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If you haven't been keeping up with the *Down the Line Podcast*, here are some of the recent episodes you missed:

**Episode 25**
Mike and Matt catch up after attending the 2022 AudioFeed Festival. They discuss what acts they caught at the festival, their overall impressions, and what they think the future holds for the festival.

**Episode 24**
Dw. Dunphy previews and chats with Mike about his new album Charm Offensive.

**Episode 23**
Theodore Andrew Obrastoff joins Mike to discuss The Arktos Chronicles, his new radio drama experience.

**Episode 22**
Mike interviews Peter Johnston RVA about his rock-based Mass hymns called Be Not Afraid.

**Episode 21**
Mike talks with And How about the new record, “Never Landing”.

Also, don’t miss the *Down the Line Archives* on Archive.org. Every issue and Podcast so far, archived forever and ever (or at least as long as Archive.org lasts that is).
This was my first year to attend AudioFeed. I am not a huge music festival person, but I have been to a few (including the epic Cornerstone 2000). I usually can't attend AudioFeed because it is on July 4th weekend. My family is not into music as much as I am, and I am a big family person, so family always won out over tuneage. But this year, the events aligned and I could both be with my son on July 4th AND attend AudioFeed. So I booked the tickets and made the long trek to a town that is pretty much far away from, well... the rest of the entire country it seems.

The pandemic has not been kind to festivals, and many are still wondering if most of them will survive the shutdowns. This article will look at some of the highlights of the 2022 festival, but Mike Indest is interviewing various people (myself included) about their thoughts about the future of AudioFeed and other festivals. Check out the Down the Line Podcast for those episodes and discussions.

Of course, I didn't catch everything... and several things I did catch but didn't get a good picture. So I won't have a shot for every facet that was good, but I will present a few of the many highlights of the festival. I am also not a professional photographer by a long shot. Oh, and the picture above? My old shoes bit the dust walking around the grounds, so Doug and I decided to "sacrifice them to the altar of Audio-Molech." (Credit to Doug for that awesome play on words - fire effect added later. We followed the camp rules.)
John J. Thompson led a series of talks and interviews that were all well worth the time. Plus he spun us some tunes from his personal collection! I think many of those interviews made it to podcast episodes, so be sure to check those out. John continues to be the driving force of our scene (whatever you may consider that today), so it was good to see him here.

Moral DK brought the rock to kick the official opening day off (there was a pre-festival day that I missed due to travel). They really showed the kids how this "live" thing is done. MDK played songs from their first album as well as some new tracks and an updated Boys Club track or two. I ran into Rob in the airport on the way home, and had a great chat (super nice guy BTW). He played me a track from the upcoming new album and... oh wow is it awesome! Can't wait to hear the new album later this year!
DTL writer and podcast host himself Mike Indest played a quick set on the impromptu stage with his wife Diana. Like most impromptu bands, they had to rock the masses in between main stage sets right across the street. But they were well up to the task.

Thompson had many great interviews, but it was probably both Wovenhand and Undercover that created the most buzz. Wovenhand made people think about what Christianity means in different contexts, and Undercover talked at length on finding unity and love in a band with such different belief systems in one band. Undercover even hinted they may be recording a new ep?
Jeff Elbel + PING played a couple of sets, including one on the impromptu stage that saw them joined by Harry Gore to play a rousing Adam Again cover.

David Eugene Edwards (aka Wovenhand) played a mesmerizing solo set that used stripped-down Wovenhand songs to create a dream-like experience.
For myself and many others, Undercover was the undisputed highlight of the fest. These seasoned rockers outperformed much younger bands. They hit so many emotional highs for the night that many of us forgot to attend the Eric Clayton show afterwards! (I hear that was an incredible show as well, and several clips online prove it was.)
Speaking of adult rockers, Matt, Matt, Doug, and Wes found out the hard way that people just won’t pay as much for musicians as they used to.

Part of the fun of AF22 was hanging out and meeting rockers as they roamed the grounds. Here Ojo (Undercover), Matt Hunt (Retroactive Records), me, Sim (Undercover), Gym (Undercover/Moral DK), and Rob (Moral DK) grabbed a quick picture together.
There were a large number of underground / indie bands to check out. A Facebook post from Steve Scott led me to check out Heather Hammers, and I was not disappointed.

No one is sure how they got Pedro the Lion to play, but after some extreme delays due to other bands and even other stages, David Bazan and company impressed even the non-fans in the audience.
Lots of impromptu conversations and even CD sales went down in the parking lot - but none compared to the surprise rainbow we got after a day of spotty showers.

So many great bands, so many missing pics: Nate Allen, Insomniac Folklore, the Sanctuary Tent, etc, etc, etc. AudioFeed 2022 was a great time to hang out, rock out, and chow down with fellow rockers (adult or otherwise). Hopefully there will be many more in the future.
Rick Alba is a great guy. I saw him play at the AudioFeed Festival this summer with Moral DK. I also saw him play decades ago with the Altar Boys. A lot can happen in a few decades. I hope this interview bears witness to the fact we do move on and forward, no matter where we come from. Rick allowed me to ask him some off the cuff questions. Enjoy!

Your social media profile is known to brush up amidst evangelicals at times. Issues of justice often get glossed over, and you remind them they bought into a piss-poor narrative. What compels you to engage online?

Ric: Well to start I promise I've never said, "piss-poor narrative" I hope, but I have come after specific notions that bring about bad outcomes for individuals or the world at large, and in my case some of those are religious notions. Usually Christian 'Evangelical' notions but only because that's what I happen to encounter in my social media feed. I left Christian Rock in 1992 which was somewhat before the internet, so for some years I had no contact and got no news from Christendom and left it in the past. To me in 1992 the world of my twenties was like a planet I'd stepped off of onto a new one, and let the old one go drifting on its way. But by the first decade of the new millennium political movements were ramped up against LGBTQ persons using Christian ideas as political weapons, and I found it in me to join in on defending against those weapons. Those ideas. It wasn't my plan to come after Christian teachings. I saw them being used to attack people so I came at them with counterarguments. It really became a thing when I signed up with Facebook. My biggest surprise, in fact one of inspirations for my second album was discovering how many people I knew from Christianity had become so progressive while still Christian, including defending gay rights and affirmation in Church and society. One of the effects was that it awoke my younger self, who had gone through life defended by no one. As I spoke (wrote, actually) to defend young gay Christians, my younger Christian self was there too, as in a mirror, feeling for the first time what it was like to have someone defending him, hoping that as I spoke my truth and kept the conversation going, there might be some benefit to people in situations similar to mine from long ago, looking for ways to pick the lock and break the chains that certain religious notions had wrapped them in. Many Christian leaders I knew from the 1980s are very active in that, and even though I'm no longer a believer, they are my heroes for what they do for the marginalized people in their sphere of influence.

Some of us at Down The Line saw you play with Moral DK at Audiofeed. Amazing set, by the way! What are Moral DK's plans for world domination?

Right now we're wrapping up the last few bits for the next album. We have a single out which is our take on "House of the Rising Sun." We've been focusing entirely on the music, and now we're trying to put together a great art package for it. Michael Pritzl is producing.

You played with Brian Healy (RIP) in his band Dead Artist Syndrome. I'm sure you connected with him a lot over the years. What kind of impressions did Brian leave with you? And what has your experience been with Brian Healy?

My strongest impression from Brian has always been our friendship. What started as a plan for a single on which I would sit-in on bass, turned into a four-year odyssey we'd take together with Gym, Ojo, John Piccari, Steve Hindalong, Derri Daugherty, and Marc Plainguet to write and create the album Kissing Strangers. Through those years Brian kept getting physically beat up by the universe and laid out. Broken bones even, thanks to a slope failure when he was at NASCAR. So most of my time with Brian was at his house or mine every Sunday, him in a chair, me and sometimes Gym or Ojo or Marc on the sofa with a guitar and a notepad. Brian was insanely generous and thoughtful. Also he was an encyclopedia of rock history and culture and I could sit for hours listening to him tell stories and give opinions.

Christianity can often be hard to pin down, given where we are today, with those buying into nationalism and other underpinnings many of us want nothing to do with. Given you could have about 712 qualifiers in your statement, would you still identify as a Christian?

I haven't identified as a Christian in a very long time, at first
out of respect for the 'distinction' of that title, but then later because of Christendom being in bed with cruel politics. When it comes to people struggling about following Jesus while not adopting 'Christian' as an identity, my take is that there's nothing in the Bible specifically requiring anyone to take on that name as an identity. Given the way things went in the Gospels, I have to think that Jesus regards a lot of Christendom as he did the religious leaders of his time, whose BS he wasn't having any of.

Who were some of your mentors or protogines for re-learning as you navigated past Christendom?

