

BUT HER LYRICS... EPISODE 003

SHOW NOTES: This episode of But Her Lyrics... tackles the title track, "Wonderful Hell," with activist and musician Ryan Harvey. In December 2019, while they both played a holiday toy drive fundraiser at the Ottobar, their conversation after the show was the direct inspiration for this song. They talk about balancing the activist in them that wants to provide music that can make a difference in the current political moment, against being an artist that needs to be inspired and can still get burnt out.

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Check out Ryan's music and podcast on his website at <https://www.ryanharveymusic.com/>

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'Capture the Flag' album workbook: <https://bridge9.bandcamp.com/album/capture-the-flag>

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT:

[intro music]

Shawna Potter: Welcome to But Her Lyrics, the show where we delve into the meaning and politics behind each song from the new War On Women album, Wonderful Hell. I'm Shawna Potter, singer and lyricist for War On Women, and your host. This is episode 3 and we're tackling the title track Wonderful Hell with activist and musician Ryan Harvey. If you haven't already, sign up for my Patreon. You'll get

treats like a bonus episode with author Carol Adams who was on the Milk and Blood episode, where she helps me with a creative feminist dilemma. And all my live and unscripted Meandering Conversations with cool people like former WOW tour manager, Autumn Lavis, the woman who runs Exotic Fever Records and put out our first 10-inch, Katie Otto, and Landis Expandis, the artist behind the music video for our song White Lies which will be our next official episode. And most recently, I got deep with Ryan Patterson. He designed our last two album covers and he not only runs Cat Magic Punks and Shirtkiller. He's the guy from Coliseum! That band rules!

Okay. Happy fun promo over, confession time! I heavily procrastinated finishing this episode. And I thought I knew why I was putting this episode off. I thought I didn't want to relive the feelings I had when writing the song: the general malaise, [laughs] wondering if anything I ever did before this moment actually helped, if it mattered. But after a good therapy session, it turns out I'm still living in those feelings. That's why I was procrastinating. And I might not fully get out of them until our global circumstances change. Until the pandemic isn't looming over everything we do. Till I can be an introvert by choice, until I can do the thing that brings me the greatest joy in the world... play shows. This might be me at my best, and that needs to be enough. The song was supposed to be the first step out of my 2016 election funk and then the pandemic hit. And then the guy that this song is mostly about royally fucked up the response and made everything worse. That's the hell part. But there is a wonderful part. I do see the beauty of people coming together, and showing up for each other, celebrating our essential workers, and finding ways to brighten other people's days despite it all. Folks working hard to address things long overdue. People finally realizing they need to put in the work to be anti-racist, finally checking out the whole defund/abolish-the-police movements, the obvious need for health care and a livable income, you know?

But since the writing of this song, I still sometimes feel like the bend of progress is an unclimbable mountain. And I worry that fake news has infected my family. And I now also feel the weight of being stuck inside, my brain turning to mush and being fearful of getting this virus and feeling the dread of just not knowing how bad things will be before they get better. Even though I am feeling more hell than wonderful, I do know things will get better. And we can all credit my therapist for that. So let's talk about fascism now. What do you say?

For this song, I came up with the chorus first and I'll get into it more in my upcoming interview with Ryan. But generally I was tired of feeling beat down and unmotivated to engage in social justice work like I had in the past. I wanted to want to make that good trouble. I didn't want to feel helpless and fight-less anymore. So for the verses, I just had to think, "Well, what is the fight now? What are we fighting against?" And it was clearly the recent rise of fascism across the world really. It's about people being afraid and needing someone to blame and by letting those in power get away with any Xenophobic, racist comments, we basically set the stage for them to move from words to action. All the lives upended, all the deportations, all the cages, all the suffering, all the death, it's on all of us for not taking this fucker more seriously in the beginning. Huh, maybe part of my election funk was actually guilt. I think generally shame can be useful, but guilt can prevent us from doing good work. It can keep us in a state where we are so focused on ourselves and our bad feelings that we don't simply make the changes necessary to prevent something from happening again, allowing us to move on. It's a waste of

energy. I don't think I feel the same way now that I did pre-pandemic. I've been able to work on some projects that felt meaningful to me, that made me feel helpful and I think to accomplish anything like that during a pandemic feels like a win. I think now I'm just trying to survive and enjoy small moments of beauty and joy in my life. Before we get to the interviews, I'll tell you one tiny thing that brings me joy. [laughs] It is actually the last line of the last verse, and the double meaning of creep; to mean stopping the spread of fascism and also, this fucking guy in charge is a creep. [laughs] So clever.

[music] Interview time!

Shawna Potter: My interview with Ryan occurred before we got the 2020 election results. So yes, please send some love to the two people you're about to listen to. Ryan Harvey, thanks for joining me.

Ryan Harvey: What's up? Thanks for having me.

Shawna Potter: Introduce yourself to everybody. What's your deal?

Ryan Harvey: What is my deal? So I'm from Baltimore here, that's where I live. And like Shawna, like you, I'm a political musician; I'm a folk singer, and at times, a punk rocker. [laughs] I also host a podcast called Hope Dies Last and I do journalism. I'm an activist and organizer, all that good stuff.

