

# Fleeting Suns



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Regarding the Bitter Jester Music Festival

To Whom It May Concern:

Colored blasts of light hitting my face, surging with adrenaline, and overwhelmed with joy... I had just been awarded a victory at Bitter Jester's Music Festival. Sweating and elated, I was played off stage to the tune of booming fireworks that 4<sup>th</sup> of July. I emerged from our years of battling a different man. As a 16-year-old highschooler, I had temporarily been given a window into the life of a famed musician. I was given a taste of what would become my life's work and occupy my 20's (or at least so far!) My band at the time, The Burrows 4, were hailed into this hall of winners by our peers and the panel. Having never played shows of this size or with such extensive sound and light production, it was a wonderful opportunity for us to be there. It was completely above and beyond any battle we as a band or I as a musician had ever participated in. Before this festival playing usually meant a bar or a gymnasium with two PA's on posts and an 8-channel mixer... nothing compared to the grandeur of the Bitter Jester festival. It is the Glastonbury of Battles of the Bands; the Coachella of band-on-band rivalry; the Bonnaroo of Band Battles. We always faced a tremendous audience, lights, and sound, especially when compared to our guitarist's cellar! We gained great press in newspapers and online and added many followers on our social media accounts.

Leading up to big finale event were the Friday Night Competitions, which were always an excellent place to promote our budding band and foster relationships with other musicians. We plugged our other upcoming shows at these preliminary concerts, too, which was really useful for us in terms of expanding our fan base. Years later, I still cross paths with bands and musicians I battled on those Friday nights. The music industry is a big family and being able to build a network outside of your own town is really useful when you're trying to get better venues, more fans, and bigger audiences.

We initially heard about the competition through our drummer's teacher and decided to apply. We were spurred on mainly by the opportunity to play for so many people... but the monetary winnings actually ended up paying for our studio time! It was quite the gift to be able to record a full album with money you had made playing your music. It was an astounding proposition to be rewarded in a real physical way beyond just the approval of your peers (though that approval is lovely on its own!).

Each year in between our Friday Night win and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Grand Finale Concert, we would practice tirelessly. And in our final year before we "aged-out" we were up against some really good bands. And though we had won every other time we participated, we were bested that year. We were, of course, deflated as any loser is, but there was silver lining in those seemingly dark clouds. In the months leading up to that July 4<sup>th</sup> loss we had changed our genre away from our roots. Though it was a slightly ugly loss with some ugly glares, we did, in fact, lose. I ended up starting a new musical project a year or two later that has now ascended to heights I never



thought possible. I am so thankful for the lessons this specific festival taught me. In our loss, I learned to never lose my roots or “where I’m from” musically. There was a certain kind of humility that my band mates and I were taught in that loss. It is, of course, a bummer, but the important thing is that – as a developing future professional musician – it taught us that there will *always* be someone who unexpectedly rocks your pants off. You are *never* the best, even if you think you are. There is probably some guy out there in a shed somewhere with a crumby old Gibson who could melt the faces off all the world’s music lovers if only they heard him. And though I’m sure it sounds rather contrived, the BJBTOB taught me how to lose like a real rock star: graciously.

If we had not aged-out after that year we absolutely would have continued to participate and re-apply. It was just such a momentous occasion for us as a wet-behind-the-ears band. It is where I first learned what a Direct Input box (Di Box) is and what line level is. I learned how a sound system really functions and how to interact with an Audio Technician and let him know what you need in your monitors. Basically this music fest showed me how to interact with the pros on a professional stage. It was – and still is – run by a highly tuned and professional crew who are all courteous and highly communicative and encouraging. Even bands that come in with music that is a little outside the box are always given huge amounts of support and given their dues. In what could be a very tense experience, the management of this festival always keeps it about the music and *not* about the “winners” and “losers.” It is the correct lens to look at a competition through. It should always be about the music and about people’s love for said music. The Bitter Jester Music Festival perfectly walks the line between hyper competitive battling and a laid-back hippie music fest. These concerts were a learning experience like no other I can think of.

If you are a teenage musician with a band, would like to play in front of a huge audience, make new and life long friends, build your future musical network, and generally just rock the F\*\*\* out, then the BJBTOB is your Christ, Commander, and Commandant. In many ways it built my stage career and was the genesis of the new love of my life, Fleeting Suns... my new band which I am thrilled about and am touring the country with. I cannot say enough how important the BJBTOB was to me and will be to you in becoming a professional musician.

Bitter Jester’s BTOB provided a crucible of musical combat that gave validation to hours of toiling in basements, practicing, and honing my writing and performing crafts. It gave me more than just a few plaques to hang on my wall. It showed me what real performing is all about. It gave me a chance to work a large crowd and learn how to galvanize an audience. It provided the stepping-stones to making me the performer I am today.

Sincerely,

Andy Burrows  
Fleeting Suns