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the dirtbag times



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the dirtbag times is a
magazine for dirtbags
by dirtbags.

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF THE STRONGMAN

I think by now everyone in America has seen one or more videos from the January 7 incident in Minneapolis between 37-year-old mom Renee Good and numerous

ICE agents, in particular Jonathan Ross. The videos all end in one gruesome conclusion: the murder of Renee Good in broad daylight by Jonathan Ross. One thing I've thought about over the weeks since the murder in regards to ICE's problem with the 4th Amendment is the optics of six dudes standing around Good's car in essence telling her several different things to do at the same time whilst brandishing assault weapons behind masks and how strong dudes relate to one another. One of them often has to be the stronger one. How does one show their dominance over the other strong dudes in the immediate vicinity? By decisive action, strong action, not weak action. Strong decisive action equals brandishing and using deadly force to establish dominance. Weak action is talking, negotiating, letting the scenario play out to a non-lethal conclusion that possibly would have let Good and her spouse drive away from the situation.

ICE has gone out of its way to hire toxic males. Couple the toxic masculinity with a lack of training, no clear hierarchy, and no responsibility with no culpability and no ready identification (we only know who Good's murderer is because he was proud of his show of strength and dominance that he didn't need to hide his face) not to mention that ICE is an entire culture of toxic masculinity with emphasis entirely on action and we have what have here.

I grew up raised by strong women. Mostly liberal but surprisingly conservative about a lot of things including gender roles. I have often listened to them tell my female cousins and their friends to be wary of sirens and flashing lights when they are alone because cops will abuse their authority when no one is looking and because there are sickos impersonating cops that will definitely abuse their assumed authority. My wife was raised in a similar way, to be wary of cops when the public is not around. They have the authority and will, given the opportunity, take advantage of a woman. That is not necessarily just in a sexual assault context, it is often in a simple flex of authority. I'm in control, you're not, and I can scare you into submissive behavior. Imagine being raised like this (women of all colors have these conversations, just as families of color and other non-traditional backgrounds do) and being put in the same context as Renee Good. And then magnify it a million times. It's a scenario that's played out on country roads and lonely midnight highways all across this nation, blown up big in technicolor and only because we all carry movie studios worth of tech in our pockets (ie. our phones) that everyone can see what most women of all creeds and people of color already know. No one is safe from the bored small-town cop, as I have

had my share of experiences being intimidated by bored police officers for no other reason than to entertain themselves and to establish the lines of authority.

When you couple this smalltown cop syndrome with an organization that recruits individuals specifically that failed to become cops or military veterans and you get an Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency that consists nearly entirely of spare parts. Add in the overmilitarization of law enforcement in general, an immense and seemingly endless budget, plus incomplete and inaccurate training and the sum totals a recipe for a disaster. It is truly amazing that it took until January for something like this to happen. It was inevitable.

Americans by and large are at the very least uneasy with how President Donald Trump and Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem have used ICE as an American Gestapo in largely Democrat-voting cities. The agency exists largely to enforce immigration policy but have been coopted into a quasi-police quasi-paramilitary organization. They cannot detain someone without a warrant or the *suspicion of a violation of immigration law*. This does not seem to matter, as ICE agents have detained American citizens, broken into homes without warrants, broken car windows to yank people out of their vehicles, and taken people from public schools. They have shot 12 other people as of press time. There are hours upon hours of video of ICE agents acting outside of the law. Local and state law enforcement have been prohibited from investigating Ross in the murder of Good. We only have the word of Noem and ICE administration that the incident will be investigated. But Noem, Trump, Fox News, and many others on the Right jumped quickly to painting Good as a domestic terrorist, not to mention (oh my god!) gay. They say the videos we have all seen show Good trying to weaponize her vehicle, some going as far as to claim that Ross was hit by her vehicle. The problem is *we have all seen the videos*. News travels at the speed of light now and even though the Trump Administration attempted to get out in front of the news before it spread nationwide they were unsuccessful. They can tell you what they see in these videos, but Americans have already seen for themselves an agent shooting a woman in the face for no apparent reason.

And before we could go to press over the weekend ICE agents gunned down another American citizen. Nurse 37-year-old Alex Pretti was onsite as a legal observer. He attempted to assist a woman (another legal citizen) ICE had knocked to the ground. ICE then shoved Pretti to the ground. In the process they discovered that Pretti had a pistol (he had a legal conceal carry license) and ICE disarmed him before discharging nine shots. Pretti died from bullet wounds in his back. Just like with the murder of Renee Good, there was video evidence that sped around the world before

Noem and "Commander At Large" Greg Bovino could get ahead of it. Just like with Good's murder, Noem and Bovino tried to gaslight Americans by telling them not to believe what their eyes see, but what the administration tells them they saw. Alex Pretti was by all accounts an amazing person who had a legal right to bear arms that day. Noem and company claim Pretti was also a domestic terrorist armed to cause mass murder.

This is, of course, is super problematic for the Right, as they normally believe the Second Amendment given right to bear arms is sacrosanct. Pretti had a right to carry, was not brandishing his weapon, and wasn't carrying around a conspicuous assault rifle like Kyle Rittenhouse was during the George Floyd protests in 2020. You will recall Rittenhouse murdered a protester and was found not guilty of that murder. Yet Pretti, legally armed (Rittenhouse was not legally armed) is a domestic terrorist. One a folk hero, one a domestic terrorist. One carrying a weapon of mass murder illegally and conspicuously so the whole world knows I AM A STRONGMAN, one carrying a pistol concealed legally for protection, quietly. Which one shows the greater strength? One carrying a weapon to cause harm to citizens exercising their constitutional right to gather and protest, one to protect citizens from a rogue government's gestapo police. This is what supposedly all the A2 warrior cosplayers are training for dealing with, yet those people can't speak up for having the Trump Administration's boots under their tongues as they lick harder and harder. And in their void more and more Americans who soft supported the Trump Administration's private war in Minneapolis are walking back that support as it continuously turns into a 1st, 2nd, 4th, and 14th Amendment nightmare. Is this is not the very government tyranny these folks were training to rise up against? The myth of the strongman is shattered and in pieces on American streets, stained with American blood.

