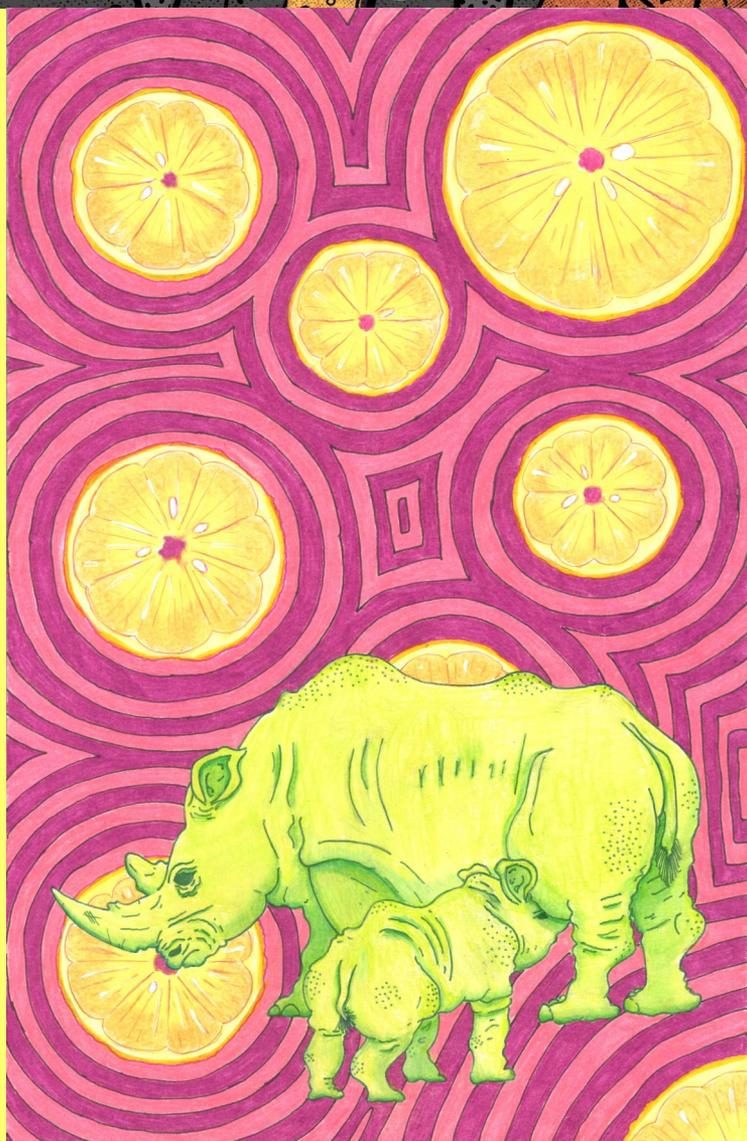


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# the dirtbag times



*inside: checks & balances - gold in the ice, something  
else in the air - the descent - creepy horse meets dolly -  
the lightning years - micromusing - awe*



# CHECKSES AND BALANCES

**the dirtbag times is a magazine for dirtbags by dirtbags.**

**editorial bored**  
kelly menace

**art splendidness**  
rowan menace, tony willingham, & wonko zuckerberg with maren farmer, jacob higgs, tish jackson, & william daniel thompson

**print meister**  
craig wheel werker

**folks that write stuff**  
creepy horse - tish jackson - pamalyn rose-beeler - william daniel thompson

**on the interwebz**  
<http://www.thedirtbagtimes.com>  
redchapterjubilee@yahoo.com

materials for review & bribery can be sent to:  
**the dirtbag times c/o kelly menace**  
16 foxberry dr.  
arden, nc 28704

Like many, I have wrung my hands over what seems like an entire field of U.S. Supreme Court decision after another in favor of the current White House regime to the general detriment of the American people, American sovereignty, the separation of powers, the Bill of Rights, and other sacred covenants that America has been built atop. I should expect this. After all, this is the Supreme Court that Republican Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell set up for President Donald Trump by not allowing President Barack Obama to nominate a replacement for Justice Antonin Scalia. Coupled with the gain of two more conservative seats during the first Trump presidency, the Court was set for conservative originalist rulings for generations to come. This is the court that has set aside the presidency from the rule of law. Last month's ruling of the Court against President Trump's tariff madness suggests that the situation is a bit more nuanced than that.

