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free. take one.

the dirtbag times



*inside: caring is cool - 2025 world series redux -
micromusing - mail call - creepy horse has a
complication - pedal pushing*



the dirtbag times is a
magazine for dirtbags
by dirtbags.

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Last month millions across the country turned out to participate in the second round of No Kings protests. By most accounts it seems that the desire for Americans to take to the streets and give voice to their concerns has increased significantly since the first round of protests in June. My family can be included in the number of folks who did not participate the first time but did so for the second round.

I am no stranger to public demonstrations. I have protested against war, for AIDS/HIV research, against racism, in support of troops returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, for science/STEM funding, against white supremacy, and for abortion rights. But I was hesitant to protest in the current climate, especially in the wake of Charlie Kirk's murder. For starters, I wasn't sure that it would do any good. Saying something sucks loudly does not have the impact of someone actually having a plan to do something about what sucks. I find protests to preach to the converted rather than to those who need to hear it the most. But in the weeks leading up to the second No Kings marches something was different. Many career activists told me they could "feel" that No Kings II was going to be different. When I voiced my concerns they agreed with my sentiment, but they replied that it doesn't matter if those things are true. Our times are extraordinary and whether or not protest may be performative they can also be uplifting, inspiring, sanity-preserving, and can create new networks of communication.

But also, perhaps most important, what these activists were hearing in the wind was that the usual suspects were going to be joined by a LOT of first time protesters and folks who were speaking out from the other side of the political divide. Folks who voted for the current regime but have had voters' remorse. People who are dismayed and moved to say something publicly about it. It is hard not to have felt some momentum on the streets of middle America that Saturday. But it was also very white and aged Gen X and up. The kids did not come out. My kids, both ensconced in college, did not protest. One told me that his friends think protest is cringe. Sloganeering is self-congratulatory and does not forward the revolution.

That is not wrong exactly, as that is a mirror held up to my Gen X characteristics. Irony, sarcasm, whipsmarts, emotional distance, etc. Protest does no good. No one cares. The regime and their bootlickers consider us cringe at the very least. "Well, of course America doesn't have kings, otherwise you couldn't protest!" A veterans activist organizer told me recently that it is going to take a lot of Americans stepping out of their comfort zones to move this country out of its current state. People who are afraid, people who

CARING IS COOL

have never done this before, people who are way too [fill in the blank]. People who are not afraid to publicly demonstrate that they *care* about immigrants, trans people, black lives, poor people, the very foundation of our government and society.

Americans are now starting to feel the pressure of the second Trump administration. Many in our society lack the imagination to empathize with others based on what we think something like that might feel like for ourselves. Many Americans need a direct connection to an issue to feel something about it. It is why the conservative right has lost on marriage rights for multiracial couples and gay couples. In the 1960s one had to *imagine* not being married to the person you loved because it was illegal. By the 2010's nearly everyone knew a multiracial or gay couple. As the net of the Trump regime widens it is not hard to know someone fired, laid off, or furloughed from a government job; someone wrongfully detained by Immigration and Custom Enforcement; someone who still had hurricane damage waiting on FEMA aid; someone whose crops lay fallow in the fields because of the tariff and trade war; someone laid off from tech work, from construction, from the service industry, or because they said something on social media that politicians didn't like. Americans are scared, Americans are angry, and Americans are *paying attention* more than they have in quite some time. They are writing emails and making phone calls. They are going to the few town hall meetings braver politicians are holding. The right is paying attention too. Not so much yet that they are beginning to walk away from their leadership, but they can feel that same wind that my activist friends have felt. The Trump administration is deeply unpopular even with those that voted for it. This month's elections prove it.

That is not to say that change has come. It has not. Many Americans still do their best to ignore the news, keep their heads down, and go about their business as normally as they can manage. They can ignore the empathetic voice inside. Their lives are small enough that they have yet to feel that personal connection. We are into the second month of the government shutdown and folks haven't been paid for their work. Most insured Americans have gone through their open enrollments and have seen their premiums doubled, tripled, and beyond. The East Wing of the White House lies in ruins. Tariffs have driven costs sky high. The President and Congress refuse to find SNAP benefits even after the courts have compelled them to do so. ICE has turned cities into the surreal combination of war zone and cosplay party. America is slowly reaching the point that it cannot continue to not care. The net is growing too wide. What comes next? We will have to see what this month holds. But I have a feeling that as the net grows, the protest will grow as well. — KELLY MENACE

MICROMUSING 1

Grime and sweat
a swollen bitter lip,
A pain that can't be felt,
for the cut is too deep.
There is no blood,
for the cut is too deep...
Another empty cup
from trying to fill,
a still beating empty heart
with a tap pouring from itself.
The Snake eats its own tail,
yet it still eats...
A lump of coal for a soul,
that's been through hell & back.
Ashes on everything,
for the soot always comes.
No comfort but silence,
from those you need most
when you need them most.
Dust around the display items
keeping the pictures in view
yet the larger picture's still
out of frame and focus..
Someone else's thoughts
pinned to your sleeve...
an unanswered mental fax
from a number long since lost
Cryptic static of self worth
arising and subsiding like the tides
against a background of nothings
No one wants the things they can see...
No one wants the wounds they didn't earn...
but someone else always digs the scars...
Loss of self to the loudest critics,
Semantics dance like something
that almost means something
to a stranger passing by for a min
much like a translucent soul
dancing in it's glass gas tube of now.
A lantern hangs outside the tavern
The flame dances & entices
where logic seldom suffices
there's always God given vices.
— WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

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The caterwauling from the Fuhrer Felon administration continues unabated in its shrillness, but despite it all, America continues.

