



PHOTO BY WILL DEITZ

You Were There: The Complete LCD Soundsystem

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For years, James Murphy has suggested that he would be closing the door on LCD Soundsystem; a lot of people didn't believe him. Even after his band announced their final night out, a three-hour show at New York City's Madison Square Garden dubbed *The Long Goodbye*, some still expect a 55-year-old Murphy will climb back on stage in 2025. Perhaps that suspicion is cynicism or perhaps it's learned behavior from watching artists turn from creative to careerist, but it's not going to happen. James Murphy may have lost his edge by the time he formed LCD Soundsystem, but he gained perspective, even wisdom. And one of the primary things he's projected from the start is that he cares, deeply, about what he does, the decisions he makes, and the reasons for them.

"When I was 30 I promised myself that I'd be out by 40 and I'm 40 now. Any more than this and I'd start feeling like a professional,"

he told *Clash* last year. "A lot of the songs I've written are as good as I'm going to do. I don't want to repeat myself. So, what becomes the next goal? Being bigger? The next goal becomes about making more money. It's just not all that interesting."

James Murphy's twentysomething failures (he was in and out of rock bands throughout those years, and even turned down an early staff writing job on *"Seinfeld"*), his studious appreciation for rock and dance history, his work ethic, and the sense of urgency felt by someone who is reinventing their music career at 30 laser-focused his vision and drive. Over the course of the past decade, Murphy and his band have argued and cajoled on record and on stage for an indie rock industry that increasingly lives online to still fight in the streets. From his first single he articulated the dangers of a life lived looking over your shoulder, or not taking your choices as seriously as possible;

the natural flipside to the days spent as *"Losing My Edge"*'s encyclopedic Internet seekers and coolhunters was B-side *"Beat Connection"*'s sad, frightened, reserved nights out.

"I've put my life into it," Murphy told *The Wire* in 2005. "I'm fully aware that it's my life. I don't have parents-- they're gone. I don't get another life. I'm 34 years old and this is it. My entire youth is gone and dedicated to this, so I care enormously. I meet lots of people who don't realize that this is their only life."

LCD also sought from the start to reclaim a specific vision of New York City and its musical history, specifically the late 1970s and early 80s, where emerging sounds rubbed up against each other in ways that can only happen in a teeming, struggling metropolis. The friction between new wave, post-punk, underground disco, electro,

and early hip-hop created some of the most invigorating music of the rock era, and Murphy homed in on that, first as a DJ and later as producer and musician. When LCD emerged in the early 2000s, New York nightlife and underground music in general were again more balkanized; scenes popped up and became about social positions within those scenes; subgenres with strict rules about what was allowed had emerged, and are by-definition dead ends into which new thoughts aren't allowed to penetrate. Murphy's dance parties re-created that earlier spirit just as it was also playing out online, with exchanges of ideas crossing tribal and national boundaries.

Eclecticism became the watchword of the time, and LCD Soundsystem were the group who best and most clearly reflected that. To Murphy, this lack of originality takes the focus off the artist and puts it on the songs. LCD didn't task themselves with a need to reflect the desires and thoughts of their audience, to be an emotionally nourishing extension of their listeners, as so many bands in the early 2000s aimed. They just strove to make good music-- borrowing from and honoring their sources, not being afraid to risk failure or humiliation, not shying from grand gestures, perfecting their craft. When Murphy did turn to articulate his own feelings-- about music, hipsterdom, scenes, human relationships, the need for connectivity, aging, death-- he just so happened to do it so well that other people couldn't help but relate.

"I don't think that I'm a great songwriter, I don't believe I'm this wildly original individual," he told Pitchfork's Nick Sylvester in 2005, trying to sum up his strengths and appeal. "I don't believe that I'm astonishingly charismatic and really need to be heard as an individual voice. I do believe I take music very seriously. I do believe I am a very good manipulator of sound and I'm very interested in how sound affects my body and I do believe that is relevant to how it affects other people's bodies."

As Murphy brings his project to a bittersweet end, we're telling its story through the music. All of it. Below, you'll find all of LCD Soundsystem's 43 songs cataloged chronologically-- from "Losing My Edge" straight through This Is Happening-- with insights on how each track fits into the big picture. --Scott Plagenhoef



"Losing My Edge"

A-side of the DFA single "Losing My Edge"; 2002

Written by James Murphy

Produced by the DFA

Nancy Whang: additional vocals

Even before releasing his debut single, James Murphy had enjoyed quite a prolific career. The Princeton, New Jersey native's official résumé dates back to 1988, when he fronted the goth-rock outfit Falling Man. That band's debut album, *A Christening*, came complete with a Neubauten-like logo and production courtesy of Ministry/Revolting Cocks member E. William Tucker; in the liner notes, Murphy (listed simply as James) thanks Francis Ford Coppola and Marlon Brando, presumably for the *Apocalypse Now* samples contained within and for providing him with a name he would apply to various endeavors over the ensuing years-- *Death From Above (DFA)*, a slogan seen on a helicopter in the film.

A relocation to New York led to a gig drumming for the quintessentially-1990s, Homestead-signed distorto-pop trio Pony. Around this time, he started getting into production, building a studio in Brooklyn with the help of his first sound-engineer clients, NYC art-rock troupe *Dungbeetle*, and personal advice from *Shellac*'s Steve Albini and Bob Weston. The building was christened Plantain Recording House before Murphy got evicted in 1995; by that point, he was working the kit for spastic, synth-spiked math-rockers *Speedking*, which showed early signs of the dance/punk dialectic Murphy would go on to explore.

The *Speedking* stint also put Murphy in contact with some kindred spirits who would figure significantly in his future: ex-

Les Savy Fav drummer Pat Mahoney and Rhode Island rabble-rousers *Six Finger Satellite*, another band taking cues from early 80s post-punk and new wave at a time when synthesizers and hi-hat-driven rhythms were decidedly unfashionable next to the domineering Pavement/*Guided by Voices*/*Sebadoh* strains of fuzzy indie rock. Murphy would go on to serve as SFS's live sound man (for which he developed an infamously loud PA system dubbed "Death From Above," which also became his DJ alias) and produce the band's 1998 swan song, *Law of Ruins*. (His ongoing friendship with SFS guitarist John "Juan" MacLean would facilitate both artists' subsequent ventures into dance music production.)

But it wasn't until assuming engineering duties for Irish DJ David Holmes' 2000 funk-noir masterwork *Bow Down to the Exit Sign* that Murphy started to believe he could be something more than an indie-rock footnote and transcend what he described to *The Guardian* in 2004 as "a lifetime failure." The recording sessions-- conducted in the resuscitated Plantain's new Manhattan digs-- introduced him to the album's co-producer, Mo' Wax/UNKLE figurehead Tim Goldsworthy, who initiated Murphy's full-blown conversion to dance music. Together, Murphy and Goldsworthy would DJ at parties in the Lower East Side, their crates filled with everything from Public Image Ltd. to the Beatles to Donna Summer. The duo-- along with local promoter Jonathan Galkin-- soon translated their genre-blurring DJ aesthetic into a new label and production team, both named DFA.

DFA's formation was perfectly timed to coincide with a renewed interest in post-punk-- along with the post-9/11 embrace of New York nightlife nostalgia-- across all corners of the underground, from the Strokes' evocation of late-70s East Village grit to electroclash's reclamation of icy synths to Soul Jazz Records' essential 2002 history-lesson compilation, *In the Beginning There Was Rhythm*. And DFA accelerated this movement considerably with its first two 12" releases: *The Rapture*'s epochal disco-punk anthem "House of Jealous Lovers" and the Juan MacLean's electro salvo "By the Time I Get to Venus".

But despite the near-instant attention his new label garnered, Murphy's first single as LCD Soundsystem-- DFA's third release overall-- was born out of a festering anxiety. In a sense, the DFA brand had already become a victim of its success. Murphy started to notice that the once-singular mix of post-punk, disco, house, electro, and krautrock he favored in his DJ sets could

now be heard at every party in town; his cutting-edge tastes were now commonplace. So, just as a sad-sack 90s indie-rocker would spill his feelings into a four-track, Murphy retreated into his basement, dialed up a Casio-grade beat from an old keyboard/cassette-deck contraption and came clean about his growing sense of inadequacy while openly satirizing the very idea of being concerned with something as fleeting and meaningless as “cool.”

To this day, amid a discography that would gradually turn ever more introspective, “Losing My Edge” stands as Murphy’s most purely autobiographical song. Even its opening 16-second tract-- where a swirl of guitar feedback and crashing drums abruptly fuse into the song’s bouncy electro beat-- provides a handy summation of Murphy’s chaotic indie-rock past and rebirth as a dance-music enthusiast. The concept for “Losing My Edge” is as simple as a standard Hollywood pitch: aging hipster tries to reassert street cred by boasting about his involvement in several pivotal moments in musical history (“the first Can show in Cologne,” “the first Suicide practices in a loft in New York City”), with Murphy’s deadpan sing-speak perfectly toeing the line between ego and insecurity.

The latter feeling becomes ever more pronounced as the song gradually layers on heavier drum breaks, ricocheting synth effects, and sheets of noise. By the end, Murphy’s narrator is reduced to desperately shouting out the names of various musical iconoclasts at random (“David Axelrod, Electric Prunes, Gil! Scott! Heron!”) as if hipness was a matter of life and death. (And the inside-baseball references don’t just end with the lyrics; as Murphy admitted to Pitchfork in 2005, the song’s rhythmic underpinning was lifted wholesale from the 1980 Killing Joke B-side “Change”). In the track’s closing moments, Murphy redirects his existential crisis outward to the listener, his modulated voice singing “you don’t know what you really want” like a neon-clad Greek chorus.

With its deliberately-paced, seven-minute build from a spartan beat to cacophonous climax, “Losing My Edge” clearly sets the template that almost all extended LCD tracks-- from follow-up 12” “Yeah” to Sound of Silver’s “Get Innocuous!” to This Is Happening’s “Dance Yrself Clean”-- would later follow. And the ideological parameters laid out here-- dance vs. punk, sincerity vs. sarcasm, wordy self-analysis vs. surrendering to the rhythm-- set the goal posts that all future LCD Soundsystem songs would fall between. --Stuart Berman



PHOTO BY KATHRYN YU

“Beat Connection”

B-side of the DFA single “Losing My Edge”; 2002

Written by James Murphy

Produced by the DFA

Nancy Whang; additional vocals

As the humorous first single by a new act, “Losing My Edge” could have easily been taken for a novelty song. But the flipside of LCD’s debut immediately promised something richer musically, with lyrics that sounded like both a lament for and a battle cry against an indie rock culture that had forgotten the value of funk. If “Losing My Edge” could be read as a cranky (if perfectly delivered) joke, what comes through on “Beat Connection” is intensity, seriousness, and love. It’s a record made by man worried that the long list of influences that closed “Losing My Edge” were being listened to but not exactly put to work.

“Beat Connection” buzzes with Murphy’s fierce devotion to both the harshness of post-punk and the suppleness of disco. It’s almost hard to remember after a decade of carefully packaged reissues of “deep disco cuts,” but, in 2002, the level of antipathy toward the genre from rock fans was still high. Thankfully, Murphy-- then 32-- was already too old to give a shit about anything other than what he liked. The lyrics to “Beat Connection”-- bemoaning a scene not getting much satisfaction from dancing or otherwise-- might have seemed like a

bitter and pointless jab at indie’s stylistic insularity if the song didn’t itself posit an alternative. It merges post-punk’s pleasure-suspicious bite and disco’s pleasure-embracing ecstasy, offering a hybrid both sides could embrace.

What unites the song’s two musical strains is, of course, the beat. In that sense, the title can be taken almost literally-- an attempt to join two worlds that had become estranged during the 90s by pointing out their common pulse. If “Losing My Edge” had a purposefully sloppy “bedroom producer” appeal, “Beat Connection” sounded like a record made for dancers by a dancer, more UK house than UK punk. As Murphy told Chuck Klosterman in an interview for *The Guardian* in 2010, “I can succeed at making music that works as dumb body music, but that can also meet someone in the middle if they want to investigate our songs in a deeper way.”

If this seems a little defensive-- “dumb body music” does sound like the lingering suspicion of guy who grew up steeped in “smart” rock music-- “Beat Connection” proves he took dance music seriously from the start. And if the beat has a rougher, live-band edge than your standard club track (much-needed after the years of lush-unto-unctuous deep house that ruled the clubs of LCD’s NYC), the tune is still constructed to move from peak to peak until it brings

people to hands-aloft ecstasy-- something that was in desperately short supply at the indie rock gigs of the era.

Murphy spent most of his life harboring that same suspicion of letting go on the dancefloor, at least until one night around the turn of the millennium that's become a key part of the LCD myths: "I was at a club not dancing, because I didn't dance," he said in that same Guardian interview. "I was on ecstasy and I was peaking, and then the DJ played 'Tomorrow Never Knows' and I lost my marbles. But I also had a very important revelation, which was that the way I was feeling was actually me. It wasn't the drug. It was me." In other words, he really needed to dance all along. It just took the right context and the right records to unlock that urge.

