

We're really into Connor Storrie's industrial noise pop project

Some amateur sleuths found an artist on SoundCloud who makes music under the name Tzar Domynik, an alias the *Heated Rivalry* star has also used for his clown persona.

By [Grace Robins-Somerville \(https://www.pastemagazine.com/author/grace-robins-somerville\)](#) | May 21, 2026 | 9:25am

Photo by Emma McIntyre/FilmMagic

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While it was his starring role in HBO's steamy gay hockey romance that skyrocketed him to elite White Boy Of The Past Several Months status, *Heated Rivalry*'s Connor Storrie has proven himself to be quite the Renaissance Man (a jack-of-all-trades when he's not jacking off onscreen to sexts from his hockey-rival-turned-secret-lover). He's been active in the [Los Angeles clowning scene \(https://archive.ph/USdWB\)](#)—which isn't too surprising, given his background as a [competitive gymnast and Groundlings-trained improviser \(https://www.gq.com/story/heated-rivalry-gq-hype\)](#). And in an [interview with Vulture \(https://www.vulture.com/article/heated-rivalry-connor-storrie-ilya-actor-russian-interview.html\)](#), he mentioned offhand that he enjoys making “ear-bloody loud” noise music as a hobby.

Some amateur sleuths found an artist on SoundCloud who makes music under the name Tzar Domynik—[an alias Storrie has also used for his clown persona. \(https://www.instagram.com/p/DS7OQ8MDKRj/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=NTc4MTIwNjQ2YQ==\)](#) One fan on the *Heated Rivalry* subreddit noted that the Tzar Domynik SoundCloud page previously bore Storrie's given name, with releases dating back to 2021. One wonders if Storrie adopting a Russian pseudonym was a nod to the heritage of his bad-boy breakout role Ilya Rozanov.



As far as the songs themselves go, Tzar Domyunik’s industrial mixes are actually pretty great. Tracks like “SPIDER BAIT” and “WRESTLING EELS” clip and pummel with record-scratching, earsplitting fury ready to enrapture your local warehouse rave, recalling the heavier shades of immediately post-Soviet darkwave and dance punk. “SAD DAD” is especially ear-piercing, with layers of wind-tunneling distortion piling themselves atop a stabby bassline. “NICED” could easily be a *Government Plates*-era Death Grips beat. Recent release “life could be like” features some ultra-boosted bass and a warped-to-hell vocal loop, and makes Storrie’s now-archived Instagram post praising New York-based noise rock band Model/Actriz make perfect sense.

Will we see Tzar Domyunik supporting Cole Haden and friends on an upcoming tour? Probably not—Storrie’s seems pretty booked and busy with projects like Molly Gordon’s comedy film *Peaked* and *Babygirl* director Halina Reijn’s forthcoming A24 feature *Please*—but it’d be an incredible pairing, Storrie’s bustling work schedule permitting. Or maybe Storrie prefers to keep Tzar Domyunik as it is—a hobby. One can imagine Storrie coming home from a long day on set in the enemies-to-lovers mines and relaxing with some Ableton plugins, unwinding to the tune of some Eastern Bloc-inspired electro-hardcore.

I’d respect Storrie’s wishes if he wanted to keep his musical project separate from his acting career, but it could be cool to hear a Tzar Domyunik needle drop in the second season of *Heated Rivalry* that’s reportedly in the works. It’d certainly be more interesting than season one’s musical accompaniment, which—aside from the occasional pull from the mid-Aughts Canadian indie (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ltYq-jalYm0>), pop (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7G1eLTV89dM>), canon—mostly sounded like a royalty-free knockoff of Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross’s *Challengers* soundtrack. I guess that propulsive, synth-forward techno has become audio shorthand for longstanding homoerotic sports rivalries in film and television—but that’s a different thinkpiece.

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Watch V. Selvaganesh’s Paste Session at Big Ears Festival

By [Karaline Bailey](#) (/author/karaline-bailey) | May 22, 2026 | 1:40pm

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Paste Studio “On The Road” headed south to the [Big Ears Festival](https://bigearsfestival.org/) (<https://bigearsfestival.org/>) in Knoxville, Tennessee. Since its formation in 2009, the Big Ears Festival has been known for its diverse lineup and boundary-crossing art. [Tombras](https://tombras.com/) (<https://tombras.com/>) Headquarters in downtown Knoxville created the perfect urban loft vibe.

