

# Vulfpeck Live at Madison Square Garden - the album

By Su Butcher for Adam Gray 'That Album' LinkedIn Live 13 September 2024

Why should you join us? Listen to some brilliant craftsmen having fun!  
I love this stuff because it's so approachable, but if you're a nerd there's a lot in there for you too.

How to listen to the Album:

- Advise to watch the gig on YouTube - the whole event is there to see.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rv4wf7bzfFE>
- Bandcamp: <https://vulfpeck.bandcamp.com/album/live-at-madison-square-garden>
- Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/album/5KmXBjpN0wHutYBoDJBxmM>

## About the album

- September 2019 gig, album released December 2019
- First unsigned band (one of the first?) to sell out MSG
- Recently the North Sea Festival on 12 July and Montreux Jazz Festival on 14 July <https://www.montreuxjazzfestival.com/en/artist/vulfpeck/> .

## Band History

- Met at University of Michigan as students.
- Founded in 2011
- Very much an internet generation band.
- Background: <https://daily.bandcamp.com/features/vulfpeck-the-gamewinners>
- Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulfpeck>

## Their Music

- Low volume funk or minimalist funk arrangements.
- Think: I want you back, Mr Bigstuff, Another one bites the dust.
- Jack Stratton made a video six years ago about the Holy Trinity - three minimalist funk arrangers.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsooA4Bro40>
  - Alfonso 'Fonce' Mizell - arranged I want you back (The Jackson 5) - he wrote the base line and kick drum pattern.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y2bVIBwpCTA>
  - Wardell Quezergue (aka the creole Beethoven - pronounced kazehr) - Mr Big Stuff (Jean Knight) - it takes a special musician to play minimal funk arrangements.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9f4CyQto-0E>
  - Reinhold Mack - arranged Another one bites the dust (Queen - greatest bass sound of all time?) Talk about space you could rent out... <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rY0WxgSXdEE>
- Vulfpeck are consummate musicians, but they don't take themselves too seriously - they have fun being great at what they do.

## The Core Band

- Jack Stratton - the techy one. Drums, guitar, keyboards, arranging and mixing. Vocals are nerdy!
- Joe Dart - bass. That's pretty much more than enough. =
- Woody Goss - keyboards, makes cartoons. Quiet and influential
- Theo Katzman - vocals, drums, guitar etc etc (the falsetto)

Common partners on this album - all these play regularly now with the core group

- Joey Dosik (sax, keyboards, vocals - angelic)
- Antaun Stanley (vocals - he is sooo cool)
- Cory Wong (guitar - funnnky!) - was named after the Vulfpeck song Cory Wong!

## Why talk about a live album?

- Vulfpeck generally record live and without cut and mixed takes, so
- They love playing live.
- They record their tracks altogether in one room and video the recording for their YouTube channel.
- The ultimate live album and a great introduction to the band and their following. Which is immense and diverse (thanks to Bandcamp and Spotify)
- My son played me Dean Town from the live gig before I heard the recorded track. I've never heard a crowd sing along with a bass like that.
- The entire live show was recorded on a single camera and has 7.7m views on YouTube four years later.
- My son is 20. He was introduced to Vulfpeck when he was 16 by a friend he met playing Minecraft. That's how it goes these days.

## A note about the set

- A roomful of furniture from their friends living room in Ann Arbor Michigan where they recorded some of their most popular tracks and YouTube videos.
- Just a load of carpets. Made it familiar and friendly
- Jack Stratton's mother comes on halfway through and leads a meditation session
- Kept the ticket prices low and stayed in AirBnBs, no tour bus or lots of gear.
- Video is recorded mostly with a live camera walking round the stage.

## A note about Sleepify - how they paid for touring

- Vulfpeck recorded a silent album and put it out on Spotify in 2014
- Raised \$20,000 which funded a free tour. (The Sleepify tour)
- <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2014/jul/25/vulpeck-the-band-who-made-20000-from-their-silent-spotify-album>
- Hilarious video interview with Jack Stratton about it. "Whenever I whine as an artist we should all remember that's why I don't have to use a label"  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LB1sTH7bUQ4&t=6s>

"In the normal world, you create your online efforts so that you can hopefully play as many shows as you can live," Stanley says. "But Jack's thinking was the opposite: Let's do as much as we can online and only play live when we feel like it. And you know, it's worked."

<https://alumni.umich.edu/michigan-alum/no-label-no-problem/>

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/subbutcher/>

## Tracks

Introducing the band along the way, along with additional players.

