

The Bottlean Gaze – A Novelette in 8 Albums

By

Bottle

(aka Paul Tompkins)

**Album photos taken by cell phone without permission
(don't be a narc)**

Ductwork

One of my new favorite things in the universe is finding legitimately under \$10 LPs. I've done a batch or two already, and now I have a new batch on the way. We could brainstorm some theories about how that's even possible, but the only way I know how to accomplish it is to publish at scale, cut out any and all middle-people, and take your chances on not actually paying for advertising that you do it all yourself. This time around I noticed one consistently recurring label, and it's Sympathy For The Record Industry (the "record industry" of course being the devil, in case that stone rolled right by you), founded by an eccentric man they call Long Gone John. LGJ started SFTRI started way back in 1988 as a sister company to his Rock and Roll themed book publishing company, vinyl figurine company, and art collecting....

Welp, that approach quickly spiraled out of control into a massive research project I'm too lazy to do right, so we're gonna change the plans you didn't even know I was planning and do a preemptively different but equally massive research project about a totally different thing. I admit, totally unfair to push you down an alternate hallway without you even knowing that I didn't ask, but it's too late to turn back now. Just imagine your own alternate universe where I did it the normal way and listened to them one night at a time with terrible puns and movie references. Maybe I can salvage some of the current-event rants, but we'll see what spews forth. So, instead of

my regularly scheduled intrusion into the living room inside your eye sockets, please accept this invitation to a little voyeuristic soiree under at my place.

As of 2019 it seems that SFTRI has officially gone cold, so let's have ourselves a merry little posthumous going away concert. I booked the roster back in that alternate reality we don't inhabit anymore, so maybe we should check it twice or thrice and adjust. Vyvyan, Willowz, No Sinner, The Ettes, Matson Jones, Buck, Lower... that last one seems wrong for some reason. Hold on, let me give 'em a haphazard preview real quick... yeah, thought so, Lower is fronted by a Dude with a D, not a Dude with an -ette as a suffix. Ixnay on the enispay, Lower can have a later review when I feel like getting around to it. This one's gonna be all female front women. Ooh, ooh, that means we can invite Scarling back for another show! Wait though, No Sinner isn't an SFTRI band. Normally I wouldn't bat my eyelashes, but there's that pesky unreviewed Grouper album about the dead boat guy. Tough call, what do you think? Anyone? Beuller? Oh right, writing before publishing. Damn, I guess I have to make one of those executive decision thingies I always hate making. Fine, No Sinner and Grouper are in. We'll just pretend they tagged along and the more the merrier. Should I tell everyone around here about the change of pants? Nah, if I let it still be a surprise then I can salvage most of the writing alternate reality me already wrote without the hassle of forgetting what you readers have or haven't read. Good

talk, me, let's never tell anyone we did and pretend the whole thing just happened normal.

That's kind of like lying, Bottle. Listen here, second person third person me, you can get a good look at your butcher by sticking your head up a cow's ass, but I'm not out there trying to sell you brake pads. I'm in here planning a massive concert of Women of Underground Rock for my own personal amusement. Now, if me'll excuse me, I'll get on with the additional complication of doing it in book form with an open-ended side plot of trying to coax my HR Lady and my Editor back into my peculiar self-inflicted psychological purgatory. It's not easy being green, and it's not easy being cheesy, but you go ahead and try being green cheese inside a Klein Bottle and see yourself out backward while I get on with it.

Chapter 1 – Where Have All The Long Johns Gone?

There is an honest to I assume Isaac Brock level of weirdness feature-film length documentary titled The Treasures of Long Gone John. I have not seen it, nor (as you should immediately assume from my prior “research project” spiel) am I going to. I do know at least a couple of those treasures are an Iggy Pop jacket and a Debbie Harry prescription pill bottle, plus thousands of unlistened to demo tapes and a bunch of mid-profile paintings by artists you probably haven’t heard of. I guess that’s technically not true, if you avidly read my reviews then you’ve at least seen a Mark Ryden painting as the cover of Scarling’s Sweet Heart Dealer. The official title of that one is Untitled, but I’m pretty sure I retitled it “mopey ballerina.” Starting to see how the one-man media empire is taking shape?

C: You are kind of like Long Gone John, aren’t-

B: Without the money, yes, now stop interrupting me, Compy.

The man published a lot of records and CDs. Mostly 7” singles, but quite a few proper LPs as well. Jack Killed Jill, Man or Astroman, we did a Lazy Cowgirls album that one time, didn’t we? Famous bands, even, like Hole. I mean, someone had to invest in The White Stripes before they could get famous. That someone was Long Gone John. Wherever his money actually came from, he was proud of losing a lot of it. Not by paying royalties, that’s why Jack escorted Meg the hell away from there, LGJ’s deals were

all handshake and product. The way they tell me he told it was that he gave The White Stripes about 30k worth of records for them to sell themselves, and if agents and major-label lawyers weren't involved it would probably be a different story.

Typical reasonable Indie deal, he'd send a band a \$3,000 advance, coordinate artwork and manufacturing, send copies to the band to sell for themselves, sell his copies at flea markets and local indie stores with zero reporting to Soundscan, and when he wound up with money he didn't need he'd send it to one of the bands who could use it at that moment. Obviously, if you're Jack White's agent you won't be thrilled with the no money you personally skim off the top of that arrangement, but if you're just a band whose only actual outlet is doing it all yourself and handing copies to local stores on consignment, Long Gone John is like the angel investor of your dreams. Like Katon De Pena, but moderately more reliable.

