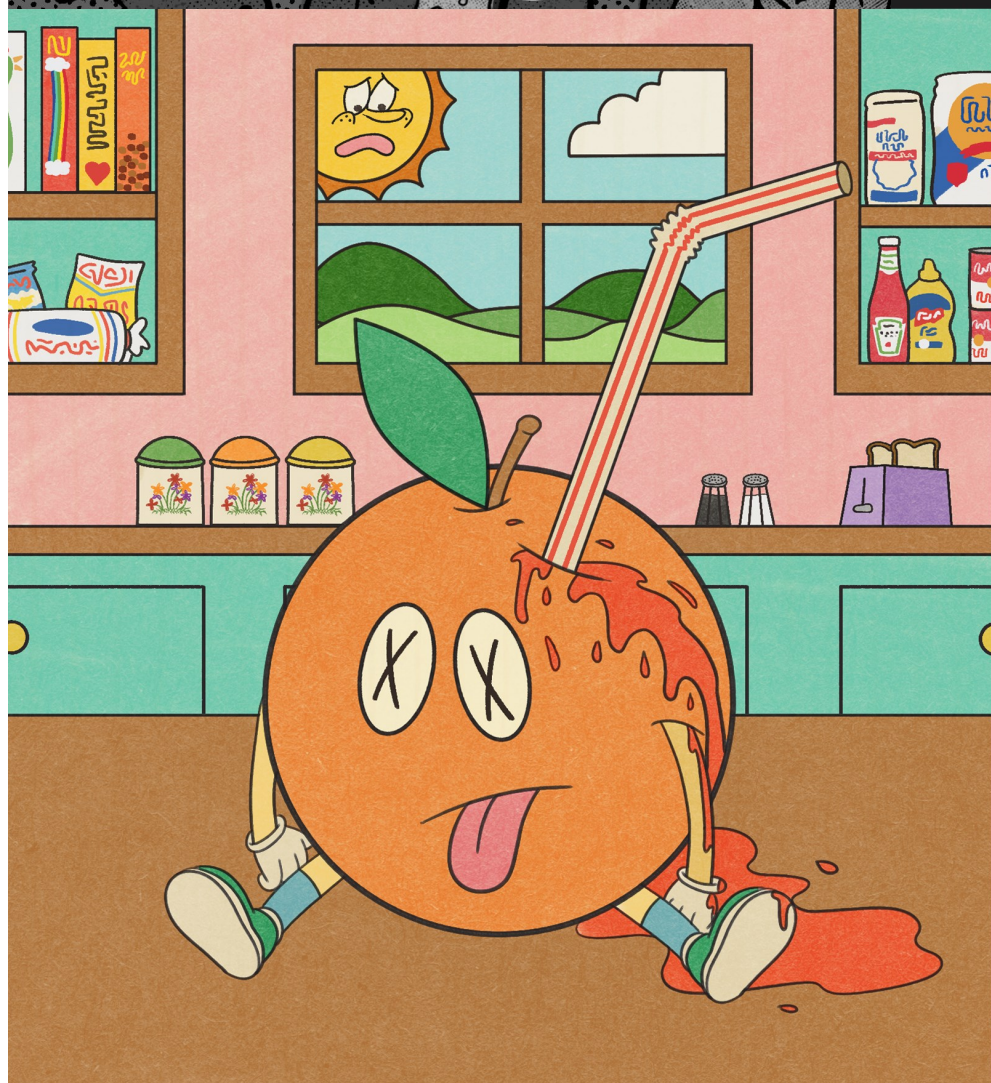


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free. take one.

the dirtbag times



inside: but his signal chat! - your band sucks - surely i will die alone - clocking in, waking up - micromusing - last minute booking - mole people - amplifier worship - record reviews



the dirtbag times is a magazine for dirtbags by dirtbags.

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BUT HIS SIGNAL CHAT!

"Lock her up! Lock her up! Lock her up!" This refrain was chanted ad nauseum at every Donald Trump rally in the 2016 presidential campaign. This chant referred to Democrat presidential candidate and former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, specifically to the ultimately fruitless investigation into a private email server that was setup for Secretary Clinton. There was concern that possibly this email server would be insecure and that Secretary Clinton might get hacked and inadvertently share classified state secrets. Of course, none of that happened and the chant itself was a cipher for hatred of Clinton as a person and had zero bearing or reflection on Clinton the administrator.

Fast forward to March 2025 when Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth and a near-dozen of other cabinet officials, including Vice-President JD Vance, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security advisor Michael Waltz, and others conducted a cabinet level top secret discussion leading to the attack on Irani-backed Houthis in Yemen along the Red Sea on March 15. This is a popular trade route that accounts for about 15% of the goods coming to and leading from Europe. Many major shipping companies are now avoiding this passage and opting to go around the horn of Africa, adding time and expense. The Houthis claim they are aggressing against Israeli ships but their attacks have been indiscriminate. The attack on March 15 is part of an ongoing campaign that preceded the Trump 47 administration. Nothing about this seems off at all ... except when one finds out that the discussion hours before the attack with key strategic information was conducted via Signal, a third party app that is not approved for government use as it is not secure. It was so not secure that *The Atlantic* editor-in-chief Jeffrey Goldberg somehow managed to be invited to the messaging chain and participated in this chain for an unprecedented look into a principals committee exchange.