I was on my own as I began to change my thinking. I wasn't familiar with Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins or anyone like that and I didn't pursue anyone's work along those lines until recently. I simply had a few realizations and that was enough. I was watching a crucifixion scene in a movie and it hit me that a supremely good being would not need blood to be spilled like that in order to be able to forgive wrongdoing. That the sentiment, "I was wronged, someone must pay," would not be in a supreme being's mentality. When a price has to be paid for wrongdoing, it's not forgiveness. Forgiveness is a decision not to demand payment at all. I realized that no one 'chooses damnation' when they reject teachings about salvation, they're just disagreeing with something they're being told by people. That was enough for me to walk away from any kind of prescribed religious teachings altogether, that if there is a supreme being out there wanting to hook up with my heart and mind, I'm not hard to find. If a pastor, prophet or apostle can get messages from a supreme being, so can any one of us including myself, without having to take someone else's word for it.

With Christmas coming up, it's a time we gather with family and relatives, which can be awkward if we grew up evangelical. Do you have any antidotes as to how to handle the dinner conversations with those we do not agree with? Skip the dinner or wear extra layers of clothes to prepare for turkey flinging over the table?

My siblings and I were raised Catholic but none of us (not even my parents) maintained it once we were adults. After that we've always been an ever-changing mix of worldviews and philosophies, any one of us changing our thinking one way or the other at any time. When we saw more of each other, not spread out all over the country, we had lively, energizing dinner debates on all kinds of things like that. Today though we tread lightly, probably because there are so many more at the table who aren't used to it.

We at DTL are superfans and geeked out at being able to meet you at Audiofeed. I know Mike Indest asked you about demos and other recordings. Do you have anything in the vault you might consider releasing? Are there any demos of Holes in the Floor of Heaven floating around?

Just a thought about AudioFeed, I arrived with some trepidation given the religio-political climate on my social media feed, but there was no trace of judgement or ill-will the whole time I was there. That left an impression on me. The circumstances around the release of Holes in the Floor of Heaven made it like my long lost abandoned child because it was in the same year that the reality of being gay could no longer be denied, and was the antithesis of the message tone of my career in Christian rock leading up to that. I realized I'd spend my twenties in a culture of revving up crowds against 'sin' and such, and could no longer continue in that. The only way to 'tour' with that album in Christian culture would have been to fake my way through it as though I hadn't changed, and I totally suck at lying anyway. So I went my way and left Holes in the Floor of Heaven behind. The album's story was centered on being locked and chained in some way, never finding a way out of it. Looking for a key and never finding it, and learning to live with the pain of it by immersing myself in the wonders of God's universe. By 1990-something I came to realize that the proverbial 'lock and chain' was something I'd wrapped myself in when I embraced religious fundamentalism and took that road. I realized that since it was I who forged that chain, I could break it without a key. So I guess I did.

And speaking of Holes in the Floor of Heaven, I see fans asking for a remaster or even a vinyl reissue. Any thoughts on that possibility?

After efforts by many, the tapes haven't been found. I have the rights to re-record it and release it on my own, which I might do one song at a time. You asked about a demo version and yes, I have the four-track cassette that was played for Steve and Derri which won me the privilege of making the album. The demo has a long, prog-rock version of what was thankfully whittled down to become"Heaven Prelude." I wrote it as a grand finale, about eight minutes of me as a 26 year old kid with his first four-track, a living room organ and borrowed guitars pretending to be Yes in their Close to the Edge years. It was about seven years between that and when the album was finally made.
After the release of the most excellent _Butterflies in Caterpillar Drag_, are there plans to record and release more music?

Since Moral DK started up with Gym Nicholson, Gary Olson, Rob Gallas, and Jeff Sheets, I’ve been putting all my energy our band and our next album. But in the background of my brain a concept theme is forming for a new project of my own. I’m torn between making a third installment of the _Lock and Chain_ story that threads through the _Holes_ and _Butterflies_ albums, or just to have stupid music fun in my room and put the serious energy into the band. They play better than I do. Except the bass. I must always be the best bassist in the band (giggles).

_Butterflies in Caterpillar Drag_ has a lot about having forgotten my twenties-self once I was in my 30s and how at 49 hooking up again with my old friends from back in the day brought it all flooding back. Like my younger self was staring at me in the mirror with unfinished business I had to attend to. While the process of coming out and deconstructing usually entails a lot of 'inner child' work, I instead saw a clear path ahead and just took off running.

A lot of the song writing for _Butterflies in Caterpillar Drag_ was powered by how surprised I was that so many people from my twenties underwent changes similar to mine, in terms of moral/ethical philosophy and the approach to thinking about God. However I was also struck by how many people there were, expressing things that sounded just like the 'lock and chain' from my past. The religious ideas that hold people down. That keep us from flashing our wings. Things about which I had spent nearly a couple decades in blissful forgetfulness. That is what compelled me to do the album and stay in the conversation on social media. Now I’m immune to the lock and chain, but not everybody is. No one is really free until we are all free.

There's a lot of just-for-fun things on the album but the deep theme is finding the beauty inside you and not caving to pressure to keep it hidden. If you have a pair of big bright colorful wings like a butterfly, some kind of talent or way of being, don’t tuck them behind you with duct tape (a reference from drag culture) for the comfort of those who want to see you as a caterpillar. The title song was inspired by the story of Lonnie Frisbee. It was the first lyric I wrote for the album.

What music are you currently digging? Also, any good reads lately?

I've been re-living my years as a prog rock fan. All my favorite bands had put out a few albums I didn't care for, so I'm going back and giving those albums another chance, like first couple of Yes albums, and early Pink Floyd. Also I hated _The Wall_ when it came out, but I saw the live show in 2010 and I've been studying its psychosocial aspects. I've also been digging on Beatles. Can't wait to hear the remixes. Most of my reading is non-fiction, just reading articles as they're suggested to me. Science journals, political analysis, etc. I read fiction on vacation. Mostly classics. Arthur C. Clarke is a fave.

Last question. Favorite Beatle and why?

Always paid most attention to Paul because he was the one most focused on the music and seemed to have the best attitude, even though my fave songs are by George. After seeing the _Get Back_ documentary John's made my list of favorite guitarists after seeing him play parts I used to assume were George. One of the reasons I picked bass as a kid was while everyone was arguing over who was the better guitarist, Paul always got credit for the cool bass parts. Ego security.
Talking About Persian Delta Blues

interview by Matt Crosslin

Honestly, I had never heard of Kevin the Persian until Mike Indest pushed his album Southern Dissonance into our hands at AudioFeed last year. But wow I am glad he did! This CD has been in my car ever since (be sure to see Doug’s review later this issue). I had to dig into the man behind the music - it turns out he has a fascinating story.

So tell us who/what is Kevin the Persian? Why perform under that name?

I knew I didn’t want a traditional band name because I didn’t want to portray myself as a collective when I’m really all by myself. I also want to remain a solo artist once I start adding band members and avoid the intra-band tension if at all possible. At the same time, using my real name seemed bland. I’m half Persian and half white, and Kevin the White seemed a bit Lord of the Rings, so I went with Kevin the Persian.

Is this your first album, or have you released others before this?

Southern Dissonance is my first and only album, with hopefully many more to come.

One part of your bio seems a bit hard to believe: how do you live without a cell phone? It seems like modern humans would just die without them.

For me it was similar to the teenager who quits smoking because his dad made him smoke a whole carton in one day. Back when I owned a bar in Dallas, I was basically a walking phone notification...constant beeping, buzzing, and vibrating. One particularly busy day I just remember being armed with an iPhone, an iPad and an Apple Watch, all singing their notifications in perfect harmony, and thinking that this can’t go on. Moving to New Orleans in 2017 was a good opportunity to make some life changes, so I decided to give up the phone for just a little while. But it ended up being such a positive change that here I am, 5 years later, getting constant flack from my friends for living in the middle ages.

I don’t think I would have had the uninterrupted stretches of concentration needed to write and record the entire album alone if I was always getting distracted by a phone. That’s why I also have a rule that no internet is allowed in my music studio. When I’m in there, I’m unreachable.

One of the reviews calls your music a mix of “the grunge of Alice in Chains and the hard rock of Lynyrd Skynyrd.” I like that because Skynyrd also brings in the blues influences that you hear on this music. You also mention being influenced by Ozzy and Metallica. So why heavy music in 2022?

If there’s one thing I’ve learned from songwriting, it’s that music is personal and subjective...a single song can touch two different people in polar opposite ways. Some people have criticized the lyrics of the song “Rock is Dead” as being conceived and condescending to genres other than rock. If that’s true, then I’m being condescending to myself because I also like old country, electronic, classical, piano jazz, and some shoegazey type stuff. I think that "Rock is Dead" is just trying to capture the feeling a lot of people get when they listen to top 10 stuff and go “what the shit is that?”...the type of stuff that’s coming out of Nashville these days as well as the genre I’ve coined “porno pop.” I don’t even think its a generational thing cause me and my friends have been doing that since junior high.

I say all that as a caveat to your question about why heavy music still matters in 2022. Speaking for myself, no other type of music so effectively channels aggression into a feeling of personal power. I mean, how can you listen to the riff at 0:40 of Pantera’s “Strength Beyond Strength” and not want conquer the world? Metal is also a medium for so many different ideas. I mean, you’ve got everything from Christian metal to Decide, who is led by an actual Satanist. Killing Joke fights the battle against corporate greed and technopoly. Type O Negative sings about women menstruating under the moonlight. Not to mention your standard songs about girls and drugs. And that’s just the tip of the iceberg. I just love all the different perspectives expressed musically.