In true Big Ears fashion, V. Selvaganesh and his son Swaminathan Selvaganesh, brought their captivating rhythmic energy to the Paste x Big Ears session. Continuing the family tradition, Selvaganesh followed in his father’s footsteps, T.H. “Vikku” Vinayakram, mastering the kanjira.

Selvaganesh is widely known for his role in the Remember Shakti tour alongside John McLaughlin, as well as his GRAMMY for Best Global Music Album with the band Shakti for their project, *This Moment*. In addition to writing and performing his own music, Selvaganesh has composed music for Tamil films, including *Vennila Kabadi Kuzhu*.

The session opens with “Shiv Tandav,” a song composed by V. Selvaganesh’s father, giving the audience a glimpse of what’s to come from the father/son duo. The drum pattern and dynamic beat bring the South Indian rhythm to life, showcasing a conversational aspect.

Selvaganesh later explains that math and numbers are interlaced within South Indian percussion traditions, using the second song “7 and a Half” as an example. They flawlessly transition into a Konnakol improvisation, where they use rhythmic syllables or vocal percussion, similar to scatting, throughout the piece.

Eagle-eyed viewers might notice a copy of Michael Weintrob’s fine art photography book *Instrumenthead Revealed* (<https://michaelweintrob.com/products/instrumenthead-revealed-book>) in the background, strategically opened to Weintrob’s portrait of Zakir Hussain, largely known as the greatest tabla player of his generation. Selvaganesh’s admiration for Hussain is prevalent, and they share common family members in the Indian community of membranophone musicians.

Closing with “Kanjourney,” a portmanteau of the words kanjira and journey, anyone can see the joy and pride that performing brings to this duo, continuing the family tradition.

Huge thanks from the Paste team to everyone at Big Ears and Tombras who helped make such a great video possible. Keep your eyes peeled for more Paste Sessions.



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Nothing sounds accidental on Bill Orcutt and Mabe Fratti’s *Almost Waking*

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On their joint debut album, two wildly prolific artists unite their compositional singularities for a suite of eight texturally rich pieces.

By [Grant Sharples \(/author/grant-sharples\)](#) | May 22, 2026 | 10:00am

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Mabe Fratti was a fan first. In a 2024 Baker’s Dozen feature with *The Quietus*, the Guatemalan cellist [espoused her love \(https://thequietus.com/interviews/bakers-dozen/feel-what-you-dont-know-mabe-frattis-favourite-albums/12/\)](https://thequietus.com/interviews/bakers-dozen/feel-what-you-dont-know-mabe-frattis-favourite-albums/12/) for Bill Orcutt’s self-titled 2017 album. “His style of playing is aggressive but he has tone, he makes melodies, he likes notes. But he also brings a bit of scratching to it,” Fratti said of the experimental guitarist’s work. Orcutt himself stumbled upon the interview and emailed Fratti about collaborating, though he’d first heard of Fratti through one of his longtime collaborators, drummer Chris Corsano, who had previously performed with the cellist

Paste and sung her praises. From [AV Club](https://www.avclub.com), the duo began sharing files and ideas over the course of a year. [Paste](https://www.pastemagazine.com) | [AV Club](https://www.avclub.com) | [Splinter](https://www.splinter.com) | [Daytrotter](https://www.daytrotter.com)
(<https://www.pastemagazine.com>) (<https://www.avclub.com>) (<https://www.splinter.com>) (<https://www.daytrotter.com>)
San Francisco base.

The result is *Almost Waking*, a suite of eight texturally rich tracks that unite two singular artists with shared compositional affinities. All of the songs stem from freeform guitar improvisations that Orcutt sent to Fratti, who worked alongside Héctor Tosta (AKA I. La Católica), her Titanic bandmate and romantic partner, to embellish with cello and occasional vocals. Fratti and Tosta would listen back to Orcutt's submissions to excavate the "harmonic possibilities" that lay within, as Fratti describes in press materials. She let those interpretations guide her melodies, and the results are remarkable.