This news was broken via *The Atlantic* and has been confirmed by the Trump administration, though Hegseth has denied that Goldberg was in the chain of communication and tried to divert by parroting Trump's talking points about Goldberg (there's no love lost between these two), calling him "deceitful," "highly discredited," and "pedaling hoaxes." In a congressional meeting that same week no one claimed it to be a hoax. This leaves Hegseth on the wrong end of fact and evidence.

How did this happen? Well, I can tell you how I

think something like this would happen based on something that happens to me all the time. My boss has a shortened nickname for her longer, more official first name. If I type in only the first four letters of her name into an email address line sometimes Outlook will accidentally pull up someone else from the work address book who has the same first four letters to her first name. Did who ever set up this Signal chain type in "Jeff" looking for someone else and the software just automatically plugged in Jeffrey Goldberg from the contacts? That is if you are not the political sort and can accept that this was just an innocent mistake. It is also possible that whom ever added Goldberg to the chain was looking to nail Hegseth to the wall and put him in a situation that makes him look like the rank amateur that he is. Knowing Hegseth's character, the only way that Hegseth could respond to such a situation is to bully and lie his way out of it and hope that he polishes Cheetos's knob enough that Trump will essentially forgive him. Or perhaps he trusts his own power and believes he can bluster his way through it the way Trump blusters through his own numerous faux pas.

Why does this matter at all? According to my friends that work in the industry, it's not all that hard to hack Signal if you know what you are doing. Had a Russian or Chinese operative hacked into this conversation that information could have been leveraged in many ways with many possible results, none of them very positive for the individuals on that message nor the individuals in the armed forces who were ordered to raid the Houthis. American lives were at stake to a certain degree. At this time of writing it is early in the fact-gathering process but already legal scholars have weighed on the illegality, immorality, and the lack of ethics of this action. Not to mention that Signal and other similar third party messaging apps are not archived by the federal government and can be set to automatically delete conversations at a given time. In the case of this Signal chat it was set to delete in four weeks. These message rings then become absolutely untraceable and, more importantly, immune from subpoena. There is evidence in this particular chat that some of the individuals in this chat have used Signal for other government body interactions. The Trump White House is operating a shadow communications net outside of the approved channels specifically so it can break the law and have zero consequences for it. Which leads us to ...

Will anything become of all this? Oh, I'm sure

there will be an investigation of sorts, even if FBI Director Kash Patel hasn't indicated that the FBI will look into it. There has been a surprisingly bipartisan WTF! response in the media, from right wing pundits who are no friends to *The Atlantic*, Jeffrey Goldstein, or Democrats in general. We have also learned that a few of the individuals were out of the country at the time of the Signal chat, and some even used unsecure personal phones to participate. Some of these, such as Michael Waltz, have already had their phones hacked early in the scandal and their information posted online from it. Many Trump supporters understand that a major mistake was made and many will want to see a response, but there will be no "Lock him up! Lock him up! Lock him up!" from Trump's supporters at large. The administration around Trump is hypocritical and will not call for the same punishment with any sort of vitriol the way they did when it was long-time target Clinton on the hook. Will Trump's Teflon coating extend to Hegseth? It is unlikely that it will. This is a true scandal that the majority of Americans can actually understand. Courts and illegal immigrants and such sadly don't move the fader. But willfully putting American armed forces in harm's way because you believe your military can operate on a shadow communications system is not a good look. Hegseth will likely learn that no matter how well you flatter and suck up to Trump that if it is no longer expediate for him to keep you around that you will no longer be around. Especially when Hegseth continues to prove that he is completely out of his element here. He thinks he can deny and gaslight. But all Hegseth has done so far is to make matters worse for the Trump administration, leading *The Atlantic* to publish the full chat transcript and let the public decide who is telling the truth. So far Trump has seemed blindsided by the scandal, but he will eventually find his footing. Trump will not go down for this, and neither will any of the rest of the individuals on the call.

FINALLY here is an issue that Democrats can use to beat the Republicans senseless over. Were it any other year and any other group of Democrats it would be a slam-dunk. But so far this group of Democrats seems to be caught just as flat-footed by Trump as Trump has been caught by this scandal. No one knows how to make anything stick to him. In his second term everyone Trump has nominated is just as bad as he is and taking out any of his cabinet is a net positive for America and a disaster for Republicans. Let's now see if the Democrats fumble. — KELLY MENACE

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CLOCKING IN, WAKING UP

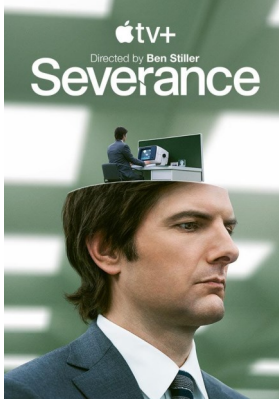
SEVERANCE IS THE DYSTOPIAN THRILLER WE NEED

Finished Season 2 this past week. Wow.

"The surest way to tame a prisoner is to let him believe he's free." – Harmony Cobel (season 1, episode 5)

notifications, the existential dread of feeling like our en-

There is something eerily familiar about *Severance*, Apple TV's disquieting masterpiece of dystopian corporate horror. At first glance, the show presents itself as a cerebral sci-fi mystery, a puzzle box of eerie hallways, unsettling workplace camaraderie, and cryptic directives. But if you've ever had to sit through an all-hands meeting where a supervisor used the phrase "put a pin in it" one too many times, or if you've been subjected to a poorly constructed PowerPoint insisting that a mandatory "team-building" weekend in the woods is somehow a perk, then you already understand the existential terror at the heart of this show.



tire life is just an exhausting loop of productivity expectations? *Severance* takes that wish and runs with it, pushing it to its most extreme and terrifying conclusions. What if we really could separate ourselves from our labor? And more importantly — what part of ourselves would we lose in the process?