In the ruling itself, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that the President's interpretation of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 to set a trade agenda is illegal. The emergency powers scenario does not cover trade, therefor trade is, as normal, controlled by Congress, not the Presidency. Trump disagrees, of course, and vows he will bypass the ruling. Court watchers see this as another ruling in a series of rulings defining the separation of powers between our three pillars of government: the executive branch (President), legislative branch (Congress), and the judicial branch (the courts). Ilya Somin of *The Atlantic* interprets this series of rulings as solidifying the power of the Presidency while simultaneously boxing that power in. Let me see if I can take someone else's very awesome professional writing and break it down into dirtbag logic.

The Presidency does what the Presidency does, Congress does what it does, and The Courts decide whether or not what these entities have done is actually in their purview and/or possibly against the law or the Constitution. Nothing more, nothing less. The Supreme Court ruled against Trump's tariffs for the same reason they ruled against President Joe Biden's student loan forgiveness program and ruled for making Trump's actions immune from the courts. The Presidency has limited powers. If the President steps out of bounds it is up to either the Courts to tell them to do something different or for Congress to use articles of impeachment and the 25th Amendment of the Constitution to keep the President in line or to remove them. Both Presidents Biden and Trump attempted to circumvent Congress. Biden knew Congress would not vote for student loan relief and acted unilaterally.

Trump could give a shit what Congress will or won't do because he believes this time he is king of America. Two-thirds of the Supreme Court agrees with that assessment. Yet one third of that body, the three most conservative judges, did not agree.

Justices Alito, Thomas, and Kavanaugh are the Three Stooges of Originalism. What is that? Lawrence B. Solum of the University of Virginia School of Law breaks it down like so: originalists believe our Constitution was set in concrete at the time of its initial enactment and that it must be applied as such; those that believe the Constitution is "a living document" seek allowance for the Constitution to adapt to changes in societal values. The Three SCOTUS Stooges are non-originalists in the regard of how they interpret their originalism as it applies to presidential power. This is complicated because these three are the most blindly partisan of the nine-member Court. Alito and Thomas are both bought and paid for by Republican fundraisers. Only time will tell whether or not Kavanaugh has been similarly purchased.

On the outside this appears to be encouraging. The Court, by this interpretation, isn't in the pockets of Trump per say, it is saying that if you have a problem with what Trump is doing then you need to have a conversation with Congress because while we can rule on what he has done, it is up to Congress to do something about Trump. We all know the Republican majorities in both the House and Senate are largely afraid to go against Daddy because many of them rode into Washington on the Trump wave. They are not wrong. Whether or not an elected official with an R beside their name is a Trump supporter or apologist does not matter anymore. The Republican Party and its apparatus belongs entirely to Donald Trump. Voters will associate Republican Congresspeople with Trump whether they like it or not. Early indications from the ballot box show that voters will hold Republicans accountable for Donald Trump. Perhaps Trump cannot face direct consequences from the public for his actions but his Congress can and certainly will. Unless, of course, the voters are denied their day in the voting booth.