He wasn't particularly stingy, either. If he decided to publish your thing he'd do a run of 1,200 and move on. He'd say that if he sold out of those copies then he'd be more than happy to talk, but that seems to have never occurred. He had no intention of wasting money on lawsuits, if you wanted to defect to a major label he'd lose anyway, so why bother? We just got done hearing the big 5 book publishers assure us that only 35% of books make any profit at all (not so surprising when people are already pulling out the inflatable Halloween lawn decorations in

the middle of September), while the top 4% account for 60% of profits; I can guarantee music is much worse than that.

Anywho, anti-mogul yadda with the collectible knick-knacks and such, we care about albums that only exist because he paid to make them, and I've got some RSVPs to not bother sending because they'll all show up anyway. If nothing else, I'm a good listener, and I'm the one writing this story.

G: Hey, Bottle! There's some hooligans assembling outside!

B: Awesome! Show 'em the secret entrance!

G: It's quite a crowd, I might get arrested for public ind-

B: Ew, Gladys! No! I don't even want to know what you thought I meant. I meant the secret entrance to the twisty slide that arrives somewhere backstage!

G: Oh, ok, that'll be much easier on my hips! I don't bend like I used-

B: Again, ew! Stop it!

As I was saying before that incredibly disturbing interruption, some friends of Long Gone John are coming over for a publicly private Frontwomen of Rock festival. I've never met any of them, but what's the worst that could happen? Let's party.

Chapter 2 - Vyvyan



V: Hi, We're Vyvyan. We got our name from a character in a book we read in English class, we like terrible mainstream American music, popping bubble wrap, and teen power.

B: Why are you talking like a creepy yearbook/playboy bio? Compy! Did you check IDs at the door? Not that this isn't an all-ages show, I just don't want no trouble.

C: Relax, this album was compiled several years after they wrote these songs and they are all at least 20 in the photos.

B: Ok, good. You gals gonna be upset if I don't end up exactly raving about your performance tonight?

V: No, we were only a band for like 3 years in high school. We did one short US tour and broke up.

B: Great. I'm sure I'll like some of it, and the minions have zero taste in music, so just have fun out there.

It never fails. Every time I do one of these shopping sprees I unexpectedly get a 10" where I least expect it. Nothing against' em, you can still pack a lot of excitement in a

smaller package... damnit, Gladys! Now I'm all gutter-minded and telling Aerosmith elevator-quality dick jokes, and I don't like it. Let's just get this over with, and move on to something a little more mature.

Vyvyan is apparently an English Garage-Punk band. Do they have many garages in Croydon? Regardless, it is incredibly uncomfortable to know their presence at my shindig has been loaned to us "by arrangement with Abuse Records." Super glad they still own their own copyrights, but that is a disturbing way to phrase a compilation album. I'm gonna go ahead and just call it an EP to ease my troubled mind a bit, but I expect these are just some random songs about being teenage British girls who formed a band and wanna be pop stars rather than lovers. It is, after all, called Teenage Wannabes (and that word around about the turn of the century has a disturbingly specific connotation in my mind). I do not want to whatever zig-a-zig-ah is, but I fear we must.

The story is pretty concise though. They formed in 1997, John Peel played their Abuse-published single on his radio programme, they recorded more songs and did a short US tour in 1999, then quit. 2nd shortest band bio ever, but what's they gonna play for us?

Now, before you accuse me of being in any way old-man creepy, these lovely ladies are the same age as me, so I'm literally just remembering being 17 to 19 years old. I gotta say, for actual teenagers this is pretty fantastic. Side A

gives us 2 songs about dating. We can all agree, sating ducks, I mean dating sucks. Even Anthony Kiedis was terrible at it (is there a Spice Girls quota for this review?). Enough of that, let's move on to the bubble wrap song. Is it secretly a Cyndi Lauper style euphemism for masturbation? No, it really is a literal song about popping bubble wrap (British people just call it "packaging plastic," I guess). Side B starts with a cover of Mickey, then a teen energy drink [snap] I mean song lamenting that they weren't born in the 70s, and we end with a song about imagining what it's like to actually be a pop star.

Alright, no shock here, this album sounds like the Spice Girls met up with the GoGos at the roller derby and decided to be friends instead of punch each other in the face. Whatever you actually want to call it, it's bubble-gum flavored. Super fucking creepy reading the bio stats on the back of the insert next to their British equivalent of Glamour Shots yearbook photos (especially the first albums they bought), but at least they aren't underage. That's now Bottle talking, but at 17 I would have cheered them on and been too nervous to ask at least 3 of them to go out with me. At least 2 of these songs are better than anything I wrote when I was 16 or 17.

It's a confusing mix of Punk and Legally Blonde-esque girl-power, but not at all in any coherent real-world sense of those ideas. Kim Gordon might possibly have been friendly, but Kathleen Hannah and Courtney Love would

probably have spiked their drinks and been really mean to them.