Shawna Potter: I remember hearing about you before we met and just thinking you're a Baltimore person, you know? They're those folks that are just like they're just another Baltimore person. You're around, you do stuff, you're involved, but no one starts out that way, right? How did your political awakening come about, or would you even word it like that?

Ryan Harvey: Yeah. Very relevant to what you do, it came through punk rock. It came through my neighbor growing up, he got a job... Talk about Baltimore, I think he got a job at the Royal Farms store. And he was working there with the lead singer of the punk rock band Chaotix from Baltimore County. And so I heard early Chaotix demo tapes, they were a very political band. And so in sixth grade, I was listening to the Dead Kennedys and the Pistols and stuff like that. And thankfully I took the Dead Kennedys route in punk and not the one that the Sex Pistols led to. [Shawna laughs] And so I got really involved in political activism. It was also at the time when the World Trade Organization protests were happening in Seattle and there were bands in Baltimore like Apolitical who I was going down to see shows live and they were talking about the World Trade Organization and talking about all these politics that were actually happening on the news. I'm very much a product of the political punk scene. Yeah.

Shawna Potter: I remember us meeting, I think it was at Red Emma's is that-- Do you remember it that way? Maybe through Mel?

Ryan Harvey: Sounds about right.

Shawna Potter: It seems very on brand for both of us. Just wanted to make sure my memory was right. Tell me a little bit about Red Emma's?

Ryan Harvey: Yeah. So Red Emma's, I used to be a worker owner there. But Red Emma's is a community space in Baltimore. It's a cafe and many other things now. It's a restaurant. It's been an event center. But it started as what was called an info shop, like a little small anarchist bookstore that-- there's a lot of those around the country, most of them closed after a couple years. Red Emma's stayed open because they sort of looked at it as an opportunity to really build a functional and long-lasting space. So they looked at how they could keep the doors open... selling food, selling books, having events, and then stepping it up. Making their own coffee, you know? A coffee roastery, thread coffee. And it's all democratically run worker owned and operated. It's a very cool project and I think for a lot of us here in Baltimore. I remember Baltimore before Red Emma's and Baltimore after Red Emma's and it's definitely one of those things. If it was gone, it would be a really big hole that would be felt by a lot of us in the city.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, and they are still around. If we ever get to visit anywhere again, Red Emma's is definitely a place to come visit in Baltimore. It's definitely a staple.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah. And spots like that, just to say, spots like that are so important because for people like you and me, yeah, it's a spot where we can go and hang out and feel safe and express our politics with people and conversation and whatnot. But for so many other people, it's a spot where they're going to see a book for the first time that blows their mind, you know?

Shawna Potter: Yes.

Ryan Harvey: And especially in the internet age where it's increasingly hard to find a place where you can actually go and look at a physical book in front of you and have somebody tell you about it, so very cool.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, a different feeling to be able to touch it, one that we are all missing right now a little bit. [Shawna laughs] So, I'm interviewing you for this podcast because of a conversation that you and I had back in December 2019 that inspired the chorus of this song, Wonderful Hell, and which ended up being the title track of the record. Do you remember that conversation?

Ryan Harvey: I have no rec-- No, I'm just kidding. [laughs] I was gonna answer that like--

Shawna Potter: That's fine, too. [Laughs]

Ryan Harvey: I was watching Jeff Bezos giving testimony today, and I do not recall it.

Shawna Potter: I have no recollection of ever even meeting you.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah. No, I totally remember it. Yeah, I remember it well.

Shawna Potter: What do you remember?

Ryan Harvey: I just remember talking about writing music right now in this political moment and sort of in the world right now. And I think I was telling you that I haven't been writing songs lately, and haven't been really performing lately unless specifically asked by specific groups to support them. You know,

partly because - I would like to say it's all political and I made a decision to step back as a white man and remove my voice or whatever. [Shawna laughs] But it was--

Shawna Potter: A real ally, folks.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah. But no, it was more organic than that. I haven't been writing and in thinking about and analyzing why, because like most artists, I'm hypercritical of myself and over analytical with myself. It's obvious that I'm not doing it because I don't feel like what I'm able to put out right now is gonna be of any use to people. I feel like it could hurt, right? I feel like I was writing a lot of songs that weren't inspirational. They just felt kind of sad. They just felt like I was observing the world and its sadness. And that's fine, I like music like that. But I've done that enough. And that was all I was putting out. And I was like, "I don't want to give that to people right now. People need hope." People need a reason to believe that they should stay involved. And listening to the stuff I'm putting out, they're just gonna curl up, you know? [laughter]

Shawna Potter: Yeah, I remember you saying no one wants to hear these songs that I'm writing right now. No one needs this right now.

Ryan Harvey: Not only am I a folk singer, but also the songs are sad. So it's two things that you do not need to hear right now. And I think I remember telling you the sort of elevator pitch that I've been telling myself which is I wanted to write songs that give people what people like AOC are giving people and not just generic hope, but real-- who the-- Can I cuss on this podcast?

