



SUNSETTERS
RAILROAD TO METROPOLIS

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A Sunsetters EP by Blind Man's Book

(Lindsay Taylor and Jordan Dooling)

(Art by RealChao)

Railroad to Metropolis is an EP. That means it is a release of music that is not long enough, or at least not considered *prominent* enough, to sustain a full album (an LP). In this case, it just wasn't long enough. This release contains just one song in it, at just under 20 minutes in length. We could have placed the song on an actual album; lord knows we need to fill out a lot of material. However, Railroad has been in the plans since at least 2016, including releasing it in this manner: as a standalone song.

As is usual with **Sunsetters** records, there are two concepts going on here. Inside the composition, the music tells the story of poor Sienna, filled with despondency and wanderlust, getting on a train she's never seen before towards a city she shouldn't visit. Outside the composition, this song is the work of five fictional musicians in a fictional rock band (Sunsetters!). This is a piece that they had first began to write sometime after the release of their **first full album**, and they developed it during but had no space for it on their **second** and **third** albums, electing to publish it as a standalone EP. (That's hardly unheard of in real life, and in particular this plan was inspired by Dream Theater, whose *A Change of Seasons* went the exact same way.) Incidentally, Railroad is also the final release featuring (fictional) Remy Larson on rhythm guitar before his passing, making this the end of a sort of "Classic Era" of Sunsetters music.

Out here in the real world, where "Railroad to Metropolis" is in fact a piece of computer music that we made, we made this thing– like all Sunsetters music– in **MuseScore**, which is free software available on the internet. You make sheet music and then MIDI noises come out. Specifically, version 3.2.3 was used, as neither of us has quite figured out version 4 yet (and, I don't want to bore you with the full technical reasons). This means that full sheet notation exists for this, and it comes in at nearly 500 measures. (Think that's impressive? Over on *Summer Sucks*, a single song took up over 900 measures! Haha!) We like to make big songs. This is because of the types of music that we like to listen to. It is also because Jordan likes to push himself and gets carried away when editing.

Now, uh, usually in these booklets, we will have a separate page for each song and give commentary as such, but there's only one song here and a lot of movements. So let's try a different approach, just talking extensively about the making of the song, in a style of ramble that Jordan hasn't otherwise done for Sunsetters before. Let's go back to the very beginning, even!

RAILROAD TO “RAILROAD”

(Jordan’s ramble)

The song came into form in staggered bursts of creative energy. First, there was nothing more than the name “Railroad to Metropolis” and a full set of early lyrics I’d written (maybe a full 10 years ago), which promised a long and fairly repetitive folksy song that would turn dark and heavy towards the end. I think we envisioned this song as being, like, 12 minutes at most at the time.

Next, Lindsay wrote some early form of the start of the song (consisting of: an elaborate acoustic guitar intro, which eventually became the basis for “Arrival;” a dramatic marching intro, which received nothing more than basic polish and became “Departure;” and a punchy trichord guitar riff, which formed the basis for “Headed Somewhere Very Fast”). I did my usual thing of listening to these compositions sporadically over a long period of time, then during the *Summer Sucks* days tried doing some edits of my own (what I did to the intro is a crime to the ears; what I did to the marching intro was basic; what I did to the trichord section was make it a little cute actually; and then I added a heavy reprisal to the intro that sounds far more in line with the heavier sections on *We Excavate*). Then years passed again without incident or evolution, and we focused instead on our albums. At some point Lindsay wrote a completely original three minutes of bass guitar for the song, which I either completely forgot about or decided against expanding into the song proper.

It wasn’t until, I think, when we were working on *No Entry* that we picked up the song again. I had, at some point during the last several years, written a piece that had a flow to it (filename “goddamn b major”) yet had never figured out what to do with it. I considered putting it in *No Entry* under the name “Eyes on the TV,” and Lindsay made some important additions exploring a slow feel. Instead of putting it on that album, the whole piece ended up in *Railroad* under the names “Sienna Goodnight” and “City of Towers,” and the flow didn’t change a bit.

