

REVIEWS

PIPPA BIDDLE



MUSIC "THE GOLDEN SHORE"

BY WE ARE THE WEST

Some music blends into a space, some music morphs to match the space in which it's played, and some music shapes the space it's in. We are the West's debut album "The Golden Shore" transforms rooms to fit its needs. Songs like "More Machine Than Man" make colors swirl. Play it in a hospital room and try to see only beige—I dare you.

I was listening to "More Machine Than Man" immediately before I called Brett Hool (voice/guitar). In a twist of fate, it is also the song his bandmates were practicing as his phone rang, with me on the other end. They were driving through Arizona's petrified forest on their way to New Mexico, all packed into a van in the most hip of band-touring-van colors: gold.

It's a fitting ride for a band that began when Hool and John Kibler (bass/voice) started jamming in Holland, in a turquoise-colored shipping container that was surrounded by sheep. After Holland they travelled to New York, where they played in the chapel of a Brooklyn convent and a tow lot in Greenpoint.

We are the West has built their name on these scrappy yet highly-crafted shows. When they returned to Los Angeles, they started playing a monthly show in a parking garage. Six years later, they're still going. If you're ever in the city on the Saturday before the full moon, you should try to catch one.

For "The Golden Shore," We are the West brought their eclectic mix into a formal studio setting. They recorded the album live in just four days with the help of their longtime drummer Elizabeth Goodfellow (Iron & Wine) and Grammy-winning engineer Husky Hösulds. Then they spent a year layering to create an experience that blends studio slickness with the sounds they built their fan base on. If "gritty lush" is a thing, they have it.

We are the West's track "For Me, For You," is reminiscent of American folk music during its transition into the 1960s. The popular folk classics of the time, from Bob Dylan's "House of the Rising Sun" to Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides Now," embraced a more contemporary sound while staying true to singer-songwriter roots and storytelling traditions. They were rock and roll, and they weren't. They weren't folk, but they were.

Janis Joplin is often left out of the folk singers club, but it was the world of American folk that first inspired her and it's where she got her start. After listening to "More Machine Than Man," turn on Joplin's rendition of "Me and Bobby McGee." Written by Kris Kristofferson and Fred Foster for Roger Miller, Joplin's take on the tune blended folk-style storytelling and rock and roll energy into an infectious track that hit No. 1 in the U.S. in 1971, shortly after her death.

"We set out to make music with a beating heart," Hool shared while cruising through the petrified forest. From that intention has come an album that is deeply human and intensely creative, while also eerily familiar. It is interwoven with a musical tradition and a melodic history. There is folk in its soul.

BOOK



AN AMERICAN STORY

Janesville doesn't need us to sell it. Written by Amy Goldstein—longtime Washington Post staff writer who shared the 2002 Pulitzer Prize for national reporting—the story of an American town was named a New York Times Notable Book, as well as an NPR Best Book of 2017. Despite the accolades, it isn't a glamorous read.

After the closure of the General Motors auto plant in Janesville, Wisconsin—Paul Ryan's hometown—the town is sent on a downward spiral. Goldstein's herculean reporting captures the human moments and the family struggles in the years that followed the 2008 closure. If you're looking for simple storylines and "everything-will-get-better" optimism, this book is not for you. But nonfiction isn't or, at least, shouldn't be that simple. What Goldstein accomplishes is far more valuable than a happy-pill book. In *Janesville*, a small town becomes a symbol of a nationwide struggle. Without sacrificing intimacy or getting lost in grandiose arguments, it tells a fascinatingly familiar tale.

JANESVILLE:



PODCAST

EAR HUSTLE

From a recording studio in San Quentin State Prison comes Ear Hustle. Now in its second season, the podcast is a partnership between Bay Area visual artist Nigel Poor and inmate Earlonne Woods and was co-founded with fellow inmate Antwan Williams. A podcast recorded in prison may seem strange, but for San Quentin, it's a new format for a nearly 100-year-old tradition of giving inmates methods through which to tell their stories. Listen to "Episode 13: Dirty Water" for a look at the horror of sex trafficking crimes and the power of restorative justice, but I recommend going back to the beginning to "Episode 1: Cellies"—finding a roommate is tough, but especially if you're in prison.

THE DISPATCH BY FOLK REBELLION

