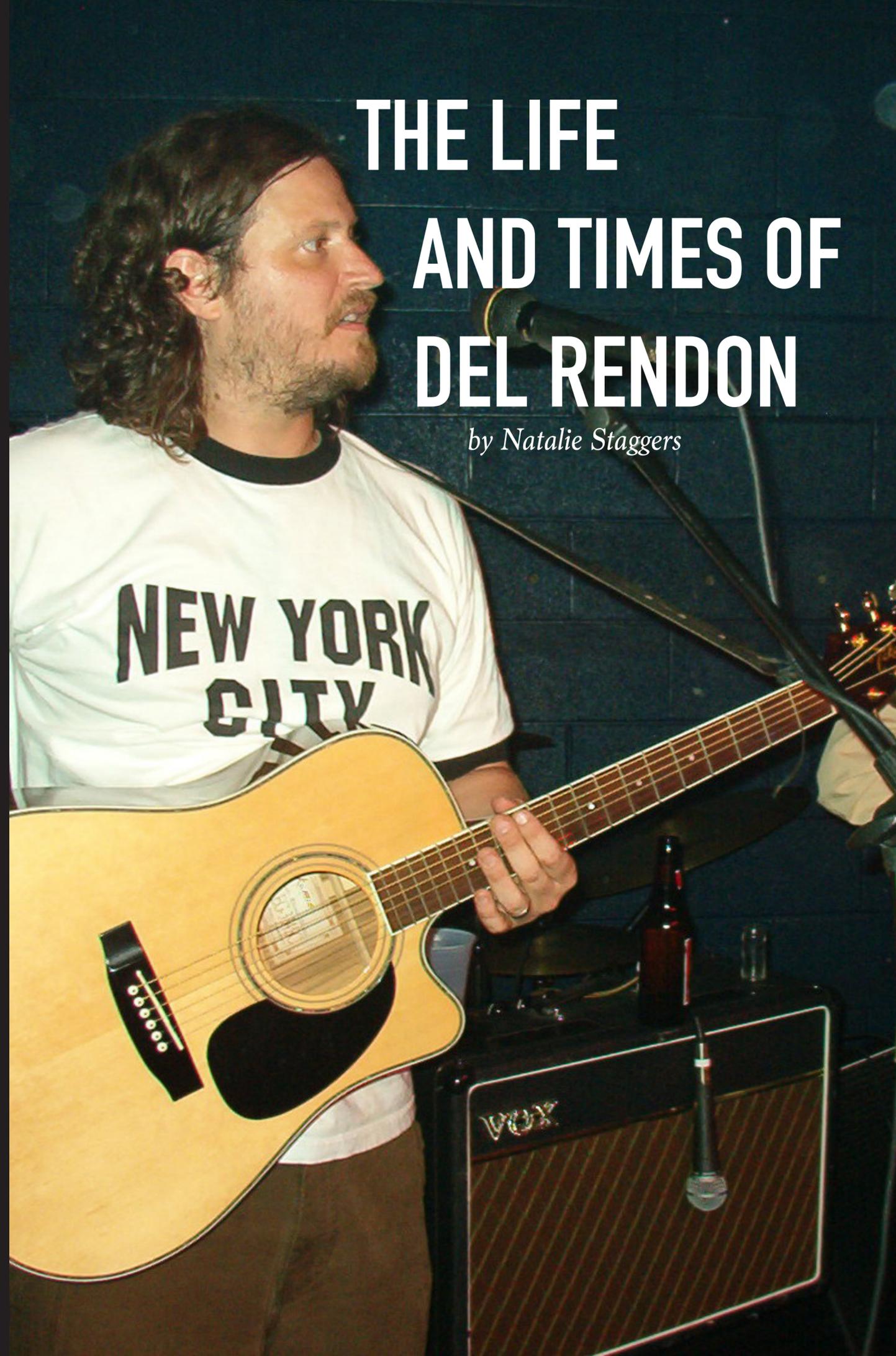


QUEUE

Disrupting the Status Quo

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Courtesy of the
Del Rendon Foundation



THE LIFE AND TIMES OF DEL RENDON

by Natalie Staggers

Del Rendon was a talented musician and artist from Starkville, Mississippi, who was passionate about helping anyone and everyone he could. It is often said that Del never met a stranger and that he could make anybody feel valued and appreciated. Del tragically passed away on September 4, 2005—20 years ago today. This loss is still felt by many but he lives on through those who knew and loved him and continues to help local artists and musicians through the Del Rendon Foundation.

Our hearts go out to the Rendon family at this time after their recent loss of another loved one, Hilary Rendon. In honor of the impact that Del left on Starkville, we'd like to tell you a little bit about Del's life and the legacy that he left after his passing.

From a young age, I can remember my dad telling me stories about the Puerto Rican Rum Drunks and how they toured the southeast, playing every gig they could get their hands on. They quickly became regulars at Dave's Dark Horse Tavern, pulling in crowds so big that the fire marshal would have to stand at the door and count heads as people entered and left. Though I was only a year old (and some change) when Del Rendon died, he has impacted my life in many ways and he's had a massive impact on the community of Starkville.

Andrew Rendon, Del's younger brother, said that one thing he remembers about Del from their childhood is how willing he was to give things up. The most coveted privilege when they were kids was to sit in the front seat and Del would regularly allow one of the other brothers to have it.

Del started making art before he could speak and his interest in music followed shortly thereafter. His dad was a musician and an artist and wanted to pursue that dream for a while but decided to go into civil engineering instead. Nonetheless, he enjoyed doodling and playing music so Del was surrounded by those passions from the time he was born.

The Rendons moved around quite a bit, depending on where their dad's job took them. They lived in Virginia, New York and Puerto Rico before eventually ending up in Starkville. It was the '70s so Mississippi had a bad rep and their dad was taken on, partially as a diversity hire. While Andrew and Martin (the youngest brother) sometimes struggled to embrace their Hispanic heritage, Del was never ashamed of who he was. He had a strong sense of identity even at a young age and was willing to stand up for himself and those he loved.

When Andrew was seven and Del was ten, they found a wallet in downtown Starkville and tracked down the person who owned it. The owner of the wallet worked at a record store on Lafayette Street and they were so thankful that they told the boys to pick a record. The first band Del truly fell in love with was the Beatles so they initially grabbed a Beatles record but it was warped so they exchanged it for *Rock and Roll Over* by KISS which started a new obsession.

Martin came along when Del was 10 and his first real memory with Del was going with their father to pick him up from a KISS concert. Their father was against metal music, but he supported Del in his endeavors and always encouraged all of his kids to be musically inclined. Martin noted that his and Del's age gap made their relationship interesting because Del was almost like a parent to him in some ways. He taught Martin how to be kind, compassionate and empathetic but also how to be a badass and be confident in who he was.

"I was so young that he in a way kind of raised me and a lot of my values and morals came from him," Martin said.

Later on, Del started a KISS cover band and won \$1,000 at a Halloween show dressed as Gene Simmons. Del and Martin were both working at Be-Bop Record Shop in Starkville which was right next door to a Chinese buffet. Ace Frehley happened to be eating at the buffet one night and Del frantically grabbed the picture of himself dressed as Gene Simmons and ran next door to get Ace's autograph. At first Ace was reluctant (partially due to the fact that he was eating and partially because Del had chosen to dress up as Gene rather than Ace), but he came into Be-Bop after and signed it.

When they were living in New York, the Rendon brothers decided to enter the Lewis County Fair talent show. Their father bought them matching shirts and they sang "We Will Rock You" by Queen. Compared to the other 4 acts, this was quite ambitious. Most people were doing piano performances or brass ensembles, but they decided that Queen was the perfect selection for this rural crowd. The boys didn't quite understand how the winners were announced so when they were announced for fifth place, they assumed they had won first and celebrated accordingly.

As the brothers got older, they continued to perform together whether it was singing songs, performing skits or just entertaining their family. They loved harmonizing to Beatles songs together—or, more accurately, Del loved harmonizing to Beatles songs and the other boys played along. By the time Del

started learning guitar he was itching to start a band. Christy Rendon, his wife, met Del when he was 25. They met at what was then Bully 3 but is now Dave's Dark Horse Tavern. He was waiting tables and she walked in "like she owned the place" and the rest was history. She said he'd spend all weekend sitting in front of a CD player and listening to songs over and over again as he taught himself how to play guitar.

"I learned a lot more songs than I ever wanted to," Christy said, laughing.

Once Del had started to get a handle on guitar, Lee Graham (a bandmate at the time) noticed that Del wasn't playing some of the chords the way he needed to. Because of the way he was playing, it was difficult to move from chord to chord so he had to relearn guitar. He started progressing quickly the more he surrounded himself with other talented musicians.

"Del was almost 40 when he died," Andrew said. "I couldn't imagine what kind of guitar player he'd be like if he was still here."

Outside of his music and art, Del loved to do crossword puzzles, read, spend time with friends and family and cook. When noting his love for crossword puzzles, Martin said, "He would've loved freakin' Wordle." One of the last Thanksgivings that they spent with Del was at Christy and Del's house and they kept a list on the refrigerator of how many trips they made to the store. By the end of the day, they had made 25 trips. Part of Del's love for cooking was the way it brought the people around him together. He loved sharing food with friends and family, even if it meant driving from door to door to drop it off. Lee Graham, the bassist for The Puerto Rican Rum Drunks, said that his favorite foods that Del cooked were Puerto Rican rice and beans and fish stew. However, he also noted that Del just had a gift for cooking.

"Everything he cooked was fantastic," Graham said. "He was just one of those guys that gets in the kitchen and starts throwing things together and next thing you know you've got something awesome."

Del cared deeply for the people around him and always wanted to make sure everyone he loved was safe and taken care of. When there was a thunderstorm or tornado warning, he'd call everyone in his contact list to make sure they were aware and had time to prepare. His generosity wasn't exclusive to his loved ones, though. He was willing to help out anyone and everyone who needed it.

One time when Christy and Del were dating and didn't have much, they took a trip to New Orleans. Del decided to play guitar and get some tips so they could go get a nice dinner together. After he'd made some cash, he packed up the guitar and they headed to get beignets. They passed a man on the side of the street who was holding up a blank sign and Del immediately walked over and handed him the money, assuming that he needed it more than they did. Andrew said this generosity was learned from their parents who were both very giving. Both of their parents regularly picked up hitchhikers and would sometimes hitchhike themselves.

"When [Andrew and Del] were like 12 and 10 years old [our father] took them hitchhiking just for the experience," Martin said.

Their other brother Eddie also regularly went hitchhiking with their dad, but he was unable to be a part of the interview because he lives in Birmingham, Alabama.

One Christmas when Christy and Del first started dating, Del hitchhiked all the way from Starkville to Jackson to spend the holiday with her and her family. He didn't have a car so Christy assumed he couldn't make it but he showed up to surprise her.

"For Christmas we sang 'The Twelve Days of Christmas' and everybody had a line and once we had somebody who could sing, it was a game changer," Christy said.

When he got to the house there was a dinosaur Band-Aid on his face which he'd used to cover up a cut

he'd gotten from someone throwing a bottle at a party. He thought the Band-Aid would make him look less threatening, and clearly he was right.

“I feel like one way to describe Del is that he never met a stranger,” Andrew said. “He had the gift [of] gab and he could just talk to anyone.”

“I think more than [the gift of] gab, he had [the gift of] listening,” Christy said. “He made people feel like whatever they were saying was important.”

Del had joined The Downstroke which was a jam band with almost exclusively original songs. They handed him a tape and told him to figure out some lyrics and he became their lead singer. Mark Goldbeck, who played keys in The Downstroke, said that their bass player Jon Beedle saw Del play an acoustic set and knew he was the right fit for the band.

“The faces he makes when he sings just let you know he really means it,” Beedle told Goldbeck, referring to how soulful he was.

They recorded a six-song EP cassette at Mileage Studio and an eleven-song LP at Easley studio (where Wilco and others recorded). The Downstroke got so popular that at one point they were opening for Hootie & the Blowfish and the crowd booed Hootie off the stage because they wanted The Downstroke back. Six months later, Hootie & the Blowfish played Times Square, NYC for New Year's Eve on national television.

At the gig where they finally broke even on the cost of recording the CD, one of the members announced to the crowd at Mulligan's that the band was over (the rest of the band was not aware). Shortly after, Del invited Goldbeck to play an acoustic set with him that he'd booked as a solo gig so they got together and ran through a few songs then headed to Dave's. Del then invited Robert Stagers (my father) who worked in the kitchen to come play drums and he called Jayson “Pogue” Herndon, who played bass, to join them.

Del figured that since they hadn't practiced together it would probably sound pretty rough so he suggested naming the band The Drunks. I mean, how much can you really expect from a band that names themselves The Drunks? They tossed the name around for a while and finally landed on The Puerto Rican Rum Drunks after Del noticed a bottle of Puerto Rican Rum behind the bar. Martin was also an artist and started making all of the posters for the Rum Drunks' gigs, many of which still hang in the entryway of Dave's Dark Horse Tavern.

After a couple gigs, Lee Graham replaced “Pogue” on bass and they added Steven Turner as their lead guitarist. Though their lineup changed some over the years, the initial configuration of the Rum Drunks was a few of the previous members of The Downstroke, Robert Stagers and Lee Graham.

Every Halloween, they chose an album to learn and would dress up related to the album then play it front to back. One year they played *The Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd and dressed up as the flying monkeys while *The Wizard of Oz* played in the background. They also played *Appetite for Destruction* by Guns N' Roses, *Houses of the Holy* by Led Zeppelin and *Abbey Road* by the Beatles.

