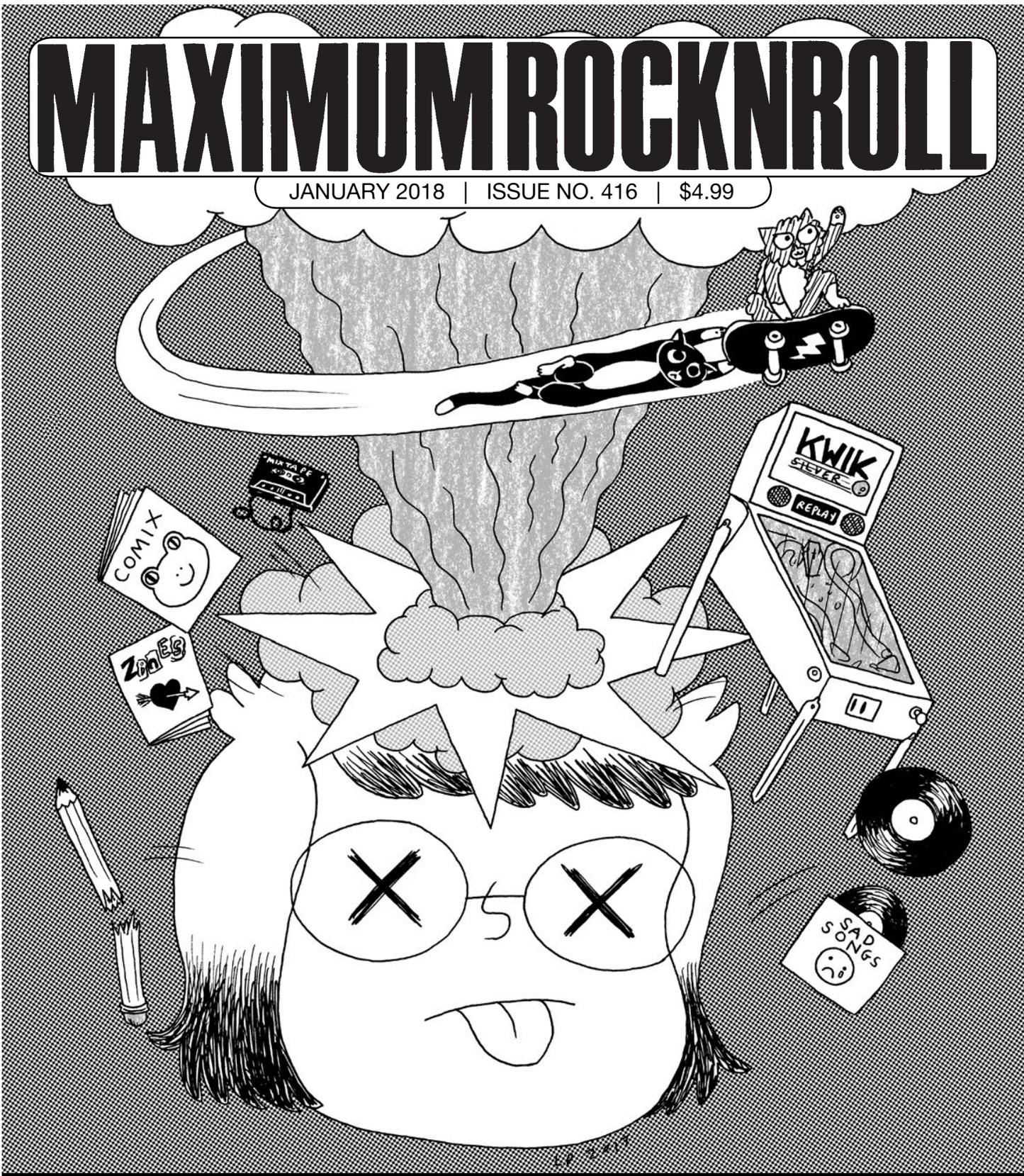


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LIZ PRINCE | FRED COLE | BENT | PERVERTS AGAIN
COMPOSITE | DIAGNOSIS? BASTARD! | VON BEAT
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COMPOSITE

One of my first shows of 2017 was on Martin Luther King Jr. day, four days before Donald Trump's inauguration. Composite's lead singer, Sami, had printed copies of King's "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" and made them available for the [mostly white] crowd. I knew then that, thanks to both their music and their willingness to combine personal, political, and live music, Composite would be a band worth following.