Lindsay wrote one more attempt at a different kind of “Railroad,” consolidating highlights from “Eyes on the TV” with other scraps of mine that have yet to become anything. I found the file for that just now and feel like I just stared into a mirror into another world. (One of these days, I would like to find an appropriate context for releasing some of our more interesting scraps and beta versions, and maybe this could end up there too.) While most of that attempt was not used, the very beginning featured Lindsay’s own composition for a gentle introductory drums over a soft slow alternate rendition of “Eyes on the TV.” This was, I had completely forgotten until finding this again, the root of the final *Railroad*’s first

movement, “Shining Sunset Sienna.” And that was the spark for me, when I would inevitably take another stab at the project.

So one day, after years of a strange flux of fragments and originality, I started a new Railroad score from scratch, relying on only a few of these ideas as the basis. Fundamentally this was “Eyes on the TV” and Lindsay’s march. I just grafted section after section, listening back to how it flowed after literally every edit, asking my inner Consumer what my Ear was Expecting– this was how our albums had taught me to work: patiently, and vigorously. By this point, the song consisted of movements 1 - 5, 7 and 8. Movements 4 and 5 were new to this version, and at core they were the Fast Part of “Eyes” (see: movement 8) but slowed down until distinct. Movement 4 was surprisingly close to final, though movement 5 was noisy and just didn’t feel right. Then the back end of the song was untouched. And this is how the song was left, *again*, for like two years, in a vivid but incomplete state which I would continue to listen back over periodically. Tried to port it into MuseScore 4 one time. Tried to add mellotron to it one time. Neither attempt panned out.

So then one day *again*, maybe a week ago, a week and a half, I didn’t even have a creative fire at first, I just opened up the score in MuseScore 3, on a whim, Dream Theater’s newest song (“Night Terror”) the general musical subject on my mind (Lindsay and I both have Opinions on it, and I guess talking over my musical opinions gets some gears turning), and I tried a thing! That very very first Railroad that Lindsay had written, it had the acoustic guitar intro. Lindsay had just mentioned to me the other day that they thought we were surprisingly capable at writing “pretty” music. I wanted to try “pretty” music again. I took that Very First Version’s Acoustic Intro, I chopped it around a little (delicately, I promise), I placed it in The Big New Score in between movements 5 and 7, I kept listening to it, I started to *feel* something, some *anticipation*, I was on the edge of my seat, it needed to play a second time but this time with new harmonies and a melody over the top– I *wrote* a melody, I listened again, it needed to play a *third* time but this time realizing those harmonies floating on their own on electric guitar, I gave it a shot, wasn’t sure it’d work, oh it *really worked*, it knocked me back, it spiraled down to a stop, I let it go silent for a full measure, now it needed a *drop*, so onward it played a *fourth* time but this time with drum and bass– but what pattern? oh, if I repurpose the drums from movement 3 and let them expand at this slower tempo it feels like a *staggered and steady* drum beat, oh I can *feel* where this is *going*, the bass has gotta do *this*, the keyboard needs to *sing* a discordant climax, this piece feels like *anguish*, this feels like *strained change*, a *transformation!* And it climaxes, and the drums gently close, and synth takes over entirely and brings us back into “Eyes on the TV’s” B Major, and Lindsay’s long drawn-out synth leads the listener on, this feels like the *end* of something, or only a transition, this feels like... Oh, man! Where did *that* come from?! In just three hours, that entire musical passage came to be, and it said all that it needed to say!

That was how the final creative fire was born. With Lindsay's approval of the new section (and what it did with their old material), I realized the song was now 17 minutes and *finally* taking a complete form. I knew, if I hunkered down, I could finish the whole thing. It wouldn't happen instantly, or necessarily easily, but there was a finish line now.

It took me at least ten hours a day, for five days straight.

But that's the creative fire for you, because I didn't care. If I wasn't working on this thing, no one else would get to *hear* it.

