











Jim's Batch of Buried Treasures! 

-  **"PINK ROSES"**
Say She She
-  **"GREAT MAN SINGING"**
Timothy Bailey & the Humans
-  **"AGAIN!"**
Lev UFO
-  **"LAST DAYS ON EARTH"**
Cari Cari
-  **"MILLIONS OF REASONS"**
Korean Boyfriend
-  **"BEAT ME TO THE PUNCH"**
Oneida



soundopinions It's time for Jim and Greg to share their latest batch of Buried Treasures. In your opinion, which was the top treasure on the list? Listen now at the link in bio.

"“A great song, a powerful story.”"

— Jim DeRogatis

TIMOTHY BAILEY & THE HUMANS UNPACK TRAUMA ON "WEIRD ANIMAL"

HOME > TIMOTHY BAILEY & THE HUMANS

By Doug Nunnally Published October 21, 2022 in News



"Deeply moving and utterly gripping"

The level of attention and detail on the new Timothy Bailey & The Humans album is truly stunning. Each little production touch and musical flourish help the vulnerable songs extend far past their tender composition, and it's what makes their new self-titled record a musical marvel. That careful, meticulous artistic vision extends past the music as well, as the band has shown on their latest music video for the album's true standout song, "Weird Animal."

Directed by Rachel Kleinman, the video evokes the longing distress of classic cinema, with scenes that evoke imagery of film noir mysteries and New Hollywood explorations. Alongside Liza Kate, Bailey explores the central query posed by the song throughout which becomes more strained and distressed as the song plays out. "Am I a weird animal? / Can you show me what I'm for?" he asks in the opening moment while brass notes sputter over an emotive backdrop of poignant tones. Bailey's delivery here is enough to pull you in, but the clever video elevates the proceedings making this song really ring deep in our subconscious.

Like the rest of the record, "Weird Animal" finds Timothy Bailey working through his past trauma and abuse with music. "Making pain into compelling art is important work," Bailey remarked in a press release for the video. "When it's done well, as it is here, it has the power to connect rather than repel." Bailey himself had much more to say about the context and genesis of "Weird Animal," but instead of splicing it up into neat little snippets, we invite you to read the full thing on his website so you can fully understand the context behind this affecting song ([link here](#)).

"Weird Animal" is the third single from the group's new self-titled record, after "Great Man Singing" this past September ([link](#)) and "Ellington Bridge" in May ([link](#)). Each fascinating in their own right, this latest single may be the most stark taste of what's really housed within the ten track record that is deeply moving and utterly gripping.

You can watch the video for "Weird Animal" below and we strongly recommend you listen to the new self-titled record by Timothy Bailey & The Humans. Stream it on Bandcamp and while you're there, maybe pre-order a snazzy vinyl copy to add to your collection ([link here](#)).

"Manages to draw from artists as diverse as Leonard Cohen, Chet Baker, and the Tindersticks"



RVA MAG'S BLACK FRIDAY RICHMOND MUSIC VIDEO ROUNDUP

by Marilyn Drew Necci | Nov 25, 2022 | MUSIC

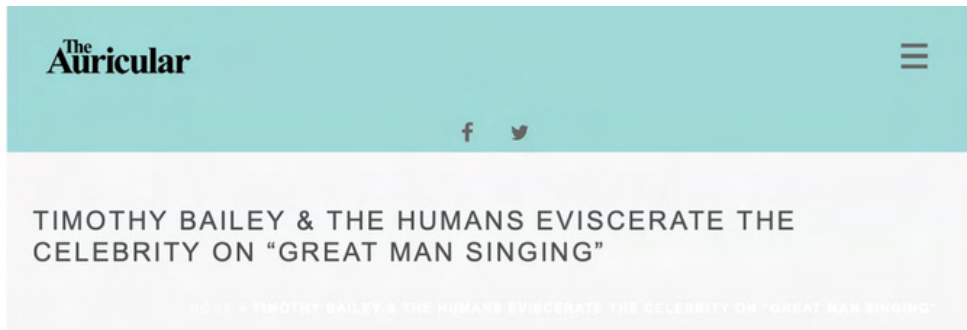
Timothy Bailey & the Humans, "Weird Animal"

timothybaileyandthehumans.bandcamp.com

Timothy Bailey & the Humans are a group that's been around Richmond for a while, but they only recently released their first proper album, a self-titled effort from which "Weird Animal" is drawn. It's the third single from the album, but it's the one that caught our attention the most, with its moody indie pop sensibility that manages to draw from artists as diverse as Leonard Cohen, Chet Baker, and the Tindersticks (and if you know all three of those references, chances are this band is right up your alley). These guys have obviously made a lot of great friends around Richmond while they were coming up, as the album features guests like Liza Kate, Curt Sydnor, Erin Lunsford of Erin & the Wildfire, and a ton more. It's the songwriting that draws you in, though. That said, "Weird Animal"'s video, directed by Rachel Kleinman, adds layers to the meaning of the track, as we see vocalist Timothy Bailey dressed up in the kind of fancy suit that makes you think he's a lounge singer in a cocktail jazz bar where they still think rock n' roll is kid's stuff. It's a weirdly appropriate setting for this jazzy and mature-sounding music, but at the same time, the song's undercurrent of loneliness and alienation also cuts through the video, as we see backstage scenes that make clear this lounge singer is maybe not having as great a time as we'd like to think.

"An impressive piece of social and cultural commentary"

"Dazzling lyricism and impressive musicianship"



Timothy Bailey & The Humans Eviscerate The Celebrity On "Great Man Singing"

By Doug Nunnally Published September 13, 2022 In News

Timothy Bailey & The Humans is coming out swinging on their new song. "Great Man Singing," the latest single from their debut self-titled album out on September 30th, is a sweeping takedown of the blind celebrity worship that allowed predators like Kevin Spacey and Brett Kavanaugh to stay on top for years and years. Armed with a scathing video, the song is an instant stand-out and an impressive piece of social and cultural commentary.