Elections are not federalized for the reason that our Founding Fathers deeply mistrusted governments, monarchies, and mob rule. That is why we have a representative democracy, a Constitution, a Bill of Rights, and a legislature. The Founding Fathers were deists and deep believers in reason. They trusted people but distrusted "people" as a whole. They left the states to figure out what worked best for them. They wanted everyone to have a say but did not want majorities to overrun

the little guy. They wanted folks in the least populated states to have the same voice as the population centers. The federal administration has no jurisdiction in elections. That will not stop Trump from putting his entire bulk on the scale to tip it in his favor. For decades Republicans have tried to make voting more difficult to limit the number of voters participating. When larger numbers of voters turn out those elections skew leftward. This principle also applies when more young people and minorities vote. Congress can pass national laws and posture about election reform but it really comes down to state government action. The Trump administration is pressuring Republican-dominated states to make it more difficult for non-white males to vote under the auspice of remedying "voter fraud" but even conservative think tanks are hard pressed to find more than double digit numbers of instances of voter fraud in the last several elections. *Double digits out of tens of millions of votes cast.* Yet we now have stiffer election ID laws in many states and the now-DOA SAVE Act that national Republicans have tried really to ram through that would disenfranchise anyone whose legal ID does not match the name on their birth certificate. That would have affected my wife because her maiden name is not her married name.

This activity will ultimately be found unconstitutional once it finds its way to the Supreme Court, for much the same reason. The feds have no business meddling in state elections. The problem here is that the court system is sssssllllloooooowwwwww. Trump and company can commit jackassery and get away with it until the courts have enough time to rule on it. And then it will be appealed, then ruled upon again, maybe in another district, etc. The only sure way to stop Trump is through the ballot box AND the threat of the ballot box. Republicans are all running scared right now because Trump and his policies are a massive albatross hanging around their necks. Their policies are deeply unpopular. Trump as a politician is deeply untrusted. Trump's failures are likely to be a generational challenge for the Republicans that are left behind once Trump has exited the playing field. There will be many true believers left in the party but many that came specifically for the cult of personality have already begun to jump ship. But there are still many Republicans who do not have the will to buck the MAGA Cult and will refuse to act against the Trump regime. The one body that can act quickly will not. So it is up to the threat of the people's will as well as the courts to do something about Trump. Perhaps we will see an Assange or Snowden type figure that will finally speak up. Either way, it is up to Americans themselves to rid this country of the problem it caused itself. Neither SCOTUS nor Congress nor our allies can or will do it for us. — KELLY MENACE



# GOLD ON THE ICE, SOMETHING ELSE IN THE AIR

I can still see it if I close my eyes.

Not this year's team – the one from 1980. That team lives in my memory the way old family photos do, a little creased, slightly faded, but still unmistakably alive. When I think of Olympic hockey, that's the picture that comes first.

I was young in the winter of 1980, young enough to believe that sports victories meant something bigger than the scoreboard. The 1980 Winter Olympics felt like a fairytale unfolding in real time.

There weren't endless camera angles or commentary scrolling across the bottom of the screen. No drones buzzed overhead. There were no social media debates before the final buzzer had even sounded. There was just the television in the living room and the sense – shared by the adults as much as the kids – that something improbable was happening.

The U.S. hockey team beating the Soviets wasn't supposed to happen. Everybody knew that. Which is exactly why it mattered.

For a little while it felt like hope itself had laced up skates.

I still remember the names: Steve Christoff. Jim Craig. Mark Johnson. And Mike Eruzione, arms raised in that celebration that seemed to stretch on forever.

That game didn't fix anything. The world stayed complicated. But for a few hours a bunch of young men played hockey with everything they had, and a country that hadn't had much to celebrate suddenly did.

That memory still makes me smile.

I wasn't expecting another miracle in 2026. The years in between have taught me to keep my expectations modest. But I found myself enjoying the Olympics more than I expected to. American athletes competing hard and treating each other decently. Opponents congratulating each other. Stories that reminded me you don't have to be arrogant to be excellent.

For a while, it just felt good to watch.

*Every day is a great day for hockey. –  
"Badger" Bob Johnson*

Then the men's hockey team won gold.

It really was a terrific game. They were fast and disciplined, and you could see the trust between them – the way a good team moves almost like a single organism. Nobody trying to do too much. Nobody showing off. Just hockey played well.

When it ended, I was honestly happy. The kind of quiet happy you don't question too closely. I even wondered, briefly, if this might become one of those memories I'd revisit years from now.