Now I've gone in enough detail about the chronological order of the thing. I can summarize those final five days much more concisely:

- The Finale came quickly.
- Movement 5 took a few tries, ultimately benefiting from fewer simultaneous melodies and a light swing rhythm to the chorus.
- Movement 7 needed rhythm and melody. Movement 8 just needed a personalized drumline.
- The entire song needed vocal lines throughout. This took an entire day and many attempts.
- All those vocals needed lyrics. This took an entire day and a half.

Speaking of the lyrics, the concept for the song is fundamentally unchanged from the very first thought ten years ago: the narrator, from a small town, takes the railroad to the strange new city, where the creepy robots kill. That's because this song exists to represent the Manufactured Newborn, a monster from the Fear Mythos. That's possibly the glue that gave this idea such lasting power to withstand a decade of experiment and development: the Fear Mythos is a smart springboard for concepts. A full ramble on that subject must wait for some other context. Just, yeah, this is a Fear song.

Railroad is a simple story, really. I didn't want to add much complexity to it. The narrator has little choice, as it's a railroad, a straight line. The decision to board the train in the first place is probably the deepest it gets, and for that section I took influence from the works of H. P. Lovecraft and from Moby Dick. It's this strange inevitability, given to us in an omniscient if veiled hindsight. It's the vibes of a gothic kind of horror. I mean, probably; I hope that landed.

Also, if you're wondering if this song has anything to do with Dream Theater's *Metropolis*, like maybe we took some influence from it? Nah, not really. I know I for one am not a huge fan of that album, and if I took influence from anything eponymous, it was Fritz Lang's old film *Metropolis*, large and ambitious and *unrelentingly* symbolic. Wild thing. I recommend it if you're in the mood for, like, a three-hour silent movie.

This time around, I elected to put an actual real instrument into our midi song: a human voice. Ever since our first album *Mythology*, we've planned some cool spoken-word sections for our songs, but I wanted the final releases to just be midi sounds, so the vocals have all been.. not.. spoken. Melodic, instead! Which midi is very good at. But over the years I have been able to dabble with putting a voice over music, and I thought this time the Sunsetters were ready to get that treatment too. The section in particular is a straightforward narrative, a little mode shift into prose, and I recruited the talents of tumblr friend / Florida pen-pal paperchamomiles. They've been a reliable supporter of my work in my adult life, as I like to think I've been of theirs, and I knew they liked to do voice readings of text; I thought their voice was great for playing the part of Sienna. I'm grateful to them. What did *you* think? Did it heighten the experience to suddenly hear an actual human voice in the middle of this midi narrative? Earnest question! (Was the robot voice awful? That was me. That was my fault.)

Does the story *mean* anything? Probably! I've come up with some interpretations (the push-and-pull between My Life As Real-World Jordan and My Work As DJay, building towers so that I may touch God). At the end of the day it's a functional piece, meant to thrill and excite. The plot may mean more to the fictional characters who "wrote" it than it does to me personally. The existence of the song itself, *that* means things to me. Here is a song that I needed to see exist, perhaps because I felt this combination of features was *lacking* from existing music. Or perhaps because I wanted another chance to try to write as compelling a 20-minute song as I could, almost entirely out of MIDI, and believed I could do it better this time. Or perhaps it's just the canonical end of the early era of the Sunsetters, and I wanted to handle that properly! Or perhaps I just really badly needed to *finish* this very old project. Okay, so it's all these things. My ultimate goal is to make my friends excited, especially Lindsay, as thanks for sticking with me; give everyone a little file to download onto their computers and organize accordingly; fill everyone's heads with *wonder*!

The final ingredient I have yet to mention is the visual art of RealaChao. She has regularly welcomed the music I'd send over, and she has contributed thoughtful art for my other projects; I'd always wanted to pair her art with a Sunsetters project. One day, while looking over her neocities website, I found a certain image in [her Abstract Art section](#) and was struck by its verticality, its use of flowing sharp shapes, and its imposing distant tower. This resonated with me. So I talked with Reala, asking about the image and proposing to pair it with Railroad to Metropolis, and she gave the OK and even helped me with some design considerations for transforming it into square album art! This may be the first time a Sunsetters release has featured art not originally made for it, but that distinction has little relevance, and I can point to plenty of real-world examples of bands Finding a work of art that they repurpose for an album cover. Reala makes good art. Reala has a cozy website. You should check her stuff out sometime.

