

# Sappy Times

SUITABLE FOR ANTHOLOGIZING IN A LIMITED-EDITION HARDCOVER BOOK SINCE 2009

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## SUNDAY

*(Looking back on SATURDAY)*

AUGUST 3, 2014, FILED FUMBLINGLY AT 5:52 AM

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### JUST BEFORE MIDNIGHT

a man crosses through the mainstage crowd with a hot pizza in his upraised hand. I assume it is hot. Maybe it is merely warm. The audience is overcome with Cousins' sympathetic haircuts, their acreage of guitar and metronomic tom, but everyone's eyes follow the pizza. Outside the tent they do not see the pizza; they don't know about it; they hear only Cousins' keening lines about friends & lonelies. The pizza belongs to one particular person but its secret belongs to anyone who glimpsed it. We're a brotherhood. We're lucky clovers. We're hungry.

"It's my body in the air," Aaron Mangle sings – as crowdsurfers take flight, casual or swooning, one grateful woman whose eyes roll back in her head. "It's the electricity in the air," he sings, as a bottle of water trembles above their guitar stack, shaking in Cousins' sour tattoo, transmuted from pink to cyan to electric yellow by the spray of Sappy's adoring light.

At the Legion later, I'll be honest: I can't see anything. Just a throng of silhouettes, horizontal lights. Weird Lines are somewhere among all that. Maybe they have a dead body back there. Instead of an autopsy it's grim whimsy: a muddle of bass and horns, trundling drums and two pals' twinned voices. This band was born to cover "Hang on Sloopy". But they don't.

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Near the beginning of the day, JOYFULTALK are three men sitting before desks. They are three side-by-side baseball caps, bobbing; glance fast and you could mistake them for three men in little cars, coupes advancing down the road. Theirs is a music of chug and canter, wheezing synths like changing weather. Sackville this afternoon is overcast and heavy. So JOYFULTALK fling arcs of friendly lightning, quirky thunder, saw a lil' fiddle. The drum machine ticks like a satellite. I check an app for the outlook. Forecast: cloud.

Duzheknew are a four-piece of high-waisted guitar, fat sax, and low, roaming groove. It's nearly tropical - I say nearly, because despite the highlife reverb of the guitar, the singing isn't tropical at all. It's nervy and strained, the voice of a worried yachtsman. They play misprogrammed prog about crickets, posters, garbage bags. The *Dr Who* theme infected by a virus. Orange-soda surf, I'll call it, with a singing, worried surfer. Someone help him find a straw.

I hear Shotgun Jimmy play through a screen door, the mic cutting in and out. Postage-stamp-sized songs, strum & whistle, DAD GAB & GG GB. "The good went well and the bad went badly," he sings. I think he's singing about my life. There is a song for the Constantines, too – like a TV theme-song for a band of adventurers, men with gasoline flowing in their veins. I peer through the screen. Jimmy is sitting beside a small, stuffed lynx.

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**FREE!**

*The Times continues on the other side of this page.*

SF9

With EONS I am reminded of the simple sorcery of voice + voice. Matt Cully and Misha Bower sing close harmonies. They are like two trees, an oak and a birch, rustling together. The afternoon is shining through a doorway. The music is pretty and somehow imperious. Misha holds a tape recorder into the air, lets it say its peace before the tape melts down.

Before that, in the same dim Vogue, Nick Ferrio played beautiful country music with a gang of old friends. It was an unspooling moment he giddily defiled: I will not forget the dirty joke about the medallists.

Then it's time for Bry Webb and Rich Burnett. Rich, a lap steel player, who has never been to Sackville before. Here he is in his flying sandals, sitting beside Bry, matching the murmured words with lifting tones.

Bry sings "Asa". He sang "Asa" here at SappyFest Seven, too. That afternoon in 2012, his son lolled laughing at the end of a chapel aisle. This year Asa is across town, playing with grandma. So Bry sings the song louder than before, out through the Vogue's open door, up into the wide rafters.

This is very quiet music. We notice when it's loud. We're all listening so closely, vigilant; sentries of our own hearts. We are listening for changes. When Bry sings "Lowlife" he is almost shouting it to his Katie. A lap steel that sounds like a fiddle, a loon; and Bry shouts into the half-lit movie theatre: "But I love you. You deserve better."

Then: "We'll find a way / A way, stranger."

For a second, through the Vogue's open door, I see it: the way, stranger.

A brief pause in honour of Tantramar Tobacco & Sports Cards, the weirdest shop in Sackville. Find it off Main Street, near the laundromat. It is faded. It is peculiar. It is full of old things, things half-forgotten; like when you wake up in the morning and you remember your dreams and then you forget your dreams. This shop is full of those dreams. On Saturday the woman who was working there seemed grumpy. Perhaps she was upset by the way we pointed and laughed at a Chumbawumba CD-single, at a trucker hat with the words *ALLERGY 2000*. But none of this was unkind; it was all wonder. Bring wonder when you go. Bring kindness. Bring cash.

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Cool are an eager festival: loose riffs, racing rhythms, a resolute commitment to the party. There are a half-dozen people up there, rockin' and groovin' and appendin' the characters  $i + n +$  apostrophe to any willin' verb. They must have brought some extra glints: there are glints everywhere, scattered and twinkling, reflecting, tiny visual yays. This crack band can sound like Chic or Weezer or Jimmy Buffett or the B-52s. They can sound like whatever good times you'd like. They can sound like *glint glint glint glint glint glint glint glint glint*

Ought's preening frontman is like a proud but generous princeling. He is coaxing us "to the left!!!!" and I feel, Canada, that we ought to take this American's advice. We lift our hands in the air. We tip left. The music is a particular rock'n'roll: rotating, toothed, metallic, like an industrial lathe. But it's also a celebratory manifesto, a Walt Whitman-ish cheer. All of us are leaves of grass in here – windblown, freshly cut at 9:30 pm.

An hour later, Julie Doiron is offering glad & crushing riffs, an avalanche of messy jubilation. Giddy feedback shrieks, interrupting up any iPhone ad. The crowd is boisterous, throwing yelps and coos, catcalls, their hearts revved up like engines. Julie's voice is supple, easily bruised. She yells a worthy motto: "We all have to try / but sometimes we don't wanna." She introduces "Mister William Kidman" and they sing Sam Cooke's "Bring It On Home To Me", two peas in a pod, exchanging jewellery in every swap of glances, a fortune in every guitar solo. William's trying not to smile.

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As Greasebeast roar at 1am, a conga line is winding through Struts' karaoke party. A woman in stripes sings "99 Luftballons" in the original German. It smells like people and the Christmas lights are glittering and the fire code has been enforced so despite the lineup, it's spacious in here; lots of room to boogie; lots of room to applaud the kid who's celebrating his birthday by singing; lots of room to win a raffle.

As Greasebeast roar, a circle of friends do sun salutations in the sunless park.

As Greasebeast roar, we gather round a dumpster and a trashed mattress, near a leaning tree. There's someone with a guitar, someone with a saxophone, someone with drumsticks. What more do you need? A dumb groove, half-remembered lyrics; all of a sudden we're dancing in the gravel. It feels like clean trouble, righteous mischief, and where's this guitar plugged in anyhow? Someone's twirling someone else at the end of their arm. Someone else is twirling someone else. This moment cannot last. This year's festival will not last. Lasting isn't everything. ☺