

# Microphones in 2020

## The Microphones

The true state of all things  
I keep on not dying, the sun keeps on rising  
I remember my life as if it's just some dreams that I don't trust  
Burning off, layered thick  
A cargo that I haul  
Wounds and loves unresolved  
I wake up with the sun in my eyes  
The present moment tries  
But now I'm back where I was when I was twenty  
Crashing through salal alone and mumbling  
One moment thinking I'm wise  
And in the next one I writhe  
Trying to re-remind myself of something learned then forgotten  
Countless sunrises burying the things  
I'd figured out the day before  
Like that I probably won't find shelter  
In the arms of any other person  
Though I will try  
Again, I'll deny  
The blanketing sky  
The thing I just realised  
For probably the millionth time  
That walking with my knees trembling  
Is the true state of all things

The true state of all things is a waterfall  
With no bottom crashing end  
And no ledge to plummet off  
Full of debris and flowers, never not falling  
And in it we swim and fall  
Sometimes beside  
Often apart  
It's just chaos heaving  
I wake up with the sun in my eyes  
Beneath present moment skies  
Squinting and wondering how I got here  
Going through the contents of my backpack  
Shaking out the dust to bring some empty space back  
Filling a long merch table with artifacts  
Looking back to see if I could draw a map  
That leads to now

I remember where I was

When I was twenty, or seventeen, or twenty-three  
The disinterested sun would still rise every morning  
Same as now  
Dawn was loud  
I took my breakfast to the couch on the porch of the punk house  
Coffee and low tide smell and my life stretching out  
Spending hours each morning reading poems and staring off  
And then snapping back to urgency, I did my dishes  
And then I would sprint  
To the studio again  
Spend all day and night digging in  
Distorted bass, spliced tape  
Singing lines like: "There's no end"

And "I won't look for you in my room"  
About my friends

I would drive out to the ocean and not tell anybody  
I watched *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in a dollar theatre in Aberdeen  
It was a rainy matinée, 2001, Sunday, March 18th  
And in the parking lot afterward  
For a few minutes in the rain  
I stood glowing with ideas  
Of what I might try to convey with this music  
At that moment, my mind flashing like a blade  
A twenty-two-year-old in flip-flops  
Running around in an empty mall parking lot  
Lost in a martial arts fantasy  
It looks ridiculous now  
But the truth is that alone there  
Something was formed  
The way they held themselves upright with tea in the opening scenes  
A warm formality, spines straight and feet planted wide  
Untipoverable like the bamboo'd undulating hills  
Walking slowly, making eye contact and gliding  
The sound of empty wind when they sword fought weightless in the bamboo  
With a purity of heart that transcends gravity  
Leaping off the mountain into ambiguity  
Falling slow  
As the end credits rolled  
I decided I would try to make music that contained this deeper peace  
Buried underneath distorted bass  
Fog imbued with light and emptiness  
I kept on driving out to the ocean  
It was raining so hard, I was wet wool caked with sand  
I watched the dunes migrate slowly

Lost mind in the tall grass  
And slowly the sound  
Of roaring waves returned  
I rose  
I returned to my station wagon with a wet face  
Extravagant solitude invigorates  
I drove back to Olympia clear-headed  
Temporarily  
And went back into the studio to resume whatever this thing is  
This spooling out repetitive decades long song string  
This river coursing through my life  
These wild swipes at meaning  
And now I circle back to look into the spring

When I was seventeen  
It was 1995  
I put the name "Microphones" on the tapes I would make late at night after work at the record store  
I was already by then a couple years deep into this weird pursuit  
Playing drums, copying lyrics out to hang them in my room  
Until I started making my own embarrassing early tries  
At this thing that sings at night above the house  
Branches in the wind  
Bending wordlessly  
I wanted to capture it on tape

At first, I called my recordings a different name  
I called it "The Microphones" on the third cassette I made  
Because I loved recording and the equipment seemed to be living  
And it sang to me like static interference