From a distance, it now seems like many early 21st-century indie fans felt the same suppressed urge to boogie. Given what LCD, the DFA, and their cohorts kicked off, records like "Beat Connection" were their own kind of gateway drug. Roughing up the disco and exposing indie's antipathy to dance as essentially unhealthy, it arrived precisely at the time such genre-fixated listening began to seem passé. Most crucially, nine years later it retains the power to move people. Literally. --Jess Harvell

"Give It Up"

Written by James Murphy

Produced by the DFA

James Murphy: vocals, bass, percussion, synthesizer

The two sides of long-form, gradually building electro on LCD's first 12" put the project on the map, and their second single immediately showed another side to the band. Both "Give It Up" and B-side "Tired" were rock songs less than four minutes long but they didn't have much else in common (they were also, appropriately, released on a 7"). "Give It Up" is a no-bullshit slab of spiky rhythm and rubbery bass that immediately established LCD as a band that could do guitar-driven post-punk. As Dominique Leone wrote in his review of LCD's debut album, "James Murphy makes great tracks. He isolates cowbells and places the microphone at just the right distance from the hi-hat so you get the analog-crisp sound post-punk bands took for granted because they didn't know how good they had it with engineers like Paul Hardiman and Rick Walton." Here, that recording acumen is used in service of a track that's lean, energetic and dripping with attitude as it channels Gang of Four and A Certain

Ratio while offering the first hint that LCD was going to be something like a real band. --Mark Richardson



"Tired"

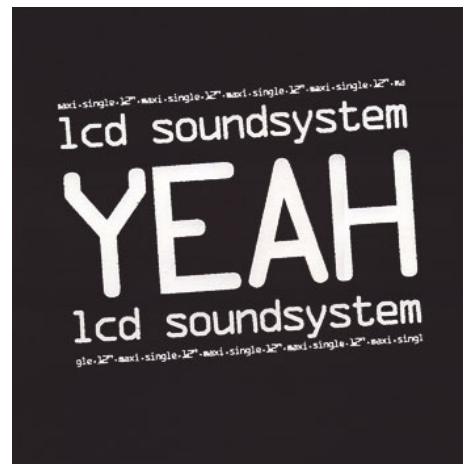
B-side of the "Give It Up" single; 2002

Written by James Murphy and Pat Mahoney

James Murphy: vocals, bass, guitar
Pat Mahoney: drums, percussion, EMS synthesizer

Just as "Give It Up" introduced compact, new wave-inspired pop to the early LCD discography, "Tired" tries on another new guise: gonzo, psych-splattered, garage-punk. The song follows the Stooges' death-trip trail while breaking down the Ann Arbor icons' classic-rock foundation to foreground tortured screaming and wanton wah-wah-pedal abuse. Even its lone, repeated lyric-- "I don't need no waking up/ Cuz I'm tired"-- is positively Stoogeian in its combination of defeatism and derangement, tapping into the same ennui that Iggy first mined with the suburban stoner blues of "1969".

Whether it was a rebuke to the highly stylized garage-rock outfits dominating NME covers at the time, or a manifestation of Murphy's devious tendency to freak-out techno-club crowds by dropping Funhouse at peak hour, "Tired" is an outburst of aggression never again matched in the LCD catalogue (save for, maybe, the accelerated second act of "Movement"). If there's a connection between "Tired" and any of LCD's future output, it's that Murphy would reassert the same baggy-eyed sentiment in much more graceful fashion on the band's Beatlesque reverie "Never as Tired as When I'm Waking Up". --Stuart Berman



"Yeah"

A-side of the DFA single "Yeah"; 2004

Written by James Murphy, Tim

Goldsworthy

Produced by the DFA

Gavin R. Russom: synthesizer, Fun Machine support, synthesizer support

Mandy Coon: vocals

Nancy Whang: vocals

James Murphy: vocals, drums, bass, keyboards, percussion

Eric Broucek: vocals, additional programming, percussion

"Yeah" is the impassioned pep talk before the championship game. "Everybody keeps on talking about it, nobody's getting it done," notes Murphy. "Everybody keeps on pushing and shoving, nobody's got the goods." Now, after nearly a decade of vital music, this bluster makes sense. But, when the "Yeah" 12" hit at the start of 2004, LCD Soundsystem had just two singles to their name-- one was led by a semi-novelty, the other put forth less-than-earth-smashing garage rock. Back then, Murphy was still a Williamsburg nerd pushing vinyl-only singles in an MP3 world. So he hedges his bets a little on this song, employing Eric Broucek, Nancy Whang, and his wife Mandy Coon to provide beyond-dry, we've-heard-it-all-before "yeah"s throughout, undercutting his own rousing pronouncements. But "Yeah" went past "Losing My Edge"'s insider-ism for something more ambitious. By the end of this nine-and-a-half-minute work out, even the most jaded "yeah, yeah, yeah"-ers were forced to listen up.

It's a decisive turning point, one that "nearly killed" Murphy, according to a 2005 Pitchfork interview. Talking about the band's self-titled debut LP, he said, "There's no song on the album that was as hard to make as 'Yeah'." It's easy to believe him.

Spread across 20 minutes and two distinct versions, the “Yeah” single aims to sum up three decades of dance music, from Stevie Wonder’s classic clavinet on “Superstition” in the 70s to the hypnotic percussion and groove of 99 Records bands Liquid Liquid and ESG in the 80s to the squelching keyboards of Daft Punk and the Chemical Brothers in the 90s. A daunting proposition, especially for someone as self-aware and exacting as Murphy. Because he knows it’s one thing to chastise people for “not getting it done,” but it’s something else entirely to actually get it done yourself. Talking about his contemporaries to *The Village Voice* in 2007, he said, “Nobody tries. And there are more talented people that should be better... I think it’s insulting... Don’t fucking come into the ring out of shape; that’s disrespectful.” “Yeah” is the sound of that frustration bubbling over.

The single also furthers Murphy’s rep as his own best critic as well as the notion that LCD Soundsystem make “musical ideas about musical ideas.” The A-side features the well-known vocal version, the one that has become an exploding highlight of almost every LCD show since. It’s dubbed the “Crass Version”. Flip the record over to get the longer, voice-less “Pretentious Version”, which is more of a jam session that doesn’t build up as much as it digs in. Usually, musicians don’t appreciate when people call their work “crass” or “pretentious.” But by beating would-be critics to the punchline here, Murphy stays a step ahead, as he always would. --Ryan Dombal

“Movement”

A-side of the DFA single “Movement”;
2004

From the album LCD Soundsystem;
2005

Written by James Murphy
James Murphy: vocals, guitar,
percussion, programming, synthesizer,
drums
Tyler Pope: bass

Rock’s Next Big Thing in the early 2000s, at least in the eyes of the media, was... rock. The Vines, the Strokes, the White Stripes, and the Hives graced magazine covers. In February 2003, Justin Timberlake could be seen wearing an MC5 T-shirt on the cover of *Vibe*; Jennifer Aniston wore one on an episode of “Friends”. Rock, it seemed, was back.

James Murphy, naturally, was unimpressed. But rather than just complain like a typical curmudgeon (you know the type-- the ones

who say “nonplussed” when they mean “unimpressed”), he decided to show them his idea of how garage-rock should really be done. “I was getting bored of all the [music press] gabber-gabber about the new rock,” he told XLR8R, in a 2005 interview with Pitchfork contributor Mark Pytlik. “I’m a huge rock fan, but wearing an MC5 shirt is not being in the MC5. For me, rock is not an outfit or a pose. I just thought, ‘If I’m gonna complain about rock, I should make some.’”

In true rock spirit, Murphy wasted little time fussing over niceties. LCD Soundsystem’s fourth single “was written in the shower, specifically for a show,” Murphy told XLR8R. “I just really wanted a song that was a strict and silly electro song that could be done identically as a rock song, so it’s basically the song twice. It was supposed to stop there, but I had fun layering ridiculous solos over it in the studio-- we ended up going with the most retarded one. That was only after we were done doing all these grandiose, really disgusting ‘American Woman’ triple-tracked solos.”

“Movement” skewers the era’s fashion-plate garage-rock twice: first by showing that buzzing synths and clapping drum machines could rock just as hard, and then by using live instruments to rock even harder in the song’s thrashing second half. No wardrobe consultant required, either; Murphy appears to be self-deprecatingly describing himself when he refers to “a fat guy in a t-shirt doing all the singing.” Of course, he saves plenty of sharper barbs for boring rock bands, tautologically decrying “a culture without the culture of all of the culture”-- a zinger by no means limited to its original targets.

It also helps that Murphy has a more esoteric record collection than many of the so-called new rock’s practitioners. The song’s stomping electronic beat recalls Suicide’s “Ghost Rider”, while the repeated phrase “I’m tapped-uh” appears with the exact same monotone over-pronunciation in the Fall’s “Telephone Thing”. (“The Fall are my Beatles,” Murphy said in an old band bio. “So, rather than sound like Mick Jagger, I’d rather think about what I like and sound like Mark Smith.”)

Next to “Give It Up” B-side “Tired”, “Movement” stands as the most bellicose track in the self-consciously un-macho LCD Soundsystem catalog. “It’s fun for me to go play with bands that are supposed to be really heavy and be heavier than them for like a minute and 14 seconds,” Murphy said of “Movement” in a *Wire* interview. The band would never record anything quite so heavy

again; “There’s no ‘Movement’, straight up,” on *Sound of Silver*, Murphy acknowledged in a *Village Voice* interview with Pitchfork staff writer Tom Breihan, and there wasn’t one on *This Is Happening*, either. Rock, we hardly knew you. But for that minute and 14 seconds-- well, three minutes and four seconds, to be exact-- Murphy sure did. --Marc Hogan

“Yr City’s a Sucker”

B-side of the DFA single “Movement”;
2004

Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA

Eric Broucek: percussion, guitar
James Murphy: drums, percussion,
synthesizer, guitar, vocals, bass

Murphy’s first out-and-out ode to New York City aims to revive seedier times. “Yr city’s a sucker, my city’s a creep,” he taunts, with the perfect combination of fuck-you and what-the-fuck-do-I-care that may have been born on the downtown F line somewhere around 1976. LCD’s fascination with its hometown would peak with *Sound of Silver*’s gloriously ambiguous “New York, I Love You But You’re Bringing Me Down”, but “Sucker” is more of a cocksure strut. They city isn’t bringing Murphy down just yet.

Instead, the song slinks like that guy stalking the Bowery in dark glasses and an ink trench coat. Continuing with the shadow-y, creepish trend, its hand-claps are borrowed from “Thriller”, the woo-hoo’s are all “Sympathy for the Devil”, and the outro synth noodles actually recall Radiohead. And just when it seems like Murphy is offering peace to those suckers outside of the five boroughs, he snatches it back with a huge, spit-y laugh right in a tourist’s face: “What you want is what we want, a case of the HA HA HA HA!” Since James Murphy is James Murphy, “Yr City’s a Sucker” just might also be poking fun at the classic New Yorker sense of entitlement. Or the fact that there seem to be less skeezy, watch-selling creeps in New York now than ever. The city’s sense of cool can often be nothing more than a reference to old times, way before Murphy set foot in Williamsburg (which itself has transformed from a treacherous pit to a place where New Jerseyans go bowling on Fridays). New York City is not the skulking bad ass it once was. But Murphy’s gonna relive its idealized grit nonetheless. Watch yr pockets. --Ryan Dombal



“Daft Punk Is Playing at My House”

A-side of the DFA single “Daft Punk Is Playing at My House”; 2005
From the album LCD Soundsystem; 2005

Written by James Murphy
Produced by The DFA

Mixed by The DFA and Andy Wallace
James Murphy: drums, vocals, bass guitar, percussion, handclaps, organ, programming
Eric Broucek: handclaps

On “Losing My Edge”, James Murphy included a knowing boast about being the “first guy playing Daft Punk to the rock kids.” It’s a joke, but there’s truth in it. For many, Daft Punk’s Homework was an important introduction to the world of dance music; because of their conceptual flair, innovative videos, and pop-style hooks, the French duo successfully busted through genre barriers in the late 90s and early 00s. And their playful way of staying above the fray made an impression on Murphy.

“I do love Daft Punk but really I think they’re a great signifier because they manage to be genre-less rather than something really specific,” he told website I Really Love Music in 2005, explaining why he picked Daft Punk to crash his imaginary basement show. “They are like a band and they are DJs; they do song-style songs and techno songs; they do dark stuff and pop crossovers. It’s like referring to David Bowie, who has been everything from folk to glam rock.”

So “Daft Punk Is Playing at My House” is a fantasy song that juxtaposes the poorly-ventilated basement punk shows of Murphy’s past with the spotless, robot-headed superstars. (Daft Punk’s gargantuan

pyramid show would debut a year and a half after this song was released, making the mental mismatch even more potent.) “I had spent so long obsessing on what was missing from indie rock that was present in dance music that I forgot what was present in indie music that was missing from house music,” Murphy said in the same interview. “I just had this idea that someone might have gone through the same epiphany with dance music and then ended up saving up to have Daft Punk to play in their basement.”

Like its namesake, the song doubles as a signifier for the broken-down dividers that may have separated punk and disco fans in the 1970s or pop and indie rock followers in the 90s. All sorts of music fans could relate to its open-mindedness, and the track still stands as LCD’s most successful hit after reaching #29 on the UK pop chart. It’s also the only LCD track to be nominated for a Grammy (it lost to the Chemical Brothers’ “Galvanize”).

