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May 2020

Digital Edition!

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12

Girl Blue

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The Weird Al Podcast

We're all fans of something, but Dave Rossi and Ethan Ullman have taken their love of Weird Al to the air.

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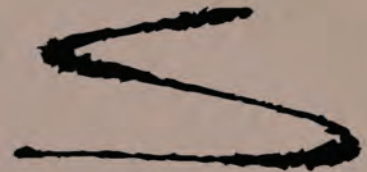
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Living in A World For You

Music is a grand exploration of the psyche, and with "A World For You," musician and composer Brandon James embarks.



Photo provided.

■ "A World For You" invites the listener to find their own story.

By Liam Sweeny

Music is a language of accents, churned out on ivories or through brass or through an electric current coasting through coils of copper, waiting for the tip of a pick.

When it comes to Brandon James, he's set out to be multi-lingual. We sit down with him to speak in tongues.

RRX: You're a multi-instrumentalist. I'm also a multi-instrumentalist, and I became one because I couldn't find other players that could jam at 4 am weeknights. I ended up with being able to flesh out my ideas fully. What are the dynamics involved in playing more than one instrument together in recording. What's good and what's bad about it?

BJ: I love all of the different

processes of writing and creating music. Instruments are tools that allow you to express yourself in different ways and I've always had fun experimenting with them. Playing bass is a totally different feel from playing guitar and getting behind a drum kit will put you in an entirely different place. You can create something, you normally wouldn't

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otherwise, just by switching up instruments and getting into another space. They all have different voices but they all speak the same language, and if you're in a position to layer them all together, you can come up with some stuff that is not only fun to play but fun to listen to.

RRX: Your music is mellow, but there's an edge in the guitar, and I like the sound of it against the calmer tone of what you're doing. It's a good contrast, like the mixing of textures you might see in modern art. Do you think songs need contrasting elements to keep from being processed as background?

BJ: I appreciate that. Again, I think it's all about expression. I draw inspiration from many

different artists and genres, and I try to channel that influence into my music. I do think a song should make you feel something, it should take you somewhere, and make you feel a certain way. But there are no rules when it comes to creating music and there is no right or wrong way to write a song. I've always just made music that I thought sounded good to me.

RRX: People who play more than one instrument either switch off in multiple bands, or they know their way around a studio. I suspect that you're both. What do you feel is the biggest thing that gets musicians through the process of recording compositions?

BJ: I'm sure it's different for everybody. But I think it's

important to try new things. You don't want the process to get boring. Experiment with new tones, different instruments. If you normally write alone, try co-writing with other people. Learn a new chord and try to find a progression or a riff around it. Come up with a story and build upon it. There are many different techniques you can use to prevent

a recording session from going stale. Have fun with it!

RRX: In my travels, I see varying degrees of self-promotion when it comes to bands. Some good, some not so. When it comes to promoting yourself and your sound, do you strategize at all? Is it important, do you think, to

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have a promotional strategy, or should the music do the drawing?

BJ: I guess it depends on what you're trying to do and get out of it. I've always been a firm believer that the music will do the talking. But they call it the "Music Business" for a reason, and with all businesses, there is a strategy to it. The times have changed, for better or for worse. In this digital age, independent artists now have complete control over their work and the potential to reach a vast audience. But with that, they are also tasked with managing every aspect of their career, from not only writing the songs but to marketing them, branding an image, so on and so forth. It can be extremely discouraging for any artist but it's important to not

lose focus on why you make music and what got you into it.

RRX: Music tells a story. Maybe it has something to do with how it can soundtrack your memories; maybe it soundtracks your imagination too. If I listened to all of your songs as chapters in a book, what would the book be about? Would there be any plot twists?

BJ: Absolutely. That's how I came up with "A World For You". I want people to hear my music and be transported to another place in space and time. I want the music to create a world in their mind where they can escape to. It's all about listener interpretation. I want the listeners to come up with their own stories and draw their own conclusions.

RRX: Quarantine is hitting

bands differently, and live music was one of the first things to go. Everybody, from individuals to small businesses to corporations and whole industries, have had basic assumptions wiped out. With livestream, do you think it was the one of the first things to evolve?

BJ: I've seen a lot of people trying to capitalize off of livestreams during this whole ordeal. It is what it is. When music is your livelihood it's just another tool to reach your fanbase. And those who are just doing it for fun to stay sane during "social distancing", that's great too. I'm personally not a fan of the platform and, honestly, I think it's a little trite. But people will do what they need to do. It's all good!

■ Brandon James performing at the Low Beat

Photo provided.



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Trying to Wrap My Head Around It

Under COVID-19 house arrest can be confining, but our ace reporter opens up.

By Rob Smittix

It all seems so surreal. As I sit here writing, ironically or intentionally I am sipping on a Corona. I never admitted to being an alcoholic but when every day is Saturday, you start to wonder. Being a stay-at-home musician under Covid's house arrest, I have been playing my acoustic and writing some dope ass lyrics. I spend my Saturdays which are my everydays being a kitchen bitch, a conspiracy theorist and a teacher for my son; except I don't understand sixth grade math very well.

Everyday it's Fear and Loathing from my living room, it's Greenday's "Longview" and Bill Murray's "Ground Hog Day" in one, except I no longer have to set my alarm. I have been "quarantined" since St. Paddy's Day. Don't get me wrong I've been out there in the wild, it's really strange. Grocery shopping looks like one of those apocalyptic movies where you might get killed for some toilet paper and hand sanitizer.

We all miss our family and friends. My eldest son Alex is in lock-down at Ft. Gordon.



Photo provided.

■ It's tough when the storyteller can't get out of the story.