At its core, *Severance* is about resistance. It's about waking up — sometimes literally — to the systems that confine us, about recognizing the ways in which we have been trained to accept the unacceptable. It's the show equivalent of that one friend who always asks,

"But have you ever considered burning the whole thing down?" except instead of reckless anarchy, it's a slow and steady unraveling of the lies we tell ourselves just to get through the workweek.

For those who haven't yet entered the world of Lumon Industries, *Severance* follows a group of employees who have undergone a medical procedure that splits their consciousness into two separate existences: their "innie" (work self) and their "outie" (personal self).

The characters in *Severance* are not superheroes. They're ordinary people who start off as good little worker bees, following the rules, staying in their designated lanes, collecting their incentive prizes like seasoned lab rats. And then — slowly, quietly — they begin to question. They push back. They look at the absurdity of their reality and think, "Wait...this is weird, right?" That's where the real magic happens. That moment of realization. That tiny act of defiance. And isn't that what so many of us are trying to do? To find our own power in a world that often feels overwhelming? To forge community in places designed to keep us apart?

The two selves are entirely cut off from one another, meaning that the innie knows nothing of the outside world and exists only within the confines of the office. Meanwhile, the outie has no recollection of their time at work. It's supposed to be a clean break — a perfect work-life balance, enforced by science. But if you've ever tried (and failed) to leave your stress at the office, you already know that's a fantasy. What follows isn't balance at all, but a slow, disturbing, unraveling of identity, autonomy, and the fundamental question: *Who am I, really?*

More than anything, *Severance* forces us to ask: *Who are we when all of our systems are stripped away?* If we aren't defined by our families, our jobs, or our national identity, what is left? And isn't that remaining self — the one that believes, dreams, feels — the truest version of ourselves?

We are living in a time of mass layoffs, quiet quitting, burnout culture, and the creeping realization that our employers don't actually see us as people, but rather as an ever-fluctuating collection of data points, performance metrics, and billable hours. Enter *Severance*, a show that doesn't just reflect these realities — it amplifies them, distorts them, and presents them back to us in the stark, fluorescent-lit horror of Lumon Industries. It's not just a story about a dystopian company; it's a scalpel-sharp metaphor for the ways in which late-stage capitalism has convinced us that our worth is measured by our efficiency.

Holding On to Ourselves

The world is a mess. Most of us are exhausted, overwhelmed, frightened, and feeling hopeless.. In many ways, *Severance* offers both a reflection of feelings and an antidote to them. It urges us to pay attention. To question. To resist the numbness that creeps in when we're too tired to fight back.

And let's be honest — who among us hasn't, at some point, wished we could just *turn off* the work stress when we clock out? That we could leave behind the endless emails, the Slack

in a time when everything feels fragmented and chaotic, *Severance* reminds us that we are still whole. We just have to wake up. — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

LAST MINUTE BOOKING



I am one of the owners of a music venue. I manage the booking. I double-booked a major electronic show and a twelve band metal festival. I caught the mistake barely two weeks before the date. It was one hundred percent my error, and by necessity, either I was going to find someone a new venue, or someone was going to be completely screwed.

And so, I found myself, on a Thursday evening, racing around to every venue in Asheville, hat in hand, begging someone to find a way to squeeze in twelve metal bands.

My first stop was The Obvious Choice. The bartender explained that the booker is *never* there, like, she's met him twice in her life. I almost never go to work in person either, but if I *never* went to work, I never would've caught the double-booking, and the metal bands and the ravers could've met in the parking lot for a West Side Story style dance-off.

Stop two, uneventful, unhelpful, but very sympathetic.

Stop three, a customer overhears me and wants to introduce himself. He emailed me seven months ago, but I didn't answer. He's got ideas. Not about twelve metal bands on a Saturday in two weeks, but about events he could throw if I answer his emails. Also, the venue is booked.

Stop four, a delightful surprise, they've hired a dedicated booker! I know him and I like him! I learn about his vision for the venue and how to pronounce his musical name – it's for a cat! – and eventually, also, that he's booked.

I'm out of obvious choices. I google the calendars of the two shiny new venues in town, both of them have ultra-hip ultra-obscure acts that you probably haven't heard of on the date I need. I don't bother going over to beg.

I try the other place I haven't thought of, and the bartender, who turns frigid when I turn down a shot, mentions the booker's name. I know of her! And, more importantly, I know her weed guy well enough to lean on the connection. She's not in, but the bartender tells me how to reach her. I send her a message and keep pounding pavement.

At the Crunchy Granola venue, they explain that twelve metal bands "really aren't their vibe." Obviously. But maybe they'd consider it anyway, out of professional courtesy? Or, maybe not.

The bartender at the dive that is totally not a venue is seriously enthusiastic and promises to send a *picture of my handwritten note?! to her bosses*. I do not grab her by the shoulders and shake her, demanding an actual email address. But it crosses my mind. God. A carrier pigeon might be more effective.

