

FIDDLEBLACK

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Independent Literary Magazine Report

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Fact Sheet

Magazine: Fiddleblack

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What They Publish: *Fiddleblack* publishes a variety of works including an online journal featuring poetry and fiction stories, a yearly print journal, a handful of fiction novels, and have recently started recording podcasts of the online stories read by their authors. *Fiddleblack's* online journal is the only work of unsolicited material they publish. They look for pieces that range from literary to speculative fiction, but have a soft spot for pieces that explore the boundaries of existentialism, setting or place, and pieces that feature “concept horror.”

Fiddleblack's online journal accepts poetry of all styles and lengths, often publishing multiple poems from one author in a single issue. They accept work from both published and emerging authors.

Founded: 2011

Submission Guidelines: *Fiddleblack* does not have a word limit on the fiction or poetry pieces submitted for their online journal, they are more concerned with the content of the pieces. All submissions can be done online through their Web site under the “Submit” page. They do not have a word count for their submissions but many of their published pieces span from flash fiction (1,000 words or less) to essays or short stories (1,000 to 6,000 words). They do stipulate that they avoid works about Seasonal/Holidays, Sports/Fitness, Young Adults/Teens.

Simultaneous Submission: Yes

Description of Publication: *Fiddleblack* is a clean publication with a visually minimalistic design. All issues are free and archived on the site making them easily accessible. Each published journal has an accompanying theme and graphic cover design. The stories and each piece of poetry opens in a separate window and is formatted and designed to have a unified but visually engaging design as well as a personalized bio by each contributing author.

Prose Per Issue/Amount Published Annually: Average of 6 stories or poems per issue, though as few as five and as many as ten stories have been published in an issue. The online Journal is published roughly six times annually.

Prose Comparison

	Fiddleblack #6	Fiddleblack #10	Fiddleblack #15
Male : Female Authors	6 : 0	3 : 2	3 : 3
Fiction : Poetry	6 : 0	5 : 0	5 : 0
Published : Emerging Autors	5 : 1	2 : 3	3 : 3
First : Second : Third Person Stories	4 : 1 : 1	2 : 0: 3	4 : 0: 2

Although not shown in the issues I read, *Fiddleblack* does feature a number of published poetry pieces in more than half of their issues. One can also see that there are a majority of male authors published, whether or not this is due to the fact that more men submit to the magazine or not, I couldn't say. Additionally, from the three issues I read there was a fair ratio of pieces from published and emerging authors, this is reflected evenly throughout many of *Fiddleblack's* issues with fluctuations in both across the years. It would seem *Fiddleblack* also fluctuates between first and third person stories, with a rare second person point of view; they make it a point to publish works of all points of view.

Interview with Founding Editor Jason Cook

Jennifer Bostrom: In *Fiddleblack's* Mission Statement the style and interests of the publication are much more detailed than I've seen in some publications who only give a line or two. How did you go about cultivating this Mission Statement?

Jason Cook: *Fiddleblack* came about as a way to fill a personal creative space more than anything. There was a time when a few of the books mentioned in the mission statement were actively carried with me in an intellectual sense. The themes, characters, even the tones felt ever present in my graduate studies, fiction, everywhere. And I felt there had to be a better way to express some of those things. The nihilistic elements in McCarthy and Houellebecq weren't interesting enough for me to discuss, but to see them discussed by others was much more interesting. I figured that there had to be others who felt the same way, as there always is when one tends to think "Am I the only one who feels this way?," and the audience grew organically from there.

JB: How has *Fiddleblack* evolved?

JC: *Fiddleblack* began as an online journal exclusively. It's grown from the start into a seldom-seen podcast and a small press that's relatively active for what it is. Conceptually speaking, we certainly maintain a part of the mission statement as it was originally given, but those requirements are more the fabric of *Fiddleblack* than anything at this point. In terms of evolution, we tend to accept work that deviates from the mission but still has seeds of the different aesthetics discussed.

JB: Do you have careers outside of the journal and press? How do you balance your time?

JC: Indeed, I personally have another business that requires quite a bit of attention. I tend to simply grunt through the process each day, doing whatever possible and unfortunately delaying emails and tasks to "within the week (or month, depending)" with the idea that it will all get done eventually. I chip and chip away.

JB: What has been your biggest reward from publishing?

JC: I think the biggest reward so far is something I never expected. When I started *Fiddleblack*, I had a sense of limitless potential at the start, and now that I'm several years into it, with X budget and Y time, I can sort of see how to drive it to a point where those values increase and the

reach becomes greater and so on. To me, to have the ability to calculate and control something that was once just an idea is very rewarding.

JB: How do you choose a theme for each issue?

JC: For a while we were soliciting submissions based on a theme given to writers so many months prior to publication. That worked for a period of time, but I felt that the submissions were becoming too rigid as people were trying harder and harder to secure placement. Now we grow the theme, if there's anything applicable, based on the accepted pieces for that issue.

JB: How involved with contributors are you when it comes to editing a potentially publishable piece?

JC: Sometimes too involved. We've had several pieces that were creatively edited beyond normal recognition, which caused some contention with the authors. There are a lot of writers that I come across who have the right ability to tell a story, but they unfortunately use the wrong content to do so. For whatever reason, grabbing creative control can probably feel very invasive and offensive.

JB: One thing I've noticed, when compared to other online publications, is how beautifully designed the published pieces are. How important is design and layout to the journal?

JC: I think there's almost nothing more important short of actual content. It's so easy to grab a content manager and cookie-cutter theme from some friend of a friend Web designer, then give a name with "Review" in the title and call yourself a journal of some sort. Defining a unique aesthetic and associating that look and feel with your readers and contributors is the definition of a publication to me, so I try to replicate that in the digital realm.