Georgia. We talk every day and we've been writing songs together. My mom is still kicking cancer's ass and I make sure to video-chat with her often. Mom started an online prayer group and I'm very proud of her. I know many of you are not religious and neither am I but I will say that there is more to this life and there is power in prayer.

I unfortunately watch the news and it's getting to me. I need to watch comedies and stand-up comedians as often as I can to escape the world for a while. I've

seen my friends on social media losing loved-ones and friends that have family fighting for their lives. I worry for the rest of us. My nephew was exposed by his Uber driver and under a special quarantine. It's just starting to hit a little closer to home now.

We are coming together by being apart and by being apart now, we can be together later. My friend and band-mate James stopped by and had a socially distant beer at my dining room table. James expressed how thrilled he was to see a friend, then he

had an eerie thought. He said "Was it worth it?" Referring to his visitation and if either one of us got the other sick. That's deep and scary. It was nice to see James but the "paranoia strikes deep" to quote Buffalo Springfield.

I am not one to usually suffer from anxiety but this situation has taken over my mind. The part that is tough for me is that I am intrigued by conspiracy theories. Some people are saying that Covid 19 is caused by 5G, I'm no Dr. Fauci but I'm sure that's not

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how a virus works. All I know is that I need to keep on writing music and lyrics to keep me sane.

Some people see this as a free vacation with some government spending money but I'd feel so much better if we were back to some kind of normalcy. That's an odd statement coming from me because I hate routine. Kids are driving me bananas and what if the wife has to stay home too? Oh, my Lord. Is there anything I can volunteer for to get me out of the house? I can hand out masks to folks on the street corners. I'm just kidding for the most part, I love them with all of my being. I guess I'm lucky I am not stuck in the house alone. I realize many of you are lonely so I should count my blessings.

Well, I hope you are all hanging in there. For all of you artists and musicians, I know it's killing you not to be able to jam with your band in person and for any of you who have mastered the ability to successfully jam online with multiple players, I'd love to hear your feedback and if you have any recommendations. My bassist Will is out in Montana and because of this current state of world affairs he had to cancel his trip to Albany in the late Spring. Another band-mate of mine just underwent a major transplant procedure, we've been getting daily updates from his family and he is doing well. The band has not been able to speak with him directly yet but I had to share this because this is what's going on. I long for the day when we are back in the studio

recording and playing gigs again.

So many shows had to be cancelled. Like all of them. It's all so very uncertain at this point in time. It's too early to know anything. Many artists are doing live stream concerts from their homes and to show your support, donations are welcome. It's okay if you can't afford to give money, just be sure to share these streams when you see them go live. This gesture is appreciated more than you know.

So I apologize that this article may not be my usual award winning journalism. No celebrity interviews, no backstage passes. Nope, just me needing to get all of that off of my chest. When Art Fredette announced on social media that he wouldn't make fun of anyone famous who died from the coronavirus, it just got real for me. Don't be afraid to tell people you love them. If your mother is alive, you need to call her. During this time we are forced to really be with ourselves, let's come out of this better people.

I told the editor I wanted to write something that touched the hearts and souls of our readers. I am not sure I accomplished that goal but just know I gave it my all. As I watched all of the teachers parade their vehicles through town beeping their horns and letting the students know that they are still here for them, I thought to myself; look for the positive in all of this. Walk the neighborhood and find #518RainbowHunt artwork, wave to people as they walk by. Stay informed but turn off the TV as often as you can.

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TALES OF TRUE AUDIO NECROMANCY

A Passion for a groundbreaking band inspires four women to resurrect the sound of Black Sabbath.

By Dan Rosen/Neoptolemus

Black Sabbath is no more. Singer Ozzy Osbourne's recent disclosure that he has Parkinson's Disease, and the exclusion of drummer Bill Ward from the "13" CD and tour virtually guarantees that the original Sab Four will not reunite to perform again. New fans will never get to experience the majesty that was this heavy metal juggernaut. Older fans who got to see them in their heyday glory will have only fond memories of those concerts.

But wait! What if you could take a time machine back to the 1970s, and witness – or relive, depending on your age – Black Sabbath live and onstage, in super-virtual reality? You can.

BLACK SABBITCH is a Los Angeles-based band that plays 1970s era Black Sabbath songs. Don't call them a "tribute band"; they literally attempt to reproduce the sound, atmosphere, and excitement of Black Sabbath's early live shows. Black Sabbitch is composed of four women: Angie Scarpa on drums; Melanie Makaiwi on bass; Emily Burton



Photo provided.

■ Black Sabbitch brings 70's era Sabbath back note-per-note.

on guitar; and Alice Austin on vocals. Founded by Scarpa, who soon recruited her former band mate Makaiwi (both of Art of Safecracking), the band has been touring heavily for over seven years now. In 2018 they added Emily Burton (founding guitarist of Fireball Ministry) and Alice Austin (formerly of Burlington, Vermont bands Queen Tangerine

and Zola Turn; late of The Lavas) and Black Sabbitch has been "metaling" hard ever since. The group has played several notable gigs, including CalJam, alongside the Foo Fighters and Iggy Pop. They are currently finishing up a nationwide tour, including numerous gigs in the Northeast US. They will be returning circa June 2020 to play at The Chance

in Poughkeepsie, among other venues.

We wanted to know a little more about the band, and founder Angie Scarpa agreed to answer a few questions:

RRX: How was the recent tour? Was it fun?

