Christopher Cappello

EDITOR'S NOTE

If Wordsworth was right when he said that a poet is a man talking to men, then what does that make a musician? When I was in high school I used to look in the mirror and pretend that my hair was longer so that I would look more like Conor Oberst. Now my hair is longer, but he hasn't made a great record since 2005. I had a friend who liked Bright Eyes as much as I did, but then he got ambivalent, and then I got ambivalent, and I haven't seen him since he went to college. Maybe in growing up, we both needed to abandon the sad-eyed, raggedy-voiced songwriter who brooded, cigarette in hand, at the nexus of our friendship. Maybe in doing that, we needed to abandon each other.

We asked our writers to muse on Identity for this issue. I was expecting a lot about ex-significant others. We got some of that, and I take a share of the blame. Throughout this whole process, I couldn't help but think about *High Fidelity*, both the 1995 Nick Hornby original and the 2000 film adaptation. *High Fidelity* spends a lot of time sifting through the muck of human relationships as well, but ultimately, it's about the relation between music and identity. The best moment—again, of both the movie and the novel—comes when protagonist Rob Gordon (née Fleming) breaks the fourth wall to examine how his music obsession has contributed to the vague, curmudgeonly, record store-owning entity that he calls himself.

"What came first, the music or the misery?" he asks. "People worry about kids playing with guns, or watching violent videos, that some sort of culture of violence will take them over. Nobody worries about kids listening to thousands, literally thousands of songs about heartbreak, rejection, pain, misery and loss. Did I listen to pop music because I was miserable? Or was I miserable because I listened to pop music?"

In 2005, the soporific mallcore all-stars Fall Out Boy would appropriate these lines in the chorus of their obviously titled song "The Music Or The Misery." Readers of Plato's *Republic* might recall, similarly, that sad songs are among the first cultural artifacts banned by Socrates and Glaucon in the Utopian city that they envision. Clearly, we all have skeletons in our closet. This issue, the RDBNPNG staff is letting them all out, not necessarily that they might be properly buried, but rather because we're all either crazy or shameless enough to put them on display. Enjoy the spectacle, you voyeuristic fucks.

Dan Friedman

KICKING MY BUCKET HAT

In the fall of 2013, I dusted off my proverbial bucket hat and rolled over to Toad's Place to see Ab-Soul perform. I was stoked as all hell. I'd been hooked on Ab-Soul since I first heard him rant about Obama's puppet masters on *Control System* two years prior, and, to my deep regret, I missed his last performance at the storied New Haven venue. This concert was like an answered prayer—salvation from on high. Plus, it was a chance to finally meet my *people*, people who, like me, got a kick out of nutty, DMT-inspired conspiracy theories and couplets such as, "Got the baddest hoes, burn the finest kush/That means I'm a botanist-slash-gynecologist." An Ab-Soul concert: that was where I really belonged, or so I thought. I walked into Toad's to find communion in the smoke clouds, incense at the altar of weed rap's high priest.

I soon learned that I was wrong. Maybe it was my old man cardigan, or the awkward—but still passionate!—two-step I did while the opening act EarthGang played their hit song "The F Bomb." Or maybe it was because I don't actually *own* a bucket hat—not even a TDE snapback—but was in fact bareheaded, like a heathen, in that hallowed place. Whatever the reason, within five minutes of my arrival, a heavyset kid sloshed beer on my shoes, and, eyeing me up and down with squinted eyes, intoned in a drunken voice a knowing observation: "You go to *Yale*, don't you?" Having made his judgment, he threw his cup on the ground and, after shoving a nearby bystander, returned to the bar for another drink.

"I don't give a fuck who give a fuck about us!" shouted EarthGang from the stage. I nodded along, but I couldn't shake the feeling that, despite my best intentions, I was giving a low-grade but not insignificant fuck. All I wanted was to have some fun, just as Ab-Soul had advised me to in his new song, "Just Have Fun," and also to feel the blessed warmth of belonging… and perhaps get my pineal gland decalcified by Soulo's subtle, transcendent lyrics. Then this drunk guy came along, this self-appointed arbiter of group identity, and called me out on my game: I was an interloper, and the fact that I knew all the words to "Druggys wit Hoes" didn't change things. Neither did the fact that I also knew all the words to "Druggys wit Hoes, Again." I felt my dreams of fellowship slowly deflating. On top of all that, I had beer on my shoes.

It is the nature of an Ab-Soul concert that as the night progresses, and you continue to breathe the shared air, your self-pitying fears about place and belonging tend to thin, then dissipate, like wisps of sweet smoke from a slow-burning Swisher. You stop thinking about yourself for a minute to look around and listen. The DJ's klaxons pummel your ears, Ab-Soul comes out, and people jump up and down doing the arm-pumping motion that one does at these events. You pump your arm a little, too. The heavyset kid who's maybe had too much to drink is calm now, no longer belligerent. Somehow he has made his way up to the stage, and he stands, inexplicably, no more than ten feet from the Idol, with his arms crossed tightly and his eyes gazing sagely over the crowd. He is the cleric of this strange, smoky revelry, and he'll come to you after the show and put a hand on your shoulder. "In my book," he'll say, "if you come to Toad's, you're alright. It doesn't matter who you are outside. You're here—in my book, you're alright." He'll shout, because your ears are ringing. They will continue to ring for days.

2

Charlie Bardey

FINDING MYSELF IN MY TOP 25 MOST PLAYED

It's time for me to come clean: I like a lot of uncool music. You wouldn't know it from the songs I choose to share with the world whenever I have access to a speaker, in those crucial moments in which my public identity as a music consumer is crafted and judged, but the truth lies in my iTunes play counts. One glance at the list of my most played tracks reveals my true musical self—my unvarnished tastes and preferences laid out unambiguously in rows of objective data.

To my credit, there are a number of songs and artists that I would proudly play for others—LCD Soundsystem, tUnE-yArDs, and Dirty Projectors, to name a handful. You would also see a lot of songs that, while popular, are nevertheless culturally designated as "okay" to like. This appreciation comes either with a shade of irony (i.e. certain selections of mid-2000's pop and hip-hop that people claim to "love") or, somehow without (as in the case of Beyoncé, the only popular artist who manages to evade both denigration and ironic appropriation).

The "Top 25 Most Played" playlist, unfortunately, paints a somewhat grimmer picture of my tastes. Glee Cast? Really? And their cover of Taylor Swift's "Mine," no less? For shame. And have I really listened to "Good Morning Baltimore" from *Hairspray* 86 times? (Answer: no, probably more, because it's also my alarm in the morning.)

Let me be clear: I truly believe that, although they can be embarrassing in certain settings, these songs often have as much musical value as those of any artist that I would publicly avow. The Glee version of Taylor Swift's "Mine," for instance, is incredible. Naya Rivera's voice is powerful and emotive, and the song itself is at once specific enough to feel truthful, but relatable enough for it to soundtrack my afternoon cry. In truth, many of my favorite songs are those that I would not normally admit to liking in public. I genuinely don't know if there is a more beautiful song than "The Rose," by Bette Midler, but I would much sooner be heard praising some Sylvan Esso track that will probably be remembered this time next year as just one of many slightly better than average electro-pop jams. Coolness is ever-evolving: with few exceptions, songs rarely stay cool for more than a few years. Equating coolness with quality essentially limits the music that we play and share to whatever Pitchfork has given "Best New Music" in a given month. Even songs that are widely considered bad can be great in certain contexts. "Good Morning Baltimore" from *Hairspray* is cheesy, cliché, and derivative, but lord knows I belt it when doing 2AM laundry.[1]

Fortunately, we have a tool that allows us to express public appreciation for *some* "uncool" songs. Contemporary youths still love mid-decade pop (literally how could you not?); we just do so with a now with a dash of irony—you don't really like the songs, you just like the idea of liking the songs, or at least you act that way, assuming an ironic, meta-musical stance. After all, it's not like you *actually* think "Get Busy" and "Toxic" are amazing songs, but it can be vaguely humorous to act like they are. However, ironic appreciation is a poor substitute for genuine emotional expression, and a lot of good songs cannot even be made cool by irony. Irony is fickle, and the rules that govern it are as complicated and nebulous as the rules for coolness. We can do better.

While I'm certainly not going to be able to change the way we as a culture consider "coolness" in a broad sense, I encourage you to start on a personal level—to accept what you like, and who you really are. Maybe you're a big Kings of Leon fan, and hey, that's okay. You don't have to tell anyone, but you also don't necessarily have to rebrand yourself completely. Look at your iTunes, or at your Spotify, or at your YouTube recommendations, and let the playcounts guide you.

1 For the record, there is only one song that is unarguably, universally horrible: "I Gotta Feeling."

Christopher Cappello

HEARTACHE INTO GOLD

A Seven-Year Soundtrack

In the 1987 underground hit "Alex Chilton" by the Replacements, a 27-year old Paul Westerberg pays homage to his idol, the former Big Star singer from whom the song takes its name. "I never travel far without a little Big Star," Westerberg sings with a wink. The song is an explicit acknowledgement of an influence that 'Mats fans had long suspected, an early moment in the indie rock tradition in which the legacy of a past group is formally acknowledged. Five years later, a 41-year old Jonathan Richman released "Velvet Underground," a similar tribute acknowledging the underground New York group's influence on his own band, the Modern Lovers. The influence of Big Star and the Velvet Underground on these two artists' respective bands is not surprising, but it is telling. When each group dropped their first record, in 1972 and 1967 respectively, Westerberg and Richman were 13 and 16. Here, in the tumultuous throes of adolescence, each of these musicians discovered the artist with which he would identify the most throughout life. This phenomenon is not limited to influential indie rockers; rather, I think that many people find the music that matters most to them during this formative period. After all, these are the years in which people are at their most impressionable, most vulnerable—when the disparate elements of a personality start to coalesce. Look back on your listening habits and ask yourself: what was the soundtrack to your narrative of maturation, to your own personal bildungsroman?

