Monsters and Tragedy

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

This thesis is a collection of recorded songs written for the bands Blacklisted and Love on the Run. The purpose of this project was to explore the songwriting process, with the primary goal being to record these songs as well as perform them to a live audience. While I take credit for the songwriting, all the songs are really products of collaboration—the result of working in a group setting. The songs reflect my interests in modern society, particularly true crime, pop culture, and the absurd. With the help of MET, TCOM, and music students, I recorded seventeen songs, which were written over the course of two years. I participated in a music video made by TCOM student Aaron Smith for his honors thesis and recorded four different song collections with a total of three different Ball State students. Both Blacklisted and Love on the Run participated in the annual Springboard Festival held April 20, 2002 at faculty member Jim Coffin’s farm, and Blacklisted participated in the Women in the Arts Festival in March 2002. During the 2001-2002 school year, Blacklisted and Love on the Run played shows in Fort Wayne, Valparaiso, Aurora, Muncie, Anderson, and Marion, Indiana.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Peter Davis for plunging into this project with me and inspiring me to listen to Alex Chilton. Thanks also to Aaron Smith for recording Blacklisted (even if it was for his honors thesis), Artie Hill for devoting a month’s worth of Thursdays to recording in Joy’s garage, Maria Yates for making Love on the Run a tangible commodity, Joy Gerwe and Kyle Johnson for allowing Blacklisted to practice in their garage, Joy, Jill, Irene, and Lisa for showing up to practice and making band-time, fun-time.
An Introduction to Music

My parents decided to send their kids to piano lessons when I was in kindergarten. The first song I considered a true accomplishment for my elementary fingers was called “Swinging Along.” I can still hum most of the song’s melody, which isn’t much of a feat considering the song runs four lines long.

During my piano playing years, I toyed with several other instruments, including the trumpet, ukulele, baritone, and a second-rate violin my dad purchased for me on a Saturday whim. Most of the time I didn’t get passed learning the basic C-D-G notes of these instruments of the week. It wasn’t until seventh grade when I expressed a desire to learn how to play the guitar that my father bought me a children-sized acoustic (I saw one the other day for fifty dollars at a deluxe gas station in Northern Indiana). Because I am left-handed, he strung the guitar backward, resulting in that unsettling look of the skyward gazing pick guard. For a year we went through basic chords, my fingers stretching and aching from the pressure of the metal strings. On Saturday afternoons after cartoons were over, my dad and I would tune up our guitars and practice such folk melodies as “Oh Susannah” and “Long, Long, Ago.”

Tell me the tales that to me were so dear
Long, long ago
Long, long ago
Sing me the songs that to me were so dear
Long, long ago
Long, long ago

About a year into my guitar lessons, my dad suggested we look for an electric guitar because, as he always said, “Everyone wishes they had been in a rock band when they were young.” We went to all the local music stores, but few carried left-handed guitars. At the last store we went to—a more intimate shop with a room for private lessons, and a run on generic copies of well-known guitar brands—the manager suggested I would be better off learning to play right-handed. I was young and it wasn’t too late to retrain me, after all left-handed guitars were not easy to come by and let’s say I was at a friend’s house and was asked to play a tune. I would be out of luck if a left-handed guitar
wasn’t handy. And since only one ninth of the population used their left-hand (and how many out of that played guitar?) most of the time I would be unable to play the guitars around me without the hassle of restringing them. Once my father gets an idea into his head it is difficult to persuade him otherwise. We drove home with him reiterating the manager’s argument.

I fought this change. I had always been proud of being left-handed. I was the only one in my family to be left-handed. I subscribed to the Left-Handed magazine that featured celebrity southpaws like George Bush and ALF on the cover every other month. I owned coffee cups that read:

*If the right side of the brain controls the left side of the body and the left side of the brain controls the right side of the body, then left-handed people are the only ones in their right minds!*

I enjoyed being different because I thought being left-handed was the only thing that made me special. And now my dad wanted to strip me of my proud minority status. I reacted with silent defiance.

During our weekly lessons I struggled, perhaps more than I really needed, to prove that learning to play right handed was like asking a legless child to walk. Nothing short of a miracle would allow me to defy nature and play right-handed. In the presence of my father I pretended to play “right,” but alone I savored the moments when I huddled behind the safety of my closed door and surreptitiously strummed the guitar lightly with my left hand. I was a martyr, a closeted minority looking for a voice, the modern equivalent of both my grandmothers who had been punished for writing with their left hands. Now after so many years of Civil Rights and demands for equality and justice I was a victim of a fascist majority.

Looking back, I am thankful my dad made me switch. It’s true, now I can pick up any guitar and play it without the thought of having to restring it. While my drama may have been more the product of childhood angst and a difficulty in establishing a healthy self-identity, the experience left me confused. The question of my place in the world became vital. Whether a natural rite of passage or an exaggerated case of nostalgia, the left-handed incident was the first experience in my life that linked music with oppression, injustice, and cruelty. And I’ve never been the same since.
Blacklisted

Blacklisted began in the backseat of a car destined for a late summer road trip. It was August of 2000, and I was thinking of what to do when I returned from a month-long stint at a mental hospital in Boston. I had an entire semester I was supposed to fill with positive activities that encouraged a healthy well being and fostered growth-oriented relationships. Somehow I came up with the idea of starting a band. My road trip partners were Irene and Erin, roommates who had become obsessed with the independent film *Gummo*, a documentary-like classic that explores the often shocking world of small town Xenia, Ohio. These were the girls that watched the film every other day, who quoted word by word, scene by scene, the honest if not creepy world of sub-suburban trash. It turned out Xenia was only about two or three hours from Muncie and since I was supposed to be engaging in healthy relationships I invited myself along for the ride.