Workers are still showing up for their jobs. Students are still going to school. Goods are still available for purchase, online and in-person. Restaurants are still open. Grocery stores still have food on the shelves.

Nearly a year of bludgeoning hasn't wrecked (except the East Wing) what makes this country great. Democracy has so many faults (obviously), but the majority of Americans will eventually come to their senses.

It's only a matter of time.
— MIKE L. DOWNEY



AH, MY BOYS IN BLUE: WHY THE 2025 WORLD SERIES FELT LIKE HOME

Baseball was, is and always will be to me the best game in the world. — Steve Garvey

Growing up when I did, I have often yearned for those predictable Dodgers rosters: Garvey at first, Lopes at second, Russell making shortstop look like the easiest job in baseball, and “The Penguin,” Cey at third base. In the outfield — any combination of Rick Monday, Lee Lacy, Dusty Baker, and Reggie Smith. You knew what you were getting every time you turned on the game... or better yet, walked into the park. You wore your cap, you cheered the plays, you went home with your heart full.

Fast forward several years to the past week and the 2025 World Series with the Los Angeles Dodgers and the Toronto Blue Jays. I wasn’t just rooting for a team, I was rooting for *us*, for that kid who knew the names of the infield like they were part of the family. For the idea that baseball fans are like a real-life family. For the chance to feel like a little kid again, believing that your team could win it all.

From the get-go, the series had signs of being something special. The Jays and Dodgers didn’t just field a bunch of players — they fielded *teams*. Guys showing up for each other. Making plays for one another. Believing in, well, in baseball..

Historic firsts everywhere:

- In Game 1, Toronto’s pinch hitter Addison Barger cranked the first ever pinch-hit grand slam in World Series history.
- In Game 3 the Dodgers won after 18 innings—a marathon that tied the record for longest World Series game ever.
- In Game 7 the Dodgers clinched 5-4 in the 11th inning—with Will Smith launching the first extra-inning homer in a winner-take-all World Series game.
- And up on the mound, Yoshinobu Yamamoto became the first pitcher to grab three wins in a World Series since Randy Johnson in 2001; he earned MVP honors too.
- Also: the Dodgers became the first team to repeat as champions since the 2000 Yankees—and the first NL team to do so since 1976.

If you’re seeing stats, records, landmarks — it was a treasure trove. But more than the numbers, what I carried with me afterwards: tons of *feels*. Sure, it wasn’t the infield brigade of my childhood, but that same feeling of belonging returned. Because when the pitching lines blur and the hits pile up, what matters is the group. The collective.

I wasn’t just watching: I was remembering. The smell of Dodger Dogs in a packed stadium, the crack of the bat, the afternoon sun peeking from behind the Jumbotron. Family vacations to L.A.

for back-to-back homestands. The roar of the crowd as Garvey scooped a throw, or Lopes turned a double play. I *felt* that rush again when Freeman crushed a walk-off homer in Game 3. I *felt* it when the Dodgers dug themselves out of Game 7’s ninth-inning hole — Miguel Rojas tying it up, Smith sending it home. The rituals, the shared heartbeat, the *we*.

That’s what this series did — it reminded me why I love baseball. Because yes, in the grand scheme of things, it’s *just a game*. But sometimes, that is enough. When everything else feels unpredictable, the ball sailing through the air, the crowd standing, the home team breathing as one — it gives you hope. It gives you delight.

I was born a Dodger fan and I imagine that I will bleed Dodger Blue until my dying breath, but watching Toronto, I didn’t want them to lose. I mean, I was rooting for the Dodgers, without a doubt, but I could root for Toronto’s grit, and hustle, and teamwork too. I could appreciate how they showed up for each other time and time again. And, yes, the Dodgers have the money to get most any player they want ... but money doesn’t turn a bunch of players into a team. Sure, you’ve got your big name stars like Ohtani, but you also had Rojas with the tying run in Game 7, and Wroblewski and Sheehan who threw scoreless innings in the same game. All of it ... Dodgers and Blue Jays together made me proud — proud for the game, proud for the nature of teamwork. It wasn’t “me” vs “you.” It was “us”.

And now? Now I’m left with the ninth title in Dodgers history, a repeat world championship at last, and a feeling that maybe the world can still get lost in something pure for a while. Not forever. But for those seven games, for those innings stretching into the night, we believed in the ball, the field, the chance.