Once the Rum Drunks started recording, they'd spend hours in the studio trying to get everything just how they wanted it. Goldbeck noted that Del was regularly late to his job at Be-Bop because he didn't want to leave the studio until they were done. There's a Polaroid of Del that says in his handwriting “late for work” as hard evidence of this. He got fired multiple times from Be-Bop for being late but was always rehired because his boss was the guitarist for the Rum Drunks.

One thing that Goldbeck noted about Del is that he was a natural at working the crowd. He had no issues with walking out and talking to everyone in the bar.

“He would probably be a marketer's dream but he didn't do it for that reason,” Goldbeck said. “He

knew everybody there and genuinely wanted to say hi.”

Goldbeck said that Del was somewhat like a big brother to him. Not only did Del teach him a lot musically, but he also influenced how he lived his life. Goldbeck had a lot of respect for Del's songwriting abilities and often when he's writing songs, he'll have moments where he wonders “What would Del think about this?”

“I still think about him daily,” Goldbeck said. “It's been 20 years now but that kind of person leaves his mark for sure.”

Goldbeck said that there are some times when it feels like Del is still here, often in moments where he finds himself brave enough to stand up and do the right thing even if it isn't the “cool” thing to do. A song that always reminds him of Del is “Sentimental Guy” by Ben Folds, particularly the line, “Little things you said or did are part of me, come out from time to time / Probably no one I know now would notice.”

Spike Harris, who was one of the guitarists for the Rum Drunks, said that Del changed the trajectory of his life by teaching him how to be a better person. Del showed him how to say a simple thank you, how to look at someone with an open mind and sympathize with their situation and how to let things roll off his back.

“All I can say is if you never met Del you missed out on meeting one of the most unique, artistic, loving characters that you could ever find,” Harris said.

Though kindness and generosity were a big part of who Del was, his sense of humor couldn't be overlooked. Martin said that if Del truly loved you, he'd smack you in the face then kiss you on the forehead. You knew you were “in” if you got a smack. Goldbeck noted that no matter where they were, if Del saw a turtle in the road he'd stop to help it out.

“That fella would stop no matter where we were headed. We could be on a four lane highway. If he saw a turtle he'd pull over,” Goldbeck said.

One day, on the way home from a gig in Jackson, Del put a CD in the CD player and told Lee and Christy that he wanted to play “Love T.K.O.” by Teddy Pendergrass with the band. Lee and Christy both gave him a look of, “be so for real,” but Del played the song on repeat for the entire trip from Jackson to Starkville. By the time they'd reached Louisville, Lee and Christy were both singing, “Looks like another Love T.K.O. oh, oh, oh.”

One time, the Rum Drunks had to play three gigs in the span of two days and on the second night they were staying at the Red Roof Inn. Six guys were staying in two rooms that were connected and they were all exhausted and sweaty. They got Whataburger because it was the closest thing to them and when they woke up the next morning to get on the road, Del looked around and said, “It smells like feet, beer and Whataburger in this sonofabitch.”

Del was also very passionate about the TV shows he loved. Every Sunday he and Christy would have dinner with Martin, but unless it was at their house they were leaving by 7:30 sharp to get back and watch The Sopranos.

Del left an impact on Starkville, Mississippi, so large that there are people I've never met who recognize me because they know my dad through Del. His legacy and his spirit live on in the people who love him and continue to share stories about him, and these are some of the life lessons that Del taught those around him.

“The main thing I got from him was how to be kind. You have to put yourself out there—well, you don't, but he made me want to put myself out there and help other people. It's so easy to do and you don't do it for the rewards but the rewards are immense.” -Lee Graham

“I worked really really hard to lock down what he believed in and what he thought and what his values were so that I would never forget it and I try to live by those things.” -Andrew Rendon

“He was a force but not like a real strong beat you up force. He was just a force of love and empathy,” -Spike Harris

“You can never ever ever put too much garlic when you’re making pork. That’s probably the biggest lesson Del taught me.” -Andrew Rendon

I asked everyone why Del was so passionate about music and while nobody had an answer they were positive of, these are some of their guesses.

“I think it was his way of calming himself.” -Christy Rendon

“Can it be a part of your DNA?” -Andrew Rendon

“I think it was about connection. It was a way for him to be connected to everything.” -Martin Rendon

“I can’t really speak for what it meant for him but I know that as a musician it’s just kind of an indescribable passion.” -Mark Goldbeck

“I think music was like a really close friend to him.” -Spike Harris

Below are a few notable quotes that I couldn’t find the right spot for in the article but that I believe encapsulate who Del was and the impact he had on those around him.

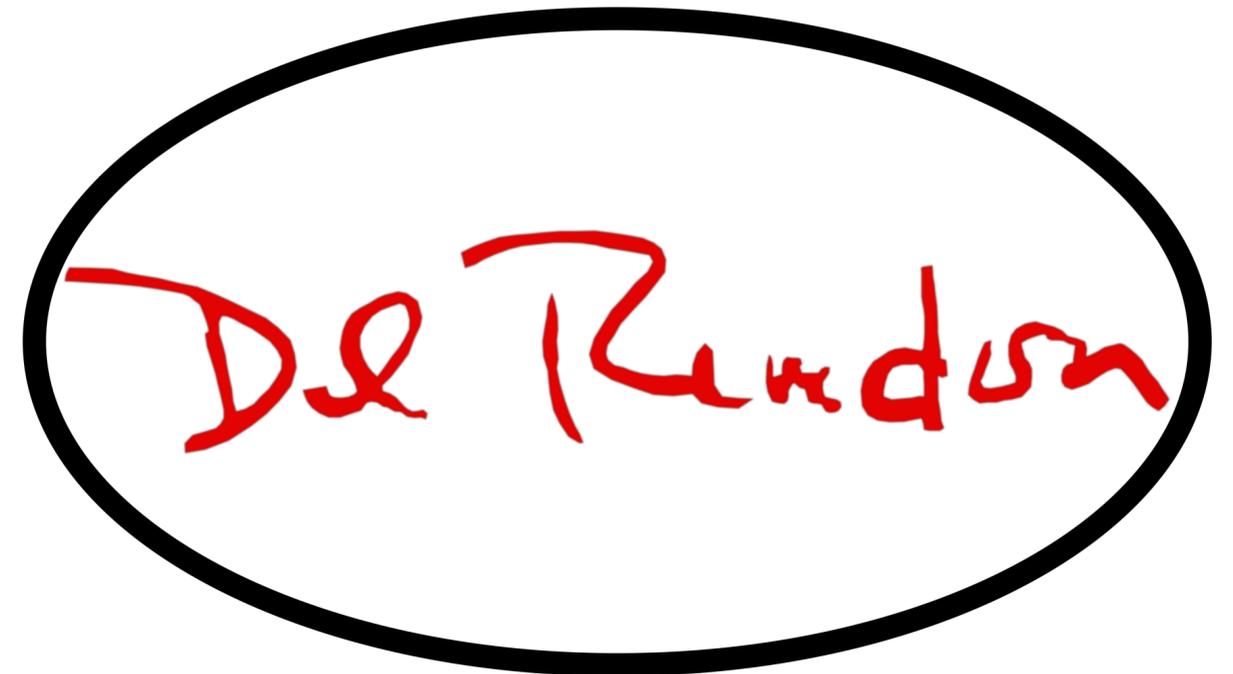
“Del was an angel. He was an amazing human. He was just the best guy and the best friend you could have and to impress you even more he was an amazing songwriter, singer and performer. He just had a presence but at the same time humility.” -Mark Goldbeck

“When I think about Del, the song that always comes to mind is Jimmy Casterbunch. I never really asked him what many of his songs were about, but he had a knack for turning out lyrics that were unique and intriguing enough to pull you in, yet still mysterious enough to provoke the imagination and invite the listener into the creative evolution of the song. Nowadays, I mostly remember Del as kind, encouraging, altruistic and humble. I’m a better person for having known him, and every time I hear Jimmy Casterbunch, it feels like he’s still here with us.” -Robert Stagers

“He could make everybody feel like he was their best friend, but I really felt like he was my brother.” -Lee Graham

Del Rendon’s death was a tragic loss, not just to those around him, but to the community and the local music scene as well. His love, warmth, kindness and empathy lives on in those who loved him and he has forever changed many people’s lives. Whether or not you knew Del, there are so many lessons that can be taken from the way he lived. Del was a gift, and I’m thankful for the opportunity to write about his life and his legacy.

The



Foundation

by Reagan Bussey

If you've ever been to Dave's Dark Horse Tavern in Starkville, Mississippi, you've at least seen the name Del Rendon. His name is immortalized above the stage that's named after him. His artwork is displayed around the bar also. As a transplant to Starkville, I didn't know much about the city before moving here. When I arrived in the fall of 2019, I knew MSU was located here, there was a Bojangles at some point and I knew there was a record store. The first bar I ever went to was the Tavern. I remember it was karaoke night. I became captivated by the bar and have spent many nights there since. I was introduced to Dave by accident. I sat at the bar on a Sunday night and a gentleman sat next to me. It was slow as are most Sundays in Starkville during the summertime. The guy next to me struck up a conversation and he introduced himself as Dave Hood. We began conversing and eventually I asked him who painted the various celebrities around the bar. That was my first exposure to who Del Rendon was. With each person I meet or talk to, the mystery of Del's story is exposed more and more.

Del's legacy continues to thrive and inspire young musicians like myself. I don't know if other musicians feel the same way, but every time I perform on the Del Rendon stage, I think about how we all have a part of him with us in our love of music and our love of sharing music with others.

After the untimely passing of Del Rendon on September 4, 2005, the following spring was the first Del Rendon Music and Art Festival. The profits from the event went towards the Mississippi State University Art Department for an endowed memorial arts scholarship in Rendon's name. It was supposed to be a one off memorial event but over the next year, more people kept asking coordinators of the event, "When's the next fest?" The event has been a continuous high point of the music scene in Starkville and the 19th Del Rendon Music and Art Festival took place this past year.

This past April was the first time I attended the Del Rendon Music and Art Festival. It was so interesting seeing all of these people who had some connection to Del or whose life was touched by his spirit or music at some point. A condition to each band or artist that performs at the Del Rendon Music and Art Festival is that they play a song written or co-written by Del. It is such an amazing and creative way to continue to bring his music to the younger crowd and those who never knew Del. Working through and learning those songs allows them to know Del in a way, continuing his ever-expanding legacy. It was kind of surreal seeing the people around me sing along to the Del-penned songs during those points of the festival.

The Del Rendon Foundation was founded after the Rendons and other close friends realized that there was a need for an organization like this in Starkville. The foundation raises funds to give back to the community of musicians and artists in Starkville but also to bring awareness to the importance of arts and music in our community and who we are as people. One thing that I think is so important about the inner workings of the Del Rendon Foundation is the people. All of the board members include Del's family and friends who were close to him during his life, emphasizing that each decision the foundation makes is a genuine decision from the heart.

More people are asking for funds which board member of the foundation Andrew Rendon speaks of in a positive light: "The more organizations, the more people, the more individuals that reach out to us to request funding, that's an indicator that we're getting our name out there. We're getting our mission out there. People know what we're doing... I think that's a way we're measuring our success."

In addition, using the Del Rendon name is a way to remember and memorialize him to friends and loved ones as Del was so passionate about philanthropy and giving back to others. The main focus is on music and arts but the foundation has toyed with the idea of doing a Thanksgiving food kitchen in the future as Del would often cook food and give it out to people during the

season. They've evolved over the years to widen their mission to the Golden Triangle region. For the last two years, the foundation has donated money to PorchFest in Columbus that takes place at Munson Brothers during the spring and hosts a variety of musicians locally and outside of our immediate region.

As the Del Rendon Foundation is always looking to give back to our community, they've currently got some projects in the works for the future. The foundation is currently working with Toad & Bird Productions for their upcoming 2nd annual Black Cat Arts Market at Fire Station Park to provide performing musicians at the event. The Mississippi State University community collaborative arts event EN MASSE encourages the community to experience and participate in a full day of art, poetry and music and has been made possible because of support from the Del Rendon Foundation. Several public art murals around Starkville have also been made possible by commissions from the Del Rendon Foundation.



Andrew Brister. *Shine*. June 2025, McGown Art Retreat and Studio.

A recurring program supported by the Del Rendon foundation is the MARS (MacGown Art Retreat & Studio) Residence Program. A stipend is paid for two to four visiting artists, writers, musicians, scientists and others each year and they reside in a guest cabin for 2 to 4 weeks while creating various works of art in the outskirts of Starkville. 2025 Resident Artist and recipient of the Del Rendon Memorial Endowed Scholarship Andrew Brister mentioned how both of these experiences impacted him as an artist and musician:

"I think it was a really good experience. I went in with an expectation to be some scholarly artist but it really made me feel comfortable and loose. I got to make stuff that I wanted to and learn new ways to make art that I previously would've been less likely to explore... Trying to do two different art forms actively is hard, and to be awarded a scholarship based on the legacy of a man doing that same thing is inspiring. To be recognized for anything or to be awarded for anything is to feel like all has meant something this whole 27 years of living."

The last but nowhere near least event that's always on the docket of the foundation is the Del Rendon Music and Art Festival which will celebrate twenty years this upcoming April.

I'll leave you with a few words from Del himself. This quote came from an interview done by Marc Poole during the fall of 1999, a Tuesday evening where Del had been playing every week for four years by this point. He was asked "What are the benefits of being a musician?"