Vyvyan makes a strong case for calling a lot of 80s kids “millennials,” mostly because they dare to give my sarcasm radar the raspberry jam treatment. Is that an oblique way of saying I give this 1 star? No, I mean it certainly might appear that way now that I said it, but I think we have to give credit for a clear sense of culturally motivated generational awareness. They, as they rightly point out, weren’t even born in the 70s, so it’s a bit unfair to saddle them with that baggage (let alone give Tripping Daisy the chance to imagine lying naked in the sun with them). Maybe if that baggage was filled with bubble wrap they could pop to ease the tension, but still. I’m not sad I listened to it, and I do kinda feel like if Hannah Montana [snap] I mean Montaque had kept at it she would have eventually written something more visceral, but as they say, they don’t actually have any hate or angst or anarchic tendencies to draw from. Fair rebuttal.

As far as the band goes, this is great. As for the actual songs, 2/3 of them are future cringe, and I think even Vyvyan would admit a little embarrassment at their own naivety. Not the bubble wrap song or the Mickey cover though, those are real keepers, coffee table conversation pieces, family heirlooms for the grandkids type stuff.

Chapter 3

X: Don't you think you were a little hard on them?

B: Hello, shadowy stranger. I thought I made it pretty clear that I didn't want Vyvyan and the words "hard on" to appear anywhere near each other.

X: Ha!

And with that "ha" the stranger vanished in a puff of smoke. Mysterious. On with the show, the next act is sure to be better.

Chapter 4

Before we even start the next set, just go check out Wicked Will by The Ettes. No qualifications necessary, it is phenomenal. That'll be chapter 5; first we got some 'splainin' to do.

Our new shadowy stranger friend brings up a good point. We run the risk of male gazing to the point of spontaneous combustion. That's just some namby pamby victim thinking the gubment uses to mind control you, Bottle. Shut up, imaginary truck driver with a stupid conspiracy opinion. There are actually 3 gazes that go by a variety of terms. We're gonna ditch the actual genitals and use the advanced metaphors like grown up thinky people.

Male Gaze, Female Gaze, and Matrixial Gaze. Sometimes people like to say that the Matrixial Gaze and the Female Gaze are the same thing, but I assure you they are not. Like I said, we aren't talking actual penises and wombs and such, we're talking psychological perspectives of the experience of aesthetic looking. As crazy as it may seem, women can Male Gaze at people just as easily as men can, and both men and women can have any sort of combinatorial 3-way Gaze orgy they want if they imagine hard enough. Grab a towel and some flip-flops, we're about to visit the bath house of Aesthetics.

Have you ever looked at a painting or movie or random person walking down the street and evaluated what you see in terms of the sexual pleasure you derive from the

view? Congratulations, you just Male Gazed like a professional creep! 50 shades of lashes with a flacid noodle, or something, you pervert. But seriously, the Male Gaze is actually a theory of the depiction of women first described by John Berger and later properly coined by film critic Laura Mulvey that draws heavily from the works of Freud and Lacan. At its core, it is the depiction of women so as to appeal to the aesthetic/sexual pleasure of looking, men deciding what's worth looking at. This is the perspective of the stereotypical male observer, women being fetishized sexual objects depicted for our pleasure.

In contrast, the Female Gaze is the perspective of the stereotypical female observer as direct contrast to Mulvey's formulation of the Male Gaze. If Mulvey is describing the depiction of women through the perspective of the male characters, the male filmmaker, and the male cinema viewer, the Female Gaze simply attempts to theoretically describe the gender reversal of these lenses and the apparent differences they can/do/should produce. It is a theory of agency rather than pleasure.

Lastly, the Matrixial Gaze of Bracha L. Ettinger. It's very similar to the generalized Female Gaze, but it responds to the concept of the Male Gaze at the metaphorical, rather than mundane, level. The Female Gaze is really nothing more than the cis-gendered reversal of the Male Gaze, we merely replace penis with vagina, for whatever good that does. The Matrix, however, depicts not the individual as

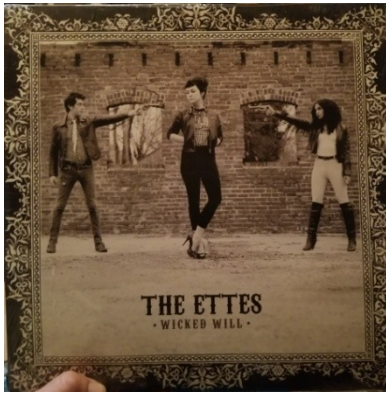
the foundation of identity, but the metaphorical womb inside which identity develops. Thus, in the Matrixial Gaze we look not upon the subject, but upon the context in which all subjects exist by means of empathy, compassion, ethics, and transformation. The Matrixial Gaze is not about how the gaze itself determines the subject we observe, but how the gaze affects the observer.

To transport this theoretical background into a totally wackadoodle place like I like to do, the Male Gaze gives us *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*, the Female Gaze gives us *A League Of Their Own*, and the Matrixial Gaze gives us *Sally Struthers/Feed the Children* commercials. Did you ladyguys hear that “pshaw” over your left shoulder? No? Only me? Ok, we’ll accept that I’m crazy and move on.

My point is that Vyvyan’s *Teenage Wannabes* was a totally Male Gaze kind of album from front to back via the pink vinyl in the middle, and the fact that this whole project is women rocking at a private concert for me and my imaginary minions could come across as being a little sus, if you know what I mean. I know that the fact that 6/7 of the recent albums I bought are fronted by women is a total remarkable coincidence, thus changing my entire plan from random one night stands into a proper book, but you don’t. How reliable of a narrator am I? I think totally, but I’m not you. I don’t think there’s any sexual pleasure component to how much I love the next 7 albums, but I’m not the judge or the jury in this case. Go easy on the

sentencing, that's all I'm asking. And so, without further
ado until that ado seems worth including, here's The Ettes.