For the song’s video, Murphy originally wanted to get the real Daft Punk to play an actual house party-- “there would just be this basement, Daft Punk, some kids, a keg and a washing machine, it would be great”-- and make a documentary about the bash. It didn’t pan out, and the final video is a forgettable, stop-motion tribute to past Daft Punk visual triumphs. But the clip’s failure is the fantasy’s gain; everyone who heard this song has thought about the tiny details that would make their exclusive Daft Punk basement gig that much more special. Musically, the song combines a bunch of now-familiar Murphy touchstones: Gang of Four guitars, Mark E. Smith vocal affectations, Liquid Liquid bass lines. But it didn’t fully come together until the band worked it out on stage, as documented in many subsequent shows and on 2010’s London Sessions live-in-studio album. Sped up and thickened with heaps of distorted synth, the live version is a huge punk rush worthy of its underground origins. --Ryan Dombal

“Too Much Love”

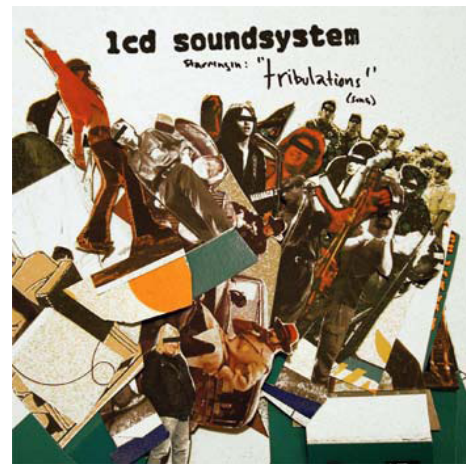
From the album LCD Soundsystem; 2005

Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA

An early song about aging, “Too Much Love” finds James Murphy at 34 modestly and meekly pondering the consequences of segueing into a new, slower phase of his life. More spacious than a lot of the cluttered tracks on LCD’s debut LP, it finds him

with one foot planted firmly in the Bowie/Eno sonic axis he so loves and the other pointing toward the wider, spacious sonics of Sound of Silver. Still a little more tentative with his vocals, Murphy had a tendency to impersonate when he used his voice more melodically than rhythmically early on, and here is no exception.

His almost-somnambulist delivery effectively mirrors both the shimmer and delicate pulse of the song’s first half and the clattering rhythm that later dominates it. Positioned on the debut album between bright-eyed singles “Daft Punk Is Playing at My House” and “Tribulations”, “Too Much Love” feels like a hangover song, the low-energy mutterings of someone trying to locate faded memories in a clouded mind. In most every way, it comes off like a test run for the “how did I get here?” tracks on Sound of Silver, a tentative step toward locating songs about himself and his internal feelings in the light of day right alongside the ones that documented the previous night. --Scott Plagenhoef



“Tribulations”

A-side of the DFA single “Tribulations”; 2005

From the album LCD Soundsystem; 2005

Written by James Murphy
Performed by James Murphy, Tim Goldsworthy, Eric Broucek, Tyler Pope, Nancy Whang, Patrick Mahoney, Mandy Coon

The throbbing second single from LCD Soundsystem apparently started out as a lark. “I wrote that as kind of a laugh,” Murphy told British website MusicOMH in 2005. “I remember trying to explain to my friend how easy it is to write pop songs. I

lcd soundsystem



was like, 'well, watch' and I wrote it and just made it up and then later I was like 'I kind of like this-- I'll get back to it and finish it off.'" Even with its incidental beginnings, the song is one of the record's darkest lyrical pieces and foreshadowed the acidic, plainspoken take on romance Murphy would eventually embrace on 2010's *This Is Happening*.

Here we find the protagonist in a lopsided relationship with someone whose flaws are obvious ("Everybody makes you late, and it's never you because you're always thinking") but that he's unwilling to detach from, presumably because of the sex. "I try making you wait, and you give me some like you give it good," deadpans Murphy. The dysfunction here nearly rides backseat to the burning instrumental, driven by the impossibly rubbery synth line, which

dominates the song's first half, takes a short breather at mid-point, and then comes back to smack in you in the face at the end.

"Tribulations" was given a stretched-out space-disco remix by Hans-Peter Lindström on the 2006 B-sides collection *Introns*, where he extended the central synth line into proggy territory and dialed back some of the vocal urgency. *Introns* also featured a rework of the song by Montreal DJ Tiga, cheekily titled "Tiga's Out of the Trance Closet" mix, which does, somewhat awkwardly, give the song a pulsating trance makeover. The video for "Tribulations", directed by Dougal Wilson, features Murphy walking in and out of frame in the spirit of Michel Gondry's 1994 clip for Lucas' "Lucas with the Lid Off". --Joe Colly

"Never as Tired as When I'm Waking Up"

From the album *LCD Soundsystem*; 2005

Written by James Murphy

Produced by the DFA

James Murphy: all instruments

After a handful of successful singles, Murphy set out to make sure the first disc of LCD Soundsystem's debut album felt like just that-- an album. "I wanted to make it album-y, meaning different tracks and different track lengths," he told *The Wire*. Nailed perfectly in an old band bio as "gently psychedelic and angelically sung," "Never as Tired as When I'm Waking Up" definitely fits the bill. (Maybe too perfectly: Murphy later realized the songs on *LCD Soundsystem* were overly disparate; "I had been too precious about it," he told *Earplug*.)

"Never as Tired as When I'm Waking Up" originates from a remarkable case of hard luck and, eventually, serendipity. "For about two and a half years I didn't have a home, so I lived in the studio," Murphy told *XLR8R*. "We were working on the *Rapture* record, and I would stay up at night and play the piano in the elevator, 'cause that's where the piano is. You could ride the elevator down to the basement and get lots of echo because it's open-topped or you could ride it up top and it's not that echo-y. I just wrote this song for myself at night; I write songs all the time and don't release them. We had recorded a song called 'Open Up Your Heart' for the *Rapture* LP and we worked really hard on the drum sound, bass sound, and vocal sound, and I was really excited about the way they sounded. So after they left at midnight, I made this song."

After finishing the song, Murphy says he noticed the descending guitar line's striking resemblance to "Dear Prudence", from the Beatles' *White Album*. "I thought it was funny and did a George Harrison guitar solo and then did a Paul McCartney bit-- it was like putting a big X through something that you've drawn," Murphy told *XLR8R*. "I had it on CD for friends, like, 'Here, this is what I made yesterday,' and Tim [Goldsworthy] was kind of insistent; he said it was cowardly not to put it out. I realized it would be a good challenge to see if I could make an album that it fits on, so that became another challenge."

By this point, the fact that an LCD Soundsystem song would bear similarities to another record should not have been

unexpected. “I’m a bit of a Zelig,” Murphy told London’s Guardian in 2004. “I’ve always been a good imitator. I love music. But I’m just not that original.” Nevertheless, it’s still a pleasant surprise that he would borrow from a tune sung by John Lennon, particularly considering Rolling Stone once quoted Murphy-- out of context, to be fair-- as declaring, “John Lennon was an idiot!” In any event, “Never as Tired as When I’m

punk sneer and you have a knowing anthem for the 21st century. But if “Losing My Edge”, “Beat Connection”, and “Yeah” perfected that formula to varying degrees before LCD released their first album proper, “On Repeat”, though plenty appealing on its own, can’t help but pale in comparison a little. The electronic tone through the track is reminiscent of the bouncing synth through “Losing My Edge”, but here the pulse is less



Waking Up” is hardly a straight Beatles rip. Its descending chord progression also hearkens back to “Ten Years Gone”, from Led Zeppelin’s Physical Graffiti. The airily intoned lyrics-- dazed, confused, and horny-- are unsparing in their depiction of a narrator in weary denial about his dying relationship. Here was a man in need of a snooze button. --Marc Hogan

“On Repeat”

From the album LCD Soundsystem;
2005

Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA

“On Repeat” feels like the final version of the sort of track LCD explored in their early singles: spare opening, heavy on repetition, adds one percussive bit after another until it builds to a climax. Throw in some funny lyrics delivered in that half-spoken post-

insistent and a little spacier, allowing the synths and wah-wah guitar to swirl around. It also feels like a final kiss-off to the New York hip that Murphy poked fun at and understood as only as an insider can. “I wish I could complain more about the rich but then/ All their children would line the streets/ Come to every show/ Unwashed and drugged.” --Mark Richardson

“Thrills”

From the album LCD Soundsystem;
2005

Written by James Murphy
Performed by: Tim Goldsworthy, Eric Broucek, Tyler Pope, Nancy Whang, Patrick Mahoney, Mandy Coon

In line with the stripped-back, purposefully crude thrust of “Yeah”, “Thrills” finds Murphy still writing about his complicated relationship with New York nightlife.

Talking to The Onion’s A.V. Club last year, he said the song was as autobiographical as his later, more introspective cuts. “[‘Thrills’ and ‘Yeah’] were songs about my life in the same way that [This Is Happening songs] are, but my life was very different. ‘Thrills’, in a way, was totally about my life-- and that was just dumb because my life was pretty dumb.”

But even if the focus is mostly hedonistic (“I’m on fire because you want me”), the track is a classic example of Murphy’s creative re-appropriation sonically. In an early Pitchfork interview, he made no bones about using late-80s synth-punk band the Normal and hip-hop producer Timbaland as templates. “Really ‘Thrills’ is supposed to feel somewhere between ‘Warm Leatherette’ and ‘Get Ur Freak On,’” Murphy said. “I wrote it right when ‘Get Ur Freak On’ came out and I was obsessed with that song. I loved all the Indian drum breaks. And the part from ‘Thrills’ that’s actually now played by go-go bells totally came from listening to Timbaland and me being like, ‘Oh! I bet if I went over to Timbaland’s house and we were working on a track and I played him ‘Warm Leatherette’ he’d be like, ‘Oh! I remember that track, that track is dope!’”

Touching on what makes this song more valuable than something like Jet’s Iggy-ripping “Are You Gonna Be My Girl?”, Murphy made the distinction between copy and homage. “I don’t feel like what I do is a pose,” he said. A live in-studio version of “Thrills” for XFM Radio was included on 2006’s Intrans and stays fairly close to the original except for an (even more) unhinged vocal and prominent glockenspiel breakdown at the two-minute mark. --Joe Colly



“Disco Infiltrator”

A-side of the DFA single “Disco Infiltrator”; 2005
From the album LCD Soundsystem; 2005

Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA
Mixed by Andy Wallace, the DFA
Mandy Coon: handclaps, backing vocals
Eric Broucek: assistant producer, handclaps, backing vocals

James Murphy is never going to win any televised singing contests. Which is not to say he’s a bad singer. From the beginning, Murphy’s voice has had that rarest and most important quality: character. Despite his occasional knowing appropriation of other singers’ styles, you certainly won’t mistake an LCD Soundsystem track for any other band once the vocals kick in.

Like most great rock frontmen, sometimes he gets around his vocal limitations by making them virtues. Think of all the tracks in the LCD catalog that would be nowhere near the same if you removed Murphy’s half-sung/half-spoken contribution, starting with “Losing My Edge” and moving forward right to 2010’s “Pow Pow”, and replaced it with vocals from a more traditional disco diva. Other times he literally pushes his voice to surprisingly affecting places, a trend that began not-so-coincidentally when he moved away from the arch kiss-offs and began penning more personal songs like “All My Friends” and “Someone Great”, the earnest strain accentuating the songs’ emotional oomph.

And then there are the handful of revved-up and straight-up rock tunes he’s written, perfect for his withering sneer and purposefully sloppy new wave harmonies,

learned early on as an 80s adolescent in love with punk and post-punk. Murphy once described the Fall as one of the “best rock’n’roll bands of all time,” and his early vocals drew as much from Fall frontman Mark E. Smith as early Pavement drew from the Fall’s music. (Which is to say: Quite a lot, but still not as much as everyone claimed at the time.)

“Disco Infiltrator” features plenty of sneer, but it’s less Buzzcocks than Kraftwerk-on-a-budget. Murphy pushes all the snotty vocal tricks he gleaned from punk and post-punk to the limit here. His pronunciations are so over-the-top silly that they don’t sound so much like Murphy’s channeling the vitriolic Smith as much as some perverse, laid-back surfer bro from the Valley, the kind of guy who pronounces “sure” as “show.” Depending on how you feel about such vocal tomfoolery, this is either one of Murphy’s most agreeably rambling performances or one of his most grating. But, along with being blessed with some of the best hand-claps in the LCD discography, the track’s not-quite-comfortable combination of minimal synth-pop and pure rant feels like the end of LCD’s more obvious “punk meets dance” first phase as it makes way for the more adventurous singing (and songwriting) yet to come. --Jess Harvell

“Great Release”

From the album LCD Soundsystem; 2005
Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA

Brian Eno is a name that has to come up often in this inventory. Until This Is Happening, LCD Soundsystem closer “Great Release” was Murphy’s most well-known Eno homage. It still might be the most blatant. Not quite a Xerox of the title track from Here Come the Warm Jets, as some wags have suggested, though it’s awful close. And even if it’s not a complete rip, Murphy was still clearly cherry-picking good ideas from across Eno’s early-70s solo albums: the mournful gray fog of synthesizer murk that almost swallows the tune, the fragile one-or-two-note piano figures Eno took from minimalist composition and bequeathed to pop-rock, the somehow-sad and triumphant keyboards.