If I understand the credits, you did everything on this album yourself? That seems like a lot of work. Especially in a "tiny room in an old industrial building in New Orleans with no access to the outside world...meaning no internet." Did you use any digital technology at all? It sounds very organic.

As I mentioned, I don’t like technology that interrupts your daily flow in life with random and impulsive distractions. But I’m a huge fan of technology that is designed for a specific task with no spillover effects into other areas of life. For example, Pro Tools does one thing...records songs. You aren’t constantly checking your Pro Tools when you don’t feel like working and it doesn’t interrupt you when you’re trying to have coffee with a friend. Pro Tools works without internet access so I can keep my recording studio cut off from the world like a monastery. So I definitely used digital tech for the album, but it was just a matter of discriminating between productive technology and needlessly intrusive technology.

For the curious (like me), what is the process for recording different instruments yourself? Start with one thing, go to another, etc?
I’ll typically go into a song with an idea of the kick and snare pattern, which I lay down first. Then I layer the bass and rhythm guitars over that, which I like better than playing to a click track. Leads and vocals come after the bass and rhythm guitars. Somewhere in the sequence I’ll fill out the drums with the toms and cymbals and also add the ear candy including feedback and any sound effects such as the gunshot at the beginning of “Suicide in K Minor.”

For the gearheads in our readership, what instruments and equipment did you use in the recording?

For the electric guitar stuff, I used a Fender Telecaster going through a hand-wired Princeton Reverb fed direct into Pro Tools via a Two Note Torpedo. The acoustic stuff was a stereo miked McPherson 4.0XP. Bass was recorded direct with a Fender Jazz Bass. Vocals were recorded with an AKG C214.

When I first heard this album, I had to ask Mike Indest if you are okay. Like, does someone need to check on you? I mean, songs about suicide, songs that seem to be upset at equality, lots of dark thoughts. Is music an outlet for you, or a reflection of your inner self?

Definitely a cathartic outlet. My lyrics don’t pretend to represent gospel truth. I’ll typically take a position on a particular issue, and then take it to its extreme to present a subjective perspective. This approach has been taken the wrong way by some who think I’m trying to force my views on them...that is certainly not my intention.

With regard to the examples you mention, “Suicide in K Minor,” while rooted in my experiences with depression, was meant to relate to folks in a dark spot...an approach that can be heard in Metallica’s “Fade to Black,” Alice in Chain’s “Down in a Hole,” and Type O Negative’s "Gravitational Constant." In the liner notes I mention that the song "What You Deserve" was largely inspired by a chapter entitled "On the Tarantulas" in Nietzsche’s Thus Spake Zarathustra. "What You Deserve" is one perspective on those who seek to enrich themselves by soliciting sympathy from others instead of helping themselves. Equality is a word with bloated meaning, not unlike “love” or “happiness.” For example, you can love your kids and you can love a pizza...in each instance love has a different meaning. You can have equality before the law, while recognizing that we are all very different and unequal in strengths, weaknesses, interests, etc. If all humans were exactly the same (i.e., equal), we’d just be robots coming off an assembly line and I think culture would be poorer for it. Let’s see...other dark thoughts on the album. The title track "Southern Dissonance" is about feeling alienated in the society in which you live. Some people have interpreted those lyrics to mean the hardships of being a racial minority growing up in the South. While the song is specific to the South, I did not intend it to apply solely to racial alienation, but instead anytime you feel like an outcast because your views or identity don’t conform to the mainstream views of your society. That’s why I consider the penultimate line of the song to be “Now I’m forced to look inside to find myself from within.” It’s about the realization that you must find who you are by looking primarily inward, not outward. I do try to keep my lyrics abstract so that the listener can apply them to their own lives, but I guess I’ve been hit or miss on that goal based on the feedback I’ve gotten so far.

Speaking of feedback - can you share some more details on the feedback you have gotten? The reviews I have read so far are glowing.

Yes, the press coverage has been overwhelmingly positive so far, but I’ve also gotten quite a lot of informal listener feedback through SubmitHub, where listeners can remain anonymous and be as harsh as they want to be. "Rock is Dead" and the title track "Southern Dissonance" have been put through the ringer on SubmitHub’s Hot or Not voting app, which is like the Hot or Not dating app except for songs. Both have been voted at or near the top of the Hot or Not Classic and Hard Rock charts, but my music doesn’t
connect with everyone. Most metrics such as vocal style, lyrics, and mix are all over the chart depending on personal taste, with the most common complaints being that the intros are long or that there’s too much reverb in the mix. "Rock is Dead’s" intro is 48 seconds and "Southern Dissonance’s" intro is 55 seconds, which I don’t consider that long, but I guess intro tolerance has gone down over time as attention spans get shorter. Reverb is a matter of personal taste, and I’d say most of my favorite albums use copious amounts of reverb. I think the classic comparison is Metallica’s Ride the Lightning versus Master of Puppets, with the former using tons of reverb and the latter using very little. While I think the songs in Master of Puppets are stronger, I’ve always liked the sound of Ride the Lightning better…it has more of an 80’s feel and you can get lost in it.

Your press materials say that the inspiration for writing Southern Dissonance came from “two tragic events: (1) the death of my mother in 2019 and (2) the pandemic.” If you feel comfortable going into it, how would you describe your Mother and your relationship with her?

The song "Two Minus One" was written for anyone who has lost someone they love. I had my mother in mind when I wrote the song. Mainly I’ll just say that she was kind, meek, and introverted and never put herself above others. She didn’t care where you sat on the social ladder of life, she treated everyone as a unique individual worth listening to. Whatever humanity I have in me, I owe to her and I miss her dearly.

Everyone seems to have a different experience with the pandemic. What was tragic about the pandemic for you (if you can go into that)?

Mainly that it has accelerated the demise of real-life human contact, causing us to rely more on screens for social interaction. I honestly fear that physically seeing and talking to people in real life will become an awkward and mildly traumatic encounter for future generations. Conversation will no longer be a rhythmic exchange of ideas and sentences, and will instead be an opportunity to post your views on others… Facebook style.

Back when I was studying for my physics degree, I remember my professor asking the old question: If a tree falls and nobody is nearby to hear it, does it make a sound?

Nowadays I ask: If a person has an experience but does not post it on social media, did the experience actually happen?

Mike Indest has mentioned doing shows with you. Which makes me wonder: what is a live show like for you? Do you have a backing band, backing tapes, or do you go acoustic?

Right now I’m 100% solo acoustic and I try to keep it as raw as possible…that is, no backing tapes, no backing band, and as few effects as possible. I plan to keep it solo for a while and eventually perform with a full backing band...after all, the songs were really written for a full and proper band and let’s face it, watching a band is more fun than watching a guy play guitar and sing by himself.
Yeah, Indest is a great guy. He sent in his Motonaut CD to us and then kept sending in so many cool ideas that we just said "dude, you should do a podcast." Or maybe that was his idea? Anyways, everyone seems to have a cool Indest story. He and I have some similar church background/spiritual abuse stories. How did you meet Mike? Have you had any interesting spiritual/religious conversations with him? He's got a lot of interesting stories if you haven't.

Before the pandemic, Mike and my wife were in a French conversational group. He also led a theology conversation group, which I found to be interesting. Now Mike and my wife both work for the same company, so I guess you could say that we've had several points of contact over the years, and now we've played a couple of shows together, strengthening the musical bond as well...we make music in totally different genres, but I think indie musicians have certain shared experiences across all genres.

You have mentioned several bands. I tried to avoid too cliché of questions, but now I am curious: what are the top bands/artists you are listening to now? What albums would be on your top albums of all time list?

Type O Negative and Killing Joke have been mainstays on my turntable for the past few years...R.I.P. Peter Steele. I've always been a huge Testament fan, but I've gotten even more into them over time...they're still releasing albums that are every bit as good as the one's I grew up with in the 90's...a rare feat for a rock band. On the more chill side, I like what Allah Las is doing...a California beach vibe with, yes, lots of reverb. My all-time favorite album is Master of Puppets with a close second being The Key by Nocturnus.

You also went for physical product (CDs and vinyl) for this release. In 2022, is that a cool thing or a retro thing for you? It seems like the kids and the old folks are both doing it these days.

Personally, I like the effect that physical formats have on my listening habits. Back when I had Apple Music, I found myself skipping songs all the time and even just listening to parts of songs. I didn't get as deeply into bands and their message. I like physical albums because I just drop the needle and listen all the way through...good songs, bad songs, and everything in between. It has rekindled my love of music.

What does the future hold for Kevin the Persian? Of course, our time is short here, but if you do get a few more years - what would you like to do? Do your plans include making more music? If so, do you think future music would sound like Southern Dissonance, or something else?

Oh, I'll definitely be releasing more music...in fact, I've got a few songs in the oven right now. Right now I'm an unsigned artist, and from a business perspective I'd ideally like to sign with a label if I can successfully grow my following, which would help to focus me on songwriting and live performance.