Not to mention ICE using a 5-year-old child as bait to lure a "dangerous" illegal from out of his home to be taken into custody, which is small potatoes compared to murder but yet another atrocious crime caught on video that can't be explained away by the administration's gaslighting.

There are, of course, many Americans willing to do the political gymnastics required to believe the government line. But as we enter into Year 2 behind The Orange Curtain fewer are willing to contort themselves into blind submission. More are understanding that we are being tested IRL as to how we would have reacted as Germans under Nazi rule in 1939. Many are failing this simple test. Every day, more Americans see a line crossed that they cannot follow. As we teeter on the verge of WWII over Greenland (for fuck's sake!) will we *finally* begin to hold this regime accountable for its fuckery? Likely not. — KELLY MENACE



CREEPY HORSE IS NOT IN CONTROL

Something people don't talk about enough in recovering from addiction, is that you are doing great and want the same for others. Unfortunately it usually ends with me wanting to shake the shit out of people until they do right. Last month, I was struggling. It was like the moment the semester ended, I immediately dealt with feelings of loneliness. I am blessed to have such great friends, my friend Ashley calls me and tells me I am flying out to Texas for Christmas, basically no ifs ands or buts.

I was ready to protest. No one should be spending money on me when they have their own families and it's so close to the holidays. I also had no realization how much I needed it until I had a few days to restabilize. I had not seen my friends in over a year. Craig picked me up and I just felt normal again.

He'd take me out for meals, watch hours of movies with me and even let me curate gifts for his mother and sister. I kept finding myself feeling like I was in trouble and looking to see if I could read in his face he was agitated or tired of me. Never. Not once. This is the friend he has been to me. I am not that way.

I'm also not how I used to be. There in lies a major problem for me. I am very reactive. Very cut my nose off despite my face. Both of my parents are highly reactive people. My brothers are reactive. Reactionary behavior is in my DNA. It's so bad in my father's family, they could trip over a cord and then attack like it did it to them.

I am free of most suffering. If it were visual, you could have seen I was splayed open and bleeding out emotionally. I am a child of domestic violence and sexual abuse. I was screaming for decades. Drugs were the only thing that kept me alive and promised me an opportunity of death. From the age of 11 or 12, I dealt with this. Oh how I suffered! Being raised by a sociopath doesn't give you the best people skills. I have all the skills and characteristics of both of my parents, except unlike them, I have an over abundance of empathy.

So every time my subconscious shit on people

and they left me, I felt that. I felt it deeply. Because I never knew what the problem was, even when I was told. And this wasn't a one time thing. This was years and years of losing friends, destroying my life and spiraling out. I washed, rinsed and repeated myself far too many times.

I appreciate the peace of my sobriety. I appreciate finally getting off the hamster wheel of emotional turmoil. I do my best to control my thermostat. I don't allow myself to get too cold or too hot. What I need to practice is stepping back and letting others find their rock bottoms. I don't want anyone I know to suffer like I did. I would take their pain for them. But it doesn't work that way. Sometimes you have to watch someone suffer. I pray it's transformative. I beg the skies that you will come through the other side because I did.

Someone very close to me has fucked up big. I was up all night stressed about it. I wanted to angrily call them and demand that they go to 30 AA meetings in 30 days, get a sponsor, do the work and get into rehab and therapy.

I vented to Trish Herrera, lead vocalist for Mydolls. She sent me a text back simply reading, "...let that go now because it's out of your control." Damn. She was right. I was literally dragged to sobriety and AA and wouldn't do it all the times until I splatted and was peeled off of my rock bottom. So I have to watch someone I love, shoot their foot off and blame everyone for shooting their feet. I know this person cannot do this unless they fully submit.

I may have my issues with AA, but damnit there are people that really need that level of self-awareness shoved in their face so hard it goes up their nostrils. I needed old sober gay people to tell me they thought I wasn't coming to meetings because I had killed myself with drugs. That's a gut punch. Going to a Crystal Meth meeting and within three weeks you and the organizers of the group are the only living members, takes you down a notch.

I will also say that of everyone I ever knew that tried to get clean and sober "on their own", went back to using within a year. With the exception of one person, everyone that I have met in the program that works it, stays clean and sober. I may

not like it, but I can attest to its effectiveness.

The hardest thing for me is to let go. To know I'm powerless in wanting to save another. We got to choose to save ourselves.

One of the nights while I was in Texas, I decided to sleep outside under the stars. My best friend Ashley had a cute bohemian style floor mattress at the end of her front porch of her beach house. It was cold out and it was comforting to hear the beach waves crashing in the distance.

I look back now and I don't know if I actually woke up or dreamed it entirely, but I felt I awoke sometime around 3 am. I opened my eyes and from a distance I saw a lone white dog, not a coyote, running full speed. Across the sand dunes, with their mouth looking as if they were smiling. It never stopped its sprint and continued to run far off into the distance before I turned over and went back to sleep. The dreams that would follow were Lynchian to say the least. Simple things in my life being told that I needed to do as I experience sleep paralysis each and every dream. I couldn't move and I knew this in my dreams. Every dream, I couldn't move. It felt like, you're not going anywhere, listen. Voices telling me to talk to my friend about my diet, to get her help. Talk to someone about this. Say this to someone. Like someone was trying to do some light upkeep on my life. All this is happening and then I awake and the sun is beaming down on me.

Maybe my place is to continue to learn. I can be there when my loved one finally does the shadow work necessary for their life. Nothing shit stomps your mouth to the curb quite like the sit down and shut up you have with that inner voice of yours you've been muting out for sometime. Having a long hard look at yourself honestly can be fucking dire. It's necessary. I am happy to be in a place where my worry is to stay in my own lane.

