



Los junk dealers

02: ALEX KENT

JUNK DEALERS: *Alex, let's start with a very important topic of discussion. In your social media, you made it very clear, you are a very big fan of horses. What can you say about that?*

ALEX KENT: The horses. I just like them. I like all farm animals. I just always found them all to be charming and I liked how they were all used in European parables maybe, or children's books, you know? So I like all farm animals and horses are one of those and really I can't explain it other than I find them very charming and everything I've done musically or whatever, as long as I've been doing it, was always referencing or informed by these animals that I just found so charming.

I actually worked on a horse ranch for a while because I grew up in Idaho, so I worked on a ranch for a while, and I found that to be very honest and rewarding work.

JD: *You know, something funny that happened prior to this interview was that I told a couple friends about interviewing you and showed them a bit of your music, and the response most of the time was something along the lines of "aren't you scared of interviewing him?", which I found funny.*

Based on some of your posts, I think that's a perception you really try to fight. Have you had any problems in regard to how you are perceived in relation to your art?

AK: Not in real life, no. I mean, I think, you know, most of the people who know me know... I'm just a very, you know, a very silly guy, really. You know, it makes me a little sad that people would have this perception of me based on what we made or whatever, but I'm just... I'm just a regular person just like everyone else.

I have my things that I excel at and that I'm good at and that people like about me in my good days and my bad days, I have, you know, things that I'm sure irritate or bother other people. I'm a flawed person so, I'm surprised that there were— you know, it's not— I'm just a musician.

JD: Yeah, no, I agree that you shouldn't be judged as a person in relation to your art.

AK: Well, I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm no saint. You know, I try and be better every day, and to follow a path of good, but everyone makes mistakes and everyone's only human, so we're all just doing the best we can, I think.

JD: *Well, let's start with just a few questions about Sprain. I had a very specific doubt really. Reading an interview with one of your label partners from The Flenser, Chat Pile, they talk about how when speaking with Jonathan Tuite they were asked some very, and I quote, "pointed political questions". And it gave the impression that the label is very careful with the bands that they bring inside, how was that initial process for Sprain?*



AK: He's careful about who he brings on. I mean, I think that in this day and age, you know, he doesn't want to randomly find out that someone that he has to represent an artist that has political or social opinions that are opposite or non-reflective of his own. You just never know, especially because *The Flenser* is pretty involved with, black metal artists and I feel like black metal artists always have this reputation of the flirtation with, right-wing politics or, like far right... fascism and, I mean, not even flirtation, like, straight up— but I think he's just being careful, you know, just so he doesn't get fucked.

Our unloading process— I mean, that was so long ago, basically, he wanted to know what kind of people we were and if we had issues with other artists. It was just a pretty standard, almost like a job interview, kind of.

JD: Do you think you'll get to work with *The Flenser* again in future endeavors?

AK: You know? I don't know. Haven't talked about it, so I'm not sure. Yeah, I mean, as far as I know, our relationship is good. I don't know if we'll work together again, but I'm not opposed to it, so to say.

JD: In the transition from *As Lost Through Collision* to *The Lamb as Effigy*, you really seemed to find a new voice, quite literally, I think you sound very different between albums. What would you say pushed that to happen? Was it a change of musical inspirations, technique, personal change? Or maybe all of those?

AK: Well, the [*As Lost Through Collision*] album was like, vocally, it was very weak and somewhat of a cowardly attempt vocally,

maybe because I used just a few techniques that I had established, like talking and yelling mostly. And, just kind of wanted to, you know, expand the repertoire of what I could do with my voice and also just make sure that it was heard and it was a valuable piece of the puzzle of the recording process instead of it just having to be there, you know, like, because in *Collision*, it was like we mixed it so low, and I was kind of insecure about it. So, [with *The Lamb as Effigy*], when we started to record that, one of the things I really wanted to do going into it was make sure that the vocals were up front and center, no matter how insecure I was about them.

JD: I feel like the reactions to that last album were very visceral, either I saw a couple of people very weirdly turned off by it or people straight up calling it one of their favorite albums ever. I personally think that's always a sign of an album making something right and you seem to be very settled in the idea of always making art for yourself and "not owe anything to anyone", but did you ever feel while recording that album that you were making something that would be "divisive"?

AK: Yeah. No. I thought everyone was going to like it. I thought everyone was going to love it, to be honest, ha-ha!

You know, I don't know, I try to avoid reading or engaging with the reactions that happen with my artwork other than saying thank you when people are polite and, you know, and talk to me personally about it.