Filmed and edited by PJ Sykes (who's also credited as a special advisor on the upcoming record), the video begins with a *60 Minutes* style "confession" between Timothy Bailey and a reporter (played by Liza Kate). Tales of debauchery follow as Bailey recounts his time with Marlon Brando to the incredulous reporter. As the song picks up steam and the central theme begins to unfold, the video shifts to shots of so-called "great" men who have since been exposed as habitual predators. In one shot, Matt Lauer is seen joking about flashing. In another, we're reminded of the personal connection between a former conservative president and a convicted pedophile. It's a parade of celebrity lows over the last several years, all adding to the societal horror as Bailey sings the central lyric of the song "You give the guy a pass / when he's good at playing creepy."

The music is brilliant here, tempering the lyrical condemnation with a yearning sound that paints the song with golden age optimism that's since been shattered by reality. It's the best type of musical commentary — one that plays out the scene an apologist makes in his mind over and over again, no matter how preposterous it truly is.

“Great Man Singing” is the second single from the upcoming self-titled record after the lofty song “Ellington Bridge” was released earlier this year. It's the first taste of recorded music from the band since their five-song EP on Cherub Records back in 2006 and expounds upon the band's dazzling lyricism and impressive musicianship. For more on the band's genesis and recording process, make sure to check out their *Style Weekly* profile from this past May, penned by *Auricular* friend and contributor Davy Jones. (Link here.)

Watch the video for “Great Man Singing” below and make sure to pre-order a copy of *Timothy Bailey & The Humans* in both digital and physical formats over at their Bandcamp page. (Link here.)

A Credible Messenger

Timothy Bailey's pathway toward hope and his first LP leading his band, The Humans.

BY DAVY JONES

[click to enlarge](#)



“It can sound like a cliché to say that creativity or art or writing or music can save your life, but in Tim’s case, I think it’s literal to the last degree.”

Author and teacher Valley Haggard doesn’t typically speak publicly about her students’ work. Her Life in 10 Minutes workshops are designed to help writers of all experience levels and ambitions dive deep into their creative consciousness, emphasizing writing by hand, sharing aloud and intentional listening. It’s a sacred space. In fact, a disclaimer is in order:

“Tim encouraged me to be very candid about my experience with his mental health and his writing,” Haggard says, “and normally I would not ever speak directly about a student or friend in this way.”

It’s not the only way Timothy Bailey, leader of Richmond-based rock group Timothy Bailey & The Humans, stands out to Haggard. Early in his time with Life in 10 Minutes, Haggard could tell something special was happening.

“At one point I remember thinking, ‘I feel like I have one of the greats — a great literary mind — in my classroom,’” she says. “He has an incredible range of skill in writing, with an endless depth of material to draw from.”

Prior to the mid-2010s, when Bailey began participating in Haggard’s workshops, he was struggling to bring the deepest-seated material, which includes early and prolonged child abuse, to the surface. He first formed The Humans in 2006, and

the group released a five-song EP on Richmond-based Cherub Records that year, but Bailey hit the reset button and reformed the group following a 2009 decline in his mental health.

“Apart from [therapy], I figured that the worst stuff in me was unacceptable to talk about. The abuse, and the difficulties of it remaining in my present when I’d like it to be in the past. In Valley’s group, I would write these brutal truths, and people would just accept it.”

“He’s allowed himself to unravel these stories [where] there’s immense pain,” Haggard says. “There’s immense suffering, but the reason we’ll go anywhere with Tim is because the language is so beautiful. There’s so much humor, there’s so much tenderness, and there’s so much humanity. It’s not like he takes us into a dark pit and leaves us there. He takes us on this very, very human ride.”

With his upcoming self-titled album “Timothy Bailey & The Humans,” his first full-length effort leading the group, Bailey is giving those outside the writing workshop a seat on that ride, starting with soaring lead single “Ellington Bridge.” The album has been a lifetime in the making, though it couldn’t have been rendered so successfully at any other point.

Seeing Bailey work in the studio is like watching two frustratingly divergent timelines finally converge in the present. In one of those timelines, he’s a confident craftsman capable of charting arrangements and articulating his creative vision when it matters. Bailey was born in Virginia Beach, attended Cox High School, and went on to study music at the post-secondary level — for a short time at William Paterson University in New Jersey and later at Virginia Commonwealth University.

“It’s a pretty fascinating thing for an artist to arrive on the scene fully formed,” co-producer and Creative Capital grantee Bob Massey says. “Tim has had all these years to really think through what his aesthetic values are.”

Bailey and his band, which includes guitarist Ben Nicastro, bassist Doyle Hull, drummer Go Weatherford and violinist Melissa Sunderland Jones, walked into Richmond’s Spacebomb Studios in December of 2021 exceptionally well prepared. Pre-production rehearsals paid dividends in the form of speedy guitar, bass and drum tracking that put the project ahead of schedule.

“He wrote arrangements and charts for everything,” Massey says of Bailey, who will also be credited as a co-producer on the sonically detailed album. “He worked with this band to collaborate on making this thing tight, and then they showed up in the studio and knocked out the basic tracks in the studio in two days. That’s unheard of. That’s like Muscle Shoals, or the Wrecking Crew. That thing doesn’t exist anymore.”

“We’re a sensitive group of people,” Bailey says of The Humans. “I think the thing that helps that, in addition to the sheer amount of time that you spend with someone, is spending time in a band that listens to one another. That’s not always a given. It’s been kind of astonishing.”

