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Chat Pile Explores the Suffering of Post-Industrial America

Andru Zodrow, Editor-in-Chief

Sometimes a band wants their listener to enjoy their music. Other times they want to make audiences feel physically ill. Chat Pile, the underground noise rock group from Oklahoma City, somehow achieves both.

Chat Pile's latest EP, "Brothers in Christ," a co-production with Kansas City band Nerver, will be released April 14. In preparation for their new slate of songs, it's the perfect time to revisit their first full studio outing, "God's Country." The July 2022 album immediately garnered positive attention from critics and fans, and for good reason.

The album's first track, "Slaughterhouse," sets the tone for the album perfectly while communicating the band's post-recession themes. The vocalist, who goes by the stage name Raygun Busch, screams "hammers and grease" while a barrage of minor chords pummels the listener. It's a testament to Chat Pile's compositional skill that the song makes the listener want to turn the song up while illustrating such a viscerally upsetting image of poverty and struggle.

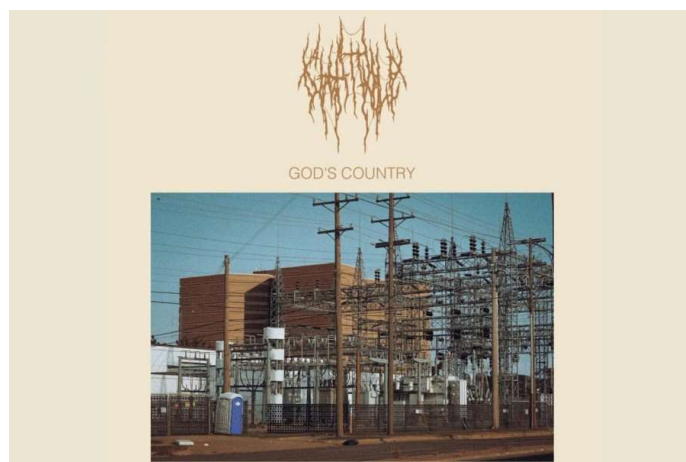
The second track, "Why," is the band's most popular song and arguably their best. With a punishing onslaught of chugging guitars, the track paints a picture of what the contemporary economy has yielded.

"Why do people have to live outside? In the brutal heat or when it's below freezing? There are people who are made to live outside. Why? Why do people have to live outside when there are buildings all around us with heat on and no one inside? Why?" Raygun sings.

While some noise rock artists feel the need to constantly layer sounds, Chat Pile gives Raygun the space he needs to give his vocals punch. The rough and slightly unhinged quality of his voice is deeply emotional, but it never becomes so distorted that it distracts from the rest of the track.

From the third track onward, the album dives into more direct horror elements. Chat Pile wrote a horror film score in 2020, and they've taken that signature theme of dread to their later works. The track "Wicked Puppet Dance" sounds like it was ripped straight out of a dusty collection of scary stories in an abandoned attic, and from that point the collection of songs drags the audience into a hellishly bleak landscape.

That isn't to say that there isn't humor to be found in the insanity of Chat Pile's work. They've always had a unique sense of absurdity which mixes surprisingly well with the unforgiving sonics of the band's work. Their 2019 EP "This Dungeon Earth" features a song entitled "Rainbow Meat" which begins with the line "send my body to Arby's." The last track of "God's Country" is similarly absurd, as



Cover art to Chat Pile's first studio album, *God's Country*. Art by Chat Pile.

it features the McDonald Land character Grimace breaking into the vocalist's room, producing some of the best lyrics released in a studio album in 2022:

"Purple man, stop coming into my room. Stop looking at things that aren't meant for you."

It's an amazing close to a superb album, and showcases what Chat Pile does best—combining the genuinely upsetting with the artistically fascinating. "God's Country" produces a swirl of brutally honest Americana—fast food mascots, debilitating poverty and violence crashing into each other to make one of the most groundbreaking albums of the early 2020s.

Chat Pile is a band that any noise rock fan should keep an eye on. Their mix of social commentary, emotionally devastating narratives and ear-splitting riffs are both challenging and rewarding. It's unclear where the band is headed next, but regardless of what their next studio album offers, it will be worth chatting about.



Cover art to Nerver and Chat Pile's collaborative album, *Brothers in Christ*. Cover painting by Simon Smith.