

# the dirtbag times



*inside: mangione pluralism - forecast - rough draft enters the porter tardis - micromusing - living as a delightful little spirit - phil collins is more than you think - dusk at purpose brewing - circuit demon - spirit - rented mule reads real good - the end of empires - record review*



## MANGIONE PLURALISM

the dirtbag times is a  
magazine for dirtbags  
by dirtbags.

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kelly menace

art splendidness

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I recently read excerpts of Barack Obama's speech given at the 2024 Democracy Forum. In this speech he spoke extensively about the idea of pluralism being a potential way out of our current balkanized political state. It is the idea that if we cannot agree in general on politics because Republicans are always evil or Democrats are always evil that we can perhaps still come together to get things done on specific issues that transcend identity politics. So we can still play for our respective teams and still get together for an all-star game on occasion for charity or such.

When I read this speech I really thought that Obama was super naive. I'm not sure that Americans can reach across the aisle for anything anymore or that many of us want to or *should* want to. But then a curious thing happened this past month. On the morning of December 4th United HealthCare CEO Brian Thompson was gunned down in New York City on his way to an investor meeting. The gunman got away from the scene, but shell casings were left behind. Engraved on those casings were the words "deny," "depose," and "delay." Nearly every American had an armchair opinion about this crime, and surprisingly the opinions were quietly supportive or at least understanding of the killing. The unnamed shooter became an instant folk hero. Most Americans, regardless of political affiliation, have experienced a denied claim from an insurance company. Many of us have been buried in medical debt or have a friend or loved one who has. When Americans are asked about universal health care most want a single payer government-regulated system. Those that don't like "free health care" or "Obamacare" are in favor of a European model when it is not labeled as such.

Insurance companies hold the right to life versus lifelong debt in their well-moneyed hands. Insurance companies dictate health care policy based simply on whether or not they will pay for coverage. Recently, Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield had to publicly walk back a policy change that would have cut coverage for anesthesia if a procedure lasted more than a certain period of time regardless if that was because of an emergency. The audacity that an insurance adjuster could know better than an anesthesiologist how much anesthesia you really need! The public outcry was deafening.

Now a suspect has been captured, Luigi Mangione, but I don't think it really matters now. The symbolism of this crime has already entered the social media consciousness. That Americans of all belief systems for the most part quietly cheered on this murder symbolically shows where Americans truly stand on our health care system, regardless of party affiliation. Heh, however we all know money has no party affiliation. Public support is always trumped by those who continue to benefit from the health insurance industrial complex. Still, perhaps a seed has quietly begun to grow in the dark. Now which one of us is more naive, Obama or me? — KELLY MENACE

# SPIRIT

All I want to do is share silly memes and cute baby goat videos, but there's this thing haunting me that I can't seem to shake. It's under my skin like a fever, a heat that's fighting some deadly infection, an infection of my soul. For months this thing has randomly crept into my dreams like the ghost of something or someone familiar and benevolent. And now I'm doing my best simply to listen.

So, I decided to start documenting my dreams. Most were the usual ones of my crush and cute animals and a life in the mountains, far from society. But then there's this one.

## -The Drums

I went downtown on Saturday by myself, hoping to meet my friends at the march. But when I got there, of course, the cell networks were jammed and my calls and texts wouldn't go through. I camp out hoping against all reason that I would see them march by in a blaze of sign-toting, pink-wearing, fist-pumping feminist glory. I'm an introvert and crowds make me anxious, so I sit outside a coffee shop with my arms folded across my chest, covering the black and white screen print of a cat scowling. It was a fitting image as I somewhat comically attempted to fend off the soul-sucking energy of too many strangers.

After about an hour, a stream of bicycle cops rode by and everyone cheered. I stood up, walked to the curb, waited for the march to begin, and focused on my breath. In that in a crowd of thousands, I felt intensely lonely. Unpartnered. Orphaned. Vulnerable. Scared. I started to panic. I had no people. I was alone. I turned around, intent on leaving.

And then I hear in the distance, the steady BOOM, BOOM-silence-BOOM, BOOM, BOOM-silence-BOOM of a heartbeat marching toward me. Animal hide stretched taut across wooden frames, powerful enough to still the crowd. From several blocks away I saw tribal flags raised and I became desperate to interpret their imagery. A group of Native American women chanted, harmonizing, their beautiful voices thick and honied with the richness of their ancient inheritance. I didn't know what they were saying, but there are some things that transcend the limitations of language: love, strength, resilience, faith, courage, humanity.

The tears fell hot and fast, streaming from the

part of me that knows no gender, no race, no borders. These were not "my" people, but they were PEOPLE: cousins long since removed from the ties of blood. Their culture did not belong to me, but it enveloped me nonetheless. Those drums, their voices — they were everything I needed and wanted. They calmed me and set my soul on fire at the same time. Thunder and rain, earth and sky, love and togetherness, birth and dead men's bones. They were the fire of Prometheus, the innocence of the Virgin Mother, and the tears of a laughing Buddha.

Those drums pulled me out of myself and reminded me why I was there in the first place: not to link arms with my blood sister, but with my brothers and sisters in spirit. For a brief moment in time, I shed the artifice of ego to instead share a heartbeat with this crowd of "strangers," and millions more across the globe.

BOOM-silence, BOOM, BOOM-silence, BOOM-silence. BOOOOM. Silence.

The spirit gracefully floated over to me, cupped my face with her hands, looked me straight in the eyes, and whispered a single word in my ear: "Now."

In a trance-like state, I marched and used my voice to fight for fairness, love, and change. I marched to help make the world a better place. I marched for friends and fellow Americans, whose experiences of oppression and injustice I will never fully understand. I marched for Freedom.

I understand now that my dream's purpose was to awaken something silenced by insecurity, fear, and life experiences.

I hope this spirit sticks around because I know I'm going to need her. I hope I can stay open and soft enough to let her in when I feel myself armoring up. I hope I'm brave enough when I feel attacked and misunderstood by critics. I hope I'm strong enough to stand up for what's right. I hope my voice is loud enough to fight the good fight. I hope she visits everyone in whatever familiar form they need, shape shifting for recognition. I hope her message is received with love and understanding.

I hope, I hope, I hope, I hope. And so it is.

Namaste and peace be with you all — *TISHIA JACKSON*





# FORECAST

For people who live in the Northern Hemisphere, January 2025 will be cold and dark relative to the rest of the year. This January may break records for length. Past weather data indicate that January is typically twice as long as February; this year experts predict it will be nearly four times longer. January's exceptional length is formed as a result of December's relatively brief cycle as well as generalized New Year's malaise. In the coming month those factors will be compounded by disappointing and inconsistent weather, increased pressure to continue doing things in spite of the cold, and Inauguration Day.

January 1st through 10th will be grey. Atmospheric pressure will peak on the 6th as folks enter the first full work week of the year, while also switching to decaf in the afternoons, forgoing their morning cigarette, or sacrificing their lunch breaks in favor of a visit to the gym. The air will be thick with irritants and allergens, and the more sensitive among us should prepare for headaches, muscle tension, and a general distaste for most other people. Throughout the following week, pressure will gradually abate as New Year's resolutions either become unremarkable routines or are silently abandoned. As the pressure in the atmosphere decreases, so will irritants.