As pastiche, it’s pretty damn good-- if you’re gonna go for an epic-but-downcast album closer, you might as swipe one of the best-- if not quite as strange and strangely affecting as Eno’s original remains. But it also suggests why so many early naysayers

had LCD pegged as a band that would be nothing without its record collection. Unlike the less obvious Eno/Bowie-isms of This Is Happening, there’s not much of Murphy here, more a sense of tribute being paid than an influence being recast. Still, released around the same time as those early Eno solo albums were remastered and reissued, the borrowings of “Great Release” don’t seem quite as surprising as they did in 2005, when not too many bands were mining Warm Jets and Tiger Mountain. If Eno’s quartet of not-quite-rock albums once again seem like central strands in modern indie nowadays, it’s thanks in no small part to Murphy’s advocacy. --Jess Harvell



“Jump Into the Fire”

B-side to the DFA 7” “Daft Punk Is Playing at My House”
Written by Harry Nilsson
Produced by Jamie Hart, Nick Fountain
Tyler Pope: bass
Patrick Mahoney: drums
Phil Mossman: guitar, percussion
Nancy Whang: organ, percussion
James Murphy: vocals, percussion

You can tell a lot about a band from their choice of covers. Harry Nilsson might seem like a strange muse for a dance-punk outfit, but James Murphy is an unabashed fan-- he would eventually record his mellow soundtrack for the 2010 film Greenberg while “thinking about Harry Nilsson and things like that,” according to an A.V. Club interview.

“Jump Into the Fire” is probably the only Nilsson number that doesn’t require much modification to fit into the LCD catalog. Most famous now for soundtracking Ray Liotta’s pursuit by DEA helicopter in *Goodfellas*, it’s a hard-charging rocker that finds its groove and then pretty much stays there for the duration, just as Murphy likes it.

The cover was a logical fit for the band on their first major tour in 2004, a way to pad out the setlist before there was a proper LP to support. On this version, recorded in a live session for BBC Radio 1, the band throws itself into the cover with cowbell-fueled urgency, so much so that it actually comes in a minute shorter than the Nilsson original... possibly the only time Murphy was guilty of making a song more time-efficient. While “Jump Into the Fire” was a raw screamer on Harry Nilsson’s spectrum, it’s a downright crooner for early LCD Soundsystem, forcing Murphy to sing more than shout and perhaps tipping the vocal improvements that would start with the following year’s self-titled LP and mature even more later on.

--Rob Mitchum

“Slowdive”

B-side of the DFA single “Disco Infiltrator”; 2005
Written by Siouxsie and the Banshees
Produced by the DFA
Recorded by the DFA, Andy Sarroff, Eric Broucek
Tyler Pope: bass
Patrick Mahoney: drums
Phil Mossman: guitar
Nancy Whang: synthesizer
James Murphy: vocals

If LCD’s later cover of Paperclip People’s “Throw” felt more like a straight homage to a classic tune, their cover of Siouxsie and the Banshees’s 1982 single “Slowdive” demonstrated an ability to re-imagine a song in their own image. It also affirmed that Murphy was a fan of the influential 80s goth-rock outfit-- he has said that Siouxsie and the Banshees’ 1979 album *Join Hands* was one of the first LPs he ever purchased.

Initially recorded by LCD at a radio session for XFM, “Slowdive” appeared first as a B-side to the “Disco Infiltrator” single and was later collected on the *Introns* odds-and-ends set. The gothic clang of the original is mostly left behind, and LCD essentially turn the tune into a Can track as the guitar, bass, and drums lock into a crisp, taut groove reminiscent of Ege Bamyasi’s “One More Night”. But, in contrast to the starkly beautiful rhythm, Murphy’s vocals are

extemporaneous and rough, capturing some of the histrionics of the original. “Slowdive” was a consistent part of LCD’s live set in 2005, often serving as the show closer. Though not a revelatory cover, it does show how well musical ideas and influences from different spheres could meet in a new place and become something that sounded distinctly like LCD Soundsystem. --Mark Richardson



“45:33” (pts. 1-6)

From the DFA 2x12” “45:33”; 2007
Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA, Eric Broucek
Matthew Thornley: technician
Alex Frankel: piano
Jason Disu: trombone
Carter Yasutake: trumpet
Terra Deva: vocals

John Cage’s “4:33” is all about a void of composition and performance creating space for random, ambient sounds. James Murphy’s “45:33” is the exact opposite: a micro-managed, dense, building-size mural of music that leaves nothing to chance. Yet the latter is just as ripe for interpretation as the former, and LCD Soundsystem’s mostly-instrumental iTunes exclusive interlude is still a conversation piece four years later. Was it truly intended as an exercise aid, or was it another veiled tribute record? Was it a corporate money grab (shame on you), or a glimpse at the future of the music industry? Was it a sly teaser for *Sound of Silver* or a writer’s block therapy session that saw wide release? And, above all, where does Murphy’s space-disco symphony ultimately fall in the hierarchy of LCD’s career?

“45:33” was supposedly a big slab of soundtrack meticulously engineered for a jog and released exclusively under the banner of a Nike Internet running club/sportsgear catalog. What’s more, for the

first few months, it was only legitimately available as an iTunes download, one of the first significant pieces of music to be released as a digital exclusive. If it seems pedantic to point out this corporate patronage now, that’s only because things have changed so dramatically in the past four years, and LCD was (for better or worse) ahead of the curve. In 2011, when Converse has built a recording studio in Brooklyn and TV commercials are the new college radio, taking a little bit of shoe company dough to fund a fairly experimental, ambitious piece of music barely raises the needle on the sell-out meter.

Especially if it was all a prank anyway. All that 45-minute run accompaniment junk, with its pseudo-scientific-calibrated tempo changes? “Well I lied,” Murphy told *The Guardian* in 2007. “I’m not built to run. I’m built for fighting, not running away!” But Murphy sells his talents a little bit short. Maybe he’s not on the treadmill very often, but he’s no stranger to the DJ booth, and making people dance isn’t too dissimilar from making them jog-- it’s all aerobics in the end. So when Nike came to him with their rules for the composition-- including seven-minute-long warm-up and cool-down periods-- Murphy’s DJ instincts let him roll with it, giving “45:33” an overall topography that’s equal parts workout and night out.

Or is it even farther away from Nike’s naïve intentions? The primary influence given by Murphy for “45:33” is E2-E4, the influential 1981 album by Manuel Göttsching of Ash Ra Tempel. E2-E4 is a chess-inspired, hour-long instrumental credited with being the transitional species between krautrock and IDM, and it was a long-form exercise that Murphy admits to being obsessed with emulating. “I was mourning that fact that music had changed and you could no longer make a record like that,” he told *The Guardian*, and Nike’s sponsorship gave him the opportunity. But the muse duties of E2-E4 don’t appear to stretched much beyond structure and length-- Göttsching’s epic is much more methodical and uniform than Murphy’s (it’s hard to picture Murphy as a chess player), and not as easily segmented into movements. Likelier source material for the content of “45:33” are the disco edits that fill Murphy’s DJ mixes, repetitions based more in melody than mood.

But “45:33” also marks an important transitional point in LCD Soundsystem’s career arc, a glimpse of the group moving beyond cataloging its influences into making something “real.” Written and recorded in the middle of the sessions for *Sound of Silver*, “45:33” is a diversion that ended

up as a sneak preview of the band's next phase. Most directly, it teased what would be one of Silver's finest moments with a full-length instrumental version of the brilliant "Someone Great", a track that fits as well here as it does as part of the LP's emotional center. But even when Murphy wasn't pre-cycling songs of the future, the distinct sections of "45:33" offered a glimpse of the newfound patience that would fully bloom on Sound of Silver. The space afforded him by a Nike-funded vanity project allowed Murphy to experiment with taking his time; even if it was an unlistenable slump-buster that helped give Sound of Silver its final shape, "45:33" would be worthwhile.

Of course, it's not-- at all. From the laser warm-up of part 1 to the piano-strut and cheeky guilt trips of part 2 to the hilariously literal space-disco-funk and horn section freakouts of part 4 to the heat-shimmer ambient K-hole cosmos of part 6, it never gets old spending three quarters of an hour in James Murphy's head. The flow between these segments is pristine-- so much so that it seems heretical that the eventual CD version was released with track breaks.

Since it requires such a time commitment-- especially in these dying days of albums-- "45:33" has fallen into the background of LCD Soundsystem's story. That's unfair. A composition of this length could easily have grown self-indulgent; a commission for this purpose could easily have become background music; a digital exclusive could have easily been a throwaway. But instead Murphy used the broad canvas to make something unique: a disco DJ set built from scratch instead of from the record box. It's one of LCD Soundsystem's most important statements, hidden inside a Russian-doll series of lies. After all, "45:33" is actually 45:58. --Rob Mitchum

ALL MY FRIENDS

LCD SOUNDSYSTEM

"All My Friends"

A-side of the DFA single "All My Friends"; 2007

From the album Sound of Silver; 2007

Written by James Murphy, Patrick Mahoney, Tyler Pope

Produced by the DFA

When DFA Records started, one of the first pieces of advice James Murphy gave to his star charges, the Rapture, was to "get out of the scene." "I just don't like scenes, it's just like high school-- there's cool kids and not cool kids," Murphy explained. "The way you determine what a cool kid is you look around and see how everybody else feels."

Pretty quickly, however, the circle of artists, DJs, and performers around DFA Records began to be seen as not only a scene but the scene in New York City. DFA became shorthand first for the nascent genre dance-punk, and then for open-minded, open-eared, rhythmic indie music in general. Artists like Janet Jackson and Britney Spears asked about working with Murphy. (In the case of the former, Murphy never returned the calls; with Britney he shared a listening session then she went to dinner and never returned.) In short, despite starting his career with a song about no longer being cool, James Murphy was all of a sudden cool. "The funny thing is, when I most publicly tried to deal with that issue was what made me the coolest," Murphy explained to The Wire in 2005. "Losing My Edge' made me really cool which I think is the funniest, most absurd thing ever. Doesn't anybody get it? Alright, nobody gets it. That's what interviews are for."

"You spend the first five years trying to get with the plan, and the next five years trying to be with your friends again," LCD sing in "All My Friends", outlining a pretty common progression in and out of hipsterdom. As

the twin centerpieces of Sound of Silver, "Someone Great" and "All My Friends" located a side of LCD Soundsystem that people didn't expect. One big shift was that the lyrics to these songs were more nakedly emotional and contemplative; they didn't scan like the surface, in-the-moment lyrics that dotted the band's earliest singles and much of its debut LP.

Another shift was that James Murphy connected melody with emotional nourishment. "All My Friends' woke me up to something else," he told The Quietus. "I didn't realize what emotional impact melody has on people. I always think about lyrics and what they actually mean and then I realized the energy I respond to physically people respond to emotionally."

A tour diary song, "All My Friends" relates the grind and the joy and the toil and turmoil of being on the road, living hard, missing the people at home. (The confessional "to tell the truth, this could be the last time"-- which people will lose their shit over this Saturday at MSG-- hints that Murphy was thinking even then about hanging it up early.) Despite a fairly straightforward and detail-heavy narrative, the song is now barely ever discussed in that context. Its sentiments simply translate into something so much greater and universal to LCD's audience-- the effects of aging, responsibility, domesticity, and even mortality onto a life spent inside and obsessed with what is nominally youth culture.

Laced with humor and pathos, and crafted with a sharp observational eye, "All My Friends" is an oddly paced song, with its patient build soundtracking its more celebratory moments before climaxing over the track's most devastatingly cutting observations-- Murphy and his "face like a dad" throwing his hands up and claiming "I'm finally dead" as he watches the impossibly tanned people younger and better-looking than him. That's inevitable of course-- we all age, we all die-- but we don't always recognize the changes coming. Turning corners, tipping points, sliding doors-- the big moments and changes in life aren't like points in the film where the moral kicks in.

James Murphy retained a measure of control over his most recent personal landmark, of course. He's walking away, retiring his band, but that's an admirable measure of control that we don't always grant ourselves. "Things happen in your life that change things," he told The A.V. Club. "For me, it always feels like I'm coming from the same place, the same way that you always think

you looked the same all the time. Like, if you see a photo of yourself from a couple years earlier, and you're like, 'That's what my hair looked like?' You just imagine in your brain that you looked the same and that your friends look the way they look now when you picture back." --Scott Plagenhoef

"Freak Out/Starry Eyes"

B-side of the DFA single "All My Friends"; 2007

Written by James Murphy

Produced by the DFA, Eric Broucek

James Murphy: performer

Jason Disu: trombone

Carter Yasutake: trumpet

Nancy Whang: vocals

For all of James Murphy's crazy love for Can-- see for example that Future Days shirt he sported so often in the band's early press photos-- most of LCD's sleek disco-derived grooves aren't overtly indebted to the legendary krautrock band's shouldn't-work-but-does combo of neatly groomed James Brown-ian funk and hairy psychedelic jamming. On "Freak Out", one half of the epic B-side to the "All My Friends" single, the band gets closer to the vibe of Can's rhythm section than perhaps anywhere else in LCD's catalog: A heavily syncopated funk pattern that rolls on and on-- more like human beings cooking hot than something coolly programmed-- until hypnosis sets in or limbs give out. There's also plenty of Afrobeat in the song's DNA-- also not a sound one much associates with LCD. But then Fela Kuti and Can were always separated more by geography than intent.