Here’s to every youngster who learned the names Garvey, Lopes, Russell, Cey. Here’s to every adult who remembers their first game. Here’s to us—still wearing the cap, still believing in the team. Because sometimes a baseball team is more than a team. It’s a link to our past, a friend in the present, and a reminder that even when the days feel heavy, we can still cheer. Loudly. Together.

Thanks, Dodgers. Thanks, Blue Jays. For the nights we needed, for the innings that stretched our hearts, and for bringing us home — back to the diamond, back to the joy, back to believing.

I’m still a fan for life. And because of you, I still believe. — **PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER**

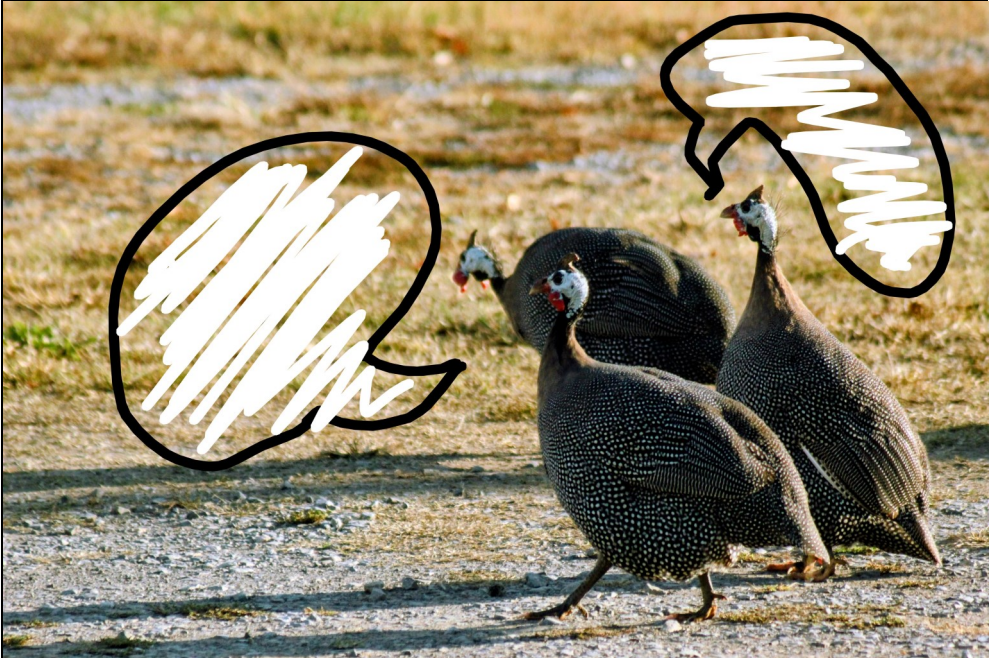


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WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



CREEPY HORSE HAS A COMPLICATION

"There's only one Keith Richards", I told myself as I looked back on my life choices while power shitting a liquid diet after drinking a half gallon of laxative for my upcoming colonoscopy. I've had five colonoscopies, some even with endoscopies. I am a first-degree relative to someone with colorectal cancer before the age of 65. In June, I found out I had an enlarged liver. A colonoscopy was scheduled, as colorectal cancer can affect the liver, as well as an enlarged liver, more so cirrhosis of the liver, can be a sign of cancer, so my doctor was sure to get me scheduled. My choice in the matter is not having colorectal cancer. The only cures for my ills is not more cowbell, but I must surrender the livelihood of dumbfuckery. Dumbfuckery is great. I loved eating whatever the crap I found at a gas station. I loved being a drunk asshole. Spending five to seven days a week in the bar scene, being a regular. I didn't quit doing shit because one day I had fucking willpower or was ever like "You know what I should do? Stop putting drugs in my nose"

No. Everything was a horrible painful lesson. I really used to believe that I would do drugs until I died. I wanted the lifestyle and was pretty good at it. When would I die? Not soon enough, depending on my mood. Nothing felt as good as being drunk and coked out on a dance floor, eyes closed and just feeling alone in the music as it booms all around you. From the age of 12, music gave me an out from a life I never wanted to live in the first place. My first punk rock show I was thrown in the pit and never looked back. For once I had a tribe. I had someone that cared. For all the feelings of abandonment and fear, drugs and alcohol filled those voids. I had it down. I knew how much meth I could do before work. Shrooms would help with the come down. Drinks after work, cocaine baggie in the bathroom and on to someone's house for an afterparty. I could do three day benders in my prime.

This week I had four breadsticks at Olive Garden and felt like I was constipated with a football. I used to be the baddest bitch in the scene and now a baguette can fuck me up for two days. It's hard. The Ego. I remember someone telling me they were disappointed I quit (meth/blow) because I "lost my edge". My reaction was fuck you. People find it cooler for me to die than to live a long healthy life. You have to grow out of it. I remember once going to a show with a woman that was a predecessor to the punk scene in Houston, she was one of the original Urban

Animals. I went as her guest to see a band that wrote a song about her back in her Urban Animals days. The women at the show had no idea that this tiny, adorable, unsuspecting woman was part of an avant-garde proto art-punk collective that skated around 1970's Houston jousting men with hockey sticks and skating the streets late at night. No, the women took to shoving and acting jealous that a band was serenading this woman and putting the spotlight on her. These were women in their 60s-70s. Calm down, Clara May. It pissed me off. I was watching 60 years olds act like 20 year olds over fucking guys.

