

MAY
2022

ART

LEIGH
LOWRY
JACK HOPKIN

MUSIC

AXIS OF
SISTER
GHOST
SACROPOLIS
CIARA
ANDREWS
BABY
BUSHKA
BLURRED
REALITY
BRIAN AUGER
FINDING
FORESTS
KING VILLAIN
FREAK SLUG

LIFESTYLE

DANCES
WITH
JUGGALOS

POETRY

EMOOG



STRANGER DAIS



WEAR WOT IS

stranger introduction - page 3 - 4

axis of's triumphant return - page 5 - 9

smashed - page 10

ciara andrews: 'she' glows - page 11 - 14

freak slug the alien - page 15 - 16

hijacked by finding forests - page 17 - 20

voila cassette club - page 21

burning hot embers by blurred reality - page 22 - 23

sunday hype with sacropolis - page 24 - 25

rot - page 26

kiss the girl - page 27

dances with juggalos - page 28 - 43

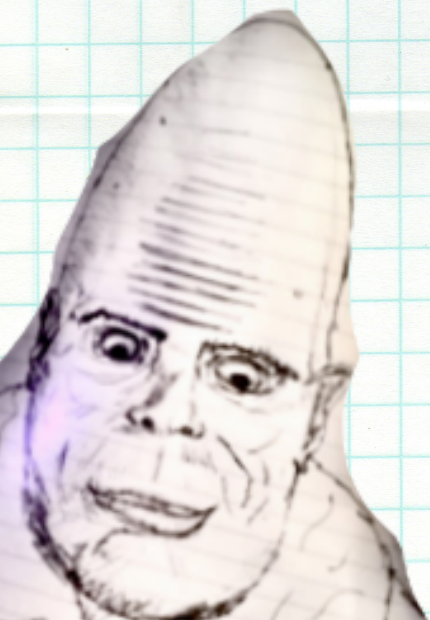
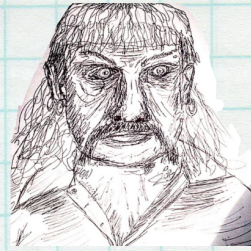
leigh lobster - page 44 - 45

baby bushka: tour de force - page 46 - 50

sister ghost rocks for good - page 51 - 52

king villain making 'wave's - page 53 - 54

in conversation with brian auger - page 55 - 62



STRANGER

DAIS



YOU REALLY WISH YOU HADN'T COME, HADN'T LET YOUR FRIENDS PERSUADE YOU THIS WAS A GOOD IDEA. THE SICKLY AROMA OF PROCESSED PORK HANGS HEAVY IN THE AIR, AND IT FEELS LIKE EVERY PERSON IN THE RESTAURANT CAN'T HELP BUT STARE IN YOUR DIRECTION.

"YOU PROBABLY RECOGNISE ME- I'M A BIT OF A BIG DEAL," YOUR BLIND DATE GRINS SMUGLY, PICKING UP YOUR BURGER FROM YOUR PLATE AND GIVING IT A BIG JUICY BITE. YOU DON'T MIND. YOU HAVEN'T BEEN HUNGRY SINCE YOU FIRST LAID EYES ON YOUR SUITOR, ANYWAY.

"I'M THE GUY THEY BASED BILLY BEAR HAM ON," HE CLARIFIES THROUGH A MOUTHFUL OF MOOSHED BEEF. NOW YOU KNOW WHY YOU RECOGNISED HIM. HE EARNESTLY PLACES BOTH OF HIS HANDS ON YOURS. WET, CLAMMY, COLD. 66% PORK. YOU PULL YOUR HAND AWAY SHARPLY. WHY DID THE AGENCY MATCH YOU WITH HIM? THEY TOLD YOU YOU WERE 100% COMPATIBLE WITH EACH OTHER!

"OH, I SEE," HE SAYS, EYES FIXED TO THE FLOOR, HIS PINK LITTLE MOUTH CRINKLING AT THE CORNERS. HE SLOWLY BEGINS PEELING SLICES OF HAM FROM HIS FACE, LETTING THEM DROP TO THE FLOOR WITH A SOGGY SLAP. BILLY BEAR HAM. EACH SLICE REMOVED ONLY REVEALS A SLIGHTLY MORE CONTORTED FACE BENEATH, THE THICK SMELL GROWING ALL THE MORE PUNGENT. "I'M SORRY," HE GROANS, "I DO THIS WHEN I'M EMBARRASSED."

YOU LET OUT A LITTLE SQUEAL AND RUSH OUT OF THE RESTAURANT, UTTERLY SHOCKED. AMIDST ALL OF THE CLAMOUR AND ADRENALINE YOU DON'T NOTICE WHEN YOU DROP THE LEAFLET YOU HAD IN YOUR POCKET THAT FIRST INTRODUCED YOU TO THE AGENCY THAT ARRANGED THIS NIGHTMARE.

"LOOKING FOR LOVE? YOU JUST HAVEN'T MET HIM YET!"

IT READS.

"BLIND DATES- EVERY WEEKDAI!"

STRANGER

DAIS

AXIS OF'S

TRIUMPHANT RETURN

From Humble Beginnings, To Touring The World - To Their New
Release Bella Pacifica



photo by Ciara McMullan

Musical behemoths Axis Of are affectionately beloved within the Irish music scene and beyond. Composed of Niall Lawlor on guitar, Ewen Friers (of Catalan! And And So I Watch You From Afar fame) on bass and Ethan Harman pounding the drums, the band have been winning over the hearts of fans since 2007.

Beginning as a group of likeminded pals who shared a passion for tunes and a big dream, the band's steady ascension to success has served as an attestation to musicians starting out the importance of tenacity, creativity - and loving what you do.

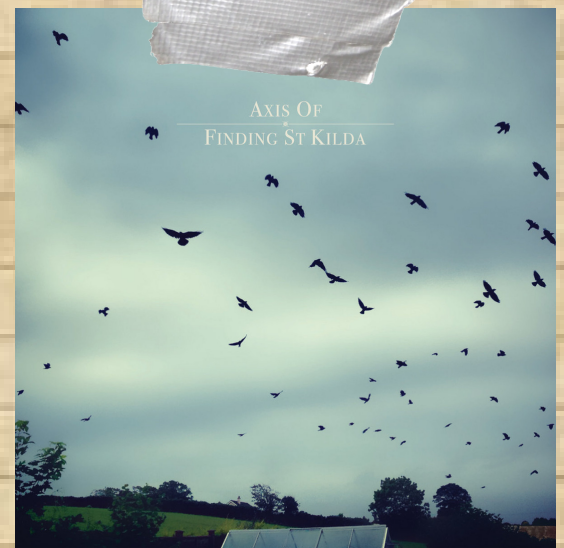
Axis Of's iconic sound, longitude and palpable enthusiasm, paired with the abundant friendship amidst the trio have landed the band legendary status. In 2010, Rock Sound magazine dubbed Axis Of "the most exciting band to come out of Northern Ireland, possibly ever" after reviewing a particularly frenetic live show in Newcastle.

Their debut album, Finding St Kilda, was met with resounding positive reviews - as was their second album The Mid Brae Inn released in 2015. Going from strength to strength, Axis Of toured the world with legendary artists such as Axis Of have supported Therapy?, The King Blues, Deaf Havana, Twin Atlantic, The Joy Formidable, Lower Than Atlantis, The Bronx and frnkiero and the collaboration.

After a constant bustle of business, the band took a break from the project in 2016. Tragically, their hiatus saw guitarist Niall in serious ill health. A reliance on medication - to counter symptoms which hadn't yet been fully explained or understood - forced Niall to withdraw further from work, friends, music and life.

Yet, the healing power of music became a solace during these dark days. Following further diagnosis, support from his family and friends, Niall began to improve. The band's exciting re-entry into music, Bella Pacifica, captures an enduring sense of triumph over darkness and a brazen belief in a better tomorrow. Niall explains how much of the new album is about endurance, stating: "it has sad songs...but it is hopeful that there can be good times again".

As the band geared up for their exciting launch party hosted at the Limelight on the 20th May (alongside the vibrantly fabulous Brand New Friend and Big Daisy), we caught up with Ewen on all things Axis Of - from starting blocks to the effervescent shimmer of Bella Pacifica.



EWEN FRIERS ON AXIS OF

The origins of Axis Of go way back to our school years on the North Coast.

There was a vibrant little punk scene where Niall, Ethan and myself played in various different bands. We quickly identified each other as “lifers”, so to speak, people with aspirations to take the music further, tour, put out records.

With that we formed Axis Of in the summer of 07 and basing ourselves in Belfast started touring and releasing albums without a break until 2016.

With a major hiatus from '16 until this year, with all of the life changes, the ups and some harrowing downs, it's heart-warming to come back to what it's always been about, friends making music they love!



Historically the major perk for us was travelling,

especially travelling in a way that no tourist ever would, peeking behind the curtain of a country's tourist trail and getting an honest impression of a place through its people, it's everyday occurrences and its service stops! But I think with this specific album we've come to appreciate the studio environment more. We recorded Bella Pacifica with Pete Fletcher at Black Bay Studio on a tiny Scottish island and it was our most fulfilling studio experience to date. We've improved our practise as songwriters and producers so to be locked in that studio environment with a new confidence has been significant. With the help of Pete, Chris Wee and Ethan, Niall and I were able to turn basic demos into something we're all extremely proud of.



With the prospect of our album launch party and first show in 6 years on the horizon, there has naturally been some reflection on past shows.

But to pick a favourite is impossible, playing in Amsterdam's legendary Melkweg with My Chem's Frank Iero was a momentous occasion, and whilst our first single launch years before in Auntie Annies was humble by comparison, it's all relative, they were both incredible experiences.



And whilst our gig history of over 500 shows contains some absolute stinkers, we're so fortunate to have had some life defining moments playing our music live.

Our first time at the much loved Glasgowbury Festival, sailing into the unknown for shows on the Shetland islands, touring with our heroes The Bronx and Torche, they're all up there. Whether it was playing the Ulster Hall or a House Party show, from Rome to Portrush we always enjoyed the privilege of playing live music.

The album charts a time of illness and mental health crisis for Niall, and, I'm thankful to say, the story of his recovery.

As the lyric writer I was interpreting his struggles and weaving that together with my own reflections on the situation. Much like a lot of our back catalogue these lyrical ideas are not especially obvious or direct and contain plenty of story telling, reference, ambiguity, allegory and (hopefully!) poetry. The track titles and indeed the album name were selected by Niall and mainly concern Canadian locations that he visited just before his health declined. We have always been attracted to themes of nature and anything oceanic, so I think Bella is a nice continuation of that.

Much like the question of 'picking a favourite gig', choosing a favourite song proves to be a tough one to answer.

Certain songs might have my favourite lyrics, whilst I enjoy the guitar parts on another. Some songs are driving songs and some will work well to dance to, so it changes day to day. In a bid to give you some kind of concrete answer, we have been rehearsing hard for our album show this month and San Jaun Renfrew is a lot of fun to play, it has the hallmarks of earlier chunkier Axis Of but with some of the wistful weaving of the current record.

