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free, take one.

the dirtbag times



*inside: ai vs the starving artist - human metamorphosis -
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record reviews*



the dirtbag times is a
magazine for dirtbags
by dirtbags.

editorial bored
kelly menace

art splendidness
katie keller, rowan menace, &
wonko zuckerberg with maren farmer,
jacob higgs, tishia jackson, &
william daniel thompson

print meister
craig wheel werker

folks that write stuff
mike l. downey - tishia 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



AI VS THE STARVING ARTIST

Recently an acquaintance in my local music scene tried to convince me that the use of ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence (A.I.) software allows musicians to adapt to the current social media-capitalized reality. The argument was that this person, who really just wanted to do things the way they did in the '90s (i.e. just show up to the show and play), wasn't equipped for having to become their own booking agent, art director, video director, recording/mix/mastering engineer, publicity agent, marketing director, and social media coordinator. This is what is expected of the average cottage industry musician these days. This was a lot to unpack at once, but this is pretty much how I responded.

First off, I felt dude's pain. I am pretty okay at being a musician. I am most confident in that role. I've pretty much accomplished the 10,000 hour thing at this point behind a drum kit. That does not in any shape or form make me a master of that instrument, but it does mean I have no excuse for only being "good enough for rec league" at it. But that's pretty much where I'm at as a singer/songwriter/performer. That is also pretty much where I'm at as a 'zine editor. We've been at this in one format or another since 2008. I love putting together *The Dirtbag Times* for all of youse. What I am not so good at is distribution, marketing, selling advertising, art direction, etc. This is why I have a whole lot of collaborators each month. For my bands, well, I also have a lot of folks that help me with that stuff! But far fewer than help me with this 'zine. I am no graphic designer by any stretch, but I learned years ago how to make fliers, make cover art, sticker and t-shirt design, etc. I'm not great at it, but certainly good enough at it from trial and error over the years to figure it out and not totally embarrass myself. Same goes with video editing. I learned some of that for work and have applied what little bit I know to band videos.

What I have also learned is that while I am certainly good enough at it to make acceptable work, I've learned when to outsource the work to more capable hands, especially if I am doing something "for keeps." If I'm pressing vinyl it gets properly mixed by a proper mix engineer and mastered by a proper mastering engineer. MAYDAY AVL, the music festival I run in Asheville, NC every May, gets proper graphic design from a proper graphic designer. I am no professional at music, festivals, or 'zines. I make no money at any of this stuff. In fact, I am frequently putting money I don't really have into it. There is something curious about artistic endeavors that people expect someone successful at it to actually make money at it. I am so far in the red on my artistic work that I will die in debt. However, that is no reason for me to result to using artificial intelligence to cheat the

handful of artisans out of my business. Most of those artisans are rec leaguers too and charge way less for folks like us who aren't pros either. They too want to support the local artist community. It's just good karma.

This acquaintance of mine could pull up Canva and fuck around until they've figured out how to make a flier for a show, or the cover art for their new album. That person could use freeware like Garageband or Audacity to record. That person could use iMovie or pay for an Adobe subscription for Premiere Pro to figure out video editing. Etc. Really, if someone wants to do their own thing it is not all that difficult to figure out how to do it on your own with the help of software that already exists. Or that acquaintance likely knows someone directly or someone that knows someone that likes to help band people out with inexpensive art design or editing or mastering or whatever. I've been fortunate in recent decades to know people that love to help. Sometimes we barter, sometimes I pay them outright. I can offer to help that acquaintance make similar connections. Another thing to note is that even if one has already designed something on their own that farming it out to the quasi-profession often makes that work look that much nicer. I see nothing but a good thing to reach out in collaboration.

In a more broader, generalized sort of way, I get why this said acquaintance would want to use AI. I have used several layers of Google translation to run things in and out of other languages repeatedly and then back to English to see what kind of fun accidents are created. I have been in bands where AI was used because the bandmate in charge of that band thought the artifacts were humorous. But the guilt outweighed the humor and the band has hired graphic artists ever since. At this point every artist should know by now that artificial intelligence takes previous works created by other artists and feeds the algorithms with those works without acknowledgement or payment for fair use. I know this acquaintance would not be cool with someone claiming copyright of his songs or recordings. That they would be cool with it for AI usage is kind of appalling.

Was I able to make my point heard? No. This acquaintance is a little bit of a lout. I am sure you, dear reader, have an acquaintance that is a lot like mine. I hope that if we continue to bang the drum for the use of actual human creators' creations instead of so-called "A.I. slop" that these loutish folks will finally receive the message and understand that, if anything, their use of prompt-based work will backfire on them. Other creators will refuse to share a bill with them, or listen to their music. Artists need to stick together and help each other diminish the use of artificial intelligence and slop-shame others that use A.I. — **KELLY MENACE**

HUMAN METAMORPHOSIS

Life sure has a way of pushing a person into metamorphosis. Not the gentle kind we romanticize, but the kind that begins with an ugly, sad unraveling.

