



TLDR At this point, lost in Pet Fezant, for all I fucking care, I could be in walmart looking intently at the graphic design of a sack of cat food, getting completely lost in the undulating stripes on the stock photo of an adult tabby male, weeping, totally astonished and moved. I wouldn't care who laughs at me, as long as they let me keep staring at these sights. As long as they don't call for security and have me escorted out of the building. I won't bother anybody. I won't threaten any sort of status-quo anywhere. I quite honestly just want to feel these little cycling patterns ripple through me, forever. Nothing else matters.

by [obsessed](#)

20y ago

What a fantastic song, these guys are crazy to make this kind of music. If i'm not mistaken, the lyrics are plain bullshit :P

by [Jaggy](#)

19y ago

this song is clearly written from the dog's point of view.

by [pedroagno](#)

13y ago

i dunno - it sounds kinda pornographic maybe?

### Warnings

#### Do not use

- if you have ever had an allergic reaction to this product or any of its ingredients
- if you are now taking a prescription monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) (certain drugs for depression, psychiatric, or emotional conditions, or Parkinson's disease), or for 2 weeks after stopping the MAOI drug. If you do not know if your prescription drug contains an MAOI, ask a doctor or pharmacist before taking this product.

#### Ask a doctor before use if you have

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- thyroid disease
- high blood pressure
- diabetes
- trouble urinating due to an enlarged prostate gland
- liver or kidney disease. Your doctor should determine if you need a different dose.

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#### General Comment

This song is pure amazing genius. Learn these words and sing along, you won't regret it.



## HOME OF FADELESS SPLENDOR

a CARDIACS fanzine for 2025



[i need more sleep](#) 10 years ago

WHAT ARE THE CHORDS???

Reply

▲ 2 replies



[Super Leekeg Shoon Dino Vervo](#) 1 year ago

A and B major for the beginning, the rest I'm too fucking lazy to figure out

1 Reply



[Super Leekeg Shoon Dino Vervo](#) 1 year ago

Just realized I'm replying to a 9 year old comment so you probably already figured it out in that time

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by [tiedup](#)

19y ago

I suggest that this song describes the feelings of a person in a dentists waiting room. The sounds of drills etc causes the person distress and to leave the dentists office. Outside is a much happier place.

by [Gay Christmas Tree](#)

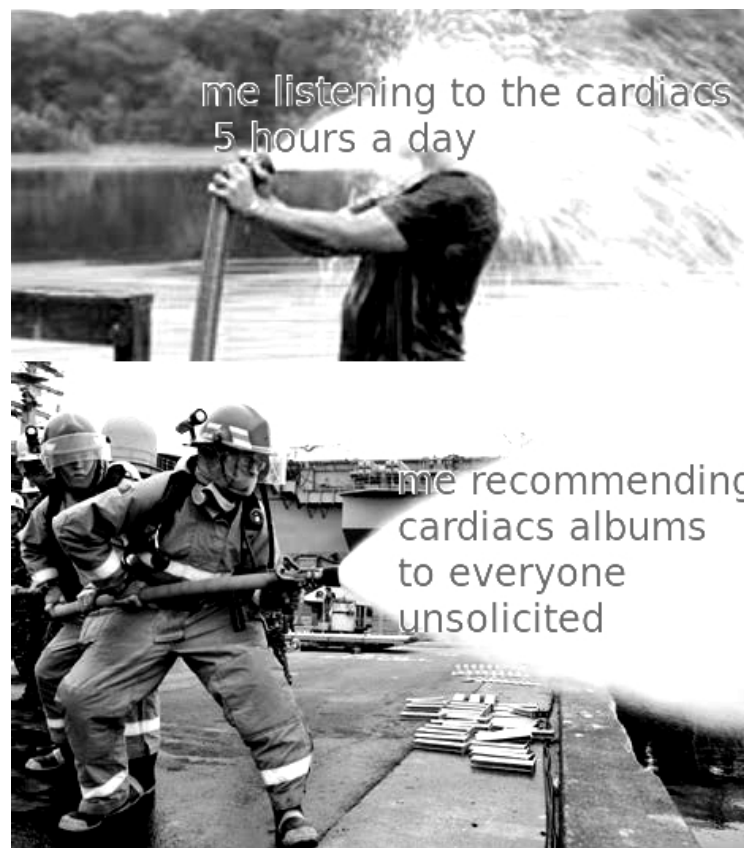
18y ago

Dude, I think it's about society, not getting a filling...

	Odd/Even	Sinking Ship	Worm	A dress	Getting shot	Pins	Sucking	Heaven Sent	Belly	Dogs	Jesus, etc	Dead menagerie	Eye	Horses	Being Dead	Literary quotes	Stairs	Knives	Wire
Eden on the Air	X	X																	
Eat It Up Worms Hero			X	X	X	X													
Dog-Like Sparky						X	X	X	X	X						X			
Fiery Gun Hand				X	X		X				X								
Insect Hooves on Lassie									X	X		X	X	X					
Fairy Mary Mag										X	X				X	X			
Bellyeye									X				X					X	
A Horse's Tail							X							X		X			
Manhoo					X				X				X					X	
Wireless		X		X											X				X
Dirty Boy						X	X	X		X			X				X		
Billion																			
Odd Even	X														X				X
Bell Clinks					X											X			
Flap Off You Beak												X	X						X
Quiet as a Mouse															X			X	
Angleworm Angel			X													X		X	
Red Fire Coming Out		X																	
No Gold																X			
Nurses Whispering Verses									X				X						
Foundling				X											X				

it's heavily inspiring to me that these people came together and created this ultrapowerful music with basically no support, no mainstream commercial success, multiple decades of super nasty press coverage and near-complete popular dismissal. from what i have read they were seemingly just sustained by their smaller but totally loyal fan following, and by their love for each other and for what they were doing. and it's easy to imagine that, because while i'm sure producing this music frequently drained them of any drop of energy, it is obvious it also returned that energy to them, multiplied it and saturated them in it, as it saturates me to a near unbearable level even just listening to it. it's almost unimaginable what it would have been like, from the standpoint of energetic saturation, to be among the people PLAYING that music for the first time.

anyway it seems obvious to me that what they were doing was summoning a near-incomprehensible nonhuman power and allowing it to inhabit them, giving in to it entirely, *without exception and without appeal*. & all i actually want in the world is for all of us to elbow all the hierarchical bullshit out of the way so that the opportunity can arrive, and for us to have the strength and the guts to open up to those powers, whenever and wherever they do arrive.



## first encounter...

im putting this up bc i just wish i had 1 friend, *just 1*, who is hit by this stuff as hard as i am. ... honestly havent experienced this lvl of obsession with any one band probably since highschool, if ever... the only comparable love i have consistently felt across a hyperbolically fat body of music is probably j. a. seazer's music, which honestly has some musical similarities, but isn't strictly speaking the work of 'a band'.

when will it stop? when will i hit the bottom of this freefall? will i ever recover from finding a collection i love this much? will i ever love again?

i want 2 tell u the story of falling in love -- it was in part the classic i-criinged-at-first trajectory; i have a mild to moderate allergy to highly lyrical music, and a very severe allergy to anything with even a lime twist of musical-theater presentation; i wasn't impressed or drawn in by their visual aesthetic at first glance; i had a suspicion that most of the other fans were coming happily from a palette i didn't remotely share (were they the people who love boring indy music? metallica? 'fratboy punk'? broadway?!) ... i also didn't like the look of the cult of personality around the front man, that's always offputting to me...

but more than any of these reasons there was just the problem that when i tried listening to an album straight through, it was all just 'too much' - somehow the flow of the songs was at first much, much more impenetrably psychotic than any of the harsh noise or psychedelic noise pop on which i generally sustain myself. i think this is due to the fact that most of this music consists of convolutedly overlapping but *incredibly tightly planned* structures. it's structure-rich. that's part of what makes it so crazy and sort of hurts your mind if you can't find a way to let it just carry your consciousness. it's different than just being overwhelmed by sounds. it overwhelms me with its structures and number of dimensions all tightly controlled and exploding together fueled by relentless, annihilating, incinerating energy. even the quiet tracks are like this. it rips a hole in the arbitrary plane of everything with its prismatic structural certainty. it really can kind of hurt for that reason.

also, there's a staggeringly huge variety of *ways* this is achieved. grandiose prog-ballad epics fracture into clown music, parody american rock-n-roll tropes ('you betcha!') stopping on a dime and dropping you into incoherent or childish slapstick scenarios, unexpected words or barking sounds that strike suddenly, sparkling mathy vortexes lassoing it all together and shoving you under the waterfall of my personal favorite effect of all these--surreal choral anthems. all of this happens suddenly, but slowly enough that you're lulled into expectations in spite of yourself, so the cold water splash of the next structure emerging gets you every time. the more i listen, the more i'm able to superficially make sense of it, the more everything seems to come out of left field completely.

as a listener, i've realized i'm way more susceptible than the average person to getting carried off, it doesn't take much to transport me, even mediocre music can consume my awareness of things entirely. but even so, i would have to say very little music has ever made me feel quite this way. i feel sad that i live in a different time and a different country than where this music was born, than where it had an actual life and circulated among people. i feel sad to be alone with it--cult of personality around the 1 'genius' songwriter/frontman notwithstanding, it seems to me to be very communal-flavored music, meant to be sung as a group, meant to be shared.