Chapter 5 – The Ettes – Wicked Will



The Ettes had a much bigger and more stamina-laden career than Vyvyan. Mostly that's because they were freaking rocking everyone's socks off. Sadly, their own Nashville record store permanently closed in 2019. SFTRI published

their first album, and they published their own 4th album with SFTRI doing the vinyl siding of things. Big tours, TV spots, a soundtrack or two, but as of this writing every single one of their links leads to a stock parking page in whatever foreign language was looking for kaput domain names at the moment they expired. That unfortunately means no more Ettes no matter how much you want them. 4/7 of my Beefettes are still MIA, but I do have high hopes for this mysterious stranger who keeps pshawing at my sauciness, not that that's related.

18/50/65+, that's the current 1/5/10 year failure rate of businesses, regardless of what they sell. Couple that with 90% of new startups failing in the first 2 years and it should be obvious why everything sucks and we don't want to work the drive-thru or refold the same pair of dress pants 20 times a day at the 35% of contextually successful businesses that survived the decade guillotine. It doesn't matter how many degrees of Kevin Bacon there

are between you and a rich guy; sum of hoard divided by number of people equals life expectancy of business. You can manipulate the individual bacon bits until you're blue in the balls [snap] I mean face, but you can't cheat zero. 100% of businesses fail by doing it wrong, whatever particular form of "wrong" we end up talking about. Oh, ok, looks like they're all set up and ready to play now. I'll definitely shut up, we're in for a real treat with Wicked Will by The Ettes.

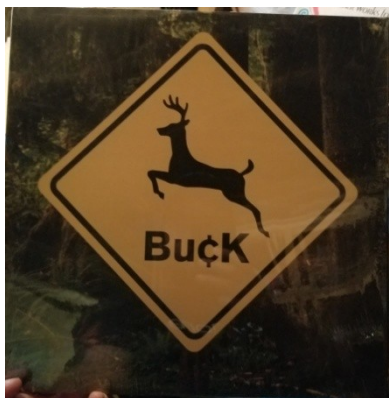
Is there a name for this thing? You know, the Spanish/Mexican Wild Southwest Six-Shooter/Bullfight Spaghetti Western phase everybody went through from 2007-2011, is there an actual name for that or do we just lump it under "Hipster"? It all just puts me in mind of a post-ironic The Three Amigos. Can we blame Jack White? Sure we can. This one's good though. It's Post-Modern CountryPunkBlues, there are real moments where I can't tell if Coco *is* Wicked Will, singing at/about him, or if Will isn't even a person but instead the more ephemerally wicked aspect of someone's general personality. Delicious.

I can't decide if it helped or hurt them that they were Patton Oswald's favorite band for a time. I suppose that depends on whether you like Patton Oswald or not; kind of a meme that people honestly didn't realize he was an award-winning comedian. The Ettes' music isn't particularly funny though, it's a post-modern take on 50s Rock and Roll, there's tons of slap-back and tremolo so it has a tangible surf feel, the vocals are reverbed out the yin-

yang, and Coco has that kind of nasal snap-twang to her delivery that isn't quite gangster, but definitely has a snarky knife-edge to it. It's hard to put into words, but trust me you'll definitely remember them because it's somehow both unique and nostalgic at the same time. They could just as easily have opened for Reverend Horton Heat as they did The Black Keys and Kings Of Leon, they have that kind of greaser vibe hiding in there too.

We'll branch out into all sorts of crazy things, but I think we should have a couple real Punk bands take the stage next. They'll be radically different from each other, but they will all maintain the high standard of rocking The Ettes have established. That, at the risk of exposing my terrible Justin Wilson impression for public ridicule, I guarantee.

Chapter 6 – The Buck Starts Here



It's tough to find out much about Buck. They aren't the rap group those bot-generated lyric sites claim they are, or any other band with additional words in their name, they're the band Lisa Marr formed after moving from

Vancouver to LA. You wanna talk about Male Gaze, here's the All Music review from Adam Bregman: "Not every song is great, but mostly this is a solid effort from one very cute-looking band." Did you barf? I barfed. Let's maybe try to do a better job than whoever that Adam guy is.

Cuddle-core is apparently a thing, and Lisa's band Cub was apparently that. Let's investigate. Urban Dictionary tells me "cuddlcore" is soft-core gay porn originating from Portland, Oregon. That I don't think is what we're looking for, ah, ok, Wiktionary says it's "a twee, childlike style of alternative rock." Damn it, what's "twee" mean? Excessively quaint, pretty, or sentimental. Best example I can find is we're back in 2010 and everyone's wearing miniskits and berets and Mary Janes like pre-Popstar Taylor Swift and Zooey Deschanel. There you go, Twee is literally Taylor Swift singing Mean over a New Girl montage.