AS: Whenever anyone asks me about touring, I like to paraphrase that classic quote from

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Capt. Willard in *Apocalypse Now*: “When I’m on tour, I always dream about being home ... and when I’m home, all I can think about is getting back into the jungle.” lol! I love touring because I love playing shows, and the accompanying incredible high you get from performing music for people – especially this music, with the intense emotion it carries. It’s really some of the most fun you can possibly imagine! It’s also a lot of work: endless driving, not a lot of sleep, alternating cold and hot, lots of hotel rooms, green rooms, waiting around, etc., etc. When the tour started, I had a crappy cold, but was able to kick that early on.

RRX: How was the tour received?

AS: Really well! As a musician, you’re always a little on edge when you play a new town, someplace the band hasn’t played before. We generally have people fully with us by the time the first song ends. The responses have been great. We tend to hang around at the merch booth after all the shows and have met so many great people. People who genuinely love this band and

are so happy we made it to their town. I love sharing this music – and my love for it – with so many people.

RRX: Your versions of Sabbath’s songs seem to be spot-on, note-for-note. Is it difficult achieving that level of perfection?

AS: Absolutely! From a purely technical standpoint, this music is not easy to play. Tony, Geezer and Bill were (and still are) extremely talented musicians who all have very singular sounds, so just the technical mastery of the songs is a challenge. But the thing most people overlook when it comes to Sabbath is the swing rhythm. They were unlike any other band in that they had a post hippy, proto-punk vibe that was born of jazz roots. Bill and Tony both came from jazz backgrounds, and that swing informs their music in a big way. For me as a drummer, navigating their tempo shifts and swing is always my goal. We don’t really try to imitate the sound of their records as much as we try to bring the experience of an early 70’s Sabbath live show and all that entailed. Their interplay in those live shows was key.



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Your Choices, My Sanity

By Art Fredette

So, we have all been on lockdown now for six weeks and like everybody else, I have been deeply immersed in social media. I realize it is a time suck and a complete sh*t show but out of this morass one thing has made the downtime enjoyable. Post 10 albums in 10 days.

This challenge has been floating around for a couple of years and I must admit until recently I have pretty much ignored it. But not now. With more time on my hands I have been watching these posts closely. My conclusion? You people have some great taste! (except for the Bon Jovi fans)

The most striking thing I have noticed is just how varied the choices are. Not only from person to person but within each individual's top ten. We tend to pigeon hole people by what we believe they like, either because of personal bias, because of dress, hair or even the band in which they play. Damn, we could not be more wrong, myself included. Some of my most conservative friends have posted some of the most out-there stuff. People who I have known as metal heads and punks have posted albums by jazz giants and even showtunes. Enlightening.

This, in my opinion, is social media being just that social. Not a political soap box, not a place to

bash your neighbors, just being social for the sake of it. I must say this has almost made this lockdown enjoyable. My eyes have been opened and beyond that, my ears have been opened. I have listened to artists I never would have approached in the past and revisited artists I have forgotten about. SO MUCH FUN! I haven't liked everything I have heard but I have enjoyed every minute of the experience.

So, basically, I am saying

thank you to everyone I know who has participated in this challenge. You have made this "trying" time a lot more fun and you have given me a bit of a music

education. Keep posting and I will keep listening.



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INCANTATIONS IN MELODY AND TONE

There is magic in song, and performer Girl Blue leaves us spellbound.

By Liam Sweeny

Some people compare music to a religion. We all have our practices, and our revered figures, and maybe it's the fact that we create that sanctifies our pursuit, or the comfort it gives us in listening.

Girl Blue has her own view of music, of course, but whether she's creating it or sitting back and listening, it is a transformative experience.

We sit down with Giel Blue and discuss transcendental tube amps.

RRX: You're a room stopper when you hop a stage. And I know it's probably heartache not being able to do it right now. So there's pent up energy, I'm sure. How do you channel it? Do you think the Girl Blue that comes out of quarantine will have a whole new level of performance?

GB: I've honestly never been more motivated. I am trying to take full advantage of this gift of time I've been given, and I am working every single day to come out of this quarantine on a whole other level as a player, singer, performer, and recording artist.

RRX: You've been amazingly successful on Spotify, and after hearing you, I have just a little more faith in Spotify's algorithms. I'll ask you something I've never asked anyone else; do you chase your Spotify rankings? I mean, no shame in it, I check my Amazon book rankings once in a while, morbid curiosity? Is checking it irresistible?

GB: Haha, actually no. I'm not too concerned with that! I'm more concerned with

Girl Blue is using the quarantine to up her groove.

Photo provided.

making things, and with people's real engagement with it.

RRX: We've all experienced it – that day we heard that first song by the band we'll grow to love, and it was all because of that moment where they blew our minds with joy. How much is music a “chasing” of that first musical joy, and how much is creating someone else's first musical joy?

GB: If I understand the question correctly, I think for me my relationship with music is more of a daily ritual at this point. Something I continue to return to. There's magic in that, but it's a totally different kind of magic

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from when it was newer and I was younger. I hope to create that kind of magic for other people, but for the most part I'm just chasing musical freedom and mastery for my own sake -- meaning the catharsis of being able to truly freely express yourself, and the grounding nature of the discipline it provides.

RRX: As is said, we stand on the shoulders of giants. Ours is a guild whose teachers usually never met their students. This is especially true today. Do you think it's ever possible to transcend

your influences? Or are innovators just really good at hiding their influences in their mix?

GB: Hmm, I think some influences can be transcended, but it depends who, and what aspects of the influence you're looking at. My favorite music sounds like a whole bunch of influences, not just one. In this way, you can hear that someone is a genuine music fan, is passionate about the music they've loved, and not just trying to emulate one thing.

RRX: We all remember that first jam that told us we were going to be musicians. Mine wasn't

complete until the cops showed up. Your experience may differ. Describe that first jam you had. Did you follow it into a band with those people?

