

Music | Bittles' Magazine: The music column from the end of the world

Thomas Ragsdale is an artist whose work bristles with personality and emotion. As anyone who has been won over by releases such as *Bait*, *Dear Araucaria* or *Under Dwellers* will attest, he is a rare breed of producer who creates music which disregards genres or easy pigeonholing. Atmospheric soundscapes, dub drenched nightmares, delicate melodies and more can be found within his meticulously crafted grooves. By **JOHN BITTLES**.

Not just a solo artist, Thomas is also one half of **Worriedaboutsatan**, (together with **Gavin Miller**), while also finding the time to run the *This Is It Forever* label which has brought us music by **Capac**, **Sunset Graves**, **Ghosting Season**, Thomas himself, and more.



This month the Yorkshire-based producer launches a brand new label, *Soundtracking The Void*, with the ghostly melancholy of his *Honley Civic Archives Volume 1*. Formed of seven rich sounding mood pieces, the album is hauntingly beautiful one minute, quiet and menacing the next. The perfect accompaniment to those moments of quiet reflection, or when you simply want to close your eyes and lose yourself within a succession of vivid dreams, the album makes for welcome respite from an increasingly frantic world.

An Unfound Door opens the record with some gentle keys, hushed atmospheric and a bittersweet air. Next, *Pick Up Sticks* catches the listener by surprise, mixing folk horror strings with a deep forbidding bass to get pulses racing and unsettle the nerves. Other picks include the mournful drone of *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow*, the piano led nostalgia of *Hawthorn* and the soundtrack inspired majesty of *Four And Twenty*. To be honest though, *Honley Civic Archives Volume 1* is an album which needs to be listened to as a complete piece, since it works together seamlessly to create a brilliantly realised world which lingers long in both heart and mind.

With the album both unsettling and bewitching my senses these last few weeks, I set out to find out more about the creator of these strange sonic vignettes. In the following interview **Thomas Ragsdale** discusses *Honley Civic Archives*, his new label *Soundtracking The Void*, the process of creating music, the future, spiders and lots more.

So, get yourself nice and comfy, and let us begin...

For those who have never had the pleasure of hearing your music, can you tell us a bit about who you are and what you do?

I'm a musician from the North of the UK making atmospheric electronica. I've written music for **Adam Curtis'** BBC films, commercials by *Prada*, *BMW* and *Twitter* and I also perform live with a full audio/visual show. I'm a pretty intense person.

Your new album *Honley Civic Archives Volume 1* came out on the 5th of October. Why do we all need this record in our lives?

It's something VERY different. I wanted to try a record that's 100% organic and only using acoustic instruments, but also creating something extremely emotional. I think it's an album that expresses many moods and situations.

The album works together beautifully. Is there a unifying theme or idea for the album?

I was definitely interested in capturing something raw and 'human'. There are only a few electronic sounds on the album and this was very important to me. I've never done any music like this before, so it was kind of an experiment. Honley is the village where I live and this album is part of a series dedicated to the people and surroundings.

If someone only had time to listen to one track from the record, which should it be and why?

I would definitely say *Pick Up Sticks*. I've played this to a few friends and everyone seems pretty terrified! It'll give you nightmares, I'm sure.

An Unfounded Door makes for an evocative opener. What makes it the perfect introduction to the world of *Honley Civic Archives*?

I think its dreamy yet unnerving atmosphere puts people in a subdued mood. I wanted people to feel a little unsure of what will be coming next...

The melancholy atmospherics of *Will You Still Love Me Tomorrow* is an early fave. Can you talk us through the creative process for this song?

This is a simple piece of music: It's four chords repeated and built upon slowly. As each cycle repeats I play the instruments more intensely. I had in mind a scene from a movie being played in slow motion that expressed a great deal of loss, but also hope.

Hawthorn, with its emotion rich stirrings is another highlight for me. How do you know when a song is just right?

Hawthorn and the previous track *The Craft* were originally one piece of music. I didn't feel it sounded complete though, so I divided them. It's hard to explain, but when I decide I've worked on something enough I just stop! I could work on music for hours, but when it feels right inside I hit 'save' and end the session.

There will also be a limited edition of *Honley Civic Archives Volume 1* available which comes with a tape featuring "an improvised piece of music specifically recorded live and only once onto each tape with a movie file of the individual performance". Can you tell us a bit more about this?

This is going to be a lot of fun! I have a stack of old reel-to-reel tapes that I don't use, so I thought I would record a special song on each of them and film the process. Each song will be completely different and improvised, so the experience is going to be incredibly personal.

Are there any plans for a second volume?

Yes, and a third! I have lots of music finished. I'm a very fast worker!

[The LP is released on your brand new label Soundtracking The Void. Can you tell us the idea behind the label?](#)

I was talking with my girlfriend about how we could collaborate on a music project together and we came up with the idea of starting a label. Ashleigh is very interested in how music is represented from an image point of view, and so working with her on developing a strong aesthetic has been amazing. I've learned a lot on how to experiment with visual art and how it can affect music. It's a label dedicated to all things atmospheric and intense.

[Do you have any further releases lined-up for the label? If so, what can we expect?](#)

We have a few ideas planned out, but we're waiting to see how *Honley Civic Archives* is received! I will definitely be doing a few things next year though. You can expect a lot of genres from eerie drone to straight up techno.

[What does the future hold for yourself?](#)

I'm going to make a lot of music, I know that for a fact. When I'm not making music I'm thinking about music! I'd love to work on more film scores and more TV documentaries. I love playing live too, and this is something I'll be focusing on well into 2019.

[Do you have any final words for our readers?](#)

Whatever it is that you do in life, go hard into it and keep on. Never give up on something you want to do more than anything. Also, don't kill spiders.

Honley Civic Archives Vol. 1 is available now from **Thomas Ragsdale's [Bandcamp page](#), or all good record and download stores. Do your ears a favour and treat yourself to a copy today.**

| [JOHN BITTLES](#)