## why a CARDIACS fanzine?

i've never made a fanzine for a band before...

but anyone who knows me knows I really can't shut the fuck up about CARDIACS...

in the following uh ""essays"" i have tried to explain why. and even if you're not into CARDIACS I hope my writing might be of interest to anyone who likes thinking about the slippery dynamics of aesthetic attraction/repulsion. especially regarding 'non-functional' things like art and music. and the question: how come i get this obsessed with some things and not others?

when I was born, CARDIACS had already been a band for 12 years. and I didn't find them til I was in my 30s.

as I try to detail in this zine, finding them was like being hit with some sort of malicious hypnosis. there was, to be blunt, a STRONG cringe reaction to some of this stuff. they don't play 'the type of music I like'. their non-musical aesthetic surfaces did not, off the bat, appeal to me in any way (and actually largely really repelled me). CARDIACS exhibit a bunch of qualities that normally would prompt me to filter them out of my music-exploration-horizon ASAP...

but, instead, the effects inverted... and I became really, really obsessed with them, so obsessed it made me feel kinda crazy.

sorry but I gotta drop a jean baudrillard quote here (take a shot every time I do) (from *Fatal Strategies*, 1990):

***Long live the secret rule of the game that causes everything to disobey the symbolic law!***

I would say I HAD to make this fanzine because I have not been capable of not thinking about CARDIACS for more than a couple days at a time, since finding them. given they're approaching a 50 YEAR MARK of building out this totally demented body of music, i wanted to make a record of the spooky, unexplained phenomenon of all their intricate work hurtling across the world and bouncing off some random painter's mind.

enjoy (or don't lol and just marvel at how in the weeds some people get)

+1

### My Interpretation

To me, it seems like it's about a child who becomes fascinated by the titular character in the 1950s show *Lassie*. The child desperately wants a *Lassie* of their own and decides to build their own "customized" dog out of parts harvested from dead insects.



Rarely, you might have a brush with something (music, art, stuff like that) so sharp that it cuts a sort of psychic hole in your world. Some people aren't open to this, but imagine that you are: imagine that you take the time to examine the hole, you try to understand how it happened or who caused it. Maybe, if you're like me, you hate your home world so much that even without understanding it, you're just totally ready to *go through* the hole. Recklessly, you just go. *And then what?*

This grotesquely too-easy metaphor comes from novelist Philip Pullman: his "subtle knife" is so sharp that it cuts holes in the world. It cuts spacetime. In the pop physics of Pullman's 1997 novel, which I just re-read with my daughter, our universe is merely one of countless billions; its singular physical fabric exists in isolation, a totality unto itself. But, parallel worlds exist, too--they're also 'there', somewhere, elsewhere, also complete unto themselves, isolated and unreachable. Foreign universes never interact with each other until this infinitely sharp knife wounds them both, and binds them together, by slicing a little connective window. The knife's user can then travel through: *leave his home universe* and enter a new one. If the window is left open, so can anybody.

Why cut a window, much less go through? We watch some of Pullman's characters traverse multiple universes just because they are vaguely noodling around. We meet others who methodically hunt the most important throughlines of their lives through a maze of jarringly different, now-porous worlds. But now that (in postmodernity) the doors have been cut, any given world can no longer remain discrete and unaffected by the others. Incongruous climates, flows of electromagnetic radiation, and virally contagious ecosystems mingle.

These acts--the use of the knife, the act of cutting windows, and the act of traveling through them--all have particular and extremely grave costs. Nobody discovers all their consequences until Pullman's story is nearly over.

Like I said, this scenario from *The Subtle Knife* is my ham-handed metaphorical preamble and I'll circle back to it and it'll make sense. I bring it up partly because Pullman's saga of cosmic atheism left a strong impression me when I first encountered it, at around my daughter's age. His work scaffolded what would become my mature understanding of art, music, literature and the phenomena possible through them. His were among the first texts I ever remember reading that made me really, really nightmarishly upset. But, they also struck me with the elementary awareness that, in fiction, we can be compensated for such intense discomfort. This happens when artists offer us beautiful sights, impossible ironies, dreamlike poesis of events, a trip through a convincingly real other place. Stumbling through a window, into some foreign reality, can be unbelievably unpleasant; it can also be worthwhile, though there's no guarantee.

Re-reading *His Dark Materials* as an adult, I was unsure Pullman's grand images and thriller-style pacing (I now absolutely hate being asked to put up with suspense in narrative fiction) wouldn't fall flat or seem cheap. They didn't; 20+ years later, I reaffirm my original impression of Mr. Pullman as someone really using the knife, a writer with enough discipline to pull off something as stressful and awe-inducing as opening this portal to a foreign world. It holds up. So I respectfully place Mr. Pullman in the same category as other artists I'll mention in this incredibly fucking long "album review".

With this already-bloated preamble to my attempt to discuss *Cardiacs'* album, *LSD*, released September 19th, 2025, note also that I don't feel so much that I'm "reviewing an

Vermin Mangle largely hinges on Tim Smith's voice: so delicate, clear, singular. The 4 tracks from *LSD* that we've heard are all choral, group vocals ("gang vocals" as bff h.w. comically cited them). [Faster than snakes with a ball and a chain](#), a song I really love, is not on the tracklist either, mysteriously.

Maybe it would be incongruous to spend 17 songs in a chorus and end with something so stylistically different? (I'm just guessing--who knows what the other 13 songs will be like, but I do sort of expect a heavy emphasis on surreal choral anthems, i.e. i'm hungry for them). Or maybe the fact that *Vermin Mangle* has become a funeral song made it necessary to keep it set apart from all the others.

It does *hurt* that *Woodeneye* doesn't have Tim Smith's voice. The pain of this is inescapable, because nobody wanted to lose him. But at least we're compensated for this pain by the fact that he ventriloquizes the chorus: they sing the words he wrote, they deliver his excuses for dying. "I'm sorry that I'm not here, perhaps to be somewhere else or something else."

It hurts to hear him say that through the surviving voices--but we do have to forgive him. After all, as he pointed out in *Vermin Mangle*, "there's room for a big forgive, and a surprise, and adventures."



by [DanAteev](#)

1m ago

Damn, some special *Cardiacs* lyrics can be even more weirder and complex than regular *Cardiac* lyrics. English isn't my first language and I guess there's some parts and wordplays that I can't understand correctly. Beforehand, I always thought that it's about Jesus and how he was crucified to be praised afterwards. How it turned out to be about boy masturbating??

At first listen I resent that Woodeneye superficially sounds a little like one of the members' other band ('The Monsoon Bassoon') which I've never yet managed to like (and to be quite honest as of right now I hate). There's something very upsetting about it—very GenX mushroom man with a guitar, very very fucking corny; somehow, the "technically difficult" mathiness of it (usually candy for me) makes it worse, not better. The whiny british rock and roll voices. When I got in a crazy car accident a couple years ago, the moment I noticed I was still alive, that album ('[The Monsoon Bassoon— I dig your voodoo](#)' jfc) had somehow randomly begun playing in the car, and I can't forgive them for that. In some cosmic way I suspect their corny rock and roll shit caused my car crash. Why, how is this me? Why am I connected to this shit? Why am I subject to this power from nowhere?

After about 900 more listens I would describe *Woodeneye* as being thrown into a dark storage unit full of strange textures and yes, I'm obsessed with it. Like most psychedelia, it demands a tactile rather than 'identity signifying' proximity for properly listening to the music. Herein lies the cringe. Like a metalhead with unwashed hair, the first-glance appearance, the surface, the pimply skin, is largely set aside—instead, one focuses on vibrations and structures.

As if openly declaring this, the cover art features [a truly heinous sort of muscular kangaroo with inexplicably stringy hair](#). After decades of songs about dogs and horses, maybe the kangaroo fuses them? In any case he is framed by fuckin' mushrooms. jfc.

