luck, hubris, discipline, "the muse" -- sure. But there is also the fact of being at once profound enough to become enshrined within the lives of a veteran audience and artificial enough to become manipulable within the amalgam of pop-culture that meets the ever-contemporary listener. In pop, the profound and the artificial are never mutually exclusive.

**"I know my luck too well
and I'll probably never see
you again"**

Ever the Mancunian-Marxist, Anthony H. Wilson of Factory Records fame once said “some people make money and some make history”. For all his charm (and charmlessness), Wilson was an expert at disguising fact as fiction, and thus played a large part in securing the posthumous success and highly crafted legacy of Joy Division. The frenzied re-spinning of the punk-story by Wilson and other more dubious pioneers demonstrates that an anecdote repeated is the beginning of mythos.

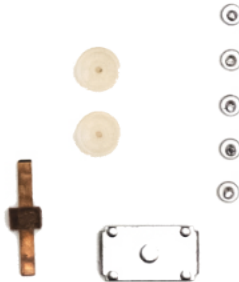
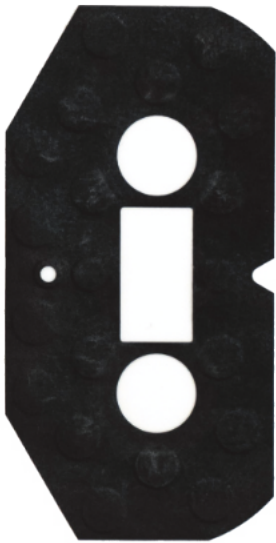
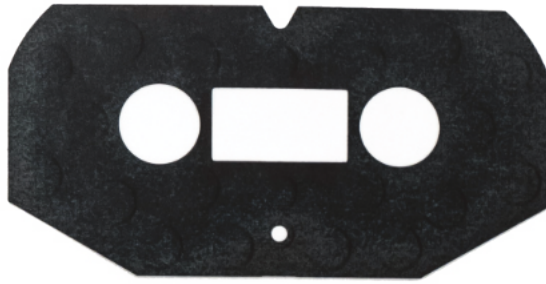
When it comes to the fabrication of sincere pop mythology, very few acts come close to the craftiness of The Smiths. Lasting a mere 4.5 years, from mid 1982 to late 1987, The Smiths were the brain-child of singer-songwriter Morrissey and guitarist Johnny Marr; joined by bassist Andy Rourke and drummer Mike Joyce (and later, 2nd guitarist Craig Gannon), The Smiths all but defined the British independent music scene of the 80's and laid the groundwork for the Britpop explosion of the 90's.

Musically, The Smiths were led by the startlingly young and equally gifted Johnny Marr who delivered melody driven and guitar based

tracks influenced by the likes of Bert Jansch, Nile Rogers and 60's girl groups like The Shangri-Las. Marr's trademark Rickenbacker jangle was delivered with a conscious femininity intended to counter the alleged chauvinism of 70's dad-rock, whilst retaining its force and technicality. The perfect bridge between pre- and post-punk, Marr's influence saw the return of guitar-led bands and a degree of virtuoso-ism that the punk ethos rebuffed.

Lyrically speaking, Morrissey countered Marr's airy pop symphonies with reflections upon lovelessness, alienation, and death -- all themes which were further complicated by the tone of kitchen-sink realism and exquisite British camp with which they were delivered (see “The Queen is Dead” for 6 minutes and 26 seconds of irrefutable proof). As Morrissey was keen to prove the literary capacity of the 3-minute pop-single to non-believers and thoughtless consumers alike, The Smiths' catalogue is as brilliant as it is pretentious (and, in true Wildean form, twice as treasurable for it).

The group's ethos (tragicomically referred to as “Smithdom” in a few interviews from the early 80's) was

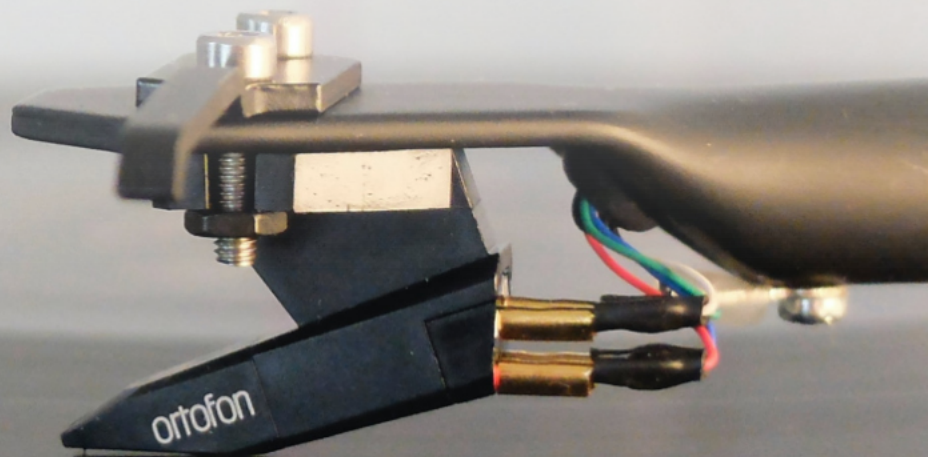


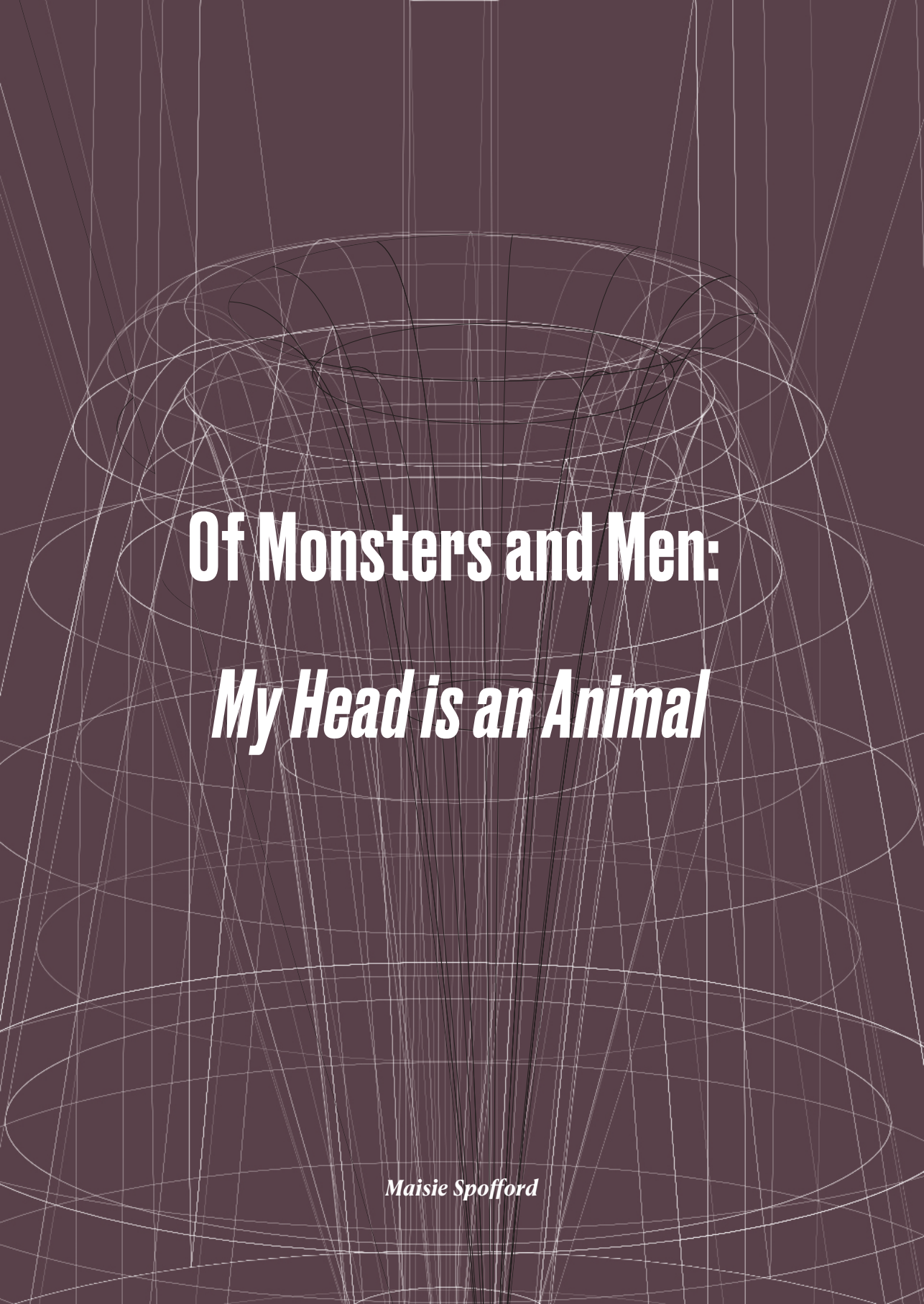
aesthetic and ideological in its scope. Visually speaking, The Smiths' aesthetic scheme is recognisable even without your -5.00 NHS specs: an array of colour-washed cover stars plucked from every corner of pop-culture, where bed-sit heroes and fierce Northern women rub elbows with camp icons and angry young men. Ever the "outsider's outsider", Morrissey utilized a number of props (flowers, hearing-aids, love beads etc.) in a series of quirky Top of the Pops appearances that secured the band's image as a threeway between the dandy, the nerd, and the rockabilly. As was recognised at the time, the singer demonstrated an all-too-keen interest in semiotics to fit comfortably within the array of typical 80's pop glamour; yet, this very shortcoming endeared The Smiths to a horde of misfits spanning generations.