Bailey wasn’t just leading his own band. The album features contributions from standout Richmond-based session talent, including trumpeter Bob Miller, vocalists Liza Kate and Erin Lunsford and keyboard polymath Curt Sydnor.

Sydnor joins Bailey on the album’s emotional low point, a sparse and wrenching ballad entitled “Yours Truly.” “It’s a grim, grim, painful song, even to sing,” Bailey says. “But [Curt] has so much intelligence and horsepower under the hood, and it’s a simple song, so collaborating with him to find the perfect overlap between all of that knowledge and skill and the intention of the song was so fun.”



While Bailey’s charts provided instructions for each session player, he was taken aback seeing those parts come to life. Erin Lunsford’s singing on “Unseen Ocean” was especially powerful. “She sang the part more or less as written,” Bailey remembers, “but with such skill and with such finesse, I just started weeping. At the end of the take, she turns over to say, ‘Was that okay?’ and she looks at me and I have tears streaming down my face, and she was kind of like, ‘Aw buddy, it’s okay.’ It was unreal.”

It’s in reactions like that one that the second timeline becomes visible: that of an artist who has experienced setback after setback, and who, as a result, is uniquely positioned to soak in the joys of making a proper debut LP. “I’m 49 years old,” he notes, “and the experience of making this record — I am not exaggerating — is the first time I ever felt like I did my own meaningful work.”

“That’s what makes this record unique,” says Chad Clark, who co-produced and mixed the album, and who releases critically acclaimed music under the name Beauty Pill. “In a way, he’s kind of a kid, but in a way he’s definitely not a kid at all ... I think those are the traits that people will fall in love with, all of those contradictions about him.”

Bailey created extensive demo tracks with synthesized MIDI instrumentation, which any arranger will tell you pales in comparison to the real thing. The first player outside the band to contribute in the studio was French horn player Amanda Burton. “It just gave me goosebumps,” Bailey says. “When those overdubs started happening, it was spine-tingling a lot of the time.”

“He’s a middle aged guy, and he’s not made an album before,” Clark says. “He gets very excited in ways that someone who’s 21 gets excited, and he’s self-aware enough to recognize that he sounds young sometimes.”

There’s a downside to that newness, though, and Clark witnessed that as well during his time at Spacebomb. Clark describes a session in which Bailey, whom Clark praises for high-level artistry, expert musical communication and compositional knowledge that exceeds his own, was thrown off by the precise, clean sound of the studio’s piano.

“It was something that he was having trouble adjusting to,” Clark says. “It was a moment where he had to reckon with, ‘This is not what I envisioned. It’s different from what I hoped.’ It was definitely a very dramatic moment, and everybody that was in the room at that moment kind of held their breath. None of us want to upset him, but it’s really important to keep going.”

Bailey’s is not merely a story of resilience — of diligently fighting through obstacles. There have been periods of his life when he could not keep going, and as a result, Bailey has lost time, both in his music career and in a more literal sense. He

describes not remembering “huge swaths” of his childhood, and he’s experienced multiple psychiatric hospitalizations. He’s carried his therapist’s phone number on a piece of paper in his pocket, using it more than once upon finding himself walking in Washington, D.C., not knowing who he was.

Producer Bob Massey has seen those struggles up close. They were both living in Washington in the early 2000s, and Massey asked Bailey for help with demos for a recording project. The results were both impressive and alarming.

“I described the thing I wanted,” Massey remembers, “which was this languid guitar solo, and he proceeded to shred like Eddie Van Halen and couldn’t stop. It was the most tangible view of mental illness that I’d seen. I was like, ‘Oh, he’s kind of here and kind of not here.’ But it was amazing to watch the fireworks at the same time.”

Massey and Bailey first met in the mid-1990s as two musicians aiming to launch careers out of Richmond’s indie scene — Bailey with his group Schwa and Massey with his group Jettison Charlie. The two became creative confidants, sharing songs with one another, and sharing frustrations around trying to break through. “Life for young artists is hard, and so it helps to have someone you can complain to and get recommendations from, and get support,” Massey says.

[click to enlarge](#)



They’ve maintained a connection in the years since, through relocations — Massey moved to Los Angeles after living in Washington, while Bailey moved back to Richmond — and through times in which Bailey was struggling. Through Bailey’s work in multiple bands, his enrollment and exit from a University of Maryland counseling psychology PhD program, and the rise and fall of a woodworking business.

“It’s just crushing to see a guy that is clearly brilliant across a spectrum of idioms unable to close the deal on anything because he’s constantly being kneecapped by his own brain chemistry,” Massey concludes. “At a certain point you just go, ‘This guy needs a f—ing break. How do we engineer this?’”

Timothy Bailey, meet Chad Clark. Massey and Clark first crossed paths a couple of decades ago, during the time Massey was active in the district’s music scene. Massey’s own discography includes Clark’s production work, and with since-confessed ulterior motives in mind, Massey recommended Bailey and Clark get together so the former could pick the latter’s brain about how to reconcile recording plans with the available resources.

“There’s a joke in Hollywood that if you want money, ask for advice, and if you want advice, ask for money,” Massey says. “I was like, ‘Why don’t I put you in touch with Chad, and you ask him for advice about how to do an ambitious recording on the cheap, because he excels at that.’”

Shortly after that initial meeting, which took place in January of 2020, Bailey asked Clark to produce the album. In addition to his Beauty Pill bona fides, Clark brings to the table era-spanning production and mixing experience, including work with legendary Washington, D.C.-based bands Fugazi and the Dismemberment Plan. “Chad is, I think it’s fair to say, a kind of genius,” Bailey notes. “He’s recognized as such in certain quarters of post-rock music production — the kind of guy who other engineers and producers look up to.”

