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Heard: Pondering Life's Soundscapes

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*Want to listen in? Using Spotify, you can scan
wherever you see a code and hear what we hear.*



the playlist

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Introduction

Finn Krol-García

Fifteen students. Thirty songs. One essay collection. The students of Skidmore College's English Honors 105 class have worked in collaboration with the Schupf Family Idea Lab to create a thirty-piece essay collection centered on songs. Students chose to write about any song they wanted and could talk about the song in different focuses- personal, historical, or social. The students were required to draft pitches for their contributions, write their drafts, edit their drafts, and also complete additional tasks in order to create a fully realized book. The book was then presented to the Skidmore Community in December 2023 at a student-run book launch. A copy was donated to the Lucy Scribner Library.

On a greater scale, music's influence is evident on campus as well. Our music department is incredibly well-established and is committed to creating community through music. The music department holds various events throughout the year- anything from student recitals to community concerts. Music lessons can also be taken for credit, which highlights some of Skidmore's core tenets of education. The multi-faceted student here can pursue both music, and science, for example, or in the case of our class, music and English. A number of the writers in this collection are musicians, myself included. This duality really established the presence of writers and music-makers here on campus and in the class.

Music, and songs that we are drawn to as people, are the soundtrack to this thing we call life. The class chose

between fifteen different ideas to write about, with everything from personal cultural experiences to academic burnout. Four of the fifteen initial pitches for the collection's theme were centered around music, and we spent several classes debating our final choice. We eventually decided to combine the four music pitches, after realizing that everyone had a music-related story to tell, but not everyone had a story to tell for the other ideas pitched.

The students had the wonderful problem of having too many songs they all cared about to choose from, but it turned out to be all the more worthwhile, due to the rich content of the essays that characterized the final piece. Music is relevant in this context because it is something that connected the classroom in a way that wouldn't have been possible with any other idea chosen.

Being able to write about music in its different forms is a crucial part of music study, but also the study of humanity. Music has served as a way to bring people together since the beginning of time, and we see this even more so now in a digital musical age. Streams, likes, and downloads can make or break an artist, or even the industry. The ways to listen to music are vastly varied, but the same idea of music as a community creator still stands.

In relation to our collection and our three essay lenses—personal, social, and historical—students chose a focus for each essay. This led to a collection that not only talks about personal stories, but also historical context. In having these three focuses, we get to read about a writer's personal life experiences, which is a great way to get to know someone, as

well as highly interesting focus pieces on the different aspects of history.

In the end, this Honors course took on the daunting task of self-publishing a fully devised essay collection and did it well. Students did not stray away from writing about niche interests or passions, and instead created a collection that goes the distance.

Skibbereen

Elliott Zajac



Few tragedies in its long history have scarred the cultural landscape of Ireland as much as *an Gorta Mór*, the Great Hunger. The economic policies of the British government, which maintained strict control over Irish industry and culture and provided minimal aid, only exacerbated the crisis. Ultimately, over a million people in Ireland died, and twice as many emigrated to other countries. The demographic shift was such that today, there are still fifteen times as many people of Irish descent worldwide as there are in Ireland.¹ Of the many folk songs from the period addressing the Famine, “Skibbereen” captures both the firsthand experience of the Famine as well as the attitudes underlying the Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848.²

“Skibbereen,” also known as “Revenge for Skibbereen,” “Farewell to Skibbereen,” or “Dear Old Skibbereen,” has a long history within and without the Emerald Isle. It was probably written by one Patrick Carpenter, a native of the eponymous town of Skibbereen, who emigrated to America in the 1800s.³ Despite its American origins, the song was not widely distributed outside of Ireland at the time, and is absent from contemporaneous American songbooks or sheet music.⁴ The oldest known draft, published in a Boston songbook in 1869, is written for a much more energetic melody than the doleful minor key of modern performances: to the tune

of a pre-Famine folk song called “The Wearing of the Green.”⁵ The latter harkens back to the failed Irish Rebellion of 1798, proclaiming “they’re hanging men and women for the wearing of the green!”⁶ This showcases the history of republican sentiment behind the song and helps to illustrate the cultural and political context in which it became popular.

*O father dear, I oft-times hear you talk of Erin's Isle,
Her lofty scenes and valleys green, her mountains rude
and wild.
They say it is a pretty place wherein a prince might dwell.
And why did you abandon it, the reason to me tell.*⁷

“Skibbereen” opens with a young child asking their father about his history as an Irish emigrant in America. The father embodies the experience of the millions of Irish who had to flee their homeland during the Famine. He dwells on the natural beauty of Ireland – particularly in contrast with the dim urban environment of 19th-century cities like New York, Chicago, and Boston, where countless immigrants lived in poverty and toil. This drastic change of scenery only compounds the grief experienced by immigrants who already felt adrift and disconnected from the land around them; they had lost both the mythic world of their ancestors and the familiar communities they had grown up in. As a child, I heard similar stories from my mother, a first-generation Irish immigrant; with modern technology, we can stay in touch with family and visit when possible. Without such conveniences, 19th-century emigrants faced a near-total severance of bonds

to home and family, an upending of the social order which they had known all their lives.

*My son, I loved our native land with energy and pride,
Until a blight came on my land, my sheep and cattle died.
The rent and taxes were to pay, I could not them redeem,
And that's the cruel reason why I left old Skibbereen.*

The economic aspect of the famine is sometimes overshadowed. Although it *was* defined by persistent starvation and disease, the impacts were just as much or more so financial. A letter from Hannah Curtis in 1847, written to her brother in America, illustrates the magnitude of the suffering; people were stuffed into workhouses or mass graves, tenants crowded into the poorhouse, and people were dying “as fast as they can,” faster than they could be buried.⁸ She writes that “no person can be sure of their lives one moment,” that there is “no prospect ... but poverty and distress,” and that her uncle’s business is failing because no one can afford to buy clothes. Hannah is “jealous and ashamed” of him for not sending her the money for her own emigration, and afraid for her future in Ireland. She herself went to America to join friends and family members a month after the letter was written.⁹ In her, patriotism is eclipsed by sorrow and desperation.

*Oh it's well I do remember that bleak December day,
The landlord and the sheriff came to drive us all away.
They set my roof on fire with their demon English spleen,
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.*



FUNERAL AT SHEPPERTON LAKES.

A funeral cortege at Shepperton Lakes, three miles east of Skibbereen, West Cork, Ireland. Sketch by James Mahony. Original publication - Illustrated London News. Published 13th February 1847. Photo by Illustrated London News/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

Modern iterations of this stanza often replace “English” with “yellow,” reflecting complicated sentiments towards the British Empire across Irish history. Growing up in Ireland, my mother didn’t learn about the political or economic realities of the Famine, or Britain’s culpability in the crisis, but historical accounts paint a very different picture. *The Irish Crisis* is a book written in 1848 by Charles Trevelyan, the colonial administrator often held accountable for Britain’s laissez-faire response to the Famine.¹⁰ His government demanded Irish agriculture produce mostly cereal crops and beef for British markets, creating a reliance on high-yield potato plots for subsistence - such that 80% of calories in a day might be from

potatoes.¹¹ He also echoes common descriptions of Irish tenant farmers as lazy and unproductive, and describes the famine as a “great opportunity” wrought by the “all-wise and all-merciful Providence,” which will bring “the civilising influence of English law” completely upon the Irish.¹² It’s clear from what Trevelyan said - and did - that Britain is responsible for providing insufficient aid to Ireland during the famine and maintaining the predatory economic system exacerbating it, as well as clearly lacking in compassion and humanitarian motivation for the Irish people.

*It's well I do remember the year of forty eight,
When I arose with Erin's boys to battle against the fate.
I was hunted thro' the mountains like a traitor to the Queen,
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.*

The Young Irelander Rebellion of 1848 was a rebellion against British rule during the height of the Famine. Inspired by France’s February Revolution, the Young Irelanders planned to topple the colonial government.¹³ However, the newly-established Second Republic of France was not willing to sacrifice goodwill with Britain to support the nationalists, and their goal of bloodless independence was overly ambitious for their political reality.¹⁴ The British detected revolutionary sentiments and cracked down on rebel leaders, and those remaining had to make a hurried stand.¹⁵ According to Young Ireland accounts, countless civilians volunteered, but they were unwilling to sacrifice them against trained soldiers. Thus, the revolution ended with an inglorious last stand in a house in

Kilkenny.¹⁶ Although their efforts were militarily ineffective, they sent political shockwaves across Ireland and Britain, and helped to consolidate remaining nationalist groups. The 19th-century Fenian organizations in Ireland and America were originally founded by veterans of the Young Ireland movement, and were responsible for the Fenian Rebellion of 1867 and the Easter Rising of 1916.¹⁷

*O father dear, the day will come when vengeance loud
will call,
And we will rise with Erin's boys to rally one and all.
I'll be the man to lead the van beneath our flag of green,
And loud and high will raise the cry 'Revenge for Skibbereen.'*

The final stanza returns to the child’s voice and highlights the nationalist sentiments that existed within the diaspora. The righteous anger present at the end of the song is one that colors Irish history across centuries; the Famine is one place in that history where pain and anger are most apparent. The wounds left on the people of Ireland remain to this day, even if the anger has faded. As a young adult, my mother came to America seeking adventure, and when she chose to move here permanently and start a family, she was mirroring the experience of those millions who chose to leave Ireland. Her words stood out to me: “I knew I had to keep my ties to Ireland strong ... I had a strong desire to get home to my people.” With minimal connections to home, off-the-boat Irish in America sought each other out and formed their own neighborhoods, where they tried to preserve what remained of their culture and

tradition, building communities persisting to this very day. Back in Ireland, people scabbled just to survive while mourning the friends and relatives they had lost, and dead or distant branches lay stark on family trees. “Skibbereen” illustrates the experience of their children, who don’t remember Ireland if they ever even saw it, and how the pain of the Famine lives on in them.

Notes

¹ Joel Mokyr. “Great Famine”. Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. Accessed October 9, 2023,

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Great-Famine-Irish-history>.

² Patrick Carpenter, author, “Old Skibbereen,” collected by Justin M’Carthy, *The Wearing of the Green; Song Book*, P. Donahue, Boston, 1869.

<https://archive.org/details/TheWearingOfTheGreenSongBook/page/n7/mode/2up>.

³ Dan Milner. ““Old Skibbereen’: Fenian anthem or Famine lament?”. *18th-19th Century Social Perspectives*, Volume 24, Issue 5 (2016).

⁴ Milner, ““Old Skibbereen’: Fenian anthem or Famine lament?”

⁵ Milner, ““Old Skibbereen’: Fenian anthem or Famine lament?”

⁶ Megan Romer. ““The Wearing of the Green.”” LiveAbout. Dotdash Meredith, published 24 February, 2019.

<https://www.liveabout.com/the-wearing-of-the-green-3552953>

⁷ Herbert Hughes. *Irish Country Songs*. Vol. II. Boosey & Hawkes. pp. 76–84. 1915. Accessed October 9, 2023.

⁸ Curtis, Hannah. Hannah Curtis to John Curtis, Mountmellick, Ireland, April 21, 1847.

⁹ Hannah Curtis to John Curtis, April 21, 1847.

¹⁰ Charles Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis by C.E. Trevelyan, Esq.* (Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans London, 1848). 200-201. Accessed October 9, 2023,

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/56727/56727-h/56727-h.htm>.

¹¹ Mokyr, Joel. “Great Famine.”

¹² Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis by C.E. Trevelyan, Esq.*

¹³ Brendan Ó Cathaoir. ““The Rising of 1848.”” *18th-19th Century History*, Volume 6, Issue 3 (1998).

¹⁴ Ó Cathaoir, ““The Rising of 1848.””

¹⁵ Ó Cathaoir, ““The Rising of 1848.””

¹⁶ Ó Cathaoir, ““The Rising of 1848.””

¹⁷ John Dorney, “The Fenians: an overview.” *The Irish Story*, published March 7, 2017.

<https://www.theirishstory.com/2017/03/07/the-fenians-an-overview/>.

American Pie

Kit Simpson



For the third time this week, my sister has overtaken my control of the aux cord. Now we are listening to “American Pie” by Don McLean instead of the Christmas music I have queued. This is a common occurrence, which probably explains why it appeared in my 2022 Spotify wrapped and is my eleventh most played song of all time. She tells me the story of the song, something she has probably done one thousand times. She starts with a lyric in the first verse:

But February made me shiver
With every paper I’d deliver
Bad news on the doorstep
I couldn’t take one more step.¹

“Don McLean mentions that he’s delivering papers in February because he was a paper boy when Buddy Holly died on February 3rd!” she exclaims. I nod, taking a sip of my tea and pretending that I haven’t heard this story a thousand times before. This is what most mornings, afternoons and nights look like in our car. Yes, we fill the speakers of our 2010 Nissan Altima with plenty of Taylor Swift, indie rock, and, when we need to feel energized, “Country Girl (Shake it for Me)” by Luke Bryan, but at the core of all our car rides is “American Pie.”

The tradition started in spring of our junior year. We’d be driving to school, I’d be playing some indie rock song I was

obsessed with that week, and she would request “American Pie” by Don McLean. I would play the song, after some brief retaliation (“this song is *literally* eight minutes long. We don’t have time for it.” “But I’ll slow down!” and so on and so forth.) She would then proceed to explain every minute detail that is packed into the song. I pretend to be annoyed, but really, I am enthralled.

As we listen to the first verse, she reminds me of the rough backstory behind the song. In 1971, Don McLean released “American Pie” to commemorate the death of Buddy Holly and, with him, the happy 1950s. He jam-packs the song with details regarding the world around him, focusing primarily on music, but occasionally bringing up other elements of the changing world. It’s quite a cynical song, as McLean sings that he feels that the death of Holly is the day that “the music died.” When I mention this cynicism to Jennah, I am promptly told off for ruining “American Pie” for her

As we approach the first chorus, I begin to engage in conversation as opposed to listening to her lecture. I would ask her just what the title as it is sung in the chorus means. She’d always give me the same answer. “It’s a reference to the phrase as American as apple pie. So many of the events in the song are so deeply American. Rock-n-roll, Buddy Holly, drinking whiskey by dry levees, chevy trucks.” Sometimes, if she was feeling feisty, she would wait a beat and make a joke about the 1999 coming of age teen sex comedy *American Pie*. Jennah loves the song “American Pie,” but she arguably loves the teen comedy genre even more.

As we keep driving, she keeps explaining. She tells me that other lyrics offer quick references to the cultural landscape of the era, and those were her favorite to explain. It became a rapid-fire game of explanations. “Helter skelter in a summer swelter” sings McLean. “A brief allusion to the Charles Manson murders” explains Jennah. Other small things like this occur over the course of the song “cause the players tried to take the field/ the marching band refused to yield” from McLean. “The Vietnam War!” from Jennah. McLean: “For ten years we’ve been on our own/ and moss grows fat on a rolling stone!” Jennah: “It’s been ten years since the death of Buddy Holly. Also, the Rolling Stones, obviously.”

It is the moments like these—the ones where she ruthlessly explains to me that the lyric “Lennon read a book on Marx” has a double meaning—that I feel extremely lucky to know her. Jennah is a deeply knowledgeable person about a lot of things: *Harry Potter* lore, the lyrics to “Hotel Room Service” by Pitbull, politics, and birds are particular favorite topics of hers. She quite enjoys sharing this knowledge with me. Often unsolicited. Every walk in the woods is accompanied by a very loud proclamation of what kind of songbird I was hearing. At times, I tell myself that I find this habit of hers grating. Who really wants to hear that much about different kinds of birds?

But in truth, I am not remotely annoyed by these tangents. If I was, I would have told her to stop long ago. These tangents and infodumps are what make Jennah *Jennah*. And besides, for every single rant that I hear about birds or “American Pie” or what exactly Pitbull means by “egg whites” in “Hotel Room Service,” Jennah has put up with a rant about

William Shakespeare or Ancient Roman poetry I could get used to hearing about the lyrics of “American Pie,” as she had listened to me over explain the story behind the creation of *The Muppet Christmas Carol*.¹ Geeking out about shit is the very basis of our relationship.

I also try and treasure how much her love of “American Pie” has influenced me, as I am aware that I’ve influenced her. One night, while boredly Spotify stalking, I looked over my sister’s sleep playlist. The first song was “The Rainbow Connection” from the 1979 Muppet movie. This is entirely my influence; not only are The Muppets at least a third of my personality, but I notably have “The Rainbow Connection”—both the original performed by Jim Henson as Kermit and the cover by the Carpenters—on my sleep playlist. Our musical relationship is somewhat symbiotic. For every pretentious indie rock or Muppety song I show her, she gets me way into the lore of “American Pie” or forces me to listen to some trashy party song.

The website American Songwriter describes “American Pie,” broadly, as “about the nostalgia that comes with closing a chapter in time.” When I hear “American Pie,” I am reminded of the many times this song has been used to close chapters in time. In May of this year, Jennah was offered the opportunity to pick the final song that was played before she left her final Mount Greylock Regional High School cast party. In typical Jennah fashion, she picked “American Pie.” Twenty 7th-12th graders sat around singing in harmony, tearing up a tad as they realized that this was perhaps one of the last moments they had with Jennah. She’d still return for their star turn as

Paris in *Romeo and Juliet* or for long holiday breaks, but never again would they be swaying along to a 1970s folk-rock song in a barn in late May. This was their closing of a chapter with Jennah.

In a more personal moment, on the night before Jennah moved to Hartford, the two of us selected “American Pie” as the final song to listen to as we drove around Berkshire County as full-time roommates for the last time. We took in the sites we’d grown up around and visited some of our favorite locations in the Berkshire Hills, like the McDonald’s we’d started frequenting when we discovered that two members of our graduating class worked at the location closer to our home or the Big Y we went to when I wanted an Arnold Palmer. While the eight-minute epic played, we started engaging in one of our newer behaviors. At some point in our relationship, the explaining and listening turned into singing in unison. We sang loudly, even though the windows were down because of a broken air conditioner. We treated the story that McLean was telling like it was gospel. I can only imagine this is how McLean envisioned the song to be sung. With family, loudly, one last time as siblings, as twins, and as best friends.

Notes

¹ Don McLean, “American Pie,” May 26, 1971, Capitol Records, Track 1 on *American Pie*, 1971

² Pitbull, “Hotel Room Service,” J/Polo Company/Mr. 305, Track 8 on *Pitbull Starring in Rebeloution*.

Bennie and the Jets

Liam Drekhoff



My car rolls to a stop as I approach the carpool lane of Lake Forest Country Day School. I look amongst the crowd of middle-schoolers to find my younger sister, Addison. Then, a full head of curls suddenly emerges through the front door that sticks out like a sore thumb. As she spots my car, Addison says bye to her friends and slightly jogs to the backseat door. As she climbs in, my other sister, Avery, asks how her day was from the passenger seat. Addison replies: “Boring.” There’s a brief silence. Then, the iconic piano intro to Elton John’s “Bennie and the Jets” plays through the speakers, and we all smile, renewed with the cheerful melody.¹ “There’s a Dairy Queen on the way home if you guys want to hit it,” I say, pulling out of the narrow parking lot. They both insist on going.

There isn’t anything in the world that would stop me from taking care of my sisters. Ever since each of them have come into the world, I have held them as tight as I could. Our family has a unique dynamic to it, and it is nice to be able to talk to people that relate to it. When there was nobody to listen, we always had each other. I’ve spent countless hours driving my sisters around, listening to how Dad was being a jerk to them from the sidelines of their soccer game, or that there’s a new boy at school from California who everybody thinks is cute, or how some girl thinks she has to be the center of attention during every group activity. I’ve never been able to

keep up with the girl drama as much as I think I can, but I try to help. Usually my efforts are met with a condescending “Thanks, Liam, but it’s not that simple with girls,” and I politely nod and decide to shut up and listen. I know that just being there for them is all the help they need. That is part of the reason why these first few months of college have been so hard on me.

As much as some people don’t want to admit it in an attempt to stay tough, we all miss at least one person from back home. Someone that we were comfortable enough with that whatever we had to say, we knew they would be there to listen. For me, these were my two sisters: Avery and Addison. Avery, the older of the two, is a junior in high school. We are close in age, and with that closeness comes similar upbringings. When we were young, we were almost inseparable. Since both of our parents worked, we spent most of our time together with the nanny. As we grew up, we shared many core memories with each other, despite being different in personality. I would be the kid who wanted to go explore the backyard, while she would be the kid who would rather play pretend with her stuffed animals. We compromised pretty well—some days she would come outside and decorate the playground set in colored chalk with me, other days, I would voice over the male-depicted toys in her imaginary world.

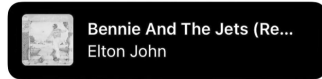
Then Addison came along. She is now in the 8th grade, and one could only describe her as the exclamation point to our trio. We often joke about how she’s always the star of the show, and it all started when she was born. Again, since our parents were often away at work, Avery and I would spend a lot of time

helping to raise Addison, whether that was keeping her company while she played with her baby toys or helping her settle down for a nap. Avery and I almost viewed Addison as our own kid, despite our parents and nanny doing 99% of the more difficult labor. As Addison started coming into her own, she did so with style. We often teased her for having the wildest personality while also being the smallest person. Either way, she was the best little sister Avery and I could ever ask for.

Now that the three of us are grown up, we have less time to spend with each other. Most of the time we have together is spent on car rides to and from sporting events, which is tedious for me, but it is a price I am willing to pay if I get to spend more time with my sisters. While this time isn’t much, we always seem to make the best of what we have. And what we have is carpool karaoke. As we all have different personalities, we all have different tastes in music. Addison likes more of a lighter hip-hop, Avery likes classic rock and alternative music, and I like a mix of the two. Therefore, when we all get in the car, it is hard to pick an artist to play. But there is one man we can all agree makes fantastic music no matter what, and that man is Elton John.

It is safe to say Elton John has had a meaningful impact on the world. Not only is he an icon in the music industry, but his impact has spread into the world of love. He has always promoted love over hate, and his voice was well heard in a world surrounded by the heat of the Cold War. With his openness about being gay during a time when it was less accepted, Elton John was the face of love during the height of

his career. This is why my sisters and I love him so much—he stands for something more than just music. He stands for the



The author and family.

idea that we should always love one another and rid the world of hate, which is a message that is reflected across my sisters and I particularly well.

One song that has been on my playlist forever is the song “Bennie and the Jets.” I make sure to play it as often as I can when I’m in the car with them. There are a lot of songs we all love, but to me, this is our song. There is something about the innocence and simplicity of the melody that speaks to how the three of us function together. The song takes us out of whatever nonsense we have going on with our lives and brings us back down to earth. It reminds us that we will always have each other whenever our lives get rough.

I have been listening to it a lot ever since I got to college, as I have missed the time we spent together over the years. I miss having the ability to be able to vent to someone about nothing in particular and have them listen to every word.

I miss belting every word to Elton John’s choruses at red lights, without any care in the world. I miss lying on a pink comforter for hours at a time listening to all the problems a 10 year old can possibly have. This longing feeling for these people we love back home is something that is not talked about enough amongst college students. As students, we are expected to be thrown into a new environment and leave our old world in the dust. Especially for those traveling across the country to go to college here, it should be made more normal to miss not being able to see your family every weekend.

It is important to acknowledge the natural feeling of longing for our loved ones that us college students are experiencing right now. Personally, I feel as though the biggest thing I am looking forward to during our next break is being able to spend time with my sisters. I never thought I would feel that way before I went to college, but I’m glad that I do. I’m glad I can love someone so much that I go to sleep every night thinking about the next time I can see them. To be able to love someone that much is something everyone should experience. As Elton John once said, “we live in an age, in an era where there is so much negativity, there is so much violence in the world...that I wanted to promote the word love.”² I guess I just believe that everyone should find someone to love as much as I love my sisters.

Notes

¹ John, Elton. *Bennie and the Jets*. May 1973.

² “Elton John Quotes.” 2001. BrainyQuote.

2001. https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/elton_john_466169.

Down By The Seaside

Emerson Fraser



While sitting on the patio of Case Green, I throw in my Air Pods, queuing up Led Zeppelin’s “Down by the Seaside.”¹ Suddenly, I am back home driving down Route 130 on my way to work. The drive is barely fifteen minutes from my house, yet I still manage to pass both of my grandparents’ houses on the way. The smell of high tide wafts in through the open windows. The lunch train’s horn blares as we turn into 66 Route 6A, home of Ice Cream Sandwich. The place is ironically named after the town it resides in, Sandwich, and the fact that we sell ice cream. I look over to my mom to thank her for driving me, but instead I am met with my friend’s face as I come to the realization that those were simply just memories.

Do you find you remember things that well?

Fifteen towns, one peninsula. Cape Cod is the place I have called home my entire life, up until recently. Now, when I am out with friends, I mention “going back home” with Skidmore’s campus in mind. Upon arriving at school, I came to the realization that I will never be that ‘full-time’ Cape resident again, that my local status has in a way changed. While my family is still there, and all my childhood and early adulthood memories were made there, I will never again return to Cape Cod with the intent of staying.

Both of my parents were born in Massachusetts, my mom in Brighton, a neighborhood of Boston, and my dad in Brockton. In his early middle school years, my dad and his parents made the move to Sandwich, a small town at the northwest canal end of Cape Cod. In contrast, my mom moved around a lot as a kid, once all the way to Indiana for a handful of months, but soon she and her parents were back on the road to Massachusetts. Over time, they moved down the South Shore, living in Weymouth, Braintree, and Hanover, before making their decision to move to Sandwich, coincidentally a street over from my dad’s house. Come junior year, my parents met through my mom’s brother, Michael, who played soccer with my dad, and they have been together since, living on Cape Cod.