Lyrical ingenuity, political intent, musical excellence, sexual-ambiguity, English devotion, over-exposure, religious fervour, honourable mentions, pithy phrases: maybe this just scratches the surface as to why, in the 35 years since their split as well as during their chaotic run, gallons of ink have been spilt divining, dissecting and divulging The Smith's legacy. The nostalgic references to Carry On, "Rebel Rebel", De Profundis, "A Taste of Honey", and Lovebug Starski, to name a few, yielded a legacy that resounded between the gutter press and hallowed halls of academia, to say nothing of the postered walls of extra-ordinary kids from Whalley Range to Los Angeles.

It's no secret that -- maybe next to The Jam and Oasis -- The Smiths top the list of desired band reunions, and this is a question with which Morrissey and Marr have been hounded for 35 years. It's also no secret that The Smiths have just as much a chance of reuniting as The Beatles do in their original line-up. What split the band and kept them apart ranged from substance abuse, lack of management (and manageability), shifting artistic visions, legal enmity, and, of course,

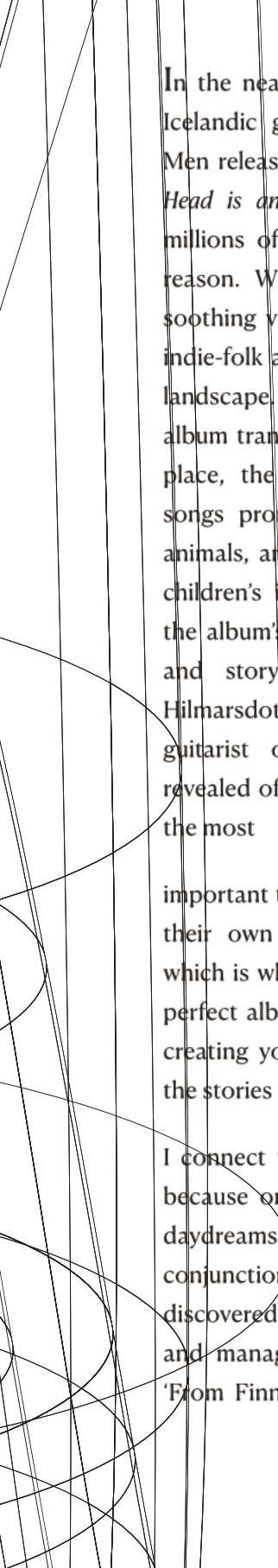
political differences. But what the founding members do agree on and have expressed in many forms is that the people who made up the original line up don't exist anymore. For this reason reunion is impossible; but, more interestingly, this is also why The Smiths, a "living sign" through-and-through, have joined the hallowed ranks of popular artefacts that are the reference points of nostalgia itself.





Of Monsters and Men:
My Head is an Animal

Maisie Spofford



In the nearly ten years since indie Icelandic group Of Monsters and Men released their debut album *My Head is an Animal*, it has gained millions of streams- and for good reason. With string melodies and soothing vocals, every song on the indie-folk album is a beautiful aural landscape. But beyond that, this album transports you to a far away place, the realm of fantasy. The songs prominently feature nature, animals, and monsters; the stuff of children's imaginations, lending to the album's core themes of fantasy and storytelling. Nanna Bryndis Hilmarsdottir, lead singer and guitarist of the six-piece band, revealed of the writing process that the most

important thing is that people “read their own things into the lyrics,” which is why I argue that this is the perfect album for daydreaming and creating your own fantasies out of the stories woven by the lyrics .

I connect to this album personally because one of my most powerful daydreams was created in conjunction with it. At age thirteen, I discovered Of Monsters and Men and managed to stream the song ‘From Finner’ multiple times a day

for weeks in a row; on the bus, in class, doing homework in my room, all the while imagining I was somewhere else. This song's strong chorus of:

**“we are far from home /
but we're so happy / far
from home, all alone /
but we're so happy,”**

really resonated with me, despite never quite having that experience that the lyrics spoke of. On the bus to a field trip, I played this song on repeat and looked out the window, imagining the experience of being on a journey far from home. This line sings to the independence that emerging-teenage-me longed for. I came to associate this song with longing for adventure, or a “way out” of my everyday life. I imagined seeing Of Monsters and Men perform in their home country, Iceland, and spending my days at outdoor concerts, and my nights stargazing on the roof of a caravan. For me, this entire album still speaks to the desire to travel and experience the world in a beautiful and all-consuming way. *My Head is an Animal* submerges you in a fantasy world that leaves you longing for more.





The title of the album *My Head is an Animal* comes from the second line of the first track, 'Dirty Paws.' Like many of the songs on the album, it begins by crafting a narrative:

**“Jumping up and down
the floor / my head is an
animal / and once there
was an animal / it had a
son who mowed the
lawn.”**

All of the lyrics in this track are split into rhyming couplets, making it feel like a spoken poem. The spoken word element and the themes of wilderness evoke images of a campfire sing-along, with the words being improvised. Its creation feels natural, yet unplanned. These spoken rhymes over a strummed guitar melody harkens to Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zero's hit single 'Home' (2009). 'Dirty Paws' also provides the first example of the beautiful building instrumental segments that pepper many of the songs on this album and contribute to the emotional intensity I feel when listening.

Another personal favorite from the album is 'Mountain Sound.' This track starts full of energy, with quick guitar strumming and a lively piano melody that mimics the melody of the refrain. The lyrics suggest this song is about not conforming with society and going to live a life in nature.

The narrator of the song joins a group of wayward travellers, and the chorus sings:

“(We sleep until the sun goes down) / Through the woods, we ran / (Deep into the mountain sound)”.

Anyone who has lived in the confines of society has felt the desire to leave all material possessions and “live simply,” like American environmentalist and philosopher Henry David Thoreau. As the title *My Head is an Animal* suggests, we are, at our core, partly animal and nature calls to us. But modern society generally suppresses that call and leaves us to channel our desires for radical adventure into daydreaming.

The most popular track from *My Head is an Animal*, 'Little Talks,' brought this album from Icelandic obscurity to global recognition. This

song was their debut single which topped charts in Iceland and prompted a US record label to sign them and release *My Head is an Animal* in North America. The music video for 'Little Talks' enforces the fantasy elements of the album. Set in black and white, it portrays a blimp-like ship navigating the skies, deterred by multiple monsters which a colorful, phoenix-like woman figure defeats. In an interview, lead singer and guitarist Nanna Bryndis Hilmarsdottir admitted that inspiration for song lyrics often came from imagined stories and situations.

In the case of 'Little Talks,' she and her counterpart Raggi wrote about “a couple, and the husband passed away- it's about a conversation between the two of them”. But, as mentioned before, what's more important is that people “read their own things into the lyrics.” Through their storytelling abilities,

**Of Monsters and Men
leave the lyrics open to
interpretation and inspire
the listener's own fantasy.**

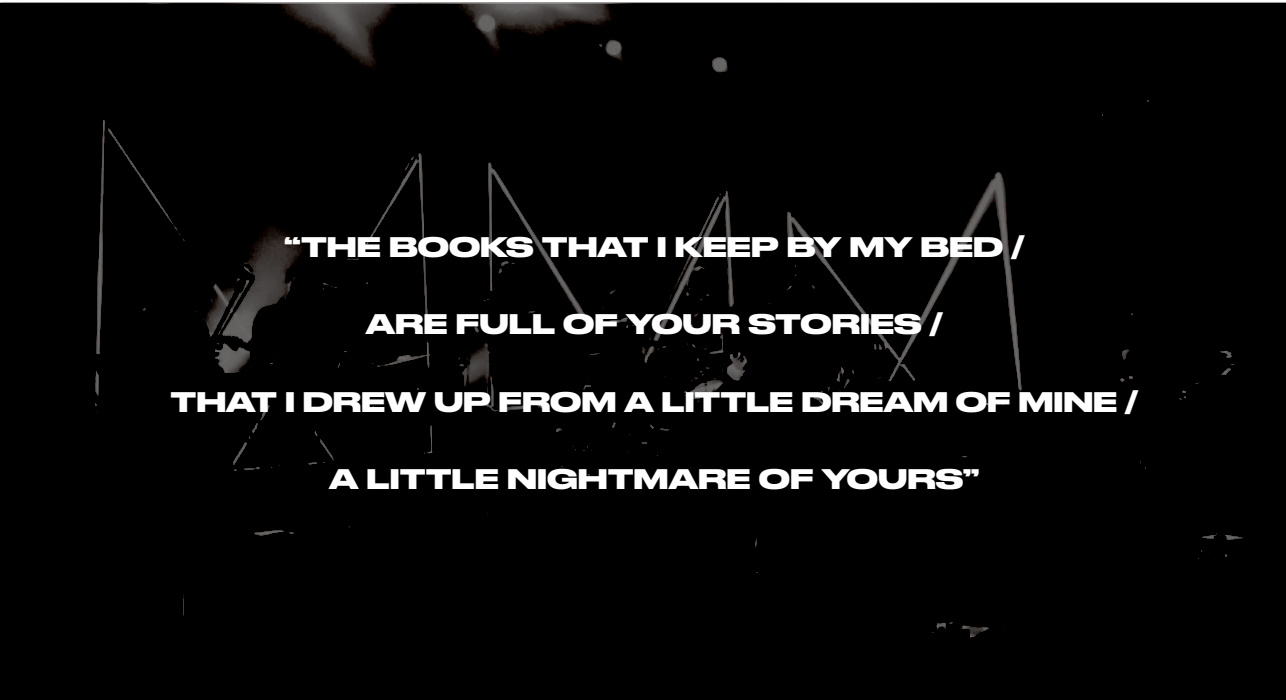
It is this encouragement of imagination that makes this album engaging to listen to over and over again.

