

APPE SONG



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In the time since the last *Pulp Kings*, just a handful of months beginning in the winter of 2020, things have changed a lot: The COVID Crisis has locked down the world for the better part of a year; The United States is gripped in civil unrest as their election, which is shaping up to be historic and turbulent, looms on the horizon; opioid deaths and suicides are at dismaying and disheartening record highs; and, while we are all facing an uncertain future, it hasn't been unifying as countries across the globe, including my own, find their populations more divided than ever. If this wasn't reality, it would make for great science fiction -- or awful, depending on your tastes. Either way, it's weird, and it's not the future I was expecting even a few months ago. But here we are. It seems like a good time for a song.

Music unifies. It brings people together across time, space, and cultural boundaries in ways other arts simply can't. Even when the lyrics are in a foreign language, the tone and mood of a song come across as clear as a bell. Centuries-old instrumental pieces still stir the same emotions in modern listeners as they did in generations now long-gone. Music is magic, and its real trick is to remind us that we're all the same.

The early days of language are a big mystery, but one idea on the origin is this: Humans sang before they talked. Way back, well before words and articulation, we were like birds and used bits of song to communicate -- just a bunch of apes singing to one another. No one knows if this is really true or not, and we probably never will, but it seems to fit. It would explain the magic of music, its ability to connect to any and all people: Our brains are built to hear it, to hear one another in the rise and fall of notes tangled

around a melody. As a writer and an awful, but not for lack of trying, musician, I hate to admit it, but music is what all other artistic mediums strive to be: a direct, emotional connection between the artist and listener that doesn't need context -- no language, no exposition, no technology -- to exist.

At the start of the COVID Crisis, when everyone first locked themselves away, a bunch of fads went viral, but chief among them and shared across the globe, were people singing and playing instruments from their porches and rooftops, windows and doorways. Something inspired us to dust off instruments and warm up our vocal cords, to fill the eerily empty streets with song, and to make music for each other.

As dire as things are, the future is still, and always will be, unwritten. We are all writing it, and the way we look at one another today will determine tomorrow's pain. It's easy at this moment in history to see our neighbours as villains, to reduce them to a singular idea that we've been told to hate and forget everything else about them -- but that's not who we are. When we had to isolate ourselves, losing our jobs and aspirations, forcing us to let go of our futures, we sang to one another. That's who we are.

Ian Benke
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