As far as the sound of future albums, all I can say definitively is that I want to continue to experiment within the general realm of guitar-centric rock music...so no rap album anytime soon.

The best place to start checking out Kevin's music would be his BandCamp page at kevinthepersian.bandcamp.com, or also visit kevinthepersian.com to see other streaming or purchase options. "Rock is Dead!"
I met Joel at the Vancouver, BC showing of Parallel Love: A Story Of A Band Called Luxury. Little did I know I had a book of his in my library called Sects, Love, and Rock & Roll, which I cherished quite a bit when it came out. Roll forward a year, I got together and asked Joel all kinds of questions. He mentioned he was writing a new book and would like me to do an interview with him when the book was finished. After two years of COVID thick in the air, I was privy to his new book.

So, a little about Joel. He is a Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia. His music criticism and other arts and culture writing have appeared in Christianity Today, Vancouver Sun, Geez, Blurt, Relevant, The Stranger, Books & Culture, and many other publications. You might say the guy gets around. As mentioned previously, he wrote Sects, Love, and Rock & Roll, a memoir of 90's Christian rock fandom. His newest book, which I base my questions on, is entitled Why Dancing about Architecture is a Reasonable Thing to Do. Basically, it is a book about music, writing, and meaning. He is co-author, with Jiang Dong, of Perspectives on Teaching English at Colleges and Universities in China (TESOL Press), and president of the Canadian Association for Studies in Discourse and Writing (2022-2024). Let's be honest, Joel is using his grey matter in ways that serve the academic community in ways most of us look up to. Joel lives in Vancouver, BC with his wife and two children.

Without further adieu, here are my inquiries about Joel's latest book. I highly recommend this book. Enjoy!

Doug: In the introduction of your book, you extrapolate on writing about music where you describe it as “an excavation of the self” and “an objective description of your subjective encounter with a transcendent experience.” Name some bands or albums with which you experience that form of transcendence?

Joel: I think I’m trying to say that the writing can always be those things, no matter what you’re writing about – I think what I’ve learned as I moved from trying to “make it” as a music critic in the mid-2000s to someone who is more interested in really honing in on my particular passions and interests as a writer-about-music is that if I don’t really love and care about something, I don’t really want to write about it. So I don’t really get much of a charge from reviewing the first album by a new band I’ve never heard of (unless it’s really, really incredible, of course – the album Rabbit Songs by the band Hem comes to mind; that album was a random one I got to review and I think it probably changed my life), but trying to write about what is moving to me about an album or band I’ve loved for years, like Midget’s Jukebox, which I wrote about in this book, or the catalogue of Sixpence None the Richer, which I’ve been writing about off and on for over ten years, I find extremely rewarding.

The premise of the first half of the book explores the how, what and why of writing about pop music. Are there any
music magazines or publications that you believe exemplify the way music should be written about?

Oh man, what a great question. I used to read music magazines way more often than I do now – and not only because both the music and magazine industries have been decimated in the last 20 years. I find myself more drawn to non-music-focused publications now, because most music-focused publications seem to need to cover everything—breadth rather than depth. I really loved The Believer's music issues (that magazine died, but seems to be coming back now!), and McSweeney's (also the Believer's publisher) series “Short Essays on Favorite Songs,” and of course the 33 1/3 series of books about albums now published by Bloomsbury. The New Yorker has had excellent music coverage over the years, too. I am just not as interested in the “let’s review everything” school of rock criticism, and more the publications and writers that do deep dives, think pieces, interviews, and really getting inside the subject matter.

With your prior book Sects, Love and Rock & Roll, you had a gathering a few years back at Powell Books with some Christian indie rock folks, some of whom I have known from my years there. You did a reading from that book and perhaps some interaction. How did that come together, and what were some highlights from that gathering?

I wish that had been at Powell’s! It was actually at a church in downtown Portland – I think First Christian Church? Todd Fadel (Sappo, Twin Sister), Danny Seim (Menomena, Lackthereof), and my friend Johnny Bertram (Synthar) played there, which was really fun. For that book it was all about trying to understand what the 90’s Christian rock scene had been all about, and I think having that group of musicians there really helped tease that out. I think a lot of the audience had no idea what was going on (I think many of them just wanted to come out to the church’s book events), but we had Todd and Danny playing old Twin Sister songs and even covering Amy Grant’s “I Have Decided,” and Johnny playing his own songs and covering Petra and Pedro the Lion. I feel like that book and the events around it helped me (and I hope others) understand that Christian rock might feel cheesy and embarrassing, but it’s also a cultural artifact like anything else, and worth exploring, understanding, and even sometimes celebrating.

You have a piece in the Hope section of Why Dancing... about the Weakerthans and how they connect with academia without over-thinking it in their song output. Do you have a favorite Weakerthans album, and how does it speak to you?

Man. I love the Weakerthans so much. I’ve been trying to write a book about them for years to no avail, and I have a long piece about them coming out in I think the Winter 2023 issue of Image. I love all their albums, but the one I probably listen to the most is Left and Leaving. I love the care with which the songs are put together. The sound of that album is just exquisite. And there’s a really wonderful expression of personal, political, and spiritual meanings on it. So many of their songs are prayers without really coming out and presenting themselves as such. The bridge of "This is a Fire Door Never Leave Open" just blows me away every time. “Tell me there’s a pull, unassailable, that will lead you there from the dark alone / to Benevolence you’ve never known / or you knew when you were four and can’t remember....” Gah.

You reference novelist Arthur Phillips from the starting gates of your book, and you quote with “...there is a pleasure to be found in that dance, in that writing, that both invoke the subject and creates something new from it, and, when you return to the architecture, to the music,
when you wander the halls or turn on your stereo, you carry with you now some new wisdom and love for the house, for the song, that you gained elsewhere.” You then write more about how wisdom and love are involved in writing about music. Do you think there is love or wisdom in pointing out to serious bands when a work of theirs is inferior to the rest of their musical catalogue?

I mean, maybe? I think I’ve made it clear that I don’t subscribe to the Dr. Zoidberg method (“Your music’s bad and you should feel bad!”), and I often feel like negative reviews gleefully revel in their own self-righteous mud-slinging, which just feels soul-deadening to me. If you can’t say something nice, and all that. Then again I think about how I feel about Weezer, and the times I’ve tried to write about them in a way that is the verbal equivalent of shaking them by the shoulders and saying “Come on! Don’t you remember what you are capable of!” It’s complicated, I guess. Overall I think we should err on the side of love, however that looks in practice.

As one studied in linguistics, and also a fan of Weezer’s Pinkerton album, what can you say about that album that appeals to you more than their later albums?

I don’t think my love of Pinkerton has anything to do with having studies linguistics – I think it’s more that I was just right in the sweet demographic spot to be the kind of person that record spoke to when it came out. I started listening to it when I was 18 and I absolutely wore it out until I was probably 22. I get that it’s pretty much all White Dude First World Problems (not to mention Rock Star Problems), but there’s just something about what feels like the anguish on that record that still really moves me. And of course musically it’s gorgeous. That’s Weezer’s most truly classical or baroque record, even though Rivers Cuomo more explicitly experimented with that style later on in a more regimented or disciplined way. The whole record is a sad, angry, horny, conflicted, noisy mess. And I guess that’s why it feels so cathartic to listen to.

I enjoyed that you quoted Jeff Overstreet when waxing about Sufjan Stevens’ music. Overstreet observed, “The wall is down. There is no more reason for the Christian music industry to exist.” You then expand on that when writing about Sufjan’s Illinois album. Would you agree with Overstreet, or would you put out some qualifiers?

I don’t know. I think he would admit to being a little overdramatic, and there was a time when those lines in the sand mattered more, not only to the people who wanted to stay on the “Christian” side (which I would’ve been as a young teenager) or those who were strongly reacting to the drawing of the line in the first place (which people like Jeff and I would’ve been in the mid-2000s). I care less about that stuff now just because I’m less invested in the evangelical culture industry than I was 20 years ago, but the fact is that most artists now can’t make a living in the tiny niche Christian industry (which is mostly “worship music” now), whereas in the 90s that was actually at times a lucrative market. My favorite bands that deal with spiritual themes in a nuanced and serious way are pretty outside that world – culturally and economically, if not spiritually -- and I think they always will be.

Joel, you and I met at the Vancouver showing of the film Parallel Love, about the band Luxury. We shared burgers and beer afterwards with Matt Hinton, who made the film and plays in the band. In the section of your book about Luxury, you reference that rock music can be received as Eucharist. I would love you to say more about this.

Well, I stole this directly from Fr. Chris Foley, the bassist of Luxury, who says as much in the film. I don’t think I (nor he) is saying that rock music IS tantamount to the Eucharist, but there’s a kind of analogy, and an articulation of the concept of “parallel love” itself, here, that works, and says something about a Christian view of life and art. It’s a truism in some churches (certainly the Catholic and probably Orthodox) that the Eucharist isn’t grapes and wheat, it’s bread and wine – the work of human hands, made from the raw materials of creation, blessed and transformed, a gift offered back up to its Source, if you will. This strikes me as a great understanding of human meaning-making endeavors, whether art or music or language or whatever. It reminds me of the metaphor one of my favorite bands, Sixpence None the Richer, is named for.