Xenia turned out to be a neat town with hills, a bowling alley, and a decrepit fence with KKK spray painted in cryptic green letters. We visited gas stations, inquiring if any of the employees had ever heard of the film that characterized their town with naked absurdity. No one knew what a “gummo” was; the awkward adolescents who drank Pepsi in the darkened doorways of Xenia nightlife (the bowling alley) gave us perplexed looks as we tested their knowledge of the film. We tried to eat at a surprisingly crowded Big Boy in the heart of town but left after ten minutes of sitting unacknowledged at the coffee counter surrounded by locals. I can’t remember where we ate dinner. But it was around this time, returning to Muncie in the blue night of late summer, when I suggested we put together our own band made entirely of girls. Everyone in the car was excited by the idea, though Erin was planning on spending the following year at an architectural internship in Miami (Florida, not Ohio) and Irene's musical training consisted of a couple months studying the guitar in the third grade. Nevertheless, I knew she was a fast learner and the idea of having the band far outweighed the ramifications of playing with a group of people who didn’t know what a fret was. I went to work right away thinking up potential song titles like RibFest 2000 and Diamond Dogs, as well as other girl who would make potential bandmates.

I decided I would play guitar because I had a nice Fender Mustang from '69 and was sufficiently skilled enough to strum out a three-chord song. Irene would play bass because she couldn’t play any other instrument. I heard Naitha, a local college dropout, would be an ideal candidate for the drummer as she was currently learning how to play. Finally Lisa would play guitar because she owned a cheap stratocaster copy with a leopard print pick guard. The original line-up existed for a few days until Naitha took charge and decided that she wanted to play guitar
instead of drums; I think she needed to be in the front of the band. Neither Lisa nor Irene could play drums at all, so Naitha assigned them to be dueling bassists. Naitha said it had always been a dream of hers to have two bass players in one band and since she was the only one of us who could claim prior band experience, we allowed her to do what she wanted. Plus, I didn’t want to force Irene or Lisa to play keyboard, an instrument the former was only partially interested in, the latter adamantly opposed. We found our drummer Stacey (the only qualification: female) through a friend of a friend.

Naitha and I were the only members of the band not enrolled in school so we met three or four times a week to write songs, work on guitar parts, and arrange harmonies. Working with Naitha was like being tutored by an older high student who drinks, does drugs, and has a big tattoo. Though she was manipulative, always prioritizing her other band the Lou Reeds and conning her friends into doing whatever she wanted (I never saw her ever pay for anything), she laughed at my jokes and had a cool haircut.

Lisa also had a cool haircut (pageboy, like Louise Brooks) and was about to graduate Ball State with a diploma in psychology. Her room was as straight as her black hair and just as immaculately clean. Organized around a motif of blue and silver with furniture she had bought at thrift stores and redecorated with bold paint and bits of colored mosaics, her room resembled an Ikea catalog. She had style and class and saved her words for a few chose statements, a strategy that made me believe everything she said.

I’ve known Irene since freshmen year when we lived in the same dorm and shared an academic scholarship. She is one of the smartest people I now, with an incredible talent in art. She graduates this year with three majors: sculpture, psychology, and pre-med. The pre-med came from what she called an “awakening” one summer to the harsh facts of the real world. Irene figured she could make a living being a doctor and temporarily gave up pursuing dreams of being an artist. After completing many stressful semesters as a pre-med major, however, she changed to psychology and sculpture with the intention of doing art therapy. Irene’s life has constantly balanced the scholastic with pop culture and artistic freedom; she could recite the periodic table while relating the latest episode of Friends as she worked on her latest woodblock print.

Stacey brought a lively fun to the band that resonated as loud as she hit her snare drum. She bought her aqua-blue drums only six months earlier (around the time she started playing) and was eager to creatively fill in the drumming gaps of our shy songs. Stacey had an identical twin and was excited to wear a sleeveless shirt with a skull and snake she had found at a second hand shop in Cincinnati.

We were now a band, complete with borrowed instruments and a practice space deep in the recesses of a sunken house filled of empty beer bottles, cigarette butts, and broken guitars. It
was within this smelly basement that we toyed with band names. The Bulimics, Iron Beef Curtain, Boxed Lunch, and Who's the Father were the provocative if not offensive titles we considered. Finally someone—I don't remember who—suggested Blacklisted, a gender-neutral term that, coupled with the five of us, conjured up images of gentle rebellion. Songs like “Bobby’s On The Beat,” about cops tailing teens in the local mall, “Holly,” written for a beautiful woman tragically murdered by her boyfriend, and “Phillips,” a hypnotic trance about light bulbs, gave us a safe quirkiness that awed the scores of boys who lingered about as we practiced. There must be something about seeing a girl hold a guitar or thumping on a bass however ineptly that appeals to the male psyche. And we did react eagerly to the attention that followed us regardless of our musical prowess. Being seen as sexually desirable was a useful tool that took attention off me and my inexperience as a musician and performer.

We only played one show with this lineup. It was an awkward display of feedback, pity applause, and a case of stage fright that left me rigid with terror. After my dreams to perform onstage in a band came true, I was disappointed with myself for believing performing was as easy as Ozzy Osbourne made it seem. We didn’t play another show for over six months. But this was not entirely due to our embarrassing first show. Naitha was causing unrest in the band with her criticism and inability to make it to any of our practices. Her bossiness made me dread Sunday night when practice was held. We discussed her dubious status as a member of the band and decided to speak with her about it. That very night she confronted us first when she announced she was quitting the band. Our lack of surprise confused her, as well as our eagerness to accept her resignation. We decided to drop the songs she had written, and that was the last of her in terms of Blacklisted.

We lost our drummer a few weeks later when she told us she was going to student teach in Costa Rica. Stacey was going to live in a hut in a remote village accessible only by mule. She wasn’t going to have a toilet let alone access to her aqua-blue drumset.