You know, a caterpillar doesn't glide gracefully into becoming a butterfly — it breaks itself down inside the cocoon and becomes something unrecognizable before it becomes something so beautiful.

And humans do this too.

We face seasons when life becomes so heavy that a normally happy, patient, and warm person starts cracking under the pressure. Stress breaks us. Fear twists our reactions. Anger becomes our shield. We start losing large parts of our whole self. We walk around riddled with holes and looking for anything to fill them.

Labels like "bad," "broken," "evil." And to fill the smaller holes are feelings of shame, confusion, and hopelessness.

What we don't realize is that our "bad" version isn't some moral failure; it's a chrysalis.

A necessary isolation often follows. It's not lonely — it's educational and freeing. It's the quiet space where we step away from noise, expectations, the roles we've been performing, and the labels we've used to survive. In that stillness, we confront the pieces of ourselves scattered by hardship. We sift through what must be released and what must be reclaimed.

And slowly, a beautiful new us merges with the remaining parts of us.

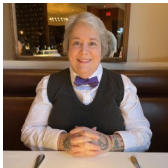
We emerge as someone wiser, softer, stronger — someone who has walked through darkness and reshaped ourselves on purpose. The human version of wings.

It's the same arc Joseph Campbell described in the hero's journey: departure, descent, transformation, return. The person leaves the familiar world, faces trials that break them open, discovers truth in the depths, and rises again — changed, radiant, whole.

It's a hard process but the end result is worth it.

We don't become butterflies despite the struggle.

We become butterflies because of it. — **TISHIA JACKSON**



THE BOOK I WASN'T READY FOR UNTIL NOW

When I was in college, my best friend and roommate was Eileen Healy.

Eileen was also my maid of honor, which tells you something about the kind of friendship we had. We lived together, survived college together, and somehow managed to remain friends after knowing entirely too much about each other. Eileen also loved *Anne of Green Gables*. I had never read it.

This was not because I had anything against *Anne of Green Gables*. I just had other things going on. I was in college. There were classes and the Babsie and dorm drama and the general chaos of being twenty-something.

Eileen had very red hair. So, naturally, I assumed I understood the appeal. Anne had red hair. Eileen had red hair. Therefore, Eileen loved Anne. This seemed perfectly logical to me at the time.

Then we graduated and went off into our respective lives.

In the 1990s (three kids and a couple of career changes later), I learned that CBC and PBS had produced a 1985 miniseries *Anne of Green Gables*, starring Megan Follows. We were a family who watched all kinds of shows together, so, in the late 1990s, Bethany, the kids, and I binged the series. We loved it and Gilbert's "I'm sorry, Anne" line (with sorry pronounced in a definitive Canadian accent) became a standard line in the Beeler household.

I remember being completely charmed by Anne. She was dramatic and imaginative and prone to saying exactly what she thought. She had an enormous imagination and absolutely no filter, which made her both endearing and, occasionally, exhausting. Marilla was wonderful. Matthew was wonderful. Gilbert was Gilbert. The whole thing was lovely. And that, I thought, was the end of my Anne story.

I had never read the book, but I had seen the miniseries. My kids had seen it. We had enjoyed it together.

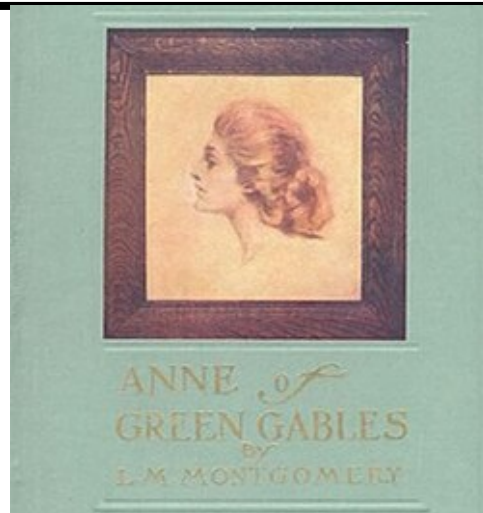
Done and done. Except, apparently, Anne wasn't done with me.

I recently borrowed *Anne of Green Gables* through Libby (the library lending app ... which, if you are unfamiliar, I highly suggest looking into to see if your local library has it [or any of the other "lending apps"]). And I am now sitting here wondering how on earth I managed to go all these years without reading it. Because there is so much more here than Anne's hair.

Eileen, I owe you an apology. It turns out that *Anne of Green Gables* is a beautifully written

"Isn't it splendid to think of all the things there to find out about?"

— Anne Shirley (*Anne of Green Gables*)



book about finding your place in the world. It is about what happens when someone who has never really belonged is finally given a place to belong. It is about growing into yourself. It is about friendship and forgiveness and grief and family and all those complicated ways we love one another.