“It’s such a massive privilege to have him involved because of his skill,” Bailey adds, “and the collaborative vibe has been so cool. We’re working from sympathetic but different aesthetic concerns.”

That sympathetic connection goes beyond music. In 2007, Clark was stricken with a viral heart infection that’s often fatal, and while emergency open-heart surgery saved his life, his health requires ongoing monitoring. (Another infection landed him in the hospital in March.) “I honestly don’t know how long my life will be,” he says. “I hope I live a long life, but it wouldn’t be shocking for me to die young.”

“He’s dealing with a health issue that is ongoing, and so am I,” Bailey says of Clark. “Mine is a mental health issue, but he and I have something in common — being someone whose health is not a given. It’s a part of the work we each do.”

Clark agrees. “I think it means we can’t f— around, basically. It’s not light what we’re doing.”

Bailey cites a lengthy hospitalization of his own, a psychiatric one in 2013, as a pivotal moment. It was around that time that he read Cormac McCarthy’s Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, “The Road,” which chronicles a father and son’s grueling fight to survive after an extinction event. “It’s such a fearless work of art,” Bailey says. “It paints a portrait of what it really is to be without hope — to be in genuine despair. And then it gets worse.”

But Bailey was struck at how hope begins to shine through near the novel’s conclusion. “That’s what it felt like to me,” he says. “Because after that hospitalization in 2013, I just was beginning to glimpse the idea that maybe — maybe — it could improve.”

Bailey has turned that glimmer into an animating idea he calls the credible message of hope, and his rich baritone is a sublime vehicle for hard-earned optimism. The narratives on “Timothy Bailey & The Humans” are undeniably weighty, from the damaging sexual relationship in “Weird Animal” (“You can never ride me hard enough with your sensitive soul”) to the insidious charisma of the title character in “Great Man Singing” (“You give the guy a pass when he’s good at playing creepy”). Still, the possibility of triumph emerges, even in bleak circumstances. As the conclusion of “Ellington Bridge” puts it, “Maybe we’ll rise beyond this night.”

“My answer to ‘Can it get better?’ is never ‘Absolutely. You’re gonna be fine. You can go through these extreme moments of human despair and it’s gonna be fine,’” Bailey says. “It’s more like, ‘With imagination and with connection, maybe it really can.’”

By setting these traumas to song, Bailey is charting a daring path forward. Chad Clark sees it as transformative. “I don’t want to be too hyperbolic,” Clark says, “but I hope Tim becomes an important figure. I think that the record could be very important. I think that there are people who are going to latch onto Tim as someone who has spoken for them in a pretty bold and good way.”

Bob Massey also sees significance in the timing of this step in Bailey’s creative life. “The culture values prodigies but discounts late-bloomers,” he says. “But I think the late-bloomer often has a lot more to offer than the prodigy. In this case, it’s an entire lifetime of experience, wisdom, skills and musicality, and it’s music for grown-ups. It’s music for people who have suffered and who have loved and who have come through the other side, or maybe are still not there yet.”

Valley Haggard has seen Bailey’s impact on an audience firsthand.

“We were mesmerized,” she says of a 2019 Timothy Bailey & The Humans performance at Gallery5 that was part of a fundraiser for Life in 10 Minutes. The first set featured Haggard’s students reading their work, and Bailey’s band followed, pairing the writing that happens in the workshop with one illustration of artistry that has blossomed from it.

“The music is this one beautiful thing unto itself,” Haggard says, “but the way that he incorporated storytelling in between the songs, and the persona of Timothy Bailey that he created to create this narrative, it just amplified the experience of the music.”

[click to enlarge](#)



While firm plans aren't yet in place, there's likely to be an in-town show in conjunction with the full album's release, which is projected for mid-July. It promises to be a rewarding milestone for Bailey — "Seeing [the album] come to fruition is one of the best feelings I've ever had," he says — and for Haggard as well.

"What I feel is joy," she says. "I feel pride. I feel triumph to see somebody who has suffered from severe, debilitating mental illness for most of his life -- to the point of being incapacitated-- be able to realize this dream. It's just incredible to watch. It's literally watching a dream come true."

To hear "Ellington Bridge," visit timothybaileyandthehumans.bandcamp.com. For more information about the upcoming self-titled Timothy Bailey & The Humans album, visit timothybaileyandthehumans.com.

December 27, 2022

Past Imperfect

Our jazz critic ponders the musical year that was 2022.

BY PETER MCELHINNEY

Time often crawls when experienced and flies in retrospect.

Year ends are the traditional separator, an interruption for colored lights and time off, over which a continuum of activity is draped. The past 12 months saw a somewhat shaky return from COVID constriction to something that passes for normality, even if the past still lingers in every cough and prudent facemask.

Best of the year lists are inevitably a fool's errand. This year involved, as always, too many great moments and missed opportunities for a complete list. So with apologies for omissions, including everything yet to happen in the waning days of 2022, here is an imperfect perspective.

It was a good year for intimate shows with extraordinary quality. A band like **Tim Bailey and the Humans** can rock a conventional club like the Broadberry, but hearing them in the confines of the Sefton Coffee Company basement opens an entirely new dimension. **John Hollenbeck's "George" quartet**, and bassist **Michael Formanek's Drome trio** played house parties at Spacebomb's lovely studios, as did a series of local bands curated, and often led, by drummer **Brian Jones**. **Curt Sydnor's "Four Folios"** series at Epiphany Church are often as experimentally revelatory as they are unattended.