I can't control other people. I can't fight or cry you out of your self-inflicted perils. Because I would. I would cry a thousand tears if it worked. In the end, we make our own decisions while we get through this thing we call life. I just hope one day you get the healing you need. — **CREEPY HORSE**

MICROMUSING

Here we are with 11 months left in 2026, and I imagine no one expected it would be as bad as it is back when the Fuhrer Felon was re-elected.

Yes, it's worse than anyone dreamed, but it's also surprising how resilient the nation still is. However, it's not that surprising. America wasn't supposed to work, according to the mores of the times. Yet here we are 150 years later.

And that's the America that will survive the current fascist administration. It'll be as forgotten as the Nazis in Madison Square Garden in 1939. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**

A POEM

"Love isn't perfect
It's messy and weird
Like us trying to flirt
After one too many beers"

— **TISHIA JACKSON**

DO THE CHA CHA

Six feet under
after being six feet above
the sound of thunder
a memory of a beer

Hey! Hey!
Let's Go!
& do that thing!

No one gets it,
but everyone does.
The same emblem in shops
and skin,
but it matters more
to you.

New shoes show
the world you're stepping
better these days

Echoes in a chamber
start to sound like your voice
Sticking your head in the sand
only protects your view for so long

Warriors come out and play!
The assailants are cartoon crooks
from the old books we read as kids!
They are cowards pretending to be brave,
Don't listen to what they say
walk the other way.

— **WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON**

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Caverns of Gold

A Benefit for WNC Hurricane Relief

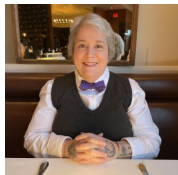
Caverns of Gold

Caverns of Gold

a vibrant coalition of over 280 musicians from western north carolina and beyond has come together to release caverns of gold: a benefit for wnc hurricane relief. this impactful compilation album seeks to raise crucial funds for those affected by hurricane helene, with 100% of the proceeds benefiting **beloved asheville**, a local nonprofit dedicated to providing immediate assistance and long-term support for those affected by the disaster. artists include r.e.m., steep canyon rangers, kevn kinney, luscious jackson, consolidated, caitlin cary, moe., milk carton kids, north mississippi all-stars, richard buckner, the feelies, and many, many others.

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ONCE WAS ONE TOO MANY. NOW WE ARE AT THREE IN ONE MONTH!

I keep thinking about names. Right now one of those names is Renée Good. But in Minnesota this month there have been others, too — three people shot by federal agents on the streets of Minneapolis in January alone. Are we still paying attention?

On January 7th, Renée Good, a 37-year-old mother of three, was shot and killed by an ICE agent during a federal immigration operation on a quiet south Minneapolis street. Video and eyewitness accounts show a moment that escalated and then ended in her death — a death that so many found shocking because it never should have happened. Even local officials and human rights groups raised questions about how it unfolded and whether it was justified, and why so little transparency existed around what should have been an obvious call for clarity and honor.

Just one week later, another incident involving federal agents resulted in someone being shot — this time a Venezuelan man was wounded during a stand-off and law enforcement engagement. It didn't dominate headlines, but it was another person, another life intersecting with a system that felt increasingly aggressive and distant.

And now today, on January 24th, just weeks after Good's death, there was yet another fatal shooting of a 37-year-old Minneapolis man by Border Patrol agents during a federal operation in the city's south side. Officials say he had a firearm; video emerging from the scene shows a struggle between multiple agents and the man right before shots were fired. What makes this even more jarring is the context: this is the third federal shooting in Minneapolis this month, all tied to a massive immigration enforcement effort that has put thousands of federal officers into neighborhoods.

Three people. Three lives. Three stories that don't feel distant or abstract — but close, too close.

I've watched the way communities have responded — with protest, with silence, with disbelief, with sorrow — all of it palpable. Tens of thousands took to the streets in subzero January weather to proclaim that their neighbors matter, that lives should not be ended in the shadows, that accountability isn't optional.

There's something profoundly human in that collective refusal to let these deaths slip into quiet forgetfulness. It's insistence that life, any life, deserves recognition, dignity, and respect. Not just "all lives matter," but "these three lives mattered and we are not going to forget them!"

Every one of these shootings has been wrapped

in conflicting narratives: official accounts claiming self-defense or threat, community video and eyewitness testimony calling that into question, public officials demanding transparency, and ordinary Minneapolitans trying to make sense of it all. What seems striking to me — the thing that I can't seem to wrap my head around — is not just that these events happened, but that they keep happening in a place where people are trying to live their lives, raise their families, share meals, and be neighbors to one another.

It's easy to scroll past headlines on a phone. It's harder to say a name out loud and let it sit in your mouth like something that matters. Renée Good. Alex Pretti, killed today. The man wounded in the middle incident [at the time of this writing, his name has not been made public]. These are people who had histories, families, hopes, friends — lives that had a whole lot in common with yours and with mine.

I've been thinking about grief, too.... How it hurts but also how it can rebuild. So, yes, there is sorrow and anger and frustration and bewilderment... of that, there is no doubt. But there's also community, resistance, connection, and the persistence of people who refuse to let this moment be the only story told. People marching, demanding investigations, calling for accountability, trying to make sure that Renée's death — and the deaths of others — aren't erased by the next news cycle.

That effort matters.

Being awake to one another matters.

Carrying the weight of these stories matters.

Because there's grace in remembering. There's hope in insisting on truth. And there's strength in saying, over and over, that every person's life is worth more than a blur on a timeline.

No, these shootings shouldn't have happened. That's the heartbreaking, unvarnished truth. And yes — we can and should demand better, demand clarity, demand justice where it's been missing.

But while the world feels heavy, we don't get to turn away from one another. Not now. Not when grief and outrage and love are all tangled together in the same breath. Not when remembering someone's name is itself an act of tenderness, but also an act of resistance.

And so I say:
Renée Good. Alex Pretti.

We remember you... and we are so very sorry. —
PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

REMEMBERING JOE ELY

The first time I saw Joe Ely perform was in the early 1980s at a somewhat seedy club in Odessa, Texas called the Pink Flamingo. A group of us who worked at the Big Spring Herald newspaper — music fans all — decided on a whim to drive over on a week night to hear this guy we'd barely heard of.