But no, I mean, I thought it was just going to be like sometimes people say not very nice things. another relatively ignored record which, for the Like, actually some guy messaged me the other most part, it was. And I didn't really know what er day and he was like: "I'm glad your band the reaction was going to be, but I thought, you broke up". All right, well, I'm not! know, this all sounded like hits to me.

JD: *And in regards to the fans that you've gained, what has been the experience with the connection you've made with people?*

AK: When people have a relationship with the music it's a huge privilege and honor. I feel really grateful that anyone listens and gives it the time of day at all. When people like it, I feel it's super rewarding. And I feel really grateful to have that privilege whatsoever. I think you have to establish a certain amount of distance between yourself and maybe the people who listen to your music that you don't know personally, but you know, outside of that, I don't really engage very much and I have a pretty private life but I'm really grateful that anyone listened and I'm really touched when people like it really sincerely.

JD: *I'm guessing you received that feedback through your social media, has that been good for the most part?*

AK: When people message, it's usually nice. I mean, I can't take most of that stuff so I just gloss over it and say thanks, you know, because you don't really want to allow it to get you and don't really want that to steep that in your life too much. Maybe it's just not healthy. It's not really healthy for a person to engage too much with the reaction that you might be eliciting in people based off of what you're making with your art. So I guess I try not to take it too seriously, but I think inevitably things come through. And sometimes, you know,

JD: I guess some people think that the music that reaches them is necessarily followed by a huge amount of people, specially when these albums show up on charts or things like Rateyourmusic, so they also tend to dehumanize them because of that, forgetting that there are real people beyond the music they listen to and it's not just "stuff on the internet".

AK: There are all sorts of [people]. On the internet, for the most part, there's not any real life instantaneous consequence to being an asshole. I can't reach through the screen and strangle the guy and maybe he wouldn't have the balls to say that to me in real life, who knows? You know, at that point, I might even respect him.

The internet can be a good thing and I think it's very important to recognize when you're reaching out to the people that made art that maybe you like or you're interested in, that those are human beings and vice-versa. You know, when the artist is talking to people who— you know, no one really owes anyone anything but I think it's important to respect how delicate the situation is when you're communicating between each other.

JD: *You also commented a lot of times about that album that you "let loose" in regards to limitations, from instruments to the length of the songs themselves, and with the variety of song length found in that album I wanted to ask: how do you know when to end a song?*

AK: That's part of my problem! I don't know. That's why they say it takes so fucking long. Sometimes you got like... little pieces lying around and then you try and make them into something satisfying and it just doesn't work until all of a sudden, eventually, you got all the parts and you're like, "oh, I can record this".

But that's kind of like— that's like a traditional way of recording music is like when the piece is finished, you go into the studio and like, track it or whatever, but I— you know, that's not exactly how I work or everyone works all the time now. In certain instances it did take that long.

I would say in terms of when a song is over... I guess if you feel like in your heart it's run its course— I mean, sometimes they don't need to be that long, and sometimes they're just done. It's very pleasurable to sit and soak them in, that's what I always liked, you know? So I don't really have a good answer for the question, but I guess you'll know.

JD: *Going back to the topic of voice, I got to ask this question to Jamie Stewart from Xiu Xiu, and given you've cited them as inspiration it's only fair that I ask you too, is there anything you do to take care of your vocal cords?*

AK: No, I don't do anything. What did they say? How cool you got to interview Jamie.

JD: It wasn't really an interview, I just asked Jamie this through text after their show in México! I did talk to them after the show a bit and they were really nice to me.

AK: Yeah, yeah. Seems like a real sweetheart!

JD: Can't really find it right now but it said something along the lines of [...]

[Here's the text itself: "Hi! LOTS of vocal warm ups, don't smoke or drink booze or coffee and drink warm water during shows. Basically have no fun."]. I thought the drinks would actually have a huge part on their shows.

AK: I was going to say I feel like, you know, the drinks... I mean, they have a couple of records about just drinking. I mean, he even has those record commentaries where he just gets drunk.

JD: So nothing at all?

AK: I don't know, I do try. Sometimes I try to take care, like in not going super hard. If we play then all bets are off, but at least as far as— or back when we did play, I mean, but as far as like, pre-show I'm not really super conscientious of. One thing I do now that I remember is when we used to set up certain songs, I used to like warm up my vocals because if we started with a song that was just like a lot of yelling, I could really strain the vocal cords before they were warmed up or kind of stretched out, so to say, so I would do that. We would start with like a *Reiterations* verse, because that song's yelling all the time, but I never really did any of the stuff.