While 'Dirty Paws,' 'Mountain Sound,' and 'Little Talks' are the heavy hitters of this album, the other tracks certainly don't detract from its beauty. 'Slow and Steady' and 'Sloom' are less energized songs, yet still chock full of poetic nature imagery featuring forests and waterfalls. The last track on the album, 'Yellow Light,' features a long, soothing outro that feels like a lullaby. Yet, as relaxing as the instrumental is, the themes are still ambiguous. The verse is a conversation between a woman, who seems nervous and a man who attempts to reassure her and tell her to ignore the "big warning signs." The outro ends with the instruments stripped down until just the piano melody is fading out a bit eerily, reminding me of my childhood wind-


up music box slowly coming to a stop, ending the album on a pang of childhood nostalgia.

Perhaps *My Head is an Animal* could be summed up in the lines below from 'Sloom'.

Each song could be seen as a story or a little dream. But, like this lyric suggests, the fine line between dreams and nightmares isn't black and white, like in the eerie lullaby dreamscape of 'Yellow Light'. While this album has become a source of escapism and inspires daydreams for me, it also has a knack for evoking dissatisfaction with life as I know it and a longing for something more. I encourage you to engage with this album and explore the response it pulls out of you.



**"THE BOOKS THAT I KEEP BY MY BED /
ARE FULL OF YOUR STORIES /
THAT I DREW UP FROM A LITTLE DREAM OF MINE /
A LITTLE NIGHTMARE OF YOURS"**



Album Review:
Long Time Coming

Mairi Small

Long Time Coming is an aptly named album. Singer-songwriter Sierra Ferrell spent years busking and travelling around the US developing her own kind of country music and captivating listeners. But her journey to a debut album is a modern one. In the past, a few performances of her original songs went viral on Americana YouTube channels (such as Gems on VHS and Western AF) and word of her talent spread through online comment sections as well as real-life gigs. She had great presence and catchy, well-written songs; above all, she simply had one of those voices: singular and timeless. She seemed to be the real deal, one of several new American musicians said to be at once returning country music to its roots and reinventing it, giving it a new spontaneity and scratchiness, a punk ethos and above all, an authenticity. *Long Time Coming* was released this August, over three years since some of her most popular online performances. The expectations were high.



It's unfair to hold a musician to the standards of performances from so long ago when both she and her music will have evolved in that time. It's unfair, but it's inevitable. And for many, *Long Time Coming* did not live up to the hopes they had. But it probably never could. The urgent melodies plucked along the bass strings of her guitar and her undoctored voice have been replaced by a bed of accompanying instruments and clean production.

And it's good. There is a lovely range of instruments on this album, all working together well; the long instrumental sections pass the melody from electric to acoustic, violin to double bass, slide guitar to saw. There's a warmth to the music, even a generosity as no instrument or voice hogs any song. But that's the thing: Ferrell's voice could have hogged the songs - it is more than strong enough for it. While its gravelly quality and distinct tone is still there, the overused reverb and the sheer amount of other instruments, at times, dampens what can be immensely charismatic vocals.

This is not to call the album bland, or to suggest that, with higher levels of production in a Nashville studio, Ferrell has somehow moved into mainstream country. In fact, *Long Time Coming* is by no means strictly country, with notes of bluegrass, gypsy jazz, and even surfer rock all featuring. There is certainly a lot of inspiration drawn from older music, primarily older country and jazz, with the track 'At the End of the Rainbow' bursting from upbeat bluegrass to a slower jazz standard style. Ferrell has a great talent for channeling older sounds in a way that is far from staid. This is not an album of nostalgia; many songs sound at once like they could have been passed down from generations or written today.

Lyrically, things also seem traditional, with many tales of lost love. However, Ferrell has a flair for interesting and often humorous images that flesh out the songs, such as the line:

"You say the women in this town, they're just like gold / from where I'm standing they spend it up their nose".

There is a playfulness to the album, and that's one of its most winning

elements. But there is real emotion too. The opening tracks, 'The Sea' and 'Jeremiah' move us from a snaking, minor song that winks at the listener to an understated story of infidelity that delivers its impact in the simplest of observations- the command for the titular character not to leave his wedding ring "in the pocket of your blue jeans." 'In Dreams' is lyrically one of the best on the album, with its pairing of love and death and the chorus' demand to "take me with you now before I'm one".

In terms of the emotional tone of each track, the flow of the album works well. But I often felt that the songs were too crowded, too flurrying, and that- as nice as all of the instruments were- they just didn't always need to be there. Slower track 'West Virginia Waltz' remains an album highlight.

As a piece of songwriting, it is near perfect in its narrative and melody. It tells the story of returning to a former love after years of "rambling", only to find he has passed away. It's the sparsity of the song that is devastating, and, because of this, I am unsure about the production- especially the bombastic ending, with its driving electric guitar and

grand cymbals. It is affecting, but ultimately unnecessary. The chorus line: “the last time I saw him, we did the West Virginia Waltz” gains enough meaning and transformation from the preceding verses that all the extra elements seem to dilute the impact, demanding an emotional response that was already there. But I am, again, comparing the studio version to an earlier video of live performance, which might be unfair. The live version was one thing; the album has a new interpretation. Why not enjoy both?

It’s a trap for the artist, and a tale very often repeated. In moving to a record deal and the reach that fans swore she deserved, Ferrell is, of course, seen to lose some of that precious authenticity- perhaps even to ‘sell out’. I don’t think she is selling out. The tracks, new and old, on *Long Time Coming* are creative and often subtle blends of a range of

musical periods and genres. It is an album that grows on you, and it most definitely shows potential. Subjectively, the tracks do not feel as fresh as the performances I have rewatched and clung to and sealed away in YouTube playlists until they gathered dust. But the issue of authenticity is particularly fraught in country music which is famously made up of “three chords and the truth”. Especially when compared with the country charts, endlessly mocked for their artificial rolling-out of trucks and beer and girls, a musician like Ferrell’s apparent truthfulness becomes all the more precious- and all the more to be fiercely guarded.

Overall, both *Long Time Coming* and Ferrell’s online performances are well worth looking into. Regardless of the arguments around authenticity and genre, she remains a unique talent and a tremendous songwriter with a haunting voice.





The Pandemic Prophets of Punk

Eden O'Brien

The true origin of British punk rock has been, unsurprisingly, the subject of much debate and controversy, with everyone from Johnny Rotten to Malcolm McLaren to Richard Hell claiming to be patient zero. But, generally speaking, the music explosion that rocked Britain from 1976 to 1979 was set off by a plethora of circumstances, notwithstanding the mavericks, Svengali's, and wordsmiths at the heart of the respective UK and New York scenes. Motley to the core, British punk took its cues from key cities, tribal fashion fads, socio-political trends, and a good dose of the right people being in the right place at the right time (read the 4th of June 1976 at the Lesser Free Trade Hall). In the seminal *England's Dreaming*, author and iconic music journalist Jon Savage traces the explosion of 1977 back to New York City—CBGB, to be exact, which played host to punk's godparents (Patti Smith, Television, New York Dolls) and first generation (Blondie, Talking heads, Ramones).

But more so than in America, the conditions leading to the explosion of British punk were built on social and political conflict, civil unrest, and, above all – boredom.

The effects of mass unemployment and labour strikes resonated most keenly among working class youths—the chief consumers of rock'n'roll.

With this in mind, it comes as no surprise that the core members of many of punk's most important bands were on the dole or were even squatters (Joe Strummer of the Clash, for example).

Fast forward to 2021 and the possibility of a music explosion rivalling the ingenuity, influence, and disruption of British punk is, arguably, impossible. At the same time, COVID has initiated a set of social, civil, and political conditions eerily similar to the ones that led to punk; from the mass unemployment prompted by the pandemic to the civil unrest of the BLM riots to the climate and anti-lockdown protests.

n light of 2021, British punk is prophetic in its emphasis on ennui and anarchy.

“Boredom,” The Buzzcocks from *Spiral Scratch*, 1977

Vocals: Howard Devoto

Guitar: Pete Shelley

Base: Steve Diggle

Drums: John Maher

Label: New Hormones

When The Buzzcocks released *Spiral Scratch* in 1977 on New Hormones—a label devised by music manager Richard Boon—it signaled shifting attitudes towards indie music altogether. The Sex Pistols signed to the major Virgin, in an audacious effort to claim more than their due, and the rag-tagged Damned released the first single of British punkdom “New Rose” on Stiff Records. With a simplicity bordering on impatience and aggression, “Boredom” is a track that sums up the frustration of waiting around: nothing to do, nowhere to go, no one to see equals boredom.

Musically speaking, pre-punk Manchester experienced a lull in the creativity that marked the 60s (the Hollies) (“you know the scene—very humdrum”). All of this changed when

Pete Shelley and Howard Devoto invited the Sex Pistols to play the Lesser Free Trade Hall in 1976, initiating one of the most influential gigs in the history of British rock. The gig that spawned some of Britain’s best loved and most important bands injected the suburbs of Manchester with the overdue DIY ethos that characterized punk. The emergence of a united/insular Northern scene—the centre of which was Anthony Wilson’s Factory Records—was both highly competitive and unusual.

While “Boredom” takes to task a very real milieu—unlike the sluggish scene it laments—the track pumps with energy and, above all, humour. In a 1977 gig review, iconic music journalist Paul Morely wrote “Shelley’s own solos are themselves abstract, frenetic flurries devoid of any obvious careful construction, often very funny, often not working; when they do work they’re delightfully exciting.” Shelley’s distorted guitar that, according to Morely, all but drowned out the equally erratic vocals, is nonetheless the heart of the tune. The teenaged John Maher’s steady drums drive the track with a relentless punk beat: hard and fast.