GB: Well, I played alone a lot from the time I was young. Still do. I was in a trio in high school, doing a bunch of harmonies and all that, which was affirming. But I knew I wanted to make music for a living from the time I was really, really young.

RRX: Coronavirus is the event of our times, truly. We could compare it to any major historical event. And art and

music is our attempt to record the collective unconscious. What do you think we're going to see from art and music as "period" stuff ten years from now?

GB: Who can say? No question that it definitely will have a huge effect, though. It already has for me. This moment in time will alter everything that comes after.

Girl Blue posts a new song every month for her Song Club. You can find it here: <https://www.patreon.com/girlbluemusic>.

Be sure to visit her website: www.girlbluemusic.com as well.

■ Girl Blue has a Song Club on Patreon.

Photo by Shannon Straney



Distance Makes the Art Grow Fonder



THE WELCOMING WORLD OF WEIRD AL



Photo provided

Weird Al Yankovic with Dave Rossi (l) and Ethan Ullman (r).

a non-Al-superfan for them to know about my collection, odds are they assume that I have all the CDs and a handful of records. When they start finding out I have nearly 100 different posters and variations from the 67-show Strings Attached Tour 2019 or the guitar effects box used for the recording of Smells Like Nirvana... they know I'm serious - and to keep their distance. Thankfully, I've never actually had a bad reaction to hearing about my collection. As odd as a Weird Al collection may be, it's still a lot less strange than collecting body parts or toenails or something.

RRX: You've had members of Weird Al's band on. And it seems like, more than other bands, per se, they might get overshadowed by the comedy aspect of what Weird Al does. I mean, it's a great tribute to a band that they are good enough to let the focus go somewhere other than them. But what can you tell us about them?

Dave: Al's band members are the most talented and versatile musicians I know - and have been with him since the beginning, over 35 years together. Not many other bands can say that. Some musicians take a lifetime to master one style of music or instrument, but the members of Al's band need to master whatever is put in front of them - whether it be zydeco, rock, pop, or polka. A lot of people unfamiliar with

Dave Rossi and Ethan Ullman have curated vast collections in tribute to a long-standing and beloved cultural icon. they bring you "Dave & Ethan's 2000" Weird Al Podcast"

By Liam Sweeny

RRX: Now you and Dave have sizeable collections of Weird Al "paraphernalia," so-to-say. Dave even has tattoos of Al and his band members, which, admittedly, is pretty hardcore. So obviously people know about these collections. Do you think people's

reaction to them is different than if you had a massive Rolling Stones collection?

Dave: Not really. Once in a while someone might be surprised, but for the most part, people I talk to get it. Almost everyone collects something, at some level. It might be Breyer horses, or it might be Rolling Stones stuff, so they can relate on some level. People tend to be more surprised at the magnitude

of my collection. When I say I collect Weird Al memorabilia, I imagine people are thinking, oh, he's got maybe all of his albums, a few t-shirts, and some posters up on his wall. I have somewhere around 6,000 pieces in my collection from all over the world, so they can't fathom the size.

Ethan: Even though my collection doesn't quite span that of Dave's - I think if I progress far enough in a friendship with

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Al might think that he just sings over someone else's music. That's not true, his band painstakingly recreates the music for every parody that Al does. It's a credit to the guys in the band that they can make it sound identical to the original.

Ethan: And I would argue, in many cases, better than the original - and certainly, a greater lifespan than the original! I remember reading online within the past year, someone making the comparison that Al is doing sold out tours across America where everyone in the audience is singing along to "I Lost On Jeopardy" - but when was the last time you've heard someone mention The Greg Kihn Band, let alone their song "Jeopardy"?

RRX: So obviously, I have to ask you what inspired you to do a podcast. Was it purely an expression of fan devotion, or was there an unmet need in the fandom? Also, did you have a way to get a built-in audience, or were you arm-twisting friends and relatives to tune in?

Dave: I can easily talk about Al with other Weird Al fans for hours at a time, and I wanted an outlet to share my love of Al with other Weird Al fans as passionate as I am. I've been collecting Weird Al memorabilia for many years, and have attended close to 200 of his concerts since the early '90s. I have a lot of interesting and unique stories I want to share with the world. From my involvement in the Al fan community, I've built up many great relationships with other hardcore

fans, and that is our target audience. I'm extremely lucky and blessed that I found another fan on my same level of fandom, in Ethan, to share all this with.

Ethan: What's really great about doing the podcast with Dave is not just that we are friends with a lot in common and a great rapport, he adds a crapload of legitimacy to the podcast. If anyone could be considered a celebrity in the Weird Al superfan community, it's Dave! He's been a prevalent member since the early World of Weird Al Yankovic forum days and especially with his tattoos of Al and the band members, his website with his collection and concert reviews, and the Weird Al Hollywood Star

Fund that he started in 2003. I remember meeting him at a concert when I was 16 and nervously asking for a photo with him. Even to this day, that's a common occurrence for Dave at Al events - only difference is now I'm the one holding the camera!

On the audience part of the question, I'm happy to report we've never traded favors to get anyone to tune in. For five or six months before we launched the podcast on May 8, 2019, Dave and I spent hours upon hours mapping out the podcast and what we wanted to do with it. We felt there wasn't anything out there that was presented from the level of a super fan or super collector of Weird Al that we were.

■ Dave and Ethan testing a new fuel delivery system.

Photo provided



We wanted to make sure the podcast was high quality - both the actual audio, and our guests and conversations. We're sensitive to not make the episodes too long, and we're sensitive to making sure the content we present is equivalently as family friendly as Al's music is. We know firsthand that Al's fans span all age groups, so we certainly didn't want to alienate any of them. One of our regular listeners was telling us he and his young son make a point of sitting down and listening to our show together every week. Our audience has been strong from week one and has been growing ever since. We also knew going in that a niche podcast aimed at hardcore Weird Al fans wouldn't necessarily have the widespread appeal of many top podcasts.

