

APOCALYPSE 1



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Apocalypse 1 2020

Hole into a Home

You have sticks and kerosene
And I have matches, cans of beans
And extra socks to keep us warm and dry
You have stories harrowing
Of how you tried to kill the king
Before the war
Before this went awry

We will sling these pesky stones
We will trim what's overgrown
We will build this hole into a home

The water makes our bodies brittle
The roof we made it leaks a little
But we have buckets, tape, and iodine
At night we light our lights and play
Guitar and sing of better days
And tell the children of your mother's eyes
(We're torn, but they should know that)

We will face this great unknown
We will heal our broken bones
We will build this hole into a home

With a little bit of lift and torsion
With a little bit of sound distortion
Exchanging letters in sly contortions
This semantic flip is working

We will build this hole

Smoke alarms and fire escapes
Can't save us if we look away
Sit and pray for it to turn out fine
In our age - the great eclipse
Press my to your apoca-lips
"Would you die for me?"
I answer "Anytime"

We will see in monochrome
We will speak without our phones
We will build this hole into a home

Catastrophe

Voices calling out

Voices calling out
I don't know my name

Pressing through the crowd
Deafened by the sound
I don't know my name

Catastrophe

Turning up the sound
Drowns the feelings out
I don't know my name

Music in the ground
Wakes they shake my bowls
I don't know my name

Catastrophe

Pieces strewn about
Bodies on the ground
I don't know my name

Sky is falling down
That's it - Holy cow
I don't know my name

Catastrophe

Apoptose

Human
Not human

Graduates crawl
To their desks every day
Collecting themselves
Collecting their wages
The gardeners charging
An arm and a leg
Trimming the hedge
Keeping the best
Tossing the rest out the window

Apoptose

You've got to go
Apoptose
Uh oh
Apoptose
You know
We're going to miss you thank you
Apoptose
One can only divide so many times
So many times before it shows

Human
Not human

Copy editors check
At astonishing rates
While cells are killing themselves
Over minor mistakes
The system nixes its health
It takes what it takes
The fix of it though
The body gets old
Misses a bitch of a typo

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You've got to go
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One can only divide so many times
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Human
Not human

Pheidippides

I had a dream
The war machine was coming
It was up to me
To save the country
Save the city
Save the peace
To save the sovereignty for Greece

I took to my feet
A sip of honey running
Swiftly through the mountains
Toward the beach
To tell my side they're coming

The war was raging by the sea
Persian mercenaries fell
In fennel fields
In summer heat
The panic drove them to back to hell
One-two to thwart Artaphernes
Everyone back home should know
As if the world depends on me
I went as hard as I could go

I could go a hundred more

I heard the voice of destiny
Shook my shoulders
She said "son
You have a story to complete.
You have miles yet to run"
A messenger, I did my deed
Bursting gasping bloodied
When I collapsed at their feet
The crowd screamed Son say something!

Victory! Victory!
I could go a hundred more

I can't help
Thinking time is running out

Dominoes

Some days
Got the world inside your hands
You can get whatever you decide
If you stick to the list
If the itch subsides
Old ways
Like water through a dam
Cool calm 'til it finds a crack
It can't stand still and it can't hold back

Oh no
These dominoes are falling down again
Oh no
These dominoes are making your decisions
Oh no
These dominoes are having an effect
They're having an effect

Written down
All the motives in your head
Well done
Got 'em all lined up
And you've planned where to go
And you've planned when to stop
And I
Thought you put these foibles to bed

You can feel coming
The shaking starts
When you can't stand still and you can't stand to walk

Oh no
These dominoes are falling down again
Oh no
These dominoes are making your decisions
Oh no
These dominoes are having an effect
They're having an effect

One Thing I Know

One thing I know
Wish time would slow down
Echoes
When I get home
And bid hello
To the empty spaces

One thing I know
One thing I know

One thing I know
I'm losing hope
Of getting over

This before I fold
My time is short
I'm so much older

One thing I know
One thing I know

One thing I know
It shook my soul
Shattered my bones
I'm so scared
To lose my hair
To assume a label

One thing I know
One thing I know

I'm too young
To feel so old
What I'd give to go
To go
To go out dancing

One thing I know
One thing I know
One thing I know

You're going to die
So am I
I'm coming over

Apocalypse 1 Liner Notes

Album Overview

The term apocalypse originally referred to a great unveiling of knowledge. More recently we have come to use the word in reference to the catastrophic end of the world.

Apocalypse 1 marks a turning point in my writing. Previous albums were composed primarily of deeply personal semi-autobiographical songs about finding my place in the world and relationships. Apocalypse looks to broader philosophical questions illustrated through the stories of others, both fictional and devastatingly real.

