

PLACES OF ESCAPE  
BY CONOR TIFFIN AND EVAN ARNOLD





## FORWARD

EVERYONE NEEDS A PLACE TO ESCAPE. A PLACE WHERE THEY CAN RELAX. AN AREA OF SAFETY THAT THEY CAN GO TO, ANYTIME. AND ESPECIALLY IN AN ERA WHEN SOME PEOPLE ARE SO COMPLETELY OVERTAKEN BY THEIR CAREERS, A SPACE TO STEP OUT OF THAT ENVIRONMENT IS KEY FOR HEALTHY LIVING. THERE ARE NUMEROUS WAYS PEOPLE DO IT - MANY PERFORM SOME TYPE OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, SOME MEDITATE, AND OTHERS EVEN USE DRUGS OR ALCOHOL TO ESCAPE. BUT IN THIS BOOK, HOWEVER, WE CHOSE TO FOCUS IN ON TWO FORMS OF ESCAPE THAT AREN'T AS TYPICALLY LOOKED AT AS WAYS TO HELP LIVE LIFE: ART AND MUSIC.

I HAD ALWAYS KNOWN WHAT IT FELT LIKE FOR ME TO BECOME ENTRANCED IN MUSIC, AND MORE RECENTLY, I'VE BECOME MORE INTERESTED IN TRYING TO FIND ESCAPE THROUGH VISUAL ART, LIKE PHOTOGRAPHY, BUT I NEVER KNEW WHAT EXACTLY OTHER PEOPLE GOT FROM IT. I WANTED TO KNOW WHY PEOPLE CHOSE TO CREATE ART OR PLAY MUSIC OVER OTHER THINGS, AND HOW THEY FELT WHEN THEY WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF THAT. I WANTED TO KNOW WHAT PURPOSE THAT ACTIVITY HAD IN THEIR LIVES AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, I WANTED TO UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF THAT ACTIVITY ON THEIR MIND.

MY PARTNER EVAN AND I BEGAN THIS DOCUMENTARY WITH THE IDEA THAT THESE ARTISTS WOULD BE ESCAPING OUT OF EVERYDAY LIFE TO FIND GENERALLY THE SAME THING: COMFORT. BUT THROUGH TALKING WITH ALL THESE DIFFERENT PEOPLE, WE REALIZED THAT'S A MAJOR GENERALIZATION OF ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS, CONSIDERING THERE ARE SO MANY. WHAT WE DID FIND IS THAT EVEN THOUGH THESE PEOPLE ARE ALL PARTICIPATING IN TOTALLY DIFFERENT ACTIVITIES FOR COMPLETELY DIFFERENT REASONS, THE COMMON FACTOR BETWEEN THEM IS THAT THESE PEOPLE ARE AT SOME POINT MAKING A LEAP FROM THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES TO A DIFFERENT MENTAL PLACE - AN ESCAPE. THROUGH THIS REALIZATION, WE DECIDED THAT WE WOULD FIND THE SIMILARITIES IN THE DIFFERENT FORMS OF EXPRESSION THAT ARE EXTREMELY UNIQUE TO EACH INDIVIDUAL LOOKED AT HERE.

THE PEOPLE EXAMINED IN THIS BOOK ALLOWED US TO PEER INSIDE A VERY PERSONAL SIDE OF THEIR LIVES, AND THEY SHARED WITH US THEIR THOUGHTS AND IDEAS ON IMPORTANT SUBJECTS. FOR THAT, WE THANK EACH OF THEM FOR MAKING THIS PROJECT POSSIBLE SO THAT OTHERS CAN UNDERSTAND WHAT ESCAPE IS, AND REALIZE THE STRENGTH AND POWER THESE FORMS OF EXPRESSION CAN HAVE ON PEOPLE. THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO YOU.