Shawna Potter: Oh, fuck yeah. [laughs]

Ryan Harvey: People being like, "Who the fuck is this? And why are they giving me something so fiery and perfect for the moment, you know?" So, part of what I wasn't doing through my songs is I started a podcast. And I think I've been able to have conversations there that are playing a role that I think is positive, but it's just not something I felt like I could be doing through my music right now.

Shawna Potter: Yeah. I mean, obviously I identify with having to start a podcast because you're missing out on something in your life. And for me, it's playing live shows and having conversations and connecting with people. Did you get a chance to listen to the song? I'm not asking you if you liked it. You don't have to like it, but I'm just curious. [laughs]

Ryan Harvey: I think I forgot there was even a link in the email. [laughter]

Shawna Potter: Okay.

Ryan Harvey: But that's very indicative of the current times.

Shawna Potter: Okay. Well, just make something up. You loved it, right? No, I'm just kidding. [Shawna laughs]

Ryan Harvey: No, it's such a good song. I'm hearing it now in my head, like in the future. By the time you're hearing this podcast, I will have heard the song.

Shawna Potter: And you'll love it. [laughs]

Ryan Harvey: Exactly.

Shawna Potter: And it resonates. "And it's perfect, Shawna." Yeah. Okay. So I remember that conversation really hitting me. Because the way that you were describing, I don't know, a general malaise or a feeling of like what I'm doing right now isn't helpful musically. It kind of put words to a feeling that I had. (To Rosie the dog: What's up, girl?) It put words to a feeling I had. And I don't know. It's just one of those conversations where everything clicks and you realize, "Oh, yeah, it's cool. I'm just like dejected." And I've just been dejected since 2016. And that's fine. But yeah, maybe it's time to move past that. Maybe it's time to do something else. And it's almost like that conversation enabled me. It just greased my wheels a little bit so that things could start running again.

Ryan Harvey: That's amazing.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, and those moments when you're some sort of artist, those moments of inspiration you just got to let them flow. You just got to accept that this is happening. And this is one of those songs on the record that just came to me.

Ryan Harvey: That was so cool.

Shawna Potter: I honestly think it was the next day, probably not, but it's a better story.

Ryan Harvey: That's a much better story.

Shawna Potter: That's what I remember anyway. It seems like it was the next day. And I was driving to the gym, and I just started singing, "There's got to be a better way than giving up and wallowing." And I was like, "Yeah, there has to be a better way than giving up and wallowing." Well, there has to be something else. Let's raise some hell and make this world worth living in. Yeah, and it just poured out of me and I just stopped in the parking lot--

Ryan Harvey: Yes, I love that.

Shawna Potter: --started writing it down and started singing into my phone so I wouldn't forget, I wouldn't lose it. And I was like, "Yeah, that's what I needed." My gears were stuck and that conversation kind of just loosened them up and got me out of a little rut with being uninspired to write or not know, it's not even not being inspired, it's really just not knowing what the fuck am I supposed to write?

Ryan Harvey: It's like--

Shawna Potter: What is helpful?

Ryan Harvey: I feel like we're such weird creatures, artists cuz we'll do things like that. We'll end up in the parking lot of the YMCA singing into our phone. But singing, but also kind of quietly screaming to get the vibe.

Shawna Potter: Yeah. You got to get the vibe, but you don't want anyone to hear you and call the police on you. Yeah.

Ryan Harvey: I've definitely written like-- I've had a lot of songs where I've written them right before performing, and then perform them. Like 30 minutes beforehand because you get those songs that just in 5 minutes they're written, and you're like, "That's done."

Shawna Potter: That's feeling it.

Ryan Harvey: It gestated for a year in my body and now it's out on paper. It's done. But as political artists, and political activists, and just people in the political community, we do think about the role we play. We're not just supposed to think I'm not just an artist. I don't think of myself as an artist, I'm a multifaceted person and I do a bunch of different things. And so of course, I think about who's hearing the song I'm singing. Where are they hearing it? When I'm writing a song I'm thinking, are these people hearing this on headphones? Are they at home? Are they in a basement show? The songs got to be louder if they're in the basement, you know? So I go through different phases where I write to different audiences based on what my life is at the time, and who I'm touring with, and what kind of venues I'm playing at. And if I'm touring at all, but also, I think about the political moment. How are people experiencing this right now? What's it doing for them? I grew up in the punk scene. So I remember times in the punk scene where the bands that were the sort of leaders of the scene were singing songs and just giving off a vibe that was really nihilistic and sort of encouraging people to just be like everything's fucked so what's the point? And then--

Shawna Potter: Yeah, extremely apathetic.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, the heroin and the alcohol is close behind that and you watch a lot of people fall apart. So as somebody who knows that especially young people who are still formulating their ideas, and their outlooks in life, or listening to my music, I have a responsibility. So that's kind of some of the things that led to that, you know?

Shawna Potter: Have you moved past that feeling that you had late last year emotionally? Do you have a different perspective now?