At the risk of sounding like a broken record, we play Belfast's Limelight on May 20th alongside the iconic Brand New Friend and Big Daisy. It's our first show in over 6 years and marks the release of 'Bella Pacifica'. With 'yet-to-be-announced' plans for later in the year the launch show will be a good place to check in with all things Axis Of.





'SHE' SIMPLY GLOWS

*Ciara Andrews' enchanting ode to new love
leaves us breathless*





“Hi ! My name is Ciara Andrews and I’m an alternative music artist from Belfast, Northern Ireland.”

Ciara Andrews is an exciting artist on the steady ascent to stardom. An incredibly gifted musician, music producer and lyricist, Ciara is an entirely self made force of nature.

In April, her single ‘She’ dropped: a dreamy alt-pop bop that captures the dizziness of infatuation and the purity of new love.

Hauntingly beautiful, Ciara’s vocals prove to be a stunning instrument itself, guiding the melody with overlaying harmonies. ‘She’ melds electronic elements with a driving thrum of drums, mimicking the sound of a racing heartbeat. The end result is a single that is all at once engaging, relatable and poignant - capturing the head spinning nature of love.

How did Ciara’s music career begin? What makes her tick? And what’s next? We chatted with Ciara and got the low down!

“I first got into making music when I was around 15 and was shown a Def Leppard album, as the guitarist Vivian Campbell is a family friend,” she says.

“From that point , I wanted to learn guitar and write songs about different topics that were inspired by events throughout my life.”

“At 18 , I recorded my first EP “Emergency Exit” and began learning how to play different instruments, use looping pedals, and learning how to produce, mix and master music. In November 2021, I released my debut album ‘23’ which was a collection of personal songs I had been working on for a number of years.”

“On this album, I wrote all the songs, played and recorded all the instruments, and mixed and mastered the album. This is where I fell in love with every aspect of music and how it makes you feel.”

“My biggest inspirations in the music industry would be PVRIS, YONAKA, PARAMORE and TYNE. Having met PVRIS and TYNE , their music has helped me through hard stages in life, and inspired me to be more creative with sound.”





“The album art is influenced by Town Square, a bar in Belfast where I work when not making music. I have been with this company for over 7 years now and the owners, management and staff have been extremely supportive every step of the way , so the album art is a thank you to Town Square.”

“My new music is a slightly different style to what I usually play, and I have created more upbeat and uplifting songs in the new album I’m working on.”

“When making the newer album, I suppose the underlying message would be to take every opportunity in life, enjoy the company of the people that make you happy, and to enjoy whatever your passion is.”

Be sure to keep up to date with Ciara’s new releases! Follow her on Facebook @ciaraandrewsmusic and on Twitter @Ciara__Andrews

FREAK SLUG

ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE

ALIEN



MANCHESTER, A PLACE FAMED FOR HOUSING ATOMIC THEORY, EMMELINE PANKHURST, CORONATION STREET - AND DREAM POP EXTRAORDINAIRE FREAK SLUG.

WHILST PERCHED IN BARCELONA, THE NAME FOR THE PROJECT WAS BORN.

"I WANTED A NAME THAT WAS SATIRICAL, STUPID AND PLAYFUL," SHE SAYS. "FREAK SLUG ENCAPSULATES THIS CAREFREE ATTITUDE IN THE MELODIES AND SARCASTIC LYRICS. THE WHOLE POINT OF THE NAME IS NOT TAKING ITSELF TOO SERIOUSLY."

FREAK SLUG HAS JUST DROPPED 'ALIEN': HER FOLLOW UP TO 'OUT OF THE BLUE' RELEASED EARLIER THIS YEAR. TEAMING WITH SAFFRON SWEET VOCALS DANCING AROUND IDYLIC SURF ROCK GUITARS, THE TRACK IS BRIMMING WITH SUMMERTIME. THE VIDEO PERFECTLY ACCOMPANIES THE TRACK AS WE SEE FREAK SLUG FROLIC AROUND MANCHESTER, PLAYING HER GUITAR AND TRANSFORMING INTO THE TITULAR CHARACTER OF 'ALIEN'.

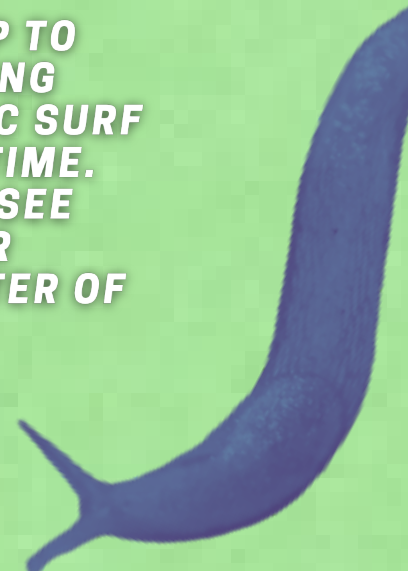
ON THE TRACK, FREAK SLUG EXPLAINS: "IN SOME WAYS EVERYBODY FEELS LIKE AN ALIEN. MISUNDERSTOOD, MISINTERPRETED, MISJUDGED. THIS SONG BRINGS ALL THOSE WEIRDOS TOGETHER SO THEY FEEL LESS ALONE AND MORE ACCEPTED."

LIVING IN THE CITY HAS RESULTED IN HER FORMING A DEEP BOND AND RELATIONSHIP NOT ONLY TO THE CITY BUT ALSO TO ITS RICH MUSICAL HERITAGE. "I'VE BEEN INSPIRED BY MANCHESTER'S DANCE CULTURE THAT STILL REMAINS PROMINENT FROM THE HACIENDA DAYS," SHE SAYS. "AS WELL AS THE LIKES OF JOY DIVISION, THE SMITHS AND THE DURUTTI COLUMN."

"MANCHESTER HAS HEAVILY INFLUENCED MY SOUND," SHE ADDS. "THROUGH ITS ICONIC MUSICAL HISTORY AND ITS LINGERING ENERGY THAT STILL IMPACTS THE CURRENT SCENES IN THE CITY."

WHILST A RETROPHILE, FREAK SLUG EMBODIES A FUTURISTIC TAKE ON POP WHILST WEAVING ELEMENTS OF POST-PUNK INFLUENCE.

WE CAN'T WAIT TO SEE WHAT'S NEXT IN THE PIPELINE FOR OUR FAVOURITE TERRESTRIAL GASTROPOD MOLLUSC.



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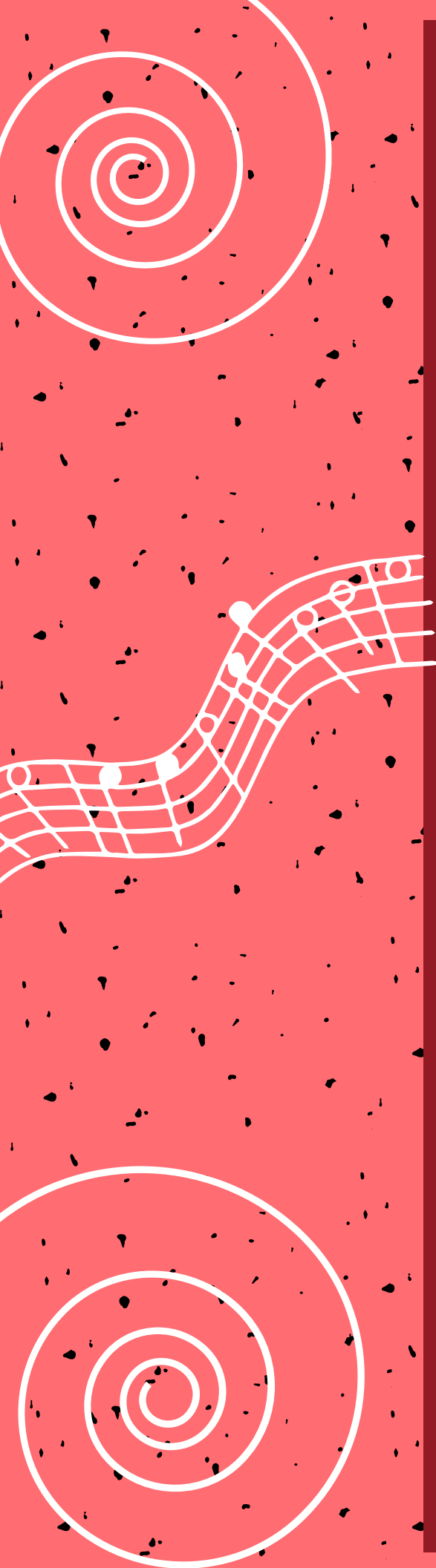
FINDING
FORESTS

Hello! My name is Darren. I love creating art and when I'm not working on my music project Finding Forests, I work as a photographer and videographer. I also love learning about psychology, nature and connecting with other like-minded people. As I'm typing this, I feel a little bit like I'm writing a bio for a dating app which is very enjoyable.

I started off playing guitar and singing when I was about 15 or so. One of the first things I did was go to an open mic in Clements coffee shop. I'm pretty sure that Ryan McMullan hosted it, but I was way too nervous to chat to anyone then - I just got up, played a couple of songs and kept to myself and my one friend that I'd bring along for the rest of the evening. Then I played bass in Brand New Friend for a year when I was about 19 or so. After that I concentrated on a band I was in called Fox Colony. I took a break from releasing and performing music for three years until January 2022 when I released my first song as Finding Forests. It's called Bad at Everything!

Creatively, podcasts are a huge inspiration for me! I'll often come up with new guitar ideas while listening to them. My favourites right now are Hidden Brain, Stuff You Should Know and Maintenance Phase. I also love cycling, being in nature and watching movies from the late 90's. Preferably ones that include a high school reunion or party of some sort. I get a lot of inspiration from reading too but sometimes reading is hard because my brain is constantly being conditioned to have a 60 second long attention span for Tik Tok and Instagram reels.





Finding Forests started in my basement bedroom in Leeds when I was studying music production at uni over there. I was anxious a lot of the time while living in Leeds. I think it was down to being in a new environment and not really knowing anybody in the area. Also my neighbour kept trying to drill his way into our house and shouting at us. I didn't have the time to settle in because the pandemic hit and I had to come home earlier than expected. I'm much happier in Belfast now though and I feel like I'm surrounded by a wonderful community of like-minded musicians and artists! The name Finding Forests is a reference to finding a place of relaxation and safety. I find that feeling when I'm in nature, creating art and connecting with other people.

My favourite thing about listening to music is when you hear a lyric about something that you've felt a million times before, but it's often left unsaid because of social norms. I don't think that can exist without the artist being super vulnerable. Plus, if you feel any sort of shame about something, releasing a song about it is a great way to get over it hahaha.

Reading fantasy novels allows me to discover some of those feelings that I hold about myself or others. I feel like you can learn so much about yourself through tall tales and quirky fictional characters, especially compared to reading non-fiction.