Composite's discography is not yet robust but it is a fine example of quality over quantity. I recently sat down with the band to discuss their origins, the intersections of community and politics, and even got a brief botany and art history lesson. Composite earns their name as inspiration and knowledge among the members is diverse and far-reaching.

Introduction and interview by Nicole Everso. Photos by Farrah Skeiky and Nicole Everso.

MRR: I noticed that for your first EP, Jordan's not listed.

Sami: Jordan's very new to the band—she just joined the band late last year. We originally wrote the EP with our old bassist and then he left the band and we were looking the right person to fill his slot. Jordan came along and I knew she could play bass and I knew she could sing and I know she's rad so it ended up being a great fit.

MRR: Sami, I know you're from the east coast. Are you [Heather and Jasmine] from California?

Jasmine: We're both from California. I'm from southern California, I moved to the Bay Area in 2007.

Heather: And I've never left the Bay Area. I've lived in Oakland since 2004.

MRR: So how did you all connect?

Jasmine: I already knew Heather because I'd booked a show for her

band, Saint Lorena, but I'd also known who she was because she's really cool and does lots of rad stuff—

Heather: —and we were neighbors.

Jasmine: And we were neighbors! But we didn't really know each other. It wasn't until...

Sami: Ray Martinez—he used to live here and be a coordinator for MRR—he had this band, Autonomy, in Chicago and when he moved here.

Sami: We can summarize the band's history. *Reader's Digest*. So, Ray started Autonomy with Heather and Jasmine.

Heather: It had been Ray's project that he'd played with, with various other members, for years and years.

Sami: Yeah, at the same time, Jasmine texted me like, "I'm in this band, we need a singer, you should come check it out." It ended up working. We wrote some songs. Once we were at the point of being show ready, ready to record a demo, Ray announced he was moving back to

Chicago. But the three of us were already like, “we’re fucking pumped on these songs we wrote together,” so we decided that we wanted to continue and ended up releasing the demo as Composite.

MRR: So, Jasmine contacted Sami about singing. How did you meet each other?

Jasmine: Yeah, we have mutual friends and through shows and MRR.

Sami: Yeah, I’d always see Jasmine around and she’s wonderful so I was really excited when she hit me up to be in a band, she’s so cool!

MRR: So, Ray’s gone and you’re looking for a new bassist. Did you audition other people before Jordan?

Sami: We had another bassist for about a year. We wrote the EP with him and did a couple of tours. I knew Jordan because we worked at Fat Wreck Chords together.

Heather: I had played in Autonomy, I filled in for one of their tours. So when Ray moved out here, he wanted to restart the band in California. So, that’s how I got involved.

MRR: I heard this song, that all three of you recorded, it’s by Know Secrets.

Sami: Ohh! Oh, yeah!

MRR: It’s really good but it also sounds so different from Composite. How was it doing that song? Did it fuck with your head making such a different thing together? Did it change how you approach Composite at all?

Jasmine: Not really! That songwriting process wasn’t very different, just faster! Know Secrets is our mutual friend Eric who I was previously in a band with. It was his music project where he really wanted to involve his friends and community in co-writing the songs. Anywho, much like Composite, we’d just build off of a riff. It was just really fast because any little riff I had he immediately had something to build off of it. Although the writing process is similar, our different styles meshing take the music in a different direction.

Heather: I’ve always played in multiple bands that had different styles.

That’s really helpful to achieve balance and to kind of have...all of your goals that you want to reach through playing music met through different projects. You might have a pop punk band that’s really fast and high energy and fun and you might have another band that’s really serious and thoughtful. So you get the best of all those worlds. It doesn’t feel like a conflict to me, to play wildly divergent styles.

MRR: Totally! I think what was interesting to me was that all three of you did this thing together.