We posted fliers looking for a new drummer during the summer of 2001. Our first and only response came from day-care teacher and former Ball State student Joy. By some sort of strange coincidence it turned out I had known Joy since I was a freshmen. She was a year older and hung out with a group of misfit boys who I also knew. Joy was blonde, cute, wore snazzy clothes, and intimidated me with her friendliness. She dated a handsome boy named Troy and her picture-perfect life was punctuated by her ability to imbibe more beer than any of the boys she partied with. Also she had been in about a million bands. She could play every instrument, though had never learned the drums when she called my house in response to our ad. She remembered me from years before which gave me comfort that such a cool person knew who I was. The first night she was supposed to meet with the band, Irene and I were late coming to Lisa’s house, leaving Joy there to present her impressive musical credentials to a less than eager.
Lisa. Joy listed off bands she had been in, including Barbie and the Rockers, Bent, The Benders, Radio Burning, and Pilot Light. She brought the CD she and her sister had made, a collection of acoustic covers of the Smashing Pumpkins and That Dog. I still don’t know if Irene and Lisa were intimidated by her skills—she could belt operatically while plucking away at the bass—or if they didn’t like the kind of music she played, but from day one Joy felt the other girls (me included?) just weren’t impressed. Little did she know that the very night she joined the band I cried in the privacy of my little apartment, afraid that her talent outshined anything I would ever be able to produce. Joy was the big time, and here Blacklisted was still borrowing equipment. Actually Joy was also borrowing her share. She didn’t have a drumset of her own for a month or two after she became Blacklisted’s new drummer.

Three months after Joy joined the band we had our first show. All I remember was that we were wearing pink, black, and grey. And that’s what counts, right? As far as our performance, we were a lot more successful, though I’m sure the band still looked constipated.

When Joy first joined the band she mentioned that her sister played guitar and might be interested in joining up. She wouldn’t be able to come to practices until school started since she lived in a little town outside Cincinnati called Aurora and worked fulltime at King’s Island. Joy’s sister Jill, became the backbone of Blacklisted. Her flawless and inventive guitar playing solidified the band’s sound and made for an exciting twist to the otherwise monotonous music that I had written. Jill was able to improvise over our old songs, not with the annoying wail of electric guitar solos, but with a thick and warm sounding strum that added new dimension with its unexpected chords. Jill could also sing. Though quiet and initially reluctant to write, Jill became a central force in the band. She has written only two songs for the band, but these songs continue to be performance highlights and crowd favorites. Her song “Too Low” was even chosen to be made into a video by T-com student Aaron Smith.

The new lineup of five was awesome to behold, yet trouble almost began immediately. Lisa and Joy bumped heads often in a silent, soon-to-be war for power. Okay, not really, but there was definitely tension between the girls. Joy is very practical—she makes to-do lists, budgets our measly earnings, seeks legal advice for us, and the like. Lisa scoffed at Joy’s paranoia, and it didn’t help that Lisa dinged up Joy’s bass by dropping it countless times. Lisa was usually late for practice, sometimes by an hour. She was always the last to show up for a show and she never carried any equipment besides her own bass, which she finally got for Christmas. I shouldn’t say she never carried equipment because about a month ago she began sensing the hostility that had built up between her and the other members. She started helping
out more, doing more for the band like making fliers for shows, calling to arrange shows, and offering paper to make CD covers (she said we didn’t have to reimburse her). But for Lisa her efforts were too little too late.

When the band first formed, Naitha and I made a pact to each other and the other girls that if someone had a problem it would be discussed up front and straightforward to the other girls. In other words: No Secrets, No Gossiping. Lofty intentions they were. We did talk behind Lisa’s band about all of our complaints like some dysfunctional family in need of group therapy. Repeatedly we talked about kicking her out but could not bring ourselves to push the issue. Instead we broadly discussed our problems, suggesting that everyone should carry equipment and everyone should practice on their own. The latter became a greater issue when we recorded with Aaron at the T-Com building. Lisa could not play a bass part that she had started playing nine months earlier. In the end, her bass part as well as Irene’s part were almost entirely taken out of the song mixes due to the shoddy playing or insufficiently tuned instruments.

When Irene informed us that she would be moving to Chicago in the summer of 2002, we were sad. When Lisa told us that she too planned to move to Chicago at that time, we were ecstatic. Here, finally, was our opportunity to start anew, with a bass player who would commit to practicing. I hung fliers around campus which read “Blacklisted: needs a new bass player.” Of course we should have known that getting rid of Lisa would not be so easy. First she informed us that she wanted to continue to be in the band though she would live four hours away. We figured, through complex calculations that took into account her habit of arriving late, that she would be a day late to practice. That would be absurdly unacceptable. We informed Lisa of this impossible situation and she replied that she wasn’t moving until November, if that. Not to be deterred, Joy, Jill, and I finally decided to tell Lisa we didn’t want her in the band anymore. It didn’t go as bad as we thought. Joy told her our decision to change the band into a four piece, and Lisa hung her head in a crying pose. There was no screaming, and although I would have liked to tell her the specific reasons we didn’t want to work with her, there was very little confrontation.

We’re still unsure if she knows why we kicked her out. She is either extremely oblivious or in denial. Now we are in the process of auditioning new bass players. While we have nothing against men, we would like to fill the position with another female. We’ve also decided to take the tag “a girl band” out of our name because it draws too much attention to our gender, and we are more interested in the quality of our music than our image. And we are considering changing our band name—Shiv? Hammerhead? Sharkey? Playing music with this group, an ever-changing experiment that continues to evolve, has shown that a group of girls can successfully join the ranks in an otherwise male-dominated musical genre. And though we still have no word of a record deal and must make our CDs with money earned from our day jobs, I can say that Blacklisted couldn’t have been a healthier activity to start in late summer.
Imagine...

Drum machine purchased from E-bay
Shirt-dresses in the style of sixties icon Edie Sedgewick
Funky beats to groove to
Azure colored Epiphone Explorer guitar
Unisynth
Lots of chorus
Hairspray
Attitude
DJX2000 Keyboard complete with simulated record-scratch noise
Jammin’ on the One
Mark Robinson covers
Robots

Imagine...

