

SAPPY TIMES

SUNDAY

(Looking back on SATURDAY)

SATURDAY AFTERNOON and Human Music's human music is so summering, so summered, that I'm catching a flash tan. If you weren't there, picture it: harmonies the colour of July, melodies the colour of August. It's shining and breezy. Guitar riffs are bobbing like hot-air balloons - the blue sky seems full of them. These three young musicians are like a geometric shape. But not a triangle. Not a triangle: some young shape, freshly invented, with a corner, a bullseye, a bend like a swooping slide.

Can a blue moon hang you over? I'm hungover from the mere fact of Friday, the luck of it. It's SappyFest on a beautiful day. The air's wonderful. And suddenly, listening to Human Music, I'm conscious of the relief of it all. The relief, the respite: life's so hard, it's so often so hard, and this is easy. All this singing, all these songs: here it's so easy. Here, in Sackville, it feels like we can make it.

Through much of the early afternoon, the bug in SappyFest's audio system has still not been squished. They swapped the soundboard overnight; the sound guy lost a bunch of his hair. But at intermittent moments there's still a deafening, calamitous noise - as if the black, mounted speakers are revolting against their human friends. Today the **ZONK**s become a terrible shriek, like two substances at war: tedium vs fun, or sap vs gruel. Fun's going to win. So will sap. There's schnitzel for sale, pros on the case, bicycle valets with time on their hands.

Indeed, by the time Adrian Teacher and the Subs start jonathan richman-ing at 5pm, the soundsystem disaster is donesville. We celebrate to *yips* and *c'mons*, songs about sweethearts and gentrification, while the crowdsurfers gamely dive.

*

D. R. Barclay's instructions for how to DJ for 57 hours straight, coincidentally identical to Sappy Times' advice for any artist in any field making any work of art: "Anyone could do it. It seems like an extreme process but it's just a tiny step repeated over and over."

Junior Correspondent's Report by Brennan McCracken

DIANA the band arrived on the main stage in pairs: two guitars, two ball caps and—this was a particular joy—two drummers. Everything was a quiet nod to two. While saxophone wailed and bandmates whirled, locking eyes across the stage, I considered the simple pleasures of all that is two. A left sway and a right sway. Jumping up and down. Me and you. DIANA play love songs like vines: sprouting, suffocating and beautiful. "That's what you get for falling in love," sings Carmen Elle, raising her guitar, reaching up to the thin cable running the breadth of the tent. She leans over the bouncing audience. This was a brave thing she did: putting trust into something small and fallible, so that that we could get a little closer. It's a brave thing we're all doing, really.

One of Saturday's finest sets is by the band called ANAMAI. They are a three-piece band like some kind of geometrical shape: but not a triangle, another one, something I dreamed about. Their songs are slow and heavy; they play in the Vogue, before a net of little lights. The singer has a voice like a sinking anchor. It is volatile, sensitive; it is never fragile. Hers is the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Before any of that, I began my day where the last one wound down: the Legion. Saturday's zine fair was upstairs, above the bar and my previous night's memories. Before I could skim any inked pages, however, a conundrum: how does one even get upstairs? It took a shake of the locked front doors before I noticed a few people heading for a nondescript blue door to my right. They must know the way, I thought, so I followed. Behind the door, a staircase. It led me right up to a ring of tables, each one an exhibit of work made with pens and cameras and printers. Downstairs, strangers and friends smiled as they opened a lousy door for each other.

This door is like SappyFest itself: neither obvious nor hidden, a speck on a map that welcomes anyone lucky enough to find it. We keep coming to this town, opening that unmarked side door and walking together to the next destination. We trust we're being guided in the right direction. We're reeds swaying together under a big white tent, here for one more last time.

FREE!

FILED FUMBLINGLY AT 6:10AM

 SAPPYFEST N°10

MAIN SECTION CONTINUED

kind of voice that simply acts, strikes: a dagger in the night, a lover running through the snow. And when the drummer's voice joins hers my dream comes rushing back: a magnolia, an answering machine's blinking red LED, the sound of rainwater running in the sewer.