Ryan Harvey: Well, maybe. Musically, I don't know. I still haven't been writing much music. I'm working full time. So it's just I'm in a very different period of my life right now. But I do think that through the podcast I've been able to sort of solve that problem for myself you know? And there was another time in my life where I had super long bouts of writer's block and couldn't do anything about it and actually got worried about it. I've stopped being worried about it because now I'm just like, "Well, whatever. It'll come back at some point. And if it doesn't, it doesn't." But then I ended up forming a punk band, and I wrote our whole first album in a month. First album is like our only demo, but whatever, that doesn't matter. But it just turns out the things that I needed to write about needed to be written in punk songs, not in folk songs. They needed a different sort of medium. And in some ways the podcast has been a new medium for me, but I definitely feel like that fire starting to burn again where I'm like, "I'm gonna,

not yet. But sometime I'm going to write some kick ass songs and I'm gonna do something with them, you know? So I have a--

Shawna Potter: You're letting them gestate for a year.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, I feel I'm no longer worried in these moments. I feel confident that I'm going to do something productive with the stuff that I've been thinking about or that I don't even know I've been thinking about. But yeah, you know?

Shawna Potter: I certainly find that-- Well, I kind of believe that writer's block doesn't really exist and that it usually is just an indication that we need to change our approach to what we're doing. And that means writing a different kind of song, right? Starting a different kind of band, or a different kind of medium, or you go into the research phase instead of the writing phase. You just got to change it up and then things start to air out.

Ryan Harvey: And there's times like-- we're living in times where obviously Baltimore had our bigger moment in 2015 and has been relatively quiet considering what's happening in the rest of the country. But there's times where I don't want to just freaking analyze stuff, I just want to go out and wild out with people, you know?

Shawna Potter: [Laughs] Yeah.

Ryan Harvey: So, I definitely-- Early in the pandemic, I was out in the streets a lot so I wasn't feeling like those were times where even though you're like, "This is not a good idea considering the public health situation." But this has just gone on for too long and the moments here now and that's what your option is. So, there's moments like that where I don't, I wouldn't think for a second like, "I need to write a song about this." I'm just there. I'm just there for what it is. And when I go home, it is what it is really.

Shawna Potter: There's a difference. There's either you're living in that moment experiencing it in that moment or firsthand, or you're reflecting on it.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, like--

Shawna Potter: And reflection didn't seem like enough this year.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, totally. And if I do write about that, it'll come naturally at some point in the future. And it'll be that song will be influenced by the time that's passed between now and then, so it'll be a different kind of song. It won't be a quick reaction, it'll be maybe a deeper reflection, so.

Shawna Potter: What do you do when you get that activist burnout? What are your tips? What are some things people listening can do if they find themselves feeling that way and feeling uninspired? Again, not knowing who won the election, people could be feeling really bad right now either way cuz there's a lot of work to do. So what do you do?

Ryan Harvey: Just keep running on empty folks, just kidding.

Shawna Potter: No, That's bad advice. No one listen to that.

Ryan Harvey: When I was young, that's what I did and it worked out fine.

Shawna Potter: Yeah. How old are we now? We feel 100.

Ryan Harvey: I'm 36. And a couple years of therapy and I'm good. No, but really A) Therapy is cool that there's no shame in that. It's when I got old, like, "This person is just gonna listen to me. Holy shit, this is great. They're just going to listen to me."

Shawna Potter: I've waited my whole life for this.

Ryan Harvey: Oh my god. But no, we need this, it is a long game, you know? And it's hard because we're in a moment right now. In the last decade, where all over the world there's just unprecedented uprisings, just moments of just absolute horror, and joy, and beauty, and hope, and crushing defeat--

Shawna Potter: Wonderful Hell.

Ryan Harvey: Yes, sometimes in the same places. Look at Egypt, it had all of that in just a few years. And we need to prepare ourselves. And this for us too as artists, right? For me, and you, and so many others, we need to help paint a picture of the world. For the people who listen to our music that's realistic and prepares them for what they will face and what they may already be facing. There are moments where you win, there's a lot of moments where you lose, but it's all a process. And you can't expect to get tomorrow what you want today, you have to think strategically. You have to expect that some things are going to take longer, not because it should damper your demand for them, not at all, but more than it should, it should sort of temper your expectations so you don't feel like shit all the time really. There's been many, many times in human history where things have been absolutely horrible in so many ways. I mean, I can't even imagine what it would have been like to experience some parts of world history and with the knowledge of what was happening and the inability to act on it. But it sounds like really cheesy and cliché to be like we're grains of sand, or every rung of the ladder is part of the ladder, but individually it's just a piece of wood or whatever. But it really is like future generations. People who are young right now really depend on all the actions we take, trial and error, losing. Science is - probably most scientists don't discover stuff, they discover things that don't work. And they're just like, "Okay, corn does not fight headaches, okay. We've learned that now." But the fact that you learned that the fact that you proved it means that someone else doesn't have to waste their time doing it and they can get closer. So we have to look at, and I'm not saying we shouldn't feel the sadness and feel the pain, we should and you need to take your time when you do and be honest about it. And build communities where people feel totally safe expressing that they feel scared, that they feel sad, and that they don't want to do something. But we also have to encourage ourselves to play that long game. And when you lose, you have to find a way to lose in a way that you can learn from and that you can accept, right? I think it's kind of like with certain aspects of trauma, We have to sort of accept and recognize where the pain is, where the pain comes from, how we're reacting to it, is that helping us or hurting us? And it can be traumatic when you mean, if we come out of this fucking situation we're in right now. And in 3 years, we don't have fucking universal health care and demilitarized police that's going to be really traumatic

for people. I mean, that's going to-- what are people going to think about the world they live in after that?

