

1 COMING DOWN OFF SUMMER

When summer ends and the first chilly night inspires a fire in our woodstove there's a familiar sensation of returning home. Home from a summer of touring festivals, home to a very different rhythm and energy and all the tasks and trains of thought we'd left behind. No bright lights, no standing ovations, no highways, no laughing groups of friends. But strong memories sparked by tokens like an old wristband or a faded hat say, "It was real!" Does any of this sound familiar? Spring is usually a season of frenzied anticipation for us musicians, but here we are, along with everyone else, in a permanent feeling of fall. Maybe this song is an unexpectedly apt soundtrack. (Ruth Ungar)

2 RADIO SIGNAL

The day of the 2017 Charlottesville riot I got a text from our friend, Vern, reading: "PLEASE for the song that kills fascists." Radio Signal was written in the next 10 minutes. Where is the hope in our twisted culture? Bob Dylan says it's in the wind. Daniel Quinn described a sacred "blaze of life" that connects all things. Pete Seeger showed us the power of many people making small contributions: "the tea-spoon brigade." Each verse of Radio Signal is a nod to one of those three great teachers, melodically informed by the beautiful old folk song Shenandoah and transformed into the anthemic rock song we share with you today. (Mike Merenda)

*And I roll, and I roll
Down the back roads of my soul.
Lookin' for light like a radio signal...*

3 WHAT IT ALL IS

I had been thinking about statues and symbols that get exalted in our culture and how misguided many of them feel to me. Where's the totem to clean water? Where are the spotlights on indigenous wisdom and sustainability? Where's the monument to peace? To natural systems? To the magic of nature? It seems all our Washington monuments are in celebration of "modern man." Colonizers. War heroes. Tributes to "Takers." How can we expect to evolve into a peaceful society when our public monuments are in celebration of conquerors; those who triumph over "the other," raze the land, and pillage "the wild?" (Mike Merenda)

*I go down to Washington town, I watch them monuments grow
Not in size but in legend I guess we can still pretend none of us really know what we know . . .*

*Out in the forest there's a beautiful chorus teeming from every tree
and it's all been here far longer than you, it'll all be here long after me*

Time is a weapon, time is yr best friend, time is what you make of it / Time made nature, made every last creature, I can't stand by idly while we're breakin it / How long do we go on living like this? How long til we realize what it all is? . . .

4 IF YOU COULD HEAR ME NOW

Greed and debauchery had finally displaced all semblances of love and decency in the name of a shallow, short-sighted nationalism. I recognize that this cultural divide stretches back many thousands of years prior to the election of the 45th president, to a time when man declared himself CEO of all living things. But this pageantry. This elevation of our basest attributes to the world's highest stage, well even I couldn't help but get swallowed up by the despicable grandeur, this grotesque expression of a profound disconnect with not only nature, but with our good nature. Do they hear us? Do you hear me? Is there decency left in this world? And if so, can it gain traction? Can it go mainstream? Can common sense prevail? Is there even a common sense? Are we this far gone? A quiet moment at my kitchen table is where this inner anguish spilled out and, through the magic of song, was preserved in the air and on the page. (Mike Merenda)

*If you could hear me now, if you could hear me somehow
If you could hear the words that i'm thinkin'
'Bout a world on fire
Good thoughts lost in the mire
And it seems like no one's listenin'*

5 BEYOND CIVILIZATION

The first time I read Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael* I knew it was one of the most important books ever written. I've even made the claim to friends that it's "better than all Dylan and all Shakespeare." Why? Because it shows us a way out. It validated my suspicions about our culture: humanity was not meant to live this way, but has been led astray by a flawed mythology. A lie. Quinn reminds us with history, science, anthropology, archaeology, paleontology, mythology, philosophy and religion, that we are of the earth. We are nature. And to live apart from "the laws of nature" is a means to an end. A means to The End. The end of us all.