The darkest, though not necessarily coldest, day of the month will be January 20th. A nasty storm will take shape over the mid-Atlantic region of the U.S., its duration currently indeterminable. High winds will bluster and howl, causing far-reaching and unpredictable damages. The most vulnerable among us will urgently need help to either find shelter or reinforce their existing spaces. The danger of this storm system should not be underestimated. However, bonfires of the heart will ignite throughout the nation on that day, fueled by that perfect blend of love and anger which leads to resistance. As neighborhoods band together to warm each other, the impacts of the storm will be lessened.

For the remainder of the month, expect a series of smaller storms. There will be hearings and confirmations and executive actions, each ushering in a new cold snap. Snow may fall, but if it does, it will most likely melt and refreeze, creating layer upon layer of ice, ready to slash unsuspecting ankles. This part of the month will feel particularly long and dark. The final days of January are going to be a good time to stay close to home, make sure you've got a healthy supply of fuel, and keep those fires burning. — *SPRING PEARSON*

# LIVING AS A DELIGHTFUL LITTLE SPIRIT



*"Lighten up, just enjoy life, smile more, laugh more, and don't get so worked up about things." — Kenneth Branagh*

When I was in college, we had a long-standing tradition of celebrating Groundhog Day that can only be described as legendary. The origin story of those festivities is an article for another day, but let me paint the picture: students, professors, administration, and staff would gather in the woods of Irving, Texas to enjoy brisket, tunes, dancing, and beer... lots of beer! It was a day of joy, camaraderie, keg bowling, and shared fun.

My senior year, however, I pushed the boundaries of that celebration. I skipped an important philosophy class, led by a professor I deeply respected, to partake in the midday revelry. Later that evening, while still basking in the bonfire-lit glow of Groundhog (and reeking of brisket and beer), I ran into Dr. Wood at the park. My attempt to explain my absence was, let's just say, less than a believable alibi.

Not long after, a fellow student mentioned to him that I felt embarrassed about being caught skipping class. Dr. Wood's response floored me: "Tell Pamalyn not to worry... she's truly a delightful spirit." That moment has stayed with me for nearly 40 years. To this day, I consider it one of the kindest and most meaningful things anyone has ever said about me. I've carried those words like a torch, striving to live as that delightful spirit Dr. Wood had noticed.

But, I'll admit, especially since the election, that torch has felt heavier to carry. Every day seems full of conflict and cynicism in our communities. The onslaught of stress has made it hard to infuse my spirit with delight... and, I know I'm not alone in this struggle.

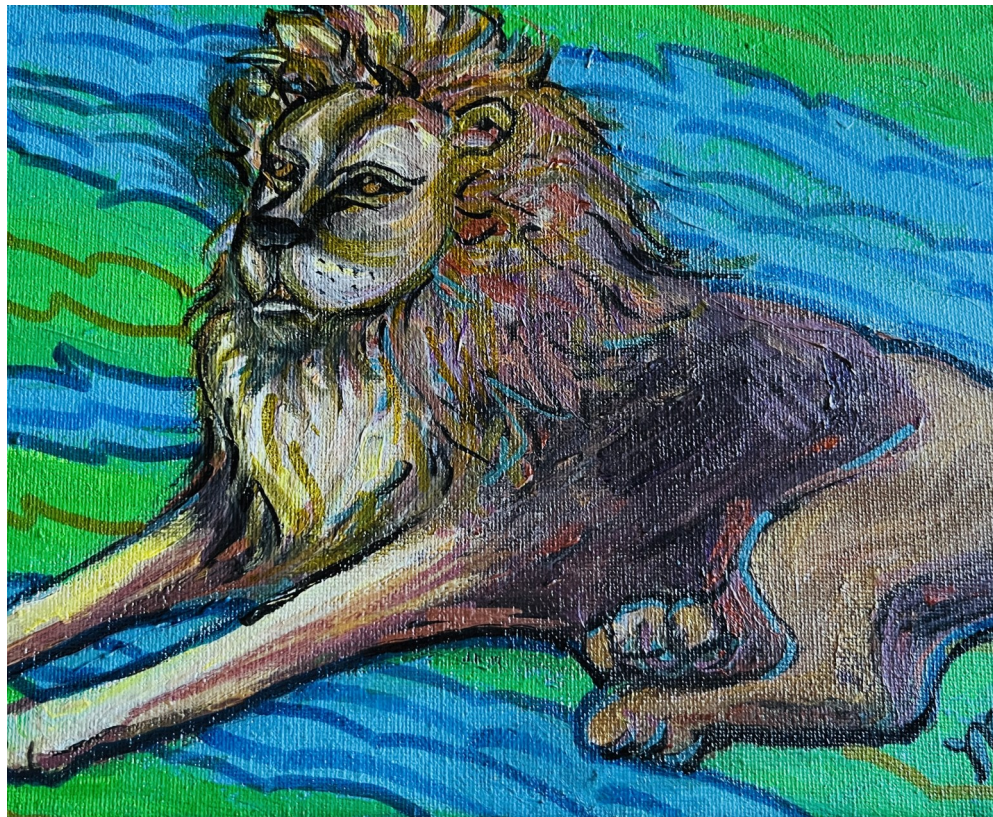
When the world feels so very heavy, it's easy to let that weight extinguish our joy. But I've come to realize that choosing delight isn't about ignoring the hard stuff; it's about creating space for joy to flourish alongside it. It's about reclaiming our own delightful spirits in the face of all that would seek to diminish them.

For me, that means returning to the things that ground me, the things that remind me of who I am at my core. One of the best ways I've found to rekindle delight is through connection with people who share my values or bring positive energy into my life. When the news cycle feels overwhelming and divisive, I think back to those Groundhog Day celebrations — not because everyone there agreed on everything, but because we focused on what united us in that moment: music, laughter, and a sense of community.

**CONT.->**



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**MAREN FARMER.** <http://marenfarmer.net>

Connection can mean spending time with friends who uplift you, joining groups that share your values, or support causes that matter to you. Creating and maintaining community helps us nurture relationships and spaces where we can feel seen, safe, supported, and understood. Authentic community reminds us that even in difficult times, we can find joy in solidarity and the mutual care of one another.

If Dr. Wood's words taught me anything, it's that being a "delightful spirit" often means learning to laugh – even at ourselves. Humor, as the saying goes, can be a good medicine... and it's an incredible way of dealing with situations that would otherwise cause tension. I've tried to make it a habit to intentionally find things that make me laugh, whether it's binging *Schitt's Creek* for the umpteenth time, sharing a ridiculous meme on the socials, or regaling friends with crazy stories at the end of the work week. Laughter doesn't make the world's problems go away, but it does make them feel a little less overwhelming. It's a reminder that joy can be one of our survival tools.

There's also something to be said for finding delight in small, everyday moments. For me, that might mean savoring my morning coffee with Babs before the workday or watching the sunset over the mountains at the end of the day. These simple joys help keep me grounded – especially when everyday life feels overwhelming.

Being a delightful spirit doesn't mean avoiding reality. It means choosing to show up with a spark of hope. It's about recognizing that joy is a necessity, especially when the world feels dark.

When I think back to those Groundhog Day celebrations, I'm reminded of what's possible when we come together with spirits of merriment. Even now, in a world that feels more complicated than ever, that spirit of connection and joy is something we can all cultivate – one small, delightful moment at a time.

