

Other credits and miscellaneous information

Bombadil is: Daniel Michalak, James Phillips, Stacy Harden

Additional vocals: Kate Rhudy

Produced, Recorded, and Mixed by: Scott Solter

Mastered by: Dave McNair

Artwork by: Stacy Harden

Photo by: Liz Devine

Management: Dolph Ramseur and James Abbott

Ramseur Records

6565 Foothills Lane

Concord, NC 28025

A short story about the credits

This album was written over several years and several places, but mostly in 2018 in Durham, NC. It is another mile marker in the long forgotten highway that Bombadil rides down. Drivers and passengers have changed, but the vehicle is still the same. Bombadil riders include Daniel “Cloudbow” Michalak, Sumner “Sumner James” James, and James “Racer Whiteside” Stacy. They all rode up front, but often just slept in the back on the bench seats. The hired driver was Scott Solter. He mapped out the journey, decided when they should speed and when they should swerve. We only picked up one hitchhiker - Kate Rhudy. She tagged along to sing and make fun of our old ride. Dolph Ramseur of Ramseur Records provided the fresh paint and endless fuel. James Abbott was the best pit crew we could have asked for. We rode hard, we rode fast, all the way across this *Beautiful Country*. Jump Aboard.

Bombadil can't make meaning for you

By Daniel Michalak

My best friend's father is a sculpture artist. He enjoys soldering metal tubes into abstract shapes. He once told me that his art was meaningless. He only made up stories of pain and suffering for each piece, because he realized he sold a lot more art that way.

Is this what we really want from our art? To sell more?

It is not always easy to express why we decided to write another record. For us, art is just an extension of ourselves and the small lives we lead. Do we really need a larger meaning? Can art sometimes just be?

I am a composer, not a performer. Songs and ideas come out unpredictably...there is no strategy or goal. It's like breathing. We don't try to add meaning to our breath. Sure, you can say it is a way for us to deal with our own emotions, to express, evaluate, describe things we see in the world. And that would be true. But really, there is no big picture, no ax to grind. We just want to write good songs.

I believe that 99% percent of music people hear, they won't like. Only about 1% of music is all anyone can ever appreciate. We are creating music for that lonely percentage of people that just want good art for art's sake. No meaning is necessary to enjoy it. Not that I think our music is meaningless — I just don't want to short-change you a fulfilling life experience by telling you how you should feel about our songs.

The odds are against us and the probability low that we will be in your 1%. We are in a race we can never win. It is belittling. It is nonsensical. It is a non sequitur. Maybe that's what Bombadil is, truly. Nevertheless, we'll create more art. Why? It can't be explained. Only appreciated with mouth agape and mind in awe.

So go make a stone plinth

By James Phillips

Why did we make this album? What is different about it from the six that came before? How does one continue, in his mid-thirties, to harbor the fantasy that his band might one day become successful in a music industry that seems content to eat itself alive? Do people care about what we make? Do I care if they care?

I got married while we wrote this record. I found out that I'd be a father as we finished it. Those moments of my life are in the songs. Even as life changes, music is still what I think about 67% of the time or so, when I'm not busy engaging in my various anxieties or drinking a glass of wine on the back porch or trying to perfect my kombucha recipe. It is my religion, my higher power, where I seek comfort and inspiration.

It has been like that as long as I can remember. My earliest memory is listening to a cassette of Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA," running in circles in the living room with my sister. These days, I am happy to recommend the new Lambchop record, pick out my favorite Joni Mitchell song,¹ consider the chord structure to "Michelle," make you a beat in Ableton, sing you song as you walk down the aisle to meet your about-to-be wife/partner/husband. Listening, playing, composing, recording is just what I want to do when I wake up in the morning.

I feel lucky to have found Daniel and Stacy, two compatriots whose beliefs align with mine. Our circuitous path has made Bombadil the only constant of my adult life outside of family. We have had our ups and downs, but it is greatly encouraging in these tumultuous times that I have two friends who are willing to entertain my ideas and push me to create something that I could not have done on my own. I try to do the same for them.

There were ideas for these songs. There are always ideas (I hope). They come at funny moments, like walking the dog or having a taco with an old friend or listening to my favorite NPR podcast. A song needs an idea to begin, so I try to pay attention when they come. I don't often succeed. Sometimes I beat myself up that I'm letting the good ones get away, that I'm not breathing the life force of attention into them.

