

# cut

Issue  
**43**



November 2016

the



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# Letter From The Editor

Oh, November. A month of changes: the weather, as fall finally gives way to winter, and gloves, hats, and scarves start making regular appearances on campus; the country, as we prepare to say good-bye to one leader and to inaugurate a new one. Whatever your seasonal or political preferences, I hope we can agree that what this month needs, now more than ever, is a good dose of distraction. And that's exactly what we have for you in this issue of *The Cut*.

Dive into this month's issue with two new pieces by our columnists: Izzy McCarthy

tackles the idea of cheap girl-power anthems in pop music, and Mark Egge gives us an insider's view of James Street Gastropub's tumultuous history and future.

Flip ahead a few pages and immerse yourself in Justin Kelly's scathing critique of Ringo Starr (whether or not you're a fan of The Beatles, this piece is worth a read) or explore Brooke Ley's ideas about religion in music.

More in the mood to read about our takes on new music? Check out our staff's monthly suggestions,

mixtape, and album reviews. Highlights include David Dwyer's rave review of Solange's newest effort and Kate Apostolou's takedown of the new Phantogram album.

Last, but not least, be sure to give our interview with Lucius a read. Mark Egge and co-frontwoman Holly Laessig sat down for a chat about live performances, temperament, stage personas, and more.

Now I'll let you get to the actual issue. I hope that you find something here to help you weather the storms of November.

**Imogen Todd**



Animal Collective at Mr. Smalls  
Photo by David Perry

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# What We're Listening To



Izzy McCarthy

# Pop Culture's Garbage Girl Power

Perhaps you've heard the beauty that is "Independent Women Pt. 1," a Destiny's Child and girl power classic. In it, Beyoncé, Kelly, and Michelle sing proudly about their financial independence. The hit was first featured on the 2000 soundtrack from the *Charlie's Angels* film and has been inspiring hoards of independent women ever since. Likewise, Beyoncé's solo work arguably produces more girl power hit singles than any other artist. But between Beyoncé's feminist masterpieces, the girl power anthem has fallen short.

As a genre, girl power hits have been a pop staple for decades. They go as far back as Aretha Franklin's "R-E-S-P-E-C-T," for example, from 1967. Girl power has always been a selling point. But while the saying "sex sells" has pervaded every corner of the business,

girl power is sold as an afterthought. The girl power anthem often becomes a throwaway song, marketed to women as pitiful compensation for all that objectification. As a result, the girl power anthem has almost always been the "chick flick" of the music industry; it's corny, it's low quality, and it fits all too well into the stereotype of what our society wants women to be.

Perhaps the best recent example is Daya's "Sit Still, Look Pretty." Sure, lyrics like "I don't want to be the puppet that you're playing on a string/ This queen don't need a king" are perfectly admirable goals. Similar to "Independent Women Pt. 1," Daya's song preaches autonomy and pride in individual work; the singer is evidently determined to pursue the career she wants and will

not "sit still." In this way, the song certainly has its positive moments and we should be happy to have young fans relating to Daya's lyrics that champion independence.

But the young singer falls into a trap. The foundational meaning of Daya's song is that in her quest for independence, she is different from "other girls." "Other girlies wanna wear expensive things," she sings, implying that it's also "other girls" who "wake up/In make up,/And play dumb." Ultimately, this is where Daya's girl power anthem becomes cheap. It's no longer presenting a nuanced and valuable account of the feminine experience because it is simply adhering to society's expectations of girls in the first place; if girls want to rebel against gender norms, they can

only do so by tearing each other down.

In contrast to this type of cheap girl power anthem, Beyoncé's musical feminism remains ahead of the game. "Independent Women Pt. 1" preached financial independence before many other artists even preached cheap girl power. Most recently, Beyoncé's "Formation" offered an account of the feminine experience the media rarely portrays, that of the black feminine experience.

So when you hear the words "girl power anthem," remember to differentiate between fake and feminist. It's important that we sift through cheap feminism to find girl power gold like Beyoncé's, which reminds us the kind of feminine empowerment that is genuinely valuable.

Mark Egge

Pittsburgh Venues:

# *James Street Gastropub*

This is the second of three columns profiling Pittsburgh music venues, with hopes of better connecting CMU students to our awesome local music scene.

Before the days of tour buses and Interstate highways, jazz musicians would tour by boat, following the rivers north from New Orleans. Located at the source of the Ohio River, Pittsburgh was the ending point for many tours. The musicians who lingered in Pittsburgh at the end of their tours (some eventually staying for life) gave rise to Pittsburgh's long and storied jazz history.

Modern Pittsburghers can experience the city's great

jazz today at James Street Gastropub in Deutschtown. A cultural meeting place since its construction in 1890, James Street's premises have been the haunts of successive generations of union bosses, sports celebrities, and now Pittsburgh jazz aficionados.