So here's my invitation to you: Find your delight. Hold onto it. Share it. It's the thing that will keep us all going, no matter what comes next. —  
**PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER**

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# ROUGH DRAFT ENTERS THE BEER TARDIS

I live in Beer City USA. Not Portland, OR (who also claims this title) but Asheville, NC. Before Hurricane Helene there were nearly 100 craft breweries within 60 miles of downtown AVL. You would think picking a brewery or even a handful to tell people that they absolutely have to go to here would be a difficult task. It is not. There are five places I rattle off immediately: **DSSOLVR** (they always have something interesting and everyone should have a mlko pour at least once); **Burial** (they are the champs of the big ABV stout around here even though I will get in trouble for saying regardless of the adjuncts in them they largely taste the same); **Diatribes** (relatively new in WAVL across from The Odd who makes interesting historic beers); **Whaley Farms** in Old Fort (if you bought beer at Appalachian Vintner 2017-2020 you likely bought it from Chris who left to start this place and he makes fantastic British and European old school suds...the hurricane messed him up but he should be back up and together at the beginning of this year); and the hands-down favorite **Zebulon** in Weaverville. Zebulon also makes historic beers and underexposed styles. But what I think it comes down to is that my taste is pretty close to that of head brewer Mike Karnowski's. Zebulon makes historic IPA's that aren't total hop bombs. They have made a series of stouts and strong ales from old recipes. At Memorial Day last weekend Zebulon rolled out a beer menu based on what American GI's might have experienced having beer in Europe during the World Wars. That kind of thing interests me WAY more than what weird shit can be shoved into a BBA Imperial Stout or how juicy one can make a quintuple IPA. So last year when the Zebulon crew announced they would have a history of English Porter series in a boxed set of course I was gonna plunk down the change for it. That said, I didn't really know what to do with it. Until now. I dedicated my Christmas break to stepping into the Beer Tardis and going back in time for The Rise and Fall of English Porter.

So let's start with what exactly is a porter? At one point it was by far the most popular beer style in England. It is an ale that gets its dark color from black kilned patent malt and most of its flavor from the roasting of said malts. The style faded in the early 20th century to near extinction in favor of stouts (which are very similar to porters but with unmalted grains and a higher ABV) when the first wave of American craft brewers such as **Anchor Brewing** revived the style in the 1970's. Now pretty much every brewery large and small makes some manner of porter. For decades if put to the wall to name a favorite beer of all time I'd rattle off **Deschutes Black Butte Porter** as my ride or die and I would absolutely mean it. I still love ol' Black Butt but have enjoyed many a **512 Pecan Porter**, **Asheville Brewing Ninja Porter**, and **Green Man Porter** as well as my newfound favorite **Sierra Nevada Porter** (they

Cascade hop their regular porter and stout and I've recently fallen in love with that "tropical stout" style presentation of fruity Cascades mixed with porter/stout char and chocolate). So this box was pretty much tailor-made for my tastes.

The sextet starts out with **#1 Porter: Brown Beer circa 1780 (ABV 7.1%)**. The boxed set comes with a booklet wherein the brewer explains some historic notes and gives his own personal taste notes as well. In this notebook Zebulon is almost apologetic to the drinker in explaining how little this actually resembles a modern porter and that one should temper their expectations. So I was surprised that I found it very much recognizable as a precedent to porter. I poured with a massive head and had an immediate funky Brettanomyces wild yeast smell to it. Overwhelmingly so at first. That said, it did not taste nearly as funky as it smelled. It is more watery and less robust than a true porter and it reminds me an awful lot of the black lager style, like **Shiner Black**. Shades and hints are definite descriptors for the flavors, with bits of coffee, hoppy fruitiness, char, and a touch of smoke. The latter two flavors come from the brewer improvising a 100% brown malt scenario (true to history) and how he had to roast his malts in the oven at home and accidentally set them on fire a touch. The char and smoke is bitter but is faint. Overall it was far more drinkable and enjoyable than I expected it to be, though I agree with Zebulon that it is not quite porter yet.

**Porter #2: London Porter circa 1820 (ABV 6.8%)** is certainly more akin to what we know as a porter. The proper patent malt is on hand (it was invented and popularized in the 40 year span between these styles) and the chocolate and toffee notes now begin to come into play. That said, it still has a touch of the wild yeast twang to it (though more so in smell than taste). The more robust mouthfeel and flavor is in place. Porter #1 was a touch watery in comparison to Porter #2. I don't get any coffee from this one but I do begin to have the creaminess in flavor and mouthfeel. This one reminds me of some of the weaker, more generic "porter" styles from mass brewers like **Michelob** and **Yuengling**.

**Porter #3: East India Porter circa 1840 (7.3% ABV)** is obviously the brewer's favorite of the box. Zebulon loves this beer so much they just released it as a standalone bomber for the winter

season. It is the only beer to have been released in bottles outside of this boxed set. It has been thus far the most challenging beer of the box for me.

It pours with a massive head like Porter #1 and has the same Brett skunk of the prior two porters. At open, #3 hits hard with English hops. It is the only one of the porters rating over 100 on the IBU scale. It has an intense soapy pale ale style hop bitterness that for me collides with the bitter chocolate from the roasted malts. It comes off at first more like a black IPA than a porter. Like #1 it pays to let this one open up a bit because that intensity mellows over the course of an hour. A creaminess comes forward as the India Pale Ale-ness of it recedes to the background. It remains bitter to the bottom of the bottle but in the way that a more recent "American Porter" designation like **Leather Jacket** from **Edmunds Oast** out of Charleston, SC is, but not with the fruity hop character that **Sierra Nevada** preserves in their porter.

**Porter #4: 1885 London Porter circa 1885 (4.0% ABV)** is the perfect porter. Everything I want in the style is right here. There's no more Brett funk in the smell or flavor. It's just a beautiful chocolate cream milkshake buttery coffee thing. It's not oversweet and would not be mistaken for a dessert stout, it just does all the porter things. It reminds me a lot of **Fuller's Porter**, which makes a lot of sense given that Fuller's is an English attempt at a heritage porter. This is the first of the six beers in the box that doesn't noticeably change as it opens up or warms. It is consistent through the entire pour. If this was the most popular beer in England for porters then vive le working class!

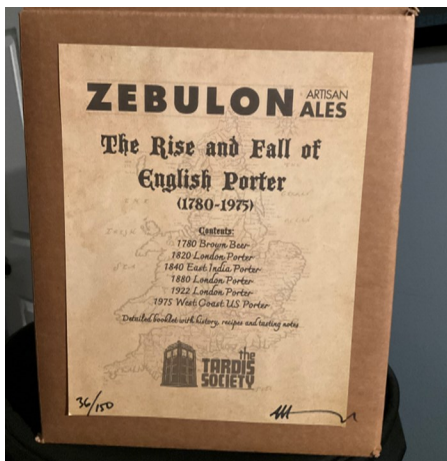
**Porter #5: London Porter circa 1922 (2.7% ABV)**. That ABV is not a typo. The booklet that comes with the Porter box explains that during the war ration years that many beers would be made from the same grain mash. A 7-8% stout, then 4-5% porter from what was left, and then an even weaker 2-3% table beer from what was left of what was left. This was normal beer making policy heading into the 20th century. The problem is that during the war years with so little grain available that the first beer would be weaker, which left the subsequent beers to be even weaker. The brewer surmises that British beer drinkers decided to stick with the stronger stouts and eventually this weakening of porter strength was its stylistic demise. So that might

lead one to think that the 2.7% porter would be a watery mess. That is not true at all. The 1922 porter tastes an awful lot like the 1885 porter, just attenuated. The mouthfeel and weightiness of the beer is still there, but the flavors are muted. It's all there, just dialed back, like a session porter (which is usually twice as strong or more).