The album's opening diptych of the title track and "El inicio es cuestión de suerte" lays the groundwork for the ensuing six pieces. On the former, Orcutt's prickly guitar announces itself immediately, and it's only a few seconds before Fratti joins him with legato bowing. The sharpness softens when Fratti briefly leaves the mix and Orcutt's six-string dots the space like stars. Before long, the pair shifts toward granular textures together, picking up in volume and intensity along the way. Though Fratti and Orcutt are never playing in the same room, it sounds like they're actively responding to each other, rising and falling in tandem, listening and adapting to the atmosphere they're creating in real time.

Meanwhile, "El inicio es cuestión de suerte" introduces Fratti's hypnotizing vocals, the only track here in which she layers harmonies over her voice and one of two in which she sings at all. Here, the roles reverse. Orcutt resigns himself to the supporting role, supplying a guitar ostinato that curls around Fratti's double-tracked vocals like smoke. The spacious production gives Fratti's vocals a dual identity: she sounds both close-mic'd and like she recorded in a resonant chamber. "Forced & Forced & Forced" sounds anything but; it's two musicians submitting to intuition and letting their core emotions emerge. Over a guitar line that gradually morphs over the course of four minutes, Fratti drives her cello into the red and delivers one of the record's most frenzied performances. It culminates in an outro where Orcutt dips out entirely, and Fratti attacks her instrument with such ferocity that you can practically see the strings fray as the piece nears its end.

"Arise from Graves and Aspire" works on a similar level but as the preceding track's inverse. Fratti's cello colors the mix with smooth padding, and Orcutt's spiky guitars tower over the stereo field like peaks in a jagged mountain range. The effect is most striking at the beginning, when the two let their instruments ring out into oblivion for a brief spell before returning to the fore with fierce riffing.

Both artists are compelling enough on their own, but together, they manage to exhume new possibilities within their respective catalogs. They soften and sharpen each other's playing, and that symbiosis reaches a zenith on the penultimate track, "Todo puede ser error," the other piece to feature Fratti's captivating vocals. In C major, the composition assumes a tenor of resolve and optimism, countering the pessimism rooted in the lyrics. Fratti's tone sounds spectral yet grounded, thanks in part to Orcutt's guitars that curl around her voice. She sings the song's title, roughly translating to "everything could be a mistake." But the words contradict the music that surrounds them. Nothing here sounds like an accident. **[Unheard of Hope]**

Grant Sharples is a writer, journalist, and critic. His work has also appeared in Interview, Uproxx, Pitchfork, Stereogum, The Ringer, NME, and other publications. He lives in Kansas City. You can follow him everywhere @grantsharpies.

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Lowertown delivers multifaceted melancholy on *Ugly Duckling Union*

The duo disentangles its friendship in a sprawling, concept-forward meditation on shame, blame, desire, isolation, and companionship.

By Cassidy Sollazzo (/author/cassidy-sollazzo) | May 22, 2026 | 9:30am

MUSIC > REVIEWS > LOWERTOWN



Lowertown's Olivia Osby and Avsha Weinberg almost didn't survive themselves. After signing to Dirty Hit as teens, they were strapped into the up-and-comer indie rock grind, touring and churning out EPs and an eventual debut album, *I Love to Lie*, in 2022. The problem wasn't that they drifted apart, but rather that they got too close. Codependently close. After a four-year "break" (three, if you're counting the *Skin of My Teeth* EP), Osby and Weinberg have re-emerged with *Ugly Duckling Union*, their long-awaited sophomore record. Back in Weinberg's basement, where they cut the earliest Lowertown tracks, the pair return to their blunt yet lyrical writing and unraveling song structures. The result comes with a little more grit and a little less studio polish, which is perfect for an act that's at its best on the lowest of fis, jutting between thrashing garage rock and soothing lullaby melodies.