Looking at the track list it seems that three of the other tracks on *LSD* are already known, from the beloved *Ditzy Scene* ep; among them, *Made All Up...* is one of my favorite songs on earth. It fills me with a bone-chilling coldness I rarely encounter. I recommend listening while half asleep.

*Woodeneye* is similar to *Made All Up* and *Gen* in the aspiration to a shrill inhuman hypnagogic euphoria. It describes beauty so intense that it takes you out of existence—either out of normal mundane existence in the sense of being "taken outside of yourself", or, maybe, literally, mortally "takes you out". Beautiful stuff is beautiful. It's stupid, it's tautology, but inescapable.

Initial cringe aside, this is one of the Cardiacs qualities I love best: the surreal choral anthem. The surreal choral anthem has a primary place in my music universe dating back to adolescence via [J. A. Seazer](#) who got me through high school. It gives collective grandiosity and overexposure of flavor. It quenches this successfully.

I find that grandiosity often scares people, especially the unapologetic, indulgent grandiosity of Cardiacs (who even have an [anthem more grandiose than that of many national governments](#))—as if it's always inherently fascistic in association. In my opinion people fail to recognize that even fash aesthetics have a disloyal tendency to invert themselves, escape their creators and become quite hilarious (material consequences notwithstanding). I would have thought that the U.S. gov proves this.

It had been rumored that the paralyzing, excruciatingly beautiful song [Vermin Mangle](#) was intended to be the last track of *LSD*, but according to the bandcamp page that's not going to be true. Off the top of my head I wonder if it's the fact that

album" as that I'm truly trying to describe a foreign universe. This is frankly pretty humiliating, but my honest feeling is that writing about this album feels like writing about something with immense spiritual gravity. I am aware that the attempt will sound proportionally insane.

I'm not saying "the music is good" or that you will like it. I am saying it's affected me so particularly that it demands this much of my focus and attention.

Cardiacs' music is no longer just "music" to me—it's an open, difficult wound in my world, a hole that leads me to (and messily entangles my own world with) a disorienting foreign universe. I have stupidly, accidentally, even unwillingly, wandered into, and become stuck in this place: I want to write back to you what it's been like to spend so much of my time over here.

I also want to get to the bottom of exactly why and how this music and its makers use power like this. I mean this ontologically, not technically. This album leaves me asking not, "How did they write, play and record the songs?" but "What does it mean that this is possible?"

As a painter, I think this question would haunt me regardless of how many (or how few) other real people experience anything similar about this specific catalogue. Even before *LSD*, Cardiacs' output amounted to the kind of library that has made me foam at the mouth praying that I could ever produce anything, in any medium, with a fraction of its power. But regarding the particular cache of music by this "band", I think there are, at absolute maximum, some few thousands of people who at present might say they experience Cardiacs similarly.

In the era of "fandom," nothing feels more demeaning than writing multiple-thousand-word essays that no one will read, about some music you found online—right? Well uh, I'm hardly alone in the compulsion to obliterate dignity glazing these old people. Cardiacs are the type of band that incites hundreds of aesthetically challenged youtubers to spew forth thousands of hours of "analysis" using music theory, attempts to reconstruct the work into sheet music, painstaking 8-bit covers, and other highly time-consuming works of spectral fixation. One [David Minnick](#) took his obsession a lot further than I intend to.

The common denominator to these compulsions is that it's really not enough for us to just "listen" to Cardiacs. It feels like the actual music doesn't emerge until you try to understand it structurally, or even spatially. This music makes people want to physically enter it, and somehow explore it in extreme structural detail for ourselves, whether through memorization, covers, digital dissection and reconstruction, or whatever form of immersion is closest at hand.

Ok, ok, ok, getting to the point, *Cardiacs' latest album, LSD, was released on September 19, 2025*. For several years before that date, I have been droning on about this album's hypothetical existence to anybody who would listen. I'm an excitable music listener, but also very picky. Nonetheless, anybody who knows me has watched me become basically a zonked, monologuing deadhead for this crew of fucking boomers (and genX "psychedelic rock" dorks). Anybody who's spent time around me in the last 6 years has surely observed the unique delusional mania that this situation has provoked in my life.

I write this after 14 weeks of daily listens. I wasn't trying to listen to it so much, but given the buildup it's not surprising that it's panned out like this. Nor will it be surprising if the

fixation goes on for years. Over time, this cluster of music will become part of my life, part of my lucid dreamscapes and the garbled dream-language residue blurted out I wake up, part of my paintings, part of my imagination. Last night I dreamed that my 95-year-old grandma sent me a cache of links to rare, previously unseen Cardiacs live vids; I woke up with tears of hangry joy in my eyes. If I live long enough to get dementia, I'll be humming Cardiacs melodies in the nursing home.

When I speak about their music, I absolutely *already* sound like I've got dementia; as you will discover if you keep reading, attempts at track descriptions produce the most high-end hors d'ourves alzheimers word salad.

Word salad: that reminds me. Regarding the album's title: after thinking it over, it turns out I can't actually agree with a certain long-term collaborator of mine who contends that "LSD makes you smarter." ... Stay with me, please... Ok, sure: I've seen it arguably "make people" *feel* smarter, and sometimes, oddly enough, this feeling alone really does somehow make people act smarter... But in probably ten times as many cases I've seen it instead just make people more *annoying*.

Never having partaken of the stuff myself (believe it or not) (being born functionally too acid-basted for it to be deemed a safe escalation, at least not until I turn 50 or 60) I can't speak to the qualities of actual LSD trips but from the outside. Despite the fact that it's 2025 and all coherence has been sledgehammered into little unintelligible shards to the point that my "material reality" looks exactly like the damn hippies' proverbial kaleidoscope, I myself have, at absolute most generous, an ambivalently tolerant relationship to "psychedelic" stuff articulated as such. After all, for better or worse, "psychedelic" is now just fully the inescapable normal form given to my home world, my entire environment. Nevertheless, as I wrote before, I mostly just find it cringe.

By all accounts, primary Cardiacs songwriter Tim Smith did use the word "psychedelic," or, alternately, he just called his music, in the euphemism of the Cardiacs half-century, "pop." I've always liked the humility and disengagement of his use of these descriptors. So, then, the choice to just straight up call the album "LSD" can be taken in this same vein: humility, honesty. "It's just what you think it is."

Here's the thing--this quality of "honesty" is precisely the double-edged risk I most associate with LSD trips and the people who take them. After all, lying (lying: the ability to construct a story artfully and with particular, critical, carefully balanced relation to context) is, in many situations, a gracious and generative activity. But in the intensity and bafflement of the trip and its aftermath, lying, confabulating, rationalizing apparently becomes simply too confusing for them. I've watched hordes of psychonauts then increasingly just neglect these tasks, and default helplessly to "honesty"--even when this neglect will leave them exposed to dork/ moron/ annoying burnout allegations. They can't do otherwise.

Will this abdication to humble honesty, coerced, sometimes irreversibly, by acid's scorch of sheer cognitive overload, empower artists to produce portals to beautiful new worlds--worlds formed thoroughly enough, with enough solidity, that other real people can actually enter them and explore them?

Or, will filter-melt and compulsive "honesty" instead just bore and annoy the fuck out of everyone you meet for the rest of your life?

I dunno. It's a toss-up.

Baurdillard calls this phenomenon 'reversibility' and defines it as 'the principle of evil'. "All things are ambiguous and reversible," he insists. 'Evil' is the slippery, disloyal and amoral quality that exists as a field around things like music.

It's the thing that allows you to tell one plush toy from another. What are they *like*? If you decide one is cool, there's a totally unreasonable but still somehow inescapable probability that it will, for no apparent or particular reason, decide to change--and become cringe. Or vice-versa.

To read my first gushing account of this set of effects shortly after they hit me, read [here](#) (as always, the password is how many cowboys are out in the yard). There are even still a few Cardiacs songs I can't listen to, that make me queasy or ashamed or annoyed... But I'm resigned to the fact that it's a matter of time until I'm crying in my car and singing along. It's that powerful, and I don't think the power can be separated from the fact that I cannot say I "like" every one of the qualities or that they are all "good" or "cool". I cannot give good reasons why they are good. None of us can, the fans, we can't actually. Pleasure and aesthetic power often overlap but they are two different things.

The new single (allegedly the first of three), *Woodeneye*, was just released today, August 1 2025--along with the full tracklist of the mythologized final Cardiacs album, around 18 years in the making.