Timings are from the gig video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rv4wf7bzfFE>

Links are to the Bandcamp tracks.

### The Sweet Science 00:00

- The Sweet Science is a doina (Romanian style tune pronounced doyna) composed and performed by clarinetist and Klezmer musician from Brooklyn Michael Winograd
- Klezmer is an instrumental musical tradition of Ashkenazi Jews of central and eastern Europe. Often played at weddings.
- Jack Stratton's dad is a Klezmer musician and the track (which also appears on their album 'The Beautiful Game') is a perfect sound to set the New York scene and reflect the celebratory nature of the gig. Almost family like.

### Tee Time 02:18

- Used to introduce the band
- Inspired by Richard Tee (the jazz pianist) and Signed Sealed Delivered I'm Yours.
- His parents named him after a Vulfpeck song: Cory Wong!

### Animal Spirits 04:19

- First love song on the album. So upbeat. One of the first ones I took to.
- About two contrasting individuals - a formal, hyper rational guy and a girl who is aloof and believes in astrology.
- "They've got sixteen mutual friends"
- Vocals by Theo Katzman (also playing drums) though Jack is pretending on the official video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTUnDV3MgVQ>

### Cory Wong 07:55

- Cory met the band in 2013 and jammed with them. The track was later re-recorded and released with his name. It's all about rhythm guitar.
- Cory has recorded on every album since and toured with the band.
- Everyone in the band has their own careers and other spinoffs.
- Cory Wong official video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AWBUnr0F3Zo>

### My First Car 12:38

- First introduction to Joe Dart. My first car is also the name of their third studio album - which is a great introduction to Joe's bass playing.
- Incredibly groovy and upbeat with a definite 70s vibe.
- Joe bought the Volvo 240GL which is on the album cover because Sweden is so funky.
- Watch the official video of My First Car here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUyuGjLy4BQ>

### Daddy, He Got a Tesla 15:42

- Features jazz drummer Nate Smith on drums.
- Repeating lyric: "Daddy, He Got a Tesla"

- Includes a sample of Mozart's Eine Kleiner Nachtmusik. Note the audience participation (this increases!)
- Daddy, He got a Tesla official video feat. Pegasus Warning, Joey Dosik & Jamire Williams: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8DRCGcuByQc>

### **Arena Meditation 20:18**

- Arena breathwork meditation led by Jack's mum to calm everyone down.
- To prepare everyone emotionally and physically for the next songs - calmer and more contemplative.
- Lovely to watch over 13000 music fans tapping their foreheads.

### **Smile Meditation 24:22**

- A showpiece by Chris Thile (mandoline) and Dave Koz (soprano sax)
- Composed by Woody Goss
- Reminds me of Taxi Theme Tune

### **Running Away 29:38**

- First of the Songs composed by Joey Dosik to feature in the gig.
- It's about when a romance is over, and you keep thinking the other person is still thinking about you.
- Is Running Away influenced by Carole King, Sam Cooke or Marvin Gaye?
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wvpljcxU3hY>

### **Baby I Don't Know Oh Oh 34:59**

- Featuring Charles Jones on Piano and Vocals.
- Composed by Ryan Lerman. A really fantastic piece of music, performed by a genius.
- You've been on my mind - I know I was out o'line - saying I've been giving up on you - I don't want to...
- Official Vulfpeck video for Baby I Don't Know Oh Oh (feat Charles Jones): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQIPXJvX9gY>

### **1612 38:53**

- Here comes Antwaun Stanley. Antwaun is another Uni of Michigan alumni.
- First of several tracks with him on vocals.
- an attempt to remember the passcode to Jack's one-time AirBnB rental
- "that's the code to my heart - I go 1 6 1 2... star"
- "Frank Sinatra"
- Gets the crowd really wound up for a bit of fun.

### **Funky Duck 42:20**

- From the Thrill of the Arts album.
- "Vulfpeck likes to offset an intense devotion to craft with goofy, irreverent lyrics."
- Funky Duck official video:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhNfddJRuIQ>
- This song has been destroyed in our house by the obvious spoonerism.

- In the gig Jack leads a search for the funky duck and Cory Wong puts on a duck head.

### Aunt Leslie 46:53

- Feat. Melissa Gardner on trombone.
- No one seems to know what this song is about. There's an Aunt Leslie in the film Captain Fantastic. Winston Churchill had an aunt called Lady Leonie Leslie. But is Leonie? Sergio Leone?
- I take it from the song that this is about the influence of a relative.

