When it became clear that, like Mr. Charm, whatever harm supposedly done by Troper was in the eye of the beholder, with much of it arguably the collateral damage of not wanting to die alone, little changed. We all washed our hands of the matter. Wasn't Troper occasionally a bit of a meanie online? Wasn't injustice systemic? We'd save the *next* witch, for sure.

Did *I* rush to Mo Troper's defense? Great question! See, I would have...but, in my high school, the bottom half of the homeroom "First They Came" poster was half-obscured. I just assumed Neimöller's poem was meant as advice. I told myself, "Mo Troper is not your problem. You don't even like power pop."

Luckily/conveniently for me, Mo Troper is fine! Is *Today I Played My Guitar and Sang* the sound of bitterness, rendered in hardscrabble lo-fi? Nope! It's a tapestry of subtle fuzz and top-shelf strings. Is Troper's isolation bordering on claustrophobic? Not unless you're phobic of running your toes through just-mowed grass. So what if his album art is the text of his psychological evaluation? Would a psychologically damaged guy have Father John Misty's backing band play on his album?

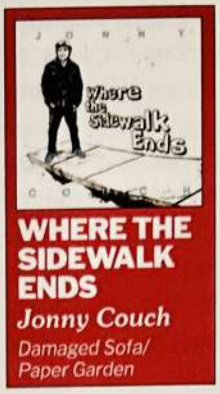
Mo Troper has let us all off the hook. No harm, no foul. So full of sun-dappled vigor is the new Troper LP, I think that the next time an artist gets torn apart by the mob, I might be double the coward. I value art so much, I may join the pile-on. Sorry, next Mo Troper, your life may be ruined by a community of feckless and unrepentant scumbags, but rest assured that you're going to get some real boss tunes out of the deal. —Z.L.



PODIUM
Cheekface
self-released

One hates to think that a lifetime spent smoking cigarettes, building one's entire personality around *Exile* being the best Stones album, and dressing like a backbencher in Crime & the City Solution—all to disguise one's nebbishness—was a waste of time. So, when a band like Cheekface comes around, unapologetically showing off about all the fun one could be having if one had had the guts to embrace one's authentic nerd self, it can grate on us phonies.

One can also get over oneself. The geeks of my youth usually ended up in either forced normalcy, Too Much Joy, or NASA. While we did enjoy the occasional school shooting, it was harder to avoid socialization. These days, for every dork who graduates into either ska or YouTube fame, there seem to be countless others who aren't interested in normalcy (outside of a national socialist framework) or music, preferring to end up as ideologically hentai, spending their days yelling at Hasan Piker. That other youths might be inspired to end up as willfully uncool/inadvertently cool as Cheekface is a win. And the new album is excellent. The poetic neuroticism might be giantly reminiscent of a less-punk Against Me! but for the nasal tunefulness of the vocals and how the band (which includes a Stellastarr on bass) squeezes out sparks. There are lines, like "I got Seoul, but I'm not Korea," that scan as, "Ah, yes. Humor," but whether those lines land is a matter of preference. Some might miss the post-/pop-punk of previous Cheekface albums, but Greg Katz's lyrics—whether they be the absurdest sweetness of "Peanut Butter Prawns" or the more sophisti-O'Hara sugar of "There Is a God"—are far better served by the confident guitar-pop-for-now-people sounds rendering them irresistible here. —Z.L.



WHERE THE SIDEWALK ENDS
Jonny Couch
Damaged Sofa/Paper Garden

If you want an exception to the canard of coworker/friend rock always being the pits, this is it. Jonny Couch has been an NYC power-pop-rocker fixture since approximately the (Rolling) Stone Age. The kind of guy you'd see at the bar or on the subway, and he'd give you a flyer for his upcoming show, and because he was a solid enough dude, you'd 100 percent mean it when you told him that you definitely intended to be there. Maybe you'd even spare a moment of guilt when, a few months later, at jeans washing time, you found the flyer crumpled in your pocket. Well, this album is like if you weren't a self-centered piece of shit and, in a bit of noblesse oblige, you managed to make it to the dude's show, managed to even catch the last half of the dude's set. And when you get there, the guy you have always taken for granted is on stage, wearing an ill-fitted leather jacket, playing all the new-wave, sweet 'n' easy, soulful-garage-pop songs that Robert Palmer would have written if he'd followed his own talent and taste instead of the easy money. —Z.L.



SET OF ALL SETS
Parts & Labor
Ernest Jenning

Chris Weingarten is an esteemed music writer who is both eminently knowledgeable and prickly about shoddy criticism. I agreed to review the new LP by the newly unhiatus'd noise-pop outfit Parts & Labor, which includes Weingarten as one of two drummers. As I refuse to be judged by my betters, I'll be drawing only from larger cultures for points of reference. Unfortunately I checked out of larger culture once music became my focus, so the only pool available is Walter Simonson's creative run on the comic book *Thor*, 1983–1987 (issues #337–382).

Much like Simonson's pencil work of the God of Thunder, Parts & Labor play with genre in ways that may seem conventional to those who have contempt for the genres themselves, while being potentially mind-blowing to anyone used to gruel. For myself, it's only Ragnarok 'n' roll, and I like it a lot. Like the angularity and balloon-animal voluptuousness of the superhero's jaw/bust/biceps, Dan Friel and BJ Warshaw write epics-in-minutes melodies that are Bifrost Bridge-ian in how they connect an Asgardian call to glory to the grounded pull of Midgard, with the intermittent squalls disrupting potentially-too-smooth passage serving the same function as what Malekith the Dark Elf hoped to loose via his opening of the Casket of Ancient Winters. Lyrically, Friel focuses on a theme of hope-against-hope, providing revelatory moments not unlike Loki deciding to join with Odin the Allfather in order to keep Surtur (the