Love on the Run
Recording

In March 2002 Aaron Smith recorded Blacklisted in the telecommunications building at Ball State University as part of his Honors Thesis Project. The most exposure I had had prior to recording these songs had been a year and a half earlier when Blacklisted recorded a song for the Muncie Music Compilation. The studio was a dank basement with spilt beer and cigarette butts covering every sticky surface. The song took several hours to complete—probably because I kept forgetting the words. Working in the T-Com building—a real studio complete with thousand dollar microphones and soundproof walls—was as exciting as it was intimidating.

Recording started at ten with the setting up of drums and equipment. Joy brought Concannon's doughnuts so the mood was cheerful. We played through the three songs we planned to record with the intention of returning to mistakes and patching the instrument through to record over the faulty parts. I thought the process would not take very long since we were all recording at once. Little did I know. Just going through and playing each song until the drums were good enough took at least an hour (that is, after an hour of setting up and another hour of arranging microphones around the drums). Then came the individual instrument recordings. At least three hours were used redoing all the instruments until we were finally satisfied with the product, though by the end of the day our satisfaction was easily met when only ten to twenty mistakes were present per song. Since Aaron had the studio reserved for the entire day, we decided to do a couple more songs. Sixteen and a half hours later we had the rough cut of five songs, including a rousing rendition of the Rolling Stones' “Paint it Black.”

Blacklisted also worked with Artie Hill in recording four songs on his four-track recorder. Four-track is like 8mm film—nostalgic, gritty, and beautiful. Or it can be extremely bad. When done well, lo-fi recordings have a charm that is often missing in highly produced music. Though Artie’s recordings were done in Joy’s garage with minimal effects and basic equipment, the general consensus of the band is that they better reflect Blacklisted’s music. Because of technical difficulties with Irene and Lisa’s basses (they were out of tune) Aaron was forced to delete most of the bass parts from the T-Com recordings. Also Joy was not
satisfied with Aaron’s songs because Aaron neglected to emphasize the cymbals on her drums. For both Aaron and Artie’s recording sessions (Artie’s took several practices over a month long time period due to the sporadic free time he had available to work with us) I did not experience the same self-conscious anxiety I had when working on the Music Compilation. Due to all the performances we had had, as well as a two and sometimes three times a week practice schedule, singing into a microphone had become second nature. Most of my inhibitions were remedied also with the help of my other band Love on the Run, which prides itself on not taking its music too seriously. Love on the Run, consisting of Artie, me, and a drum machine, is a free-for-all as far as performance goes. Artie and I will “dance” in among the crowd (all six of them) and try to go out of our way to dramatize the event. It’s difficult to be embarrassed after you’ve been the only one in the room dancing (and to your own music!).

Love on the Run recorded with Maria Yates in early April at Ball State University’s Music Engineering Technology (MET) studio. Because we used a drum machine, we were able to record seven songs in half the time it took for Blacklisted. Still I was surprised that recording went on for as long as it did. First the drum tracks were accidentally deleted (add an extra hour), then there were problems with the sound of Artie’s guitar (add another hour). The process of recording was tedious, and I spent most of the time sitting on the floor doing my homework. In the end, of course, it is worth the effort just to have your own songs recorded on a tangible medium.

Blacklisted also worked on a music video with Aaron Smith for a song, alas, I did not write, but which is one of our most popular. It’s called “Too Low” and is about a girlfriend’s liberation from the arms of a controlling boyfriend. Jill wrote it and sings the lead vocals. The video was shot over two days. One shoot was predominately outside and shows the band of girls gradually running together after losing their meathead boyfriends. The video culminates with a “performance” by Blacklisted in a basement, our boyfriends gazing dumbfounded at us in their underwear. Silly and fun, I enjoyed making the video, which is another part of Aaron Smith’s honors thesis project.

I recorded five songs on my own using Artie Hill’s four-track recorder. I performed all the parts of the songs—guitars and vocals—and mixed the songs myself. The songs sound spontaneous and raw, compared with the MET, TCOM and even Artie’s recordings. I did not worry about perfection or timing but rather the overall attitude of the songs. I would like to continue this process of laying down embryonic songs because of its value in helping the band flesh out the song more thoroughly.
Monsters

I can't remember the first time I became intrigued with the macabre. In third grade my dad let me stay up on two school nights to watch Helter Skelter. After the movie I asked my mom if Charles Manson really could be Jesus. After all Jesus was crucified because people didn't believe He was the Son of God. Was it fair to call Manson crazy when he was making the same claim? Eventually she said he couldn't be Jesus because Jesus didn't murder people in their own homes. I went to bed that night not entirely satisfied with the idea that wild-eyed Manson did not carry some mystic divinity however twisted.

In fifth grade I learned of a soccer match in England which turned deadly. The situation is not new: a crowd of eager fans turns into an overzealous mob and tears down bleachers while with such force that the first trapped like sardines tall metal fence. People while journalists on the their death grimaces. The pictures were plastered morning newspaper, I asked other side didn't save the She pointed out that there down their cameras and tried The story affected me so so brazenly depicted next to clipped out the article and

By middle school I read Stephen King on the and begged my mom to rent oversized box at the local video store. The film's premise, which I surmised by my frequent handling of the box cover, concerned mental patients that had escaped from an insane asylum (they probably murdered the doctors and nurses). Stumbling into a nearby town, the patients begin a bloody carnage that does not end until the last and most physically formidable man—a giant, mute simpleton—is killed by means of an axe in the neck, a machete to the head, and about a million gunshot wounds. The picture on the front of the box showed the man, who was not unlike Rasputin in his tenacity to live holding, a severed human arm, its blood dripping from his fleshy face.