For me, it started with a funeral. It's 2007, I'm twelve years old, sitting in the back of my mother's Saab. We're driving north on I-95 and my sister is in the backseat next to me and my parents are in the front. My grandmother has died, and I'm confronting mortality for the first time—timidly, tenuously, as you might

expect from a twelve-year-old. I'm vaguely aware of the implication that this incident has for my own future, of the transience of life, but the visceral impact of this realization eludes me. We're returning home from the funeral, which I can barely remember now, but I remember this car ride with clarity. The skies are overcast and it's raining and the sun has nearly set. We're maybe an hour into a six-hour drive to Connecticut and the car feels burthened with an uncomfortable silence, a funereal sense of gravity. In retrospect, I imagine that my parents felt pressured to speak with their children about the meaning of death, to comfort us with vague Catholic platitudes and tighten up our still-nascent mortal coils. They probably tried to talk to us in this way, but I can't remember anything specific.

What I do remember is my father gesturing to my mom to open up the black booklet of CDs that we kept in the side pocket of the passenger's door. She flips through the discs, past X and U2 and Elvis Costello, and settles on a yellow CD with black text, which she removes from its plastic jacket and inserts into the player. Roused from my mid-roadtrip lethargy, I watch this ritual attentively. My parents have always played music in the car, but I haven't heard this album before. Eventually I will learn that it's called *Automatic For The People* by R.E.M., that it's sold 18 million copies since its release in 1992, that its soporific single "Everybody Hurts" has been overplayed to the point of parody. For the next 49 minutes, however, I don't have to consider anything beyond the music itself. We listen to the CD in reverent silence, seeking validation for our collective confusion and fragility in each reverberant strum and stirringly plainspoken lyric. The faint organ pulses of "Find the River" fade out; Mike Mills and Michael Stipe send forth one final wordless harmony into the empyrean. Hurt, but still striving. Lost, but still searching. My mother cues up track one again and the album plays on repeat as we drive forth into the encroaching night.

Now it's 2010. I'm fifteen years old, a year or two removed from the inevitable "classic rock phase," a misguided, post-*Dazed and Confused* rite of passage for any millennial tween boy. I'm starting to get a sense of what it means to follow music deliberately, posting on forums and seeking out self-branded "independent" blogs. I attempt to morally justify the use of file sharing sites such as Mediafire and Megaupload, and my adolescent conscience eventually relents. Animal Collective's *Merriweather Post Pavilion* leaks in late 2008 and I watch, for the first time, the grand spectacle of the online hype cycle. For weeks, it's all my friends and I can talk about. I listen to it dozens of times, but most of its appeal comes from the communal, ritualistic nature of my experience with it. It takes something more insular and personal to shock me like R.E.M. did on that night in 2007, and it arrives in June of 2010.

The story is a familiar one: Girl expresses interest in a certain band, childish teenage boy imagines that he can transmute this into interest for *him* if he devours their records and subsumes everything appealing about them into his own essence. A New Jersey punk rock group called Titus Andronicus is playing a show next month in New Haven and I need to familiarize myself with them, fast. A text message tells me that she will be there, so I need to be there too, affirming my status as a devoted fan, indicating to her that we share those precious "mutual interests" on which teenage relationships are so precariously built. I load the group's two full-length albums onto my iPod Classic that night and cue them up on my fifteen-minute walk to school the next morning. *The Airing Of Grievances* plays first. It lives up to its title.

Why do you do the things you've done
And how dumb would you have to be
To do them again like I know you're going to?

Fear and Loathing in New Haven, CT. Patrick Stickles is singing to himself, or to a soon-to-be ex-girlfriend, but really, like all great singers at the moment in which a listener discovers them, he's singing to *me*. And he's right to call me out! Me—a fifteen year old boy, walking to my bougie Connecticut preparatory school, listening to his band as the first move in my latest teenage fantasy. Even if it something were to happen between the two of us, I know that my interest would fade and slip away, or we would flare out in a messy, destructive breakup. I imagine this experience and consider its likelihood while Stickles' guitar tacks its way through the tape-hiss haze. "Fuck you!" he shouts, buttressed by a beer-drunk choirs of friends. They're five or six years my senior at the point of the album's recording, and they know what's up with respect to adolescent egotism and its myriad ills. It would take me another few years to apply these lessons to my own life, but I loved this record from the moment I heard it. In July, I go to the show and scream my lungs out for maybe an hour and a half. The girl never shows up, and I haven't seen her since.

The next year, an Amtrak train rolls in to the station in Providence, Rhode Island. My long-distance girlfriend picks me up in her mother's car and we drive around the city. Neither of us is speaking much, but there is comfort in this silence—the placid bliss of reunion. I'm sixteen years old and I'm the closest that I've ever been to love. I can feel it on the threshold, little *Amor* darting around the doorframe of my experience, waiting to be welcomed indoors. We stop in a record store in Warren, a Providence suburb, and I buy her *You Forgot It In People* by Broken Social Scene. She buys me *Let It Be* by the Replacements, which will become my favorite album ever. The record store clerk notes that *Let It Be* was only pressed on vinyl once, in 1984, and that copies of it are hard to come by these days, especially in such good condition. I consider it a providential sign that our relationship is going well. We listen to *Let It Be* on my iPod and make out in her car, because her parents are home and wouldn't be comfortable with us holing up together in her bedroom, where she keeps her turntable. "Look me in the eye and tell me that I'm satisfied," says Paul Westerberg. We're bad at this, but we're trying to make it work.

In two months, she will end the relationship in a Skype call on the day of my aunt's funeral. It still sting to admit that. She'll tell me that I look nice in my black suit. I'll tell her that I love her for the first time (at this point, there's nothing to lose), and then she'll hang up. I'll send a few pathetic text messages throughout the next few days, but I'll never hear from her again. "Your age

is the hardest age," Westerberg reminds me on "Sixteen Blue." Even now, three years removed from that age, I can't spin the record without thinking of her. The wounds have healed, the feelings have dispersed, but the memories remain entrenched, unshakable. *"Everything drags and drags."*

In the subsequent three years, I wrestle with my identity in numerous ways. I feel as though I'm traveling directionless on a ship unmoored, like Coleridge's mariner, alternately blaming myself and blaming the world for my various uncertainties and problems. Here, in this foreboding darkness on the threshold of adulthood, music is a singular source of constancy and guidance. In Barcelona in 2012, Jens Lekman suggests that I trade romantic malaise for apocalyptic terror, on "The End Of The World Is Bigger Than Love." I comply willingly, though temporarily. That same year, Waxahatchee's "Bathtub" shocks me out of my longstanding fear of commitment and makes me pine for romantic stability. In the summer of 2013, as an 18-year old, I sit in the backseat of an ex's car while she and her boyfriend drive home from a weekend trip. Phosphorescent's "Down To Go" lilts softly over the surround sound speakers; the delicate piano flickers and lyrical pedal steel sooth the cracks in my embattled soul, and I fall into an untroubled sleep. "You'll spin your heartache into gold," Matt Houck assures me. "I suppose."

Psychologically, this period of life is can be characterized by a vague, general 'difficulty' and the regrettable sting of naiveté. We have a tendency as humans, or maybe just as Americans, to believe in a narrative of self-improvement, especially in these adolescent years—to think that whichever version of our self exists in the present is superior to that of the past. Perhaps this is a healthy outlook in the moment, but once one starts to apply it over multiple stages of development, you begin to see the fallacy. And yet, each new phase does at least offer the *hope* of a stable plateau—not necessarily a life of ease, but at least the will to withstand hardship and continue to strive. Throughout the past seven years, and particularly in the past four, the music that has collated in my mind and on my record shelf has helped me approach this goal. Although some of the albums I love have threatened to lead me into a downward spiral of imagined commiseration throughout the years, music has, by and large, been a source of comfort and a powerful instigator of reflection in my life. We change over time, but the records that we love remain the same, entrenched in our experience. To go back and re-listen to the soundtrack of our lives can remind us of who we once were, and, perhaps, offer guidance as to where we might go from here.

Nick Henriquez

APOLLO IN FURS

Constructing a Canon of BDSM Music

0. Foreplay

People fuck to music—it's the only type of art people fuck to. People might fuck with a movie or TV on, letting a little sitcom static bubble up mid-coitus, but people don't fuck *to* TV. People fuck *to* music. We learned how from movies and porn. And music.

Ever since R&B, or rock'n'roll, or jazz, or the blues, music has been sex. Or rather, music has been how we talk about sex, popularly; how we approximate sex, with dance; how we know what sexy is and does and sounds like; when it's gone and when JT has brought it back. We don't hear about President Obama's sex life on the news, but he did do a few bars of Al Green, and we all know what that means.

And music about sex was edgy, for a long time. "Tutti Frutti," "Lola," even George Michael's "I Want Your Sex"—all banned from the radio at one point or another. But after the protest songs of the 60s had dried up and all songs were about sex, more or less, it took a pair of handcuffs and a riding crop to get the attention of pop music—but it happened. And a canon of kinky songs emerged, from the late 60s on, songs that testified to and embodied the most widespread 'deviant' sexual behavior in America.