Along with hosting hundreds of concerts and events a year, James Street also plays center-stage to the annual Deutschtown Music Festival in July. This year's free, all-ages music festival featured over 200 bands and attracted over 18,000 participants. Despite its successes, the venue's future was uncertain last spring. A spate of noise complaints from its upstairs ballroom threatened the owners with the loss of their liquor license and possible jail time. The venue reached out to the community to

raise the money needed for soundproofing and air conditioning. Through its crowdfunding campaign and events, the venue completed its ballroom renovations and has returned to hosting live music—sans complaints—since. The generous financial support from community members and musicians reflects the venue's cherished place in Pittsburgh's music scene. Every Thursday, famed jazz percussionist Roger Humphries hosts a jazz jam session. For a more casual introduction to jazz, James Street hosts a collegiate night the first Tuesday of every month, showcasing local university-affiliated musicians (including CMU's own Grammy winner Eric DeFate in October). Collegiate night is free with a valid university

ID. In addition to jazz music, the venue hosts many local and regional bands of all genres, as well as many alternative lifestyle events, including a drag brunch the first and third Sunday of every month.

For upcoming events, find the venue on Facebook or at [www.jamesstreetgastropub.com](http://www.jamesstreetgastropub.com). Unless otherwise stated, shows are open to all ages. A \$5 cover charge applies to most events.



**My Precious Son:  
The Omnichord**

Article by Brooke Ley and  
Illustration by Cindy Hsu

The very first article I wrote for *The Cut* was titled “Kids’ Music is Surprisingly Good.” In it, I talked about the interesting use of instrumentation in the popular cartoon *Adventure Time*. While researching its soundtrack, I learned that the show uses a type of synthesizer from the 80s called an Omnichord. The instrument has buttons to select different chords and a sort of “strum bar” that one uses to play notes within the selected chord, similar to a harp. From the first time I heard its chiming sound, I was in love. I knew I needed one.

Today, the Omnichord is still sold, but not in its original analog form—it’s been rebranded in as the fully digital Q-Chord. But the Q-Chord wouldn’t do for me. There’s a certain level of charm of having an instrument from the 80s, not to mention the superior sound of the original version. Sounds in the Omnichord start as square waves and are then filtered and sent through a VCA, which gives it a warm analog sound that cannot be recreated digitally. Knowing this, I considered looking for one on Ebay, but I was discouraged by the prices I saw. Wondering if it was really worth it, I asked the *The Cut*’s Editor in Chief what his opinion was. After watching some videos of the instrument, he told me that it would increase my bedroom pop sad girl aesthetic. Yes, I decided, I definitely needed this instrument.

After months of hunting on Ebay, I was finally able to find a pretty good deal on an Omnichord—the OM-84 model to be exact. Recognizing that it was still pretty expensive, I feared that I would be disappointed with the product. After playing it for about a month, I now feel as though it is one of the best purchases I have ever made.

First, I fell in love with the sound. I’ve never heard anything like its chime; a friend said the instrument “sounds like what magic would sound like.” I can also alter the sound in ways I hadn’t realized before. One of the knobs allows you to change the “sustain” allowing the notes played on the strum bar to either be very plucky or to ring out. One can alter the “voice” of the strum bar notes, making them sound less warm while adding vibrato.

Surprisingly, the Omnichord also has a drum kit. It is horribly cheesy and 80s and I hardly ever use it, but it certainly adds to its charm. There are 10 different drum kits that can be used, each with the tempo control and an “add a bass line” feature. Although this feature is admittedly pretty goofy, it’s been used in interesting ways in popular

music. The song “Clint Eastwood” by *The Gorillaz* takes its drum part and bass line from the Omnichord’s “rock 1” option.

Lastly, I was surprised with how versatile the instrument is. It can play many chords, 84 to be exact, but I didn’t realize how this allows for most chord progressions. Further, I thought that the Omnichord could only cover songs with a very specific sound—one that fit the sound of the Omnichord itself. However, I have come to learn that the Omnichord, while fitting certain aesthetics better than others, can work for almost any song. Chord progressions with difficult fingerings on a guitar or ukulele all take the same amount of effort to play on the Omnichord—it only requires that you press simple buttons. Although there is a bit of skill that might go into effectively utilizing the strum bar, the instrument is one that is extremely easy to pick up.

All of this may not be enough to convince you to buy an Omnichord. I definitely enjoy mine, but it’s still not an instrument for everyone, especially if you can’t rock that “bedroom pop sad girl” aesthetic. Instead, my hope is this: that if you fall in love with an instrument, you take the risk of buying it. Believe me—it’s well worth it.

# Talking to Lucius

Known for their catchy synthesizer riffs, thoughtful song-writing, doppelgänger personas, and fantastic costumes, indie-pop sensation Lucius return to Pittsburgh next Thursday, October 27th with new music and a new band line-up. The Cut columnist Mark Egge recently spoke with co-frontwoman Holly Laessig about creating transportive live-music experiences, being shy, and stage personas.

**The Cut:** When you play Mr. Smalls in Pittsburgh next week (and at all of your shows), what is the musical experience you are trying to create?

**Laessig:** I went to a show last night, and I was thinking about being on stage and how, when I was young, I didn't decide to be a singer or performer until high school, almost right before college. I think it was Junior year of high school when I decided, "okay, this is what I want to do." I'm surprised I came to that conclusion then because, before that,

**We see things when we hear music. It's all sort of connected.**

I listened to records and I sang along with them (always) and taught myself how to sing and emulate everything and mimic other singers and get inside the music. But as a person, I was very quiet. I was very, very shy. I always thought, "how would I be able to do that? I can sing, I enjoy it, I think I'm good at it—but I would never perform. I can't even have a conversation with somebody. How is that ever going to work?"