From the small AM radio station down the street  
Night in Anacortes in the mid-90s, oil tankers rumbling  
I stayed late recording every night  
Then I drove back to my parents house  
My headlights through the trees along Heart Lake Road  
Winding down the dark slope

Beneath Mount Erie  
I was already who I am

A bottle of India ink, masking tape  
Julie Doiron, Tori Amos, Cranberries, Sinéad O'Connor  
Eric's Trip, Red House Painters, Sonic Youth, This Mortal Coil  
Kurt Cobain had died  
I had my driver's license and a girlfriend  
And we'd cling to each other and dream that anything's permanent  
Even back then  
The beast of uninvited change  
Insisted itself in  
And look here, it still hangs  
But when I was young (Young)  
I'd go driving in the rain

I saw Stereolab in Bellingham and they played one chord for fifteen minutes  
Something in me shifted  
I brought back home belief I could create eternity  
Leaning the guitar up on the amp, taping down organ keys  
Feeding back forever distorted waves of cymbals oceany  
Slowly starting to try the move the words beyond  
Mere melancholy  
Into something that rings  
True and old and useful hopefully  
But when I was seventeen, I sang  
In the moment, hurt romantically  
Grasping in the dark

Like: "Shadows of the moon..."  
"On the back of the car seat..."  
"Where she sat once"

It's not that bad, but I know I wanted to go deeper beneath pain  
Beneath the human

Is it because my parents barely had any money  
And preferred to leave the baby in the garden  
That I grew up to blur the boundary  
Between myself and the actual churning dirt of this place?  
That it feels normal to me to speak with the voice of weather  
To build and move into a mirage  
Made of songs cascading down a rock face in a homemade myth?

Even deeper back into the mist  
When I was twelve or thirteen  
On a family trip, we hiked down a steep bluff to an ocean beach in whipping  
rain  
My little brother's clothes got wet from playing in the winter waves  
My parents made a fire of smokey driftwood and we huddled in  
And took his wet clothes off and held him naked above the flames  
Smelling like smoke and salt on the drive home  
Surely this experience explains something about whoever it was that sang all  
these songs

When you're younger, every single things vibrates with significance

Gazing at the details in the artwork of a 7-inch  
Devouring every word in a zine  
There was barely internet  
Meaning gets attributed wherever appetite bestows a thing  
With resonating glowing ringing out through a life  
What from these times do I carry with me still?  
The things I survive return repeatedly  
And I find again that I am a newborn every time

When I wake alone in the dark  
Again, I swim  
Out into the lake of the heart  
And in

Mm...

When I got back to Olympia from the ocean  
I woke up early before dawn to start recording  
The things I wanted to communicate had to do  
With finding out how to break out from seeing  
Only the inside of reflected ocean on the sky

It was early 2001 and I was almost twenty-three  
I'd finished recording The Glow Pt. 2  
And I was either always on tour or setting up a tour  
Always running, voracious, thirsty  
I'd go out to the lake with friends  
Swim out to the middle and dive as far as I could  
Down to where the water gets cold, with open eyes  
We'd go up on the roof at night and actually contemplate the moon  
My friends and I just trying to blow each others' minds  
Just lying there gazing, young and ridiculous  
And we meant it, our eyes watering  
The moon without abstraction  
Then became a floating ball of a rock in outer space  
Not a sticker or a light or a hole through black paper  
We were making food and records and paintings  
And walking around beneath a real infinity  
I felt my size

That brief dissipating shock of looking into outer space  
And seeing, for just a second, the bottomless distance pressed against my face  
My little mind trying to write it down, zooming out  
A faint yelp lost in a thunderstorm  
Sufficiently small, thinking on the geologic scale  
Making the voice of mountains

Reaching beyond my old concerns  
From when I was seventeen in 1995  
All the layers of life  
Glint in my flashing eye  
Simultaneously  
And at any moment we could die  
And so with urgency  
I keep a candle by my side  
And watch it disappear and glow  
At the same time