But also, *Sprain* never really toured. Like we would tour when we could, but most of that stuff was coming out of our pockets and mostly my pocket, really, so, you know, if I was on tour for a month, so to say, I think I would have to start to take care and maybe do some of the stuff that Jamie does, because otherwise you could really blow out your voice and do some damage. But because our tours are at most like a couple weeks on a long one, I never got to a point where I got that kind of vocal exhaustion, so to say.

JD: *Now onto your new project Big Brown Cow. With Sprain there was a lot of focus on texture but with the one recorded performance available on YouTube, it all seemed a lot more minimal this time around. Would it be right to say that Big Brown Cow will focus more on the lyrical content rather than the texture?*

AK: *Big Brown Cow* is, I guess, more like a straightforward singer-songwriter—like I don't put as much focus on musical abstraction as opposed to the lyrics, like you were saying but there are still things about that project that are not just straight ahead, like, folk songs or whatever, maybe. But with *Big Brown Cow*, it's a lot more just, like, naked and vulnerable. And I always felt like, you know, some of the songs, the *Big Brown Cow* songs, that I was writing, there was a certain amount of vulnerability or confessional quality to them and I found that the most intense way to deliver that was nakedly, with minimal instrumentation, like you were saying.

JD: *Are you planning to release more stuff under Big Brown Cow?*

AK: So, I don't have many recordings of the project, but I have attempted to commit to a

certain starkness or like brittle instrumental quality so that the words are super forefront and there's nothing really to hide behind.

I guess this is a good time to bring up we are—I mean, Sylvie who was the guitar player from *Sprain*, and we've been playing music together for, you know, I think almost nine—it's going to be nine years in September, that we've been playing music together. So we've been flying together for a long time and we have a new project coming together. We kind of like not revealing too much about it, but we've got a lot of stuff in the works. [Alex is talking about *Shearling*, which at this time has already been announced to debut August 3!]

So actually this new band is more in the vein of what *Sprain* is like: more textured, more layered, you know, the aggression... and a lot of the time the *Big Brown Cow* songs end up becoming a part of that project because I just want to do more with them or whatever.

JD: *Are you bringing stuff back from Sprain into [Shearling]?*

AK: *Sprain* was playing one of the songs we're working on. It was a pretty long song and it wasn't really there yet, it wasn't really finished. But we kind of, like, were still playing live, on tour and we did some stuff, but it's the last song we ever played, so our plan is to kind of renovate and make better of that song for the next project. So, it'll come. We are kind of writing more songs and we're doing more stuff in the vein that was almost more like little theater pieces, sort of like movies, like cinematic.

JD: Oh, yeah! About that, I remember you listed some of the filmmakers that inspired your work. What's your favorite Béla Tarr film? Mine is *Werckmeister Harmonies!*

AK: That one's really amazing. I mean, *Sátántangó*, that one's also super good, it's just so long. I guess if I had to pick a favorite... maybe *The Turin Horse*, that one's really good. Film music is really fucking amazing and very inspirational to us. Like, I mean, there's just so much good stuff that's made for film. Right?

AK: Did you read that on the reissue? The *Deceit* reissue?

JD: It's from the vinyl reissue, yeah.

AK: Yeah, yeah, I have [that] thing. I read that too, a while ago.

JD: For sure, I think there's something really important about borrowing from other mediums into the one you are actually working on. Keeps the inspiration going.

AK: Yeah, there's no way to tread too closely to the inspiration if you're cross-mediums.

JD: There's this quote from Charles Hayward—

AK: Oh, yeah, one of the best!

JD: Yeah! Which one of the two *This Heat* albums is your favorite?

AK: I really like both. I mean, my favorite is the self-titled one, the blue album. That one's fucking crazy.

JD: *Deceit* is also insane.

AK: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I like it. I like both of them a lot. I think they're a really awesome band. Yeah. Very inspiring. Very, very big influence for us.

JD: Anyways, [Charles Hayward] said *Make-shift Swahili* "was a big learning situation for me; I learned to let go with my voice, to release

the energy that each song required, no matter where that might lead" and that quote too makes me think a lot about the way you've been performing these last years now. How has it been letting go of your own voice on those performances?

Letting go of it... I mean, yeah. I guess I kind of took the same approach in a way because I was always so self-conscious of it sounding kind of stupid or just not the way I would want my voice to sound. But, I learned that you know, there's a certain amount of self-acceptance you just have to get used to if you want to sing and no one can sing my songs except for me. I guess I just kind of like, just do it.

When I was more insecure about it, I almost felt like forcing myself to do it, especially in front of an audience, was like exposure therapy in a way that's kind of corny. It's a little stupid to say, but like, it was kind of like that. I was like "oh, I gotta do it, so I might as well do it in front of all these people".