Hijacked is about the complexities of sexuality and first-time relationships. I feel like the education system is totally lacking when it comes to teaching people about relationships and what is and isn't healthy. If school children were at least taught basic psychology and that Ryan Gosling threatening to kill himself in the notebook if someone doesn't date him isn't a healthy representation of what relationships should look like, then people might have a lot less problems in that area. We're given overly simplistic mantras about consent like "no means no" without really delving into the complexities of it. People are not very good at saying what they like and don't like and that can lead to this hazy existence where nobody really knows why they're doing anything at all. This happens both inside and outside of physical relationships. Hijacked is an exploration of that feeling.

I recently played in the American Bar on the 14th May with Kilgour and Smallmint. I'm planning on releasing some new songs later in the year as well, and one of these will be featured on a compilation with one of my favourite Belfast bands so I'm super excited for that!

Keep up to date with Finding Forests on Instagram @findingforests_ and through their Facebook page!

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VOILA

RECORDS

**A BOOM FI
CASSETTE CLUB**

COMING SOON — Never stop discovering new
music! Get original, curated and exclusive
drops every month!

**BLURRED
REALITY'S
'EMBERS' IS A
TASTY RETURN
TO HARD ROCK**

By Megan Hopkin

OUCH, IT'S SMOKIN' HOT!

Armagh rockers Blurred Reality are back and better than ever before! Aiming for the stars, the band's new release is headed straight for the stratosphere - and taking your head clean off along the way.

Embers is filled to the brim with nihilistic lyricism, existentialism and an industrial thrum that battles against the tune's naturalistic themes.


Beginning with guitars that carefully intertwine and build upon one another, beautifully crisp vocals overlay and set the melancholic scene. Before long, the drums' driving metallic throb builds this song into a churning, relentless throb that beckons the listener to hold onto every word. With a midsection face melting guitar solo, Ember is a peach.

Made all the more impressive by carefully managed production, Blurred Reality are seen to hit their stride with gusto.


Drummer Cameron Johnston explains that the creation of Ember began in a fabulously rock and roll way.

"Ruairi (guitarist) wrote the song and came up with the main riff on a old, broken acoustic guitar that had 3 strings that were all tuned to the same note, which makes the riff pretty interesting and unique when played on a regular working guitar!"

Whilst being a departure from Blurred Reality's previous repertoire, it's become a new favourite amongst the boys.



"The song is quite different to our other songs as well. It uses the same influences as our previous songs but has a more straightforward approach, with it being our shortest song. I would also argue this is our most catchiest song so far as the main riff is an earworm, as well as Craig's (vocalist/bassist) vocal melodies on top!"



“Lyrically, the song focuses in on how sometimes someone needs to reach rock bottom before they can climb back up and move forward. Life can sometimes seem like a constant downward spiral and the lyrics centre around someone currently meeting their bottom and hoping that their luck begins to turn.”

Personally, I’m excited for Ember to become the music for a gnarly skate video. Now, if you excuse me, I’ll be humming the chorus for the next five hours.

“After a storm hits a hate of nature’s fear when you’re six feet underground...”

SACROPOLIS

AND

'SUNDAY HYPE'



STRANGER DAIS alumni Sacropolis have released a brand new bop!

'Sunday Hype' is a dreamy bedroom pop anthem capturing the magic of those slow, dreary weekend-ending moments.

Contrary to the title, Sunday Hype is all about the Sunday Blues.

Anthem in its own right, lonely instrumentation and lyrics set a different tone to the band's usual upbeat wavelength. Instead, Sacropolis weave a tapestry of isolation doused in atmosphere.

Hazy, dreamy vocals lament the dawning of the day. However, the hook holds a groovtastic bassline and an incredibly catchy guitar riff, embodying the excitement of things yet to come.

Horribly hungover, the band wrote their bedroom pop song about the horrors of the ever dreaded Monday Eve.

Sacropolis says: "We felt the need to capture this atmosphere between laziness and loneliness in a song. We came to the conclusion that it was ok to do absolutely nothing on a Sunday and not always be surrounded by people".

Be sure to check out 'Sunday Hype', available to stream online.



ROT

I linger beneath the skin

Gorging myself on the breath

Of fresh air you offer me: Death.

With mirth as my wine,

I feast upon your time.

A broken clock is correct twice a day

Though, in absence of a face of flesh to decay

A blossom of rust may be planted into its once ticking heart:

A mechanised Garden of Eden living dead within scrap.

Like a plume of black smoke

I creep to the edges of you

Leaving whatever blooms to choke

Amidst the destruction of the coup.

What once was a bouquet crumbles to dust;

Beauty dissolved into that which disgusts.

By EMOog



*kiss
the
girl*



DANCES WITH **JUGGALOS**



(HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND GET DOWN WITH THE CLOWN)

By Jack Hopkin

A tale of growing mutual respect against a context of years of discrimination, of overcoming challenging differences in language and culture, and of coming to understand a long ridiculed and persecuted 'other,' 'Dances with Wolves' is a 1990 film about a Union Army officer during the American Civil War who manages to attain acceptance amongst a beleaguered tribe of initially hostile Great Plains Native Americans. It's a bit like 'Avatar' but set against a tragic historical backdrop and stripped of big blue people, implied alien bestiality and silly words like 'unobtainium.'

You might already be wondering why this is relevant information. Truth be told, it's not, really. Consider it a bit of a framing device, a grand parallel to justify and ennoble how I have been spending my precious free time lately. And just how have I been spending valuable nuggets of my fleeting, finite existence of late? Infiltrating a Facebook group for Juggalos in the hopes that they'll teach me their ways and accept me as one of their own, of course.

Before we get into that exhilarating online adventure, though, it's only fair to provide some background information. For the uninitiated, the world of the juggalos can make for quite the overwhelming rabbit-hole, and in the name of fairness I'm offering a brief primer so that no one gets completely left behind:

A 'juggalo'- or 'juggalette', if we use the feminine form of the noun- is defined as a fan of Detroit's very own Insane Clown Posse, often abbreviated to 'I.C.P.'

A hip-hop duo formed in 1989 comprising of rappers 'Violent J' (the not so violently named Joseph Bruce, the portly one who slightly resembles John Wayne Gacy) and Shaggy 2 Dope (one Joseph Utsler, the quieter fellow who looks conspicuously tougher), I.C.P are renowned as much for the outlandish clown makeup they don onstage and for their cartoonish, often offensive public image as they are for their usually critically panned 'twisted' carnival-themed music- not to mention the intense adoration of their extremely visible fanbase.

As legend- and by 'legend' I mean official I.C.P lore- would have it, our two gangsta rapping, backyard wrestling heroes had initially performed under the more conventional but no less cringe denomination of 'Inner City Posse' before a young, starry eyed Violent J had a dream about a lone clown running through the streets of Delray. Accordingly, the boys adopted the clown makeup, changed their name, and, as if by divine acknowledgement, that very same night, Violent J had a second vision- of "spirits in a travelling carnival" appearing before him. The die was cast.

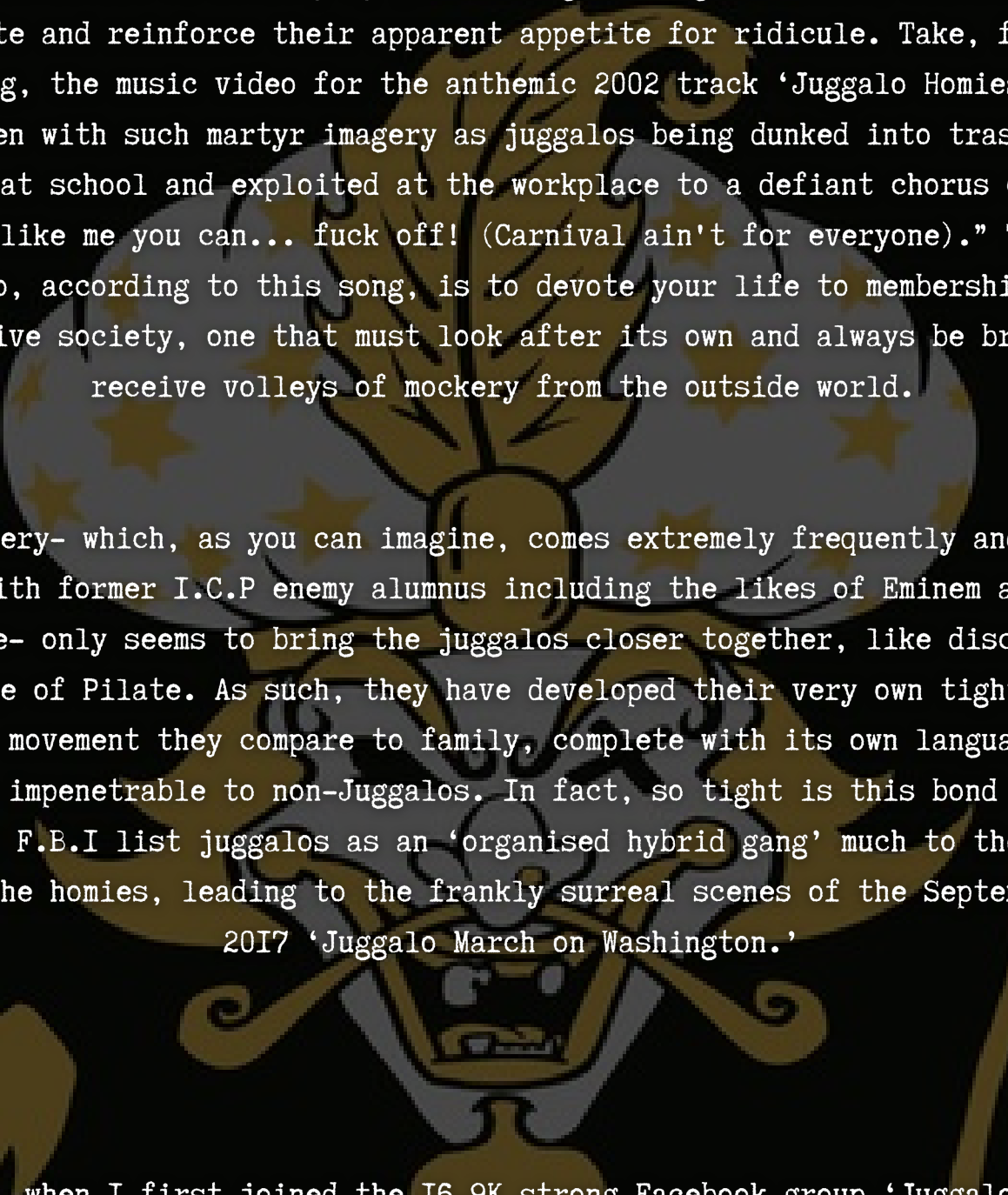
But just who are the juggalos? And why are they? In one of their most famous recordings, 'Hokus Pocus' from 1998, I.C.P categorises their followers as 'serial slaughtering stranglers' and 'folded, fat, floppy titted freaks,' and even in the encouragingly titled track 'What Is A Juggalo?' we are offered only such charming depictions of a juggalo as "a fucking lunatic" with a "rope tied to his dick" who tells a "bitch" that "her butt stinks" and who will gladly "dip his nuts in your soup." Perhaps the most authentic answer amidst this frankly pretty puerile stew is the buried admission of "well, fuck if I know."