My parents eventually moved out of Sandwich—if you consider one town over moving—to Mashpee, where I call home today. In addition to my parents as well as my brother, sister, and cat, Diego, my entire extended family lives on Cape Cod. Every single one of my cousins, aunts, uncles, and grandparents live in the same three towns. Even my deceased relatives are buried in the sandy soil. On top of blood related family, most of my parents’ friends from high school have stayed on Cape Cod: ones that my siblings and I have come to consider our family. People like Joel Finley, who owns Ice Cream Sandwich, and Eric Anderson, a Skidmore alumnus, two places near and dear to my heart, much like Cape Cod.

With this community of friends and family around me back home, Cape Cod has become a place of familiarity. I have grown so used to having people around that I have known my

entire life, that the change of the future has grown to be a source of worry. Despite this, I have begun to work towards finding a place that is my own, as opposed to my family's.

*Hear the people singing,
singing about their growin',
knowing where they're goin'*

When I was first looking at colleges that I was interested in attending, I was thinking of going as far as possible. The University of Glasgow was my top choice, and I was set on bringing my family back to Scotland, the area that we first came from generations before. In line with my indecisive personality, I quickly changed my mind on this idea and went back to the drawing board. My next idea was to become a military psychologist. This would allow me to travel to different countries and give me the opportunity to get some perspective on the world and find my place in it. This too, however, ended up being scratched from my plans, and once again I was looking at directions to go. One night, at a party my parents took me to with their high school friends, Eric told me about his time at Skidmore. He told me about how he loved the campus and the town of Saratoga Springs even more. I decided I would go check out the school, and that was when I figured out *my* place. Now, a year and a half later, I am sitting within one of Skidmore's buildings writing this.

*The people turned away,
yeah the people turned away.*

While in the present it has felt as though I have been in a way disconnected from my home, the future holds so much more change that I will have to be prepared for. Following college, unlike my brother and parents, who only made it through a semester of school before returning to Cape Cod, I plan on making my way through graduate school, and later residing in a city. Whether it be New York City, Washington DC, or Chicago, I am unsure of yet, but it will likely not be Massachusetts, and most certainly won't be Cape Cod. While it would be nice to return home, I have realized that there is no opportunity there with what I want to do in life. It is time for change, but the realization of no longer being a Cape resident has impacted me in more ways than I thought it would. The memories of home, my family, the kids I grew up with and their families, all left behind for thoughts of the future.

And she will come back again.

I have made sure to remind myself, however, that there will always be a place for me on the Cape. My room back home will forever hold a piece of my soul: my posters coating the walls, the peeled off ceiling from when I was in a bunkbed, cracks in the door frames from slamming in the heat of an argument with my mom. Even though I am not physically present, there will always be a ghost of my existence in the house, one that I can fall back into whenever I need a sense of that familiarity again.

So far away, so far away.

Even though I ended up much closer to home than I was originally planning on being, there are so many differences between here and there that have presented themselves in my first semester at college. No longer are beaches within a five-minute drive, and planes from Otis Air Force Base aren't flying over and shaking my room, their engines echoing through the trees. The air here doesn't smell like salt, and the cement isn't coated in an ever-present layer of sand. There are people that don't know what a frappe is, who are confused by the use of the term 'bubbler' or who have never seen a rotary before. These little things have gone to show me how much change can take place by simply crossing an hour over a border, or five hours back to the Cape, which can be deemed minimal travel in comparison to the places where others come from, yet it feels like years away to me.

While physical memories hold the capabilities of bringing me back home, so does music. "Down by the Seaside", a Zeppelin song that was surprisingly not shown to me by my parents much like all their other music, has many themes and lyrics that I correlate with the ideas of being back on Cape. The title itself encapsulates what it is to live on the Cape: being by the seaside at all times. When I first discovered this song, my friend and I were driving down one of the Cape's many roads that follow alongside beaches. We were discussing the idea of becoming pirates, dreaming of spending our lives out on boats, being one with the ocean, and listening to Led Zeppelin's serene melody as we drift through the current. There is something somehow so Cape Cod in this story, and the

memory of it brings a smile to my face. The lyrics themselves reflect on

See the boats go sailin'

Although I am hundreds of miles away now, I can still close my eyes and picture the beach, the planes overhead, the smell of salt water, the faces of my family, and suddenly I am back home again getting out of the car to head into Ice Cream Sandwich.

Notes

¹ "Down by the Seaside," Track 9 on *Physical Graffiti*, Swan Song, 1975.

Silver Springs

Carolyn Albright



Imagine being in one of the most popular bands of all time with hundreds of millions of listeners and having to perform, travel, and have millions watch all stages of your relationship - from the honeymoon stage to the heartbreak stage and all of the aftermath. When this happened to Stevie Nicks, she had every excuse in the books to quit the band. Most laypeople crumble after breakups and they do not have people worldwide watching their breakup and making up their own assumptions. Additionally, her now ex was one of her few colleagues. After the breakup, many paid attention to her for being the ex of Lindsey Buckingham, instead of paying attention to her for the talented musician that she is. Yet, instead of letting this breakup crush her, Nicks wrote and sang one of the most masterful breakup or heartbreak songs of all time, “Silver Springs.”¹

To fully understand the context of the song, “Silver Springs,” we must go back to the beginning, when Stevie Nicks first met Lindsey Buckingham. They met as high school seniors when Nicks joined Buckingham’s psychedelic rock band, Fritz.² For around 10 years, the band continued on with the two of them staying merely friends as they dated other people. This all changed when they left the band and moved to Los Angeles together. Leaving the band and their homes pushed them together and they were soon a romantic item. The second that

they hit the star studded and media filled city, they were seen as the new “it” couple in the music industry. When they first hit Los Angeles, they attempted a folk rock band of just the two of them called Buckingham Nicks.³ Although their album cover of them topless became iconic, the album itself failed and they were let go by their record company. This sparked turmoil in their relationship as they both were frustrated, stressed, and desperately trying to find ways to afford Los Angeles. Thankfully, tensions lifted when they joined Fleetwood Mac.

Their time with Fleetwood Mac started when the band had moved to Los Angeles and lost a few members. The band, with its members at the time being Mick Fleetwood, John McVie and Christine McVie, wanted to add Buckingham’s guitar playing into their band. When offered this, Buckingham declared that he and Nicks were a package deal and Mick Fleetwood offered for them to both be in the band. After a couple days of argument between Stevie Nicks and Buckingham as Buckingham believed that they were going to have to be the ones to fix the poor dynamics of the band, they finally both agreed to join the band. Unfortunately, this was the start of the end in regards to their romantic relationship.

The couple was already teetering very close to breaking up only a few months into joining Fleetwood Mac, but they stayed together for about another year. When they were finishing up writing the songs for Fleetwood Mac’s second album and the first album that Nicks and Buckingham were a part of, *Rumors*, Nicks finally told Buckingham that their relationship was over, but demanded that this would in no way harm the band and that she would do whatever it takes to keep

Fleetwood Mac together. This stayed the case for many of the rocky romantic relationships that occurred with the band, including Nicks' affair with Fleetwood while he was still married to his wife.

Instead of letting her frustrations from her failed relationship with Buckingham ruin either her own or Fleetwood Mac's success, she expressed her frustrations out in the songs that she wrote. The main song that Nicks wrote which encapsulates her anger and bitterness towards Lindsey Buckingham is the song, "Silver Springs." Not only that, but the background and history of how the song was created and the frustrations that Stevie Nicks faced in order for it to finally be produced only add to the meaning of the song.

Nicks intended for "Silver Springs" to be included in the album, *Rumors*, which was the album created during the time of her breakup with Buckingham. She named the song "Silver Springs" after passing the town Silver Springs in Maryland and thought that the name was beautiful and whimsical, much like what could have been with her relationship between her and Buckingham. Although the song starts with these feelings, it eventually is filled with Nicks' rage of what could have been and how that now she can now haunt him and his mistakes for the rest of his life as he will always hear her voice in the songs that they made and performed together. Even better, as this song was written for and intended to be performed by Fleetwood Mac, Buckingham would have to surrender to the truth of Nicks' expertly crafted lyrics since he would have to play the guitar as Nicks sang the lyrics and even chime in with the vocals at some parts of the song.

Much like the rough history of Nicks and Buckingham's relationship, the song, "Silver Springs," had to suffer through a lot of heartache before it was actually produced. Nicks originally intended the song to be for the album *Rumors*, but right before the album was finished, "Silver Springs" was cut from it. During a sit down with Nicks in a parking lot, the leader of the band, Fleetwood, told Nicks that there was no room on the album for her song due to its length. This was absolutely devastating for Nicks not only because of the meaning of the song, but also because she was going to give all of the revenue of the song to her mom. The song was eventually included on the back of *Go Your Own Way*, but the single was not nearly as profitable as *Rumors*.

Although the entire history of "Silver Springs" is a complicated roller coaster of ups and downs, much like Nicks and Buckingham's romance, nothing tops the live performance of "Silver Springs" during their reunion for *The Dance*.⁴ The performance perfectly sums up their tense and toxic relationship. As Nicks begins singing, neither she nor Buckingham do as much as glance at each other. During the first chorus, both exchange quick looks at each other but make sure that the other does not notice. Buckingham's guitar solo then starts and Nicks begins to stare at him. By the time that the instrumental break is over and the chorus begins again, Nicks stares hard at Buckingham, but it is not until she sings "I'll follow you down to the sound of my voice will haunt you," does Buckingham look back at her. Once he does, the glares between them do not stop and just get more and more intense. This leads to the last time that Nicks sings "You'll never get

away from the sound of the woman that loved you,” while staring deep into Buckingham’s soul. After she finishes these lyrics, he turns around and fades away from the lights while she finishes the song. By him hiding, he is finally surrendering to her and attempting to run away from her stare and words.

Not only was Nicks able to utilize this song to assert her strength and power to Buckingham, but both my mom and I were too and I bet that countless other people have done the same. Now I understand that there is no such thing as “winning” a breakup, but I’m almost positive that Nicks won this one. She also gave countless other people that listened to her masterful song the ability to feel as though they won their breakups too.

Notes

¹ Fleetwood Mac, "Silver Springs," Stevie Nicks, Ken Caillat, Richard Dashut, 1976, Rhino/Warner Records, 12 on *Go Your Own Way*, 1977.

² D’Zurilla, “Stevie Nicks and Lindsey Buckingham: How It Went Wrong - Los Angeles Times 1.

³ Weaver, “Stevie Nicks' Dating History: From Lindsey Buckingham to Joe Walsh.”

⁴ Fleetwood Mac, “Fleetwood Mac - Silver Springs (Official Live Video) [HD].”

The Mary Ellen Carter

Amanda Denney



It’s a below-freezing February night in 1983, and the crew of the *Marine Electric* is manning her up the East Coast, transporting coal from Virginia to Massachusetts.¹ In the routine flurry of activity that comes with setting off on such a voyage, the 34 sailors on board haven’t thought to worry about the storm brewing on the horizon. At two in the morning, the captain shakes the crew awake and tells them that the ship is taking damage from the storm. He makes the dreaded call to abandon ship, and they ready the lifeboats. But before they can make their escape, a wave sends the ship reeling sideways and traps the crew members under the ship’s deck.

39-degree water chills the bones of the terrified crew members. The chief mate manages to swim out from under the deck of the sinking ship and finds himself in the Atlantic Ocean in the middle of the night, with no land in sight and a ship full of his comrades sinking beside him. With nothing else to do, he swims. He finds a lifeboat and clings to it for dear life, choosing the discomfort of cold water over the certain death of freezing air. Waves batter him, submerging him for seconds at a time, and he begins to doubt his chances of being rescued. As he considers giving up, the refrain of a song floats to the front his mind, bidding him, *Rise again*. He holds this phrase close to him and sings it to himself between the crashes of waves, and after a harrowing three hours, he finds himself in a Coast

Guard helicopter, one of three survivors of the wreck of the *Marine Electric*.

“The Mary Ellen Carter” is a sea shanty released in 1979 by Canadian folk singer Stan Rogers, and Robert Cusick believed that it saved his life.² Its upbeat banjo and guitar orchestration makes the introduction of a shipwreck as its subject a bit jarring, but it tells the story of a group of sailors who decide to make their fallen ship “rise again.”³ Rogers once said that he wanted to write a “hymn of great inspiration” that didn’t include God, and the result was “The Mary Ellen Carter.”⁴ It’s a hymn to perseverance, a hymn to taking control of one’s life.

By almost all accounts, the *Mary Ellen Carter* and her fate are fictional. The song tells the story of a group of five friends whose ship, the *Mary Ellen Carter*, sinks after its temporary crew takes her out during a storm while drunk. The friends ask the ship’s owners for help retrieving it, but the owners refuse, saying that they’ve been paid back for the loss and that the ship had a good life. But after a long history with the ship, the friends can’t let her go. They want not only to raise and repair the ship, but also to ensure that her legacy is not forgotten.

The loyal crew of the ship scouts out the wreck and begins to make repairs to the ship slowly over several months. The lyrics describe their painstaking dives into the water, the protagonist’s experience getting “the bends” or decompression sickness, and the steps the group takes to prepare for the final lifting of the ship. The song doesn’t confirm whether their plan succeeds: listeners are left with the crew’s promise that “the

laughing, drunken rats who left her to a sorry grave /... won’t be laughing in another day.”

Then the focus turns to the listener, specifically one “to whom adversity has dealt the final blow / With smiling bastards lying to you everywhere you go.” The song is no longer about this ship and the friends fighting to save it: it’s directed towards anyone who is feeling hopeless. It encourages them to “turn to, and put out all your strength of arm and heart and brain / And like the Mary Ellen Carter, rise again.” The tale of the *Mary Ellen Carter* transforms into an allegory for people who persevere against odds despite enduring loss.

With that in mind, we return to Robert Cusick’s plight on the night of February 12, 1983, as his position as Chief Mate of the *Marine Electric* plunged him into mortal danger.⁵ Cusick retold his story in various capacities, including in the documentary *One Warm Line: The Legacy of Stan Rogers*. In the interview that precedes “The Mary Ellen Carter,” Cusick says, “I’d heard enough stories of a vortex, a whirlpool, sucking people down when a ship [sank], so I started trying to swim away as fast as I could.”⁶ He swam for “the best part of an hour,” then came across a lifeboat and took shelter in it.⁷ The 39-degree water was marginally safer than the 29-degree night air, so Cusick kept his body submerged in the water that remained after waves crashed over the lifeboat.⁸ This was his only protection from the elements, and it did little: periodic waves “inundated” the boat, and Cusick, in moments of despair, thought, “Just breathe in the water... the struggle will be over. It will be peaceful.”⁹

Cusick then remembers that “the words came into my mind: *rise again, rise again*”: the chorus of “The Mary Ellen Carter.”¹⁰ The shipwreck storyline was fitting, of course, but the final verse seemed to be addressing Cusick himself:

Rise again, rise again – though your heart it be broken
And life about to end
No matter what you’ve lost, be it a home, a love, a friend.
Like the Mary Ellen Carter, rise again.

Those words anchored Cusick to reality, and he “just kept saying that... and then the water cleared away and I’d shout it out, sing it out.”¹¹ Cusick believed that “The Mary Ellen Carter” was one of several “inspirational forces” that saved his life that night.¹²

In the following years, Cusick testified against officials who overlooked safety concerns from the *Marine Electric*, which was originally a World War II tanker.¹³ Cusick’s testimony spurred many maritime regulations and retirements of ships that were unfit to sail. He channeled the traumatic memories from that night into activism for a safer industry. Cusick died in 2013 at 90 years old and was recognized as a “hero” for his work to improve nautical safety.¹⁴ His daughter Carol sang “The Mary Ellen Carter” at his funeral, and she writes, “Thank you Stan for giving me an extra 30 years with him.”¹⁵

Cusick’s wreck-inspired reform isn’t the only one related to “The Mary Ellen Carter”: in June of 1983, Stan Rogers died in an airplane electrical fire, and the tragedy “led to changes in aviation regulations around the world to make airliners safer.”¹⁶ The changes wrought by disaster echo

Rogers’ lyrics and show that it is worth fighting for things to get better, even in the wake of an intense loss. In addition, remembering and celebrating what has been lost—as the *Mary Ellen Carter*’s crew does “that her name not be lost / To the knowledge of men”—allows its legacy to continue to exist.

The night of February 12, 1983, is the most prominent example of “The Mary Ellen Carter” saving a life. But countless fans have shared that “The Mary Ellen Carter” has also pulled them from the brink. One user writes that the song “used to keep me alive and my head up, but now it keeps me propelled.”¹⁷ Another writes, simply, “Playing for a friend in a coma.”¹⁸ Someone quotes the line “No matter what you’ve lost, be it a home, a love, a friend,” following it with, “Yeah, I’ve done all three, and I rise again.”¹⁹ Other fans of Rogers’s music express that “The Mary Ellen Carter” has helped them through depression, alcoholism, loss, and, more recently, the pandemic.

Some listeners are disappointed that there is no answer at the end of the song: did the *Mary Ellen Carter* ever “rise again?” Does the crew succeed in raising the ship from the depths, or does she only rise in the hearts of her crew and those who listen to their song? It seems clear to me that the song is intentionally left ambiguous. The story is never over, even when we listen 40 years after Stan Rogers’s death, and his buoyant lyrics ensure that countless stories endure.

Notes

¹ Bob Cusick, “Cold Comfort,” Web and Wire, https://web.archive.org/web/20061109120644/http://www.webandwire.com/cold_comfort.htm.

² Cusick, “Cold Comfort.”

³ Stan Rogers, “The Mary Ellen Carter,” Fogarty’s Cove Music, Accessed November 6, 2023, <https://stanrogers.net/the-music/song-archive/the-mary-ellen-carter/>.

⁴ Charlie Baum, December 13 1998 1:08am, “comment on,” skw@worldmusic.de, Wanted: background to ‘The Mary Ellen Carter’, *The Mudcat Cafe*, December 12 1998, <https://mudcat.org/thread.cfm?threadid=8054#49153>.

⁵ Cusick, “Cold Comfort.”

⁶ Kensington TV, “Stan Rogers performs ‘The Mary Ellen Carter’ in One Warm Line documentary,” YouTube video, 6:02, April 21, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT-aEcPgkuA>.

⁷ Kensington TV, “Stan Rogers performs ‘The Mary Ellen Carter’ in One Warm Line documentary.”

⁸ Cusick, “Cold Comfort.”

⁹ Cusick, “Cold Comfort.”

¹⁰ Kensington TV, “Stan Rogers performs ‘The Mary Ellen Carter’ in One Warm Line documentary.”

¹¹ Kensington TV, “Stan Rogers performs ‘The Mary Ellen Carter’ in One Warm Line documentary.”

¹² Cusick, “Cold Comfort.”

¹³ Robert Frump, “Bob Cusick, Hero of the SS Marine Electric, Dies Peacefully in NH,” The Frump Report, September 13, 2013, “<https://frumpblog.com/2013/09/13/bob-cusick-hero-of-the-ss-marine-electric-dies-peacefully-in-nh/>.”

¹⁴ Frump, “Bob Cusick, Hero of the SS Marine Electric, Dies Peacefully in NH.”

¹⁵ @carolmuzik, 2013, “comment on,” Kensington TV, “Stan Rogers performs ‘The Mary Ellen Carter’ in One Warm Line documentary,” YouTube video, April 21, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fT-aEcPgkuA>.

¹⁶ “June 2, 1983: Dundas singer-songwriter Stan Rogers dies in airline disaster,” The Hamilton Spectator, September 23, 2016, https://www.thespec.com/news/hamilton-region/june-2-1983-dundas-singer-songwriter-stan-rogers-dies-in-airline-disaster/article_15b58d2c-ee68-5f3b-aca-96f7c7bfe906.html.

¹⁷ @willmpet, 2018, “comment on,” MinistryofStabbing, “Stan Rogers - The Mary Ellen Carter,” YouTube video, June 27, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fhop5VuLDIQ>.

¹⁸ @tedcrum, 2020, “comment on,” MinistryofStabbing, “Stan Rogers - The Mary Ellen Carter,” YouTube video, June 27, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fhop5VuLDIQ>.

¹⁹ @tommallon4052, “comment on,” MinistryofStabbing, “Stan Rogers - The Mary Ellen Carter,” YouTube video, June 27, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fhop5VuLDIQ>

What a Fool Believes

Ben Galligan



It was February 2023, and my dad and I took a trip down to sunny Vero Beach, Florida. Now Vero Beach is just a quiet little city on Florida's Treasure Coast, and I have been traveling to this city since I was born to visit my grandmother, but since her passing, we go down to escape the harsh Massachusetts winters.

Vero Beach isn't known for much besides its lavish retirement communities but I find happiness in the relaxation it brings me. On this trip, we made our usual stop by a small beach shack by the name of Casey's to grab some food before heading to the beach. Casey's isn't known for its fine dining as it still serves sandwiches on Wonder Bread and drinks in styrofoam cups, but when we arrived I was immediately taken aback when I heard this catchy piano riff over the PA system. The song's catchy lyrics and talk of an island escape spoke to me and I was hooked on the song immediately and had to decipher what it was with my dad. When I hummed it back to him we got it— "What a Fool Believes" by the Doobie Brothers.¹

This discovery led me to explore this new genre perfectly titled "yacht rock." They said that yacht rock was a shallow genre only made to appease the masses and sell records yet the more I discovered about the genre the more I realized how much of a cultural impact yacht rock had and what it said

about American culture in the 1970s. Born out of soft rock and pop in the late 1970s in southern California, yacht rock is known for its smooth vocal lines, intricate melodies, and glossy production sound. This combination led yacht rock to be a dominating genre from the mid-1970s until the early 1980s when notable yacht rock bands collected awards for their achievements with The Eagles, The Doobie Brothers, Christopher Cross, and Toto all collecting a Grammy Award for Record of the year between 1978-1981. This so-called "California Sound" was able to please both fans of pop and soft rock and called many bands into the genre. Soft rock band America switched up their sound from smooth acoustic-centric songs in the early 1970s to a primarily yacht rock sound with their 1983 album *View from the Ground* and Fleetwood Mac tried to capitalize on the trend as well with 1982's *Mirage*.

None of these sounds changed more dramatically than The Doobie Brothers. Before 1976, The Doobie Brothers were seen as a standard rock band from San Jose, California, with long hair, flared jeans, and heavy guitar riffs. Yet when their lead singer Tom Johnston came down with stomach ulcers they called in the king of yacht rock himself, Michael McDonald. With the Doobies, McDonald overhauled their songs and ditched the guitar riffs for a piano, and the blues-driven melodies to more complex jazz melodies. With this, The Doobie Brother became bigger than ever.²

There is no question that the genre dominated the music scene in the 1970s but why yacht rock? Why was Michael McDonald one of the biggest men in music for only a brief five-year stint in time? The songs themselves discuss falling in love,

sailing away, and staying in a beachside town and rarely did the songs try to make any kind of complex statement regarding the state of the world, yet that is what consumers loved. From disco to color TV the 1970s saw a boost in commercialism, and with substantial economic growth in the 1960s, many were working the standard 9-5 job. Yacht rock spoke directly to the working-class adult as it was an escape from the work life and was smooth, cheerful, and surface level. The songs struck a chord with audiences who thought there was more to life than office work and that a life of boating, and relaxation should be valued just as highly in our society. Middle-class America held onto this dream of a society in which people enjoyed life to the greatest and resonated with the luxury and leisure mentioned in the songs. Supplemented with the carefree nature of the songs made for a perfect mix for yacht rock's success.

Despite these relatively peaceful times away from war, the gas crisis and political strife led consumers to want to escape from the everyday stresses of life. A perfect artist to look into when it comes to this genre is Jimmy Buffett. Born in Mississippi in late 1946, Jimmy Buffet built his empire of "Parrotheads" with songs based on island escapism. Jimmy Buffet spoke to a generation who yearned for an escape from their work life, and to sail around the Caribbean without a care in the world.

Buffett followed the general trend of most yacht rockers from producing soft rock ballads in the early 1970s to writing "Margaritaville" by the end of the decade. Yet after the trend faded and mainstream rock bands moved on, Jimmy stayed behind and helmed the ship himself and sailed the idea of island

escapism into the 21st century. Buffett not only continued to release yacht rock and yacht rock-adjacent music but launched his own cruise ships, restaurants, casinos, and even retirement complexes all with the theme of an island escape under the name of his hit song "Margaritaville." Buffett took the same ideas that made yacht rock popular in the first place and implemented them into savvy business practices and capitalized immensely.

Now what happened? Well like most things in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was a flash-in-the-pan moment and was quickly forgotten about. In the mid-80s commercialized music for the masses continued to grove and the uses of synths and electronics made their way over as well but the smooth buttery lyrics of escaping to a world more tropical was inevitably left behind. Michael McDonald and Christopher Cross would release albums throughout the '80s and '90s but not near the amount of popularity as before. As of now yacht rock has been absorbed into the much larger subgenre of dad rock and continues to live in this ecosystem with other forgotten artists of the past.

As I look back to the time when I first discovered yacht rock I realize that I bought into the dream myself. The cold grayness of Massachusetts in the middle of February made me yearn for a tropical paradise away from everyday life as the pressures of school and work were immediately lifted off my back as soon as I touched down in the Sunshine State. Yacht rock was the perfect complement to this getaway as it described just what I needed at the time.

As I look back to the moment when I was waiting in line at Casey's I realize now that there was more to yacht rock than I had initially thought. Being in a bonafide retirement community is practically what yacht rock instilled in these people back in the 1970s. It perfectly illustrates the American dream of working 9-5 until you are sixty-five and then you move down to a retirement home somewhere warm to live out the rest of your golden years. This idea of island escapism was playing out right before my eyes and despite what critics will say about yacht rock's shallowness, it tells the story of the American dream and what the lifecycle of a worker is really about.