Then came the celebration.

The locker room filled up with people who hadn't played a minute of hockey – cameras, officials, hangers-on. Kash Patel was there, apparently having the time of his life. I still can't quite figure out why the Director of the FBI needed to be part of an Olympic locker-room party, but maybe that's just one of those mysteries modern life provides.

And then came the phone call from Donald Trump.

There was a joke about the women's team, who had also just won gold.

The room laughed.

And just like that, the warm feeling evaporated.

The women had done exactly what the men had done. Trained for years. Sacrificed time and comfort and probably a few functioning joints. And they won. Same flag. Same anthem. Same gold medals.

Still somehow the punchline.

The women declined the invitation to celebrate at the White House, which struck me as entirely appropriate. Champions don't need validation from people who confuse excellence with swag.

I know politics have always been part of sports.

Getting older means accepting that the heroes of

your youth turn out to be regular human beings with opinions you don't always share. Plenty of players from that 1980 team have views that make me wince a little (or, you know, a lot now.

That's life.

But this difference feels like something else.

The Miracle on Ice felt like it belonged to everyone.

This one felt smaller than it needed to be. I wanted to love this victory the way I loved that earlier one. I wanted to tuck it away alongside those living-room memories – the television glow, the nervous excitement, the sense that sometimes beautiful things just happen without being forced.

It didn't land that way.

And that's what disappoints me – not the hockey. Hockey never disappoints. If you know me at all, you know that much is true.

What disappoints me is that we couldn't just have the moment. Just celebrate the game and the players and the sheer joy of doing something difficult well.

Instead, the memory now comes with noise attached.

Because for a little while, they really were magnificent.

And then they laughed – at the joke, at their Olympic companions, at the women who wore the same colors and brought home the same gold.

So yes – congratulations to the women. They showed the country what excellence looks like when it's paired with kindness. That's the memory I'll keep.

And to the men: thank you for the hockey.

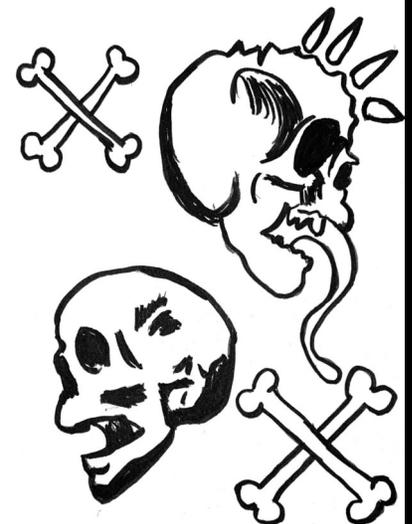
I just wish the story had ended there. –  
PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

## MICROMUSING

### LAP CARDS OF THE GERIATRIC

A moment  
A sound  
A thought  
A 747  
going off course  
from no ground control  
our hearts break  
we wake  
was it a dream ?  
or a bad memory ?  
played on TV to milk ratings  
and test the waters ?  
Chill or be chilled  
We are watching,  
The lap dogs barking,  
at the neighbor window washing  
the bugle blares  
"We don't care"  
while tabloids dance  
as parents weep  
Not today we say again  
setting our hearts back  
while the war drum clangs  
"Fall in line"  
..."it's time to fall in line again"  
just like the recess bell...  
all the rules don't matter to us  
but they do to you,  
look over there,  
not over here...  
oh no conflict again?  
There's NO time for accountability  
when the world's a school yard bully  
Black eyes mean we're victims too  
Move over New World Order  
here comes  
XTra Lrg Big Brudda

– WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



TISH JACKSON

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# THE DESCENT

I once took a class that introduced the idea of “shame-based cultures.” It was framed as something foreign, though. Framed as a way other societies regulate behavior through accountability rather than guilt. But what I’ve come to understand since then is that this framing needed more.

The cultures mentioned weren’t built on shame; they were built on honor. Now I understand that you can’t have one without the other.