The new series programmed by **Adam Hopkins** at Artspace had some great nights with both local groups and individual artists passing through town, including saxophonist **Josh Sinton** and guitar/organ duo **Grassy Sound**. **Michael Hawkins** jam sessions, featuring guest artists and anyone brave enough to sit in, relocated with Orbital Music Park from a jewel-like corner of a warehouse to Cary Street. **Cameron Ralston** and **Daniel Clarke's** golden hour performances in Quirk Hotel's boutique lobby were a weekly reminder of the offhand brilliance of the local scene.

NARROWCAST

by Al Shipley

Monthly Report: September 2022 Albums

Wednesday, October 05, 2022

4. Timothy Bailey & The Humans - *Timothy Bailey & The Humans*

Chad Clark from Beauty Pill/Smart Went Crazy co-produced the debut album from this Richmond, Virginia band, and it's a really unique, charming record. Timothy Bailey has a voice with a pleasant slight rasp and a lot of character, and it plays nicely against these beautiful arrangements full of viola and flugelhorn and vibraphone. "Weird Animal" and "Ellington Bride" are the standouts from my early listens to the album.

RVA PLAYLIST

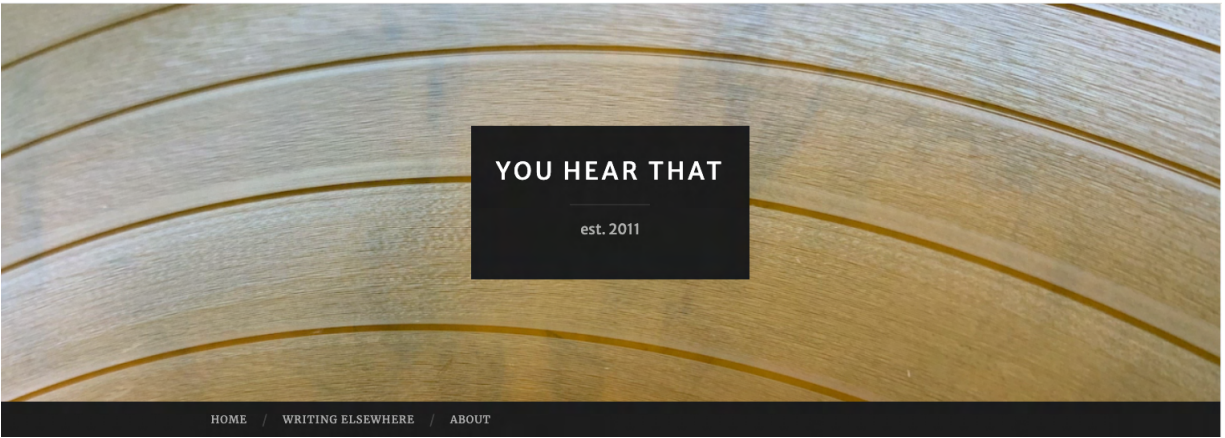


Now Playing – RVA (Local Stuff)



Timothy Bailey and the Humans

This album is a journey. Going through the darkest depths to eventually finding your way to the light, this is a beautiful record from start to finish. With well-crafted emotional songs, this project tells a powerful personal story of a journey through mental illness to find meaning and hope. If you like artists like Leonard Cohen or Nick Cave, this will be right up your alley.



YOU HEAR THAT

est. 2011

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Bandcamp Friday: May 2022

MAY 6, 2022 / [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

I normally write up a handful of releases for Bandcamp Friday, and I've listed a bunch of stuff I'm excited about below, but this time around, I want to shine an especially bright light on a single song: "Ellington Bridge," the first single from the upcoming eponymous album by Richmond-based rock group Timothy Bailey & The Humans.

On Tuesday, [a *Style Weekly* article](#) went live that I'd been working on for more than five months — a deep-dive into the journey that led to the creation of *Timothy Bailey & The Humans*, and into the creative community that has rallied around Bailey. (The album was recorded at Spacebomb Studios with his band, a killer lineup of session players performing Bailey's own arrangements, and production help from Creative Capital grantee Bob Massey and Chad Clark of Beauty Pill.) I feel fortunate to have had a window into such a remarkable creative achievement — music that's as bold and beautiful as any I've heard, and that communicates a type of hope that will both break your heart and mend it back together stronger than it was before.

Bob Massey may have said it best:

"The culture values prodigies but discounts late-bloomers," he says. "But I think the late-bloomer often has a lot more to offer than the prodigy. In this case, it's an entire lifetime of experience, wisdom, skills and musicality, and it's music for grown-ups. It's music for people who have suffered and who have loved and who have come through the other side, or maybe are still not there yet."

Wake-Up Call

Trying to make sense of a changed music industry after a 25-year absence.

BY TIMOTHY BAILEY

[click to enlarge](#)



I am a Rip Van Winkle of the music world. When I quit my band in 1995, I fell asleep—metaphorically speaking—in my creative life. And just as Washington Irving's character rediscovered his changed world upon waking after 20 years of slumber, the music world I awoke to as a middle-aged person was not the one I knew in my 20s. Not by a long shot. But while most musicians I know had encountered sweeping changes in the music business incrementally, I ran into them all at once. It was a stark contrast.

Before nodding off in 1995, there was a music industry. I know because I spent the first half of my 20s striving to become a part of it.

I moved to Richmond because of a band in January 1992. That band, Schwa, had started in Virginia Beach, but our bassist, Michael Hearst, lived in Richmond where he was a VCU music student. I followed Mike west on I-64 a year after he'd moved here. We were part of what I now think of as the uncool segment of the Richmond music scene. It was composed of people

who liked spending a lot of time at the library as teenagers. We were sweet, terribly twee and bereft of rock n' roll edginess. Cool Richmond back then was a good bit darker, harder and more heroin-chic.