Sami: It ended up being cool. I think it was little bit accidental. I knew he wanted to write a song with Jasmine and Heather because he knows that they’re talented musicians and likes what they do. When he was going through vocals for that record, I actually ended up singing on three or four tracks. That was the one that I ended up singing the most on. It was kinda cool because it was the first time I’d written a vocal thing with someone else’s vocal project. But then it ended up feeling special because it was mostly a Composite song but with this completely different sound. It was a neat experience to hear that played back and hear these elements of playing which were really familiar but also done in such a different way.

Heather: I think the weirdest thing about the process was seeing them perform it live with different people.

MRR: I didn’t realize that happened!

Heather: It was this song we’d written together and watching someone else play the part...I improvise a lot when I’m playing so it was really wild to see someone copy what had been captured on the recording.

Jordan: That one improvisation you did is *art* now!

MRR: On your sound! I appreciate it because I think it’s not a genre we are seeing much in Oakland these days. Ötzi is kinda similar—a darkwave-y, bass-y, dark punk kind of sound. Do you feel like you are different?

Jasmine: There’s some really rad, dark punk, bands in Oakland that I really enjoy like Crimson Scarlet and Silent Era. I don’t know that I personally feel very different, especially since I fell into the post-punk



guitarist with a reverb and chorus pedal trap. Whoops! [laughter]
Sami: I do think we take a different approach than a lot of bands do. One of the things I really like about playing in this band is that we all have a very unique way of playing whatever instrument we play and when we write songs we kind of intentionally try to listen back and see if it sounds too on point for a specific genre—if it does, we try to make it a little different. We work hard to keep things dynamic that way and try to push ourselves.

Heather: I think there's a lot of bands that I feel our music is akin to and it makes sense to play with but on an aesthetic level we don't sound like them. For example, one of my favorite Bay Area bands, Bitter Fruit...I don't think we sound anything like them but when we play shows together it's a lot of the same crew of people and the sounds make sense together even though they don't sound the same.

Jordan: I think we're all into the local scene enough that even though we don't sound like those bands, it makes sense for us to play with them.

Sami: Politics is something that strongly informs what we do. So a lot of times I think we end up playing with bands we feel politically aligned with. Not on an aesthetic basis but on the fact that this is also an opportunity for movement and for action. It's cool to be given a platform to really talk about things and stand alongside people that interpret that differently but have similar ideas.

MRR: That's a good point. That's something that excites me about Oakland. Do you think about politics when you write or are you thinking more micro?

Sami: I think about politics when I write lyrics, for sure. Sometimes it's a "personal is political" sorta thing but often, so much of my anxieties that I choose to unleash [laughter] through writing are based on my political outlook. All of us are outspoken, political, people.

Heather: We've played a lot of shows that are benefits and in that context I think Sami especially has been in a position to say something on stage about an important thing that we all care about and is a bigger political issue. But then we also take those politics home really seriously. We've been asked to play shows at a particular place or with a particular band and a friend or someone we know will say "hey, I

don't feel comfortable going there because someone in that band or at that house assaulted me and I don't want to be public about it." So we've quietly declined to participate and protect the confidentiality of the person who let us know. We don't want to benefit from or lend any credibility to something that we think is hurtful to the people we want to be supportive of.

Sami: And when it's OK, we've been explicit about it. Like making a public announcement that we're never going to play at Gilman or turning down a show with TSOL because the singer has called himself a "violent, grave-robbing rapist" and we're like "We sing about sexual assault! We're not going to play with a dude who says that shit, even if it's just for shock value."

Heather: The Gilman thing ended up being kind of scary.

Sami: Yeah, people were threatening us.

Heather: It was mostly online but people were threatening us and then we, incidentally, ended up not playing any shows for eight months after that happened because we were still looking for a bass player. But I was scared that, if we played a show, people would come and—

Sami: We got some messages from some scary dudes that were saying "hey, I see you're playing this show. See you there," that kind of thing.

Jordan: It's also a very strange thing to just target one band.

MRR: It's probably not just one! It's a legit fear. After Ghost Ship, the internet alt-right had entire campaigns around targeting DIY venues across country. Just sitting at home all day calling up places. That's what they do. They're obsessed with moving their "troll" behavior off the internet and into real life. It's terrifying.

Sami: Totally! And it's hard to judge how real the threat is.