1. Dom/Sub Debuts: "Under My Thumb" / "Venus In Furs"

It could be that the Rolling Stones were one of the first with 1966's "Under My Thumb," from *Aftermath*. It's there lyrically, more or less, depending on how much you can tune out some of the more misogynistic overtones—"under my thumb / the girl who once pushed me around / it's down to me / the difference in the clothes she wears," or "under my thumb / a Siamese cat of a girl / under my thumb / she's the sweetest pet in the world"—but the music is about as blue-eyed blues as it comes, save the two polar-opposite additions of Brian Jones' marimba and Bill Wyman's fuzz bass. A little less marimba and anti-feminism, a little more fuzz bass and consensual kink, and "Under My Thumb" could have been remembered for feisty sexual politics instead of being the song Meredith Hunter was stabbed during at Altamont.

As it is, though, BDSM is about nothing so much as commitment, and the Stones' halfling of a kink song doesn't cut it. Instead, let's give the starting pistol to the Velvet Underground, named after a pulp exposé of deviant sexual practices in the 1960s—partially because they had already written a song about kink, "Venus In Furs." Like how early queer experimental filmmakers like Markopoulos, Maas, Anger, and Brakhage, particularly) attempted to legitimize their sexual desires through links to older European traditions, the Velvets took inspiration from the Leopold von Sacher-Masoch novel of the same title. And, again like some queer avant-garde film (Rice's *Chumlum*, Menken's *Arabesque*) there's much of the exotic in "Venus in Furs"—Cale's viola drone feels less like La Monte Young's piano than a tanapura, and Lou Reed's chanted vocals about "shiny boots of leather," "ermine furs," and a "whiplash girlchild in the dark" are nothing short of hypnagogic fetish dreams. VU made bondage enchanting, mystical, and otherworldly.

2. Puppy's First Collar: "I Wanna Be Your Dog"

After Cale left the Velvet Underground after the friction and sparks of *White Light/White Heat*, he started doing production work, mostly for Nico, but also for a wild garage group from Ann

Arbor, MI—the Stooges. Cale's drone soaks into the third track on their 1969 self-titled debut, "We Will Fall," but it's track two that's a paean to domination worthy of Severin himself. The scorched-earth guitar that opens the track (somehow even more frizzled in Cale's original mix of the song) gives birth to the rawest incarnation of punk: three crunchy chords and a driving beat. Far from the Howlin' Wolf impression Iggy Pop would perfect on *Fun House*, on "I Wanna Be Your Dog," his voice his the static inflection of total determination: "now I'm ready to close my eyes / now I'm ready to close my mind / [...] and now I wanna be your dog." (Though if you want to imagine a *Fun House*-era "Dog," Kim's guttural screams on the Sonic Youth cover are about as close as you can get). Forget all the punk rock kids who would later start wearing leather collars the same way the Sex Pistols stole Richard Hell's ripped jeans—when Iggy says he wants to be your dog, he means it.

3. Harder, Darker, Slower, Stronger: "Discipline" and *Filth*

From there it only got darker, louder, and meaner. Domination play gave way to full-on sadomasochism, and music not only about the pleasure of pain, but operating as such—predicated on the visceral pleasure of anything loud and harsh enough to actually hurt.

Throbbing Gristle made it hurt. Brutal synths and drum machines and maybe even some real instruments distorted and cranked enough to coax a drop of blood from your ear canal, leaving it cradled in your concha. Live shows with slideshows of hardcore porn and graphic torture. Not to mention Genesis P-Orridge in combat fatigues screaming "we need some discipline here." Listen to either live version of "Discipline" appended to most reissues of 1979's *20 Jazz Funk Greats* and try to imagine anything more terrifying.

Swans are like a cockroach after a nuclear winter. No Wave survived the death of punk and Swans survived No Wave, pretty much the only associated band to make it into the 80s. Early Swans is juggernaut music, one chord and a handful of lyrics turned into a slow but unstoppable momentum. It's pure sadomasochism, without any campy accessories; Michael Gira's dark monotone spits out commands over the distorted churn: "gag him and screw him down," "use your body to get satisfaction / satisfy the dog," "I'm under the bed, I'm licking the floor," "take control and keep it." In sum—"power for power's sake."

4. Synths and Chains: "Sweet Dreams (Are Made Of This)" and "Master And Servant"

Perhaps due to the lineage of industrial music, it was 80s British synthpop groups that first brought kink to pop. Annie Lennox and David Stewart, the Eurythmics, got there first and biggest in 1983 with "Sweet Dreams"—and Lennox's smirk while she taps a black rod against her gloved hand testifies to who "wants to use you" and who "wants to get used by you."

Depeche Mode followed suit (also adopting a sort of business-fetish look in their video, albeit with a bit more leather) the next year, with "Master and Servant," which was about as subtle as it sounds and very nearly got banned by the BBC. The track is rather over-the-top, especially the synthesized whip sounds and Gahan's cheeky delivery of Gore's equally smart-alecky lyrics: "Domination's the name of the game / in bed or in life." Still, it was enough to put BDSM on the charts, and establish the convention of using bondage to spice up an otherwise saccharine pop career.

5. 50 Shades and Number 1s: Dominant Divas

"Master And Servant" peaked at only #87 on the Billboard Hot 100, but that synth line would have its day, sampled and recontextualized into Rihanna's 2011 #1 hit "S&M." Along with the video, full of ball gags and latex, Rihanna ushered in the era of full-on kink-pop. There had been hints—Nine Inch Nails' "Closer," Britney's "I'm A Slave 4 U," Christina Aguilera's "Not Myself Tonight," pretty much all Lady Gaga videos—but Rihanna brought whips and chains to the very top of the charts and public consciousness. She gave an interview to *Rolling Stone* that more-or-less explicitly confessed a predilection towards masochistic tendencies in the bedroom, a fact that became sensationalized further when she withdrew her restraining order against notoriously abusive boyfriend Chris Brown. Through the lyrics of S&M were certainly more empowered, Rihanna found herself similarly caught between consensual kink play and abusive behavior that makes "Under My Thumb" off-putting.

Fortunately, though, the future of kink-pop doesn't end with Rihanna. At the end of 2014, Nicki Minaj released the music video for "Only," full of kink imagery (and a vast improvement over the Nazi imagery of the song's lyric video). Earlier in the year, a slowed-down remix of Beyoncé's "Crazy In Love" was used to soundtrack the trailer for the film adaptation of E.L. James' *50 Shades of Grey*, perhaps kink's biggest moment in the limelight yet.

6. Post-coital

There's more kink in music than ever before, and it could be in danger of losing its bite. Travelling through the underground from art-rock to punk and industrial and surfacing in pop has tarnished the leather, loosened the collars and cuffs, and eased the whip along the way. It's become easier than ever to pull on thigh-high boots in the music video for an otherwise vanilla pop track—so the edge of BDSM music lies, as ever, in the sound.

Outside of pop, BDSM-fueled music is still exploring dark and sensual soundscapes. Wax Idols, an LA-area band fronted by a professional dominatrix, play reverb-drenched but austere gothy post-punk; noisy techno projects like Vessel craft house beats for dungeons; and ever since the Weeknd showed up, some subsets R&B has been getting more and more interested in leather and studs, as well as industrial clangs and fuzz.

There's a pleasure in the dark and sometimes painful—and if sex is music, adventurous sex should have a similarly adventurous soundtrack. As long as there are whips, chains, guitars, and synths, there will always be kinky people—and, with any luck, kinky music as well.

7. Playlist

01 "Under My Thumb" Rolling Stones
02 "Venus In Furs" Velvet Underground
03 "I Wanna Be Your Dog" Stooges
04 "Discipline" Throbbing Gristle
05 *Filth* Swans
06 "Sweet Dreams (Are Made of This)" Eurythmics
07 "Master and Servant" Depeche Mode
08 "Closer" Nine Inch Nails
09 "I'm A Slave 4 U" Britney Spears
10 "Not Myself Tonight" Christina Aguilera
11 "S&M" Rihanna
12 "The Scent of Love" Wax Idols
13 "Red Sex" Vessel
14 "Crazy In Love (Remix)" Beyoncé

Stefanie Fernandez

HORRIBLE MUSIC AT THE TRACE ITALIAN

On Darnielle's Wolf in White Van

I saw animal skins running down the cave floor, skull dust rising. Everyone in my orbit would have a terrible day: the arbiter of days had decreed it. From my increasingly improbable perch I looked toward the dark heavens somewhere up beyond the imagined cave ceiling, and I pantomimed the aspect of a man thinking hard about what he might want to eat. And then I looked back down to the present moment and I spoke; "I am King Conan," I said. "I thirst for blood."

In the opening pages of John Darnielle's 2014 novel *Wolf in White Van*, readers are immediately entrenched in a dusky psychological landscape that reeks of the aftermath of an unnamed trauma. What is it about trauma that hollows out spaces within us for relevant media to fill? This is the question that *Wolf in White Van* seeks to answer from the perspective of its disfigured protagonist, Sean Phillips. The survivor of a tragic "accident" (whose nature is not revealed until the end of the book), Sean imagines worlds in the various arenas of his quiet, post-traumatic life; particularly in world of the play-by-mail role-playing game he has designated as his work: *Trace Italian*. The game is a choose-your-own-adventure of sorts that has players search a disease-addled and post-apocalyptic America for the safety of the rumored fortress at its center, the Trace Italian. Those who search for the Trace must be consumed by the necessity of their survival. The novel weaves in and out of the gameplay, blurring the lines of reality as Sean and several others find solace, albeit at a cost, in the imagined world of the Trace.