I am not familiar with the band The Dears. You describe them to be on a completely different trajectory than a band like Rage Against The Machine, who often wield their music as a form of protest. You describe The Dears as
"humble…a people who know their world is going to hell and know they’re part of the problem." The concept of a band writing relevant songs but resisting the idealism of rising above the oppressive system is intriguing. How would you reference this theologically? Can you reference any other bands that echo this kind of narrative in their writing?

Yeah, I think this is probably me trying to read my own views into what this band is saying. I really like Rage Against the Machine, but the band whose protest music I really love (and I sometimes get crap about this) is Five Iron Frenzy. Even at their most righteously angry, there’s always an element of “I’m part of the problem, I’m indicted by my own participation in what I’m protesting against.” That strikes me as really healthy if you don’t wallow in guilt about it and use it as an exhortation to work against injustice even as you benefit from it. I know some people think original sin is an oppressive construct or whatever, but it makes a lot of sense to me as a way of understanding solidarity, to me.

You have given me a lot to chew on in your piece about the band Stars and their _Set Yourself On Fire_ album. The fact that the frontman of the band responded to writer Annie Lamott’s review of their album earns my admiration. While I cannot embrace the Buddhist practice of self-immolation (setting oneself on fire) as a constructive or salvific act, as the band’s title track may hint at, I do embrace some of what singer Torquil Campbell is on about, namely that loss is a part of the human condition, and winning is for narcissists like Trump.

What inspired you to write about this kind of “soft revolution” motif in music?

Well, I just really, really love this band, which gets back to your first question, probably. I wrote this piece when I first fell in love with them, but I’ve been listening to them for 20 years now. I really allowed music to shape my view of the world when I was younger, because my Christian rock fandom was a big part of my forming my faith, and I still do that with “non-Christian” music, I guess. What Stars does is almost a natural continuation for me of 90’s Christian rock’s focus on “losers” (Steve Taylor), “freaks” (DC Talk), “aliens” (Newsboys), and “zombies” (Audio Adrenaline) – making a space for difference, for otherness, what have you. I saw them in Seattle earlier this year and it was just glorious to be jumping up and down with 200 people to a schlocky dance beat and the lyrics “put your hands up if you know you’re gonna lose.” It’s such an antidote to the banalities of some dance-pop music (like, I dunno, “all I do is win win win no matter what”) – and the core of that song is the lyric “no one is lost,” in which again I can’t help but hear a rather Christian message of universal hope, even if the band wouldn’t articulate it that way.

What music are you dancing about architecture with lately?

I always say this, but I’m not really writing about music very much these days. My last few projects in that world have been a long interview with John Van Deusen, whose music I commend to everyone, that think piece about the Weakerthans, and a longish essay about the Canadian artist William Kurelek, which I realize is not music but is still probably dancing about architecture. I’ve probably still got one or two more music-related books in me, but I’m not sure how or when I’ll get them out. Which I realize sounds gross. Sorry.

How can one interested in purchasing your books get them?

You can go to Amazon, which is probably the easiest, plus they have it on Kindle. Or you can go directly to the publisher, Wipf and Stock, which is pretty convenient if you’re in the U.S. For Amazon .com or .ca, just type my name into the search box. There is also my page at the publisher’s site.

I also do an occasional newsletter in which I write about songs, usually, among other things, that you can subscribe to my newsletter here.
Interview by Mike Indest

The Christian Geeks Classic Rockcast highlights music from the 80’s and 90’s. No matter if you lean more towards Adam Again or Stryper, they cover it all! I thought it would be fun to shoot a few questions to the hosts Steve and Britt to get to know them a little better, and if you are unfamiliar with their awesome podcast, introduce them to you.

Really enjoying the podcast and reminiscing about these classic Christian albums. What made you want to take your love for this music and create a podcast?

Steve: Thanks so much! Britt and I kept running into each other at school events for our kids and I knew of him because our wives work together. At some point I believe we both RSVPed for the Bloodgood documentary premiere on Facebook and that’s when we realized we had this love of 80s Christian rock in common. After that we started hanging out some and going to shows. We would sit around and chat for hours sometimes over coffee and we thought it would be fun to record our conversations and see if we couldn’t use those conversations to create a community of Christian music geeks that love this stuff too. It’s never really been about creating a huge following or anything, we just wanted to give people an opportunity to pull up a chair and "join" a conversation of people just like them.

Britt: Steve and I were talking about this stuff already, going to shows like Stryper and Kings X when they came in town, and we connected on this and other things like ministry and coffee. I was already doing a couple other podcasts and it was natural to think, "Hey, let’s do one on this amazing music." Also, while I love modern praise music, some of the artistry and diversity is missing in Christian music like we had as kids, and we wanted to celebrate that era.

The reviews range from Stryper to the Lost Dogs. Were you both into all types of music or were you fans of different genres and bring different tastes to the show?

Steve: My tastes have evolved some over the years, but I’ve always liked most styles of music. In the 80s, I was into hair metal, new wave, and rock. If the music is good, I can appreciate it. I got more into alternative and hard rock in the 90s, but I still enjoyed reaching back to 80s music. On our episodes, we are pretty candid about whether or not we were into the album we are covering, but it’s safe to say that one of the two of us loved it, even if the other never listened to it.

Britt: He’s a little more country; I’m a little more rock ‘n’ roll. Seriously, though, we both love the same styles of music generally. I did get into the more alternative bands, both late 80s and into the 90s, but I was really into the heavy metal and rock. Steve was more into the alternative bands but liked the metal, too. We have our strengths but a lot of it overlaps.

Which albums are you surprised still hold up really well?

Steve: There are lots of albums that I think hold up, but aren’t so much of a surprise (most projects by King’s X, 77’s, Adam Again, for example). However, I think that Rick Elias’s first two albums are still fantastic.
Britt: Great question. Whiteheart’s *Freedom*. Amy Grant’s *Lead Me On*. Most of the stuff produced by Brown Bannister is still classic and holds up. Sacred Warrior’s *Wicked Generation*. Adam Again’s *Dig* is still genius level as an album.

What do you consider the most underrated album of the 80’s or early 90’s?

Steve: L.S.U.’s *Shaded Pain*. That album pushed my musical tastes in directions I didn’t know existed. Also Chagall Guevara’s debut. They didn’t get enough exposure. They should have been huge.

Britt: Whiteheart’s *Highlands* is their second best album musically, songwriting, production; it had it all (*Freedom* is the best, obviously). Another great album that doesn’t get discussed a lot is Precious Death’s *If You Must*: a great mix of metal, funk, and aggression.

What classic albums do you wish would have a re-release?

Steve: I think the Whitecross debut deserves a quality remix and remaster. Also Ten Songs by Adam Again. I would love to hear that album with some Jon Knox drums mixed in instead of a drum machine. Oh, and AD’s *Timeline*.

Britt: Going back to Precious Death, the production suffered on that album, trying to be too raw as music moved into the 90s. Would love a remix and re-release of *If You Must* on vinyl.

What classic album are you most embarrassed about still liking?

Steve: Really good question! So many... I love the "yacht rock" genre - 70s and 80s soft rock. I even made a Christian Yacht Rock public playlist on Spotify (search it up!). But as for a specific album, I’m going to say Michael W. Smith 2. It’s so wonderfully 80s.

Britt: Probably Sandi Patty’s *Via Dolorosa* or Carman’s *The Champion*.

Who are your dream guests?

Steve: I would love to interview Kerry Livgren, Randy Stonehill, Steve Taylor, or Terry Scott Taylor. Gene Eugene would be very high on the list if he were still with us.

Britt: Ray Parra, Brown Bannister, Tommy Sims

Which episode have polarized the audience, or you two, the most?

Steve: We tend to agree on most things, but probably the most disagreement we encounter are on albums that weren’t as impactful on one or the other of us back in the day. For me, that was probably Fear Not or *Weapons of our Warfare* by Deliverance. The audience is usually on board because people will listen when it’s an album they love. If we are critical, most of the time our listeners appreciate that because people in this market tend to always say only good things even when critique is warranted.

Britt: I don’t think any episode polarized us, but I wasn’t as crazy about the Idle Cure debut album or Russ Taff. Didn’t like either from the day so no nostalgia and overall the albums didn’t impress me.

Preferred method of listening to music?

Steve: For day-to-day listening I will stream music, but I’ve gotten to where I will buy vinyl or CDs to listen in my home office as much as I can. Mostly, I just stream Apple Music or Spotify on the road or at work.

Britt: MP3 on my phone or streaming on Amazon Music. I do have some days where I get the vinyl out and go through an album or two. I’d listen to more vinyl if I had a kick butt sound system, but I’d probably run everyone out of the house. Lol

Most cringe-worthy lyric from an album you have reviewed?

Steve: We joke a lot about Whitecross’s debut album. There’s a lot there to critique. So for me, probably "Now I live each day for Jesus, For soon he will return, He’s bringing his reward with him, Satan, he’s going to burn." Close second from Angelica "Set it straight once again so you don’t go unaware, for your soul I really care." A lot of the cringe comes from forced rhyming.