As "Freak Out" ends, the rhythm breaks down a playfully messy "drum solo" and then segues immediately into "Starry Eyes", a cute bit of synth-pop froth that's among the least messy things LCD ever put to tape. Its robo-girl vocal makes it sound like an electroclash re-do, half-a-decade later and a whole lot better. Around 2003, the DFA received a call from Ms. Britney Spears, who was looking to work with Murphy and Tim Goldsworthy. That not-quite-as-bonkers-as-it-seems dalliance fizzled out in the songwriting stage, but, in a way, "Starry Eyes" sounds something like a successful Britney/LCD collaboration. (The sessions weren't totally a bust-- Murphy got to hang onto to Britney's notebooks, though he told The Guardian in 2004 that he was "going to eBay that shit.") Given pop's current infatuation with robo-girl vocal hooks and electro beats, Murphy could conceivably transition to the world of Billboard now that LCD's retiring, if only for a laugh. --Jess Harvell



"North American Scum"

+ "Onanistic Dub" (Remix: Eric Broucek, James Murphy)

A-side of the DFA single "North American Scum"; 2007

From the album Sound of Silver; 2007

Written by James Murphy

James Murphy: drums, vocals, organ, programming, percussion, handclaps, guitar, bass

Tyler Pope: bass

Eric Broucek: handclaps

Marcus Lambkin: handclaps

Nancy Whang: vocals

American pride took a helluva beating in the mid-2000s, whether you were a red-state hawk supporting what turned out to be a groundless invasion of WMD-free Iraq, or a blue-stater aghast at the poisonous effect that the Bush administration's arrogance had on the USA's international image. As such, Americans touring abroad often found themselves in the position of having to answer for a government they didn't vote for, and a culture of superiority they didn't necessarily ascribe to.

"North American Scum" marks James Murphy's first foray into the realms of observational, on-the-road songwriting and political commentary, as it recounts his own experiences with presumptuous Europeans casting judgment upon his citizenry. However, the song isn't necessarily about Murphy proudly embracing his "scum" status in the same manner gay people have transformed "queer" from a slur into a badge of honor; as he explained to Clash last year, its underlying message is that "Americans are [as] insecure and embarrassed" as anyone else.

Fittingly, the sonic terrain laid out here is distinctly European-- the opening organ

drone and tick-tock synthetic beat are obvious nods to Can's Ege Bamyasi track "Spoon", and by the time the song hits its caterwauling chorus, bassist Tyler Pope has locked into the motorik pulse of the Can classic "Mother Sky". (The repeated "North America" refrain, meanwhile, hews closely to that of Buzzcock Pete Shelley's 1981 new-wave nugget "Homosapien".) But, for all its spot-the-reference appropriations, "North American Scum" is a distinctly Murphy creation in its combination of bravado and neuroses. It's a statement of a proud American who refuses to let his country's bad reputation sully his own personal patriotism, but who's also not too conceited to admit that Europe has the U.S. beat hands down when it comes to after-hours party action. Murphy and Eric Broucek's epic, abstract "Scum" overhaul-- aka the cheekily titled "Onanistic Dub"-- jump offs from this thread; aside from a few samples of Nancy Whang's "North America!" holler, the only connection the remix has to its source material is that it's precisely the sort of heady acid-house excursion that you'd hear at one of those parties in Spain or Berlin where they go all night. --Stuart Berman

"Hippie Priest Bum-Out"

B-side of the DFA single "North American Scum"; 2007

Written by James Murphy

Producer: The DFA, Eric Broucek

Given James Murphy's long-standing Fall fixation, the downright Mark E. Smith-like title of "Hippie Priest Bum-Out"-- a seeming mash-up of "Hip Priest" and "Bingo Master's Break Out!"-- might lead you to believe this song would be another outright homage to the Mancunian miscreants, à la "Movement". But this simmering, sinewy instrumental-- which first surfaced as a B-side to "North American Scum"-- is much more beholden to the New York school of early-80s post-punk than the UK version, its percussive clatter and thick disco bassline cribbed straight from the Liquid Liquid playbook. Though somewhat vaporous and inconsequential as a stand-alone track, "Hippie Priest Bum-Out" would be put to much more functional use on Murphy and Pat Mahoney's Fabriclive 36 DJ set, where the song serves as connective tissue between Punkin' Machine's sleek disco-funk obscurity "I Need You Tonight" and a spacious dub of Junior Byron's electro touchstone "Dance to the Music". -- Stuart Berman



“Get Innocuous!”

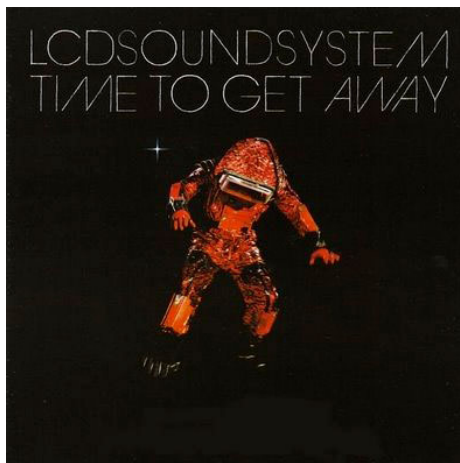
From the album Sound of Silver; 2007
Written by James Murphy, Tyler Pope
Produced by the DFA
Tyler Pope: bass
James Murphy: vocals
Nancy Whang: vocals

Can a band’s second album already be a back-to-basics move? Where LCD’s self-titled LP looked to expand the boundaries laid down by the early singles, Sound of Silver went back to the original blueprint and worked to perfect it. “Get Innocuous!”, both the LP’s opener and the first song written for the album, was built on Murphy’s favorite trick-- call it the “bricklayer method.” Rather than jumping right into the thick of the song, Murphy gives a master class in how to construct a groove, adding each element separately until the full machinery of the song is eventually assembled. Blame the band’s long run times on this need to educate-- the vocals typically don’t come in until minute three or four because Murphy can’t resist the compulsion to show the listener his winning hand like an asshole poker player, one card at a time.

If the methodical build-up of “Get Innocuous!” makes a throwback first impression, the rest of the song previews new tricks. The first sign that something is different is when Murphy finally opens his mouth, and actually... sings? While he had made tentative steps beyond spoken-word rants on the self-titled record, Murphy’s vocals on “Get Innocuous!” immediately suggest a more serious approach to the microphone. A notorious vocal impressionist, he gets a chance to do his Thin White Duke here. Slow and laborious, the vocal part is a mokey grouch trying to resist the urgency building around him,

desperate for attention, even resorting to a sing-songy cheerleader taunt.

It makes sense, then, that this is one of Murphy’s first songs that takes part in the hoary old rock’n’roll tradition of talking about Life On the Road. “It’s about myself trying not to be on tour and trying to go home,” Murphy told The New Gay. “I don’t like it. I like traveling, I like seeing cities, but it’s truly grueling... You arrive in a bus, you wake up, you go inside to try to find a bathroom. You do sound check, do interviews, after that maybe go backstage and do dinner and then it’s time for the opening bands. Then you play.” Fortunately, “Get Innocuous!” is easier to dance to than “Turn the Page”-- at least until it lands in a barbed-wire room of horror-movie strings. But, in the context of Sound of Silver, it’s a more optimistic horoscope that hints at how the LCD Soundsystem formula would pay dividends on the album’s epic two-song centerpiece. --Rob Mitchum



“Time to Get Away”

A-side of the DFA single “Time to Get Away”; 2008
From the album Sound of Silver; 2007
Written by James Murphy, Patrick Mahoney, Tyler Pope
Produced by the DFA

Starting off with a “Billie Jean” beat, “Time to Get Away” furthers the mysterious binaries that pop up often throughout Sound of Silver. Here, Murphy needs to do away with someone who “brought a lot of money.” Maybe he’s talking about that brief rendezvous with the mega-pop world, when he was approached to work with the likes of Britney Spears and Janet Jackson. It’s hard to tell, exactly. But it goes along with Sound of Silver’s themes of opposition, and the

contradictions within the band: rhythm vs. melody, sentimentality vs. passive cool.

It also establishes a moral high ground when Murphy rambles, “I knew you were low, man, but the truth is I was shocked.” Once again, we’re left to guess at his opposition’s offending gesture, but Murphy doesn’t ruffle easy. It takes a lot to break him. He’s mostly a benevolent figure in and out of his songs, a guy who wants to avoid the jerks as much as anyone. He can’t really sing, and, considering the contagious beats that constantly surround him on stage, he never really dances that much up there. He’s no superhero. He has to work for it, and you always want to be on his team. So when he needs to get away, you definitely want to go with him-- even if you’re not exactly sure where or why you’re going. There’s a trust. --Ryan Dombal



“Someone Great”

A-side of the DFA single “Someone Great”; 2007
From the album Sound of Silver; 2007
Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA, Daniel Morrison, Jimmy Robertson
James Murphy: synthesizer, vocals, glockenspiel

When “45:33” first started going around a lot of us wondered, “What is that gorgeous electronic bit that starts bouncing about nine minutes in?” Even in instrumental form, this throbbing slice of electro seemed so rich with feeling, glimmering and gorgeous but also tinged with a darker undercurrent. More than a few people found themselves fast-forwarding to that section just to hear the brilliance of the passage. Could this really be a new LCD Soundsystem song? What on earth will it sound like in its final form?

“Someone Great”, the song that made use of that heavenly instrumental, is a towering highlight in a career with a lot of them. It also seems to appeal to those who don’t necessarily have a lot of time for LCD. Though the repeated refrain-- “when someone great is gone”-- obviously hints at loss, possibly death, one of the keys to its enduring appeal is that it never gives too much away. It’s

he never wishes to explain the song, “I just think it’s unnecessary because it’s personal. Songs are songs and to reduce them is to waste them. If I wanted to make something about something I would write an essay. But even within an essay you want there to be an objectness to it.” In the end, “Someone Great” feels like a kind of alchemy. --Mark Richardson



PHOTO BY WILL DEITZ

cryptic and even a little funny as it spins out lines about how the loss at the center never feels quite the way you’d expect.

But even though the simple melody is affecting and the words manage to convey the ache at the song’s center, the wonder of the production is still something to behold. There’s an oddly organic quality to the song’s bounce, and you never quite get a bead on what instrument might be responsible for a specific sound. There are bells, a bass-heavy synth pulse, drums that sort of gallop along. But it all feels bound and singular and hard to pull apart. Murphy has been loathe to go into the meaning of the song because he wants it to work as what he calls an object, a completed “thing” to be taken whole. As he explained in an interview that appeared on the *Quietus* last year about why

“Us v Them”

From the album *Sound of Silver*; 2007
Written by James Murphy, Pat Mahoney, Tyler Pope

James Murphy: drums, vocals, organ, programming, percussion, claps, guitar, bass

Tyler Pope: bass

Nancy Whang: vocals

Eric Broucek: handclaps

Marcus Lambkin: handclaps

From “Losing My Edge” to “North American Scum”, there’s always been a sense of cultural combativeness in LCD’s music, and with “Us v. Them”, they draw a with-us-or-against-us line in the sand without getting too specific about either side. Chicago critic Jim Derogatis once speculated the song’s titular division referenced Murphy’s defining years as a late 70s/early 80s underground music fanatic (“a time when

real music fans defined themselves-- and the world-- by the sounds they loved the most”, he wrote), which gets close but also misses the point. There’s no time stamp. Murphy’s call-to-arms is too universal-- literally meaning those who get it and those who don’t-- to be so specific.

Sonically, the track is one of LCD’s sturdiest disco numbers, and it’s the tension between those long, climbing verses (which bear a resemblance to Talking Heads’ 1983 track “Slippery People”) and the skyward, Eno-referencing choruses that keep it feeling urgent over eight-plus minutes. With its ability to escalate momentum, it’s no surprise that “Us v. Them” became a live staple for the group (it’s their tenth most-played song according to setlist.fm) and was, for a long stretch, the song they’d open with before launching into “Get Innocuous!” or “Daft Punk Is Playing at My House”. There are three other appearances of “Us v. Them” in the LCD catalog: Two versions on the *A Bunch of Stuff* EP from 2007, one a remix by the dormant San Francisco slow-disco group Windsurf, and a sped-up studio take for KCRW’s “Morning Becomes Eclectic”, and another live performance on 2010’s *London Sessions* LP. Of the three, Windsurf’s “Any Color U Like” revamp is the most transformative, completely scrapping the original for a balmy, 11-minute Balearic take. --Joe Colly

“Watch the Tapes”

From the album *Sound of Silver*; 2007

Written by James Murphy

James Murphy: drums, bass, guitar, handclaps, percussion, vocals, piano, Casio synthesizer

Patrick Mahoney: vocals

Though not as obvious in sentiment as “North American Scum” or “All My Friends”, “Watch the Tapes” is another *Sound of Silver* track that sees James Murphy coming to terms with his new life as a globetrotting performer. But where “Scum” and “Friends” respectively address the life of a traveling musician and the physical/emotional disconnect it effects, “Watch the Tapes” is a sardonic comment on careerism and music-industry machinations, set to a propulsive new-wave thrust pitched somewhere between the tightly coiled robo-rock of “Give It Up”/“Daft Punk” and the manic “Movement” (with the omnipresent Eno influence rearing its head once again on those “awooo” chorus turns). But the song is also a distant cousin to Pavement’s “Cut Your Hair”, as both satirize the pursuit of pop success through instruction-manual

directives. (Stephen Malkmus: “Face right down to the practice room!” Murphy: “Read all the pamphlets and watch the tapes!”) And there’s evidence here that the irony of an indie-rock lifer cashing major-label checks during an industry-wide meltdown is not lost on Murphy, the line “we all claw-claw-claw cli-climb onto sinking ships” a knowing nod to parent company EMI’s well-publicized flagging fortunes. --Stuart Berman

“Sound of Silver”

From the album *Sound of Silver*; 2007
Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA
James Murphy: drums, vocals, bass, kalimba, handclaps, percussion, synthesizer, piano

LCD has always been a project run by a magpie and a maximalist. As the wide range of artists quoted at the end of “Losing My Edge” might suggest, James Murphy has never been happy sticking to one style. “I think most people make referential music at this point, like the Strokes or whomever,” he told *DJ Times* in 2005 about his borrow-whatever-works approach to songwriting versus bands who imitated one particular genre or era. “It’s in a tradition. I don’t want to make music that’s in a tradition sonically. I like people like Todd Rundgren. And that’s why I feel like that’s my place.”