Nope, Old Blue Sweater just sounds like Cow Punk to me. Lisa does have kind of a raspy voice with the Canadian version of a hick accent that puts me in mind of Loretta Lynn meets Tilt, but this is definitely Punk smothered in sarcasm. “Well she looks like a witch but she tastes like chicken....” How is that Twee? Was Letters to Cleo Twee? They seem like the most logical comparison after Tilt. Buck sounds more like a band Twee would opportunistically latch onto rather than the kind of thing they were actually going for. Grimes is like Hyper-Twee, no doubt, but Buck feels more authentically just a band to my mind. It’s worth noting though, just like with The Ettes, a lot of people would be perfectly happy to lump this all under Hipster and move on.

Now, is not every song actually good, or are they all good in more different ways than a single mansplanation is ill-equipped to comprise? My standard criterion for good or bad is of course believability. Is it a logical reaction to something? Can you walk around with these ideas in your head and still be a functional human? Is it humorous? Let’s dive in and find out.

Look, Side A definitely gets less and less cutesy as it progresses, so much so that by the time we get to Sucker, which by the way is quite possibly the best Hole song Courtney Love never wrote, we’ve dropped all façade. The Suicide Pact is pretty humorous, why get married when we’re so in love and there’re all sorts of other more creative ways to kill ourselves? My fascination is just

another nail in the coffin. [aatchoo!] Alkaline Trio couldn't have [atchoo!] said it better. [atchoo!] Excuse me a moment, I feel a bout of interrupting dialogue coming on. No, no, the show must go on, I've listened to it 3 times already. Be back in a jiffy.

Chapter 7

X: So sus.

B: Alright, Shadowy Stranger, I've had just about enough of you. What's your angle? Are you secretly the ghost of Long Gone John? Are you gonna turn out to be Sandra Narzon? An insanely delayed holla-back to my imaginary cousin Dixie? You just here feeding off the potential energy of an impending Ballroom Blitz?

X: Wouldn't you like to know. I'm just here to enjoy the show, but also point out how uncanny it is that this whole batch of brand-new bargain-bin priced records are all girl bands who barely got any recognition outside of little regional circles. So now you change your whole milieu around to put on a concert in your own mind-harem while backpedaling like a drunken unicyclist. Sus.

B: Ha! If I didn't know better, I'd say you're Madame Coincidence slumming it for the fun of it. I just hope something in here betrays your omniscience.

X: Believe what you will.

B: No, that's a thing I don't believe in, believing things that is. Honesty's my game, but I don't have to believe I'm right or wrong about it. I honestly bought records under \$10 with more than 4 songs on 'em, and that's the extent of my influence. The fact that the vast majority are fronted by women is society's problem, not mine. I didn't create you as a character, you just showed up to interrupt as I was

writing it with your Dominatrixial Pshawing. Stay, enjoy,
but just let me do my thing.

X: Ok. Fair's fair.

Chapter 8 – Matson Jones



I don't know about you, but after that heated exchange, I need something different. Matson Jones certainly qualifies.

Matson Jones, what's with that name? It's actually the pseudonym Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns used to sign their collaborative projects. They did not draw that typewriter on the cover. The band, though, is 2 cellos/vocalists, upright bass, and drums.

Goodness gracious, great balls of burning garbage! Here's the actual intro to the only review I could find with minimal internet digging:

"In 2005, a chamber rock quartet from Fort Collins started playing around Denver and Boulder rock clubs. It wasn't long before the city was abuzz over Matson Jones, a group fronted by two mysteriously attractive cellists, Anna Mascorella and Martina Grbac – who dressed in a subtly seductive fashion and wore their hair over their eyes."

You know what's more interesting to talk about? The fact that they formed about 9 years after the first tentative steps toward merging classical and rock/metal that was the Metallica tribute band Apocalyptica. Those 4 Finnish

cellists, by the way, formed in 1993, which by total coincidence is the exact same year that Elvis Costello and the Brodsky Quartet collaborated on *The Juliet Letters*. Elvis and the Brods were never going to be a mainstream kind of thing, but Cello covers of Metallica was hard to call anything other than a flagrant foul on the field. Not that you can't like it, even I totally liked it, but you can't just walk around trying to hide your marketing gimmick under \$60 bangs. That's not a slight against Matson Jones at all, that's me picking a fight with the larger industry of magazine hype for marketing cash. The article I'm referencing goes on to explain the much larger influence Matson Jones had on the burgeoning Colorado Indie Rock scene, but the ends don't justify the gaze in my opinion.

The reality is two-fold. You're either going to love or hate cellos as substitutes for rhythm guitar chugs. It can sound corny, or it can sound refreshingly different, but it's not new and it's sadly not a trend that's going to catch on for any extended period of time, no matter how much I wish it would. I love stringed instruments in Rock bands.

Apocalyptica quickly turned into just another metal band with normal guitar and bass and guest vocalists because novelty can only take you so far. On the other hand, most bands don't need 27 albums to get their point across. One-off projects are just as worthy as career bands when they're fantastic.

Matson Jones is pretty fantastic without needing any additional qualifi-(objectifi-)cations. Welp, I've got people to see and places to burn down. Who's on next?

Chapter 9 – The Willowz



Thank goodness. Great news, everybody, I was totally wrong. The lead singer of The Willowz is a guy. Co-founded by their female bass player, but PH balanced for a front man who might as well be a Jack White clone. I was

only a step or two away from deeply regretting leaving Lower crying in the dirt like on the actual cover of Seek Warmer Climes.