## BEN MANDEBERG

I WALKED INTO SLIM'S EXPECTING THE SAME OLD SHOW. A POWER CHORD HERE AND THERE, SOME JUMPING UP AND DOWN, AND MAYBE EVEN SOME MOSHING. AS USUAL, THAT SWEATY, MOIST 'GUY' SCENT HUNG HEAVILY IN THE AIR, PROBABLY LEFTOVERS FROM THE MANY METAL AND HARDCORE BANDS THAT HAD BEEN PLAYING PREVIOUS TO THE TIME I GOT THERE. THE CROWD WORE THAT FAMILIAR SHADE OF BLACK I'D BECOME SO FAMILIAR WITH AFTER GOING TO COUNTLESS SHOWS, BUT LITTLE DID I KNOW HOW TRULY DIFFERENT THIS SHOW WOULD BE. AS A GLASS GESTURE, THE BAND I WAS THERE TO SEE, WALKED ONSTAGE I RACED TO THE FRONT, READY TO TAKE PICTURES OF MY FIRST SUBJECT: BEN MANDEBERG.

BEN IS A SEVENTEEN YEAR-OLD GUITARIST WHO'S BEEN PLAYING ACTIVELY FOR A SOLID EIGHT YEARS. MORE RECENTLY IN HIS MUSIC HISTORY, HE'S BEEN PLAYING GUITAR AND SINGING FOR THE LOCAL BAND A GLASS GESTURE. IT'S EASY TO TELL THAT HE'S A MUSICIAN WHEN YOU SEE HIM, IN FACT, IT'S HARD TO MISS. WITH BROWN HAIR DOWN TO HIS SHOULDERS, A NOTORIOUSLY KNOWN PAIR OF PURPLE PANTS THAT HE WARS REGULARLY, AND A SPONTANEOUS PERSONALITY, HE'S NOT SOMEONE YOU'D FORGET EASILY. HE LAID OUT HIS IDEAS NICELY FOR ME ON WHAT MUSIC REALLY MEANS TO HIM, AND WHAT HE GETS OUT OF IT. AND IN DOING THIS, GAVE ME A PIECE OF THE BIGGER PICTURE I WAS LOOKING FOR: WHY THE ARTS PROVIDE A WAY FOR A PERSON TO LEAVE EVERYDAY CONSCIOUSNESS - ESCAPE, IF YOU WILL - AND WHAT'S SO APPEALING ABOUT THAT ESCAPE TO THE ARTIST.

"IT'S REALLY JUST ABOUT HUMAN INTERACTION WHEN IT COMES DOWN TO IT. YOU CAN JUST CONNECT WITH PEOPLE ON SUCH A DIFFERENT LEVEL MUSICALLY THAN YOU CAN, I THINK, WITH LITERATURE OR ANYTHING VISUAL, JUST BECAUSE IT'S ALL SO COGNITIVE AND IT'S SUCH A DIFFERENT, UNSPOKEN KIND OF INTERACTION THAT YOU CAN HAVE." TO HIM, MUSIC IS SO MUCH MORE THAN JUST A CATCHY CHORUS AND PLAYS ON MYSPACE - IT'S A STATE OF MIND. THE CONNECTIONS THAT HE HAS AND MAKES WHEN PLAYING MUSIC ARE INDESCRIBABLE, BUT THEY ARE STILL THE REASON MUSIC MEANS SO MUCH TO HIM. "IT'S LIKE TRYING TO DESCRIBE LOVE OR SOMETHING. IT'S JUST THERE, AND IT'S HUMAN NATURE. IT'S RHYTHM AND PEOPLE NEED RHYTHM IN THEIR LIVES. IT'S CONTINUITY, AND THEY NEED SOMETHING TO FALL BACK ON, THEY NEED SOME KIND OF FORCE TO HOLD THEM DOWN, AND A LOT OF THE TIME THAT CAN BE MUSIC, JUST BECAUSE MUSIC, I THINK, A LOT OF THE TIME MAKES PEOPLE'S LIVES SEE MORE REAL TO THEM, JUST IN THE SENSE THAT PEOPLE RELATE TO MUSIC AND IT'S COMFORTING, AND PEOPLE CAN SEE SOMETHING IN THEIR OWN LIVES IN THE MUSIC, AND IT MAKES PEOPLE AWARE OF THEMSELVES."

