

To put We Are Augustine's debut album, *Rise Ye Sunken Ships*, in the proper context, one needs to understand the major inspiration behind this brand of energetic and emotional indie rock.

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A piece on WeAreAugustines.com, written by Ryan Berg, gives the backstory. Jim, the brother of lead singer and songwriter Billy McCarthy, had a very troubled past. Since high school, he lived in homeless shelters and on the streets of California after succumbing to excessive substance abuse. He was also committed to psychiatric hospitals on multiple occasions.

Billy and his sister tried valiantly to help, going so far as to let Jim stay with Billy in New York. That only lasted a short time, as Billy realized that treating Jim's condition was beyond his capacity.

Jim eventually used a knife to attack a worker in a shelter where he was living. He then found himself in prison and diagnosed as a schizophrenic, unfit to stand trial and too dangerous to stay with the general public.

For four years, Jim remained in solitary confinement, his only escapes being small stints at more psychiatric hospitals.

While staying at one, he overheard he'd again be relegated to solitary confinement.

He panicked.

Then hanged himself.

Their mother, also a schizophrenic and addict, came to a similar demise. Lying on a cot in a homeless shelter, she overdosed on sleeping pills and cocaine.

Next to her bed, she had scribbled two things on the back of a business card from a local mortuary: her children's names.

Billy, Jim and their sister never knew their father.

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Unlike the direction of artists like Bon Iver and The Antlers, who created hauntingly pretty works after having their hearts broken with *For Emma, Forever Ago* and *Hospice*, respectively, We Are Augustines takes the opposite approach with *Rise Ye Sunken Ships*.

It aims for redemption and triumph through nimble electric guitars, propulsive drums, pulsing bass lines and Billy McCarthy's brazen and distinct howl. It all blends to form frustrated yet pensive sonic scenes.

Throughout the record, the songs' emotional undercurrent hinges on the subject and content. Music is either angry and dark ("Patton State Hospital", "Juarez") or a blend of major and minor-keyed, more exultant pieces ("Book of James", "Chapel Song").

A few songs are quieter and stick to a gradual pace,

notably "Barrel of Leaves," a piano-lead ballad, and "East Los Angeles," an acoustic guitar procession. Their quieter tempos, sparse instrumentation and resigned lyrics bring a welcome change of context and pace.

The most memorable and emotional song comes in "The Book of James," where Billy and Jim trade perspectives. With lifting trumpets, sweeps of electronic accentuations and frantic handclaps, the two brothers sing back and forth to each other. Billy: "He stood there in his shoes, unable to move. / Kid, I drove all night here / to tell you I love you."



Then Jim: "I stand in my shoes / unable to move / with my hat in my hands / at the bottom of the ocean."

This song, one of the highlights of the album, also contains one of the record's flaws: A few breakdowns last too long. In "Book of James," the momentum already hit its peak around the three-minute mark, but the music continues with a mostly instrumental outro that lasts nearly two minutes.

The other flaw involves the similarities between ingredients and textures, creating difficulty in differentiating some passages of songs from others. But that's being picky. *Rise Ye Sunken Ships* is an album of desperation, hope and frantic pleas to a loved-and-lost brother. All those emotions are adeptly channeled through the compelling and aggressive indie rock.

Even the instrumental concluding track feels triumphant, with steady horns gradually ascending and descending, snippets of what sounds like radio interference, thwacking drums and slips of electronic ambience driving the song forward before everything slowly fades into a distorted crackle and then nothing.