For those who don't know, Cardiacs was formed in 1977 as 'Cardiac Arrest,' and their entire existence has beset audiences with Sediction Via Cringe. It is said that you either hate them or they're your favorite band.

I resisted... "I don't like stuff like this," I told myself... But then they became my favorite band. Despite their undeniable 'technical' skill and effectively high-energy affect, through the 80s and 90s the band's refusal to stay in a safely validate-able punk-adjacent realm, and willingness to dabble in dork shit (like prog rock, folk, 'psychedelic rock' and even some almost musical-theater-like shit) effectively explain their divisiveness. In 2008, front guy and main songwriter Tim Smith suffered a literal cardiac arrest that left him permanently disabled until he died in 2020. Fans feared the unfinished album would never be released. But today, along with the release of *Woodeneye*, the surviving band members have just given a release date for the album: September 17.

The title of the album is (and we knew this already)... LSD. The title itself made me cringe when I heard it and I've given all this context to say that I had a partial cringe reaction to the song.

When I saw the *album art* I blurted out, "oh jesus christ" and started laughing; I am also deeply allergic to hippie stuff and the crushing cornyness of "druuuuugs!" It must be my trauma from when in art classes I was surrounded, outnumbered 20 to 1, by college boy stoners painting a giant pot leaf with an eye in the middle, or a wizard/gnome next to a mushroom surrounded by rainbows or stuff like that.

It absolutely kills me. Why, why did they have to call the album LSD and have this image on the cover? Why? How could they do this to me? Why? Because I know it's too powerful and I don't stand a chance--I already know I'm going to be listening to this shit obsessively for possibly decades, the rest of my life maybe.



intuitively understand that the aesthetic dimension *is not ethical*. Your aesthetic choices will betray you at a moment's notice. Tech dudes profoundly resent both this confidence and the fields' complexity, and want to find a way to not just make money or cut corners but *punish* the entire realm of aesthetic literacy.

They want a collective abdication of the power of aesthetic navigation. They want to forcibly subordinate the aesthetic dimension to their one monolithically cool toy. It won't work, it's literally not possible, but that's their dream.

Now: *Woodeneye*.

I joke that Cardiacs has "ruined music for me" because my relationship with the band has reordered my sensibility at such a profound level that there is actually something destructive about the change.

It cannot by any means possibly be reduced to, "hey, I found a cool band with music I like." My entire relationship to music, to the creation process, and to what is, for me, the most fundamental dimension of all, and what I have built my life around (aesthetic sensibility and the aesthetic dimension of all things), underwent a tectonic shift. It continues to change me; all other music from that point on has been, in some way, existing in relation to Cardiacs.

Like anything involving the aesthetic dimension, this is not an entirely wholesome or positive process. It's fucked up. One uncomfortable but critical aspect of this process has been the cringe.

When I first encountered Cardiacs, it made me cringe so hard that I rapidly x'd out of the window I was in, mumbling "no, no, no, god no." I sat at my desk, still cringing. I thought for a while. Then, for some indistinct but absolutely undeniable reason, as if moved by an invisible law, like a pidgeon navigating the earth's magnetic field via nameless pull from inside my brain, I reopened my browser and went back to it.

As if somebody had just taken a sheet of sandpaper and scraped it along my face, the first Cardiacs song I heard *bothered me so much* and made me so palpably embarrassed that I couldn't stand to move on from it. It had fascinated me, not in a positive way, but also not in the unthreateningly foreign way that [everything is terrible!](#) videos fascinate me. It was right on the line between uncomfortable and beautiful. It was not one thing or another. It couldn't be parked safely in a genre I felt good about or solidly bad about. In the Baudrillardian sense, it was seductive.

Over the last five years, this cycle has played out over and over again, all within the Alphabet Business Concern garden. For instance, I have a profound allergy to 'folk music,' *especially* 'psych folk,' and deeply resented the Cardiacs side project, The Sea Nymphs, for existing. How could they do this to me? Why? Now, a few years down the line, those goddamn songs, what can only be called incredibly fruity, prissy, precious 'eris shit,' a style which normally has me running the other direction and gasping for air and breaking out in hives, are situated among the most important music of my entire life.

I just know that, however they got there, Cardiacs clearly do have a sort of LSD filter-melt in play--but they've also managed to maintain the ability to exercise *incredibly tight and consistent structuring control* over what goes into their word salad. The result is that they are, undeniably, artists working in high gear within their own terms, terms they've spent decades developing. I mean by this that they're able and confident enough to risk everything for the self-contained integrity of their foreign universe, obey the laws of some far-away dimension.

By 'risk everything,' I mean not only the devotion of insane time, effort and resources for dubious promise of ever receiving sufficient financial or energetic return, I also mean that they're willing to risk not being understood. They're willing to look stupid. They're willing to look crazy, pretentious, boring, nerdy, spectral, etc. They're willing to keep being a band for nearly 50 years without ever getting back anything close to proportional external validation, by any metric. They're willing to be seen as *massive losers* by Earth metrics. But for all that, they have if nothing else totally and utterly convinced me that the throughlines of coherence they're following are completely real--truly foreign, coming from some inhuman ultraviolet pulse or lucid dream dimension, but absolutely real.

Stay with me...

"We like everything," Tim Smith says on a BBC radio interview. The conversation was about 'genres'. "We really, really, I don't think there's a tune that's ever been written by anyone that we don't like."

"...And that's your criteria," the host affirms vaguely. "If it's good, you're into it!"

"If it's good we're into it... If it's bad, we're into it," he mumbles. "We really like everything. Everything."

The host laughs. "I can't believe that."

"Believe it," Tim says.

"I like the noise of scratchy little insects," Jim adds.

I do believe them--and I kind of think this assertion really does sort of 'explain' the sheer range of sounds they draw from, play with. Any piece of music could be a portal worth going through, at least worth exploring. There are little self-contained modes of aesthetic organization literally everywhere. Even a horrible place is interesting. Everything has intricate, strange internal logic of some kind. In order to use the subtle knife to enter other worlds, one has to be capable of feeling around in space without prejudices: believing in the reality, the legitimacy, of places you haven't been yet, places you aren't from. These worlds all have something to offer, even if it's something nasty. From this position, there's no point in rejecting them (merely because they might be, for instance, mortifyingly cringe).

But how do you navigate through thousands of possible portals to divergent aesthetic environments? How do you curate which *strange internal logic* to play with, when everything is potentially on the table? My own experience with this question is that you have to sort of abandon consciously reasoning through things; never rummage through the pile of infinite clutter with too many rationalizations in mind. You have to be incredibly

patient, diligent, and willing to endure pain, but also simultaneously willing to let *something else* guide your hand; you have to be capable of trusting that *something else* to point you the right way. You have to be absolutely devoted to *following the rules*, while not trying to know consciously what the rules are. For this to be possible, you have to be capable of absolute faith: maybe in a concept of "fate" (in the Baudrillardian sense, yes take a shot I mentioned JB, of always awaiting that ironic, impossible conjunction that links elements while inverting meaning) or as a God, or something like a superstition. (Philip Pullman writes eloquently of another name for this force, and another tool for accessing it.)

For example, fate will demand that you admit into your life a demented painting of a muscular kangaroo with stringy hair surrounded by clover, and if you unquestioningly honor the selection (and wait 30ish years) you'll eventually find out what it's meant for.

Undaunted by the potential for pointlessly disorganized incoherence that emerges when every type of music is potentially in the mix (and, in my opinion, because they know how to listen diligently to this inhuman, fateful force) Cardiacs, in their (to date) 48-year lifespan, took it upon themselves to build an insane quantity of perversely cohesive and grand structures out of wildly divergent parts. Their music is always deeply confusing, incredibly intricate, but never "chaotic". Somehow, it builds on itself by endlessly diverging from itself. *LSD* is only the latest result of this ambitious project.

I'm ready to swear that Cardiacs' catalogue, taken as a whole, really does have, and rigorously obeys, a set of *self-consistent aesthetic rules*—but the problem is that they're operative along the 27th dimension or something. The rules: I know they're there, I can feel them playing out, but I can't boil them down to anything without sounding crazy. For instance, I started fleshing out a paragraph (and ended up scrapping it because, well, it sounded crazy) something along the lines of 'what if there really is a higher dimension that operates like 3D space, but its physical principles involve *structures of resonance generated by complex associative stylistic echoes*?'

...

One more explanatory tangent: in 2021, I spent two days at the City Museum in St. Louis (one day with my daughter, and one day alone). This "building" (I guess you'd call it) is the work of a different filter-melted and highly disciplined, confident crazy person, a Mr. Bob Cassilly. Now there's a guy that makes you think, "Perhaps this man has a relationship with LSD." [Watch this short interview and decide for yourself!](#) (Did it "make him smarter," or the other thing?)