But [performing] really takes you to a different place. I think we've helped ourselves some that way with putting on, sort of, this superwoman outfit. You become something else, and you take yourself on a journey. I think, in turn, that takes everybody else on a journey, and that takes them to a different place, and lets them experience something outside of themselves.

We're very visually driven. Both [Jess Wolfe and I]

come from families of visual artists. I think that's an important part of our psyche and our palette. We see things when we hear music. It's all sort of connected.

For a small band starting out, one of the cheapest, most affordable ways of being something was to dress ourselves and create this kind of thing with the matching outfits and unifying our voices visually. That's where, I think, it stems from, and everything's expanded from there.

**TC:** When you're on stage and performing, it seems there's a well-define persona. Is there a clear line between your persona on stage and who you are when you're with friends and family?

**L:** No, not really. I think there's a difference, like I was saying earlier, by enabling ourselves through costumes and visuals and songs to take us, as well as the audience, to a different mental space. I think we try and go somewhere different than we would in everyday

life, and that helps us perform and enjoy it. But no, there's not like a clear, definitive line between ourselves on stage versus ourselves on stage versus ourselves with our families.

**TC:** Is it the case that you've changed to become more like your stage persona?

**L:** You throw yourself into these situations and you meet so many people and you have to adjust and grow. I've definitely grown a lot since I was young. Like I said, I was very, very quiet then, and I still feel introverted, but I think as I've grown, and as I've been put into these situations and been forced to speak up, it becomes part of you. I don't think it makes you a different person, I think it just it becomes more habitual, and therefore more natural.

*Lucius returns to Pittsburgh on October 27 to Mr. Smalls in Millvale. Tickets are \$18 and available via [www.mrsmalls.com](http://www.mrsmalls.com)*

## Andrew Bird

Imogen Todd

“His presence, even when he wasn’t singing, filled Byham Theatre, the paintings of cherubs gracing the ceiling of the old theater seemed oddly in line with Bird’s angelic musical workings.”

Andrew Bird is nothing if not a showman. On a brisk evening in early October, he played many roles in snapshots from his newest album, *Are You Serious*: a friend giving brutal but needed advice on “Capsized,” a melancholic father figure on “Valleys of the Young,” and both sides of a disillusioned pair of romantics on “Left Handed Kisses”. The performance was a lot to handle for one man (“I’m feeling loopy tonight, who knows what might happen,” he deadpanned at one point after a particularly energetic song), but none of it seemed overdone. His presence, even when he wasn’t singing, filled Byham Theatre, the paintings of cherubs gracing the ceiling of the old theater seemed oddly in line with Bird’s angelic musical workings. During the show, the stage lights shifted in time with his transformations. Green swirls threw his shadow against the wall in goblin-like proportions; blue bursts of strobe outlined his gaunt silhouette; warm waves of red lights painted shapes like ladybugs behind him.

In addition to his newer works, Bird played a collection of songs from his older albums, devoting incredible energy and care to creating each, and in doing so he managed to make them all sound better than their respective recordings. He built songs from the ground up, laying down short bursts of violin plucking, then looping those over each other until they formed a thicket of sounds. Over this, he would begin to sing, whistle, or strum a few guitar chords, continuing to loop these sounds over the previous ones until finally, the band joined in. By the end of any given song, guitars sounded like drums, violins sounded like guitars, and his vocals soared above the layers.

After a standing ovation and at the behest of a fan, Bird began his encore with “Saints Preservus,” a somewhat creepy tune with lyrics that echo Emma Lazarus’s poem at the foot of the Statue of Liberty, along with this line: “I’m a stranger / In a land that’s anything but strange.” Please stay strange, Andrew Bird.

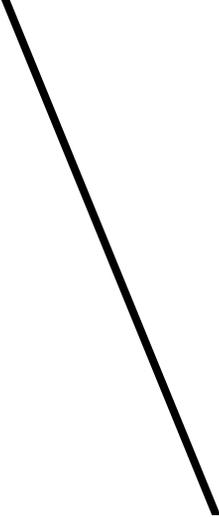
## Animal Collective

Joe Sweeney

“Every song shared a similar motif: an ever-building stack of simplistic elements culminating in a tornado of sound.”

Animal Collective spoke in tongues from the pulpit of Mr. Small’s Theatre. The crowd, a mix of diehard fans, intrigued casual listeners (myself included), and ravers just looking for an excuse to do drugs, pulsated in the hodgepodge of sound emanating from the band. Vocals, fast-paced and upbeat synths, and a crisp drum kit made for a high energy atmosphere. Every song shared a similar motif: an ever-building stack of simplistic elements culminating in a tornado of sound. Although repetitive (and at points aggravating), this style gave way to some truly magical moments when a profound voice unobtainable with any structured approach rose from the chaos. Multiple times I found myself bored with a song, annoyed with the layering and unorganized intensity, only for it to mutate slightly and become something beautiful.