[click to enlarge](#)



Schwa was a starter band. We didn't always play in time or sing the notes we meant to, and my songwriting back then was horrendously prolix. I can't help blushing when I recall some of my worst lines (behold: night after night I sang the line, "self-proclamation is not self-abnegation.") My heart was in the right place, I guess. However good (or bad) we may have been, though, we were earnest about trying to be good. And as particularly uncool people, we were also extremely ambitious.

Back then, you weren't supposed to want to "make it." At least not in the world of indie rock. Striving to make it was uncool. But Schwa was operating in the aftermath of Nirvana's megahit "Nevermind," and all the country's little bands like ours believed there were potential record deals out there with our names on them. For a while, we were correct to a startling degree. Back then, A&R people at major labels really did discover bands, write them checks for \$250,000, and send them into the studio. I knew people in bands for whom that exact thing happened. Their records are largely unknown now, but at the time it was overwhelmingly tantalizing to Schwa. We wanted that.

One day I came home from class at VCU to a full answering machine. The first message was from a singer we knew from a band in Norfolk. His voice was quavering. "You guys got the Jackpot feature in CMJ," he said gravely. I don't think I knew what CMJ was. I probably had to call someone and ask. It was The College Music Journal, more-or-less the Pitchfork of its day. The Jackpot column was exactly what it sounds like. Bands featured there had won the proverbial jackpot. Mike and I used to mail our tapes to any organization so much as vaguely associated with the music industry. My guess is that the address for CMJ was on a list we saw somewhere. We'd won the jackpot in a lottery we barely knew we'd entered.

[click to enlarge](#)



The messages after the singer's on my answering machine were all from A&R reps at major labels. Sony, The David Geffen Company, Warner Brothers, that kind of thing. "We're interested. Send us your stuff." So we sent them tapes. Some passed immediately. Others asked for more material. We borrowed money and recorded another demo. We sent the new material to the labels who asked for it, and they all passed. Sad trombone!

Schwa had a few other close encounters with career success. We wound up with a manager in Athens, Ga. and we once turned down a record deal with a label because it seemed even shadier than most. Our video placed second in an unsigned band contest on NBC's "Late Night with Conan O'Brien." (Watching it now makes me feel like a goon—it's like looking at your goofiest middle school yearbook photo). SpinArt Records released a 7" vinyl single; we'd changed our name to the anodyne "Fashion Central" by then—a story for another time. All along, an A&R rep from Atlantic seemed to haunt us, alternately expressing interest and never returning our calls. My point is that back then, a model existed for the monetization of music. That model made some people wealthy while giving many more a stable middle class existence.

I burned out and quit the band in 1995, and my long slumber began.

A changed world

I had a long, weird dream while asleep. In it, I moved around between Richmond and DC. I worked jobs that felt alien to me, like I was playing a character on a TV show that I didn't like very much. In any case, I wasn't involved with music in any meaningful way. When I finally woke up, it was into a very different world. It seemed as if there were perhaps no such thing as the music industry anymore, at least not any form I recognized. I had fallen asleep in a world where music was bought and sold in units (albums) that cost around \$12. Music fans bought them at stores. Record labels and the artists they represented shared the profits. And even though the system was never great — many artists got ripped off by label executives and other grifters — overall, that system let musicians carry on with making music.

The following is a summary of the changes I noticed as I yawned and stretched and tried to wake up with a gallon of coffee. Facts and figures below are of the back-of-the-envelope variety, intended to illustrate vast disparities in broad strokes. I do not maintain that the arithmetic is exact. My hope is that it illustrates the huge scale of the changes.

I should note that most musicians already know all of this. Some may find my reactions to the changed landscape overly reductive—or even comically naive, like a caveperson gaping at the sight of an airplane. That's okay with me. I am long

accustomed to playing the fool; but in discussions with non-musician friends, I've found that most music listeners—from the most casual to the most die-hard fans—seem unaware of the profound effects these changes are having on our shared musical culture. Without wider public awareness, I'm afraid we'll remain stuck in a system that isn't working.

How the old way worked

Maybe you've heard musicians complaining about how streaming services like Spotify have screwed everything up for them. And maybe when you've heard those complaints you've thought to yourself, "Cry me a river already! So what if musicians can't get rich anymore? I can't get rich from my job, either." That's understandable, but it misses the much broader change that's taken place, which is this: Apart from the most visible and well-paid musicians (Taylor Swift, say), almost nobody is earning enough to afford even a lower-middle-class existence from music anymore.

Permit me a digression into a little armchair history. These are just my observations, the kinds of things I muse over on a long drive. But here's a sketch of how it used to work.

"I'm not writing to bemoan the loss of this old way. It's over. What's done is done, spilled milk. I try to accept reality instead of bargaining with it. But I want you to know where the music we grew up on came from. There was a business model that made it possible, and that business model is gone."

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Until the last two decades of the 19th century, when you heard music it was because you were within earshot of a musician. Try to imagine that: There was zero music unless you were in the presence of it being made. I find it hard to fathom what that was like. The phonograph was invented in 1877. Before it, there were only the sounds of nature and human activity.

From the dawn of time until relatively recently, if you made your living as a musician, you were probably either on the payroll of an aristocrat or the church. There were high-art amateurs who performed composed music in the parlors of the wealthy, and there were folk musicians who played for gatherings of regular people. That's more-or-less it. In any case, professional music was not the province of the world's Bob Dylans. Poetry, personal writing and music were generally separate endeavors. There weren't quite singer-songwriters in the way we think of them now.

The sale of recorded music as a business enterprise may seem like the natural state of things because it's been there our whole lives, but that is an illusion. It can be a hard one to see past.