Darnielle himself is no stranger to the storytelling of imagined worlds. Darnielle's previous book *Master of Reality*, a semi-critical, semi-fictional entry in the 33 1/3 series on classic albums, examines the desperate struggle of teenage Roger Painter, unwittingly committed the psych ward, to retrieve the tapes the nurses took from him, especially the Black Sabbath album that is the book's namesake. Darnielle's best-loved stories, however, stem from his work as the heart of indie folk act The Mountain Goats. The Mountain Goats' discography consists of volumes upon volumes of desperate characters, including the mutually abusive, codependent alpha couple around which 2002's *Tallahassee* centers and the quiet residents of the same year's *All Hail West Texas*. On albums like 2004's *We Shall All Be Healed* and 2005's *The Sunset Tree*, Darnielle also writes extensively on the subject of his own lived trauma, namely his descent into hard drug addiction in his teenage years and child abuse at the hands of his stepfather, respectively.

1966
1967
1969
1979
1983
1983
1984
1991
2001
2010
2011
2013
2014
2015

The characters within these albums are intensely human. In "The Best Ever Death Metal Band in Denton," for example, best friends Jeff and Cyrus rail against the world that dared separate them from their greatest joy—incidentally, music:

When you punish a person for dreaming his dream, don't expect him to thank or forgive you
The best ever death metal band out of Denton will in time both outpace and outlive you! Hail Satan!

The song has since become a favorite at live shows, and "Hail Satan!" has gone down in Mountain Goats fandom lore as the most cathartic lyric ever written for yelling at the top of your lungs at crowded concerts. These stories, fictional or not, teach of the hard-earned joy of survival, the prospect of worse things to come, and the transformative power of the dark spaces in between.

The goal of Sean, Roger, the alpha couple—and ours, too—is to fill these dark spaces of absence with meaning; to discern our reflections in the encoded messages of the world around us; and of course, in music. Sean adopts the horrible, distorted realms of fiction, comics, film, and music as the face he presents to the world—the face of his trauma—finding his mutilated reflection in the decaying wasteland that surrounds the Trace. He finds it in the Conan the Barbarian. He finds it in his tapes:

And then I played some music, old music, and it sounded awful, and I loved it, I loved it so much.

He finds it, too, in camp conspiracy. After watching a late-night religious special on Satanism, Sean finds himself fascinated by the supposed satanic messages encoded in classic rock songs, most notably the popular theory that Larry Norman's "666" played backwards mentions a "wolf in white van" (and by the way, I highly recommend YouTube-ing the clip). Sean's fascination with the encoded satanic lyric speaks to the hidden interior beast, extant but sleeping until coaxed into light by the visceral trigger—to kill it, before it kills us. The novel, too, works backwards, poring over encoded messages and flickering shadows to reach its heady revelation. The result

is a heartbreaking image of truth at the genesis of all the novel's astounding consequence.

Disfigured, broken, but alive, the identity of survivor is garish and proud in its triumph in the face of death. Like Conan seated atop the bones of his enemies, Satan before his army of brainwashed Jeffs and Cyruses, or the clan seeker at the foot of the impossible, spired Trace Italian, we wear our trauma like armor. For the sake of survival, we mine at the edge of something interior for our truth—to wake the wolf sleeping in the white van. To descend into the Trace.

Griffin Brown

OH, INVERTED GIRL

You know the opening moments of "Caring is Creepy" by The Shins? Unusual sounds: a small whistle arpeggiating, something percussive moving about (maybe a tambourine), James Mercer striding across the needle with "I think I…"—they belong to a girl, whom I'll refer to as L. I'm not sure if L likes James Mercer. I'm not even sure if she has ever listened to The Shins, let alone *Oh, Inverted World*. So how could she own them? Inadvertently. She owns my experience of that innocently melancholic collection of indie gems from 2001. Yes, when I think of L, I think of "Girl on the Wing;" during the "New Slang" scene in *Garden State*, Natalie Portman fades into L, and it is she who is sitting cross-legged in the waiting room chair with headphones on. That album was the soundtrack to my time with L, a period in which I needed something to mirror my uncertainty. It has since become a reminder of incipient desire, and it is L's, forever.

Whether it's *Oh, Inverted World* or any other album, what we consume is insolubly connected to the context of our listening. The foundational events of my life thus far—however clichéd that sounds, especially since my list isn't exhaustive or detailed—have had auditory complements. Perhaps more than any other artistic medium, recorded music has an importunate tendency to furrow deep into memories, emotions, locations, and people—just consider the effect of the Vinteuil sonata in Proust's *Swann in Love*. Yet, I cannot wax on about music's acclimation to the individual without clarifying (if only to myself) that we still have *agency* over what is later interred in our experience. So why, out of all the music ever captured, do we listen to what we do, *when we do*? Every person's explanation is different, of course; there's no axiomatic list of ideal music for every occasion. What we choose, then, is indicative of our intrinsic relation to the matter at hand. In investigating an early affair, I hope to find some portion of selfhood reflected in my musical affinity.

L was one of the first people I opened up to. We came to be through mutual friends and initially flourished. Yet, as I became more invested in this mind, I found L wanting in areas I desired; she exhibited a hesitant impenetrability akin to a lack of trust. I tried to get to her, but continually felt pushed away. There was some unassailable density central to her person, which Mercer perfectly encapsulates in his pithy writing: "Shut out, pimpled and angry / I quietly tied all my guts into knots," he proclaims on "Know Your Onion!" Disenchanted, but not quite beleaguered, I moved on to other people without completely abandoning what L represented: a step forward in my interpersonal growth. Specifically, she helped elucidate what, exactly, I was looking for in another.

I could have listened to the staples of bleak conundrum—Elliott Smith or The Microphones, perhaps—but I did not. This particular choice revealed something about the nature of the relationship and my own emotional development at the time. I had no dependence upon L of the kind that more serious, ailing romances engender, in the way that Leonard Cohen knows so well. My mental health was obviously subsisting at a reasonable level, for I did not opt to seek solace in the beautiful psychosis of Jenny Hval's music. And yet, although this infantile entanglement of hearts was light and naïve, I felt despondent nonetheless. For that, Mercer and his Shins were apt: inventively plaintive lyricism, sanguine chord progressions, and generally upbeat tempos. *Oh, Inverted World* was a confidant who underscored the levity of a situation that turned somber more frequently than it should have.

The second line of closer "The Past and Pending" was prophetic, in retrospect: "We settle down to cut ourselves apart." Our surgeon was inconspicuous; whatever existed between L and I was severed by casual negligence. No utterance of conclusion, no definitive statement against what had been—just a gradual attenuation into nothingness. In the Shins' debut, I found an analogue to my turbulence. It described where I was, and how I reacted to L's opacity. For a time, I thought as Mercer thought.

> "It pleases me this memory has swollen up with age."
> —The Shins, "Weird Divide"

Isabelle Savoie

"I'M ONLY COMFORTABLE WHEN I'M GRUNTING"

For those of us who participate in its culture (which, if you're reading this, should include you) music is a huge part of who we are. There's a song for every moment, a song for every memory, a song that we each feel describes our self in a given situation more accurately than words alone ever could. Music with which we particularly identify often makes us feel more comfortable, more understood—a sentiment best expressed by a certain Miley Cyrus when "the DJ dropped [her] favorite tune" in the 2009 single "Party In The U.S.A." Suddenly, the garish, stiletto-filled city of L.A. becomes a paradisiac bastion of joyous sound, an American Eden in which our heroine can party on in peace. She had found her new home.

This being said, I'm not sure how many of us can say that we identify with the title of this piece, which comes from a statement that Tanya Tagaq made last year during an acceptance speech at Toronto's Carlu Theatre. In her speech, the Inuit musician used the above phrase to describe the feeling of comfort and unity that she experiences when performing her distinctive music—a radical, contemporary take on traditional Inuit throat singing. On September 22nd, 2014, Tagaq won the Polaris Music Prize for best album, beating well-known Canadian artists such as Drake and Arcade Fire for the coveted title. Tanya Tagaq brought something to the forefront of the music scene with which many people were not previously familiar, and the recognition of her music has ushered in a greater global awareness of a part of Canada's culture that is often overlooked and seldom appreciated.

The Inuit peoples' relationship with the Canadian government has been one of turmoil and "has developed around a long conversation of rights recognition and struggle for voice within the Canadian political system" according to historian Sarah Bonesteel in her 2006 report *Canada's Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development*.[1] With societal struggles including but not limited to the question of citizenship status, the lack of adequate healthcare, and a sub-par education system, the Inuit community has long been trying to gain legitimacy within the framework of "western" Canadian society. With *Animism*, Tanya Tagaq brings them one step closer.

However, Tagaq's quest for the validation of the Inuit identity does not stop with the throat singing itself. Both the artist and the album have strong roots in political activism. In fact, *Animism* is dedicated to Loretta Saunders, a murdered Inuit university student from Labrador. Furthermore, Tagaq's performance at the Polaris award ceremony included a list of missing and murdered aboriginal women scrolling on a large video screen behind her, and her acceptance speech included her opinion on the seal hunt—and extremely controversial issue in Canada—namely, that "people should wear and eat seal as much as possible because if you can imagine an indigenous culture thriving and surviving on sustainable resource, wearing seal and eating it, it's delicious and there's lots of them."

Bridging the gap between throat singing and contemporary avant-garde music, Tagaq brings traditional Inuit culture into the 21st century on *Animism*. Various types of throaty sounds (including, as she puts it, "grunting") are mixed with enticing rhythms on the record, producing a shamanic sound that is sure to engage even those listeners who have never been exposed to this style of music. Previously, the fan base of Tagaq's genre could certainly be described as "niche;" however, the success of *Animism* has enabled her to share her cultural identity with many Canadians and people abroad.