The venue was not very promising: a long narrow room populated with a handful of tables dominated by a bar running the entire right side, already crowded with boisterous early drinkers. A small stage was at the far end. The opening act was a surprisingly unimaginative genre-neutral band called Wheatstraw. It was getting later and later. Calculating the drive back with the headache of getting up for work the next day had us all wondering whether we should cut our losses and head back.

Then the Joe Ely Band hit the stage to dash any thoughts of leaving. For one thing, the band had an accordion, a steel guitar, and a lead guitarist who looked 12 (actually 16) that was jaw-droppingly talented. And there was Joe Ely careening around the stage as if he was about to launch himself into orbit . . . and pull the rest of us deliriously with him.

I had seen Bruce Springsteen live for the first time a few years before and marveled at how he seemed to reach everyone in the audience. Ely had the same gift. He poured out everything in that performance. I mean, how can you not have a piano onstage, but delight everyone with a raucous tune called "I Keep My Fingernails Long so They Click When I Play the Piano"?

I'm the worst dancer on the planet, but I joined my friends in filling the tiny dancefloor in front of the stage, so close Ely's sweat peppered us as he coaxed yet another searing solo out of his teenage guitarist (who turned out to be Charlie Sexton who has a brilliant solo career in addition to backing folks like Bob Dylan and Elvis Costello). What a night.

I later saw Ely live four more times including a

searing show with The Blasters in addition to a contemplative solo acoustic turn by him. I wish I'd seen him more.



It's easy to see why The Clash were drawn to his music and to his live shows. Ely was likely part of the reason "The Only Band That Matters" toured the US and certainly Texas at all. And if you listen to Ely's tune "Musta Notta Gotta Lotta"

at high volume, you'll hear punk all the way and a steel guitar that could buzzsaw Sequoias. I dare you.

Ely's recorded work is impressive even though the many live albums don't really do credit to the actual events, but they are still dynamite. Over the years, I've gotten five vinyl albums and five cds (and yes, a couple of live recordings in there. Why not?)

There's a certain symmetry in five of each that go with the five live concerts I've been privileged to experience. I'm saddened so much that he's gone.

If you have not been lucky enough to have seen him live or you haven't given his music a try, now is as good a time as any. You might have heard of his Flatlanders work with Texas musicians Butch Hancock and Jimmie Dale Gilmore. If you like more Americana, they're a good place to start.

"Lord of the Highway" and "Dig All Night" are two great early Ely albums that mix rock and the quieter stuff. By "Streets of Sin" and "Silver City," his sound was more traditional Americana but just as affecting. Last year's "Love and Freedom" has a tune with Springsteen whom he recorded with a couple more times.

You can always check out the greatest hits collections his various labels have assembled over the decades, but how much of that gets to his family is questionable. Ely's label "Rack 'Em Records" is the best place to start. However, just listen. I don't think you'll regret it.

Farewell, Joe Ely. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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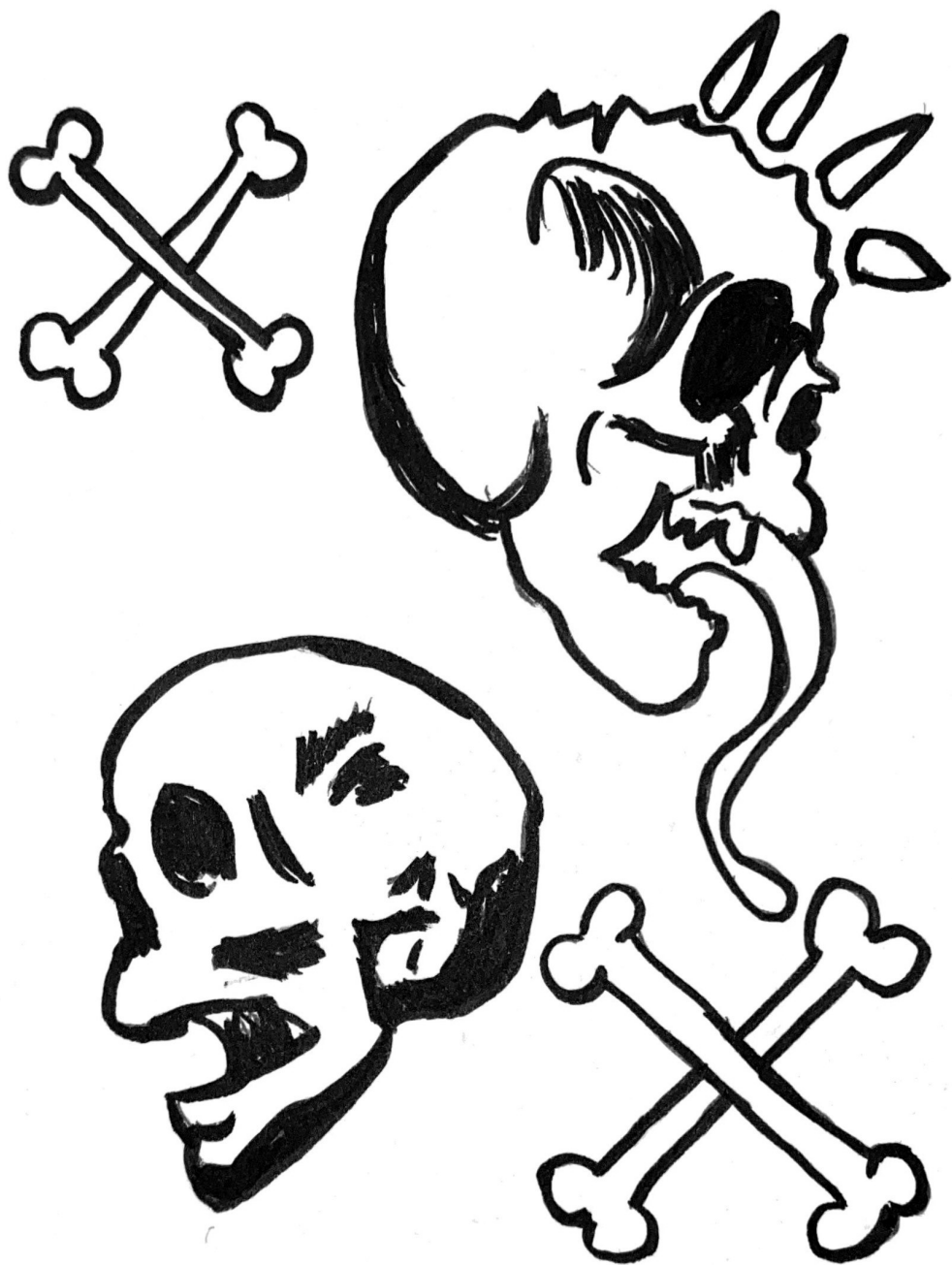
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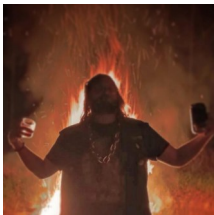
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TISHIA JACKSON



