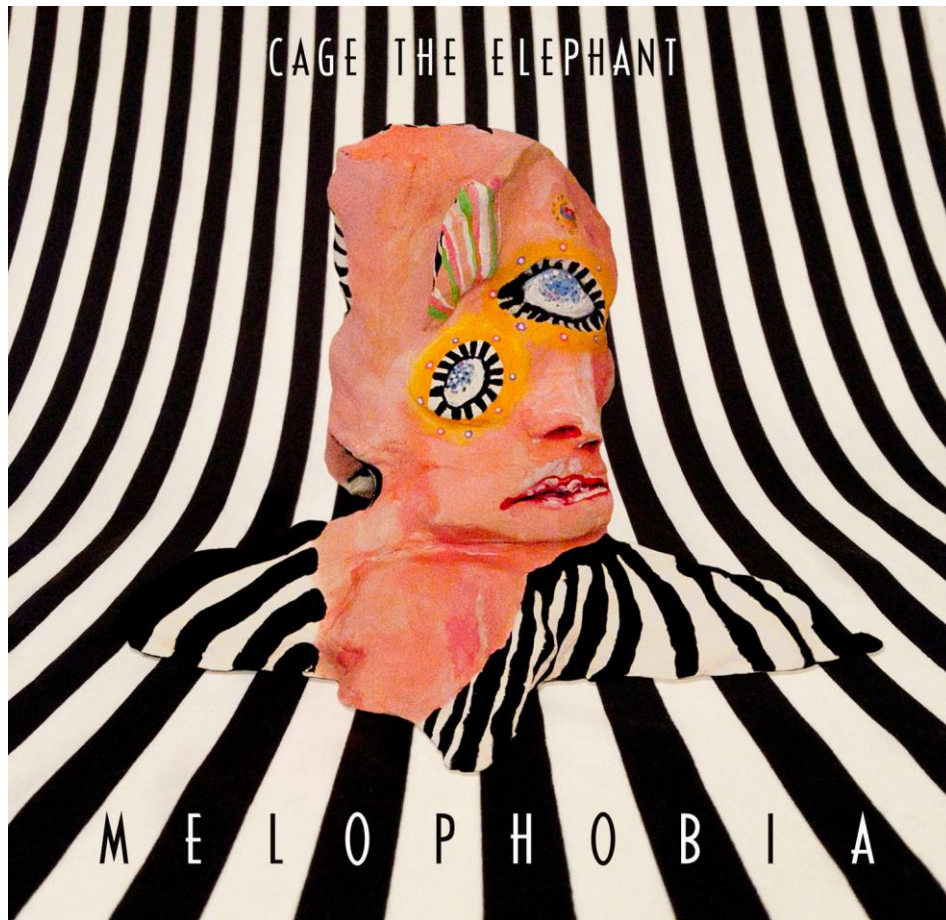


# “Cage the Elephant - **Melophobia** or how to not fear new sounds”

by Ariadna Herrera



Matt Shultz, vocalist of Cage The Elephant, was once told; "if you're not slightly embarrassed to sing the lyrics, you're probably not writing a good song." This is all the American band needed to set off the production of their third album. As Matt Shultz states, "the entire record was a struggle to maintain that naked honesty and I tried to do that for every song." With these ideas in mind, *Melophobia* was born and along with it, a new era for this Kentucky rock band.

Cage The Elephant was formed in 2006 in Kentucky. The actual members of the band are the brothers Matt (lead vocals) and Brad (rhythm guitar) Shultz, Nick Bockrath (lead guitar), Matthan Minster (keyboard and guitar), Daniel Tichenor (bass) and Jared Champion (drums). However, in this album Bockrath and Minster were not part of the band yet. Instead, former member Lincoln Parish played the lead guitar.



From left to right: Brad Shultz, Lincoln Parish, Matt Shultz, Jared Champion, Daniel Tichenor.