Here's a sketch of how that business enterprise worked. Companies formed to identify talent and market music. They sent scouts all over to find musicians who made music they thought they could sell. They engaged those performers in exclusive contracts granting the companies the rights to record and sell the music the artists made. In return for signing such a contract, the musician was given a lump-sum payment (an "advance") ahead of the recording project and a share of profits once the music began to sell. Typically, the performer didn't start seeing those profits until after the company recovered the amount of the advance. The money songwriters and performers earned from recordings came from profits, unless sales of the album generated an amount less than the advance, in which case, the company ate its loss. Revenue generated from licensing deals, touring and merchandise were usually beyond the scope of recording contracts.

Even when musicians were earning only 14% of the profits from album sales, many were able to pay their bills. For working musicians—non-superstar acts—royalty rates in the range of 14% to 18% were common. Again, I'm talking about working musicians, not just superstars. Imagine 20,000 copies of an album selling for \$12 each. That's a gross of \$240,000. This

would not have been a big hit in the old model. (For reference, a “gold record” is one that sells 500,000 copies.) But 14% of \$240,000 is \$33,600. Combined with other revenue streams (live performance, a separate royalty derived from radio play, the sale of shirts at concerts) that was enough for working musicians to pay rent and keep the lights on.



The old way is gone. This is chaos.

That old way is gone, though. Streaming has taken its place. The \$10 you pay for a monthly Spotify subscription gives you instant access to 80 million songs. Let's say that the average album has 10 songs on it. That means that via Spotify, you can listen to any of 8 million albums whenever you want (80M songs / 10 songs per album = 8M albums.) Imagine that you'd paid \$12 for each of those albums. Buying 8,000,000 records would've set you back \$96,000,000. I find it hard to visualize the huge scale of that difference.

But wait, there's more. You might think that the \$10 per month Spotify takes out of your bank account is directly apportioned to the artists you listen to. So if you only listen to, say, Timothy Bailey & the Humans (my current band), you might think that we get most of your monthly fee—less Spotify's admin costs. But that is not what happens at all.

Spotify aggregates all subscription revenue. It computes the percentage of total plays represented by the artists on its platform. Then it allocates payouts by those percentages. So if Taylor Swift gets 99.9% of overall plays on the service, and Timothy Bailey & the Humans get .1%, Taylor Swift gets \$9.99 of your monthly fee whether you listened to her or not. And Timothy Bailey & the Humans get \$.01.



Actually, it's worse than that. The reality is that most musicians on streaming services don't even see that much. I recently heard a story of a well-known independent artist with a sizable following receiving \$80 for 300,000 streams. Not that long ago, when singles could be purchased for \$.99 on iTunes, 300,000 sales would have yielded a \$300,000 gross. Okay, all of

these cocktail napkin calculations have their problems, and people could reasonably argue that I'm fudging some details. But do the details matter when the scale of difference is this vast? Just look at the comparisons. \$96 million (access to 8 million albums) vs. \$10 per month (for the same stuff). \$300,000 (for 300,000 sales of a single) vs. \$80 (for 300,000) streams.

I'm not writing to bemoan the loss of this old way. It's over. What's done is done, spilled milk. I try to accept reality instead of bargaining with it. But I want you to know where the music we grew up on came from. There was a business model that made it possible, and that business model is gone.

There are exceptions. Once every blue moon a new independent artist gets signed to one of the still-extant record labels with enough resources to make a difference for that artist. But again, we're talking about single record deals here and there—and they're big news in the music community when they happen. They do not constitute the churn of an actual industry. These exceptions give the public (not to mention hopeful musicians) the false sense that the old system still exists in a meaningful way. That is another illusion.

To be sure, record companies still exist. There are three major labels—Sony Music, Warner Music Group, and Universal Music Group. They underwrite the work of the pop stars whose names you know. They're rumored to negotiate favorable deals with the streaming services ensuring that those pop stars get the lion's share of streaming payouts. And yes, there are still independent record labels. But most are the curatorial hobby projects of one or two people. They're music lovers fighting the good fight.

These days, most small labels do not often possess meaningful resources that musicians cannot just access themselves. There are exceptions here, as well. A small handful of independent record companies remain that can actually help musicians. I cannot imagine the deluge of desperate pleas for their attention they must receive every hour of every day! These companies still exist because they came of age before streaming, are run by smart people with integrity, and own a stake of copyrights in already successful catalogs. Accessing them is exceedingly difficult. I know people who know them, and I can't get in touch.

A fool's errand

As I came-to in this new world, I thought maybe I'd have luck with the old way of being a musician and making records. I looked at the various indie labels putting out good music. I thought maybe I'd eventually connect with one of them. Once my band's debut album was finished, we tried to interest some of them. But the longer that went on, the more I began seeing behind the curtain—the companies I was interested in barely existed in a fiscal sense. They had virtually no money to pay for recording music, manufacturing physical products, and distributing it for sale. They would not be in a position to actually help us. The reason they have no money is simple: almost nobody buys music anymore. Like every other musician not working with one of the remaining financially viable record labels, we were on our own.

So I begged and borrowed to raise the funds that paid for the recording of our debut record. I managed the entire process the old-fashioned way, paying for recording in a professional studio with a professional engineer. I worked with the best co-producers I could—and that was only possible because of existing personal relationships. I paid the fees for a well known mixing engineer and one of the best mastering engineers on the planet. We've avoided further costs by doing all the PR associated with an album release ourselves. I'm paying for the initial LPs with money from pre-sales and won't make a cent until we've sold almost the entire run.

In short, I have functioned as the record company throughout.

This has been a fool's errand. Don't get me wrong—I'm glad to have done it...once. But surely you can see that spending over \$10,000 on something like this—when it will never return anything like that amount of money—is a hilariously bad business idea.