My fascination for the macabre has never left me, though my shock level has been tempered. Once shocking pictures of people suffering or already dead do not affect me like they did when I was in third grade. The jumpy black and white films they showed us in school of hollow bodied concentration camp victims; the televised clip repeated for days after the Challenger blew up showing the precise moment our childish faith in technology disappeared; Saturday afternoon documentary television like The FBI Files, Investigative Reports, and The New Detectives have introduced me to the reality of
horror. Now I search the Internet for stories that will astonish me, terrorize me like the ones from my childhood. Maybe I like to be shocked. Maybe I'm just morbidly curious about the depths to which we can stoop. Or maybe I don’t want to be so deadened that murder and mayhem don’t touch me anymore. It’s the murder that makes me feel more alive, a sentiment that sounds like something Ted Bundy might say to eager psychologists searching for a reason behind the killings. And writing about the monsters of the world helps me control them because I know tomorrow I will be looking for the next horror to add to my catalog.

The Monster portion of my thesis concerns crimes that have been committed by monsters or have been monstrous in their very nature. Most are true.

**Cause-n-Effect**—development of technology and its grotesque affect on modern society
**Slipper**—execution of inept soldier Private Eddie Slovik during World War II
**Holly**—unresolved murder of a girlfriend by the Unicorn Killer
**Between Us**—incestuous love affair between brother and sister
**Cat Radio**—Cold War technology meets the Humane Society
**Sawa**—Japanese “performance art” responsible for the deaths of twelve bank employees
**Six Days in Stanford County Prison**—psychological experiment with startling results
Cause-n-Effect

This song is a product of the boredom that often accompanied me while working at a local Chinese restaurant. I couldn’t get the robotic chorus out of my head, so I wrote it into a song. The song reflects the technology and information overload that has bombarded our society since the onset of the Internet. Several lines of the songs are phrases selected randomly from article titles in a fashion/art magazine, which creates a confused urgency to the song. What does it mean? What does technology mean? What's the meaning of the message? Artie created the wonderful drum machine and bass lines, which bring the song to life.

What’s the meaning of the message?
Cause-n-effect
Mixed media’s got her
Technology’s pet.
Can you see behind me?
Computer wire
A virtual world
Bill Gates is a liar.

What’s the meaning of the message?
Cause-n-effect
Mixed media’s got her
Technology’s pet
Designer a-go-go
Evoking Matisse
Prize pop on a yo-yo
Iron beef curtain feast.

What’s the meaning of the message?
Cause-n-effect
Mixed media’s got her
Technology’s pet
The artful dodger
Cause nobody knows
Clowns scare little children
Wires hang from their nose.
Slipper

Private Eddie Slovik was a social misfit during his youth and had previously been in trouble with the law for petty theft. But his ultimate punishment occurred during World War II after he deserted the army for a second time. President Eisenhower ordered Slovik to die by firing squad in an effort to curb wartime desertion.

Slovik had not been a model soldier; he feared weaponry and complained many times he was too nervous to be a soldier. Some of his letters to his newlywed wife reveal his state-of-mind:

“I am in the infantry for 17 weeks and after that I don't know where I am going... Honest honey, I feel like crying every time I sit down to write you a letter... I am so unlucky.”

“Everything happens to me. I've never had a streak of luck in my life. The only luck I had in my life was when I married you. I knew it wouldn't last because I was too happy. I knew they would not let me be happy.”

When asked by a member of his firing squad to be calm—take it easy—Eddie replied, “Don't worry about me. I'm okay. They're not shooting me for deserting the United States Army---thousands of guys have done that. They're shooting me for bread I stole when I was 12 years old.”

Eddie was the only American soldier since the Civil War to be executed for desertion. He was twenty-four years old.

Sent to boot camp with a slipper
Eddie told her that he missed her
They were married for just one year
Eddie had everything to fear.
Eddie couldn't use a gun
He was captured by Canadians
Eddie’s rifle wasn’t loaded
His insurrection was duly noted

The only American to be executed by his own men
The only American to be executed by his own men

Frail and timed and a misfit
“Honey I feel like crying every time I sit
Down to write you another letter
I am so unlucky.”

“They're shooting me for bread I stole when I was twelve years old.”
“They're shooting me for bread I stole when I was twelve years old.”
"Don’t worry about me—take it easy
They wouldn’t let me be happy.”
The only soldier killed by his men
Eddie dies again.

“They’re shooting me for bread I stole when I was twelve years old.”
“They’re shooting me for bread I stole when I was twelve years old.”

For more information about Private Eddie Slovik visit
http://www.detnews.com/history/eddie/eddie.htm
Holly

Ira Einhorn—longhaired, philosophical, hippie guru—murdered his ex-girlfriend Holly Maddux in Philadelphia, 1977 by bludgeoning her to death. After the frantic murder, he stuffed her body in a trunk and hid the gruesome box in a locked room in his apartment. Her decomposed body was discovered over a year after she was killed. Unwilling to admit his guilt, Einhorn jumped bail and fled to Europe, where he spent the next twenty years of his life living in relative peace with a new girlfriend amid the protection of the French countryside. France finally extradited him back to America in 2001. Holly is immortalized in pictures on a tribute website as a beautiful young woman cruelly struck down in the prime of her life by the Unicorn Killer. Visit: http://www.ourholly.org/

Holly was a lovely lady
Smiling like she’d never die
She was twenty-one so she bought us beer
I think she was a cheerleader

The prettiest girl in all the town
The smartest girl all around
The Unicorn Killer struck her down
And left her in a trunk for dead

Years went by and nobody saw her
Holly, all that’s left are pictures
Smiling like you’d never die
You deserved better

The prettiest girl in all the town
The smartest girl all around
The Unicorn Killer struck her down
And left her in a trunk for dead

Ira Einhorn, you motherfucker
You stole something beautiful
So you could keep it forever forever
But a corpse doesn’t make a very good girlfriend
So you got yourself another and another and another and another

The prettiest girl in all the town
The smartest girl all around
The Unicorn Killer struck you down
And left you in a trunk for dead
Between Us

"Between Us" is a love song, though the participants are not likely candidates. The song is not based on any specific story, but is a twisted tale of incest. Usually we think of incest as a crime committed by a male member of the family on a younger male or female. However this song tells the story of an older sister who holds an unhealthy attraction for a younger brother. The sister attempts to seduce her brother by rationalizing sex between them. Perhaps there has been a break in the family structure that has rendered the children vulnerable and in need of love. In any case the speaker of the song wants this love from her brother.