I think another thing that has really helped to grow our listenership is the quality of our guests. One week, we'll be talking to Mr. Lawrence - known for his role of Plankton on *SpongeBob Squarepants* - about how he designed the cover art on one of Al's albums - and the next, we'll be talking to the band Portugal. The Man about how they listen to Al on all of their road trips - and the following week we're talking to Al's personal hair stylist. We're able to share, present and collect some incredible stories and insights from people that either know, have worked with, or have been inspired by Al, like never before.

RRX: Weird Al - is he truly weird? I mean, to the normies out there, a guy who makes a career

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off of spoofing popular songs might be considered weird, but isn't he just the first musician to bring into the mainstream what we were doing in our cars since we had cars with radios?

Ethan: Al is most certainly weird for NOT following the norms of other celebrities or musicians. We live in a world where it's not uncommon to read about celebrities abusing women, taking drugs, making racist remarks, getting arrested, punching a TMZ photographer. He's never had a scandal or negative press.

Al is also weird in that his career has outlived that of many of the musicians he's parodied in the last 40 years. He's weird in the sense that he's received 16 Grammy Award nominations and five Grammy Awards, is the best-selling comedy recording artist of all time with five platinum albums, a double platinum album and two more gold albums in the US alone, was the first and only comedy musician in history to debut at #1 on the Billboard Charts - yet he's not recognized in the Rock 'n Roll Hall of fame, and it took 15 years of fans petitioning and raising \$40,000 to finally get him a Hollywood Star. And all that aside - on a personal level - Al is a hard worker, a family man with a wonderful wife and daughter and dog, Sandy. He has always gone above and beyond spending time and signing autographs and taking pictures with fans. There really is no better role model in Hollywood for someone to look up to, in my book!

Dave: If you've only seen Al

on YouTube in one of his hilarious music videos, or dancing on stage dressed as a giant peacock, or rapping lyrics about mowing his front lawn while riding a Segway, then yeah, he's weird. Off the clock though, so to speak, he's pretty normal. He's rightfully got a reputation for being one of the nicest guys in Hollywood. And he surrounds himself with good people as well. He's a role model to not only kids, but people of all ages everywhere. We need more Weird Als in the world. He's also incredibly generous to his fans. I've personally waited hours in line after several of his concerts to see him, and when it came to be my turn, he looked me in the eye, listened intently, patiently answered all of my questions, and treated me like I was the only person there and the only person that mattered -- as, and I should add, that he did for everybody before me, and everybody in line after me as well. When it came time to schedule his ceremony to finally get his Star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Al's manager made it clear to me that Al wouldn't commit to anything unless it was what the fans wanted. Over 1,500 people attended Al's Star ceremony. The people in Hollywood told me that most celebrities have between 80-100 people show up. If that doesn't say something about his character, nothing will.

RRX: The fandom. Obviously, you and Ethan are in it for the fandom. And when you hear "Weird Al fandom," you have to wonder whether he has a comedy

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Observations and Ramblings from a Cranky Old Guy

By Jeff Spaulding

Welcome back, I hope you, your family and your friends are doing well, and more importantly, are safe.

So, where do we start?

At this point, mostly from where we left off in the last issue.

I don't know about you, but I am SO tired, so, mentally tired.

COVID-19, Coronavirus, the Chinese Virus, whatever you want to call it (and I really don't care which one), it's still a royal pain in the ass!

I have lived through my 64 years of "borrowed time" on this earth, and I have seen some remarkable, fascinating and tragic things, but nothing like this.

And as of this writing, (April 17th), while there is hope, "normal" is still a long time coming.

(At least through May 15th, according to what Gov. Cuomo told us yesterday.

Speaking of the Governor, I promised at the start no politics in these articles, no ragging on Cuomo, Trump or anyone else with that kind of authority.

That said, these writings are meant to be at times amusing, but they are also meant to be relatable.

The sad truth is, this virus is something we all can relate to.

Are you working?

Are you "essential"?

If not, are you furloughed,

fired, can't find a job?

As you may know, I am in the broadcasting industry, and being a News Guy, that is more "essential" than ever before, it's our job to let listeners know what is going on locally, statewide, regionally (in some of our cases), nationally and worldwide.

Personally, it's tough enough to keep up with everything in the Capital Region, but in my case, I am responsible, for informing listeners of developments in, among other states,

Massachusetts

New Hampshire

Connecticut

Rhode Island

New Jersey

(As of this writing, the fine folks in Vermont and Maine are on their own.)

Imagine the mental and emotional strain I and my co-workers have gone through from trying to absorb all that grief, all that pain, all that suffering, all that death, numerous times a day, and then try to relay that to a listening audience without not wanting to make everyone (and yourself) jump off the top of Trump Tower.

Mention of that specific building was not meant to be snarky or sarcastic, it's just that I needed a big and well-known point of reference.

We've been doing that daily for about two months now (two months, three months, four days, I have honestly lost track of time.)

And while I am old enough to remember Vietnam, I was too

young to remember seeing death and destruction nightly with Uncle Walter.

Perhaps this is what it felt like.

There is true pain in my heart, for those without money trying to live.

For those with no job trying to survive.

For those who got it, or have it.

For those who passed because of it.

For kids who don't understand.

For old people who don't understand.

For the rest of us who don't understand.

We're prisoners without a prison.

We're kidnap victims without a kidnapper.

We're slaves without a slave master.

I promised this paper from the start, no politics, no inappropriateness, no nasty words.

