



Descent to Hell *(the album)*

A crazy quilt of songs written in the early 2020s, with a couple of oldies revisited. I didn't set out to maximize variety, but this album has blues, folk, 50s rock, heavy metal, country, spoken word, poetry, synth-pop, jazz—something for everyone to dislike.

Music, Lyrics, and Vocals by Lee Chapman (except as noted below)
Arrangements by Lee & Ahren Buchheister
Produced, Recorded, & Mixed by Ahren Buchheister
Mastered by Mike Monseur at Axis Audio

01: Descent to Hell (*song*) (2021)

I don't wanna boast
but I've achieved my lifetime goal—almost.
I've done what I love most
from east to west and pole to pole out of control:
I ride roller coasters:
every roller coaster.

From first world to third
they make life a joy
for me, a grown-up nerd
a too-big little boy
riding roller coasters:
every roller coaster.

CHORUS:

I've done the greats but not the best.
I will before my final rest
but I'm too fat so I'm forbidden
to ride the one I haven't ridden:

Descent to Hell

After your ears pop at the top
the heart-stopping first drop,
then the first white-knuckle grip
the death-defying double-dip

Descent to Hell

But now I got the colon cancer;
my wife is asking how I'll spend my final year.
She could have guessed the easy answer:
my sole remaining wish is to complete my career:
descend to hell

(CHORUS)

I don't have much time to wait;
I finally gotta lose some weight
even if I must forsake
Chablis and steak and chocolate cake.

BRIDGE:

The months go by
and slowly I'm
approaching the limit from above.
Is it enough?
I'm getting buff.
I've given up every food I love;
the weight's gone down
but not enough,
so though I'm getting weaker and my stomach aches
I'm cutting out the water and protein shakes.
The weight goes down.

I fly to Dubai, take a cab to the park, and barely make it there.
They're weighing me in and subtracting my wheelchair—a pound to spare.
They're lifting me in and they're lowering the restraint.
I'm trying to stay alive another five—and not to faint.

CODA CHORUS:

I've ridden the greats but not the best.
I will before my final rest
now I no longer am forbidden
to ride the one I haven't ridden:
Descent to Hell
After your ears pop at the top
the heart-stop—

We just rode a little tram, through the jungle, up a mountain, in Costa Rica. That was the closest
I've come in decades to riding a roller coaster.

Ahren Buchheister: Bass, Organ
Ashley Maccabee: Drums, Guitars, Vocals
Mike Noonan: Piano

02: There's a Stink Bug in My Beer (2021)

CHORUS:

There's a stink bug in my beer

There's a pimple on my rear

1st: The solution is quite clear

2nd: Probably gonna hit a deer (one of these days)

3rd: and my truck's stuck in third gear, but I
gotta move away from here

Living in the wilds of Maryland

There's a rainbow-snake convention here in my back yard BUT

finding genuine baguettes is not that hard AND

creative writing groups meet in my favorite bar AND

the Folger Shakespeare Library is not that far BUT

(CHORUS)

Living in the wilds of Maryland

whose state house was the capital of our nation AND

where Amtrak always gets you to Penn Station AND

you got the Renwick Gallery in Washington AND

the Hirshhorn and the Phillips and Smithsonian BUT

BRIDGE:

Time's a comin'

to move away from here

Time's a comin'

For me to disappear

Been living in the wilds of Maryland

a slave state whose motto is "The Free State" WHERE

taxes are way too high to tolerate WHERE

people eat piles of crabs without a plate AND

don't save enough room for Smith Island cake AND

whose Chesapeake Bay is nothing more than weeds and mud AND

is always threatening Naptown with another flood AND

there's too much colonial architecture AND

at St. John's there's always a Plato lecture AND

(CHORUS)

We were sitting in our sun room when Bob exclaimed, “Fuck! There’s a stinkbug in my beer!” I knew I had to memorialize the moment in song.

Sam Guthridge: Banjo

Aaron Malone: Fiddle

Ahren Buchheister: Acoustic Guitar, Upright Bass

Mickey Eckman: Drums

03: Leaning (2020)

The cathedral at Pisa
is a beautiful building
but nobody notices.
Its baptistery is beautiful too,
but nobody notices.

The baptistery illustrates the transition from Romanesque to Gothic,
but nobody notices.
The campanile is pure Romanesque,
but nobody notices.

Nobody notices
the cathedral
and baptistery, and
nobody notices
the beauty of the campanile because,
in addition to being beautiful,
it *leans*;
Everyone notices it *leans*.

Its architect—was a genius.
The contractor—was a moron.
The tourists are morons.
The engineers—who *halted* the lean—but did not *fix* the lean—morons.

