Glitterer is a band from Washington, D.C. Initially, and for some time, it was a solo project: a man and his laptop, with occasional in-studio and onstage assistance from other human beings. Four records, including two full-length albums on Anti-, were released in that one-guy period. But now Glitterer is a *band*: four charter members writing and recording songs and performing them at shows together, driving around the country, getting on each other’s nerves. Road cases piled in the van. Soundcheck at 5 p.m. Merch in the back. A band. You’re familiar with bands? Glitterer is one of those. They play loud melodic post-hardcore rock music that can sometimes seem simple but is always subtly weird and complex. Their new 12-song LP, *Rationale*, will be out on Anti- on Feb. 23, 2024.

Ned Russin, the singer and bassist, the erstwhile one-guy, started Glitterer in 2017, about a year after his previous band, Title Fight, stopped touring. He was in New York, studying at Columbia, reading, writing, thinking, paying exorbitant rent to live in a nice apartment in Bushwick, and quietly panicking about the direction of his life and the nature of existence. He would sit in his bedroom in the nice apartment and write music using loops, synths, his bass, and his voice. He recorded 18 songs — gnomic, hooky ditties that gave oblique expression to the quiet panic — and released them himself, on two successive EPs.

Then he finished at Columbia, struck out in whatever job market newly minted Ivy Leaguers compete in, signed a record deal, and started touring with the laptop. The debut full-length, *Looking Through The Shades,* came in 2019, featuring live instruments and production help from Alex G. Things were looking up. Then the world went to hell. In stupefied isolation, Russin and his studio collaborators made another full-length record in the first pandemic year. It was called *Life Is Not A Lesson* and it came out in early 2021 — not the most auspicious timing. But like its predecessor, the record made a mark, eliciting raves in outlets like The A.V. Club, Spin, Stereogum and a little publication called the Washington Post, in which critic Chris Richards (a D.C. post-hardcore musician himself, most notably as a member of the Dischord band Q and Not U) described Glitterer’s music as employing “melodic bursts so efficient, they almost feel absurd” and referring to one section of the song “Fire” as “a staggering moment.”

Making *Life Is Not A Lesson* was lonely and harrowing, Russin says now, but when it was done he continued writing new songs at his usual prolific rate. He had a day job by then (“my first proper W-2 job,” he says, “at 30 years old, after a decade playing music”), but inevitably there would be another Glitterer record. More pressingly, now that the U.S. live-music scene was warily reconstituting itself in the post-acute phase of COVID, there would be shows.

Executive decision: No more laptop. It was time to become a band. “I had a few different ideas of how to expand Glitterer,” Russin says, “but after spending a year practising songs about loneliness by myself, I decided a cohesive band was the only way to go. It has been, and always will be, my preference to be in a collaborative, creative unit, I just had to figure out how to get there.”

And so in the late spring of 2021 he began recruiting musicians from the D.C. and Baltimore punk/hardcore/indie scenes. As luck would have it, his future keyboardist, Nicole Dao, was also his boss at the time. “Ned was working at my shop, Donut Run, when I heard he was looking to put together a full band for Glitterer,” Dao says. “I mentioned that I knew how to play piano. Ned extended the offer to practice with him, and I accepted.” Eventually, a full lineup coalesced, with Dao on keyboard, Jonas Farah on drums, and Connor Morin on guitar.

For more than a year, this incarnation of Glitterer-the-band hit the gig circuit — local one-offs, regional weekends, longer-run tours both domestic and foreign, including a Spring 2023 run with Tigers Jaw and a subsequent headlining summer tour that drew capacity crowds.

All along, the new songs kept coming. “In my post-COVID haze, the earliest song I wrote for *Rationale* ("It's My Turn") was about getting a job,” Russin says. “A lot of the subsequent songs continued in that territory, wondering about what I should be doing, trying to figure out my ‘purpose,’ both philosophically and vocationally.”

Russin handled the lyrics, but all four members worked on the music together, a new and fruitful process. “Some songs we worked on as a group at practice, and other times we'd work out parts on our own,” Dao says. “Once Ned, Connor and Jonas basically laid out a song, that's when I like figuring out where keys fit in. I worked with Ned on a lot of my parts, and I really enjoyed that, since this was my first time ever writing music.”

By early 2023 there was enough material for an album. In May, the band took up residence for a week at a spacious Philadelphia Airbnb, where the hot water worked about half the time, and each morning they commuted to the studio. They recorded *Rationale* with in-demand producer Arthur Rizk (Ghostmane, Code Orange, Power Trip), who, to date, has either recorded, produced, mixed, mastered, or done some combination of all four on every single Glitterer record.

To an extent even greater than with previous Glitterer releases, *Rationale* is steeped in the many streams of indie rock and post-punk/hardcore that course through the variegated musical landscape of greater Washington, D.C., the band’s homebase. Russin cites Lilys and Unrest as key influences on his recent song writing, but the record also evokes heady and formally adventurous local legends like Fugazi and Nation of Ulysses, as well as some of the more theatrical and conceptual ’70s and ’80s British groups (e.g., Wire, Siouxsie and The Banshees) that made early and lasting impressions on the D.C. scene.

Lead single “Plastic” combines high-impact musical gestures — a capital-R riff a la The Stooges in the James Williamson period; a climactic keyboard lead that evinces slyly self-deprecating melodrama — with an Ozymandias lyrical turn, a reflection on the transience of earthly human deeds (“Anything / That’s everything / Ends up in landfills over time”). Such *sic transit gloria* resignation recurs frequently, as on “The Same Ordinary,” a wall of phasey 4ADish sound with lyrics about accepting, like an old-time Calvinist, a vocational calling, the one thing you know you’re meant to do, in all its objective banality and pointlessness (“Cause passion is arbitrary / It’s all the same ordinary”).

Also in keeping with D.C. hardcore history — specifically, its often unabashed intellectualism — is Russin’s willingness to own up to literary influences. He gives partial credit for the new album’s title, *Rationale*, to the author and publisher Martin Riker, who in his most recent novel, *The Guest Lecture*, records the involuted, anxious, and epigrammatic thoughts that invade a struggling left-wing academic’s mind during an especially dark night of the soul. “Ideology,” the protagonist says to herself at one point, is “all the assumptions you make about how to live, and you live so deeply inside these assumptions that it's very difficult ... to remember which parts of your reality are natural and inevitable, versus which parts are things people just made up.”

“That quote and the book’s themes tied a lot into what I was thinking about while writing,” Russin says. “It’s about the need to find pleasure, and maybe more so meaning or purpose, in small, mundane things, the modern anxieties and frustrations with just trying to be a human being. The lyrics touch on a lot of those ideas.”

Glitterer needs no Rationale for being the band they are and making the music they make. But they’ve provided one, nonetheless.