From the outside looking in, the origins of the movement are all pretty eccentric. The first recorded use of the term, apparently, came during a live performance of 'The Juggla' in 1994 during which Violent J referred to his fawning crowd as 'juggalos' for the first time, with the name sticking to this day. For Juggalos, the music of I.C.P and the other acts on their record label, 'Psychopathic Records', is not just media to be consumed and enjoyed. Rather, it represents a sort of canon, the manifesto to an entire way of life- you are either in or you are out, and he who is not 'down with the clown' must be observed with extreme caution.

The feverish enthusiasm expressed by juggalos towards I.C.P can be compared fairly to that of the roving platoons of Grateful Dead fans of yore or even victims of the once endemic 'Beatlemania' fever, but their rituals are far more idiosyncratic than either of the aforementioned genera. Most obviously- and hilariously- there's their affinity for painting themselves up like scary clowns, but there's more to it than that.





Self-proclaimed outcasts, they like to consolidate their place as members of a fringe subculture of society by just acting downright bizarre, almost as if to propagate and reinforce their apparent appetite for ridicule. Take, for extra seasoning, the music video for the anthemic 2002 track 'Juggalo Homies', which is laden with such martyr imagery as juggalos being dunked into trash cans, bullied at school and exploited at the workplace to a defiant chorus of "if ya don't like me you can... fuck off! (Carnival ain't for everyone)." To be a juggalo, according to this song, is to devote your life to membership of an exclusive society, one that must look after its own and always be braced to receive volleys of mockery from the outside world.

Such mockery- which, as you can imagine, comes extremely frequently and from all sides, with former I.C.P enemy alumnus including the likes of Eminem and Sharon Osbourne- only seems to bring the juggalos closer together, like disciples in the age of Pilate. As such, they have developed their very own tight-knit, insular movement they compare to family, complete with its own language, that can seem impenetrable to non-Juggalos. In fact, so tight is this bond that 2011 saw the F.B.I list juggalos as an 'organised hybrid gang' much to the massed fury of the homies, leading to the frankly surreal scenes of the September 16th, 2017 'Juggalo March on Washington.'

And so, when I first joined the 16.9K strong Facebook group 'Juggalo Family LOVE,' I was apprehensive that they would all see right through me and immediately go on the offensive like a swarm of antibodies, attacking me like the dirty ol germ I am. And so, by means of preparation, I first referred to that most reliable of resources: Wikihow. In the article, 'How To Be A Juggalo,' the conversion process is narrowed down into three simple steps, which I followed, Brian Butterfield style, to the letter. Send in the clowns.

STEP ONE:

'APPRECIATING THE MUSIC'

The most obvious of all the steps, the Wikihow article helpfully reminds readers that in order to be a fan of I.C.P, you actually have to listen to them. Special attention is given towards the memorisation of lyrics because, and I quote, "if you know all the lyrics, you can have fun singing along with the band!"

Whilst much of Insane Clown Posse's music consists of crude, sexist and violent imagery shouted over calliope music with persistent reference to hatchets, other bladed weapons, and a malevolent necromancer by the name of the 'Great Milenko', there is a surprising array of lyrical variation to be found. For instance, we have the cautionary tale of 'Fonz Pond,' a spooky body of water that kills children. Despite making it all up- and the music video depicting the titular pond as, more or less, a little puddle in the woods- there's a sense of genuine urgency and concern from Violent J and Shaggy 2 Dope on behalf of their imaginary fanbase of children: "Don't go near the water!"

Then we have 'In Yo Face', a song that manages to shoehorn a pious line about shaking the hand of Satan with a "cross in my palm" within only one stanza's distance from the abhorrent imagery of obese joker Violent J "fucking this slut up in her dirty ass." The latter line, as you have likely observed, is offensive on so many levels. Is it meant as forbidden boast or sordid confession? Was it an act of love? Did they even get married?

Why did Violent J miss the opportunity to rhyme 'slut' with 'butt'?

Now, by sweeping contrast, take the childlike wonder of 2010's 'Miracles,' one of I.C.P's undisputed masterworks. It is a song about the beauty of the natural world that bears an uncanny resemblance to the Lonely Island's later 'Incredible Thoughts', and I would like to take the time to reproduce some genuine (albeit out of context) lyrics for your appreciation and, no doubt, great pleasure:

"Look at the mountains, trees, the seven seas, and everything chilling underwater, please!"

"Fucking rainbows, after it rains! There's enough miracles here to blow your brains!"

"Shaggy's little boy looks just like Shaggy.. and my little boy looks just like daddy..."

"I love my mom..."

"Fucking magnets, how do they work? And I don't wanna talk to a scientist, ya'll motherfuckers lying and getting me pissed!"

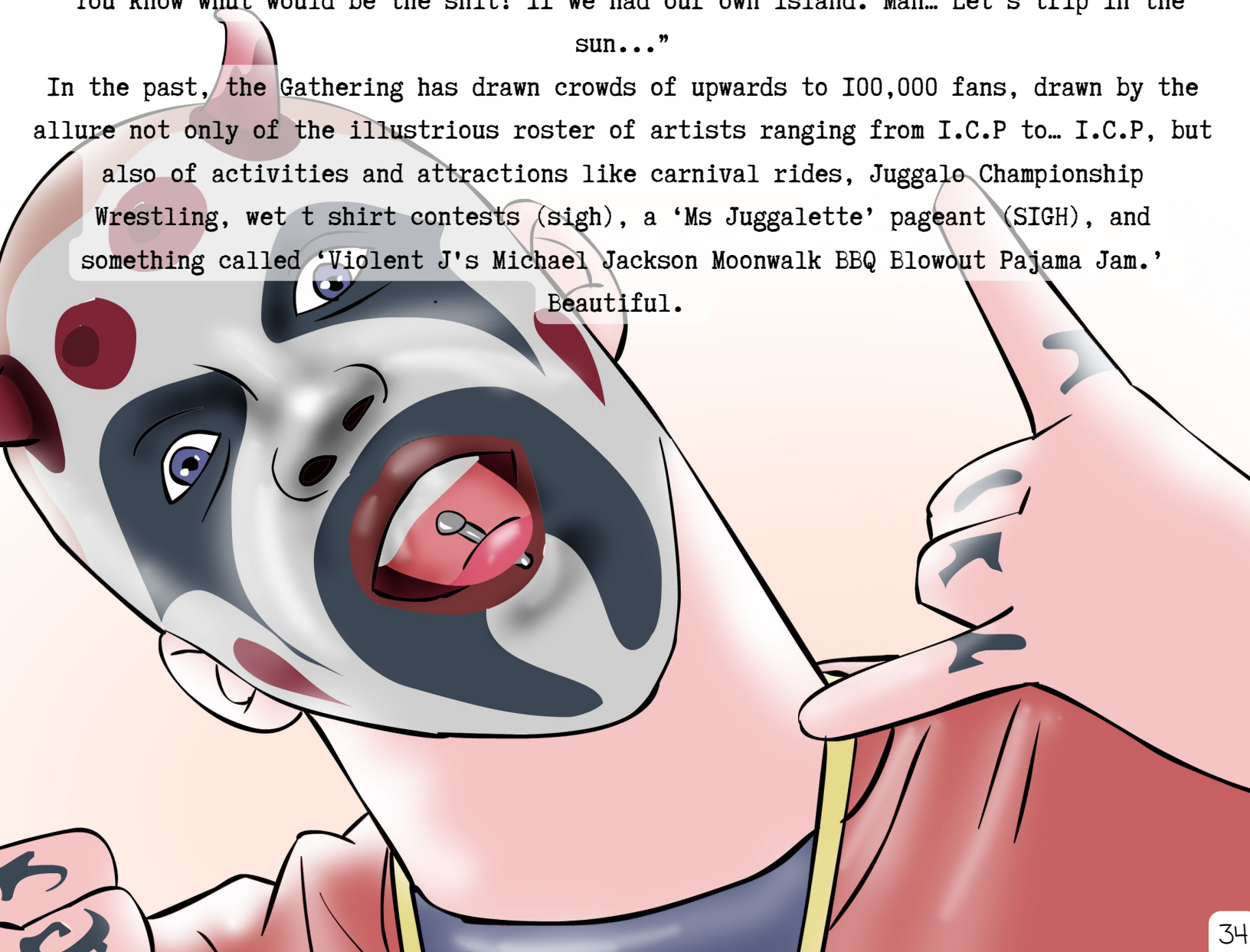
Step One? More like Step DONE.

STEP TWO: 'ATTENDING EVENTS'

Adherence to this second step is somewhat harder, given that just about every major juggalo happening occurs over yonder in the New World of Americky. We'll circumnavigate this particular conundrum for the grand finale, if you're patient. But, we can't skip this section entirely since that would be to ignore the most prominent event in the entire jug calendar: the annual 'Gathering of the Juggalos,' a five day festival that's effectively a yearly Woodstock for those who love to paint up. Just as Woodstock had its very own theme song that captured the ethos of the event courtesy of Joni Mitchell, so too does the Gathering: 'Juggalo Island,' an unexpectedly breezy, hippie-ish ditty praising the virtues of letting one's "nuts hang by the water" whilst "feeling jolly, ya'll!"

"You know whut would be the shit? If we had our own island. Man... Let's trip in the sun..."

In the past, the Gathering has drawn crowds of upwards to 100,000 fans, drawn by the allure not only of the illustrious roster of artists ranging from I.C.P to... I.C.P, but also of activities and attractions like carnival rides, Juggalo Championship Wrestling, wet t shirt contests (sigh), a 'Ms Juggalette' pageant (SIGH), and something called 'Violent J's Michael Jackson Moonwalk BBQ Blowout Pajama Jam.' Beautiful.



STEP THREE:

'LIVING A JUGGALO LIFESTYLE'

Now THIS is more like it. On May 10th, 2022, I made my debut in the Juggalo Family LOVE Facebook page with the following post:

"Whoop whoop," (note: this is the standard greeting and mating call of the Juggalo. If a jug says this to you, you MUST say it back or you are in direct violation of every social law of the posse) "I'm new to the fam and I was just wondering if I could start up a Q/A type post for new juggalos like me? I've only just discovered I.C.P but I have some questions. PEACE!"

It didn't take long for the fam to take the bait, but early responses seemed to suggest that my careful disguise was already slipping. "Uh oh," replied one group member defensively, whilst admin 'Juggalo Jesus' seemed intent on testing my integrity by hitting me up with some wise-guy sarcasm:

"Rule #1 in the Juggalo handbook," he told me, "specifically states that you must tattoo your facepaint on to be a real juggler. I'm selling copies of the handbook fo' about tree fiddy if you need one."

Another told me only that the answer was "riddle box." Upon searching the phrase on the internet, I was greeted, unsurprisingly, with lyrics to an I.C.P song. I could not ascertain as to whether they were intended as a means of intimidation or threat or if I was missing out on some hidden meaning:

"Wicked wicked wicked wicked clowns! Hey, I'm Violent J! And I'm here, well, I'm here to kick yo ass!" they read.