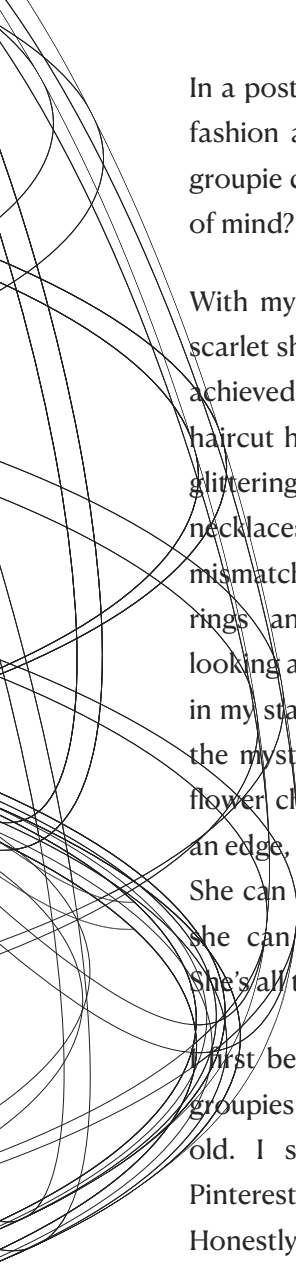
And then there's Howard Devoto: enigmatic, funny, pretentious, annoyed. There's something about the all-too keen "you know me—I'm acting dumb, dumb" that reminds one of the equally creative and ridiculous ways people have tried to entertain themselves this Covid-tide: sometimes stupidity is the last refuge of the bored (or maybe not?). Either way, "Boredom" is a track that captures that feeling of directionless energy with which we've all become familiar, while offering a ridiculously danceable solution.





The Groupie Conundrum

Eleanor Pitt



In a post MeToo era, can the iconic fashion and social influence of the groupie coexist with a feminist state of mind?

With my purple velvet flares and a scarlet shirt tied at my breasts I have achieved the look. A shaggy, wild haircut hangs in my eyes, which are glittering and darkly lined, and a few necklaces hang down my front, mismatching and messy as are my rings and bangles. I am quietly looking at myself in the mirror, intent in my stare. I look like one of them - the mystical, cool, fairy woman - a flower child, but not quite: she has an edge, a defiance, a rebelliousness. She can be soft and maiden-like, or she can be strong, sexual, brash. She's all these things at once.

I first became interested in 60s/70s groupies when I was about 17 years old. I saw pictures of them on Pinterest, and I was hooked. Honestly, I've never been super into late 60s or early 70s rock - the only musician of this place and time I ever truly loved was David Bowie. But even so, the fashion and atmosphere of this era has been hugely influential in my personal style and artistic reference. Anyway, here's what I do know for certain: the rock and roll of the late 60s and early 70s,

its rampant sexuality, and its confrontation of the everyday and the safe, was a hugely influential moment in music and popular culture. It caused an important shift in the way we thought about and talked about a huge number of issues - most notably sex - as well as producing iconic music that would influence generations to come.

But in recent years, the #MeToo movement has confronted uncomfortable and dangerous situations that women throughout the entertainment industry have faced at a systemic level. As the gender politics of celebrity and entertainment became more and more scrutinised, I started to examine the world of 60s/70s rock in this light; for all its talk of rebellion, the classic rock scene still seemed essentially to reproduce the status quo of the outside world in terms of gender roles. To me this is keenly felt in the case of the groupie, my original inspiration.

Groupie. What does the word make you think of? According to Merriam-Webster, a groupie is 'a fan of a rock group who usually follows the group around on concert tours.' This definition, while mostly accurate, ignores the definite sexual

undertone that is often ascribed to groupies, and that was certainly present in the scene. During the 60s and 70s, groupies were just another part of the wild tapestry of sex, drugs, and rock and roll that hung across the Sunset Strip and beyond. But there is no question that then and now, their cultural legacy both as the free rock and roll chick, and as the sad, abused girl taken advantage of by older, more powerful men, lives on.

This is what often bothers people about groupies: the power dynamic. A rock music icon, selling out show after show, famous throughout the country and maybe even the world, has more power both socially and monetarily than most of the women 'with the band'- usually in their teens or early twenties, often without a job, hanging around a band or star's troupe until they got a chance to be in its innermost circle. And these women and girls, often by their own admission, whilst fans of the music first and foremost, were attracted by the stardom of the person/people to whom they chose to get close. Were they particularly vulnerable to the celebrity influence of these musicians?

Yet, many of the groupies did have some power and influence in the music scene. They often contributed towards the wardrobes and makeup of the bands through the influence of their own. The groupie fashions of the period are creative, outlandish: scarves become skirts, white dinner gloves are worn as an everyday accessory, and the girls are adorned in an array of fairytale colours. Long dresses, long hair, and dreamy, sometimes literally clown-inspired, makeup (makeup that was said to have inspired the band KISS' stage paint in the legendary groupie and writer Pamela Des Barres' case). The influence of the way they dressed in my eyes was akin to many music fashion icons of that time: if Bowie was notable for the way he blurred the lines of masculinity and femininity,

many of the groupies could be said to be just as notable for their reinvention of modern and historical forms of female sexuality and femininity.

They were also a direct inspiration for the music of these bands. Countless examples exist of songs written about groupies: songs like 'Plaster Caster', directly named after Cynthia Plaster Caster, a groupie from Chicago who had the - some would say odd - habit of making moulds of 70s rock icons' penises. There's also the more disturbing inspiration behind Iggy Pop's 'Look Away' that begins with 'I slept with Sable when she was 13' in reference to a real 13 year old girl known as Sable Starr that Iggy Pop had a relationship with for several years. It cannot be forgotten that there are too many famous groupies of this era that were underage. A notable example of this is Lori Mattix - a so-called 'baby groupie', often pictured with the aforementioned Sable Starr. Rumoured to have lost her virginity to David Bowie, she was also in a relationship with Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin from the age of 13 to 16 (he was in his 20s). It is interesting to discuss how the social attitudes towards an underage girlfriend may have changed from the 60s/70s, but what doesn't change is the fact

that a 13-year-old is a child who cannot consent.

Sometimes the groupie attitude changes towards her experiences. In 2018, post MeToo, Mattix was asked whether her viewpoint on her experiences had changed from previous interviews where she defended Page and others. Although still neutral to positive about her experience, she is nonetheless quoted as saying 'I wouldn't want this for anyone's daughter.' In my opinion, the underage status of these groupies is a part of their cultural legacy. Even if not underage, it is important to acknowledge that a key part of the groupie identity of this time is being young and beautiful in a man's eyes. Although the groupie is the wise-cracking, sensual, self-dubbed 'foxy lady' who knows what she wants, she is also the youthful, flitty fairy in a world of older rockstars who feel powerful when she's around. And sometimes, she is a child.

... usually younger age
... is just one part of the power
... imbalance ... implicitly



present in the interactions between musicians and groupies. Another part was undoubtedly gender. Although there were female rock musicians such as Janis Joplin and Patti Smith that were incredibly influential during this period, it's safe to say that groupies outnumbered them. And if there were male groupies, they certainly were not canonised into rock culture in the same way as their female counterparts. So in the 60s/70s rock world, it is clear that typical Western gender roles are largely reproduced. When we look back on the history of rock music, and of most popular art in the Western canon, a message is transmitted clearly: men make the art, women witness and support it, or maybe get to inspire it. Women are passive, men are active. Boys play in bands, girls listen.

Even in their loudest creative expression, their unique style, hints of the male gaze on groupies exist. Sometimes their outfits are bold and impractical with an obvious emphasis on their bodies and sexuality: short skirts, high clunky shoes, heavily made up eyes that look wide and almost childlike. In their most maiden-like, whimsical outfits I see the mystical allure of the archetypal groupie: something they may have been trying to produce to get the attention and support of rockstars. To survive in this world, to be a groupie, hinges on the attention of male musicians, so conforming to a certain kind of vision they have for women seems necessary, and I believe many of these young women did so whilst also being described and photographed through a male lens.



Isn't this part of the groupie mystique, though? A woman who conforms to the male gaze, who likes the attention of men, but on her terms, and who perhaps willingly uses this as a springboard for her own career or legacy. The groupies of this time were pioneers of *young* female sexuality and exploration, but could only exist in our patriarchal context. Using the tools at their disposal, groupies carved out a place for women in the rock world that has had a lasting impact on culture, fashion and music to this day. Even if they weren't a part of the creation and distribution of this music, we can't discount their legacy. I, for one, refuse to write them off as a bunch of silly young girls who were all abused by older men and that's the end of that. Many women look back on their time as groupies fondly - one of whom is 'Miss Pamela' Des Barres.

When asked about her status as a groupie in the wake of MeToo, specifically the Weinstein expose, Des Barres said '...It [her life in the 60s/70s] was a whole other universe. And I hope that people will see my life as the choice for freedom.' While questioning the actions of the men who had more control of this period, we can also allow these women to define their own experiences and identity and can celebrate their legacies. Even if a groupie had questionable or bad things happen to her - is this all she should be remembered by? I don't think so.

Undoubtedly, the groupie's legacy is complicated, and is a product of an even more sexist world of rock music, that had little regard for the safety of young women and girls. But I cannot help but claim my artistic and stylistic inspiration from the label 'groupie.' I feel seen by these iconic women creating their own narrative and image of themselves in a patriarchal world. I am too.



**PUSH
TO OPEN**

**PUSH
TO OPEN**

FALL HAZARD

This ride does not have seat belts or other passenger restraint devices.

Children and riders with developmental limitations must be accompanied by a supervising person to ensure that the rider remains seated properly during the ride.





