

I was immediately hooked by the title track “Interpret It Well” of Ches Smith’s forthcoming album and the tension built through its series of delicate passages that become completely unhinged in its slamming, euphoric, final minutes. The experience of the music itself is one of being slowly drawn into the vortex of an awesome and powerfully destructive storm. The cover of the album, a Raymond Pettibon drawing of a small house, railroad tracks, telephone poles, and massive funnel cloud looming on the horizon, illustrates this feeling explicitly. The resulting video *Protect Your Home (Interpret It Well)* is an archival montage on the subject of home security assembled from a torrent of commercials, public service announcements, and DIY footage addressing a wide spectrum of possible threats.

Test videos produced by research institutes and insurance companies were the first pieces of the puzzle I assembled. In these clips, full scale housing structures are demolished using simulated environmental conditions in an effort to develop (and sell) methods of reinforcing buildings from severe winds, flooding, fires, and storms. Maybe a lifesaving investment for certain homeowners, but a band-aid level solution when put in the broader context of destruction caused by the climate crisis.

Two other archival films feature prominently. First is *The House in The Middle*, a 1954 film made by The National Clean Up - Paint Up - Fix Up Bureau, a "bureau" invented by the National Paint, Varnish and Lacquer Association trade group. The film depicts the effects of a nuclear bomb test on a set of three small houses and sells the idea that a clean, freshly-painted home is more likely to survive a nuclear attack than its poorly maintained counterparts. The second key source is *Residential Shelter in Place*, a 2002 video produced by the newly formed US Department of Homeland Security and FEMA. In this piece, a suburban family diligently follows recommended post-9/11 protocols to seal themselves off from a chemical attack by using plastic sheeting and a surplus of duct tape: fantastical depictions of low-cost solutions meant to pacify the public anxiety of a potential “event.”

Expanding from there, the work rotates through numerous vectors: protect your home from lawn erosion; from spills on carpet, from electromagnetic frequencies, from evil spirits – flipping channels as we speed down the highway and ride the rails directly into the path of the storm. Past and future blur as the narrative culminates in a sequence of footage from TV Sign-off reels. Typically constructed as archival montages, depicting symbols of national pride and military power, these were historically played as lullabies, easing the transition from the end of the broadcast day to the unsettling and ominous quiet of “dead air.”

Frank Heath
04/04/22
NYC

Credits:

Directed/Edited by Frank Heath

Produced by David Breskin

"Interpret It Well" appears courtesy of the artist and Pyroclastic Records and is the title track from the forthcoming record by Ches Smith - Available May 6th 2022 on Pyroclastic Records.

Craig Taborn - piano

Mat Maneri - viola

Bill Frisell - guitar

Ches Smith - drums, vibes

Composition by Ches Smith (Preposterous Bee Music, BMI)

This work was made possible by support from The Shifting Foundation.

Thank you:

David Breskin, Ches Smith, Chelsea Hadley, The Shifting Foundation, Ann Braithwaite, Simone Subal, Erin Shirreff, C. Spencer Yeh, Rob Slifkin, Jon Kessler, Jesse Wakeman, B.J. Wooley, David Tedesci, Lisa Albaugh, Reed Timmer, Hank and Sarah at Pecos Hank, Doug at Stormchasingvideo, Alex Schueth, Paul Cossu, and Doug and Nick at Periscope Films.