

## **PRESS RELEASE - Digital Hobo, 21st Century Ballads**

January 5, 2022

In Fall 2021, musicians gathered in Vancouver's Afterlife studio to record "21st Century Ballads", the debut album from Digital Hobo. The project is produced by Leeroy Stagger and features, Ryland Moranz (Guitars, Mandolin, Banjo), Geoff Hicks (percussion), and Tyson Maiko (bass). Guest Artists include Dawn Pemberton on vocals and Steve Mariner on harmonica.

The album comes 80 years after Woody Guthrie recorded "Dustbowl Ballads". This classic recording, often cited as the first concept album, spoke to the crises facing humankind in the 1930s - soil erosion, drought and mass migrations of desperate dustbowl farmers.

"21st Century Ballads" addresses those eerily familiar themes as they play out today in 2022 - but with a unique twist. Each ballad is written from the perspective of musician Digital Hobo, who lives in the year 2121. He wanders our future world performing songs about events that haven't yet occurred in our lifetime

Packaging this sci-fi future within these ballad's lyrics creates a powerful narrative in the realm of speculative fiction. The album fearlessly takes on our current bogey men - climate change, pandemics, systemic racism, income inequality, and human rights abuses. In the Digital Hobo's future world, these crises played themselves out and humankind overcame their adversities.

Says Digital Hobo about the writing process "I wrote each song with the assumption that we're going to survive all these crises and come out the other side to better times. As an artist, when I made this mental leap, the songs came fast and furious in about a month of obsessive writing. I feel very lucky to have had this inspiration. And lucky for the support of a Canadian music community in bringing these songs to life in the studio and on stage"

The songs on "21st Century Ballads" span multiple genres and diverse subjects.

The rock-anthem "Tell Me" speculates on a future world where politicians are screened before they take public office to ensure they are not sociopathic or narcissistic. Governance improves markedly, and the electorate is no longer held hostage by the personality disorders of their elected officials. "When you're playing the political game, are you a Kennedy or Machiavelli? Are you gonna treat us all the same, or scare us with your endless yelling?"

"As the World Cools Down" is a Dylanesque folk ballad written from the other side of our climate emergency. Says Digital Hobo, "In this song, Humankind reverses climate change through legislation, retooling to a low carbon economy, and most importantly, changing our own personal habits." The song's lyrics directly challenge the listener to take action, "Car Rides, Cheap Flights, Steak Dinners - Are written on the stones of your Grandkids graves"

"Amazon Holler" brings the listener into the conditions of workers in our gig economy. Reminiscent of work song Hollers from slaves in past times, the lyrics highlight the business practices of Amazon and it's far reaching effects on working people. "You can save a lot of money - click it when you need it...But did you see your good neighbour moving' to the poorhouse, Working overtime for the Amazon Man"

The folk-rap song, "COVID Refugees" paints a hopeful picture of our future world in which the pandemics are held in check by international cooperation and preventative measures. "Epidemiology is the biology of the bug that's killin' us, without apology!"

When asked about touring live with the material, Digital Hobo says "I'm stoked to play these songs to live audiences. On stage, I'll be in character as the future wandering minstrel Digital Hobo. I want to take the audience on a trip toward optimism. Something we need more of today. I want the audience to have 'hope with teeth'. If we can get folks to think creatively about our collective problems, then we've accomplished our highest goal as artists."

When asked about his relationship with the music marketing machine, Digital Hobo says "The record executive told me to break into the music biz, I should dye my hair blonde, wear clothes to make me look younger, and write sad songs about the past. So I ran hard in the opposite direction. I dyed my hair grey, wore clothes to make me look older, and wrote optimistic songs about the future!"

### **Liner Notes**

In the year 2121, Digital Hobo is a travelling musician who is steeped in the old music from generations past. He performs songs written in the 21st century that remind his audience of the great calamities of those times.

Historians depict the 21st century as a time of upheaval. Global crises destabilized many nations and upended the political and economic status quo. It was a time of global pandemics, climate emergencies, refugee migrations, social inequalities and jarring revolutions. And yet, humanity overcame these challenges, ushering an era of stability that persists into the 22nd century.

The 21st century was also a time of exceptional creativity. A musical revival occurred, firmly rooted in the tradition of political protest songs. Singers were inspired by the earlier works of 20th century musicians such as Joe Strummer, Bob Marley, and Woody Guthrie. Rooted in these fertile musical traditions, songwriters wrote about the turmoil of their times. This is a collection of ballads written and performed during the tumultuous 21st century.

You're invited to step into the future.

You're invited into this music, with the intention that it brings you hope and inspiration in uncertain times.

You're invited to listen to the entire album in one sitting while reading and reflecting on the liner notes.

You're invited to share it with your friends, who may also find it inspiring.

You're invited on this journey from "Learned Hopelessness to Learned Helpfulness".

You're invited to explore ideas to improve our future at [dighobo.com](http://dighobo.com)