If I were Earth's Emperor I would—*correct*—it.
the lean

Don't tell me we can't afford it;
we can afford hundred-million-dollar Super Hornets
and multi-billion dollar submarines,
and hundred-million dollar loft apartments
one thousand feet above Central Park with solid marble tubs.
(As emperor I'll have two.)

Don't tell me it's impractical—
Don't tell me it's impossible—
what fourteenth-century men have built
twenty-first-century men can fix.

If nothing else,

we'll take it apart
stone-by-stone,
numbering every one,
storing the numbers in a big spreadsheet.

We'll reshape or replace the stones,
using computer-aided design software,
or not,
and reconstruct
the tower
so
it doesn't
lean.

Then someone
other than the emperor
might notice the beauty,
the gracefulness of proportion,
the delicacy of form,
the harmonies in the colors,

and not just
take moronic photos
of morons
"holding it up."

Something I've fantasized since childhood.

Ahren Buchheister: Bass
Mickey Eckman: Drums
Mike Noonan: Piano



BEN RIBLER SINGING "DEAD-END BLUES"

04: Dead-End Blues (1979)

When I bought it
this car was covered with chromium
Back when I bought it
this car was covered with chromium
but this beautiful bright shiny car got rusty
and drove me deep down to the doldrums

CHORUS:

I got a ledge to my left
solid rock to my right
a chasm ahead
and pride behind

I got the dead-end blues
I got the dead-end blues
I got the flat-tire, battery drained out of gas *cul-de-sac* blues

I'm gonna floor it
and drive it straight off of this precipice
I'm gonna floor it
and drive it straight off of this precipice
Either that or I'll just sit here vibrating
my engine block knocking converting my catalyst
I'm an auto-masochist

(CHORUS)

I got the flat-tire, battery drained *cul-de-sac* out of gas dead-end blues oh yeah

Ben Ribler is a terrifically talented singer/actor/dancer whom I first saw in the musical *Something Rotten*. His performance was so inspiring it gave me the courage to contact him and ask him to sing one of my songs. I'm honored that he agreed. *He kills it*. And Ahren kills the arrangement. And all the performers kill their performances. Wow.

Ahren Buchheister: Guitar
Seth Ebersole: Baritone Sax
Aidan Ewald: Drums
Graham Furniss: Bass
Brent Madsen: Trumpet
Ben Ribler: Vocal

05: People Are the Worst (2021)

CHORUS:

People are the worst
If I believed in sorcery
and evil dark conspiracies
I would think they've all been cursed
People are the worst
If space aliens really wanna
Eat our planet's flora and fauna
They should eat the people first
People are the worst

VERSE 1:

especially people who think their country is number one
especially those who think there's nothing wittier than a pun
especially every good old white boy racist with a gun
especially every dad reliving childhood through his son

(CHORUS)

BRIDGE:

they say things like "I'm *li-te-ral-ly* dying of thirst"
they show up for important concerts unrehearsed
you'd swear they must have been coerced by malevolent adults
or spent their early lives immersed in con man cults

VERSE 2:

especially people who deny that math is fun
especially those who don't know real life has begun
especially people who think they're a bigger Beatles fan
especially people who think there is nothing cuter than a nun
a nun on a teeter-totter beaming
a nun on a roller coaster screaming
a nun winning at parish croquet
a nun teaching children to pray and obey

People are the worst

This concept was a joke before this year's election. Lily Tomlin once said "I try to stay cynical but I can't keep up."

Ahren Buchheister: Bass

Mickey Eckman: Drums

06: Teen Idol (2022)

he was a teen idol
he was number one
seven times
another teen idol
whose long hair scared parents
when he was done singing
and they were done screaming
his diehard fans
went suicidal

all that was half a century ago
I am surprised it even made the news
but if you've heard and really need to know:
he died of Beatles, bitterness and booze

he was a teen idol
he was number one
seven times
another teen idol
whose tight jeans scared preachers
when he was done singing
and they were done screaming
his diehard fans
went suicidal

his fans grew up or went to war
they don't play eight-tracks, cassettes, or records anymore
the service is for friends and family only
though he was twice-divorced, childless, and lonely

he was a teen idol
he was number one
seven times
another teen idol
whose grammar scared teachers
after his last movie
after his failed comeback
his diehard fans
went suicidal

just like a teen idol

Inspired by, but not limited to the facts of, Bobby Rydell's death. He was "a pompadoured, velvet-voiced teen idol of rock-and-roll's early years,"¹ and starred in the film *Bye Bye Birdie*, which featured the song "We Love You Conrad."

Nick Bertling: Drums

Ahren Buchheister: Bass

¹ Harrison Smith in *The Washington Post*

07: She Moved (2022)

She moved
into her former fiancé's
fourth-floor efficiency
in Brooklyn.