"You don't make a lot of money being a musician but the smiling face [is a benefit]. When you can tell you're making someone happier, I really can't explain that feeling."

DISCOGRAPHY DEEP DIVE

I chose Fleetwood Mac for Discography Deep Dive for a myriad of reasons. First, I adore Stevie Nicks (I'm aware she's kind of crazy but damn can she sing). Second, Rumours and Fleetwood Mac quite literally got me through my sophomore and junior years of college. Also, I knew that Fleetwood Mac was a blues band before the Stevie and Lindsey era, but I had never listened to their early stuff so I wanted an excuse to deep dive into the music of theirs I hadn't experienced before. I also thought it would be funny to pick an artist with an ungodly amount of studio albums (kind of poor choice in hindsight). Fleetwood Mac has had many iterations—some MUCH better than others—but I'm glad that I've experienced all of them.

- NATALIE STAGGERS

NATALIE

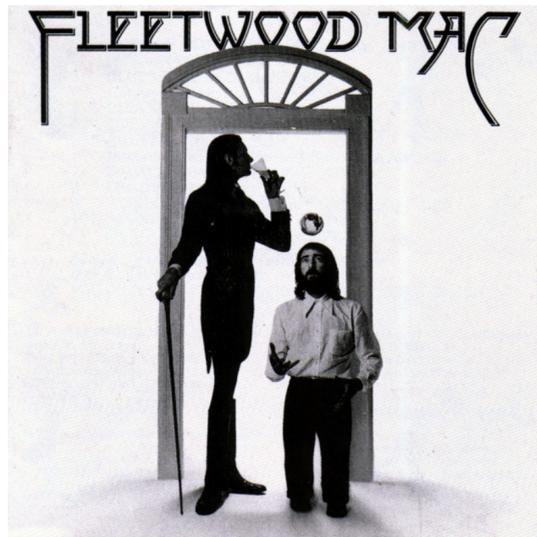


1

★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'GO YOUR OWN WAY', 'THE CHAIN'

"If it weren't for 'Oh Daddy' this would be a 5/5 album. The pure, raw emotion packed into every song makes it hit just as hard no matter how many times you listen."



2

★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'RHIANNON', 'LANDSLIDE'

"Seeing Stevie Nicks perform 'Rhiannon' and 'Landslide' live was one of the high points of my life and I bawled like a baby. This album is so damn good."

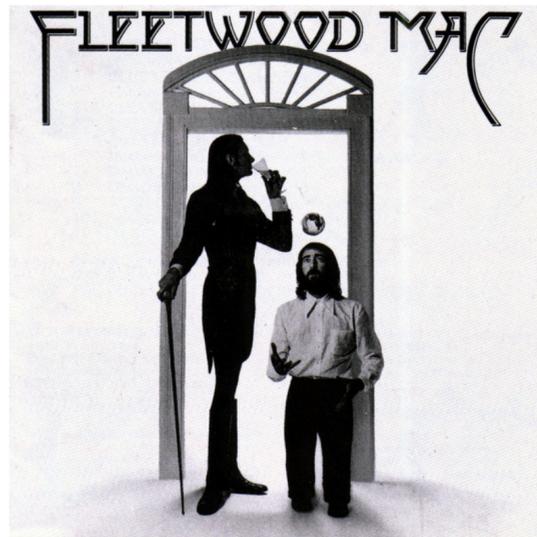
REAGAN



★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'YOU MAKE LOVING FUN', 'THE CHAIN'

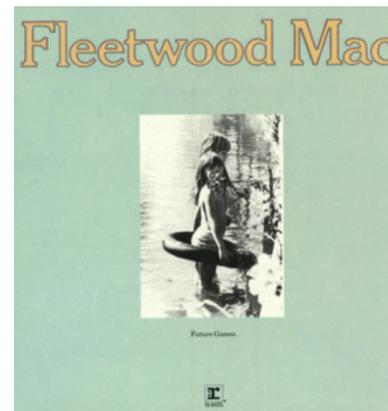
"Fueled by drugs, infidelity and other interband personal conflicts, Fleetwood Mac would release their magnum opus, *Rumours*. One of the best selling and critically acclaimed albums of all time, the group reached their artistic peak here and it shows. The vast majority of the album is fantastic and earns its place in music history."



★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'RHIANNON', 'OVER MY HEAD'

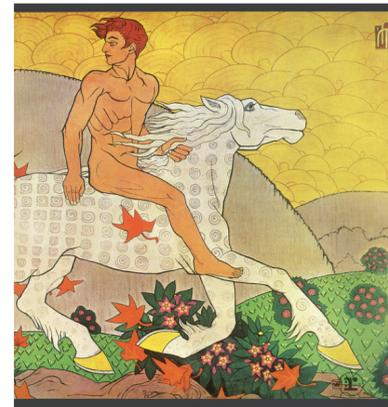
"It's insane that the world's introduction to Stevie Nicks as a new member of Fleetwood Mac is 'Rhiannon' which has become one of their most popular songs and is culturally significant. With radio friendly singles dominating the charts, this would be the beginning of Fleetwood Mac's legacy."



★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'MORNING RAIN', 'FUTURE GAMES'

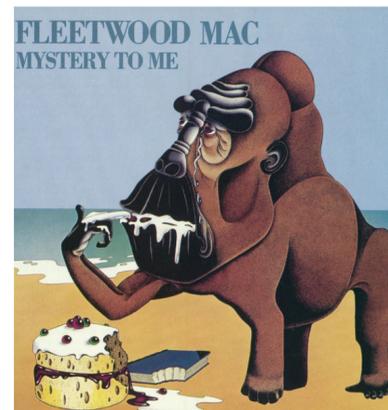
"There's an ethereal aspect to this album that I love. I feel like it's an interesting combo of their early sound and hints toward the sound they'd become famous for."



★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'OH WELL (PT. 2)', 'MY DREAM'

"Some of the songs on this album are so atmospheric and I LOVE IT."



★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'BELIEVE ME', 'THE CITY'

"There's so many bangers on this album. I love the funky basslines and their use of the talk box."

3



★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'STOP MESSIN' ROUND', 'LOVE THAT BURNS'

"I'll admit, the photo of Mick Fleetwood on the cover used to scare me for some reason. The group is finding their footing by utilizing less covers and writing some great blues tunes."

4

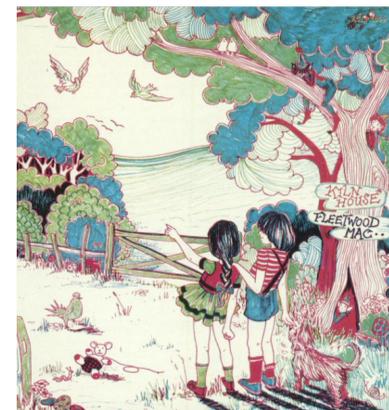


★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SEVEN WONDERS', 'EVERYWHERE'

"This is the better of the two '80s Fleetwood Mac albums to me. It is dated because of the musical equipment and typical '80s sounds they utilize but that doesn't take away from the fact that this is an overall good album."

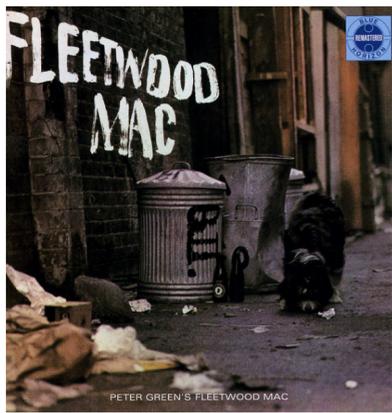
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★★★★★

FAVORITE TRACKS:
'BLOOD ON THE FLOOR', 'HI NO SILVER'

"Wow. Another stylistic change after the departure of Peter Green. An album full of songs pulled from early Chuck Berry-esque rock and early '60s doo-wop songs is not what I was expecting, but I will gladly welcome it with open arms. The A side is fantastic but the B side still has its low points."

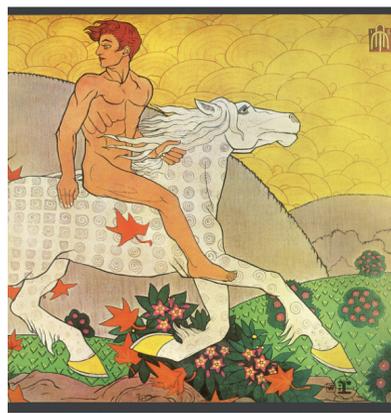


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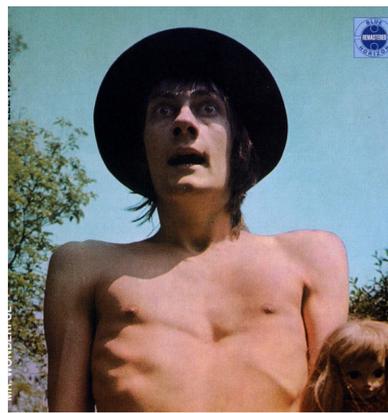
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SHAKE YOUR MONEYMAKER', 'MY BABY'S GOOD TO ME'

“This is not at all the sound people think of when they think Fleetwood Mac but it’s still very good. I love a good blues album.”



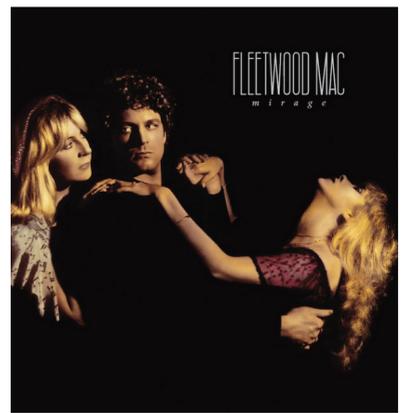
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'OH WELL (PT. 1)', 'WITHOUT YOU'

“Right from the beginning, you hear the departure from the traditional blues that the group had strictly used in their first two albums and notice that they have moved more in the direction of psychedelic rock. I believe this album is the first appearance of ‘Greeny’ on a FM studio album. Who knew that guitar would have one of the most sought after tones in rock music?”



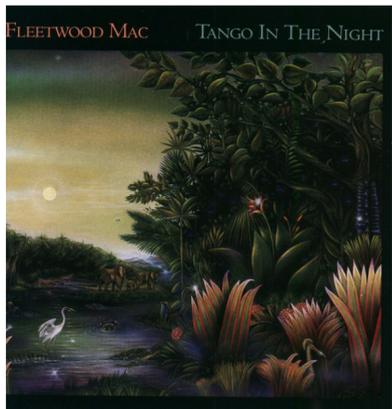
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'ROLIN' MAN', 'LOVE THAT BURNS'

“It’s a good blues album but it feels a little more repetitive than their first album so I get bored after a while.”



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'OH DIANE', 'GYPSY'

“Fleetwood Mac goes ‘80s. I think this album is more enjoyable to listen to than *Tusk* because it’s not *Rumours Jr.*”

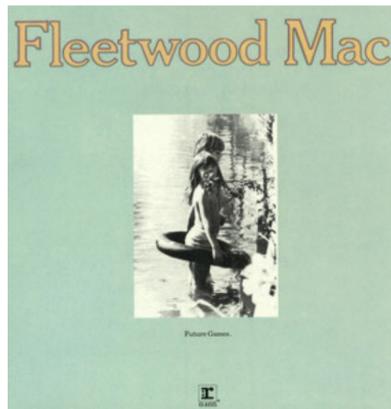


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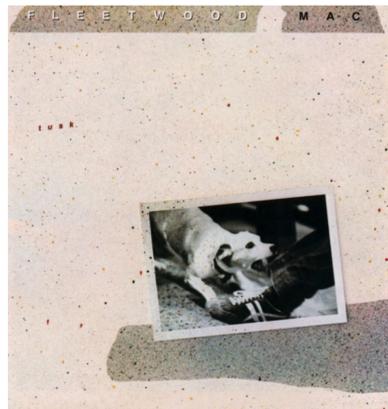
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'EVERYWHERE', 'LITTLE LIES'

“The A side is a lot stronger than the B side (with the obvious exception of “Little Lies”) but overall it’s a good album. There are definitely songs that stand out and songs that are just okay.”



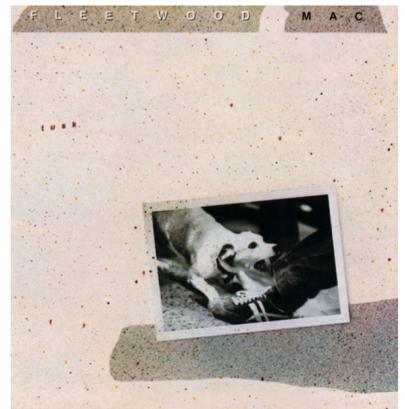
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SOMETIMES', 'SANDS OF TIME'

“The first album to feature longtime member Christine McVie and guitarist Bob Welch? I’ll admit, I only knew Welch from his soft rock career of the late ‘70s. We see a change in style again and the C. McVie penned songs give you a peek of what is yet to come for the group.”



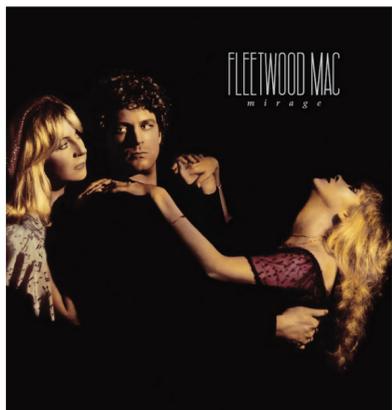
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SARA', 'TUSK'

“A lot of these songs lack the emotional depth that those on the past two albums have. There are, however, a few standouts.”