MUSIC IS BEN'S PLACE OF ESCAPE. BUT THAT'S NOT TO SAY HE'S ALONE - OTHER PEOPLE ESCAPE TOO, MANY TIMES JUST IN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT WAYS, AND FOR COMPLETELY DIFFERENT REASONS. HOWEVER, HE'S MAKING THAT ESCAPE INTO ANOTHER STATE OF MIND AT SOME POINT, JUST LIKE THE OTHERS.



photo by Evan Arnold

“THE WHOLE POINT IS, IT’S SATISFACTION AND ALL IT COMES DOWN TO IS SATISFYING, AND I GUESS YOU COULD CALL THAT REFRESHING AND I GUESS YOU COULD CALL THAT SOME FORM OF ESCAPE.”









“...IT’S SUCH A DIFFERENT,  
**UNSPOKEN**  
KIND OF INTERACTION THAT YOU CAN HAVE.”

“...IT’S RHYTHM AND PEOPLE NEED RHYTHM IN THEIR LIVES. IT’S  
CONTINUITY, AND THEY NEED SOMETHING TO FALL BACK ON, THEY NEED  
SOME KIND OF FORCE THAT HOLDS THEM DOWN...”

“...PEOPLE CAN  
**SEE SOMETHING** IN THEIR OWN LIVES  
IN THE MUSIC AND IT  
MAKES PEOPLE AWARE OF THEMSELVES.”

“...MUSIC, I THINK, A LOT OF THE TIME MAKES PEOPLE’S LIVES SEEM MORE REAL TO THEM, JUST IN THE SENSE THAT PEOPLE RELATE TO MUSIC AND IT’S COMFORTING...”

-BEN MANDEBERG

“BEING IN THE ZONE IS JUST HAVING MUSICAL CONVERSATIONS WITH PEOPLE.”

















## ERIC TAGGART

I WALKED INTO A ROOM THAT I FIGURED USED TO BE A POOL HOUSE. BUT WHAT I SAW INSIDE THAT ROOM WAS NOTHING THAT I HAD EVER SEEN IN ANY POOL HOUSE BEFORE. THERE WERE BABY DOLLS ON THE GROUND, SOME MISSING THEIR BODIES. THERE WERE SCRIBBLINGS ON THE WALLS, MOUNDS OF OLD CANVASES, AND OLD, BROKEN GUITARS. NOW, IF YOU DIDN'T KNOW THAT ERIC TAGGART WAS AN ARTIST, YOU PROBABLY WOULD FIND THIS ROOM FRIGHTENING, BUT THE TRUTH IS THAT IT'S THE OPPOSITE. THIS ROOM IS A STUDIO. A LAB WHERE ERIC REVEALS HIS INNER EMOTIONS, THOUGHTS, AND FEELINGS TO HIMSELF, BY CHANNELING RAW FEELING INTO HIS ARTWORK. FOR ERIC, THIS PLACE IS A JUNGLE GYM - A PLAYROOM OF SORTS, WHERE HE LETS HIS MIND RUN WILD. THIS IS THE VERY ROOM IN WHICH ERIC MAKES HIS ESCAPES.

ERIC'S DEFINITION OF WHAT ESCAPING THROUGH ART DOES FOR HIM IS QUITE SIMPLE, BUT STILL SO INCREDIBLY IMPORTANT TO HIS LIFE. "I THINK ART IS A WAY THAT I PROCESS A LOT OF MY FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS. I WORK WITH WHAT YOU MIGHT CALL TROUBLED YOUTH - KIDS WITH DISABILITIES, MENTAL HEALTH CONCERNS - THINGS LIKE THAT, SO IT CAN BE PRETTY INTENSE WORK AND I DEFINITELY SEE WHEN I LOOK AT MY ARTWORK AFTER IT'S DONE, I SEE THAT I'VE PROCESSED A LOT OF MY EMOTIONS AND MY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS ABOUT THOSE KIDS AND THEIR LIVES IN MY ARTWORK, AND SO I THINK IT'S A WAY TO KIND OF LET OUT ALL THAT STRESS AND TENSION AND WORK THROUGH IT." A PRIME EXAMPLE OF ESCAPE. ERIC USES HIS ARTWORK TO CHANNEL THAT RAW EMOTION THAT HE HAS INTO SOMETHING GREAT. AND NOT ONLY DOES IT RELIEVE THOSE FEELINGS THAT HE HAS INSIDE OF HIM, BUT IT ACTUALLY ALLOWS HIM TO USE THOSE FEELINGS TO DO SOMETHING PRODUCTIVE. FOR ERIC, ART GIVES HIM A MUCH NEEDED RELIEF.

THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ARTISTS AND HOW THEY VIEW AND EXPERIENCE THEIR ESCAPES IS AN AMAZING ASPECT OF THE SUBJECT, AND ERIC'S VIEWS ARE NO EXCEPTION. "IN A SENSE I FEEL LIKE FLOW, FOR ME, IS LIKE A FORM OF PRAYER, AND IT'S A WAY OF BEING REALLY IN TOUCH WITH WHAT'S GOING ON INSIDE OF ME AND KIND OF REALLY IN TOUCH WITH MY SURROUNDINGS AND THE MATERIALS THAT I'M WORKING WITH." ERIC CAN CAPTURE HIS ENVIRONMENT THROUGH THE ZONE HE REACHES IN HIS ESCAPES, WHAT HE REFERS TO AS HIS "FLOW". THIS STATEMENT GOES ALONG WITH THOSE OF OTHER ARTISTS, A COMMON THEME BETWEEN THEM BEING THAT THEY HAVE A DEFINABLE ZONE WHERE THEY FEEL MOST PRODUCTIVE AND LEAVE REALITY COMPLETELY ON SOME OCCASIONS. ERIC ALSO FEELS LIKE HIS ARTWORK "TAKES ON A LIFE OF IT'S OWN" AT TIMES, ANOTHER COMMON FACTOR BETWEEN ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS ESCAPING INTO THE ZONE. THIS SENSE OF HOW ART CEASES TO BE CONSCIOUSLY CREATED DEFINITELY SEEMS TO GO ALONG WITH LOSING TRACK OF TIME, SOMETHING ERIC RELATES TO GREATLY. "YOU DEFINITELY LOSE YOUR SENSE OF TIME. I'LL BE DOWN IN THE STUDIO FOR SIX HOURS AND THINK THAT IT WAS LIKE THIRTY MINUTES, I WILL REALLY LIKE LOSE MY CONCEPT OF TIME."

ERIC'S PLACE OF ESCAPE IS ACHIEVABLE MOST EASILY FOR HIM THROUGH ART. IN THIS PLACE OF ESCAPE, HE EXPERIENCES A SERIOUS LOSS OF TIME AND FEELS IN TOUCH WITH HIMSELF AND THE MATERIALS AND AREA AROUND HIM. HE USES THIS ESCAPE AS A WAY TO VENT EMOTIONS AND THOUGHTS THAT OTHERWISE, WOULD BE LEFT INSIDE OF HIM. BUT EVEN THOUGH HIS ESCAPE MAY TAKE PLACE DIFFERENTLY THAN OTHER ARTISTS, AND HE MAY GET TO THAT PLACE IN A DIFFERENT WAY, ALL OF THOSE ARTISTS ARE STILL GETTING THERE IN THE END.









“I THINK OF IT AS BEING KIND OF LIKE MEDITATION OR PSYCHOTHERAPY OR PRAYER  
IN THAT IT’S A PLACE FOR ME WHERE YOU RALLY GET TO REALLY MEET YOURSELF.  
IT’S KIND OF LIKE A QUIET PLACE OR A SANCTUARY WHERE YOU CAN REALLY KIND OF  
BE ALONE WITH YOURSELF AND GOD.”











“I WILL CREATE ARTWORK AND HAVE KIND OF A VAGUE SENSE OF WHERE IT’S GOING AS I’M CREATING IT OR WHEN I START IT AND IT COMPLETELY TAKES ON A LIFE OF IT’S OWN. IT GOES IN DIRECTIONS I NEVER HAD IMAGINED AND I KEEP WORKING WITH IT UNTIL THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT IT THAT SEEMS RIGHT TO ME.”





“...THERE’S A SENSE OF PLAY THAT SURROUNDS IT, A SENSE OF PLAYFULNESS AND PEACEFULNESS, JUST KIND OF LETTING YOURSELF GO INTO THE PROCESS AND MATERIALS YOU’RE WORKING WITH AND LETTING YOUR MIND GO WHEREVER IT WANTS TO GO AND CREATE...”