THE OUTER ZONES OF FREEDOM: USE IT OR LOSE IT

Freedom and the USA are synonymous with each other like bacon and eggs. To think or say otherwise was ludicrous and up there with imagining the moon were made of cheese. That's why asking someone from the U.S. to imagine being censored you'll a spark of frustration light in their eyes as they redistribute the steam from such a thought to things other than bashing the lights out of the person suggesting you imagine such a thing in the first place.

For instance, can you imagine being censored? Truly censored? On all levels; truth, opinion, want, or need? Well unfortunately for those that don't just have spare billions lying around that is an increasingly possible reality. The notion was once something that sounded off in the distance, perhaps much farther down the line. It was the stuff of dystopian nightmare novels by conspirators to help sell books and keep kids on their toes when it came to happening in the U.S.

However, the wild thing is that this is no longer the case. What was once a mere work of fiction and warning is now starting to shape up like some fast approaching large vehicle from the likes of *Maximum Overdrive* in the rear-view mirror of American "Progress". Every day another horrible fact based story or ten come, out it seems, that would once shake people to their core for one reason or another and send ripples through the ether providing the talking heads of the faithful mind-trap boxes enough fodder for the coming weeks if not months if needed in slow times. FACT BASED NEWS IS NOT IMPORTANT. SENSATIONALISM SELLS. HEY LOOK OVER THERE. BUY THIS. NOT THAT.

Now there seems to be so much constant far reaching — never in a million years — would a sane person ever actually think type events that we are becoming even more desensitized to the smoke and mirrors and horse and pony shows for people who will always have and always have had more than they will ever need, or use, but they sure never cease to bother us with the endless wants and act like we burdens when we express ours like basic human necessities for our own, much less golden toilets and extravagant ballrooms. It's getting hard to see straight in the house of mirrors when the very core institutions

charged with keeping us safe and showing us the ways are shamelessly — without even trying to hide it — that the rules do not apply to them. Your voice is your voice and if you don't want to visit the gulag or get deported to a nation you've never been, or have your life ruined and scapegoated for someone else's blunders — smile and nod, and play game. Keep your mouth shut, and your head down. The current system spouts unchecked lies like a leaking radiator and expects you to be so mentally exhausted you'll just lap up lies and stop with the questions.

In the last decade we have watched things take a freedom nosedive that makes the Bush administration seem like real bastions of peace and freedom. In the last year we have seen this escalate to new lows our "dear leader's" ruthless cut throat dictator friends would of approve, some have even started taking notes. With talk show hosts like Colbert and Kimmel fired for speaking up and their minds while their corporate overloads kissed the ring of a would be king in depends for passing favor in the courts. We have seen U.S. troops deployed on innocent citizens for exercising their birthright freedoms of speech and protesting things that are and that they feel are unjust. We've seen more behind the veil of the illusion of power too as the Epstein list only continues to get delayed and redacted and the old slight of hand look over there — Venezuela! Minneapolis! Iran! Greenland! Phone! Nobel!

This massive corporate entities are paying tribute to the orange man baby conman convict just like the oligarchs at the fall of Soviet Russia. The rules simple — if you want a seat at the table and to heard — BUY IT. KISS THE RING. All these massive settlements outside of court to broker deals otherwise illegal and immoral. News programs, correspondents, musicians, artists, and more are all being asked loudly to protect the feelings of the reality TV star king of bankruptcy while being told to be themselves and speak freely but remember — or else! We're being told it's us against each other, while they rob us blind. I remind you there are more of us than them. WE HAVE THE POWER. The power's that be want us to think otherwise because fear makes people easier to control. If you see something say something and remember your voice is yours, and what America is about, but waste it bowing

to a thin skinned buffoon. Make your art, sing your songs, tell your tales how you feel them. I'm not saying everything needs to be political or anything either, just don't fear the "time out corner" right now. The world needs your unshielded heart and spirit now more than ever. Let truth ring and sing and freedom toll from the hills while we weaponize our convictions to ensure we successfully ward off these cartoon villains masquerading as esteemed distinguished representatives.

If there was ever a time to write that thing, draw that idea, build that project, or dream that dream. Now is that time. Many are arguing that our best days are behind us and that we should just step back and watch things crumble, but I counter that perhaps we just needed a reminder of what is really at stake here so we can get back to dreaming bigger and better. Eventually and every so often you need to find the weakness in a system to be able to learn from them, fix them, and grow from them. Let's do just that and remember all the good we seek, deserve, and yearn to share and spread and let's do our all to make that happen and take back the narrative of hope and healing from the hands of a snake oil salesman. We are better than this and while things are bad and may seem bleak, remember these are growing pains, and we're growing.

There are still plenty of good times to come, but for now we must fight for those and make our own in the face of adversity and looming threats and fear campaigns. This is a supposed to be a place of hope, and once was. In many ways, it still is. Don't let censorship win. Speak up whoever you feel, your voice matters, and the truth is a very powerful weapons. Let's make sure that we get things back on track to "WE THE PEOPLE" and not "WEED OUT THE PEOPLE".

