Dedicated to Sean Strub

January 5, 2017 By Shawn Decker

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A slideshow from Synthetic Division's last show in May, 2022

The Times of the Sign (POZ September 2022)

Writing music was a big part of 2016 for me. It had been quite awhile since I'd actually written music as Synthetic Division. My last album, 2015's Shaking the Disease: An Unlikely Tribute to Depeche Mode, was a collection of cover songs. Sure, I had fun with the arrangements and it was a thrill to cover the band I met as a dying wish 25 years earlier... but those Depeche Mode classics were hardly my own songs.

At the beginning of last year, I felt the itch to write again. And the title track for The Love of Your Life, the new album, was the first song to come together. I took a few secret journeys from Virginia to Brooklyn to huddle up with my songwriting partner, Alan Siegler, and shortly after our first recording session I realized that I wanted to dedicate the album to Sean Strub. What was supposed to be a 4-song EP turned into an entire album as new songs started to form around the album's theme of love, loss and survival. In search of a visual to go with the first batch of songs and to also capture the essence of Sean Strub's work as an activist, I looked to David Wojnarowicz's (1954-1992) art online. I'd forgotten about U2 tapping David's work for the cover for their 1992 single, "One". As a teen at the time, I never heard that song in the same way after learning that an HIV positive artist provided the visual assist for such a powerful song.

Inspired, I was still at a loss as to what to do for cover art.

A few days later I caught the cover of Sean Strub's memoir, Body Counts, out of the corner of my eye as I was walking past my bookshelf; I stopped and stared at that image of Sean sharing a kiss with his boyfriend, Michael Misove, who passed in 1988. The tenderness of that photograph and the reality of sharing a love under the constant presence of an uncertain fate... it hit heavy.

I've been fortunate with the support system I've had in life, and Sean Strub was a real game changer for me in the Spring of 1996. I was an eccentric 20-year old fan of POZ magazine who'd

just put up a crude website, thus ending a decade-long gag order I'd imposed on my HIV diagnosis. At the time, I was no longer thinking of my virus as a dark secret anymore, or something that would take my life in a few years time. I wrote Sean a fan letter and he responded with an invitation to travel to NYC to be interviewed for the magazine by Degen Pener... a real "holy shit" moment in my life. Sean's belief in how I was framing my journey with HIV emboldened me to be a braver truth-teller. He also allowed my unedited style of writing online to develop by giving me the opportunity to become a columnist for the magazine and the experience of learning the importance of a great editor. (Thanks, Phil Bond!)

So, it is with tremendous respect, love and admiration that I dedicate this new album to Sean Strub. Thanks for everything you've done, not just for me, but for the HIV positive community. I still have a lot to learn from you.

Positively Yours,

Shawn

(Get the album here and listen to Synthetic Division's entire digital catalogue!)

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