'Sounds Important' offers humor, mood

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Their second collection of classic rock, "Sounds Important" by Suffering Fools was released on Nov. 11, just a couple months ago.

Heads up! If you're a fan of the music advertised/reviewed by Nylon magazine, this album may very well strike your fancy.

Ironically, I first listened to this curious LP in the last hour of 12/21. I was waiting for the world to end, you know, and I just thought, why not? And thankfully this turned out to be a really good choice because it turns out the world didn't end and I can listen to it again. Better yet, you can listen to it too.

The music of three English major Transy grads – who spread their wings and flew into the big, wide world in the 90's – unidentified even within the CD insert, I'm left to Google and its magic. A few minutes later, no luck. The anonymous remain relatively unknown: only as Suffering Fools – and more specifically, Fool 1, Fool 2 and Fool 3.

I'll admit, my taste in rock music is more modern than what this album mostly features, but I still found several of the 14 tracks that I liked for one reason or another (see box* for highlights from my commentary that I recorded while I initially listened to each track).

The guys behind Suffering Fools, who are currently located in different states, agreed to answer my earnest questions – tossing in some good-natured humor too. When I inquired why their anonymity is so important, Fool 3 responded, "I think we mostly like the idea of having a secret. What we'd like to happen someday is that everyone suddenly gets interested in our music and the Internet goes all alight with 'Who are Suffering Fools?' Then we might reveal ourselves. But why tell the world who we are until somebody cares?"

In a world where so many seek fame, this is a refreshing take coming from musicians. I pursued which track they each connect with most and why.

Fool 1 responded with, "Sixty Cycle Hum. It's saying when people let you down you can go off somewhere and be alone with the music. I've always done that a lot, messing around with tape recorders since I was eight years old. That's how I became the producer, or what passes for it. I was always the kid with the tape recorder."

Fool 2 simply stated that, "Connecting with a track is a curious metaphor," which surprises me in its truth, given recorded music's origin.

Fool 3 countered, "He's obviously never been on a train. For me it would have to be 'Nonessentials' because I remember writing it in Davis Hall when I was 19. It's not brilliant, but it takes me back to the very earliest days, which is why I wanted us to record it. I remember wanting to do something acoustic and sort of intimate, and that's where the song was coming from."

Fool 1 elaborated on why they chose suffering Fools as their band name: "We're all about complexity, and Suffering Fools has different possible meanings. It could be fools who are suffering, or the

Pauline reference to suffering fools gladly or even the idea that suffering can be an illusion (if you take 'fools' as a verb)."

With intriguing and clever cover art, I inquired about what exactly they were attempting to convey.

"We have three frogs playing music out in the wilderness in desperate hope that someone will hear. That's kind of like us, if we were frogs. Just for good measure, they're using an amplifier," Fool 1 assured. Their voices, however, do not sound the least bit croaky.

And what musical quirks do our Suffering Fools have?

Fool 1 said, "I always want to use instruments we've never used before. Right now I'm writing a melody for an egg slicer."

Fool 2 had a different reply: "One of my musical quirks is that I think Brahms's orchestration can be described as dark brown and I found it turgid and constipated in its sound. I'm annoyed by Schenkerian analysis and formalist criticism."

Fool 3 rolled his eyes at Fool 2 and commented, "This from the guy who's always invoking the Intentional Fallacy. As for me, I always use flatwound bass strings, which is sort of uncommon these days. Also, I have a wireless device in my head that sends a charge directly to the pleasure center of my brain whenever someone buys our album. Especially someone from Transy."

Their website, sufferingfools.com, with its creative design and layout and witty commentary, is certainly worth a visit.

∗ Track Commentary on 'Sounds Important'

1. Overboard – The subtle melody allows the listener to focus on the lyrics, which are clearly the focus of this track which all three Fools chime in on. Who or what is the stowaway? You'll just have to listen to find out.

2. Traded Down – Sounds like a mix of "Dancing in the Moonlight" by King Harvest and the Charlie Brown theme, until we hit the chorus. Then it sounded fairly cacophonous (I'll leave positive or negative judgment to you). These lyrics are clever and may induce laughter.

3. Days of Beer and Tulips – A wonderfully outré pairing, making for a cleverly kaleidoscopic and trippy song that particularly pleases and isn't afraid to go the distance.

4. Nonessentials – "And I don't need you." Featuring guitar and raw lyrics while emotionally far from void.

5. Summer Cold – Should have a new genre named after it: Detective Rock. Many layers juice up the lyrics that are honest about how it can really suck to have a cold when the weather's balmy.

6. Slime – A perfect backdrop for a stranger/loner walking down a deserted street to face his fate, whatever it may be. Partly uplifting, partly melancholic, delicately balanced.

7. Back Together – Speechless. I'm … I don't know what to say. Between the random chainsaws and seeing his ex's lips in the sink (what does this mean?!!) this is a very odd love ballad.

8. Back In The Game Again – Starts tribal, goes pop, gets jazzy, ends tribal, but stays true to its rock-inspired roots the entire time. High energy, just like the lyrics would indicate the hostage situation to be. The song is aware of its versatility and makes the most of it. I see why it was saved for last: this number gets a ten out of ten. Spot on, Fools.