“Sound of Silver” is one of the best showcases for his ability to borrow from various eras and styles without quite quoting directly. It’s also his best riposte to the “minimal” period in dance music that just happened to coincide with LCD’s rise to prominence. Murphy has long been open about his feelings on minimalist producers, happy to ride a beat and nothing but for ten monotonous minutes or more. As he told *Pitchfork* back in 2005, griping about a Kompakt record: “So many [dance] records I put on, I’m like, ‘Hey! OK, you turn stuff up and down and mute shit for seven minutes, go fuck yourself.’”

Instead, “Sound of Silver” blends elements from across the history of dance music into a vast and always-changing new whole. Freestyle drum hits that ping-pong around the mix; a hard-driving snare that splits the difference between Gang of Four and Todd Terry; percolating keyboard blips drawn from Detroit/Berlin techno; cosmic vocal and/or synth swells that bridge “Blue Monday” with krautrock; and quite a bit more. By building the track up on one unexpected sound, rhythmic trick,

and blink-and-you’ll-miss-it melody after another, you get the kind of maximalist epic that can’t be easily slotted into one of dance music’s confining subgenres-- especially minimal-- an approach born from Murphy’s commitment to “making disco edits that just get better and better and better.”

“Sound of Silver” is not instrumental, though, thanks to the oh-so-brief and pointedly poignant lyrics. The song is all chorus, one that gets to the core of the uneasy vibe that permeates the whole LCD project. “Sound of silver talk to me/ Makes you want to feel like a teenager/ Until you remember the feelings of/ A real live emotional teenager/ Then you think again.” In those five lines, delivered in an Eno-as-stentorian-space-alien voice, we find several of the key questions posed by LCD’s existence. If you’re over 30, isn’t it a little emotionally unhealthy to avoid the realities of adulthood by reveling in teenage kicks? And doesn’t that kind of nostalgia for adolescence ignore not only the grownup concerns we should be thinking about but also the actual pain and ickiness that went along with being a teenager? And, if so, is it possible to write hedonistic pop music that both acknowledges the realities and responsibilities of adulthood and doesn’t suck? The answers, on the evidence of the band’s catalog, are yes, yes, and yes. --Jess Harvell

“New York, I Love You But You’re Bringing Me Down”

From the album *Sound of Silver*; 2007
Written by James Murphy, Pat Mahoney, and Tyler Pope
James Murphy: vocals, guitar, synthesizer
Justin Chearno: guitar
David Gold: viola
Amy Kimball: violin
Pat Mahoney: drums, percussion
Lorenza Ponce: violin
Tyler Pope: bass, guitar
Jane Scarpantoni: cello
Morgan Wiley: piano

New York City has always held a particular fascination for Murphy, a small-town kid who grew up about an hour south in Princeton Junction, N.J. Many of his biggest influences left their mark there: from the Velvet Underground and Andy Warhol’s Factory scene in the late 60s, to the disco heyday of Paradise Garage along with the punk and, later, post-punk bands at CBGB’s in the late 70s, to the after-hours eclecticism at Danceteria in the early 80s, and on through to hip-hop’s late-80s “golden age.”

Murphy always feels like he missed the city at its peak, he told *The Guardian*. “During my favorite era of music, I was too young or non-existent,” he said. “When I look at 1968 to 74, watching everything getting turned upside down, and record companies run by weirdos, and genuinely strange music becoming hits...”

More than the music has changed. During the mid-70s, New York City came perilously close to bankruptcy. By the turn of the millennium, the city had transformed into a very different place: safer and wealthier, yes, but lacking the outlaw mystique from those years of cheap rent, rampant crime, and smoldering tenements. CBGB’s became a high-end fashion boutique.

Murphy moved to New York City as a teenager in 1989, so he has enough perspective to appreciate what the city offers while also lamenting what he missed. “New York, I Love You But You’re Bringing Me Down”, then, is a brutally honest love song to the five boroughs, where “the boring collect-- I mean all disrespect” but “please don’t change a thing.” Over cabaret-style piano that builds to a glam-rock guitar crescendo, Murphy lists off his romantic object’s every flaw and then decides, in the manner of tender balladeers from Billy Joel to Bruno Mars, she’s perfect just the way she is. The resemblance to sentimental pop fluff is no accident. “With ‘New York, I Love You,’ I simply wanted to write a love song, but I hate love songs, so I wrote one to the city,” Murphy told *Earplug*.

He elaborated further on his Gotham love affair in an interview with *The Village Voice*. “I think it’s a really diverse, weird country filled with lots of weird people, but New York’s the place where weird people have some actual power,” he said. “And that’s why I love it. It’s the place where you can piss and moan, but you’re never going to hear ‘love it or leave it’ here because being patriotic doesn’t mean being retarded. It’s just an irrelevance. I love New York. I super love New York. It is expensive and it is retarded and filled with assholes, and so’s everywhere else. I just wouldn’t live anyplace else. I don’t see the need to make New York seem like it doesn’t have things which make me want to shoot myself in the fucking face as a way of explaining that I love it. I don’t see the point. I love it. It’s my home.”

As a subversion of a traditional love ballad by a New York artist known for edgier work, “New York, I Love You” can be seen as a descendant of Lou Reed’s “Perfect Day”, a shaky-voiced cabaret-style number that Murphy once called “maybe” his favorite

song of all-time. A couple of years earlier, Murphy said, “It’s kinda soul-crushing in a way to go listen to ‘Perfect Day’ and say, ‘I’m gonna go write a song like that,’ and it’ll be fucking horrible by comparison.” It’s also impossible to escape the legacy of Frank Sinatra’s “New York, New York”, another piano-based cabaret number that looks at the transplant culture of the city that never sleeps. There’s a difference, though: If Murphy couldn’t make it here, he wouldn’t want to make it anywhere else.

Since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in fall 2008, New York City has changed again, as the bubble that fueled some of the past decade’s gentrification finally burst, if only for a few minutes. Other notable songs have gone on to take a critical look at the city, from Julian Casablancas’ alienated 2009 solo cut “Ludlow St.” to Gil Scott-Heron’s harrowing “New York Is Killing Me”. During live performances, LCD Soundsystem has been known to close “New York, I Love You” by quoting Jay-Z and Alicia Keys’ “Empire State of Mind”, a choice that underscores the celebratory intentions beneath Murphy’s deeply ambivalent power ballad. This is a song for anyone who persists in believing a glorious myth despite knowing full well the reality is far more mundane.

As different as “New York, I Love You” is from the album it concludes, it fits in seamlessly alongside “All My Friends” when it comes to its underlying theme. “I’ll tell you the best thing [Allen] Ginsberg did for me,” John Cale, speaking alongside Murphy, told *The Guardian*. “He came over to La Monte [Young]’s when we were rehearsing and I’d been in New York for like three months. I was very green. Very few people could understand what I was saying because I had a really thick Welsh accent. The first thing he said to me was, ‘Have you got any friends?’ And it was just like bam! All the air went out of me. He said, ‘In New York the hardest thing is to find friends. You have to go out and physically hold on to them.’ I remember that.” --Marc Hogan



“No Love Lost”

From the DFA single “All My Friends”; 2007
Written by Bernard Sumner, Ian Curtis,
Peter Hook, Stephen Morris
Produced by the DFA

Considering LCD Soundsystem have spent much of their career living in the intersection between the tangibility and rawness of live playing and the almost limitless freedom of programming and sound manipulation, it makes perfect sense that Joy Division would be among the few bands they actually covered. After the suicide of Joy Division singer Ian Curtis, the remaining members of the ultimate 70s post-punk band turned into the ultimate 80s dance band, New Order, which organically explored the sonic terrain that LCD spent much of their career traversing.

On their 2007 tour, LCD covered Joy Division’s “No Love Lost”, an early song that dated back to that band’s days as Warsaw. The track most overtly tied into the origin of their eventual name, which was the moniker given to Nazi houses of prostitution and sexual slavery as described in the 1955 Kazetnik 135633 novel *The House of Dolls*.

The “No Love Lost” cover was originally slated to be the B-side of the “All My Friends” single, but it was mooted there and relegated to being part of the digital release only. It would eventually surface on vinyl, however, on a split tour 7” with Arcade Fire, sold during the bands’ joint American tour in autumn 2007, and later via each group’s website. (On the A-side, the Quebecois in Arcade Fire took on the French pop classic “Poupée De Cire, Poupée De Son”, a France Gall song penned by Serge Gainsbourg.)

Both live and on record, the LCD track is

played simply as loud, fast rock’n’roll--driven by power and velocity, almost entirely exorcised of the original’s spoken-word segment, a reading from *House of Dolls*. (From that, only the song’s title remains.) The dread and desperation of the Joy Division song is perhaps not surprisingly absent but its patient build is; instead, LCD’s version come across sort of oddly as a shot of adrenaline and directness amidst shows that tended toward longer songs and scenic routes. --Scott Plagenhoef



“Big Ideas”

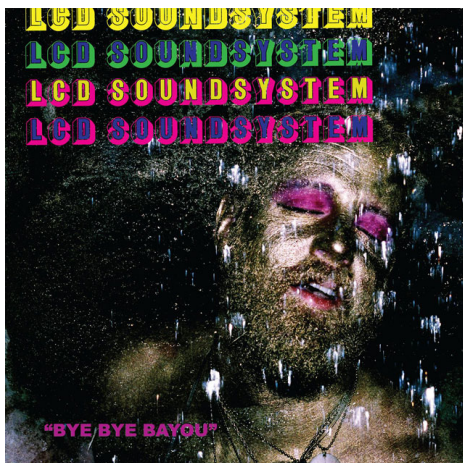
From the DFA single “Big Ideas”; 2008
Written by James Murphy
Produced by David Sardy, James
Murphy

“Big Ideas” was written for 21, a Robert Luketic (*Legally Blonde*, *Monster in Law*) film about the true story of a group of MIT math nerds who practiced counting cards and took Vegas casinos for millions at the blackjack table. (No, we haven’t seen it either.) It’s been pretty well forgotten, but the song has LCD making a close approximation to a straight-up pop/rock song and succeeding.

The song title, soaring chorus, and film subject matter suggest a tale of triumphalism, but the big ideas in question scan more like the ramblings of a drug- or drink-induced mind, fleeting fits of supposed genius that are long forgotten the next day. The track’s long instrumental opening slightly nods to 70s electronic film soundtracks, sounding like chase music, or a sped-up, muscular version of kosmische.

Placing alongside indie hits like “Young Folks” and “Time to Pretend” (and, even more crazily, Broadcast’s “Tender Buttons”) didn’t help get the soundtrack get any attention, however, and it now sits as one

of the more overlooked things in the band's catalog, the sort of track that would appeal to those who aren't necessarily fans. --Scott Plagenhoef



"Bye Bye Bayou"

A-side from the "Bye Bye Bayou" single; 2009

Written by Alan Vega

James Murphy: vocals, synthesizer, recorded by, mixed by, producer
Pat Mahoney: drums, percussion (electronic), vocals
Tyler Pope: electric bass

Recorded in 2009 at the start of the This Is Happening sessions at the rented LCD bunker/recording studio known as The Manshun in L.A., "Bye Bye Bayou" covers the Alan Vega song of the same name from the Suicide singer's self-titled 1980 solo debut. LCD's version, which was released as a 12" single for Record Store Day in 2009, stays true to the vibe of Vega's original-- swampy, haunted-- but smoothes over some of the grittier vocal and percussive edges.

Here, Vega's manic caterwaul becomes a sultry low-register croon, the guitar twang and hollow pitter-patter turn into an undulating synth-and-bass groove, and the original drum punctuation becomes a crisp digital handclap. Murphy's appropriation of Vega's "Brooklyn man stranded in the Bayou" theme can be read as him feeling untethered from New York while recording in L.A., the paranoid feeling of having to produce outside of your home turf. And while his vocal performance and arrangement is spot-on, it's Pat Mahoney's inhuman drumming that ties it all together. Mahoney is also featured on the sleeve's uncharacteristically colorful artwork, shirtless and paint-splattered, fully dialed into his job as time-keeper. --Joe Colly



"Throw"

A-side of the Planet E single "Throw"; 2010

Written by Eich, Me, Son, Sche (Carl Craig)

Produced by James Murphy

One of the tensions driving LCD's music through their history was between the machine pulse of electronics and the imperfection of live playing. Murphy believed that people together making music in a space had a special quality all their own that couldn't be replicated with computers, but, as a committed fan of dance music, he also understood the hypnotic power of the sequencer. As he told Artist Direct in a 2007 interview, "I like a lot of Detroit techno, where it's lots of really short disco loops that really cut quickly. But I also don't like it when it's all just boring loops. If the loop itself is not a focus, then I'd rather play it, because that gives a little more life to it. But if the loop itself is the focus, then sometimes it should be left the way it is. Like listen to 'Throw' by Carl Craig [aka Paperclip People]-- it's obviously a loop and it's really magic as such, and you wouldn't want to have some dude putting some 'feel' into it."