Shawna Potter: Well, that's what worries me is that if we're not there in 3 years, then people will feel like I felt in 2016 and feel despondent, and feel like they want to give up, and what's the point? And so again, you gave me a really good answer. But I want to get specific, what do you do when you feel that way or when you feel activist burnout and you need to get back in the game? What helps you?

Ryan Harvey: I mean, lately the worst kind of period I went through political burnout was in 2010. And the years and years of war I was very involved in the anti-war movement. The Tea Party had risen up. It looked like everything was-- It basically looked like what happened in 2016. And then there was Tunisia and Egypt, and then there was the protests in Wisconsin, and then there was all these protests in Europe, and then there's Occupy and it was just like, "Okay, who are you all? And hello, I'm Ryan. How can I get involved?" So, you have to also depersonalize it sometimes like, "This isn't about me. I'm not the center of the world." And it's fine. If I'm mopey, and sad, and whatnot, there's other people. And, I remember during Bernie's first run people were like, "Oh, the problem with Bernie is that there's no one after Bernie. He didn't train anybody." And then the squad came up and it was like, "Yeah, Bernie didn't train the squad." But his story is tied to theirs. And people also take care of themselves, you know? They develop outside of the people that you think are the center of the world. So just in people are inspiring. So I do look to people, and I look to the younger people, and I try to be humble in my approach and accept the directions people are taking. But yeah, sometimes it's just shitty and I just feel like crap, you know?

Shawna Potter: And that's okay, too.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, totally. And for me, I think throughout my life I've turned to history a lot, you know? In times where I'm down, I might read more, I might watch documentaries about things I didn't know about because I really do believe that understanding the human condition better, understanding what people felt like at other times in human history it really helps us understand that we're kind of living the same. I don't know. We're living a lot of the same experiences. A lot of people have lived and there's been many times where the world looked like it was on the brink of just complete calamity. The only addition being the climate which is fairly new for that, but I mean, there's been periods of war that were just far more horrendous than anything I've experienced in my life. And people live through those and continued producing art. And by the end of them, people were very thankful that they did that, you know?

Shawna Potter: I know that no matter what people are going through when they know that they're not alone, they feel better about it. And so it sounds like that you're not alone right now. We're all living with what's happening in 2020 together, we're all witnessing it unfold together. But it sounds like you're also turning to the past to everyone else that's come before us. And--

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, definitely.

Shawna Potter: --so that's - you're really not alone, that's a lot of people sharing tough experiences with you.

Ryan Harvey: And I think that's increasingly hard today because we're so distracted, you know? I've been trying the last few weeks. I've been trying to quit using social media as much. I've been trying to not use Instagram which became like the new addiction after I distanced myself from Facebook. So with all of those things are sort of, they're intentionally designed to keep your attention on those things. And obviously people have found ways to utilize them to let good information come in through those mediums, but I don't know. I remember one time years ago I was leaving my childhood best friend's house and his father just had a stroke and I was driving away. And it was really hard. He survived the stroke but he definitely had lingering things from it. And it was just kind of really hard. And as I was driving away, I turned on music. And I drove for like 10 seconds and then I just realized I'm distracting myself from feeling this. And I turned the music off and I drove home in silence because I realized I need to process this. I don't need to think about the process. I don't need to identify what's happening, I just need to sit with it and just think about whatever I'm going to think about independent of the distractions. So I think that we're-- our culture is very built around these distractions now. And I think there's a lot of evidence that shows that a lot of social media use actually makes us feel more lonely, and sort of more separated from culture, and from our families, and each other and whatnot. So I've been trying to do some of that stuff.

Shawna Potter: I think that's great. That's good advice. Thanks, Ryan. Thanks for sharing all of this.

Ryan Harvey: I'm not saying I'm successful, don't get all too excited.

Shawna Potter: We all---we've just been doing our best, you know?

Ryan Harvey: Somebody is going to see me once this podcast comes out and I'm re-addicted to Facebook, and I'm--

Shawna Potter: Slam the phone out of your hand, yeah.

Ryan Harvey: --in some big argument. They're gonna be like, "I just heard you. You're on this podcast saying that you are on Facebook.

Shawna Potter: Luckily, only like two people will listen to this. So don't worry about it.

Ryan Harvey: There you go. So, you heard me folks. Turn off your podcasts and pay attention to the world.

Shawna Potter: No. Yeah. No, you're right. That's great. Thank you. Thank you for doing this. Can you tell us what's next for you? What we can look forward to from you?