“I GUESS TO SUM IT UP YOU COULD SAY THE ART SHEDS A LIGHT ON OR DEEPENS MY  
EXPERIENCE OF THE OTHER SUBJECTS RATHER THAN BEING SOMETHING THAT’S  
DIFFERENT OR BETTER THAN, IT SORT OF INFORMS OR  
ILLUMINATES THE OTHER AREAS...”









## ALDO NOBOA

WHEN YOU FIRST SEE ALDO NOBOA THE FIRST THING YOU NOTICE IS HIS HAIR; IT RESEMBLES A DYING MOHAWK, BUZZED-LIKE HAIR ALL AROUND WITH A FEW STRANDS OF HAIR AT THE TOP OF HIS HEAD THAT SOMEHOW EVADED THE RAZOR. ALDO HAS THE WISE EYES OF A THOUSAND YEAR OLD MAN, YOU CAN'T TELL HIM ANYTHING BECAUSE HE ALREADY KNOWS EVERYTHING. WHEN I FIRST WALKED INTO THE ROOM, HE HAD A PRESENCE MUCH LIKE MY FAVORITE ROCK STAR, JUST A FEELING OF AWE WASHED OVER ME.

"I AM A MUSICIAN, I AM A MUSIC TEACHER, I'M PART OF A NATIONAL MUSIC PROGRAM THAT IS A BUSINESS AND MY COMPANY TITLE IS CHIEF OF KNOWLEDGE, WHICH, I CONSULT ON ALL THINGS PERTAINING TO CURRICULUM, CULTURE WITHIN THE SCHOOLS, AND MUSICAL DETAILS," HE CALMLY SAID, REASSURING MY NERVES. ALDO IS THE LEADER OF THE SAN FRANCISCO BRANCH OF THE PAUL GREEN SCHOOL OF ROCK MUSIC; A NATIONAL MUSIC PROGRAM TEACHING KIDS HOW TO PLAY MUSIC. "ROCK SCHOOL," AS ITS SO AFFECTIONATELY KNOWN, IS A BIG DEAL, RANGING SHOWS FROM THE HAIGHT STREET FAIR, TO A HALF TIME SLOT AT A GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS GAME, TO 12 GALAXIES, A CLUB ON MISSION STREET. ALDO SOMEHOW MANAGES TO GET THE SCHOOL THE KIND OF SHOWS MOST PROFESSIONAL BANDS DREAM OF.

DURING THE INTERVIEW, ALDO TOLD ME THAT HE IS A TEACHER BECAUSE OF HIS QUEST TO EXPLORE HIS PREVIOUSLY UNANSWERED QUESTIONS ABOUT MUSIC. SO, I ASKED HIM HOW HE ESCAPES BECAUSE HIS PASSION AND LOVE IS SO CLOSELY LINKED TO HIS JOB. "IT MAY SOUND CORNY, BUT, WHAT'S CRAZY, IS THERE'S NOTHING TO ESCAPE IN THIS REALM. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN, LIKE, IF I WERE CUTTING FISH FOR A LIVING, THEN MY ESCAPE WOULD BE MUSIC OR WHATEVER, BUT I DO MUSIC FOR A LIVING, AND THERE'S NOTHING TO ESCAPE," HE ANSWERED.

ALDO'S THEORY ON HIS ZONE IS QUITE DIFFERENT, HE EXPLAINS TO ME THAT HE FINDS A CONNECTION BETWEEN HIS EXPLORATION OF MEDITATION AND THE ZONE; BOTH ARE ABOUT BEING IN THE MOMENT AND EXPERIENCING NOTHINGNESS. "ALL YOU NOTICE IS THAT NOTHING IS STILL, AND THAT'S A GOOD SPOT, BUT I FIND THAT ZONE TO BE THE MUSICAL EQUIVALENT WHEN I'M IN THE THROWS OF THE BEST PARTS OF PLAYING MUSIC, I'M NOT DOING ANYTHING I'M JUST PLAYING, I'M COMPLETELY IN THE MOMENT, I'M NOT THINKING, I'M NOT WORRYING, I'M NOT CONCERNING MYSELF WITH SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE IN THE CROWD, I'M NOT EVEN NECESSARILY CONCERNING MYSELF WITH MY MUSICIANS. I'M JUST THERE, WE'RE ALL JUST THERE AND WE'RE MAKING SOMETHING IN THE MOMENT."