The weather moves across the land and doesn't have a reason  
This rippling uncertainty beneath our bones  
Is still  
The true state of all things

It was at a truck stop in northern Italy  
I was on tour playing drums and always wandering off alone  
Squinting into the setting sun  
My notebook filling  
I was touring, living on an alternate plane within  
But set apart from this life  
Where people wake and work and don't self-uproot each day  
Instead we passed through the towns like criminals  
I was so gladly included in this rare world  
This moving cult of groundlessness  
Roomless, moving, awake  
Across that parking lot, recognition of the same

Another touring American band  
Bonnie 'Prince' Billy  
All dressed in matching track suits and sunglasses  
Grizzled and silly  
A kind of Italian tour costume  
Blending in, but not really  
And their playfulness with persona  
Liberated me with permeability  
I thought, "Who is it even that sings  
And who comes to life  
Between the ears of the hearers in the rooms at night  
And how can we all get deep?"

The packaging distracts from the nourishment it wraps  
Fixation on the singer's face or on the band's name  
Keeps us groveling and blind at the edge of a sea  
Unsubmerged in the singing waterfall  
Looking for a door into The Mansion  
Taking this weird art project out into public

Indulging in cultivated ambiguity  
About participants' identities  
Letting misperceptions hang  
Because nothing's really true  
With this imagined collective called "The Microphones"  
I wrote about climbing up and dying  
And then flying off as vultures  
And a universe beyond  
Innocent of the real air of death  
That awaited down the path

At the very end of 2002, I took the Microphones name and crumpled it up  
And burned it in a cave on the frozen edge of northern Norway  
I made a boundary between two eras of my life  
A feeble gesture at making chaos seem organized  
The roaring river carves on, laughing at my efforts  
While the idea of something called "Mount Eerie" engulfed me  
And time  
Refuses to stop

Many, many years later  
I heard "Freezing Moon" by Mayhem  
And these words jumped out:  
"The cemetery lights up again"  
"Eternity opens"  
And I say:  
"Nothing stays the same  
No one knows anything  
Someone else lives in the house I used to live in

And soon it will be torn down or burn"  
And who would even want to live in a prolonged stagnation?  
I am older now and I no longer feel the same way  
That I did even five seconds ago  
Watch me thrash around  
And try to gracefully allow the past to hang  
Like: "No big deal"

Bands that break up and then reunite for money can do whatever they want  
But it makes me glad that I am only this one contrary grump, impossible to r  
eunite  
Live  
The present moment burns

I will never stop singing this song  
It goes on forever  
I started when I was a kid and I still want to hold it lightly  
This luxurious privilege to sit around  
Frowning and wondering what it means  
Playing with words  
And trying to prove that names mean nothing

A finger  
Pointed at the moon  
Mistaken  
For something shining and true

I never used to think I'd still be sitting here at forty-one  
Trying to breathe calmly through the waves  
But nothing's really changed in this effort that never ends

When I took my shirt off in the yard  
I meant it, and it's still off  
I'm still standing in the weather  
Looking for meaning in the giant meaningless  
Days of love and loss repeatedly waterfalling down

And the sun  
Relentlessly rises still

It seems like I'll never not lose wisdom  
Constantly relearning all the basics  
Never recognizing any faces  
Crawling out from under living layers  
Squinting in the light of the earth bathing  
Shaking off the weight of expectations  
Plus all this nostalgia is embarrassing  
So I walk into an unknown room  
Without a name

So what if I label this song "Microphones in 2020"?  
I hope the absurdity that permeates everything joyfully  
Rushes out and floods the room like water from the ceiling  
Undermining all of our delicate stabilities  
Admitting that each moment is a new collapsing building  
Nothing is true  
But this trembling, laughing in the wind

Anyway, every song I've ever sung is about the same thing:  
Standing on the ground looking around, basically  
And if there have to be words, they could just be:  
"Now only"  
And

"There's no end"