"Hey! what's up muther fucka! This is Shaggs 2Dope! Congratulating you for opening the box! THE RIDDLE BOX! It looks like you received your prize. The cost! What it cost! Was your ASS! BITCH BOY!

Hahahahaha!"

Sheepish but unperturbed, I continued on my quest for knowledge. Point number one in Wikihow's Step Three was insistent that to be a true jug I needed to drink a cheap American carbonated drink by the name of Faygo soda, apparently a crucial ingredient in any self-respecting homie's blood sample. My own research had already informed me that I.C.P have made a tradition of spraying gallons of the sugary drink on their fans after one particular gig saw Violent J dousing a bottles' worth on row of concert goers who were flipping him the middle finger, but I wanted to hear about the deeper meaning straight from the collective horses' mouth:

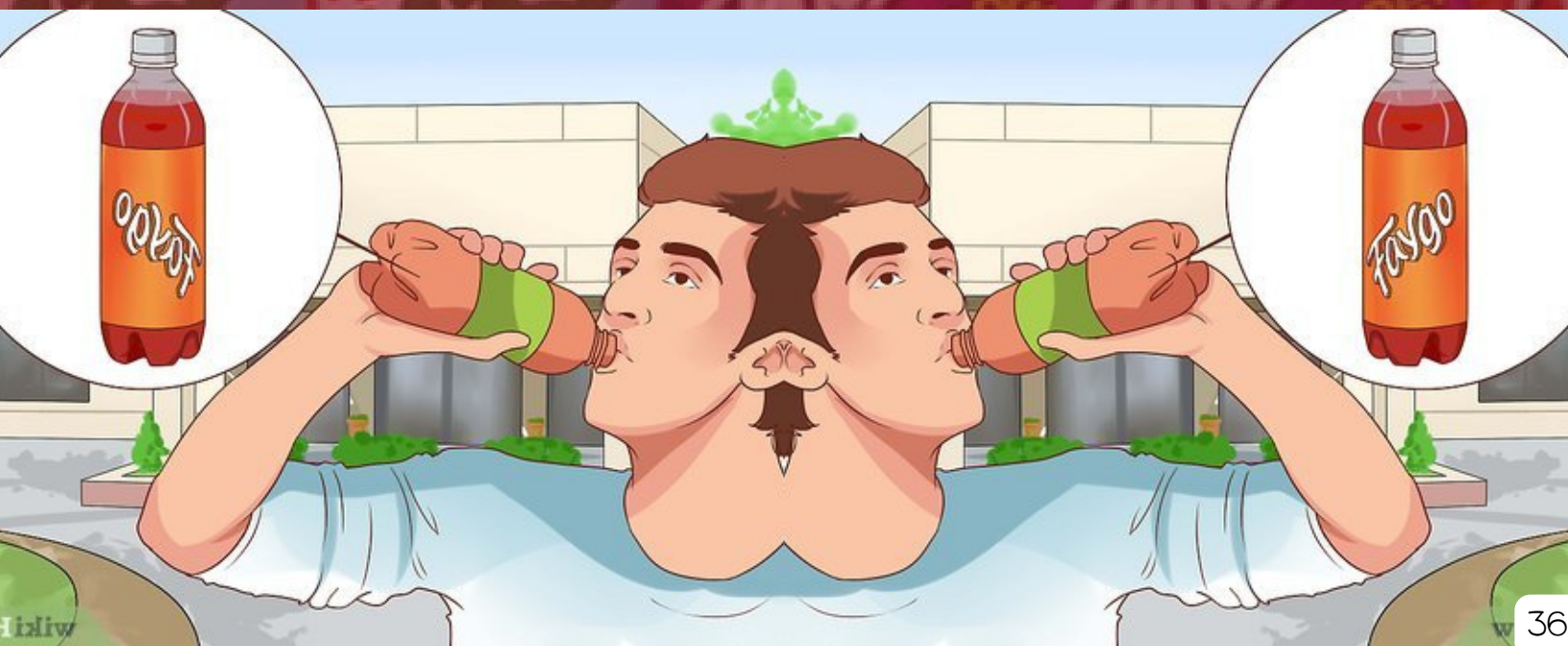
"My first question really is," I asked with the earnest disposition of an apprentice at his master's feet, "why Faygo? Does it have to be Faygo? I don't think they sell Faygo where I'm from, is the problem."

One homie informed me that "Faygo was there choice of pop soda because it was cheap and they were poor," whilst another jug jester opined that it would be "absurd" if they drank anything else.

Meanwhile, Juggalo Jesus, seemingly warming to me and my outwardly authentic thirst for knowledge, addressed me by my first name.

"Jack," he replied with advice I am unlikely to ever heed, "you can put in a product request to store managers and they will get you certain things like Faygo. I once flooded the entire East Coast with the shit with one request a few years ago," he added, bullshittingly.

He continued, "Also, Faygo has nothing to do with being a Juggalo, it's just a clown thing. Drink whatever tf you want, but I will point out that most Faygo is caffeine free and caffeine is bad for your mental health." I confess to being surprised by this mature change in demeanour from Juggalo Jesus. I had clearly underestimated the wisdom of my new guru.



Curiously, some banter amongst the crew which saw Juggalo Jesus joking about performing Christian rap led to a little theological debate. "Thought we already perform Christian rap, but with Swear words and Violent content..."

"that's the claim... But there is maybe 2 or 3 mentions of 'Jesus' in I.C.P's music. They also claim to have faith in Jesus but Shaggy says he cant exactly say that." Upon investigation, the unbelievable is indeed true: Insane Clown Posse music does indeed, apparently, represent a subversive form of Christian rap. The so-called 'Dark Carnival' lore, comprising six concept albums known as 'Joker's Cards,' in fact represents a series of parables intending to alter the "evil ways" of listeners before "the end consumes us all." That palpable aversion to scientists from 'Miracles' is starting to make a lot more sense now, huh?

By the climax of the sixth of the aforementioned "Joker's Cards", it is revealed that the 'hidden message' of I.C.P's music had always been to follow God. The Guardian's Jon Ronson wrote of how I.C.P had "only been pretending to be brutal and sadistic to trick their fans into believing in God," whilst Rolling Stones' Ben Sisario was perhaps closer to the mark when he asked, "Is this man's final dis of God, or His of us?"

The next stage of my transformation as suggested by Wikihow was to learn to talk like a juggalo. This is where I had stumbled long ago in the summer of 2019, when I had made a previous abortive attempt to ingratiate myself with the fam. This magazine didn't exist then, of course- I was just doing it to be a little rascal:

"what's a jug gotta do to get a whap whap around here?"

I was only able to lure out one single responder. "whap whap," he parroted with no fewer than fifteen laughing emojis, seemingly shocked that the beloved 'whoop whoop' catchphrase was being bastardised. So incensed was he that he responded a second time:

"Gonna whap your face off h8er."

Now that I was back like scoliosis, I had to do my darndest not to blow my cover or break any taboos- of which there are many- so this time I opted for a far more delicate approach. "What's everyone's favourite juggalo slang? I'm trying to learn how to speak like a true jug- I know 'whoop whoop' and 'mmfcl' of course. PEACE." (Mmfcl, I should add, is a fun abbreviation for an equally fun phrase- Much Mutha Fucken Clown Love. Sign off your next text message to your grandmother with it.)

The responses to this particular query were varied to say the least, ranging from the surprisingly wholesome- “the realest juggalo shit you can ever do is just be yourself homie” and “Just be ur self bro”- through to the by now standard barrages of profanity- “Fuck the fuck off mother fucker!”, “JCW..Fuck your face”, “Get skop muhfukka get skop” and, my own personal favourite, “Show us your fuckin butthole.” I remain unsure as to whether the latter examples were genuine responses to my question, terms of endearment from my new brothers and sisters or just angry juggalos baying for my blood.

Some didn't really understand the assignment quite so well. One middle aged woman with a confederate flag in her profile picture just typed “WHOOOP---WHOOOP,” despite my explicitly saying I already knew “whoop whoop”, before leaving no fewer than ten separate GIF responses of kittens, married couples and little doggies kissing cats. Another lady told a strange story about being 47 and being “never even allowed to hear I song no lie.”

Others just straight up lied and said “there isn't an official lingo,” despite I.C.P lyrics being laden with made up words that someone out there must understand. One particular gentleman offered no real meaningful addition to the discourse other than to inform the group that “sewer gutter blood” runs through his system and that you “can't paint a frown on a clown.”

The greatest shock to the system, though, was a helpful wall of text that reads like the uncensored script of the episode of ‘Spongebob Squarepants’ in which Spongebob and Patrick learn swear words from graffiti on a dumpster: “Fresh, nedan, motherfacko, show your butthole, whoop whoop with 2 scoops, scrub life, pal yeah, boof it, spin the wheel, fxck your rebel flag, fuxk your sleep, fxck that hill, it's raining faygo, what up ninja, honk for sugar and if you don't gather you don't matter.”



Vocabulary thusly enhanced, I opted to get a dialogue going about one of the other five elephants in the room- the clown makeup. "thank you fam for all being so welcoming!!" I said like a sweet little boy. "Another thing- about the makeup, is it customary to copy shaggy and violent j's look or is it anything goes? Can I paint up however and still be

'juggalo'? And do you guys ever paint up in public?"

"anything goes bro," reassured one of my new best friends. "i haven't painted up in public, because.. my part of town aint the friendliest but I hope all goes well."

Main character Juggalo Jesus returned to the fold to offer a combination of bravado and lies that Jay from the Inbetweeners would be proud of. "thats the best time to do it. They all be like dafuq? We used to have 20-30 clowns in a small town of less than 2000 and it wasnt shit to drive down the road and see someone painted up. Police hated us, lol."

"THANK YOU FOR THE ADVICE," beamed the reluctant homie. Perhaps confusing Juggalo Jesus for an apparition of the genuine Christ, he offered, as an apparent means of atonement, to "start doing it and maybe even get to the local church i serve at wearing juggalo paint ;DD." Hoo, boy. Poor, lost soul. I feel partially responsible. Sorry, that church.

I must note at this point that within a matter of hours of joining Juggalo Family LOVE, my hitherho largely empty DM inbox began to flood with spam messages as I was added to mass groupchats full of messages sent from porn bots. Has even artificial intelligence learned to punch down on the lowly juggalo and prey upon them like a vulture? Some were tragic: "i still miss the guy with that dick," lamented one mournful bot, whilst another very forward one going by the name of 'Richard' misunderstood the nature of sex work when it told me and assorted other unfortunates that it was a "prostitute" that had chosen us for compulsory lovemaking.

Meanwhile, things started taking a turn for the ever seedier and weirder- to the point of outright dark- within the group itself, which started to resemble a digital Hieronymous Bosch landscape. One juggalette started posting very unappealing photos of herself with Psychopathic Records logos- a little running clown holding a hatchet- that she'd printed out on paper stuck onto her naked breasts with Sellotape, whilst another expressed a moral dilemma about how, whilst "Juggalos should stick together," a number of the juggalos he shared his halfway house with were "sex offenders" and he didn't want to hang out with them.