JB: And what advice would you give to someone starting his or her own independent press or literary magazine?

JC: I'd recommend that he or she limit their scope. There are enough broad-faced literary magazines out there, and the shelf life for any given one is terribly limited. I recently saw a company that's partially dedicated themselves to archiving dead literary journals, if that gives any indication of the reality of my previous statement. Limit your scope and cultivate an audience that's almost fetishistic about your kind of content.

Prose Review

Fiddleblack #6:

The Ones by Nicholas Rombes is plainspoken magical realism story in an exotic setting. The story is told by an unnamed narrator, accused of murdering a number of children, during his interrogation and escape from police holding. The story is split in two sections. In first, the narrator enumerates the method of killing he chose for each one of his victims, how he hunted them, and how old they were. However, in the second the narrator retracts these stories, explaining he's been tortured and forced to take the blame for the murders of the children, all the while chained to a desk. The lines become blurred during this second section in which the narrator questions if he's even being held by the real police, speculating that perhaps his interrogator is the murderer, and finally when trying to escape he loses touch with reality, no longer understanding time and space of himself, at one point asking "what really does it matter if I'm the Inspector or his subject?"

The story builds very quickly from its opening line "Robbie D., third grader, sleepover, his heart beating against the palm of my hand," and maintains an easy pacing throughout. The story is told from the first person point of view which, in the second section, lends itself to the confusion of who the narrator really is and his struggle to find himself. The sentences are long, employing many commas, which also helps to immerse the reader in the same hazy stream of consciousness that the narrator cannot find his way out of. Section one sets the tone for a disillusioned world, a world that is wrought with real horror and then the story is flipped on its tail poses a horror that lives in the mind of a person who cannot tell fact from their own fiction.

The Saddler's Son by Dane Elcar is a plainspoken realistic story told in a domestic setting. The story is about a man coming to grips with a violent murder he committed in the middle of the night and how he recognizes that it is not an action one can come to grips with. In the middle of the night he brings a girl down to a secluded location near a river, strips her of her clothing, at which point it is alluded that the narrator rapes the young girl, though it is never explicitly stated. During the rape the man chokes the young girl until she stops breathing, but after pushing away from her she regains her breath at which point the narrator becomes angry and beats the girl until she begins to bleed out and he leaves her there to die. He returns home and carries on life as normally as possible, haunted by his own actions.

The story's opening line "I know you don't want to hear it," immediately grabs the attention of the reader. This statement of recognition carries a tone of finality, guilt, and anger that persists throughout the entirety of the story. Told in the uncommon second person point of view, the narrator spends his last statements asking the reader "Do you know of it? Could you see it in me? That side. Could you see that in me?" The short, clipped sentences are also consistent in most of the story, which suggests a frenzied tone coming from the narrator and puts the reader in an eerily conversational setting with the narrator. In the later half on the story the narrator begins to contemplate life and death "I didn't believe in hell until that night. I wonder what that says about hell? I know it doesn't come after you die."

Fiddleblack #10:

Sparks by Gillian Morrison is a plainspoken realistic story told in a domestic setting. The story is told from the point of view of a teenage girl on her way home from the high school senior trip to an amusement park. While she and her friends were waiting in line for a roller coaster ride they saw something fall to the ground and realize one of their classmates had fallen off of the ride and died. Interspersed are short tellings of her relationships with the people she is with when Stephanie, the classmate, died, including her brief interactions with Stephanie as children. During the time of Stephanie's death the narrator is engaged in a sexually driven, yet emotionally abusive relationship with a boy, Chase; she is also struggling with the knowledge that her mother has begun an affair yet looks down upon her relationship with Chase.

The story is told in the first person bringing the reader close to the reader's internal struggle and opinions of her family and friends, Chase in particular. Although the story is centered on the events of Stephanie's death the true focus is the narrator's relationships. The pacing is quick and smoothly flows in and out of scenes between the present and her past experiences. In particular Morrison showcases this smooth transition in the opening line: "He wouldn't look at me on the bus, but we'd had sex a week earlier, pulled off to an unlighted road near the point, the ocean only feet away from the parked car," telling us both past and present and the setting in a single sentence. These transitions make the switch from past to present natural and don't jar the reader.

Remember the Bridge by Eric Van Hoose is a plainspoken realistic story told in a domestic setting. The story's main character is Wade Fuller, a man passed his prime, is drowning

his anger after a domestic fight in cheap beer when he runs into a high school friend, Connor Clayson. The two men reminisce together about all of the things they used to do together as boys, in particular they would go to an old bridge, climb the railing, and wait for cars passing below to vandalize or throw things onto, “litter, nickels, chunks of pumpkins around Halloween.” Their evening leads them back to the bridge and the boys decide to drop a stone over the bridge on the next car. The story ends with a news report months later, a man, nearly killed in the crash, wants to let the men responsible know “Wherever you are, you’re forgiven...God forgives you.”

Remember the Bridge is told in the third person point of view, has a very fast pace, but the ending leaves a lackluster feeling. Although it can be understood that Connor and Wade fled the scene after the accident, in what seems to be a departure from *Fiddleblack*'s other stories, *Remember the Bridge* spends no time on the contemplation of existentialism or consequence to actions that characters in previous stories have pondered over. This story likens to a listing of unfortunate events and bad choices with little character development. However, the story does make an attempt at coming full circle. The story begins with Wade being thrown out of his apartment, by who we assume is his girlfriend or wife, threatening to call the cops. In retaliation Wade says “I hope to God you do, I hope to God you do” which sets up a level of irony considering no cops were called in the face of the accident and the ending line is “God forgives you.”