I mean, there's positives and negatives to doing anything like that but for my relationship with myself, I'd say it's very rewarding. I don't know if it's rewarding for the people around me or the people who listen to it, but for me, it

is.

JD: *Does the lyrical content ever feel like "too much" to perform?*

AK: Well, I mean, this is a big thing too. I never really viewed that music or those vocals, no matter how they came off emotionally to other people, like that. I had a great time doing that stuff, like, even if the music was described as dark or scary or whatever stupid word, as far as I know, we always had a really good time playing it. It was rewarding and it was fun. I mean, even if it was like intense music, it was great even doing those vocals and stuff.

Like, you know, you're getting emotions out and things are happening, but it's still, like, we wouldn't be doing it unless there was some type of fulfillment to it, some type of, for lack of a more eloquent term, fun involved.

JD: *You've also talked a lot about how God, sex and shame had been playing a big part in your songwriting, if anything I'd add honesty may be the fuel of it all but, when you write, do you mostly write from your own standpoint or are you more keen of working with characters in the scenarios you write?*

AK: Well, I guess it just depends on the song. Sometimes I am providing a voice to other characters or just using the vocals to embody a certain feeling that might not be totally in line with my personal philosophies outside of performing or making the music but, you know, it was both and some. Sometimes, it was just the way I feel about stuff but it was always to serve an idea or an emotion or something I thought was necessary to talk about. It was never playing a character for the sake of it, there was always like a point in which it inevitably came from, I don't know, my various neuroses or my subconscious.

JD: *Ok, I wrote this question as a mild joke originally before doing most research and it read like this "What is your favorite Unwound album and why is it The Future Of What?" but it turns out five years ago you actually did call it one of your favorites. Is it still?*

Yeah, that's my favorite one. I think it's the best one. Yeah, I really like it. I don't know why that one hasn't received the same acclaim that some others have. I just think it's like so intense and beautiful and moving and that's when I feel like the guitar playing, especially, the guitar playing and the bass playing became, not un-melodic, but they became very percussive, like they were more like— like there's chunks of sound generated by these string instruments, more so than riffs or whatever, like in the earlier records, which are also fucking awesome. And there's still a lot of that stuff in *The Future of What*, but it just became great harmonically and very relatable and more abstract. Like, I just, I don't know why, that one always just spoke to me. I just thought it was so intense and beautiful too. It's a very beautiful record.

JD: All exactly my feelings on that album.

AK: And Sara Lund is just the best drummer. Every second of that record she's playing on is, like, a super awesome, creative drum part, but it doesn't really take center stage like a lot of other drummers that I really like, do. Like, there's some drummers like Chris Corsano or Chess Smith or maybe like Greg Saunier from *Deerhoof*.

Like these people are amazing percussionists and really good, but oftentimes they're more like, and this isn't a bad thing, but it's harder to not pay attention to the percussion in the settings, but if you really tried, you could probably listen to *Unwound* casually and not totally pick up on how fucking genius all those drum parts are, because they serve the song so well. They're like such a brilliant foundation for those songs.

that I love so dearly that I just... I can't pick it. Music is so different. I mean, what's the point of ranking? Like, it's not a competition, you know? It's all there to be listened to and to enjoy it in different capacities and different facets. It's kind of funny that the stuff you say when you're younger comes back to bite you. But yeah, *Yankee U.X.O.* is fucking awesome.

JD: Yes, just as you are saying. Sara never seems to feel afraid of being in the back, but she really keeps the whole thing together.

JD: There's actually a riff from *Rockets Fall on Rocket Falls* that you played on the last *Sprain* song.

AK: And I really want to reiterate that I don't mean any disrespect to the other percussionists that I mentioned, because I think those people are fucking brilliant and they're awesome. It's just different styles, you know? Sara played the way she played and it's great. That's pretty much all I know. And now I also can't really talk about— you know, I'm not exactly the most generous musician in terms of playing with other people either.

AK: Was it? Which part? Wait. I'm confused. I actually stole something?

JD: Oh I thought that was completely intentional, like an homage.

AK: No. Which song was it on?

JD: The very last one you played on *The Moroccan Lounge*.

JD: In that same interview I said earlier, you also called *Yanqui U.X.O.* as your other favorite at the time.

AK: That one. No, I mean, I did not intentionally, but maybe, you know, it's bouncing around up there somewhere. So, whatever, now you know I never made anything original. Unfortunately

AK: Did I say it was my favorite? I don't know. I mean, I don't have a favorite. How old is this interview? It sounds like, maybe, like seven or eight years ago.

in that regard, I'm a very big failure.

