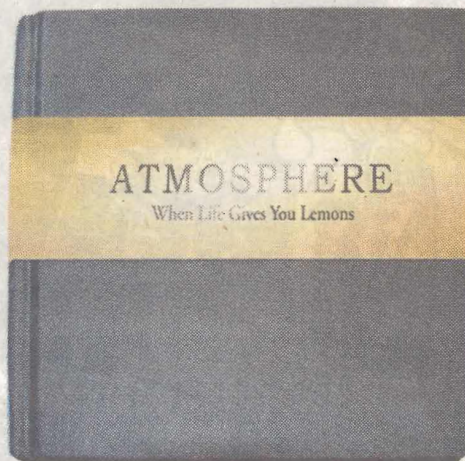


# SUNDAY LIFE E

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## Three high-profile local bands still believe a good, thoughtful album is more than equal to the sum of its parts.

By Ross Raihala, Pop Music Critic

In this era of MP3s, iPods and pick-and-choose playlists, the album is a dying art form. Then again, maybe it just depends on who you're talking to.

Three high-profile homegrown acts — Cloud Cult, Tapes 'n Tapes and Atmosphere — will release new albums this month and tour nationally to support them. And as far as these artists are concerned, their new releases are definitely not just random collections of songs.

The hip-hop duo Atmosphere went as far as to write a children's book that accompanies the theme of their new one, "When Life Gives You Lemons, You Paint That S— Gold."

"The book is the same story as the album," says rapper Sean "Slug" Daley, "but it's told in a way for kids to get. There's a princess, a little shrinking boy, a group of bad kids. It's about taking what you've got and making the best of it."

Tapes 'n Tapes' Josh Grier figures his band went through "probably 50 different sequences, with a lot of messing around and tweaking and second guessing" before settling on the final running order of "Walk It Off."

And Cloud Cult's Craig Minowa, who has based much of his group's past work on the unexpected 2002 death of his son, sees "Feel Good Ghosts (Tea-Partying Through Tornadoes)" as the start of a new chapter in his life. "With our last record, we wrapped up this long process of trying to understand mortality and the hereafter," he says. "Feel Good Ghosts' is focused a lot more on what we're made of and where we come from in this life."

We sat down with all three bands, discussed the new albums song by song and talked about what they mean, how they were recorded and where the musicians go from here.

The albums, in the bands' words  
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## Atmosphere

**The album:** "When Life Gives You Lemons, You Paint That S--- Gold" (in stores April 22)

**The lineup:** Sean "Slug" Daley (vocals); Anthony "Ant" Davis (production).

**The story:** More than a decade into a career that has seen Atmosphere become a titan of the underground rap world, the pair figured it was time for a little optimism. "The whole purpose of hip-hop in the first place was to make the best of things," Slug says. "You had a whole lot of disenfranchised, disempowered people with plenty of things to worry about coming together in parks and basements to party and forget about their problems."

**The CD-release show:** Atmosphere has yet to schedule a local concert but will host an April 22 midnight opening at Fifth Element (2411 Hennepin Ave. S., Mpls.) where Daley and Davis will meet fans and hand out free swag.

Atmosphere's Anthony "Ant" Davis, left, and Sean "Slug" Daley.

### 1.) "Like the Rest of Us"

**Slug:** "We wanted to make a quieter album, and that was one of the songs that sparked it all off. I should note, we made a double album. But I realized how ridiculous that is today. I missed my chance. I should've done that five years ago. But it focused things."

### 2.) "Puppets"

**Slug:** "There's no drums for so long, you never know if they're going to hit. When they do finally hit, it's, like, 'Here we go, the album is starting.' I see the first song as more of an intro than an actual song. The lyrics come from a conversation I had with a friend of mine about the Minneapolis music scene. I was so disappointed in the things he had to say. Hopefully, he'll hear this and hear my side of the conversation, since he wasn't trying to hear me that day."

### 3.) "The Skinny"

**Slug:** "This song is not really about a pimp. It's actually about cigarettes. I've been fighting with cigarettes for a long time, and, you know, I'm still on the loser's end of it. But I kind of figured if I write a song about cigarettes and how much they're pimping me, that could be the motivation (to quit)."

was a sign to me. But every time I've tried to say something socially worthy, it always comes off preachy, and I don't like being that guy. I never really did a great job of alluding to what the song's really about. For the most part, I think people are going to think it's about a hangover. My friend Tunde (Adebimpe) of TV on the Radio sings backup vocals on it. It's real subtle. I thought he stole the show from me, which is the only reason I turned him way down."