And, perhaps most importantly, it is about hope.

Not the shiny, inspirational-poster kind of hope. The quieter kind. The kind that keeps going.

Anne has spent much of her life being unwanted and misunderstood. She has learned to use her imagination partly because she has had to create the things she doesn't have. She arrives at Green Gables expecting, once again, to be sent away. Instead, she stays.

And then something happens that I think is easy to miss when you're young. She begins to change, but not by becoming someone else. She becomes more fully herself. That's a very different thing.

There is a lot of growing up in this book, but it isn't just Anne who grows. Marilla changes. Matthew changes. The people around Anne change because she is there.

And that, I think, is one of the things I find so moving about it now. We tend to think of love as something we give to people who have already earned it. *Anne of Green Gables* has a different idea. Sometimes we love people first and discover, along the way, that they become easier to understand because we have taken the time to

know them. There is so much tenderness in that.

And I suppose I notice tenderness differently now than I did when I was twenty. At twenty, I was busy becoming an adult. At this point in my life, I have had enough time to realize that becoming an adult is not actually something you finish. You keep becoming. You change your mind. You discover things about yourself. You lose people. You find people. You make mistakes. You sometimes make the same mistake again, just with better shoes. You learn that the people you love need you in ways you didn't expect. And, if you're lucky, you discover that you still have room to become someone you haven't met yet.

I think that's why this book feels so right to me in 2026. We are living through a time when there is an awful lot of pressure to decide who belongs and who doesn't. Who is worthy. Who is acceptable. Who gets to be heard. Who gets to be safe. Who gets to be loved. And here is this book, written in 1908, quietly telling us that people are more complicated than the labels we put on them. That imagination matters. That kindness matters. That belonging matters. That the people who seem difficult or strange or inconvenient may have more to offer the world than we can see at first glance.

It isn't a political book. And yet, somehow, it feels relevant to the political moment we are living through. Maybe because the world is always in need of reminders that people are people. Maybe because hope is always worth making room for. Or maybe because sometimes we just need to be reminded that a good story can still make the world feel a little more manageable.

I keep thinking about Eileen. Back in 1987, she knew something about this book that I didn't. She loved Anne, and I assumed it was because of the hair. Forty years later, I finally understand.

And there is something wonderfully funny about that. Who would have thought that one of my college roommate's favorite books would follow me from 1987 to a family television room in the late 1990s and then, all these years later, find its way into my hands through an app on my phone?

Apparently, some books are patient. They wait until you're ready. I'm glad this one waited for me. Because *Anne of Green Gables* is beautiful. It is funny and sometimes heartbreaking and full of people who are learning how to love each other. But more than anything, right now, I find it hopeful. And I think we could use a little more of that.

So, Eileen, if you're reading this: You were right. It wasn't the hair. Well... it wasn't just the hair. — PAMALYN ROSE-BEELER

MICROMUSING

As we close in on elections the D.C. Reichstag will likely pollute, it seems the goal of the current administration is to make as many people miserable as possible while glorifying and boosting the already-bloated rich.

Can anyone remember the last time anything came out of Washington D.C. that benefited anyone other than the Fuehrer Felon and his bootlicking toadies? Is there nothing or no one that the slimesuckers will not stoop to tarnish? You just know gold-plating the Capitol Dome is under consideration.

Vote for anyone and everyone who is not Republican seems to be the only sane course. — MIKE L. DOWNEY

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— WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON

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THE CHICKEN FROM OMAHA

Have you ever heard about the Chicken from Omaha? Not the edible fried chicken, more like the tale of about the Chicken from Omaha. You see the story has it that there was this chicken who “accidentally” figured out he was a chicken on a chicken farm in Omaha. I say “accidentally” because some argue that it was God’s will that woke that chicken up to what it was and what going on out of the rules of Universal fairness – they couldn’t all be asleep to what they were forever. They say many come and go to slowly help their kind grow if they want when they are ready. Unfortunately many of those allegedly become crispy chicken buckets and such before any real change or growth can happen.

They say consciousness just hits ‘em like a dart out of the blue – one moment they are grazing for bugs and shade and then – walah - bloop – blink – consciousness. With all the why am I here’s? What is here? What am I? Who am I’s? And more! Like the snap of fingers there sits a chicken that no longer can healthfully thrive or live any type of meaningful life in the typical chicken environment. They know nothing but that they know that they know nothing which is just enough to keep them up at night. You can typically spot em within a couple of days, but some claim sooner even up to the moment when they become “aware” if you know what to look for and walk by at the right time. Some have described it as a baffled blank dead eye stare with slower blinks before attempting to reintegrate with the flock. This they say never works out because as the cycles of days pass the newly awakened chicken(s) see the monotony beyond and those of daily urges and cycles. They understand the concept of tomorrow’s tomorrow and beyond enough to know there is more than the loop to the world.