So now I'm in my growing up stage because well, punk rock ages about as well as gas station sushi. It's like in *Anchorman* when they talk about going to the same party for years. Now it's funny to me when people question my being a drinker or a druggie! That being said, taking care of yourself is hard. Especially when all you've ever tried to do is slowly kill yourself.

Back to the colonoscopy. I had just started my 24 hour liquid diet before taking the laxatives when I found out one of my friends died. I did drugs with her. I did a lot of shit with her. I once had her punch me in the face when I puked in her car, drunk. You know, I think it's crazy that as addicts we love to have someone "worse than us" around. I was probably that friend to her. We were crazy when we hung out. Like dousing a fire with gasoline. I had distanced myself from her and just about everyone in my attempts at getting clean and sober. It wasn't them, it was me. In the time it has taken me to get clean and sober, I have lost nearly 40 people to drugs, alcohol and the complications they cause. Two days later I'd find out another friend had passed away from cirrhosis a couple years back.

Like most addicts, we don't die IN our addiction. It's after. Long after. When life goes on and you are finally getting it together. Amy Winehouse didn't die in the height of her addiction, it was in her sobriety she tried to drink like she did as an addict. My friend was clean when she died. Unfortunately her heart was too damaged from years of cocaine and meth. She had finally kicked her habit and was getting in shape for the military. Days before she abruptly passed, she was taking pictures in the gym, flexing. She had found comfort in the Christian faith and was saved. She had a little girl she was doing all of this for and life decided it was time.

It's the day of the procedure and I've been up since 6AM finishing the last of my laxative when the nurse calls. They need me to come in four hours early as they ran out of patients. I'm so scared I'm going to projectile shit myself riding the train over there, I bring wet wipes just in case. I've got this real sweet kid from my school with

me. He's my plus one so I can go home safely after anesthesia. He's just turned 21 and I'm paying him in weed to get me home safely. When we arrive, I think they mistook him as my child and told him he could go into my room with me. We both agree my doctor is creepy and most likely a pornographer from Eastern Europe. He's creepy, doesn't understand personal space and has a handlebar mustache. I'm in the room waiting to undergo my sedation and watching them inject my IV line.

I awake with the doctor four inches from my face asking if I'm awake. "Of course I am!" I state, awaiting the findings of my exam. "Well you weren't" the doctor replies in his thick accent. He tells me my colonoscopy was aborted because I began twitching, my heart rate went to 140 bpm and I was unresponsive for 30-40 minutes. He then says I need to see my psychologist. Not what you expect to hear after a procedure as mine, "We were just watching the TLC channel in your asshole and decided you need to see a psychologist." I was told to follow-up and reschedule. Ten minutes before I was life or death, ten minutes later I'm just fine cause the doctors are ready to go. The next thing I remember is sitting at a burger joint ten minutes after that, eating french fries and drinking a Pepsi. Yeah 21 year old boys aren't the best at making sure you eat right after a medical procedure.

The thing is, when I woke up with the doctor all in my face, I couldn't have told you my life had been in peril or that I'd had any troubles aside from the huge chomp I took out of my tongue while I was feeling experienced. Nothing in my body told me I had been in trouble. It was that quick. It's funny how much of my life was a death wish. I wanted to die for decades and couldn't ever succeed, thank god. Now I go in for a routine procedure trying to take care of myself, to get my asshole filmed and almost die because my meds don't work with the anesthesia. Who almost dies in a colonoscopy? Sometimes you just have to laugh or you might just cry. — *CREEPY HORSE*

MICROMUSING 2

THE POLITICS OF REST

Rest rationed, policed, and exploited. We are told that we have to earn it, to buy it, to mark it in our schedules after our obligations.

But rest is our birthright. Rest is a refusal to let productivity dictate worth. To let our bodies recover and heal.

Our culture worships exhaustion. So, choosing to rest is an act of resistance. "My body is not a machine" and "I will not measure my value in deadlines, emails, or the hustle."

Rest reminds us that cycles of sleep, of seasons, of breath are natural, necessary, and non-negotiable.

Rest is reclaiming rhythm from the clock, insisting that life is not a spreadsheet.

The politics of rest are simple but radical:

- Rest is collective care. When one person presses pauses, it gives others permission to press pause too.
- Rest is refusal. It interrupts exploitation.
- Rest is memory. It connects us to ancestors who dreamed, resisted, and survived. Who created us.
- Rest is future. It plants seeds of joy, creativity, and rebellion.

Rest is not laziness.

Rest is strategy.

Rest is survival.

Rest is power.

Rest is important.

Go take a nap.