Yet hourly, I find myself saying WTF quite a lot.

And it's more than just the letters when I say it.

But here's the thing.

Can you feel the hints of the spirit of people, the goodness of people, the kindness of people?

It's so damn refreshing.

Tragedy, heartache, death, we all feel it, we all experience it.

But this time, we are ALL living through it.

What's those song titles of my youth?

Put a Little Love in Your Heart
 United We Stand, Divided We Fall

Reach Out and Touch Somebody's Hand

The emotion in OUR heart is going into OTHER hearts.

My friend and/or neighbor is hurting inside, badly, just like I am, I want to help HIM as I hope he would help ME.

I don't know about you, but I can feel, ironically, an improved relationship with my loved ones while confined.

This is like 9/11, but once it's done, we just can't as before, put the flags and banners away six month later.

We will get through this.

No one knows when or how, but we will.

If you are hurting, people will be there to help.

Just like those same people know you will be there to help if they are hurting.

Hope that wasn't too heavy for you.

And don't worry, once this is over, whenever it is, I promise you, I will still be an asshole.

Thanks for listening.

Be hearing you...hopefully!



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The E-Block: Just Telling a Story



■ (L-R: Luke Pascarella, James Soren, Joshua Reedy (interviewer))

Photo provided

Improv is the buzzword of the music world, but at a show for The E-Block, improv starts before the instruments are unpacked.

By Joshua Reedy

Amidst a nationwide pandemic, it can be hard for musicians and artists to stay positive. Local scenes have made resounding statements to attest for the survival of struggling artists, whether it be through digital concerts, home recordings or Zoom band meetings. Two members of The E-Block, a local band that brings an exciting mix of Soul, Jazz and R&B, sat down over a Zoom chat to speak about their band, and how they are remaining focused and positive in spite of the pandemic. The E-Block is composed of Anthony Campoli (guitar),

Luke Pascarella (guitar, vocals, multi-instrumentalist), Dom Toma (Drums) and James Soren.

RRX: First of all, how are you guys doing? Are you hanging in there?

LP: We are hanging in there.

JS: I'm doing pretty solid. I was watching a lot of TV but I stopped doing that because I felt like a bum-ass, so now I play a lot of Minecraft which makes me feel way more productive than I am.

RRX: So we'll get the obvious question out there first: How has this virus affected your band and the music scene as you see it?

LP: I actually kind of see it as positive and negative for us.

Positive because it's unlimited time to work on music, but it also sucks because we are more of a live band mostly - we're so used to playing with each other. This is probably our longest stretch in over three years without playing in front of people.

JS: I agree. I think a lot of the time we'll use live performances to organize our practices, and so the fact that we can't just practice in real time is kinda tough. But we have a lot of these ideas sort of already cooked, or at least half baked. The reality is we have all the time in the world to sort of cook them through.

RRX: I also want to talk

about what it's like having a larger variety of instruments (sax, among others) and people, and how you manage input from different places.

LP: It sort of feels like we don't (have a lot of people) because we're constantly switching out bass players. Every time we have a gig where we need a full band, it's like, we just go down the list of all the bass players we know and try to find which one can come and which one can practice. We usually don't get to practice, which can be more fun as it adds an element of surprise if we don't know who we're playing with.

JS: Yeah, I think it's all very organic. We didn't start out thinking we'd have the pieces that we have, I mean, the band didn't even start out with me (laughs) so I've sort of seen how it is to enter the conversation and start to influence things where I can. Personally for me, it's gotten to the point where - you know, the first time I got to play on our first EP, I was walking into songs where I didn't really have a part in making and now it's super cool to be on the other side where I'm even writing lyrics now. I've gotten to the core of the songwriting process.

LP: We're trying to get some flute too, trying to get James on the flute.

JS: I am working on it! I have Mom's old flute.

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LP: But yeah, it's fun to have a big group, it's fun to have a team. Right now our core group is me, James, Dom: our drummer; those are the main people who if we have a gig we know will be there. But a lot of the time over the last year, just working and gigging, playing acoustic shows with Dom has been our main source of gigs - it just works better for live shows and bar stuff. Or even private parties, people don't always want a full band.

RRX: Is it fair to say that you guys use a lot of improv when playing live as opposed to what might happen in a practice?

LP: Absolutely. Yeah, I don't know if we ever play the song the same way twice live. We practice at our gigs pretty much. That's

where we work stuff out, because a lot of the time nobody's really there to watch at like, bars, so we see that as a really good time to practice. It's fun to practice our improv jams at shows too. I mean, we have these base ideas of what we're playing. As the sax player I don't carry a ton of weight, I mean, I'm playing lead and I'm playing bass parts, and I'm playing rhythm parts and I'm trying to lock in with the drums or trying to do harmonies - all just depending on what part we're at in the song, or who we're playing with, or what kind of people we're playing for.

RRX: Definitely. And it's definitely different talking to you guys because most of the other bands I've interviewed have been alternative rock, would you

guys consider it fair to say you're a blend of jazz and R&B, or how would you best classify your own sound?

JS: We argue about that all the time (laughs).

LP: I like to say soul, I don't know.

RRX: I can definitely hear elements of soul in your stuff.

JS: Soul is good, but definitely all those other genres you mentioned as well.

RRX: So James, I know you are at least a part of the jazz band at UAlbany, is that part of how you all met, or what's the story behind that?

JS: Yeah, I met Dom, our drummer, through the jazz band. So, I was a freshman in the jazz band at UAlbany in 2017 in the fall and he was a senior, it was

his last semester; so we just kind of met in that window of opportunity in jazz. He (Dom) invited me to meet Luke and the rest of the guys and that was the start of that.

RRX: So what's the start of the band?