I have had a few conversations about the future of beer with my colleague Jeff "Puff" Irvin, the Department Chair for the Craft Brewing Institute of the Southeast at A-B Tech Community College in Asheville. Puff has told me many times that he feels that the future of craft brewing is in non-alcoholic and low gravity beers. His reasoning is that brewers make money on volume. You want someone to come to your brewpub and drink several beers. In order to do this and not get popped by 5-0 on the way out of the parking lot the ABV's must come down. Otherwise, a patron might only drink a pint or two max. The true craft to this equation is to make a 3-point beer as flavorful as a 7-point beer. Zebulon has made a 3-point beer that, while it is not as flavorful as a 7-point beer, is still enjoyable on its own regards that is no compromise in quality from the more intense, higher ABV porter but can be consumed in quantity. I think Puff might actually be on to something here (though I still think most N/A beers are still pretty bad).

**Porter #6: American Porter 1975 (5.8% ABV)** was crafted using a recipe given to Zebulon by one of Fritz Maytag's 1970's brewers at the truly groundbreaking **Anchor Brewing** in San Francisco. Anchor is mostly known for its "steam beer" that is a true American classic (and one of the few completely American beer styles) but founder Fritz Maytag may also have been the man responsible for rescuing porter from extinction. In the context of this beer box, Maytag's porter isn't the star of the offering. Not that it is bad or anything, but it is not as interesting as some of the earlier beers nor as "perfect" as #4. But in the context of the times Maytag's porter, stacked against all the light American lagers of the 1970s, must have hit San Francisco like a goddamn bomb. #6 feels like a middle spot between #4 and #6. A solid porter with more flavor than the table porter but less flavor than the porter of the English heyday.

Overall, my liver may not be glad that I drank 500mL plus of medium-large ABV beers for six nights straight but I'm glad I quaffed them this way back to back. I really got a sense of the evolution of a beer style from its origins to its rebirth. I wish more brewers had the skill and the inspiration to do something like this. I'm looking forward to catching the Zebulon Beer Tardis on its next journey wherever or whenever it might depart. — **KELLY MENACE**



# RENTED MULE READS REAL GOOD: *BODY COUNT 33 1/3*

The 33 1/3 book series is a series of short books examining one "classic" album per book. Examples of albums covered in this series include *Pet Sounds*, *Exile on Main Street*, *Trout Mask Replica*, *Forever Changes*.... In other words, 33 1/3 is manna for music nerds. At roughly 100-150 pages per volume, it is a relatively light read too. Having presumably exhausted the list of "classic" albums quickly (i.e., albums that appear in Rolling Stones Magazine's seemingly endless "greatest albums of all time" issues), 33 1/3 started publishing books on outliers. This brings us to *Body Count* by Ben Apatoff.

Prior to forming Body Count, Ice-T was at the height of his powers with a successful career in Rap and Hollywood (playing a police officer in *New Jack City*). Body Count was formed as a project to explore Ice's love of metal/punk bands like Black Sabbath, Mott the Hoople, Slayer, Blue Oyster Cult, Black Flag. The original line up consisted of Ernie C on lead guitar, D-Roc on Rhythm guitar, Mooseman on Bass Guitar and Beatmaster V on Drums. Most of the members of Body count were friends of Ice-T who played music to avoid gang banging.

This volume gives a concise review of the First Body count album including classics such as "There Goes the Neighborhood", "Body Count", "KKK Bitch", "Bowels of the Devil" and the infamous "Cop Killer". At the time, such a rap to rock and roll crossover was unheard of. People didn't know what to make of this album; though it sold in respectable numbers. Ice-T/Body Count's split set at the Lollapalooza festival sealed the deal.

As interesting as the track-by-track review of the album, the coverage of the attempt to have the song "Cop Killer" pulled is even more interesting. Spearheaded by Combined Law Enforcement Associations Texas (CLEAT—it had to be in Texas of course), CLEAT wanted the track "Cop Killer" removed from the album. The issue with this song was its blunt portrayal of vengeance against police brutality. Body Count's first album was put out around the time of the Rodney King beating by the Los Angeles Police officers, so the topic was timely (unfortunately in 2024-25, the topic is

still timely). NRA head Charlton Heston chimed in against the album as did President George HW Bush, Newt Gingrich, and Al Gore. No surprise there with Mr. Gore. Al Gore's wife was Tipper Gore, head of the Parent's Music Resource Center (PMRC) who wanted to ban records and were responsible for the "parent advisory" label put on albums that is heeded by absolutely nobody.

CLEAT played hardball threatening to boycott Body Count's label Warner Bros. (At this point the merger with Time Warner had taken place so a boycott would not just be albums.) There were death threats to Warner Bros employees and mumbled threats of pulling police protection from the Warner Bros building (and from Body Count's tour). Ice-T had his taxes audited twice and was placed on the FBI's National threat list. Ice-T's response was characteristically blunt/profound "If you believe I'm a cop killer you believe David Bowie is an astronaut," and "The First Amendment ain't got shit to do with me. When the First Amendment was written, I was property, Black People were property."

After fighting the good fight, Ice-T agreed to pull "Cop Killer" from the album basically because he realized that Warner Bros wasn't going to go the distance in backing him. Warner Bros began pulling deals with other rap acts such as the Geto Boys over the controversy. Ice was dropped from the label anyway after this controversy blew over; no good deed goes unpunished. "Cop Killer" was replaced by "Freedom of Speech" a collaboration with Dead Kennedys' Jello Biafra. Ironically enough, the right "cancels" things better than any left winger (Bud Light anyone?).

Body Count is still at it with a new album *Merciless* which showcases a band that has lost none of its fury. Ice-T is, ironically enough, now most well known as playing a police officer on *Law and Order: SVU*. The truth is stranger than fiction.

Overall, 33 1/3 Body Count is a very easy read, packed with great stories. It might be the closest to a history of Body Count we will get so pick up a copy. — *RENTED MULE*