If it were hotter in here we'd all be sweating; instead just the memory or the foretelling of sweat, of sitting with another spirit in the sweltering dark.

*

In the bowling alley, at midnight, there are many dubious smells. It's not Nancy Pants' fault. The crowd is going nuts. The bassist has bashed his hat off. The singer jumps and slouches, squeaks and serenades; she's a wolf and all three pigs; we're straw, sticks, obliterated brick. "Take it from me," she sings, "it's not a game." But it feels like a game. It feels like all of us are playing. Nancy Pants are joyous, garagey; they're yet another three-piece, yet another shape, something sweaty and late. We're passing grins around like slices of pizza: gotta make sure everyone gets one.

Hours earlier, Frog Eyes' Carey Mercer says he is quantifying every experience in terms of dollar values. "A \$10,000 kiss," he says. A million-dollar day. So: here is \$75,000 worth of stage banter, a penny's worth of poverty, ten billion nickels' worth of frantic, luscious rock. This is a band of renegades: two partners making crazy, sensuous music, guitar appearing from every damn direction, down the ladder or up your gut. Occasionally Mercer plays guitar as if he's stroking a snake, a thick, big python. Yes, "stroking a snake": this man will use my euphemisms as kindling, he can light fires from any wreckage. God, this music feels free-er than so many other musics. Anxious, riotous, and still free. Still a solace,



A Portrait.

Drawing by Patrick Allaby.

a respite. Even harsh sounds can be places to hide or rest: maybe noise is all your wounded heart needs. Maybe the shrieking, zonking sound-system was like Moonsocket's thunder or Construction & Destruction's flowing, uneven ruckus. Perhaps it was meant for someone, and perhaps it rescued their day.

Sometimes Frog Eyes have an elegiac mode, chords all echoing, like a church steeple that's up in flames. Sometimes they play a love song - actually only once, and it's a love song like no other love song, impolite and entreating, as sincere as someone deliberately spilling their most precious glass of wine.

Mozart's Sister drinks water. Her songs pour out like sweet liquors, spiked drinks, and she's always sipping water: a woman in command of her performance, baby-girl and belter, lying lover. All this new material and the crowd is almost shocked into motion, raving in their shoulders and thighs. Here is Whitney Houston, Prince and QT; here is a voice like a darting viper. Soft synths tumble against brittle beats - these trim, tightened songs, sweet as

ring-pops. The scene's all in magenta light, and then the lights get lower, the lights get lower, the lights get lower...

Until Angel Olsen is there, from Asheville to Sackville, a guitar and its singer. Her songs appear like thoughts: just begin and end, no impediments. They are short streaks of song, this is desire, this is heartbreak, each chorus like a message in ink. Sometimes Olsen plays with a band; here she is alone, solo, and the songs come out so slowly. During "Lights Out," whole years skate by between each chord: a heartbreak, a death, a friendship, a reprieve. I imagine a clockface on the wall and its hands suspended, still, not quite ready to go on.

At one point Olsen stops and says to us, in a voice that's almost wry: "Life is just so hard." Then she says, "Life is just so hard, all the time."

What I think to myself is: "Not all the time."

Sappy Times is written by Sean Michaels and the 2015 Junior Correspondents, Allison Graves, Miranda Jones & Brennan McCracken, with a daily illustration by Patrick Allaby. This is the second of three issues distributed around Sackville as part of SappyFest 10. Sean is the author of the novel *Us Conductors* and founder of the archaic music-blog *Said the Gramophone*. He lives in Montreal. Brennan, who contributes today's Correspondent's Report, is a student, writer and listener from Halifax. Special thanks to Lucas "Big Python" Hicks, designer Jody Zinner, Judy @ MTA, Thea Metcalfe, Janice Melanson, all the volunteers and billetes. You can reach *Sappy Times* by email at sean@saidthegramophone.