Ugly Duckling Union is ostensibly about Osby and Weinberg's relationship, their forced separation, hunt for individualism, and eventual reunion. Even so, the pair went so far as to create a fictional word for the album, framing it as the story of a duckling protagonist, Dale, who leaves home, finds a new community, and embarks on a mission to take down a tyrannical media company that profits from isolating citizens. Whether or not Dale's story was intended as a way of depersonalizing *Ugly Duckling Union*, the narrative resulted in its own real-life ecosystem, complete with comic strips, handbooks, plushies, Minecraft servers, and Discord channels. Dale's story speaks to the commodification of the internet and the dissolution of many of the internet spaces that were so integral to Lowertown's existence.

Lowertown weaves its story into Dale's, opening the album with repeated maybes, getting at the disorientation that comes with losing yourself in another person and not knowing where you end and they begin. Heaven's indeterminable from Hell, good is also bad. Osby and Weinberg address their relationship early on "Worst Friend." The pair's dissonant vocal melodies throw all that angst and buildup back at each other, having a conversation within the song about their codependency atop late-2000s-type electric

Paste guitar. The hook switches from your worst friend in the verse to “I’m a splinter” (https://www.pastemagazine.com) (https://www.aylbloom.com) (https://www.jezebel.com/) (https://www.jezebel.com/splinter) (https://www.pastemagazine.com) cyclical back and forth that’s at the core of even the earliest Lowertown song.

They turn inward on “Forgive Yourself,” a somewhat shame-ridden track centered around a sole electric guitar arpeggio turning into a cymbal-heavy, gritty two-guitar grunge duel, then peeling back again. The song rises and falls across its five minutes, anguish swelling and overflowing through Osby’s guttural droning as she delivers lines like “It’s hard to hurt the ones you love / It’s hard to realize it’s you who’s done the wrong” over screeching guitar feedback. It’s emotionally claustrophobic, the constant build-and-release mirroring a wavering sense of self.

“Echo of Desire” and “I Like You A Lot” are the two poles of *Ugly Duckling Union*’s rendezvous with yearning. The latter stands as one of the sunnier tracks in the Lowertown discography, the upbeat twang and goofily relatable lyrics (“I like you a lot, sorry to let you know”) offering a reprieve from the self-blame and despair. “Echo of Desire,” on the other hand, aches with hollowness, the vocals and electric guitar weaving discordant melodies and tugging at each other, evoking the simultaneously exciting and terrifying feelings that come with wanting someone. Warbles and bends brush up against Osby’s single-pitch vocals like little sighs, a lack of self-awareness leading to the strange disappointment of getting what you thought you wanted (“What a shame, what a shame, what a shame”).

“Cover You” feels like the softest, most level-headed look at desire, and one of the more unexpected moments on *Ugly Duckling Union*. Finger-picked, harp-like acoustic guitar floats alongside gentle flute melodies. It feels like a Cat Stevens lullaby in a wonderfully comforting way, the kind of warm joy that comes from new friendship. It’s a moment of emotional clarity, providing a much-needed sense of ease that acts as the folky fairytale eye of the album’s frenetic storm. Lowertown keeps that experimentation-minded approach close, especially on the album’s back half. “(I Like To Play With) Mutts” is a rhythm section-loaded breakbeat track that features fuzzy vocals and rap-ish run-on deliveries. It’s Lowertown at its most lo-fi: the bass overwhelms, the static glitches and flares, the vocals are bolstered by lower, demonic octaves. “DIPSH*T” is a dissonant, ghost-of-Frank-Zappa-level spooky track that is so theatrical it almost feels animated. There are horror-movie-level screams and horns that sound like cars honking, a kind of freakout that releases the bad-trip energy. It comes and goes so quickly that it feels like a between-track auditory hallucination more than a song.

The wordless, counterintuitively-titled “Some Things Never End” closes *Ugly Duckling Union* with an acoustic tenderness à la the Allman Brothers’ “Little Martha,” painting a satisfying picture of Dale & co. walking into the sunset. But the peace is temporary by design, cycling you back into disorientation when “Mice Protection” comes back around. Even when filtered through fantasy and abstraction, *Ugly Duckling Union* still feels pointed and personal. Lowertown presents a more nuanced and even seasoned look at melancholy, giving the album an emotional complexity that allows them to strike a balance between lighthearted, almost crass lyricism and over-the-top instrumentation, while also offering deep-rooted ruminations on self-confidence and the darkest dimensions of codependency.

[Summer Shade]

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