Honor isn’t the absence of wrongdoing; it’s being willing to face it. Shame, in a healthy form, isn’t a condemnation; it’s a signal. It’s the body communicating, whispering to the mind, something here must be investigated. It’s the emotional threshold that invites responsibility, reflection, and repair.

American culture wants all of the honor and none of the shame. We want to see ourselves as good, righteous, and extraordinary without sitting with the harm that made these “negative” qualities. We want to feel proud without ever having to feel implicated. This doesn’t make us cruel. Perhaps it just makes us human in a culture that never taught us to listen to and understand our shame.

If most of us claim to be tired of the hate and division, isn’t it worth exploring why being challenged feels so dangerous right now?

In recent years, the term “white fragility” has entered mainstream, and we white folks have by and large heard it as an accusation. As a slur. An insult.

I’ve come to understand it differently. This term is not a condemnation; it’s an observation of our inability to move through the shame of our missteps without shutting down. It’s a diagnosis of a nervous system with no practice holding shame without emotional and physiological collapse.

The body tightens. The chest floods. The mind scrambles for escape hatches. And in our attempt to flee the discomfort of the moment, we fail to hear the invitation beneath the critique.

We’re not being called out. We’re being called in.

Into conversation. Into empathy. Into a deeper, more honest understanding of ourselves, our history, and the systems we’ve inherited.

I think of moments in my own life when others have shined a light on a part of myself I didn’t want to see — a blind spot, a harm, a complicity — and how instinctively my body wanted to recoil, explain, defend. No one had taught me how to

breathe through that moment. How to stay long enough for the shame to soften into understanding.

It is easier to bury the truth than to sit with it, so we rewrite the story. We accuse the messenger of cruelty. We retell the story in a way that makes us look great. Honorable. Honest.

And in doing so, we lose access to the very honor we’re trying to protect. Many of us who consider ourselves informed or “woke” have developed our own relationship to shame — one that disguises itself as moral certainty. We, too, can use the language of justice to protect ourselves from looking at where we’re weak, defensive, or afraid of being wrong. Different masks. Different rhetoric. Same human nervous system.

Maybe we can, regardless of party affiliation, look at people we’ve been taught to mythologize and systems we’ve been taught to trust. Maybe what will surface are the histories that were intentionally softened, silenced, or erased.

There will be moments where the instinct to turn away is strong — where the impulse to say this is too much or this doesn’t apply to me rises quickly.

Understand, please: That’s not an attack; it’s an invitation.

We don’t have to fix everything from there. We don’t have to carry the whole weight of history on our backs. We have to stay and look. Stay with the discomfort long enough to let it teach us. Stay with the image of real human beings — bodies, families, lives — behind the abstractions. Stay with the understanding that shame is not the opposite of honor, but rather its doorway.

We are being asked to grow.

Growth? We are capable of this. Brave? I believe we are brave enough to sit together in the heat of knowing. Smart? Smart enough to hold complexity without fleeing. Kind? Kind enough to listen without needing immediate absolution.

We do not need to resolve everything right now.

But we do need to sit and take note and try to understand.

Honor begins there — not in the stories that flatter us, but in the courage to look without looking away.

And this, my friends, is how the descent becomes transformation. — *TISH JACKSON*



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

OOOPS!  
ALL  
MAGATS



JACOB HIGGS. IG: alien\_zit



WILLIAM DANIEL  
THOMPSON



# CREEPY HORSE MEETS DOLLY

## AWE

My birthday is today. It's also a Sunday. Not the worst day because, I was

born on a Sunday. But Sunday isn't the best day for celebration. I decided to celebrate my birthday the night before and for good reason, the movie *Dolly* was playing at Music Box Theater for its movie premiere hosted by Shudder.

I found out about this because I follow Max the Impaler, the pro wrestler who plays the monster in the movie, on social media. They invited me knowing I live in Chicago.

I arrived 15 minutes before showtime and saw Dolly in person in the main lobby. Unfortunately for me, the line to get a picture was too long and by the time I was in and getting to snap a pic, the producers came up to take them away.