Animal Collective purposely avoided the popular tracks from their latest record, opting instead for deep cuts both old and new. This was disappointing on some level, but also impressive: They didn’t need to



rely on their hits to put on a good show. The only real interaction with the crowd occurred when they reminisced about performing at Mr. Small's years ago, when it was just starting as a venue. Aside from this brief interlude, there was hardly a moment of silence, one song slowly growing to its climax, then quickly morphing into the next.

The music was framed by decorations and a light show akin to Basquiat, Kandinsky, and Pollock collectively vomiting on stage. The massive heads of cartoon alter egos sat behind each of the band members, and above the stage, looping claymation videos were synchronized with the beat. Together, these small stage elements added visuals that aligned perfectly with their music.

Overall, Animal Collective delivered their psychedelic-pop music with a great atmosphere, while simultaneously distancing themselves from their past success.

### **Nothing But Thieves**

Justin Kelly

**"It was precisely the brilliance of Conor Mason that illuminated his band's lack of luster."**

Nothing But Thieves burst onto the alt-rock scene because of front man Conor Mason's stunning vocals—and their October 22 concert proved that they don't have much else to offer. To be sure, I was in awe of Mason's singing. Spanning a huge range of pitch and expression, he summoned forth the high-octane power of Aretha Franklin, tempered with the vocal control of Regina Spektor or Bobby McFerrin. From the mumbled intro to "Itch" until the ethereal falsetto wailings of "If I Get High," Mason had me transfixed.

And it's for exactly this reason that I was so disappointed by the whole show. While Mason tore through chorus after chorus with stunning virtuosity, his band simply fell short. Drummer James Price made exactly two facial expressions all night – one of them a laugh at something the guitar tech said – as he pounded through the set list with little subtlety or emotion. Bassist Philip Blake reached a similar level of impotence.

It was precisely the brilliance of Conor Mason that illuminated his band's lack of luster. His talent and energy made the band seem dull (probably to a greater extent than they actually were). I left Stage AE dreaming of what the concert might have been like if Mason had been joined by musicians of a similar caliber: sublime, without a doubt.

The opening band, The Wrecks, didn't do Nothing But Thieves any favors. They ripped open the show with thirty minutes of electrifying post-punk jams, the whole band dancing away behind their energetic leader Nick Anderson. Anderson's combination of classic alt rock vocals (think The Killers or Vampire Weekend) with screamed climaxes and rapped verses made for a very entertaining opener, and the band's driving energy made it hard not to dance. The Wrecks have only released one three-song EP, but they're a band to keep an eye on.

## Joyce Manor w/The Hotelier and Crying

Brooke Ley

“They were very down-to-earth people who seemed very passionate about their work—you really could pick up on that in their performance.”

I know it’s not recommended to go to a concert for an opening act, but when have I ever listened to what The Man says? I went to this concert mainly for Crying, all of whose works I’ve really enjoyed. They put on a great, although slightly guitar-heavy, performance, and I had a lot of fun hanging with them for the interview (Check it out on page [insert page here]). They were very down-to-earth people who seemed very passionate about their work—you really could pick up on that in their performance.

That being said, I really enjoyed the performances that both Hotelier and Joyce Manor put on. I had listened to Hotelier and Joyce Manor a bit in the past, but not enough to really recognize many of their songs. (I can only listen to angry/sad pop punk when I’m in a certain mood.) Nonetheless, the palpable energy of both bands really made for an enjoyable show. Admittedly, it would’ve been more fun if I knew the music of the bands; there seemed to be a certain passion in being able to shout out the lyrics along with the band that I wasn’t able to experience.

Also, I wasn’t expecting Joyce Manor to be a mosh sort of band, but with warning from my friend, we stayed towards the back. As a 5-foot-tall girl, moshing isn’t exactly something I enjoy. However, I heard from my friends at the front that the mosh was “gentle” and what you’d want out of a mosh. I was mainly surprised by the number of people who ran on stage with the band prior to crowd surfing, which there seemed to be a lot of. Although I wasn’t participating, the general moshing added to the energy of a band that I would expect to be more chill and sad. To be honest, I preferred it this way, as it made for an exciting and memorable concert experience and was a new way to enjoy their music.