Marvin Gaye's
What's Going On -
at 50



Alexander Robertson-Rose

All in all, 1971 was a fairly consequential year. Mohammed Ali lost the 'Fight of the Century' to Joe Frazier, Nixon started the war on drugs and the Stanford Prison Experiment happened. There was even time for two moon landings and for Disneyworld Florida to open. 1971 was also, many argue, the greatest ever year for music. Led Zeppelin, The Who, Joni Mitchell, David Bowie and The Beach Boys all released critically acclaimed albums. Yet all of these have arguably been eclipsed by the album *Rolling Stone* magazine called the best ever just last year. Marvin Gaye's *What's Going On* remains, 50 years on, a sound that defined an era, both politically and socially; one of the great protest songs which became one of the great protest albums. As it turns half a century old this year, and as its main target, the Vietnam War, passes ever further into the mists of history, so much of Gaye's magnum opus remains painfully relevant.

After a decade as a smooth Motown hitmaker, *What's Going On* was not just a strong political statement, but also a statement of creative independence from Gaye. Presented with the song which was to become the title track, originally written by Motown

songwriter Al Cleveland, he tweaked the lyrics, melody and instrumentation before presenting his recording to label owner Berry Gordy. Significantly different in tone and content to Gaye's previous hits like 'I Heard It Through the Grapevine', Gordy reportedly called it "the worst thing I ever heard in my life."

With jazzy flourishes and layered vocals, the song's mournful texture is as smooth as Gaye's earlier hits, but fizzes with energy. The lyrics, while simple, are an emotive, personal plea for peace. "Mother, mother/There's too many of you crying / Brother brother brother / There's far too many of you dying". Gaye's vocals soar above the instrumental and the background chatter, turning the listener into a spectator, able to observe the world's ills from afar.

Needless to say, then, the public disagreed with Gordy, and Gaye was quickly asked to follow the track with an entire album. The result was a flowing, soulful effort, with repeating motifs that make the record feel like one extended track. Over the course of 35 minutes, Gaye addresses such general topics as war, climate change, addiction, religion and police brutality, yet throughout there is an

unerring focus - a direction, both lyrically and instrumentally, that makes the album truly compelling.

“With the world exploding around me, how am I supposed to keep writing love songs?”

Gaye later asked. By 1970, he had lost his duet partner, Tammi Terrell, to a brain tumour and was struggling with cocaine dependency, a failing marriage and a disillusionment with the music industry. In the midst of this, his brother Frankie was fighting in Vietnam – the inspiration behind the second track, ‘What’s Happening Brother.’ This is a story from the perspective of a veteran returning home from Vietnam to find a society that has changed beyond recognition and has no place for him (“Can’t find no work, can’t find no job my friend). The lush instrumentation returns, with backing vocals and call and response making the song sound less like a political statement from Gaye himself, but rather a plea from a disillusioned generation.



SEX
IS GOOD BUT
HAVE YOU EVER
FUCKED
THE SYSTEM

ing
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In truth, Gaye might have hoped for the album to sound a little dated by now, given the focus on society's ills. Yet songs like 'Mercy Mercy Me (The Ecology)' and the album closer, 'Inner City Blues (Make Me Wanna Holler)' feel just as relevant today as they did 50 years ago. 'Mercy Mercy Me' laments climate destruction; as a resident of Detroit, the industrial hub of the US, Gaye was perhaps well-placed to ask "Where did all the blue skies go? /

Poison is the wind that blows from the north and south and east". 'Inner City Blues', meanwhile, could easily have been written today, with provocative lyrics like

"Money, we make it / Before we see it, you take it." Once again, the lyrics do not take much decoding, but rather serve as a cutting reminder of the injustices of society. During a year when billionaires and celebrities are paying for trips into orbit, Gaye's criticism of the money spent on the space race in the first verse feels especially pertinent today.



Gaye would die only 13 years after the album was released, shot by his father, a pastor, during a family disagreement. He was 44. Such tragic circumstances give an unintended new meaning to excerpts from the title track like "Father father / We don't need to escalate / You see, war is not the answer / For only love can conquer hate". The song 'God Is Love,' an ode to the role of religion in Gaye's life and a more


upbeat message, urging families to come together and preach kindness, is another song which has been changed by time, with its references to 'my father' especially painful

giving the nature of Gaye's demise. Yet despite this, the shortest song on the album still remains a truly joyous moment of profound hope for the future.

A heavenly blend of jazz, doo-wop and gospel hymn, *What's Going On* represents many things. It represents a snapshot in time, of a year like no other and a world at a cultural crossroads; it represents our world today, beset by so many of the same problems that Gaye lamented, but most of all, in all its soaring beauty and jagged edges, it represents what

it is full of – life. Though Gaye is with us no longer, his record stands as a testament to the power of soul music. There are many legendary albums of the modern era that deserve to be called the greatest – several from 1971 alone – but in *What's Going On*, *Rolling Stone* could not have picked a better one.





**Forgotten while you're
here, remembered for a
while: 5 'lost' female
singer-songwriter gems**

Liliana Potter



**ACCOMPANYING
PLAYLIST FOR
THE ARTICLE**

The timing might have been inopportune, the cultural zeitgeist narrowly missed, an audience may never have even been in mind; certain songs, despite best efforts, are simply sung for nobody. However, there's no knowing when a hidden gem, after laying underground for years and years, can be unearthed decades later by keen-eyed magpies. These gentle treasures from the outsiders of the 60s/70s singer-songwriter movement - heavy-hearted, yearning, often celebrating nature - have reunited with an audience of modern-day folk lovers that was missed by their initial release. For every Carole King and Joni Mitchell, there's a Vashti Bunyan or a Connie Converse, unique and underappreciated until their bottled messages washed up at shore; let's blow the dust off a few of these lost-and-found sounds.

I REMEMBER

Molly Drake

CHIMACUM RAIN

Linda Perhacs

**ROSE HIP
NOVEMBER**

Vashti Bunyan

THE END

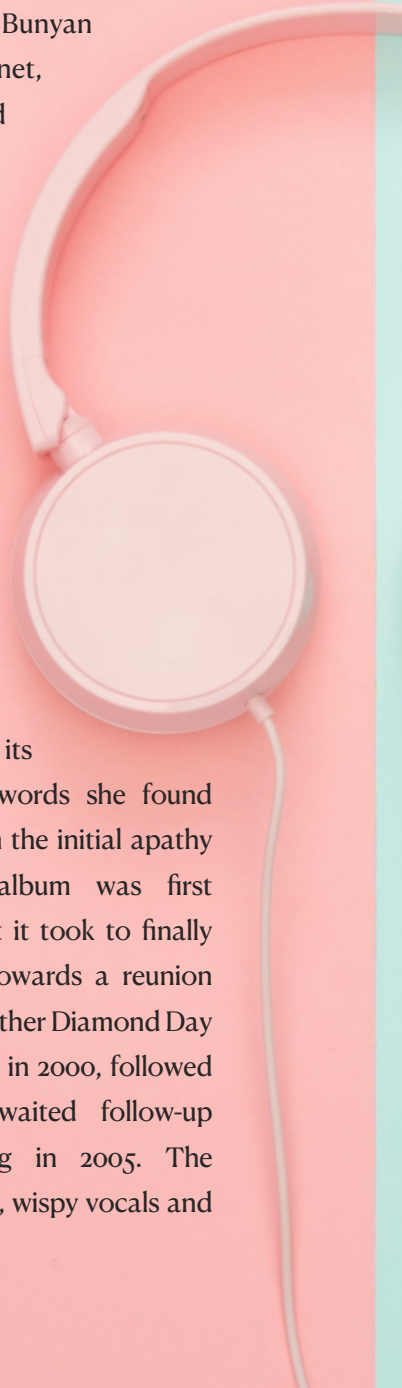
Sibylle Baier

HONEYBEE

Connie Converse

Vashti Bunyan's *Just Another Diamond Day* is perhaps the exemplar lost folk album, with artists such as Devendra Banhart, Fleet Foxes' Robin Pecknold and Joanna Newsom owing to its influence. After finding little success with an initial foray into 60s London's pop scene, Vashti (along with her boyfriend Robert, their dog, and a guitar) undertook a horse-and-wagon pilgrimage to the Hebrides, dreaming of an off-the-grid existence in the artist's commune of fellow singer-songwriter Donovan. As it turned out, Vashti's pastoral dream unravelled like a scarf on a nail; the caravan was cold, people were hostile towards their nomadic lifestyle, and by the time they arrived at the commune (it took them a year and a half) Donovan had left, and there was nowhere to stay. *Just Another Diamond Day*, recorded in three days upon her return, documents the trip - tranquil dreamscapes of glow worms, swallows, and lily ponds, lullabies woven through with a sense of melancholy which led an initial reviewer to say it made him inexplicably depressed. This unfavourable review, amongst the general cold reception and lack of promotion the album received, devastated Bunyan. Believing her

efforts to have been a terrible failure, she turned her back on music, unable to listen to the album. 30 years passed in self-imposed musical exile without Vashti ever singing, even to her children, musical past presumably entirely forgotten. Then, something strange - the turn of the century saw Bunyan onto the early Internet, where she found *Diamond Day* not to have been forgotten after all. In fact, it was now a holy grail collector's album, with original vinyl copies selling for thousands online, and forums of folk fans puzzling over where she'd disappeared since its release. The kind words she found there, a far cry from the initial apathy with which the album was first received, were what it took to finally encourage Vashti towards a reunion with music; *Just Another Diamond Day* was reissued on CD in 2000, followed by the 35-year awaited follow-up album *Lookaftering* in 2005. The homespun aesthetic, wispy vocals and



wide-eyed whimsy dismissed as nursery rhyme fodder in 1970 were at last rediscovered, newfound interest inspiring Bunyan to take full creative control (she didn't have a hand in Diamond Day's production, admitting in interviews to never having fully

connected with the 'folk' label) and incorporate more electronic elements in her work post-hiatus.