I purchased a ginger beer from the concession stand and made my way into the main theater. Being by myself, I was able to get fairly closeup. Dolly would appear on stage with the director making a statement about what this film means to everyone involved.

Filed on 16mm film, Dolly is a new character for the horror genre. This is something in the vein of Rob Zombie's more somber tones and straightforward terror seen in movies like *Devil's Rejects* and the Dark character that uses their ability of pantomime much like Art the Clown.

As the heavy for the film, Max the Impaler never speaks a single word in the entire movie. Yet, they control the narrative of the movie and you fully know exactly what they are communicating.

The movie opens with Sean William Scott and his girlfriend played by Fabianne Therese dropping off his daughter to spend the day with family so the couple can go on a special hike. They do a great job of working together as a couple in this film. They have banter, pranks, all the nuances of a couple in love.

In the meanwhile, we see glimmers of Dolly and that these paths are about to converge. And when they do, holy shit. The carnage is quick. It's so graphic, I legit had to turn away in some of

MOMMY KNOWS BEST



the same situation. She's no idiot. She's fighting non stop. You feel her tension. You understand her terror.

The effects makeup on this movie I think is what really seals the deal. I really don't want to give spoilers but the gore is more realistic in capacity than say the gore in *The Terrifier* franchise. It looks like what was done to it. The injuries and wounds sustained to everyone in the movie had ME limping in exhaustion and pain. I'm so glad

that Dolly makes so much use of a shovel not seen in much of any horror movies.

Dolly is very unique. It's a female horror character played by an out, non-binary performer. This isn't a skinny woman with a boob job clad in leather like Lady Death. This is a woman that is as tall and as strong as any men out there. Dolly could almost be considered a girl's girl due to the fact that she only appears to murder men. It's something very new and exciting to the horror genre.

In a genre where teen sex literally always results in the brutal murder of a shirtless teenage girl, it's refreshing in 2026 to see a very dark and scary

horror movie character that can and does lift grown men off of their feet as they are strangled. This is scary because if they can kill those that are supposed to be your "protectors" who will protect you?

I did actually enjoy this. The movie runs more on a real-time kind of style. The movie utilizes this to give you all the dread that the characters are feeling in the moment. It has some quick comedic moments but trust, it's fleeting.

I like this. Without making any assumptions or statements, they are doing a horror movie completely different than what audiences are used to. The entire audience sat through until the very end and Max received ovation when their name came across the screen. As I left, Max was already outside signing posters and merch for sale. I bought a poster for the movie. They were even able to get the director to sign it so that's pretty cool.

Movie is out nationwide March 6th. — *CREEPY HORSE*

the scenes, while I laughed in others.

By this point Max had come back into the theater and sat beside me. This was their premiere. They were locked in to the movie as much as we were. There were also camera crews there from

Shudder filming our responses in the audience. I'd later be asked to film my reaction to the film so that could be fun.

The woman played by Fabienne in this movie is a great actress and brings the realism of say what you or I would be thinking, possibly doing in the

You know those moments when the world stops for a second, and you're just... hit by an invisible force. Like when you're standing at the edge of a cliff, staring at the vastness of an ocean, and you feel small and infinite, like a single grain of sand? Or when you hear a song and it tugs your heartstrings and short-circuits your brain, then suddenly you're crying in public, thinking, why don't I do this more often? That is awe.

And not only is it a poetic feeling — it's science. Awe is great for you. Like, really great for you. It improves your health, reduces stress, and even makes you a more empathetic, kinder human. Basically, it's nature's way of saying, "Bro, chill and enjoy this wild ride we call life."

Awe is amazing. It's that feeling you get when something cracks your brain open and reminds you that the world is so much bigger — and so much more magical — than your daily to-do list. It's a combination of amazement, wonder, and just the right amount of humility. Awe says, "Hey, you're small, but don't forget that you're part of something so much greater."

