

INTERVIEW BY KELLEY O'DEATH

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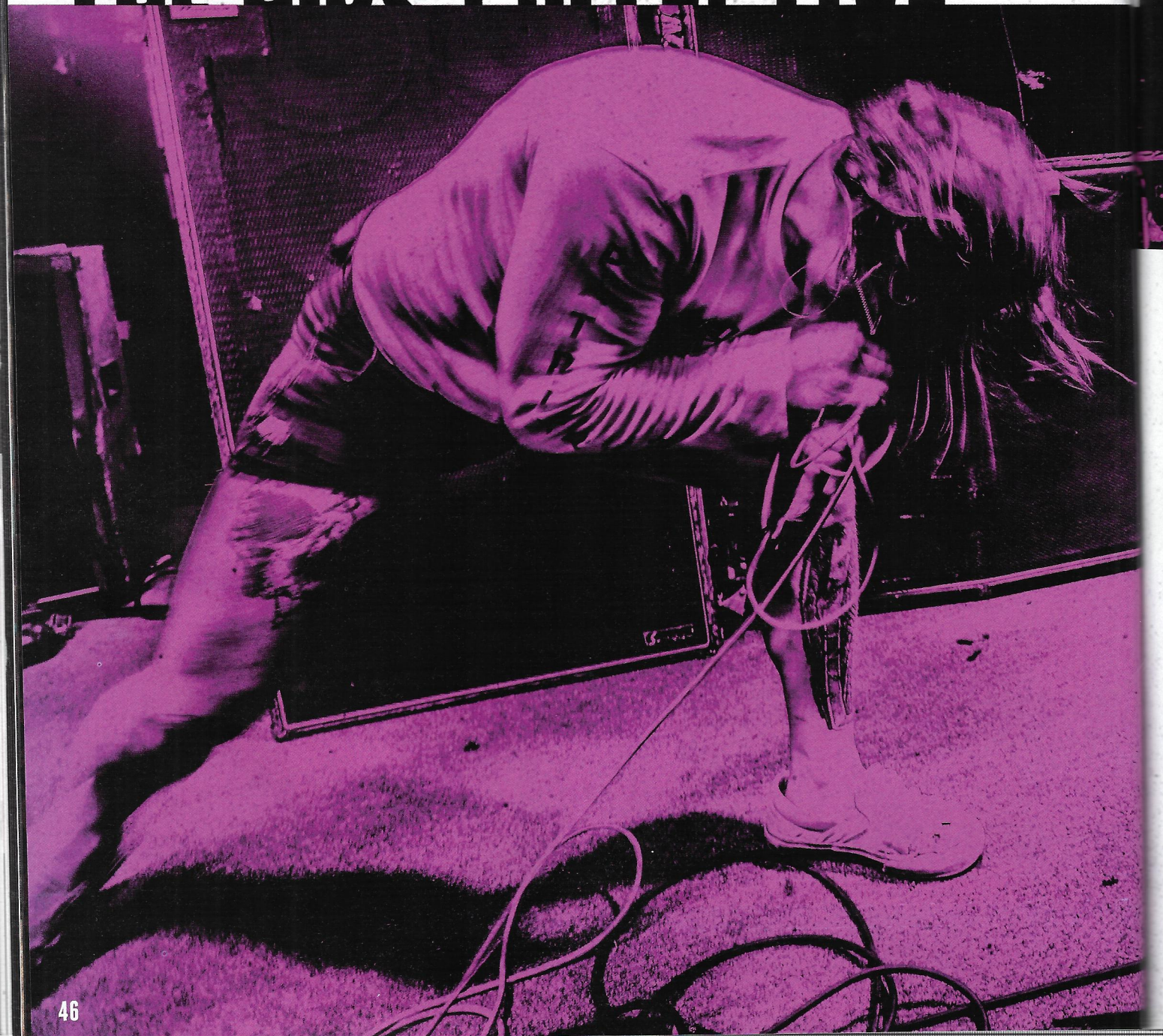
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**"YOU'RE A HUGE REASON WE ARE STILL ALIVE / YOU MAKE US WANT TO CONTINUE TO STRIVE / TO BE LIVING FOR YOU, LIVING FOR US / WE'LL CARE FOR YOU UNTIL WE'RE DUST / WAKE UP TOMORROW."**



**S**o begins The HIRS Collective's debut LP, *Friends. Lovers. Favorites.*, released April 20 via Get Better Records and SRA Records. The opening track, "Wake Up Tomorrow," featuring Bitchcraft, is everything the Philadelphia-based collective's friends, lovers, and favorites have come to expect from them—crushing and concise—but it's also a fitting intro for a record that is, at its core, a love letter to their community.