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, I don't really know. I mean, I've got-- By the time you're hearing this, hopefully I'll be still doing my podcast every 2 weeks and putting out really interesting interviews with a focus on global social movements, and art, and culture. But yeah, I really don't know. I mean, I don't know how many

people know what's new, what's next for them right now. It's very up in the air. I think the possibilities of the election paint very different pictures for my life for sure because--

Shawna Potter: Yeah, for all of us.

Ryan Harvey: Yeah, I mean, who knows? The listener knows because you have time traveled to the future. But currently Shawna and I have no idea what's about to happen. And it could be really, really, really scary and really bad. It could just be really weird. Or it could be like, "Ah okay. Okay, that's good."

Shawna Potter: "Okay, all right. Well, still work to do. Yeah. Okay." And where can people find you?

Ryan Harvey: So around Baltimore when the pandemic's over, you can find me around town. But ryanharveymusic.com. You can find me on Twitter, and Instagram and Facebook either Ryan Harvey Songs or Ryan Harvey Music. They're different for the different ones. And yeah, and my podcast is Hope Dies Last. You can hear it on all the platforms that you listen on.

Shawna Potter: Perfect. Thank you so much, Ryan.

Ryan Harvey: Of course, good to see you.

Shawna Potter: Thanks to Ryan for being such an excellent podcast interviewee, not just interviewer. It's a good skill. You might have heard me talk to my dog Rosie out of nowhere in the middle of speaking to Ryan, so sorry, couldn't really cut around it. Post-inauguration day I assume lots of people are feeling a mixture of relief, exhaustion, joy, and even suspicion that not enough will change. I felt compelled to watch the inauguration, maybe to prove to myself it was real. And I felt sad for the 400,000 people in the states that have died, wondering how many could have been avoided if our elections were one year earlier. I was happy that all women, but especially women of color could see themselves in the second highest position in our country. And I cried on and off all day whenever they showed something meant to brighten everyone's spirits, some kindness, something meant to help everyone share a moment of celebration, which is good to let it out, but kind of awkward when you're trying to fit in a workout and in the middle of doing bicep curls. I know the entire band has felt a lot of complicated feelings lately, too. But we don't really have time for that, so let's just see how they feel about this song specifically, okay? Dave?

Dave: Wonderful Hell's great. It's a weirder drum part. But I like how--

Shawna Potter: How so?

Dave: It just like- it uses the toms more in this more rhythmic and melodic way, whereas usually toms are just used, I don't know, for fills or whatever to just be like [drum sounds]. These are more like a part of the beat. And also sometimes when you use the toms as a part of the beat, you lose the snare. It turns into this kind of tribal kind of thing. But Wonderful Hell uses both. We're using both the snare drum and the toms in the beat. So we're both tribal, and rhythmic, and melodic at the same time. And that's what we're going for anyway. And it makes it build a little bit more so that we're like when it does

come time to smash the crash and not just be like when the high hats anymore, you really feel it and really feels like songs like peaking and has traveled somewhere.

Shawna Potter: And did you get that from somewhere specific or it was just obviously the thing to play?

Dave: This is like both. So this is like the matching of Brooks making demos because when Brooks makes demos, he puts drum beats on him. And I think he doesn't--

Shawna Potter: He's gotta put something in there.

Dave: Yeah, yeah. And I get pissed off because they sound like real drums cuz he's really good at programming drums. And I'm like, "What am I even doing in this band? You don't even need me here." But a lot of times we'll have these very weird ideas that you would not think to do because it's not a natural way to move your hands around the kit. So in fact, I remember playing when we did the song in the studio, I set up the drums differently for this song so that we can achieve that whole toms in the middle of the beat kind of thing because it just doesn't make any-- like your hands bump into each other if you try to do it the way that he had it on the demo. So I basically took Brooks' idea, and then shifted it a little bit, and then turned it into more of my own thing. But it, yeah, originally came from him.

Shawna Potter: Yeah. Well, and you're making it physically possible to do. I love that. I love the weird kind of not even accidents? But the things that can happen when you're demoing with Reaper or something. And yeah, you can put in a drumbeat that if you were sitting in front of the drum kit, you wouldn't think to do that. But without that, you just push some buttons and you come up with something more interesting or harder or impossible and you figure out a way to do it. [laughs]

Dave: Literally, impossible. Yeah.

Sue: [00:38:00.09] Wonderful Hell, oh yeah, that one. Oh, that song is so catchy. It's like the catchiest song. It's great. I don't know. It's so good. I can't even remember how the music goes right now. But I just

Shawna Potter: Do you want me to play it for you?

Sue: Yeah, just for a second. How about that?

Shawna Potter: Just a little. Well, then.

[Wonderful Hell plays]

Sue: Oh yeah, skip 30 seconds. Oh, yeah.

Shawna Potter: The bass sounds great.

Sue: Yeah. Man that bass sounds great. [Shawna laughs] Who did that? That's--

Shawna Potter: It takes a village. It's a team effort.

Sue: Yeah, it takes it takes a village-- [laughter]

Shawna Potter: to make a record.

Sue: And I don't know. I can't wait to play the song live because it's gonna be so fun to hit that chorus. It's gonna be so fun. And that ending is like, "It's great." I don't know. It's gonna be so great when we play this live like [Laughs]

Shawna Potter: I know.