I'm the oldest by one little year.
Come closer—what is there to fear?
Flowers for me and a watch for you.
I like you and you are like me too.

We grew up grew up together.
You with me makes my life better.
Reach for me and I will reach for you.
There is nothing mom and dad can do.

Best just to keep it between us,
The others won't understand.
I see your face in the mirror,
The closer that I stand.

My birthright, a sweet inheritance.
Someday we will make good parents.

Best just to keep it between us,
The others won't understand.
I see your face in the mirror,
The closer that I stand.
Cat Radio

I read somewhere that back in the fifties American scientists created a Frankenkitty with the intention of spying on Russia. Scientists surgically installed a recording device that could relay information back to headquarters into the body of a common housecat. The cat’s tail functioned as the antenna. The plan was to let the cat out in a Moscow park and hope that Cold War secrets would reveal themselves through the whispers of passing Russians. The government spent millions of dollars on the project only to have the cat run over by a passing taxi minutes after its release.

You taught me how to feel again
Split my belly insert battery
Wired precisely
Antenna-tailed monstrosity

Cat Radio

You taught me how to speak again
Sent me to the dustbin till I was killed again
By a taxi from the Kremlin

Cat Radio

Cold War technology
New Age mythology
Kitty wants an apology!

Cat Radio

Peculiar answers
To my questions
This latest aberration
Sawa

Fifty years ago a man posing as a medical doctor entered a Japanese bank and told the employees he was to administer them an oral inoculation against dysentery. Sixteen employees lined up to drink the medicine, which turned out to be a mixture of poison. Twelve people died, and the robber made out with less than a thousand dollars. The mass murderer, it turned out to be, was an artist named Sadamichi Hirasawa whose crime was actually some questionable piece of performance art concocted by a sick mind. Though he was sentenced to die for his crime, his attorneys managed to sidestep his punishment on a technicality, allowing him to spend the rest of his life in prison painting and writing his memoirs.

Soaking your brushes in a little cyanide
It was closing time when you did decide
To start your new account—your best art
To rule the scene like Hogarth

Doctor needs to lay his hands on the line
Take two pills of cyanide
Call me in the morning if you don’t feel well
Otherwise look for me in hell

Line up
Line up
Line up
Deliver us from the evil one
Deliver us from the evil one
Six Days in Stanford County Prison

In an introductory course to psychology, our class watched on a large screen scratchy black and white videos showing inhumane experiments from the sixties and seventies. There was Milgram's Obedience Experiment, where average Americans succumbed to the pressure of administrating what they thought were harmful zaps of electricity to other participants in the experiment. There was the experiment with cute Little Albert, a baby conditioned by scientists to link startling loud noises with rats and other furry creatures. Thus the sight of a bunny caused him to start crying.

While learning about Titicutt Follies, an alarming documentary from the late sixties showing mentally disturbed patients treated inhumanely, I came across the Stanford County Prison Experiment. A film crew made a video documentary about this experiment, which dealt with power issues among prison inmates and prison guards. A pseudo-prison was created at Stanford University. College students made up the prison population, arbitrarily chosen to be either prisoner or guard. Within a few short days the experiment erupted into a chilling example of the abuse people in positions of power are capable of. Prisoners were isolated in solitary confinement, ordered to eat old meat, and forced to endured mental abuse at the hands of ruthless guards. The experiment was stopped early and dubbed "unethical" by the very scientist that supervised the Stanford County Prison.

Awakening to a blindfold crowd
I'd never screamed so loud
Tried to prove that I was mad
Escape-plan from my comrades

I just want to see you one more time

John Wayne's pushing a hunger strike
What they did was so unsportsmanlike
Punished for anything
416 did a bad thing

I just want to see you one more time

Just you wait 'til I grew up
I'll be the next Jung
Revolutionary scientist
Ruling over your prison world

I just want to see you one more time
Tragedy

Tragedy is similar to Monsters in that both are topics people tend to avoid at cocktail parties. But Tragedy permeates our lives a little more than monsters normally do. Tragedy stalks us in the supermarket, especially in the check-out lane where tabloids command our attention by daring us to flip through the pages to see that outrageous photo of a celebrity we would like to see somewhere on a beach in Europe, topless and flabby. Tragedy is in the gossip of the latest divorce, the failing grade, or the fat jokes we share with friends and acquaintances in hushed tones behind thin walls. Tragedy is Paula Abdul farting at the Grammy’s. In short, Tragedy is a fusion of legitimate suffering and pain blended with the scam of celebrity idolization, resulting in nothing more than superficial misfortune.

I do not claim that the Tragedy that occurs in the lives of celebrities is inherently inferior to our own: when Katie Couric’s husband died of colon cancer, her grief was no less real than when my grandfather died. The fact is we elevate the lives of the famous until their hardships seem as insignificant as the plot of their new film. We view celebrities through a television filter that protects them as much as it protects us. Perhaps reading about celebrities is akin to living vicariously through older siblings who get to drive and go on dates. While we look up to the older children and wish to be like them, dress like them, drink the same carbonated beverage as them, resentment can arise from this arrangement; that’s what Tragedy is ultimately about.

Tragedy is also our own suffering, our own experiences of rejection, betrayal, and hard luck. It is the age-old story of getting dumped. Tragedy is the hardship that may not affect our need to survive, but addresses the wants that every human has. Tragedy is having a lack of what we desire.

Tragedy can be applied to both natural disasters and a nasty hangnail.

The murder of a child beauty queen, where death and tragedy mingle with pop culture to produce front-page stories in People Magazine... The movie of the week depicting true crime and suffering through the mediocre acting styles of child actors grown up... Angry love, abusive love, delinquent love, obsessive love, drunk love, the love of pop culture... This is the other world I have explored in my songwriting.