And the science behind it? So, it turns out, awe isn't only a nice feeling. Scientists have found that experiencing awe can change you. It strengthens your immune system, reduces your stress hormones, and even shifts your perspective. You start seeing yourself as part of a bigger picture, which makes you more likely to be kind, generous, and connected to others. (Basically, awe turns you into a better person. But, no pressure.)

The best part? Awe is everywhere.

It's in the way sunlight filters through your window in the morning. It's in the sound of rain hitting a roof. It's in the stars — seriously, look up at the stars! The universe is out there doing its thing every single night, and we barely notice.

Finding it isn't really the what and more about the how. It's paying attention. It's slowing down. It's letting yourself be open to the possibility that the world is full of wonders, big and small. It's finding the every day magic.

In a world that constantly demands more — more productivity, more hustle, more all of the things — taking time to experience awe feels almost rebellious. It's like telling status quo, "No, I don't need to be busy every second of every day. I'm going to sit here and marvel at this cute squirrel in the forest thank you very much."

Life isn't just about ticking boxes or chasing goals. It's about feeling connected, being present, and remembering that there's so much beauty and mystery and magic out there, just waiting to be noticed.

So, here's a challenge: Find a moment of awe this week. Maybe watch the sunset. Or listen to music that moves you. Look at something ordinary — a shadow on the wall — and really see it. Let it stop you in your tracks. And when it does, let yourself really feel it. Let yourself be amazed. Because awe isn't just good for your soul — it's good for the world. — *TISH JACKSON*

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# THE LIGHTNING YEARS

I have a friend who plays in an amazing band. Their band is a professional level band on the cusp of breaking out from the dirtbag club scene. This band has amazing musicianship and songwriting smarts. I follow them on all the social media and have bought most of their albums. I've booked and promoted shows for them and they have slept in my house. They are peers but really it's almost like having Baroness or Converge be your peers. They are playing the same stages I play but I belong on those stages. This band belongs in a stadium.

Recently the band posted a video for a song from one of their albums, a song that happens to be my absolute favorite song of theirs. I commented on the link saying that this was my absolute favorite song of theirs. The band member who runs the social media liked my comment and responded, "hey, I'm glad you like this song but we have newer ones too." I did not respond. This wasn't something I could respond to in a manner that could fit into a terse social media comment. Two, I also recognize that this particular band member is prickly online. Not so much in person, where they are much warmer and personable. Turning that prickly response into a broader discussion in that format would've been an absolute nightmare of miscommunication. This column is that response.

I am not a successful songwriter in terms of financial reward or popularity but I have written songs I'm proud of and I have sold a few thousand copies of my bands' albums at this point. I have seen people singing along with me at my shows for the better part of 20 years now. Someone is digesting what I'm cooking. I have talked to friends and fans enough to understand now that my songs do not belong to me. Sure, I wrote them, I know what they mean to me, I know what function in my emotional and creative life they serve, but I also understand that they serve in a different capacity for the people who have found something worth assigning meaning to in those songs. Those songs now belong to them. When my band The Ex-Optimists gets together to play shows our "fans" expect to hear certain songs at these shows. They are patient when we play new songs. What they really want to hear are the songs that they have assigned personal meaning to. Even though we're not, say, Iron Maiden or some other long-running band with an immense catalog of material, we do have a number of albums, singles, split singles, and compilation/tribute recordings out there. I've likely written and recorded 200 songs at this point in my "career". I may have an album coming soon with seven or eight brand new songs on it, but likely we can only play one or two of them live. People will want to hear "the hits" and that's okay. I dare say my band friend, were I to ask them if they would be disappointed in seeing their favorite

artist in concert and that artist did not play their favorite songs they might cede the point. Then again, this artist is prickly and likely would say they are happy to go on whatever trip the artist wants to take them on.