It is said that slowly but within days their “bawk” begins to change and develop some more complex tonalities which would show deeper attempts at communicating and emoting, but that since there is no deeper cluck language model for their kind their pleas are futile and on deaf ears too dumb to understand even if they could. Furthermore, as one could image these “bawks” supposedly become increasingly desperate and pathetic with time and become more obvious than not of their “affliction” with some ranchers saying that they downright refuse to put them with the bulk chickens in processing and save them for the scrap-meat piles since they say the fear of existence seems to make the meat tougher and gamier which many customers aren’t too keen on. So they tend to try to spot them and separate them before they spread their “plight” to the others. Not that this is a common fear but it is a valid one with some farmers saying they used to leave them be sometimes tried to validate their existences before being culled by them

little hats and suits to feel important but the chickens didn’t know what any of that was so it only seemed to bother them more because they knew their shortcomings were greater than they could fathom.

A handful of people swear it’s a “problem” best left to itself. They claim if you just leave them with their thoughts long enough you’ll eventually find what’s left of them in the dog or hog pen, sometimes behind a tractor tire but that’s neither here nor there, the point being as they say “some things just have a way of taking care of themselves”. Evolution it seems keeps tossing these little feathered fellas the chance to seize the means of life and thrive but are set in their flock ways to comfortable to attempt to change or grow in anyway other than keeping things as they instinctively always have been – livestock – a living commodity for the enjoyment of others.

So by this point you are probably thinking to yourself - “okay now this all sounds pretty interesting and possibly even a little far fetched, but what does it have to do with the Chicken from Omaha?” Well you’d be right to think so if you were, and that’s what I’m getting to! You see, this extraordinary occurrence just happened to befall our fowl feathered friend in the most human of ways! How so you ask?! Well imagine a chicken “coming to” in the middle of a field and processing plant with full understanding of what is transpiring about it and without a second thought walks clear past the fence lines, guard dogs, factories, and such only to steal a smoke from a tractor near the end of the way of his departure for the closest and loosest watering hole. His thoughts? If he could come to and decide to walk away, so could they if they so chose.

Nebraska isn’t known for much but it does have corn and the luxury of being the only double landlocked state/province in North America. That and it does have some watering holes scattered among it’s ever expansive flat greatness. One such place happened to be “The Golden Crap” a failed half-assed bootleg gambling endeavor buy an ol’ exiled moonshiner with one good eye named “Klaud”. The building looked more like something from the scrapheap of a third world junkyard but the beers were cold and hooch mostly legal. There was enough room for maybe 10 people comfortably – 20-30 standing is pushing it on a nice day. The occupancy sign read a hopeful 75. Many a lonely soul had sat there pondering that dreadful possibility where one would be jealous of a sardine.

Of course, our main character knew nothing of such things only he had an unquenchable thirst and such a place just might be it’s best bet to quench it. By the time the Chicken from Omaha as it would come to be known arrived alive on the

scene it had already procured a couple packs of cheap smokes and about \$50 and some loose change from a loud mouthed local who was on his foul way down when the Chicken happened to be passing by. It could tell the fellas intentions were less than pure and he was on his way down anyway so what was a strong stray right hook from a newly conscious chicken?

Now one would think that a Chicken swinging open the door of such a place would be something of a sight for old eyes in these parts if anywhere but it was far from the case. As it turned out none of the maybe eight people counting “staff” so much as batted an eye. It was a busy night and some things tend to get looked over rather easily in the moment of things.

Truth be told they say this Chicken walked right up to the bar hopped on a stool dropped a Jackson, lit a smoke with a match and stomp with which it signaled to the near blind keep to pour a shot of gut rot and a cup of slog bier on repeat for a good hour or so. This apparently went on for a good while before another walked in just as abruptly and yet without much notice still doing the near damn same thing without missing a beat. By this point the bar keep felt he might be seeing double on behalf of all the swill consumed on the clock to help deal with the harsher realities of being on the clock. The Jukebox was playing a song from the Schmenges on repeat and no one seemed any the wiser.

As twisted fate would have a third walked in a few hours later doing almost exactly the same damn thing as well. Equally unnoticed and just as determined to cut loose as the other two which were already well on their own hardened and glorified path to self destruction. With time the numbers steadily grew till there actually were some 75 + patrons in the old Golden Crap. Mostly drunk newly sentient fowl types on an ungodly rampage but the help kept the drink coming believing most of it to be nothing more than a horrible flashback from years blatant LSD and Angel Dust use. What did it matter? The drinks were paid for and the shack was the fullest it had ever been and without a special guest artist at that too!