In the next venue, a basement, the bartender who looks young enough to be one of my daughter's kindergarten classmates tells me all about how they used to do booking in Chicago. I don't know why I'm standing here. The drinks in here have names I can't pronounce. This china shop is not going to host twelve bands worth of bulls.

Fine, OK, but what about that spot on my way home? The manager sashays and twirls, using a dish towel as seductively as I've ever seen, while explaining that they don't *do* live music anymore sweetie, not after they got sued by BMI for copyright infringement last year. No, not even if I promise the metal bands won't play covers. (Which, by the way, for all I know one could be a Celine Dion cover band or something. I cannot honestly assure anyone that there won't be any covers, but I am way past the point of being pernickety about honesty at this point).

I go home. I'm out of ideas. I send a few hopeless emails, to a permanently closed venue, to several bars the sizes of closets, to someone I heard might host music, to a friend with connections the next county over. None of this is going to work.

In the morning, to my complete astonishment, my inbox has three yeses in it, two from places I emailed, one from one of the in-person stops. I have never, ever been so relieved. The metal bands find one to be satisfactory, and we manage not to derail the train.

Saturday, April 12th, 3:30pm. Go mosh your hearts out at Sludge Mountain Mass at Shakeys. Then, bring your glowsticks by Sly Grog for Lumasi afterwards. — *SPRING PEARSON*

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YOUR BAND SUCKS

SURELY I WILL DIE ALONE

"i'm not old. your music just sucks." — old guy yelling at clouds to get off of his lawn

not infrequently, i run into someone who tells me something to the effect of "there hasn't been any good music since [insert random date that somehow manages to correlate to that person's teenage/college years]," or "there's no good [rock/guitar/punk/etc] music being made these days."

we know that is not true.

the problem is not with the music being made, but with either 1) being open to new music, or 2) finding that new music.

only you can address the first issue. perhaps challenge yourself to explore a bit outside of your zone, whether that be chronological or genre. set a goal to check out one new-to-you band or artist per week.

in regards to the second issue, the algorithms work hard to keep you in your comfort zone by feeding you the same stuff over and over and over. fortunately, there are a lot of ways to find new music, but they all require a bit of effort on your part.

you might try going to a local show and listening to a band or two on the bill that you're not already familiar with.

or checking out bands mentioned on the Bandcamp Daily feature (at the bottom of the bandcamp homepage: <https://bandcamp.com>)

or you might want to read the record reviews in some online zines like razorcake <https://razorcake.org/category/review/record-review> or maximumrocknroll <https://www.maximumrocknroll.com/reviews> and then check out some bands or releases that sound interesting to you on the bands' bandcamp or website.

or you might tune in to a community radio

station (local or distant; over the air or online) and see what sorts of music they're into these days.

back when i was less old, i spent many select hours listening to programming on two houston stations: KPFT and KTRU. i got turned on to a lot of new music being played by DJs with open ears and a bigger network of cultural contacts than i had at the time. and it turned out that some of these DJs were also in local bands, or ran record stores, or published zines. this, in turn, put my teenage self into record stores not located in suburban malls, and had me skipping lunch and using my lunch money to buy records.

these days, i'm finding a lot of my new music by listening to WFMU's online feeds. as "the freeform station of the nation," the programming is varied, and some of it's not my bag. but if i didn't have to actually work, i could probably occupy the better part of every single day of the week listening to shows that are in or adjacent to my wheelhouse. as an added bonus, many of the DJs prepare "year-end best-of" shows, and all programming since about Y2K has been archived, so even if you're not a regular listener, you can dig into the archives to listen.

the following collection of 2024 Year-End Best-Of/Favorites from some of the DJs at WFMU whose shows tend to feature music likely to appeal to Dirtbag Times readers scientifically disproves the naysayer claims:

2024 WFMU Year-End Best-Of Shows

Musical Dose with Medson <https://wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147490>

Burn It Down! with Nate K <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147316>
Honorable Mentions: <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147724>

Paul Bruno
Pt 1 Albums: <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147499>
Pt 2 Singles, Etc: <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147729>

Rock and Roller Derby with Suzy Hotrod
Pt 1: <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147592>
Pt 2: <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/148054>

Three Chord Monte with Joe Belock <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147605>

Feelings with Michele with One "L" <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147645>

Kick Out the Jams with Joey D <https://wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147628>

Strong Style Chris Crash <https://wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147557>

Hooligan with Terre T <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147535>

The Evan "Funk" Davies Show <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147922>

Cherry Blossom Clinic with Terre T
Pt 1 Albums: <https://wfmud.org/playlists/shows/147931>
Pt 2 Singles, Etc: <https://www.wfmud.org/playlists/shows/148153>

so damn much great music came out last year, and the year before that, and the one before that, and this year too. give it a listen and discover your new favorite bands, then support them by buying their music and/or merch on bandcamp (or your favorite local/indie record store), seeing their shows, and telling your friends.

i suspect i'm preaching to the choir here, but hey, you could have stopped reading after the first paragraph.

since you've made it this far, let me know what cool new music you found last year, or last week. i might dig it too. remember kids, it's cool to share cool music with your friends.
— PROFESSOR FUZZ

THE LOST DEE DEE RAMONE TRACK

Hello children. I'm willing to bet a lot of you weirdos have some kind of list with missing media that has eluded you for years, possibly decades. I myself have many lists of the sort. And luckily with my recent lifelong search for an elusive Movie coming to an end, I was able to finally put some childhood Horrors to rest. (Shoutout to ERNEST GOES TO AFRICA by the way).