I was actually quite dumbfounded that no one had ever recommended *Ishmael* to me before a few years ago. I dove headlong into his other books: *The Story of B*, *My Ishmael*, *Beyond*

Civilization. "This makes so much sense!" Our culture has built itself up to believe that we represent all humanity itself. That man was born a civilization builder. An Earth eater. Many of Quinn's critics suggest that he thinks we should go back to living in caves and hunting with sticks. Needless to say, no where does he suggest that. But rather, perhaps, that the enormous stretch of time - millions of years - which we've brushed off as "pre-history" - may contain some wisdom about the way in which humanity interacts - sustainably - with the earth. And where might one find such wisdom now? Why, with the teeny smattering of indigenous peoples scattered throughout the world; those who know the earth's secrets and have lived in sync with the planet for longer than we can possibly imagine: cultures that are evolutionarily stable.

I've been pretty vocal about sharing Quinn's books and ideas. Humanity has bought into a myth that the world belongs to us, was made for us. We are held captive by the very notion that we are a chosen species; that the world is ours for the taking, assuming "the power of the gods." Of course this absurd premise, this myth, is precipitating our demise. Maybe civilization isn't the pinnacle of man's achievement but rather a sick distraction. Maybe, just maybe, there's something better, something sustainable, in balance, waiting for us, Beyond Civilization. (Mike Merenda)

6 CALIFORNIA

When you grow up on the east coast, California beckons as a promised land... a fertile world of opportunity, and my first adventures there did not disappoint. It's safe to say that the Cali in this song is quite romanticized or even simplified but it brings me back to some of my first awed memories of the state, amongst Redwood trees, enjoying fresh delicacies, and a laid-back interaction that seemed other-worldly to my mile-a-minute New York self. I remember watching a Californian order a pizza... it was a slow and meandering process that somehow jived with the pizza guy's also chill demeanor. Of course in NY neither of these people would have made any sense but in California they delighted me! Kudos to the band for singing the overlapping vocal parts that make the chorus so fun, and for chugging along in that incredible galloping rhythm. It feels to me like a sunny day, with every vegetable perfectly ripe and no particular hurry in the air. Bliss. Come on down! (Ruth Ungar)

7 SOMEONE'S HURTING

I was strolling a picturesque Scottish hillside as my phone displayed yet another horrifying live-streamed shooting by police back home. The chorus of a song I'd started echoed in my head. *When it feels so good like you're walking on air you know that someone's hurting somewhere.* It was not a metaphor but the absolute truth. A man had bled and died in a car in front of a woman and child who loved him as I had been blithely collecting wildflowers and admiring an old castle wall. The policeman who shot him did not offer help. The news began to report on the degree to which the dead man caused his own fate. An already dark song gained its third verse. *Now we talk about the privilege of the people who look like me / How our worries*

are the size of a nickel in the big wishing well / If someone was to shoot me, I bet they wouldn't run free / And we wouldn't be talking about how I brought it on myself. Singing this song helps me to remind myself of the power I possess, the system from which I benefit, and the influence that I can hopefully have for good. I am learning what it means to be an ally, which starts with listening and hopefully ends with strengthening the voices of those in pain. All of us share a planet and share a heartbeat. Let's stand together for kindness and social justice for all. *I want to be the one you call when it's not alright.* (Ruth Ungar)

8 YOU CAN COME TO MY HOUSE

When I first played this song to a friend he joked that it could be a sitcom jingle, and he wasn't wrong. There's something decidedly pop about You Can Come To My House. It's more or less a recollection of the life we lead as traveling minstrels but also as hosts to traveling minstrels! Yes, here's a makeshift bed (or three)! Yes, there's whisky *here* and coffee *here* if you get up before me. Yes, you can join us for dinner if you arrive in time! Yes, you can do laundry! Yes, we can sit around the kitchen table late into the night and talk about it all. And, yes, the kids will likely wake up all up in the morning no matter how bad your hangover is! (Mike Merenda)

*You can come to my house, you can pick some records out
Coffee in the cupboard, whisky on the shelf
You can come to my house, I'll try to keep the children out
Of your hair in the morning, you come to my house*

9 EAST SIDE WEST SIDE

When we were kids in the early 80's, universal environmental sentiments abounded. "Pollution" and "littering" were obvious problems. Less liberal-minded families might have disagreed with ours on details like nuclear vs. solar, but nobody wanted to waste resources or live in a dirty mess. WTF happened? I'm sure there are a few explanations of how clean air, clean water, and a respect for nature have become partisan or even fringe concepts but it still puzzles me. It may be a cliché lyric but I had to say it:

We've all gotta drink the water, we've all gotta breathe the air!