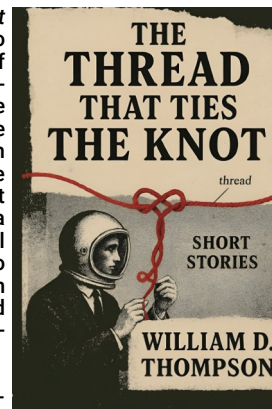
The world is your stage, your dreams have never been closer, and the truth has seldom mattered more. So hang in there folks, we're in for a bumpy ride, but if we work together to be good to one another and just — we can put an end to this embarrassment at least and be decent folks back on the path to endless possibilities, remember to breathe — we're going be OK and hell maybe even happy. We just have to hold each other — especially our elected and non elected representatives — accountable. — WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

READING ROCKS

Summing up this book in one word is simple: unsettling. It's not surprising this collection includes a warning by the author that the enclosed writings are not for everyone.

And while author William D. Thompson labels his assemblage "short stories" — some likely would be considered essays, but that's just quibbling.

The wonderfully-titled *The Thread that Ties the Knot* also boasts a number of Thompson's drawings throughout the book to accent the reader's immersion in the words. These range from the Ant flag in "Honor of a Hero" to the pedestal in "Worry's Heart" to the rabbit's foot in "Rabbit's Paw." And the cover art is delightfully odd.



Readers will find — as the author cautioned — that not every story will resonate with them. However, Thompson also notes that there should be something for most everyone. That's the singular advantage of a collection. If one doesn't stick, move on to the next.

That said, this reader found a few tales that stuck. "From the Heart" begins as a somewhat typical tale of a young man looking for love before veering deliciously off into another direction altogether. "Honor of a Hero" is a weird story of an apocalyptic war between ants and worms. Probably the most effective is the deceptive horror story entitled "The Spiteful Drunk."

Overall, *The Thread that Ties the Knot* is permeated by a dark, often cynical, comic worldview. As Thompson outlines in his bio, this book coalesced from his life in Texas and national travels around California, Maine, Washington, and Florida. With a degree in graphic design, Thompson can't be faulted for including his handiwork in his first published collection.

Readers of the precursor to *The Dirtbag Times* — the groundbreaking 979*Represent* — will likely recognize some of these tales and artwork. To echo Thompson from the foreword of his book (quixotically labeled as "forward" by Thompson), happy reading. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