Murphy used "Throw" as an example because LCD had been playing the track live for a couple of years at that point, often segueing into it from "Yeah". The original version of the song, released under Carl Craig's Paperclip People alias, came out in 1994 and eventually went on to become a classic of the second wave of Detroit techno. Sampling the bassline from "Hit and Run", a 1977 single from Loleatta Holloway (RIP), Craig's "Throw" ups the tempo and strikes a bewitching balance between the rubbery groove of disco and the sleekly minimal pulse of techno. The track is all but defined by the hissing hi-hats that tear through

every bar and add a sense of forward motion to the lightly jazzy keys and clanging percussion. LCD's version is looser and less relentless but stays true to the pulse of the original, with the beautifully recorded bass and drums forming the backbone. Released as an iTunes-only bonus track to This Is Happening, "Throw" got a nice nod from its creator when it was released as a vinyl 12" on Craig's Planet E label with a remastered version of the Paperclip People version on the flip. --Mark Richardson



"Oh You (Christmas Blues)"

From the EMI/Parlophone/DFA Greenberg OST; 2010

Written by James Murphy

Performed by LCD Soundsystem

Though the soundtrack for Noah Baumbach's 2010 film Greenberg was produced by James Murphy and features 11 songs by him, "Oh You (Christmas Blues)" is the only one credited to LCD Soundsystem. While the soundtrack is Murphy's least accessible work by some distance, there's no doubt that he captures the bummed-out, existential woes of the film's titular character.

In an interview with Pitchfork's Ryan Dombal last year, Murphy said it wasn't a stretch putting himself in Greenberg's shoes. "I was going to be a comedy writer when I was young and then I was in a band that sucked and broke up. I was just a failed musician that gave up going to college to be in a band that sold no records and was designed to fail, then I wasn't doing anything. So it wasn't that hard to get my head wrapped around being misplaced in L.A. as a New York grump," he said. The song itself, a sad piano stomper that recalls both Harry Nilsson and John Lennon, is one of the noisiest in the LCD catalogue, with scrawling guitar, distortion

left on the bass, and Murphy's high-pitched croon turning to a scream by song's end. Thematically it's pure heartbreak and disillusionment: "I can't forget what you put me through, sometimes I can't believe it's true," goes the refrain. "Oh You (Christmas Blues)" was recorded in Los Angeles during the This Is Happening sessions at Murphy's rented home/studio, the Manshun. --Joe Colly

"Drunk Girls"

A-side of the DFA single "Drunk Girls";
2010

From the album *This Is Happening*;
2010

Written by James Murphy, Pat Mahoney,
Gavin Russom

James Murphy: EMS Polysynthi, EMS
Synthi A, guitar, bass, claps, vocals,
Wurlitzer electric piano, acoustic piano,
tambourine, drums

Gavin Russom: EMS Polysynthi, vocals

Pat Mahoney: vocals

Morgan Wiley: acoustic piano

Any time James Murphy is asked about "Drunk Girls", he blows it off as just a "dumb song," a straightforward rocker recorded to offset the long, serious pillars that hold up *This Is Happening*. But being the album's comic relief didn't prevent it from also being the album's lead single, repeating the diversionary strategy employed by releasing the similarly terse "North American Scum" as *Sound of Silver*'s pre-release promo. Perhaps Murphy simply likes throwing a curveball on the first pitch to toy with people's expectations, or maybe "Drunk Girls" has hidden depths beneath its surface, not unlike its primary subject matter.

"It's a song about funny genders and people being wasted, and people who are drunk trying to relate to each other, which I always find deeply hilarious and predictable-- even in myself. Nothing is more fun to me than two drunk people trying to negotiate some type of romantic involvement. It's always pretty funny to watch," he told NME.

Murphy's humor works best when it's off-the-cuff and ruthless, and the hurried assembly of "Drunk Girls" (recorded back in New York City after *This Is Happening*'s L.A. mansion session was complete) produces one of his best routines. Narrated from his favorite perspective of the guy too old for the party (who's still at the party), Murphy comments on awkward mating rituals with the sympathy-laced teases of someone who isn't too far removed from participating himself. He sides with the female side of



the Battle of the Sexes, praising girls for their patience under bladder pressure, their legal recourses, their popularity, and their strange, inebriated poignancy ("love is an astronaut"). But most of all, it's a love song with the lowest bar for romance possible: "I believe in waking up together."

Musically, it's about as playful as LCD Soundsystem ever get, with a chipper synthesizer blooping along like an arcade game, double-time krautrock refrains, and a distorted bass guitar steering the ship with triumphant sustains and even a solo. It's also one of Murphy's least veiled borrowings, cutting the middle path between "Boys Keep Swinging" and "White Light/White Heat" for its vocal call-and-response. In interviews, Murphy claims he didn't set out to pay homage to either tune, and it's believable-- in the attempt to make a more immediate, less calculated song, he may have just fallen back on the muscle memory of his deepest influences, creating something new out of something familiar.

For one of the brainiest guys in indie rock, turning off that overactive mind and letting reflexes take over can feel pretty good from time to time. --Rob Mitchum

"Dance Yrself Clean"

From the album *This Is Happening*;
2010

Written by James Murphy
Produced by the DFA

Clean hands. Clean dishes. Clean coal. From purging the body of drugs to ridding a troubled relationship of emotional baggage, getting "clean" can have an awful lot of connotations. For LCD Soundsystem, the first track album-buyers would hear after *Sound of Silver* marks, at the very least, a clean break. Following the songs about growing older and losing touch with loved ones that dominated the previous LP, "Dance Yrself Clean" serves as a jarring introduction to a whole new set of themes,

calling on listeners to revel in paranoia and neurosis. That sense of conflict extends to the music, which starts softly before jacking up the volume about three minutes in, sending anyone who had turned up the volume scrambling to dial it back down again. “I wanted to do these romantic songs where you’re sort of blind to what’s going on-- you’re like the ignorant narrator,” Murphy said of the album’s desperate, yearning tone in an A.V. Club interview.

ways, too. The song was absent from the This Is Happening tour until a triumphant appearance in Montclair, N.J. on Sept. 23, 2010. “I made a conscious decision not to play too much of the new stuff in the early part of the tour,” Murphy had said in April at Brooklyn’s Music Hall of Williamsburg, according to Brooklyn Vegan. “I remember being a kid taking the train two hours just to hear ‘This Charming Man’ only to get ‘Panic.’” What’s more, the liner notes

Nancy Whang: yells
Gavin Russom: whippers

For all of their much-lauded human rawness and ability to throw down on stage, many of LCD’s rhythms have been minor masterpieces of the programmer’s art, the sort of in-studio tweaking and layering that all-digital dance music has been built on for years. “One Touch” is so layered with noise that it’s tough to tell if its drums were played or programmed. But if you listen close, you can hear how each element was snapped into place with clockwork precision underneath the surface chaos. As they’re introduced, the track keeps ratcheting up in intensity, until it becomes a seething (but controlled) mass of little rhythmic riffs, a great example of the way LCD has used studio science not to clean things up but to make them burn hotter.

You don’t often think of LCD in relationship to UK bass music, one of the few strands of modern pop to not make its way into the band’s mix. Even in terms of dance music, James Murphy came out of a much different tradition from that which produced dubstep, funky, and the like. His music has very little Jamaica in it, and most of his rhythms have none of UK dance music’s fractured sense of syncopation. But, in a strange way, the feverish density of “One Touch”-- the way all the keyboard blips and synth riffs and shouts and blasts of static and more-syncopated-than-usual drums all become part of that restless rhythm-- recalls the dizzying polyrhythmic detail of producers like Ill Blu. Especially in the context of the more streamlined/motorik rhythms all over This Is Happening, it’s one of LCD’s last great tributes to the power of rhythmic overload. --Jess Harvell



PHOTO BY KATHRYN YU

So, three years after Sound of Silver, where are your friends tonight? Over a simple two-chord vamp with conga drums, scattered percussion, and a chirping keyboard riff, Murphy suggests they might be jerks-- “present company excepted,” of course. Then thick synth tones burst from the speakers, accompanied by live drums, and Murphy’s voice rises to meet them, at one point toughing out probably the longest sung note in the entire LCD discography. Though packed with some of Murphy’s sharpest one-liners, “Dance Yrself Clean” proves a deceptively elusive song, with unexplained mentions of “a string of divorces,” a coldly glowing basement, and deconstructed Marxism. But the overall effect is of a narrator willing himself-- and, almost definitely, an embattled partner-- to party their worries away. “It’s the end of an era, it’s true,” Murphy sings, surely referring to more than the end of this iteration of LCD Soundsystem.

“Dance Yrself Clean” is elusive in other

offer few clues as to who plays what on the album version. A video posted online shows Murphy drumming and hunching in front of a screen, preoccupied with completing This Is Happening. “Making a record for me always brings about a really deep, panicky depression,” he says in the video. “Add the pressure of ‘This has to happen, it has to happen now.’ Except that it’s just a fucking record.” The power of “Dance Yrself Clean” lies in the pessimistically conveyed hope that a “fucking record”-- or at least dancing to it-- can be redemptive. --Marc Hogan

“One Touch”

From the album This Is Happening; 2010

Written by James Murphy, Gavin Russom, Nancy Whang
James Murphy: drums, Yamaha CS 60, Roland TR-606, noise, vocals, claps, glockenspiel, percussion, EML 101, Casio MT-68, Casio CT-410V, guitar

“All I Want”

From the album This Is Happening; 2010

Written by James Murphy
James Murphy: vocals, guitar, bass, acoustic piano, drums, claps, fun machine, EMS VCS3 Putney

“Usually I’m pretty purposeful about my grand theft, like stealing the guitar sound from [Robert] Fripp for ‘All I Want’ and stuff like that,” James Murphy told the A.V. Club last June. This comment is the perfect summation of Murphy’s referential aesthetic. It’s the important thing to remember with LCD: Murphy is not writing and recording this stuff hoping that no one notices where he is borrowing from. He’s not living in fear of being discovered. The borrowing, in cases

like “All I Want”, is a large part of the point. “There’s all this anxiety that people are going to ‘catch’ you,” he told Joe Colly in a Pitchfork interview. “No one wants to get called out for being derivative or something. It’s like, we’re all making rock. No one’s reinventing the wheel over here. If anything, the balance is struck by not worrying too much about it. So I’m spending my energy trying to make a good song rather than spending my energy trying to cover my tracks.”

On “All I Want”, Murphy uses the associations we might have developed with respect to the immortal chugging drone in David Bowie’s “Heroes”, and bends them sideways so that they point somewhere else. So that while “All I Want” borrows liberally from the Bowie track, it has a different feel, a different mood, and different aims. Murphy plays that Fripp-like guitar drone on “All I Want”, along with everything else. But if the recording is a one-man-band effort, the song itself reaches outward. Its maker sometimes seems to regard the sentiments on display as embarrassing, but the inherent risk there ultimately serves as one of the emotional tentpoles of the LCD project. “I can take more chances now,” he told City Life. “I don’t have to be cool anymore. I can be embarrassing.” On “All I Want”, that means owning up to some self-pity and then collapsing into a straightforward expression of need. But if the words hint at a character who seems broken and unsure, the confidence of the music surrounding it creates a perfect sense of balance.

One of the most striking things about “All I Want” when it first hit was an unusual mixing decision that put that guitar drone above the vocals; the instrument seemed to be singing lead while the voice murmured beneath it. A later take on the song for the London Sessions release adjusted the balance and put the guitar back into the mix with the rest of the instrumentation. In that live-in-studio version, the keyboard chug came to the fore and you got an even stronger sense of Murphy’s vulnerability. In both cases, “All I Want” serves as the perfect encapsulation of how obvious influences can be transformed into something personal and new. -- Mark Richardson



“I Can Change”

A-side of the DFA single “I Can Change”; 2010
From the album *This Is Happening*; 2010

Written by James Murphy, Pat Mahoney
James Murphy: Roland TR-808, Roland System 100, Roland SH-101, Korg Poly Ensemble, Yamaha CS 60, blocks, scraper, cowbell, vocals, Simmons, clapper

One of the early pieces of advice James Murphy gave to the Rapture, his star charges in the nascent DFA days, was to lose their emo moments. Years later, James Murphy still seemed dedicated to eradicating faux emotional anguish from the indie world. “I’ve been so obsessed with erasing the fake emotive nature of the rock I see around me-- what we used to joke was called I Feel You Feel music, which is where you just say something vague but with a ton of intensity, so that a big room full of people can just feel like you and they are in sync, and it’s utter garbage,” he told Time Out Chicago.

So it’s not surprising that the few times Murphy has projected naked emotion from behind the mic it scans as real. He isn’t a strong enough singer to gnash and wail, so the weariness or weight in his songs is conveyed by their melodies, or the way his voice cracks and gently pleads. For ballad “I Can Change”, Murphy found the inspiration to put his heart on his sleeve from the synth-pop and indie music of his early teens. “‘I Can Change’... was more about me getting in touch with the music I listened to in eighth and ninth grade, like Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark and the Smiths-- this kind of romantically yearning music that I really loved growing up, and have kind of gotten out of touch with,” Murphy said in an interview with The A.V. Club.

Even for the decidedly non-macho Murphy, his comfort level with the song and the emotions it conveyed led him to almost not include it on *This Is Happening*. “I was like, ‘What’s the worst that’s gonna happen? People think I’m a simpering idiot? Fine,” he told The NME. By the time the song was released, Murphy seemed rightly proud of it. “I tried to do the best job I could with that song. I wanted to make it really beautiful and it’s got a Jimmy Somerville falsetto,” he admitted to The Sun. “It’s music of desperation. Everyone has their full range of emotions unless they’re a sociopath. It’s a desperate song, but I don’t think it’s any more serious or heartfelt than any other.”