Tagaq's music is entrancing, if somewhat unfamiliar to my unaccustomed ears. In the words of my suitemate, "Why are you listening to that again? Turn it off, it's so creepy!" This was my initial reaction as well, but something about this album definitely grows on you. Personally, at the risk of sounding shallow, I think it makes a pretty effective study soundtrack. Then again, if one person's study soundtrack can be representative of another's cultural identity, the musician in question has really managed to cover all her bases. More importantly, to the nearly 45,000 Inuit living in Canada, Tagaq's success is an affirmation that one of their most culturally significant art forms has been validated outside of their community—a step in the right direction in terms of their relationship with the Canadian government and Canadian society at large.

1 Bonesteel, Sarah. *Canada's Relationship with Inuit: A History of Policy and Program Development. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada*. Government of Canada, June 2006. Web. 24 Nov. 2014. <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100016900/1100100016908>.

Eugenia Zhukovsky

EARL SWEATSHIRT VS. KURT COBAIN

Exposing Identity Through the Depression Disconnect

Earl Sweatshirt and Kurt Cobain don't seem to have much in common as far as stylistic musical choice, but they do bear a critical similarity: they are both very, very, sad. In each artist's own way, Cobain and Sweatshirt have both managed to transmute this pent up emotional energy into tense, affecting songs that have permanently influenced and changed the grunge era and alternative hip-hop genre, respectively. Both artists have astounding personalities that couldn't escape the limelight if they tried, even with a plane ticket to Samoa, in Earl's case. Both are brand names: Earl plasters his face across his album covers like a display; Kurt Cobain's eyes can be seen burning through posters on every disaffected teenager's wall, and will continue to do so forever. But the most shocking similarity between these two artists is how wildly misunderstood their artistic vision has been, and how each has reacted to this.

Kurt Cobain's story isn't new. Nirvana became the biggest band of their time when Cobain himself was far too mentally fragile to cope with the pressures that come along with that. Cobain was never destined to be famous, except that he couldn't be anything else—his pain garnered the attention of a global audience, and no one could look away from what they saw: a man completely exposed, emotionally naked and totally terrified. His grasp on the definitive angst of the '90s was so complete and thorough that he became a legend of creation, simultaneously one of the most famous men in the world, and a complete and utter wreck. He scribbled a suicide note that later would be plastered on buttons on Hot Topic and that was that. And yet, there is something to be learned from Kurt Cobain's faltering and his inability to see the way in which his music was so effective. What Kurt Cobain wanted his music to be, it seems, was a reflection of himself, *the* Kurt Cobain. According to him, this isn't what he got. In some ways, that will never be what any

artist gets. But what is so crucial to understand for musical artists (and listeners) is that the emotional disconnect between the audience and the artist is exactly what will also provide the most meaningful source of connection between the two. It is paradoxical, but it cannot be unseen once it is realized: the audience listens to Kurt Cobain, the audience feels something from Kurt Cobain, and each member experiences their own personal reaction to the music based on their personality and experiences. For someone as depressed as Cobain was, it couldn't have been easy to realize that this "misunderstanding" was the great gift of his music, and that individual listener was as much of a human mind as he was himself.

But perhaps it's getting better. Earl Sweatshirt is just one of many musical artists who has been able to assume an identity as a weird, depressed individual and yet continue to make music that both audiences and critics regard as outstanding. Earl Sweatshirt started out as a provocateur, a character rapper blasting profane, absurdist lyrics not unlike his mentor Tyler, The Creator. Collectively, Odd Future is an exaggeration of a rap group, with plenty of room to be "misunderstood" by the public and still stand among history's most popular rap collectives. But what Earl Sweatshirt did, after he was misunderstood by his mother and sent to Samoa to volunteer, was come out with *Doris*: a brilliant, heartbreaking album that mixes his original blasphemous innuendos with a new twist—an emotional pang. *Doris* spills out the confessions of a young and confused rapper with all the talent in the world and only a vague sense of what to do with it—an emotional outpouring that's not easy to understand without a deep, focused listening experience. It was not the typical Earl Sweatshirt fashion to unleash a confessional regarding the estranged relationship between him and his parents, but this is exactly what he did on "Chum," a highlight of the album and its lead single.

Earl knows this. He knew that his new album wouldn't make sense to most of his bandwagon-hopping audience, and he knows that his emotional toil cannot be perfectly understood by his fans—but what distinguishes Earl from Cobain is the way in which he uses this for personal and for commercial growth. In the end, what Earl must do and does, is "brush the dirt up off [his] psyche:" to own his strange identity and accept the misunderstanding as necessity.

Daniel Kemp

METHOD ACTING

I want to hurt him
I want to give him pain
I'm a Roman Candle
My head is full of flames.
—Elliott Smith, "Roman Candle" (1994)

Elliott Smith began his career writing albums as full of personal and confessional lyrics as the lines above. However, on his 2000 LP, *Figure 8*, the personal subject matter was largely replaced with universal themes. When asked about this in an interview, Smith said, "I hope it wasn't a reactionary record on how people perceived me. It probably was though, to a certain extent." Perhaps the writer of a half-decade's worth of melancholy lyrics wanted to change his public character, and pull it closer to his private identity. When asked in the interview if he wrote *Figure 8* with the idea of dispelling the notion that every song he writes is autobiographical, Smith responds, "I probably did. I could feel myself doing it and I didn't want to."

Early in his career, Bright Eyes frontman Conor Oberst also pushed against the autobiographical nature of his songs through lyrics, albeit with less subtlety than Smith. The band's 2002 breakthrough record *Lifted, or The Story is in the Soil, Keep Your Ear to the Ground,* features back-to-back tracks that grapple with the misunderstood nature of songs that seem autobiographical. In the song "Method Acting," the then-21-year-old sings, "It's not a movie, no private screening/This method acting, well, I call it living." This idea of "method acting," the acting philosophy commonly known for how actors stay in character away from the camera or stage, is an important one for Oberst and Smith.

Subsequently, in "False Advertising," Oberst pinpoints money as a motivating factor in his onstage acting: "For a song I was bought/Now I lie when I talk with a careful eye on the cue card/Onto a stage I was pushed with my sorrow well rehearsed/So give me all your pity and your money now." Like an actor in the theatre, Oberst found the benefits of method acting profitable, but he's hardly the only musician to have done so. In his book *Who Is That Man?: In Search of the Real Bob Dylan*, David Dalton discusses Dylan's habit of "shredding and adopting" characters, calling it a "form of authentic counterfeit." Thus, the iconic folk singer was able to borrow characteristics from a range of his idols while retaining a sense authenticity.

The monetary gains of a musician's method acting is questioned, however, in Elliott Smith's "King's Crossing," off his posthumously released 2004 LP, *From a Basement on the Hill*. "This method acting that pays my bills keeps the fat man feeding in Beverly Hills," Smith sings. Here the focus is not on the fact that the musician is making a living off of his acting, but the even more disheartening notion that the anonymous music executives are profiting the most from their clients' exaggerated misery.

In addition to financial benefits, method acting can make an artist more relatable to fans. In the case of a musician acting by exaggerating his or her sorrows, this usually implies relatability to a much younger fanbase. In Tim McMahan's 2002 interview with Oberst, the singer-songwriter is hesitant about discussing his most dedicated fans: young girls. "I'm glad that they made a connection with the music and want to feel empathy, but at the same time…" According to McMahan's account, Oberst never finished the sentence and instead began to discuss the "responsibilities and expectations that come with popularity."

Method acting is well known for the great lengths that actors will go to fully understand their characters, and perhaps we should observe the public personas of our favorite musicians with that in mind. Successful musicians build careers on the fact

that millions of listeners can empathize with each song, regardless of the truth of the story or the authenticity of the emotions. The illusion of truth may matter for fans, but whether or not the acting stops when the band walks off the stage is, quite frankly, none of our business.

Shantavia Chappell

WHO IS SASHA FIERCE?

Grammy Award winner, singer, songwriter, record producer, dancer, and actress are just a few terms that describe the woman who was born Beyoncé Giselle Knowles on September 4th, 1981. Beyoncé is a household name. But, who is Sasha Fierce? Sasha Fierce is Beyoncé's alter ego. Some say that Beyoncé is a member of the Illuminati, and that she worships the devil by way of this alter ego. Others say that Sasha Fierce is harmless, nothing more than an elevated form of the singer herself. Considering these perspectives, one wonders whether Sasha Fierce is really *just* a character that she plays, or if this persona exists as an outlet for some distinct, otherwise unseen side of Beyoncé.

One can define an alter ego as a second self, an additional personality within a person. Beyoncé has admitted in several interviews that she has two personalities: one, a calm, cool, and collected type of woman, and another, manifested in Sasha Fierce, who is the complete opposite. On stage and on camera, Beyoncé assumes the latter identity. As the singer herself puts it, "Sasha Fierce is also the person who is in all my music videos; the person in the "Crazy in Love" video."

Beyoncé the human is generally shy and private, but on 2013's *Beyoncé*, Sasha definitely takes over. A sexual icon, Beyoncé becomes her alter ego as she dances seductively and adorns herself with racy clothing. Of course, Sasha Fierce also had her own self-titled album. "In November 2008, I decided to give my fans what they really wanted and what they were used to in my third album, *I am… Sasha Fierce*," Beyoncé said in an interview. "I wanted to introduce my fans to who I really am, and give them a better, deeper connection to my true feelings, my sensitivity, and my vulnerability." Up to and including this album, it seemed that the more mature Beyoncé became, the more she made use of the Sasha Fierce persona. "When I am afraid or need to be strong or a little tougher," she said, "these are the times when Sasha Fierce comes to the rescue."