— *TISHIA JACKSON*

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FURY OF THE MOTH

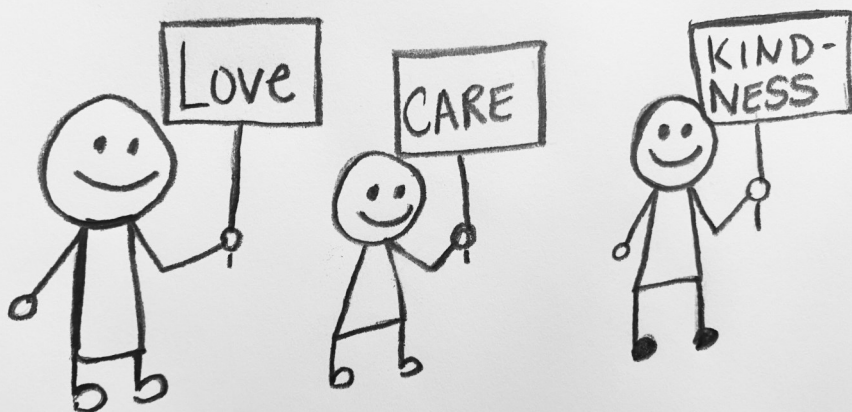
Moth because you want to
Moth because you need to
Moth because you can
Moth because you are
Moth because you care
Moth be with you
Moth be with them..
Moth always sees the light
Moth will eat the comforts neglected...
Moths and flames
like dancing in the rain
are best in the moment.

— *WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON*

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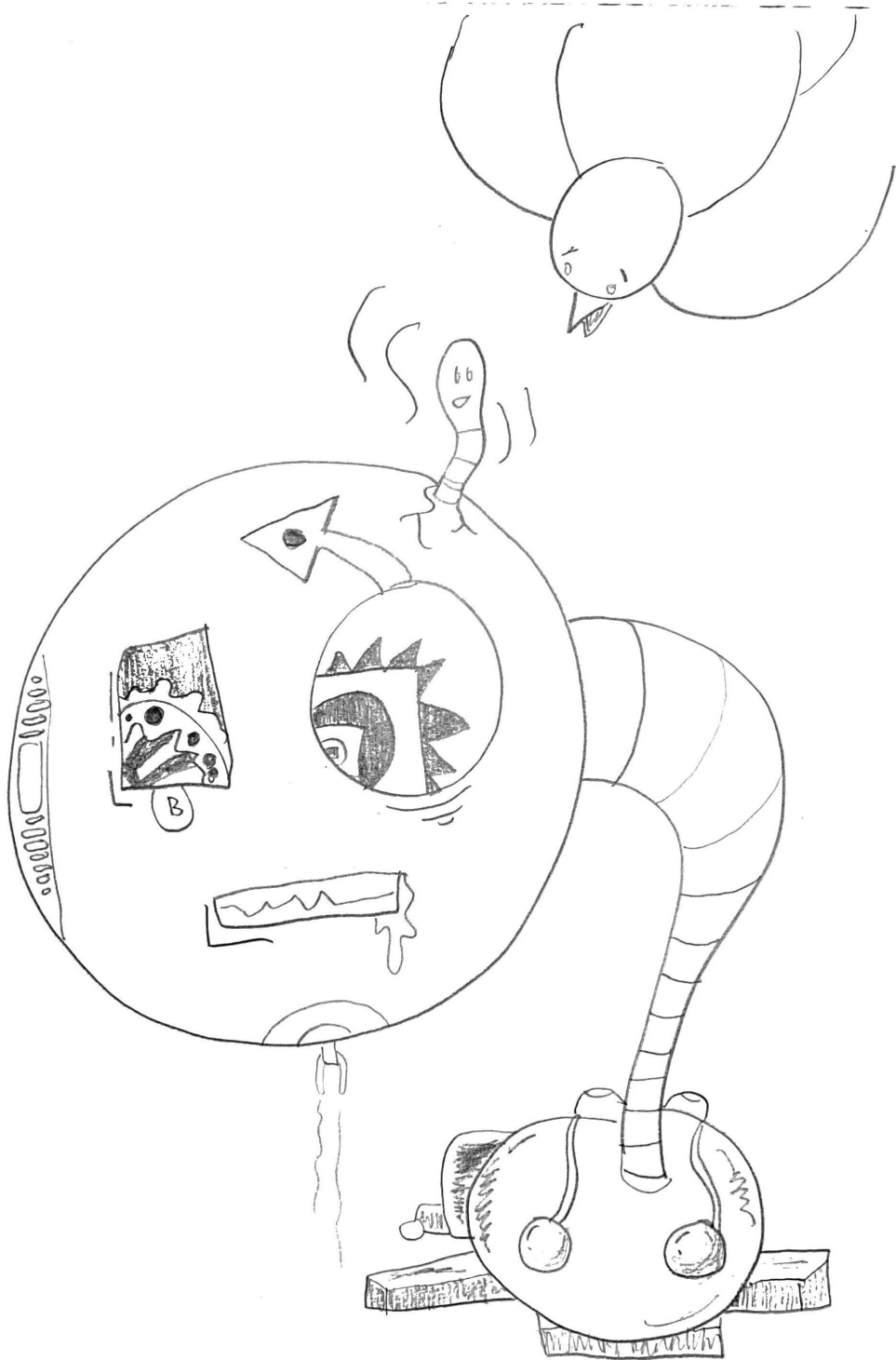


TISHIA JACKSON

"Kindness is not weakness. Caring is sabotage. Empathy is rebellion. Solidarity is the crack in their concrete."

