

Jelly Side Down's Debut Hits All the Right Notes: The local alt rock band will release "Had to Be There" on Halloween



The first time I listened to Jelly Side Down's debut, *Had to Be There*, my jaw dropped, and I distinctly remember pausing the song "Polaroids" to share it with my mom. The production quality and the layered harmonizing guitars in the mastered mix were immaculate (but I'll talk more about that later). I'm convinced that New England bands are something special, each one an undeniable diamond in the rough just waiting to be discovered - and Jelly Side Down is the poster child for that category.

The band whose name makes me think of a bagel dropped on concrete every time I hear it consists of vocalist extraordinaire Cass Venditelli, shredding lead guitarist Anthony Nappa (aka "Nappa"), rhythm guitarist Jacob Dion, bassist Jacob Duhamel and drummer Steve Cunningham.

Vocalist Cass Venditelli said, "Polaroids, home videos, inside jokes — a big theme of our album for me is the journey of finding recovery through companionship and friendship in general. Many of the early songs that I wrote were written by someone who was hurting deeply, angry and upset, and through writing, performing and finally recording them, it was very therapeutic and cathartic for me. It feels good to finally see myself on the other side of that, thanks to the people I surround myself with."

"**Grayscale**" provides a gorgeous intro to the album. It features breezy guitar licks floating behind decadent reverb-laden vocals. It's haunting, and quite brief at a mere 1:14. Emotional lyrics sung by Cass show her frustrations: "I rinse my mouth, and spit you out / I take back myself." This easily could

have been a full song, but it functions very well as a lead-up of the next one.

“Polaroids” starts right in with harmonizing guitar licks and a staccato rhythm bouncing off the airy vocals. It’s bright in tone, but quickly becomes quite angry at the onset of the pre-chorus. “I hold onto your last words / and I’ll just wait until mine are heard” are lyrics begging to be plastered on band merch (or at least a sassy greeting card or two). The dueling guitars in the bridge are the highlight of the song (and very possibly for me, the album). The overall grit of this song and tone of Cass’ vocals reminds me a great deal of Paramore, and I mean that in the highest sort of compliment, because Hayley Williams is a force.

The title of **“11:11”** initially made me think of the Waterparks song of the same name, but this one is quite a bit different, even opening with a clever sound byte (probably from a movie I can’t quite place). This one feels like a subtle nod to folk pop (and possibly ska) at the beginning, with verse moments cognizant of The Pretenders. “You’re the call I pick up from miles away / how could I be so naïve to think that you would stay / just another day” is all too relatable.

“Specter” is a very worthy release for Halloween. This song opens up with more harmonizing guitars, and then a chugging beat brings the listener right in on the action. “You locked yourself away / can’t break down the walls” is a haunting image, and blends flawlessly with the instrumentals.

“Goose Wayne” is one of the pre-released singles. This song has been out for a bit, but lyrically, might just be my favorite on the album. “I grabbed my skateboard and left / and this is the last you’ll see me walk away / don’t need back my things you kept / they were just holding me back anyway” is so quintessentially pop punk and coming of age, and I absolutely love how real that vibe and culture comes through. There’s also a really subtle key change after the bridge, and I almost missed it because the guitar solo preceding it is so expertly written and executed.

“18k: is an excursion into soul-funk, the band challenges their sound by trying out a new style while still feeling cohesive. It’s so motivating, and a great pump-up song that anyone can relate to. Layers, layers, layers. So many layers, thematically and musically.

“Valerie” is a cover song. Fun! It’s much more electrified than the soulful and poppy original by the Zutons (and the more pop-rock version by high school me’s favorite band R5). It’s bright and cheery, but still fits the theme of unrequited love.

Clean and distorted guitars intro **“Snakeskin,”** a song that is full of auditory intrigue. Cass’ softer vocals brighten it further, but a dark undercurrent remains. “Smoke at the windows / smolder in my lungs as I

struggle to hold words / and blow them through my teeth" is so viscerally enthralling.

"True Colors" starts off minimalist with an electrified clean guitar riff, and then builds. It's a lovely interlude as the listener heads toward the end of the album, offering them a place to think and reflect.

"I Hope You See This" is easily the angriest song on the album; it's a tornado from start to finish. As the title suggests, it's basically a big, long, callout to an ex. But it's got power-pop girl-power-anthem qualities in it, too. "Put down the phone / leave it alone / I hope you'll see this someday" in the incantatory pre-chorus, then "I rinse my mouth and spit you out" comes back around thematically. Interestingly, I've noticed a pattern with spitting and speaking limitations related to the mouth, and I appreciate this thematic consistency throughout.

The next song on the album, "Midnight," is a calming come-down from a well-deserved rant (or, it at least starts that way). Exhibiting yet more cleverly surprising dynamic transitions, this song manages an enlightened tone, with a more confident sort of acceptance. Another movie sound byte ends the song as it fades. The angst is still there, of course, but it's clear that the music has brought the band on a journey - just as it has for the listener.

Follow Jelly Side Down on their socials @jellysidedownri and listen to *Had to Be There* on Halloween.