Notes

¹ The Doobie Brothers, "What a Fool Believes," Michael McDonald, Kenny Loggins, August 1978, Warner Bros., 2 Minute by Minute, 1978.

² Drew Toal, "Sail Away: The Oral History of 'Yacht Rock.'" Rolling Stone, 2015.

Tom Sawyer

Adam Berger



There's an old trope about the music you listen to in your youth disappointing your parents. Innumerable movies have a scene where the kid is blaring death metal or gangster rap or any other new and frightening genre to the ire of their parents. Sometimes, the cyclical nature of this is parodied; in *Back to the Future*, Marty McFly plays Chuck Berry's *Johnny B. Goode* to a ballroom of teenagers in 1955, who are left bewildered; McFly concludes that "I guess you guys aren't ready for that, yet. But your kids are gonna love it." Of course, by the film's release in 1985, the song had become a rock-and-roll classic. Usually, the parents like straight-laced, old-fashioned music, and the kid listens to or plays louder, angrier, and edgier songs. My parents, though, like punk rock.

Both my dad and my mom got into punk during their high school and college years in the 1980s, and that love never stopped with age. When my sister and I were born, they took care to raise us on the music they wanted to listen to — bands like The Ramones and The Clash. It didn't really stick with my sister, who wasted no time in gravitating towards her own music taste (musicals then, and nu metal now), but I loved it. From kindergarten to fifth grade, all I listened to was 80s punk, to the delight of my parents, their friends, and the occasional cool teacher. I especially enjoyed The Ramones, much like my parents, and always asked for it to be played on long car rides,

a request they were happy to oblige. One day at school, however, a combination of curiosity and YouTube's music recommendation algorithm changed everything, and I clicked on the link to Rush's *Tom Sawyer*.¹

Before I say what happened next, some music history is probably necessary. Rush are one of the standard-bearers of progressive rock, a genre of rock music that peaked in the 1970s, with the name coming from "progressive" used to mean "advancement through accumulation." Progressive (or prog) rock grew out of 60s psychedelic bands experimenting with more complex and technical techniques over poppier sounds with greater mainstream appeal, taking influence from jazz, folk, and even classical music. Defining characteristics of prog included unusual time signatures, long songs, fantasy lyrics, and a sort of self-seriousness not present in earlier rock, leading to a somewhat earned reputation for pretentiousness. Punk, on the other hand, emerged in the mid-70s as, some say, a reaction against what was happening to rock music. Early punks saw prog, psychedelic, folk rock, and soft rock as betraying the spirit of rock and roll, and aimed to take it back to its accessible, rebellious, and nontechnical roots. The guitar solo, a staple of prog rock, was scorned as self-indulgent, and bands moved away from the instrumental experimentation of prog to stripped-down bands with one or two guitarists, a singer, and a drummer. One of my favorite songs in elementary school, *Do You Remember Rock 'n' Roll Radio* by The Ramones, was in fact a criticism of rock's direction, singing the praises of old rock DJs and implicitly attacking the experimental singer-

songwriters and prog groups that had been dominating the genre.

Of course, I didn't know any of this when I first clicked on *Tom Sawyer*. All I knew was that I had found a new song, and that it was good. Part of me wishes, considering how it would ultimately change my music taste, that I had a better story around discovering it — finding it in the back of an old record store, say — but it was really just a video I happened to click on, a split-second decision in the most impersonal and least fleeting circumstances possible. When I got home that day, I went onto our TV, opened up YouTube, and began playing it. I had done this before, with the kind of music my parents liked, and they had never minded in the past. This time, however, my mother came running into the living room and asked what I was listening to. When I said it was "A cool new band I found, called Rush," I expected her to be happy, as had happened when I "discovered" punk bands they hadn't shown me directly in this same manner. But she seemed upset. I could tell she wasn't *really* upset in the way she would be if I had done something truly wrong, but I could tell she wasn't exactly a fan of Rush; why, I did not know. To 11-year-old me, Rush sounded pretty similar to all the other music I liked — why was *Tom Sawyer* any different from *London Calling*?

When my dad came home, he similarly went through the five stages of grief over that four minute song. Over a decade of conditioning me to have the coolest music taste in elementary school had gone out the window, and in its place was a future of 20 minute songs about elves, 19/16 time signatures, and wind chime solos. The transition from cool,

stripped-down 80s punk to everything it had gone against meant my tastes were moving in entirely the wrong direction; by high school, I'd be Alex P. Keaton.

For me, though, this was an interesting development. Here was music that I liked, and the people I had always agreed with musically didn't. Over the course of the next week, I started listening to more Rush, discovering my favorite song of all time (the epic twenty-minute sci-fi rock opera *2112*), and a plethora of new bands my parents had never shown me, such as Styx, Yes, and, eventually, prog's offspring (and perhaps the least punk kind of rock in existence), progressive *metal*.

What ultimately came of all this was a realization on my part that there's a lot of good music out there, and a subsequent desire to dig deeper into the music world. Throughout middle school, I would browse Wikipedia for new kinds of music I hadn't listened to and try them out, constantly adding new bands and songs to my mental repertoire. Sometimes, I found something my parents also liked (Warren Zevon, Roy Orbison, New Order), and sometimes not (Dream Theater, Outkast, Iron Maiden). I took a lot of pride in how much I knew about music, in a way I now see as having been quite obnoxious, but that was, at the time, pretty helpful in helping me build an identity in the tumultuous years of puberty. My parents also became somewhat more accepting of my love of rock's less sharp edges, with my dad taking me to a Primus show a few years later, though they never totally gave in — at that same show, I caught him texting some friends about the “masturbatory” nature of Les Claypool's multi-minute bass solos.

Of course, I still liked punk rock, and I still do now. I also like progressive rock, synthwave, power metal, ska, hip hop, new wave, and too many other genres to count. I've learned more about what my parents like to listen to and am careful not to play too much prog or metal while we're listening to music together. The experience has also inspired me to think about what makes us like the music we like; my parents came of age as punk rock was being developed, on the tail end of prog's '70s domination, while I was raised on the internet, with the whole history of music, sans context, just a click away. While I still love the music, of course, the main thing I always think about when I listen to Rush is about how it was my first foray into the musical unknown, and how music has played a part in connecting with my parents.

Notes

¹ Rush, “Tom Sawyer,” Geddy Lee, Alex Lifeson, Neil Peart, Pye Dubois, and Terry Brown, October-November 1980, Anthem, Track #1 on *Moving Pictures*, 1981.

Orinoco Flow

Morgan O'Halloran



If you are to understand my family, you must first understand the matron, matriarch, and money maker, my mother. My mother is a professor of political science at Columbia University and has used her intuition, intellect, and inability to stop working to raise three children in the middle of Manhattan. Her grandparents immigrated from Ireland sometime around the 1920's and brought their specific brands of Irish Catholicism, cynicism, and cunning with them. My sisters and I have always known that we were Irish. It was certainly hard to ignore with a great-grandfather named Patrick Fitzpatrick, but like most other kids, we never thought much of it other than the jokes about leprechauns, red heads, and the humor that came with being born two days before St. Patrick's Day.

As Americans, the idea of culture and heritage comes to us through a strange and distorted lens. People often ask, "what are you?" as a shorthand for "what kind of generational trauma do you carry?" Eastern European? Your parents are homophobic and strict. Asian? The same, but also if you don't get good grades you'll be disowned. Hispanic? You have a huge family, at least half of whom is *super* religious. The list goes on. This was the view of culture and tradition I grew up with. An unfortunate and inescapable situation you would always be in.

This is why I've always hated tradition. The concept that things were better just because they were older never made any sense to me. Why should I have to do something a certain way because some guy however many hundreds of years ago was like "yeah that seems pretty good I think everyone should do it like this for the rest of time"? I grew up thinking that tradition and conservatism were interchangeable, and the only purpose it served was to try to shove everyone into some archaic homogeneous mold of what a "good" person is. It felt confining, claustrophobic, and cramped, and I pushed against it with all my tweenager might until I felt I was free from the shackles of expectation.

Looking back, the irony of the situation is almost comical. I felt tradition to be some Big Brother-esque force, not realizing that the only one who can put that much pressure of expectation on you is, well, you. Outside opinion only does so much, but there's no end to the amount of influence an internalized notion can exert. I have also come to realize that tradition and culture are inescapable.

Growing up, we never felt much of a connection with Ireland. It seemed like a fun piece of trivia, a get-to-know-us ice breaker fact that never really affected us. We'd grown up knowing nothing but our little corner of the Upper West Side, why would we care about some island thousands of miles away with more sheep than people? Nevertheless, little bits and pieces of our heritage managed to worm their way into our lives without us knowing. Our mom's decidedly un-Christian views on spirituality and ghosts, my twin sister's speech impediment that sounded strangely like an Irish accent, and the eminent

voice of Enya that flowed each morning from my mom's old alarm clock and radio that was older than we were.

Enya, aka Eithne Pádraigín Ní Bhraonáin, is an Irish singer who has this funny way of making you feel like you're floating in a sensory deprivation tank. She combines classic folk, new age, pop, and traditional Celtic music into an entrancing and soothing melody that rises and falls the ocean waves, and makes you feel isolated and connected simultaneously. One of her most popular pieces, *Orinoco Flow*, uses a deceptively cheerful combination of harp, synth piano, and contrabass in a serene and buoyant sound.¹ With catchy lyrics and unmatched vibes, *Orinoco Flow* is a prime example of new age music.

To us, though, it was just the "sail away" song. To us it was mom's alarm and the sign that she was about to start dancing around the house trying to wake us up. To us it was the song we listened to after begrudgingly getting up and jumped on her bed, chanting "SAIL AWAY, SAIL AWAY, SAIL AWAY," at the top of our toddler lungs. I remember the feeling of flopping down onto her bed, out of breath after jumping up and down for three and a half minutes straight. I remember my mom's old sheets, smooth, cool, and smelling of her lavender soap. I remember I couldn't sleep in my bed at night and would instead sleep with her, grape juice in my sippy cup and a wet washcloth against my nail as I would suck my thumb and relax from a long exhausting day of being a baby. I remember every morning at 7 AM the gentle songs of piano and harp would fill the air. I remember resenting that song for the first minute as it meant that I had to wake up and loving it for the other three and

a half minutes as my sisters and I exhausted ourselves before breakfast.

This was our tradition. This was the way it was always done in our household. Until it wasn't. It's hard to place a timeline on these sorts of things. There's never really a starting or stopping point, they just sort of fade in and out of existence on their own. Maybe we grew too old. Maybe one of us fell off the bed one too many times. Maybe my mom got rid of that old alarm clock radio. Maybe we just got tired of it. Either way, one day it eventually stopped, and I never really noticed or realized until now, fifteen years later. Now we have new traditions. There are fewer of them, and they aren't quite so animated, such is the price of growing up and not living together anymore. The apartment we grew up in is now my older sister's domain. She's become the new Witch of Apartment 51 and navigates a rotating cast of roommates. Me and my twin are at college now. She's in Ohio, lost somewhere in the cornfields, and I'm here, writing this essay.

My mom lives in Dublin, five hours and 3,400 miles away. We helped her move there the summer of 2022 after she got a job at Trinity College, and I lived there for six months after my gap year programs had ended. I've moved five times in the last year and at this point, I'm not sure what is considered "home" anymore. I'm caught somewhere between my mom's windowed living room and leaky fridge in Dublin and the empty room I once grew up in and the new washing machine that sings a little song when it's done in Manhattan. Where does tradition, and the home it embodies, lie? In the people who made it or the place it was practiced?

This lack of “home” has made me reconsider many things I knew for sure. It’s amazing what escaping to Europe for a year can do for the American teen. It helps to put in perspective things we take for granted, and the assumptions that come with them. The melting pot has melted us into a big goop of cultures, religions, and traditions that have a hundred and one different sources. Communities are a hodgepodge of cryptogenic habits and unusual beliefs that persist in how we talk, walk, dress, eat, pray, and play. And at the end of the day, that’s what tradition is. I have come to realize that tradition is inescapable and, like everything else in the world, not kind enough to be easily categorized.

If you figure out where home is, let me know. I’d love to know where to spend Christmas this year.

Notes

¹ Enya, “Orinoco Flow”, WEA, track 7 on *Watermark*, 1988.

Kiss Them For Me

Emerson Fraser



Throughout time, musicians have changed their genre. Bands such as Fleetwood Mac, who transitioned from blues to rock, or solo artists more recently like Taylor Swift, who transitioned from country to pop, are known for changing their initial style and adopting a new way around music. While these changes have had varying reactions from fans, it ultimately led to a better place for the bands. The same thing happened with Siouxsie and the Banshees. While their older music held up a punk style with songs that had a fast and loud tempo, “Kiss Them For Me” marked a change in direction both lyrically and musically. Throughout time, genre is inevitably going to evolve, much like people. It is good to keep in mind, however, that while things have to change, this change is good.

Making their claim to fame in 1976, singer Siouxsie Sioux and bassist Steven Severin came together to introduce punk rock band Siouxsie and the Banshees to the streets of London, originally under the name of Janet and the Icebergs. In addition to Sioux and Severin, the members consisted of prominent names such as Robert Smith of The Cure and Sid Vicious of Sex Pistols, as well as a revolving door of others who spent increments of time with the band. Siouxsie and the Banshees released 176 songs before their ultimate break up in 1996. Their biggest song during their existence was “Kiss Them For Me,” released in 1991.¹ The genre changes of “Kiss

Them For Me” had an impact on the band and captures the idea of change being perceived as good.

Siouxsie Sioux herself has a lengthy history that led to her punk persona, beginning with a childhood of isolation resulting from “her alcoholic, unemployed father.”² Sioux experienced a lot of disappointment in her younger years, which led to untrustworthy relationships with adults and a lack of self-confidence that impacted her mentally, leading to illness in her teenage years. At the end of her teenage years, Sioux and her best friend at the time, Steven Severin, came to learn about Sex Pistols, a popular English punk band. From there on, Sioux realized her connection to the punk scene and adopted the persona that came with it, including fashion. Soon, her and Severin would form Siouxsie and the Banshees, a punk band of their own. After being established as a band, Sid Vicious, who surprisingly had a stint with the band that influenced Sioux’s punk identity, Sex Pistols, joined Siouxsie and the Banshees for a handful of time as a drummer. Vicious had an interesting story with punk himself, being defined as “everything in punk that was dark, decadent and nihilistic.”³ It was not long that he had with the band however, due to his untimely death at the age of 21.

Following their formation, Siouxsie and the Banshees came to be an essential band in the genre of British punk rock. Punk rock was captured through raw vocals paired with fast paced instrumentals. The singers of these songs did not necessarily need to be ‘good’ by any means, as people were just fans of the loud and lively aspects of the songs, rather than talent. The music inspired a new lifestyle for many, giving way

to style and behavior. People wore many layers with additions of accessories like fishnets and chains. Oftentimes clothing was black or darker shades of purple and gray. Makeup and big hair were also staple pieces of punk culture, and many would wear their hair in large, spikey, colorful mohawks. People who identified strongly with punk also often acted in defying way, having strong set beliefs against authority and fighting outright against capitalism. For this group, punk was a time in which they were able to find themselves and what they stood for. These clothing styles were what made them feel confident and well represented in society, like Sioux herself.

Although Siouxsie and the Banshees’ music was typically what would have fallen under the umbrella of punk or ‘gothic punk’, the specific song “Kiss Them For Me” marked the introduction of a new style of music: dance pop. Unlike their prior punk title, dance pop was what was played in clubs, as it had the dancing tone as opposed to the grunge head bop of punk. It was more lighthearted, and the singing was valued more than the instruments. Siouxsie and the Banshees’ plan when it came to “Kiss Them For Me” was to reinvent the band itself, as their style was beginning to become outdated. Their producers decided that the best way to keep a crowd of fans was to begin moving their style away from what was popular and adopting what was becoming popular. As a result of this, the band began to produce music that was more of the style of popular 1990’s singers such as Cher and Madonna. “Kiss Them For Me” was their first dive into this new music, which was met with positive reviews, specifically in the United States, as this was where they finally achieved a mainstream hit. From

1991 and on, the band began to adopt this new genre and integrate it into their music. While it was going well, in 1996 the group ultimately decided on breaking up, as each member had plans for their future careers. Siouxsie Sioux and drummer Budgie combined talents following their marriage and formed the band The Creatures, who later took in bassist Steven Severin. The Creatures became a branch off band of Siouxsie and the Banshees, releasing post-punk and pop rock music for some time.

Change is a crucial part of life. Whether it is discussed in the means of music or your personal life, everyone needs to change in order to better themselves. Throughout my life, I have struggled a lot with accepting change. As a kid, I feared moving schools when it came to the end of elementary school. When things didn't go exactly according to plan, I always reacted dramatically, often with tears. While it took time to accept this aspect of life, I found that it was possible. COVID quarantine opened time for me where I came to learn the positive aspects of change. Much like those of the punk era, I was able to find a style and way of life that made me feel comfortable; one that I resonated with. I had a lot of alone time that left me reflecting on things about myself: who I wanted to be, how I wanted people to see me. School kept me from being able to know who I truly was. In prior years, I was putting on a face for others and trying to please them, but with time, I was able to understand who I really was. By being on my own, I learned the things that I liked and disliked, and what parts of my personality I wanted to make the most apparent. When I returned to school, I had practically changed my entire persona

for the better, and found that by accepting this change within myself, I was much happier. Since then, I have continued to grow into my skin and have found confidence in who I am. I have also noticed that accepting changes around me has become easier, such as changes in plans, and more recently changes in environment upon my arrival at Skidmore.

I believe that this idea of change being a good thing applies to the music industry as well. To keep their reputation, Siouxsie and the Banshees had to reshape their musical identity, and this type of change can be a make it or break it move. Fortunately for them, things went well, and they became popular around the world. If we consider this in our own lives, subtle changes we make every day can continuously change us for the better.

Siouxsie and the Banshees' progression in music indicated an evolution of the band made necessary to stick with the times. Now that you understand the band, do yourself a favor and go spend the next four minutes and fifty-seven seconds indulging in the beauty of "Kiss Them For Me."

Notes

¹ Siouxsie and the Banshees – Kiss Them for Me,” Genius, Accessed October 7, 2023. <https://genius.com/Siouxsie-and-the-banshees-kiss-them-for-me-lyrics>.

² "Siouxsie Sioux,” Wikipedia, November 18, 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siouxsie_Sioux.

³ “Sid Vicious,” Wikipedia, September 27, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sid_Vicious.

Galileo

Marta Insolia



One thing we humans all have in common is the desire to find and understand the purpose to life. Throughout our lives, however, we are constantly told what to believe in and how to process the concept of life itself. Galileo Galilei, for example, spent his entire life battling the church's influence of religious prejudices on his scientific truths. Throughout history, many innovators and philosophers like Galileo have been persecuted for their differing beliefs in the concept of life after death, and many wars and historical conflicts have started due to religious beliefs. When I first heard the Indigo Girls' song "Galileo"¹ the summer before my sophomore year of high school, I realized that their lyrics are not just about religion in today's society. They are about the hardships in conceptualizing a bigger, more convincing truth to life. These hardships are particularly relevant in actively developing teenage brains. As a teenager myself, I find it difficult to remember that it is okay to form my own opinions on life after death. I also find it difficult coping with all the emotions that come with the discussion of existentialism in general. Indigo Girls capture the complex feelings that every teenager encounters as they delve into the heavy concepts of reincarnation, karma, and the mind-body-soul connection.

To fuel their argument, Indigo Girls feature the story of a specific, historical figure in their song. They write about Galileo Galilei, well known Italian astronomer, philosopher, and physicist, and his failed attempt to shed light on the scientific truths of the universe. The first lyric of the song states, "Galileo's head was on the block / The crime was lookin' up the truth". Galileo was one of the first to make public that the Earth orbits the Sun, instead of the other way around. For years before this, humans were convinced that Earth was the center orbital focus and that every celestial body corresponded to Earth's movement.² Thus, Galileo opened eyes to the scientific truths of the world around us. The religious community, however, strongly disagreed with Galileo's discoveries. So, on February 26, 1616, the Roman Catholic Church banished Galileo from teaching and upholding different views from the biblical scripture's literal interpretation.³ Therefore, he was exiled into silence just because his views differed from the accepted beliefs of the time.

Jean Marie Carey - PhD in Art History from the University of Otago - refers to Galileo's achievements as more than just a scientific breakthrough. She emphasizes how his "observation, careful measurement, and attention to the structure of a given event all led to an appreciation of hidden causes that ultimately expressed the pervasive mathematical unity of all nature."⁴ In other words, Galileo's careful attentiveness and conscientiousness to the life around him was the key factor in discovering the deeper truths to the universe that no other human had yet found.

In the remaining years of his life, Galileo spent 8 years of house arrest strengthening his ideas on the power of gravity and laws of the universe.⁵ The Roman Catholic Church did not realize their mistake in condemning Galileo until 1992.⁶ However, Galileo remains one of the world's most renowned and influential physicists. When Indigo Girls sing, "I call on the resting soul of Galileo king of night vision / King of insight", they use Galileo's life story as metaphor. The writers suggest that seeking one's own truth and personal beliefs may result in societal rejection. It is actually very likely that beliefs even slightly different from the majority will be denounced. However, that does not mean that they are wrong - or even that they are right. Indigo Girls do not talk about correctness or incorrectness. Likewise, Galileo's story is not about seeking revenge against the church. Rather, the Indigo Girls reflect on Galileo's "resting soul" and "night vision", which he uses to carry so much insight in so much darkness. They reflect on how he faces ultimate condemnation for being strong enough to battle the concept of existentialism instead of following the singular, most dominant flow of religious beliefs.

Writer of "Galileo", Emily Saliers, also discusses her own, personal beliefs of life after death - particularly the concept of reincarnation: "And as the bombshells of my daily fears explode / I try to trace them to my youth / And then you had to bring up reincarnation." She explains how her worst fears are in correlation to past lives' deaths and how every new life is an opportunity to correct the wrongs of the life before you. Saliers asks herself the speculative question: "How long 'til my soul gets it right / Can any human being ever reach that

kind of light". As she conceptualizes the idea of serving time for past mistakes, Saliers refrains from sticking to one, strict religious belief. Instead, she continues to question the beliefs she already knows in order to form her own ideas. Saliers explains how her fear of motion could be due to "Some other fool across the ocean years ago" who crashed their plane. She recognizes how this does not make absolute, scientific sense, but it makes sense to her. This personal belief helps Saliers understand miniscule details about herself and form a greater cognizance over who she is and why she is this way. Simply stated, religious and existentialist beliefs are subjective and up to one's own opinion.

When writing this song, Indigo Girls chose no specific audience to focus on. However, the deep, spiritual topic they discuss pertains a significant amount to teenagers. The teenage years have been described to me multiple times by multiple different people as the worst years of your life. In my own experience, ages thirteen to nineteen have definitely been the years with the most change - both physically and mentally. Teenagers physically grow into adults during adolescence but take several more years to achieve complete emotional development.⁷ These few teenage years are a roller coaster of emotional imbalances and instability where rising hormones contribute to increasing awareness of how we look and are perceived.⁸ Also, during these years, teenagers are encouraged to set long-term goals and plans for the future, move out of their family homes, and create a life for themselves. Teenage uncertainty is exacerbated by the fact that these are the first years we are encouraged to become independent and

introspective. This factor forces many teenagers to think more about the concept of existentialism and their purpose in life. Many people I know claim that the unexpected teenage outbreaks of emotion are really just ‘normal teenage angst’ - something that we all have, due in part to the hormonal imbalances most apparent in maturing children. This may be true, but what is often forgotten is the importance in recognizing the difference between ‘normal teenage angst’ and existential crises. A person experiences an existential crisis when they begin to doubt the fundamental meaning, purpose, or worth of their life.⁹ Indigo Girls help teenagers encountering any form of existential crisis recognize that it is up to them to choose what to believe in, and that this choice does not have to be definite or have a label. “Galileo” reinforces that universal beliefs do not have to be large and full of absolute certainty - they can also be happy and silly and unresolved.

Overall, by relating Galileo’s story, Indigo Girls recognize the power dynamic between knowledge and authority and how this concept is very relevant to teenagers trying to discern what is the “*real* truth” of the universe. By doing so, they reassure their fans - particularly teenagers interested in existentialism - that we are not alone and that almost every single person in the world has had very similar revelations in their lifetime. Also, as Indigo Girls pair this heavy subject with an upbeat melody and playful guitar, they remind us that wondering about the universe can be fun, insightful, and introspective - it’s not about who is right or wrong in the end. To Indigo Girls, it is about the journey along

the way and finding yourself through the creation of your own beliefs.

Notes

¹ Indigo Girls, "Galileo," Track #2 on *Rites of Passage*, 1992.

² Charles S. Slichter, “GALILEO,” *American Scientist* Vol. 31, No. 2 (1943): pp. 168-173.

³ Jean Marie Carey, “This Day in History: February 26,” Italian Art Society, 2023

<https://www.italianartsociety.org/2017/02/on-26-february-1616-galileo-galilei-was-formally-banned-and-banished-by-the-roman-catholic-church-for-teaching-and-defending-the-opinion-that-the-earth-orbits-the-sun/#:~:text=Jean%20Marie%20Carey-.On%2026%20February%201616%2C%20Galileo%20Galilei%20was%20formally%20banned%20and,the%20Earth%20orbits%20the%20Sun.>

⁴ Jean Marie Carey, “This Day in History: February 26.”

