

Liner Notes

It's tough to be an album these days.

A couple of years ago I moved from Ottawa to Toronto for school. I had to stay in a really small room that simply wouldn't hold both me and the hundreds of CDs I had collected over the last 14 years, so I put all of the CDs and album artwork into binders and tossed all of the jewel cases. Midway through the year I picked up an external hard drive to perform the increasingly popular 21st century version of the "great reorganization". I lugged my CDs out and started burning. I wore out my burner when I hit the N's. I also discovered that keeping my CDs tightly bound together was having adverse effects on the discs and artwork, which had disc-sized circles pressed permanently into them. My copy of "Echo Park" by Feeder was cracked. I threw it into the garbage can beside my desk.

I have treated my poor albums so unfairly. They sit on the top shelf of my closet in the binders, lying dormant and unwanted. I'm sure the liner notes for "Superunknown" still smell the way they did when I couldn't put them down in 1994. I still buy CDs occasionally, but I listen to music on devices that don't require me to open the physical artifact, to hold the disc gently between thumb and forefinger before replacing it with the label right side up, tucking it in between two CDs that may have no other connection to each other beside the fact that, on some level, I enjoy them.

I own a grand total of one album on vinyl. It's "In Rainbows" by Radiohead, and I bought it after the band offered that album on a pay-what-you-want basis on the Internet. Vinyl sales have gone up recently because those who miss having the artifact of music in their homes are turning to it. It's bigger and prettier. One pays more homage to the sacredness of an album by owning it on vinyl. I don't own a record player, but I understand the ritual of those who like nothing better than to put a needle on an LP, strap the headphones on and really *listen* to a collection of songs.

Today, we sit in traffic with portable mp3 players, skipping songs a third of the way through, only interested in what's next. There is now so much music available to the public that the old compilation formats can't hold it. We wear hundreds of songs like a social armor when we walk down the street. We hail remixes, re-cuts and mash-ups as a vibrant, significant technological art form of the new century. Of course we do. They represent every song all at once – ideal for the evolution of our listening habits and attention spans. With so much variety, we have to make choices quicker and more often.

In my early years of having day jobs, I had a paper route. It took me about the length of Nirvana's "Nevermind" to deliver to each and every house. I listened to that tape so much that I could hear both sides of it playing at once. Just recently I was watching a special about the making of "Nevermind". Butch Vig was sitting at the control panel, raising and lowering levels, showing how the mix was put together, describing the challenges and solutions for each song. Seventeen years after hearing that album for the first time, I was hearing it in a whole new way, and it reminded me, in part, of why albums are special.

Another reminder came from recording this material, which I have thus far called a collection of songs, demos, mp3s, etc. They are those things, but while finalizing them to the best of my ability and resources, I noticed that there are elements across songs that I have tried to keep consistent. I wasn't happy with just recording a bunch of songs, even if that would have made up

a bit of an easier-to-understand package to send to the relevant affiliates that all bands consult when they want their music heard.

I think there's a flow to this material, and it comes out of learning how to write songs again. I hadn't really written a song in about 10 years before the demo version of "No Time Left" was finished last September. Before I started writing songs again, I wanted to make sure that the conditions were perfect. I wanted to embrace what technology has done for the production of music. I like to rock out as much as the next suburbanite, but lately drum machines have been speaking louder to me than the feedback of a Jaguar (or a Squire, as budget dictates). I also can't scream as loud as I used to when I was annoying the residents of Welsh Street in Peterborough back in the mid-90s, so the voice you hear is the voice of a former angst-ridden teen somewhat mellowed by getting older and accepting his middle-classness.

I'll say this about these songs. I wrote them in the bedroom of my basement apartment in Centretown, Ottawa from August 2008 – April 2009. I used an M-Audio Oxygen 61 midi keyboard and software for the pianos, synths and drums, a Stagg BM350 bass, a Fender Squire Strat electric with a Boss DS-1 pedal, a Behringer XENYX 1002 mixer and same-series ACX1000 acoustic amplifier, and a Shure PG58 microphone.

Dru Jeffries provided additional guitar on "Punxsutawney" and "Born a Ghost". He emailed me the tracks from Montreal. Andrea Wrobel provided spoken word for "Fading AM Radio Signal" and "Throw Yourself at the Ground and Miss". The song "93" contains samples of poetry read by William Carlos Williams, from his poems "The Three Graces" and a segment of "The Descent". "Throw Yourself at the Ground and Miss" contains a passage read from "So Long, and Thanks for All the Fish" by Douglas Adams. The final mixes were done in GarageBand.

I listened to a lot of Wilco while writing the last half of it.

There are 10 songs here. Ten's a good number, I think. It's not too long and not too short. It has more songs than Catherine Wheel's "Wishville" and less than They Might Be Giants' "Flood". What are these songs about? A lot of the time they're simply words that I think sound good together. As a teenager I always liked the way the word "away" sounded in a rock song. A word that kept coming to me while writing lyrics was "another", as though I was joining the effort in progress somehow, as if it had always been going on.

A lot of the time, the songs are about the state of the world. Parts of "Clear" and "Star Maps" certainly are. There are songs that are about technology and worrying about getting old and marveling at how it feels to be alone in an environment that has been pulled so close together by modern communication. They're about finding happiness in simplicity and finding a role to play when all the roles have been given out. They're about the enormity of the universe in comparison to a single soul alive in it. And they're about love, of course, because all songs are about that.

I have a favour to ask, and chances are that if you've read this far, you're a person who's willing to do favours. Take this album, these songs that are numbered 1 to 10, and put them on an mp3 player. Put them in your phone or whatever you use to hear music as you bounce from place to place. Come home, fire up the computer and strap on the headphones. Listen to the songs, in order, from first to last. Some suggestions for environment: a long bus trip to another city. A walk that you take just for the exercise or something to do. Listen to it instead of simply hearing it, just once or twice. Put "Moments After Waking" or "Over and Over" on a playlist for somebody. Better yet, give these songs to as many people as possible. They might like them.

I'd like to thank my friends and family for equal parts humouring me and engaging me for the last nine months. I want to especially thank Winston Anderson, Matt Buttler, Steve Ducharme, Dru Jeffries, Jim Keehn, Ian McEachern, Chris Risdon, and Andrea Wrobel for their invaluable help, support and advice in the process.

Love, peace, empathy, desire, mischief and gladness,

David Emery (Wire and Light)