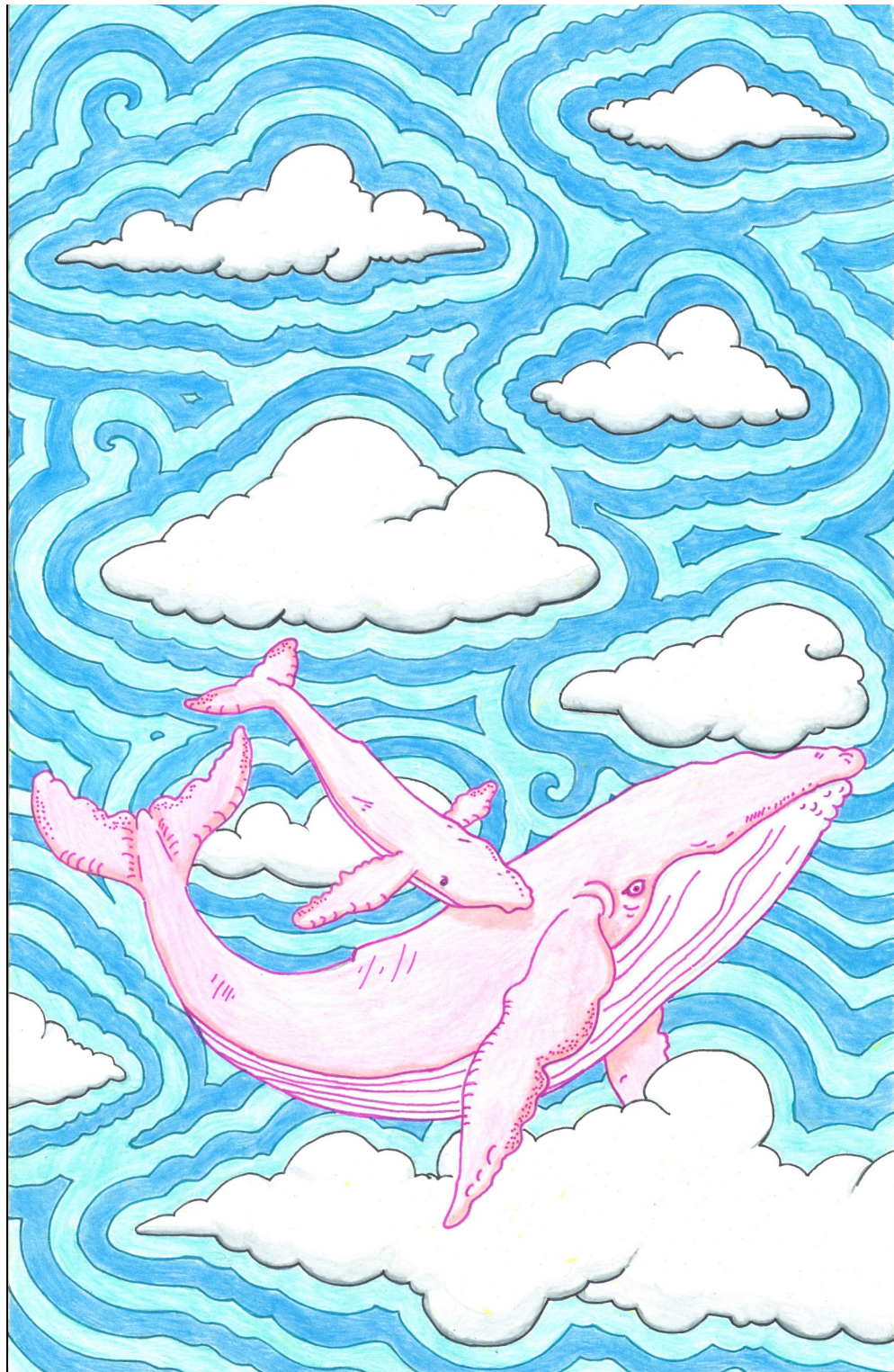
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# PHIL COLLINS IS MORE THAN YOU THINK

Autumn 1976. I was 13 years old and really, really, *really* getting into music. Manfred Mann's Earth Band had swept me away with *The Roaring Silence*. My 8-year-old brother, Blayne, was lead guitar for a band that featured a lead-singer who played mandolin. Heady times, heady times. The lead singer saw that I got into *Roaring Silence*, and said, "Kid, if you like that, you're gonna go nuts for a band called Genesis."

Lo and behold, Pittsburgh FM station WDVE was having an in-depth special on Genesis, so I listened and was blown away. Funny, I didn't rush right out to buy a Genesis album. Actually, I snatched up their lead guitarist Steve Hackett's first solo album, *Voyage of the Acolyte*, and played that till the grooves wore thin. There was this drummer on that record who also *sang!* I was more impressed with his drumming — he not only could kick out the jams but also had a playfulness that was matched by how he made the drums *sound* — not just to keep time, but their own expression.

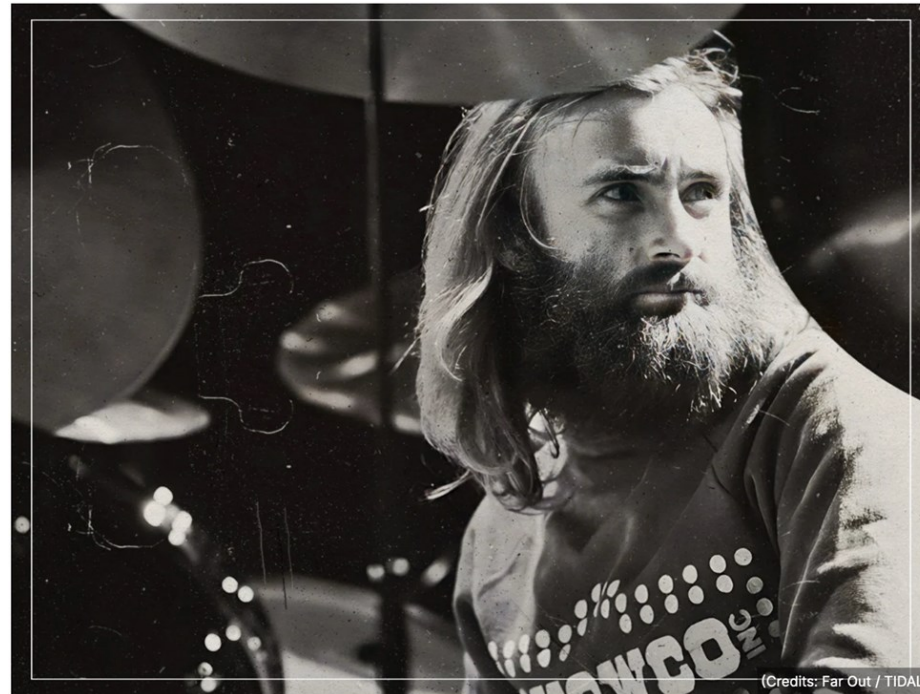
That following spring 1977, I bought Genesis' eighth studio offering, *Wind and Wuthering*. The first track, "Eleventh Earl of Mar," stunned me. Mike Rutherford's grinding, grunting bass line was outdone only by the sound of the drums. First of all, you could *hear* them. Second, what you heard was more captivating than *anything* I'd previously listened to. I later found out that, during the recording of it, Phil Collins told his mates that he wanted the band's drum sound to be as expressive and song-changing as John Bonham's on Zeppelin's "Kashmir."

Phil adored John Bonham. I grew up loving Zeppelin...only to find I loved Phil's skinning even better. In swift succession, I scarfed up *Seconds Out* (Genesis' legendary live album where Phil drum duels with the likes of Chester Thompson and Bill Bruford), *Selling England by the Pound*, *Nursery Cryme*, and *Foxtrot*. I soon found out that Genesis' soul sprung from the inventive lyrics and vocal interpretations of Peter Gabriel, when Phil was "only" the drummer (and backing vocalist). Hell, it wasn't till I bought *Selling England* that I knew that Phil and Pete were two different people! Oh, to be 13 again. (Not.)

As my album collection grew, I got to hear legends like Neil Peart, Simon Phillips, Keith Moon, and Carl Palmer. In the decades since, I've enjoyed Terry Bozzio, Meg White, and others. Still, I've always come back to Phil.

Yeah, I thought he was a good singer, who ably stepped into Peter Gabriel's shoes and admirably fronted the band. I was intrigued when he recorded *Face Value* and bought it the day of its release. I'd already taken in the gated-reverb drum sound that Phil, Peter, and Hugh Padgham had

## A "DRUMMER FIRST" INDEED



(Credits: Far Out / TIDAL)

revolutionized on Peter's 1980 third-album lead-off song, "Intruder." The drums were the heartbeat of that song. But the intro song to *Face Value* took it to a whole new level — the drums were more than making a statement. They burst the soul of the listener, influencing every aural experience for the next 40+ years, from music to movies to sound bites to samples to any and every mood we could construct in our imaginings.