⁵ Jean Marie Carey, “This Day in History: February 26.”

⁶ Jean Marie Carey, “This Day in History: February 26.”

⁷ Bruce Kehr, “Existential Crisis in Teenagers,” Potomac Psychiatry, 2016,

<https://www.potomacpsychiatry.com/blog/existential-crisis-teenagers.>

⁸ Bruce Kehr, “Existential Crisis in Teenagers.”

⁹ Bruce Kehr, “Existential Crisis in Teenagers.”

Riverdance

Elliott Zajac



When your average American off the street is asked to think about Ireland, one of the first things to come up - along with Guinness, leprechauns, and St. Patrick's Day - is probably going to be Irish dance; a whirl of bright colors and lively music, cheerful dancers in vibrant costumes. For decades, the distinctive, energetic style has remained exceedingly popular both within Ireland and around the world. Many Americans, especially ones who live in areas like Boston, New York, and Detroit, where countless Irish immigrants settled in the 19th century, have probably seen a performance, or even know someone who does it. Within Ireland, it's in every plaza during every county fair, schoolchildren march grudgingly to lessons, and tens of thousands flock to glamorous, high-budget productions, not least of which is *Riverdance*; an Irish dance showcase that premiered at Eurovision in 1994 and was later adapted into a stage show. A revolutionary moment for Irish culture, *Riverdance* was groundbreaking in its fusion of the traditional styles of song and dance with modern and multicultural ones, bridging the gap between the old and new Ireland.

Dance has a very long history in Ireland. The nature worship of early Celts involved ring dances echoed in modern times by forms such as the highly traditional Sean-Nós songs and dances.^{1,2} Later on, the conquest of Ireland in the 12th

century by Norman invaders brought in a wave of new influences, introducing elements of mainland European folk music.³ However, Irish dance didn't really start to develop its own identity as a cultural pastime until the 16th century, while Ireland was under the authority of Queen Elizabeth I.⁴ A letter written to her from Lord Deputy of Ireland Henry Sidney in 1569 speaks of the "very beautiful, magnificently dressed and first-class dancers" he saw in the city of Galway, and details how they moved into straight lines while dancing.⁵ By the late 17th century, Irish dance had been widely adopted by the English court; the first Irish jig was published by Sir John Playford, a choirmaster at St. Paul's cathedral, in 1686.⁶ A dance known as the *Rinnce Fada*, literally "long dance," was performed for James II when he arrived in Ireland in 1689 following his removal from the English throne.⁷ Dance had become ubiquitous in Ireland; "on Sundays ... all the people resorted with the piper to the village green, where the young folk dance till the cows come home. There was no occasion from which dancing was absent."⁸ Ireland's heart pulsed with the song of its people.

Later, during the 18th century, traditional dance started to become codified. Ireland saw the rise of traveling 'dance masters' who collected, guarded, and passed on regional forms of Irish dance. Heavily influenced by French quadrilles, they developed the styles of step dancing most people think of as Irish dancing today.⁹ They also started the tradition of large group dances, where the most talented could show off their footwork with solo performances. For most, however, it remained a casual, communal affair, with families gathering at

crossroads or inside a house and dancing till dawn. Some propose that the iconic stiff-arm posture characteristic of the style originated from these cramped confines.¹⁰ This period marked the beginning of modern Irish dance.

If the masters of the 1700s gave structure to Irish dance, the Gaelic Revival of the late 1800s and early 1900s are what established it as a cultural institution. In the wake of the Irish Potato Famine, with so many Irish lost and scattered around the world, there was a major push - especially by nationalist interests - to preserve and promote Irish language and heritage.¹¹ Organizations such as the Gaelic League set up communities across Ireland, as well as England, Scotland, and America, with this goal in mind.¹² They held céilís and feiseanna - social dances and competitions, respectively - as well as public demonstrations in Europe and America, and were instrumental in the development of Irish dance. These events have become a key part of how those in Ireland and abroad connect with their heritage today! However, the League's pushes for broader organization suppressed many of the regional variants of the dancing masters in favor of the straight-backed Munster style, as well as other styles such as set dancing that they saw as unduly influenced by foreigners.¹³ Later groups, such as the Irish Dancing Commission, have worked to restore the dances that had previously been lost.

It wasn't until much more recently, though, that Irish dance became the cultural phenomenon that it is today. *Riverdance* brought the new face of Irish dance around the world, and the fervid members of the Irish diaspora seized on it with a passion. It was first performed at the 1994 Eurovision

Song Contest in Ireland - not as an entry, but as an interval show. Since then, it has dominated the international perception of Irish dance and the evolution of the form as a whole, fusing traditional music and choreography with modern styles, including American tap dance, Russian folk music, and flamenco. It's held over 15,000 performances over 30 years, and been seen live by 30 million people. The energy there is fervent, and so many of the people who go to see it are huge fans and repeat viewers - I've personally been there three times with my family. For a lot of people in the Irish diaspora, it's the most accessible and authentic way to be in touch with the culture their ancestors had to flee. The opening number, "Reel Around the Sun," has over 6.6 million views on YouTube, and there's even a movie adaptation on Netflix, featuring magical talking deer—"exhaustingly bad" according to film critic Deirdre Molunby.¹⁴ It helped to create a resurgence of interest in Irish step dance and Irish culture around the world, such that within two years, there were 25% again as many competitors at the World Irish Dancing Championships than before, and countless individuals around the world have taken up Irish dancing as a way to learn more about the art form, or to explore their Irish heritage. Pretty much all of modern Irish dance - especially on the international level - owes its existence and popularity to *Riverdance*.

Riverdance was originally developed by composer Bill Whelan, who drew heavily on his previous work *Timedance*, which was performed during the interval of Eurovision ten years prior. *Timedance* featured Baroque-inspired music and ballet dancing, but for *Riverdance*, he wanted to highlight

Ireland's cultural traditions.¹⁵ This coincided with the period of incredible economic growth in Ireland known as the "Celtic Tiger," when decades of dedication to domestic higher education paid off alongside substantial foreign investment. The seven-minute single they released, also named "Riverdance," hit Number 1 in Ireland and in the UK within days of the original airing.¹⁶ Nine months later, *Riverdance - The Show* was born, selling out the Point Theater in Dublin for five weeks straight.¹⁷ Whelan's score even won a Grammy for Best Musical Show Recording, beating out *Rent*. Credit is also due to world-champion Irish dancers Michael Flatley and Jean Butler, who were both lead dancers and choreographers in the show; Flatley in particular split due to creative differences and has gone on to produce other shows since, including the somewhat pompously eponymous "Lord of the Dance," and used to have his feet insured for 60 million dollars. Their innovations incorporated new rhythms and even - gasp! - some upper body movements into the previously more reserved, classical genre, taking inspiration from contemporary dancing and tap. *Riverdance* created a new paradigm of dance in Ireland and inspired the younger generations to connect with and educate themselves about their cultural heritage. Coming out of centuries of suffering and oppression, it reflects the rising pride and joy among the Irish people.

Notes

¹ Arthur Flynn. *Irish Dance* (Appletree Press, 1998). Excerpt taken from "The History of Irish Dance," Irelandseye.com, 2004, <https://www.irelandseye.com/dance.html>.

²"The History of Irish Dance," Celtic Steps, accessed 5 November 2023, <https://celticsteps.ie/our-story/the-history-of-irish-song-music-dance/>. Research taken from *Toss the Feather - Irish Set Dancing* by Pat Murphy, published 1 January 1995.

³ Arthur Flynn. *Irish Dance*.

⁴ Arthur Flynn. *Irish Dance*.

⁵ Sidney, Henry. Henry Sidney to Elizabeth I. Dublin, Ireland, 1569.

⁶"The History of Irish Dance," Celtic Steps.

⁷"The History of Irish Dance," Celtic Steps.

⁸ Quote from John Dunton, 1691. Accessed via "The History of Irish Dance," Celtic Steps.

⁹"The History of Irish Dance," Celtic Steps.

La Vie Bohème
Finn Krol-García



Notes (continued)

¹⁰ Editor, “How Irish Dancing Conquered The World,” *Old Moore’s Almanac*, accessed 5 November 2023.

<https://oldmooresalmanac.com/how-irish-dancing-conquered-the-world/>.

¹¹ Editor, “How Irish Dancing Conquered The World.”

¹² Editor, “How Irish Dancing Conquered The World.”

¹³ Editor, “How Irish Dancing Conquered The World.”

¹⁴ Deirdre Molumby, “Riverdance: The Animated Adventure' is a baffling, terrible children's movie,” *Entertainment.ie*, 2021,

<https://entertainment.ie/movies/movie-reviews/riverdance-the-animated-adventure-484869/>

¹⁵ Aoife O’Mara, “25 years of Riverdance: a history of the Irish dance phenomenon,” IB4UD, published 31 December 2020, updated January 19 2021,

<https://www.irelandbeforeyoudie.com/25-years-of-riverdance-a-history-of-the-irish-dance-phenomenon/>.

¹⁶ David Hennessey, “The true, behind-the-scenes story of Riverdance,” *The Irish World*, 20 March 2019.

<https://www.theirishworld.com/the-true-behind-the-scenes-story-of-riverdance/>

¹⁷ Aoife O’Mara, “25 years of Riverdance: a history of the Irish dance phenomenon,”

Most people, when mad, would just flip someone off. Seven fed-up characters in Jonathan Larson’s *RENT!* instead stand on top of tables and break into song in this angry, act-closing, number about their lives- while also flipping off their extremely shitty landlord. The song “La Vie Bohème” by Jonathan Larson features several truly angry and impassioned queer people protesting the idea that an artistic lifestyle is dead.¹ *RENT!* itself was a show that followed the lives of a friend group of seven members, four of whom had AIDS or were HIV positive, and their adventures in the Lower East Side of New York City. The seven characters include Mark (a Jewish filmmaker), Roger (an HIV+ musician with serious trauma), Tom (an ex-MIT student turned activist), Angel (a genderqueer drag queen living with AIDS), Maureen (a bisexual performance artist and the protest organizer), and Mimí (an HIV+ Latina stripper). Each character in *RENT!* was written with immense depth and conscientiousness. This show was the first time in Broadway history that people living with AIDS were mentioned onstage and it left ripples in our society that we can still see to this day. In “La Vie Bohème” the characters then pretend to grieve the death of bohemia (an artistic lifestyle) but quickly start dancing and belting out notes about what it is to live with AIDS, being queer, subverting social expectations, and leaving a legacy behind that is worth

remembering. Objectively, it's these performers' voices that heavily influenced the fight for transgender rights that we're currently witnessing today, bringing transgender and queer livelihood to the forefront of society in the nineties, where most homophobic people were eager to sweep any mention of gender queerness under the rug.

To begin, I was personally in *RENT!* in February 2023, and I got the chance, as a visible transgender person, to stand on top of a table and yell about my character's life. Through the show, my character navigated moving back to the streets where *RENT!* is placed, grieving their failed dance career due to an injury, and being generous to others even when he had next to nothing for himself. While it's often hard to be a gay person- playing a character who had a life much more difficult than mine gave me hope for the future. Aside from the characters in the show getting the opportunity to express themselves exuberantly, *RENT!* gave people a reason to talk about gay people's lives for the first time, despite public pressure to ignore the AIDS crisis.

The AIDS crisis was a rapid surge of AIDS (acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome), which is the final stage of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) and wiped-out hundreds of thousands of people, most queer, some not, from 1980 to 1997, with a total of "6,400,000 people dead by 1997."² HIV itself is a virus that attacks the cells in the immune system. It essentially makes the smallest of illnesses deadly and wreaks havoc on one's body. HIV is spread from the exchange of bodily fluids from one infected person to someone else, as well as the sharing of used drug needles. AIDS and HIV struck the gay



The author performing, second from right, in RENT!

community of the 1990's at an alarming rate quickly turned into the AIDS crisis. Being gay was seen as a social disease and was highly stigmatized. Hospital nurses wouldn't even touch HIV+ patients in a heartbreaking turn of events. One of the reasons it's often so hard to find queer adult role models as a queer teen is because so many queer adults didn't live through the 1990's.

To that end, the public's response to *RENT!* was visceral, with *RENT!* becoming an international sensation overnight. All of a sudden, queer people and non-queer people

alike were starting to pay attention to the oppression queer people faced, with varying opinions on the crisis itself. These opinions ranged from pure, unadulterated hate and fear to calls for community rebellion. In 2023, similar themes of hate and ignorance riddle everyday life, making the lives of transgender people in America highly dangerous, due to a contemporary trans panic that often parallels the gay panic of the 1990's. Regardless, community is often found in things like music-music like the angry, joyful sounds of "La Vie Bohème."

We see the side effects of the government's decisions in the 1990's to this day, namely the current attack on transgender rights. To elaborate on these attacks, our current national government refuses to take a stand in either direction about transgender rights, just as they did in the 1990's regarding public aid and queer safety. Now, this indecision leads to each individual state ruling on trans people rights to play sports, their access to healthcare, and more. Due to the number of conservative legislators in America, said decisions have resulted in highly hostile environments for transgender people that vary from state to state, with many people losing access to their medications or ability to live wherever they would like to. The fallacy of America's welcoming nature that is touched on in *RENT!*, as seen in this quote:

Anyone out of the mainstream!
Is anyone in the mainstream?
Anyone alive with a sex drive...
The opposite of war isn't peace...
it's creation!³

where Mark and the entire restaurant sing about not fitting in with the American ideals, as seen through Mark's line about war and peace. This inability to fit in with a conservative perspective is also incredibly present in the current struggles transgender people face today. Access to medical care or the ability to play on sports teams that align with one's gender are no longer ensured rights for transgender people and are often even "off-limits" due to a conservative majority opinion. It is an incredibly vicious period in which to be transgender, and it has undeniable parallels to the loss of humanity experienced by queer people in history.

Additionally, "La Vie Bohème" brings some much-needed vibrancy to the closed-off perspectives of a society eager to cast judgment and to discard anyone who didn't conform to the norm. Each actor on stage sings about various aspects of their life and the things that bring them joy. For example, Angel and Mimí sing,

to hand-crafted beers made in local breweries,
to yoga, to yogurt, to rice and beans and cheese,
to leather, to dildos, to curry vindaloo,
to huevos rancheros and Maya Angelou.⁴

These four lines highlight things that they appreciate, even though Angel has an incredibly difficult life and so does Mimí. Even so, Angel isn't a victim of her life and is a proud performer every time we see her in drag, and a vibrant spirit out of drag, up till her very last breath. Mimí struggles with drug use, but isn't afraid to connect with others through dance, as seen when she stands on a table and Collins narrates her actions:

In honor of the death of bohemia an impromptu salon will commence immediately following dinner.

Mimí Marquéz, clad only in bubble wrap
will perform her famous lawn chair handcuff
dance to the sounds of ice tea being stirred.

Mimí's commitment to life is also shown in the love story between her and Roger that drives the story of *RENT!*. These characters, much like the transgender and queer people of today, actively seek out and fight for the things in their life that they enjoy, even when they have every reason to succumb.

Furthermore, while Angel and Mimí are filled with joy and life in "La Vie Bohème," their lives and their voices also touch on the importance of queer activism, queer activism hereby defined as activism enacted by queer people and allies in the 1990's. Communities then and now have had to band together to save queer and trans lives as they are under attack in the current nation. These lyrics sung by Mark,

Revolution, justice, screaming for solutions
Forcing changes, risk, and danger
Making noise and making pleas!

highlight some of the rage found in activism in the 1990's. While Mark was not the first to protest and speak up in the show and real life, these lines in "La Vie Bohème" were some of the first lyrics to reach the general population and served to awaken the nation to queer injustice. *RENT!* is an angry, loud play, and when it spoke up, people had no choice but to listen.

All in all, "La Vie Bohème" did the revolutionary thing of daring to be unforgivably queer. That power has left ripples in our society, and we can see those effects in everything from

transgender rights and access to everyday things now, and to the deaths of hundreds of ancestors then. The exuberant existence of queer people then absolutely has lit the way for the others in this generation. We are people living vibrantly, listening to and performing songs like "La Vie Bohème"- just like me.

Notes

¹ Original Broadway Cast Recording "La Vie Bohème A" and "La Vie Bohème B," Jonathan Larson, Revolution Studios Distribution Company, LLC, Tracks #23 and #25, *Rent* (Original Broadway Cast Recording), 1996.

² Criswell, Christopher. "A Brief Timeline of AIDS." AIDS timeline. Accessed October 23, 2023. <https://www.factlv.org/timeline.htm>.

³ "Original Broadway Cast of *Rent*- La Vie Bohème B," Genius Lyrics, accessed October 2021, 2023, <https://genius.com/original-broadway-cast-of-rent-la-vie-boheme-b-lyrics>.

⁴ "Original Broadway Cast of *Rent*- La Vie Bohème A," Genius Lyrics, accessed October 21, 2023, <https://genius.com/original-broadway-cast-of-rent-la-vie-boheme-a-lyrics>

Girl Next Door
Ben Galligan



As a freshman in college, you are constantly meeting new people. The constant “Hey what’s your name...where are you from?” questions seemingly weasel their way into almost every conversation. After you catch their name and location—which will be promptly forgotten in the next 5 minutes—you then proceed to go on about things you like to do and make small chit-chat to try and get to know the other person. One thing that I’ve seen myself saying is, “I was in a band in high school so... I like to play music.” People then ask me about the band and I give them the shorthand version of everything, but what they don’t know is how impactful the band itself had on me. From forming the band at 14 to watching it grow into something bigger all to see it crash down helped shape me into who I am today. Now I sit in a reflective period of it all, and the music we once played and listened to now holds a very different meaning than it did back then.

The band’s origins came about after some friends and I volunteered to play a small performance in one of our English teacher’s classrooms at the end of the school year. Now, I had no place coercing them into doing this performance. Up until then, I had taken a handle fun of piano lessons when I was 8 and had only picked up the guitar that previous December. Despite the drawbacks on my behalf, my other friends all

played an instrument competently enough which conveniently left me as vocalist. After about 2 weeks of practicing and our stellar show in front of 5 people, we decided that we should continue to play music together. This small spark ignited something big in all of us and something we wanted to pursue going into high school.

That summer we started experimenting with some different sounds but only one seemed to stick. The genre of skatepunk and Blink-182 was a game changer in my teenage mind. Their fast riffs and immature humor were all I could ever ask for in a band. From that moment on, all I wanted to do was either listen to skatepunk or play it. Still new to the guitar, their guitar riffs were simple and easy to master. I remember going online to ultimateguitartabs.com and searching for one of my new favorite songs, “Girl Next Door” by Blink-182 off their 1993 debut album *Buddha*.¹ This song made me feel like I was a true skatepunk guitarist. I was able to play the song from beginning to end with no mistakes and that little accomplishment made the guitar more than a hobby but a passion.

Throughout our freshman year of high school, we continued to hone in on our sound and we practiced tirelessly. We adopted the name “No Rest” and began booking shows in and around the Boston Area. When freshman ended and summer started, the band was at its peak and my life became carefree. It consisted of getting up each morning, walking my dog, eating a bowl of Cheerios, practicing guitar, biking over to my friend’s house to wake him up, biking over to our drummer’s house, and playing music all day. Periodically

between playing, we would set aside time to skateboard because how can you be in a skatepunk band and not know how to skateboard? I was living life without a worry in the world as we would skate down to our local CVS and I would pick up Cheez-Its, Diet Pepsi, and Juicy Fruit chewing gum. I spent all day playing guitar and having fun with my closest friends and I couldn't wish for anything else. What I didn't realize is this would be it. The band would never be this close again.

No Rest would continue to press on but it never came close to what it was during that summer. As school started back up we would only practice once a week and during that time we were completely focused on writing our material and practicing, but the friendship backing the band was starting to fade. As shows rolled in and we began playing more live the band became more of a job than a fun creative venture. Always being on the talk with venues and making sure we had practiced enough to sound good enough for the audience. Skatepunk as a genre was also beginning to lose its shiny veneer and we always argued which musical directions we wanted to go into. I became blind to the fact that constantly trying to improve the band, write more songs, and book more shows was propelling the band forward but pushing our friendship further back. This eventually came to a breaking point when we sat down to record our debut album. The process was dragged out over a year and we had spent all the money we made from shows on it and once it was finished it came at the cost of the band altogether. Shortly after the release two of our members came to me and told me that they were starting a new project, this

project would be more hardcore and the writing was on the wall that No Rest was over.

The following months after the band broke up I was bitter to the fact that it was all over just like that. The band was gone, the CVS where we spent all those afternoons shut down, and my friend whose house we spent hours practicing was demolished when he moved. It felt all very sudden that a new chapter of my life was starting but I still wanted to stay in the past. It wasn't until I listened to "Girl Next Door" for the first time that I began to reflect on the whole situation. The song brought me back to why we started the band in the first place. We were friends first and the band supplemented that. I was so focused on playing more shows and writing more songs that I didn't see the band deteriorating right in front of me. The backbone of the band was that we were all friends and we were doing this for fun and the moment it became a chore the spark was gone.

As a freshman in college, the band has been broken up just over a year, and every time I hear skatepunk, it brings me back to those times of playing music all day and hanging out with my friends. It is especially difficult when you think of the what-ifs. You look at every minute decision you made and wonder if it could've ended any differently. Looking back, No Rest ran its course. It was a high school band and I have a lot of core memories of being a part of it, but it came at the expense of growing up. We grew our separate ways and moved on but, every time I hear Blink-182 or skatepunk it transports me back to the carefree time of my life. The genre and the songs that make it uphold these crystal clear memories of what it was like

to be in a high school band. Now my skatepunk playlist goes unplayed for weeks at a time but I'll throw it on occasionally if I'm feeling in a skatepunk mood or if I wanna reminisce about the days of being in a band. Despite the band ending in an unfashionable way, it brought about some crucial learning experiences that have let me reflect on the situation from a broader perspective to a point where I can look back on those times in a positive light.

1er Gaou

Jack Fink



I walk to the team huddle filled with dread. We're playing our rivals; Deering High School, a squad that has remained undefeated this season. I survey Fitzpatrick stadium. The normally confident and loud student section has grown silent, anticipating a loss. This is until the song "Premier Gaou" by Magic System breaks the eerie silence.¹ The student section erupts in a frenzy, singing along to the song. "*Nan guin nan wan, nan guin nan wan. Elle est fâché elle dit elle s'en va à la maison.*" All of my teammates look around at one another. Now emboldened by the music, we feel more connected to each other as ever.

"Premier Gaou" was the first song on my high school soccer team's warm-up playlist. Chosen by the Congolese upperclassmen of the team during my freshman year, the song was a reliable motivator whenever we played a home game. "Premier Gaou" was as consistent at bringing our team together as the beautiful game of soccer was. This wasn't an easy feat, as our team shared as many differences as possible.

The Portland High soccer team I played for was very diverse. Throughout the four years I played, the team harbored people from all walks of life. People from every country, political belief, part of town, and skill level came to play. We didn't always understand each other. The ball and field were our main forms of communication. Yet the whole team seemed

Notes

¹ Blink-182, "Girl Next Door" Ben Weasel, January 1994, Kung Fu Records., Buddha, 1994

to understand what the song “Premier Gaou” meant, even though half of us didn’t speak French. “Premier Gaou” meant that we came to play the game together. “Premier Gaou” represented us. It represented the culture and values we had created as a team. The song connected us to the atmosphere we created on and off the field. We played with love, compassion, kindness, and joy. We were tough, and we wanted to win, but above all, we loved the game and each other. The song connected us despite our language barriers and differences, in fact “Premier Gaou” connected us *to* one another's differences. It was a window into many of my teammates' cultures, and became a window into our team culture. “Premier Gaou” was an epigenetic force that activated our shared identities as Portland Bulldogs.

Music viscerally connected us, and does the same for others all across the world. Both music and soccer sweep across the globe, emotionally touching almost every community and culture. Consequently, Music is the most global expression of emotion. Fluency in Portuguese isn't needed to comprehend the beauty of samba, just like our team didn't need to speak the same language to play soccer with one another. Music and soccer break cultural and language barriers to connect those who love them emotionally and physically. A beautiful example of their socially adhesive properties is the world cups and their theme songs.

Almost everyone remembers the 2010 South Africa and its theme: “Waka Waka” sung by Shakira.² The song was a social glue for me every summer connecting me to my neighbors during our shirts vs skins futsal matches.

It feels like it's 2010 again. “Waka Waka” plays on the subwoofer we brought down. The court begins to simmer with excitement. All fourteen of us on the Kennedy Park blacktop are brought back to the iconic and global South Africa World Cup. Fenced and floodlit, the futsal court is transformed into the largest stage of global soccer. I score a goal, slotting the ball past Paolo. Our team of seven shirtless players celebrated like the 2010 Spanish World Cup champions. We ran up and down the court, dancing to the music.

Shakira’s voice connected fans of the game all across the globe. “Waka Waka” is a prime example of the social glue music can be. “Waka Waka” came to represent the global passion that the World Cup breeds. It was a musical manifestation of soccer and its culture. The World Cup themes are just as strong an agent of emotion and unity as soccer itself is. What is it though, that makes songs like “Premier Gaou” and “Waka Waka” so proficient at bringing people together?

Music connects us so effectively because it gives us shared emotional and physical experiences. We dance together and feel the beats together, enjoying the joyous getaway of melody that viscerally connects us. Music has the power to evoke strong emotions. Quite literally, “The limbic system, which is involved in processing emotions and controlling memory, ‘lights’ up when our ears perceive music. The chills you feel when you hear a particularly moving piece of music may be the result of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that triggers sensations of pleasure and well-being.”³ Songs can help us both cry and smile. We can share feelings of passion and happiness, as well as sorrow and depression. All through music.