Tragedy—ambiguous love
Wrinkle in Time—underage love
Best Friend—blooming love
Girl, Interrupted—waif love
Just Tell Me When You're Done—jaded love
Finish What You Started—jaded love
No Good—masochistic love
Blue Moon Sunday—stalker love
Who's the Father?—pregnant love
Tragedy

I was watching VH1 when the inspiration hit to write a song about Michael Jackson’s childhood abuse. Like most people I am intrigued with the self-proclaimed “King of Pop,” though I’m disgusted when I think about all his plastic surgery, child molestation charges, and marriages of convenience. His twisted life scares me, as do most of the subjects in this song. The purpose of the song is not to compare the bombing of Hiroshima to Pee Wee’s stints in jail or the awful child-aging disease Progeria to spiders eating their babies. But it does reflect a society where our generation gets most of its news from MTV; where America’s most important politician is Bono; and where authorities were forced to ask visiting Playboy Bunnies to leave Ground Zero after their scantily clad bodies distracted members of the cleanup crew from their sober work.

Michael Jackson was beaten by his dad
It’s sad, it’s sad
They get old before their time
It’s a crime
Robert Downey Jr. got arrested for coke
No joke, that bloke
Spiders have their babies and then they get ate
Like a grape

Cody from “Step by Step” hits and beats his wife
The pig from “Babe” was butchered.
Molly is a singer in the band
No way man, no way man.
The pig from “Babe” was butchered.

Van Gogh cut off his ear and mailed it to a friend
Is that the end of revenge?
Hiroshima J. was blown off the map
It’s a trap
Parasites live in your body
Marvin Gaye’s dad killed his only son
Another love on the run

The drummer from Def Leopard hits and beats his wife
The pig from “Babe” was butchered.
Pee Wee got arrested again
The pig from “Babe” was butchered.

Free Willy isn’t free
He’s in captivity.
A Wrinkle in Time

This song is all-keyboard fun; no other instruments besides vocals were used in the recording. Artie and I wrote this song spontaneously while driving to a Love on the Run show. We had been humming the tune for a while and already knew how the chorus would go—I just needed to write the words. Artie derived the music for the song from a mix already on the DJX 2000 (our keyboard). The song, shaped from Madeleine L’Engle’s middle school classic of the same name, became a frustrated lament of unrequited love.

The speaker in the song is a hipster in her late teens/early twenties. Like a lot of youth of her generation she frequents discos every weekend. One Friday night she sees a boy dancing by the jukebox and becomes immediately enraptured with his je ne sais quoi. As she approaches to meet him, he turns and walks away. The “wrinkle” comes from the physical distance between them, as well as the age difference; alas, he is only fourteen. The song reflects the disappointment of young love that is too young in a time where bad French in disco songs was a common occurrence.

I saw you dancing there
I couldn’t help but stare
I wanted you to see
The little game you play
In my everyday
Je suis d’ Fleur de Li!
But you went away
Approached the DJ...

A wrinkle
A wrinkle
A wrinkle in time
I’ve got to get to you!

And so you did convey
Those little games you play
You’re only just fourteen
Say goodbye today
I’ve got to rockaway
I’m NC-17

A wrinkle
A wrinkle
A wrinkle in time
I’ve got to get to you!
Best Friend

Everyone has that friend who was painfully shy in high school but finally emerged from her shell to become a popular attraction with the boys. Did a little drugs. Drank a little alcohol. Got a little pregnant.

Saw her at a party last Saturday night
A little hung over she got in a fight
I asked her what was wrong—she didn’t know why
Her dress was torn and began to cry

Best friend going down again
New York’s calling—here’s where the subway ends
Best friend gone way too far
Chicago’s next in line cause she’s got a car

She gave me twenty bucks to go down the street
Said there be some guy that I’d like to meet
I asked her what it was she wanted to get
She said she didn’t know, she’d think about it

Best friend going down again
New York’s calling—here’s where the subway ends
Best friend gone way too far
Chicago’s next in line cause she’s got a car

She loves Costello no less than zero
She dances til dawn at the all-night disco
She only wears designer clothes
A little bit of powder spilled out of her nose

Best friend going down again
New York’s calling—here’s where the subway ends
Best friend gone way too far
Chicago’s next in line cause she’s got a car

Best friend going down again
New York’s calling—here’s where the subway ends
Best friend gone way too far
Chicago’s next in line cause she’s got a car
Girl, Interrupted

Remember a couple months ago when police arrested Winona Ryder for shoplifting $5,000 worth of clothes and merchandise from a ritzy store in Los Angeles?

Girl, I saw you standing there
There were cops behind your hair
They were putting on the cuffs
They said you’d had enough
And as they reached inside your bag
They pulled out five thousand tags
"Book her! She’s come undone.
Another love on the run."

It was another shopping spree
Bel Air to West Beverly
Donna Karan, Calvin Klein
It was a quarter after nine
Your credit card rejected
You said “Oh I just forgotten.
I was in a rush.
Can we keep this on the hush?”

Girl, interrupted
I’m just a girl, interrupted
Girl, interrupted
I’m just a girl!

And when they opened up your purse
After your million dollar spurt
They found Xanax, Ativan
You said it was because American
Quilt and Little Women
caused you to begin sinnin’
Oh how you wished for another Heathers
or a Scissorhands, Edward.

Girl, interrupted
I’m just a girl, interrupted
Girl, interrupted
I’m just a girl!
Just Tell Me When You’re Done

and

Finish What You Started

The first song was inspired by a fictitious song a friend of mine wanted to write called “Just Tell Me When We’re Dead.” I obviously misheard her, but the mistake inspired me to write this song. The second song is a nice companion to “Just Tell Me When You’re Done” in both its lyrical content and its punk/new wave inspired music. The content of the songs were inspired by a personal experience of mine, though both have been fictionalized to a certain degree. The story behind the songs is not interesting enough to write about, just note that if you’ve ever had your heart broken, then you may be able to identify with these songs.