After that, Phil's career took off, till he was ubiquitous as, well, *the gated reverb*. I followed his solo career with a self-satisfied smirk. I bought none of his other solo albums, nor did I take in any of his live solo shows, though I continued to flock to Genesis performances, the highlight for me being the *Abacab* tour when it stopped for two sold-out nights in Rome and was the last time the band did its iconic album-side-length *magnum opus*, "Supper's Ready." Times were swiftly changing. Phil was no longer a prog-rock session man with the most influential prog band of all time. Hell, he was as big as Sinatra, Michael Jackson, and any other era-defining pop performer one can think of. He acted in movies, TV shows (remember *Hook* and the "Phil the Shill" episode of *Miami Vice*?) He produced numerous chart-topping works of other artists. Wrote musicals

for Crissakes. Became derisively known as "the Cabbage-Patch Rocker." Me? I didn't go emo, but I did say the hackneyed, "Pffft! I liked him when he was obscure and cool!"

This is a long-winded way of describing what I felt watching *Drumeo's Phil Collins: Drummer First*. It's a joyful and bittersweet homage to this multi-talented performer, who, all along, simply considered himself an incredibly fortunate drummer.

Sorry, that shit doesn't happen by accident *or* by fortune. You can watch *Drummer First* and cringe at what's become of Phil — decrepit enough to have trouble even sitting down at a drum kit. In fact, his son, Nic, who played drums for Genesis' 2021-22 *Last Domino* farewell tour, steals the show with his winsome charm and loving regard for his much older dad. The producers obviously couldn't pay for the rights to play actual Genesis and Phil Collins music (Sony now owns all Phil's solo work and Genesis' Phil-era playlist). So, faithful to the legion of stick-wielders who don the tools of ignorance and slam away at the skins, the documentary's score is mostly Nic playing all the riffs, which he does more than capably.

Through it all, Phil seems bemused, if befuddled, at the attention. Sadly, though the youngest member of the Genesis core, he's aged much, much faster than Tony Banks, Mike Rutherford, Steve Hackett, Anthony Phillips, and Peter Gabriel (whom I believe is still touring his latest album as of this writing). It's hard to match up all the younger images of Phil with the crouching, cane-styling old man who looks incredibly like my late Italian grandfather.

*How did he do all this?* the less-informed, young viewer might ask. I saw him live with Genesis a half-dozen times. He didn't just fill Gabriel's frontman duties, he also drummed, developed his own performance persona, and did a tambourine dance that many Olympic gymnasts would be hard-pressed to replicate. All that ceaseless live work covered his body in tambourine bruises. The very *un-ergonomic* drum kits of the 70s and 80s kept him crouching and reaching and pounding the fuck out of his wrists, ankles, knees, and back.

Off stage, the man was a tireless workhorse long before he became a pop superstar, doing session work with the likes of Brand X, Mike Oldfield, Brian Eno, Argent, and Thin Lizzy. Long before he was a vocal sensation, Phil Collins was the drummer that musicians' musicians *had* to have on their records. They were looking for a sound. Needed a guy who could just lay it down in one or two takes, with no bullshit. A bloke who could crack up the nastiest of producers in midnight recording sessions, then tipple a pint with the lot afterwards.

The endless work, touring, and bodily demands demolished three marriages. See, if you married Phil, you didn't just gain a husband; you were snagging a ride with an artistic phenomenon. I think they all loved him. I suppose, also, that he was no picnic to be married to. A little of that comes across in this two-hour tour. Musician interviews are topped in underwhelm factor only by hockey interviews. You can read Phil's bio, *Not Dead Yet*, and get more of that. He's no Lizard King. Really, he's just a bloke who loved to drum and was obsessed with making drum sounds that would be, well, *cool*.

Fuck if he didn't do *that*, in spades! So they ask him *how* he did this and that, what was the inspiration, where does your genius come from? And the little old bloke who doesn't look like he could hoist a feather, let alone drumsticks, says something like, "Well, I wasn't there when the boys laid down the Apocalypse 9/8 section of 'Supper's Ready.' So, next day, I went into the studio, listened to it a few times, got an idea of what I wanted to do, and added the drums."

CONT.->



**<-CONT.**

Phil hasn't thought about this shit for 50 years. The reality is, if we could've asked him 50 years ago (and believe me, I've read the contemporaneous accounts of his exploits), he'd say the same thing: "It's drumming, mates. It's what I did in that take. Lucky they recorded it."

This documentary adds a coda to that. Phil doesn't put it in so many words, but it's what makes watching *Phil Collins: Drummer First* more than worth the time. "Yeah, guys, I used to drum, but I can't no more. I can sit down to sing. That's alright. I like most of what I did with Genesis. Some of it, not. It's a gig."

You see, genius doesn't come from a master plan. It flies with passion, like sparks off a wheel. And when the sparkler guts out, we're left with a warm memory. Not to regret that we can't have it anymore. After all, we've got his discography available at a click to entertain us.

Rather, we know that *more is coming*. There's another little bloke or two out there, some spitfire girl who's shunned at school, or a go-at-you little boy who just wants to thrash away, come what may. And in 50 years, we're gonna wonder how these tykes spun off fireworks of genius.

And what we find in the watching — and more importantly, in the joy of *listening* to the soundtrack of our lives — is that genius comes out of nowhere. And that's damn, fucking incredible. Like a little man who lit up our lives and who doesn't give it a second thought.

Keep thrashing, Phil, in spirit, if not in body. Love ya! — **BETHANY BEELER**



## MICRO Musing

I wonder what the New Millennium equivalent to "Chicken Little" is.

If you're younger or missed the 2005 movie, Chicken Little is a character screaming the sky is falling. Essentially, he was so scared the world was ending he couldn't do anything.

Half the country sees the sky falling while the other half expects boom times. Let's face it — neither will come true. Things will not be as bad as expected. The boom-timers, however, are in for a shock.

All we can do is what we have control over — let the "Chicken Littles" worry away. It's going to be okay. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

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# CIRCUIT DEMON

I first met Eliezer (AKA Circuit Demon) years ago as the drummer for an indie project. In the years of booking shows, he always seemed the quiet humble kind of person, so imagine my surprise when I discovered his cyberpunk project a year or two ago. Watching him navigate his own project and the multitude of other projects he keeps spinning is pretty impressive. The first time I got to see Circuit Demon live, I was impressed with his onstage presence and aggressive song structure, a true contrast to the person I had gotten to know. Getting back into interviewing bands, I knew Circuit Demon was going to be on the list...

**Let's start with some informational stuff first. Can you tell me what year you started the project and why you picked the name "Circuit Demon"?**

I started this project in late 2020 with a couple of song ideas that I sat on for a long time before taking it serious. I actually got the name Circuit Demon from an Insect Warfare song. I really liked that band growing up. And even though I make completely different music from them, I felt that the name fit the vision that I had for this project. I chose to make Cyberpunk music because for years I've been really into watching those kinda movies. Like the first *Bladerunner*, *Tetsuo* the iron man, *Akira* and so on. I wanted to make music that I thought Cyberpunk should sound like. I was kinda tired of the synthwave side of Cyberpunk and I wanted to make something more aggressive and dirty.

