

Contain Podcast - 3 Years On

I never wanted Contain to be a podcast—I don't even particularly enjoy talking that much. The podcast aspect was sort of an accident. I'm happy that it happened though, and grateful for all of the kind words, messages, and surprising amount of listenership it's garnered. This year, Contain—despite its oblique and unclear premise—has managed to be in the top 1% of subscribed, 1% shared, and 5% of total listens of all podcasts thru apps. This is bonkers considering it doesn't fit neatly into a definite genre, having to contend with iHeartradio Romance Advice—nor has it received any institutional financial backing or promotion (despite a once persistent and now discredited Thielbux rumor).

The project started off as a CD label. Then we branched out into curating live events—from smoke machine half-performance jazz-background gonzo theoretical lectures to music nights/screenings of movies. We also did one vaguely infamous event featuring a formerly disgraced neocameralist blogger/software engineer, soundtracked to a Chicago footwork/drill DJ set at a Dutch Soldier Hall. This was all done in 2019-January 2020, just before the pandemic happened.

Alex (Talan) and I uploaded our first episode exactly three years ago this day—January 13th, 2020. We had no context for the music we were making, so this would be our chance to give it one. Put yourself back in 2019: peak TDS, peak Culture War Witching Hour...it was pretty inescapable. If you rejected any part of what was happening, you weren't canceled per se, but labeled 'access denied' to most of the amenities institutional power had to offer. It was a difficult landscape to create anything in. I wanted to see if I could work some Trickster magic into the equation: I wanted to see if a fourth world was possible.

The initial episodes were barely coherent rants uploaded exclusively to Soundcloud. They featured some vague semblance of post-marxian theory, some geopolitics, and a bit of anthropology...woven in-and-out of the music we had recorded for the label. One of the first reviews we got was 'you guys need shock collars for when you go off too far into outer space'. The first episode was generally well received though, which was surprising given my 20-minute tirade about ketamine abusing 40-year-olds from the Midwest who wear 'little boots'. I wanted to see if I could skirt the line of controversy and unspoken acceptability that didn't delve too deep into dogma and polemics. Again, this was a 'music label/imprint'—we primarily saw ourselves as artists interested in making things rather than gossiping. Sadly, this objective was not always achieved.

Then the pandemic hit and there was no more music. No more events, no more anything. We wanted to do underground events, but nobody was willing to do them at the time. I played one illegal house party with Jewelxxet which is where we first met (the episode with them was an all-time favorite, in spite of its baleful circumstances). I decided we should make the show a weekly thing, just uploading it to Soundcloud, and trying to integrate all the stuff we were doing at the time into that medium. Make unique fliers and scores for every episode, try to give it some objecthood, like a tiny drawing or stamp or flexi disk.

Cohosts came and went, alliances were forged and broken, health issues & calamities ensued, but it kept going. There were flirtations/investigations into subjects that were str8 cap (crypto bs), and some that yielded outcomes amenable to the creative world I wanted to construct for myself and the listenership. I was gravitating towards any topic or person I found interesting at the time and wanted to give a host platform so they could share the things they were working on and some of the topics guiding them with a bit of my input as well, maybe work something out on the spot. It was just a vessel for unexamined kinesia drifting through post-accultural terrain. It seemed like a new world of possibility had opened up through this quickly ascendent medium of the infotainment era.

Three years in, I am not happy with the state of podcasting. Many fellow podcasters, failing to realize a positive project out of the negative capacity of shallow 'cultural critique' have jumped the shark. Some become partisan lackeys—mostly through empty Shock Jockery (fake edgy pick-me-ism's said forcefully as if they contain any truth whatsoever) and self-referential master-signifier Warholian beta narcissism. I'm ok seeing this stuff bite the dust in all honesty. There are also projects whose work I cherish & am happy to support, so it's not all bad. Research IS important...courage is important, mystery is important, the other/the imagination are important—let's celebrate the Death of The Author and give breath back to the lonely word.

But collaboration is also important. Alex Bienstock has been a major part of this project with Finpunk Inc. The book & movie we created together with the help of Emi Brahm was the most fun I'd had working on anything ever. The book even made it into a liberal arts philosophy curriculum despite protests from 16th graders. Bienstock's conceptual artistry & freewheeling mind have been essential to all of this. Alex Talan helped set the backdrop for much of the show by establishing a sound/mood with his innovative editing process & Coolwater musical project. Even though he's not a fan of being perceived through the eyes of agonizing glass-surfaced networks, he's back working on music with me for the show & helping get the CD-R label back up and running. Contain is also starting a new side venture with another talented designer called United Trash—pure idiotic unisex wear.

Also, to the guests who appeared on the show. Much gratitude towards them for taking the time and putting themselves out there, for having that kind of faith in something like this. Especially the recurring ones like Emmalea Russo, with her grounded Hanian gospel.

The plane of influence has shifted a bit, and I'm not gonna lie—it feels pretty fucking good to not be labelled an absolute nutter anymore. A few guests have told me they've sold more clothing, or paintings, or something good came their way from just having had a basic conversation. That makes me happy.

When I started, my goal was to eventually get 400 downloads per show. Now, each public episode averages around 10-15 times that. It's been challenging, there have been at least 100 times I've said to myself 'I'm ending this all right now'. I still don't know what to make of any of it, I still don't have a bio for Contain. I need someone else to help me translate and describe it. I've

poured my absolute heart & spirit into this-that I can say that with certainty. I just know as long as people are interested, I'll keep doing it. I don't really know what else to say.

Thank you for your support. Your interest is the only thing making this happen. Much love to you all.

Sincerely, Barrett *****