Heritage artists face a real conundrum, especially those with decades of albums' worth of songs to measure against. I wrote a song about this once called "My Lightning Years" inspired by this concept, that the true artist continues to make art long past the time when it seemed the artist could capture lightning in a bottle, their critically accepted prime. The artist naturally feels that they are only as good as their most recent work, even if the public might feel otherwise. There is naturally a financial motive for heritage artists to continue writing, recording, and releasing new songs, but most of them continue to do so because that is their thing. Some people crochet, some people play golf, some people do crosswords. Songwriters write songs. Their success is measured not in what songs they've written 50 years ago, but in the songs they wrote on their most recent album. Their journey is not complete, even if you or me as a fan have not followed all points of that journey. I bring up Bob Dylan as an example. I moonlight part-time as an usher at the local civic center and have been paid to work the last several times Bob Dylan has played the venue. Many of our patrons think that we get paid to see concerts, but really we are paid to observe other people seeing these concerts. We hear the music, and we do absorb the show when/if the audiences allow for it, but mostly we watch others watch concerts. It is interesting to observe a heritage music act's audience, especially if that artist is someone like Dylan. He takes people on his trip, not a nostalgia trip. Bob keeps putting out new albums and plays setlists culled largely from his last 20 years of output. If you come to his show hoping for "Masters of War" or "The Times They Are A-Changing" or "Blowin' in the Wind" you will be very disappointed. I know Bob's earlier recordings fairly well. In three concerts I have recognized only one song that wasn't a cover. Bob doesn't stand on his previous work. Heh, he's an artist, he don't look back. But Bob eats and lives on his current work because he doesn't think he's done. His "lightning years" aren't behind him. Two-thirds of his audience understands this. A third does not and it is amusing to watch how uncomfortable this makes that segment of the audience.

It is of course up to the audiences to decide whether or not they will continue to follow Bob Dylan or The Ex-Optimists or whoever on that journey. Again, once those tunes become part of the public work they become the public's work, not ours. That is certainly a two-way street. I as the artist have to be okay with my very small

fanbase telling me that while I may have a brand new album out that I feel is my best work and everyone should be as excited about it as I am that I need to understand that while I may have curated an amazing journey for my fans to come along on, *they may not decide to go there with me*. Often times this manifests in someone saying "man, have you heard so-and-so's new record? It fucking sucks, dude." This is, of course, one person's assessment based on whatever internal criteria they have developed for what is good and what is not. It has as much, if not more, to do with them than it does with the artist or the artist's output. What it comes down to is that each person is an individual and that person likes what they like. That does not mean if an artist's new work is "unsuccessful" that it is the fault of the audience and not the artist. I think of someone like Neil Young or Ryan Adams or Kanye West or Guided By Voices. These artists are prolific. These artists sometimes respond to the times and will often times be inspired by something outside of their recognized milieu and will chase that inspiration down a rabbit hole. Sometimes they respect their audience enough to understand they may not go down that rabbit hole with them. Or in GBV's case, it may be that the artist releases a flood of material and at some point it may become too much for the audience to properly absorb or to financially afford. We take attention spans for granted these days. Artists release albums and they/we expect our audiences to absorb them as such. But who really has 40 minutes to sit down with an artist and give them our whole undivided attention? I love music, but even I don't get the time to sit with music the way I once did. There's just *so much of it* and it's hard to stop time and really let that music in. And that's with recordings. Who has the undivided attention to sit/stand with hundreds to tens of thousands of other fans after paying tens to thousands of dollars to attend an artist's live performance? Taylor Swift's audience pays thousands of dollars to hear their favorite songs, not Taylor's favorite songs.

To me, I feel that my friend should be excited that they make contact with an audience at all. I know that they are writing songs from their personal experience and would do so even if there wasn't an audience beyond themselves. Be glad for the person that took away something useful from your art. Be understanding that they have bullseyed a moving target that millions of other stimuli have missed. Thank them for their interest. Don't criticize the fan for not having absorbed all of the work equally. Don't run them off for not liking your new material and much as your old material. The relationship between art, artist, and patron is complicated enough already. Why gatekeep it? — KELLY MENACE

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