



LOVESICK

BUILDING A BETTER SCENE IN PROVIDENCE

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Photo by Owen Muir

Providence, Rhode Island is a city of contradictions. The capital of a postage stamp sized state that's home to huge populations of people from all over the world; a "liberal" a city that tries to crush struggles against brutal police and abusive bosses; a city that claims the motto "The Creative Capital" while criminalizing young artists of color (<http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150430/news/150439951>). A vibrant array of bands carrying the energy of those contradictions have been born out of Providence, but few have affected the city as much as **LOVESICK**.

LOVESICK is the trio of Josh Rodriguez, Manny Brooks, and Nathan Thao Phrathep, and they create music that channels all of the frustrations of growing up and living in a place like this into a powerful, yearning sound. The three have managed to inject a new energy into the city's punk and DIY scene. Each show they play they bring along an ever-increasing group of fans, almost all young people of color, many of whom are new to punk spaces

and music. When they play, their fans create the ideal environment: bouncing off the walls, crashing into one another, respectful, supportive, and most of all, absolutely joyous in the moment. I talked to Manny Josh and Nathan about their band and the impact they've had on the city.

LOVESICK's self-titled EP will be out March 19 on Endless Bummer Records

EVAN MCLAUGHLIN: I've been involved in the Providence DIY scene for a little while, and everyone I talk to says that shows here have completely changed from just a few years ago. Shows at warehouse spaces used to be really white spaces, and you'd see the same group of punks all the time. A lot of the people that come to your shows say that it's the first time they've been in a punk or DIY space, or that they wouldn't be in those spaces at all except for your band. Why do you think you've managed to make these connections with so many people?

Josh Rodriguez: I think a lot of it is just us trying to be open minded, trying to accept the way other people are. We might seem normal, but we're outcasts in a way, we've been like that since we've been kids. We dressed different, we spoke different, we listened to different music, and people around us saw something special in us. Because of that, we just have an open mind and see what's special in other people too. For us, it really doesn't matter. Our friends will come to the show and they might be weirded out at first, but they'll get used to it, they'll like the music and they'll like the space. Our friends will come and then their friends will come, and it'll spread like that.

Nathan Thao Phrathep: For me, I had no idea that any of this was out there for a long time. All the music I knew about was on the internet. It wasn't till my dad took me to see Pilgrim that I ever knew that there was local music in Providence. I just went to more and more shows from there. I go to a show a week now. I'm just amazed with how talented this city is, every single person you meet at shows is talented and is doing something.

JR: I go to New York a lot to get away, and everyone views it as the only real center of culture. But I see the similarities that Providence has to Brooklyn and to other really creative places. It's not different, there's not less here. There's just as much energy here.

NTP: I feel like Providence is just going to keep getting better, I could name bands from here that I love all day. It's just because there are so many ways that people are actually putting the effort in to get youth involved, to get kids resources to make things. Places like Spark City, AS220, New Urban Arts, they're just going to make it so that things here keep getting even better. People see how cool it is to do all of this. Nothing's cooler than making a warehouse space and putting on shows.

How did you first get involved with music, and how did you form the band?

Manny Brooks: Me and my brother have always wanted to play music, I started playing guitar when I was 8 years old. My church needed a guitar player, so I decided to figure it out. I didn't know how to play, so I just played it like a bass. Me and my brother always wanted to make a band, my mom said Josh used to flip rice pans over in the kitchen to use as drums, until they got him actual drums to play.

NTP: My dad's a musician, so I grew up with that always around. I got my first guitar at 13 and just taught myself, tried to copy all the guitarists I idolized. Manny was the only other person I knew who played guitar, so we made some really bad metalcore music when we were 14. Josh and Manny asked me to join the band like 5 days before they had a show at the Columbus Theater in Providence, and I joined the day they started recording their demo, so I had to learn everything right then. It was pretty hard.

I know you're involved in different kinds of art than just music. Do you see LOVESICK as a combination of all those different mediums of art that you're making and involved with?

JR: Originally LOVESICK came from me. Before it was a band, I wanted to make a clothing brand called LOVESICK. I would make my own clothes, embroider LOVESICK on my jeans. For a while too, it was a tag I did around the city. I would write LOVESICK with a heart around it. It was just something that I liked the sound of, I thought it was catchy. I learned how to wheat paste at New Urban Arts (<http://newurbanarts.org/>) and started putting up posters all over too. After I stopped tagging, there's a store downtown named Clover that asked me to do a whole mural for them. It was stencils covering the whole wall that had a picture of Kennedy, and said "Hey Kennedy, the Kids are LOVESICK," inspired by Andy Warhol, the Sex Pistols, Raymond Petty. When me and Manny decided to make a band, we thought it would be a cool name for it. It's kind of a combination of all the different things we do.

MB: I got a job at New Urban Arts mentoring after I saw my brother making art there and thought I wanted to do it too. Because of my job I get to use the studio whenever. I learned how to do sewing screenprinting, all kinds of different things. I'm making wallets, pouches, things people can carry, pretty soon I want to be able to do my own hoodies and shirts.

Recently, there was a street artist named Devin Costa who was putting up tags reading LONELY (<http://www.providencejournal.com/article/20150902/NEWS/150909861>) on buildings in Providence. A couple months ago, he was caught on security camera in one of the buildings, and the police decided to charge him with 13 different felonies, one for each tag he put up. His fines total more than 12,000 dollars, and he can go to prison if they're not paid off within a year. (<https://www.generosity.com/community-fundraising/lonely-as-i-have-ever-been-providence>) For the past few years Providence has been selling itself as "The Creative Capital," a haven for artists to come and create, what do you think of what the police and the city are doing to Devin and other young artists of color?

JR: I have a personal relationship with Devin, and I know him and the art he makes. It's messed up! The way I look at it is that he could have been doing something else instead of putting those tags up. He could have been selling drugs, he could have been killing someone. Instead, they're charging him with making art. I mean, yeah it was illegal but how can you say you support artists and then do that?

NTP: They're trying to make an example of him. Devin and other artists are getting prosecuted just for making art. It's so repressive, we should be able to create in the creative capital!

JR: It's all over the city too. I'll put up a poster downtown, by the next day its gone. They've got people patrolling the streets taking things down. It's not offensive, it's not a nazi sign.

NTP: The repression just makes me want to make more art just to oppose it. Just because he got in trouble, we should still all be making art, we should be making more art. They're trying to make it so that everyone in the city is scared, but we can't be scared.

Every time Lovesick plays, you bring a huge crew with you, and they always go incredibly hard at your shows. How did people start getting into your band?

MB: We got invited to play the Downtown Boys record release show, and after that people started asking to play shows with them. It's funny because our first bassist left right before that show, so I had to write an entire set from scratch, I wrote our whole demo for that show. I was still listening to the songs before the show because I was still learning all of it. I didn't know if people would like it, but it was a really good feeling.

NTP: I joined the band after that show, and then a crew of people kept coming every time, and always bringing new people with them.

Was it people you already had a relationship with, or did people come in just for the band?

NTP: I mean there were some people who we knew that we didn't really have a real relationship with before. There were people who we'd seen all over town but the shows were the first time we had really talked to them.

What's next for Lovesick?

MB: I just want to play in New York.

JR: We want to start touring, we talk about it all the time. We want to do it next summer.

NTP: Since I joined the band, a lot of things I wanted to do, a lot of dreams I've had have already been coming true. My high school graduation was at the Columbus theater. Four months later, I join this band and our first show is there! I never thought I'd walk down the street and have people recognize me and want to talk to me because of my band.