How does one cope with a devastating loss? Does one remain optimistic and resourceful? Does one drown it out with distraction? Does one remove oneself from the situation? Does one fight until one has nothing left to give? Does one fall into old habits or addiction? Does one live in the now and focus on comforting others?

I began writing for Apocalypse 1 in 2017 during my lengthy bike rides to work. If an idea came to mind, I would jump off of my bike and record my ideas on my cell phone. All songs were recorded in my bedroom in San Francisco from 2018 to 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early 2020 I thought it was an appropriate time to release some songs.

The album artwork is a photo of Slackers Hill in the Marin Headlands. Stick figures watch the object in the sky as it closes in on them.

Songs

Hole into a Home

How do we respond to changes and challenges? Do we maintain a positive mindset? Are we resourceful, resilient, and creative? Sometimes a change in language is all we need to begin addressing a challenge. Sometimes all it takes is changing a single letter. Instead of thinking of a new situation as a loss, one can accept it and think of it as an opportunity. Instead of seeing a hole, one can make the effort of turning it into a home.

Hole into a Home tells the story of two people who live through some catastrophic event and look at the positives instead of the negatives. In the first verse, two strangers take inventory and share their stories. They befriend each other. They resolve to clean up a patch of earth in order to start over again. In the second verse, they acknowledge the challenges of their new environment (radioactive water and a leaky roof), but they also have identified solutions to these problems (iodine and tape). They have a family and find room for joy by singing together at night, but they also share information about the past so the children will learn where previous generations went wrong (“we’re torn, but they should know”). The bridge highlights that remaining optimistic may take work, but if we take a positive perspective and use different language to explain our situation, we may find ourselves in a better place. The third verse begins with a warning that taking action to respond to threats is essential. Thoughts and prayers don’t change the situation, only action does. The characters have found themselves in a dark time, “the great eclipse”, but they will support each other to the end by any means necessary.

- A special thanks to Kenji Kurita for letting be borrow his Telecaster for the solo at the end.
- Hole into a Home is my first song featuring a harmonica.

Catastrophe

This song was inspired by the Pulse night club shooting in 2016. People go to night clubs to find respite from the day-to-day grind, to dance out their stress, to lose themselves in the music, to find a community that does not judge them. Night clubs are places where people can be free to express themselves physically and lose themselves in a crowd. It is an environment of loud, hot, controlled chaos, that is often very safe and accepting. But one night in Orlando in 2016, 49 people lost their lives in such an environment. Catastrophe imagines what it would be like for a person who goes out for a night of partying in order to drown out his stress, instead finding himself frightened and disoriented in the Pulse night club.

Apoptose

Apoptosis is the process of programmed cell death, a self-destruct mechanism, which occurs normally during the early development of multi-celled organisms in order to eliminate nonessential cells. For example, human embryos have webbed fingers and toes, but our digits are separated by the time we are born because the cells in the webbing undergo apoptosis and are eliminated during the later stages of development.

Later in life, the ability of cells to self-destruct is also relevant to a variety of illnesses. Excessive rates of apoptosis can cause atrophy while insufficient levels of apoptosis can result in uncontrolled cell growth – cancer. The p53 gene codes for a protein that causes an increase in cancer cell apoptosis. Disruption to the regulation of the p53 gene is implicated in impaired apoptosis, resulting in the formation of cancerous tumors. The apoptosis of malfunctioning cells supports the well-being of the organism as a whole.

Human organizations also appear to have built-in self-destruct mechanisms that maintain the well-being of the organization as a whole. If a person is playing an important role and functioning normally in a job or in society, they remain a part of the system by their own volition and by the support structures within the system. If a person's actions and philosophies are no longer in line with those of the greater organization, the person is eliminated either by choice or by force. The system thrives when outliers are removed. Do the systems to which we belong respect our humanity, individuality, and weaknesses, or will they eliminate us as soon as we stop meeting expectations?

The chorus is sung from the perspective of a biological sorting machine, checking the genetic code of a cell to determine if that cell is viable to perform a necessary role or not: "human" or "not human". But aren't we also asking ourselves this same question when we are involved in a task that is not in line with our values?

I was inspired to write this song for four reasons

- My company focuses on the development of anti-cancer agents
- My mother, aunt, and friend were diagnosed with cancer around the time of writing
- I was burnt out from work and wondered if I was really a human being or, rather, a working machine. Was it time to remove myself from the situation?