# Concert Reviews

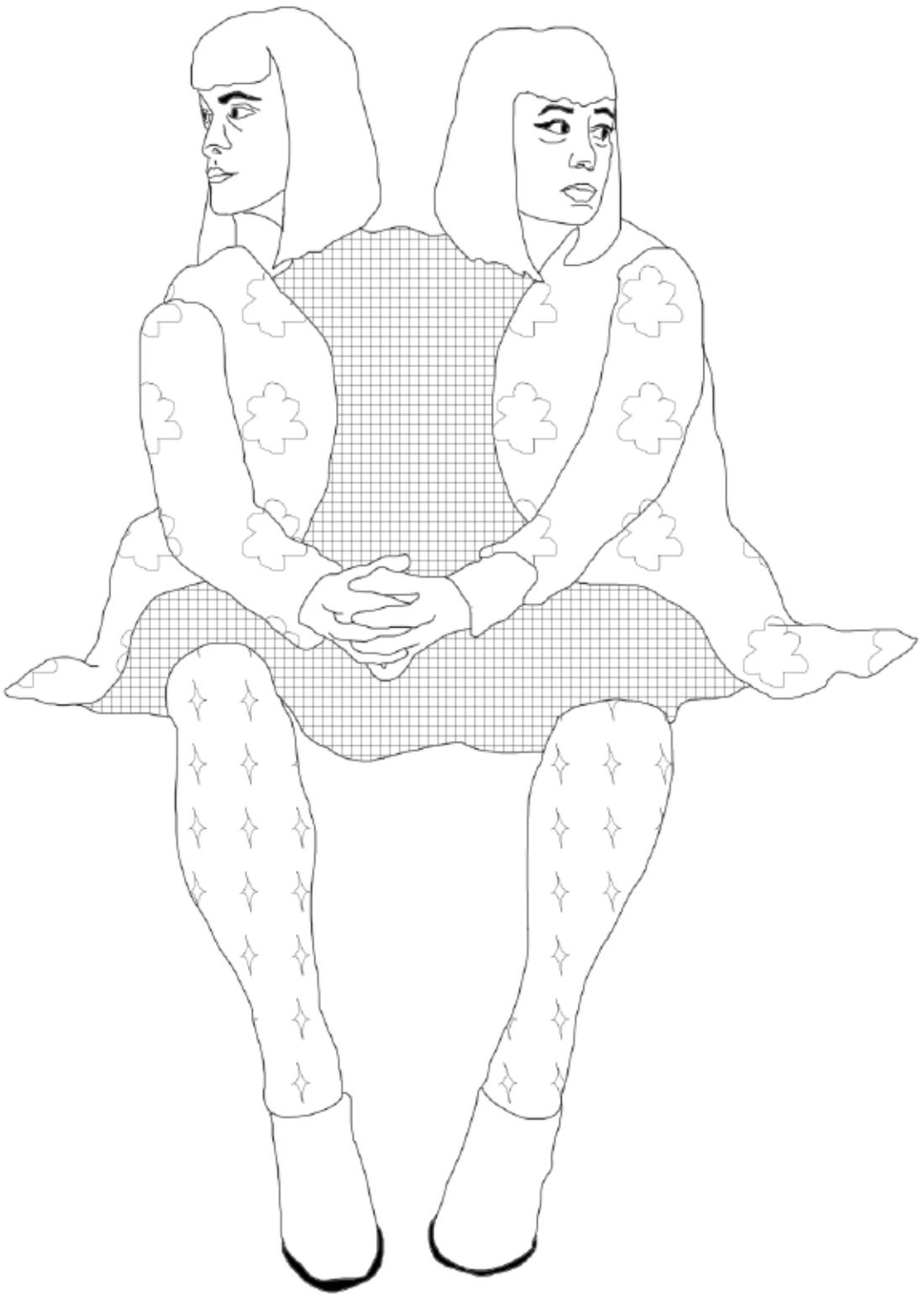


Illustration of Lucius  
by Jenna Houston



Crying at Rex Theatre  
Photo by Lucy Denegre

# Thanksgiving Songs

## **Suburban Home by The Descendants**

Are you during back to the suburbs for the holidays? Are you pissed about it? Play this real loud in your parent's car.  
Lucy Denegre

## **"All I Want For Christmas Is You" by Mariah Carey**

This is honestly the only Christmas song I enjoy, and Thanksgiving signals the beginning of a month of alienating both friends and family as I listen to it loudly and on repeat.  
Imogen Todd

## **I'm Coming Out by Diana Ross**

Looking for a fun way to spark family drama?  
Brooke Ley

## **Silent Night by The Wiggles**

This was the only song that would make my sister stop crying in the car when she was little. Hopefully we can all make it through a family gathering without crying.  
Paige O'Riordan

## **Medal of Honor by You Blew It!**

If you're trying to fight with your girlfriend outside of an ugly sweater Christmas party then this is the song for you. You Blew It! Is in top emo-revival form, with one of my favorite guitar riffs of all time.  
Brad Puskar

## **IV. Sweatpants by Childish Gambino**

Did you finally just upgrade from the kids table to dining with the adults? Are all your cousins jealous? Leave them with a good song to show them just how little you care.  
Izzy McCarthy

In the season of shitty dinner pregames, suspicious foods, and that one extended relative you wish wouldn't show up to family gatherings anymore, these are the songs that get us through the holidays.

# ***Crying with Crying***

An Interview by Paige  
O'Riordan and Brooke Ley

**I feel like writing an album is sort of like running your life through a delay pedal or having a baby? I've never had a baby. But like I'm putting a lot of time into this thing and like the fruit of your labor doesn't happen immediately and you have to do a lot of waiting.**



**The Cut:** You guys just released your first full length album. Can you talk a little bit about what inspired that?

**Ryan:** The goal was always to release an album, but overall, the inspiration for this album—Well, I don't know if this band is going to last. There's no telling. So I thought that I wanted to make the album that I wanted to hear in middle school.

**Eliza:** A lot of the album was written during last summer and fall—in 2015. It hits on these two universal quests. The first of which is something in the past—whether that be a time, place, a state of mind, the condition of a relationship—and then running into a discrepancy there and trying to recreate things. The second of which is to search for solution out of the ordinary. A lot of my environment, whether it would be like static at home or on the move on various tours, were kind of complicated situations—involving interpersonal relationships on those tours. That was a huge influence. A lot of things I was reading at the time inspired the songwriting to be more like storytelling.