For those who aren't familiar, Mr. Cassilly and his associates assembled a world: of caves, tunnels, trees, ladders, aquariums, towers, topiary, exhibits, elevators, arcades, multiple suspended airplanes, mosaics, tarps, mesh, taxidermy libraries, trampolines, terrifying wire pathways through mid-air, medieval torture chambers, tanks of fish that nibble your dead skin off, sculptural mazes, skateboard ramps, a circus, a ferris wheel into the sky, a ten-story slide in darkness, and thousands of other elements.

Mr. Cassilly, in his (by all accounts) intense interpersonal dysfunction and selfishness, compulsiveness, dilation of perspective, and acute ethical negligence, allowed himself, *and demanded that this world allow him*, to get completely and absolutely lost in his own agenda. In the genesis of the City Museum, Mr. Cassilly was, evidently, fully absorbed to

The horrible irony I've found in the course of my life is that even people who most aggressively disavow the entire existence of the aesthetic dimension, who will die swearing that there's no such thing as an aesthetic field, still navigate through their own worlds using an aesthetic compass, *without knowing it or having any conscious relationship with it*, or even hating and resenting it. Language itself, including gestural language, operates via aesthetic field. One cannot communicate whatsoever without engaging aesthetically.

There are people for whom music is essentially a product, a commodity that consumers use to 'chill out' or 'get excited' or to signal identity, a sort of fashion accessory or social token. In the minds of such people, just as you would use dental floss to floss your teeth, you use music to drown out sex sounds, or to fend off boredom. A party is supposed to have music in the background. A TV show is supposed to have a themesong. If only there were some way to just auto-complete these functions without having to get confused by all the possibilities, or run afoul of making the *wrong* choice by accident and getting mocked!

For the aesthetically illiterate people who run the world, music's power to make an 'atmosphere' or to unite groups in the joy of a shared sensibility is undeniably profitable and even, at times, necessary—but, they reason, there must be some way to recreate this profitability without having to engage in the messy and confusing process of actual aesthetic navigation, without risking failure, alienation, embarrassment. Or—ideally—without having to pay anybody who *is* capable of doing this navigation.

The ascent of AI currently underway is such a boring phenomenon I have no real interest in writing about it much, but I will mention this aspect of it: when I've talked to AI optimists, the number one thing these people want to see happen is the obliteration of the irrational, slippery power of aesthetic fields. AI optimists want it to go away. They categorically resent the existence of that entire dimension, which to me makes about as much sense as resenting that we exist in three dimensions rather than two. They seem really convinced that two dimensions would be so much neater.

I have limited patience talking to these people; it feels as if I'm locked in a cage and the prisoner next to me is going, "Wow, these bars are so solid! Isn't it amazing? How did they make these? They're so advanced, so functional! They're so impressive! Aren't you impressed?"

There's also this deep suspicion of how *confusing* the aesthetic dimension is, and a desire for centralized aesthetic standards rather than a fray of heterogeneous aesthetic war. Ideological fascists in particular want there to be an aesthetic 'consensus' in the world; fascists politics have always hinged on (incredibly dumb but) undeniably aesthetic projects: the notion that people *should be blonde*, for instance. Liberals also want there to be a consensus—just a different type, revolving around affective qualities (i.e. 'kindness'? 'science'? ) rather than necessarily visual appearances. This is one of the major lines of continuity between liberals and fascists: the shared discomfort with the world's inherent aesthetic friction.

Tech-worshippers have always resented the fact that most other people on earth have some level of confidence doing aesthetic navigation, fucking around, sensibility-building, fighting with each other—and that most people already



She asked me to give an example and it made me realize the extent of this baseline of tremendous, glorious, easy literacy. We take it for granted. The differences between something pretty or funny vs. something ugly is instantly visible to her, to me, to everyone we know.

When my daughter draws, she can tell immediately what is a success and what is a failure. She knows *there is such a thing as failure*, and that the complexity of the rules (and the fact that the rules can continue to change, unpredictably, endlessly—while still functioning as *rules*) cannot be summarized. She knows how to look honestly, see honestly, have integrity to unspoken and unspeakable yet absolutely undeniable rules.

“Long live the secret rules of the game that leads everything to disobey the symbolic order,” my bf Baudrillard says.

I first attempted the example of walmart: in its architecture it's a temple to aesthetic illiteracy, of rational reduction to “savings,” the sheer bottom line—yet it runs on irrational and largely aesthetic impulses, and moreover, all the cashiers and most of the shoppers are highly aesthetically literate, razor sharp and sophisticated. Everyone in the normal population knows, in one way or another, without having to think, how to play with signs, how to break meaning, how to unravel and recombine the surfaces of things to create an effect, how to circulate effects among ourselves without resorting to narrative, symbolism or sheer quantification.

In walmart, despite the aesthetic field of walmart itself, there is, thank god, no aesthetic consensus: only a war of infinitely different sensibilities in which everyone and everything takes a side.

Everybody can and will find a way to play and to satisfy themselves, whether through fashion or the performance of conversation. For normal people, it's the most regular thing in the world, as easy as breathing.

My second example: we can all tell the difference between the pixar movie *cars* (my daughter finds aesthetically baffling and horrible) and the miyazaki movie *spirited away* (a fave of hers). Yet, for people making money off media, they strive to reduce this difference to ‘well, which one makes more money? which is more marketable? which got a higher number of views? where's the data?’

Or cocomelon, she added. I said, exactly! What's the difference between *cocomelon* and *spirited away*? (I haven't seen much *cocomelon*.)

*Cocomelon*, my daughter explained, is one of the most intense forms of aesthetic violence she's ever encountered, just so viscerally horrible and grating. Apparently it's her high water mark of aesthetically illiterate insanity.

We discussed how cocomelon being ‘for babies’ doesn't justify its shrill, demonic qualities: actual babies will watch literally anything. A baby will watch you tie your shoes with just as much interest as anything else. Cocomelon, my daughter said (in so many words), being a product for the sake of having a product, is a regime. It's an argument. She demonstrated: it's a bludgeon: you like this! you like this! you like this! ONE TWO THREE, THERE'S AN APPLE IN A TREE!

arguably a destructive degree in the relentless hunger to see his lucid-dream-nightmare-world become a real place for real people to physically explore.

By way of this process, this sacrifice of time, money and energy, he did in fact make something remarkable and insane come into existence. Then he made it accessible to the public. He died in the process of expanding his world, at an even larger plot of land he'd secured and was building out; [he was killed in an apparent bulldozer accident, under questionable circumstances.](#)<sup>2</sup>

I'd heard about this place, and heard it was “pretty crazy,” but my visit completely surpassed anything I could have imagined. I did not utilize any LSD but my trip was a transformative experience. I crawled through its caves, stared down its vaults, got stuck, got nervous, then mortally terrified, then literally got lost; each new element stunned me first with its inexplicable inclusion and then a second time with its baffling physical situatedness in relation to everything else.

While exploring this world, the entire time, I had an earbud in my ear playing Cardiacs and Sea Nymphs. I am religiously grateful to have had a chance to inhabit the reverent envy I feel of the power to materialize these fully-formed, impossible spatial phenomena. I mean both: the City Museum and also the music of Cardiacs.

These worlds and the processes of opening them up are not “safe”: I spent a lot of the day thinking about the risk, harm, and sacrifice involved in the endeavors. To use the subtle knife, you must first let it cut off a few of your fingers. I think this is an important visualization of the physical sacrifice necessary to create things. The other world cannibalizes whoever cuts the door, to say nothing of the neighborhood, the other places, problems, people and things that could've been fed resources instead. At the City Museum I thought a lot about the creators of these works and the ways in which the works parasitized them, diverted them away from other lives they could've had, or even injured them, the ways that making things almost always *injures you* in some way, injures your world of origin, your family and friends, your body. I thought about Bob Cassilly and Tim Smith as people who, each in different ways, opened up something so bogglingly powerful that they ultimately (whether via associative logic, or literally) lost their lives in it/because of it/through it.

The day *LSD* came out, I had to go to work. I had to get in my car and drive to work, and then work my job. But--delusionally--I did not feel that I was at work, or that I was even on Earth. The aforementioned subtle knife had cut an exit, and I had slipped through.

...

Notwithstanding everything I just wrote in seriousvoice™, in general I have a pretty severe allergy to selfseriousness. I wonder what it is about certain works that bypasses this effect. It must be something about scale: regular-scale selfseriousness makes me groan, but multiply the quality a gazillion bajillion times and it becomes pretty funny, then seductive, and, ultimately, really moving.