As a result, the first Timothy Bailey & the Humans album could be its last unless we dramatically reduce the recording quality of the material we release or unless some other source of funding materializes. The larger point is that my band is not alone. This is the normal situation these days. Your \$10 Spotify fee will continue to grant you access to everything that's been recorded thus far. But new, high quality recordings will become increasingly rare. Bands like mine will stop making records. Name a currently working musician (whose work you love) who is not supported by a major label or one of the handful of robust independents still operating. That person's output is likely to grind slowly to a stop.

[click to enlarge](#)



A new way forward

It's not like we're giving up, though. A lot of us are still out here hustling. We reach out to music supervisors in the film and advertising industries to seek licensing deals for our music. Personally, I find it depressing that we have come to think of having our songs used in truck commercials as "success," but sometimes there's real money there.

We sell digital downloads and physical albums of our work on Bandcamp, perhaps the only shining beacon of fairness and decency online where artists are still compensated fairly. You can find our music on the streaming sites and on YouTube, and some of us do what we can to get our work onto influential playlists in the hopes of being noticed by the almighty algorithms. So I don't contend that there is no way forward. It's just that the old way—the business model for recording and distributing music that characterized musical culture for the past hundred years—is gone.

As mentioned earlier, nearly all musicians know this. So far, though, very few fans seem to understand the scale or the implications of these changes. When I first awoke from my long slumber, I did not understand any of this. Many of my musician friends couldn't see the changes as starkly because they'd suffered the indignities step-by-step, not all at once like I did. My impression is that new music that is both recorded well and distributed widely is vanishing. The music world we knew our whole lives is going away, if not gone already. The era that began with the invention of the phonograph and manifested a "music industry" during the 20th century appears to be over, may it rest in peace.

Music itself will be fine. I don't worry about that. Above the surface, big money will increasingly drive us toward the same kind of monolithic culture that mainstream films have devolved into. But below the surface, music will fortify itself and branch like a great fungus. Right now, it's anyone's guess what new system will emerge to fund the high quality recording and distribution of the future's music. When that system begins to emerge, I suspect it will be characterized by the absence of intermediaries like record companies and streaming services. I hope so.



Dream On: I Met The Muse... And She Meant Business

By Timothy Bailey Published March 30, 2023 In Features

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Editor's note: This guest article is a departure from our regular local music coverage. It provides a unique insight into the tenuous relationship artists have with inspiration. Written by local musician Timothy Bailey, this retelling tracks the journey from writer's block to creative fulfillment that culminated in the acclaimed album Timothy Bailey & The Humans, which was shortlisted for the 2023 Newlin Music Prize. Hopefully, this can offer some help for other musicians currently deadlocked in their artistic endeavors.

I have recently [written elsewhere](#) about how I found the world changed after sleeping for more than two decades. I had a lot of weird dreams while I slept. As I transitioned into wakefulness, the distinction between sleeping and waking was blurry at best—as a result, I'm not sure whether the report that follows is about a dream or just a long figment of my imagination. But then—what is a figment of the imagination if not a dream you have while awake?

This dream—or vision—or whatever it was—took place at the top of a rocky cliff in a coastal Mediterranean setting. I was sitting on the ground with my back to the cliff's edge. A 30' tall woman stood directly before me. She looked like the torch bearer from the old Columbia Pictures logo or the Statue of Liberty. She wore layers of diaphanous robes that fluttered in slow motion. The sun blinded me from behind her left shoulder, so I wasn't able to make out her face. The whole vibe cliched, but it was nonetheless impressive—imposing—in the dream.

The first thing she said was, “***Silence!***” I obeyed. The word echoed in a low bass that vibrated my bones like an old cartoon character getting electrocuted. The moment she spoke I instantly realized that she was The Muse—it was as if she'd communicated her identity telepathically. There was no mistaking her position of authority. The feeling I got was that she saw me as a barely sentient lump of carbon, a tool that could more-or-less see and hear, albeit primitively.

When she spoke again, she announced that I was to receive her “position statements.” The phrase seemed incongruous, like something an ad agency might test in a focus group, but who am I to criticize? I'm only reporting what I heard to the best of my ability. I'm probably getting some of this wrong. But here's what she said:

“I'm with you when you begin to think you're an artist, even if you're delusional. You probably are delusional, but if you attend to the delusion, I am with you.

When you have the idea, I am with you. When you play with the idea, refine or discard it, I am with you. When you resurrect the idea because you realize you dismissed it too quickly, I am also with you.

I oppose you when you conflate notoriety and artistry—or a work's popularity with its effectiveness.

I oppose you when you habitually deploy irony as a mask for entrenched nihilism.

I am with you when you find artistic community anywhere you can.

I oppose you when you contribute to any kind of calcified orthodoxy.

When you're willing to take whatever heat may come in response to your work, I'm with you.

When you stop what you're doing because you sense inspiration shimmering nearby and need to attend to it, I am with you, but I won't offer the same inspiration twice.

When your focus on semiotics and critical theory replaces the art that inspired it, I oppose you.

When you ask open-ended questions of artists about their work, I'm with you.

When you dismiss artists as pretentious because you don't like or understand their work, I oppose you.

I am with you when you seek meaning—especially when the meaning is unclear, confusing, or surprising, or when the seeking itself is frowned upon.

When you confuse propaganda with art, I oppose you—regardless of the righteousness of your politics.

I oppose you if you believe that art's place in human life is avocational, a hobby. I oppose you, and demand an answer—what do you think life is for?

I'm with you when you treat art—your own, others'—with seriousness, as worthy of debate, as a force that creates the world as much (or even more) than it responds to it."

The vision (or dream, hallucination, flight of fancy, or what-have-you) ended there. It definitely seemed like she was still talking. I'm worried I might have insulted her by snapping out of it when I did, and I haven't heard a word from her since then. I'm still worried. I find I listen out for her differently now, though—as if my life depends on it.