**C:** You said that you weren't sure if the band was going to last. Do you care to elaborate on that

a bit?

**R:** I don't think we were ever making a stable amount of pay-my-rent-and-loans money. Not that many people get an opportunity to get label funding to make an album, so I personally thought that I should at least see one album through before quitting. Quitting and getting a job that I know will pay rent.

**E:** Accountant!

**R:** (Laughing) Yeah, it has nothing to do with the actual band. It was never like “we're all arguing all the time”. It's never been like that.

**C:** What bands were your favorite when you were growing up? Like what was the first band that made you say “wow, I want to make music”?

**R:** The bands that made me pick up a guitar were AC/DC, Led Zeppelin, and Guns N' Roses. I don't listen to any of them now, but whatever. They also influenced a lot of bands that I like. A lot of bands in that time period are bands that I really, really enjoy.

**E:** I listened to Dido and The Cores and Celine Dion and Norah Jones. So I always wanted to be a pop singer. Then for a while there was the Avril Lavigne

and All American Rejects stage, which in retrospect is such trash now, but I still had this itch to be with a guitar and bopping around or something.

**C:** Where would you say is your favorite place to tour?

**E:** My favorite place to play is—I feel like we all really love the West coast. Playing LA is always great. Playing San Francisco is always great. The Northwest is awesome. We didn't get to do it on this tour but playing Austin is always amazing.

**R:** I agree with all that plus Boston, and our hometown, New York. But yeah, the West coast feels magical. I feel like it's also because I really like it, though.

**C:** What main differences do you see between the East and the West coast?

**R:** Well, first of all, hip hop sucks on the West coast... I'm definitely joking. I mean, one's colder and one's warmer. One is like beautiful in the area that you're in and then one is beautiful when you look away from the area that you're in.

**E:** The dogs are happier on the West coast. I can attest to that. The humor is really different. A lot of people say that sarcasm doesn't exist on the West coast.

Maybe it's because they're already happy? They don't need to use humor as a survival skill. Being someone who grew up in Queens, I'm just automatically louder and curse a lot. But it's funny, being in transit so much and being drawn to the West coast, I feel like I'm losing what is familiar to me and what I feel familiar with.

**C:** So we mentioned dogs—what is your favorite breed of dog?

**R:** I've only been close to one dog in particular—Brody—and he was a cairn terrier. For anyone who doesn't know what a cairn terrier is, it's basically Toto. Which is also a great band. So overall, a top tier dog. Very fun, very friendly, a great dog to get to know. And I miss Brody dearly.

**E:** I've never had a dog but I did make a pact with a friend to get a Great Pyrenees and name it Falcor. I've never met a Great Pyrenees but they look really magical. Also is it the Australian Shepherd, those ones with the magical eyes? They run really far and fast. I like those a lot.

**R:** I like how mine was personal and yours was just like “I want the fastest, strongest, most powerful, hottest dog”!

**E:** No, no, not hot! I'm not attracted to dogs. I just—I don't have any pets because

I feel like it's cruel to have one in New York City.

**C:** True, yeah. So why did you guys choose the band name Crying?

**E:** We were forced to! No, just kidding.

**R:** My goal with the band name was to have an easy name that no other band had. So we did the thing with last.fm where you search like last.fm/artist/ and then you write the name in the url. And there was no Crying. But Crying itself was a suggestion from a friend. At the same time, we started out doing chiptune music. A common pitfall of chiptune musicians is to have a really game-y names. And the name Crying is strategic in that everyone cries. And it sounds sad and has nothing to do with videogames.

**C:** In a similar vein, how did you guys come up with the t-shirt—the Sonic/Totoro/Iron Maiden amalgamation?

**R:** We needed t-shirts because we had just sold out of two designs. The guy that is in charge of this printing company we work was like “I can get you t-shirts in a timely fashion from a certain shop, but one of your t-shirts is too detailed, so we need to make a different shirt”. So we got to a hotel at like

1:30am and I made a few designs and finally got to that one. I was kind of in this manic, tired stupor and I just thought like “this is definitely the most perverted, twisted, disgusting shirt that I've ever thought of” and like people love that. It's got Sonic, Totoro, and Iron Maiden—there was almost the Monster logo but that would have been too much.

**C:** What was the most enjoyable aspect of creating an album together?

**E:** I think everyone was a lot more involved and collaborative. We all spent about a week in Seaside Lounge Studio in Brooklyn. We kind of had this makeshift home where we were all together for the creative process of recording but also a lot of the songwriting happened in-studio. So it felt like we were investing a lot of time and being present with each other in terms of writing the album. I feel like writing an album is sort of like running your life through a delay pedal or having a baby? I've never had a baby. But like I'm putting a lot of time into this thing and like the fruit of your labor doesn't happen immediately and you have to do a lot of waiting. So it's like months and months later, you have to re-experience this piece. Sometimes you can't register that. But it's really exciting to come back to being

present with the album after waiting so long.

**C:** So you talked about how you started off doing chiptune music. Listening to your album, you guys have sort of started to move away from that. Any reason? Do you agree with that?