Before *Melophobia*, the band released two albums that put them in the spotlight. Those two first albums were influenced by everything the band members like: blues, funk, classic rock and punk. They gained a status as a new and emerging rock band in America and managed to do a couple of tours with those records. Their live performances became a success due to their high energy and emotion, so they continued playing live. So much so that they spent five years non-stop touring. After that, the band decided to rest and start writing songs for their new and third studio album, *Melophobia*.



The Making Of The 'Melophobia' Artwork [Cage The Elephant]

make the new album.

The cover of the album was designed by R Clint Colburn. The word itself, *Melophobia*, means “fear of music”. All through the recording process, they pushed each other’s limits and shared their creative emotions, which later they would put together into songs. According to the drummer, Jared Champion, sometimes they would have fights over what they thought it was good music. They clashed stylistically and even personally but, in the end, that melophobia is what drove them to

For the band, this was an attempt to find their original and honest sound. They wanted to get rid of the ambiguity that stuck with the other two albums and, instead, finally obtain their “inherent style”, as Shultz says. To do this, they tried to stop listening to recorded music, so it would not influence their own creations. All this effort is reflected in *Melophobia*, an album that sure brings the best of them.

Making of the cover: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?=49&v=dzR2VKULUOc>



*The Shultz's brothers, Matt and Brad.*

The first track of an album is always important. It plays a huge role on how the LP is going to be listened and understood. “**Spiderhead**” does an excellent job kicking off *Melophobia*, especially with the three first seconds of the song when you can only hear loud drums, guitar and bass chords rumbling everywhere. Although the lyrics, written by Brad Shultz and Daniel Tichenor, are not their best (*spiders in my head, spiders in my mind...*), the guitar solo in the end makes up for those hollow lyrics.

The sound is a little bit rough, even dirty, especially in the chorus, and it hits its dirtiest top at minute 3:16. This for me is a proof of the contrasting sounds of the band: throughout the album, we can listen to both songs with nice clean sounds, but also loud rock tracks with rawer, dirtier sounds. Also, as I like to imagine, the ending is a reference to blues music: two guitars play a little Call and Response all the way from minute 3:17 to the end of the first track while another guitar, the bass and the drums keep the rhythm. The band has always been influenced by blues, and I think this is the way they translate it into their own identity.



“Spiderhead”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8DOKTX4EFY>



The second song of the album is also the lead single. “**Come A Little Closer**” got to number one in the *Billboards Alternative Songs* chart in the US, which makes it the fourth song from the band to top the chart. The song itself has a dark feel in it, which is remarked by a consistent bass line.

By the time you listen to the first chorus, your expectations on the song are quite low. It does have their distinctive Cage The Elephant sound, but it gets boring very soon. However, by the time the bridge comes (2:16), the song gets 100 times better. It is undeniable that the bridge is the strongest part of the track: it slows down, all the instruments get quieter and the voice melodic. And then, it speeds up in one of the most energetic displays in this album (2:58). This part is great to listen to with the loudest volume possible. The way it builds up sure makes you want to stand up and start dancing to the tune. All in all, it is not one of my favourite tracks from the album because I would say it lacks sparkle, it is not a unique song. Although it sure is my favourite bridge from *Melophobia*.

“Come A Little Closer”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KVYup3Qwh8Q>