I tend to not let these things get by me. So some years back when I made my Award Winning documentary *FOREVER: THE UNTOLD STORY OF ROCK N ROLL HIGH SCHOOL FOREVER* (free on YouTube!) I took it as a personal goal to find the lost songs from the Movie.

My Documentary covers the lesser known yet superior sequel to the Ramones classic. Of course starring none other than our lord and savior COREY FELDMAN. And One of the only connections to the original is Dee Dee Ramone being featured on a track by Jean Beauvoir (the guy that produced any Ramones tracks that have synth), titled "CUT ME TO PIECES." We can hear a brief snip in the film itself.

Anyways it was while making that classic Documentary that I talked to many cast members and crew when I found out that damn, this Dee Dee Ramone track is "Lost" lost. And from what we hear of it, it really sounds like a great tune. There was a planned soundtrack for the film but it all went to shit due to Corey's drug busts etc. Which led most of these tracks to be lost to time. Hoooooowever, I managed to track down a few. most notable "LOVE AT THE LAUNDROMAT" from the fictional band ZILLION KISSES, and of course "VERY SCARY" from WILL AND THE BUSHMEN. (again, on YouTube free for the first time thanks to yours truly), yet this damn Dee Dee Ramone track has eluded me.

I talked with Jean Beauvoir over emails and on the phone, (even thought he tried his best to pretend to be his own manager), and the dude said he has an old copy on tape that he would happily license to me for \$5,000.....so anyways fuck that dude. But it didn't stop me as I even tracked down Dee Dee's widow, who also said she has a copy this time on a CD. But her old ass doesn't know how to upload or rip it (or know how to keep responding to me apparently). But the search goes on as they say, Hey Ho Lets go I guess. If you or someone you know is a total asshole loser that can manage to track this thing down, please, Contact Crime Stoppers at 1-800-TIPS. And SUBSCRIBE to Staunch TV on YouTube. — ADAN GONZALEZ

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O DAMN!

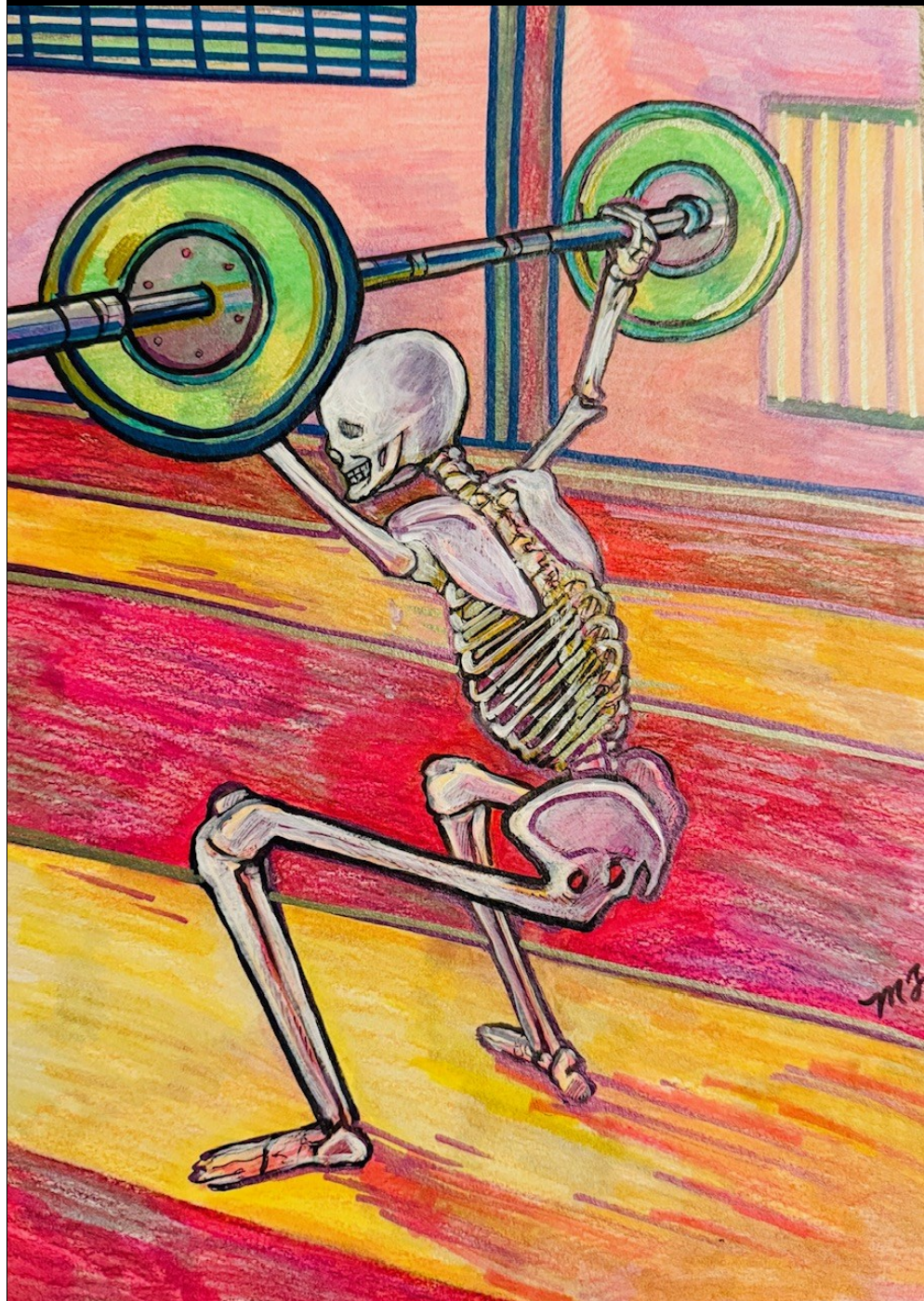


WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



WHERE
IS
MY
TIMES?

