

The Armed HOUSE PARTY AND MUSIC VIDEO SHOOT

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August 2 was a hot night in Detroit and on E. Boston Boulevard, a bunch of people moshed at a mansion owned by a young musician named Brian McGuire. The Armed were in town to shoot a music video before setting out on tour with Queens of the Stone Age. I had never heard of The Armed before but what I gathered from researching them briefly before attending this party with a press pass is that they're becoming very popular, they have a very developed aesthetic style and they are from Detroit. People started approaching the house around 8pm. Some had flown in from out of town, some had walked five blocks from their home. A large grandfather clock had been removed from the inside and was placed at the entrance alongside a table where everyone was asked to sign a waiver. There were people pretty much running all over the house with cameras, cords, music equipment and also a bunch of people wearing name tags that said Daniel. It was very difficult to understand what was going on...I spoke to someone who was introduced as Michelangelo, but later told me his name was not Michelangelo, and he also did not help me understand who had what role in this whole production. So, we decided to try and learn about The Armed from the perspective of some super-fans who came to be extras in the film and rage to the hardcore synth-y punk rock music. We asked them the typical interview questions like what year did the band start and why do people like them so much but we ended up getting some really in-depth answers which helped me grasp the complexities of this cultural entity that The Armed has become.

Daniel: *I heard about the band through the internet and friends. I moved up here from Miami, Florida in 2017 and found out about them then. I really love how inclusive The Armed is but also they are getting to a grander stage now. Even though they are about to go on a major tour and are being recognized on a global scale, they seem to always find a way to include their fanbase. We are living it right now all together at this house party in their hometown of Detroit. Literally, I think the first time I saw them was at El Club around 2021 or 2022 and on that day, I talked to someone in the crowd with me who flew in from Alaska just to see them and I laughed because I just drove from Auburn Hills.*

Daniel: *I first heard about the band when they played El Club. My friends were like you need to see this band, it's one of the wildest live shows in Detroit. Last year I saw them play at Pitchfork and seeing a Detroit band play was really cool. It was a mix of people who knew them and people who didn't but the energy was infectious. I had hit up The Armed's Instagram through my band's Instagram to say congrats on the latest release and the manager Tony responded to me and said that he had seen my show last month at Third Man Records. He was super sweet about it and really took time to respond. I got the vibe that they are pretty plugged in terms of connecting directly with their fans and this event represents that. They are throwing a house party on a weekday and just trying to make it cool. They are tuned into their fan base and I respect that about them.*

Daniel: *I really like what The Armed did with the sound with ULTRAPOP, how they tried to make Pop really aggressive and yet they still*



sounded really melodic and really pretty. I love how they're local too, that made a hell of a lot of difference. The band has a great grass-roots thing going. A lot of local love in Detroit, I mean they packed El Club for both the live movie screening and the album release show on the small tour they did to support the last album so yeah, great local scene. I connect with the broader community on the Discord. I tried to do parts of the little puzzle that they did with the website...failed miserably, I am not the best puzzle solver. But I'm on the Discord. Something interesting to know about the band is there is a sorta cult surrounding the band and the cult leader is Dan Greene. He's apparently a real person but there is a lot of mystery surrounding the band that confuses people about who the actual members really are. There were rumors that other people were actually the ringleaders. It's fun how there is such a cult of mystery around it.

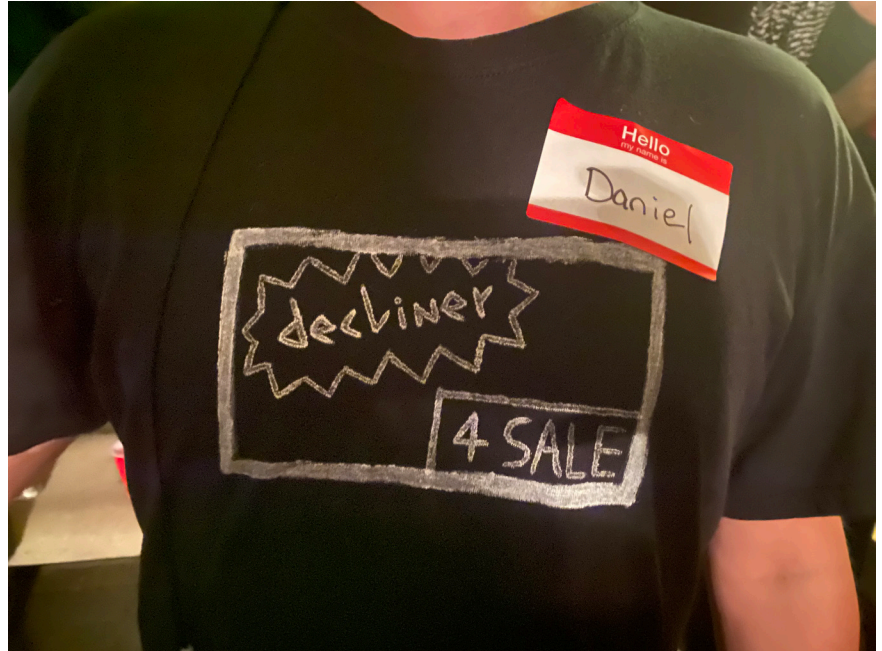
Daniel: I flew in this morning from New York City. I'm here because the Armed is the greatest band of all time. I think people really respond to the diversity of ideas and personnel involved and there's all different kinds of people from all walks of life, like one of the guys that writes for them bags groceries in a Safeway. Another person is an advertising executive. The whole situation just feels very real but then it collides with the worlds of highly influential people like Queens of the Stone Age or the writer from the New York Times who is also here tonight.