[Jenarchy hums]

Shawna Potter: [laughs] You can also give me any of your alternate lyrics that you've already come up with for each song [Jenarchy laughs]. That is a common thing in our band for everyone to make up different and fake joke lyrics for these very serious songs, [laughter] and I always love hearing what they are. It's always a fun surprise. So anyway that that applies to every song we talk about, too. [laughs]

Jenarchy: Yeah. And it's important for us to have coping and fun times in the revolution.

Shawna Potter: That's right. You got to laugh.

Jenarchy: Yeah. Wonderful Hell, I think it's a good anthem song. You know because it brings it around to it's like - stuff's fucked up, but it has this kind of fight in it at the end like we're all going to come together and be okay. I like that song, catchy.

Shawna Potter: Wonderful Hell

Brooks: Wonderful Hell, so Wonderful Hell was a song that was written...well the guitar at least was written at the same time as all the batch of songs was written for Capture the Flag. So it was a leftover from Capture The Flag that just didn't make it.

Shawna Potter: Is there any reason why?

Brooks: Well, when I'm thinking about whittling down 30 to 40 songs into about 10 to 12 songs, I look at I have sort of a formula on how many fast thrashy songs versus how many rock songs versus how many weird songs. And so this one probably got cut just because it was one too many like D-beat song. And if you recall, doing Capture the Flag was already sort of stressful anyways. So I didn't really want to bring in any extra songs that might not make it on the record. I just wanted to concentrate on the songs that we knew were going to go on it. So that's probably why it got cut. And also, it was just - the demo was just the two sections which is kind of the fast thrashy part, and then the chorus. That post chorus part, the C part never existed until I reworked it for this record. And so it was one of those things where I just didn't know where the song was going. And you didn't have any lyrics yet. And it really took for you to kind of-- I know you'd kind of have it in your car and write lyrics. And I think when you came up with the chorus vocals that's when it sort of became a song for me. And I knew where it was going and how the C part would sound when I heard the vocals.

Shawna Potter: Yeah, and they just kind of came upon me all of a sudden. Just one day I had that chorus melody just hit me as I was listening to these demos in the car and on the way to the gym. And so I remember being at the gym and every time I came up with a new word, or the next line I'd have to go back to my locker and write it down so I wouldn't forget or like-- and then eventually get my phone and singing into my phone while I'm on the elliptical to make sure that I don't lose the melody because at least one thing, I'm self-aware enough to know that I have pretty bad memory. And so I was really worried about losing this cuz I thought it was good. I didn't want to lose this chorus. But yeah, all of a sudden I had it and then it felt like "Yeah, the song got finished really quickly."

Brooks: This song also satisfies a desire I had to write a song where kind of the drums and bass are carrying the song along and the guitars are just feeding back which is kind of a Fugazi type thing to do. But also there's this band Hierophant from Italy and they have a song on one of their records that I love so much. And it's the whole beginning of the song is just this crazy squealing feedback, and the drums, and bass kind of pounding through. And so once we kind of decided to do that on this song for the first verse, then the song made sense cuz I always try and change up the second verse from the first verse in a song so it's not just the same. And so what I usually do is play the first verse and then the second verse make it a little fancier, like have a guitar overdub or something. But in this case, stripping away the guitars in the first verse and then bringing them back in on the second verse was the answer and I really liked that. I will say that even though I think this song turned out well, I think it's my least favorite song on the record.

Shawna Potter: Recording wise or the song itself or?

Brooks: I think it's just a... I don't know what it is. Again, I like it. It's just if somebody forced me to order them, I think I would put this one last.

Shawna Potter: I remember that when we were talking with Bridge Nine and Stephanie who's doing PR for us on this album who we've known for a long time. I just asked them, "Well, what songs should we release first? What's the hit? What do you guys like?" And they came back with Wonderful Hell. I remember you being like, "Are you fucking serious? They want to release what song?" You were incredulous. [laughs]

Brooks: Yeah, I was shocked. But two independent outside sources picking that song just proves that that's not my strong point deciding what song is going to sort of catch on with people. And I think it did well. I think it was a good choice. And I think it did get attention for being the first song released off the record. I just I don't know what it is. I think it's maybe because it does have that sort of driving D-beat feel and there's so many records out there out that have this sound to them. And this song doesn't have that sound. So maybe I just had to come to terms with- we're actually not one of those kind of bands. We're our own band. And sometimes I run into that wall in recording where I'm really trying to do something and then realize like, "Oh, we're just we don't sound like that." I did listen to it the other day for the first time in a while and I did enjoy it, so.

Shawna Potter: Do you remember anything about recording it in the studio?

Brooks: Yeah. I feel like it was probably one of the first couple songs that we tracked just cuz it's not super hard and we felt comfortable playing it and it was a good song to get comfortable in the studio with. And yeah, I feel like it was in the early batch of songs we recorded.

Shawna Potter: Did you record Sue's vocals?