At almost every West African wedding “Premier Gaou” will be played. It inspires dance, love, and unity at weddings throughout Africa. It is a song that brings people together both on the soccer field, and in marriage. “Premier Gaou” allowed our team to connect with the cultures of one another, and specifically the cultures of West Africa. Similarly, it can be a glue for many Africans, connecting them with their West African roots and families.

Kosiso Ugweze shares how “Premier Gaou” has served her as a social glue, helping her connect with her African heritage. “I have never understood the lyrics to Magic System’s ‘1er Gaou’. The song is primarily in French and like many West Africans who find themselves on the British side of colonial Africa, I’m separated from my brethren by a language barrier. This is precisely what makes this Ivorian song so important to me, to all of us immigrants, dancing in weddings and birthday parties in our little corners of the world.”⁴ Kosiso describes here how the song helped her to connect with West Africans despite their language barriers. This is exactly how our team experienced the song. Our team was all able to appreciate and come together through “Premier Gaou.” It connected us as a team, and represented the reasons we loved soccer. Likewise, “Premier Gaou” represented why she loved West Africa to Kosiso. “It (‘Premier Gaou’) has transcended language and borders for two decades, traveled across seas to remind us of the small joys wherever we live.”⁵ “Premier Gaou” helped connect Kosiso with everybody at the wedding and everyone who shares the identity “Premier Gaou” represents. For Kosiso, this is her identity as an African. The

social and cultural connections “Premier Gaou” creates can be felt globally and locally.



The author and teammates.

In a similar way, soccer connects us. My team and I were connected physically and emotionally on the soccer field. We shared the same joy, emotions, tears, pain, and hard work.

When we conceded a goal in the last minute to Deering at home, we all felt the disappointment and pain of the loss. The emotional burdens of both our losses and victories forged bonds between us as teammates. When we forgot to clean the lockers after our big win against Windham, you best believe every player was running their asses off the next day. We all felt the pain of those sprints, and we all cheered one another through the finish line.

“Premier Gaou” joined us in *our* team culture. It had the exact same feeling that we attributed to soccer. We would travel to other towns and be disgusted by the Skrillex remixed bullshit they played before their games. Their dreadful tunes represented them, and their genre of play. They played scrappy, physically, with buzzed heads and black cleats. Our home games began with ten songs, almost exclusively in French or Portuguese. The genre of soccer that we had reached a consensus on was heavily driven by African culture. We played a style of soccer that was represented through our music. We played with skill and flair. We played soccer the way it is supposed to be played, as the world's game. Similarly, “Premier Gaou” is the world’s song. It's a song that connected me and my soccer teammates, but also connects people around the globe.

“Premier Gaou” has proven a powerful global social glue and has been my glue as well. It fashioned lifetime values and connections for me and my teammates, as well as connected Kosiso and many others to their West African roots. Whenever I shuffle onto the song on my playlist, I am reminded of how it feels to be a Portland Bulldog. Even though I have

become a member of countless other teams and now play the game in a completely different state, the song connects me over the 300 miles with my teammates back home. Salif Traore sings, “*Dieu merci pour moi je savais chanter un peu.*”

“Thank God for me I could sing a little.”

Notes

¹ “Magic System,” 1er Gaou”, Angelo Kabila, 1999, Next Music, Track 1 on *1er Gaou*, 2002.

² Shakira, “Waka Waka” (This Time For Africa), John Hill Golden Sounds, January-April 2010, Epic Records, Track 12 on *Sale el Sol*, May 7, 2010.

³ Jäncke, Lutz. “Music, Memory and Emotion.” *Journal of biology*, August 8, 2008.

⁴ Ugweze, Kosiso. “1er Gaou.” *Atticus Review*, June 18, 2020. <https://atticusreview.org/1er-gaou/>.

⁵ Ugweze, “1er Gaou”.

Banana Pancakes

Liam Drehkoff



When my friends and I brought out a guitar to accompany a warm, crackling fire, we gave it to my friend John. John had played guitar since he was a kid, but fell in love with it in high school. He only knew a few songs well enough to play off the top of his head, but we didn't care. One song that was part of his small rotation was the song "Banana Pancakes," by Jack Johnson.¹ We all loved this song for a variety of reasons. For one, Jack Johnson brought us all a lot of nostalgia. He was in charge of the Curious George soundtrack, including songs like "Upside Down", so many of us listened to his songs as toddlers. But the song itself spoke a lot about our lives at that moment, as high school seniors. The lyrics of the song reflect a dialogue between Johnson and his wife in which he is telling her to relax and enjoy life. This is why when we sang every lyric to each other; the words were coming from our hearts.

It felt as though we were living Johnson's message of loving life and not getting caught up in the small things that could disrupt our joy. We could finally ease our minds from the stress-provoking responsibilities in our lives, whether it be studying for finals, applying to colleges, or working our minimum-wage summer jobs. Our upbringing tried to convince us that these sort of responsibilities were made up the entirety of our lives, but thankfully we had the awareness to know life is about much more than how much money you could make.

So instead of worrying about these responsibilities, we simply chose to enjoy the calm, summer nights that would compile the last memories we made together before going off to college. We didn't do much, really. We didn't go out eating much, we didn't care for huge parties or anything. We preferred the warm crackling of a fire pit under the night sky, and the comforting sounds of John's acoustic guitar. Even now, when I close my eyes, I can relive the moments: the laughter echoing through the silent night, our shadows dancing against the trees from the orange glow of the flame. This feeling of a carefree bliss — that is the feeling that has kept us all at peace in the stressful world of being a young adult.

For you, this feeling could be different. Maybe it is enjoying a sunset shimmering off a large body of water. Maybe it is drinking a nice cup of coffee on a chilly fall day. Maybe it's reading a book accompanied by the sound of the wind rushing through the trees. Whatever it is, the satisfaction of a stress-free moment will always make us feel happier. A quick step back from our life responsibilities can help you enjoy the gifts that you do have. Sometimes, this feeling is necessary for us to go through our lives in a healthier state of mind, a state that contains less stress.

Almost 1 in every 4 college students is diagnosed with some form of anxiety.² This can be anxiety about schoolwork, social relationships, job applications, family, or just a new environment. A college campus surrounds students with different factors to increase stress levels, and there isn't much they can do about it. We are in a very important time in our lives, and being able to accept that fact and adjust our lifestyle

to it can be a battle—one that takes serious tolls on us. Frequent headaches, higher blood pressure, difficulty sleeping, and even acne are all symptoms of high stress.³ Additionally, stress can negatively impact our personalities. When we are stressed, we often have significantly lower energy. Our patience is lower, and we lash out on people we care about. Our self esteem can drop, which could end up being a dive into a depressive state. Our thoughts can race, our focus can get all over the place, and we can be encompassed in a general state of being overwhelmed.⁴ I know when I read that, I can think of several instances when I have experienced one or more of those symptoms in the last week alone. And if you can too, you fit in with the incredibly large majority of college students who experience frequent bouts of stress (which is 80%).

Why is this percentage so high? If stress is so bad, why can't we just fix it? While stress can have negative effects on people, it is simply a part of life. In fact, outside of college, the percentage of people with some form of anxiety increases. It is inevitable that in our lives, we will be faced with responsibilities, and with those responsibilities comes a certain amount of stress. There is no use preaching about how we should prepare ourselves for a life stress-free, because it is just unrealistic. However, what should be preached, and what Jack Johnson writes his song about, is that life is not made up of our stress.

*We could close the curtains,
Pretend like there's no world outside.*

We do not live in a world that will stop spinning if we do poorly on an assignment, or if we miss our train to work in the morning. The difference between those who struggle with stress and those who thrive in it is whether or not their lives revolve around it. In order to thrive with the stress in this world, we need to take breaks. Close the metaphorical curtains and simply unwind the knot of responsibilities that our minds weave every day. If we are able to detach ourselves from our work for only 5 minutes, not only will we be more productive, but we will stay in a more positive state of mind.⁵ This way, we can use stress as a helpful asset in our work rather than something that will send us into a downward mental spiral.

The over-competitive college landscape today makes it easy to slip into this spiral. Our focus as students lies solely on our achievements. And while it is a good thing to care about your schoolwork, many of us are doing it for the wrong reason. In my experience, I've been told as a child to get good grades, get into a good school, get a good job, make a lot of money, and finally, have a big happy family. Nowhere in that plan is there a "enjoy your life" step. A "try new things" step. An "explore your interests" step. In our generation, the importance of being thankful for the beautiful world we live in has been significantly undermined.

*We got everything we need right here,
And everything we need is enough.*

This is the message Jack Johnson preaches with his lyrics. Life is sometimes about taking a step back and viewing

the bigger picture. We should try not to get caught up in the needlessly chaotic system known as the industrial world, and rather enjoy the simple things, like a fire pit with your friends on a summer night. If we focus on these moments in our life rather than the ones that fill us with stress and anxiety, we will all live happier lives. Johnson is explaining how money can't buy happiness, and he is absolutely right. In fact, serious mental illnesses are much more prevalent in high-income areas than in mid- and low-income areas.⁶ When people put their nose in their work and refuse to look up from it, they dig themselves into a dark hole, whereas when people take a step back from their work every once in a while, they recognize the beauty in life and their current possessions.

These two messages are why this song is so important to me and my friends, and why we love singing it. Because when we are together, with a guitar playing and the stars looking down on us, we forget about all the essays we have due next week, the time-demanding jobs we have, and all the other stress-creating parts of our lives. We can just live happily in the moment.

Notes

¹ Johnson, Jack. *Banana Pancakes*. 1 May 2005.

² Marksberry, Kellie. 2023. "College Students." The American Institute of Stress. 2023. <https://www.stress.org/college-students#:~:text=Anxiety%20is%20first%20at%2023.5>.

³ "College Stress - Learning Center." 2017. Learning Center. 2017. <https://learningcenter.unc.edu/tips-and-tools/managing-college-stress/>.

⁴ Marks, Hedy. 2021. "Stress Symptoms." WebMD. 2021. https://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/stress-symptoms-effects_of-stress-on-the-body.

⁵ Cornell University. n.d. "Study Breaks & Stress-Busters | Cornell Health." Health.cornell.edu. <https://health.cornell.edu/about/news/study-breaks-stress-busters#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20taking%20purp>oseful.

⁶ Levinson, Daphna, Matthew D. Lakoma, Maria Petukhova, Michael Schoenbaum, Alan M. Zaslavsky, Matthias Angermeyer, Guilherme Borges, et al. 2010. "Associations of Serious Mental Illness with Earnings: Results from the WHO World Mental Health Surveys." *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 197 (2): 114–21. <https://doi.org/10.1192/bjp.bp.109.073635>.

Tum Se Hi

Keya Shah



“Kill it Keya!”

The shouts filled the quiet room as the lights brightened on my best friend and I on stage him with a ukulele and me with a mic in hand. The first note of the song slipped between my lips before I knew, my best friend in tow. We were singing “Tum Se Hi” by Mohit Chauhan in front of our whole school.¹ Why, you ask? Being in an international school where over 50 nations are represented, created a unique opportunity for all of us to have a week dedicated to the showcase of our respective cultures. This week was the central, south and southeast Asian culture week and all the Asians in school came together to host three events through the week. We were at our final event which was a performance-based event. My best friend and I decided we wanted to sing a Hindi song, one that would work as a duet, obviously, and one that was close to our hearts and culturally significant. We landed on “Tum Se Hi” a beautiful love song placed in one of Bollywood’s most well-known movies, “Jab We Met.”² This song stands out as a testament to the power of a melody to capture the essence of a narrative and the hearts of its audience. The song has become iconic, closely linked with “Jab We Met,” and its success helped transform the movie into a standout romantic Bollywood hit.

In the 2000s, Bollywood was all about mixing old-school Indian vibes with a new twist. That's when “Tum Se Hi” dropped. More than just a track for “Jab We Met,” it became the voice for a whole lot of emotions that people were quietly holding onto. The Bollywood music back then was leaving the flashy 90s style for something that hit closer to home—music that got you right in the feels without making a big show of it. “Tum Se Hi” was a winner because it was catchy but not overdone, and its lyrics were like poetry that really got what love is about in India. This song has earned itself an entire essay because of the way it framed love and its connection to home. It speaks about a quiet all-consuming love, one that everyone longs to be caught up in. This longing is what would spark conversations between strangers, creating new paths too friendships and connections.

“Jab We Met,” with Imtiaz Ali at the helm, was a game-changer in 2007. It told the tale of Aditya and Geet, two people who were chalk and cheese but ended up on a wild ride to love. This flick was real—it showed that love isn't all sunshine and roses but is still worth the ride. People loved it because it was the kind of romance, they could actually see themselves in. Aditya and Geet's, the main character of the movie, trip from just some random encounter to becoming each other's everything was packed with laughs, tears, and all the drama you'd want. Their growth wasn't just about finding each other; it was about finding themselves too. And that's how “Jab We Met” and in turn “Tum Se Hi” flipped the script on Bollywood love stories—it wasn't just about getting the girl or the guy, but about all the messy, beautiful stuff that happens along the way.

"Tum Se Hi" stands out in the world of Bollywood where peppy dance tracks are the norm. This tune is special – it's a heartfelt ballad that caught on just as much as any blockbuster dance number. It's got this warm, upbeat vibe that's perfect for its romantic message. The melody is a cool mix of regular notes and those little twists you find in Indian music, giving it some real depth and a genuine feel. And there's this line, "Tum Se Hi," that keeps coming back, meaning "only with you." It's simple but really establishes a connection between the listener and singer because of its repetition and meaning. It imitates the thoughts racing through lovers' heads when thinking of each other. The lyrics are a poetic expression of love's profound and all-encompassing nature. The opening lines muse on the paradox of presence and absence, suggesting that even when the loved one is not physically present, their essence is so integral to the narrator's life that it feels like they are there. The song speaks to the intertwining of two souls, where every day begins with thoughts of the beloved, and life itself gains meaning through their connection.

The song "Tum Se Hi" bridged a gap for me in Skidmore, linking me to my new community. The South Asian club, Hayat, had arranged a movie night early in the semester. As a newcomer, the idea of sharing a film with peers who spoke my language was comforting. The selection, "Jab We Met," was perfect, a beloved film I hadn't seen in ages. In the dim glow of Davis Auditorium, anticipation buzzed among us—veterans of the film and first-timers alike. As "Tum Se Hi" began to play, a wave of excitement washed over the crowd, and we all sang along. In that moment of shared joy, a girl

beside me and I formed an unexpected duet, a gesture that sparked a deep friendship. Despite hailing from Karnataka, a place far from my home state, and meeting in the US, a country on the other side of the world, our connection was instant, all thanks to a shared love for a song.



Tum se hi shor mei khamoshi hai
You are the reason my chaos is silent.

The song's magic is that it's personal and universal all at once. You can feel it speaking to you about your own love story while also telling a tale that everyone can nod to—it's that rare kind of track that gets passed down, with the millennial crowd appreciating the nostalgia and the younger iPad kids discovering it as if it's brand new. What keeps "Tum Se Hi" relevant isn't just the nostalgia factor; it's how it captures love's essence in a way that's always going to be relatable. Love, loss, hope, joy—it's all in there. It's a song that doesn't get old because the feelings it talks about don't get old.

"Tum Se Hi" has stuck around for a reason. It's not just another love song; it's become a part of the cultural soundtrack. Even years later, it is used as background music for Indian weddings when the bride walks down the aisle to meet her groom as it sings about the love they feel at that moment and hope to feel for the years to come. People still have it on their playlists, hum it to themselves thinking of their past or current loves. I know not one person that hasn't heard this song, it was the song that my generation and the one that came before grew up on. It played in the morning in my house as I got ready for school, I unknowingly hummed it while playing in the park with my friends, in fact it was sung to me by my best friend on my first birthday away from home. It was the one we sang to our peers from the stage and the one that allowed me to create friendships in an unknown, unforgiving foreign environment. This song isn't just about love; it's like a bridge to the past, to the cozy and uncomplicated moments of my childhood. It's a thread that ties me to my roots, my language, and the invisible parts of myself that you feel in your heart, much like the way love silently wraps around us.

Notes

¹ Chauhan, Mohit. 2007. *Tum Se Hi*. Edited by Irshad Kamil. T-Series: [Pritam.youtube.com/watch?v=c7ejSZRWOSI&ab_channel=BollyBeatBox](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c7ejSZRWOSI&ab_channel=BollyBeatBox).

² Chauhan, Mohit. 2007. *Tum Se Hi*. Edited by Irshad Kamil. T-Series: Pritam. <https://genius.com/Mohit-chauhan-tum-se-hi-romanized-lyrics>.

Holocene

Sam Kleid



When I hear those gentle guitar strums, the dry breeze of the Negev hits me all over again. I'm pulled back to a moment in time where everything feels right. I can see the fiery orange and yellow painted across the sky before me, the mountains towering above. I can hear the melancholic piano; the melodies and the harmonies intertwining with drum beats. The instrumentation reaches a crescendo, a beautiful chaos of sound. I can feel each note of Bon Iver's "Holocene" bringing me closer to my surroundings.¹ I can see for miles.

When "Holocene" travels into my ears, I find myself back on a summer morning in 2021. I was sleeping on a tweed mat, the rocks pinching my back like mini blades, and I woke up to muffled whispering voices. Disoriented, I sat up in a brain fog that's common to a 4 AM wakeup, everyone walking around and prepping for the hike in a zombified state. My camp friends and I were at a Bedouin campsite 30 minutes away from the base of Masada, an ancient fortress in the Israeli Negev Desert. We came back together this summer after losing our final camp summer to COVID, reuniting at the airport and embarking on a month-long trip to Israel. I'd been cooped up in my New York City apartment and confined to online classes for almost 2 years. I was finally back out in the world, in a place where I had lived for 3 years. The trip had been full of laughs,

adventures, long hikes, and late-night conversations under the desert stars.

We sat with each other on the bus driving to the hike, taking in the scenery of the desert mountains. We arrived at the base, a gentle light beginning to grace the violet sky, and off we went, trudging up a curvy snake path. We were no strangers to hikes, we'd spent days in the desert camping and braving the sweltering heat, but this one felt different. Out of breath and gasping, we ascended, floating up the hilly path, finally reaching the summit. I took in where I was standing, the flats of the Dead Sea on one side and the desert on the other. We walked among the old granite structures and arrived at a rough ridge overlooking the sea. Standing at the edge, the wind whipped at my ears. I could practically feel the silence. My friend pulled out his speaker and pressed play. The first gentle strums of Bon Iver's song began, and each note made me feel more grounded, connected, and at peace. Surrounded by lifelong friends, the music engulfed my soul. It felt like nothing else in the world mattered than right there, right then. The day went on and we descended the mountain. I couldn't get those feelings that "Holocene" evoked out of my head.

For each and every one of us, certain songs have a pull. This "pull", an unexplainable occurrence defined as a second in time where a distinct note transports the listener to the first moment they heard it. A hangout with friends, a moment of pain following heartbreak, or a nostalgic family memory from childhood. This concept, the idea that one note from a song can transport anybody right back to a moment, that everyone has their own "Holocene", puzzled me. What makes the brain react

immediately? The intriguing phenomenon actually has a name. In a study conducted by Kelly Jakubowski and Anita Gohsh, they reveal that music-evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMS) are intertwined in our everyday lives.² They explain how when certain songs come on, we as humans are almost involuntarily transported immediately back to the memories we associate them with. We retain pieces of the songs and the memories that come with them because we listen to them more frequently than we watch our favorite movies and TV shows. The moments when songs were playing are more likely to live on, and the emotions that stem from them come back time and time again. Jakubowski and Ghosh highlight how MEAMs are found to help individuals suffering from memory issues like Alzheimer's and Brain Injuries regain long-lost memories and consciousness. The study's results revealed that every subject had, on average, at least one MEAM moment per day that came while doing everyday tasks such as homework, chores, and driving. Each song had specific implications for each participant, and in some cases, overlapping genres evoked completely different emotions. MEAMs come when listeners least expect it, causing introspective and reflective moments in times they are needed most.

I sat on a yellow school bus barreling through wintery Ohio terrain, on the way to a playoff game in my senior year. I moved here 2 years ago, excited to continue playing basketball, the sport I loved and had played my entire life. My arrival was met with challenges I never would've expected. Playing all around the world, I'd experienced the love and unity the game brought. Whether in New York City Parks or in Tel Aviv

gymnasiums, I always felt connected to every single one of my teammates and peers. Here in Cleveland, it wasn't the same. My teammates were the best of friends, but in that clique way that left the new kid out to dry. My coaches stuck to the lineups and team "culture" they loved so dearly. Throughout the two seasons, I put my passion and love into every second. It was my senior season, my last chance to showcase my skills, the year I would finally get the chance. I never got it. Now, I found myself on the hour-long drive to what could be the final game I ever played, knowing that I wouldn't touch the court.

The rickety wooden farmhouses and barren forests rolled on, and the sun began to set as I pondered my waning love. I pressed play on my playlist and along came the strums. The unmistakable melody of "Holocene" took over my psyche. I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. The feelings from that desert morning came flooding back, and along with it, came the memories. When I pretended to be Kobe Bryant's teammate in the NBA Finals, hitting the game-winning dunk. The smiles and dances in middle school locker rooms with teammates, the friends I made at pickup games. The sessions with my dad in the front yard where he and I would laugh and laugh as he blocked every shot. The crescendo came, and I thought back on my last two years, the people on the team that reached out, the bonds I made through this beautiful sport. I realized that no matter how much I would play that night, I'd always hold basketball dear, and my love would never falter.

This MEAM moment, among many others, is why when people ask what my favorite song is, I say "Holocene". The title of the track, according to Justin Vernon, Bon Iver's

lead singer, pays homage to a bar in Portland, Oregon while also referencing the Holocene glacial epoch, the geographical era the world is currently in.³ In an interview with *Mojo* Magazine, Vernon explained, "It's partly named after the (geological) era, but it's also the name of a bar in Portland where I had a dark night of the soul...The title is a metaphor for when you're not doing well. But it's also a song about redemption and realizing that you're worth something; that you're special and not special at the same time."⁴ Its lyrics focus on appreciating the beauty of nature and what's around you. At times my anxiety takes over, when I'm overthinking and I don't feel functional, I sit down and hit play. I let the meditative melodies take charge. The transportation to that tranquil moment in the Negev makes me more reflective, and in moments where I'm overwhelmed, my thoughts feel as clear as day.

The summer before college, I was working back at my camp. I took my campers out stargazing on a crisp summer night in the Berkshires. They went around one by one, and expressed stresses, feelings, and emotions. I told them the story of the hike, and the out-of-body experience of hearing "Holocene" with the mountains before me. I told them to let the music play, to think about their feelings, to let them all fall away. I told them to focus on one particular lyric, the one that always puts me right back on Masada, the one that always helps me see clearly. The one that helps me look past the turmoil, and ahead to the future. On Masada, with my friends around me and the sun peeking out above the mountaintops, I looked ahead and let everything go. The drums repeated as the piano melody

formed. Like Vernon, I finally felt I was worth something, I was special to the world, and I had a purpose. His voice, wrapping around me like a warm hug, sang:

*And I could see for miles, miles, miles.*⁵

Notes

¹ Bon Iver, “Holocene”, Justin Vernon, Jagjaguwar, Track 3 *Bon Iver*, 2011

² Jakubowski, Kelly, and Anita Ghosh. "Music-evoked Autobiographical Memories in Everyday Life." *Psychology of Music*, (2019). Accessed October 17, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305735619888803>.

³ Jennifer Bell, “The Meaning behind the Song: Holocene by Bon Iver,” Old Time Music, August 12, 2023, <https://oldtimemusic.com/the-meaning-behind-the-song-holocene-by-bon-iver/>.

⁴ The Editor, “It Holds up - ‘Bon Iver’ - Bon Iver,” The Alternative, August 21, 2021, <https://www.getalternative.com/it-holds-up-bon-iver-bon-iver/>.

⁵ *Bon Iver – holocene*. Genius. (n.d.). <https://genius.com/Bon-iver-holocene-lyrics>

Nightcall

Adam Berger



Some songs speak to us because of powerful, poetic, or meaningful lyrics. Others are possessed with a musical beauty that brings a tear to the eye of any listener. Still others are experimental in a way that sticks in your head and leaves you thinking about them even when you aren’t listening. “Nightcall,” a 2010 song by French DJ Kavinsky, isn’t any of those.¹ I also don’t have any important memories tied to it, and it really doesn’t remind me of anything in my life at all. What “Nightcall” does have, though, is a pure sense of cool that no other song has managed to capture quite so well. I don’t turn to it when I need to cry, or when I’m celebrating something big, or when I’m homesick; I listen to “Nightcall” when I want to feel *cool*.

The song starts not with music but with the sound of a quarter clinking into a machine and a phone dialing out. There’s a clear element of the retro here — it’s the sound of a payphone, a symbol of a bygone era. What’s interesting, though, is that the song isn’t anything close to a mere throwback. The music that follows is strikingly modern, with a robotic voice singing over a futuristic synth melody. Blending 80s aesthetics (payphones, synthesizers, etc) with those of an imagined future isn’t anything close to an idea unique to “Nightcall” — the cyberpunk genre is full of it — but it’s definitely an interesting contrast that you don’t often see in

music. The end product is a song that sounds like it could have been made in 1986 or 2086. That sound expertly stimulates my imagination; as Kavinsky's synths pump into my ears, Edison-bulbed New American restaurants turn into neon-lit ramen dives, my softshell jacket becomes a hard-boiled trench coat, and empty sidewalks swell with cybernetically-enhanced pedestrians.