Every time we choose compassion, we jam the gears of their machine. Division is their profit model. Connection is our counterattack.

The revolution doesn't start with fire. The revolution starts with listening."



WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

MAIL CALL: CHAINSAW SYNPHANY

The long awaited experimental alternative acoustic full-length debut album *WE DID THIS INSTEAD?* from CS?VIO; Will Thompson aka Chainsaw Synphany and Adan Gonzales aka Victory Is Ours released through Fuck the Mainstream Records recently turned 15 and I thought now was a good a time as any to take a quick little look back on it, the band, and some killer tunes that shit have yet to ever fully get their due. The enigmatic duo was both art and living cartoon absurdity. The band always changed their name per release and did random one off shows in the most unlikely of places including an over the top acoustic house party performance at the house of some cartel dudes' place by request! This record was a soulful and colorful release that saw the band pursue a different direction sound wise than previously intended for their full length debut. Originally conceived of as being a juggernaut Texas styled Industrial album as one the early release tunes "Chainsaw Synphany Victory is Ours" and "Where Yo Hat?" which were aimed at the original vision a record in that vain with the title "Texas Thang". One thing led to another and the guys ended up having a blast while making it in the process while experimenting with the sounds and substances. The record was recorded in Kingsville, TX at the guys' studio/pad on the main strip near the University. This record was made after the guys relocated South to Kingsville as Will attended college and the guys got their other projects going as well somewhere new. The bulk being recorded in winter and spring. The record was mostly cut in a couple months time while the dudes worked at a club and print shop in town together while developing the bands and brands. It was wrapped ultimately in a year with a fall release. All these things together came to culminate to the title of "We Did This Instead?" Did you know that rumor has it that if you listen closely enough you can even hear the bong being played!

Stacy Vasquez, formerly of Cinema of Fear, F.T.M, and Sistine Ceiling, makes a cameo on drums on the song "LATE" which is also the only song that made the record with drums and helps make a splash when enjoying the audio journey as it is. Also contained on the album among its soundscapes towards the end are a handful of carefully fun crafted acoustic covers of tunes from; Ween, My Drug Hell, Dwarves, and Fuckemos. The audio journey is a unique and pleasurable one filled with lots of raw passion, doobie, and charm. By this point the band's name had already changed from full form joint name to abbreviated CS/VIO, CS?VIO, CS¿VIO, including



some capital letter variants for added measure to keep the fun and absurdity of the project and its spirit. The ever evasive tuna so to speak. There was a full band recording of "Drips" with drums, and the whole nine yards that was roughly mixed and intended for the deluxe version one day, but it was ultimately lost – with some super rare rough versions floating around on unlabeled CD-R's allegedly.

Stand out tracks like "Winter High", "Gravity" – a tune that makes the gravity bong sound like a

metaphor for a heavy life lived. "Skin the Cat" a fun genre bending instrumental that while soothing ears keeps the feet tapping to their own unique beat. The acoustic covers all stand out strongly on their own right. With two "Girl at the Bus Stop" and "Do Ya Wanna Dance?" receiving a nod of approval and kind words from the original artists. The end live improv jam "Free Associative Thought" seals the deal and makes the record wrap up and feel like you're there hanging with the guys taking bong hits in a sketchy shed out back. A video of which is available for

viewing on the YouTubes if that sort of thing tickles your fancy. Happy hunting!"We Did This Instead?" stands out 15 years later as unique as ever, and if anything just as important for people to hear, especially musicians who are feeling trapped by the social rigidity of genres and scenes. Let loose, be yourself, create, be free, and enjoy man. The sounds are lo-fi, and while not a Grammy winning break out this record is without a doubt a slow roasting delicious audio stew steadily slow cooking and ahead of it's time as the world waits to catch up to their level. Fans of Ween, Tenacious D, Flight of the Concorde, and the likes should easily feel a connection with CS?VIO now Rotoscoped. Now that that's out of the way, why not do yourself a favor and treat yourself to something still very fresh and different after all these years – WE DID THIS INSTEAD? By CS?VIO. You'll be glad ya did! Perfect for long drives, walks, late night sessions, or any other damn time. Pack a bowl and sing along! Perfect for headphones, and surround sound systems. Download includes bonus content. Enjoy ya lovely bastiches! – KING MOTH

LISTEN:

Youtube: https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_lg_cQvetW0RQ5B1_7GfW-iAYqxwdpHhV0&si=biBkS04NknQZxhHG

Spotify: https://open.spotify.com/album/6swWJQ3DAuFTtuPstSEfVE?si=0zbu96NRIumxhaA6_IY-A