A minimalist line drawing of a person's head and shoulders, facing right. The person has a simple, rounded head with a small dot for an eye and a single line for a mouth. The text "WHERE IS MY TIMES?" is written in a large, bubbly, hand-drawn font to the right of the person's head. The drawing is enclosed in a thick black border.



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

PEDAL PUSHING: AMPLIFIER WORSHIP

Electric guitar players have three components to the sound they make: an electric guitar, guitar pedals, and guitar amplifiers. Some do not use pedals, some do not use amplifiers. But for me, out of all three of these components the one I am most obsessed with is the guitar amplifier.

I currently own five amplifier heads, two combo amplifiers, and five speaker cabinets. I use each of these setups for different rehearsal, practice, gigging, and recording scenarios, depending on what I want to accomplish and the restrictions placed upon me by where I'm playing. I also own a guitar amplifier simulator pedal and a reactive load box with speaker impulse response files that emulates a speaker cabinet captured by a microphone.

My favorite amplifier that I own at the moment is a 1970 Fender Bandmaster amp head. I use this amplifier with either one of two speaker cabinets: a G-Tone cabinet with two Weber 10A125 alnico magnet 10" speakers; or an Ibanez cabinet with two WGS G12 C/S ceramic 12" speakers. Fender amps are largely known for their loud, clean tone with a slight dip in the midrange. There are exceptions to this tonal generalization (earlier tweed cabinet Fenders tend to be less clean and have more midrange, brown panel Fenders have a little less midrange than the tweeds but more than the black and silver panel Fenders, etc.) In this case, the generalization is quite true. This amplifier has a fantastic base to stack guitars and guitar pedals atop. It is a 35w vacuum tube amplifier. It is loud. It can put out 105dB of clean sound 6' from the speakers. That is really loud. Not quite jet engine loud or arena show loud, but it is certainly loud enough to be heard in a rock band context. The amplifier has a "sweet spot" at 4 on the volume knob. That sweet spot can be alternately not loud enough and too loud depending on the context. In the context of band rehearsal and shows in smaller rooms (100 person capacity max) it fits. In larger rooms it is not enough unless it is mic'ed. In my experience with this amplifier in performing spaces around Asheville it is often almost loud enough. The 2x12 speaker cabinet is more efficient (meaning that the speakers are louder) and can generally add a few decibels to the volume. If I know I am playing somewhere that needs that extra volume then I use that cabinet. It has been too loud in the type of space where the sound engineer wants complete control of the band's mix, rather than mixing the quieter instruments to match up with the louder ones. It is often too loud at home in the basement IF my significant other is home. In that case, I use the reactive load box and record the amplifier via a line level output. It does a good job of relatively recreating the sound of a mic'ed speaker, but it reacts somewhat differently and the emulation is not exact. It is often times a compromise.

So what happens if there's a gig that requires something louder than the Bandmaster? I reach for a mid 2010's Fender '59 Bassman LTD amplifier. Mine is the amplifier chassis placed into a head cabinet. Normally, the '59 Bassman is an amplifier and speaker cabinet combination in one. With four speakers onboard it makes the cabinet quite heavy and unwieldy to carry. I use my Bassman amp head with a separate G-Tone cabinet with two Eminence Texas Heat ceramic 12" speakers. It is a 45w vacuum tube amplifier. It has the tweed tonality of earlier Fender amps with more midrange content (the part of the audio spectrum that we perceive more clearly). The tweed Bassman is the model that Marshall Amplifiers used as a basis for their earliest amps. This amplifier has a wider tonal breadth than the Bandmaster, but is not as "good" a clean amp base as the Bandmaster is. This is, of course, entirely subjective. I can spend a long time fiddling with the controls on the Bassman and not quite find that sparkling Fender clean tone OR I can just plug into the Bandmaster and there it is. That said, the Bassman turned up to 5 is the best Marshall hard rock tone I've ever heard, especially if used in tandem with an overdrive, boost, or distortion pedal. Its clean setting is much louder than the Bandmaster's, so if I am playing outdoors or in a really large room without the aid of the PA then I am wanting that Bassman.

In the same vein as the Bassman, I have a tweed 5E3 model Deluxe amplifier clone, built by Carl's Custom Amps in Arizona. At the time this amp was built Fender had no similar amp in current production. Now Fender makes a '57 Deluxe reissue. It is the amp that made me fall in love with the tweed side of the Fender tonal spectrum. It is a combo amp that contains the amplifier and a speaker in the same cabinet. The cabinet is made of super light pine and the speaker is a Weber 12A150 alnico magnet 12" speaker. It is very easy to carry around. It is a very finicky amp, as it is the ultimate "too loud and too quiet" amplifier. The amp has 12 settings for its controls. It has clean tone on 1 or 2 but then begins to distort from 3 on up. On 12 it sounds like it is going to melt. Think Neil Young's tone on "Like a Hurricane," as that is Neil's vintage Deluxe cranked and in full collapse. With 12w of tube power you would think that it is 1/3 to 1/4 of the volume of the Bandmaster or Bassman, but decibels and watts behave in powers of 10. A 100w amplifier is twice as loud as a 10w amplifier. While the Bandmaster and Bassman rigs are louder than the Deluxe, it is not a night and day difference, more like the Deluxe is 90% as loud. It has more to do with tonal differences and amounts of distortion. And it also has to do with multiple speakers instead of the single speaker in the Deluxe. That said, the Deluxe is either barely on, a very small spot on the dial that is rehearsal volume clean, and then LOUD distortion that only gets more