### Wait for the Moment 50:55

- Last of Antwaun Stanley's tracks.
- Picking up on the phone call element of Aunt Leslie. Full of childhood and teenage emotion.
- I love the lyric "I'm good at stuff and you're into stuff, lets make products. I'm a product guy and you're a produce girl. I said money money money will be spent"
- Has a lovely bass solo by Jo Dart and a great bit of keyboard and clarinet solo.

### The Hill Climbers (speech) 57:26

- "I get Tony Robbins result at TJMax prices and I mince garlic"
- Jack Stratton tells the story of Vulfpeck beginning their first gig in 2013 "with no rope, no label and no management"
- First gig in NYC which was totally promoted online. Making the analogy between the Vulfpeck journey and a mountaineering expedition.

Which brings us to some of their most successful and iconic numbers.

### Back Pocket 1:02:25

- A beautiful song about young love in the playground/
- One of the most successful of their tracks released in 2015.
- 93 million streams on Spotify.
- You might remember it from an Apple commercial (wasn't the first one): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8VX2QNn7bU>
- Lovely official video of Back Pocket (5.5 million views). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yG96RttfZtM>
- At the gig Theo Katzman gets the crowd to pitch the song and then gets them to sing the three-part harmony chorus. They then sing the song a cappella with the audience singing the harmonies.
- Later on, there is a three clarinet jam!

### Beastly 1:08:44

- The band's first release (April 2011 as a YouTube video). This was before they released their first EP.
- A classic one of their instrumentals which characterises their focus on the groove.
- Apparently named after an awful movie (a modern take from 2011 on Beauty and the Beast)

- Beastly also has a typescript named after it by James Edmondson (lots of vulfpeck fans make stuff). <https://ohnotype.co/fonts/beastly>

### Christmas in L.A. 1:15:50 (intro) 1:21:25

- Jack Stratton jokes that he isn't an Israeli citizen but learned that there is a loophole in the citizenship rules called the 'Santa Clause' which means if you write a Christmas song, you're immediately granted Israeli citizenship.
- Sung by Theo Katzman who wrote the lyrics.
- "I'm not talking about Hannukah in Santa Monica..."
- "Gotta get down to Los Angeles, 'cos this year that's where Santa is"
- Theo leads the audience in a three-part harmony set up.
- Interview with Theo Katzman about Christmas in LA:  
<https://liveforlivemusic.com/features/now-theo-katzman-discusses-means-vulfpeck/>
- Vulfpeck video for Christmas in LA:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5K3UgrPdbQ>

### Dean Town 1:28:36

- Next Stop Dean Town (2016) one of their most performed songs.
- This is the first bit of the gig I heard, the track Nathan showed me on YouTube.
- This is the track that started the singing along with a baseline?
- Showcasing the amazing talents of Joe Dart.
- Written by Woody Goss, arranged and mixed by Jack Stratton.
- Dean Town is inspired by the Jaco Pastorius/Weather Report song Teen Town where the bass takes the lead instrument role. If you want to watch some real nerds comparing the two tracks and adoring every minute:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KZj1oc33OLI> "These are some of the best musicians alive today"
- A modern-day classic. Brilliant musicianship but accessible.

First encore:

### Birds of a Feather we rock together 1:33:10

- Antwaun Stanley (with Joey and Theo on vocals)
- Cover of a song by Mocky, a Canadian singer songwriter.
- Mocky version of Birds of a Feather (the original)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUAb1W\\_z1SE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUAb1W_z1SE)
- Lots of light waving.
- Vulf video of Birds of a Feather features Joe Dart making pancakes  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WQm4R0LM2mE>

Second encore:

### It Gets Funkier 1:39:09

- A little reprise of the bedroom funk tune they have featured on so many of their Eps and albums but which gets faster all the time.
- A very 70s intro music middle 8.

- It gets faster: There's a video compiling lots of different versions here:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EpYHp-W51H4>

Then Jack ends the show by doing a handstand.

## Extra takeaways

- The favourite thing I found whilst researching some of the background to this session was A Very Vulfy Christmas made by Woody and rather Peanuts inspired:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Czj01VhbEwM>
- Loads of other stuff about Vulfpeck here:  
<https://www.reddit.com/r/Vulfpeck/s/1EUJ2RWaY2>

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