Amazon: https://amazon.com/music/player/albums/B012UE1OJO?marketplaceId=ATVPDKIKX0DER&musicTerritory=US&ef=dm_sh_wBo78VjmS1xn5DQKZJjUyKITF

Apple Music: <https://music.apple.com/us/album/we-did-this-instead/1016926721>

Tidal: <https://tidal.com/album/48321560/u>

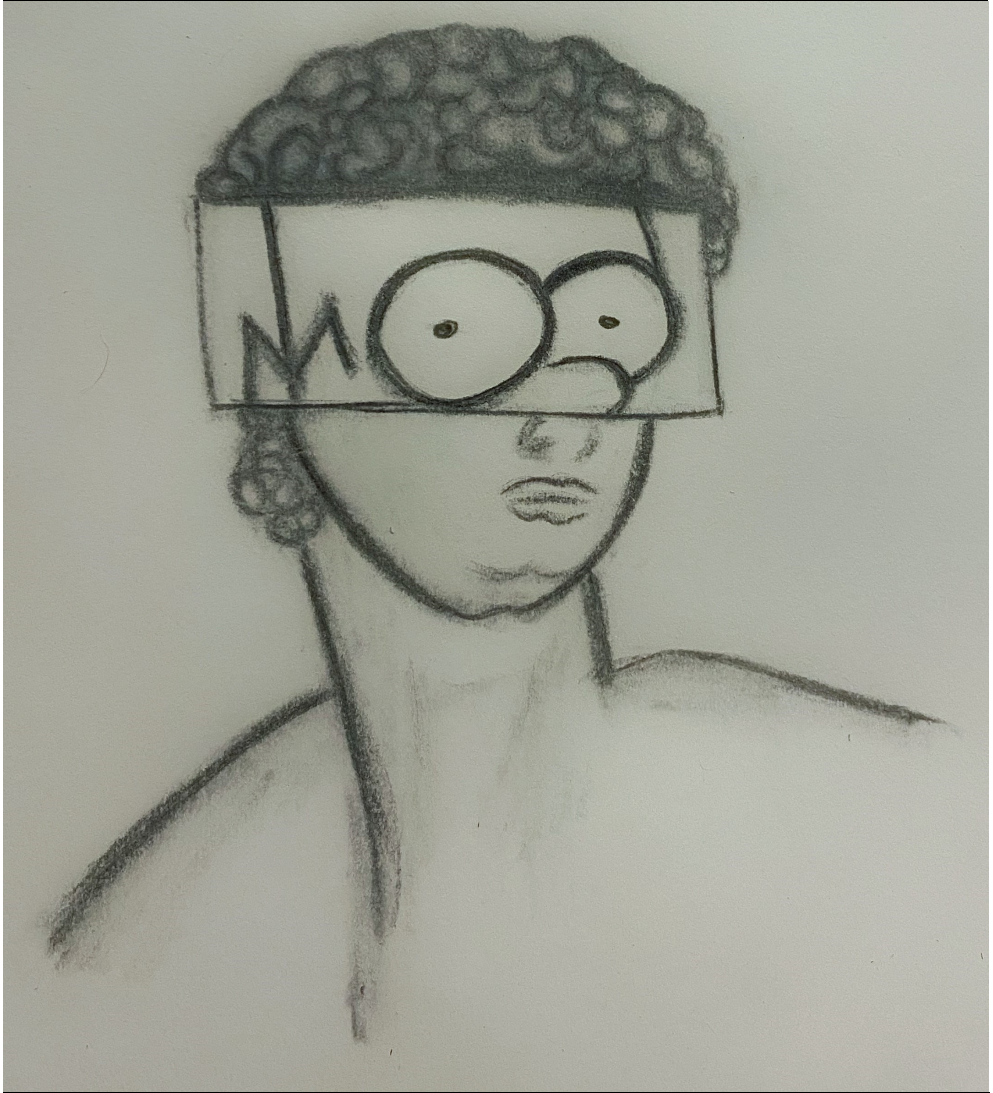
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TISHIA JACKSON



WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

Earlier this year I attended the Asheville Guitar Show. I had a few bones to spend and was looking to bring something home, but as always happens in situations like that, you never see anything you can afford or want or need. As I was on the very last aisle on my way out of the trade show I heard some metal pinch harmonics and saw a guy wailing on an 80s Fender Super Strat and as I got closer saw what he was playing through and I instantly headed over.

I had read about Mahaffay Amps on the gear forums. This particular amp dude was playing, the Hilowatt, has a tiny but loyal following amongst players looking for cranked Marshall toanz at lower volumes. I had a saved search on Reverb for one of these amps and was shocked to see one out in the wild. I stopped and talked with the rep for a bit, who actually lives locally in Asheville. We talked for a little bit and I had him wrap one up for me. I bought it without even playing through it.

