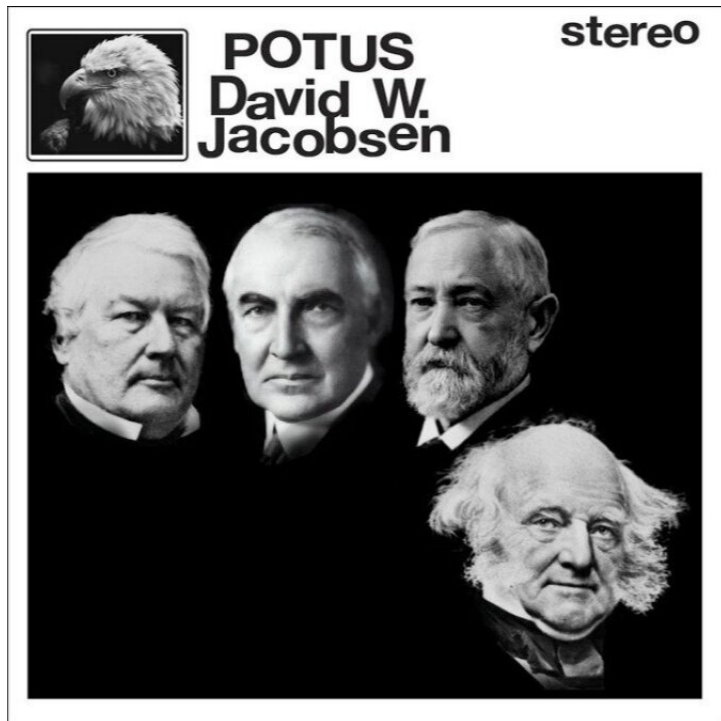




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Jacob W. Jacobsen's *POTUS* album cover

Album Review: David W. Jacobsen's POTUS

February 15, 2021

By: Jesse Stewart, Staff Writer

The last ten years of politics have brought with them an abysmal scourge of un-funny and uncreative 'satire', skewering politicians and

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ideologies simply for the smug self-satisfaction of the artist and their own personal beliefs. It seems as if art that addresses political figures no longer needs to possess any subtlety or craftsmanship, as the effort exists only to appease audiences by dogmatically adhering to a particular group's preconceived notions and unchallenged perspectives.

However, existing in contrast to the sorry state of political satire, David W. Jacobsen's most recent album *POTUS* functions not only as an excellent analysis of some of American history's lesser-known or lesser-liked presidents, but offers a witty and sometimes even rather poignant perspective as well.

Bad artistry in satire can be easily spotted in instances when an artist succumbs to insecurity and arrogance by peppering their work with direct references to their own intelligence and cleverness, rather than letting the audience arrive at that admiration on their own. Jacobsen's lyrical prowess may be wry but the construction of his points (as well as his relatively obscure choices of subject matter) create a very fulfilling portrait of what it means to be buried in history despite having such a clear mark on it.

Figures such as John Adams, Andrew Johnson, and Richard Nixon might be well known, but Jacobsen's choice of analyzing their lesser-known actions, speeches, and works in the way of catchy little tunes, jumping between genres and tone, work together to create a Schoolhouse-Rock-by-way-of-James Taylor lesson through the chapters of America's history that aren't printed with the same bold ink as more obvious events. His analysis and

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perspective on presidents John Quincy Adams, Zachary Taylor, and Chester A. Arthur are quite competent and intriguing as well, choosing to portray the insecurities that come with leadership in a way that don't come across as pandering endorsements nor scathing indictments.

As someone with an active interest in both history and art, the kind of person that might flirt with the young woman at a party by recounting some of the less-dull chapters of the Memoir of Ulysses S. Grant or quoting the love letters between John Adams and his wife Abigail, I cannot overstate how simply competent, well-researched, and engaging this collection of songs is. Jacobsen makes it quite clear what books and documents serve as a reference to his lyrics but the way in which he composes feathery and discrete melodies around what would otherwise be heavy and obvious points creates a very dynamic listening experience. The particular aspects of each president's life that he chooses to hone in on and extrapolate a tune from is pretty remarkable.

Regardless of your political leanings, I think it is safe to say that at least half of our presidents were not up to par. Personally, I think you can make a great case that about ninety-percent of the men that have occupied the position committed acts that they should have been tried and punished for (for those of you doing the math at home: that's about five innocent people in a quarter of a millennium). I would argue, generally, that he chose some of the objectively-obscure aspects of these men's lives and found a weird little chunk of humanity in each of them that otherwise

would either go completely un-remarked-upon or only noticed by my fellow weirdos that like to tell friends what we read about on Wikipedia at three in the morning, “Did you know Rutherford B. Hayes is basically a founding father of Paraguay? ...What do you mean you don’t know what Paraguay is?”

I can honestly say, without hyperbole, that I was disappointed with the album’s runtime, as I could have easily listened to thirty-four more tracks about the unaddressed men who also occupied that office (there have been forty-six presidencies but only forty-five presidents, try that one at parties too). David W. Jacobsen’s *POTUS* is a worthy album, measuring for both your time and education, with no better time to educate yourself on your country’s former leaders than on this President’s Day.

David W. Jacobsen’s *POTUS* can be found on Spotify, Apple Music, and YouTube.

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