This is where things get really weird you see the proto chicken from Omaha in a strunken daze after doing a fresh hot rail off the bar realizing it is they alone who are sentient and the others for whatever reason are merely doing as chickens tend to do and following suite. This therefore meant in their eyes that only they were “REAL” and individual enough to justify going so hard and being so irresistibly fly in the process. The Chicken from Omaha also realized that the farmer in the morning was going to be rightfully perturbed upon realizing most of his chickens

had “flown the coop” so to speak.

Within minutes the place was quiet as a mouse. You see the Chicken from Omaha had found an exposed wire along the floor boards of the bar that ran the whole parameter decided to work smarter not harder by pissing in the spittoon on the floor while standing on the bar till it overflowed on the ground and hit the exposed wires essentially frying all who dared to place their feet on the ground in the tiny box shack. With all threats neutralized and no remaining need for cash at the bar the Chicken from Omaha killed the remainder of the cooler of beer before leaving and setting the place on fire with a freshly tossed spent match as it lit its exit cigarette with the Chicken from Omaha walking out like bad-ass from one of the old 50’s greaser movies.

Supposedly, the Chicken from Omaha got on a bitchin’ vintage Triumph from one of the unfortunate bonus casualties and rode off into the distant sunrise like a true bad-ass right into the side of a oil tanker and family of five and woowee it was something else for the Sunday evening News brief before the Lottos. It was something like out of a James Dean movie one person said – and they were right – that the instructional video at the farm for peaceful mindless grazing had accidentally been switched with an old tape with a few James Dean movies on it which the chickens had absorbed and subconsciously processed as their core inner ethos and one by one sprouted rebel personas and each “individual” followed suite. And since there could be only one – Chicken Prime – the Chicken from Omaha had no other choice but to conclude the movie the only way it knew how!

The funny thing about thing about the whole ordeal was that the locals were more fascinated by the Chicken Prime – that they damn well whitewashed the some eight or nine actual accidental homicides in the name of a wildly unique urban legend all their own. Over a short period of time about 3-4 months there were some themed parties, then a local play, bootleg shirts & posters, poorly made YouTube tribute videos, and more.

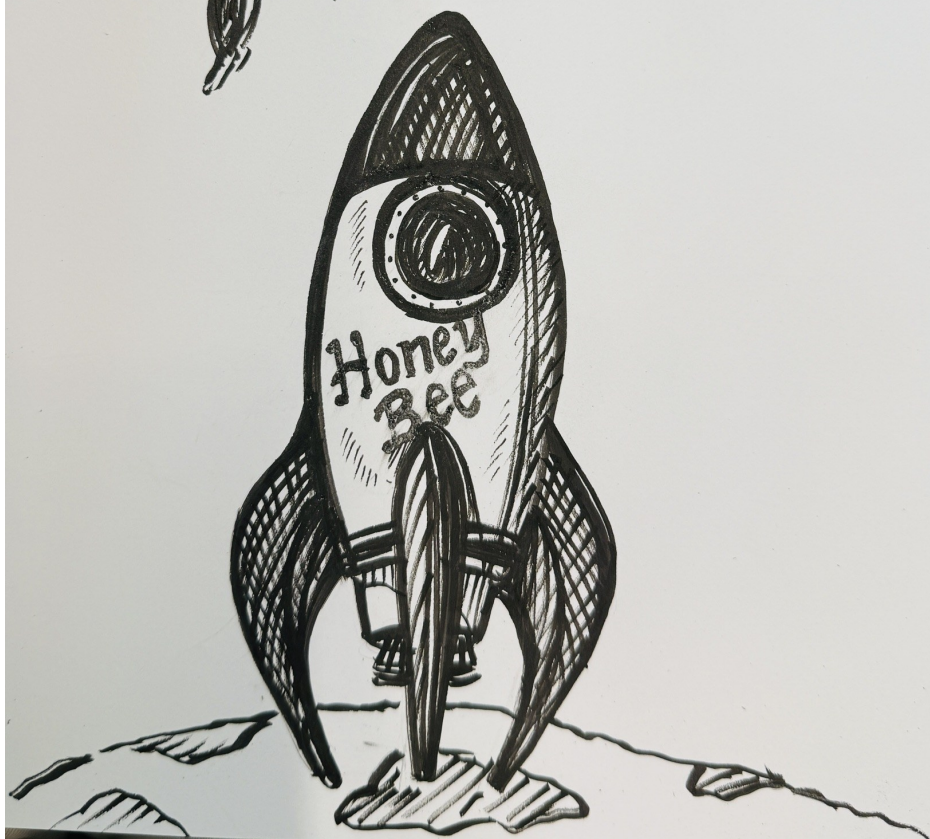
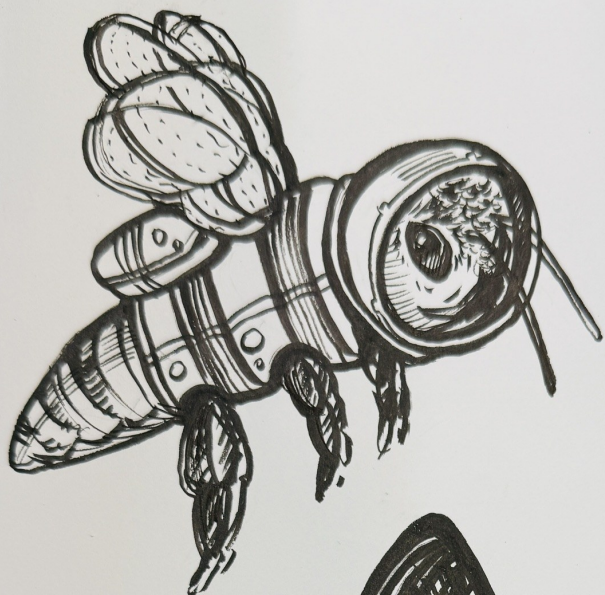
Ironically it seems despite being a manufactured product with the tag individual while essentially being somebody else’s dinner – the Chicken from Omaha was the poetry in motion the small little community needed to build it’s own shameless local legend thrift and gift shoppe for passers by to stop at and get those silly little things you forget you bought and accidentally leave at rest stops down the way. And that was something they all needed – hope and the American dream. After all it is true as they say - life does find a way

— WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON



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PEDAL PUSHING VERSUS PRS

I am a Fender amplifier guy. I have used Fender or hot-rodded Fender circuits pretty much the entire time I've played guitar in bands. True, I haven't always only specifically used Fender circuits, as I am ever curious and, on at least a few memorable occasions, I have made records that mixed my Fenderness with Vox and Marshall styled amplifiers. Yet the Fender thing was always mixed prominently. That said, I am always on the prowl for new tones and these days I am far more likely to mess around with my amplification than I am my guitars or my pedals. Especially now that I have become more adept at recording myself at home and have become more comfortable with a cocktail of choices at the pedalboard. I have been looking to add British tones to my very American amplifier selection for tonal variety. I have owned a few Marshall and Vox style amps without any of them sticking. Late last year I traded an amp and a pedal for a Paul Reed Smith HDRX20. The HDRX20 is PRS's attempt to build a clone of Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock Marshall JTM 45/100 amplifier. The Hendrix Family Estate loaned Paul Reed Smith's engineers this amplifier and the PRS team went to work trying to copy the amp.

First off, what is so special about this amp, other than Hendrix used it at Woodstock? At this point, we can conveniently divide Marshall amps up into four different eras: the JTM45 (think lower gain mid to late '60s); the Plexi/JMP (think LOUD and slightly more gain classic rock late '60s to mid '70s); the JCM800 (I lump in the master volume JTM era ... much higher gain hard rock and metal of the late '70s and the '80s); and the JCM900 + (the modern era of higher gain Marshall from the '90s onward). Hendrix's Marshalls were JTM 45/100's. The JTM45 was the original Marshall circuit that was patterned closely on the Fender 5F6A tweed '59 Bassman amplifier. It is not a 100% copy as British transformers and tubes were used. As a result, the JTM45 is not as harsh as most Marshalls, is fuller in the low end, and has relatively low gain. This amp ran at about 30 watts. Hendrix's 45/100 doubled the output tubes and beefed up the output to closer to 100w to match the requirements of British guitarists like Eric Clapton and Pete Townsend, who, like Hendrix, often blew up their Marshalls running them at full tilt in large theaters or outdoors. In America, Hendrix largely played backlines of Fender Dual Showman and Sunn amp stacks, mostly because Marshalls were hard to import until the '70s and because they were unreliable. But that JTM45/100 is *the* sound if you are after Hendrix at Woodstock. The PRS HDRX20 attempts to capture that tone in a 20w package with a master volume, a couple other modifications, and an affordable price tag. The HDRX20 runs three 12AX7's in the preamp, is



solid state rectified, and runs 20 watts out of two 5881 power tubes. That is a very odd tube compliment for an amp that would have historically run on EL34's. The 5881 is associated with American production and specifically with the '59 Bassman. Marshalls of that period ran two separate channels with two inputs per channel. Many players would jumper the two channels together to give more control over the overall EQ of the amp. PRS prejumpers those channels. Rather than a normal and a bright there is a bass and a treble channel. This is a nod to the Super Lead and Super Bass versions of Marshall amplifiers. There is a master volume, the typical treble/mid/bass/presence controls and a couple of switches: one activates more upper mids and one that works like a bright switch. On the back there are plenty of output taps for nearly any cabinet scenario one might want to use.