**R:** The first two EPs are, by definition, chiptune because we used a Gameboy. The album is not chiptune because we didn't use a Gameboy. So it's definitely an absolute. The reason for that though is one time I was making a baseline with the Gameboy—planning out the album. And it wasn't the sound I heard in my head. So then I was like “why should we even have a restriction?” I'm going to use these software synthesizers because why not. I'm not in another band. I don't only listen to chiptune. So that's why the new album has all of the other stuff—it's the actual sounds that I heard in my head and wanted to make.

**C:** That's all we've got; thanks so much for taking the time to talk to us!

*With a change of plot,  
please be patient with  
your heart*



*try to understand what  
my system suddenly  
wants to reject*

Rage Against The Mediocrity:

# In Defense of Sh\*\*ing on Ringo Starr

Justin Kelly

I'm not sure why so many people feel the need to defend Ringo Starr, but for some reason, they—*do*—just say a negative thing or two about the least talented Beatle and wait for people to trot out a thin defense. It's either, "He did exactly what the music needed!" or, "He paved the way for rock 'n' roll drummers!" Both are weak, but the latter is especially dangerous.

The most common defense is the former, and I don't even know where to begin to express my distaste for this style of thought. Go listen to their recently remastered record *Live at the Hollywood Bowl* and decide for yourself whether or not Ringo's constant, washy pounding of the cymbals is exactly what that music needed. Music does not "need" one drum beat or another. Language like that implies that a song or performance is like a Sudoku puzzle, and all the musicians need to do is figure out exactly what notes go where. Music is not arithmetic, even if Ringo's banal style might lead you to think so.

Defense number two is actually valid, and that's the scariest part. Ringo—*did*—pave the way for lots

of drummers. After The Beatles' appearance on the *Ed Sullivan Show*, sales skyrocketed for the brand of drums he used, and his sound crept across the world into the ears of billions of people and millions of young drummers. There is no doubt that his style played a huge part in steering the course of rock drumming. THAT is the issue with Ringo Starr. He had a profound effect on drumming, but it wasn't a positive one. He limited the range of expression and solidified the image of the drummer as an oaf, a non-musician who contributes nothing more than rhythm. In pre-Ringo popular music, variation and creativity were abundant among drummers (see Gene Krupa, Sammy Davis Jr., Joe Morello). Then came The Beatles, the most popular band in the world, and they had a drummer that only played one beat. And, sadly, that low level of musicianship became what the world expects of drummers.

# Christianity in “Non-Christian” Music

Brooke Ley

In Kanye West’s 2004 song “Jesus Walks,” he raps that “They say you can rap about anything except for Jesus. That means guns, sex, lies, videotape. But if I talk about God my record won’t get played, huh?” At the time, this song was praised for its openness of faith within a non-Christian genre, but whether through Kanye’s influence or not, Christian beliefs are now more frequently seen in non-Christian genres or at least music enjoyed by non-Christians.

I was thinking about this in terms of Chance the Rapper and Sufjan Stevens in particular. Chance’s latest album “Coloring Book” has a pretty clear gospel influence to the point that when you google it, the listed genre is “Christian hip hop”. However, I struggle to associate “Coloring Book” with distinctly Christian music. I wouldn’t expect to turn on my local Christian radio station to hear “How Great” playing despite the fact that the majority of the song is a choir singing a hymn. I also enjoy the album as a non-Christian and know many others who share this sentiment. I think this is mainly due to the fact that Chance’s

music has relatable aspects to it outside of the Christianity, and although it is a distinct part of his rap, it is not necessarily the main feature in all of the songs. Further, the Christian parts of his songs are still extremely well made; it’s hard to deny the beauty in the opening verse of “How Great.”

Sufjan Stevens differs from Chance in this respect. On Google, his album “Carrie and Lowell” is listed under the genre “Indie Rock.” However, I would argue that the entirety of the album is about God and other Christian topics.

Rather than including relatable non-Christian aspects in his tracks, Sufjan instead makes the Christian God relatable regardless of faith. Although a song like “No Shade in the Shadow of the Cross” is one with clear Christian influence, it is mainly about self-destructive behavior and succumbing to self-fulfilling prophecies, a relatable theme regardless of religion.

There is also a certain degree of “normality” that Christianity holds within American society that other religions fail to achieve. I think it would be difficult

for a non-Christian artist to make a song with religious influence that could become popular despite listeners’ differing religions. Drake tackled this a bit with him having a bar mitzvah in his music video for “HYFR”, but I would be interested to see how non-Christian religions could be integrated into music specifically.

# Norf Norf Memes

Bradley Puskar  
with illustration by Jack Taylor

So the other week, this really sweet white lady decided that it was a good idea to film herself reading the lyrics to Vince Staples' "Norf Norf." She created the video after hearing the track being played on a Top 40 radio station her kids happened to be listening to. In the video, the nice woman kindly reads every word of the song, being reduced to tears at multiple places, and then delivered her message: stop playing all this inappropriate hippity hop on the good, clean radio. She believes that music has become filthy and inappropriate for her young children. Let's talk about it.