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'OVER & OVER', 'SARA'

“The steady decline of Fleetwood Mac is beginning. This double album is still good but it’s tough to top *Rumours*. The sensationalism of their personal drama is beginning to become their ‘personality traits’ and turning them into a parody of themselves. This is most evident in the title track being akin to “The Chain.”

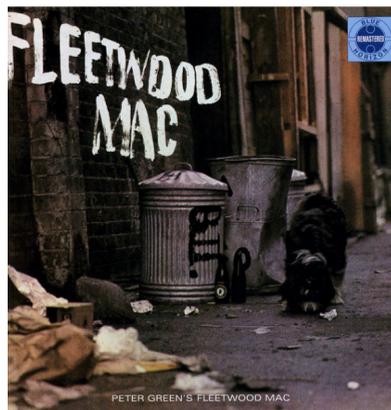


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FAVORITE TRACKS:
'GYPSY', 'HOLD ME'

“I like the overall sound of this album and the use of background and harmony vocals. Plus, it has a few of my all-time favorite FM songs.”



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'MERRY GO ROUND', 'SHAKE YOUR MONEYMAKER'

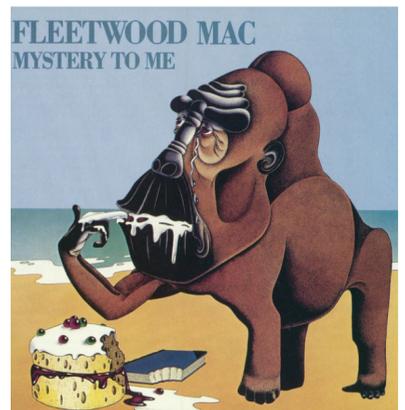
“I’m a sucker for some traditional blues with that swing. Some Brits can do it well and this iteration of Fleetwood Mac did a fine job on this debut.”



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'THE GHOST', 'SUNNY SIDE OF HEAVEN'

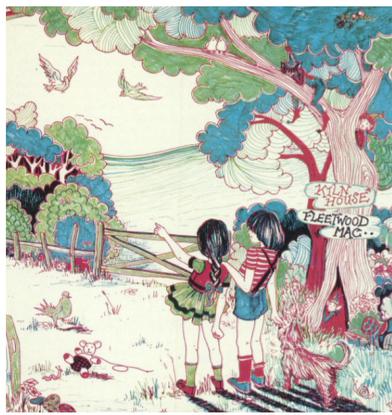
“This album feels like coming home to someone you love. I like the A side a lot more than the B side.”

11



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'HYPNOTIZED', 'MILES AWAY'

“This album has one of my favorite Fleetwood Mac songs on it. It’s better than the last few efforts but still doesn’t knock it out of the park for me.”

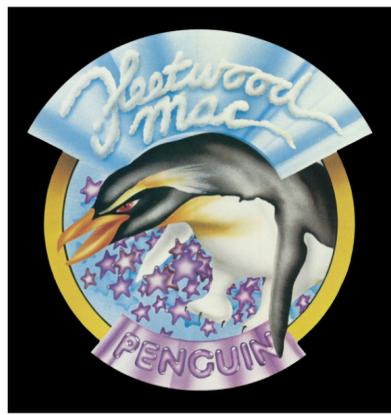


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FAVORITE TRACKS:
'STATION MAN', 'JEWEL EYED JUDY'

"This album felt more like a random collection of songs than a cohesive album but there are some gems."



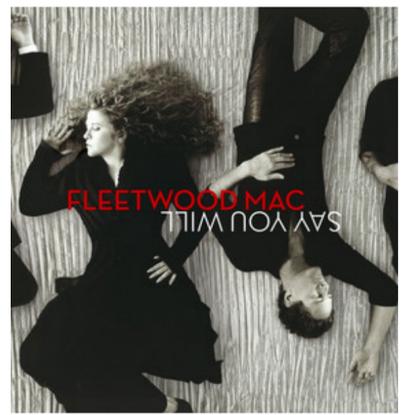
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'BRIGHT FIRE', 'REVELATION'

"You can start to see the seams loosen and the everchanging line ups are starting to wear thin. This album does have highs but the lows outweigh."



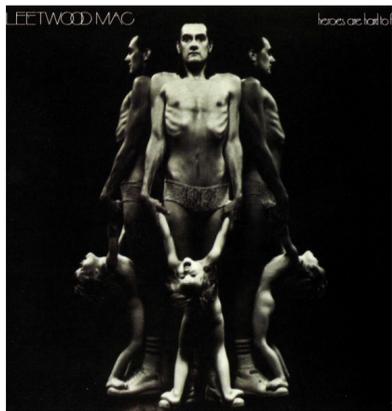
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'REMEMBER ME', 'CAUGHT IN THE RAIN'

"It felt aggressively average compared to the others."



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'WHAT'S THE WORLD COMING TO', 'MIRANDA'

"Finally, the family is back together. After the highly successful reunion of their 1997 concert tour and live album, *This Dance*, the final Fleetwood Mac album would be released in 2003. Unfortunately Christine McVie wasn't there so there won't ever be a finale to this great musical lineup in the 21st century. It's a decent last effort for the group, but without C. McVie an important element is missing and it's the most evident in the vocal harmonies."

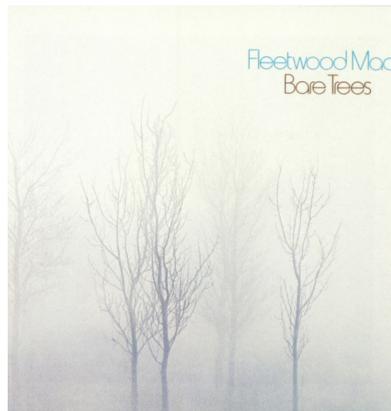


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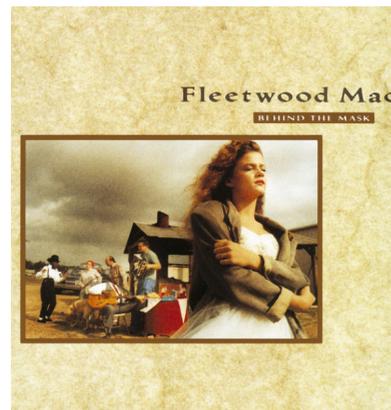
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SHE'S CHANGING ME', 'BORN ENCHANTER'

"It wasn't bad but there weren't really any standout songs in my opinion. It's just okay."



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SUNNY SIDE OF HEAVEN', 'SPARE ME A LITTLE OF YOUR LOVE'

"This album isn't super cohesive and the songs all fall a little flat to me."

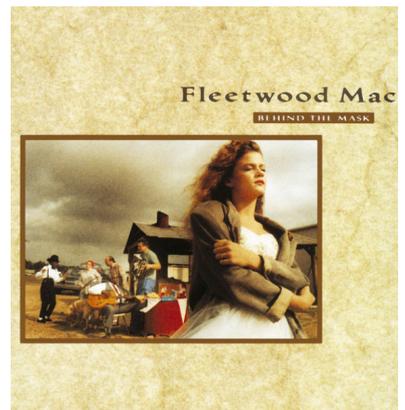


16



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SAVE ME', 'BEHIND THE MASK'

"Um guys... I think we lost the plot. Okay but actually what is even happening here? Losing Lindsey was a real devastation to FM."



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'AFFAIRS OF THE HEART', 'WHEN THE SUN GOES DOWN'

"This one was really hard to get through. I didn't find any particular redeeming qualities to this album. The rock/pop royalty has fallen with this release."

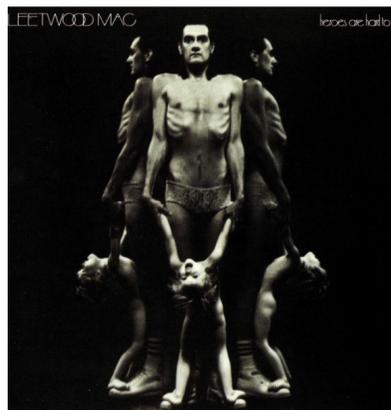


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FAVORITE TRACKS:
'BLEED TO LOVE HER', 'MIRANDA'

"Getting back together to make one last album was a nice thought but the loss of Christine McVie shows. Most of these songs feel dull and lifeless."



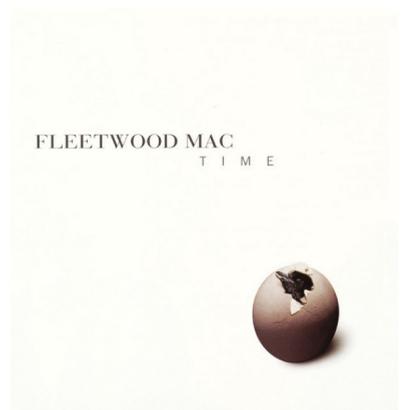
FAVORITE TRACKS:
'SILVER HEELS', 'SAFE HARBOUR'

"Oh my god, this album's cover is terrifying. They have come so far from their traditional blues beginnings because of constant lineup changes with the exception of John McVie and Mick Fleetwood. It's not the best way to end this era but it's certainly not horrible."



17

"Making a post-Rumours album without Lindsey or Stevie is actually diabolical work. Out of principle, I ain't listening."



FAVORITE TRACKS:
'I DO', 'SOONER OR LATER'

"Okay, I thought the previous album was hard to get through. This release has nothing on *Behind the Mask*. First off, no Stevie, and who the hell is Bekka Bramlett? For the record, the songs listed above are not my favorite, just the most tolerable."

Reviews

The Ringing Bell

Derek Webb

by Natalie Staggers



I grew up attending a very small, community-oriented church that holds a special place in my heart to this day. In my early teen years, I often helped work the sound, lights and music (SLAM) booth which I took a lot of pride in. I'd walk into church, make a cup of coffee, chat with a few people then go to my post and listen to the same playlist we played every week before the service started. While you might think I'd get tired of these songs, I grew to love them and a few that particularly stood out to me were from *The Ringing Bell* by Derek Webb.

The Ringing Bell was Webb's fourth album, released in 2007 by The Smoakstack and Sumner Studio in Nashville, Tennessee. A few of the songs have Christian themes, but many focus on life, love and ethical troubles that people face daily. The album begins with "The End" which fades seamlessly into "The Very End," a beautiful song about unconditional love. My favorite line from this track is, "Cross my heart, hope to die / You are my firefly / And I'll love you to the very end." The piano drives the melody and while it's simple, it perfectly

captures the tone of the song. "A Love That's Stronger Than Our Fear" fiercely disrupts the mellow, reflective mood with the electric guitar making an abrupt appearance.

"I Wanna Marry You All Over Again" is one of my favorite songs on the album, detailing the desire to go back to the very beginning with someone you love and relive becoming friends, courting them and falling for them. As someone who is almost constantly reminiscing, I relate to this song on a deep level. Ironically, this song was written about Webb's wife at the time whom he divorced seven years later.

"Name" is one of my favorite songs on the album because I hate being put in a box. Spite is my biggest motivator because if you tell me I can't do something, I'll show you just how capable I am. While most people are scared to break societal norms and do things outside of what's expected of them, I like to keep people guessing. Confining yourself to what others think of you does nothing but limit your potential. Webb considers this song the "thesis" of the album, as it demonstrates his unwillingness to be restricted by society's expectations of himself and his music.

"Can't Be Without You" starts off strong with the lyrics, "I'm not scared to look into your eyes even with him standing right beside you / Love is hard, especially when you're not mine / So here's to you, you can take my heart 'cause I've lost my mind." For years this song has been my go-to when I've found myself in a position where someone's perception of our relationship doesn't align with my own—both platonically and romantically. I love the way it summarizes the tension of feeling inevitably tied to someone while knowing that the relationship will never live up to your expectations.

In 2019, I had the privilege of going to a private house show where Derek Webb performed. Bo Jeffares, a good friend of my dad's, lived in Tupelo and noticed that Webb would be passing through so he asked if he'd come play for a small group of people. Webb agreed and there were only about 20 of us in the living room, attentively watching his performance. He had a small ring of lights around him and we sat silently, embracing the intimacy of the moment. I got to speak to him briefly after the show and my dad got a signed copy of *The Ringing Bell*.

This album has followed me through many seasons of life, and in a way it feels like I grew up with it. As I've gotten older, the personal meanings I've attached to the songs have morphed and changed but they have always held a special place in my heart. I hope that something from this album speaks to you in the same way it does to me.

Shortly after the release of *Vermillion*, the Los Angeles-born band Three O'Clock broke up, leaving guitarist and songwriter Jason Falkner to find a new gig. His friend Roger Manning convinced him to move out to San Francisco and join Jellyfish, a band that received minor radio play but was much more trouble than it was worth. Falkner found himself consistently arguing with band leader Andy Sturmer about his lack of songwriting opportunities and the band's unwillingness to distinguish themselves in a unique way. After the tour of their 1990 album *Bellybutton*, Falkner left the band and swore to never join another. After working as a session musician for a few years, he found himself eating his words and joining The Grays with Jon Brion, Buddy Judge and Dan McCarroll.

With three songwriters and multi-instrumentalists, they quickly made an agreement to split songwriting duties fairly and not allow petty band politics to cause their downfall. They swapped instruments depending on what the song called for and made the songwriting process as democratic as possible.