Heather: And to be clear, this was before then and it was punks! It wasn't even like Proud Boys.

MRR: Yeah, and, Proud Boys were founded by the founder of Vice. They have close ties to punk communities. Which is what makes them terrifying.

Heather: There's a lot of crossover and I think that's been something



that...as I get older I'm thinking "did punk always suck this bad?" Like, did I just not see it because I wanted to be part of it so bad? Or, has it really gotten worse?

MRR: I think it's always been that way. I watched *Decline of Western Civilization* again last summer and I mean... being a brown person I tend to either pay close attention to racism or I just delete it. I totally forgot just how much racism is in that movie. There's one kid who just spews ageist and racist stuff and my boyfriend was caught off guard. I'd totally forgotten about it all. But that's a thing, people in '80s L.A. punk...pretty racist. *Darby Crash!*

Heather: Is that the first one? I haven't seen it! I've seen the third one and I met those kids—

MRR: Which is the third? The kids in the squats?

Heather: Yeah, and those kids were fucked up because they were manipulative and intense but they weren't into being bigoted, they were into stealing stuff.

MRR: There are worse things than stealing stuff!

Sami: They're into being scoundrels.

Jasmine: I haven't seen the first *Decline* since high school and I loved it then. I wonder if I watched it now if I'd be like "oof."

MRR: I still love it! I mean *Alice Bag* is in it. Overall it's still great but I just totally erased all the bad shit and held that movie as idol status.

Sami: Everything is so fucked and problematic in so many ways that sometimes, to protect ourselves and just enjoy life, you end up putting blinders on for certain things. One thing I really appreciate about this band and the dynamic we have now is that I feel like we're all really committed to supporting each other in not having to put blinders on and instead just confront whatever it is we need or want to confront. It's what motivates me to keep playing music in this group.

Heather: And I think part of the idea of looking back and being like "oh crap, all this fucked up shit is going on was it like that when I was younger and I just didn't notice," I think kind of our project of being here and playing...In the Bay we're lucky because there are so many sub-scenes and many of them are supportive of each other. We support each other and we try to support our friends. We try not to be anti-things-that-suck but more like, fuck that noise we're going to do this cool thing over here and you're all invited. If you're a fucking douche you're going to be asked to leave.

MRR: That's important! I think people exaggerate this rise of PC culture and call it whatever you want but if that doesn't happen...All these little rats just start coming in. It's one and then suddenly you have a Proud Boys group in your house and it's like "sweet, glad I didn't stop the problem at the start!"

Jordan: People want to say that people are being a PC crybaby, snowflake, etc. If wanting to be a good person means I'm a snowflake then I will wear that title proudly if that means I'm not going to participate in someone else being a shitty person.

MRR: I think we've finally learned that ignoring things does not make them go away. It doesn't stifle those voices. It doesn't work.

Sami: It just allows them to rise unchallenged.

MRR: They just grow in private and then everyone wonders where it came from.



Heather: It's interesting, going back to macro vs. micro political theme because unfortunately, we're all way too familiar with the feeling of being gaslit. And that is gaslighting, when you speak up about something and you're told you're being a crybaby or too sensitive. It's invalidating your feelings, your experiences, and your contribution. It's gaslighting on a massive scale and it's fucked. We can recognize it on the bigger scale because we've recognized it on a smaller scale in personal relationships. From parents to teachers to bosses to coworkers to partners and / or friends. We're used to being told that our feelings are not legitimate or invalid.

Sami: That we're hysterical. That makes this a neat project because we get to challenge that in ourselves, to get "hysterical" and have it be fun. Or at least cathartic!

Jordan: After being told my entire life that I'm too sensitive, coming here is like going to church. I like coming to a place and talking about these things that affect me and other people in a serious way and having it be understood.

MRR: You mentioned earlier that there's a situation where it's revealed that a venue, house, or person is not acceptable. And you respond directly to the person and support them. Do you think the information percolates out?

Jordan: A lot of things find their way out when people know each other and the community is big but it's also fairly small in terms of people talking to one another. I don't go out of my way to disclose that information unless I feel like someone is going to get hurt—

Sami: Or if someone is asking for it to get out there. That's the big thing.