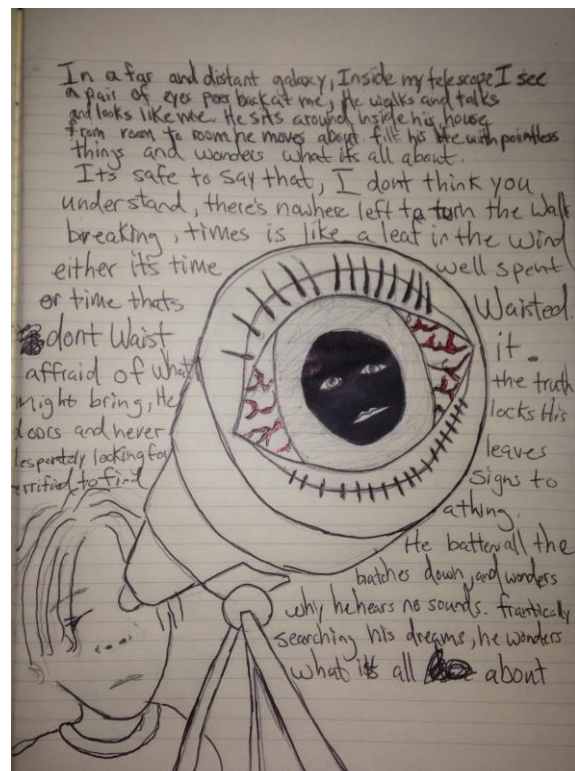


## *Come A Little Closer*

"Come A Little Closer" single cover.

The track that comes after "Come A Little Closer" is not as upbeat but it sure is worth mentioning. "**Telescope**" was for Matt Shultz the most challenging song to write from the album. After touring for five years, the singer spent his days shut-in at his place running out of things to do. He would decorate the rooms of his house a dozen of times and basically sink in a vacuum of loneliness. This desolation inspired him to write a song about it, but seeing it from the outside. As Matt Shultz describes it: "*I thought it would be interesting to write a song about a lonely person who is scared to see the truth that is right in from of him. I thought it would be interesting if you could watch yourself from a distance. That song is a personal account of loneliness. I'd find myself staring at a blank TV screen feeling sorry for myself.*"

Personally, I think these are the best lyrics from the album. They are still not very complex nor





intricate, but you can see how Shultz is getting better at this, with lines like “*Time is like a leaf in the wind / Either it's time well spent / Or time I've wasted / Don't waste it.*” They sure are honest and straightforward, something the band was attempting to when making *Melophobia*.

“Telescope” is one of the only two slow tempo, we could even call them ballads, from *Melophobia*. In both the band did a fantastic job with creating an enigmatic, soothing atmosphere. It has a good melody in it, and even if it's not a masterpiece, I still think it's one of their most notable work. They succeed on getting a clean, neat sound without abandoning their dark, punk trademark.

For the link to listen to, I decided to choose the “unpeeled” version, as they call it, from their last album named, guess what, *Unpeeled*. The album collects 21 live tracks, from covers to their own old songs. I liked this one song particularly because you can hear how I changes a little when they play it live and, especially, how Matt Shultz sings it. It has a good ring to it and the harmonies are very well reached. Plus, there are some classical instruments in it, which contribute to creating a satisfying melody.

“Telescope” (unpeeled version): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5DzSgwwHHo>



“**Take It or Leave It**” is the second single of the album and it reached number 12 in the US. It is far more cheerful and upbeat than “Telescope” and full of the Beatles’ influence. Especially the way Matt Shultz sings the chorus, it reminds me of “I Want to Hold Your Hand”. Just as all the songs of the album, it has some enigmatic, funky guitar riffs that create a nice, feel-good melody. The song is very danceable and it is striking that they came up with it completely out of the blue. The way Matt describes it; “Brad started playing this little guitar thing. Pretty soon,

Jared started playing drums to it. Everyone jumped in and the song started to happen. It was one of those 'light-bulb' moments.” The chorus took them a little bit more of time, but eventually Matt came up with some decent and honest lines. My favourite from all the track: “*Sweet wheel of death keeps us holding our breath.*” The vocals are piercing, but not necessarily in a bad way. He sounds like he is complaining, which perfectly suits the lyrics.

The music video is basically clips of the band performing the song while some roller skaters have a dancing competition. It has a very retro style and some Saturday Night Fever feels, which may not have anything to do with the song’s meaning, but they give a cool touch to the whole mood of the video.