Not surprisingly, The Willowz had probably the biggest career of all these bands because Michael Gondry included two of their songs on the soundtrack to *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Also not surprising, the one song that was actually in that movie accompanied Kirsten Dunst dancing in her underwear. Gondry used another of their songs in a different movie, specifically saying he wanted to be the Warhol to their Velvet Underground. Sounds more like the Schroeder to their Pink Floyd if you ask me.

Shadowy Stranger has at least kept their promise, so I'll honestly point out this is getting to be a drag for a feminist like me. I wanted Harris for President, with Biden being a perfectly acceptable 3rd/4th term VP. Lemme run back and

check that aside from The Ettes.... Yep, just as I remembered, no gender distinction in that measly 35% of businesses that survive over a decade (which is still only 10% of all businesses because 90% of brand new businesses fail around the 2-year mark, remember?), but I'll bet the overwhelming majority of that exclusive club are run by dicks. How similar are the ratios of male/female billionaires and the male/female salary gap? I know, I know, correlation does not equal causation, but doesn't it all actually imply that men are much more voracious about systematic exploitation than women? Not exactly a laudable personality trait from where I stand. I wasn't expecting to quote Red Jumpsuit Apparatus, but do you feel like a man when you push her around?

Anywho, standard Hipster Garage Punk ala Jack White meets The Mars Volta style cacophonousness... and... go! Holy hell, there's everything but the kitchen sink happening here, including animal sounds. Apparently they were trying to make this sophomore album, Talk In Circles, their own little "suburban Pet Sounds," but this is just a crazy mess of an audio deluge. Maximalism at its loudest, neighbors 3 blocks away are calling the cops, and I am now dizzy. It's undeniably good though, in a New York Dolls have a parking lot fistfight with The Stooges kind of way. Normal people would call the vocals terrible at best because they don't at all understand the aesthetic. That aesthetic is our old friend Restless Teenagers who don't have their parents' definition of success as a viable option. There is a coherent MC5 comparison hiding in here

somewhere; this is that kind of disheveled decadence, like a trashy prom after all the chaperones have had too much of the punch they themselves spiked to drink. There's also a Rolling Stones influence, no matter how much anyone involved might try to deny it.

In a different context this would be a totally different review, but here they stick out like a sore thumb as the Heath Ledger on this 10 Things I Hate About Shrews spectrum I've inadvertently shaken a spear at. I guess that was all the Larisa Oleynik side of the coin. Time for the Julia Stiles perspective with a revisit of Scarling and then that Grouper album I've been postponing for a better context, like now, before some out of nowhere resolution where nobody dies so we call it a comedy.

Chapter 10 – Scarling (Revisited)



Look, I never lie, I invited Scarling specifically for the refreshing stench of macabre terror delivered in an ironically saccharrine-sweet voice we all need after multiple albums of comparatively chipper suburban girl punk, but

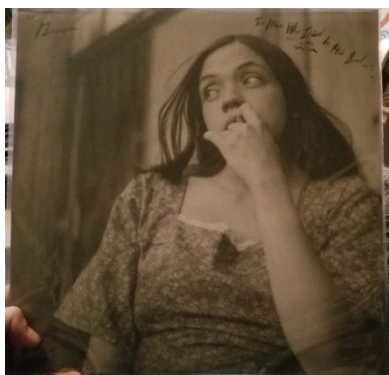
since Jessicka is here, I have questions about Crispin Glover and Baby Dracula.

What is the deal with Crispin Glover? He's a weird dude, but I don't think we're just talking about reverse male gazing at the eccentric characters he famously portrayed. I think we're actually talking about Fake Shemp, and taking a stand against industrial abuse/exploitation for the benefit of everyone. I assume none of you know what Fake Shemp is, so I'll explain in detail. A Fake Shemp is a body double most often used when an actor dies so as to A) avoid the hassle of recasting, and 2) surreptitiously save a lot of money so you can keep more profit for yourself after ingeniously solving such an inconvenient road block. Why did they cast and publicly acknowledge a second actor as Dumbledore instead of Weezering the Fonz into Hogwarts? Crispin Glover. Here's the way it went down. Glover and Zemeckis and all the execs couldn't agree on contract terms for bringing Crispin back for the Back To

The Future sequels, so Zemeckis reused unused footage from the first movie, hired a body double and used prosthetic makeup to make him look like Glover, then credited Glover as “George McFly from Back to the Future” without paying him. Crispin Glover 1) not being dead, and B) remembering all those fruitless meetings he heard himself argue during, called “bullshit” in the form of a likeness-infringement lawsuit he unquestionably won to the tune of \$700,000+ dollars (presumably somewhere close to the salary he was attempting to negotiate in the first place). That wasn’t just a one-off lawsuit, no Fake Shemp became an official SAG stipulation afterward.

Slightly more uncomfortable, Baby Dracula. Whoo boy, this song is a doozy of a double-layered metaphor about man-children. You got your normal manbearpigs equal vampires, but on top of that the unspoken yet completely obvious metaphor of breast feeding a baby boy who’s going to grow up to be yet another manbear-chauvinist-pig no matter what you do. Female Gaze for the win, that one.