"Am I wrong for that?" the strangely conflicted young man asked. "In my opinion," a wise clown pondered, "real Juggalos aren't sex offenders."

It was a sobering reminder that, although most within the juggalo community are harmless, even loveable weirdos who just like to listen to evil circus music and wear clown makeup with their friends, there still remained a minority of truly degenerate juggalos who were prone to taking things too far with a startling affinity for violence, xenophobia and casual misogyny. As goes without saying, we don't vibe with or claim those clowns, homie.

Having stared into the widening mouth of madness that showcased what happens when you put almost 17,000 juggalos into a private echo chamber, I strove to reinject some positivity into the group by inviting the members to share memories of what surely would have been the greatest moment of their lives:

"Any homies ever lucky enough to get to meet I.C.P in the flesh or speak to them? What were they like? Mmfcl."

This stirred up the juggalos like hungry piranhas as they clamoured to tell their tales. Amongst them were some anecdotes that sound extremely unlikely, but in the world of the juggalo, it is genuinely difficult to separate truth from fiction.

"I snuck past security and got up on stage in the middle of a set," related a man who looked a lot like a school teacher, "stood between J and Shaggy, and put my hands on both of their shoulders. I can't believe nobody beat the shit out of me." Another told of seeing Violent J around the year 2000 "walking out holding a banana and two apples at his groin so Shaggy could scoot by to the bus in a mask without being seen."

"We all knew it was him and let his antisocialness slide," he added, convivially.

The stories kept on coming. One remembered how at a Gathering of the Juggalos "many moons ago" he secured a backstage pass from a ring girl only to be told by Shaggy that "backstage is for chicks only," whilst another spun a dubious tale of almost getting run over by a golf cart "full of chicks" driven by Violent J at the Gathering in 2003. For some reason he also "gave shags the bird the same day."

But, after this near-death experience at the hands of his hero, there was a redemption arc. When a juggalette leapt in front of his wife at a post-gig autograph signing- supposedly pulling up her shirt and exclaiming "here J, sign these!"- the honourable Violent J instead opted to "walk around her" whereupon he signed his wife's ticket.

"that showed my wife MAD respect from J..." he told me in much the same twinkle eyed manner he will no doubt tell his grandchildren.

By this stage, I felt my transformation into a full-time juggalo was all but complete. I should add that we had reached out to Insane Clown Posse directly to ask them what it means to be a juggalo but, unfortunately, at the time of writing, we have had no response.

There were a couple of other suggestions within the Wikihow, such as joining the social media 'Juggalobook'- a definite no-go after witnessing the cesspool that was this particular corner of normal Facebook- and investing in a cryptocurrency called 'Juggalocoin'- I didn't feel like leaping off of a Wall Street high rise building with a cry of 'I'm ruined! Whoop whoop!' just to cement my legacy as truly down with the clown- but I felt these to be ancillary. Juggalo, after all, is a state of MIND.

There was just one more hurdle to contend with. I'd made my peace with becoming a jug within my own psyche, but how could I tell the world that the old Jack was gone, to be forever replaced with a newer, krunker model?

It was a question I had posited the fam back in the summer of 2019, when I presented them with the following brainteaser:

"whoop whoop brothers. how do I come out to my family that I'm a juggalo? i have got a family gathering tonight but they don't know I'm down with the clown. mmfcl."

As you probably already expect, I was greeted with the typical combination of bemusement and bewilderment, and for every juggalo and lette that wanted to offer genuine help there was another who clearly thought themselves to be the wisecracking class clown in a whole circus full of them- like my first responder, who encouraged me to stick my nuts in my family's soup. Joke's on him- I'm a 'lo and I GET that reference now!

"Paint up," suggested one encouraging juggalette, before, having thought about it for a little moment longer, added a second comment:

"I don't believe it's like coming out as gay."

This was a rather common belief amongst the group- "It's not something you have to or need to 'come out' as."



“just say hey I’m a lo,” I was advised, “I’m down with the clown or whatever phrase you wanna put. Leave it at that it’s no big deal.”

Buoyed by the encouragement of the fam, I let them believe I took their advice on board for what was, I might add, an entirely fictitious family gathering. “I rocked up to the family gathering painted up in my jug makeup brothers and lemme tell you it didn’t go down so good.”

But this is the year 2022! I’m ready to take more concrete steps to reveal my new identity. The world is a much more accepting place than it once was. It’s not like there’s still losers spending their time writing articles punching down at the expense of self-proclaimed easy targets who just want to enjoy their slightly weird but more or less innocent fandom in peace. That would just be mean, after all.

So, to show my earnest support for my homies, I decided to paint up. In public. This is brave, this is bruised. This is who I’m meant to be, this is me.

And, to paraphrase Insane Clown Posse, if you don’t like it, you can fuck off.

DOWN

WITH

DA

GLOWN





John



Leigh

BABY BUSHKA

ON BEING A KATE BUSH TOUR DE FORCE



WE ALL LOVE A BIT OF KATE BUSH. SO WHAT COULD BE BETTER THAN EIGHT KATE'S? BABY BUSHKA IS THE EIGHT WOMAN STRONG KATE BUSH EXPERIENCE OF YOUR DREAMS. HAILING FROM THE STATES, THE LADIES ROCKED THE STAGE OF BLACKBOX ON THE 21ST MAY.

WE CHATTED WITH NATASHA FROM THE INCREDIBLE TROUPE BRINGING THE BUSH TO THE MASSES!

How do you all know each other?

*Well, San Diego has a close-knitted music scene...so we all knew of each other or were already collaborating! Every single woman in this band is a musical force! When I asked everyone if they wanted to do this project...the answer was a resounding... "**** yes!"*

How did the idea come to play? Why Kate Bush?

I got into Kate Bush only 6 months before Baby Bushka started! But when I fell in love with her...I fell hard! It's so easy to dive deeper into her world and become obsessed! Her discography, visuals, and art is so strange and beautiful. One day, as I was listening to Hounds of Love...I thought how fun it would be to put on a Kate Bush dance party and perform the music live. 24 hours later, a venue was secured and all the amazing women musicians in town I asked to be a part of it said yes! Baby Bushka was born! Apart from our violinist Batya, who's been a fan longer than me, I don't think the rest of the band was very familiar with Kate's music until we started the project. Now we all have our own love affair with her work and it's beautiful to share that with audiences!

*How did you come up with the name
Baby Bushka?*

*Have you ever seen a picture of a Bush
Baby? They are these adorable and
slightly terrifying nocturnal primates
found in sub-Saharan Africa. There are
myths and folk tales about them and I
have always loved their name. That
melted with Kate's song
Babooshka...and boom. Baby Bushka
was born...somehow.*



What does the Baby Buska experience entail for an audience member?

Two different acts with songs spanning her decades long career. Colorful jumpsuits, 5 part vocal harmonies, choreographed dancing, drama, humour, magic, sisterhood! It's epic!

What Kate Bush song is the most popular when you perform it?

I think it has to be a tie between Wuthering Heights and Cloudbusting!

Is Kate herself aware of your unique tribute?

I think so! After meeting Del Palmer at our first London show in 2018, he was very supportive and enthusiastic about our project and was kind enough to pass on a love letter that we stayed up all night writing together for her. Kate, if you're reading this...write us back!

What is touring as 8 Kate Bushes like?

Well luckily we don't try to look or sound like 8 Kate Bushes...that would be too much for anyone to handle I think haha. We definitely look at this project as a unique interpretation of her music through 8 women...and yes touring with 8 different bushes is a lot of fun! We all have stage names and that could perhaps give some kind of indication of the many different personalities on the road. There is Heavy Bush on drums, Midnight Bush on keys, Sugar Bush on guitar, Little Bush on Bass, Bad Bush on violin, and then up front doing all the crazy choreography and harmonies is Hella Bush, Fancy Bush and myself...Boss Bush!

What is your favourite tour moment to date?

Oh, that's a hard one...there are many!

One that comes to mind is our show in York back in 2018, during our first pilgrimage tour! Our band mate, Nina (aka Dark Bush), used to sing This Woman's Work and pass out fresh roses to audience members during her performance.

She would bring audiences to tears everytime with her rendition. That night in York, she pick up a bouquet of dried lavender instead of fresh roses and during her performance, little lavender flowers dropped all over the stage as she handed out the stems. For the rest of the show, as we danced over the lavender with our feet...the aroma filled the stage! That memory is especially dear to all of us now since Nina died in a car crash during the pandemic.

What's next for Baby Bushka?

Touring Japan? A residency on the West End? Another album? Who knows...now that live music is back we want nothing more than to dream big and keep the Bush alive! Audiences give us life and as long as they'll have us...we'll keep coming!



SISTER GHOST RAISE £200 FOR HOSPICE

In our last edition of STRANGER DAIS, we sang the praises of Sister Ghost's incredible Stay Spooky EP (which, if you haven't checked it out already, is a travesty. Get on it right now).

This May, the duo released their latest music video. Cut Like A Thorn made it's televisual debut - and it is a beauty.

Cut Like A Thorn is a triumph in many layers. Whilst holding onto the high calibre of rockin' tunage from Stay Spooky, the song has proved to be a beautiful tribute to Shannon's late grandmother as well as a vessel for all important fundraising for Foyle Hospice.

The reason for the additional release for this particular song is that it was written after the passing of my Granny, and it's her one year anniversary," explains the Sister Ghost front woman.

"Cut Like A Thorn was my first experience of writing to cope with grief and it's about the things I learned from her as well as the wider story around that generation of Irish women who bore so much in order for my generation to have more freedom and autonomy with their lives and careers."

The supporting video for the single is equal parts a personal homage to a heart wrenching period in Shannon's life, whilst also celebrating the beauty of her roots.

SISTER
GHOST



cut like a
thorn

“The music video contains footage from the many walks I would take around my home village in rural Co.Derry during the pandemic lockdowns, as these spaces were part and parcel with the time of her passing and my writing of the song.”

Cut Like A Thorn raised a whopping £200 for Foyle Hospice: money which will help facilitate the needs of families and cancer patients within the North West.

Sister Ghost have exemplified the phenomena that music can hold not only for the listener, but for the wider community: turning pain into hope. That, I think you can agree, is simply *magic*.

Be sure to catch Sister Ghost playing on the 3rd June at the Black Box Green Room playing as part of Women's Work festival.



KINGWUZAN

MAKE 'WAVE'S WITH
INTENSE NEW TRACK



Heavy Prog band King Villain have been ever so busy in the first year of their inception! Stomping onto the scene with their debut EP, 'Visions', it was clear the quartet were ones to watch.

King Villain have amassed an impressive fanbase who will all be excessively excited to know that the band is back to kick your ears' ass. In a really, really good way.

'Wave' is set for release on the 6th June: yet we lucky hobbits at STRANGER DAIS were able to sneak a preview of what's to come. And boy, is it juicy.