**You're pretty eclectic. You play in a metal project and a punk project... why an electric genre after being in so many others?**

Electronic music has always had a special place in my heart. Of course, Electronic is an umbrella term but I do find myself enjoying a lot of forms of it. Because of that I felt it was easy for me to express myself thru this project. As far as being in two other bands, I needed something for myself where I don't have to rely on other people to show up for practice haha. I keep myself busy on my own time as well.

**How is the underground electronic scene? What have been some of your favorite shows to play?**

I haven't been as active in the scene as much as I'd like to. But there's definitely a lot going on in Texas. My favorite show I've played as Circuit Demon would have to be when I played with Loyal

Nothing and Othering in Arlington at Growl Records. The crowd was great and the other bands killed it. It was super fun and I was happy to be



Photo by Tim Lara

there.

**Some of your song titles evoke strong imagery. Would you care to expand on why you named some of them?**

"Culturesport" is basically about corporations and algorithms are whats culturing people today. Art and music nowadays seem disposable. Nothing is sacred. You gotta be a "content creator" to get attention. And being influenced either artistically or as a consumer by being on social media like TikTok making you buy stuff or only listening to music on Spotify. Watching too much Netflix. Being a Culture culture on Instagram or being a keyboard activist on Twitter. The line between the real world and the digital world is no longer clear. And it's really affecting people's perception about themselves and how to react to the world around them. The songs on my demo where meant to be more cinematic so like "Homemade Weapons Defense System" is like the idea of being protecting your house in a dystopian setting like a purge or something. Or "Annihilator" is my take on a Terminator type soundtrack.

**You play a lot of out of town gigs. Is that on purpose? Do you feel your hometown is supportive of artists that aren't mainstream?**

Yeah I feel like there's no support for any kind of electronic here in Victoria, TX. But then again I've always felt like an outcast in anything I've done haha. Maybe I just need to put my own shows together or something. So if anyone here in Victoria makes any kind of electronic hit me up haha. I have felt more welcomed playing out of town where there's more like minded people like all the times I played vaporwave shows and stuff like that or the shows I've played in the Dallas area.

**Your stage show is a major part of your live presence that is home built. Would you like to explain the evolution of it?**

Playing shows with Body Cruise in Austin really influenced me wanting to include visuals. I feel like the glitch art aesthetic goes well with what I'm trying to do now. But sometimes keeping it simple with a strobe light and a dark room is cool too. I can sit here and talk all day about my visuals rig haha maybe one day I'll post a video explaining the set up haha.

**Can you describe your creative process for building a song?**

Most of the time I'll come up with ideas of how I want a song to sound like and every thing falls into place. Like I want this song to be more EBM or more techno or even something off a b-movie soundtrack. Other times I come up with a bass line and drums and then I'm able to add layers of other stuff and eventually sounds nothing like what I intended and most of the time that's the more beautiful side of creativity for me like a positive accident. Currently I write my stuff in FL Studio and then when I'm happy I'll try to recreate it on my hardware set up.

**What do you have planned for 2025? Any big goals?**

In 2025 I'd like to go out and play more shows. Maybe put some shows together myself. Definitely will be releasing more music though. I have a lot of unreleased tracks that I play live. I have other projects I'm working on aside this one as well.

**Where can people find your music and follow you?**

You can find my stuff everywhere on most platforms. But I prefer if you check it out on YouTube or Bandcamp (circuitdemon.bandcamp.com) — **TIM LARA**

# DUSK AT PURPOSE BREWING

On December 14, 2024, in the heart of Fort Collins, Colorado, Purpose Brewing and Cellars welcomed beer lovers to their much-anticipated *Dusk* event. The evening was a celebration of dark beers in all their rich, roasty, and decadent glory. We (Katie Killer, Wonko Zuckerberg, Bethany Beeler, and Pam Beeler) came armed with our discerning palates and high spirits, ready to explore a tap list that promised indulgence, whimsy... and the need for Bethany and Pam to catch a Lyft back to Loveland.



*"Beer makes you feel the way you ought to feel without beer." — Henry Lawson*

## The Lineup: A Symphony of Darkness

The menu was a dark beer aficionado's dream, with everything from barrel-aged stouts to spiced porters. Flights were recommended (and that recommendation was indeed heeded) as we worked our way through the highlights:

**Povitica (5.4%):** This dark Czech lager, with its roasty, nutty profile, drew immediate comparisons to its namesake bread. "It's like a liquid Bake-Off episode," exclaimed Bethany, as she savored swirls of sweet, nutty goodness in every sip.

**Candy Pumpkin Porter (5.8%):** Halloween in a glass! This porter conjured spice rack nostalgia with notes of mace, nutmeg, and cinnamon. Bethany called for more mushroom beers, proving her palate is as adventurous as her commentary.

**Crimes Goose Imperial Stout (10.5%):** "Pandan city!" Katie declared, savoring the sweet almond notes that danced with Amburana and Tonka. Wonko wistfully wished it were green, but the flavor needed no enhancement.

**Cinnamon Roll Barleywine (10.9%):** "It smells like Christmas!" declared Pam, drawn to the dessert-

like aromas. The creamy, cinnamon-forward finish was pure holiday joy.

**S'mores Imperial Stout (10.5%):** Bethany's unequivocal favorite: "If I were ordering a fun 6 oz pour, this would be the one!" The toasted marshmallow and granola additions made every sip a cozy fireside experience.

## Guest Beers Steal the Spotlight

Purpose wasn't the only star of the evening.

Guest pours from local breweries added depth to the event:

**The Pooka (15.2%):** A bold, whiskey-barrel-aged imperial stout, it inspired dramatic (and questionable) metaphors from Bethany, who declared, "I wouldn't let a man who drinks this near me!"

**Barrel-Aged Shadowman (17.4%):** The towering ABV and Colorado whiskey barrel character left Wonko in awe. "The finish is pure silk," he marveled.

## The Verdict: An Evening of Maximum Dosage

With musings that can only come from an afternoon of drinking and a shared love for dark beers, our group left Purpose Brewing satiated and inspired. The event was more than just a tasting — it was a celebration of craftsmanship, flavor, and the brewing community that makes Fort Collins a beer lover's paradise.

As Pam put it: "Y'all, I'm in love with these beers. *Maximum dosage!*"

Dusk didn't just meet expectations; it raised the bar for dark beer events. Cheers to Purpose Brewing for a magical evening that left us all craving more! — COMPILED BY PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

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**I HAVE SUNDAYS.  
WHERE THERE'S AN ILL,**



*WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON*

## **SHORT TAKES**

I'm watching and waiting, as the cars whiz by, for nothing in particular. From my balcony view I can see the light fading, the heat slipping away to wherever it is that heat and light go when dusk erases the day. I wonder if that's the place where the answers are written, the place I'm supposed to be right at this very moment. For now I'm sitting still, letting the wind kiss my legs and brush my hair. And when I can move again, I carve my name into the railing and lean out, out, out until the blood rushes to my head and I have to pull back. My tiny apartment is the edge of the world, if such a place ever existed. And somewhere out there, out where the heat and the light wait silently for the next noonday, lies something bigger than all the thoughts in my head. Something waiting to gently absorb me until I'm no longer trying to make sense of everything. And the cars are still whizzing by, but now I know why I'm watching and waiting. — *TISHIA JACKSON*

### **A SCUM**

Bacterial soap scum in the petri dish of life, looking for more meaning than cleaning up shit. The bumps and bubbles should be more than enough  
For something so vapid, small and self-important.