FIND THE DIRTBAG TIMES ON FACEBOOK AND THEDIRTBAGTIMES.COM

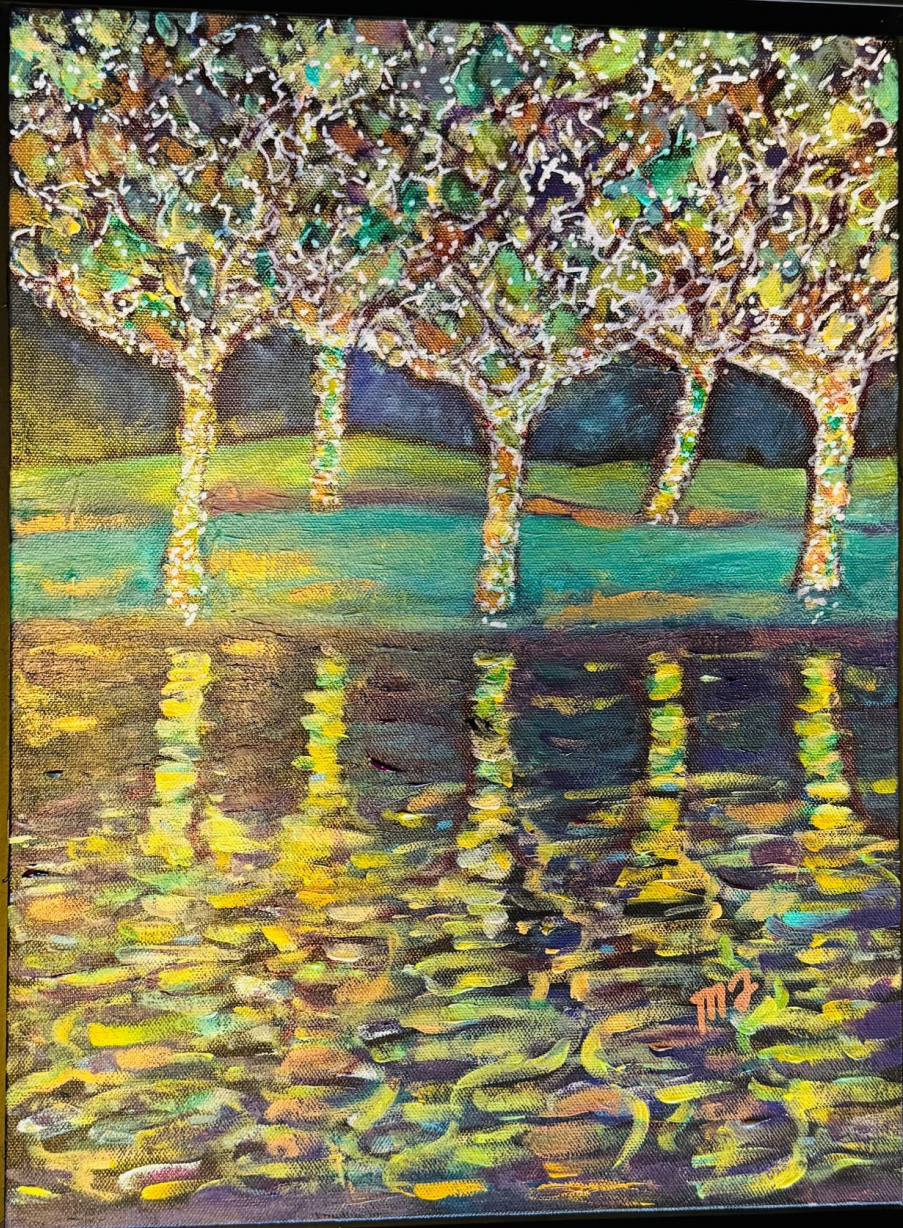


SCOTT STURDY
PHOTOGRAPHY

UNKEPT UNION

They dressed us for the ceremony,
stitched the fabric of promise
into our skin.
Someone whispers, Do you swear?
The veil is smoke,
drawn over greedy mouths,
and the vows arrive
as muffled echoes.
Someone whispers, Yes, I swear.
An oath was spoken—
but the walls were already cracked,
the pillars hollowed with rot.
Still the procession moves forward
through the beautiful wreckage,
confetti of plaster falling like ash
slashing faces, hands, feet, hearts.
We await the kiss of renewal,
hopeful for wholeness,
and we pick our way through the rubble
and the rebar
and the bones.
Nevertheless, the ritual goes on,
as if belief itself could mend the cracks.
As if promises, spoken into ruins,
might one day rise unbroken.

Poem and model: Joan Monahan
Photography: Scott Sturdy Photography
scottsturdyphotography.com



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



EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

it's the beginning of the year, meaning 'tis the season for previous-year "year-end best-of-faves" lists. i can't be bothered to make a formal list, but as i've listened to a number of year-end themed shows on WFMU over the past few weeks (see below), i've reflected on the two new records that i've gravitated toward the most in 2025. interestingly enough, both offer modern takes on a retro style that resonated with me as a young person, and apparently still does now that i'm dirt old: female-fronted post-punk.

the self-titled album by **chime oblivion** grabbed me from the first time i heard a track on wfm. the vocals immediately reminded me of siouxsie sioux, but without feeling like a direct ripoff. the band is a john dwyer (the oh sees) project [bass], featuring drums by og uk post-punk legend david barbarossa (bow wow wow, adam and the ants), og no-wave multi-instrumentalist weasel walter (flying lutenbachers, lydia lunch retrovirus) on guitar, and fronted by H.L. NELLY (naked lights). sonically, barbarossa and dwyer lay down driving grooves, overlaid by walter's barbwire guitar lines, and nelly's haunting vocals. this was the go-to playlist in the fuZZZmobile during our summer tour. perfect for driving. somewhat nostalgic, yet completely contemporary.
[<https://johndwyer.bandcamp.com/album/chime-oblivion>]

optic sink's "lucky number" took me by surprise. they played the big stage at gonerfest in september, and that was my first exposure to the band. i enjoyed the set, but it didn't really grab me in that moment. the following night, i saw them again at the lamplighter for a gonerfest afterparty set. in a small dive bar setting, their set hit me very differently. not only was the sound more lo-fi and literally in-my-face, but i was also afforded a front row view of the performance: real-time looping and beat-making, along with good old analog guitars and bass. the album was released a short time later, and every time i heard a track on wfm, it hit me harder. not only was i getting a strong siouxsie vibe from natalie hoffmann's vocals, but the bass and guitar lines struck me as even more joy divisionesque than they did live. the whole record grooves hard, with a post-punk meets techno feel.
[<https://opticsink.bandcamp.com/album/lucky-number>]

at any rate, these two records got more play at casa de fuzz and in the fuZZZmobile than any other 2025 releases (not counting ours, which i had to listen to for other reasons). it was interesting, and not surprising, to see both of these albums pop up on a number of the year-end shows on wfm. and in case anyone is interested, below is a list of year-end playlists from wfm djs that likely have some dirtbag appeal. dig in and find your new favorite song, record, or band.

WFMU 2025 Year-End Faves Shows

Rock and Roller Derby with Suzy Hotrod
Six-pack abs for the seedy underbelly with Gotham Roller Derby's own Suzy Hotrod. Rock and roll, punk, and things with a good beat that make you dance, sweat, and/or punch something.
Pt 1: <https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159699>
Pt 2: <https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/160166>

Three Chord Monte with Joe Belock
The Citizen Kane of adult entertainment.
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159676>

Tom Dash
DIY music for the spirit; bumper jams for happy people; terrestrial music for space travelers; punchy, post-punk jitters, synth drones for the mindful; fuzz-drenched, basement rock to sooth the soul...
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159721>

The Hard Stuff with Frank in Queens
The sound of the 60s becoming the 70s...and beyond! Late-era garage and early hard rock, with a pinch of more "modern" sounds thrown in for flavor. Fuzz, frets, riffage, and wattage.
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159729>

Strong Style Chris Crash
Chris Crash presents punk rock for the Toonami Generation! Some songs will hold a strong beat that will cause mass pogo dancing. Some will be wild demon rockers. Some will be emotional anthems for the crowd to sing along to. This is Strong Style!
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159703>

Transmissions from Echo Beach
Find: Symphonies of Treble, Words Of Expectation, stab, skronk, shimmer, sheen, The New Sound of Now, Ideas for Walls, pleasure, pith, Flutter and Wow, Motorik, cowbells, disco akimbo, at least one Cantankerous Singer, The German Language, shards of glass, Ethiopian Punk,

organic, synthetic, sawtooths & squarewaves, Library Riffage, yesterday's recipes, the wrong speed, intentional static, floating, ethereal, time and timelessness.
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159698>

Jessica
Music for nothing to do all day but to sit on the porch in your underwear and drink cheap wine!
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159861>

Musical Dose with Medson
Musical Dose is a spirited journey through the world of garage rock, heavy psych, rockabilly phycobilly and any other type of billy. Then topped off with a little glam, rock and roll and twangy guitars.
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159831>

Burn it Down with Nate K
Music for the revolution in my head: choogling punks; power pop, both skinny-tied and long-haired; soul shouters and girl groups; bubblegum and acid rock; global fuzz; weirdos and outsiders, and the Weirdos and the Outsiders; Archie Shepp and J. Geils. Plus, live bands.
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159716>

