

***In the dark times,  
Will there be singing?  
Yes, there will be singing,  
About the dark times. (Bertolt Brecht)***

***We won't be led to slaughter.  
This is self-genocide.  
It's the hand of the people that's getting tenses now,  
And when we rise up... (Algiers)***

This is the musical response that dark times demand, one that not only shakes its fist but deploys it. Locally-informed global citizens, Algiers refuse to sit idly by while most contemporary artists appear perfectly content to sit out the revolution. Not only do Algiers harbor a purposeful sense of obligation in what they do on their latest resistance record *The Underside Of Power*, but they recognize the roots and thorns of precedent in said resistance.

“This album was recorded in a political environment that collapses the late 70s economic crisis and the looming onslaught of arch-conservative neoliberalism, via Thatcher and Reagan, into the late 1930s, a world riven by fascist nationalism and white power fantasies in the US and abroad,” says bassist Ryan Mahan. Their shared experiences and collective understanding of this rising tide of sinister politics compels them to make music together, to combat the potentially crippling waves of frustration and despair to let out a soulful roar, a call-to-action set to an eclectic, positively electric beat.

The inclination to do otherwise is one worth fighting. Take Algiers frontman Franklin James Fisher, for example. Writing incendiary and even beautiful lyrics from inside a Manhattan nightclub's coat check room, enduring the same damn songs thumping away nightly in the next room for the pleasures of a predominantly white audience, he tends to see the bigger picture as well as its pointillistic details.

“This nightclub is every nightclub in the world, basically. Whatever is being played there, whatever is happening there is happening everywhere else in the world,” he says. “It's as if the entire history of music is boiled down to these fifteen artists--and I use the term loosely,” he says with an exasperated, dismissive sneer. With the world burning outside, a generation's obliviously privileged dances to a carbon copied soundtrack.

It speaks volumes that a black man in America with an expensive Master's degree--and all its overwhelming personal debt--finds himself picking up shifts at such a place that literally manifests the culture industry's exploitation and commodification of black experience. An aptly unjust fate, Fisher is confined to an enclosed space while others move their feet freely mere steps away from him. “You have to find ways of getting through it without completely losing your mind. Luckily I'm able to escape inside my own head.”

Fortunately, the multiracial quartet Algiers provides more than mere distraction, but rather a revelatory creative release and wholesale rejection of the globally normative corporate playlist culture. Poke at the seasoned members' bruised flesh, and out come wafting touchpoints as disparate and intriguing as Big Black, Wendy Carlos, John Carpenter, Cybotron, The Four Tops, Portishead, Public Image Limited, Steve Reich, and Nina Simone, to name but a few. Deep echoes of Black Lives Matter and its 20th century forbears gather, surge, and subside in their often soulful work, a form of principled, acute dissent more interested in learning from the past than in evoking nostalgia.

The variety of locales in which the band recorded the genre-resistant *The Underside Of Power* echoes their present state of diaspora, as a multinational musical cabal with no more than two members living in the same city simultaneously. The group's virtual homelessness exposes them, collectively and individually, to the codified injustices of creeping fascism, the compounding plain-sight provocations of Britain's xenophobia and Trump's America.

"Brexit and the US election taking place at the beginning and towards the end of the process definitely shaped it for better or for worse," says guitarist Lee Tesche.

And while many artists seem uninterested or even afraid to fully engage with these potent topics in song, Algiers has zero qualms about taking a direct approach. "We're fortunate enough now where we're able to openly talk about racist, violent police and murderous state structures," says Mahan. "When we were growing up in the South, these critiques of class and race oppression were largely and sometimes violently suppressed. It's why we take inspiration from the Panthers or the Chicano movement, to name two."

Furthermore, the lack of a singular geographic base of operations only seems to creatively embolden Algiers, who've adapted in brave new ways musically. "Being separate and still wanting to write forced us to really get to grips with modern technology, to bend it to our will," says Mahan. That doesn't mean geography is not important to Algiers. As the band's very name more than implies, they are inspired by the Algerian city at the center of a struggle to overthrow its occupiers, a symbol of dignity and resistance to oppressed people everywhere.

Adding to this Casbah rocking mix of ideas is the relatively recent inclusion of drummer Matt Tong, formerly of Bloc Party. Joining the group for the touring cycle following their prior album, he'd spent time gelling with the original trio as a core component of their simply ferocious live sets to understand and help shape the dynamic. "I was very conscious of being the new guy, working out how to augment the emerging compositions without distracting from them," he says. For a band that seems to revel and thrive in flux, Tong's substantial role in the making of *The Underside Of Power* worked out well. "For me, what it is to work as a musician has changed drastically since I first started out and Algiers has shown me that there is still so much to master."

Beyond the technical necessities living their respective lives both in and outside of music,

Algiers' continued deviation from a more traditional band approach created a more versatile sound, one that better incorporates a collective and respective panoply of influences and styles. "We were determined to push our sound even further than before--weirder, gentler, catchier, noisier, groovier--and had hope that we could somehow translate our live energy to record," says Tesche.

Some of this is informed by their choice of collaborators in this process, a crew that includes Adrian Utley [Portishead], Ben Greenberg [Uniform, The Men], Randall Dunn [Sunn 0))), among others. Pick any track off *The Underside of Power* and the reference points expand exponentially, a dizzying and thrilling *Recommended-If-You-Like* list that would consume a series of afternoons.

Featuring a fully-sanctioned sample of slain Black Panther Fred Hampton, the revolutionary "Walk Like A Panther" presents an alternate reality where Adrian Sherwood produced *Yeezus* instead of Rick Rubin, with Fisher bellowing justifiable threats over a storm of formidable sonics. "Death March" fuses post-punk primacy to the Italo-horror tradition, in an effort to mirror a looming and perpetual sense of modern dread. Elsewhere, the raucous "Cleveland" turns into a full-on demonstration, with names of victims of institutionally sanctioned racial violence like Sandra Bland and Tamir Rice invoked over a neck-snapping electro beat.

The dangerously poppy title track finds a glorious midpoint between Suicide and The Temptations, making for the catchiest expression of outrage this side of the '70s. A molotov cocktail of a single, that particular song represents a potential paradox for Algiers, the maintaining of a renegade righteousness in the midst of a peppy soul tune. "It's more important than ever in this particular time, but it's something we've never shied away from," says Tesche.

The band doesn't concern themselves with that risk. "No matter what your messaging is, you can't control what people will or won't take away from it," says Mahan. "The only thing you can do is put stuff of substance out there."