LP: Oh yeah, I've known Dom since I was in kindergarten, he was good friends with my older brothers. Dom and I also lived within a mile of each other our whole lives. So yeah, Dom comes to me and says, 'There's this nasty sax player in jazz band, let's invite him to play with us.' Dom and I had been playing together acoustic for a while and we just wanted another piece. We had a weekly residence there at Blue 82 that would just go from 10 p.m.

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to 1 a.m. so it was kind of a weird gig. So we just had James come to one of those, and we were just calling songs and he had to jump right in and he killed it. We knew it was the missing piece.

RRX: So you guys have one EP of original material, and I understand you're working on a second EP right now too?

JS: Yeah, we've got a single we're gonna put out within the next week, and at least one EP coming out in the summer.

RRX: You guys definitely have a very versatile sound, and you could easily fit into many shows. What was the weirdest show you've ever played in Albany?

JS: I think the amount of times that we've had to stop playing because somebody got knocked out - like, the fact that that has happened more than one time...

RRX: (laughs) Now, knocked out from drinking, fighting or what?

JS: All.

LP: We saw one person just get lifted up, and just get slammed down on the ground. We've seen this one lady grab another woman by her hair and just pull her down some stairs.

JS: And we're not gonna name any of these places either. But yeah, it's about being your own bouncer. When you do these gigs, it's not just about setting up your own stuff, playing your own music you are also completely your own security. I don't know why people want the microphone so badly when they're drunk, and I've picked up so many warning

signs now. I know now that when somebody is trying to show you a picture of their kid - huge warning sign that they are about to run for the mic, I don't know why! I always say you have to bring your own mic, that's my policy. That's not all the time though, sometimes people come up and it's great, and it's fun or they'll make a request.

RRX: Yeah, I've noticed that you guys pull out really fun covers that the crowds always enjoy, so I was wondering how you choose what to cover. And James, I've spoken with you about keeping covers fresh or even doing a cover of a cover before.

JS: Yeah, I think a part of it is that some of my favorite artists are sort of updating great music from the past or putting their own twist on it that catches my attention; and that is just such a great vehicle for all of this history that I otherwise may not have known about. So sometimes we are doing a cover of a cover of a cover (laughs). Like, D'Angelo is a huge inspiration.

LP: Yeah, we just love to trace it all back. We love D'Angelo because we love Prince and Stevie Wonder and we love Parliament and Funkadelic and James Brown. So all of that music stands through all of those newer artists, and we even do some Drake covers that have been influenced by the 90's neo-soul and R&B. It's fun to show our roots and our influences.

RRX: So how do you guys approach songwriting on your own?

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Dave and Ethan (Cntd.)

Continued from Page 18.

fandom, or a music fandom, or both. What does such a hybrid fandom consist of? And we'll take for granted that all fandoms are diverse, but what is particular to a Weird Al fandom?

Dave: Al's fandom is so diverse, it covers everybody. All one needs to do is take a look at the makeup of his audience at any of his concerts. There are little kids there with their parents. There are young couples. There are middle aged people, and there are seniors. Al's music is special in that it gets passed down among generations. People who discovered Al on the radio in the early days of Dr. Demento's radio show, played his music for their kids as they grew up, and in turn their kids are now playing it for their kids. With each album or new thing he does, a new crop of fans discover Al for the first time, and they will grow up with him as well, and pass it on.

Ethan: And sometimes - people aren't even necessarily a fan of Al for his music or his comedy or his appearances - people are just a fan of the fact that someone can go out there, be silly, and let them know it's okay for them to express themselves and call themselves weird without worrying about judgement. In recently speaking to Weird Al's touring merchandise manager, who has been working in the industry for decades and toured with everyone from Britney Spears to the B-52s - she says Al's fans are the most polite and respectful fans

she sees, without exception.

RRX: I imagine that you guys have some sort of relationship with Weird Al; I mean he knows you, knows what you have going on. Do you get the skinny on anything before it launches? And really, any weird or odd perks to having the podcast, either from Weird Al or the supporting cast in his life that you've featured?

Dave: Al has told us that he listens to the podcast, so there's that. We're on Al's holiday card list, which is also nice. I have had a great relationship with Al and his manager for many years now. Al treats all of his fans wonderfully. I might get the heads up on something now and then, and

The E-Block (Cntd.)

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LP: We don't really have a set process but a lot of our ideas come out of our live performances. If we don't really have a set idea at a show we'll just start playing something and a lot of the time that will turn into a song we'll start writing. Sometimes I'll just write something alone and then I'm super eager to take it to Dom and James and have them add to it 'cause we all have our own sound that we bring to it, and that's really our E-Block sound.

JS: I want to talk about Syracuse - I think this is a pretty good example of the process. Last summer we got the chance to record at Syracuse's studios, we slipped in and all the doors

that comes from the trust and friendships I've built over the years. Al's band has been really supportive of our podcast as well. For example, Al's guitar player, Jim "Kimo" West wrote and performed our theme song, and was the very first guest on the podcast. Al's drummer, Jon "Bermuda" Schwartz has been a guest on the podcast several times. Last time he was on, he brought many rare and unreleased music clips with him and let us play them on the air. He continues to be a champion for the podcast by suggesting guests, and helping us connect with guests we want to interview.

Ethan: We launched the

were locked except one because we had this one connection with an engineer who is just the man. I brought my buddy up, Joey, who plays bass - I've known him since I was a kid...

LP: Insane player.