Paul Bruno
Too weird for the rockers. Too rock for the weirdos.
Pt 1 (albums): <https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/159908>
Pt 2 (singles/reissues): <https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/160086>

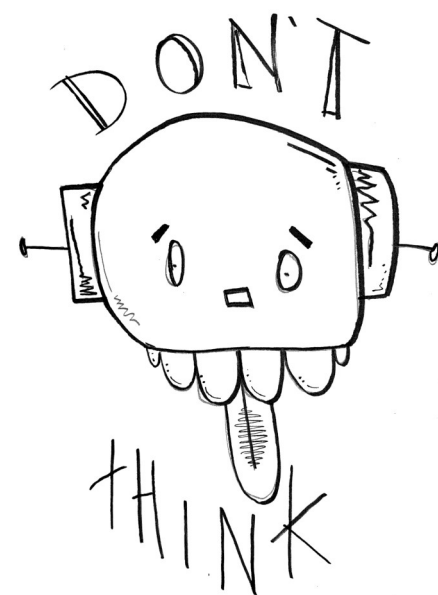
Cherry Blossom Clinic with Terre T
Punk/new wave, psych, glam, garage, mod, freak-beat, funk, krautrock, noise, hardcore, indie, DIY, power pop, soul — any and all good moving music! Live bands frequently, tix @ 4:06 — why stop? Live life — it's hectic but short, yo!
Pt 1 (albums): <https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/160261>
Pt 2 (singles/others):

Hooligan with Terre the DJ
1hr of groin grabbers: Glam, goons, hard rock, braces-n-boots, bennies, booze, coke, cock-rock, stoned, 'stached, stooges, speed killers, proto-punk, pre-metal, thugs... The Dumb, Duh, Doy, Oi, Void Doid
<https://wfm.uz/playlists/shows/160335>
— PROFESSOR FUZZ

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^ AND v TISHIA JACKSON



RECORD REVIEWS



VARIOUS ARTISTS
Songs For Honeykut

This album is for musician Justin Honeykut. Charity music collections are always a good deal to support since no one's come up with a feasible medical plan for musicians yet, not surprising since the U.S. government can't devise one for its citizens (not being too political since the Affordable Care Act is the best of the past decade, but only a start even as no one has come up with anything else).

Sorry for the rant. *Songs for Honeykut* is a quality collection of tunes by a variety of artists dominated by punk, but also includes modern rock and quiet folk. There's even a nice instrumental, courtesy of **SkyAcre**.

The disc kicks off with the rollicking "Super Scarborough Brothers" by **The Hangouts** that lasts about as long as it takes to say the title, quality over quantity. There's the oddball lover's lament "Diane" by **Sevenses** as well as the extreme low-fi punk "Over It" by **Kodiak**.

Bachelor Police has the strangely-affecting "Waiting to Explode" that's preceded by the lovely garage rock of **The Prof. Fuzz 63** with "I'm in Love with a Mutant Lover."

Those in the know (which now includes you the reader) will enjoy two musical selections led by this publication's erstwhile editor: "Stanford Prison Blues" by **The Ex-Optimists** and "Daydrunk Honeykut" from the **Invasion Boys** (Kelly Menace plays and sings everything). And let's not forget "Set That Ass Up" by **Debit Card**.

The compilation closes with the thoughtful piano-driven ballad – "Cold Feet" – by solo artist **Burton Myers**.

There's not really a bad song on this collection, so don't be afraid to pony up a few bucks to benefit another musician. You'd pay more for a latte or athletic socks. This'll do more good for your ears and your well-being. See Sinkhole Texas Inc on Bandcamp and maybe even check out a few other indie tunesters. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**



THE PROF. FUZZ 63
My <3's Still Beating But I'm DEAD2U

If you're a sucker for garage rock, look no more. The Professor Fuzz '63 has your fix. This three-piece family band has been cranking out basic rock and roll for a few years now. (Note: I own vinyl, cds, and cassettes by them.) If this is the sound you

like, you can't get enough of it.

This album is filled with the Professor's quirky wordplay and song titles as usual. The thing is – the oddball titles more often than not pay off with great tunes. Take "Narcocleptic Driver's Ed Teacher" for example. The tune is a basic straight-ahead rock and roll tune, and what's wrong with that. The title cut kicks off with Sleepy Redhead's classic keyboard organ before the beat snaps in.

Great driving and writing music for all ages – you can't have enough of that.

One of my favorites on this album is "Hand Grenade Princess" that also leads off with organ wails before the drums come alive. And that's a great title, you know. "The Amazing Adventures of Steak Knife and Biscuit" is another favorite tune and title.

Now "Edge of the World" doesn't boast a weird title, but the music is as top-notch as the rest of the tunes: just rock and roll.

"White Gladis" closes the album, another solid tune with Prof. Fuzz's lead guitar and his filtered vocals through an old telephone receiver (great looking live too).

And the cover is striking as well. You can save it for next Halloween. You can't go wrong. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**



MESSA
The Spin

Yeah, this has been out for awhile but thanks to year-end best-of lists I caught up to it.

The great thing about stoner/doom/desert metal is that its expanse can be filled in many different ways. Italian doom metal **Messa** have filled that expanse *The Spin* with a good dose of gothic guitar rock, post-punk, Berlin School kosmiche electronica, and (gasp) film noir to their cinematic epic sound. LP opener "Void Meridian" begins with a John Carpenter-esque bass synth sequence before opening up into a gothic guitar rockout that would make Christian Death proud mixed in with some righteous NWOBHM riffing. There is more of the cross-genre goth/metal/synth witchery across the seven songs on this album. But my heart nearly stopped at halfway through the big metal of "The Dress" when the band brought it down with clean jazz riffs, doomy atmosphere, and then whoa shit where did this muted trumpet come from trading runs with the clean guitar?!?! I need more of THIS in the doom metal genre and big ups to **Messa** for bringing all the noir. — **KELLY MENACE**



**SONGS FOR
HONEYKUT**

TINYURL.COM/HONEYKUT