"If it weren't for our friends, lovers, and favorites—who have become our family—a lot of us in the collective wouldn't be alive," HIRS say. "The amount of outreach and support we have gotten from them is mind-blowing and so heartwarming. Makes us feel like we are either doing something kinda right or that the work and support we've tried to give is coming back to us in the sweetest ways. Also, the word 'community,' like many others—'queer,' 'safe space,' etc.—have been trampled on and overused or misused by so many folks trying to infiltrate our community and scene. I hope we can take those words back and make them feel like they have more genuine meaning again. We really hope that we've also helped keep some folks alive and [let them] know that they aren't alone in the world."

Being a collective is just one way that HIRS invite active participation from their community. "We challenge the idea of 'punk' as a genre and [see it] more as, hopefully, an ethic," they explain, "one in which we try to be able to include everyone by trying to always play all-ages shows; invite and support bands, groups, and performers that are made up of other oppressed and marginalized folks; have sliding scale and no-one-turned-

away-for-lack-of-funds shows; have sliding scale ideas with merch; invite trans, Black, POC, femme, short, etc. folks to take up space at the front of shows—stuff like that."

Still, listeners won't find much space between the music and the message on *Friends. Lovers. Favorites.* HIRS' songs are short, swift, direct punches to the gut. "If something needs to be longer, we'll make it longer," they shrug, "but it seems we're able to get our points across quickly. Also, if you hate us, you don't have to deal with us too long, and if you love us, we'll always leave you wanting more. That's a pretty good feeling."

This may be HIRS' first full-length, but the collective have already released literally *hundreds* of songs. Regardless, the new album feels like a major milestone. "It feels huge," they confirm. "We've normally written and recorded stuff over the course of maybe a month or a week or even just one day. This took about four years, and it was so involved and hands-on. It also involved so many of our friends, lovers, and favorites—hence the name, duh—so it feels so special to have so many angels we love and care about so much as a part of this record in so many different ways."

Some of those sweet baby angels are gargantuan powerhouses of the underground, including Shirley Manson, Laura Jane Grace, Martin Crudo, Erica Freas, Marissa Paternoster, Alice Bag, and Sadie Switchblade, just to name a few. "It meant so much to us to humanize these folks that we have looked up to for so long," HIRS say. "It's amazing to be able to ask folks you might see as these huge, untouchable rock stars to be on our record and, then, for them to be excited, commu-

nicative, see the importance of our message, and say yes. We'd be lying if we said we didn't cry or get happy-nauseous when the folks we asked said yes. So many intense feelings. Thank you to all of them!"

It may feature some serious heavy-hitters, but the true star of the album is the powerful statement it makes. Is there a thread that ties all of these tracks together? "Definitely," the collective say. "Existing in the world as marginalized and oppressed people. Being an ally for them/us."

Part of this allyship comes in the form of one of the most historically important yet commonly derided forms of radical action: violent resistance. Even their logo—a hand with long, sharp, hot pink fingernails brandishing a pocketknife—makes it clear that righteous violence is a cornerstone of The HIRS Collective's mission statement. "When there are trans folks, specifically trans women, *specifically* trans women of color, being murdered over and over and over again, why would we ever choose to only be passive?" they offer. "People, often cis straight white men, come at us all the time, like, 'Why are y'all so violent? Why do you want to hurt men?' and we just want to say, 'Read between the fucking lines. *It's not all about you.* It's about us and how we are in danger *all the time.*' We also support de-escalation, nonviolent communication, accountability processes without excommunication, and more, *but* we also support violence as a last resort—and as a *first*, because we are sick of being in danger without being able to respond."

There is also a tendency to see violent resistance as more palatable when it's proposed by white voices and movements, and punk

is not immune. This trend makes a track like "I'm Tired" stand out like a fiery beacon. The song features lyrics and vocals by Pierce Jordan of Philly's Soul Glo, a band who harness hardcore's potential to fuel Black liberation.

"The song is largely about microaggressions I observe and experience in the city as a whole," Jordan says. "[It's] hilarious [how] a lot of these microaggressions are coming from liberal-appearing white people, even though a lot of them have dreadlocks or won't look me in the eye as they walk past me on the street or will walk into oncoming traffic in the middle of the day to get onto the opposite side of the street when they see me. Shit like this makes you not give a fuck about how you look to people, whether your hood is up or down, because you're probably seen as threatening regardless." Jordan discusses this further on Soul Glo's forthcoming A-F Records split with San Antonio's Amygdala.

As if all the pathos, rage, joy, and general badassery imbued in *Friends. Lovers. Favorites.* isn't enough, the LP also comes with a copy of their 2017 EP *YOU CAN'T KILL US* and the brilliantly titled *YOU CAN REMIX US*, which features the EP's five tracks remixed and reimagined by women musicians.

HIRS will be out on the road until late May, but after that, what lies ahead? More tours and shows? New music? "Always yes, and always yes," they assure. Until then, they only ask that you remember: "It's OK to be sad. It's OK to be sick. It's OK to take meds. It's OK to not take meds. It's always OK to ask your friends for help." 🌸