more one turns it up. It is a very easy amp to get a good rock and roll rhythm guitar sound from. Turn all the knobs straight up and go. It is only enough for the smallest of rooms, and I use mine mostly for band practice, recording, and sometimes for shows when I know I need to have low stage volume.

Another amp I use when I need to better control stage volume is a Mesa Boogie Mark I reissue head. Of all my amps it has perhaps the most ability to dial in clean and distortion at a variety of volume levels because it splits the volume control into preamp and power amp settings. You can make the preamp distort but then use the power amp setting to keep the overall volume low. Or keep the preamp completely clean and turn the master up to have a loud clean base. The Mark I runs at a full 100w but can be used in half power setting that uses two of its four power tubes and lowers the wattage to 60dB. It doesn't make much of a difference. It does have a "tweed" setting which lowers the voltages sent to the tubes. This allows the amp to use smaller, less efficient power tubes in 44w or 22w half power. That does make a difference on the overall output volume. The Mark I is a hot rodded Fender Twin circuit. It has a hotter preamp for more distortion and instead of having the typical Fender mid scoop the Mark I has a prominent mid-forward tone. Aggressively so. I used this amplifier for years onstage and in recordings with my Texas band The Ex-Optimists. It is a bit of a blunt object in that it is loud but over time I began to find the basic tone not as appealing as the Fender amplifiers. These days the only time I bring out the Mesa is when I REALLY need to watch stage volume.

What happens if I have one of the other amps out at a show and I run into a sound engineer that is adamant my amp is too loud? I break out a Vox MV50AC from my gig bag. It is a palm-sized hybrid amplifier. It has a tube preamp and a Class D solid state power amp. It is very light and small enough to be carried in my gig bag, yet it runs 12w to 50w of power depending on the speaker cabinet ohms rating. It too, like the Mesa, has a master volume and can run at a wide variety of volumes. Unlike the Fenders, it has a different EQ range and is more mids and highs forward than the Fender tonality. It is modeled after the Vox AC15 and AC30 amps. It is not an apples to apples comparison. But in a pinch I can plug it into the speaker cabinet in lieu of whatever tube amp I've brought with me and can let me get through the gig in peace, even if I don't feel like I sound right.

I have two other amplifiers that are more for fun or for very specific uses. I recently purchased a Mahaffay Hilo amplifier head. It is like the Vox in that it is a tube and solid state hybrid. It is meant

to be a late 60s Marshall "plexi" type amplifier at a much more controllable volume. It is that. It has that Marshall high end sizzle and plenty of distortion. It does not cop the edge of breakup clean sound that Marshalls also have. This amp requires one to "underdrive" it, that is to lessen the amount of input that goes into it. Unless, of course, I wish it to have that monster gain rock guitar sound and then it does that quite well. This is not an amplifier that I see myself ever playing live, unless I find myself in a band where I'm just loud without tonal or volume variation.

The other "extra" amplifier I have is a mid 2000's Fender Custom Vibrolux Reverb. It is an amplifier in a speaker cabinet with two Weber 10F125 ceramic 10" speakers. It is based tonally on the brown panel era Fender tonality but with a hotrodded preamp designed to hit distortion earlier in the volume curve. It has been modified to limit noise and to give more clean volume. It has onboard reverb and tremolo and, other than the reverb in the Mesa, none of my other amps have that. It was purchased to be a "grab and go" option for band rehearsal and for shows where cartage space is at a premium. This amplifier sounds great at low volume and works well onstage. It has a great clean sound under mic at home, but is a bit harsh when using guitar pedal drive and distortion.

There are times when I need the sound of an amplifier and don't need to use or can't use an amplifier. For these instances I use a Strymon Iridium. It is a guitar pedal and not an amplifier at all. It uses similar impulse response technology to emulate mic'ed speaker cabinets and digital technology to emulate the preamp tones of a generic Fender, Vox, and Marshall amp. It does a remarkable job with these emulations, though the front end of the pedal does not behave exactly like an amplifier. In an instance where having only a line level output is needed this pedal is ideal. When I play singer/songwriter shows rather than carry an acoustic guitar to plug into a PA I use an electric guitar and plug into the Iridium and then into the PA. It gives the sound engineer complete control of the mix. I use the Iridium for recording when I need to record demos or music for work videos. I recently saw NYC metal band Castle Rat play live through an Iridium and another such amp emulator pedal and in the 200 person club setting it sounded these pedals sounded like real guitar amplifiers. This is the wave of the future for live guitar tone, but it requires more control to be ceded to the sound engineer, and not every small venue has the flexibility or the PA to handle such an approach. And, well, loud guitar amps are just fun. Live rock and roll is meant to be loud and for the time-being I'm gonna continue to be a holdout for amplifier worship. — KELLY MENACE