Just Tell Me When You’re Done

I was asleep when you walked in on me
Lying as still as a statue.
My eyes we’re closed I couldn’t see you
I couldn’t see you—you were beautiful
But I couldn’t see you I couldn’t see you.

You snuck beside me crept over me
And I whispered in your ear.

Chorus!

Just tell me when you’re done
(turn out the lights, the glare’s bringing me down)
Play me while you strum
(another girl’s heart as you ask her to make out)
Cut me when I’m numb
(clean up the mess and then get the fuck out)
Wake me when you come
Pinch me, I’m asleep, and I’m dreaming!

My leg won’t quit it bothers you
Always shaking and cold as a statue
“Sorry dear I don’t know why
but this has happened once again?
Just when things felt right.”
I woke up full of spite!
I went too far
I went too far
Chorus!

Just tell me when you’re done
(turn out the lights, the glare’s bringing me down)
Play me while you strum
(another girl’s heart as you ask her to make out)
Cut me when I’m numb
(clean up the mess and then get the fuck out)
Wake me when you come
Pinch me, I’m asleep, and I’m dreaming!

Finish What You Started

I was stumbling in Ann Arbor
The path was hidden by a mile-long trench.
I felt stricken, tasting skin
You came in. I was born.

Oh the way you let me in.
Oh the way you gave in.
I was taken.

Finish what you started

I dropped size. MAOI
You were bored with my smile.
When you see that you need me
I’ll be gone in Canada.

Oh the way you let me in.
Oh the way you gave in.
I was taken.

Finish what you started

Confess. You’re a victim
Of yourself. Of yourself.

Oh the way you let me in.
Oh the way you gave in.
I was taken.
No Good

Nic Lee provided the basic chord progression of this song. I wanted to write a quick song, and Nic helped me by playing a common chord progression. The generic lyrics amplify the cliché riff used in the verses of this song, and in fact, the only salvation lyrically of this song is the chorus, which incidentally was written while I was making Chinese food at a former job.

The focus of the verse lies not in the lyrical content but in the emotional outpour of the singing. When Lisa sings this song, her voice scratches through the verse to the point where word deciphering becomes extremely difficult. That’s just as well, since the words are not extravagant. In fact, the simplicity of the words is indicative of the mentality of the narrator. She is from a lower socioeconomic class (she works at the local Village Pantry), she is prone to exaggeration (“six foot ten”), and she is turned on sexually by stereotypical characteristics (blonde, tan, red boots).

The narrator mangles metaphors in the second verse. She means to say that some people see him as a tall drink of water, though she can only articulate “some say he’s a glass.” Two lines later she continues her metaphor which serves to flesh out her intentions a little more: “a drink of water.” Interspersed in this metaphor is her reaction to this man. He is an “ass” and not a tall drink of water but rather “devil’s fodder.” This statement can either signify his abrasive personality which ultimately serves the ethics of demons or can be another strange twist on “devil’s food cake,” a dessert which is extremely tempting, but has repercussions.

The chorus is the only part of the song that is attractive lyrically. Often water, sea, and oceans are symbols of freedom, life, peace, even desirability (tall drink of water). In this case the narrator’s ex-lover’s ocean is full of menacing jellyfish which can cause a nasty sting. His sea is not refreshing, but salty and dirty (algae). His love is only temporary (“runs through me”) and scars the narrator like that threat of a murderous ex-boyfriend, which we assume she knows something about given her use of the simile “like an ex-boyfriend on a killing spree.”

Compared to the expressive singing during the verses, the choruses are sung with stale monotony. The harmonies take away the individual voice portrayed earlier in the song and suggest this situation of abusive love is not new to the narrator. She has been through it all before and can barely rouse enough energy to convey her anger. The only point at which she successfully breaks through monotony is when she screams “like an ex-boyfriend on a killing spree.” A portion of that line is then repeated three times at the end of the song, a grim forecast that her days of loving bad men may not be over.

Working at the VP
Never suited me me,
Until he walked in
He was six foot ten.

He had red boots on,
His hair was really blonde,
He was very tan,
I wanted this man.

That was a year ago.
I became his whore.
Then everything went wrong,
Now we don’t get along.

His love was like a salty sea brimming with jellyfish and algae.
All that water runs through me like an ex-boyfriend on a killing spree.

Some say he’s a glass
(I say he’s an ass)
A real drink of water
(The devil’s fodder).

He ain’t no good
Always misunderstood
As cheap as a fly
A real wise guy.

Yeah, he’s no good!

His love was like a salty sea brimming with jellyfish and algae.
All that water runs through me like an ex-boyfriend on a killing spree.
Blue Moon Sunday

Remember that boy in your math class in middle school with the shy smile whose house you begged your mom to drive by just so you could see his bedroom window or his German shepherd romping through the yard? Those relationships never work out anyway. This song is about an obsessive love that borders on the disturbed.

I met you on a blue moon Sunday
I met you on a blue moon Sunday

And the moon is by night
A stranger by day
Don’t let me slip
Oh let me slip away

I can see you in the morning
I can see you in the morning

I’m higher than a kite
My stranger at night
I’m walking by your light
Now by and by

Your starshine shines in my eyes
Your starshine shines in my eyes

I’m licking your spoon
Like I didn’t know what to do
Despite all that I do
You make me blue

You on a blue moon Sunday
I met you on a blue moon Sunday

I’m your idle satellite
My stranger at night
Let me find you soon
I beg of you
Who’s the Father

This song originated as a potential band name for Blacklisted. Though the provocative title was transformed into a strange little song, the band has only performed it live two or three times. It is best to experience this song in person.

I was late again this week
The third time this month
I ask you if you please
Who’s the father?
Who’s the father?
Who’s the father?
[continues as another voice begins improvising lyrics to the crowd—something along the lines of:]
Was I with you last night?
I don’t remember
[begin listing off and echoing boy’s names taken from those among the audience:]
Deric, Deric
Artie, Artie
Kyle, Kyle
Peter, Peter
Douglas, Douglas
Michael, Michael
Who’s the father?
Who’s the father?
Who’s the father?