JS: Yeah, he's (Joey) kickin' it at Berkeley right now. But we all went up last summer just trying to get a bunch of stuff recorded and Luke had this one idea on the spot and we recorded it super quick, did some improv over it, had some scratch vocals. Of all the stuff we recorded that was sort of the most up in the air but it was cool and over the past year we've been chewing on that idea, adding stuff, taking away stuff, changing the form. And this is the first one that I've kind of co-written some of the lyrics and stuff and now it's starting to

podcast about a month before Al's Strings Attached tour last summer. I had paid for a meet and greet at one of the first shows I went to, and when I walked up to Al, he immediately recognized me and said how much he enjoyed listening to the podcast. Even though we spent six months planning the podcast - that was the one thing we had never considered - Al listening to our podcast! And what did I say in response to Al? I thanked him, and gently let him know that while it's great he enjoys our podcast, he really isn't our target audience.

You can listen to Dave & Ethan's 2000" Weird Al Podcast at <http://listen.2000inch.com>

become somewhat recognizable - a lot of the elements of the original ideas are still there but now it's gone through this process of everyone adding their stuff. It's all a long process but a very collaborative process.

LP: And we do everything in-house; mixing, mastering and recording - everything is done between us three (Luke, Dom, James).

RRX: And another thing I wanted to talk about given that you guys do a lot of improv, is the theory side of things. Are you guys all based in music theory, did you grow up playing a lot?

JS: I (pauses) No (laughs).

LP: I don't know, I don't come from a musical family. None of us really - did you ever take lessons James?

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The E-Block (Cntd.)

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JS: I think theory has never been the way to digest music for me as the first wave. I think you have to feel something, and have something and then go back to learn the theory stuff. The director of the New York Jazz Academy, this guy named Javiar Arau is a killer sax player; and I remember I did a summer with them once, it was a bunch of old people in a hot church in the Upper East Side and me. I was way in over my head and I didn't practice as much as I should have and I didn't know what was going on. I was scared a lot and it was terrifying and weird and awful, kind of, but also really cool because Javiar told me, and I'll always

remember this, when soloing for example: 'playing is a story'. And I was so worried about the theory, and what I was playing, and how I'm playing this scale and how I'm doing this which I didn't understand anyway. But anyway he said, it's like you're telling a story, so tell the story. Think about the parts of the story, what you want to say, and say it; and that has always, always been true. We play stuff that, if you want to put a label on it, you could, but it's not necessary.

RRX: Also, do you guys have any other bands or people you want to shout out?

JS: I guess shoutout to Joey Farber, the fucking man.

LP: He's the reason our single sounds the way it does, his bass playing.

JS: Yeah and his bass will be on more of our stuff for sure.

LP: Yeah shoutout to anyone who has ever played in The E-Block the list is huge. Probably like, 50 different people have been in this band.

RRX: Any info you want to give for your upcoming EP?

LP: I'd say definitely expect a different sound.

JS: For me, I've just kind of been a sponge taking in so many new things over the last year. I think this EP is gonna be indicative of all the new things we've learned over the last year. I think it's a really good representation of our growth.

RRX: Well, it's great to hear that you guys are keeping your heads up and releasing stuff through this, I'm hoping it will

help motivate other bands to hang in there. Is there anything else you guys want to say?

LP: I just hope that Albany musicians come together and work together more, and it's definitely happening but I just hope it happens more.

JS: There are a lot of people and a lot of talent to be organized here so shoutout to all the UAlbany and Saint Rose kids that I don't know yet who are grinding away. I think we can build a scene that's super cool and inclusive.

The E-Block will be releasing a new single near the end of April and have plans to release their



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Passing Our Time in the Cocoon

By Liam Sweeny

It's tough to put out a local art, music, and culture page. I'm just saying in general, not just in "times like these." There's a whole life that underpins the punched clocks and battered soles of the ever-present 9-to-5. It's a vibrant life where a whole different set of people toil for the love of faces they may or may not see the next weekend. People shed their inhibitions and dance, even if it's a shuffling of feet that escapes the grip of our legs. It's the passionate quest for

experience. And covering this world is our passionate quest here at Xperience.

So it's always tough, but now more than ever. Who were the first to have to close shop? The crowd-drawers. And we are a part of that, putting shows on every month. The last show we put on was on February 29th, a memorial for my dad called Rock & Remember. We had other shows planned, but inch by inch, we had to draw back. And it was absolutely heartbreaking to see our family shutter doors, even as we shuttered doors. We hurt for our friends in bands and the venues

that supported them, and us.

So here we are. And I wouldn't think of leaving this in a minor key. I've noticed some things, about the local music scene, but really about all of us. Not since 1918 and the Spanish Flu has the entire planet been through the same challenge. We are connected in a way we've never been before. And as much as experience can unite us, it can also divide us between those who experienced a thing and those who didn't/couldn't. But with the pandemic, we're all in.

Are there differences? Of course. Jeff Bezos is probably

going through some different stuff, and maybe he's running the show from a private island somewhere, and I'm going stir crazy in an apartment. But before this is through, someone too close to us will get sick. Tragedy brings people together when the dust settles, and this one's global.

But more to the point, which for me is music and the scene. I see the connection here too. Quarantine and social distancing is a great equalizer. Zoom will book anybody with a half-way-functioning webcam. You play for a small crowd of people who either dig what you do, or have nothing better to do. How is that different that what goes on at a live show? Now we've had to go with the honor system and donations for pay, but maybe we can find a way to encourage wallet-and-purse openings.

What I've noticed in doing the publication is something that gives me a lot of hope: musicians are taking this time to up their game. They're practicing more. They're collaborating and trading in ideas to take the place of live practices and show. The "players" are on hold, temporarily, and the composers are exploring music.

I don't see how we come out of this without a fiercer set of band members. When we can go back and get the experience of a show, we'll be sharing more than just warm memories. We'll be sharing a metamorphosis.



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