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As told to Arielle Gordon, 1853 words.

Tags: Music, Politics, Collaboration, Process, Inspiration.

On the art of reaching consensus

The four members of D.I.I.V. discuss democratic decision making, pushing back against the restraints of capitalism, and making creative work in a post-truth world.

I saw the documentary that you put out about your tour with Depeche Mode, where you played Boston Garden. I was curious about how you worked on interpreting your sound for such a huge venue.

Cole: We thought so much about what to do for that show, and "How do we appeal to Depeche Mode's fans?" The simple answer is, we didn't really change anything. It was a cool case study in if our music works in spaces like that. When we were performing, it really felt like it was working.

Colin: I think the more dominant thing was trying to make the best possible D.I.I.V. set and do what we do the most efficiently in 30 minutes. And if people like that, then great. And if they don't, then they don't like the essence of the band.

You've typically taken three or four years between each album, but some bands release an album every year. I'm curious how a longer creative process impacts the sound of each new record.

Colin: I think we need deadlines. That's what pushes us to actually finish. I certainly think that some bands get overly indulgent, but I think that it just took us the amount of time to arrive at the record. We were certainly trying really fucking hard the whole time. We weren't dawdling or something like that.

Cole: I think it speaks to this time in the music industry where there's so much stuff you have to do in order to make money. You can't just make money off your recordings. Making albums is the primary thing we do, but it's just not a sustainable thing. We finished this album a year ago, so if we wanted a record to come out a year from now, we'd have to have it done now.

You look at Depeche Mode's early catalog, and the first time they took more than a year between records was *Violator*. That's their seventh record. And there's so much progression and so much growth and amazing songwriting between every record and so much development from *Broken Frame* to *Construction Time [Again]*, it's like a new band every year. But I think that that was just the nature of that era, and things are different for musicians today.

Colin: This is not a comment on whether or not our music is exceptionally good, even though I do think our music is good, but we do really try to make the best possible album we can. And I think there are plenty of moments along the path where if our standards were a bit lower, the album would get done faster. We really demand a lot from each other and the band itself, and I think that's why it takes so long. If we made an album in one year, I'm not sure we would get that same effect.

Frog in Boiling Water is described as the first time the band approached a record democratically. What was your system prior to that? Did the democratic process help or hinder your creativity during this album?

Cole: Each record was a step. The first record I made pretty much just by myself, and then the second record brought people in at various times as we learned to play the songs as a band. *Deceiver* was more collaborative, live jamming in the room. We could probably talk for a long time about the difficulties in democratic decision-making, especially when there's an even number of people. We try to use the "fist to five" consensus method.

Ben: Did the democratic process help or hinder the band? I think that it was obviously both. It helped get a larger quantity and volume of ideas. There's a bigger pool to choose from, but then that obviously makes it more complicated. I think it helped us make better music, but it was harder to make the music because

there were more ideas and voices to sift through.

Colin: Knowing what we know now, if we were able to go back and do this record again, it would be really different. It's a learning experience of how to communicate and coexist with people that you're in partnership with. You learn the lessons when you learn them. The process, the conflict, made the album that we have now, and that's just the truth, more than it being a good or a bad thing.

Across your discography, your lyrics make both veiled and explicit references to political issues. I'm thinking of "Skin Game" on Deceiver, where you call out the Sackler family by name, or the title track of your new album. How do you balance overt and more interpretive political expression?

Cole: *Deceiver* was like taking out the trash in terms of our personal inventory, but there were larger implications to the story of addiction involving the Sackler family specifically. That was a step into that world of a more politically driven song, but we had to deal with putting a bow on the wreckage of our personal lives.

This record is what we've always wanted to make and been interested in, lyrically. All we talk about is politics in the band. Making a political record is such a strange world. There are so many bad political records that try to propose a solution, like, "Just vote for this party." That felt really trite. We wanted to capture this capitalist dystopia for what it is and draw attention to the people and institutions that are the roots of these issues.

Speaking of capitalist dystopia, I was curious about the satirical Saturday Night Live music video for "Brown Paper Bag." SNL's milquetoast politics really represents that boiling frog that you're talking about.