First off, this woman makes a pretty compelling argument, at the surface. Are top 40 tracks more

violent, more kid-unfriendly, than in the good old days? The short answer is no, it isn't. Rap has been on the radio for years, and you can't make this argument if you remember classics like Kanye's "Slow Jamz" from 2004, or 50 Cent's "Candy Shop" in 2005. These songs are literally just about having sex, so come on. Radio today's just as inappropriate as it used to be.

My main gripe with her decision, however, is pretty simple. Who does this woman think she is, telling people what should be allowed to be played on the radio. It's public, made for the masses (most of which are adults), and anyone thinking that a song isn't specifically appropriate for kids

shouldn't be on the radio is just wrong. If you're a parent and you don't like the songs kids are listening to, then don't let them listen to it. That's the power parents hold, in case everyone forgot. It's honestly pretty rude to think that a station would put into place even more censorship rules just because someone is offended as a parent.

Staples commented on the whole situation, after enduring a barrage of fan tweets. Surprisingly, his only complaint was toward his own fans. He reminded everyone that people simply have opinions, and it isn't right to make fun of them for how they want to parent their children. Smart move, Vince.



# Album Reviews

## A Seat at the Table by Solange

Solange Knowles returns from a four-year absence with *A Seat at the Table*, a wonderfully constructed account of the Black experience in America. The album is comforting and inviting, with its tight harmonies and gentle funk dominating the soundscape.

All songs are directly about Solange's experiences with her culture and race, and this extremely personal touch makes her work hyper-specific to America in 2016. Every song is informed by her Black experience, and to great effect. The album unfurls along this thematic narrative. The first proper

song, "Weary," is aptly titled: she's unstable and questioning her place in the world, and calling on the audience to do the same. "Weary" leads right into "Cranes in the Sky," an impressive highlight. Solange cycles through a list of distractions from her worries: "I tried to dance it away/I tried to change it with my hair/I ran my credit card bill up." Over a simple percussion line and a soft bed of strings, it is a melancholy, yet also redemptive, look at solitude and how to repair in times of stress. She nudges the audience to be mindful of themselves, and it is nothing if not beautiful.

This emotional journey continues throughout the album. It becomes more redemptive, more celebratory, and more empowered. Solange has great dexterity: she knows exactly what she's doing, and she succeeds in communicating what her struggles have been.

Solange created one of the best albums of the year: the production is perfect, and it is paired with such a strong perspective and voice. There is no way around it: this is an *important* album. She provides solace, which is no small task, and she never wavers from being a beacon of empowerment.

David Dwyer



## Never Hungover Again by Joyce Manor

Since their signing to Epitaph records, and subsequent release of previous album *Never Hungover Again*, Joyce Manor has taken on a more clean cut, polished sound. This refinement is still clearly visible on their newest album, *Cody*, but they still keep the punk edge that makes them a great rock band.

The latest record lengthens things up, featuring their first track over the four minute mark, "Stairs." However, the songs keep the intensity high, cramming easy-to-follow stories into each of the ten cuts. Standouts include singles like "Fake ID," in which singer Barry Johnson recounts a romantic

encounter with a girl who likes Kanye a little too much, and "Last You Heard of Me," which tackles the concept of relationships and how easily they go wrong. Overall, the album is a wonderful step forward for Joyce Manor, wherein they continue to refine their sound and mature their lyricism.

Bradley Puskar



**Yes Lawd!  
by NxWorries**

Brooke Ley



I've always been disappointed with "cloud rap," because although it combines rapping and vaporwave (two genres I love), I've always found the vocals unfitting for the vaporwave instrumentals. I wasn't sure what I was looking for in the vapor wave and vocals combination until I found it in *Yes Lawd!* NxWorries is a

match made in heaven, combining the talents of producer Knxwledge and vocalist Anderson .Paak. Knxwledge compacts .Paak's scattered vocal styles into a more coherent form, while .Paak adds a new, sexy layer to Knxwledge's vaporwave influenced instrumentals. And when I say sexy, boy, do I mean sexy. This is a Marvin

Gaye album for the modern generation, with lyrics and instrumentals that are fully aware of their sensuality. Though the lyrics border on vulgar at times, .Paak's smooth voice delivers them perfectly. Even if you're not looking for a sultry album, I'd recommend *Yes Lawd!* for its excellent instrumentals and vocals alone.

**Gameshow  
by Two Door  
Cinema Club**

Cassandra Howard



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**Eyelid Movies  
by Phantogram**

Katherine Apostolou



When Phantogram first released *Eyelid Movies* in 2009, the small, relatively unknown duo breathed a fresh sound into the music world. Now a festival staple, Phantogram is edging towards the mainstream. Their newest album, *Three*, is an unfortunate consequence of this trend. The unfocused

album lacks originality and instead feels like a whiney diary, filled with scattered thoughts and feelings. The instrumentals are overdone and muddled. The songs render an image of bored artists hurling colors onto a canvas that combine to make a muddy brown. The one track that stands out from the mess

is "You're Mine," which has the clarity and edgy punch of Phantogram's earlier work. While it's honorable for musicians to experiment, *Three* is not the kind of experiment that reveals creative discovery or spark. It's long, it's dull, and it's disappointing.



Joyce Manor at Rex Theatre  
Photo by Lucy Denegre



**the cut**

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