Chapter 11 – Grouper

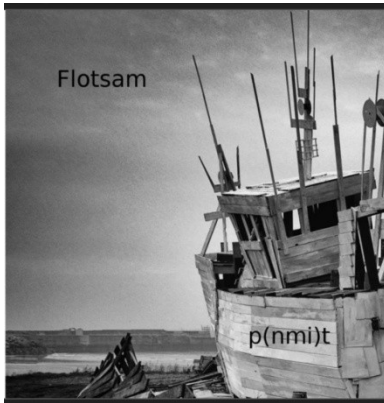


Now I think is the appropriate time for a cool down. Let's hear the sequel to Dragging A Dead Deer Up A Hill, it's Grouper's leftovers from said dead deer session bottled up as The Man Who Died In His Boat. You're not going to

believe this, but after like 9 months of the network adapter just glaring red at me, this old laptop just magically gave me the blue means go light. Compy actually came through on getting the comp-center up and running again. So, quick, while I'm well enough to perform localized internet research without needing multiple forms of portable media, I'll give you the concept in Liz's own cut and pasted words, with a proper citation, even:

"When I was a teenager the wreckage of a sailboat washed up on the shore of [Agate Beach](#). The remains of the vessel weren't removed for several days. I walked down with my father to peer inside the boat cabin. Maps, coffee cups and clothing were strewn around inside. I remember looking only briefly, wilted by the feeling that I was violating some remnant of this man's presence by witnessing the evidence of its failure. Later I read a story about him in the paper. It was impossible to know what had happened"

(Minsker, Evan (December 12, 2012). "New Grouper Album Coming, Plus Reissue of Dragging a Dead Deer Up a Hill". *Pitchfork*. Retrieved March 25, 2016).



I bet that scene looked something like the cover of p(nmi)t's Flotsam. I'm admittedly not thrilled with "charred ambiance" being the official throwaway description of her total musical output, but at least no one is

describing her haircut and/or evaluating her prettiness instead of actually listening to the album. Probably just scared of insulting the Fourth Way cult, but despite my making extreme fun of both them and Scientology, I can't help but notice that I still have both my kidneys.

Interesting tangent, that one, I recently inadvertently walked past a television that was playing a Leah Remini episode about how the Scientologists had a real nasty rivalry with the Nation of Islam, because racism is a competitive sport, I guess? Nation of Islam is extremely anti-semitic, and Louis Farrakhan, previous to his career as a Black Supremacy Anti-Semitic Conspiracy Theorist, was a Calypso singer. Just saying the two religious groups have way more in common than anyone might have believed. Leah Remini isn't no one, by the way. King of Queens is probably what you remember her from, but I actually remember her from Who's The Boss and Saved By the Bell

because I was an adolescent boy once. She grew up in the Church of Scientology, and I think it was somewhere around 2013 when she finally said “this shit is bananas” and left to loudly proclaim to everyone that that shit was indeed, as we already suspected, bananas. I only bring it up because that’s the same freakin’ year *The Man Who Died In His Boat* was published. The amount of coincidence in my random tangents is exactly as unnerving as an unpiloted boat washing up on shore, and I look upon it with pretty much the same expression Liz’s mom has on her face in the photo on this album cover.

Boat is much more haunting than *Deer*, but I don’t get any char on the ambiance. It still smells like damp cedar and pine with an occasional faint underwaft of briny fish. This cabin in the woods hasn’t so much burned down as been consumed by moss and rot. But there’s no sadness here. Melancholy, tiredness, a sense of directionlessness, sure, but not particularly sad. Forgotten, then rediscovered just before it disappears forever, maybe. Unlike *Deer*, these are no longer songs. Maybe I’m just projecting the otherness onto these pieces, but we’re clearly farther along the timeline of fading away. The deer has been dragged up the hill, now we simply sit by the fire and wait for sleep to consume us.

There is a finality to it, but it’s an episodic kind of finality. This was simply a moment, and now that moment is over. The real beauty of *Ambient*, though, is that it can’t mean the same thing for you that it does for me. Our paths might

cross at unexpected moments in some imaginary airplane terminal, but we have to accept the utter aloneness of our own experience.

Chapter 12 – No Sinner



How in the world do we end this thing? We started off on the uncomfortable edge of Bubblegum, tried on a few different styles of Punk-tinged spectacles, got real dark and broody, a Blues Rock album seems fitting. Colleen Rennison

may not fight like a man (because she's a Vancouver woman), but I hear tell she's a pretty good singer/songwriter.

Tons of high-profile women in Blues. Bessie Smith, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, Aretha Franklin, Billie Holiday, Susan Tedeschi, and of course Bonnie Raitt. Bonnie, apart from being one of the only female slide players ever, was also the motherly chaperone of some of the biggest names in Blues. She made sure they didn't get too drunk to play every night. Colleen probably can't claim that particular level of responsibility, but we have to end this show and walk home in some fashion, upright would be preferable. Here's No Sinner's second and final album as our final album, Old Habits Die Hard.

Wowzers, this is phenomenal. Like I've been saying all along, I'm not actually here to give some deep meaningful analysis of men vs women, or even argue semantics about

Blues-based-Rock vs Rock-based Blues (this is definitely the latter), but I do feel the need to point out that his is an album all about authenticity and honesty. Whatever it is you hear in terms listening to a female Blues singer, there is absolutely no doubt that No Sinner are phenomenal. I'm always guilty of not having much to say about fantastic albums, and this is no exception. I have to just shut up and listen, and I highly recommend you check it out. Damn!