Daniel: They engender a really passionate fan base who really responds to their ethos, which is all about believing in yourself and not giving a fuck about what other people think and creating art the way that you want with no



boundaries or no creative limits. Everything they do feels like an art project and there's this collective network of people contributing to this art project. Everyone gets asked to do weird shit all the time. The thing about the Armed's move to the next commercial level is all about the aesthetics of Pop. The manager draws from all sorts of different influences and now this is another part of the Armed's personality that is being showcased. Some people in the collective have more say and put more of their personalities into it at different times. The band is constantly growing and changing based on these inputs. This project can belong to people in a lot of different ways. I know things about the Armed that other band members don't know. There's other stuff that people in the Armed have done that other members don't know. Everyone is having different individual experiences within it.

Daniel: The fan participation is a part of the project but it's also a separate entity that's kind of within their own control. How the fans choose to use it is their decision. There's the art that's put out by the mothership and then there's the reaction. I think The Armed is moving towards a system that is sort of like a company. The fitness aesthetic is also going to be dialed back a bit. The superhuman stuff became an obsession of a couple of people that then turned into a core manifesto of the ULTRAPOP album but I think it's also an empowerment thing. We are normal people who changed our bodies into Marvel's superhero bodies. You can do the same. The superhuman body thing can be amplified in any direction. It could be a career change, for instance, take that you're applying to law school and ULTRAPOP the shit out of your application. They maximize and build themselves up in unpredictable and exciting ways.



Daniel: *I think they started in 2009. These Are Lights was their first release and then they put out Common Enemies which was a four song EP. Then they did a few others and released another EP after that. Their first official long play was Untitled, which had a math-core slightly grimy escape plan kinda vibe to it and then the next album was Only Love, and that one had more of a synthy, poppy vibe to it which was kinda a departure from their math-core Untitled vibe. In 2021, they put out ULTRAPOP. That's the album that really got me into them. That one was another iteration on their poppier/ synth-core driven hardcore stuff. Also, the entire time up until ULTRAPOP, they were pretty much anonymous. You could kinda figure out who was in the band if you knew them, but up until ULTRAPOP, nobody really knew what anybody even looked like. They had rotating singers, rotating on-stage members. They wanted to separate the art itself from who made the art. They felt like that shouldn't really matter and the art should be able to stand on its own. They wanted to create an environment where everybody contributed but nobody felt like they needed a spot. They tried to keep the ego out of it by not having anybody credited. Then ULTRAPOP came out and then they did a music video showing the bands face for the first time and they were all jacked. They decided if they were going to reveal who they are that they wanted to look really muscular and fit. If you watch the All Futures video, basically everyone in that video is looking really good. They turned that into a PR bit where they went into detail about getting jacked and their workout routine and their meal plans. They got a physical trainer who is also a nutritionist to make a system for them. It really inspired me to start working out, I actually signed up for a physical trainer because of it.*



Daniel: *They are a super mysterious band. Even if you ask questions, I am sure most of the answers you get will be fictional in some way or another. For instance, one of the band members at the beginning, Tony, used to tell people his name was Adam Vallely because Adam Vallely is some British dude who is a fan of The Armed in the UK. Adam Vallely did not know that Tony was going to steal his name so everyone was like “fuck Adam Vallely” but he’s just this British dude. Randal, another guy who used to be in the band at least since Common Enemies II, said his name was Johnny Randall and the main person behind all this mysterious name stuff is Dan Greene. There is a member of the Armed named Trevor, and he plays Dan Greene in all of their music videos and photoshoots and stuff. The real Dan Greene is on the cover of the Untitled Album. Dan Greene became this sort of cult icon for the band. They say he writes all their music and gives them advice on what to do all the time. He kinda became the central figure. One of the things they did was they put out a book called The Book of Daniel in an attempt to make a commentary on how everyone treats everything like religion now and Dan Greene is also a god.*