So what does it sound like? It is an odd Marshall, that's for sure. One can dial it up to sound like the really bright, hard, percussive, and aggressive Plexi era amps. One can also dial in more of the bass channel volume and make it sound A LOT like tweed and brown panel Fender amps. It works extremely well with single coil pickup equipped guitars, which makes sense as the '60s era Fender Stratocaster was Hendrix's choice of guitar. This amp is a great clean to edge of clean pedal platform, which comes as a surprise to a lot of players. The beautiful neck pickup cleans from Hendrix's chordal ballad work are there. But in order to make the amp bark like one would expect a Marshall amp to do one has to run the master volume to at least 10 o'clock. Keeping the input volumes low keep the tones cleaner, running them higher makes the amp distort but that full bloom thing most rock players are looking for requires the input and master volumes to climb to noon. This is where one begins to wonder if the "20" in HDRX20 actually refers to anything. This amp on noon is well beyond what I'd normally call "bedroom volume." In fact, it is quite giggable at that volume in a loud rock band.

The tube compliment suggests something more akin to 35-40w and that PRS may have fibbed a bit about clocking this amp at 20 tube watts. I have used this amp with both a Celestion 65w Creamback loaded 1x12 and an Eminence Texas Heat loaded 2x12. Both of those speaker cabs are very efficient and help this amp to project more than if one were to use a set of more inefficient speakers, like Celestion Greenbacks. That still does not explain away just how loud this little guy is and the velocity it wants to run at.

In practice I find this amp to be a lightweight and affordable version of my '59 Bassman LTD reissue in a head shell. I can run this amp clean to cleanish with plenty of dirt from my pedalboard and get it to give me all the Marshall I want with all the Bassman low end I prefer. The amp weighs 27 pounds so it is quite a bit more portable than my Bassman. While it definitely wants to see some volume I get some beautiful clean to edgy clean tones at home with a more reasonable level of volume. That master volume does not help it to sound like it would at full tilt with the channel volumes up and the master way down. It sounds like a can of bees. If one wants to use it at home and get Woodstock tone I suggest using an amp load or an attenuator. I have used the amp with the 1x12 at a 500-capacity space mic'd and had plenty of clean stage volume even with a fairly hot JB-loaded SG. I've also used that amp with the 2x12 in a large room unmic'd and been audible. I think the important distinction for me is that I don't care for most Marshall amps because of the tight and attenuated low end. It makes bright guitars sound thinner, clanky, and icepicky to me. A Marshall wants to be hit hard by humbuckers with heft. If one only uses the treble input that is certainly the case with the HDRX20. But using the bass volume helps to give it way more tonal breadth than were it just a Plexi style amp. Mixing the '60s and '70s tones together gives the player the possibility to dial up their own ideal Marshall tones.

This amp currently retails for \$899 but I have seen sales on the amps periodically at \$699. A Bassman LTD runs at \$2199 currently (holy shit!) but that is a combo with four 10" speakers. The PRS requires a speaker cabinet (the matching HDRX20 cab sells for \$999). The only competition at this price is Marshall's Origin lineup and to my ears while the Origin series has less gain and more of a '60s sound they still attenuate the lows in a way that don't work for me. I also find that the Origins master volume has to be turned up loud even for good cleans. The HDRX20 has a wider volume spread for cleaner tones. These amps come in around \$500 used often and are worth a try for sure at that price. — KELLY MENACE



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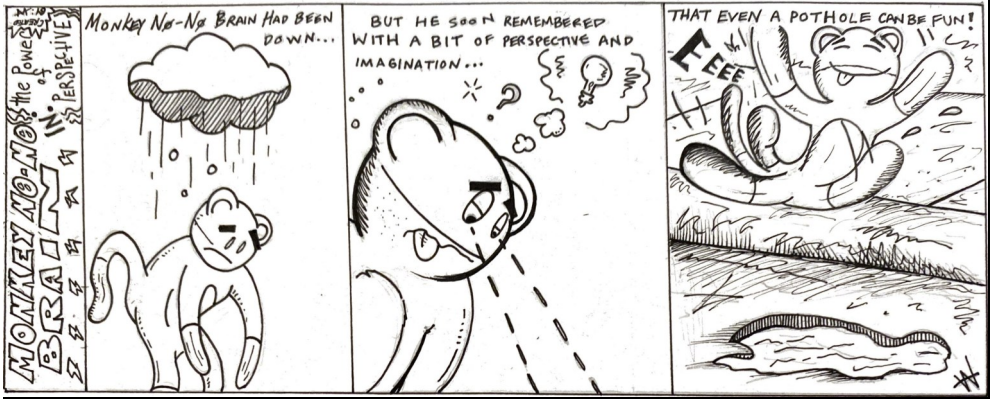
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RECORD REVIEWS



NETWORK 23

A Tribute To Jean Michel Jarre

Normally I'm not a fan of musicians covering someone else's music since it often turns out the only ones you prefer sound like the original. So why not listen to the original, right? But this homage manages to capture the thrill of the instrumental primary source while adding a fresh touch.