The lyrics of "Nightcall" depict a phone call, something made clear by the aforementioned payphone sounds. However, it's pretty much impossible to determine exactly what the two vocalists are singing about. The first singer, Kavinsky (with the aid of a voice modulator), cryptically states that "I'm giving you a night call to tell you how I feel. I want to drive you through the night, down the hills. I'm gonna tell you something you don't want to hear. I'm gonna show you where it's dark, but have no fear." In response, another voice, Brazilian singer Lovefoxxx, simply repeats the phrase "There's something inside you. It's hard to explain. They're talking about you, boy. But you're still the same." Again, you can't really glean much that's concrete from these lyrics alone; the singers care about each other, and there's something that makes the first singer important, but that's pretty much it. This ambiguity, I'd wager, plays a decent role in making the song so vivid and evocative, and crafting the sense of cool it passes on to its listeners. They aren't about a specific experience you may or may not have had, or anything that you may have existing thoughts about; they're just vaguely heroic. Additionally, the conversational structure means that it can feel like the lines are being said to you, the listener; I'll admit that I sometimes grin a little at

"There's something inside you. It's hard to explain. They're talking about you, boy. But you're still the same."

There's also a very cinematic vibe to the whole song; the way the synths play creates a sense of growing action. Ultimately, the song sounds like it's straight out of a movie soundtrack in the best possible way; indeed, the cult film *Drive* (2011) famously used "Nightcall" in its soundtrack, which was a big part of how it initially became popular. I'm a pretty big movie buff, and "Nightcall" gives me the sense that I'm the protagonist of my own movie — I'm not just walking or driving around at night, I'm a man on a mission. I'm Rick Deckard, or Batman, or Neo. I'm aware of how painfully corny this all sounds, to be clear, but it is the truth. In a sense, part of the power of "Nightcall" is how it overwhelms that aforementioned corniness; when I'm listening to it and letting my mind run wild, I'm just not thinking about how goofy what I'm doing really is.

There's a definite sense of escapism tied into my enjoyment of the song. We all have our anxieties, and one thing I've struggled with feeling for a while now is a lack of purpose now. I get the sense, occasionally, that nothing that I do really matters, and that the work I do isn't actually in service of any tangible goal. When I submit an assignment to class, for example, I sometimes feel like I'm just kicking a can down the road rather than coming closer to my degree, whatever it will be (my undeclared status probably doesn't soothe my fears, thinking about it). The feeling of "Nightcall" isn't just that I'm important or heroic, it's that I'm working towards something. I'm not aimlessly walking around at night because I don't know

what else to do, I'm here for a purpose and ready for action. My everyday fears of mediocrity fade away as Kavinsky's futuristic cityscape grows closer in view. I'm not going out looking for a story, I'm in it, right now, and playing an active and important role in something with tangible stakes and consequences.

While this all sounds pretty personal, I'm confident in saying that I'm far from the only person who "Nightcall" has this effect on; just look at the song's YouTube comments. @jakegriffith6871 says that "I work a crappy job, the one benefit is that I get off at midnight and get to listen to stuff like this on my drive home." @JoaoGuilhermejoaomagioli speaks of "Listening to this song while walking around the city at night. Best feeling ever." @Keeper69s says that he's a truck driver who feels like "every turn and length of road is undiscovered as I've never driven them before" when he listens to "Nightcall," which he describes as "haunting but beautiful." There are a few common themes throughout the comment section (and my personal experience): it's listened to alone, when walking or driving, and almost always at night. This specific song, heard under these specific circumstances, unites people across the world in imagining themselves as the hero of their own story.

Like I said earlier, "Nightcall" isn't a particularly experimental song. It isn't incredibly well-written, or emotionally poignant, or technically impressive. It would likely never rank on any of the many, many lists of the 100 or 500 or 1,000 greatest songs of all time that you can find floating around the internet. But despite all that, it has incredible

evocative powers to me and thousands of others across the world. In a world of people who don't know their purpose in life, what they're working towards, what they exist to do, one song can unite us through a powerful, unusual, but undeniably real sense of escapism. Sometimes when I'm walking around at night, listening to "Nightcall," I'll walk by another person by themselves with headphones on or earbuds in. As improbable as it is, sometimes I wonder if they too are playing "Nightcall," or at least a song with a similar effect on them, and that neither of us know we're both passing a fellow protagonist.

Notes

¹ Kavinsky, "Nightcall," Kavinsky, Lovefoxxx, and Guy-Manuel de Homem-Christo, 2 April 2010, Record Makers, Track #8 on *OutRun*, 2013.

Stubborn Love
Carolyn Albright



For around the first seven or eight years of my life, it was so easy to read exactly what I was feeling. I was an open book and wore my heart on my sleeve. I did not realize that not everyone did that. I thought that it was the norm and had absolutely no shame in expressing anything and everything that I was feeling. I remember wailing as loud as my lungs could take while my mom rocked me and held me in her arms all for. I felt my emotions strongly and I expressed my emotions strongly.

This all suddenly changed when I became the age where I was supposed to be “mature.” One day, my mom sat me down and let me know that I must cover all of my emotions with a polite smile. This was not just for the sake of the people around me, but for the sake of myself as well. She said that if I showed my emotions, then my say would no longer matter and that this would especially be the case when I start a professional career. My opinions would no longer be heard and instead be brushed off because I am just an “emotional woman.”

Suddenly, I no longer expressed my emotions strongly. As I learned to mask my emotions from the world, I gradually masked my emotions from myself too. This made me become emotionally numb. Additionally, with no longer being able to express or feel my emotions, I was no longer able to understand what I was feeling in my heart and soul. This led to all of my

emotions being expressed as pounding of my heart, nausea, and rapid breathing. I did not know how to process what I was feeling so no matter the emotion, albeit good or bad, it would present itself as anxiety.

This all changed when I heard the song, “Stubborn Love,” by The Lumineers for the first time.¹ I was in the car with my friend when it came on. I did not listen or dissect the lyrics the first time, but I found the instrumentals and singing in it to be beautiful. After listening to it, I put it on all of my playlists and would play it on repeat. I would scream the lyrics in the car without even thinking of their meaning. Although I did not understand why, I would always feel more at peace as the final chords would play and for a second, I would get relief from my anxiety.

It was not until I went through one of my first breakups that I realized how truly important the song was in general, but to me as well. As I read the text that I just got sent from another girl, proving that my then boyfriend was cheating on me, I felt as though if I cried, I would lose the breakup, and show weakness. As I was holding in the tears, the goddamn lyrics

*It's better to feel pain, than nothing at all.
The opposite of love's indifference.*

could not stop playing in my head. At first, I rolled my eyes and brushed the lyrics off. I mean, I get songs stuck in my head all of the time. I thought that it was just a nuisance and I was already annoyed. Additionally, although I never really paid close attention to the lyrics, I know that it had something to do

with loving someone and I most definitely did not want to think about that at the time. But the lyrics kept on repeating again and again to the point where it was all I could think about. No matter how hard I tried to get the song out of my head all I could hear was

*It's better to feel pain, than nothing at all
The opposite of love's indifference.*

It finally got to the point where I figured that by playing the song, I might actually be able to get it out of my head. So I got in my car and turned on the song. Like usual, I screamed the lyrics, but this time, by the end, I was also crying. Not only did the crying surprise me, but so did how I felt after. I felt surprisingly at peace and felt a sense of relief.

After that moment, whenever I was sad, frustrated, or mad about my ex-boyfriend cheating on me, I would not cover my feelings up from myself or from anyone else. I found that this helped me get over the breakup much faster than previous ones. Even my friends told me how impressed they were about how quickly I got over my ex-boyfriend.

This realization, all thanks to listening to the song, "Stubborn Love," made me consider if the meaning of the song could be applied to more emotions. The song expresses that instead of one protecting themselves from pain by not feeling love, it is better to expose themselves to love and the potential of heartbreak that comes with it. Listening to the song made me realize that heartbreak is ok and I am allowed to express the pain of it. The song also helped me express my other emotions

as well. My thought was that if it is so cathartic to express the painful emotions that I am feeling, the expression of sadness and just all emotions as a whole should be allowed.

This made me think about why my mom told me to suppress my emotions in the first place. I know that she meant no harm in it and thought that it would only help me in life. As I thought about it more, all I could think about is that whenever I got emotional growing up, my dad told me that I was being too much of a girl and to toughen up like him. Additionally, when women are emotional, they get asked if they are on their period. I realized that all along, the reason why I was not allowed to show my emotions was because it made me seem weak and like a girl, which is unfortunately an insult in society. Men are stronger and tougher, so to be called a girl is to be called lesser than.

This also made me feel empathy for men. They are also not allowed to show emotions as if they are, they are also deemed weak. No matter what sex one is, they get penalized for showing how they are feeling. This song demonstrates that being willing to feel these emotions instead of just shielding yourself from them and others from seeing them, takes courage. Instead of making one weaker, it makes them stronger. Additionally, all but one of The Lumineers' band members are men. By creating a song about raw emotions and how they should be expressed, instead of trying to hide from them as in the end that causes the most damage, they send a powerful message that paves the way for any type of person to follow. Through "Stubborn Love," they open up a door for people to express their emotions proudly.

Ever since I had the realization that I can express my emotions thanks to “Stubborn Love,” I have used the song to cry to when feeling numb or struggling with feeling or expressing my emotions without being scared to do so.

Bring on the Monsters

Amanda Denney



“We can’t just hide at camp waiting for our parents to fix things,” says Percy. “We have to do it ourselves, out there, in the real world. Because that’s where the monsters are.”¹ That line is fresh in the audience’s mind as the electric guitar begins the opening vamp of “Bring on the Monsters.”² Teenagers who have spent most of the show arguing now come together to sing this anthem that empowers youth to take on the world they’ve been given. Of course, in this case, the teens are also brandishing swords that they’ve been using to fight literal monsters. “Bring on the Monsters” is the final song in the unlikely hit musical, *The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical*, based on the book by Rick Riordan.

I was a Percy Jackson kid. I read the books when I was eleven, then reread them, then drew the characters, then listened to songs based on the characters, then made custom T-shirts and wooden swords so I could dress as the characters. So when I learned in 2017 that a *Lightning Thief* musical was beginning pre-Broadway productions, listening to the soundtrack on YouTube became my newest way of consuming Percy Jackson content. I saw the touring production of *The Lightning Thief* in 2019, then followed it online through its Broadway run, which ended in January 2020.³ Although by that time I’d left my Percy Jackson obsession behind me for the

Notes

¹ The Lumineers, “Stubborn Love,” Jeremy Fraites, Wesley Schultz, Ryan Hadlock, August, 2012, Dualtone Music Group, 7 on *The Lumineers*, 2012.

most part, I kept coming back to the *Lightning Thief* soundtrack for its sometimes goofy, sometimes inspirational numbers.

At the end of the summer before my senior year of high school, I captioned my summer roundup post with a “Bring on the Monsters” lyric: “Summer’s over, it’s time to begin, / And if you’re looking for trouble, then count me in!”⁴ It was a fun reference that captured the playful energy I wanted to channel as I began the year. Despite that confident caption, though, the future made me nervous. I didn’t know where I was going to college or what I would study. The real world was understandably scary, and I wasn’t sure where I fit into it yet.

By February, some of those pieces had fallen into place, and some hadn’t. I’d committed to Skidmore, but a lot of my friends had majors and careers in mind, and I didn’t know where to start. My mom was helping out at auditions for a community theater group called Open Door Theater that was putting on a production of *The Lightning Thief*. I knew immediately that this wasn’t an opportunity I could miss. I asked my violin teacher to push my 7 PM lesson back an hour and signed up for an audition.

Open Door Theater prides itself on the diversity of its cast, and that’s made it a hub for disabled and neurodivergent actors in my community. For that reason, *The Lightning Thief* was a perfect choice. *The Lightning Thief* originated as a bedtime story for Rick Riordan’s son, who was struggling in school due to his ADHD and dyslexia. On Riordan’s website, he writes, “I felt the need to honor [neurodivergent kids], to let them know that being different wasn’t a bad thing.... Talent didn’t come in only one flavor.”⁵ In the musical, that idea

becomes “the things that make you different are the very things that make you strong.”⁶

During my audition, I read a scene with a girl named Samantha who had selective mutism and communicated in American Sign Language. I knew a little ASL, but definitely not enough to understand her quick, fluent signs. Instead, an interpreter spoke Samantha’s lines out loud while Samantha signed them. Interpreters would later be present at rehearsals and performances because many ASL-speaking audience members attended Open Door’s productions. Musical theater’s emphasis on dance and music often creates a sensory experience that is accessible to some and completely inaccessible to others, and Open Door strives to break down that boundary. I was cast in *The Lightning Thief* along with Samantha and 30 other people, about half of whom were neurodivergent or disabled, and together, we were tasked with a story that tells its audience that disabilities can be superpowers.

While choreographing “Bring on the Monsters,” we learned the title line in ASL: open hands beckoning into our chests, then clawed hands on either side of our heads, moving forward and backward twice. Everyone in the cast signs this together every time they say “bring on the monsters.” Even though actual monsters like Medusa and the Minotaur were part of the story we were telling, “monsters” meant something different to each person in the cast: a bully at school, a state’s government pushing for healthcare restrictions, an abusive family member, a society that refused to acknowledge or accommodate a disability. The signs were both part of the

dance and a message that tells everyone who understands both languages that we are standing together. We all say, in any way that we can, that whatever the world throws at us, we can withstand.



The Lightning Thief interpreters signing "world."

Photo by Terri Carotenuto.

Graduation drew steadily nearer as rehearsals went on, and I began to appreciate the blend of uncertainty and confidence in “Bring on the Monsters” more and more. The villain has escaped, and Percy, having just recovered from a brush with death, realizes that the safe haven of his summer camp won’t allow him to solve problems outside of that community. His friend Annabeth tells him:

Things will get bad

Before they will get better

It may feel like an ending but the battle’s just begun.

These lines spoke to me in more ways than one. As I moved out of one period of my life and into another, framing the changes in my life as beginnings rather than endings made those changes a little less jarring. But beyond that, our generation is coming of age in a world rife with prejudice, and after years of being told to let the adults work things out, I, for one, am dying to change that world. The chorus follows the title line with “bring on the real world,” and Percy adopts that mantra later in the song. The “real world” in *The Lightning Thief* is everything outside the realm of Percy’s summer camp, which is magically protected from the threats of monsters and mortals alike. In real life, parents and politicians often try to shield children from the real world, but hiding from monsters almost always makes things worse. It’s high time that we made decisions for ourselves.

The end of the song has Percy singing “I’ll be back next summer,” since he’s decided to return to the real world for the school year. The other characters start out by accompanying him, then break into unique lines, often referencing previous songs. Annabeth picks up “bring on the real world,” then adds her own catchphrase, “bring on any challenge.” The mentor characters sing, “*Normal* is a myth.” Finally, the ensemble comes together to sing what I think is one of the most powerful lines in the song: “We’ll make them listen to us / We’ll make them listen.” In the first song, the line is “You never listen to me / You never listen.”⁷ By the end of the show, *me* has changed to *us*, and the teens have turned their frustration at

being overlooked into a promise that they will make things better.

We performed *The Lightning Thief* at the end of June, two weeks after I graduated from high school. The performances were at an outdoor stage at a park and had open captions and ASL interpretation. Our closing performance went smoothly despite the 90-degree weather. When “Bring on the Monsters” rolled around, I lined up behind Samantha with the rest of the ensemble. Our cue line came, the same line I’d quoted the summer before: “And if you’re looking for trouble, then count me in!” We marched in, singing and signing “bring on the monsters.” Energy radiated from us, a group of people of all ages and abilities, confident in our differences, shouting at the world: “We’ll make them listen to us / We’ll make them listen!” Our Percy finished his final “I’ll be back next summer,” and the audience exploded into audible and visible applause alike. We took our bows, ran offstage, and hugged each other, cheering and crying. I didn’t have everything figured out, and the country definitely didn’t, but standing on that stage after the show, I knew that there were places in the world for all of us, and when there weren’t, we would make them.

Notes

- ¹ The Poseidon Cabin, “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical | Full Musical,” YouTube video, 1:49:41, February 7, 2023, <https://youtu.be/zaH6Qeokvb8>.
- ² Rob Rokicki, “Bring on the Monsters,” The Lightning Thief Company, Broadway Records, track 19 on *The Lightning Thief (Original Cast Recording)*, 2017.
- ³ Andrew Gans, “The Lightning Thief: The Percy Jackson Musical Ends Broadway Run January 5,” Playbill, January 5, 2020, <https://playbill.com/article/the-lightning-thief-the-percy-jackson-musical-ends-broadway-run-january-5>.
- ⁴ Rob Rokicki, “Bring on the Monsters,” Genius, Accessed October 17, 2023, <https://genius.com/Original-cast-of-the-lightning-thief-musical-bring-on-the-monsters-annotated>.
- ⁵ Rick Riordan, “The Learning-Disabled Hero,” Rick Riordan, September 2, 2005. <https://rickriordan.com/2005/09/the-learning-disabled-hero/>.
- ⁶ Rob Rokicki, “Strong,” Genius, Accessed November 16, 2023, <https://genius.com/Carrie-compere-chris-mccarrell-and-rob-rokicki-strong-lyrics>.
- ⁷ Rob Rokicki, “Prologue/The Day I Got Expelled,” Genius, Accessed October 19, 2023, <https://genius.com/Original-cast-of-the-lightning-thief-musical-prologue-the-day-i-got-expelled-lyrics>.

Scott Street

Jack Fink



When I first began playing soccer in eighth grade, I joined an indoor soccer team with some friends so I could continue playing soccer in the cold dark of winter. During a game where we were losing, our coach screamed at us from the sideline to “stop playing like girls”. Half-way through a club soccer game my teammate Holden collided with an opponent and began to bleed profusely from his eye. Our coach didn’t even care to ask if he was okay, he just shouted “Take that shit like a man!” Just yesterday I was playing basketball with some friends. We used one half of the gym for our game, and the Lacrosse team used the other half for what looked like a very intense cardio-vascular session. Our game came to a screeching halt when we heard someone scream “stop running like you have a tampon in!”.

Toxic masculinity is something I have experienced too often in sports. Testosterone filled courts and fields can become gladiatorial arenas of dominance, and what is supposed to be a platform of healthy competition and camaraderie can devolve into a violent and emotionless battle. Many of my former teammates would never be caught crying or sympathizing with the opponent. It's like sports is a hazard-zone for emotion. It seemed to me like any feeling other than anger had no place in an athlete.

This is what I thought before I showed my teammates “Scott Street” by Phoebe Bridgers.¹ I opened the back door to the car and Martin, Paulo, and Cristo hopped in the backseat. I looked in the rear view mirror. Everyone had blank, emotionless expressions. We had just lost in the state finals. We were all seniors, so we had just played our last game together. I had let the tears flow out on the field, getting many of my teammates wet as we hugged after the match. However, as I looked around the turf, Martin, Cristo, and Paulo weren’t crying. Of course, they were sad, I think they just didn't find it appropriate to cry. They were disappointed to lose, and distraught they would never play another high school match, but as athletes we had all been conditioned at one time or another to hide our emotions and stay strong. I was going to get it out of them though. I connected my phone to my car's aux and clicked shuffle on my “sad” playlist. I pulled the car out of the parking lot and started the long drive back home.

It only took a minute of “Scott Street” to have the back seat crying. I looked in the mirror again and saw Martin crying while looking out the window, Cristo sobbing into his elbow, and Paulo with his head in his hands. It was like “Scott Street” was the final push they needed to just let it out. The song's melancholy melodies helped expose their true emotions and prime their sadness. “Scott Street” provoked tears for the rest of the ride.

Phoebe Bridgers’s songs are known for their emotional sound and topics, it's almost like she makes music to cry to. She’s very good at eliciting tears, having received eleven Grammy award nominations during her illustrious career.²

“Scott Street” for instance, is a song about Phoebe’s crippling loneliness. In it, Bridgers tells a story about reconnecting with an old close friend. Phoebe sings, ““And what about the band?” You said, ‘They’re all getting married.’” describing the pain of realizing how much they have changed, and how disconnected they have become. All the while, the sorrowful strumming of a guitar adds to the emotion. Who wouldn’t cry at that?

In a biological sense, music literally evokes sadness through its rhythm and sounds. Some songs have the unique ability to let us viscerally feel our sadness. In "The Reason People Listen to Sad Songs," Dr. Juslin explains this phenomenon. “There are cognitive mechanisms through which sadness can be induced in listeners. Unconscious reflexes in the brain stem; the synchronization of rhythm to some internal cadence, such as a heartbeat; conditioned responses to particular sounds; triggered memories; emotional contagion; a reflective evaluation of the music — all seem to play some role.”³ Specific songs with the right rhythm and sounds, like “Scott Street,” *make* us sad.

Even without Scott Street playing, we all felt the sadness of the circumstance. We had played together for four years and spent countless hours playing the game we loved with the team we loved. Just like that, it was over. We all felt that, but some were not able to show it. Music has the unique ability to conjure emotion and vulnerability. Even the most serious of athletes melted when Phoebe Bridgers sang, “Anyway, don’t be a stranger.”

The sadness Phoebe Bridgers conveyed in her song allowed me, Martin, Paolo, Cristo, and I to feel our emotions.

We could connect to her melancholy melodies and lyrics and felt them vicariously through her music. It was like Scott Street was an emotional conduit and gave rise to our tears. Phoebe Bridgers's lyrics and experiences normalized the pain we felt in the moment, allowing us to show our sadness in the open. “Scott Street” connected us to her pain and sadness, as well as each other.

In fact, sharing the emotional experience of sadness with a group lessens the weight of the emotion. In a study by Dr. Junslin, she explains how empathizing with others sadness can manifest as positive empathy. “Maybe, because sadness is such an intense emotion, its presence can prompt a positive empathic reaction: Feeling someone’s sadness can move you in some prosocial way.”⁴ Not only does empathy normalize our negative emotions, but it connects us to those around us, which inherently fights the isolation sadness can create. The importance of empathy in lessening the negative effects of sadness is why a higher level of vulnerability is so needed in the world of sports. The emotional support of a sports team shouldn't go to waste, but unfortunately empathy is often discarded as “girly” or weak in the world of sports.

Sports often encourage us to suppress feelings and project a stoic exterior, but music serves as a catalyst for emotional release and bonding. Through the melancholic melodies and poignant lyrics of songs like Phoebe Bridgers's "Scott Street," we were reminded that it's okay to feel sadness and vulnerability. Music provides a safe space for everyone to shed their emotional armor and connect with one another's

emotions. It normalizes the experience of sadness and helps combat the isolation that comes with it.

Normalizing feeling emotions like sadness is so important. Men, and especially athletes, have been programmed by the institutions of sports to hide their emotions. That night I wanted to show my teammates that it's okay to feel sad and to cry. I wanted to show them that they weren't alone in their sadness, and they did not need to carry that burden by themselves. Processing emotions alone can be dark and isolating. But sharing those feelings with a group makes sadness a less scary beast. "Scott Street" playing through the speakers allowed us to feel together.

Notes

1 Phoebe Bridgers, "Scott Street", Vore, Dead Oceans, Track Number 5 on *Stranger in the Alps*, September 22nd, 2017

2 "Phoebe Bridgers." Wikipedia, November 11, 2023. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phoebe_Bridgers.

3 Whang, Oliver. "The Reason People Listen to Sad Songs." The New York Times, May 19, 2023.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/19/science/behavior-music-sadness.html#:~:text=Unconscious%20reflexes%20in%20the%20brain,seem%20to%20play%20some%20role>.

4 Whang, "The Reason People Listen to Sad Songs."

It's Not The Same Anymore

Lily Brooks



I was raised not to use the word hate. My family always echoing my use of the word with "Lily, hate starts wars". Growing up, if I have learned one thing about myself, it is that I *hate* change. When I was younger, my mom and I moved a lot. Each move to a new house restarted the cycle of negative change. My mom and I have moved 8 times, which is a lot of change for a young girl. Each move brought immense stress and added to my loathing for change. Change is bad. It always has been. It always will be. Opinions formed from my imprisonment in constant change. Nothing good will come from change, so it should be feared and avoided at all costs, which is only rational thinking.

I opened Spotify, as I typically do when I have any sort of free time and my headphones. I hit shuffle on an older playlist I made. I started to skip around, then the sound of a guitar being lightly played filled my ears. "It's Not The Same Anymore" by Rex Orange County took over my brain.¹ I was immediately transported back to my sophomore year self. Me circa 2020, in a new school, with new people, and new situations; basically, my worst nightmare. My previous school had shut down, which forced me and my classmates to scramble to find a new school, one of the harder situations in my life. Just a year prior I was in my eleventh year of school with the same people I had been in school with since pre-K. A

place where the biggest change year to year was getting a new uniform and a new teacher. A place I had grown to be extremely comfortable in. That was the opposite of where I was a year later, and I was not coping with that well. It got to the point where it physically pained me to smile, “I lost the joy in my face”. My mom had a call with my advisor where my mom mentioned that at my old school I was known for my bright personality and an everlasting smile, my advisor said he had no idea who that girl was. This was the one time I agreed with him because I had no idea where that girl had gone. I listened to the lyrics “My life was simple before” and immediately, as force of habit, compared it to life before I was thrown into a new environment. I longed for my life back. Days blended; I was a walking zombie. Wake up, school, home, go to bed, wake up, school, home, go to bed, and repeat. I lost my ability to embrace happiness. I wasn’t okay. It was as clear to me as it was to everyone around me. The song brought on the usual spiral associated with it of hating all of the change in my life. I was going down a familiar dark road, “It’s not the same as before.” Life would never be the same again. “It’s not the same anymore” and I would never be happy again.