Joyfully reunited with the ability to express herself creatively, Vashti's next endeavour is a memoir of her life on the road and beyond, to be published in 2022 - fittingly, putting to paper the unlikely fable of her musical journey.

There are echoes of Bunyan's story in a small movement of similarly left-of-field folk women of the era; riding the coattails of the post-Dylan 60s, arriving just a little late to the hippie movement's folk zeitgeist for commercial success. Take Linda Perhacs' 1970 psychedelic folk masterpiece *Parallelograms*, again enabled by the Internet to develop a

cult following 30 years delayed, all while a modestly unaware Perhacs worked as a dental hygienist. *Parallelograms* layers shimmering vocal harmony and looping guitar figures, alongside more experimental moments (check out that sudden vibe change in the middle of the title track if you want something to be violently awoken by on your napping playlist), reflecting your world through its peculiar lens like light through a glass prism.

Connie Converse stands apart as perhaps one of the first singer-songwriters, with reel-to-reel recordings of her songs dating back to the mid 1950s. The mythos of her work - startlingly ahead of its time, wryly funny and personal vignettes accompanied only by guitar - is inseparable from the mystery of her disappearance; one day, Converse wrote letters to friends and family expressing a need to start anew, packed up her belongings, and simply drove away, never to be seen again. In 2009, following a radio show feature which inspired two listeners to track down her lost recordings, *How Sad, How Lovely* was compiled and released. It includes 18 songs which never found mainstream success at their time, home-recorded to tape by

Connie and her friends in 50s New York; their super lo-fi aesthetic and witty, detached perspective is laced with moments of matter-of-fact vulnerability which put me particularly in mind of Kimya Dawson. Try Playboy of the Western World for some particularly lovely chords, or Two Tall Mountains for a drier flavour of Vashti Bunyan's pastoralism ("up that tree there's sort of a squirrel thing/sounds just like we did when we were quarreling").

For many, Molly Drake's musical legacy is inseparable from that of her son, enigmatic folk singer-songwriter Nick Drake. The release of her 1950s home recordings came as a result of the posthumous cult interest in Nick's music, and *The Tide's Magnificence: Songs and Poems of Molly Drake*, released in 2018, clearly reveals a melancholic, observant introversion common to the two. However, the perspective of Molly's songs stands alone - her soft, 50s-formal vocals and minor-key piano wrench you with their retrospective yearning, frequently reflecting back over her life pre- and post-motherhood ("did I not notice when the year was young?", she sings on Cuckoo Time). In looking regretfully at ambitions unfulfilled, *Poor Mum* serves as a

chilling, unsanitized reminder of the sacrifices made for family life, particularly in the restrictive 1950s: "nothing worked out in the way you planned, nothing was quite as you thought (...) / joy as it flies cannot be caught". In their honesty, sadness, and fixation on memory, the songs of Molly Drake evoke a similar feeling to looking at photos of a parent when they were your age, illuminating vivid details from the life of a woman often painted in broad strokes (by Wikipedia, at least) in relation to her children.

Colour Green was recorded in the early 70s by a then 18-year old Sibylle Baier, her somber songs arising from a low period when a friend attempted to cheer her up with a trip through Europe. Her voice is a direct, unaffected alto (its tone reminded me a little of Nico, or fellow 70s singer-writer Bridget St John), accompanied by simple plucked guitar. The straightforward plainness of her delivery and familiarity of the subject matter - kitchen table encounters, hillside scenes, small details paused and lingered over - disarm you from *Colour Green's* inarticulate emotional complexity. 30 years after its recording, Baier's son discovered the album and made CDs for their family, passing one copy to an industry contact

which led to the album's final release in 2006, out of its hibernation to soundtrack *sadgirl road trips* for years to come.

The music of Sibylle Baier and Molly Drake didn't intend to find an audience, with their respective families setting into motion the unearthing and release of their albums. The resulting recordings are intimate, nostalgic, permeated by an atmosphere of deep sadness which hangs over each slice of life scene like autumn smoke; made all the more personal by the fact they never were made to be heard.

These bittersweet, belated unions of artist and audience provide a hopeful antidote to the algorithm worship currently foisted upon aspiring artists, demanding constant content. They show us it's okay to figure things out on your own time, away from industry games or even any audience at all; that it's never too late to find appreciation for your art, even after believing it to have been a failure for years and years. I demand you give at least one of them a try. In fact, if I may, let me tailor you a recommendation:

(Quiz on next page)

Quiz

Answer these 5 questions and I'll assign you a cult 1950s-70s female singer-songwriter album.

1 What's your intended wistful listening experience for your prescribed album?

- a** Just you, your record player, and a few wistful smokes.
- b** Walking wistfully barefoot on East Sands, pondering the ocean's indifference with awe.
- c** To the lade braes on a wistful autumn day, to wander over fallen leaves.
- d** Overhearing it in a city bookshop, overcome by potent wist.
- e** Baking a wistful, cat-shaped loaf of bread and giving it little tomatoes from your garden for eyes.

2 Out walking, you have only one photo left in your black-and-white film camera: what pastoral sight are you capturing?

- a** A mother bird and her chicks in their nest
- b** The nearest source of running water
- c** The view from high up a hill as the sun sets over the little town
- d** A rodent skeleton you find in a cave and adorn with flower heads
- e** Your dog, shaking the mud off her back

Your favourite season?

- a Late autumn
- b Summer
- c Early autumn
- d Winter
- e Spring

You're sitting at your regular window seat at the local coffeehouse, observing passers by with a detached curiosity; or how they hurry to and fro about their daily business, like wayward clouds scudding on the autumn breeze. You sip your drink wistfully; but what was your order?

- a Earl grey with a slice of lemon
- b Hibiscus green tea
- c Black filter coffee and a piece of buttered bread
- d Espresso and a paperback
- e Breakfast tea with oat milk and a sugarcube

Ok, let's cut the niceties: what's your biggest flaw?

- a People assume all sorts of mean things about me because of my cut-glass accent
- b I am constantly permatripping on life
- c I come across cold and aloof but actually I'm just extremely wistful
- d I'm a genius but not doing great mentally
- e A sentimental tendency to over romanticise the aspects of my life which really don't need it

Answers

Which letter did you answer most? Your most common letter tells you which cult 1950s-70s female singer-songwriter album is for you.

***The Tide's Magnificence:
Songs and Poems of Molly
Drake - Molly Drake***

You have this jaded world-weariness to you which Ms Drake is sooooo perfect for. It's okay, troubled one, set down your burden for 51 mins or so. The library will still be there for you once you're done.

***Parallelograms
- Linda Perhacs***

You're probably a little odd, Parallelograms will get you. A weird wistful girl album for only the VERY weirdest most wistful girls, which is you I suppose - congratulations?

Colour Green

- Sibylle Baier

Woah sorry, did a double take just there! Didn't realise I was in the presence of someone so cool and mysterious. Up til now I thought I was literate, but girl your demeanour is unreadable. I'm sure you'll connect with Colour Green in that way.

Just Another Diamond Day

- Vashti Bunyan

You're a sucka for domesticity, you've definitely baked something in the last month and probably have a passing familiarity with crochet - Just Another Diamond Day is the perfect record for you! That is, if you can stay off cottagecore TikTok long enough to listen to it through.

How Sad, How Lovely

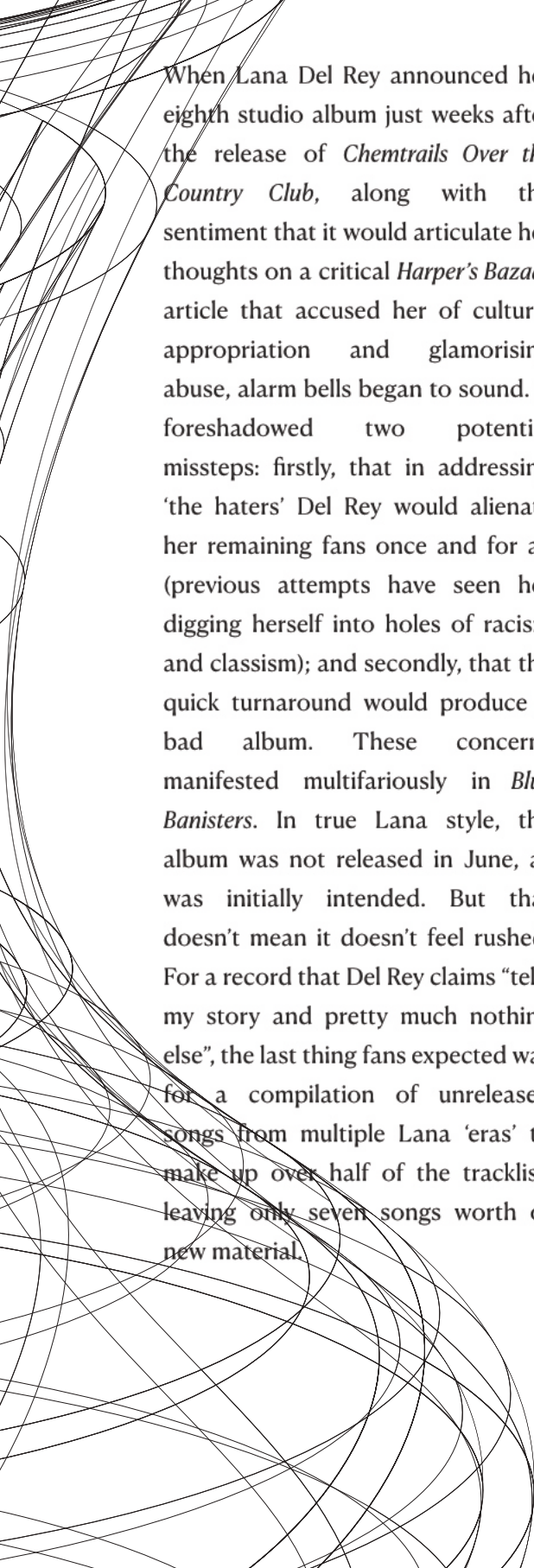
- Connie Converse

Hey, you good? The ol' gifted kid burnout hitting especially hard this time of year? Check in with yourself while you give this one a spin, have you been drinking enough water? Connie cares.