Britt: Some of the 80s lyrics that put the pressure on the girl to be “pure.” At the time I didn’t notice and sang along, but now those lyrics seem a little one sided. Some of the Whitecross lyrics on their debut album are painfully bad and cliché. And the Fear Not album had some lyrical jumps that were just confusing. But I still love all those albums!
Back in the early 80s I heard about these underground Christian punk bands called Moral Majority and Public Confessions from a zine called Zine Of The Times (aka ZOTT). David Joo was the kid who edited the zine with these unheard of Christian punk bands and his street punk art. Joo had a hidden talent for finding these cool unknown bands before Undercover came onto the scene. David Villalpando, otherwise known as Burrito, because he was Hispanic, was the screamer behind the bands Moral Majority, Public Confessions, The Warning, and later 8 Ball Cholos. His then-wife Tracy also screamed with the first few bands. I recall they formed a newsletter/ministry known as Radicals For Christ. They were not only trying to be hardcore with their music, but also their faith. As a kid in my teens I wanted anything Orange County, CA (the location of many of these rad xian new wave and punk bands) had to offer. Back then you had to send a hand-written letter to the addresses in found in ZOTT or Cornerstone magazine, hoping for a response back. Well, Burrito wrote me back.

I did not know Burrito well. I only met him in person once. I showed up at a Tom Fest back in the 90s. I saw Billy Power of Blenderhead and Burrito sitting on a bench on the fest grounds. They knew each other and were buds. I really enjoyed hanging with these guys. I honestly do not remember anything we talked about, but I was thankful I knew them.

Fast forward over a decade later I went through a divorce and faith deconstruction. I spent some time on Facebook and came across Burrito’s FB page. I checked out the posts on it. Burrito had a varied friend base - folks all over the political and faith spectrum. Some of the commentary came from a place more conservative than where I landed. I asked Burrito if someone like me would fit in on his page. He assured me people would be decent. Surprisingly they were. There were rockers, bikers, Hispanics, evangelicals, agnostics, pit bull lovers, a whole assortment of folks who were ok with Burrito being a man of faith, a punk guy, a motor biker, and pit bull lover.

This probably sucks as a memorial to Burrito. The thing I want to say is Burrito got known as a hardcore Xian, singing turn or burn lyrics. This is what he knew. He wanted to please God, and do it with all his might. Over the years he built up a wide collective of compadres. If we could be so fortunate to do that in our lifetimes, we would be more blessed in the end. When Burrito passed away in 2021 he was missed by many. He had a motor bike shop, a career in music as a Christian punk singer, a love for pit bulls, and a big heart for people of all kinds. He accepted people in their differences.

So I leave this memorial on a sad but hopeful note. I hope Burrito is cool with this synopses.
Down the Line’s intrepid reporter Doug Peterson was able to connect with Frank Lenz to get some answers to questions about Lenz’s past, present, and future. Be sure to also read Peterson’s review of Lenz’s new album Pyramid – out now on Velvet Blue Music!

(Editor’s Note: This interview happened back in April 2020 and was first published directly online. Some of the information is now dated. We decided to include it here mainly because it has too much great information to be left out.)

You began drumming at an early age. Was there a time or an album project which you feel you came into your own element or your own style of playing?

I’ve always been very conscious of the style and sound of my playing even at an early age. I would say I had a decent idea of a personalized sound and feel when I started playing on worship records in the early 90’s and got more refined during the Lassie Foundation and Starflyer recordings. Probably the most “frank lenz” sounding drumming is on the Headphones record and early Richard Swift recordings.

I simply love Lassie Foundation. What are some memories or impressions playing on the Lassie Foundation albums?

My favorite memories are making records in a super gross practice studio in Orange, California, Andy Pricket’s parents living room and being creative with some of the most creative dudes I’ve known. I also have a memory of us playing at a bowling alley in Long Beach where the promoter shafted us so we decided to play one 20 minute version of one of our songs… Can’t remember which one but it was fun and deeply satisfying.

I read in an interview that you were working with Gene Eugene when he passed away. I was like, Holy Sh-t, that would be heavy. What project was being worked on then? How were you involved?

We were working on a Nick Garrisi recording. It’s still a bit too much of a bummer to discuss so I’ll leave it at that.
You played on two Starflyer 59 albums. Those of us who have followed SF59, that seems like such a benchmark. Were the studio times focused and well-tuned? Were there areas of improvisation and flexibility to interpret the songs with your own unique signature?

Total flexibility. We had toured together as that band for a bit, so we were pretty comfortable with each other and letting people do their thing. It was a focused environment with not a lot of distractions. On Old I remember Jason having an overall sound in his head so we would have short discussions and just play. Portuguese Blues was another where Jason had a real clear sound he was going for and he engineered that drum sound himself, one of my favorites! On Talking Voice VS Singing Voice that was mostly Jason and I doing things on our own and meeting to put stuff together.

I loved The Headphones album. I only wish there were more songs. How would you describe your contributions on that project? Say more.

I love that record! I wish I had better memories surrounding that time but unfortunately that great record was made at a sh-ttty time in my personal life, so the memories are quite bittersweet.

Dave Bazan is truly one of my favorite singer/songwriters ever and T.W. Walsh so underrated that it’s f-cking criminal.

How did you connect with Richard Swift and what were your collaborations like with him?

Richard and I met while I was drumming on his first recording, he was young and talented and figuring himself out. We made his next record together and eventually made a deal with the record label to buy me a Pro Tools set up and we started recording often and with great intensity. Most days were long with each of us (and Elijah Thomson the third member of our trio) taking turns at the helm. It was the most creative I’ve ever been and that spark has stayed with me to this day.

The last time I saw you play live was with Damien Jurado when you came up to Vancouver about three years ago. There was a moment in the show when it seemed Damien was conjuring up a Jim Morrison-like impromptu segue in a song. I looked around and the audience was not lost to the fact that something special was happening. Is there a “letting go” approach that appeals to you, or does it happen on a hit or miss basis?

It’s basically on a hit or miss basis like dating, there’s either an attraction or not. If you can connect with anyone on the bandstand, you’re lucky. In the case of Damien I’d follow that guy off a cliff. He’s amazing. The longer you play, you should find yourself in the company of musicians you can more easily groove with. That’s the idea anyway. When you’re locked in with an entire band and everyone’s on the same page, you’re unstoppable and it’s the best thing about being a musician.

When you began playing with bands, most of the ones I knew about were faith-based i.e. Fold Zandura, SF9, Morella’s Forest, Mike Knott, etc. Was that something that resonated with you then? How does that play out with you now?

I turned to religion when I was in junior high to help find some peace at home. I was aware of the Christian music scene and went to a few shows so when I was asked to join a Christian band I said yes. At that time, I was affiliated with what would now be considered the evangelical segment of American Christianity and believed most of its tenants. I no longer am or consider myself a Christian or any other religious type. I suppose I’d have to label myself an agnostic… who knows what is running the show or if there’s even a show to run.

If you were stranded on a desert island and you had to take three albums with you, what three would you grab?

Bernstein conducts Copeland CBS masterworks

The Velvet Underground

Charlie Parker and Strings

Holy Rollers was an intriguing soundtrack. How did you get involved with this project, and what was it about the movie that appealed to you?

What a fun movie! I had worked with the producer on a previous doc called Strictly Background and he asked if I’d help with the music. I loved the subject matter and any chance to work on a film I’ll take! So much fun and I like the pressure of having to turn in things on time and on budget!!!

On the new album Pyramid what synthesizers did you use to record this? Also, from “Metratonix” to “Ohm My God,” you go from a 90s rock vibes to dark ambient. What is the soundtrack you want to create here?

Pyramid was played on:

Juno-106, Korg MS-20, Arturio Microbrute, and Critter And Guitari Pocket Piano. Along with Hammond M-111 Organ (which in any regard is an analog synthesizer). My guide to this record started with synth sounds, every inspiration came from the instrument I was farting around on, trying to be patient and find the right sound and accompanying harmonic structure that would keep the mood in line with the sound and build from there. I wanted the record to have expanse without too much melody or hook, a record to listen to and not play in the background.

Who would you like to collaborate with on future albums?

I’d love to work with someone who’s into modular synths, that would be fun!!
The Huntingtons have been promoting their comeback album for a while, like many bands do when they make the same decision to release music after a long break. The difference with this Ramones-inspired band is the level that they appeared driven to make it happen. So many bands (that shall remain unnamed) let their age get in the way of delivering a timely album, and when they do, their approaching mortality seems to suck a lot of the passion out of the project. The Huntingtons seemed to have avoided both pitfalls, delivering a full album in a relatively normal amount of time, with an abnormally high level of passion (especially when compared to other advancing rockers). See our review for their new album in this issue, and read on as Chris Eller and Mike Holt of the Huntingtons answer our questions.

(Editor’s Note: This interview - like the last one - happened back in February 2020 and was first published directly online. Some of the information is now dated. We decided to include it here mainly because it has too much great stuff to be left out.)