Jordan: I never want to disclose something without a person's permission if it affects them directly.

Heather: I had a conversation with someone about this yesterday where they had a bad experience with someone and they didn't want to make



a big, public, deal about it but they were worried that this person being around was dangerous to other people. Even in our bubble, people who speak out against other people who have social capital frequently get punished for it. People don't always want to be exposed to that punishment or danger. It's a tough choice. We all agree that we tend to go with whatever decision that the person who was hurt feels comfortable with but it's a really tough question because it's a balance of protecting other people but you don't want to expose yourself or the person who was already hurt to future or further injury. There's probably tons of stuff we don't even know about.

MRR: One reason I ask is because I came from Olympia / Seattle which can feel like a land of accountability processes. Olympia is such a large community in such a small space, everyone knows everything in about two minutes and there are meetings called for everything. It's like living in rural Kentucky but with a bunch of punks. I've never lived in a place as geographically large as the Bay Area with such a tight-knit community spread around the region. It's really weird to see how those dynamics shift. It seems harder to manage things like this.

Sami: It is. Sometimes either you get blindsided with something or you end up playing at a place or with someone and you—

Jordan: You find out later that they suck.

Sami: Yeah! Or that they're dangerous. I've definitely had encounters where I found out later that the person was actually dangerous and I had to distance myself.

MRR: And then you have to do it slowly.

Sami: Exactly.

Heather: We have the internet now! I think there's a lot of interaction

among people who don't actually know each other in real life, like through Facebook groups.

MRR: That's the other thing. I moved from the east coast when the internet was still on the rise for younger people in subcultures and from there I moved to Olympia where the internet was completely unused in the community despite becoming more popular in general. Olympia opted out. So moving here and seeing that people who are into punk use the internet for that community is weird.

Heather: And it has been a little more underground since the fire, with DIY spaces getting shut down people are getting scared—

Sami: Or evicted.

Heather: There's a little more security around information and people are using those channels but less publicly. Some events are using addresses, you have to "ask a punk" which is a pretty reliable thing.

MRR: One of my first shows in Oakland was my friend's band coming through on tour and I didn't know anyone but I wanted to see them. They didn't know the address before they got here and I was like "I don't know any punks! I just want to see my friends play!"

Jordan: Tell me where to find a punk to ask!

Heather: I like the idea that in theory you could ask a punk you don't know! I did that once a few years ago on tour. We had a show in Asheville, North Carolina, and we didn't know where it was. We got off the freeway and figured we'd find downtown / central Asheville. As we were getting off we saw some punks walking so we rolled down the window and were just like "hey! where's the punk show?" and they gave us great directions.

Jordan: I want that to happen in the Bay Area but the likelihood of that happening is less and less, unfortunately.

Heather: If you know what neighborhood it's in you can probably find it just by looking but you also might find a different show.

MRR: How was the recording process for your EP, Artemisia? Are the songs mostly ones you've been practicing or were they new songs?

Jasmine: After the demo we found our second bassist pretty quickly and wrote a bunch of songs with him. One song from the demo was re-recorded for the EP. Right around the time we were ready to record was when we split ways with him. It just came out and I'm really excited!

Sami: It has been a long time in the making so it feels good to like...birth it. Just think of the sleeve as the placenta.

MRR: Are you going to eat the placenta? You're supposed to do that.

Sami: I'll never tell.

MRR: The first song is really good and the art looks great. Did one of you make it?

Jasmine: Heather did the artwork.

Heather: The concept was collaborative!

Jordan: We spent a day in the library looking for cool photos of statues.

Sami: Looking through the art books.

Heather: We had a band day at the library in downtown Berkeley. There's a whole floor of art books and it's magical.

MRR: Was there a theme you were looking for or did you kind of grab the books that were compelling?

Sami: We had a rough idea of the general aesthetic we were going for and elements we wanted to incorporate. I was dead set on calling the EP *Artemisia* and because it's Greek we kind of ended up going in the

direction of looking at statues of Greek goddesses and stuff like that. I think the statue on the cover is a rendition of Aphrodite.

Heather: Who it turns out was the consort of all other Gods.