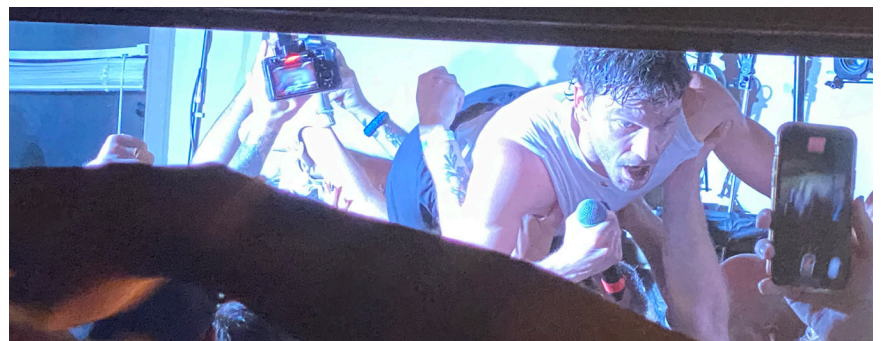
Daniel: *They have this cult-y looking website. If you go on the site you can join the Discord. They also have puzzles on the website. The one they did for Christmas was a chopped up letter and a chopped up picture. When we solved it, we thought that the picture had the name of all of the singles they were going to release for Everything is Glitter and Liar 2, which I’m pretty sure this music video will be for that song.*



Liar was one of their songs off of Common Enemies. Then in June, they started another website called Vatican Under Construction, which had anagrams of all the song names that they released slowly over time. They released three at first, then a couple here and a couple there and each had a puzzle, which acted like another teaser for the album. Finally one of the puzzles told us about this show and so that was sorta like our secret until they announced it on Instagram. They really get the fans super invested through all of this. I feel like they're genuinely doing something new and fresh and authentic and they want everyone to feel like they're part of the band too. We are literally at the house of one of the band members right now, Brian. He plays guitar in the band sometimes.



Daniel: I love The Armed, they're my favorite band, but in a way, they feel more like an art collective than a band to me, because their visual stuff is all very cohesive. They have an advertising company. Tony owns an advertising company so all their visual stuff is very in-sync with their music stuff and their merch too. Everything is very on-brand, and it feels really easy to trust what they're doing because they're so consistent with the logic, like everything they do makes sense within the context of themselves. I never feel like they're going to pull the wool over my eyes. One big controversy recently though, was that they were using AI art for their new album and that made some people fucking pissed because AI is a super hot topic right now, but their message behind it was that AI art has gotten to a point where you don't even need to have real moments or you don't even need to have a real person try to convey that moment, you can get an algorithm to do that for you.



*That's where we're at now as far as authenticity. I can totally understand people not liking the art and thinking it looks bad, but you can't say it doesn't fit with The Armed's whole ethos, right? For instance, one of the things The Armed has done is art appropriation. The first long-play, *Untitled*, had Dan Greene wearing Bowie's *Aladdin Sane* makeup and he's just smoking a cigarette looking sad. Um, the *ULTRAPOP* cover is supposed to look like a generic Spotify playlist, and that was sort of a commentary on the commodification of music. For the music video *Polarizer*, Randall, who is an editor, took a bunch of popular music videos at the time and edited them all together to make the music video for *Polarizer*, so art appropriation has always been a huge part of their thing. They even have a line in *All Futures* that goes "taboo appropriation just because we wanted to..."*



Around 10pm, The Armed came on after an opening act by Mango Star to film a music video for one of the songs they played live that evening. They crammed themselves inside the bay windows at the front of the living room. Amps were stacked in front of a stone fireplace, photo and video equipment staged on the mantle. Box fans were placed in every window, stressing themselves to flush the moisture and heat from the home. Once the band started, the crowd of neighbors, out of towners, and various members of The Armed's collective crowded into the front living room of the house to watch the show. People who didn't fit inside the room perched on the railings in the grand staircase adjacent to the room and collected in front of the windows on the front porch trying to get a view.

During the show their main vocalist Cara Drolshagen kept getting lifted up by the crowd, passed around, and smashed into the wooden coffered beams on the living room ceiling. Halfway through the show they had already blown two of the house's circuits. Mics kept dropping and had to be swapped out. The sound guy managed the show from the dining room next to a large wire shelving system stocked with various canned and dry goods. Troy Van Leeuwen from QSA joined them for a few songs, squeezed into a small corner in the bay next to Patrick Shiroishi on synth. @cloudsolid, a tattoo artist who lives in the home, set up a table in a side room and was tattooing fans with The Armed's ⓧ icon until late into the night.

As people began dispersing at the end of the show and others were packing up the equipment, the behemoth Randall Lee Kupfer yelled out "treat it like it's your house!" Neighbors, fans of the band, and remaining stragglers grabbed cans, cups, and debris on their way out, leaving the large home vacant and spent from chaos.



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