COLUMN

LEND ME YOUR EARS: Pitchfork's era of irrelevance

The decision to put the website's album reviews behind a paywall gets a 0.0/10.

// BY CIELO GAZARD



ILLUSTRATION BY JULIAN RAYMOND

To celebrate 30 years as the Internet's "Most Trusted Voice in Music," Pitchfork decided to ruin its website. Last week, the online music magazine launched a five-dollar-a-month subscription model, which restricts those who do not subscribe to being able to read only four album reviews per month. Those who wish to pay will have access to every single review on Pitchfork's website, as well as the ability to comment under album reviews and rate albums themselves. The change comes after Pitchfork's 2024 merger with the fashion magazine GQ, which resulted in massive layoffs and the permanent cancellation of its annual music festival in Chicago. Is this the final nail in the coffin for the once-independent music criticism website?

Five dollars a month doesn't seem too bad a price for a subscription. For comparison, a digital subscription to Rolling Stone magazine costs $7.99 a month. But I do wonder how many people are actually willing to pay to read album reviews. As someone who gravitates toward older music, I do not engage with Pitchfork as a website to see the latest discourse on a new release. I formulate my own opinion on an album and then see what critics have to say about it. Some album reviews I've read are incredibly snarky and self-indulgent. But I have also found myself fawning over reviews rich with beautiful prose. I only found such reviews by scouring through Pitchfork's immense archive, which is now closed off to those who are not willing to subscribe.

Pitchfork has found difficulty adapting to the social media age. Before being acquired by Condé Nast in 2015, Pitchfork was the place for indie and underground music lovers to read reviews written by one of their own. In the last 15 years, it has reviewed more mainstream pop and hip-hop acts, an important move for the website to reach a larger audience. However, as a result of some extremely obsessive fans who have attacked writers online for criticizing their favorite artists, Pitchfork's album review system has come under intense scrutiny.

Instead of a star system, Pitchfork uses a scale of 0.0 to 10 for its albums. In the press release following the announcement of the subscription model, Pitchfork released their "public guide to evaluating music using our 101-point scale." This explanation, to me, is pointless. Not all scores are created equal. A six for a popular artist could be career-ending, but the same rating for a different musician would be well received. In the world of shortened attention spans, some people only engage with sites like Pitchfork to see the score and not read the rest of the review. These people, who have not actually engaged with the review, might simply be upset when their favorite artist receives what they perceive as a bad score.

This is why it is quite alarming that Pitchfork is now allowing subscribers to review albums themselves. There are plenty of websites where people can rate and review albums. Head of editorial content Mano Sundaresan stated that this change is supposed to reflect that "music and music criticism are inherently social." This is what sites like Rate Your Music are for! Not everything needs to become a social media app.

If everyone is a critic, where does that leave those who want to write about music for a living? Pitchfork has long prided itself on employing freelance writers. The latest changes to its website seem like a dire warning of the website's death. Although I've had my share of negative reactions to certain reviews and scores, places like Pitchfork are crucial for music discourse. Music lovers need music critics. Pitchfork's increasing irrelevancy will not result in the death of music criticism, but rather the displacement of the music critic.

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ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS CASTILLO-WEST

HOROSCOPES

// BY KIVA BANK

Snow envelops Cross Campus in white velvet. Frost glistens on the rooftops of Sterling Library. Icicles cling to — and then fall from — the edge of Beinecke, almost impaling passersby.

Critters emerge from under the snow, searching for scraps to feed on, much like the people you've never seen before traversing through the basement with heaps of dining hall food to store in their dorms. Game of Thrones fans are speechless, because winter has already come.

The stars and CNN foresee a potential Snowpocalypse part two this weekend. And the stars are never wrong.

Aries
You haven't given up your New Year's resolution to get that hot summer bod. You're in the gym every morning at 7 a.m., lifting tirelessly. Unfortunately, when it's time for leg day, your knees will tremble and on your way home you'll slip on the ice outside of your dorm. Ambition has its pitfalls — no pun intended.

Taurus
You need to block Yale Date Drop from your email. Their spam messages are distracting you from meeting your deadlines. The only thing you should be shipped with is your Gcal, to whom you must be faithfully devoted to for the remainder of the semester.

Gemini
You're upset you didn't get a bid from Aeris. You were caught up in the rush craze, but just as the snow eventually clears, so will your vision. You'll realize that it's not necessary to pay thousands of dollars in dues just to drink with your friends. As for "philanthropy" or whatever, you can donate the money that you're saving to charity.

Cancer
You're debating whether to join Fence or Edon. As you complete your rush meals, ask yourself this question: would you rather be gay and artsy, or performatively gay and artsy? If you think you know which club is which, you're probably wrong. They're both pretending to be the same thing: cooler than they actually are.

Leo
Just because your Zodiac sign is Leo does not mean you are destined to join Leo. The fact that you read this horoscope crap likely counts against you. They probably think believing in this space mumbo jumbo is gay (derogatory) and artsy (also derogatory).

Virgo
You'll hate your professor for the rest of the semester for making you trek to class through 12 feet of snow at 9 a.m. Don't take it out on them during class, however. Wait until it's time to evaluate them at the end of the semester. Revenge is a dish best served cold, well after the snowpocalypse.

Libra
Snow Darty (Snarty) tempted you to skip your Monday afternoon seminar — the same one you emailed the professor 10 times to get in to. The CourseTable gods are frowning upon you. To restore your karmic balance (and your GPA), you should forgo all parties for the foreseeable future, until you recover from your mysterious "sickness" and are able to go through a whole class without snoozing.

Scorpio
Rush didn't quite go as planned. You got into your top choice sorority, but your roommate did not. Be prepared for the upcoming weeks of unresolved tension, passive aggressive comments, and thinly veiled jealousy. She's actually doing you a favor and preparing you for sorority life and sisterhood.

Sagittarius
You prefer to spend the wintertime indoors, hibernating and avoiding the flurry of rush events. There's bad news for your binging habits though. Your favorite television show will end eventually, even with its 11 seasons, 4 more seasons of spinoffs and 2 busted blockbusters. It's good to get some sun once and a while — even though there is no sun in the darkness of winter. Or Bass Library.

Capricorn
You thought trekking through a blizzard was worth the dick appointment. Briefly, it was, warming you up on a cold winter night, but the illusion of comfort will shatter faster than snowballs. Is that itching from wearing too many layers? Or that unwashed wool sweater? You might not feel it yet but, it looks like you caught something — a cold, STI, or worse…feelings.

Aquarius
Stop posting on Fizz in favor of your social club and start balancing the books. Touse this. Bouse that. You're worried about the wrong things. Let's focus on the issue of nouse (no house) that is rampant amid Greek and non-Greek social life across campus. There are no parties to be had if there's no backyard to throw them in.

Pisces
You are debating whether or not to quit soccer because she said she doesn't date athletes. Lucky for you, it's only club soccer, and you absolutely should change your entire personality to fit someone else's perception of you. That's the entire point of rush season. Boola Boola.

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