That's Men in Bed. It played as I pulled out of my driveway and slid into traffic. Its spatially vast, mythically overbearing impact widened my eyes and filled them with tears. Even before I could feel my way through the unintuitive pulses of its theatrical chords and

2 <https://www.riverfronttimes.com/this-was-no-accident-bob-cassillys-widow-says/>

mostly-gaps-rhythms, my face was mouthing the central assertion. Yeah! Sure! Whatever you say! I surrender!

I surrender!

Durr!

An aching muscle-like sensation somewhere in my central nervous system painfully relaxed, a sense of anticipation (I hadn't even realized how consuming and tense, as if it had been there my whole life) dissipated like magic. Yeah. I understand! Some would stop the birds from singing if they could! Those assholes. We already know who they are. Better free those damn birds, get them out of there! Fly 'way, free! I shouldn't be driving a car. I'm on a cliffside, I can leap off of it, glide and bounce over the wet rocks. I can fly! I surrenDURR! I'm onlooking a situation at once totally unintelligible and also, impossibly, utterly recognizable. It's a dream retroactively invented but absolutely clear. I knew with complete certainty every intimate detail of the whole nonexistent backstory in a burst of awareness: the ships, the tower, the guns, the corpses. Durr! Time to change lanes!

The evil genie of fate is at work here, nailing the visceral response from something so simple. I felt a sense of relief like I'd waited thousands of years to hear the empty space between these odd little chords. It hurt so much to be oriented, again, somehow, to recognize a world in the aftermath of so many deaths.

Later on, I think over that moment. As its closest superficial comparison is something like music from an early 2000s video game, or one of those youtube compilations called things like "Relaxing With Dramatic War Movie Soundtrack Tunes," Men In Bed kind of buries the lede or at the very least thwarts expectations of a "pop" album. In most cases I'd say it's a big risk to open any type of album with songs this 'dire', but it has a precedent. Much like Cardiacs' main grandiose anthem (opening track of Heaven Born And Ever Bright--utterly baffling when I first heard it), and also echoing the mythic tenderness of Sing to God's spell-like opener, Men In Bed is fully in line with the ritualistic way Cardiacs worlds are entered. It seduces not through "fun" but through an aggressive attempt at suffocation, pleasurable asphyxiation, via grandiose amazement, a shot at the moon. If nothing else, opening your album with something like this will definitely just filter out some listeners. You'll only keep listening to something this nuts if you're curious enough to be patient, or if you're already primed to yield to its power, cognitively drop everything, and enter the foreign environment.

The May stampedes in, a horny/gross/frenzied detonation. Rather than echoing from castle battlements or whatever, the vocals are, transitionlessly, now being shouted right up in my ear, frantic, angsty, and intimate. I'm abruptly relocated: stuck in muddy farmland with wet shoes, just as a thunderstorm is about to open up overhead. The grass is blinding green and only seems to get greener as the sky darkens. The damp air is methane-smelly and volatile. Static electricity buzzes and frizzes on every strand of grass and every piece of body hair. It's exciting and stressful.

The May has similar imagery and acceleration as some other abruptly-accelerating second tracks, notably the dissonant psychosis of Eat It Up Worms Hero and the rubbery aggression of There's Good Cud. The choral drone of the line "If I were your cow, I'd run when I saw you" seems to come from the same accusatory barnyard as the line from There's Good Cud, "Fuck you, you! Don't you *get* me!" I wonder what it is with cows, farmland, the earthy violence (but also, in all three cases, well-ventilated, windy lightness) of these



### aesthetic fields and seduction via cringe: the release of woodeneye

This morning I grabbed two plush toys, sat them next to each other, and asked my daughter: how is one different than the other?

Obviously she's not willing to answer patronizing rhetorical questions like this, but we had a fun conversation. I made the following assertion: we live in a world run by people who *cannot tell the difference between these two things*. At least, they can't do it without resorting to, 'well, do they have a price tag? which one is more expensive?' or, 'well, do we have a factual backstory on where they were made?' or 'who owns them?' or—at absolute most nuanced—oh, maybe they're different colors? maybe they 'depict' different things?

I argued that we are being held hostage by people that have to rely on a 'factual' or numerical basis to tell one thing from another. Entrenched in the power structures around us is a profound, vicious imperative to distrust one's own eyes or ears, a need to rationalize every observation in some sort of quantifiable value system (or niche ideological dogma built of short-sighted rationalizations).

Worst of all, there's an exponentially more intense *enforcement of distrust* of anything that could ever be contaminated with the slur 'subjective'. For the powerful people and entities we are subject to, the very existence of *qualities* that cannot be reduced to the factual or numerical is, in this time and place, belligerently disavowed.

This is aesthetic illiteracy. I told her we are being held hostage by aesthetically illiterate people and entities.

She found this assertion hard to believe because, for one thing, the differences between things are so obvious to her. For another, we live in a highly aesthetically literate population, and nearly everybody we know or encounter out in public very visibly displays this literacy.

***At this point, lost in Pet Fezant, for all I fucking care, I could be in walmart looking intently at the graphic design of a sack of cat food, getting completely lost in the undulating stripes on the stock photo of an adult tabby male, weeping, totally astonished and moved. I wouldn't care who laughs at me, as long as they let me keep staring at these sights. As long as they don't call for security and have me escorted out of the building. I won't bother anybody. I won't threaten any sort of status-quo anywhere. I quite honestly just want to feel these little cycling patterns ripple through me, forever. Nothing else matters.***

LSD indeed.

In conclusion...

As I mentioned, you cannot make use of the subtle knife except by first letting it slice off some of your fingers. I think people don't register enough the irrecoverable time and energy that artists slice out of themselves in order to use that power. And why? So that they can terminally neglect their "real" circumstances (including their own physical bodies) and unethically enable us to do the same. Also: if you pass through one of the subtle knife's sliced windows into another world, you are irradiated by ultraviolet or gamma ray-type damage. The distance from your home world, or the neglect of it, is a radioactive strain on matter. It slowly makes you sick and kills you.

*LSD* is a sort of casket brimming with treasure, a braid of mismatched scraps that somehow make a terrifyingly strong cable, a sliced-open portal to a sparkling, twisting, indeterminate dimension where physical laws are constructed out of cycles of grief and relief. *LSD* has made me believe that its world, all of these environments, these foreign realities with ironic and magnificent qualities, like Oz, always already existed. The world of *LSD* was always there--independent of Cardiacs, but they sliced their fingers off so that they could open up a window into it, and did us the favor of allowing us to visit.

When we do visit, it might irradiate us and undermine the possibility that our time and energy will be devoted to our home reality. It might steal our lives from us. Music can cause physical pain. Music can make you sick. Music can be so intense that it kills or immiserates the people who make it, who write it, who play it. But my home world also causes me physical pain and makes me sick. It tortures people I love and people I'll never meet, both alike. It hacks away at the will to survive.

That's why I'm willing to get sick, get lost, or suffer if it means I can have a chance of going through one of these windows. The result will definitely not be a happy ending, but it will be astonishing and phenomenal.

by [pedroagno](#)  
er - does he murder someone at the end?

13y ago

by [nginmu](#)  
it's just about getting up in the morning. really good song

9y ago

second-track landscapes. (She Is Hiding Behind The Shed, another cumulonimbical stampede of a second track, albeit one with no livestock, which also bursts in on the heels of a solemn anthemic opener, was one of the songs initially responsible for luring me through the Cardiacs window in the first place.)

The tension is relieved in the choral swells, a few moments of nonsensical deep relaxation via overwhelming vocal buzz. I'm ascending the highway ramp, but I'm also fixated on these gray-black thunderheads where they bloom and expand overhead. I'm surrounded and drowning in loud crackling lightning like a million squealing zippers being unzipped in every direction. When the berserk refrain finally hits, invoking the ambiance of a stairwell in which someone's dumped 9000 rubber balls, and cutting off the frustrated and rich "gang vocals"<sup>TM</sup>, I hear the sky crack open and I smell the mud.

As suddenly as it began, The May hurtles seamlessly into Gen. It feels like waking up by rolling out of bed: a brutal but inevitable-feeling transition. *Of course!* I love hearing *LSD*'s first quenchingly clear sounds of Tim's voice, gently but urgently singing from beyond death and surrounded with vertiginous choral surging.

