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these days – how people make their living with the way the business is today. Sometimes the answer is still music, or at least, music-adjacent. But a lot of times it's not.

He didn't do this before. We worked a little more solidly in the aughts. But I've been slowing down. It's a question everyone has to ask himself in this business of art. What is viable? Can I do it? When do I transition? Or can I, even? Do you double down on the music or look around (for something else)? It's a scary question.

J.C.: Well, I assume because of Pavement's past success you have a certain amount of luxury to just make the records that you want to make. You don't have to go play "Cut Your Hair" at a state fair.

S.M.: That's true. I mean, that doesn't sound so bad! I saw Los Lobos at the Stockton State Fair. It was during the time of "La Bamba." I was totally psyched.

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Yeah. I think that's not a bad thing. A band like Pavement, or even Big Black, it was kind of a signal of eliteness, you know? Like, we're above the struggles. This is pure. The indier-than-thou thing kind of reads pretty badly now, especially when it's white males doing it. That being said, there was a sense of community I felt, and also, expectations were pretty low to begin with. Most of us were happy to just be playing at (the Hoboken, N.J., club) Maxwell's. That's where the bands we saw were. Two hundred people was like, massive.

J.C.: The new record was produced by the Decemberists' Chris Funk. Had you known him long?

S.M.: I didn't know him very well. I know John Moen, because he was in the Jicks. But Chris had this new place that is like a cool studio that he's managing, and so we went to tour it. And Chris, if you were to ask him, he would say probably "of course I want to work with Steve, I liked Pavement

when I was a young man!" So it kinda just fell into place. I thought to work at home would be a good idea, but it's also on the West Side, so it actually felt like a commute to work.

And besides that, Chris, is, you know ... he's very good at music (laughs). He can play, and he knows way more people than I know in the music community, so he amassed some different players: strings, a fiddler bro. It was fun to have somebody arrange different things to happen.

J.C.: You've said that phrase, "good at music," a few times. It seems like everyone who starts out in punk or indie-rock, if they keep playing long enough, gets to that point eventually.

S.M.: That's true. But there's usually somebody that's really good in almost all bands. Of course there are amateurish miracles made by outsiders or non-players that are amazing, too. I kind of like being, you know, the modern primitive guy. I'm not bad or anything. Songwriting – I got that, so I can get away with playing with some sick players like Joanna, when I'm doing my thing.

J.C.: Last year, after the Trump inauguration, you and Colin Meloy and Sleater-Kinney and a bunch of other bands played the "Hell No!" concert, benefiting the ACLU and Unite Oregon. Onstage you said: "It's pretty fucked up if I'm being political."

S.M.: Yeah, that's right. I'm not big into ... I'm post-politics, man. I see through it all.

J.C.: Well obviously you didn't make something like the Superchunk record, which is an explicit protest album, but I'm assuming the last two years must have had some effect on your writing?

S.M.: Not as much ... I mean, (our generation) has been through a lot of stuff. Reagan. The Iraq War. George Bush. When that election happened, there were a lot of tears and broken hearts for many reasons, including it being a woman that was running, and having that kind of shot down by this guy. But through all the noise, I see these problems that are constant, even before Trump. I don't think he's gonna cause a nuclear war, so I kind of put my

faith in that. And just hope for it to end in the next chapter to come.

J.C.: Well, let's talk about the song "Bike Lanes," which is pretty topical.

S.M.: Yeah man. Portland. Have you ever looked on these bike forums? They're intense. It's like, real tears, and a lot of anger is vented, and passive-aggression, but also positivity, and good things. Change happens.

And then, this wasn't about bike lanes but I saw there was a benefit for something, and it seemed kind of like ... like it could have been for something else. It was a good thing. Good was done.

But it got me thinking about, "Where do you spend your time? How are you going to use your service, and your helping time?" And so the bike lanes stood in for that. It was like, what are you into, if you're just caring about the bike lane so much?

And then the song changes pace. There's a myriad of ways I could have gone. It would have been a bit preachy and didactic to criticize people's kin-folky obsession with lifestyle. Or you know, how people are gonna hunker down with a good book by the fireplace and ride out this Trump thing. There's a lot of kind of, almost Portlandia bullshit I could've put in there. But I wasn't keen on it. So I decided to make it dark. Police brutality. Combine my obsession with "Baltimore" (the name of a song on the Jicks' 2008 record "Real Emotional Trash") and a story that I also followed really intently. Freddie Gray. Just the name sounds like an outlaw folk hero to me. He got fucked with in a bad way.

J.C.: You're a Blazers fan and a fantasy baseball player, so what do you think of Portland's latest baseball fantasy?

S.M.: I don't want it, to be honest. I hate to say it, but I am happy with baseball the way it is. I'm happy watching games in other places when I'm traveling. And I just imagine it being a traffic nightmare, and also taking up space where people could live. I'm happy with just the basketball team. I don't need the soccer team even. That's enough for me, personally.

It doesn't seem real to me, and Portland doesn't seem like a baseball town to me. I'm use to the Mets and the Yankees and the Dodgers and the Giants, where it's like this totally intense thing. But I suppose it could happen. People are very supportive of things here. Portland Arts and Lectures. The soccer team. People geek out on things – even doughnuts.

"Sparkle Hard" is out on Matador Records/May 18. On August 5, Stephen Malkmus and the Jicks will end their summer tour at the Star Theater in Portland.

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– STEPHEN MALKMUS

(Pictured left to right) Joanna Bolme, Mike Clark, Jake Morris and Stephen Malkmus of the Jicks release Sparkle Hard, the band's seventh record (and first since 2014), May 18. The Jicks will play in Portland on August 5 at the Star Theater.

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