Although *I Am… Sasha Fierce* was the character's formal introduction, true fans were already familiar with the persona by the time that record dropped in 2008. In fact, Sasha can be sourced back to Beyoncé's performance of "Crazy In Love" at the 2003 BET Awards. At the beginning of the performance, she raised her hands skyward and experienced a new sense of becoming. Later, she would refer to this event as Sasha Fierce's "coming out night."

However, this moment of becoming was no serendipitous occasion; rather, Beyoncé had planned it out well in advance. In her mind, an enormous banner adorned the stage with flashing lights and her name, "BEYONCÉ," displayed in huge block lettering. The dancers moved in perfect synchronization around her, as she, the definitive Diva, parted the sign in two and moved through it, beyond it. All of this had been envisioned, and all of it was perfectly realized when the night of the performance came. This itself was the essence of becoming: to visualize something and then bring it to fruition by sheer will, not to mention a significant portion of the BET's budget. The performance ended, and Sasha was in full effect.

"When people meet Beyoncé and speak with Beyoncé, they're expecting Sasha," the singer explains, perhaps inadvertently slipping into a royal third person, "Beyoncé is relatively shy, more reserved and nothing like Sasha. Beyoncé wouldn't be that entertaining on stage, so Sasha comes out and she's fearless. Sasha can do things that Beyoncé cannot do when she's in rehearsal. Beyoncé can try, but it will not happen. Sasha can sing notes, sing strong, and do all these other things that when she's by herself she cannot do."

And yet, although Sasha and Beyoncé seem like opposites, they are essentially unified by their dichotomous relationship. While Beyoncé herself can work as a sensitive, calculating, and private artist, Sasha's signature "fierceness" aligns her with a tradition of musical artists who are larger than life, daring, even magical—transcendent pop figures such as Michael Jackson and Prince. By assuming this persona, Beyoncé can stand within that Pantheon: uninhibited, freed by the ecstasy of performance, lost, but guiding a generation of adoring fans.

Last year, The Huffington Post wrote an article in which they examined Beyoncé's multivalent identity. In it, Beyoncé is quoted as saying, "I think Beyoncé is Beyoncé, Mrs. Carter is Beyoncé, Sasha Fierce is Beyoncé, and I'm finally in a place where she doesn't have to separate the two. It is all pieces of me—just elements of a personality of a woman, because women are complicated." It seems that by now, more than ten years after her epochal performance at the BET Awards, Beyoncé is ready to stand on her own, having, as the saying goes, faked it 'til she made it under the guise of Sasha Fierce. Now we wait to see what Beyoncé—under any name—is going to do next.

Olivia Klevorn

HEADPHONES

I started with a pair of white ear buds. Mostly, I made the choice out convenience. Everyone knows ear buds come complimentary with every iPod/iPhone/iProduct purchased, and I was not about to question the efficacy of an Apple product, especially one that came for free. The cheap plastic chafed against the insides of my ear canals, and when it got too cold they sometimes popped, causing me to envision a current traveling through them and immersing my cerebral cortex in dangerous waves of high voltage electricity. Still, the ear buds quickly became almost as necessary to my daily survival as the ears

they were made to fill. Soon, it was nearly impossible for me to leave my house without them. Not only did I feel unable to walk out the door without their reassuring tangles filling my pockets—I couldn't even leave the house without unless a song was already playing. Some mornings my mother would honk wildly at me from the car as I stood in the open doorway, paralyzed as I scrolled to find that one song—whichever track was the best to accompany me across the brief distance between my front door and the car that would carry me to school that day.

Every morning I carpooled to school with a group of neighbors and whichever parent was tasked with driving duty. Each adult had a unique shuttling style. One boy's father liked to present us each with a puzzle or a riddle that we were challenged to solve in the course of our fifteen-minute drive to school. One girl's mother liked to probe us about gossip, as though the adolescent dating scene at her daughter's high school were fodder for her own romantic imagination. My mother stayed silent, letting the comforting broadcasts of NPR fill the gap between the front and back seats. Regardless of who was driving, I stuck to a well-calibrated, dependable ritual that would allow me to duck through hoops of unwanted conversation without being branded with the label of teenaged rudeness. I started the commute with a cheery "Hello" and "How are you?" sometimes with a seasonal comment included for variety. After exchanging these initial pleasantries, I would plug myself into my iPod and let Morrissey blur the surroundings into the melancholy guitar riffs that I needed to steel myself for the inevitable arrival at school.

Once I took my first step onto my high school campus, the ear buds began to serve a more instrumental function. Whereas before they allowed me to design my own context by excusing me from unwanted conversation and imbuing the gray melancholy of my morning trip to school with their own emotional hues, at school they allowed me to design *myself* in the midst of an unchangeable context. There was, I reasoned, no way for me to alter the freezer-burned waffles served daily at breakfast, or to keep my Spanish teacher from rudely chastising a class full of 15-year-olds for *ever, under any circumstances,* speaking English in his classroom. These things were fixed, forced upon me by the non-negotiable, social and institutional norms that governed my typically angst-ridden teenaged existence. So, I focused on myself, even though the structural integrity of my character had not developed beyond an avid interest in Chuck Palahniuk and Winona Ryder, I considered this project of deliberate change to be a monumental achievement.

This transformation manifested itself in various ways. I dyed a small (but noticeable!) chunk of my hair pink, refused to wear any of the clothing that my mother brought me, listened to *I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning* in the dark recess of my bedroom, and started smoking cigarettes on the square of empty roof space outside my bedroom window. At school, I found myself able to engage in even the most trivial discourse only when I had something *important* to say. It wasn't that I was shy—no, I had plenty to talk about. And yet, for some reason, I found myself depending on what seemed to be previously choreographed moments of *planned* communication. I enjoyed participating in class discussions, because they were sanctioned by teacher-moderators, time limits, and predetermined topics. I didn't mind lunch, which was bound within a thirty-minute window that could be broken up with food or homework (or, for some of the more esoteric members of my high school class, a Yugi-Oh tournament or two). In these moments, I shone. I polished my best anecdotes and paraded yesterday's funniest YouTube clips, wrote extensive notes on key passages from books we were reading and passed them off as improvised genius, and counted the minimum number of comments that needed to pass between moments of participation in order for someone to come across as both smart and considerate.

I met my match in the "passing period," ten minutes of time granted to students and teachers in-between classes. In theory, "passing period" was meant to be a time when people "passed," which I held to mean the physical act of passing from one class to another. To me, walking past each other in the hallway to get from one part of the building to another didn't seem like a social activity, but to everyone else it was. Passing period became the opportunity for quick secrets to be shared and presents to be given. Prom invitations were frequently given during passing period, and sometimes groups would plan fundraisers to be held only during the time in-between classes.

It might be argued that the "passing" in "passing period" signified something beyond its transitory denotation. Perhaps on some level, people interpreted it as a period in which they could "pass the time"—a set interval within which both students and teachers were allowed the freedom to move through time and space, freed from the confines of classrooms and a lesson plans. Maybe others considered it to be a moment each day that was sanctioned for "pastimes,"—clubs and sports and such. Students often planned club meetings or posted announcements during this period, and when that didn't work out, many were still committed to getting *something* done in those fleeting minutes, even if that kernel of productivity were as small as letting the Lacrosse team know whose mom would be driving to the field that night.

Regardless of the linguistic framing, it became clear to me that "passing period" was problematic. As soon as the bell rang, students began to bound down the hallway, seemingly all at once, spilling the intricacies of their days in the quickest and simplest terms, clapping hands on backs, exchanging high fives, and waving with the spirit of D-Day sweethearts. As this chaos erupted around me, I plodded through the hallway with my head down, a pair of ear buds jammed far enough into my ears to provide me with an excuse for my silence if a teacher or classmate should attempt to solicit my attention. This behavior quickly gained me a reputation. Compounded with my penchant for dark clothing, and what has been recently termed a "resting bitch face," I gained a reputation as perhaps not the friendliest member of the Class of 2012. Instead of passing the time between classes by staring into the faces of people who offered me solace in the depths of my high school ennui, I stuck headphones in my ears and ventured into to an imagined land of stages, guitars and fast moving hips. I didn't listen to music

that could bring back memories or complement the reality that blanched my vision. Rather, I listened to songs that transported me to other times and other places—music that took me away from the monotonous conditions of my bland adolescent existence. I listened constantly, and, most imported, I listened *publically*. I wanted people to see me listening, to watch as I deliberately detached myself from what they imposed on me.

As the "girl with the headphones on," I could create a categorical place for myself in those moments when my position in both space and time was undefined. With headphones on, I could abstain from the process of social self-creation that everyone else felt obligated to participate in. Instead of sharing my interests in Nirvana and The Feelies with the cute guy whose locker was outside of my English class, I could let "Come as You Are" blast my ears and imagine what he'd think of a girl he overheard listening to Nirvana in the hallway. By refusing to communicate, I gave myself an identity that could not be questioned, because it was built by the very people who would question it—an identity constructed by everyone but me. The girl with headphones, conveniently, can neither hear what other people think nor tell them what they should. And she likes it that way—detached, immutable, invincible.