She and Robert moved,
just before the baby,
to a two-bedroom
in Queens,
closer to his job.

*river view
more or less*

She and Robert and the baby moved
into a little house
in Valley Stream.

*good schools
parks*

She and Robert and the children moved
to a six-bedroom Colonial
in New Canaan, Connecticut.

*granite counters
French doors
no wires strung above the street*

She never thought she'd live so nice.

She and Robert moved
to a luxury condo
in Naples, Florida.

*ocean view
palm trees!
no steps
no snow*

She moved
to Maryland
to be near the kids.

She moved
to a new retirement community

so as not to be
a burden on her son.
free wi-fi
shuttle bus to doctors
private veranda
It's more than she needs, really.

A friend moved from New York to Florida and, eventually, to Maryland. I made up the details.

Lee Chapman: Guitar
Ahren Buchheister: Bass
Mickey Eckman: Drums
Brent Madsen: Flugel Horn
Mike Noonan: Piano, Vibraphone

08: Night Lights (1983)

night lights
stars
night lights
semis, cars
night lights
red and green flashing
navigation lights
night lights
satellites

night lights
radio tower
don't crash into me
night lights
open twenty-four hours
EAT!

street lights
don't mug me please
strobe lights
"This is the police—
freeze!"
blacked out balcony
naked you and me
candle flickering
neighbor snickering
Peeping Tom
come on down
help us wish upon some

night lights

tired eyes
staring up all night
night lights fade away
sunrise
everything bleached white
every boring day

When I wrote this I was living on a 19th floor with balcony. One night I awakened to party noise, looked out my sliding glass door, and saw a nude party happening on the balcony one over and one down. They saw me and invited me to join. Of course I declined.

Nick Bertling: Drums

Ahren Buchheister: Upright Bass

Brent Madsen: Trumpet

Mike Noonan: Piano, Vibraphone

09: Who'd We Lose? (2021)

Who'd we lose this year?
Assorted celebrities.

Who'd we lose this month?
A Naval Academy classmate.

Who'd we lose this week?
A no-mask politician.

Who'd we lose this week?
Our cleaning lady's best friend.

Who'd we lose this week?
Our Cancun concierge's tia,
our Cancun concierge's tio,
our Cancun concierge's madre.

Who'd we lose today?
My fellow poet's stepson.

My Covid song, in the style of the early Gary Numan, listing all deaths I was personally aware of
(out of the seven million and counting).

Nick Bertling: Drums
Ahren Buchheister: Bass

10: Another Honeymoon (2021)

Honey, honey
Honeymoon

He cheats
She finds
receipts

She washes clothes
She changes sheets
She knows

He's no Boy Scout;
when it comes to lies,
he's first string.
When she finds out
he denies
everything.

She says she'll leave.
He fights her,
then
gaslights her,
then
calls her naïve.
He blames her.
He says he's sick of their games,
then finally
admits it all,
commits
to the long-haul.

He cries.
She cries.
They both apologize.

She gets over it,
takes him back,
thinks their lives are on
the right track.
Again.
She convinces herself that

it's not him,
it's all men.

Honey, honey
A second honeymoon

He cheats...*(repeat entire song)*
Maybe it's time
to ask Father Joe
But what does he know
about real people's lives
How could he know
about husbands and wives

Maybe Dear Abby in the Post
She's almost always right
'bout when to run
'bout when to fight

Whether it's in-laws and brides
Whether it's parents with cancer
Whether it's how long to hide
She's got the answer

Honey, honey
Another honeymoon

A woman wrote to an advice column describing her cyclic marriage: infidelity, discovery, reconciliation; repeat.

Mike Noonan: Piano
Erin Snedecor: Vocal

11: Zones (2021)

World War I never ended.

In the red zones:

“Complètement dévastée”

(Completely devastated)

It'll still kill.

The map shows an archipelago of red,
areas pockmarked
with unexploded bombs,
unfit to farm,
becoming “war forests.”
An area the size of Paris
still off limits.

Bones continue to turn up.

You can't eat the mushrooms.

You can't drink the water.

The wine has lead

from the barrels

from the wood

from the trees.

World War I never ended.

In the yellow zones:

“Zone de dommages importants”

(Significant damage)

It'll still kill.

The memorial near Verdun,
with its military museum,
honors both French and Germans impartially.
It could have been designed by Albert Speer
(I know, wrong war).

Lille's memorial depicts
resistance leaders being executed:
a shopkeeper,
a salesman,
a Belgian,
a wine seller,

a student.

World War I never ended.
In the green zones:
“Zone moindrement touchée”
(least touched)
It’ll still kill.

