



TopHouse - *Practice*

Expectations versus reality. Unbridled optimism versus rugged lived experience. *Theory* versus *Practice*.

This is the conflict at the center of Tophouse's dueling new EPs.

Theory, released in May 2024, brims with hope, optimism, and the unshakeable knowledge that hard circumstances and people can change for the better.

The new EP, *Practice* is different. While the band's intricate arrangements and high-energy performances carry through, the subject matter and outlook of these new songs stands in stark contrast to the upbeat and hopeful worldview of *Theory*.

"We didn't start out writing these songs with a two-part set of EPs in mind," says lead vocalist Joe Larson. "But when they were written and we were looking at how to arrange them on an album, the clear delineation of themes became pretty apparent. The idealistic, hopeful worldview that we can all strive for in *Theory*, up against the hard reality that life doesn't always work out the way we want in *Practice*."

"I Don't Wanna Move On" is a stark meditation on coming to terms with separation. The chorus repeats, like a rosary, swelling to a frenetic burst of cathartic acoustic energy.

"Meteor", bolstered by lush string arrangements and Western electric guitar, is about crashing and burning from self-sabotage. The Western elements in this song, themselves a rarer color palette for Tophouse, are contrasted by a vaguely sci-fi string track.

On "Waste", the band confronts the consequences and loneliness of living with past mistakes. The song's vivid imagery places the listener in a frigid, stark, and lonely moment asking the haunting question – is every experience worth having, or are some experiences worth never having at all?

Tophouse, comprised of Larson (lead vocals, guitar, banjo), Jesse Davis (guitar, mandolin, percussion, backing vocals), William Cook (violin, backing vocals), and Andy LaFave (piano, backing vocals), formed in 2016 in Missoula, Montana, where Cook and Davis met in the music program at the University of Montana. They began as a street performing duo, honing their craft performing instrumental originals on the streets (and empty parking garages) of Missoula. Cook soon brought Larson, a longtime friend, into the fold and the trio began recording original songs and performing up and down the stunningly beautiful Bitterroot Valley.

In late 2019, the boys were faced with a hard choice: keep growing their personal and professional lives in Missoula and leave music as just a hobby or leave their beloved home state and move across the country to Nashville and devote themselves to music. They chose the latter.

“It was sort of always the plan to move to Music City” says Larson, “I think it was a combination of naiveté and the desire to make the whole music thing a concrete part of our lives.”

Within a few months of moving to the Southeast, the world ground to a halt due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Stuck in an unfamiliar city with nowhere to go, the trio hunkered down and honed their craft. As the world began to cautiously open back up, the band reemerged with new music and a new member: Lafave, an old friend of the boys from back home, rounding out the sound with piano.

In the spring of 2022, Tophouse began posting videos of their performances on social media. Much to their surprise, within weeks their posts began getting traction and the views continued to multiply as their online following expanded quickly and consistently. Wasting no time, the boys sought to move this connection with new fans from the screen to real life. They started booking shows themselves and began touring as much as possible wherever possible. They played any stage, backyard, bar, brewery or living room that would have them between Nashville and Montana. Somehow, word spread and people kept showing up, sometimes driving hours to attend these tiny shows. It was truly amazing and the four band-members took none of it for granted. The growing audience only made them work harder on both on their live experience and cultivating a community with their fans.

It wasn't long after when Tophouse found a likeminded manager and booking agent who shared their vision and work ethic. Soon the rooms and crowds grew larger and larger. Even their Instagram is nearing 300,000 followers. Within two years, Tophouse went from playing to anyone who would listen to selling out shows across the entirety of the United States.

So, what is a Tophouse show like? One of the defining characteristics of a Tophouse show is the contrast between their tight, energetic performances and their warm and witty stage banter in between songs. Cook might recite a passage from a beloved book to background accompaniment. Davis might begin an impromptu Q & A with the audience. It's the comfort and chemistry of four people who have known each other for a very long time and are perfectly OK with just being themselves. Who they are onstage is exactly who they are offstage.

Of all the things that have come together for these four homegrown Montana boys, what rises above it all are the fans. The connection forged between Tophouse and their fans is genuine and infectious. This is apparent when you hear their passionate audiences enthusiastically belting out the choruses and singing the verses at every show. Or, when you see the fan art shared online or in-person or hear the emotional stories of how Tophouse's songs have become the soundtrack to their loves, losses, triumphs and tragedies.

“It really is the best part,” Larson says; “getting to hear how our little songs can be used in so many different ways. It's very encouraging.”

Four old friends from Montana sharing their music with new friends everywhere. That's Tophouse, and they're just getting started.

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