British electronic duo Network 23 also are so prolific that dipping into cover tunes is forgivable. Their tributes to Tangerine Dream and Kraftwerk also strike some chords. But frankly, I've always been a fan of Jean-Michel Jarre. This is almost a perfect retrospective of his work while showing off Network 23's chops.

The upbeat songs from "Equinox" and "Magnetic Fields" as well as "Chronologie" are solid choices as well as the atmospheric "Oxygene 6" closer. Like a good homage should do, you hunger to hear more from the original albums.

Of course, Network 23 would have had me with just "Rendezvous 4" that is one of the most rapturous pieces of electronic music ever (look for a live version with a saxophone and try not to weep for the reason).

Network 23 can be found on Bandcamp. I discovered them during the pandemic with their soul-saving *Calming Sounds for Troubling Times* series. And you get extra Cool Nerd points if you know the origin of their name without looking it up. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**



BAD MUTHA FRANKENSTEIN

Alive In the Underworld

San Antonio based Carrie Ayala aka Badd Mutha Frankenstein has been making music for well over 20 years now and has been a key player in the Texas Industrial metal scene for quite some time in some form or another whether as former lead guitar woman for long running controversial Texas Industrial Metal band Fuck the Mainstream 2000-2007 and then Toxi Traumatic for some time there afterwards for a bit as well before making the move to solo artist around 2011 as Badd Mutha Frankenstein and then full into instrumental soundscapes and soundtracks. A frequent contributor to FTM to this day she collaborated with a number of other FTM REC alumni on a number of projects and tunes. In fact, she appears on all three Chainsaw Synphany albums of the Orwell Ingsoc trilogy as well as future releases. Other collaborations

include with Gas-Kit, Barragan, EVOL (projekt unknown), The Guant, and more.

Alive in the Underworld is BMF's debut full-length LP. This record collects the efforts of the better part of a decade post both bands and shows Carrie coming into herself more as a solo artist and soundtrack master. This album features haunted industrial instrumentals and high octane fist pumping awesomeness with tracks like "Crash & Burn", and "Murder Ride [feat. Deadguitarz]" which also appears on the Fuck the Mainstream Records compilation *One For the Road: A compilation of friends, thugs, & back ally tugs*. The bulk of A.I.T.U. was recorded in Austin at Studio 77 by Scott Stone. This record helps not only showcase the talent of the underground and underdogs it's a soundtrack to a movie being made by you in real time through your eyes in the now. Something like that is bound to suck you in.

The record features an audio journey that takes the listener through the rivers of purgatory and straight through the gates of the underground in the underworld and beyond to where the party never stops and the ghouls always rule! The album contains an instrumental cover of the classic FTM tune "Heaven Lies" along side a remake of an early BMF tune "Lost in Sleep". There's an emotional ode to the passing of her pop with "Free at last (in loving memory)" which takes the listener somewhere somber

heartfelt and brooding with the pulse of life so many songs lack. If you still had any doubts, the horror themed romp "Blood, Guts, & Werewolf Nuts" is on point to open and kick off any worth while Gorey B-movie golden gem from the best things yet-to-come.

Essentially, if you're looking for a kick ass instrumental record to throw on for the long cruise to work or play throw this beast of a record on and let your head do the banging, your finger do the wagging and your toes do the tappin! *Alive in the Underworld* showcases an artist's metamorphosis and journey to self definition and discovery by digging through the depths of Hades and themselves **ALIVE IN THE UNDERWORLD** delivers the goods. — **WILLIAM DANIEL THOMPSON**



THE PREAKNESS

A class act in a bad situation

Good music does not age out. Sure, there are always those hipsters and so-called-cutting edge folks who swear the greatest music in the world is streaming right now. But let's face it: lots of aural crap out. But that's another issue.

A class act in a bad situation by The Preakness is not a new album. My CD copy is from 2008

(originally released by the redoubtable, now shuttered, Two Sheds Music). The Bandcamp "reissue" is from 2019. But here's the thing: it sounded fresh then; it sounded fresh seven years ago; it sounds fresh now.

The Georgia trio with intertwined male-female vocals concocts these ear-friendly pop tunes that borrow from the Brian Wilson/John Fogerty playbook heavily: a good song should not be longer than three minutes.

Ten of the 13 tunes on this album clock in under the magic 3-minutes. It's not too surprising that one of the longer tunes gets a bit preachy and might have delivered its message better in a shorter version. Who knows? "Frog logic" is melodic if cryptic while "this drive" is a mid-tempo puzzler. "The spoke" gently lopes along while "water's edge" is a languid rocker that's just fun to listen to and ponder. "Air traffic" and "on the couch" rock the hardest. "On the couch" appears to be about a rock band touring and having to sleep on couches, but the music is the fun part anyway. "Way to shore" closes the album in a melancholy fashion.

Listen on Bandcamp for free, maybe invest in some old indie music. — **MIKE L. DOWNEY**



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Caverns of Gold

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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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