Brooks: I did. I recorded all the vocals. Yeah, we recorded all Sue's vocals on the same day. We had her come in. And we set up a vocal booth kind of in the middle of the live room. I sort of built a little hut so that we didn't mess with your vocal booth area.

Shawna Potter: Also to keep all our germs separate because this is like right as COVID was blowing up. [laughs]

Brooks: Yeah, we kept our germs separate. But I don't know, and I like using, for backup vocals, I like to use a different mic and maybe a different space so it sounds like its own thing.

Shawna Potter: All right. Well, there's your task people. When you listen to the song at the end of the episode, see if you can hear any difference between the way my vocals were recorded and the way Sue and Jenarchy's vocals were recorded.

[music]

Shawna Potter: Okay, it's time for Patreon shout outs and questions. Shout out to our sponsor First Defense Krav Maga outside DC in Virginia. Another shout out to Meatheads Melissa and Lauren, and Recruit Stephan. Melissa had a couple of questions. She asks, "What's the best live show you've ever been to?" Well, right now they all seem pretty fantastic in hindsight even the ones I was bored and didn't want to leave. I'd like to think I would never take attending another show for granted. But I refuse to believe that that means I have to spend all my money and be out every single night when it's safe to be at shows. The cure for this unhealthy balance of no shows is not 'all shows'. [Laughs] But onto your question, let's see. I got a couple in mind. I think I was still in high school and I saw Tori Amos at the Grand Ole Opry. And I remember being transfixed so that was pretty magical, same with Shannon Wright soon after I moved to Baltimore. I knew some of her stuff and she just did not look how I thought she would. She had really messy hair under a trucker hat and like never looked at the audience the entire time. She also had one of those light up boards that piano teachers use to show their entire class what keys they're playing. And it was actually really beautiful to watch. I guess more recently would be Gojira. I was standing in the middle of the audience before they started and I just remember as soon as they hit the first note my body just took over and like pushed to the front. And next thing I knew I was singing at the top of my lungs, like fully on autopilot. I surprised myself with that and probably all the people around me. Sorry. And the last tour I went on, I got to see Cave In every night. And they're one of my favorite bands of all time. So that was pretty great to see that and to be able to sing part of Big Riff with them on the last night of their tour. That was so cool. Okay, Melissa also asked, "If you were stuck on an island and could only have one album to listen to what would it be?" Fuck if I know. I don't know. Thanks for asking!

Before we end, I often put a book link or two in the show notes and transcript of each show which is available on my website. But this time, I want you to comment on Patreon or tag me on social media with a book or resource that has helped you survive the last 4 years. Yes, I know, this shit didn't start 4 years ago, but I bet with the unending news coverage it became a little harder to set aside, to not let it weigh you down, to go about your fucking life. So let's resource share, okay? You never know if something you've read or listened to will help someone else find their resilience. So I'll start. Hollaback has been hosting free virtual workshops throughout 2020 and on, one of them being about personal resilience. So go to ihollaback.org to see their upcoming trainings. I attended a few just to make sure I was up on the latest. And I don't know. It just seems like something really helpful for the moment. So I look forward to learning what's gotten you through because maybe it can be helpful to me, too.

[music]

Shawna Potter: All right, that was episode 3 of But Her Lyrics... But Her Lyrics...! Keep listening to hear the song Wonderful Hell in full. The album Wonderful Hell is available on vinyl from Bridge Nine Records, digitally from Bandcamp, and streaming in all the usual places. Thanks to Brooks Harlan for chopping up our song Her? to create the podcast theme song. If you'd like to support this podcast or this band, we'd be very grateful. Share, subscribe, and review this podcast. It's free and it helps. You can buy WOW merch from B9store.com, shirtkiller.com, and in the UK in Europe, you can buy it through Cortex Records and LHPmerch.com. You can buy my book Making Spaces Safer on AKPress.org or from your local independent bookstore. It's available in Spanish too from Orciny Press, and there are E-versions as well. If you need a tube amp fixed or built, check out Big Crunch Amplifier Service and Design, Brooks Harlan's shop. I just redesigned the website so please let me know if you find any grammar or spelling issues. I might have let one or two slide. And join my patreon to help me keep this pod going. Join at the Seeds level and only \$1 a month or donate more to help me reach my first goal of \$1000 a month which would pay me, all my guests, and cover supplies digital and physical to help keep this podcast going. I know each and every one of us is going through our own personal Wonderful Hell, but I encourage all of you where you can, when you can, raise your own Wonderful Hell. Fight this shit, fight for each other, fight for yourself and I will see you on the other side. Thanks for listening.

WONDERFUL HELL

I can't ignore

What's in front of me

The fear is real

But not the enemy

I can't believe

It's really happening

We set it loose
And now it's free
There's got to be a better way
Than giving up and wallowing
Let's raise some wonderful, beautiful hell
And make this world worth living in
We should've known. We didn't want to see
We made it worse. This is our doing
It's not one man
Or one country
We've got to stop
This fascist creep
Let's raise some hell
There's got to be a better way
Than giving up and wallowing
Let's raise some wonderful, beautiful hell
And make this world worth living in
Let's raise some hell.
[End]

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