I still listen to headphones in transit. Although there are no passing periods in college, I still feel empty if I don't give my punctuated walk from building to building to dorm room some kind of soundtrack. In the morning, there is no carpool waiting to bear me to school through the bleak haze of Chicago's North side, but I still struggle to move my feet from threshold to bike pedal without an exterior rhythm to push me forward. Admittedly, though, some things have changed. I look forward to waving and smiling, and acknowledging the existence of the few familiar faces I see on campus. Like in high school, people who know me still comment on my attachment to my headphones. Complaints like "I yelled your name seven times, and you still didn't see me," are leveled on a regular basis. But my world is too big for these things to matter anymore. Unlike in the cloistered halls of my high school, there are probably dozens of headphone-wearing individuals walking around this campus at any given moment—more, if you include people at the gym.) At Yale, most people who see their fellow students walking around like this probably don't reduce their headphone-clad classmates to their conspicuous practices of music consumption. Perhaps this is because we operate in an Ivy League environment, where a certain degree of sophistication is assumed of the entire population, but perhaps it's because we recognize the responsibility of the person *wearing* the headphones to determine how much they mean. Today, I like to listen to music when I walk, ride, run, slide, scooter, fly or type from page to page. It's not because I'm afraid of what it means to be on the threshold, nor does it mean that I'm afraid of change. Although you might need to speak up a little when trying to get my attention, I'm not trying to let the silence of listening substitute for speech. Ultimately, in this world over which we each have so little individual influence, it's simply nice to control the soundtrack for a while.

Isabelle Rossi de Leon

JUST BE ONE

I have an awful habit of shuffling 10,000 songs and expecting the right one to appear. I'm not really seeking a particular track, artist, or even genre. I'm trying to incite a mood. More than that, I'm looking for a story. Every song has its own imaginative accompaniment, a unique scene or story that each creates in my mind. They unfold whether I want them to or not, though I can sometimes twist the plot. I wouldn't call them fantasies, since not every story ends well for the heroine. I'm not sure what they are at all.

I've associated music with these internal storylines for as long as I can remember. To my mind, every one of my favorite songs is deeply personal, regardless of the song's objective content. I subconsciously craft the narrative for my soundtrack, pulling memories, fears, and hopes from the dustiest corners of my mind. My love of music stems from this inexplicable, uncontrollable connection. To me, listening to music is a lot like dreaming. It lets the positive elements of my identity—my creativity, motivation, and confidence—overcome the elements that hold me back: my stubbornness, lack of emotional control, and veiled insecurity. The dream-like experiences allow me to evolve. Although my fictional personas fail on occasion, I subconsciously romanticize their suffering. They react flawlessly, the way I wish I could.

I imagine that I started singing to give myself some sense of control over music. Replication wasn't enough, though. I needed to *create* in order to control the stories. I wrote my first full song when I was thirteen. It's called "Stars," and I still play it at gigs sometimes. The track is about a boy I can't remember. Maybe he wasn't even real. Regardless, the experience of playing it pulls me back in time, allowing me to relive naïve emotions. Writing music gives me the chance to create the stories *and* the soundtrack—to bring to fruition an entire sensuous dreamscape for myself. As a songwriter, I control the internal transformation from reality to fiction. For a few minutes, I become the protagonist in my head, rather than the real-life girl who's still trying to figure it all out. Even if the story isn't pleasant, the narrative control allows me to react in the best possible way. I never make the same mistake twice in a song.

I have too many reveries. There are hundreds of fictional women I want to be, and I write differently for all of them. In this sense, music has actually been detrimental to my sense of self. I can't decide between my idealized versions of the hip artist, the intellectual coed, the black-clad rocker, the popular blonde... These forms of myself seem to have congealed into a decidedly unappealing musician and person. I have lost the ability to define who I am in a half-assed attempt to live every dream at once.

Writing music is dangerous. It gives you a decadent and potentially harmful power—the power to change your identity. In retrospect, I should never have tried to harness my musical daydreams. These experiences are uncontrollable and exist somewhere outside of my consciousness, where they should remain untethered. My desire to command what cannot be

controlled has prevented me from growing as a musician and a person; I realize now it's time for me to decide who I am *outside* of the fictions that I imagine. I have to refuse every single flawless identity and write from my core rather than from my overactive imagination.

So I'm starting over, sitting on the floor with my guitar in a sea of crumpled white paper.

Max Weinreich

BASEMENTIA

Editor's note: In this piece, former Records director Max Weinreich reflects on his experience in the department, with a specific focus on his relationship to a certain basement.

I am that basement. You didn't know that when you wandered down into me, to hear the sounds my intestines made, with throbbing bass and drum. You didn't know that I was the one you were walking through, walking on, and you certainly didn't know that I was clinging onto this dark-lit space-place for my existence.

There is a tradition. I plug in the cords. I untangle the cables so the band people won't chastise me, will smile at me, will take pity on me. I supply power and I find beer. No one sees me do it. If they saw me, it would be pointless. Because the point is that no one thanks me, really. I don't want to be thanked. I want to feel that my efforts are thankless. Selfless. Heroic. I vomit them out and clean myself up. Nobody knows what I do, so what are they thanking me for?

If you really want to know what being Records Director meant to me, it's like this. It's not about plugging in the cords or doing the menial tasks—that's the easy part. No—it's the fear. The deep, unsettling fear that I experience every time I ask these people I've never met (whom I secretly love) to drive in from New York to vent their emotions for a room which might be empty. It's panic. That's what I do, I panic so that other people will dance. And when they start to dance, that's when I know it's time to scurry up into the kitchen. The key to that kitchen was the reward I needed. It was trust crystallization.

I could only write this with a beer in me, with people dancing above me, in complete and deliberate solitude. I knew it was about me being emotional for no exterior reason; being in the cancerous dust of that basement is an end in itself.

You don't know how it feels when a tree falls in the forest, when a band plays to no audience except for you. You don't know what it is to tie all your regrets to a small subterranean square. You don't know what it is to invest your entire self into a world that others will take for granted, appreciate only vaguely, tangentially. You tell yourself that you love and need it. To coil the cables, to collect the things left behind, to see through people. To clean up the trash that they left for you. Did they know you needed something to throw, or to throw away?

This is a thank you to everyone who came to one of my shows in that basement, who walked into me, who listened to the sounds and talked to the people and tripped on the cables and drank the beer and talked about the things and who arrived at nine even though there was no music until ten. In that basement, the most raw, most vulnerable part of me was always on display. Nobody realized it, because nobody else saw that place the way I did. You can't know why I am who I am and you can't know that the basement was my identity. And you won't know, until you smell it in the hot sunlight, until you turn that kitchen key, and you explain to the first band why nobody came out tonight, and you start trying to be alone. You don't see the cans behind the washing machine. They're mine.

Anonymous

[WITH ME]

Thank you. You sat next to me in high school art class and drew kinda haphazardly and talked about drugs. You worked at that coffee shop downtown and wore those graphic tees that our school made you turn inside-out. You were so *liberal*. Maybe I was scared of that nose piercing. Or maybe it was those things you drew. But you were the "type of person" my parents told me to stay away from. You were *dangerous*. [That's why I *admired* you.]

At first I did what the teacher asked. I drew a hand in many configurations. I drew five different kinds of noses. I drew a sheet draped over the still-life fruit. Always completing my sketchbook assignments on time. Then I found out that she didn't give a shit about assignments insofar as they were *assignments*. No. She wanted us to *think*. I poked and prodded into my mind to translate my thoughts into reality. It didn't matter how fucked up it looked in the end. It didn't matter because it was the truth—the real *truth* of what life was like for people like you. [People like *us*.]

I heard it when they called you a freak behind your back. They blamed it on how you looked. You were just too *different*. I agreed. I heard it when people called you a dyke behind your back. How could you be such a *queer*? I nodded and sported a half-smile. [Out of *self-hatred*.]

Maybe they would find out how much of a QUEER LIBERAL FREAK I actually was if I did anything but appear to agree. I let injustices slide to keep up the façade that everything was all right in semi-rural Wisconsin—That a mixed-race gay man with radical politics ever belonged in the rural Midwest. [Even though I know there were people—people like *me*—who tried to make me feel welcome.]

You were the first person to make me listen to The Antlers. They were your favorite band. It was my freshman year of high school and I was really gay and pubescent and full of discomfort and doubt. Soon they were my favorite band. We're "friends" on Facebook but maybe you don't remember me now. Maybe that's OK, because in more ways than one, you changed my life. Thank you.

•

"Pull me out…pull me out…can't you stop this all from happening? Close the doors and keep them out."

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I replied: for most of high school I was deep into the closet. I hid myself behind my status as the "science guy" – the one that was doing everything at once. I released all that pubescent sexuality in my music and art. And I talked to strangers online. Probably creepy people, but I thought I could relate. They were freaks like me.

"Can't you see I'm scared to speak, and I hate my voice 'cause it only makes you angry."

I replied: There was someone else who told me about The Antlers. She always came early to school, just like me. At 6AM she stopped me on the stairs. She asked what I was listening to, and then we talked about how we loved The Antlers and we walked together to the library. She was always there. She read a lot of books I regretted not reading. And I was scared to talk to her. The other kids thought she was *weird*.

"Some patients can't be saved, but that burden's not on you. Don't ever let anyone tell you you deserve that."

I replied: I didn't know her all that well, but the *Chicago Sun Times* said, "Girl 'out to save world' dies of overdose in Oak Park." She chatted with a stranger online. She took a Greyhound to Chicago. She went to his apartment. She took too much heroin. He ran. She died.

"But we'll make only quick decisions, and you'll just keep me in the waiting room, and all the while I'll know we're fucked, and not getting un-fucked soon."

I replied: She was me. I was her. The timing was impeccable. And when my parents found out who I was talking to on my computer, I felt like I had died along with her. I felt as though our lives had become intertwined.

"I'd happily take all those bullets inside you and put them inside of myself."