From the offset, guitars are heard bouncing from joyous highs to troubling lows, before being met by Wheelie Campbell's distinctive vocals. Impressive harmonisation adds weight to the vulnerable lyrics, orating the very personal struggles King Villain bravely shines a spotlight upon.

"The track explores struggles with Bipolar disorder and the feeling of equal droves of mania and depression coming in waves - just like how we hope this track comes across equal parts serene and intense," explains guitarist Daniel Keown - who also mixes King Villain (wizardry at its finest, as the band always sounds absolutely gorgeous on record).

"We've definitely had our heads down since our last release - this was the first track we completed start to finish as a full band since Wheelie has joined on vocals, and we think it sounds so much more confident."

Combining an outstanding percolating bassline with emphatic percussion punctuating the melodic undulation in 'Wave', King Villain capture a fascinating virtuosity within the track - harnessing the murky atmosphere of ever rising waters readying to sweep the listener away.

A highlight within the track is undoubtedly the mind bending guitar riff which would give Polyphia a run for their money.

Ultimately, 'Wave' is a window into what's yet to come for King Villain: and if this is the taster, we are ecstatic to follow on to the next musical morsel.

"We've been hiding away in the studio, working on crazy tones and ethereal sounds and avoiding just about every gig we're offered in favor of making just about the craziest EP we can - and this track is the best insight into the scale of what's to come later this year!"

Be sure to presave 'Wave' - and watch this space. King Villain are back, baby!

IN CONVERSATION WITH BRIAN AUGER



By JACK HOPKIN

It's a record that has come to define that far-out psychedelic era of British popular music; from the opening otherworldliness of the tinkling piano that summons an unknowable lyric rendered in soulful decadence through to a cathartic closing keyboard freakout that likely still swirls on somewhere in deep space, 'This Wheel's On Fire' by Brian Auger, Julie Driscoll and the Trinity was unavoidable on U.K. radio airwaves in the summer of 1968, when it reached number 5 on the national charts.

Yet, for bandleader and organist Brian Auger, the smash success of the single (which, in re-recorded form, would provide a nostalgic theme song for the hit 1990s BBC comedy series 'Absolutely Fabulous') was but one chapter in a multi-decade straddling career that has also seen him help to launch the Yardbirds into the mainstream consciousness, perform with a pre-fame Rod Stewart, Hammond-hypnotise the Monkees and jam with Jimi Hendrix.

Upon arrival in a London that had only just started to swing, Brian quickly made ripples on the club scene and secured a name for himself as an in-demand session musician, even topping the 1964 Melody Maker jazz poll. He would then go on to join the ranks of the ill-fated but nonetheless extremely popular musical revue known as the Steampacket, before ultimately forming the Trinity alongside fellow Steampacket alumni Vic Briggs and Julie Driscoll.

This configuration recorded a number of commercially and critically acclaimed works for Marmalade Records- including their magnum opus album, the double L.P 'Streetnoise' (1969)- before eventually parting ways in 1970. That same year, Brian would assemble a backing band for an ambitious new project dubbed 'Oblivion Express'- a jazz rock fusion group with whom he would tour and record with for much of a decade that saw him voted the world's number one jazz organist by readers of Contemporary Keyboard magazine.

Having relocated to California with his family in the mid-1970s, Brian has continued to perform and record with a reformed Oblivion Express in which his daughter Savannah provides lead vocals and his son, Karma, takes on percussion duties.

A musician's musician with a loyal, multi-generational fanbase, Brian Auger granted STRANGER DAIS an exclusive interview in May 2022 in which he discussed his early influences, music industry machinations against the backdrop of paisley patterned 60s London, and his upcoming releases with Soul Bank Music...

Growing up, did you always aspire towards becoming a musician/performer? Who would you cite as your earliest influences?

“No, not at all. My parents wanted me to get into something safe like chartered accountancy, but instead the Universe decided I was to become obsessed with American jazz and I became a self-taught jazz pianist.”

You have come to be revered as an innovator of jazz/rock fusion and have become especially associated with the Hammond B3 organ. What first drew you to this particular instrument in the first place?

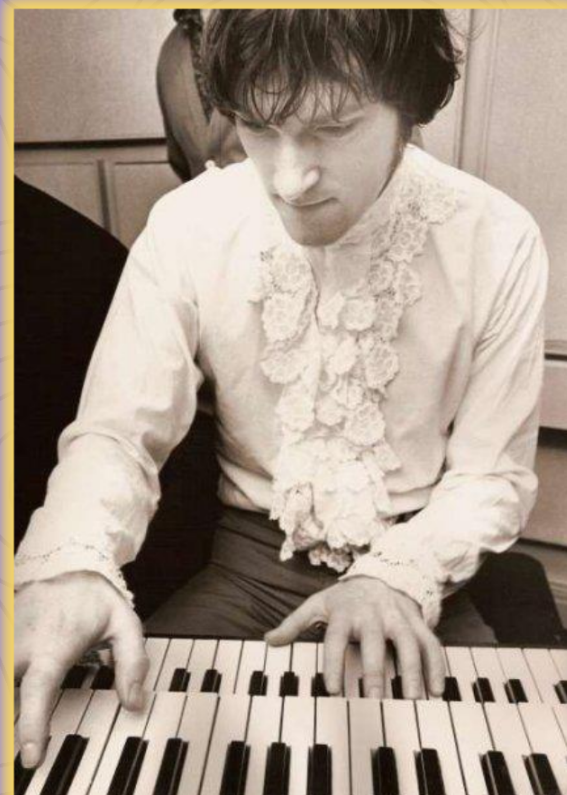
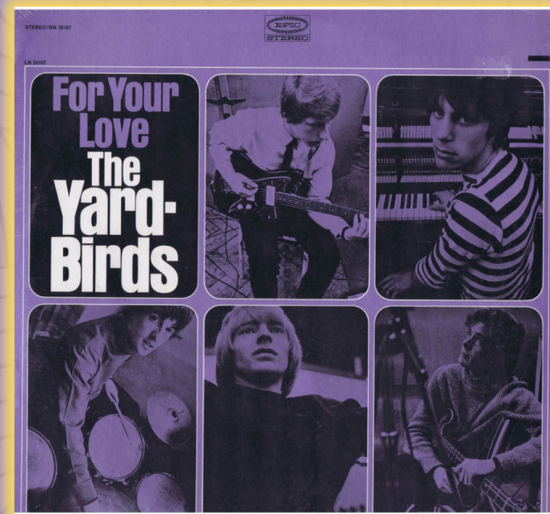
“I was walking through Shepherd’s Bush Market in London when I heard an amazing sound. Upon enquiry, it turned out to be the album, ‘Back at the Ghicken Shack’ by the great Jimmy Smith being played over the speakers of the WG record store. I took it home, and so began my interest with the Hammond.”

In 1965, as a session musician, you provided the now-iconic harpsichord intro that opens ‘For Your Love’ by the Yardbirds. How was it that the Yardbirds came to approach you, and what do you recall of the session? Did you have any idea that the record was going to become such an enormous hit?

“The Yardbirds and I were in the same booking agency, and at that time Paul Samwell-Smith asked me to play on a single. I was to come to a studio opposite the BGC in Upper Regent Street. Upon arrival, I was played the tune and Paul said he wanted an intro and then rhythmic accompaniment throughout.

It was then that I noticed that there was no organ in the studio, and there was no piano either! Paul then pointed to a shape under a cover in the corner. Whipping the cover off revealed a double-tier harpsichord. I was assured that that was what we had for the session. I asked for five minutes of practice time on the harpsichord because the action was really different to the organ or the piano, in fact this instrument used a plucked action. Anyway, I rolled out some arpeggios for the intro and let fly.

While walking to the tube to catch the Central Line home, I thought to myself, ‘who the hell is going to buy a pop single with harpsichord on it?’ Boy, was I wrong!”





That same year, you formed the Steampacket together with Julie Driscoll, Long John Baldry, Vic Briggs and Rod Stewart but, due to contractual issues, no official recordings were released by the group during its short lifespan. Had the Steampacket recorded, do you think the band would have stayed together longer, or even scored a hit?

“Long John Baldry was a household name at that time, and, having seen my first organ band at the Manchester club ‘The Twisted Wheel’, he asked me if I was interested in forming a band with him and if I would come to a meeting with his manager and agent. At that meeting, I was asked to run the band and to make sure that ‘Balders’, as I called him, arrived on time to the concerts and learned new tunes for rehearsals.

John INSISTED that I took an unknown Rod Stewart into the band, so I thought it would be great to have a female singer, the unknown but fantastic Julie Driscoll, who was answering Yardbirds fanmail in our agency and whom I had recorded with (as a session man) on two singles.

There was nothing like this band on the market, at that time, and the band took off like a rocket. For almost two years the three managers, Baldry’s, Rod’s and Giorgio Gomselky argued about whose record label should issue any recordings. They did a great job, and because of their intransigence and incompetence, the band began to fall apart.”



Your next musical venture as 'Brian Auger, Julie Driscoll and the Trinity' earned massive continental success, including but not limited to the 1968 U.K top 5 hit 'This Wheel's On Fire.' What motivated the band to record a cover of what was then a comparatively obscure Bob Dylan song?

"Julie and I were summoned to the office by Gomesky, where we were played a couple of tunes that remained on the famous 'Dylan Tapes' that had made the rounds. Fortunately, Julie liked 'This Wheel's On Fire' although there was just Dylan singing to a sparse guitar accompaniment and a walking bass track.

I took it home and tried several 'rock' rhythms that did not work. Finally, I stuck with the walking bassline, like a slow march- Eureka! At that time, psychedelia was rampant, and when I added the organ, piano and strings, the track jumped out at me, then Julie's vocal set the whole thing on a low simmering flame. The Universe had spoken clearly. I did not think we had a single for the market, but I really loved the track, and Julie's vocal was magnificent."

When Jimi Hendrix arrived in London, his manager Chas Chandler encouraged him to join the Trinity and, on at least one occasion, he played with yourself and the Trinity during a set at the Cromwellian club. What were your impressions of Hendrix, both musically and personally?

