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As told to Meredith Graves, 909 words.

Tags: Music, Inspiration, Adversity, Identity, Independence, Sex, Politics.



The Hole

Words are the foundation of magic. One great example of a magic word is HOLE. Conjuring up innumerable instincts and assumptions, spurring instant action—ok, “Hey Beavis, you said Hole.” Or, “Hey eighth grade Meredith, you can argue context all you want and okay, yes it’s a band, we know, but you still have to turn that shirt inside out.”

Or, “... Hole?” A sticker or a tag on a notebook, **DOLL PARTS** all caps, **CELEBRITY SKIN**, or for me personally, **I WANNA BE THE GIRL WITH THE MOST CAKE**.

I remember hearing that song, recognizing the suspension of narrative that hangs in and between that idea and its conclusion—*someday you will ache like I ache*—if you stick around long enough or take her seriously enough—and I thought, okay Courtney. Me too.

These days when we say “Me Too” it is a response to the commonality, the relatability, of experience. “I told you from the start how this would end, when I get what I want and never want it again”—and everything that happens after. For women, femmes, and GNC people in music these experiences transcend decade, genre, and every imaginable intersection of privilege and oppression dissolved under the weight of punishment specific to us, the kind we’re told we deserve or at minimum must be subjected to, if we are to succeed.

At the hands of managers, booking agents, photographers, journalists, stylists, and our audience, or someone’s audience—whoever’s there to excoriate us—it happened to Edith Piaf and Tina Turner and Courtney Love and it happened to me, too.

Twenty years ahead of women in music joining the larger societal discourse around Me Too, we were writing Hole lyrics on our three-subject notebooks to accomplish the same ends. We didn’t know the echo, or signal boost; we were young, it was the mid-90s. I didn’t have tits yet, which, if that were part of the criteria for relatability, or reading comprehension, I’d still be in trouble—but she was there, telling the truth, wildly and victoriously while impressionable young young younger girl children saw her, transfixing and impossible, on the covers of magazines, proof of concept. How could you not believe everything she says. She’s living it, semiotically, right here in front of us, defiant in photographs, *I’ve told you and I’m going to keep telling you*.

Without or even just before the hashtag Me Too—when that symbol, not for nothing, would have been read as POUND—lyrics from “Petal” and “Doll Parts” were our whisper network, our secret code. If you listened to Hole you were at least aware of and had probably experienced the inequity in music that leads to our shared anger. It held up twenty years ago and it hasn’t changed now.

A closed loop, a Hole album—proving itself necessary from start to finish and onward through what we now call historical record. The name pointing to cunt and the abyssal, the way it rolls off telling you everything you’ll ever need to know about the reviewer or critic speaking. Context and affect abounded in the songs’ arrangement, their rhetoric, and yet over and over we got to watch male music writers assigned Hole’s unknown depths drowning hilariously in the shallow end. The only Cancer Courtney ever brought upon the industry was by virtue of her birthdate, the only Siren song that which is innate to Water signs, the endless shattering pools of feeling.

“I want it again, but violent, more violent—”

Sexy, to me and like four other people intellectually aroused by anti-capitalist revenge narratives—but where’s the harpy in that, the cruel sense that not one reviewer listened to the records, proving her more right than anything they could have written given a year to sit with the record and all the supplementary Julia Kristeva and Silvia Federici required to give it the read it’s always deserved?

Secret messages embedded in the rhetoric of violence, unencrypted in screams, misdirected by cleavage and a band name easily, willfully misinterpreted by boring, horny, self-important rock critics in magazines long shuttered and forgotten for good reason. Archetypes in cardigans, panning bands on the basis that they just don’t like bands with girl singers, their names last seen in bold type in the late 1990s and or on their divorce paperwork—and here we are meanwhile, acolytes of Babylon feasting at the feet of our high priestess, unable to remember their names.

The real history will always belong to us.

LIVE THROUGH THIS—this not a declaration of fortitude or perseverance or a “with god all things are possible.” Instead, it’s a resignation to phenomenological fact. Rock-and-roll criticism and the absolute despair of being a female poet-scholar-visionary in an industry supported on the logistical side by disgusting men who generally can’t kill us directly, just wear us down to breaking—or worse—simply exploit our rage, making death look like a sick all-expenses-paid vacation we can’t afford. *Live through this*, as if we’ve got a choice in the matter.

All there is left to do now is thank you, because thanks to you, we can and will.

To quote the visual artist Audrey Wollen, “Girls own the void—back off fuckers.” Warm and dark, implicitly feminine, it is the abyssal gap between lived experience and the pitiful male lack-of self restraint, of understanding, of the ability to hear the frequencies of female pain at levels far beyond that which serves their pleasure; the darkness we commit to when we dare make rock and roll; the Hole.

Name

Meredith Graves

Vocation

Writer, Musician


Fact



Lauren Renner

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