I replied: She came home from work. My mom slammed the door shut and locked herself in the room. I knocked. No response. A week went by. I tried to talk to her. She burst into tears after I spoke. A month went by. Nothing was going to be the same, I thought, vaguely. Years went by. And I still wish I didn't need to have hurt you. That I could take all the pain and but it back into myself.

"Well no one's gonna fix it for us, no one can. You say that no one's gonna listen, and no one understands. So there's no open doors, and there's no way to get through, there's no other witnesses, just us two."

I replied: There's still nothing I can say. But I let Peter Silberman sing my feelings out for me. And caress me. And cry with me.

•

The girl in my art class, the people I chatted with online, the girl who I met on the way to the library—they come back to me when I listen to *Hospice*. I return, for 52 minutes, to a time when I was naïve, weak and depressed, longing for love and acceptance. But that's the beauty of it: sometimes you need people to cry with, and the devastating story of *Hospice* gives me that sense of companionship now that they are all gone.

The Antlers shaped who I was. They showed me how to understand that my identity was my own—that it was immutable, and that it was true. They helped me carve out a singular space in my hometown, and, perhaps most importantly, they made me feel as though I wasn't the only one crying. And maybe I wasn't, after all.

Sam Frampton

THE NEW GUIDE FOR THE PERPLEXED

I. We don't care who sees
"Young, Wild and Free" by Snoop Dogg and Wiz Khalifa (from *Mac and Devin Go to High School*, 2011)

Sometimes you forget who you are.

When this happens, simply take a long look in the full-length mirror leaning against the wall next to your desk. Evaluate what you see. You aren't short. Once every few months, a short person might call you tall. You aren't particularly skinny or fat, and—despite some vague motions you made in the direction of exercising a few times last month—you are not particularly muscular either. Your mother always told you that you were good-looking, but you never believed her.

Surely there's more to you than that, but who the fuck cares? You've already gotten so far by adopting purposeful normalcy as your trademark. At that house party last week a girl approached you at your perch on the couch next to the fold-out table that served as a bar for the night. You don't remember her face or name, only the unnecessary urgency with which she spoke. You could tell she fancied herself the edgy type.

"So tell me, what's your deal?" she asked.

Slumping a bit to make your already casual demeanor even more casual, you replied, "I'm just, you know, a guy."

She laughed.

IIa. If my soul has a shape, well, then it is an ellipse
"Blue Hawaiian" by Pavement (from *Brighten the Corners*, 1997)

Sometimes you and your roommate silently agree to give up. Within hours, dishes have accumulated in the sink. Now you feel no remorse when you plop your morning cereal bowl on the top of the pile and walk away in the same breath, even as your roommate looks on. What's more, there isn't a scrap of toilet paper to be found in your Godforsaken science experiment of an apartment.

When this happens, don't fight it. It is remarkable how seamlessly you can reorganize around the obstacles created by your own laziness. When you run out of clean dishes, simply stop eating in your apartment. Since it is cold outside, alternate between the two restaurants located within a block: the Chinese place and the burrito place. Past experience has shown that you can eat chicken fried rice and steak burritos for three days before your taste buds lose their ability to distinguish between the two. On the fourth day you will begrudgingly wash all of the

dishes in the sink and speak nothing of it.

Your roommate always holds out longer than you.

IIb. Now I see there's joy inside your arms
"Happier than the Morning Sun" by Stevie Wonder
(from *Music of My Mind*, 1972)

That solves one problem, but you're still out of toilet paper, and everyone's busy taking finals so your apartment isn't going to see a roll of Charmin or Cottonelle or even *Scott* until next semester. No matter though, you already know which campus buildings contain an Ideal Place to Take a Big, Nasty, Gut-Wrenching Shit (IPTBNGWS).

All IPTBNGWSs are one-seaters, often tucked into basements of department buildings. Generally, the only people who use them are professors and grad students, so you won't run into any of the gnarly antics of the feces-on-the-wall variety that undergrads like to pull from time to time. What's more, they always boast an abundant supply of paper products and get cleaned just as regularly as any other public restroom.

Cherish the time you get to spend in each IPTBNGWS. Once you're in, it essentially becomes your porcelain-and-tile living room. Answer each knock on the door with a polite "occupied" and proceed to stay as long as you damn well please.

Be ready to think of a quick quip when you open the door to find it is your roommate who knocked earlier and is now waiting to use the IPTBNGWS next.

III. "A Call for All Demons" by Sun Ra
(from *New Horizons*, 1956)

Sometimes you encounter crazy white people. Not the funny kind Dave Chappelle likes to joke about, the reckless ones who start a Friday night with a shouted vow to drink themselves to death. No. I mean the kind who stare you down in a restaurant until they lose control and start yelling, "I'm going to beat you up, black man!" The ones who mutter fighting words at you under their breath as you walk by. And then the ones who ask, "What's the big deal?" when you tell them these stories.

When this happens, resolve to never share these stories again.

IV. Like they used to say "Pass the Peas" by the J.B.'s
(from *Food For Thought*, 1972)

Sometimes the semester ends. This means it is time to leave bitter and cramped New England for the vast and cordial Midwest, to return to your parents and your younger brother and the pretty little house they all moved into after you started college.

Before you leave, do the only thing that you will miss while you are away from school. Select your favorite record from the small collection on your bookshelf. Drop the needle and lay in bed, on top of the comforter you've never washed. Close your eyes and listen to the crisp funky groove. Try to name the feeling you feel. *Warm.*

Ruby Bilger

INTERVIEW: MAX, 8, EATING RAMEN AT HIS KITCHEN TABLE.

Music makes me think of the sky. Sometimes I look at the sky, and I see plants. They're usually ferns. Sometimes I see old man cacti.

I play cello and piano. I play classical music, but one time I played a jazz-ish piece from Charlie Brown.

When I memorize a piece, if I'm lucky, I remember it for the next month. I'm alright at sight reading. How long have I been playing? Ask my mom. Four years on the piano? Three years on the cello?

We listen to all sorts of music in the house. Not just classical or jazz, we also have salsa and tango.

When we went to Vermont, I had to do my math workbooks in the morning, and I hated doing that, so sometimes I would listen to Tango and sometimes Haitian music. I tried to get away with that but it didn't work. My mom didn't like it.

I like songs better when I know I can play them.

A lot of the CDs I know have been recommended by my parents, and then I forgot all about them, and then I start listening to them many months later and I think that it was my idea to listen to them, but…it's almost like being branded.

My shuffle is a major source of entertainment, and so is Prince.

All the kids at school have iPhones and it's so annoying. I don't have one, and I don't need it, because it's not legal for me to be walking around by myself anyway.

Pop is big at school. Katy Perry is the girls' thing, One Republic is the boys' thing. We don't really sing together. Ezra thinks it's nerdy, but it's not nerdy, but not cool either… it's not a fourth-grade student thing to do. If we do sing together, we just make a parody of a song. Do you know the song 'Timber'? Ezra made a parody of it about poop. I helped him. I don't remember it. His thing is poop parodies. Other kids don't even notice him.

Songs don't really remind me of my memories. The first songs that I loved were the Bach cantatas. The slow ones are moving, and the fast ones are hyper-moving. The slow ones make me relax and the fast ones make me want to minuet. It doesn't really come as a really big exclamation, when I hear a really good song, but when I hate it, it comes as a big exclamation. It's like, red-exclamation-point-slash-x. I hate songs when they sound ugly and cheesy. I don't like cheesy music.

My mom used to say that I shouldn't be listening to a thirteen-year-old's pop music all day long, because it's bad for your brain or something. And I didn't quite understand that—

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I thought pop music really made your brain fall apart. But classical music didn't do that. So when I really liked this one rap song, I was like, 'oh my god, I really want to listen to this, but I can't because my brain will get smaller.' If I heard any pop song that I knew was pop I would plug my ears. I was seeing all of these pictures of brains. They looked like Nuclear Worms candy, so I thought that my brain would get black and start rotting. I thought that each slimy piece of grey matter would fall off into my skull and mold and disappear. I was always afraid when it didn't come out of my mouth or my nose.

When there's a song on the radio that I like that I'm not allowed to listen to, I'm happy that I'm getting closer and closer to being thirteen, because then I can listen to it. I'm also excited to stay in this one moment right now so I can eat more ramen. But I don't even like this fake ramen that much.

I don't know what other career I'd have besides music. I don't know what I'm good at. I've had eight years to work it out, and I still don't know.

If I'm sad and I play a sad song, I get even more sad. Some of the slow Bach cantatas don't make me feel sad, but the piece itself is sad. I feel the feeling of the music, but if I feel the feeling too much I'll actually start being sad. I'll start remembering things that were sad that happened to me, or thinking of sad things that could happen. Usually the sad things are from my dreams. I'll dream of something normal, like my mom is sitting at her computer and there's a lightning storm outside, but then she gets hit by a lightning bolt. Even some kind of Disney soundtrack sad song—do you know *Frozen?* Do you know "Do You Want to Build a Snowman"? That song feels sad at the end, and it makes me imagine my dreams, too. Like I had one dream where my dad was sleeping, and an all-black ninja came in and poured oil over him and set him on fire.

WYBC 24

RELATIVELY DARK BLUE NEITHER PURPLE NOR GREEN

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Editor In Chief
Christopher Cappello

Managing Editor
Nicholas Henriquez

Contributors
Charlie Bardey
Ruby Bilger
Griffin Brown
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Shantavia Chappell
Josh Feng
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Sam Frampton
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Nicholas Henriquez
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Isabelle Savoie
Max Weinreich
Eugenia Zhukovsky

Design
Jonathan Gorman
Eric Nylund

Printing
Linco, Long Island City

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