An honest account of the struggles and difficulties and needs of a lover, Murphy has never copped to it being autobiographical-- and he and his wife did not split, as was often reported around the song’s release-- but its recording was an emotionally vulnerable moment. “I kicked everyone out so I could do the vocals,” Murphy told Time Out Chicago. “I started pushing it and I kept getting very self-conscious about them. When I finished I was deeply terrified. I had Pat [Mahoney], the drummer, come over and I told him, ‘I’m gonna leave the room. Play this and tell me if I’ve lost my mind.’ I came back and he gave me a hug.”

“I Can Change” is probably the most naked thing Murphy committed to tape. “Someone Great” obviously resonated emotionally, as do “Home” or “All My Friends”. But songs about grief, or the need for human connectivity and belonging in a social setting are less risky than examinations of one-on-one relationships-- particularly active ones. True to “Pow Pow”, “Losing My Edge”, and other “position” songs, Murphy grasps both sides of the picture here, perhaps bested only in this way in recent years by Belle and Sebastian’s “I’m Waking Up to Us”. Unlike that song, which was written at the end of a relationship, “I Can Change” is a rare example of someone articulating the ups and downs of a relationship from both within it and with an understanding of multiple points of view. --Scott Plagenhoef

“You Wanted a Hit”

From the album *This Is Happening*; 2010

Written by James Murphy, Al Doyle
James Murphy: drums, handclaps, guitar, bass, EMS VCS 3 Putney, EMS Polysynthi, EMS Synthi A, Moog Rouge, Synare, Moog CDX, Korg Poly Ensemble, acoustic piano
Al Doyle: guitar, Yamaha CS 60

When James Murphy started LCD Soundsystem, all of his critical vitriol was inside baseball aimed squarely at his own tiny peer group of indie rock. Then a funny thing happened: LCD Soundsystem outgrew in-joke status, then outgrew indie rock itself, matriculating to a sphere of Grammy nominations, Britney Spears collaborations, and major label distribution. Maybe LCD only became a big fish in the music industry ocean because the industry shrunk to a pond as the group was ascendant, but the expectations of that upper-tier remained the same as it ever was. In 2010, a year when Vampire Weekend and Arcade Fire could debut at #1, a genuine “hit” from LCD Soundsystem-- whatever that means today-- was no fantasy, and surely crossed boardroom minds.

In typical James Murphy fashion, “You Wanted a Hit” confronts this unspoken corporate pressure with bluntness, petulance, and humor. It is, wink-nudge, the longest song on the album at over nine minutes. To rub the joke in further, the first three minutes are given over to an ambient synth experiment thinly related to the rest of the song. It’s almost as though Murphy had sat down to craft a hit single and his subconscious led him to the exact opposite conclusion-- the Low instrumentals component of the LP’s broader Berlin-Bowie tribute.

So when the actual core of the song comes in, Murphy sounds almost apologetic with his first line. “You wanted a hit? Well, maybe we don’t do hits?,” he asks with false innocence, knowing the answer. The music, on the other hand, appears to be attempting a (possibly half-hearted) effort at hit-making, built on the premise that the secret to making a radio banger is simplify, simplify, simplify. Co-written with Hot Chip member and occasional live LCD-er Al Doyle, the instrumentation is unusually stripped-down for a Murphy production. Once the synthesizer wash cycle is through, the guitar comes conspicuously front and center, chugging away at a “Jessie’s Girl” rhythm that gets harassed by a noisy anti-solo

halfway through. The drums are relatively naked, the keyboards and cowbells are kept to a minimum, and Murphy’s vocals are played straight-- except for brief flashes of heavy echo that throw the vocals momentarily out of phase like William Hurt bouncing off the walls and fighting his primal urges in *Altered States*.

“I’m not actively trying to not make hits, I’m just making music the best I can,” Murphy told *The NME*. “Whatever it is that makes a hit, I’m not that interested in, I guess... It’d be kind of fun to have one, or maybe it wouldn’t be, maybe it would be a disaster.”



PHOTO BY KATHRYN YU

Does that indecisiveness make “You Wanted a Hit” the closest thing to a suicide note for LCD Soundsystem on what is claimed to be their final album? Maybe. The fact that it’s not the final word on *This Is Happening* suggests that Murphy, typically self-aware, didn’t want to end on the clichéd move of flashing your middle finger at the industry. But it could be part of an explanation for dissolving LCD Inc. at the height of its powers, a confession that the project had reached a ceiling of popularity that it wasn’t equipped to shatter-- or that Murphy didn’t feel a need to surpass. Not wanting to be the music industry’s babies any more, he’s taking his ball and going home. --Rob Mitchum

“Somebody’s Calling Me”

From the album *This Is Happening*; 2010

Written by James Murphy
James Murphy: snaps, Casio MT-68, Wurlitzer Sideman, EMS VCS 3 Putney, bass, acoustic piano, Roland System 100, vocals, Korg Poly Ensemble
Jason Disu: trombone
Matt Thornley: snaps
***This Is Happening* released May 17 in UK and May 18 in U.S.**

“Somebody’s Calling Me” is an anomaly in the LCD oeuvre. For one, you can’t really dance to it. You could slink, maybe. And it’s uncharacteristically sleazy. “Darling, come with me,” sings Murphy, “And I’ll show you the place I sleep.” The track’s narcotic beat and dozed vocal melody owes a great debt to Iggy Pop’s “Nightclubbing” from 1977’s *The Idiot*. As usual, the homage was no accident.

Explaining the origin of the song to *The A.V. Club*, Murphy said, “The original was just the piano and the beat and the singing. And that was it, because I was on Xanax and asleep, and that’s what I did in the middle of the night. But then when I was working on it... I was totally like, ‘Ha ha, this sounds like

'Nightclubbing.' Let's put some crazy synth sounds on it.' Once you find out it sounds like that, you just have to allow yourself to use what you like, or else you're trying to hide it-- and that's usually a way to make a boring song. I'd rather have a song I like that sounds like another song, than a song that I'm hoping nobody notices sounds like another song that I'm not that into."

It's the same strategy he employed throughout LCD's run, so why stop it on the final album's penultimate track? Murphy's blatant pilfering offers a refreshingly modern, Internet-abetted, and open-minded spin on typical ideas of ownership and rip-offs. His record collection is an integral part of his language, and he translates with tactful ease. Talking to Pitchfork about Iggy Pop's "Lust for Life" in 2005, Murphy said, "Part of it is love for the music, part of it is that self-destructive tendency. And that to me is totally interesting." Murphy never fell prey to much of the self-destructive aspects of stardom-- too smart, too self-aware. But, with "Somebody's Calling Me", he dips his foot into the fabled decadence, and comes up with something creepy and unique that also stays in-line with LCD's fluent way with musical ideas. --Ryan Dombal

“Home”

**From the album *This Is Happening*; 2010
Written by James Murphy**

James Murphy: drums, percussion, bass, vocals, handclaps, Sequential Circuits Prophet-600, guitar, Casio MT 400, EMS VCS3 Putney programming
Matthew Cash: EMS VCS3 Putney playing

Based on its title, the last song on the last LCD Soundsystem album sounds like a culmination. But, as is usually the case with this band, it's not so simple. "Home doesn't just mark Murphy's return to his Brooklyn dwelling after years of touring and recording. If anything, it puts the whole notion of "home" into question. Talking to the A.V. Club last year, the singer said, "It's not like, 'I've got to get out of this band. I've got to go home.' This band is home in a lot of ways. It's my closest friends; it's a place where I really feel comfortable and happy." But not totally comfortable and happy. There's tons of ambiguity going on in the song, like when Murphy sings (perhaps to himself), "And this is what you waited for/ But under lights, we're all unsure/ So tell me, what would make you feel better?"

Musically, “Home” is as warm and familiar as your grandparents’ house. There’s the



perky wood-block percussion and the beat that could go on forever without complaint. And it has Murphy adapting to his new sense of home that's somewhere between contentment and ambition. He makes sure to put in some poignant parting words, too. "You might forget the sound of a voice/ Still, you should not forget/ Yeah, don't forget/ The things that we laughed about," he wisely advises.

Of course, we won't soon forget his voice, either. But he knows as well as anyone that it's the moments that matter: the first time you heard "All My Friends" surrounded by friends and sort of lost it; when you listened to "Losing My Edge", chuckled, and then boned up on Can and Modern Lovers; going back to "Someone Great" after a loss. For a guy who once "vowed not to make personal music," "Home" is a sentimental-yet-dignified last call. Murphy gets the last word: "If you're afraid of what you need/ Look around you, you're surrounded/ It won't get any better/ So good night." --Ryan Dombal

“Pow Pow”

**A-side of the DFA Record Store Day
single "Pow Pow"; 2010**

**From the album This Is Happening;
2010**

**Written by James Murphy, Pat Mahoney,
Tyler Pope, Nancy Whang**

James Murphy: guitar, Simmons, omnichord, vocoder, vocals, handclaps, congas, cowbell, Synare

Pat Mahoney: drums

Tyler Pope: bass

Nancy Whang: vocals

Jayson Green: vocals

A lot of indie music these days is about not having a position, not having something to say, not poking your head up and trying to articulate something specific about yourself, or the world, or how you feel. It's almost an epidemic in some circles: Trying or caring is somehow haughty. Simply capturing a vibe or a mood is preferred instead. But that's what marketing does; it's not what music is supposed to do.

This sort of cowardice-- choosing fitting-in over standing out-- isn't something James Murphy takes lightly. LCD Soundsystem never cared for doing things half-ass and using nonchalance as a substitute for really putting yourself out there. "Sloppy as an aesthetic... [is] an indie rock pose that you don't need," Murphy told *The Wire* in 2005. "If your aesthetic relies on things being not good too much, it's going to run out."

LCD Soundsystem never projected anything casually-- least of all effort or aesthetic associations; they pushed thoughts and the strong articulation of them, even if they weren't fully developed. "Instead of writing an op-ed piece, I have a band that's an op-ed piece," Murphy told *Time Out Chicago*. "There's always an element of: This is what I think a band should be. Rather than: This is my vision. I don't fuckin' have a vision. I'm a trench fighter."

Not having a specific vision doesn't mean Murphy lacks perspective, it's just an often messy, malleable perspective. "Pow Pow" was the final song they recorded. The song leaps from perspective to perspective-- "from the position of singing about positions," he told *Clash*-- but it's not just about the necessity of understanding other people's opinions. It's about recognizing that context shifts, and so do your own thoughts.

"Pow Pow" finds the band purposefully coming full circle. Lyrically, it recalls its early singles: rambles of inside jokes, interior monologue, score settling, stream of consciousness. The words don't seem labored over, they flow out of James Murphy like oral histories. "I don't write the vocals until the day they're recorded, ever, because I feel like it would make them false," he told *The Wire* about his early method in 2005. "Pow Pow" has that same feel-- spontaneous, unguarded.

It also recalls "Losing My Edge"'s sense of being on the outside and the inside at the same time-- depending on the fickle shifts of fashion or time-- and how valuable each can seem, especially from where you're currently standing. "The best position song I've ever written is 'Losing My Edge', but if someone asks me what the position is then that's like fucking," Murphy explained to *Clash*. "I make the song because I don't know how else to explain the position. So the position about 'Pow Pow' is about trying to get this oscillation, so it's the last song I wrote for the record and trying to figure out the ways in which I make records and the back and forth of watching the band change."

Knowing it was to be LCD's last song, Murphy came armed with a list of things he wanted to do and say. Among the things he crammed in, the most talked-about were his pride in having a black president and his seemingly random insult to *The Village Voice*'s Michael Musto. Each, however, further crystallizes the thin line between drawing conclusions based on absolutes and fixed positions; they each illustrate how different the same thing can seem in various contexts. "Before Obama won, every time I get off the plane in another country, I get the taxi and they're like: 'Oh! Obama can't win, America's too racist they'd never have a black president,'" he told *Clash*.

"It was kind of amazing that people started treating America like it was a different country all of a sudden. Like before, it was this backward, aggro, Bush country and now it's this forward thinking, liberal country and you're like: It's the same fucking place!... We made t-shirts that said: 'My country has a black president. How about yours?'"

The Michael Musto shout-out stems from James Murphy crashing a *Paper Magazine* Awards stage, Kanye West-style, an act that inspired Musto to call Murphy a "douchebag." In the song, Murphy seems to at least partially agree: An act that seemed funny or clever in the moment-- a tongue-in-cheek reaction to an event he called "super, super-dumb insider crap"-- in "Pow Pow" he calls "ridiculous." (When *The A.V. Club* informed Murphy that Musto has told him to "suck it" in response, Murphy felt his antagonist understood the spirit of the exchange: "He did? I love it! That's perfect. I think he gets it. I hope he gets it.")

From almost the beginning, Murphy claimed he'd hang up his band before reaching 40; he didn't quite make it. "There were times when working on the last song on the record was really emotionally brutal," he told *Clash*. "Like, after my 40th birthday I was working crazy hours and it was making me kind of insane. It wound up being emotionally like, being at a funeral in some sense. I was like, 'This is the end, this is the last time I do this.' I felt like I've gotta go out the way I came in, which is making something that I'm interested in and making it the best I can. Keeping it weird and wonky just seemed to be the best way to do it." --Scott Plagenhoef