If there were a predatory church that offered music like this I reckon it could really fuck up my life. I'm brainwashed. I'm ready to roll in the aisles, blubbering. (Instead, though, I'm at work, cleaning soap scum and pubes off some dipshit's tub.) I love this new version, pounding religiosity amped up higher than ever. The EP version of Gen has been out for years, but the songwriting feels as if it only now makes sense, fused oceanically with The May.

Gen is bisected by what I've always felt is a rather ridiculous ZZ-Top-ass twanging guitar solo--we've burst out laughing when we hear it and muttered, what the fuck is this? Why does it sound like this? 27th dimension logic; they don't care "how it sounds," they let fate select something, and of course it winds up being the right thing; against reason (and dignity), it works. Then, back into a rolling, violent ocean. Can you jam anything else into that scary harmony? It feels crammed to bursting. It occurs to me that some dork on the internet is already out there filming himself as he's trying to break down what the chord is and why it sounds like that. It feels like matter itself is screaming. The molasses-reluctant chord changes and highlighter-yellow resonant droning richness calls to mind a shrill choir vibrating every tile inside a massive cathedral, crossed with, of all things, extremely sped-up Louisiana sludge metal progressions.

I'm assembling a vacuum cleaner and filling up a mop bucket as Gen burns out like a scorched fluorescent tube. I must call out the fact that Gen concludes, technically, with a fucking truck driver key change--my FAVORITE! Hilarious! Apocalyptic! Inhuman! Screech, screech, screech. Really, really, silly, so silly that it seems directly referent to a theological doctrine of some sort, not expressible in Earth terms.

Woodeneye busts in; I already wrote several thousand words about this song when it was released as a single August 1, 2025. After months of my scrutiny and interrogation, here, at track #4, I feel that it now, like a puzzle piece wedged into its correct spot, finally reveals its magnificent display. I also feel even more powerfully embarrassed about loving it than I did in August. If you never listened to Cardiacs and you heard only this song out of context, you might think, "Ah, the type of shit they play in a tattoo shop where 57-year-old men get tribal tats on the bicep." "Ah, the type of shit they play in a walgreens where the county's edgiest manager has gauged ears and forbids staff from changing the radio away from the alt rock internet station his brother runs."

I guess *LSD* is frontloading its hysteria: arguably not a typical Cardiacs choice. Strobing and buzzing much like *Core*, spazzing much like *To Go Off And Things*, this track unravels itself in strands of fertile hedonism; it feels frivolous while somehow also comprised of the same grand solemnity flavoring the previous songs. Where most of these other songs feel like environments, *Woodeneye* is, to me, a sort of baffling *object*. A treasured object, a precious, expensive drug unto itself. Its shrill, cathartic indistinctness and mystery vibrate and flash. As I said in my other "review," this song reminds me of formative favorites of J.A. Seazer's work: *Earth as a Character Gallery*, *Conic Absolute Egg Algebra*, et al.

"Make him kiss it, make him cry": word salad alert: it's the closest thing *LSD* gives us to a Come Back Clammy Lammy-style peak of collective hysteria. It accelerates and climbs in a similar way. Skipping, ambling, like losing your balance running down a rocky trail and the best option is just to accelerate.

A little introductory drone fizz brings us into the swamp sunset of *Spelled All Wrong*. The first track that doesn't beat you ruthlessly over the head with choral intensity, and instead expands over a map, allowing a horizon to bloom into view, maybe because you're rising in a cold singular balloon. It's an intensely dynamic and heavy song but it feels like a lullaby, in comparison with the manic speeds on either side of it.

It occurs to me around this point that there is a lot of sadness in this album. I register a melancholic quality to even the most energetic tracks on *LSD*. Even the faster tracks all feel tense, anxious, or vulnerable in some way. (I'd say the only real moments of unburdened, joyful playfulness come in later, in *Skating*.) Here, for a moment, things fully slow down and become overtly sad. The texture brings to mind *Spell With A Shell*, but with a tone that evokes matured reflections on tragedy rather than infantile demands for impossible outcomes.

It's a maze of layers of grief: brittle nails, feathery, liquid, brick. Spooky, gentle, tragic, dreamy. They've gently foregrounded some blubbery dream-language, and surround this thread with plaid stripes of differing thicknesses, angles, colors. They leave enough space to let me get lost in the golden buzz, the autumn sunset with dead cypress silhouettes, the twisting cycle of central melodies.

*Spelled All Wrong* winds down gently, subtracting its beautiful singular elements, one by one subtracting the droning, the chimes, the heavy-velvet-quilt-folds melody, until only a small, simple, gentle little cycle of acoustic guitar remains. Its smallness and delicateness is starkly different than anything in the first four tracks: we've explored so many spatial scales already, and we're not even a third of the way through the album.

And...

Before we get to sample the brisk, indulgent playfulness of *Skating*, there is also a (significantly more evil) playfulness--or at least a sort of ruthlessly silly spirit--to the gleeful, perverse sixth track, *By Numbers*.

I know this is a kind of cliché: I've read that in some era of medieval church music, confusing polyrhythms (and certain dissonant note intervals) were understood as literally evil, products of hell. *By Numbers* is the first song I've ever heard that could convince me there's something real in this thesis.

Something to the recording quality of this album version of *Made All Up* sounds intentionally muted. In contrast to the EP version, and to the song immediately before it, this track sounds and feels like you're up close inside of it, as if my head's stuck inside a box full of the song; the outside world resonates with the sound, but is muffled. It blasts in highlighter-yellow vividness, directly through the cells of my skull; by contrast, the EP version articulated the same vaulted church ceilings as *Gen*. I guess I'm still more obsessed with the EP version of this song, one of my lifetime's most beloved pieces of music which affected me so intensely on its own.

To me, *Made All Up* is more anthemic than almost any other Cardiacs song. Diabolical, similarly "religious" in tone as *Gen*, I find its placement on the album satisfying and fitting. The little cycle of odd pauses and key shifts are consummate Cardiacs. I really like how the keyboard has the last word.

To dare to listen to the last song on *LSD*, I had to face a surprisingly sharp and indeterminate fear. This fear was based in the intuition that nothing could ever match the irradiating sensitivity of (rumored as the original intended closer to *LSD*) *Vermin Mangle*.

*Vermin Mangle* is a powerful song. It had an effect on me in the top handful of affecting pieces of music I've ever heard. When *Woodeneye* was released, I wrote already about how, like many people, I could not help preemptively feeling nervous about its absence on *LSD*. I should have trusted them; I'll readily admit that *Pet Fezant* is the most stunning possible closer for this album.

When expectations are built up this much, there's perhaps only one functional approach to close out the album, and this track nails it. In its maddening simplicity, *Pet Fezant* vaporizes all my closest-held landmarks, orientations, expectations. The deceptively straightforward, once again musically 'demonic', lilting melody descends like a fog of nitrus around the impulse to evaluate things rationally, muffles everything, and frees me. All the baggage burns up in an instant. I become and the world becomes weightless smoke. We slow down enough to feel how smoke twists and dissipates.

Over its nearly-7-minutes the repetitive cycle of chord changes always set just off to the side of where I anticipate them lead me further and further away from anything else mattering. It's an intimate, dazzling lucid dream unto itself. The counterpoint bass line is the bafflingly delicate, understated, rambling, never stopping, gliding along reassuringly, dense skeletal structure underneath the song. The gentle but relentless pulse brings all of it--this entire foreign universe--back to the tiny splashes of rolling ocean water where it hits the shore. So powerful that it's almost impossible to notice, I clearly hear it cycling, believably, forever, at a sort of decadent medieval feast in another universe. The particularly seagull-ey *Kavus Torabi* guitar solo soars over the foggy beach, searching for something.

In daylight I realize that *Pet Fezant* is middle-of-the-road regular psychedelia in that it sounds like fricken "*Feathers*"; in daylight I realize that it really annoys me and jilts my dignity to be utterly emotionally struck by anything that can be said "sounds like *Feathers*". But I can't care anymore. I've been persuaded to travel somewhere totally unrecognizable, and look at a landscape so bafflingly beautiful, that I can't be bothered to evaluate what the map says.



Lovely Eyes holds us hostage for a few minutes inside things many of us prefer not to inhabit. The uncomfortably frantic energy whines, climbs, overloads itself with layers and ultimately becomes dramatically dissonant. It crashes out way too melodically. It's affecting, in a way that I find largely unpleasant, like licking a gross thing... Finally, we're freed from the grip of this mortifyingly emo-adjacent outburst by the patient clicking of a familiar tambourine pattern.