Their first, and unfortunately only, album *Ro Sham Bo* was released by Epic Records on February 22, 1994. Despite the band's conscious attempts to avoid preferential treatment, their producer Jack Joseph Puig favored Falkner's songs and included an extra song of his on the final cut of the album. This caused tension between the band members and Brion left shortly after. Combined with their lack of commercial success, the band broke up and left one album as their short but memorable legacy.

My first time listening to *Ro Sham Bo* was on my way to Atlanta earlier this summer. The highway was starting to feel monotonous so I asked one of my friends for an album recommendation and I immediately became obsessed with it, listening to it on repeat for the rest of the trip. I fell in love particularly with "Very Best Years" and "Both Belong," but there isn't a bad song on the album. I will admit that part of my initial obsession with the album was due to the fact that I had a huge crush on the person who suggested I listen to it (my now-boyfriend) but its hold on me has stood the test of time. The production is perfectly polished, giving it a classic sound that any music connoisseur would appreciate. Though Puig clearly had his faults, having incited the disbandment of The Grays, his resumé doesn't lie. He's worked with U2, John Mayer, Fiona Apple and Stone Temple Pilots, among many others.

A couple things that stand out to me about this album are its complex harmonies and the diversity of the tracks but cohesivity of the album as a whole. Due to the way the album was approached, allowing multiple members to contribute songs, each song feels unique and has its own sound. However, the overall tone and production makes this collective of songs feel like one complete project. I am also an absolute sucker for their willingness to toy with odd chords and thick harmonies. This album is the perfect mixture of feeling familiar but being distinct and unique from anything you've heard before. It's clear that Falkner's desire to create a new sound that wasn't overly-reliant on its influences was fulfilled by *Ro Sham Bo*. They weaved their influences into these songs in a way that makes the album feel nostalgic without being repetitive. In a weird way, it reminds me of an album my dad recorded and produced in the early 2000s but I can't pinpoint exactly why.

My precious boyfriend who introduced me to this album wanted to note that, "It's one of my top 5 favorite albums and it reminds me of my beautiful girlfriend <3<3<3<3."

Ro Sham Bo The Grays

by Natalie Staggers



Purple Stone Temple Pilots

by Natalie Stagers



I didn't grow up listening to Stone Temple Pilots because I'd heard people say they were overrated or that they were just copying what Pearl Jam was doing. They weren't recognized as part of the grunge scene simply because they weren't from Seattle so they were seen as posers or copycats. Though critics gave their first album, *Core*, low ratings, readers voted STP as the "Best New Band" in a poll done by *Rolling Stone* in January of 1994, six mere months before *Purple* was released.

In the last couple years, I've decided that I should give STP a chance to prove me (and all the other haters) wrong and they've made their way into my Spotify rotation. I like *Core*, but the first album of theirs that really gripped me was *Purple*. They expanded on the solid foundation they already had by pulling in psychedelic, folk and southern rock influences rather than trying to be a straight-up grunge band. Right off the bat, there's heavy guitars with riffs that are nothing short of earworms. I've seen a lot of people saying that "Meatplow" is one of their least favorites from

the album but it's one of the ones I consistently find getting stuck in my head.

STP started writing *Purple* while they were touring for *Core* and the entire album was recorded, mixed and mastered in '94 over the span of about three and a half weeks. It got pretty negative reviews from critics on first release but is now cited as one of the greatest rock albums of all time. The album originally gained popularity due to "Big Empty" being part of the soundtrack for *The Crow*. There are many references in the album to vocalist and lyricist Scott Weiland's drug abuse and the incidental damage it caused. Weiland's struggle with drugs started to drive wedges between the band members and made it more difficult for them to communicate. "Vaseline" discusses him being a junkie and how he was constantly lying to his wife and bandmates while falling further and further into heroin addiction.

"Interstate Love Song" is the most popular STP song, and for good reason. It starts off slow and simple before opening the sonic floodgates and becoming undeniably kickass. The guitar work largely shapes the sound of the album and is one of the most notable aspects in my opinion. I mean, just listen to "Silvergun Superman" and tell me it doesn't make you feel indestructible. I don't love the breakdown at the end but I guess sometimes you just have to have fun and be a little silly with it.

The only songs that don't stand out to me on this album are "Pretty Penny" and the closer "Kitchenware & Candybars," but I can understand the appeal for those who like these tracks. In my opinion "Pretty Penny" disrupts the flow of the album because of how sonically different it is from the other songs but I do appreciate that they're willing to experiment with different sounds, instruments and techniques—just don't throw it smack dab in the middle of a cohesive album maybe. "Kitchenware & Candybars" is a bit of a downer in my opinion and also doesn't fit with the rest of the album, but to be fair it's about Weiland and his wife getting an abortion so it would be odd if it was really upbeat or aggressive.

Regardless, if you've disregarded STP like I had in the past, I encourage you to give them a chance. *Purple* immediately became an album that I had on repeat after my first listen and I truly believe that everyone can find at least one song to appreciate on it.

*Music is subjective.
We can agree to disagree.*

Paranoid (1970)

Black Sabbath



I've been listening to this album pretty much on repeat since Ozzy died back in July. Every song is absolutely spectacular. It's a perfect beginning to the revolutionary genre that would become heavy metal. Even though it has some of Sabbath's trademark songs like "Paranoid" and "War Pigs," other tracks like "Hand of Doom" and "Planet Caravan" are gems that often get overshadowed.

Hey! Album (1998)

Marvelous 3



My introduction to Butch Walker was actually through Daryl Hall. Walker was a guest on Hall's web show, *Live From Daryl's*. The two sang "Say It Isn't So" (which is one of my favorite songs) and Walker knocked it out of the park so I knew the vocals were going to be top notch. The songwriting is much better than I expected. The progressions utilized were more complicated and unique than I would expect from a late '90s indie rock album. The stories interwoven throughout the album keep me hooked, especially the knock on daytime trash TV like Jerry Springer or Sally Jessy Raphael's respective shows.

Ro Sham Bo (1994)

The Grays



First off, I was hooked by the first song. I had never heard of this group. The '90s are a bit out of my wheelhouse but I'm always interested to be exposed to more of the music that was coming out during this time like this album and the previous. The experience with this one was enjoyable. I feel like I would be repeating myself, but it reminds me of the previous album. The only way that I could describe it is if The Beach Boys were born 30 years later and knew how to use gain.

Into the Wild (2007)

Eddie Vedder



This is the first movie soundtrack that I've been given. I've heard fantastic things about the movie but I've never seen it. I'm not the biggest Pearl Jam fan but it was an enjoyable listen. It probably would've been better if I had seen the movie.

A White Sport Coat and a Pink Crustacean (1973)

Jimmy Buffett



I do have a soft spot for Jimmy Buffett. I wasn't expecting a country-adjacent album from him. The album cover should've given that away as it's a play on "A White Sport Coat (And a Pink Carnation)" by Marty Robbins. This proves that Buffett has a bit more substance than the beach bum persona that he portrayed for the majority of his career. As someone who isn't particularly well versed in country, I liked this album. It reminds me of the other "crossover country" hits of the era which can ease the ears of most non-country minded people like myself.

Every Way but Wrong (1986)

Latimore



I was today years old when I figured out that Latimore and Kenny Lattimore were not related. Crazy how two people with similar names can have a significant amount of success within the same genre. Anyway, I'm a sucker for R&B, especially when you combine that with the stereotypical sounds of the mid to late 1980s. I was a bit disappointed. The songs felt a little two dimensional and began to run together. I will say, "This Love Is Real" is obviously the best song on the album.

NEW ARTISTS

Seera

by Natalie Staggers



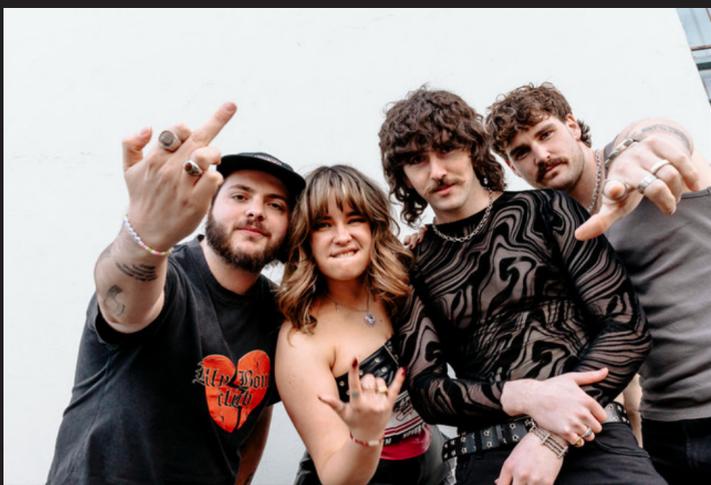
I was at a band meeting about a month ago when our bassist told me I needed to check out this new all-female Arabic band called Seera. He didn't tell me much about their sound but he said that they came on the radio on his drive and immediately grabbed his attention. They've only released one album which has nine songs and clocks in at 39 minutes but its unique sound makes you want more. Each of the members (Haya on guitar, the masked "Thing" on drums, bassist Meesha and her sister Nora on lead vocals and keyboard) bring different talents and experiences to the table, making each song distinct. Haya focuses on Arabic-psychedelia, Nora likes blues and jazz, Meesha's experience is grounded in funk and "Thing" blends all these influences together.

The word "Seera" means story or journey and it represents their paths crossing along with their individual stories before the band came to fruition. Their influences include Opeth, Tool, Ilham Al-Madfai, The Black Keys and Queens of the Stone Age but the atmosphere they create is like no other. In a short amount of time they've found a sound to call their own.

Willowbank Grove

by Natalie Staggers

Similar to the initial impression I got from Gert Arwood & the Centennials, Willowbank Grove immediately gripped me with their funky basslines and use of horns. This four-piece from Melbourne takes influence from '90s alternative rock and the current music scene in Australia. While I'm not a huge Red Hot Chili Peppers fan, Willowbank Grove reminds me of the aspects of the Chili Peppers' music that I do appreciate: a unique guitar tone and groovy bass lines that make you want to dance. Camryn Jordans, one of two lead vocalists, has total control over her beautifully powerful voice. She masterfully chooses when to be soft and gentle and when to growl out passionate and demonstrative lyrics. Their blend of electrifying guitar riffs, funky bass lines, trumpet solos and perfectly balanced harmonies makes them enticing in a way that captures all of your attention. You never run out of things to notice and appreciate. I'm excited to see how they build upon their already solid foundation and develop through future projects.



Fascinations Grand Chorus

by Reagan Bussey

This duo composed of Stephanie Cupo and Andrew Pierce really moves you back in time. Their songs are inspired by the summer sounds of 1960s and 1970s pop. I fell in love with the simplicity of their songs and the seeming dedication to recreate the atmosphere of those pop songs of yesteryear production-wise. I can't find much information about the duo on their Bandcamp or Spotify but their first singles were released in 2016 with two albums released in 2019 and 2022. I discovered them after I came across an Instagram ad promoting their new single, "Static Heartbreaks," which I've had on repeat for the last few weeks.



ÖLÜM

by Reagan Bussey



I had to do some digging to figure out the origins of this Anatolian group after the music video for their song, "Yeşil Güneş," came across my feed. The video was filmed on a Super 8, and judging by their appearance, the quality of the video and their dedication to the feel of the early 1970s, I thought I had discovered an obscure group from across the world. I was quite surprised to find out this band was located in Los Angeles and the members were born in the last 30 years. The group pulls from traditional Turkish

folk melodies and combines it with the electrified sound of Western rock music. Ölüm gives you a unique sound that I've never quite heard before and I'm excited to see what they manage to fuse together in their upcoming debut album release.



Sting

by Natalie Stagers

I've been surrounded by music from a young age and have vivid memories of watching my dad play in bands that stretch back to when I was in elementary school. My dad writes a lot of original music and many of his albums hold a very special place in my heart and timestamp eras of my life. I grew up listening to Sting and the Police but for a long time I had really only heard the big hits like "Roxanne," "Every Breath You Take" and "Wrapped Around Your Finger." As I got older and gained a deeper appreciation for my dad's music and lyricism, I asked who he considered to be his inspirations when it came to songwriting and Sting was the most prominent.

I remember sitting in my parents' bedroom with the TV on and having an extensive conversation about the meaning behind various Police songs with my dad. He dissected lyrics and references that I had glossed over while casually listening and it became suddenly apparent how much thought was put into their music. On a trip to Birmingham to visit my grandparents, I decided that I was going to listen to the Police's entire discography. I wanted to have a deeper understanding and my own personal experience of their music. *Outlandos D'Amour* immediately gripped me with its upbeat, punky feel and catchy choruses and hooks. While I wasn't a huge fan of *Regatta De Blanc* as a whole on first listen, I've come to appreciate it as I've spent more time with it. *Zenyatta Mondatta* was much less familiar to me than the other two albums but the songs were so unique and diverse that it almost immediately became my favorite. While I could take or leave a good bit of *Ghost In The Machine* and the first half of *Synchronicity*, "Every Little Thing She Does is Magic" and the entire B-side of *Synchronicity* are some of the most brilliantly written songs I've ever heard.

There are many factors that contributed to me picking up bass in December of 2023, but listening to *Zenyatta Mondatta* is high up there. Every bassline on that album is distinctive and largely defines the tone of the songs. It's hard to pick favorites, but if you've never paid attention to the bass on "Canary In A Coalmine" or "Man In A Suitcase," you're missing out. While I could dissect every Police song and what I like/dislike about them, I'd rather talk about the life of Sting, a man who has largely defined not only my dad's musicianship but mine as well.