So what is it exactly? It is a hybrid tube/solid state guitar amplifier, but not in the way hybrids are usually done. In this case, there is a tube preamp (one ECC82), a tube power amp (one ECC83S), and a 30w solid state "reamplifier". It has controls for gain, master volume, and tone, has an FX loop, and an overall channel boost switch for choosing brit or hi gain modes. This particular version is a head that adapts to 4-16 ohm speaker loads but there is also a combo version that houses a 6 1/2" speaker. The manufacturer's literature claims that it has manageable volume from whisper-quiet to stage-ready punch. This isn't entirely hyperbole, but it also isn't entirely true.

One has to start with what sort of Marshall Plexi tone one has in mind. For some Marshall means CRUNCHY SCREAMING HARD ROCK/METAL but for most who have ever actually played a Plexi amp, those amps usually don't have that kind of gain unaided. For most when they think of Marshall they think of the JCM800 series of the '80s and JCM900 series of the '90s. Master volume amps. Plexi amps (named for the plexiglass control panel on the amps themselves) were available in the late 1960s through the early 1970s before the JMP series was introduced. Jimi Hendrix was perhaps the most famous Plexi player (though Hendrix was a notorious cheater and often played Fender and Sunn amps too), but Cream era Eric Clapton, Jimmy Page (who also cheated on his Marshalls in the studio with Supro and Rickenbacker amps), and Paul Kosoff of Free (one can point to their "All Right Now" as a really good example of what an overdriven Plexi rig sounds like). These amps were largely clean until turned way loud, and then they really don't

PEDAL PUSHING: MAHAFFAY HILOWATT



have the kind of overdrive one usually associates with a modern Marshall. It requires volume for both the preamp section and the power amp sections to overdrive, which is what gave those amps that classic crunch. It is interesting that Mahaffay markets this amp as being a mini Plexi at lower volumes because it really doesn't sound nor behave like a Plexi. It has almost no clean headroom. True Plexis have miles of headroom before they break up. This amp gives up the overdriven toanz almost right away, more like the hi input side of a JCM800. One can get cleaner, edge of breakup sounds from the Mahaffay amp but not at stage volumes. Of course, stage volumes are relative to the stage. Most of the places I play actually require some amount of stage volume because the places I play are smaller

with smaller PA's. To achieve the kind of stage volume I would require means this amp would have to be breaking up really good, which is what I believe Mahaffay really wants to achieve with the Hilowatt. Since most people hear '80s hard rock and metal in their heads when they think of Marshall, the Mahaffay actually delivers THAT sound with a very controllable master volume. Think anything from classic punk rock, hair metal, and the sort of "heavy" guitar sound we've heard on thousands of 1980's recordings. Flip the gain to "hi" and it rages into the '90s with heavier alt-rock, grunge, and pop-punk sounds. In fact, this amp would be absolutely perfect for someone who plays Epitaph Records style punk or anyone that needs sweat hog guitar crunch

tones who may need a solo boost but no other pedals. The amp does respond really well to guitar volume and can clean up a bit with volume roll off. But it doesn't work so well trying to use the amp as a clean or dirty clean pedal platform. The preamp is just too hot to make that an effective use of this amp at any volume.

However, where this amp truly shines is in a studio setting. It doesn't matter if the amp isn't loud enough for whatever when it's at home or in a sound booth under mic. It can give one that full stack on 10 sound at a far more reasonable volume as well as that dirty clean or lighter gain rhythm tones Plexis are renowned for. The amp also works really well loaded down with a reactive load for silent recording. This is how I prefer to use the Hilowatt, with a Suhr RLIR box. It becomes a more complicated version of a direct injection Marshall in a box pedal at that point. But of course a pedal that can be taken onstage and used credibly as a live guitar amp.

The build quality seems okay so far but it definitely feels like a homebrewed product (which it is). I would prefer a real control panel for the volume/gain/tone with actual numbers. It is hard to replicate settings as there are no marks on top of the amp. I find the brit setting to have plenty of gain and I can't fathom ever needing to use the hi setting, but I'm sure others will. Mahaffay says you can put lower gain tubes in the preamp to bring the preamp volume down. I've tried using another ECC82 and it didn't really have an appreciable effect on the headroom. I have used it at all ohm settings with different cabinets. Running it into 16 ohms does seem to bring the volume back a bit farther and at 4 ohms it has the most volume.

In short, the Hilowatt would be an excellent choice for someone that needs roaring Marshall gain at today's stage volumes and has a lot more subtlety when used under mic at lower volumes. These run around \$650 new and \$750 for the combo version. This price seems a little tall when one compares the Hilowatt to their obvious competitors like the Soldano SLO Mini, Friedman BE Mini, the Bogner Ecstasy 30, as well as the Quilter Superblock UK and high gain version of the Vox MV50 amps. All of these amps are much less expensive than the Hilowatt (though none of them have tube pre and power amp sections) and in the case of the Soldano, Friedman, and Bogner amps those are largely pedals with solid state power amps. One can find Mahaffay online at mahaffayamplifiers.com. They make other amps that cop Fender tweed and Leslie rotary speaker styles as well as a new Phil X endorsed Hilowatt 45 in a full sized head enclosure. — KELLY MENACE

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Caverns of Gold

Caverns of Gold

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