And I dug back into my childhood brain for the inspiration and tried writing with the positivity of Sesame Street and the soul of Free to Be You And Me. A song with a message that makes people sing along and dance. Dancing and singing together is a great way to connect and get out of our hyperfocused bubble state, right? I've been to a Lucas Graham concert. It works!

Our kids travel the world with us. I hope more young Americans will have the opportunity to travel outside our borders or at least outside of their city and state, bringing good energy with them and returning home with a more macro perspective on humanity.

*Keep walkin on a good path around the big world, come back and tell me what you found.
We can fight or we can wrestle with the details but we're standing on common ground.*

I remember saying the pledge of allegiance and singing patriotic songs when I was quite young in school. I loved to sing those simple-sounding songs and I loved to feel proud. "She's a Grand Old Flag" really stayed with me for some reason. I remember being a little older and being turned off by the anthemic energy of "This Land Is Your Land." I'm not sure why. In my 30's Peggy Seeger told me that she had stopped singing it. A pair of Indigenous musicians stayed silently seated when that song was performed at a festival finale and she began hearing it very differently. I was grateful to get that message from her.

I wonder if all of these songs have some good still left in them. I quote them in my song as touchpoints for our common culture and a place to start the conversation. There is so much pain in the soul of this country. I know I'm a textbook "snowflake" and the opposing argument is "love it or leave it." But I can't give up on this country. I think it is patriotic to admit our own flaws and keep trying to do better.

*My country tis of thee, sweet land of liberty, close minded bigotry, open hostility
So stand or take a knee, just join your hands with me
and let freedom ring. 'Cmon everybody sing*

(Ruth Ungar)

10 YOU GOTTA BELIEVE

A reminder to not get swallowed up by all the dark forces that occupy so much bandwidth in our culture, and to acknowledge the millions of small contributions good people make on a daily basis, across the political and cultural spectrum. The idea for the last verse was directly lifted from something I came across online, inspired no doubt by Greta Thunberg and her righteous campaign for truth and ecological justice: "Maybe **we** are the ones that we've been waiting for." (Mike Merenda)

HAVE YOU READ DANIEL QUINN? (Radio Signal, What It All Is, If You Could Hear Me Now, Beyond Civilization, You Gotta Believe.)

Have you read Daniel Quinn? I believe his books may be some of the most important ever written. Before I found him I wasn't even aware his perspective existed. It was like finding the seventh side of a cube.

It's a story about humility. And captivity. About finding the way out. It's about hope and science and history and culture. It's logic. It's the past is the future and the future waits behind us. It's sustainability as our greatest ability. It's not because we were told to but because we know to. It's a story about balance. It's a story about changed minds. Of thousands of cultures spanning eons. And community. And humankind. And the community of all living things. Our way is not the only way to live.

It's a story about breaking free. It's a story about seeing. And how to precipitate a cultural sea change.

"Teacher seeks pupil. Must have an earnest desire to change the world. Apply in person." So reads the opening paragraph of Quinn's flagship novel, *Ishmael*

When after writing *Ishmael* Quinn found that many people still had many questions, well he went back to work with *The Story of B* (spoiler: B stands for blaspheme), *My Ishmael* (The lessons of *Ishmael* geared for younger students) and *Beyond Civilization* (some examples of what a new society might look like.)

Radio Signal, What It All Is, If You Could Hear Me Now, Beyond Civilization, You Gotta Believe: all of these were deeply inspired by Daniel Quinn. Beyond Civilization is literally the title of one of his books.

I adore his words. They've validated my severe misgivings about the current way of things and filled me with hope that we may yet navigate a way out of the mess we're in. With stories. By unlearning modern myths and reappropriating ancient ones we may yet find a way to live in accordance with the laws of nature, in tune with indigenous wisdom and ultimately, Beyond Civilization.

There's a town down by the end of the road
And some people trapped there in it
I guess they were never told
To start a journey you must first begin it

And I roll and I roll
Down the backroads of my soul
Lookin' for light like a radio signal