Sting, otherwise known as Gordon Sumner, was born in Wallsend, Tyne and Wear, United Kingdom near Swan Hunter's shipyard. Every morning he woke up to see men being called to the shipyard by the sounding of the hooter at 7 a.m. sharp. As he watched them pass by, he began to wonder what his future would look like. Everyone in Wallsend worked at one of three places: the coal pit, the rope works and the shipyard.

Sting was introduced to music at a young age, with his mother bringing home records of artists like Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis and Elvis. Naturally, he gained an appreciation for rock n' roll and he said these records incited an emotion within him akin to religious ecstasy. His first memory of music was of his mother playing tango music on the piano as he sat on the floor and watched her feet move up and down on the pedals. The piano would later become an outlet for releasing frustration and confusion about his ever-changing family dynamic.

When he was five years old, his father left his job as an engineer of ship engines and turbines to work at a dairy. Sting had a younger brother, Phil, and a younger sister, Angela, was on the way and the family was trying to make ends meet. Sting spent many days of his adolescence toting milk around Wallsend with his father and memorizing the house numbers and how many pints each received in a desperate attempt to win his father's approval. As he hauled milk from door to door, he started to imagine a future where he was rich and famous, allowing his young imagination to run rampant with grandiose ideas.

His first "singing job," as he puts it, was selling *The Chronicle* alongside his childhood best friend Tommy Thompson. Thompson was a deviant by all means, rolling his own cigarettes and outwardly professing his atheism and appreciation for crudely sexual turns of phrase. When

Thompson needed a tea and cigarette break, he'd let Sting take over his post, teaching him how to croon so as to get passerbys' attention.

Sting's parents' financial problems were getting worse and they were quickly finding it difficult to pay the bills. They were forced to sell the piano that held Sting's formative musical memories and he watched as his mother sobbed in devastation. Not long after, he stumbled upon his mother and one of his father's employees, Alan, engaging in an affair and Alan was fired shortly thereafter. Sting started spending more time at his grandparents' house and the piano became an instrument to process his emotions through. Though the music he was creating at the time was often aggressive and dissonant, it brought him a sense of comfort.

Between his mother's piano playing, his father's singing and his grandfather's mandolin playing, music was somewhat of a birthright to Sting. This is a feeling I'm quite familiar with, having grown up in a family where nearly every member, even great grandparents and second cousins, was somehow involved in music.

Around the age of 11, one of Sting's father's friends emigrated to Canada and left behind his acoustic guitar with the Sumners. It was old and the strings were rusted but Sting felt an immediate connection to the instrument. He ran down the street to Braidford's Music Shop to grab new strings and a copy of "First Steps in Guitar Playing" by Jeffrey Sisley. He quickly became utterly obsessed with learning guitar and noted, "I've often thought that playing a musical instrument is an obsessive-compulsive disorder or a symptom of being socially inept, but I can't decide whether playing an instrument makes you socially inept, or you're a sociopath to begin with and you play an instrument as some sort of consolation."



Sting's first exposure to the Beatles, a band that would largely define the beginnings of his musical career, was in a changing room during his last year of junior school. While he was roughhousing with the other boys in the room, "Love Me Do" began playing on a transistor radio in the corner of the room and its revolutionary sound captured his attention. He noticed a level of sophistication in their music that was sparsely identifiable in other pop music of the time. The Beatles having similar up-brings to Sting (Lennon and McCartney went to grammar school and grew up in Liverpool) only continued to fuel his ambitious imaginations of fame and fortune.

Sting's first time experiencing a live band was at 15 years old at the Club A Go-Go. The Graham Bond Organisation was playing and while Sting couldn't quite wrap his head around the music or determine how he felt about it, he could acknowledge that the musicians on the stage knew what they were doing. At the time, the band was composed of Jack Bruce and Ginger Baker, both of whom went on to play for Cream. Dick Heckstall-Smith, who played with countless English blues rock and jazz fusion bands of the '60s and '70s, was on tenor sax.

Sting developed an obsession with "Top of the Pops," making sure that he was in front of the TV and ready every Thursday night at 7:30. In December of 1966 he got his first taste of the Jimi Hendrix Experience and was blown away. Not long after, Hendrix played at the Go-Go and though Sting was underage, he was tall enough that he managed to sneak in. He cites this as an experience that forever altered his worldview and revolutionized what he knew music to be.

As Sting's mother's affair progressed, he became very reclusive, avoiding his family and the subsequent tension from her unaddressed infidelity. It was never mentioned and rather hung in the air like a taboo topic that nobody wanted to approach. Music was his only escape and he became consumed by learning the guitar, often dedicating more time to playing music than to his studies. He began spending his evenings at the Whitley Bay YMCA where he met brothers Ken and Pete Brigham. The three boys quickly bonded over their love for music and Ken and Sting began playing together regularly, fantasizing about one day becoming bluesmen themselves. Pete, who often accompanied the two on bass, was busy one night so Sting decided to try his hand at this new instrument. He found beauty in its relative simplicity and humble but nonetheless necessary presence.

While learning bass, he'd play 33 rpm records at 45 rpm, resulting in the orchestration being an octave higher and allowing him to more easily distinguish the bass parts. He became obsessed not only with the music itself but also with the way in which it was constructed and executed, all the way down to the moving of a needle on a record. He compares the fascination of music to the feeling you get while staring into a fire. They are both experiences which seem to grasp the attention through sensorial pleasure, begging you to engage with the imagination and the incorporeal realm.

Sting graduated grammar school with decent but by no means impressive marks and decided to avoid university by aimlessly drifting between blue collar jobs. He found himself working at a mindless and miserable desk job as a tax officer. His only respite was dragging his first love, Deborah, to countless pubs and dance halls to see bands like The Faces, Fleetwood Mac, Julie Driscoll and Brian Auger. Deborah encouraged his fantasy of one day finding himself among these musicians. Afraid of slipping into a monotonous existence at a desk job, he decided to take action and applied to Northern Counties Teachers' Training College. He treated college as a way to give himself more time to figure out how to break into the world of music. He met Gerry Richardson who had a similar M.O. and they quickly became close friends. He spent as much time engaging with music and gigging as possible while still having the safety net of a college degree in case music didn't work out.

Sting's friend Paul Elliot was a drummer and had a van and conveniently Gerry's band was looking for a drummer. While they weren't looking for a bassist, Gerry felt bad hiring Paul and not Sting so he replaced the old bassist. The band's name was Earthrise and within no time Sting had stolen Gerry's girlfriend, Megan, who also happened to be their singer. Sting was still dating his first girlfriend, Deborah, (how naughty) and continued to see her for a semester and a half before finally cutting things off. The band also fell apart shortly after.

Once Earthrise ended, Sting started seeking out other work and though he massively fumbled his audition, he joined the Newcastle Big Band. He also joined the Phoenix Jazzmen which is where he was assigned the name, "Sting." Gordon Solomon, the band leader and trombonist of the Jazzmen, called him this after Sting showed up to practice in a black and yellow sweater that made him look awfully



similar to a wasp and it stuck. In his final year of college, he was offered a permanent teaching position and began to daydream of settling down with Megan, only to find out shortly thereafter that she was seeing someone else.

Gerry and Sting had picked up gigs together here and there, one of the most consistent being University Theatre's revival of "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat." With a few of their friends who were experienced session musicians, they started Last Exit, a nod to "Last Exit to Brooklyn." Gerry and Sting moved in together, convincing Sting's now ex-girlfriend Megan to masquerade as Sting's wife in order to secure the apartment—the landlady was insistent on a married couple living there. Sting would leave the rent with his upstairs neighbors and he and Gerry would conveniently be out of the apartment when the landlady came by to pick it up.

They started a friendly competition to see who could write more/better material for the band and it became apparent very quickly that Sting had the upper hand. While this did build a bit of tension between the two, Sting only resorted to throwing plates around the apartment once. Just as the band was starting to gain some notoriety, Sting received a call from Sister Ruth, a nun and headmistress at St. Paul's First School in Cramlington. Sister Ruth had taught Sting's sister Anita who was a star student and noticed his name on a list of those qualified to teach in the upcoming year. Though his true dream was to be a musician and he had no real intention of teaching outside of a last resort, his bank account was looking dry and a record deal wasn't exactly on the horizon. He was offered the job and took it, still being mindful that it was nothing but a way of biding time until his music career took off.

The University Theatre approached Gerry and Sting again, asking them to perform for their run of "Rock Nativity." This gig is where Sting met the woman who would become his first wife, the leading lady of the show, Frances Tomelty. After the play ended she returned to London and Sting resolved to stay with her long distance, driving the 300 mile trek between them every chance he got. During this period was when he wrote "The Bed's Too Big Without You" and "I Burn For You," both of which would become Police songs in the future. While spending the summer with Frances in London, Sting became determined that if Last Exit was to have any future, it was in London. While Gerry was nearly immediately on board, their borderline geriatric bandmates John and Ronnie were hesitant.

One day, as Sting arrived at work, he noticed his father standing at the gate. He took him to his office where his father informed him that he had found letters addressed to his mother. The elephant in the room that was his mother's affair with Alan was suddenly out in the open and his father was in shambles. Sting gave him the keys to his flat, hoping that some time away would do him good. Meanwhile, John left Last Exit to work at Sunderland Empire. Sting was convinced this was the end of the band but Gerry was only more inspired to make things work as a trio. This arrangement forced Sting to be more creative in his playing and was part of what prepared him for his role in the Police.

In the midst of aggressively campaigning for the band, reaching out to every record label who would give them the time of day and gigging anytime they could find work, Sting found out that he would be a father soon. He and Frances decided to get married and four days before their wedding, Last Exit made their way to London to record under Virgin Publishing. Their grandiose dreams of futuristic technology and a huge studio were cut short when they discovered that Pathway Studios was, in Sting's words, "a tiny room somewhat smaller than the circumference it takes to swing a cat." Never having been offered a record deal before or knowing what to look for, they graciously accepted a 50-50 offer where royalties were split evenly between the band and the publisher.

After a summer of playing on a cruise ship as the "Ronnie Pearson Trio," Sting returned home



and his son was born. Last Exit was picking up as many gigs as possible and growing in popularity once again. At a gig at St. Mary's College, Phil Sutcliffe (a music critic who considered Last Exit to be the "next big thing") showed up with someone who would change the trajectory of Sting's life: Stewart Copeland. Stewart, a relatively successful musician himself at this point, commented that Sting should give him a call if he happened to be in London any time soon. After a sudden change in lineup and a reluctance of some members to move to London, Last Exit seemed as though it was on its last leg.

Sting, Frances and baby Joe moved to London and crashed at Frances' best friend Pippa's house while they looked for a place to live. While on a morning stroll, Sting found himself in Mayfair and decided to give Stewart Copeland a call. He happened to call from a phone box on the street Stewart lived on and Stewart told him to come up to the flat. He was invited to an informal jam session in which a natural chemistry was immediately acknowledged. Stewart mentioned that he had always wanted to play in a three-piece band, referencing Cream and Hendrix as influences, and said that it creates a more interesting challenge. Stewart suggested they name the new band the Police and Sting internally scoffed but reluctantly agreed. Sting noted that, "before any of this can work, we will need another player, and Stewart will need to get a haircut, and quickly."

Sting found himself at a crossroads, struggling to determine where his loyalty lied. Should he prioritize the band he'd been playing with for years even though some members seem ready to throw in the towel or does he put all his eggs in the chaotic, punk-inspired basket that is Stewart Copeland? Stewart called one morning to say he'd found a guitarist and Sting rushed over, lugging baby Joe's cot up four flights of stairs. Sting was introduced to Henry Padovani who was hardly a virtuoso but knew enough chords to play a few songs. Though he wasn't the most talented guitarist, he was friendly and eager to learn so they added him to the lineup.

The trio decided to record two of Stewart's songs ("Fall Out" and "Nothing Achieving") and hand deliver it to record stores. Miles, Stewart's older brother, had a record label and let them record there and also decided to become the band's manager. Miles also happened to be managing Squeeze at the time. Last Exit was falling apart at the seams with Ronnie and Terry still refusing to move to London. Sting and Stewart were barely holding the Police together because Henry couldn't play any of the guitar parts they needed him to. Miles drew up an agreement that Stewart and Sting would play drums and bass respectively for Cherry Vanilla on the contingency that the Police got to open for them. Though the Police's set was only 10 songs (9 of which were written by Stewart), they were playing and that was something. After a subsequent tour with Wayne County and the Electric Chairs, Sting returned home to the news that his first love Deborah was dead. A few days later, Sting and Frances met their neighbors James and Trudie and Sting was taken aback by Trudie's beauty. Parts of her looked so much like Deborah it was almost uncanny. In an ironic and almost inevitable way, Sting felt himself following in his mother's footsteps as he fell in love with the girl next door.

Sting's publisher's boyfriend Mike Howlett wanted to start a band with Stewart and Sting called Strontium 90. He was also a bass player and Sting noted that having two bass players in a band wasn't typical but they found a way to make it work. One afternoon, Mike brought a guitarist friend to the house who some may recognize the name of: Andy Summers. Sting immediately acknowledged how well-read Andy was and his ability to play a variety of styles and genres. He made a mental note that Andy could be the perfect addition to the Police but didn't say anything since Mike was in the room.