### 9.) "Yesterday"

**Slug:** "It's the most optimistic beat on the album, and I wanted to write a sad song on top of this happy piano joint. It's about missing someone and really coming to terms with what that means. It's about my dad."

### 10.) "Guarantees"

**Slug:** "We did a benefit for a friend of ours maybe a year or so ago. I didn't want to bring the whole band up into this small, small venue, so just me and the guitar player took a bunch of my songs and made quick vocal/guitar renditions of them. This is one of the songs we did, and we liked it so much we decided to record it. It's one take. It told the story."

#### 4.) "Dreamer"

**Slug:** "It's a move into some poppier stuff than what me and Ant usually do. I think it's important to show those sides of us as long as we show them for the right reasons. There's another song, 'You,' that comes later, and it's twice as poppy. I wanted 'Dreamer' to come before 'You' so it transitions you and doesn't just smack you in the head."

**Ant:** "It was a b---- to do. I had a hard time coming to grips with that song."

#### 5.) "Shoulda Known"

**Slug:** "When Ant played me the beat, it reminded me of Prince. Like the 'Dirty Mind' era. So, I knew I wanted to make a real dirty, racy song. But I didn't want to get too dirty and racy, because I'm getting too old for that s---. So, I had to figure out how to make a gross song without too much drug stuff and too much sex stuff. I used the narrative to imply the grossness of the story. There's still the f-word in the chorus, and there's a couple other words that aren't, you know, happy words. It's an old song. I almost feel like what I'm saying coulda, shoulda, woulda been said on 'You Can't Imagine How Much Fun We're Having' back in '05. It's kind of a cheater."

#### 6.) "You"

**Slug:** "It's the poppiest s--- I've ever done. And it scares me because I don't know what people are going to think about it. The funny thing is I don't consider what people are going to think when I'm making it, but once it's done and there's nothing left I can do about it, that's when I start to get neurotic. It is (fellow rapper Brother) Ali's favorite song on the record. His wife told me he sings the chorus around the house. To me, it can't get no better than that."

**Ant:** "It was fun to do. It's a couple of people just laughing and having fun. Hopefully, that comes through."

#### 7.) "Painting"

**Slug:** "Ant knew someone who played lap steel guitar, so we used it to capture a certain (darkness). It may be the first time a lap steel guitar is used in a rap song."

#### 8.) "Your Glasshouse"

**Slug:** "I don't want to say it's trendy, but it's contagious for everybody to take issue with what's going on in this presidential administration. It's become the new thing, when even losers like myself started to pay attention to politics. That

#### 11.) "Me"

**Slug:** "It balances 'You.' It's pretty self-explanatory. I called it 'Me' because it's about me. I feel like it should be the be-all end-all of me writing any more songs about relationship turmoil or my co-dependencies. It's, like, 'This is how I am, this is why I'm like this.' So hopefully, it'll sink in to myself and help self-fulfill my prophecy of eventually running for mayor. You guys are laughing at that, that's great."

#### 12.) "Wild Wild Horses"

**Slug:** "If you listen to the chorus, you could see why I actually looked into tracking down Tom Jones to sing it with me. I mean, I didn't go too far, but I looked into it. That song gave me a glimpse into what my life is going to be like when I actually do have to go work in Vegas. Because it's coming. I'm not going to quit, ever. Even when they fire me, I'm just going to go to Vegas."

#### 13.) "Can't Break"

**Ant:** "This was probably the biggest challenge. It's based on a sample, and we were trying to find the original sound they made. We had, maybe 10 synthesizers, all kinds of them. We had two keyboardists, me, (guitarist) Nate (Collis) and our engineer Joe (Mabbott) all playing."

**Slug:** "You should've seen all five of them playing synths at the same time. It looked like Devo."

#### 14.) "The Waitress"

**Slug:** "Tom Waits beatboxes on it. I'm friends with his son. We've known each other for quite a while now, going on five or six years. And

I finally asked him, I think literally, 'Have I known you long enough now to ask if I can get in touch with your dad? Or is that offensive?' So, I sent him the song and asked if he'd sing the chorus. He sent it back and totally avoided the chorus, but instead beatboxed on it. And it sounds good. It worked. We kept it subtle. I didn't want to be exploitive. I wanted to make sure it made sense musically, and I think ultimately it really did."

#### 15.) "In Her Music Box"

**Slug:** "It's about a little girl who learned how to use and abuse escapism through music. It finishes the story. When we made this song, I knew the minute it was finished it would be the last song on the album."