Pheidippides

Pheidippides was an Athenian herald who is said to have run 26.2 miles (42 Km) from the battlefield at Marathon to Athens in 490 BC to announce the Greek victory over the Persians. Famously, Pheidippides dropped dead after sharing the good news. Prior to this run, Pheidippides had run from Athens to Sparta to ask for military assistance from the Spartans, ultimately covering about 150 miles (240 Km) in two days. Pheidippides' run inspired the modern-day Marathon race, which is 26.2 miles (42 Km). This song recounts the journey from Pheidippides' perspective.

At the time of writing, I too had an epic challenge to overcome. The startup I worked for had just lost its lead chemist, so I was asked to step up into the role. We were running out of money and time. We only had so much time to develop a molecule to demonstrate proof of concept. I was stressed. I, like the rest of the team, gave everything I had to find a successful solution. With hard work and great luck, we were able to move the science forward and secure an additional funding round to keep the company alive. But we were not at the end of the run yet. Not even close. Unlike Pheidippides, "there are miles yet to run" and "I can go a hundred more."

I experienced a variety of significant personal events during the creation of this song: I went through a breakup, I lost my grandmother, I fell in love, I attended my brother's wedding. The line "I can't help thinking time is running out" was written as a reminder to myself that we only have so much time to do the things that we want to do on this earth. We should use our time wisely and give everything we have to seize the day.

- The song is set at 180 bpm, which is theoretically the ideal cadence of steps per minute (3 steps per second) for an elite marathon runner. You can hear simulated foot fall at 180 bpm in the introduction and during the quieter parts of the song.
- This is my first song with a ukulele. It can be heard most clearly in the introduction.
- I learned all about Pheidippides from ultrarunner Dean Karnazes' book "The Road to Sparta".

<https://www.amazon.com/Road-Sparta-Reliving-Inspired-Greatest/dp/1609614747>

Upon the release of this song I thanked Dean via twitter. And he "liked" this song.



Dominoes

This song is about how easily we fall into our bad habits and catastrophic thinking. We think we have control over a situation, we know what we have to do, but somehow we end up falling to old habits, doing things that we don't want to do. One stimulus can trigger a multitude of unwanted outcomes, so we need to be weary of the overlying stimuli that set us off on the wrong paths. Once a line of dominoes starts to fall, it's very difficult to stop. But could the cost of trying to stop it be detrimental as well?

Nuclear reactions occur by a domino effect of sorts. The fission of Uranium-235 releases two neutrons which then strike two other Uranium-235 which release two more neutrons, and on and on to grow exponentially. Nuclear bombs can destroy entire cities, but nuclear powerplants can power cities and cut down on carbon emissions.

The domino theory was a Cold War concept coined by President Eisenhower. The idea was that communism would spread throughout Southeast Asia from nation to adjoining nation if the US didn't interfere in Vietnam. Western nations thought the growth of communism would lead to the end of the world as we knew it if left unchecked. This thinking led to the Vietnam war, which cost 58,000 American lives. Was it worth it?

One Thing I Know

In 2019 I saw my friend Kelly for the last time. Kelly was my "big sister" in graduate school - a mentor and a friend. She had a lust for life, an enthusiasm for science and teaching, and an utter disregard for social norms like no one I had ever met. She challenged the status quo and crafted her life into a rich tapestry of experiences and connections with a diverse array of wonderful people. She often encouraged me to leave my job to teach science with her in San Francisco.

Kelly had been diagnosed with breast cancer and she took it in stride. We had a big "Fuck Cancer" barbeque for her a few weeks after she was diagnosed, and she claimed repeatedly that we are all going to die. Her end might come a little sooner, but we all faced the same fate, so we might as well live in the moment. In 2018 Kelly shattered her cancer-riddled hip in a bicycle accident at Burning Man and was airlifted out. She stayed in the hospital for a few weeks but eventually recovered and returned home.

Over the next year, I moved to a place two blocks from Kelly and visited her on occasion to give her haircuts and have dinner with her. On the last day that I saw her, Kelly told me that her cancer had returned and this time it was in her brain. Her boyfriend had left her because he couldn't deal with the stress. He was exhausted from the months he had spent helping her with her recovery from the bicycle accident. Kelly and I sat on the window seat in her apartment as she unloaded her frustrations about her relationship and her diagnosis. She told me what it was like to feel 80 years old at the age of 35. She told me that all she wanted was to go out dancing again.

When I returned home following our conversation, I wrote this song using some of Kelly's own words in order to process what Kelly had told me. The guitar and vocals were recorded in a single take. I haven't played it since. I reached out to Kelly on a few occasions to share a few funny videos, but I never heard back from her.

On April 13, 2020 the world lost Kelly. I wish I had made more time for her.