On the ride home, Stewart and Sting argued over whether Andy was the right fit with Stewart being concerned about his “look.” Though Henry couldn’t play guitar, he had the look of a rock star, particularly one that plays punk music. They came to the conclusion that they should invite Andy but keep Henry as well and have two guitarists. After a festival that Strontium 90 played in Paris, Andy told Sting and Stewart that he wanted to be part of the Police and leave Strontium 90 behind. While at the 100 Club, Stewart ran into an old friend whose band he managed for a while: Kim Turner. Kim would eventually become the band manager for the Police. After playing as a quartet for a while, Andy gave the band an ultimatum and Sting decided to fire Henry.

Between August and December of 1977, Sting wrote most of the material for *Outlandos D’Amour*, finally feeling as though this was the band that would make it. At a hotel, Sting passed a poster from “La Comédie Française” that depicted a man with a large nose and plumed hat. The man had wooed a beautiful woman on the behalf of his friend. His friend died soon after and the man was left to pine for this beautiful woman, Roxanne, who had no idea he existed. That night, as Sting retired to his room, he sat down to write a song and titled it “Roxanne.”

In 1978, they started recording *Outlandos D’Amour* and it was completed in ten days. After recording the album, Miles suggested they title it “Police Brutality” and dress up as cops interrogating a seductive woman on the cover (Sting was not a fan of this suggestion). They played the album, except Roxanne, for Miles. Saving Roxanne for last, as they were worried the stylistic divergence would turn him off, they finally pulled it out. After sitting perfectly still and silent for the entirety of the song, Miles responded simply, “It’s a goddamn classic, it’s a fuckin’ smash.”

Miles was so obsessed with the song that he sent the tape to A&M who seemed just as eager to be involved with the project. On January 26 of 1978, Miles walked into the studio with a contract from A&M to release “Roxanne” as a single. By March the contract was ready to be signed. Though “Roxanne” received minor airplay, BBC refused to play it and it failed to be a hit the first time around. A&M gave them another shot, releasing “Can’t Stand Losing You” as a single later that year.



After a U.S. tour where many nights resulted in making less money than was spent on expenses, they started to gain notoriety for their willingness to play anywhere to any size crowd. The first gig of this tour was at the infamous CBGB’s in New York. Though nobody knew who they were, they played better than they ever had and captivated the crowd. A few days later in Poughkeepsie, they played to a crowd of six people, three of whom were DJs and excitedly said they’d be playing

“Roxanne” on the air.

Right before this tour, they debuted on “The Old Grey Whistle Test” in an effort to promote *Outlandos D’Amour* and Sting sprayed himself in the eyes with silver metallic spray. He was rushed to the eye doctor where he was told he had chemical burns. If you watch their performance of “Can’t Stand Losing You,” you’ll see that Sting had to borrow Stewart’s oversized sunglasses to hide his hemorrhaging eyeballs.

As the band gained fame, tensions rose and it became clear that Sting and Stewart had different creative visions for the future. There had always been a playful sense of competition between the two but because Sting was writing the songs he had more creative control over their sound. One of my favorite examples of their lighthearted disdain for each other is in the music video for “De Do Do De Da Da Da” where Sting repeatedly tries to cover Stewart’s face with the headstock of his bass. It’s very silly and if you’ve never watched the video you should. Sting and Andy are

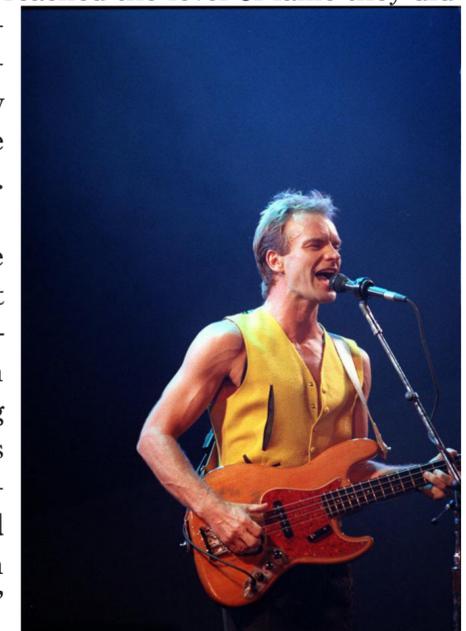
actually playing the song while Stewart is just frolicking around in the snow.

During the writing and recording process of *Outlandos D’Amour*, Sting’s mother finally left his father and eloped with Alan. Sting sent her a letter detailing his disapproval and saying that he couldn’t continue to have a relationship with her. Though she would return to his father after the affair didn’t work out financially, she would divorce him later in life and try to make things work with Alan once again. In 1987, Sting’s mother passed away and a few months later his father died as well. He attended neither funeral as his relationship with both of his parents was complicated and confusing and this would haunt him for years to come.

A few days after his father’s death he was in Rio de Janeiro, awaiting the biggest concert of his life, and he sought out some sort of ritual to give him solace from the grief he was experiencing. He wasn’t religious and was struggling to process the deaths of his parents. He ended up taking ayahuasca and had an out of body experience that changed his perception of life, death and the afterlife.

While I love the Police and regularly cite them as one of my favorite bands of all time, Sting is the real mastermind behind their songwriting and their success. Stewart Copeland and Andy Summers are fantastic musicians, but the Police wouldn’t have reached the level of fame they did had Sting not been involved. He has an uncanny ability for storytelling which is largely highlighted not only by his songwriting but also by his autobiography, “Broken Music.” His ability to make the mundane raptly intriguing is impressive and he can create a compelling narrative from nearly any experience.

After the Police, Sting went on to write 15 solo albums, some of which I haven’t had a chance to listen to yet. A few that stand out to me are *Ten Summoner’s Tales*, *The Soul Cages* and *Mercury Falling*. The first time I listened to *The Soul Cages* was with my dad and we sat in silence while it played over the living room speakers. It’s a beautifully crafted album that explores grief, life and death and was inspired by the death of his parents. As he stated in his autobiography, “I was the bright red apple in her [his mother’s] green eye, just as I was a thorn in his [his dad’s] side, and we have unfinished business.”



Sting has played with countless jazz cats like Branford Marsalis, Kenny Kirkland, Darryl Jones and (my dad’s favorite) Omar Hakim. There are albums that I don’t necessarily love to listen to casually (e.g. *The Dream Of The Blue Turtles*) but I can still appreciate and respect the musicianship and skill that it took to write and play the songs. There are also still songs that stand out to me on those albums such as the cover of the Police’s “Shadows In The Rain.” Before listening to Sting’s cover, I felt like that was one of the duds on *Zenyatta Mondatta*, but the solo version emphasized aspects of the song I hadn’t noticed before and now I love both versions.

One of my favorite anecdotes from his autobiography comes from the first time he met Miles Davis. After Darryl Jones (who was part of Davis’ band) played on *The Dream Of The Blue Turtles*, Sting was invited to Davis’ studio in New York City. Davis greeted him by saying, “Sting, you got the biggest fuckin’ head in the world.” Sting was confused, but Davis continued, saying, “Saw ya in a fuckin’ movie, man, and your head filled the whole fuckin’ screen.”

I saw an interview between Rick Beato, Sting and Dominic Miller (Sting’s guitarist) where they discussed how music has become much less intentional since the advent of streaming. Music is constantly surrounding us, in our cars, in restaurants, in bars and in the grocery store. When

records were the main form of listening to music, it was a ritualistic process to listen to an album. You had to take it out of the sleeve, place it on the turntable and put the needle down then keep an eye on it so you knew when it was time to turn it over. Now, you can skip from song to song, never having to listen to an album in full. He also noted that the disappearance of the bridge in pop music has led to a more streamlined sound that makes every song sound the same. To this day, Sting's practice routine is entirely classical music, particularly Mozart and Bach. This heavily influences his songwriting and he said that the bridge is an integral part of any song because it allows for the song's meaning to change. Bridges are often short but create intrigue through changes in keys or tone and when manipulated correctly can change the entire meaning of or add meaning to a song.

Ultimately, Sting is one of my main inspirations as a musician and I couldn't understate how much he has shaped my taste in music and the way I play. I think there are many gems both in his personal and the Police's discographies that are often overlooked. Most people can acknowledge the Police's importance in the history of music considering they were the biggest band in the world at one point, but I hope that this article inspires you to pay closer attention to what's actually happening in the music and to gain a deeper appreciation for them.



I am often excited by the prospect of two passions in my life overlapping. In this article, two of mine happen to overlap in the best way possible: radio being featured in a television show. Two of my favorite television shows, *Frasier* and *Northern Exposure*, utilize the radio station as an occupation in a way that particularly captivates me (not just because there's a radio station featured but because of how they portray the radio station). Now, if you're thinking that *WKRP in Cincinnati* would be a perfect example of this, I beg to differ. The show takes place at a radio station and doesn't utilize it in the same way that I'm about to discuss.

I'd much prefer to watch a television show over a movie. You develop a certain attachment to the characters and you become emotionally invested in their growth and how they've changed over the course of the series. One of my favorite TV shows of all time is *Frasier*. The show is regarded as one of the most successful spin offs of all time, from one of the most popular television shows of the 1980s. To try and take the narcissist psychiatrist Frasier Crane out of the setting of *Cheers* and give him a new life surrounded by all new characters is a tough gig in itself but the team of David Angell, Peter Casey and David Lee were able to get the job done. The end product produced one of the smartest and most intellectually humorous shows of all time. I'd much prefer to watch *Frasier* over its contemporaries such as *Seinfeld* or *Friends*.



Frasier Crane fled Boston to his hometown of Seattle and became a radio psychologist at the local talk station, KACL. The episodes usually show him in his element at the station answering callers' questions, often just for a joke or two and not necessarily having any substance. Once his mic is turned off and his show has concluded, the scene portrays the stark contrast and dynamic between Frasier and his colleagues, most of whom are working class people.

The way *Frasier* uses the radio station as an extension of Frasier Crane's personality is quite telling. After finishing my 10th rewatch of the show this past week, something occurred to me. He's worked at this radio station for eleven years and nothing about him has changed. He's surrounded by others who are quite the opposite of him and became close friends with his producer but he's still the snobby, uptight prick that he's always been.

If you watch *Cheers*, you see the tendencies for Frasier's narcissist personality but it's particularly heightened once he moved back home to Seattle. This is partially brought on by his brother Niles, but I think it's also because of his local notoriety that comes with him being on the radio. Working at KACL brings out the worst in Frasier Crane. He often uses his employment as an opening line for picking up women, getting tables at the finest restaurants in Seattle or trying to get out of some trouble he's caused for himself. He refuses to fraternize with his co-workers to the point that when he throws holiday celebrations, he doesn't tell others from the radio station about it because those people are "below him."

He doesn't make an effort to remember the names of the people he passes by in the hallway ev-

eryday on his way to the studio, and ultimately but subtly, he treats his producer more like an assistant than a producer. He is shown not taking his callers' problems seriously and being condescending as he mentions his alma mater of Harvard quite often. KACL provides a backdrop to the flaws of Frasier Crane and enables him to look down upon his co-workers, even looking down at some of the other talent even though they are on the same professional level as him.

Now, let's discuss the way *Northern Exposure* uses the radio station.

Northern Exposure was a bit of a cult classic TV show. It was fairly successful during its original run, even winning quite a few Emmy's, but after the conclusion of the series run, I'd say it sort of fell into obscurity. It received home DVD releases and was re-run on networks like TV Land but in the age of streaming, it's nowhere to be found.

My father was walking through a Cowboy Maloney's one time and while looking at the TV sets he noticed they were tuned to a show that he had never seen before. After some research during the early days of the internet, he bought the first season on DVD. I always remembered my parents watching it and the DVD box set case looked like puffer jackets, a nod to the setting. My dad has been trying to convince me to watch it for years and he finally got me to watch it once it hit streaming services in January of 2024.

The show begins with Joel Fleischman, a fresh Columbia med school graduate and NYC native, on a flight to Alaska. He had been awarded a scholarship that had the stipulation of him working in Alaska for four years after the completion of his degree. He was under the impression he was going to be living and working in Anchorage. He's later told that he'd be working in the fictional town of Cicily, Alaska. It is often called the "Alaskan Riviera" in the show. Once he arrives, he's introduced to a town of 215 people (including Joel) with one of the most interesting casts of characters in a TV show. I love the way they introduce these people because you experience Cicily right alongside Joel and see the town through his eyes. The introduction of the characters and the setting feels so organic and isn't forced like a lot of other television shows that force scenarios to expose the whole point of the show.



One of my favorite characters in the show is Chris Stevens (portrayed by John Corbett), local womanizer and radio DJ. He's the sole DJ for the radio station featured in the show, KBHR. He plays a wide variety of music, covers topics and even reads novels and poetry on the air. When you get down to it, KBHR is the heart and soul of the town. Throughout the series, KBHR is heavily featured, not always directly but in the background. Most of the residents and businesses in town have radios tuned into KBHR anytime they're featured.

Chris Stevens and KBHR serve as a subtle narrator for the show. If you listen and pay attention, his short quips and choice of song reflect whatever is going on in the plot of the episode. Even if he's not outright talking about what is going on in the scene or the episode, there's parallels between the two. Most of the endings of each episode feature Chris summarizing the episode, even if his character has no knowledge of the events, furthering his role as the all-knowing narrator of *Northern Exposure*. You rarely see narrators portrayed in this way. They're usually retelling a story that has already happened, à la *How I Met Your Mother*. Chris Stevens is there in the moment providing the town, and you as the viewer, a brief overview of what is happening in the show. He has his own deep story that further paints him as an interesting choice for narrator because he isn't two dimensional. I could go on and on about the characters from this show, but Chris Stevens stands out as one of the best.