FOR ALDO, HIS SHEER DRIVE TO EXPLORE HIS OWN QUESTIONS LED HIM TO FIND CONNECTIONS BETWEEN MUSIC, HIS JOB AND PASSION, WITH OTHER INTERESTS IN HIS LIFE LIKE MEDITATION. AND SINCE HIS INTERESTS COME FULL CIRCLE, ALDO HAS NO REASON TO ESCAPE FROM HIS JOB BECAUSE TEACHING AND BEING THE LEADER OF ROCK SCHOOL ONLY HELPS HIM ON HIS JOURNEY TO ANSWER THE QUESTIONS HE NEEDS FULFILLED.



“THIS ZONE THAT WE SPEAK OF IS THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING COMPLETELY IN THE  
MOMENT WHILE BEING COMPLETELY THOUGHT FREE.”







“WHEN I’M IN THE THROWS OF THE BEST PARTS OF PLAYING MUSIC, I’M NOT DOING ANYTHING. I’M JUST PLAYING. I’M COMPLETELY IN THE MOMENT. I’M NOT THINKING, I’M NOT WORRYING, I’M NOT CONCERNING MYSELF WITH SEVERAL HUNDRED PEOPLE IN THE CROWD, I’M NOT EVEN NECESSARILY CONCERNING MYSELF WITH MY MUSICIANS. I’M JUST THERE, WE’RE ALL JUST THERE AND WE’RE MAKING SOMETHING IN THE MOMENT, AND TO ME THAT IS THE ZONE”

























## CONCLUSION

“THIS PLACE IS A HOME, IT’S A LANDSCAPE, AND IT’S SAFE TO STAY IN. BUT THIS PLACE CAN’T BE DRIVEN TO, AND IT DOESN’T HAVE AN ADDRESS. YOU’LL FIND THIS PLACE SOMEWHERE INSIDE YOUR MIND, AND YOU’LL KNOW WHEN YOU’VE BEEN THERE. THIS IS YOUR PLACE OF ESCAPE.”

PEOPLE ARE CREATIVE AT HEART, AND ONE AMAZING PART OF CREATIVITY IS THE FACT THAT NO MATTER WHAT SEX, RACE, OR AGE ONE MIGHT BE, ART AND MUSIC ARE TWO CREATIVE PLACES YOU CAN ALWAYS GO TO RELIEVE YOURSELF OF WHATEVER PROBLEMS YOU’RE HAVING OR WHATEVER JOY YOU’RE FEELING - THEY’RE AN OPPORTUNITY TO POSSESS TOTAL FREEDOM. BECAUSE OF THESE REASONS AND MANY MORE, PEOPLE HAVE CREATED ART AND MUSIC FOR ALL TIME, BUT UNDERSTANDING WHY PEOPLE TODAY ARE STILL DOING IT TODAY LIES IN THIS VERY SUBJECT - PLACES OF ESCAPE.

THROUGH EXAMINING DIFFERENT ARTISTS AND MUSICIANS AND HOW THEY ESCAPE INDIVIDUALLY, WE WERE ABLE TO COME UP WITH A COMMONALITY BETWEEN ALL OF THEIR ESCAPES. EACH PERSON, ALTHOUGH ESCAPING IN A DIFFERENT WAY, EVENTUALLY MAKES A LEAP FROM EVERYDAY CONSCIOUSNESS TO AN ALTERNATE FORM OF CONSCIOUSNESS. WHEN THERE, THEY ALL EXPERIENCE DIFFERENT FEELINGS, BUT THE SIMILARITY BETWEEN THEM IS THAT IN SOME WAY, THAT ESCAPE HELPS THEM COPE WITH THE NORMAL SIDE OF LIFE, AND THIS IS WHAT KEEPS BRINGING THEM BACK TO THAT ESCAPE CONSISTENTLY.