Lana Del Rey - *Blue*
***Banisters*: a reunion with
familiar, unknown, and
lost eras**

Maya Marie



When Lana Del Rey announced her eighth studio album just weeks after the release of *Chemtrails Over the Country Club*, along with the sentiment that it would articulate her thoughts on a critical *Harper's Bazaar* article that accused her of cultural appropriation and glamorising abuse, alarm bells began to sound. It foreshadowed two potential missteps: firstly, that in addressing 'the haters' Del Rey would alienate her remaining fans once and for all (previous attempts have seen her digging herself into holes of racism and classism); and secondly, that the quick turnaround would produce a bad album. These concerns manifested multifariously in *Blue Banisters*. In true Lana style, the album was not released in June, as was initially intended. But that doesn't mean it doesn't feel rushed. For a record that Del Rey claims "tells my story and pretty much nothing else", the last thing fans expected was for a compilation of unreleased songs from multiple Lana 'eras' to make up over half of the tracklist, leaving only seven songs worth of new material.

If this is indeed Del Rey's "story", it largely consists of songs that were superfluous to other albums, and don't tell us anything about her we don't already know. The 'new' portion of the album, however, demonstrates a clear shift in sound and a turn towards more biographically-focused lyrics in order to paint a fuller picture of her life. Del Rey addresses childhood trauma in 'Text Book' and 'Wildflower Wildfire' over raw, disjunctive production that acts as a soundboard to her breathy vocals, which sound more vulnerable than ever. The title track, 'Blue Banisters', is a sensitive, piano-driven ode to friendship that traces her introspection during interactions with her friends. It is similar in soundscape to the captivating love song for LA, 'Arcadia', and the perhaps too on-the-nose defence of sad art, 'Beautiful'. 'Sweet Caroline', co-written with Del Rey's sister and father, is a song dedicated to her sister's newborn. We gain a gloriously funny glimpse into Del Rey's family dynamic as she sings:

'You name your babe
Lilac Heaven

After your iPhone 11

"Crypto forever," screams
your stupid boyfriend

Fuck you, Kevin'.

Although the shift in production on these new songs leaves them feeling to some extent unfinished, the sound is coherent and perfectly accompanies Del Rey's self-reflective journey. I only wish she had either stopped here or waited to create more songs in this style, rather than adding so much filler content.

Hands down, the best songs on *Blue Banisters* come from a completely different project: an unfinished 2017 collaboration with The Last Shadow Puppets. 'Dealer' and 'Thunder' are disparate from the rest of the album in both sound and content—they really don't belong here—but to be honest, I'm glad I can finally hear them. 'Dealer' is a dreamy array comprising contrasting elements: Miles Kane's pleasingly slippery vocals and Del Rey at her most unbound. She lets loose on the chorus, almost screaming the muffled lyrics: "I don't wanna live / I don't wanna give you nothing / Cause you'll never give me nothing back / Why can't you be good for something / Not one shirt off your back". This vocal turn is a shock at first, but ultimately so, so satisfying. 'Thunder' is more mellow in tone, but still hits hard. Del Rey paints an evocative portrait of her lover on this track; he "acts like fucking Mr Brightside", but is much more of a downer in private, causing her to ultimately walk away for her own sanity: "if you're on fire, then you're on fire, you should just keep burning". These songs are so good that I wish we'd received the whole of this intended collaborative project instead of the incongruent collage that *Blue Banisters* has become.



Even less successful are the three cuts from 2014's *Ultraviolence*. Don't get me wrong--these songs aren't bad--but they don't do anything for this album, only causing it to drag on and lose focus lyrically. We revisit the same exes that we knew so well and hated so much from the *Ultraviolence* era, and get a blast from the past hearing in real time the difference between the earlier moanier vocals she became famous for, and the lighter, more sensitive vocal approach of recent albums. It evokes an exciting nostalgia to reunite with such a great album, but these songs would have much better served an anniversary repressing of *Ultraviolence* in three years' time.

Blue Banisters reunites listeners with familiar, unknown, and lost Lana eras alike, and, in that, is an album like no other for Del Rey. The album features some truly amazing songs—'Arcadia', 'Blue Banisters', and 'Dealer' are highlights—but, lacking a coherent theme or style, gets lost along the way. You'll add a few songs to your playlists, but you're unlikely to return to the album as a whole too often, especially when there are plenty of other perfect from start-to-finish Lana Del Rey records to choose from.





Paul Simon -
Graceland

Alexander Robertson-Rose

“The United Nations General Assembly requests all states to prevent all cultural, academic, sporting and other exchanges with South Africa. Appeals to writers, artists, musicians and other personalities to boycott South Africa.”

UN Resolution 35/206 of December 1980 was clear: South African culture was to be cut from the world's tapestry. The boycott was just one part of a series of political and economic measures aimed at forcing the end of apartheid, which had formally persisted in South Africa since 1948. Many musicians broke with the boycott in order to perform in the country; Queen, Rod Stewart and the Beach Boys just to name a few. But in recording *Graceland*, his unexpected comeback hit which revitalised his fading career and reintroduced South African music to the western world, Paul Simon became the face of the cultural boycott debate.

By 1984, Simon was quickly fading out of the popular consciousness and was facing several personal issues. His musical partnership with Art Garfunkel had deteriorated, with the two deciding to go their separate ways, his marriage to Carrie Fisher had fallen apart, and his record *Hearts and Bones* was a commercial failure. Battling a period of depression, Simon privately felt that he had lost his creative vision and would never again ascend to the heights he had previously reached. Maybe it was destiny, maybe it was luck, or maybe it was a bit of both, but his life was to change later that year, thanks entirely to a small, bootlegged cassette tape.

The title track of *Graceland*, describing a road trip taken by Simon after the breakup of his marriage with Fisher, is one of the most compelling songs on the record. *Graceland*, Elvis Presley's old Tennessee mansion, is not just a tourist destination for Simon but represents something more – an opportunity for grace. He counts himself among the number of “Poor boys and pilgrims with families / And we are going to *Graceland*.” The ideas of pilgrimage and grace are used repeatedly in this song, adding to the sense that Simon's journey is more spiritual than physical.

It soon becomes clear that Simon's marriage troubles are the source of his search for grace, with the verse, "And she said losing love / Is like a window in your heart / Everybody sees you're blown apart / Everybody sees the wind blow." Simon's wistful, softly sung vocal performance and soothing backing vocals make this one of the most melancholy and thought-provoking moments on the album, as Simon considers how he has been affected by the very public nature of his divorce and fall from grace. Of all his brilliantly written songs over a long and successful career, 'Graceland' perhaps stands out as one of his most thoughtful and considered efforts.

It's amazing how a life can change on a cassette tape. The tape in question was of mbaqanga, a type of street music from Soweto, Johannesburg, rooted in traditional Zulu music. Upon hearing it when it fell into his lap in 1984, Simon immediately felt revitalised; this was it, he realised, this was the inspiration for his next record. But in order to make his vision a reality, he would have to go to South Africa, breaking with the boycott. It was a difficult decision, one which Simon later defended on grounds of musicianship. "I was

following my musical instincts in wanting to work with people whose music I greatly admired," he said. "I wasn't going to record for the government of Pretoria or to perform for segregated audiences." His motivations, then, were purely artistic, not financial. Nevertheless, that did not stop him from receiving plenty of (albeit expected) criticism from around the world. Indeed, for several years after the release of *Graceland*, people would protest his actions outside his concerts. But, despite the inevitable backlash, Simon chose to make the trip, touching down in Johannesburg in February 1985.

TABLE MOUNTAIN

Table Mountain Aerial Cableway
Cape Town, South Africa
Photograph courtesy Unsplash
from Thomas Bennie



'Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes' is another highlight of the album which perfectly demonstrates Simon's idiosyncrasies and his penchant for imagery. The story of a rich girl - so rich that she has diamonds on the soles of her shoes - and "a poor boy / Empty as a pocket," the song's lyrics feature an array of vivid images, which end with the two characters sleeping in a doorway, both clad in diamonds, a symbol of how they have blended together. Inventive basslines and guitarwork mesh seamlessly with Simon's vocal delivery, with Zulu lyrics also featuring, as they do on other tracks. This song, too, is trademark Simon, with a hint of folk and lyrics that, somehow, simply sound right.



Soweto in the mid-80s perhaps wasn't the best place to be a musician. At least, not for everyone. Apartheid legislation meant that the black musicians Simon was working with had to adhere to a strict curfew. Police presence was significant, and it was obvious, even to a white outsider like Simon, that "right below the surface there was all this tension." Being a musician in Soweto also tended not to be particularly lucrative – Simon paid his collaborators \$200 an hour, way above the \$15 a day that was the normal rate for Johannesburg musicians. Although Simon was paying substantially more than even the rate for New York, it ultimately seems a bargain when you consider what the two weeks of recording produced.