You probably get asked this a lot, but probably the biggest question is: why a new Huntingtons album now? Or maybe why not earlier?

Chris Eller: We all felt it was the perfect time for something new. We spent a good 4 years or so playing shows with all of our old material, and our way of changing things up and making our sets exciting were to add older and obscure songs that we thought people would be interested to hear play live. We would get asked a lot about whether or not we were going to record an album and none of us had a reason why we shouldn’t. We started writing with the idea that if these songs didn’t have that “magic” or if it was majorly stressful in any way, the new stuff would get canned. After a few rehearsals the chemistry was there and we decided to fully go for it.

For those that have not heard there is a new album, or that are maybe on the fence, tell us about Muerto, Carcel, O Rocanrol. What topics do you address in the lyrics? What does the title mean for those that can’t translate it? Was there an intentional connection in that title to Michael Monroe’s solo work, or was that coincidental?

CE: The title of the album translates to English as “Dead, Jail, or Rock and Roll”, and it might have been loosely influenced by Michael Monroe, but we didn’t decide to call it that strictly because of that song. What it means to us is that we could let the band die and basically hang it up and go out with a whimper. Jail is symbolic of us feeling trapped by our past and playing shows with nothing new or fresh to offer. And Rock and Roll is the idea to write a new rock and roll record and breathe new life into this band, and that’s what we decided to do.

We’re all in our 30’s and 40’s, Cliffy just actually turned 50, so writing an album about being awkward in high school or not getting the girl, or whatever else the subject matter was of the earlier albums wasn’t an option. We still have a song about “Back to the Future,” we have a song inspired by the TV show “Trailer Park Boys,” but overall the album addresses subject matter about us getting older and things we deal with on a personal basis. Some of the songs are very personal, and some are about people we know. It’s definitely the most mature album we’ve ever written.

What effect does age have on punk rock? Do you have to go all "cranky old man get off my lawn" to find that source of angst?

CE: Age can have that effect on punk rockers if you let it, I guess. But you look at bands like Bad Religion who are very “seasoned” at this point and they’re still writing and...
performing at an incredibly high level. And I don’t think we’re an “angsty” band, we certainly aren’t grumpy old men at this point. Our kids keep us young, and playing punk rock keeps us young. We love doing this. If we ever felt like we physically couldn’t perform these songs, we wouldn’t do it anymore.

**Will the "once every few decades" pace be the new norm for Huntingtons album releases, or do you think there will be more albums on the horizon?**

CE: We’re already looking at the beginning stages of another album and we just recently started hashing out new material. I think we all rediscovered how much we love this band, and the people seem excited to hear new stuff from us. As long as we’re still interested in writing new songs and recording new albums, we will. I can’t imagine us all being close to 70 writing a follow up to this album!

**How does recording an album in 2019 compare to, say 1993, or even the 2000s? Is new technology a blessing or a curse in that regard?**

CE: We approached the recording process on this album to capture as much of a live feel as possible. A lot of the guitars and bass tracks were kept that were used when we recorded the drums. We over dubbed on some stuff but kept a real old school approach. I think a lot of bands take advantage of all the technology these days to get their album as perfect as absolute possible and the feeling and soul of the recording gets lost along the way. We really wanted to keep it as raw as we could.

If I am remembering correctly, this album didn’t utilize crowd funding to get released. Why not go the route of Kickstarter like so many other bands?

CE: We made it clear when we were getting ready to record that we weren’t going to use crowd funding of any kind to help us. We don’t look down on that idea, but it just wasn’t an option for us. We wanted to earn this on our own, so we played a bunch of shows, didn’t keep a dime of the money from them or from merch, and did it that way. I guess some form of crowd funding was used in a sense because we thought it’d be cool to give people the opportunity to own some seriously rare products from our band. We auctioned off master copies of Get Lost and Plastic Surgery and some other cool things. So if you want to look at that as a crowd funding tool, I guess you can make that argument. But we’re a blue collar band and didn’t want to have our hands out for money and put their name in the “thank you” list as a way to repay them. Plus we knew it wouldn’t cost us an over the top amount of money to make this album, so raising the money ourselves wasn’t out of the question.

Your promo materials talk about reaching new fans as well as taking risks. Does a band that has been around as long as The Huntingtons really need to reach new fans? How do you that with a style of music that is not the current flavor of the year in the wider music world?

CE: We have a nice core group of fans who love what we do, and we’re happy with that. Obviously it would be nice to put out an album that would reach ears that have never heard of us, and with social media it’s much easier to do these days. And I think with the current climate of music these days where there aren’t a crazy amount of bands recording straight up rock and roll albums anymore, maybe there are some people who will appreciate what we’re doing. If we don’t reach any type of new audience, so be it. We really aren’t concerned at this point to reach a brand new audience.

**Are there any plans for live shows or tours with the album?**

CE: We play as much as our personal lives allow us to. Three of us are fathers, so right now our kids and wives are our priority. We’ve all got careers that put food on the table and keep the lights on. This band will occasionally buy us a family dinner! So no, unfortunately an actual tour is not in the works. We play and we’ll travel within reason. We’re going to Italy this summer to play Punk Rock Raduno so that’s a big deal for us.

Seeing that several bands are releasing collections of old demos, have you ever thought about releasing any of the Cricket demos?

Mike Holt: Nah. There are early Huntingtons demos and recordings of album rehearsals floating around if people care to check that kinda stuff out, but there isn’t anything particularly valuable in going back to the Cricket days. We’d rather work on getting records like Get Lost and Plastic Surgery released on vinyl. *(Ed note: looks like they anyways)*

Whenever it is all said and done for The Huntingtons (whether or not that comes after this album or several more), how would you like people to sum up the entire work of the band?

CE: When it’s all said and done, I hope our legacy is one that is obvious that we did everything on our own terms. We never went along with whatever the popular trends were at the time and always stayed true to our beliefs. We hope we made some albums along the way that maybe helped someone out during a trying time in their life, or at the very least provided a little soundtrack to a time in their life that was fun and carefree. If our band has influenced at least one person in a positive way over the 25 plus years we’ve been a band, then it was completely worth it.
First of all, yes we know that there were many, many more good albums released in the past two years since the last issue. These are the reviews that were submitted by the deadline for the issue. Hopefully more catch up will happen by the next issue. We also know that there are several people that have sadly passed away in the past few years that we need to have tributes for as well - Sean Doty, Brian Healy, etc. We are working on those as well. They have been interviewed here before, so we decided to start with Burrito since we never got a chance to interview him before he passed away.

**Love Coma | Love Coma | 2020 Independent | lovecoma.bandcamp.com**

I was pretty surprised to hear that Love Coma was making a new album a few years ago. I loved their other two albums, so I was afraid that their new album might not measure up in my nostalgic mind. But wow is this album great. It feels like the opening track is an intentional callback to their earlier work, and then they pick up and grow from there as if they had never stopped making music. Which, okay, Chris Taylor has been making excellent music as a solo artist since back then - but the way they made this collection of songs a definite Love Coma album and not just a "Taylor put the Love Coma name on a solo album" thing that so many returning bands do is impressive. They are still mainly in the "alternative rock" category - but it feels like they defy that category in many ways as well. If you were hesitant about this album, be sure to check it out on BandCamp - you won’t be disappointed. Oh, and I would highly recommend the vinyl version - the beautiful artwork looks stunning at full size. I sincerely hope this is not just a one off recording, as I would love to hear more. (Matt Crosslin)

**Jeff Elbel + PING | The Threefinger Opera | 2021 Marathon Records | ping.bandcamp.com**

After waiting for about 9 years, we finally have a new Jeff Elbel + PING release. And my, my was it worth the wait. While Elbel and company tend to run in the alternative rock circles, there is a certain quality to their music that also transcends that label. Plus add in a quirky sense of humor, and you have one of 2021’s must get releases (or 2023 if you missed it when it came out). Hopefully you have watched the fun video to the hilarious and catchy tune “Rhyme Dictionary” (recorded at the AudioFeed 22 festival) on YouTube. If not, go fix that right now. But there are also serious rocking tunes such as "Like Lightning" and "Mr. Madarakis" that you just want to repeat over and over. There are even some hints of folk and Americana here and there - along with incredible musicianship of the regular and guest musicians. Oh, and this one is also available on vinyl - a great format to enjoy this opera on as well. Give it a listen at BandCamp and then get the record before they are gone. (Matt Crosslin)

**Michael Knott | All Indie EP II | 2021 Independent | hilldegmaria.bandcamp.com**

While the date on this one says “2021,” it was actually released at the end of December and many see this as a 2022 release. Also, with nine full-length songs, it is technically longer that most LPs. But, regardless, Michael Knott is back and this EP is a great collection of songs. But it’s kind of hard to pinpoint why exactly - it is Knott doing some acoustic and some alt rock. A little experimental at times, a little pop at times. It even won praise from some fans that didn’t quite like PTSD or Heaven High. I liked both, by the way - it’s just that this album is different than those, while still a familiar mix of Strip Cycle, Rocket and a Bomb, and Life of David. Songs like "Army" and "Love & Money" have a good amount of rock and guitar bite, while songs like "Dream Into You" that are haunting and beautiful. Also, Knott’s previously released song "Photographs in Time" is included here as well. Unfortunately, the limited edition CD-R copies seem to be all sold out, but you can still listen and buy the digital version on BandCamp. (Matt Crosslin)