In Amiens, eleven tablets
in the south door
of the cathedral
commemorate the dead
from the British Empire
and its dominions:
The United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Ireland (Protestant and Catholic),
England, Scotland, Wales,
India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Newfoundland.

World War I never ended.
In the blue zones:
“Zone sans dommages”
(Damage-free zones)
It’ll still kill.

War, huh, yeah
What is it good for?
Absolutely nothing, uhh
—Edwin Starr

Ahren Buchheister: Bass
Mickey Eckman: Drums
Mike Noonan: Piano

12: I Can't Care (2015 Alaska, 2021 Maryland)

I got bills to pay
I got games to play
got a life to lead
and two wives to feed
I got tickets—to some ballet

I got vows to break
I got deals to make
you will find my name
in the hall of fame
of pure profit—without shame

I can't care
I don't dare
though I got much more than my share
I still don't have a dime to spare

do not criticize
you who empathize
go to church and sing
but don't do a thing
just swallow—the big lies

life's unfair
justice rare
I can't care
I don't dare
though I got much more than my share
I still don't have a dime to spare

saving whales and baby seals
raising funds for meals on wheels
historic preservation
wetland conservation
every new disease
endangered birds and trees
archaeological treasures in peril
feral cats who should be sterile

so just hope and pray
it'll go away
it'll be all right
at least out of sight
while I play—solitaire—I can't care

This started out about me, about how it's impossible (and unwise) to care too much about every problem in the world. My guilt gradually morphed it until the speaker is just a greedy bastard. I wonder whom he voted for?

Nick Bertling: Drums
Ahren Buchheister: Bass
Mike Noonan: Piano

13: Boxes (2023)

Make a thousand
Sell a hundred
Give a bunch away
Gotta wonder why

Make a thousand
Sell a hundred
Drag the rest around
for the rest of my
days
years
decades
days
years
decades

Boxes
Boxes
Boxes
Boxes of
CDs
CDs
CDs
Hundreds of
CDs
CDs
CDs
Obsolete
CDs
CDs
no one
wants

Corky Siegel's style
is iconic a
revolution in
blues harmonica

and the man can teach
how to play a song
40 years ago
I took his class
just as my
struggling career
making music was
at an impasse

I will not forget
Corky's solid advice
to me:
Write a bunch of songs
then record a real nice
CD and you'll

Make a thousand
Sell a hundred
Never compromise
Keep the music pure

Make a thousand
Sell a hundred
Drag the rest around
For the rest of your
days
years
decades
days
years
decades

Drag the rest around

from the closet
to the basement
from the basement
to the closet

of the new house
from the old house
to the Happy Sunrise Community

Toss the LPs
anything old
Toss the boxes
if they get mold

Toss the school books
every gym shoe
Toss the boxes
filled with mouse doo

Every time you move
to a smaller place
gotta make some space
just in case

This song is a companion to “If I Were a Penguin”—together they mark the beginning and end of my songwriting career, and they’re similar in style: three-chordish and something I can perform on my guitar unaccompanied. We did add a few instruments here and there for spice but basically it’s me singing and playing live in the studio, in one take, with no pitch correction.

Lee Chapman: Guitar
Bob Green: Hurdy Gurdy
Ahren Buchheister: Omnichord

14: Intersection of Nothing (2022)

The union of everything is everything
The union of nothing is nothing
The intersection of everything is nothing
The intersection of nothing is everything

Another matrix, two-by-two
might be false, might be true
what it means is up to you
to figure out now or misconstrue

Look at it this way:
it's like multiplication.
To multiply a bunch of numbers,
start with one,
(not one of the numbers, the actual *number one*),
then multiply
what you've got so far
by each of the numbers in turn,
one by one,
one at a time.
When you've got no numbers left
you're done.
If you had no numbers
to begin with,
you're done—
and the answer
is still—one.

Similarly,
To find the intersection of a bunch of sets,
start with the universe,
take each set in turn,
and find its intersection with
what you've got so far.
Just as the sum of nothing is zero,
just as the *product* of nothing is one,
if you had *no* sets to begin with,
you're left with—the universe.
The intersection of nothing is everything.

Ahren calls this my “Revolution 9.” Hardly. All they have in common is that they’re weird and no one likes them. The original title of this album was “Union of Everything” but I decided that would be too much of a turn-off. People would rather descend to Hell than think about math. I’m pretty sure I have the math right—I sure hope so—but the older I get the more I doubt myself.

Chorus—The Children of the World
Ahren Buchheister: Acoustic Guitar, Organ, Space Echo
Bobby Ambrose: Vocal

*Dedicated to my loving husband Bob
for making me happy*

*and to Ahren
who makes me and my songs
sound so good*

Thanks to Barb Brown



ORIGINAL COVER