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HERE LIES
THE WINNER OF THE
GRAMMY AWARD
FOR
BEST NEW ARTIST
BY REAGAN BUSSEY



The Grammy Award is a coveted award given to the best of the best in the music business each year. They have a wide variety of categories to cover all bases such as Record of the Year, Album of the Year and various Vocal Performance awards but today there's one in particular that I'd like to talk about: the award for Best New Artist.

This award has been given every year since 1960 and its criteria is "for a new artist who releases, during the Eligibility Year, the first recording which establishes the public identity of that artist."

This award has gained some notoriety over the years because it has a "curse" surrounding it. Whoever is granted "Best New Artist" by the Grammy's usually has a significant downturn in their career after receiving it.

Looking through the first decade of the awarded artists, there didn't seem to be artists who suffered from this supposed curse. Such winners included Bob Newhart, The Beatles, Tom Jones and famed conductor Peter Nero. I think it is interesting that the first winner of the award was Bobby Darin.

Now if you're thinking, "The 'Beyond the Sea' guy?"

Yes, him. Several years ago, I learned of an incident that sent him into quite a spiral that he never recovered from. Bobby Darin was huge in the era of cute doo-wop type singers. In the era when very few artists wrote their own songs, he did, and it was huge. "Dream Lover" charted in the Top 20 worldwide and is one of my favorite songs of all time. My summer of 2019 was filled with lots of Bobby Darin and his contemporaries.

His career throughout the early '60s was quite successful but towards the later half, he failed to have successful singles and another blow came to his personal life. In 1968, he was present when his friend Robert F. Kennedy was assassinated. Later that year, he discovered that the woman who he thought to be his mother was actually his grandmother and his older sister, Nina, was actually his mother. After these two events, he lived in seclusion in a trailer near Big Sur in California. Once he returned to L.A., he released folk and protest music, a sharp contrast from his previous work. The albums were not commercially or critically successful. Struggling from financial issues, he sold his songs, his record company and his publishing company. He suffered from health issues and eventually passed at age 37 during open heart surgery in 1973. This Best New Artist who was such an immense talent died young, broke and without the rights to his own songs.

In 1970, the nominated artists were Crosby, Stills & Nash; Chicago; Led Zeppelin; Oliver and the Neon Philharmonic. Now, we can obviously pick out some of the outliers when it comes to talent. Can you guess who won? No, it wasn't Zeppelin and no, it wasn't Chicago. CSN were the recipients of the award. Hindsight is 20/20 though, right?

CSN had added Neil Young to their lineup to release *Déjà Vu* on March 11, 1970—the same day as the 12th Annual Grammy awards. *Déjà Vu* was a huge hit everywhere, reaching No. 1 in four different countries by the same July. After the conclusion of their tour, the band had broken up and would not release another studio album for seven years.

In 1977, the Starland Vocal Band (known for their hit "Afternoon Delight") won the award. After that though, their albums failed to chart in the top half of the Billboard Top 200. The group released four more albums before ultimately breaking up in 1981. Taffy Danoff, a former member of Starland Vocal Band, was quoted as saying, "We got two of the five Grammys - one was Best New Artist. So that was basically the kiss of death and I feel sorry for everyone who's gotten it.

You know who was also nominated that year?

Boston.

This next year is one of my favorites because of the amount of sheer talent that was nominated.

Picture this: It's 1979, disco was still heavily dominating, and as a result, A Taste of Honey won the Grammy Award that year. Who were the losing nominated groups you might ask? Well, The Cars, Elvis Costello and Toto were those groups.

Let's move forward to the 1980s. Christopher Cross was the recipient in 1981 with his self-titled debut being a massive hit. He had won Album of the Year, Record of the Year, Song of the Year, and of course, Best New Artist. He was the king of soft rock. His songs were being parodied on SCTV, partially because of Michael McDonald's involvement. His position on top didn't last very long though. Cross' first album sold over 5 million copies and his follow up managed to only sell about 500,000.

Just two years later, the Australian group Men at Work was the winner. Their debut, *Business as Usual*, spawned numerous catchy songs that I still find myself humming today. In the world of MTV, they were propelled even more. Their second album was a success but by the time their third album was released, it was the beginning of the end. Their original five person lineup had just dwindled down to just two members by the time recording began for their third album and that would be the last album Men at Work released.

We're now going forward to the '90s to one of the most scandalous moments in music history. German duo Milli Vanilli was composed of Fab Morvan and Rob Pilatus and was created by Frank Farian who also founded Boney M. The group had the look, they could dance and they could sing, or so we thought.

The two performed live on MTV in 1989 and the first sign of lip syncing came out as the recording of "Girl You Know It's True" began to skip, causing Pilatus to run off stage in panic. Their accents and seemingly little grasp of the English language during interviews also made some think that they didn't actually sing on the records. Singer Charles Shaw revealed that he was the actual singer on the albums after being snubbed as a performer on the American releases of the album. The group won the Grammy Award for Best New Artist in February of 1990 and a PR disaster and scandal was on the horizon. Due to growing concerns and Morvan and Pilatus demanding they sing on the next album, Farian decided to fire them and reveal to the public that no, Morvan and Pilatus did not sing on the album. The *Los Angeles Times* confirmed on November 16, 1990, that the group did not sing on their albums. The Grammy committee revoked the Best New Artist award from Milli Vanilli, the only group to have the award revoked in its 65-year history. Rob & Fab never recovered from the public criticism and unfortunately, Rob Pilatus died of an accidental overdose in 1998.

In more recent years, the curse has claimed artists such as Amy Winehouse who died of alcohol poisoning just 4 years after her win. Other artists of not much substance also won it, such as Zac Brown Band, Fun. and Macklemore.

Chappell Roan is the most recent recipient of the Best New Artist award. She took the world by storm in 2024 with the cult following of her debut album, *The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess*. Not long after her win, she has received much backlash on social media for "dive-like" behavior and tone-deaf comments. We'll see if history repeats itself with her.



This past June I ordered Pizza Hut through their app and after I had paid I was notified that I was rewarded a free three month trial to SiriusXM. One of my fluent languages is free trials to services so I jumped on the opportunity quickly. I had never had satellite radio because we were too poor when I was a kid and the only other exposure I had to it was my friend's parents who were wealthy. Their dad would usually cut it on (mostly to '70s on 7 because I had requested older music, much to the chagrin of my friend).

Satellite radio has always been quite a mystery to me, shrouded behind its \$24.98 paywalled price tag. I've been listening to it almost exclusively during the duration of my free trial, switching back and forth from a variety of different genres and channels. Yacht Rock Radio has definitely been my favorite of the channels I've included in my library.

Satellite radio is still fairly new in the grand scheme of radio and has its benefits. First off, it's ad free. I feel as though that's a big selling point to people. The other is that it is uncensored because it's a paid service. The FCC can't regulate what goes out over the air. We'll discuss that more a bit later though. First, let's go over the history.

The American Mobile Satellite Corporation was founded in 1988. Its main purpose was to provide satellite communications for telephone, fax and other data signals. In 1992, AMSC established a unit called the American Mobile Radio Corporation which was dedicated to further satellite into radio and develop a digital-based satellite radio service. After seven years of work, the XM Satellite Radio Holdings corporation was created in 1999. On September 25, 2001, the first satellite radio service was officially launched.

The service offered a wide variety of music for the subscriber to listen to, offering their own channels but also simulcasting some of the most popular radio stations in the country like KIIS-FM from Los Angeles. Other channels included The Verge (featuring unsigned artists), Quoi de Neuf (Art & Entertainment news), Top Tracks (classic rock), Discovery Channel Radio and even Playboy Radio. There were channels that were solely dedicated to non-English speaking music. They really had all their bases covered.

XM realized they needed to make bigger moves to expose more of the population to what they were offering. The company began to partner with major automotive manufacturers to offer in-dash XM receivers to their vehicles. They also needed the talent to bring in eager ears.

In 1998, Opie and Anthony had recently been fired from Boston station WAAF after an April Fools prank announcing the death of current Boston mayor, Thomas Menino. They claimed he had been in a car accident in the company of a Haitian prostitute. The prank received national press attention as the duo included false police reports and Menino had been on a flight during the prank and was not available to discredit the misinformation. After the possibility of WAAF's broadcast license being revoked, the two hosts were fired. They were given offers from a station in Atlanta and from WXRK and WNEW, both located in New York City. As WXRK was the flagship for Howard Stern's nationally syndicated morning show, the two chose WNEW as it would be an easier foundation to build an audience. They were growing at an astounding rate, quickly becoming one of the top 10 rated shows.

A feud began between the two top rated shows on WXRK and WNEW as Howard Stern convinced Infinity Broadcasting (which employed Stern, Opie and Anthony) to issue a gag order on Opie and Anthony, stating that they can't talk about Howard Stern on the radio. Ironic, isn't it? The duo began to rack up FCC fines but a certain contest got them taken off the terrestrial airwaves for good.

They were suspended in 2002 following their Sex for Sam contest which encouraged listeners to have sex in risky places for prizes. A couple visiting Manhattan simulated the act in a vestibule at St. Patrick's Cathedral during a mass service. The couple were arrested that day. WNEW issued an apology the following day but the Catholic League refused to accept and insisted that Opie and Anthony be fired.

After the expiration of their contract from Infinity the two were hired by XM, making them one of the first "shock jocks" on satellite radio. They could be as lewd as they wanted without having to worry about an FCC fine now.

On February 1, 2004, almost 90 million people had their eyes glued to their TVs to witness the Panthers and Patriots in Super Bowl XXXVIII. The highly publicized halftime show is one of the highlights of the event. Janet Jackson, Justin Timberlake, Nelly, Kid Rock and Jessica Simpson were all set to perform. Jackson and Timberlake were the last to perform, dancing together during Timberlake's song "Rock Your Body." During the last few seconds of the performance and the entire show, Timberlake ripped part of Jackson's top off, exposing her breast. Public outcry ensued and the FCC fined CBS \$550,000 over the incident. After that, the way media is regulated would change.

The FCC cracked down on indecent programming and use of improper language on TV and radio by increasing fines. This regulation change by the FCC caused Howard Stern to join the other newly established satellite radio corporation, Sirius.

The company was founded as Satellite CD Radio in 1990 before changing the name to Sirius in 1999 and launching on February 14, 2002. The first Sirius receiver was supposedly sold at a Cowboy Maloney's in Jackson, Mississippi.

The Howard Stern Show debuted on Sirius on January 9, 2006. 180,000 Sirius radios were activated the day before. It has become one of the most popular and long standing talk satellite radio shows on Sirius.

To "better serve" the consumer, the two companies announced a merger and the FCC approved it on July 25, 2008 with a 3-2 vote. The National Association of Broadcasters opposed the merger as the mega-corporation now had a monopoly on the satellite radio business (mind you, iHeartRadio and Cumulus were around at this time). Attorney generals from eleven states tried to convince the FCC to put regulations in place on the merger and several Democratic Congressmen criticized the Bush administration for allowing it to go through. I wonder where they were when Bill Clinton implemented the Telecommunications Act of 1996.

SiriusXM is still a major company in the realm of radio, with reportedly 33 million total subscribers at the end of Q1 this past year. It still has a wide reach on the way that people listen to music as SiriusXM also owns Pandora which then bumps them up to about 160 million listeners per month. Sure, radio is still a dying business in the world of immediate gratification for the song that's been stuck in your head all day but I have discovered over these last few months that satellite radio is still a great way to listen to music if you're not interested in hearing advertisements and want to find that one specific niche genre and/or artist that you love.

Queue&A

Q: What is your favorite Del Rendon song?

Natalie: "Jimmy Casterbunch"

A: My favorite Del song is undoubtedly "Jimmy Casterbunch." There are many Del songs that I love, but something about "Jimmy Casterbunch" has always stuck with me. I love the relatively simplistic instrumentation and the repetitive lyrics that draw you in and make you want to sing along. The soft drums drive the song while the synth and sparse guitar parts shape the tone. It also has one of my favorite Del lyrics: "You left me in the rain so long I'm beginning to like the cold." Every time it gets to the keyboard lead around 2:35 I start to tear up. Something about it is so expressive and packed with emotion and it gives me this overwhelming sense of gratefulness for everyone and everything in my life. "Jimmy Casterbunch" was one of the first songs Del wrote for the Rum Drunks. Lee Graham said that he saw it as a metaphor for Jesus Christ and that Del wrote the song while riding in the back of a car on the way home from Oxford. Del didn't like to share the meaning behind his songs because he wanted each listener to have their own interpretation of what it meant to them. While I haven't quite cracked the code of what "Jimmy Casterbunch" means to me, I know that it's a song that will stick with me for years to come.

Reagan: "Jelly For My Shoes"

A: My absolute favorite Del song is "Jelly For My Shoes." The contrast of the upbeat instrumental track and the quiet, mischievous delivery of the vocals caught my attention when I first heard the song. The beginning of the song is reminiscent of the bluegrass genre with the slide guitar and "train beat" drums. At the end, it kicks off into a gospel praise break that always makes me dance in my chair when I'm sitting at my desk listening. Kudos to Del for pairing the repeated line of "that I'll be home someday" with a praise break.

We send our thanks and gratitude to Andrew, Martin, Christy and the rest of the Rendons for their help in the process of creating this issue.

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Last but certainly not least, thank you to Del Rendon who shared his love of life and music to the fullest during his lifetime so that we can continue to enjoy what he gave to us and remember him for many years to come.

Please help the forever evolving music & arts community here in Starkville and the Golden Triangle by supporting those that make music & arts their mission.

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