— *WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON*

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# SOME END OF THE SEMESTER THOUGHTS ON THE END OF EMPIRES

I just wrapped up another fall semester, and every other year, including this one, for me that means I've just spent about eight weeks teaching about the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE). My classes focus on the "then, there, and them," and are not about making explicit comparisons to contemporary peoples, places, or events, but sometimes the students catch on and make the connections. From behind the lectern, it's rewarding to watch the invisible little lightbulbs go on over some of my students' heads as they actually learn the value of studying history and the humanities.

From the political infrastructure of the harsh and short-lived Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BCE), the early Han rulers established China's first real empire. Its borders expanded under the reign of Emperor Wu (r. 141 –87 BCE), marking the largest footprint a Chinese state would occupy until the 8th, 18th, and 20th centuries (Mongols not included), and in doing so, the Han state incorporated a variety of "non-Chinese" peoples into a multicultural empire. Moreover, the reach of the Han touched Korea, southeast Asia, and deep into the Central Asian steppeland via the "Silk Roads" (a name not used until the 19th century). The Han military quelled the threats from the steppe nomads and foreign trade under the guise of "tribute gift exchange" flourished. The early Han was Confucian in its worldview, (emphasizing strict adherence to patriarchal social norms), militaristic and expansionistic in its political agenda, economically prosperous, and socially stratifying. It was a textbook definition of "empire," and a contemporary of the Roman's Mediterranean-European empire.

As time went by, things changed. The quality of Han emperors declined, as they naturally must. These succeeding emperors were all born in the palace and raised comfortably in the halls of luxury and wealth, attended to by a cadre of scholar-official tutors and eunuchs. They married as young teenagers, and when they took their throne they built harems of a couple of thousand women. It's not hard to imagine a teenage emperor being more interested in the affairs of the palace than the matters of government.

Palace women and palace servants (eunuchs) began to hold great influence over the rulers, and by extension, the state. Moreover, the families of palace women and the eunuchs were rewarded with official positions, land, and wealth, much to the dismay of the scholar-officials who attempted to keep the rulers focused on matters of governance. These three factions became bitter rivals at the imperial court.

The scholar-officials, for the most part, came from old-money families, many who had landholdings and local or regional prominence centuries before the Han founding. They were generally scholarly and Confucian in their worldviews, and saw service in the government bureaucracy as almost a hereditary occupation. Education and public service was the core of their identity. Their families had sufficient wealth to be able to afford tutors for their sons, since they were not needed to work in agriculture. As these sons entered public service, they worked to gain additional benefits for their families and those of similar socio-economic standing. Additionally, the common practice of inter-marriage between members of the imperial family and members of the local and regional aristocracy ensured that the interests of the empire's wealthy families would be given priority at court.

At the top of the wishlist was tax exemptions for large properties. Once this exemption was declared to be law, these "great families" of the empire began to expand their landholdings by offering to pick up the tax bills of small family farmers, many living year-to-year on the brink of financial disaster, in exchange for deeds to the properties, which when under ownership of the great families immediately became tax exempt. As family members of the palace women and eunuchs received gifts of land, their properties too became tax exempt. With this, economic inequality in the empire accelerated rapidly.

As the new-money (in-laws and eunuch families) and old-money scholar-officials literally fought at court over control of the ruler and for greater landholdings, wealth, and power, the common folk of the Han empire struggled. By the second century CE, some three hundred years into the dynasty, natural factors amplified the suffering of the commoners. Floods, droughts, and an epidemic took their toll on humans and agriculture. Famines ensued.

There were few options and little hope for the common folk. As the Han legal system favored the elites, commoners had no place to turn for relief. Those who turned over the deeds to their lands became indentured servants in perpetuity. Others fled the tax collectors and jail and became vagrants or bandits. Still others turned to cryptic religious texts loosely connected to Daoism, which spoke of the coming apocalypse, and the survival of a chosen "seed people" who would survive these calamities and repopulate the world with "righteous" believers and usher in an era of "Great Peace."

Recognizing the failings of the Han court and government, this millenarian movement attracted large numbers of followers (in the hundreds of thousands, by some accounts), drawn from all levels of society. For the commoners, an apocalypse promised a new deal; for the elites, it offered an opportunity to further advance, perhaps even claiming the throne itself. For most, the thought of tearing down the then-current Han government seemed attractive, consequences be damned.

The millennial cultists organized militia and planned to attack the Han government early in the new year of 184 CE. This year was symbolically significant. It marked Year One in the traditional sixty-year Chinese calendrical system. It was a rolling over of the odometer, so to speak; a millennial year. As the time approached, doomsday cult supporters at court got nervous and leaked the plans. Troops were dispatched to the cultist's base in the east-central part of the empire. The cultist's militia were no match for the Han troops, and the so-called Yellow Turban rebellion was quashed in a matter of months.

But peace was not in the cards. The generals who defeated the rebels then established themselves as regional warlords and operated independent from the child emperors at court for the next four decades. In short, a civil war ensued, which led to the abdication of the final Han emperor in 220, and the establishment of three rival states (the so-called "Three Kingdoms" period), who fought each other for another 60 years before China was again, briefly, reunited.

As I teach the history of this empire over the course of about two months, students begin to pick up on familiar themes. When they ask questions or make comments explicitly linking the events of the Han with the present day, I respond with one of two stock replies: "Good thing nothing like ever happens these days," or "Everything old is new again." I teach at a public university in Howdy Arabia. I can neither confirm nor deny that our discussion of incompetent and/or uncaring rulers controlled by outside interest groups, factionalism at court, unjust legal systems, economic inequality, predatory financial and legal practices, epidemics, famines, homelessness, needless human suffering, religious millenarianism and gleeful welcoming of an apocalypse, rebellions and civil war, and the fall of a once-great empire might also apply to an empire other than the Han.

And so, as history often teaches us, "this is why we can't have nice things." — PROFESSOR FUZZ

# RECORD REVIEW

Orcutt's *Music For Four Guitars* was one of my favorite albums of 2022. It was like listening to a guitar-only version of the Philip Glass Ensemble. Arpeggios ran amok in counterpoint and it was beautifully meditative. *How To Rescue Things*, Orcutt's latest, is also beautifully meditative but has completely different touchstones than minimalist composition. This time, Orcutt is hard onto blown-out late period Coltrane.



*How To Rescue Things* is like a great big tone poem of drones, oohing choirs, orchestral crashes, and bass vocals intoning phrases like "ohhhhhhh myyyyyyy Gooooooodddd" while Orcutt rips distorted electric guitar on top. At times those choirs come forward and move a few chords around under Bill with an occasional "aaaaaammmmmeeennnn" that is very much reminiscent of the music Alice Coltrane made through much of her career and the direction her late husband John Coltrane was reaching toward right before his death. Orcutt even has the Alice Coltrane harp flourishes on "Old Hamlet" in case you missed this explicit homage. At times, especially on "Pylon! Pylon!" and the swelling strings and toning orchestral bells of "Requiem in Dust" it almost sounds like the music from the film *It's a Wonderful Life* and could double as seasonal solstice music for those completely worn out on traditional Christmas music.

This is not 100% a style pastiche. I don't believe I've ever heard an electric guitar scream, explode sheets of sound, or play intricate little melodies atop such lush pedal tones curated with this type of ensemble before. It also amuses me to no end to hear Orcutt's 60 cycle hum at times when he rests between phrases.

All toll, this is a good way to relax and get right with yourself. Or perhaps to reach spiritual nirvana in lotus position. Or soundtrack your own visit to Oz. — KELLY MENACE



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