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MOLE PEOPLE

J.R.R. Tolkien fought in WWI, "the War to End All Wars, 17 million deaths. He endured his son Christopher fighting the Nazis in WWII, 85 million deaths. There must have been moments the daily onslaught of horrors seemed overwhelming. There are parallels to what we're suffering through, albeit on a smaller scale for now. I take heart in Tolkien's words from *The Lord of the Rings* "... in the end, the Shadow was only a small and passing thing; there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach." — MIKE L. DOWNEY

It's hard to be seen, by those who squint, looking for imperfections, instead of the greater whole. — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



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RECORD REVIEWS



Invasion Boys
Pole First

A search of my CDS turned up six previous releases by Invasion Boys, the solo non de plume for the prolific Kelly Menace*. These recordings are the tunes (half a hundred so far) he says don't fit with the numerous bands he's played in over the years. Personally, I look forward to them for the eclecticism.

Pole First surprises in its cohesiveness though. You just never know. Sure, I might have liked another quirky "Black Sabbath Towncar Driver" or rhythmic "My Lightning Years" – even an unexpected cover like the Steve Earle, but this Invasion Boys hones in on the basics: solid rock and telling lyrics. It's hard to complain about that.

"So Unkind" and "You Come Running" are brooding melancholy looks at friendships that fall away while "Here We Go" is a searing burst of anger at our national dumpster fire. The thoughtful "ctrl-alt-del" is followed by the glorious "Everyday Rocknroll is Saving My Life" which is just as good as its title suggests.

Check it out on the ever-diverse equal and inclusive Sinkhole Texas Inc. Records.

*(yes, the editor of this publication – and yes, I paid for the cd and received no compensation for this review, so there.) – MIKE L. DOWNEY



Ministry
The Squirrelly Years

After all these years us Ministry fans finally got one of the things we had always wanted – better recordings of some of the catchier tunes from the band's early days when they were much less the heavy industrial juggernauts they became and were more glam synth pop than anything else. This has long been a source of controversy for fans and the band alike much akin to the those early Pantera albums when they were more glam rock and glitter than the in your face brutal tough guy metal they became known for. For years there has been speculation about whether Ministry would ever acknowledge the albums much less if they would ever possibly re-record some of them with even a hint of their later heavier flair.

After years of speculation, a few final tours and albums, and a bit of misrepresentation Ministry has done just that – for better or worse. I say it this way for a number of reasons, some of which I feel need to be ranted about. The album comes from those lovable cash-grab based folks Cleopatra Records which seems to take pride in letting the consumer know – they don't care about the quality of the end product so much as there is a recognizable name attached to it and that they can make the records as cheaply as possible. Not that records need to have major financing behind them, but you can tell when someone cares about the quality of a final product. A mere glance at the

record's deluxe packaging or regular cover will make the case loud and clear with it's use of generic clip-art and age old meme images from the early days of the internet – for example the large nutted squirrel found on the back album art or the boner squirrel of the cover.

More so, to say it leaves one wanting anything else is an understatement and makes the listener fear actually listening to said record. I know they say "never judge a book by its cover" but it's pretty damn hard in some occasions and this is most certainly one of those occasions. The album was rumored to be coming down the proverbial pipeline for a while now and had a lot of people excited as we get close to yet another announced "final tour and album". Among the hype was that long rumored and recently talked about involvement of longtime member, bassist and co-conspirator Paul Barker of Lead into Gold, Revolting Cocks, and more. This however, unfortunately turned out to be untrue for this record though Barker is slated to appear and be involved with the band's forthcoming "final" album currently slated for a 2026 release and supporting tour. It was to be a return to form that would see the band coming back swinging while not only acknowledging these previously "forbidden" tunes but bringing new heavier life to them for a new audience and providing the answer for many long term fan's greatest Ministry what-if.

However, after taking that all into account and giving the album a solid listen through a few times it becomes clear that these reworkings and re-recordings are much more than the shallow cash grab the beyond lame album art and partnership with Cleopatra make it out to be. The songs shine in their own right as renewed gems that are worthy of a listen or twenty. Personal

noteworthy reworks are "Revenge", "Work for love", "I'm not an effigy" & "We believe". Hell even the latest recording of "Everyday is Halloween" which has to be closing in on the double-digits of re-re-recordings feels at home here and not completely worn out and tired as it should at this point. As for the personnel involved in this re-imagining it's honestly hard to tell via the internet w/o physically holding a copy which let's be honest – probably doesn't tell you either. Nonetheless, this record deserves to be listened to at full volume for all to hear as it's the music that makes the record ultimately and not the cover – though oooof what a bad cover – for another good example of what not to do with a records album art just look to Black Flag's 2013 and current last release *What The...!* Talk about brutal!!! All things considered it's another solid Ministry record and one of the better cash-grabs churned out shamelessly by the overlords at Cleopatra. The future may seem short with only "one more" record slated to be released next year before calling it quits, but who knows maybe Al & Paul will have so much fun they record a couple extra at the same time and continue to surprise us down the line! One can only hope!!

The band is currently slated to embark on an international tour in support of the *Squirrelly Year Revisited* - with support from fellow genre legends and peers Nitzer Ebb, My Life with the Thrill Kill Kult, and Die Krupps. This tour is certainly one that is sure to leave fans clambering for more and will see the band finally bringing their long hidden synth pop origins into the fold with their much heavier mainstream staples, thusly bringing it all together once and for all. – WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

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