Sami: She's the goddess of love! She's got a lot to give.

Jasmine: We were looking for statues but also different botanicals and we knew we wanted some moon textures in there.

Sami: Yeah, and Artemisia happens to be my favorite genus of plants. It is home to a lot of witchy plants like mugwort and wormwood, and it's named after the female botanist that is credited as being the first to identify them. As a female ecologist I think it's cool that some of my favorite plants were named after a female botanist. It's also the name of an Italian painter from the 16th century, who was raped by her mentor. It was rare for women to be apprentices to painters at the time. She took him to court, which is radical for back in the day and she lost because of the patriarchy. But what is probably her most famous painting is a rendition of Judith slaying Holofernes but the way that she did it was her and another woman slitting the throat of her rapist.

MRR: I know that picture. The guy lying down..

Sami: Yeah! And that appeals to my art history nerdiness and female empowerment and witchy things and botany. It encompassed all of these things that I was thinking a lot about when I was writing the record so I felt strongly about incorporating that into the name.

Jordan: Now I know what I'm getting you for Christmas. I've seen a massive back patch of that painting and it's incredible.

MRR: How are you feeling about Artemisia six months in? How has the reception been?

Sami: I've been pleasantly surprised at how well the record has been received. We've gotten a lot of really lovely feedback that people like it, sold a fair amount for the first six months, and folks that came to our shows seemed genuinely stoked on it. That feels nice. That said, a lot of these songs were written at least two years ago (if not more!), so I think we're all champing at the bit to get new material under our belt and to keep progressing our sound and songwriting. I feel like we've all improved as musicians and our process as a band is more comfortable, and our new material is definitely reflective of that.

MRR: You recently went on tour. How was your first east coast tour after the release?

Heather: Yeah, we did a short Northwest tour and then a Northeast and East Coast tour in November. Thanks everyone who helped us out and made it so amazing!

Sami: It was great! It is very hard to predict how a first tour anywhere is going to go, since not many people know who we are outside of the Bay Area. But we ended up getting booked with super solid bands, and not a single show was a dud. Folks were incredibly gracious and

hospitable and seemed genuinely stoked on what we're doing. It was a really positive experience! It's a great feeling to leave home and realize how many amazing people live all over the place, making art and building community. It was humbling to be able to meet so many people and to be received so kindly. It felt particularly important to feel that now, considering how divided people are over political lines and how generally fucked things feel in the world at large.

MRR: What's up next? More touring, writing more?

Heather: Moving forward, we're working on a full length; we have a lot of stuff in the works. But as Bay Area living goes, it's a struggle to put as much time as we want into the creative projects that keep us going.

MRR: I appreciate you letting me take some of your time!

Heather: We always spend the first hour of band practice talking.

Sami: We hold congress.

Heather: We really like each other and we don't get to see each other much so it's hard to use our only hang out time to do just one thing.

Sami: We have future goals.

I think we'd all like to tour Europe at some point. I'd love to go to Australia but that's going to be...we've gotta get an LP done first. I wanna write, I wanna tour, but sometimes you gotta take breaks.

Heather: I wanna throw this out there. We played a show where, for the first time in 15 years of playing music, there were no men in any of the bands on the entire bill. It was really fucking cool.

Sami: It was also a pop-punk show. We played with bands we wouldn't normally think about playing with just because we're such different genres. The crowd was such that I wasn't... there were people I'd seen at Fat Wreck Chords shows... but I wasn't sure how they'd receive a weirdo, goth, punk band. And it was so rad! It was the most...we got such a kind and awesome and kinda

overwhelming response from people. It was really fun and rad to be surrounded by a bill of women, there a bunch of dudes there to support the bill. Everyone was really respectful and stoked on all of these bands.

Heather: Even though all of the bands came from a wide variety of genres and mostly not what I'm normally into, everyone ripped super hard. Everybody was so fucking talented.

Sami: And we didn't know many people at the show which was a very different experience for us, for a local show.

Heather: I didn't know a single person! It was refreshing and cool.

MRR: Like being on tour but at home.

Sami: Yeah! I'd like to do more of that. It felt really nice to step outside of our typical comfort zone, be well-received, and have a great time.



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