JD: That's art!

JD: Yes, around the release of the band's first EP.

AK: It's most likely true. I listen to that record a lot, especially growing up, so it's probably bouncing around there and then came out.

AK: Yeah, yeah. No, I love that music. I still like that stuff. I mean, there's just so much music, I guess back then I was more into this idea that I had a favorite but now there's so much stuff

[*The riff from Rockets Fall on Rocket Falls I refer to here is the one at mark 4:44 and the one I refer to they played on The Moroccan Lounge can be found after the 5 minute mark.*]

[It seems it was really Sylvie who was playing that, which would explain why Alex didn't remember. Sorry!]

JD: *Is there any music that has got your attention at the moment?*

AK: I mean, there's always stuff that I think is cool that I'm listening to. I'm not super up to date with a lot of stuff and, like I said earlier, like, music, media and discourse and stuff like that, all.

Not for me, personally but it's great that other people enjoy it, but I personally am a little bummed out by it, so I pretty much ignore it at the risk of maybe not being as up to date with everything.

Most of the stuff that I like, it doesn't matter when the records are from. It's usually word of mouth. I thought that there's a really great record with this band *Junior Mint Prince* that my friend Luta Asplund and their friend— I can't remember the other person's name [Naomi Harrison-Clay!], but they made this awesome record and their band was called *Junior Mint Prince*. I thought that was really, really good. I really liked it. That's the one I'm going to say. Yeah, I think you would like it a lot. [*I did, holy shit, insanely good record.*]

JD: *And to end this interview I want to know what is up next for you? What are the plans further for Big Brown Cow?*

AK: I mean, I've tried, like, there's a few different instances where I've tried to record *Big Brown Cow* stuff and I always get distracted and then chunks of it would appear on the *Sprain* records. So I don't know. I mean, the

main focus right now is me and Sylvie's band. I would say that's where the primary focus goes.

We have a lot of that music recorded, too, you know, in varying phases of finality. As far as the recording process goes, we have a fair amount of it recorded, quite a lot, actually. So I think that right now our focus is just making more music.

If live shows come, then they'll come, but we don't have anything booked. I don't have anything booked for *Big Brown Cow*. I don't really try to go out and get shows anymore. If someone asks, I usually will play if I can because I enjoy playing but, first and foremost, I think the new project, you know, is the plan and hopefully I'll get around to writing some more songs for *Big Brown Cow* and sticking to the skeletal sound that we're going for with that band.

JD: *And is there anything more you could say about when we'll get to see this new band?*

AK: Yeah. I mean, when it comes out, it comes out. I would like it to come out tomorrow. I'd really like to just, you know, be back on track as far as— you know, maybe we'd set up some shows and do a tour or something if we could afford it.

But who knows when that stuff will be ready. I work on it every day. We work really hard, if I do say so myself. I work on that stuff pretty much every single day. I don't have much of a life outside of working and hanging out every once in a while with some friends and just doing that music. Hopefully it'll come out relatively soon, but I couldn't tell you.

JD: *How is work going for you?*

AK: How's work going? Fucking sucks, what do you mean? Ha-ha. No. It's great. I work at a coffee shop because that's what I do to pay the bills. I don't have any skills outside of just service. I've been doing that for so long, but at the one I'm at, I got a really good team, and they're just full of really colorful characters who are also interested in the same things I'm interested in and I really like working with those people. It's great fun and also we play any music we want to, which leads to a lot of interesting decisions.

JD: *To go back for a bit to that old interview again, you expressed that it was difficult to find a place in the music scene in Los Angeles with the music you were making. After all these years, do you think that has changed?*

AK: Yeah, I mean, I think so. I think that things are always like that. I think what I was saying in the interview you read from all those years ago is probably coming from a place from, like... naiveté. I think that I was probably just frustrated. I mean, I think there's always something happening if you dig deep enough.

But what I will say is that compared to back then, now I think it is a lot more lively in terms of there being more experimental music being made. I would say that Los Angeles is primarily dominated by a bunch of really milquetoast bullshit indie rock. If I can be— if I could be supposed to say that. But, you know, it doesn't really interest me, but— that was impolite, but probably true. I think it's getting better, you know? But I do think things come and go in waves.

I do think there's a good wave right now. I really have never been a part of what people would call a music scene or whatever. I mean, I'm around, I played shows, but I was never a big socialite in that regard but I know people and I like them and I appreciate them and I think there's a lot of talented people here, but I have more of a private life.

I just ran all these questions you asked me. I just go on and on. Ramble on and on.

JD: That's a great thing, that means I may be doing my work right!