Ditzzy Scene is an example of a Cardiacs work that fully devotes itself, gives itself over to the aesthetic of near-institutional formality. For decades, Cardiacs have always been willing to play with a quality of *institutionality* in a way that might be stomach-turning to people looking for fun; Ditzzy Scene shamelessly takes us there. For a while, we become proud members of some vine-covered british insane asylum who sing this song every morning in a mandatory assembly of inpatients. We're on the deck of a gloomy ship, doing a naval awards ceremony for a patriotic octopus. Part national anthem, part classic-rock-B-side, part mansion-ey cult choral warble, I've rarely found any other music similar to this. Again, my closest analogy would be J.A. Seazer's psychedelic dirge Missing Link.

One of this album's challenges, for me, is learning to tolerate Mike Vennart's slithery clear voice. The smoothness has a certain quality that automatically ejects me from my comfort zone. It's one of the factors in how the texture of track #14 Downup (due to the instrumentation? the mixing? the mode?) presents, regrettably, as in Woodeneye, the same surface as some utterly shitty genX alt-rock. Sorry guys... We're back in the tattoo shop, the walgreens. A man is singing wistfully about his feelings but he can also ROCK! No portal unexplored... At the same time, it's built around beautiful interlocking melodies, intricate braided overlaps. Some of them remind me of Sea Nymphs gem Heaven Haven. It's both superficially intolerable and substantially touching--and the effect is amplified by how much we long to hear Tim's rougher voice, how easily we can imagine it. It's so close but it's out of reach.

Though it's a very different type of song, the closest Cardiacs analogy is probably *Faster Than Snakes With A Ball And A Chain*: there are some similar frills, choral confusion and carefully compartmentalized micro-environments. It also reminds me a bit of a gentle little track near the end of *Guns* that doesn't get a lot of attention (*Song Of A Dead Past*). And, as far as I'm concerned, the mixing of *A Roll From A Dirty Place* is exquisite: bright and precise so that every element gets to be totally distinct in texture.

But, in spite of its upbeat glee, By Numbers feels... demonic. By Numbers feels like watching a child rip wings off butterflies: innocent, curious, hyperactive sadism. Burning a car. Smashing a window. Shooting a healthcare executive in broad daylight. Seductive, simple, friendly acts of destruction. Consequences and context and rationales aside, there is, irrationally, something disturbingly *good-natured* in play. By Numbers isn't *trying* to hurt anybody... it's just trying to do its thing.

[illegible]

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Then, the rest of his band materializes out of nowhere, and whisks you into a complex ballroom dance scenario. They don't care that you have a concussion and there's no way out of it.

The Blue and Buff is the only song to date about which my daughter has quietly remarked, "I like this one," which kind of surprised me. Thinking it over, it makes sense; she's down with Sea Nymphs, and this sounds something like one of the poppier Sea Nymphs songs but extremely beefed up, injected with Cardiacs-grade textural variety, a maze of barbed wire, a climbing, golden proggy labyrinth. My favorite moment is when a ghost chuckles quietly about halfway through--gives me chills.

It lands like a sort of fable about something evil happening, but presented with bubbly innocence of, yes, word salad. There's a sad tone behind the babytalk and behind the bright, explosive instrumental sections, even though it ends with a moment of modest triumph.

I've already seen Skating described as "probably the most batshit thing Tim ever wrote," but personally I'd give that title to any of several other contenders. I get why people have made this remark, though. Skating really does go all over the map, living up to the Cardiacs trope "more ideas in one song than most artists have in their whole careers." But, there's a pleasantly coherent throughline. Here: you could approximate Skating if you imagined The Duck and Roger the Horse, only if it were tonally and lyrically 'about' *pleasant memories of ice skating* (rather than being 'about' dead animals circa World War I?) and drawn mainly from 1960s aesthetic clusters (rather than those from, say, the 1860s).

The mania never lets up; even the pauses and negative space feel springloaded with inevitable velocities. An exciting, freestanding whopper of a prog section hits about 2/3 of the way through. I laugh out loud so many times listening to Skating (and so did my daughter). It's got elevator music. It's got coked-out bursts of freefloating optimism. It's got a splendid sort of collage, adorned with all kinds of treats, what can only be called musical jokes. Fussy outbursts. Being tickled. Sea Nymphs and Sing to God referents. Posthumous narration, sensual private comments, even wipeout. Geez.

The thing skates like crazy until it finally runs itself into a wall of exhaustion.

And now maybe we're all tuckered out. Overtly melancholic again, Breed could fly under the radar, at 3:11 between two longer, higher-energy tracks. The trickling, spraying meltwater of Skating has its viscosity lowered to a molasses crawl. Probably the lowest viscosity we've handled yet. And it's a little sticky, too.

The sad, deflated, lullaby-like atmosphere didn't make much of an impression on me until the other day when I was listening to it while watching ducks viciously bite each other, on a frozen pond. Something clicked. The coldness and discomfort encase some visceral connective urge. But it doesn't seem to be a human one.

Then, Volob is the only track I don't yet "enjoy", or at least, I've only "enjoyed" it when I was so nearly asleep that the words were blissfully unintelligible. It comes on again as I drive home from work and I'm painfully annoyed by its direct verbal emotionality. (But, I rationalize, such was also the case with Signs on the album Guns--eventually, after what I think was over a year, it hit home and I had to pull over and weep in my car. I'm not there yet with Volob but at this point I trust them. Their world is varied and rich enough that I'm willing to let myself be challenged by uncomfortably raw lyricality--normally something I can't tolerate. So I keep listening.)

It's probably obvious by now that I'm less interested in lyrics or what things are 'about' than I am in styles, textures and environments. I'm a hard sell on lyrics: IMO they should just be there to give the voice some way to participate, but they all too often become disruptive and distracting. Usually this happens because the lyrics start making arguments and points, or, worst of all, storytelling. Thankfully, a good percentage of Cardiacs lyrics are either 'about' the ocean... Or they are 'about' animals. To flesh it out a little, there's a lot about being animals, or being animalistic, or being inanimate, or being in the ocean. (Becoming-animal, becoming-intense...) To me, this is the good stuff. Keep it simple. I am a stupidosexual. I want to leave personhood behind, not be invited (or pressured) into an 'identification' dynamic. So that's the barrier for me with Volob even though the electrified junglegym that structures the rhythm/melody has many points of interest. The pulse is compelling, the reversals of gravity, the moments where it falls through open spaces. Like watching squirrels play in an elevator shaft.

As if they knew I was tired of voices talking, the next track is an instrumental. Busty Beez has some sort of lore about it already where it was a 'lost manuscript thought irrecoverable for several years' type of thing. It doesn't *need* to be something like this, but I'll take it. It does convincingly sound like something discovered on waterlogged sheet music in a sealed chest in a sunken ship.

Busty Beez takes its time coming into focus. There's so much to take in; no need to rush. Plenty of time to explore the plants and insects. The brain-harming 27th dimension shapes. The twisting forces of compressive or expansive gravity in a foreign universe where it functions differently. Stars mating over millenia. Or insects mating. It brings to mind the music playing over a documentary montage of snails mating that I saw as a kid. Slow, slimy, uncanny, unrecognizable and euphoric.

To say it's dream-music isn't enough. Do you ever wake up in the morning with a song in your mind? Or, falling asleep, get given something fully-formed and wordless like this? In the vein of Wireless, Busty Beez is a slowly-unfolding a liminal process that cuts the double album in half. You wander for months through the minotaur's cavernous maze, maybe, repeatedly thinking you've found your way, only to realize you have to double back several more times. The mischievous patterns subvert your sense of navigation over and over... If you're patient, the reward is finding your way back out.

And ouch! The sun is a little too bright when we get out.

In a 2005 solo show, Tim Smith, preparing to play To Go Off And Things, rambles: "*We're talking about eyes. Again, night after night it's really just to see it, what they do, it looks lovely, look at all this, when you look at, just, it looks, a bit strange really, you're all lovely tonight, you look fluffy, with your beautiful eyes... Which makes it stink of eyes in here, sort of... You're all lovely, look, look at how beautiful you are.. Sorry, sorry...*"

A musician friend listened to Lovely Eyes and uttered the disparaging phrase "death cab for cutie". It HURTS, but I have to admit I know what she means. The melodies are great, but. This is an urgent, sweaty, even angsty pop song. It has an adolescent spirit in a middle aged execution and the result makes me deeply uncomfortable. To revisit some of what I wrote in August about Woodeneye, Cardiacs are *always doing this shit to me*: making me listen to and, worse, enjoy things that should bother and repel me. There are Cardiacs tracks all but indistinguishable from *musical theater*; there's the most embarrassing imaginable spread of old man alt rock; there are countless hair metal moments and *prog* is basically the backbone