Well, I think that's it! I've talked in considerable detail about aspects of this release that I generally did not give focus to on previous commentaries. Thank you for reading all these words! I hope that I gave you a window into making sense of Sunsetters music from a design standpoint. It's possible that you are completely new to Sunsetters, even, in which case I reckon this made for the best introduction to the project that I could give at this point in my life!

I mean, probably.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS

(A word from Lindsay)

This is our second Single-Song EP after *Ancestor*, and while it's probably the better of the two, it was an infinitely more difficult writing process to make Railroad what it now is. I think the difference in the level of difficulty between the two songs in terms of writing largely stems from the fact that each section of *Ancestor* had pretty much been written already (though initially intended to be separate, unrelated things) when Jordan first mentioned wanting to make *Ancestor*, while we intended Railroad to be written as one cohesive song from the word go. All throughout the writing process for Railroad, I was never really happy with it, though I couldn't really tell you why. Maybe I was too in-my-head comparing it to *Ancestor*, maybe I'm just super rusty as a prog songwriter, maybe I've got Impostor Syndrome or something. Whatever the reason, it left me with little desire to do anything with it, and anytime I would attempt to work on Sunsetters stuff, I would instead try to focus on other releases, like the fifth album (though progress on that has also been slow, for one or more of the aforementioned reasons).

About my involvement in the writing process, it's probably safe to say that most of what I actually ended up doing for Railroad was working on the arrangement, both of the song itself and Railroad as an EP. I spent a good while thinking about how to structure the Railroad EP, what other songs, if any, could fit on it, what order said songs would go in, whether Railroad the song would be one track or split in two, that kind of thing, which probably stemmed from a desire to make the EP feel like its own thing and not *Ancestor Again*. We've ended up not going for any of that and leaving Railroad the sole song on the EP and kept it in one track, but I think we've successfully made it not feel like *Ancestor*, and so ultimately I'm happy with how the EP turned out.

As a song, too, I think Railroad is both really quite good and sufficiently distinct from *Ancestor*. For the longest time all there we had was a clean intro (which Jordan reused for the quiet section eight-something minutes in), the marching drums section, a fast bit after which wasn't very good, and vague ideas for lyrics. As I recall, the writing process from there would go something like: Jordan would add new bits, then I would have a go at arranging them, then Jordan would add new bits, and so on and so forth. It's a process that seems to work well for us.

All in all, the song is killer and has some of our best bits in it.

Sunsetters are:

Elsie Carr

Lead Vocals, Keys

Ganymede “Degan” Allen

Guitars

Remy Larson

Guitars

Paul Blackwood

Bass, Backing Vocals

& Fin Jensby

Drums

Blind Man’s Book are:

Jordan Dooling

*Arrangement, Composition, Lyrics, A Voice,
Editing, Production, Design*

Lindsay Taylor

Arrangement, Composition, Lyrics

paperChamomiles

Voice of Sienna (movement vi)

RealaChao

Digital Art

& Knuckles

All Instruments

Special thanks from Lindsay to:

Musescore versions 2 and 3 for being great and also free; all the bands/singers I like for doing good work; the Fear Mythos do, in fact, still exist and are still cool. And our fans; it feels pretty good after all these years to know there’s more than one of you out there. And Jordan, for doing what you do best and making cool prog.

And everyone who listen to the EP. We hope you have enjoyed listening, and that you continue to do so.

Special thanks from Jordan to:

MuseScore versions 2 and 3 were used in the several years of this piece’s production.

Audacity was used for additional sound editing.

Freight Train Passing SFX by Alex_Jauk.

This album shares some light thematic connections with the Fear Mythos ARG *Nine is God*, and I’d like to thank those who collaborated with me for that, as well as those who were players in the game.

Thanks so much to Chamomile for lending your voice to this. You were exactly the American voice I thought the part needed.

And thank you to Lindsay. I built a bit of a Tower here, but you laid the tracks leading to it.

See you next album!