“Take It or Leave It”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahZFnwDVI1I>

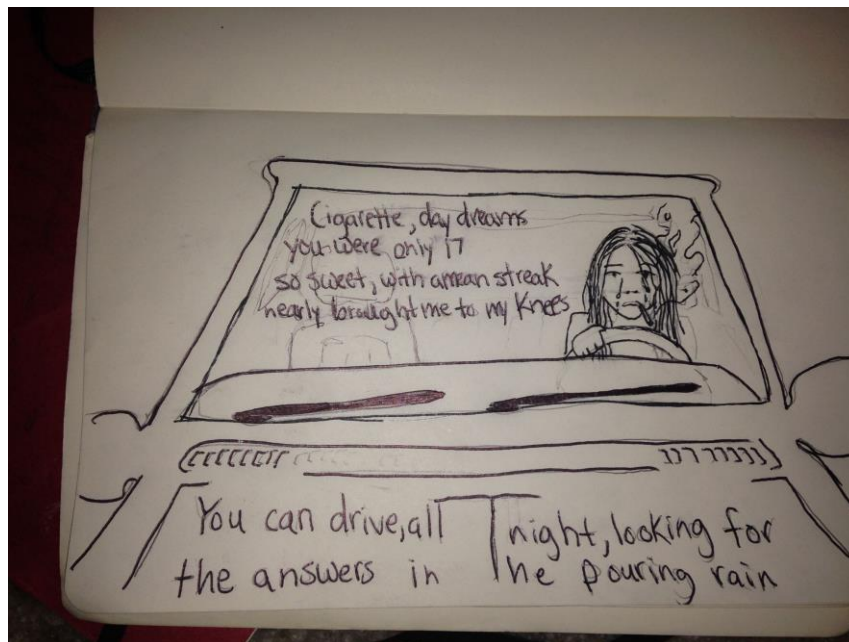


The next song I want to talk about is “**Halo**”. For me, it has always been a combination of the two styles you can hear in *Melophobia*. It is not as slow as the ballads from the album, but it sure has more melody than the energetic punk tracks. The song is not even 3 minutes long, but there’s something in it that sticks in. I think we could say it is the catchiest, most pop song from the album, maybe even from their whole discography. The lyrics are, once again, simple and straightforward. Matt Shultz wanted to write about personal struggle, and the backing vocals really help building up this feeling. I believe that, even if ‘Halo’ is simple, the melody is still great, especially the guitar riffs, and it proves how good Cage The Elephant are in creating solid, decent melodies.

“Halo”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9jZGFrQMqE>

If “Spiderhead” is a great opening for the album, “**Cigarette Daydreams**” is an even better way to close it. For this song, the band drifted from their punk rock genre and tried to focus more on the vocals rather than the raw loud instrumental sounds. The song has a beautiful guitar and piano melody supported by Matt’s tender vocals. It was the first song I ever listened to from this band and it is still my favourite. I think listening to it is a unique venture, rather hypnotic. It is written and sung with a lot of emotion and the delicate guitar chords accompany this nostalgic feeling. It is also surprising that it only took Matt Shultz 20 minutes to write it, the fastest song to be written from *Melophobia*. This shows their mastery of not only writing loud energetic punk songs, but also of creating mesmerizing ballads, worthwhile listening to. This is a song that will immediately transport you to your saddest and happiest memories. At least to me it always does.

“Cigarette Daydreams”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oPeETnB8m8w>



Sketches of the song made by Matt Shultz

*Melophobia* was released the 8th of October in 2013. The reviews from music critics were mostly positive, regarding them for thinking outside *their* box and experimenting with new sounds, lyrics and melodies. *Rolling Stone* magazine gave them 3.5 stars out of 5, and I would give it 4/5. Even if they still have a long way to go, the album has some brilliant tracks for being their third LP.

The band considers playing all their songs live very important because it is what they really love from this profession. This is always reflected in the work they put out, always very energetic, usually danceable and with a lot of soul. I think this is a good thing because then both the audience and the band enjoy more the concerts.



In conclusion, I think *Melophobia* is a big step forward in the group's identity and true sound. Without it, the album they would release next, *Tell Me I'm Pretty*, would not be as good and mature as it is. *Melophobia* is a milestone in the band's progress and development. It is always an enjoyable listen for me. I recommend you listen to the songs, preferably in the order they are put in the album. I had never done it before this review and I assure you it was a new and gratifying experience.

*Melophobia* (full album): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bievu-G-MjE>