**Moral DK | Cold in August | 2019 Independent | moraldk.com**

Since Moral DK made it on the cover and into an article for this issue, it is past time to review their killer debut album. At least, I should get this review out before their upcoming second album is unleashed. Moral DK played some new songs at AudioFeed 2022 and they were incredible. But this review is for their debut album. For those that don’t know, Moral DK is comprised of members of Undercover, Black & White World, Altar Boys, and other well known 80s/90s bands. Their sound is kind of a dark, heavy, gothic driving style - you can hear the influence of the various members’ bands on the sound. Of course, there are several current or former members of Undercover in this band, so that is one of the most notable sonic palettes in the mix. Several songs sounds like they could have been on a missing album in between Balance of Power and Devotion. But the DK boys also mix in many other styles as well. If you don’t have this CD, be sure to get a copy (I believe Boone’s Overstock has copies) before the new album drops soon. (Matt Crosslin)
Kevin the Persian | Southern Dissonance | 2022 Independent | kevinthepersian.bandcamp.com | From New Orleans we have a heavy rockin’ album from Kevin The Persian. This is hard-driving indie rock with Southern-leaning guitar tones. That bastard Mike Indest, who puts out the Down The Line podcast, placed this CD into my palms at the AudioFeed fest, and I have had it on my playlist at least a few times over the last couple months. Be on the lookout for the interview with Kevin The Persian in this issue of DTL. It will fill in a few gaps for how his music finds its place amongst the zillion albums out there.

Framing cultural identity as a Persian living in a Confederate state in the U.S. is a large part of this album. This album pulls that off convincingly. But even more convincing is his love of rock music and giving it his 110 percent. Did I mention he plays every instrument and sings every line on the album?

Not only is Southern Dissonance the title of the album, the theme also threads into a good portion of his songs. From “Coping Mechanism” contemplating purpose in life, lack of hope in “Suicide in K Minor” and “Persian Delta Blues”, dislocation in “Southern Dissonance,” and losing someone dear in “Two Minus One,” this is not music to knit to. Or maybe it is. My point is there is a healthy dose of the dark and stark realities life often deals us. This, however, is not stoner rock, nor is it blues rock. This is the stuff you would hear on alternative radio back in the 90s, bookended by the likes of The Headstones and Big Wreck. 2022 is the year we are privy to hear this platform with new ears, tying hard truths with music equally as hard. And a brilliant relationship it is.

I hope Kevin The Persian puts out more of this musical greatness. His song “Rock is Dead” is the best of contradictions because I find just the opposite when I put this album on. Long Live Kevin The Persian! (Doug Peterson)

Cicero | You Can’t Outrun Your Mouth | 2022 Independent | ciceroemo.bandcamp.com | I am blown away by this cassette release from Portland’s Cicero, which have been around since 2007. This is the fun and adventurous indie rock I fell in love with in the 90s. Their BandCamp page says they were “fed from bands such as Sunny Day Real Estate, Mineral, Dear Ephesus, and Clarity era Jimmy Eat World.” While I think SDRE is in a league of their own, there is a raw yet experienced indie spirit backing this tape that I deeply miss in music from the last couple decades in general.

It appears Paul Hedrick is the longevity member of the band, though you also have Michael Bloodgood’s (R.I.P.) son Brian on bass (the apple does not fall far from the tree), and guest appearances from Greg Dimik (of Empty Tomb, Crux, and Gov’t Hate Mail fame) and Evan Way (who released an excellent worshipful CD awhile back). Not a lot of info on this band online, so apologies for not giving credit where it is due.

The emo influences are definitely present from the second one hits the play button. Wild energy builds on some songs, much in the way I recall in bands like Mineral or Live. It is indeed an artform to keep the listener in suspense of elevated energy building up, and Cicero manages this well. One thing I would have liked is if the lyrics could have been included. A band like this have something to say, and some small but readable lyrics in the tape cover panel would have had me in the corner of my living room spending an extra twenty minutes diving in to find out what this band is about.

If you need an excuse to get a tape player, you have found one here. Those of you who bought into tapes long time ago and never gave up, this one is for you. Oh, and they also have a limited lathe cut 8” square poly disk, for those of you who have turntables, and are even more adventurous than I. (Doug Peterson)

Daniel Markham | Burnout | 2022 Independent | danielmarkham.bandcamp.com | So when a release gets sold as “alt country musician goes heavy metal”... well, you have to admit that sounds a bit suspicious. Daniel Markham is a name I have heard, but never really listened to as I don’t get into a whole lot of the alt country scene. But when Velvet Blue Music helps promotes a release of any kind, I tend to give it a shot. VBM knows their music. The first track jumps out of the gate with a fuzzed out distorted guitar sound that really digs into the “power pop influences” that Markham mentions in the promo materials. Yeah, that is a pretty good sign that the alt country really is gone on this release. Markham kind of moves through everything from heavy fuzzed-out power pop to sludgy doom-inspired metal. Its kind of a bit of a unique take on metal, which to me is a welcome new direction in the ancient art of head banging. This is probably accented by the fact that vocally, Markham still fits in well with indie rock / VBM type bands. I’m kind of digging it, even if I can’t really find the best way to describe it. There are also songs like the title track where he just rocks out with little metal influence, so the hard rock label also fits as well. Overall, Markham proves that he really does have a metal heart beating under all of the alt country music he has been playing all this time. (Matt Crosslin)
Frank Lenz | 2020 Velvet Blue Music | velvetbluemusic.com | Pyramid, the new EP by Frank Lenz, is nothing short of magic. It’s not indie rock and it’s not a film score. It’s an intentional instrumental project with flawless fluidity. If you liked the more experimental side of Lenz’s 2013 Water Tiger, this one will not disappoint.

The primary instruments are analog synths, the kind that are clunky and sound oh so good. Frank also throws in drums like only he can. Additional synthesizers by David Vandervelde, and bass covered by Elijah Thomson, who also played in the three-piece on the Richard Swift’s (RIP) debut album. The sound variations are impecably acute and well-planned.

For the best listening experience, I would recommend strapping on some headphones. Then pour yourself a nice beverage and be taken down mystical paths, dark caves and expansive valleys. There are even excursions into the funky and psychedelic. If you’ve dipped your toe into the streams of Brian Eno, say from a decade ago, or Amon Tobin, this is your ride.

I loved the “Metronix” track, which starts out subdued and somber. Chaotic drums work their way in and build up to a bass/key cacophony. “Ohm Eye God” continues with random piano playfulness, all the while an eerie synth background gives it a horror story atmosphere. The EP ends on a majestic tone with “Tiger Beat Singalong,” a lush yet unapologetically busy display of electronic madness. This is Frank Lenz as Mr. Hyde behind his array of old school keys.

By the time you’ve fully immersed yourself in these tracks, you will be left wanting more. (Doug Peterson)

Deni Gauthier | 2020 Independent | denigauthier.bandcamp.com | Deni Gauthier is a longtime friend of Down the Line, and the fact that he released a new album should be enough to get you to go out and buy it. Well, unless you are in Coronavirus lockdown, then you should be going online to buy it ASAP. Gauthier’s work has always been lush, complex, and deep... but this release really takes it to the next level. Didn’t I say that for the last album? Well, Gauthier has done it again. To my ears, this release reaches back a bit more to the 80s/90s alternative music he obviously loves, while still keeping a firm hold on a modern pop sound (the non-annoying version, that is). It also feels like it rocks a bit more than past offerings, which really works well in the overall soundscape he is weaving here. The lyrical content is familiar but deep, with Gauthier looking at love and relationships through various lenses of hope through pain, reflections of loss, hard lessons learned, and determination to keep going even through life’s imperfections. I believe this is also available in CD and vinyl formats as long as the U.S.-Canadian border is open-ish. But oddly no cassette version, despite Gauthier’s love of that format (as evidenced by his Instagram feed). (Matt Crosslin)

The Huntingtons | 2020 Burnt Toast Vinyl | btv.foxhole.info/btvstore | So many times I tell myself that I need to probably be done with punk rock, because I am getting up in age and I don’t deal with teenager issues or youthful angst anymore. But then bands like the Huntingtons come along and remind me that punk rock is so much more than the small boxes I put it in. Like they proclaim in the opening song “I’m Too Old to Care!” The question becomes: are they too old to be recording loud, fast music? The definitive answer is “not by a long shot!” I don’t know how a band can put out a bazillion albums decades ago and still find a way to pull off another one over a decade later. But at the same time, there is noticeable growth from past offerings as well. The catchy Ramones-influenced sing-along choruses are still there, as well as the fast-paced driving guitars. But there is also a sense that the band as a whole is at the next level. You can get this one in digital, or go to Burnt Toast to get the vinyl version with a bonus 7-inch. Trust me, you will want the bonus disc. (Matt Crosslin)