Chapter 13

What the hell have we learned here? I dunno, I guess it boils down to a question of intent. There's something so tangibly sinister about framing it this way, Girl Bands at the Bunker. It sure seems like a male gazy thing to do. Is it, though? Is that all I'm doing, just objectifying bands for my own hedonistic pleasure? I guess if Sandra were here we could get my dude-synopsis of her female thoughts on the subject, but I don't think that's what I'm doing at all. We aren't compare/contrast-ing guy bands and girls bands except to note the much larger discrepancies of fame and acceptance in relation to artificially gendered culture. Front men seem free of restriction in terms of expressing themselves, front women always seem to get caged inside that difference, substitution, antagonism, and defiance. That's certainly a lopsided viewpoint.

Trans-subjectivity, universal difference, the ethics of witnessing, these are all an attempt to escape from the boundaries of subjectivity. It's not a competition or a conquest, but a much larger space of connection. Closing off those connections is a very male gazy thing to do, mansplaining discrete meaning like a fact or a totem that has been satisfactorily taxonomized, or even taxidermied. This is great, this sucks, if you like this you might also like this, gate keeping and image/meaning mongering. Those aren't my motivations. Instead, I share them. Rather than bringing them here to sate some unquenchable desire, I bring them here to write about the experience, to share

what they do to my brain as they rattle around like the agitator in a can of spray paint. A bit phallo-centric to say I then go paint the walls with my peculiar cerebral graffiti, though. Perhaps I cannot escape the maleness of my gaze no matter how hard I try. And yet, I'm pretty sure, it's the genderfication itself that I find stupid. Then again, my cis white penis-ego is the one calling genderism (the attribution of unique cultural and psychological implications to gender) stupid. Then yet again, gender is a cultural construction in the first place, existing only because the concept is in some way advantageous for someone. As uncomfortable as it might feel, we might as well ask about the difference inherent in a white Canadian woman fronting a Blues Rock band, and then further ask what that difference says about the inherent normativeness of Grouper or Buck. Is one more authentic than the other? Sure sounds absurd in my brain to try to reverse the two because they are definitely not interchangeably Female, and there is certainly nothing Twee about No Sinner. And with that paradox of my apparently non-overcomeable Male Gaze, I bid you adieu. Not goodbye forever, there's obviously an eternity of albums ahead of us because that's my thing and I'm sticking to it, but an episodic parting until our paths recross like they always do. Go write your own conclusions. My infrastructure's up and running again, though. Will it be enough to get the whole crew back into orbit and produce something interesting? Who knows? Fun times.

Epilogue

S: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Slow your Emma Watson “we need man-Feminists” roll.

B: Sandra, you’re back! That’s great. I think you might have misunderstood my point. I’m not filling out the application for a club card for honorary “Ally” status, here. Ain’t no law that says I can’t criticize the same structure. You came to me with the estrogen rush of a Brian Setzer Christmas album, you didn’t like your own “Golf Course On A Space Ship,” we played footsies to soft Jazz through absolutely no fault of my own, Princess Zanzibar. Mayor of Bottleville isn’t the boss of anyone. Make an album and I’ll publish it no questions asked, same as GREGORY, same as Carl’s dog. You’re an autonomous, thinking person whether I find you attractive or not, and I hold myself to the standard of acting the same regardless.

S: Fair enough, but I think you were trying to guilt trip me into coming back.

B: I assure you, that one I left honestly open ended. You’re here because you wanna be, and we use your art because you hand it to us. Boot to the boys was the punishment for transgressing your consent and I accepted it to even the score because you decided to even the score. I can appreciate Vyvyan for what they wanted to do, but as a product it makes me 7 shades of squeamish. I didn’t climb a Twee ‘cause a bear was chasing me or to secretly peer

into a bedroom like George McFly, I instinctively find it a Stepford Wives level of sus.

S: So what's your actual uneducated guess?

B: About what? About Long Gone John? Was he just a cool dude, or was he ODB eyeballing Kelis? These albums were barely a 10th of what he actually published and his publishography can only honestly be described as ambidextrous. I just liked the irony of framing it the way I did.

S: I suppose that is a pretty consistent Bottlean View of the subject.

B: Why do you think I titled it that way?

S: Titled what?

B: The short book you're epilogue-ing. It's called The Bottlean Gaze.

S: You utter bastard.

B: Tee hee, you said "udder."

S: Does this stupid thing need cover art?

B: Only if you're offering.

S: I'll think about it.

B: Ok. It'll take me a while to format it and insert photos of the cover art myself, what with Skip still fishing inaction.

Not gonna pay to play this time, especially for a novelette, but I probably will impose upon the monetary kindness of strangers for my expertise in pressing the export to PDF button.

S: Good luck with that, Blanche. I'll be in my office, please don't hesitate to not need me for anything.

B: Yes ma'am. Wouldn't dream of it.

Welp, like I said, fun times. If it's all the same, though, I like to keep the holidays in their respective month containers so they don't get all tangled up together. I have a hard enough time with chronological time as it is. You can inflate those ghosts and pumpkins and vampires if you wanna, but go ahead and wake me up when September ends. Halloween's the one day that doesn't feel like a nightmare around here.

P.S. I don't know how you came across this little pamphlet of mine, but if you enjoyed it please consider sending a couple "good job, Bottle" dollars to paypal.me/pnmit. We appreciate the utilities around here, but they aren't free. Cheers.

- Bottle 9/18/22