“And it’s fine because I’ve learned so much from before.” I was pulled back into the present; my usual spiral was put to a halt. I *have* learned so much from before. I took out one of my headphones, slipping away once again from the 2020 version of me. It didn’t make sense. This song always made me more upset and allowed me to grieve the easy life I once had. Why was it no longer making me feel that way? Although I had listened to the song hundreds of times, I *heard* the line “It’s not

the same anymore, it got better” for the first time. I realized I wasn’t my sophomore self anymore. The girl who hated change *had* changed, but not in a negative way. The song that had once made me sob for my old life made me appreciate the growth and change I had undergone to escape the sadness that engrossed me. I was thinking positively about change. My world view was turned upside down.

I began to reflect on the changes in my life. When I arrived at my new high school, I met my role model. The woman who became another mother to me. The woman who called me her surrogate daughter. The woman who was my biggest supporter throughout my junior and senior year of high school, and even in freshman year of college. The woman who I now want to be when I grow up. Okay... maybe that change led to good.

When I said yes to something out of my comfort zone, I met the most perfect girl. The girl who is there for me no matter what. The girl who knows my coffee order. The girl who grabs my hand when my leg starts to shake. The girl who kisses my cheek, and smiles when she looks at me. The girl who makes my heart jump. The girl who I would do anything for. The girl who I love. One of the best changes.

When I went to college, I met two of the best humans. One who effortlessly dances her heart out across our room. One who sings beautifully along to whatever song she is listening to. Both the kindest souls. The two humans who sit in my bed with me and talk me down when I’m overwhelmed, or just when I want company. The girls who I will keep in touch with for the rest of my life. The girls who I have no idea what I

would do without. The girls that will forever be my family. The most recent great change.

I put my headphone back in and hit play on my phone. I let the song come to an end. I sat in silence for a minute, in the aftermath of the song, allowing myself to recognize the life altering realization I had within 6 minutes and 26 seconds. An old favorite song of mine, now back as one of my current favorites. Not a favorite because it allowed me to grieve and sit in the sadness I was drowning in, but a favorite for an opposite reason. A favorite because it allowed me to appreciate my journey and allow me to begin to welcome change instead of cowering away from it.

So maybe change isn't bad. I could even be as bold to say I like change. In realizing the growth and change I have made in myself from sophomore year to now, my hostility for change has melted away. My perspective has shifted. Change has brought in some of the best experiences of my life. Without things changing, I wouldn't have everything that I love now. I wouldn't have my role model, the most perfect girl, or the two best humans. And I wouldn't change that for the world. My shift in my attitude towards change allows me to embrace new things in my life with hope and light. Now, when I doubt my ability to work through new things, I can reflect on the positive change in my life and the wonderful things it has brought me.

Notes

¹ Rex Orange County, "It's Not The Same Anymore," Sony Music Entertainment. track 10 on Pony, 2019.

Little Miss Perfect

Finn Krol-García



The song "Little Miss Perfect" is a beautiful song about perfectionism that was submitted to the Write Out Loud contest for musical theatre performers.¹ It won first place, and while it was originally in the Netflix show *13 Reasons Why*², it's become more famous for being associated with Amity and Luz, characters from Disney's *The Owl House*.³ Youtuber @theonedorkthatdraws created an animated music video that's written from Amity's perspective, and uses the song "Little Miss Perfect" as the background soundtrack.⁴ Amity is a highly intelligent and guarded witch, who works with abominations-purple goo monsters! Luz is a vivacious, openly queer human, who, after sneaking into the Boiling Isles (the magic world in which the show is set) begins to teach herself magic. Amity is a character who has worked hard to become the top of her class at Hexside, the school they both attend. Luz's presence, in the beginning, makes Amity nervous, and she shuts down around Luz. Amity and Luz have undeniable chemistry, but Amity has trouble letting herself fall for Luz. In this video and song, Amity struggles with imposter syndrome, and has an incredibly difficult time navigating the lines between being happy and being academically successful (or god forbid, both). Amity faces an absurd amount of pressure from her family in the show to become the school's top student, and is always snapping at others, watching her back. She doesn't know, in the beginning,

what it is to be loved regardless of academic accomplishments. These phenomena are not uncommon in the queer community, and the video highlights some of the difficulties queer people face.



*Luz (left) and Amity (right) arguing.
Screengrab from Owl House.*

First, speaking from personal experience, a huge portion of academics at the high school level revolves around uniformity and assimilation. I often found that to succeed, I needed to be able to type my work, and go the extra mile, often which meant bonding with other students who also spent hours in the library, studying and generally not being kind enough to their bodies in regards to hydration and nutrition. My queer relationship is one that constantly challenges ideas of perfectionism and what it means to be “on” all the time, and if I were to have been public about it, I would have stood out

from the crowd as someone who can do the impossible. It would have raised the question of what happiness as queer person “should” look like, and in standing out, one loses the relatability factor, a sacrifice that many queer people, who already deal with being different and oppression, aren’t willing to make. I, like Amity, was having trouble and correlating success with a very cisgender heterosexual perspective. I couldn’t perceive being happy with my girlfriend, succeeding at school, AND having people know about it. Amity experience this and we see it in the music video.

A pretty girl walks by my locker
My heart gives a flutter but I don’t dare utter a word
Cause that would be absurd behavior for “Little Miss Perfect.”⁵

I found it easier to pretend I wasn’t in a relationship at all than to face the music, a sentiment which Amity also experiences here.

Next, Amity's home life contributes greatly to her struggles with perfectionism, as illustrated in the song. Amity feels that she has too much at stake to be able to risk letting herself be happy in such a raw way. In the show, Amity’s home life is featured in a few instances, and one can see the intense amounts of pressure she’s under. Her mom only really shows her affection when she succeeds in school, and most other creative thoughts or endeavors she has are shut down. Her dad is incredibly caring, but often lets Amity’s mother have the last word. This, plus Amity’s rambunctious twin siblings, often

contributes to Amity feeling like she has to overcompensate just to be seen as enough. All of this internal conflict initially manifests itself as hatred toward the person who makes her reconsider her entire life, which objectively isn't as fulfilling as it could be. I have a similar experience to Amity- I have a twin brother, and I always felt pressure to be a good student and to make my family proud of me. It's a torturous line to walk- being happy or succeeding to the point where you only make others happy. When Amity hates Luz, it really highlights all of the pressure she's internalized. Amity is hit hard by this, and spends the first season highly conflicted. Deep down, I can't help but root for these two, because I have lived Amity's experience. I often feared the fallout from my family or even the voices in my own head, if my grades and academics were any less than perfect, but I am finally in a place where Luz's experience is one that rings true. In the last few years, I realized that external pressures like validation, acceptance, and ensuring my future were huge contributors to how miserable I was at home, at school, and in my relationship. It took moving away to understand how to remaster my approach to balance, and it's something I'm still focused on learning now, as a college first-year. Regardless, Amity's experience captures the multitudes of being a highly talented queer academic. There's way more pressure on us than I think anyone else realizes, and that most academics put it there ourselves.

Next, something I think *The Owl House* and the song both lack is the process it takes to apologize to the people you've pushed away out of fear of not being seen as good

enough. In the song, Amity panics when Luz kisses her, and essentially pushes her away.

*Next thing I know, I lose control
I finally kiss her but oh, no
I see a face in my window
Then my brain starts to go
Na-na-na-na-na-no
You can't risk falling off your throne
La-la-la-la-la-love
Is something you don't even know.*

While this event isn't canon, Amity's internal struggle highlights that there often IS messy fallout to visibly queer relationships, and people at different stages in their lives may react differently to external stimuli. I personally have had to have a lot of conversations with my girlfriend about being visibly queer and putting her and our relationship first, when it is needed. In order to maintain relationships, one often has to step it up after things like that occur, and while I wasn't able to initially, I did later on. Amity and Luz face a wild amount of external conflict in the last season, but they stick even closer together in times of hardship. Part of their ability to do this comes from the fact that they grew up together. As someone who also got the opportunity to grow up with their girlfriend, it warmed my heart to see the real queer struggle Amity faces onscreen. While it wasn't easy for Amity or me to reject the academic and familial pressure we've been under, we did it in the end, and did it well!

All in all, the queer educational experience isn't one that I would wish on anyone, as it's way more stressful than it should be. However, I don't think that I would be the same if I hadn't lived it myself. My relationship with my girlfriend is amazing and so is my pursuit of academics here at Skidmore. Queer people can do both.

Under The Table

Marta Insolia



'Unbridled, feminine, Fiona Apple rage' is an aphorism that my older sister and I would recite in every scenario in which we felt put down or quieted by a sexist remark - we would look at each other and know exactly what the other meant. When reciting this, we are referring specifically to Fiona Apple's "Under The Table."¹

I was a sophomore in high school as we made our way back from a family gathering, lamenting over our uncle's blatant sexism. Everyone laughed and encouraged the jokes, ignoring me and my sister's shared looks of disgust. She nodded understandingly as I explained that I felt a mix of discomfort and frustration the entire time. Instead of replying, she turned up the car's music to the top volume and started belting Fiona Apple's lyrics, slamming her fist passionately on the steering wheel to the slow, steady, angry beat.

*I would beg to disagree,
but begging disagrees with me.*

When I was growing up, my mom would cook dinner for our family every night. She would spend hours in the kitchen, carefully preparing a perfected, explicitly thought-out meal - one that everyone in our family would appreciate. After a while, I noticed that my dad was never the one to compliment her cooking. He had, instead, grown used to expecting it every

Notes

¹ Joriah Kwamé and Taylor Louderman, "Little Miss Perfect," Benjamin Rauhala, Kurt Deutsch, Taylor Louderman, 2019, Write Out Loud, Track #5 on *Write Out Loud*, 2019.

² *13 Reasons Why*. United States: Netflix, 2017.

³ *The Owl House*. United States: Disney Plus+, 2020.

⁴ "Little Miss Perfect - TOH Animatic by Thatonedorkthatdraws (Re-Upload by Oh Cramity)." *YouTube*, YouTube, 17 May 2021, www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfASGgTlyMs.

⁵ "Little Miss Perfect," Genius Lyrics, 2023, <https://genius.com/Write-out-loud-little-miss-perfect-lyrics>

night. I remember feeling guilty about this, and an odd sort of anger, so I'd compliment her instead. My sister and I now talk about the way our mom would cook meals for our dad when we were little, beholden by the fact that she finally realized no one deserved that much luxury without properly cherishing it. In my experience, especially while growing up, feminine rage never just encompasses anger that is screaming or crying. It is also staying silent in the face of adversity, and being told that is the correct and most appropriate way to handle your emotions. As Fiona Apple enforces through her lyrics, anger is the most unacceptable emotion for women to express in today's world, so it remains incredibly difficult to find the words to convey your frustration when your head is bubbling with rage. If this Fiona Apple song had existed at the time my mom was still cooking meals for my dad, (even though I may have been too young to discern the deeper meaning behind her words) it would have helped me understand that it was okay to feel this particular type of fervent irritation.

*I told you I didn't want to go to this dinner...
So when they say something
that makes me start to simmer,
that fancy wine won't put this fire out.*

My sister and I used our beloved Fiona Apple code-phrase most often with a specific uncle who had a knack for casually dropping the most controversial ideas. I have one memory of him nonchalantly complaining about how women nowadays find it so hard to dress appropriately and not put *everything* on display for *everyone* to see. As should be

expected, I felt a familiar twinge of fury fabricate itself in the back of my mind, screaming at me to let it out. *Why does he feel entitled enough to say something like that? How am I just expected to sit here and say nothing when someone generalizes and scrutinizes my entire gender?* But there was also a different, more patronizing voice in the back of my head - *Showing my anger will only show weakness.* Instead of completely shutting down and pushing away all my emotions, my sister looked at me - in a way that clarified she knew exactly what I was thinking - and whispered yet again, 'unbridled, feminine Fiona Apple rage'. Almost instantly, I felt a wave of relief, remembering that I wasn't sitting alone in this pool of outrage. I smiled at her and rolled my eyes in disgust at his comment. Instead of working against the anger, I worked with it. I replied, "the way women dress should be of no concern to you." He looked surprised. Surprised by the fact that I stood up for myself and my gender. Surprised by the composure and temperance in my voice as I used my anger to fuel and even strengthen my argument.

*I'd like to buy you a pair of pillow-soled hiking boots,
to help you with your climb.
Or rather, to help the bodies that you step over,
along your route, so they won't hurt like mine.*

The summer after sophomore year, I decided to get a job at our local pet and garden shop. This was a family-owned business where the manager position was passed down generationally to each son. Off the bat, I knew this store's values were definitely more conservative, but I tried my best to

separate the work environment and work itself - this proved harder than I imagined. One of my coworkers, who initially seemed genuine and even took the time to give me a tour of the entire shop my first day, started to get on my nerves. After the first few weeks on the job, I noticed that he was always trying to find me to converse about his personal life, exposing details about himself that seemed oddly private and specific. This made me uncomfortable, but I told myself that he was just being friendly. He then started repeatedly asking to see each other outside of work - each time I would decline. Eventually, I became so uncomfortable that I decided to tell my manager. Instead of responding empathetically, he told me, "Sometimes men can just be creepy, but he's harmless. You'll be fine." Once again, unbridled, Fiona Apple rage was bubbling to the surface as I heard her words ring clearly in the back of my mind: "Leave me alone, don't push me. Cookie, don't push me, don't you push me." I wanted to act on this rage. I wanted to tell my manager about the pit in my stomach every time I came into work, knowing my coworker would come looking for me. I stood in his office for a few more seconds, staring him down with fiery, bewildered eyes. Replaying the words over and over in my mind: *Are you even listening to me? Do you hear what I'm saying to you?* He returned the look with a blank, negligent expression. I nodded once and left his office, promising myself that I would never put up with a boss, coworker, or friend that silences and disregards my very real and pertinent discomforts. It infuriated me that this man's carelessness about his female employee's safety was the reason I had to lose a job I desperately needed at the time. It infuriated me that my creepy

coworker would get to keep working the same job and probably act the same way around the next new hire. I let myself sit in all of these emotions, and used my unstoppable, Fiona Apple rage to push me to make the right decision. The next day I came to work, I quit.

Kick me under the table all you want, I won't shut up.

Throughout each of these experiences, I learned that this song holds a special place in my heart. It defines my relationship with my sister and mother, as well as my relationship with myself as a woman. "Under The Table" also not only holds the ability to help women cope with and better understand the perpetual, inevitable, and confusing emotions they feel every day, but it also helps them recognize that many other women around the world relate to and are actively undergoing very similar experiences and revelations. Fiona Apple reminds everyone that we are not in this alone. So now, anytime I find myself simmering with silent rage, my first thought is no longer, *how do I suppress this spiteful, unladylike, and embarrassing anger?* Instead, I hear Fiona Apple's lyrics playing in the back of my mind, chanting that I'm not overreacting, and I won't shut up.

Notes

¹ Fiona Apple, "Under The Table," Track #4 on *Fetch The Bolt Cutters*, 2020.

Dear April
Sam Kleid



I walked home. It was late May, the beginning of summer. The sticky city air sat like an invisible fog that I navigated with each step. I strolled down the cobbled sidewalk. I looked at the brownstones across the street, elegant and grand, standing in the night. I heard the laughs of families leaving Prospect Park after a long barbeque. This was the last late-night walk I would take.

Six months before, my dad, in blue scrubs, sat me down in our Brooklyn apartment. He told me our family was moving to suburban Ohio before junior year. Proud of him and his midlife journey to become a doctor, I tried to be supportive. I was used to this. Following my dad on his quest, our family took a globe-trotting journey from smoggy L.A. to falafel-filled Tel Aviv to beachy San Diego to my beloved Brooklyn. But this time seemed harder. The freedom I felt walking its streets, the way it shaped me as I explored it. The city had finally started to come back to life, our masks came off, the weather was getting better and better. And here I was, taking each step like it was my last one, and letting the beautiful energy of my city slip away. I put in my headphones and pressed play. “Dear April” by Frank Ocean filled my ears. I listened and thought about my relationship with the city. ¹

In all the places I lived, I never truly felt like I was home. I hadn’t spent enough time in any place to become comfortable. I left each place with sadness, with memories and

bonds. I never developed a deeper relationship that would make me call it home. I would always be asked the question of where I was from. I would bumble and struggle, explaining where I’d lived, and where I was born. In my head, I would always wonder where I’d go next. Almost nothing about what I thought was home felt constant.

New York was the fourth place I would live in my life, a new beginning, a new experience. On the night we arrived, I looked out the window of the car as we drove past the skyline. The skyscrapers glistened, the streets alive and bustling, and the energy I felt put me at peace. The next week, my dad and I practiced my new commute to school. I’d be starting seventh grade, taking the subway all alone at twelve years old. We went step by step, turn by turn. He made sure I knew what stop I would need to get off at, where to go if I needed directions. He seemed worried, but I knew I was ready. I left on the first day of school, taking in an early city morning. I was alone, standing with my backpack and headphones on a hot subway platform. Everyone around me commuting and starting their days, all invigorated by that unexplainable energy. I was new here, but everything about it felt perfectly right.

*Like you took these strangers
And our two strange lives
And made us new ²*

The lyrics describe the end of the relationship between Ocean and his lover. He writes a metaphorical letter to “April”, reminiscing on how they met and interacted. Ocean and his lover, two strangers. Me and the City, two strangers. After that

day, we weren't strangers. I had a new love and a new appreciation, and it kept growing. It was so easy; I had the greatest city in the world at my fingertips. Late at night with my best friends. We would travel between boroughs, eating the best pizza and dumplings, seeking out concerts, and exploring new neighborhoods and cultures.

We were safe for a while

We were safe as the years flew by³

Entering my freshman year of high school, I was more at home than ever. I whisked around the city, carrying myself like a true New Yorker. I was ready for high school there, another new experience where I could learn and grow. The COVID pandemic changed all of that. Infections spread through the city like wildfire, and just like that I was confined to my shoebox room for 6 months. Being stuck in that small of a space when that big of a city was out there felt like I was jailed for crimes I never committed. I called my friends day after day, deep talks late into the night kept us connected. As cases lowered and we reemerged, we still felt trapped, staying close to home and not venturing like we used to.

When my dad sat me down that night, it was right around when everything was starting to get normal again. I sat and questioned everything. Where would I go from here? New York—kinetic, engaged, full of energy, teeming with diverse, interesting people—was my truest home, where I was the best me. I was frozen. I couldn't grow anywhere else.

what we had can't be the same now⁴

The somber synths and acoustics played as I walked down the blocks, memories with friends popping up when I noticed the bodega in the center square. I imagined the carefree nights in the heat of the pandemic, where we would sit laughing in the bitter cold, our presence keeping each other warm. Each moment, each lyric made me reflect more and more. Earlier that same night, I'd sat with those same friends in the park. We danced to our favorite songs, told stories, and shared hugs and promises to stay in touch. These were people who shaped me, shaped my identity, and provided me with constant comfort. The next day came and went, and I drove away from the city, feeling that I would never find a true home again.

It was two years later, and my mom and I just stuffed the car with duffels, containers, hangers, and all the essentials for college life. Junior and Senior years in Cleveland were different. I moved in the summer, and after being away, came back to start school in September in a house and a place I barely knew. I arrived in my new town of Chagrin Falls to the band playing on the first day of school, a celebration of returning in person after the pandemic. I looked around. Jocks with their letterman jackets, cheerleaders with pom-poms, my world was turned upside down. I had lost that freedom the city brought me. I felt as if I would never feel at home again.

My family hopped into the car as we all discussed our plans for move-in. I was at this pivotal moment, moving away from home for college, but I didn't know what moving from "home" even meant. I was leaving family, new friends I had made, but this place, nothing about it, felt like a real home. We

began driving down the winding roads, I pressed shuffle on my playlist, and on came “Dear April.” I listened back to the lyrics, thinking about this new journey I was embarking on. For the first time, I and every other 18-year-old starting college were all starting anew at the same time. There was no more being the new kid, no more nervousness, no more feeling unfamiliar without the support of others. I realized then that New York gave me a gift I could take anywhere: knowing how to deeply see the world around me, embrace and explore it. I realized that home can be a place, a location you live in, your town or city, but it can also be something else. Home can be what you feel when you’re somewhere, the people you meet there, the memories you make.

Ocean’s words repeated, I felt ready to seek out a new home, while staying grateful for what my past homes had brought me.

*What we had won't be the same now
But you will make something new
And it'll take you through this.*

Notes

- 1 Frank Ocean, “Dear April”, Frank Ocean, Daniel Aged, *Blonded*, 2020
- 2 “Frank Ocean – Dear April.” Genius.com. Accessed November 17, 2023. <https://genius.com/Frank-ocean-dear-april-lyrics>.
- 3 “Frank Ocean – Dear April.” Genius.com.
- 4 “Frank Ocean – Dear April.” Genius.com.
- 5 “Frank Ocean – Dear April.” Genius.com

Yo Perreo Sola
Morgan O’Halloran



If gender is a spectrum, doesn’t that mean that there is one person who is the most female? Does she then become the ideal woman that all other women should look up to? Can one win at being female? Of course not. No one can be the most female, that’s ridiculous. How would they even grade themselves? Whoever can put on the most makeup? Bake the best cookies? Wear the cutest skirts?

How about men then? If gender is a spectrum, doesn’t that mean that there is one person who is the most male? Of course not. No one can be the most male, that’s ridiculous. How would they even grade themselves? Whoever can lift the heaviest weights? Have sex with the most women? Own the most cars?

Now wouldn’t that be strange.

Gender stereotypes may be breaking down, much to many a geriatric’s chagrin, but the expectations that come with them remain as embedded into the fabric of society as ever. Women who can’t have kids and men who can’t find jobs are pitied. Women are consoled when their partners are disloyal, and men when they can no longer be free to do as they please (“The ol’ ball ‘n chain.”) Women who wear pants are stylish and practical, and men who wear skirts are gay, unprofessional, or worst of all, Scottish.

It seems, then, that the breaking down of gender norms only flows in one direction. It's alright for a woman to want to act like a man should. Take charge of her life, get a job, and wear those suit pants. But men are not allowed to act like women. What man wants their wife to make more than them, tell them what to do, or feel like they're not the one wearing the pants in the relationship?

People have long protested, voted, and sued for feminism as "an advocacy of women's rights on the basis of equality of the sexes." And it has worked to a certain extent, but not always in the way hoped for. As opposed to reexamining and reforming society into one that does not place men above women, we have taken the far easier route by simply allowing women to act like men. Men are still superior in every way, but if a woman wants to pretend to be one and be independent, well good for her. The roles and attitudes of men in society haven't changed. All that's been allowed is for women to transgress themselves into the traditional roles of men.¹

This asymmetry has caused men to feel the need to further distinguish themselves. To ensure that the real men distinguish themselves from those encroaching on their conventional jobs in society, they must be more masculine than those counterfeits ever could be. They must have the most money, the most power, and the most control over women, lest those around them show them up and prove themselves superior.²

Such ideals are exemplified in the Western concept of toxic masculinity, which, despite what politicians and

influencers would like you to think, is nowhere near a new concept. While not the same, the concept of *machismo* has played a role in Iberian and Latin cultures for centuries. Meaning "very male," *machismo* is a power issue in which hyper-masculinity is perpetuated, often manifesting in the form of emotional detachment or repression, as well as aggression towards those deemed lesser, most usually women.³ While in theory this mindset promotes protecting one's family and taking pride in one's masculinity, over the decades it has devolved into the rigid and harmful expectation of men today.

This attitude is promoted primarily through the media. Such mindsets are pervasive and seep their way into every form of communication, influence, and learning. However, parents, politicians, and priests seem much more content to blame the newfangled forms of communication like social media, movies, and music for influencing the youth than the well-established educational and governmental systems.

This bias arises because it is far easier to identify who and what are behind the messages seen on TV and Spotify than to detangle the messy history that shapes a country's beliefs. As a result, the influence of prominent artists, directors, and actors has skyrocketed, and such individuals must be more aware of the messages they spread through their work, words, and actions than ever before. Harmful mindsets are easily perpetrated and perpetuated, often without conscious thought about why individuals act as they do.

Under specific criticism are certain music genres that are seen as harmful to the impressionable audiences who listen to them, notably rap, R&B, and trap music. Independent of the

stigmatism pointed towards genres primarily populated with artists of color, there is cause for concern. The genres of trap and reggaeton music are infamous for their objectification of others through lyrics concerned with sex, drugs, and crimes artists will never be charged with due to their popularity.

This shared storyline has led people to surmise that every trap artist is the same, viewing them as bad influences and exemplify the lives every 9-5 cubicle inmate wishes they could pursue. Unrepentant, unhinged, and unsympathetic to the example they set for the impressionable youth who think their actions are the pinnacle of cool. And this, in part, is true. Every music genre has people who objectify others and themselves, trap is no exception. This is why the artists who do care deeply about their message and its impact matter more than most will ever know.

In contrast to the thoughtlessness many have come to associate with trap and reggaeton artists, Puerto Rican rapper and singer Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, better known as Bad Bunny, has put considerable effort into using his platform to denounce violence against women and bring attention to other social justice issues. Bad Bunny is considered the king of Latin trap music, helping Spanish music reach mainstream popularity in recent years. His five studio albums cover a wide range of subjects, from injustice and corruption in Puerto Rico to its exploitation by the United States to toxic masculinity and feminism. Through various interviews, he has expressed that the reggaeton genre is swamped with *machismo* and violence towards women. Several of his songs speak about respecting

women and their independence, including his double platinum-certified 2020 release “*Yo Perreo Sola*”.⁴

Translating to “she twerks alone,” “*Yo Perreo Sola*” is a club anthem celebrating women’s independence and freedom to dance as they please. “*Yo Perreo Sola*” is written from the perspective of a woman who no longer cares for others’ opinions or needs anyone else to dance with (“*Ante’ tú me pichaba’ / Ahora yo picheo*”).⁵ It serves as a message to respect women and their decisions, and not to assume she wants to be with anyone but herself (“*Te llama si te necesita / Pero por ahora está solita*”).

