



JOPPA ROAD

Live at Opus Salem, Ma

It was a warm weekday in mid July when I first heard of Joppa Road. I was at Spotlight in Beverly, MA: a divey yet hip bar and music venue. The guy in charge of booking the bar's bands was asking me what music I was into. "Well, my favorite band is Ween," I say, expecting a raised eyebrow and a chuckle. "Oh, really? We have an awesome Ween cover band that comes around here every so often!" I gave him a guffaw for humoring me, then noticed he was pointing to a small banner behind the bar: "JOPPA ROAD: A WEEN TRIBUTE EXPERIENCE." I found them on Facebook and saw they were playing at Opus in Salem.

It is now Friday, August 18th. Spotlight abruptly closed the other day, and it looks like it's gone for good. The places at which my type gather seem to be going away. Apparently some Nazis will be assembling in Boston tomorrow for what they are calling a "Free Speech Rally," though what they really want beyond being angry is anybody's guess. There's a possibility of

nuclear war with North Korea in our future. I needed Ween in my life now more than ever. I downed some pot chocolate (sea salt and dark chocolate Punch Bar) and called my Lyft.

Opus' venue is named Opus Underground, and I'm guessing it's because you need to walk through a dark alley into a glowing door down some underground steps to get here. I sat alone at a small table next to the bar. I thought maybe the chocolate was kicking in early but luckily it was just the chair being kind of uneven. The brick walls are decorated with portraits and photos of Debbie Harry, Kanye, Beastie Boys, Madonna, Janis Joplin, and The Rolling Stones. The place seems to have a bit of a cafe vibe, with couches and carpets for some added comfort. They've done a lot here for a such a small place. There's a bar in the back with a picture of Biggie standing near the two towers. They have some good beers on tap, and I was probably going to need them; I was feeling out of place among the attractive patrons.

Hopefully my awful friend arrives soon and I won't be the only monster here. I decide to give him a call:

"Are you almost here?"

"On my way."

"You have to go down an alley to get here. Look for the door with the red light shining on it."

"What?"

"Down the alley, open the secret door."

"But last time I just went in through the front door of the restaurant."

"Oh."

Joppa Road was setting up on the opposite end of the bar. A flag with the familiar boognish smiling at me hung behind the band as they set up. Seemed like nice dudes. Didn't want to bug them. "I think there's a band tonight" says one of the pretty girls. Maybe if she gets drunk enough she'll end up brown like us. While exploring, I noticed a room behind a semi-drawn curtain. Holy shit, there's a pinball machine in there! This place is awesome. I'm very excited; this all may be lame white people culture, but it's really all I have right now.

Joppa Road plays "Homo Rainbow" as their sound test. There's a lot of guys in this band...six, I think; the night was getting blurry already. They take another break before they start playing for real, and the crowd gets weirder. Not the usual Salem weird, where there's just a couple people with pastel hair or whatever. I mean there's a guy here who, as friendly as he seems, might kill my friend and I if the conversation goes sour. His head could explode at any second, and my reaction would be "oh well, saw that one coming." He's sniffing quite a bit. His eyes are very bloodshot. He is talking to my friend and I about the opera.

Thankfully, more and more Ween fans (or at least people that appear that way to me) start pouring in. Joppa Road is about to play again. One of the singers has steampunk goggles now.

"Gabrielle" is the opener. A really, really good version too. These guys know what they're doing. The lead vocalist has an interesting way of singing; he almost appears to be making Joe Cocker faces. He's very intense and soulful, but clearly affable enough to be singing Ween. "Take Me Away," "Bananas and Blow," "Japanese Cowboy," and "Ocean Man" are next. I go outside for some air during "Spinal Meningitis." The

couple outside doesn't seem to appreciate me sitting off in the corner smoking weed by myself. I try to go back in, but the door is locked, so I swing around the place back to the creepy alley with the hidden door and smoke a joint with some other fans. Another person joins, we're all having a great time, and someone remarks "none of us know each other, this is beautiful." Truly.

"Piss Up A Rope" is finishing up and "It's Gonna Be A Long Night" starts blasting off the crowd's faces. This is a damn good band. Their sound has a bit of a harder edge to it, and it lends itself well to songs like *Long Night*. Interestingly enough, they add the same bit of toughness to their *12 Golden Country Greats* covers, making for an interesting experience. If I had to guess, I'd say they're probably fans of *All Request Live*. The sound just reminds me of that, for whatever reason, and given it's the album that made me a Ween fan, I was really happy. The crowd was clearly having a great time. There's two middle-aged women waiting for drinks laughing so hard their guts must be hurting. The younger crowd is up front, dancing to songs they came to see. The majority of us have dumb novelty t-shirts.

Opus has gotten pretty crowded.

Continuing the *All Request Live* theme, a very dance-like "Where'd The Cheese Go" is played and a lot of dudes are bopping up and down. It's getting a bit sweaty in here, so I take a seat for a moment. Then, in some weird collective unconscious moment, the lead singer addresses the crowd: "This next one is for Spotlight. If you haven't heard, they closed the other night, and we hope Mark and the guys land on their feet. They gave us our first gig, so...let's hear it for Spotlight." They break into *Awesome Sound* and it is perhaps my favorite performance of the night. Very heavy, very brown, very good.

Conversations among the crowd have shifted from "I think they're some kind of '90s band?" to "what happened to Spotlight?" Some were shocked to hear it was gone, others (including a member of Joppa Road, grabbing a beer during a quick break) have some theories or inside information concerning the closing. There's a nice vibe shared among us knowing we all loved Spotlight, we all loved Ween, we all loved the same bartenders and owners and patrons and friends, and we all migrated to the same place.

The rest of the night is pretty hard to keep up with. “Booze Me Up and Get Me High” is the final song of set two, and there’s an encore featuring “Transdermal Celebration” and “Blarney Stone.” Most of us are very drunk and it is extremely loud. There’s a lot of shouting concerning Uber, Lyft, and/or cab situations. I wove to Joppa Road and yell “great job!,” as politely as you can yell something at the top of your lungs. My friend and I get into our Lyft and figure out how to split the fare. The driver is concerned with the nazis tomorrow. I give my opinion on the matter (that they’re fucking nerds), and then stop, realizing that being drunk in the back of a livery service is not the place for this kind of thing.

It is now August 23rd. On Saturday, August 19th, tens of thousands counter protesters marched the streets of Boston, drowning out any hope the nerd nazi army had of holding a rally. Only a handful of hopeful rally attendees actually showed up, and they hid under a pavilion in the Common. The rally was a failure, and by 1pm only counter protesters remained. On Sunday, August 20th, I watched two great friends get married at an elegant estate in North Andover. It

was obviously a great weekend, and while I’m sure it still would have been great even without the Ween, it of course didn’t hurt. Ween used to be something I always enjoyed and thought nobody else did. It’s a really good thing I was wrong.

Full Playlist (provided by the Joppa Road Facebook page):

SET ONE

Gabrielle

Take Me Away

Bananas & Blow

Japanese Cowboy

Ocean Man

Spinal Meningitis

Chocolate Town

Roses are Free

Don’t Shit Where You Eat

Piss Up A Rope

Long Night

SET TWO

LMLYP

Finger On It

Buckingham Green

Party

Sorry Charlie

Mister, Would You Please Help

My Pony?

Where’d The Cheese Go

Awesome Sound

Demon Sweat

Homo Rainbow

Booze Me Up

ENCORE

Buenos Tardes

Fat Lenny (some kind of remix)

Object

Transdermal

Blarney Stone



You can find Joppa Road online at facebook.com/jopparoadbeverly

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