Cole: *SNL* is strange. They talk about politics, but it's just the most banal, liberal institution. But we made that website, *Soul Net*, which was trying to propose these fake solutions. It was this weird website that was really web 1.0, conspiracy-pilled. We made that and it was so fun and a cool art project, but it felt so niche and we were like, "How do we explode this into a world that just a normal, regular person would understand?" The first thing that came to mind was *SNL*.

There's this post-truth phenomenon where you can just put anything online, and if it's in the right echo chambers, it's true. There's services that you can pay to plant news articles that will show up on Google. So I paid 30 bucks to get three websites to post news articles, and then when you Google "*DIIV SNL*," it says *DIIV* is playing *SNL*.

Colin: It's really unbelievable how many people believed it and continue to. We did an interview when we were in London with the interviewer who's known us for a really long time and is a big fan of the band and a savvy person. He just asked, "It's just amazing to see you guys. You went on tour with Depeche Mode and you played *SNL*." I almost burst out laughing. We were unsure of whether or not he was being sarcastic, but he really thought we played *SNL*.

Cole: People who saw the music video on Instagram or Twitter said, "It's in my curated echo chamber, so it's true." It was a funny media literacy test. We wanted it to look real, so to the people who believed it, it's not like, "You're a fucking idiot," because we did everything we could to make it appear that way.

You've said that Frog in Boiling Water is an album about late capitalism. How do you feel that economic structure impacts creativity?

Andrew Bailey: There's a really good article by Liz Pelly, "*The Problem With Muzak*," which describes how the Spotify model of music incentivizes less creative music. That's just a microcosm of something that's true all over the place in every aspect of art. It's to the point where we literally can't survive as artists unless we serve capitalism in one way or another. It's really frustrating.

Colin: We're making political music because there's something to be really political about right now. I think that that is part of the process of making art. Even if it's not explicitly political, it's a response to the system that we're living in. It's part of everyone's experience. You want to be thankful for your inspiration in some perverted way.

Cole: We can't overthrow capitalism because we need material to write our next album about.

Colin: It's nice to have a villain.

Did you learn anything about being in a band from touring with Depeche Mode?

Cole: We met Dave Gahan, the singer from Depeche Mode, and he had some great advice. He said, "When it's an off night and the crowd's not responding, I just turn around and I play to the band. I play to my friends." I was like, "Wow, that's beautiful."

Andrew: The importance of hype music. They listened to music to get them hyped before their set. We started doing that, and it is crazy how much of a difference it makes. I remember learning when I was a kid that the band Buckcherry listens to the full AC/DC *Back in Black* record before their set and I always thought it was corny, but I get it now. It does something to you.

What's your hype music?

Ben: DMX.

DIIV Recommend:

Mark Lombardi:Global Networks: Both an artist and a journalist investigating the financial connections of the global elite, Lombardi's sociograms reveal the relationships that form the foundation of the para-political world order. -Andrew

Mircea Cartarescu:Solenoid: A strange, long piece of Romanian fiction taking place in Bucharest and surrounding areas. A mix of auto fiction, surrealist science fiction, and cosmic horror. -Ben

Keeping a routine: My whole life, everything involving time and schedules was inevitably a chaotic mess. Since having a baby, he keeps me on an unbreakable routine and it's revolutionized my life. My wife and I have no choice but to follow his routine and set aside time we want for work, time for family, personal time, time to make stuff and work on stuff. It's been great. I guess I thrive in routine, who knew? -Cole

John Barth: Lost in the Funhouse: A collection of experimental short stories that feels worth mentioning in the spirit of the album title being inspired by a book I read in high school. This is another book I first read back then that I find myself thinking about a lot since it fundamentally changed the way I think about storytelling and its role and creation within the infinite complexities of human experience. -Cole

Stasis: Bone Totem: Point and click sci-fi horror/puzzle video game. It's a wild adventure into the depths of the ocean involving ancient civilizations, demented experiments on humans, post-religious culture and grief. I sobbed about the fate of a sentient, disfigured toy bear. -Colin

Name

DIIV

Vocation

musicians (DIIV)

Fact

Louie Kovatch

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