The iconic music video for “*Yo Perreo Sola*” has over 600 million views and ends with Bad Bunny’s central message: “*Si no quiere bailar contigo, respeta, ella perrea sola*” (If she doesn’t want to dance with you, respect it, she twerks alone). The last scene contains women dancing and enjoying themselves, illustrating the freedom this song promotes. It contains the feminist motto “*ni una menos*,” (not one [woman] less) the name of an Argentinian movement that campaigns against gender-based violence. Similarly shown is “*las mujeres mandan*,” (the women rule), a reference to a song of the same name which advocates for women’s independence.

Along with conveying an important message, Bad Bunny’s music video is unique as it includes him entirely in drag. Other shots include him dressed entirely in pink, wearing a skirt, and twerking with himself. The outfits and motifs in this video are similar to those he wears in real life. Bad Bunny is well known for defying gender norms, often performing in skirts, dresses, and with nails painted.

Bad Bunny has long been an ally of the LGBT+ community and an advocate for all victims of gender-based violence. In a 2020 performance on the *Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon*, he wore a skirt, a pink jacket, and most notably, a shirt that read “*Materon a ALEXA. No a un hombre con falda.*” (Alexa was killed. Not a man in a skirt.) The statement tee referred to Alexa Negrón, a transgender woman killed a week earlier for using the women’s restroom at a McDonalds in Puerto Rico.

Just as exposure to media can harm and warp one’s view of the world, it can also uplift and affirm in more ways than words are able to. Sometimes, seeing a reflection of yourself or a specific aspect of yourself in others can provide more comfort and assurance than ten years of therapy.

Notes

¹ Giraldo, Octavio. "El Machismo Como Fenomino Psicocultural." *Revista Latinoamerica de Psicologica* 4, no. 5 (1972): 295–305.

² Bieliauskas, Vytautas J. "A New Look at 'Masculine Protest.'" *Journal of Individual Psychology* 30, no. 1 (January 1974): 92–98. <https://doi.org/00221805>.

³ Giraldo, El Machimso Como Fenomino Psicocultural, 296.

⁴ Bad Bunny, "Yo Perreo Sola", Universal Music Publishing Group, track 5 on YHLQMDLG, (2020)

The View Between Villages

Kit Simpson



My adolescence was dedicated to taking in the views of various western Massachusetts villages. I spent my falls in Lenox, running amuck on the local theatre company’s campus. Summers were given split custody: half of my days were prancing around Williamstown, wasting hours walking up and down Cole Avenue with close friends. Any other day, I could be found on my aunt’s porch, gossiping about whatever family member was absent from that day’s gathering. During the colder months, I was likely in my hometown of Lanesborough, cuddled under a blanket, making up stories about the figurine village that lived on top of my hutch with my sister while sipping fruit punch and watching the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade with my mother. In spring, I hopped between villages, depending on where I felt called: some days were dedicated to eating on my grandparents’ deck in Pittsfield, and some were admiring the hills while sitting at my local ice cream shop in Williamstown.

Perhaps the most memorable view came in the form of my daily commute: a drive that took anywhere from twelve to twenty minutes, depending on how late my siblings and I were running on any given day. My view was quintessentially Berkshire County. Springs and summers were bright and green, and in fall the trees turned vivid shades of red and orange. The winters looked and felt like something out of a children’s

Christmas book, with snow covering hilltops and fir trees along the route. This drive was part of my life for around five years. On this route, I felt at peace. When I drove to school in the morning, I was able to leave whatever was bothering me at home and emotionally prepare for the day ahead. On my drive back, I was able to briefly forget my academics and extracurriculars and focus on the view.

Vermont-based folk singer-songwriter Noah Kahan is known for encapsulating the feeling of rural New England in his music. 2020's "Maine" uses the state as an ideal escapist locale; 2023's "Paul Revere" makes the New England icon a simile of escapism. His most known lyrics are "I love Vermont / but it's the season of the season of the sticks"¹ and "I'm mean because I grew up in New England."² Kahan's rural Vermont background is integral to his work as an artist.

On the 2023 extended edition of his song "The View Between Villages," Kahan sings about a similar feeling about returning home to mine. He highlights both the feelings of anger and of peace that come with returning. In his second verse, he sings "It's just me and the curve of the valley / and there is meanin' on Earth, I am happy."³ In the chorus, he changes this emotion: "I'm angry again." Kahan ties this anger with being closer to his physical home; a feeling that I understand completely. Kahan uses the first two verses to set the scene and establish his initial emotions regarding the situation; he is driving home and admiring the scenic part of Vermont from which he hails. He is at peace because of this. He even laments that he feels "seventeen again." This feeling, paired with Kahan's claim that "there is meaning on earth/and

[he] is happy," which implies that the peace he felt at seventeen makes him want to regress to who he was when he was seventeen.

Kahan's lament here is something that I find relatable. Every time I drive around my villages, I find myself exclusively listening to the music that I listened to during the winter of my junior year; The Beths are replaced with the *Tick...Tick...BOOM!* soundtrack. I'm not alone in this feeling. my close friend Nic recently told me that they are unable to return to Lanesborough from Worcester without regressing into their tenth-grade Twenty-One Pilots phase and listening to the *Anything Goes* 1962 off-Broadway cast recording. Our regression is multi-faceted, but it is primarily based on a nostalgia that we feel upon returning to the Berkshires. There's a desire to return to the era of our life where we were deeply connected with family, as well as our hometown; to be able to run to the local Target without having to make small talk with our guidance counselor about how we're doing in a brand-new place.

The bridge of "The View Between Villages" does something interesting: in lieu of singing, the bridge begins with around fifteen seconds of silence before Strafford, Vermont local Hazel Lewis begins speaking: "I think for me...I found a town big enough for anything that I want...I'm not a city girl, by any means, haha." What is interesting is that Lewis states that she's found a place that she loves, not one that she was born in. A 2007 article from the Strafford Herald announcing that Lewis had won Citizen of the Year—good for her!—states that she was born in Lyndon, VT, and moved to Strafford 65

years prior to the article.⁴ She is soon joined by fellow Straffordite Melvin Coburn, who shares that Strafford, his birthplace, means a lot to him, and that he values how much his community looks out for one another. Both speakers have a level of pleasant nostalgia not present in much of Kahan's tone; where Kahan stays melancholic or angry, both speakers laugh as they share their speeches.

When I hear Coburn and Lewis discuss their lives in Strafford, I am reminded of my own mother; a woman who will, as Kahan sings in "Homesick," die in the house that she grew up in. A woman whose father died in the house that he grew up in. My mother is not nearly as old as Lewis or Coburn—in fact, she is closer in age to Kahan—but she still discusses her childhood in rural western Massachusetts with a similar level of nostalgic joy. There is a deep love for her hometown rooted in her; many holidays are spent listening to her recounting tales from her Lanesborough youth. She holds a lot of regard for the town that she grew up in; every time she leaves—whether that's one town over or to New Hampshire—she will return.

Nostalgia can often cloud visions of home. Instead of being a place that people associate with negativity, it is viewed as a haven: a place where one can return to the nature that they grew up in with confidence. But there's always a negative side to returning home, where the rose-colored glasses shatter and negativity festers again. In his chorus, Kahan addresses the worse parts of coming back home, singing "the death of my dog, the stretch of my skin/it's all washing over me, I'm angry again." After a short while—in the case of Kahan's song, a

minute and fifty seconds—I, and many others who leave small town New England, are quickly reminded of the reason that we left our small New England towns, whether that's dead dogs, family problems, or exes with whom we no longer identify. Of course, as soon as we leave our towns, we forget why we left; a fight that seems like the end of the world becomes a distant memory. There is a sudden desire to go back. When I leave, it only takes a few moments before any disagreements with my mother on the ride back are forgotten, and suddenly I am once again filled with the desire to sit on the couch next to my mother watching the Macy's parade and sipping fruit punch.

Notes

1 Noah Kahan, "Stick Season," Republic Records; Track 2 on *Stick Season*, 2022.

2 Noah Kahan, "Homesick," Republic Records; Track 12 on *Stick Season*, 2023.

3 Noah Kahan, "The View Between Villages-Extended," Republic Records; Track 21 on *Stick Season (We'll All Be Here Forever)*, 2023.

4 Frietag, John, "Hazel Lewis is Citizen of the Year," *The Herald*, May 24, 2007, <https://www.ourherald.com/articles/straffords-hazel-lewis-is-citizen-of-the-year/>

eyes don't lie

Keya Shah



“The eyes are the window to the soul”, an age-old saying that holds profound truth particularly when you have a crush on said soul. In the complex tapestry of human emotions, one of the most exhilarating and mystifying experiences is having a crush. To me the song, “eyes don't lie” by Isabel LaRosa is the perfect vocalization of having a crush.¹ It is a whirlwind of sensations that can awaken butterflies in your stomach and make your heart skip beats.

Let me take you back to the story of my very first crush. It began just like in those classic tales – we'd been best friends since kindergarten. Our daily bus rides were a cherished routine, where'd swap stories over bites of our mom's bus-food masterpieces. But what truly got me were his eyes; a deep, rich brown that held the power to make me fall over laughing with just one glance. Having a crush on him was sudden and surprising.

I didn't know when I found myself smitten, until I entered a world of overthinking every interaction between us. The moments when I would see him walk by and millions of imaginary scenarios cross my mind, my body warming, cheeks brightening. And then he would turn and wave and immediately every single thought disappeared. I tried to make it not obvious, but I couldn't; my eyes were gorilla glued to his face, lips smiling wider as he walked closer. I noticed the smallest details, where a particular mole is, the colour of his eyes in the sun. The tilt in his walk which makes it uniquely his. I could recognize him by just his stride. When he laughed and his cheeks become beet red. It's in these minutiae that I

found reasons to admire him even more, as if these idiosyncrasies make the completely one-sided bond, we shared all the more special and unique.

Why am I telling you this? You ask yourself. That's cause I want to tell you about the song that captured my heart just like my crush did. A song that makes me imagine all the instances above and more indescribable ones. The song “eyes don't lie” by Isabela LaRosa plays on repeat in my mind. It's as if the lyrics and melody encapsulate the emotions, the longing, and the anticipation that come with having someone special in your life.

I first encountered this song on a random Monday night, a night that seemed ordinary until it didn't. It was the soundtrack for someone's cosplay transition reel, and the soft husky voice of the singer immediately caught my attention. The lyrics resonated deeply with me, making me wish I could sing it to them right there and then. It became my personal anthem, and the powerful bass line seemed to sync perfectly with the rhythm of my own heartbeat whenever I saw them. It honestly felt like the song captured the essence of my crush experience. It was akin to the drumbeats, a constant reminder of the exhilarating rush of dopamine I felt every time I was close to them.

As I navigate the labyrinth of emotions that come with having a crush, it is interesting to consider the psychological aspects that underpin this common experience. According to an article by Brooklyn Reece, there are five elements of attraction: proximity, similarity, reciprocity and familiarity.² In fact, while reading the article, I realised that the lyrics of the song articulate these five elements beautifully.

*Yeah, you're beautiful, don't have to try
Darling, you look divine.³*

It's no secret that looks often light the first spark of a crush. Maybe it's a killer smile, eyes that you just can't stop looking into, or just the way someone carries themselves that totally reels you in. And let's be real, a sharp jawline doesn't hurt either. It's all these bits and pieces of someone's look that hit you with that 'wow' factor and make you sit up and pay attention.

*Can't lie to you, baby
Wanna feel your body close.*

Turns out, just being around someone a lot can kickstart a crush. It's like when you're working the same shifts with a co-worker or you've got a seat next to someone cool in class. The more you're around each other, the more you pick up on the little things that make them unique. You start to expect their jokes, their hello's, and even their eye rolls at a bad joke. All those small moments start adding up, and before you know it, you're looking forward to seeing them more and more. Proximity is kind of sneaky like that; it takes the everyday hangouts and turns them into something special, building a bridge between just knowing someone and actually feeling that little spark.

*You tell me you hate me
Then tell me shit nobody knows.*

Similarity weaves a powerful thread in the tapestry of attraction, resonating deeply when we discover shared passions. Imagine the delight of finding that you both savour the worlds of young adult fantasy novels, particularly those crafted by BIPOC authors. It's not just a mutual hobby—it's a

gateway to understanding one another's perspectives and values. When these stories feature morally complex characters—flawed yet unwavering in their loyalty to their allies—they become a mirror for the complexities and steadfastness you might seek in a partner. This alignment in taste extends beyond mere preference; it signals a convergence of intellect and emotion, forging a profound connection. Shared values and experiences act as a beacon, drawing you to someone who not only shares your interests but feels like a kindred spirit, offering the promise of a deeper, intuitive understanding. It's the discovery of this intellectual and emotional harmony that often marks the beginning of a significant and enriching bond

*Pull you in exchanging souls
Trace my skin, losing control.*

Reciprocity is the exchange of actions and emotions that fortifies a connection between two people. It's that electrifying sense of being valued, as shown through immediate and thoughtful responses to communication. For instance, when one person quickly replies to a text, it signals attentiveness and eagerness to engage. A paragraph in a text conversation suggests a willingness to invest equal effort into communication. Physical gestures, like a reassuring hand-hold while walking, are intimate affirmations of mutual interest and care. These are the subtle, yet powerful, indicators that someone is truly invested in getting to know and connect with you.

*You tell me your secrets
You keep your life between your lips.*



Darling, you look divine.

Familiarity is a critical secret sauce for developing a crush. It's the gradual process of tuning into the distinct tone of someone's texts, sensing their presence even in digital communication. Through consistent interactions, like sharing lunchtimes routinely, you begin to map the contours of their personality. Understanding their idiosyncrasies and rhythms, you gain insight into their character. This growing acquaintance brings with it a comforting sense of predictability and security, which often lays the groundwork for deeper affection. The more acquainted you become, the more your attraction is likely to deepen, as familiarity breeds a welcoming sense of connection.

Its complexities and nuances spinning me into a world of daydreams and what-ifs. As the song “eyes don’t lie” by Isabel LaRosa played on repeat in my mind, it echoed the sentiments of my heart with each lyric, each note. This melody, woven with the science of attraction, became the anthem of my

infatuation, encapsulating the essence of every stolen glance and whispered conversation. It served as a reminder that crushes are more than fleeting moments of admiration; they are profound intersections of emotion and psychology, of human connection and introspection.

In the end, whether or not these feelings culminate in a relationship, the journey of a crush is a testament to the human capacity for affection and the endless possibilities that come with it. It is a dance that teaches us about ourselves, about the longing for connection, and the beauty of vulnerability. And as the final notes of my crush anthem fade, I'm left with a sense of gratitude for the experience, for the joy and the heartache, for the life lessons learned in the space between heartbeats. The story of my very first crush, then, isn't just a tale of longing and emotion—it's a chapter of my personal growth, a symphony of experiences that will resonate within me forever, as timeless as the age-old saying: “The eyes are the window to the soul.”

Notes

¹LaRosa, Isabel. 2023. *Eyes Don't Lie*. Edited by Thomas LaRosa. RCA Records: Thomas LaRosa. https://youtube.com/watch?v=6wJEEcTIPss&ab_channel=IsabelLaRosaVEVO.

²Wu, Katherine. 2017. “Love, Actually: The Science behind Lust, Attraction, and Companionship.” Science in the News. Harvard University. February 14, 2017. <https://sitn.hms.harvard.edu/flash/2017/love-actually-science-behind-lust-attraction-companionship/>.

³LaRosa, Isabel . 2023. *Eyes Don't Lie*. Edited by Thomas LaRosa. RCA Records: Thomas LaRosa. genius.com/Isabel-larosa-eyes-dont-lie-lyrics

anatomy
Lily Brooks



A few months ago my best friend, Lexi, and I were on what we like to call a wrap-around, where we drive around aimlessly and listen to music at full volume with microphones in our hands. Lexi asked for my phone to queue a song, I instinctively handed it over. She said, “I heard this song earlier and I know it will resonate with you, it’s about shitty dads.” I skipped to the song and as the first few lyrics hit my eardrums, I burst into tears. I had never heard a song so gracefully and accurately portray the relationship I have with my father.

Some people think that family means forgiveness. In my eyes, they couldn’t be more incorrect. Why is sharing DNA a get out of jail free card to be flashed over and over again? Why does sharing biology mean one no longer has consequences for their actions? Why isn’t it allowed to hurt because you are half of me? The argument makes no sense. Family is supposed to protect you from harm, is supposed to give you love and support so you can grow into the best version of yourself, anything but that treads into unforgivable territory for betraying the exact description of what a parent should be.

My father is a character. Often, I hear that term being used lovingly to describe an eccentric member, one who isn’t your stereotypical person. The word brings the image of a cartoon, showing a lively and bubbly person in one’s mind. That is not the manner I am using it. Instead of hearing

character and thinking of Mickey Mouse, think Cruella de Vil. Don’t think of the happy-go-lucky, fun-loving character, think of the lying, deceitful, in-it-for-their-own-gain villain from *101 Dalmatians*. You may think it’s harsh to compare my father to a notorious villain who skins puppies, but trust in the person who was “raised” by him, the comparison is a gross understatement for his character. I call him a character because most of the time I can’t internalize that he is a real human. The way he acts, the way he has treated me, the way he has treated my mom - how is this man real? How does he justify his actions? *I* certainly can’t justify his actions *or* cease to be stunned thinking about him as a real person. So, he is a character. Comparing him to something imaginary makes it easier.

Kenzie Ziegler opens “anatomy” with
You called me today on a random Tuesday
Don’t ask me why I still have your number saved
Hello stranger, it’s been forever
You’re acting normal but nothing’s normal about
Trust issues, and soaking tissues
Lyin to my sister and sayin’ “I don’t miss you”
With no closure, just getting older.¹

The last phone call I had with my father was November 16th of my junior year. I looked at my phone to be shocked with the caller ID reading ‘dad.’ He hadn’t called me in over a month. Why was he calling me today? I picked up the phone to be greeted with “Happy birthday, Lil.” I said thank you and let him try to continue a conversation, except it wasn’t my birthday. Did he know it wasn’t my birthday? I’m not sure, but

that was the last I heard his voice. Plainly put, we haven't talked since. He acted so normal for it being the first we talked in a month, and so normal when the fact was, it wasn't even my birthday. I'll give credit where credit is due, it may not have been the right day, but he wished me a happy birthday that year.

Thinking about how normal my dad acted in our conversations enrages me. "Nothing is normal about trust issues" the lyric that felt like a punch in the stomach the first time I heard it. I learned at a very young age that my father is a pathological liar. According to the Mayo Clinic, a pathological liar is one who has "the compulsive urge to lie about matters big and small regardless of the situation." Matters big and matters small. My father fabricated huge lies about our family, my father lied about what he ate for breakfast.

The day I figured out my father's tendency to lie directly to my face shattered my ability to trust. If my own father lied to me like that, then everyone else must be lying too. I began to question everyone's loyalty and honesty. When anyone would tell me anything I couldn't let go of my suspicion because in my mind it probably wasn't true. Following every lie, I found myself thinking, "I wish for once you would be honest." I have broken down countless times after realizing yet another thing my dad had told me was a lie. I waited and waited for some sliver of honesty to come out of his mouth, only to realize that day would come when pigs fly, a tough realization for a 9-year-old.

Ziegler also sings "dated shitty people, because of how you treated mom" The way my father treated my mother was, in short, not pretty. In my first few years of dating, I ended up

with very controlling, manipulative people. I allowed them to rule the relationship and stepped down if conflict arose. I threw my feelings away. I let myself be flat out used and taken advantage of. Looking back, I dated people who were spitting images of my father. "Now I'm with someone good but I'm still feeling numb," the permanent consequence Ziegler and I will both face because of fathers and exes. After my last relationship I put a lot of work into battling my expectations of my role and my partners in the relationship. That allowed me to welcome a healthy love into my life, someone who has brought light, honesty, and comfort, but no matter how much she proves she's here for me, there is always the nagging voice in my head reminding me of the actions of my father. Emphasizing that people leave, people lie, people hurt you. Patterns allow you to begin to see through someone, "Say you'll visit, empty promise." My father, a pathological liar, made many empty promises. This added to my disbelief and lack of trust in promises made by others, something I still struggle with.

Often, I miss my dad. I lost out on that paternal figure that many cherish. "You've been my missing piece so why aren't you missing me, guess I meant less than I thought." My father being absent more than present in my life brought on some severe self-worth issues growing up. If my own father wouldn't stay and love me, who willingly would? This has brought on a lot of issues when it comes to me accepting love and care and even more when trusting someone won't just up and leave. "No closure, just getting older" I will never get an explanation for the reason my dad treated me how he did, and he is too immature to have a conversation that would provide

me with any sort of closure. So, my closure is time. My closure is getting older, getting wiser, and retraining myself through the years. Retraining myself from all the negative impacts he has had on me. Learning that not everyone is a liar, learning that people do choose to stay, learning that just because he is my father doesn't mean he can get away with anything. I do agree family should be cherished, and often family should be forgiven, but I draw the line at forgiving someone just because they are family. I share the same DNA as my father, but in the words of Kenzie Ziegler "hate that you're half of me."

The last line of the song. At that moment after the song came to an end for the first time, I looked over at Lexi, tears still flowing from my eyes. I went to speak, but the words wouldn't leave my mouth. I felt empty and full all at once. A celebrity I look up to has gone through something that so closely mirrors my life, I was seen. On the other hand, all wounds that I thought had developed into nice scars were now ripped back open, fresh, and bleeding once again. I felt Lexi's eyes as I continued down the road, she knew how I was feeling. As the only person I have opened up to about my father in detail, she's become skilled in recognizing what presses at those wounds he left on me. Lexi paused the music, met my eyes, and opened her mouth. I cut her off, "holy shit." Lexi let out a slight laugh, "maybe I shouldn't have shown you that."

Notes

¹ Kenzie Ziegler, "Anatomy," Hollywood Records Inc., 2023.

About the authors

Carolyn Albright (she/her): Carolyn Albright is from Pelham, New York. She is a freshman and is on the riding team at Skidmore.

Adam Berger (he/him): Adam Berger comes from Stonington, in the Eastern part of Connecticut. He is passionate about movies and watches them far too much (his favorite movie is *Lawrence of Arabia*, if you were curious). He also loves trying new foods, board games, and reading about history.

Lily Brooks (she/her): Lily Brooks is from Cape Cod, Massachusetts. In her free time, she enjoys watching *Criminal Minds* (2005-), playing soccer with her friends, and listening to music. An NFL football player once complimented Lily's name.

Amanda Denney (she/her): Amanda Denney is a sophomore and an intended Theater major with an Anthropology minor. She is also a founder and music director of Off-North Broadway, Skidmore's musical theater club. She is from Marlborough, Massachusetts. In her free time, Amanda writes, draws, and spends too much time going through her chaotic notes app.

Liam Drehkoff (he/him): Liam is from Evanston, Illinois. In his free time, he enjoys playing sports, photography, and skiing. Liam once used to play the saxophone, and yes, could play “Careless Whisper.”

Jack Fink (he/him) Jack is from Portland, Maine. Jack likes soccer, basketball, spending time with friends and family, and animals. Jack likes Spiderman.

Emerson Fraser (she/her): Emerson Fraser is from Mashpee, Massachusetts, a town on Cape Cod. She can be found outside at most times, even in the coldest weather, and loves to write poetry, listen to music, and spends most weekends hiking. Emerson's biggest talent is performing *Just Dance 4* dances.

Ben Galligan (he/him): Ben Galligan is from Wellesley, Massachusetts. In his free time, he enjoys going to the gym, playing the guitar, and watching the Boston Red Sox. Ben has never travelled outside North America.

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Sam Kleid (he/him): Sam Kleid is from New York City and lives in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. In his free time, Sam enjoys playing basketball, rock climbing, thrifting, going to concerts, and spending time with friends. Sam loves listening to music and discovering new songs, so he's excited to share his passion for music in this collection.

Finn Krol-García (he/him): Finn Krol-García is from Burbank, California. Finn is a mixed-race actor, athlete, artist, and writer. As a writer, Finn has written various pieces over the years, including but not limited to two novels (in revisions), a play, and a picture book. Finn has one published poem called "Queer Sex is Weird" and generally works to live a life he's proud of!

Morgan O'Halloran (they/them): Morgan O'Halloran is allegedly from the Upper West Side of Manhattan. In their free time, they enjoy drawing, playing games, and not committing crimes. Morgan has a twin named Quinn who is lost somewhere in the cornfields of Ohio.

Keya Shah (she/her): Keya Shah is from Mumbai, India. In her downtime (if she gets any), Keya can either be found buried in a book or a K-drama. Keya has a tattoo of a cat stretching on a book on her forearm.

Kit Simpson (they/he): Kit Simpson is from Lanesborough, Massachusetts. In their free time, they enjoy crocheting, reading, and rewatching *Much Ado About Nothing* (2011) starring David Tennant and Catherine Tate. Kit has never been stung by a bee, but he has been stung by a wasp.

Elliott Zajac (he/him): Elliott is from Toledo, Ohio. He spends his free time going on walks in nature, listening to music, and reading books, web comics, or serials. Elliott always goes up and down stairs as fast as he can.