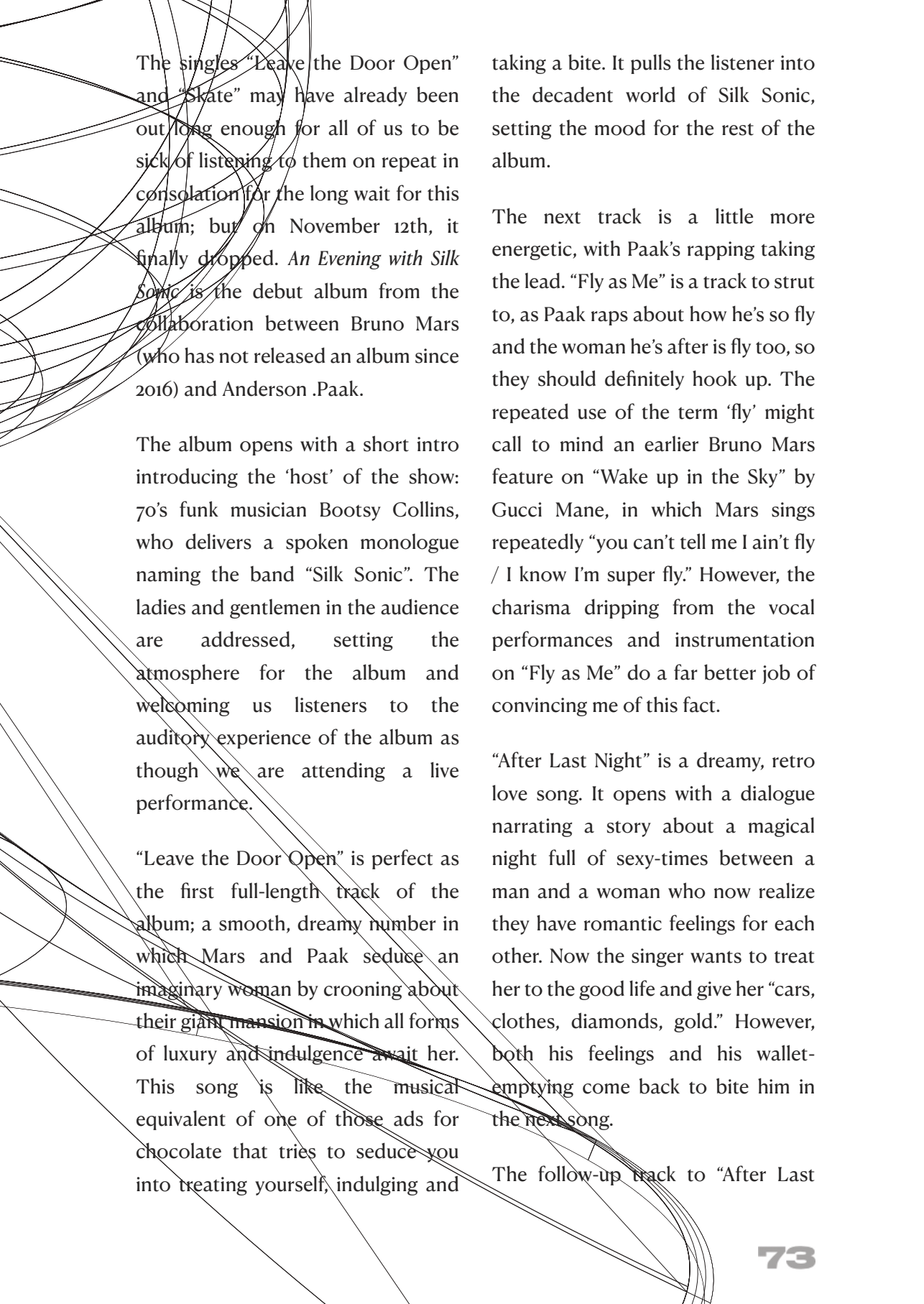
The song 'Homeless,' for example, a completely acapella track with South African group Ladysmith Black Mambazo, is a beautiful blend of harmony and call-and-response which is at once mournful and joyous. On the one hand, considering the high prevalence of homelessness in South Africa, especially in townships, the anguish of the subject matter is clear to see. Yet, as with so much of the album, there is a fundamental hopefulness to the song, a sense of the beauty of life and nature. This track, perhaps more than any other, fully embraces traditional African music, and is all the better for it. Naturally, critics remain. South African jazz musician Jonas Gwangwa stands among them, with his pointed remark, "So, it has taken another white man to discover my people?" As valid as this view may be, *Graceland* never feels patronising, nor does it really attempt to comment on the political system of the time. Above all, it is simply what Simon hoped it would be – a creative triumph.

Whatever your view, Simon's work remains, standing as a testament to the beauty of African music and to his skill as a songwriter. In a decade of glam metal, new wave and electronic music, of drum machines, synthesisers and questionable haircuts, *Graceland*, with the kind of folksy charm that only Simon could pull off, is warm, gratifying and profoundly human. It is a record that is aware of the darkness around it, but is unapologetic and unrepentant in its pursuit of light. These days, it is widely recognised as Simon's best work and, after its release, he even reunited with Carrie Fisher for several more years. It's amazing how a life can change on a cassette tape. Simon's certainly did and, with the release of *Graceland*, so, I'm sure, did the lives of countless others.



An Evening With Silk
**Sonic reunites modern
music listeners with a
lounge-vibe and sound
from the '70s**

Audrey Herrin



The singles “Leave the Door Open” and “Skate” may have already been out long enough for all of us to be sick of listening to them on repeat in consolation for the long wait for this album; but on November 12th, it finally dropped. *An Evening with Silk Sonic* is the debut album from the collaboration between Bruno Mars (who has not released an album since 2016) and Anderson .Paak.

The album opens with a short intro introducing the ‘host’ of the show: 70’s funk musician Bootsy Collins, who delivers a spoken monologue naming the band “Silk Sonic”. The ladies and gentlemen in the audience are addressed, setting the atmosphere for the album and welcoming us listeners to the auditory experience of the album as though we are attending a live performance.

“Leave the Door Open” is perfect as the first full-length track of the album; a smooth, dreamy number in which Mars and Paak seduce an imaginary woman by crooning about their giant mansion in which all forms of luxury and indulgence await her. This song is like the musical equivalent of one of those ads for chocolate that tries to seduce you into treating yourself, indulging and

taking a bite. It pulls the listener into the decadent world of Silk Sonic, setting the mood for the rest of the album.

The next track is a little more energetic, with Paak’s rapping taking the lead. “Fly as Me” is a track to strut to, as Paak raps about how he’s so fly and the woman he’s after is fly too, so they should definitely hook up. The repeated use of the term ‘fly’ might call to mind an earlier Bruno Mars feature on “Wake up in the Sky” by Gucci Mane, in which Mars sings repeatedly “you can’t tell me I ain’t fly / I know I’m super fly.” However, the charisma dripping from the vocal performances and instrumentation on “Fly as Me” do a far better job of convincing me of this fact.

“After Last Night” is a dreamy, retro love song. It opens with a dialogue narrating a story about a magical night full of sexy-times between a man and a woman who now realize they have romantic feelings for each other. Now the singer wants to treat her to the good life and give her “cars, clothes, diamonds, gold.” However, both his feelings and his wallet-emptying come back to bite him in the next song.

The follow-up track to “After Last

Night” is “Smokin’ Out the Window”, its antithesis. The sound of this track is equally smooth and sultry, but the lyrics are bitter and angsty. The singer regrets spending so much money on the lady, only to find out that she was unfaithful. “I thought that girl belonged to only me” he laments, “but I was wrong / ‘cause she belong / to everybody”, subtly accusing her of being a slut without explicitly saying it. This song centers around the image of the singer engaging in the introspective act of smoking out of an open window, which is a common enough trope that it invokes a vivid scene in the imagination. The song is rescued from cheesiness by the lyrics being self-aware of the melodramatic theme of the song. “Not to be dramatic,” Paak sings ironically on this track, “but I wanna die.”

The next track, “Put on a Smile”, continues the melodrama. With the spoken intro by Collins and the thunder/rain sound-effects, it invokes another trope from retro music videos in which the artist sings dramatically in the rain about his heartbreak. The transition from this track to the next one, “777”, is abrupt to say the least, since “777” is closer in mood to “Fly as Me”, with the

vocalists celebrating their own decadence. This stylish track is about gambling in Vegas and winning big, and there really isn’t much more to take away from it.

“Skate” was the second single that was released for this album after “Leave the Door Open”, and it is a catchy, feel-good love song. This song edges over somewhat into the realm of cheesiness, but it has enough groove and charisma to make up for it. However, avoid listening to this song too many times on repeat as I have done; it gets old and loses its charm fairly quickly. I am afraid this song will be run-ragged on pop stations and personally if I have to listen to this song one more time (to quote Anderson .Paak) “not to be dramatic” but I would rather die.

The closing track on this album takes a turn for the psychedelic, the lyrics describing the sensation of the effects of hallucinogenic drugs kicking in. It takes on a double-meaning, as the artists say goodbye to their audience and goodbye to the plane of sober reality. They promise that the party isn’t over, it’s just moving “up and beyond” where everyone can “dance all night on Saturn’s ring”. The album slowly fades out with a trippy, reverb-filled

soundscape and concludes with another brief dialogue by Collins, who sends the listeners “love from up above”.

Lyricaly, some of these songs do not stand out all that much, and you won't find anything all that deep or groundbreaking, but they are cleverly self-aware of the clichés and tropes by which they are influenced. The lyrics work in tandem with the sound and performance of this album to successfully create a whole atmosphere for the listeners, making us feel as though we are really spending an evening with Silk Sonic, swaying to their music in the audience.

Inspired by 60s and 70s soul and funk sounds, Silk Sonic re-unites modern listeners with a retro sound and aesthetic, creating a 70s lounge performance atmosphere. The themes of this album center around luxury, wealth, and indulgence. The fantasy the album creates is materialistic (I counted at least four references to different luxury car brands), decadent, and mildly misogynistic at times; but it is an irresistible fantasy in which to indulge.







REUNION