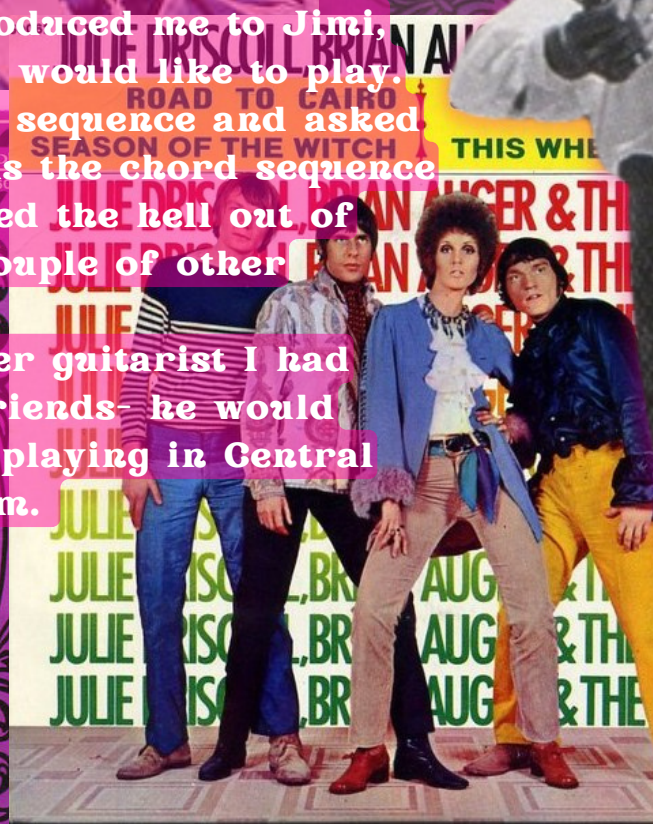
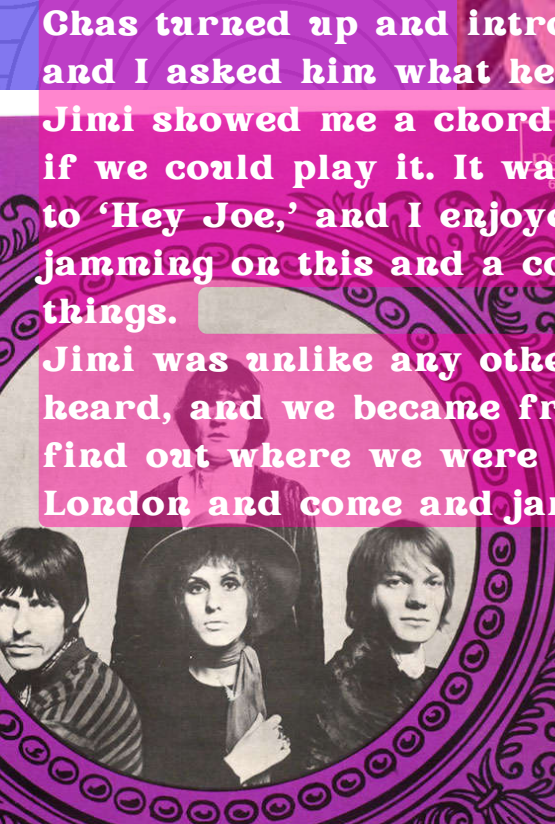
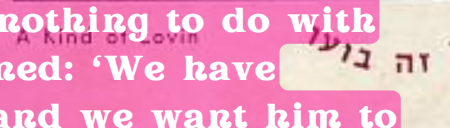
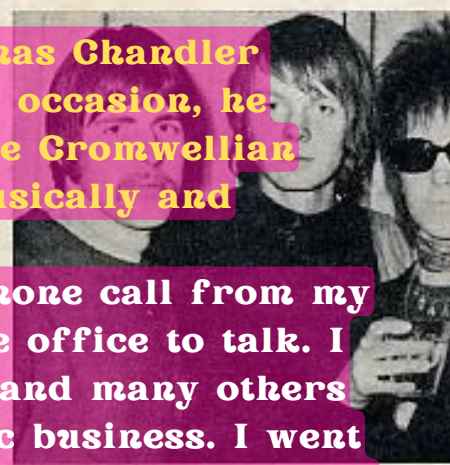
"This is how it happened from my side. I received a phone call from my friend Chas Chandler asking me if I would come to the office to talk. I knew that he had partnered with Mike Jeffrey, who I and many others considered to be one of the biggest crooks in the music business. I went as a favour to Chas, but I already knew that I wanted nothing to do with Jeffrey. While Mike sat there at the desk, Chas explained: 'We have brought this great guitar player over from New York and we want him to front your band.'

I said that I already had a guitar player, Vic Briggs, and that Julie Driscoll fronted my band. 'Do you expect me throw them out, or to leave them on the street?' Mike then said, 'That's your problem.'

I refused their offer, but, as a show of friendship to Chas, I told him that on Thursday night that week I would be playing at the Cromwellian Club, and, furthermore, this guitar player (whom they had neglected to name during the meeting) was welcome to sit in with my band and, as the Cromwellian was where everyone who was anyone in the community went, it would serve well as a showcase.

Chas turned up and introduced me to Jimi, and I asked him what he would like to play. Jimi showed me a chord sequence and asked if we could play it. It was the chord sequence to 'Hey Joe,' and I enjoyed the hell out of jamming on this and a couple of other things.

Jimi was unlike any other guitarist I had heard, and we became friends - he would find out where we were playing in Central London and come and jam.



In 1969, you featured prominently in the Monkees' television film '33+1/3 Revolutions Per Monkee.' What are your pervading memories of working on the special, and what was it like to work alongside the Monkees?

"My main memories were of continual laughter. We had a great time with the Monkees, who told us from their beginning that they were actors who had answered an ad in the L.A Times and had been picked to compete with the Beatles. They invited us to their homes, and we had a great time being around them."

It has been said that a dispute with manager Giorgio Gomelsky was a primary catalyst towards the eventual dissolution of the Trinity. What was the cause of this dispute?

"Yes. I had started the Trinity and I spent every cent I had made in the Steampacket for transport and for my organ, equipment, and wages. Gomelsky wanted to take over my band and it became clear that he didn't really give a damn for the band, but was gradually peeling Julie away from us."

In Italy during an important press gathering some RCA artists were sent to Viareggio to stand next to Julie and 'secretly' get their photo taken standing to the side of her. Gomelsky did nothing, and even some of the journalists came to ask me what was going on. The headline in the magazine 'Oggi' said 'JULIE DRISCOLL LEAVES BRIAN FOR FRANK SINATRA'S GLAN.' Julie and I were both furious that this seemed like a setup, and I could never trust Gomelsky again."

Many other things that were even more blatant occurred until Julie ended up leaving the music business altogether, and I left Gomelsky. RCA in New York asked to sign me, and in 1973 I recorded the album 'Closer To It', which went on the Billboard Rock, Jazz and R&B charts simultaneously, allowing me to move my family and the band to California."



Your next band, the more jazz-rock-oriented Oblivion Express, managed to attain frequent critical acclaim and scored a number of hit albums, particularly where the U.S charts were concerned. What is your favourite anecdote of life on the road with Oblivion Express in the 1970s?

“Well, there are many, but here is one: in 1973, when entering Genoa in Italy, we all noticed that the posters- that were very large- had been made in two pieces. They were everywhere, big red print on white paper, and all pasted the wrong way around. They proclaimed, ‘AUGER BRIAN N EXPRESS OBLIVIO’- this line seemed like a Papal blessing! We laughed our brains out.”

In 1975, you resettled full-time to the United States. What encouraged this move?

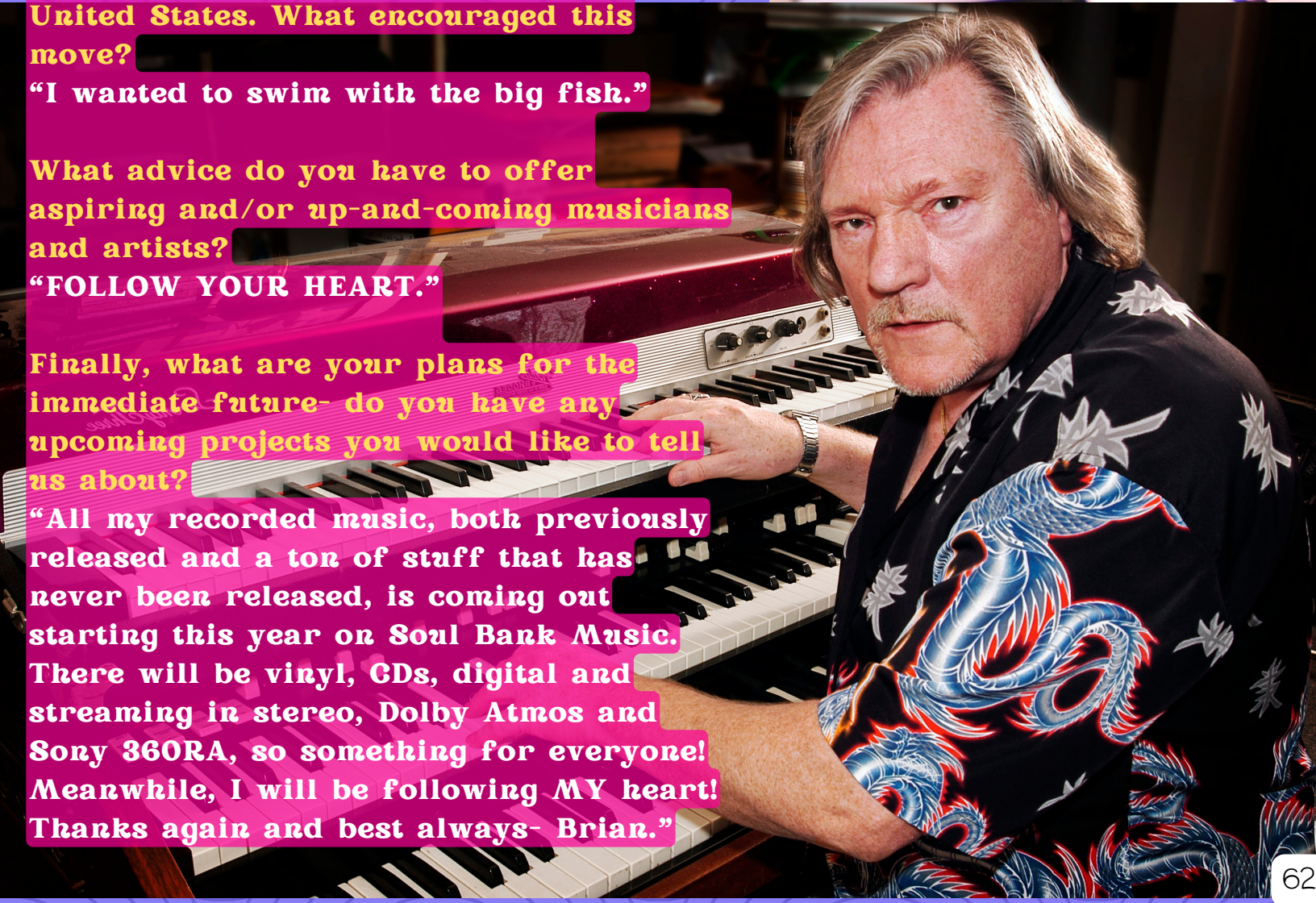
“I wanted to swim with the big fish.”

What advice do you have to offer aspiring and/or up-and-coming musicians and artists?

“FOLLOW YOUR HEART.”

Finally, what are your plans for the immediate future- do you have any upcoming projects you would like to tell us about?

“All my recorded music, both previously released and a ton of stuff that has never been released, is coming out starting this year on Soul Bank Music. There will be vinyl, CDs, digital and streaming in stereo, Dolby Atmos and Sony 360RA, so something for everyone! Meanwhile, I will be following MY heart! Thanks again and best always- Brian.”



STRANGER

DAIS