Albums are the culmination of a few years of ideas. They are mile markers in a life committed to music, moments to celebrate the ideas of the past and to make space for new ones to come. They are very hard to make, but I think you should try to make one. Or make the thing that is your album, say a zen garden or a stone plinth or a new take on the unicycle. It is very likely that no one will listen to your album or ride your contraption, but really, just go for it. It will be worth it. We higher functioning primates should use our dexterous hands and large brains to make monuments to our brief time on this planet. Even one other human finding meaning from that creation is a remarkable thing, but honestly just making the thing itself delivers a satisfaction that I can not quite describe. Those cave painters were not worried about Werner Herzog when they got to work.

With all of that being said, I'm much more interested in telling you about the ideas I have for the next album, the one that has not even begun to be written yet, than to explain what we were thinking for Beautiful Country. I mean the album is right here, I hope you will listen to it. I'd be happy to answer any questions.² But a few thoughts before I go:

¹ "Car On a Hill" *Court and Spark* 1974

² My cell is 919-491-0309 and email is sumnerphi@gmail.com

our producer for this record, Scott Solter, is a fascinating musical thinker. The baritone electric guitar is a useful musical instrument. Getting take-out Chinese can really change the vibe, especially if your choice has broccoli.

When I Met Bombadil
By Ken Rumble

Maybe it was a bus that took us, probably a bus; certainty isn't something I've searched for, but I found Bombadil in the okra when we stopped outside of Silk Hope and wandered into the greenery to viola da gamba. Three of them in a row, like a stack of Tom Thumbs whose names weren't Tom, but Sumner James, James Stacy, and Daniel Peter. I couldn't be sure though, because I'd say something and they'd sing back, I'd say something and they'd sing back, something like "I am the golden fluted feather thief," and I looked, but I haven't looked for certainty.

Because I love this damn beautiful country, I took them and didn't cut the pie; I'm not comfortable saying why precisely — Daniel on his kite, Stacy with his boomerang, and James petting that painted wren — there wasn't room in my luggage, so I stretched out a towel on the bus seat beside me, set an empty box on that, and there they were, and though I tried to shush them, gently, since they were small, silence and them were two wheels on a cart. They just kept singing, the ten wheels on the bus kept humming along, and pretty soon we all hummed along, me, the passengers, the driver bobbing her orange storm, we all hummed or sang along that road so the song and the road felt one, and where we're going, I don't know, but Bombadil keeps singing, and I suppose we'll see when that clock strikes three.

If Bombadil's made from sun like us, it stands to reason their blood beats like ours, and then the moonlight leaking from the other side of their dreams makes sense. The bus rode up that moonlight though as we approached Sandy Mush Township, them dreaming while singing, and the three of them mumbled something about a place "full of storm clouds," which I confused for the tiny sheep whispering beside me, a gift for my dear one I'd set out to see. I did not know how to get to her though and didn't think I would, which is why I was uncertain about the bus,

aside from my general lack of certainty, because who takes a bus anywhere except after their dreams.

We flew in that bus on a river of moonlight, sailing like a paper boat with Bombadil's song at our backs, their song singing us back, and I understood I couldn't get where I wished any other way, because when you fall in love with this beautiful damn country, when you fall in love with this beautiful damn country without a song singing you on, when you fall in love with this beautiful damn country without a song singing you on, all you do, all you can think to do is fall on fall on fall. So I sailed on, and they sang on, and the bus driver smiled a smile back at us through that big silver mirror that said she never missed a road sign she never saw.

Levitation

By Stacy Harden

Fifty thousand miles of espresso stained white lines, painkilling jungle birds, elevated time shredding and BCMS has shown me that this country really is beautiful. It's been much like getting dressed without checking the weather, expecting a thunderstorm but opening the door to a calm spring morning; or tripping toward the pavement in your dream only to come crashing into your pillow. Reality is more interesting when experienced firsthand, and unknown unknowns are what make it exciting - the Spice of Life as Farmer John might say.

A decade ago I wouldn't have been able to comprehend where the ride has taken me. "What's Bushwick?" "Which time zone are we in now?" "What's the altitude?" I would have laughed if you had shown me the map, or listed all the times I would buy the same snacks at the same gas stations. If you had told me that I would be doing all of it with James and Daniel, who helped inspire me to pursue music in the first place, I wouldn't have believed you.

I've smelled the gardenias and the desert after it rains. I've witnessed the transition from evergreen forest to smooth golden hills and I've yet to see the lawnmower. Quiet places can still be found, especially where unexpected, and innumerable astoundingly kindhearted people continue to come out of the woodwork. There is a moment in time rolling toward me as fast as I'm skating toward it, when everything might coalesce and make some grander sense. Until then I'm content to see which forks in the road are taken and which are picked up. Every so often, it's both.