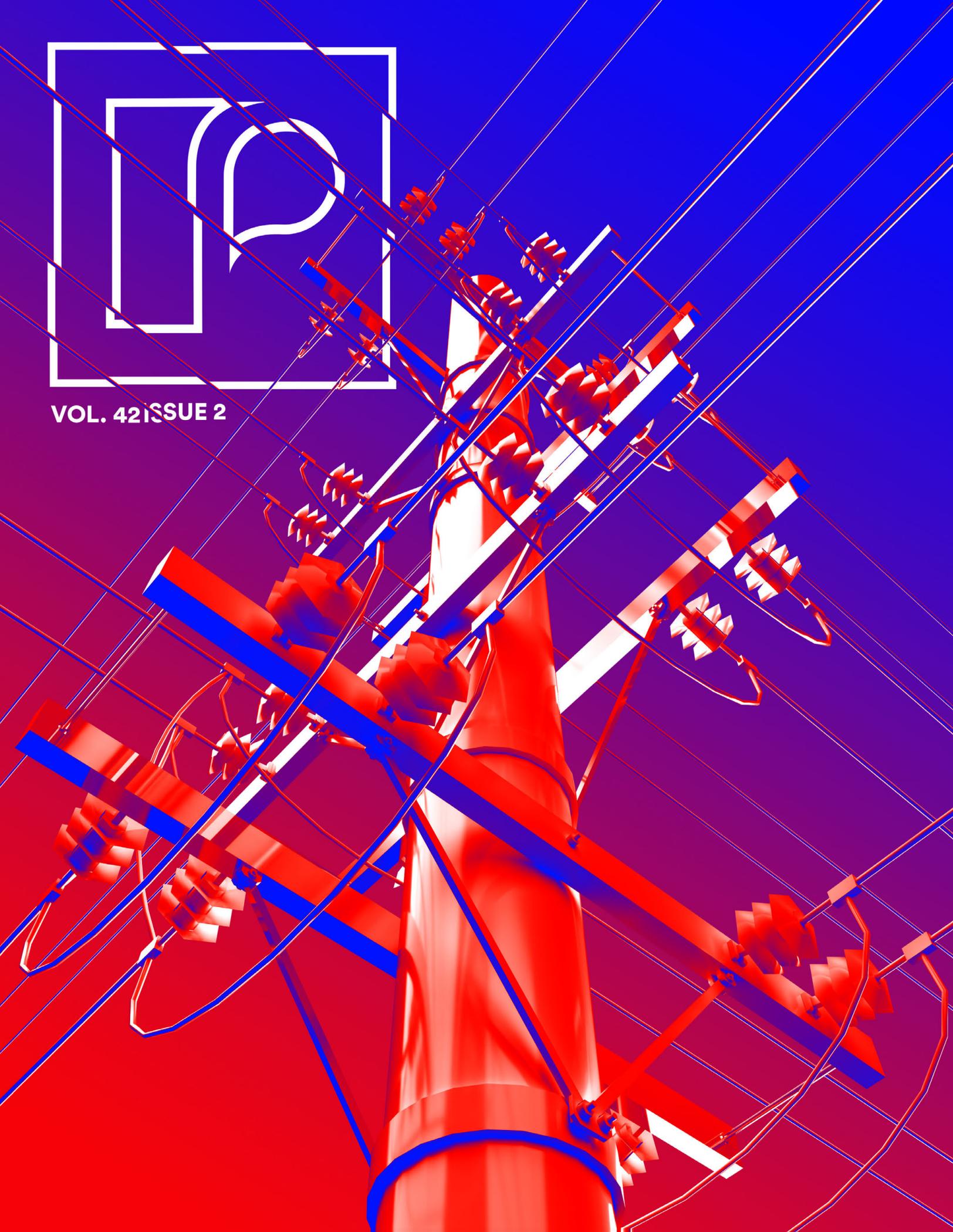


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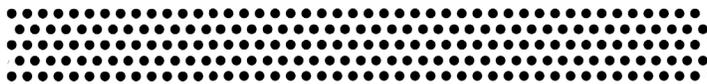
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Letter from the Editor



By Deanna Albohn

As my time in college comes to an end, I'm left wondering why I did certain things, why I didn't do others, should I go to grad school — you know, the real existential stuff.

Lately, I can't help but keep asking myself "what's the point?"

What's waiting for me on the other side of the Zoom graduation "stage?"

Everything in life is so uncertain that I can't stop myself from worrying and making myself sick with anxiety every day.

This has certainly been one of the weirdest times in all of our lives, and it brings me a strange comfort to know I'm not the only one who's been struggling. I've been doing a lot of ruminating while locked inside my house and my greatest realization from this whole ordeal is that NOTHING MATTERS. Nothing really matters at all, and you can do whatever you want as long as it doesn't hurt anyone else.

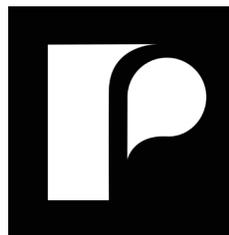
Our time here on Earth is limited, so why do we hold on so tightly to things that make us sad and anxious? All the small things we spend hours and years stressing over often have no real effect on our lives in the long run. We waste so much energy deliberating over the most minute aspects of life — that seem dramatic and important in the moment — only to completely forget about them the next day, week or month.

I'm not encouraging you to quit your job, drop out of school or make any other hasty decision, but to simply reevaluate the parts of your life that don't make you happy. I'm not a professional, just someone who's seen a few too many episodes of *Tidying Up with Marie Kondo* and is getting rid of things that no longer spark joy in her life.

Maybe I'm a nihilist for thinking nothing really matters.

I don't know, but life is what you make of it — why would anyone want to purposely spend it stressed out and unhappy?

Maybe some things do matter. Tell your friends and family that you love them, start that project you've been putting off, learn a new hobby — the world is your oyster!



THE STONY BROOK PRESS

NOVEMBER 2020

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The Press is located on the third floor of the SAC and is always looking for artists, writers, graphic designers, critics, photographers and creatives!

Meetings are Wednesdays in SAC 307K and Zoom at 1PM and 7PM.

Singer-songwriter
Leslie Mendelson knows
how we're feeling and asks
us to "All Come Together."

by Nicholas Grasso

Photos by Shervin Lainez

Singer-songwriter Leslie Mendelson's survey of personal and societal struggles on *If You Can't Say Anything Nice...* would have been a fitting release had it dropped on an ordinary spring day. Instead, the Long Island native's new album hit shelves of closed record stores April 17 amid a global pandemic, elevating it from a poignant collection of 10 tracks to a prescient soundtrack to a generation-defining affair.

While love and loss buttressed 2009's Grammy Award-nominated *Swan Feathers* and 2017's *Love & Murder, If You Can't Say Anything Nice...* tackles flagrant issues of today and purges depression on tracks like "Would You Give Up Your Gun?" and "I Need Something to Care About."

"A lot of these feelings were bubbling up and they needed to come out," Mendelson said of writing about her depression and anxiety. "So there was really no other way to go about it."

Accompanying her sharp appraisals are heartfelt tunes like "Lay It All On Me" and the urgent "All Come Together."

The live entertainment industry went dark in the spring, canceling Mendelson's own tour to support *If You Can't Say Anything Nice...*, but she refused to let that stop her from performing. She flipped on her "party lights," crystalline specks that electrify the gray curtain backdrop in her Brooklyn home, and armed herself with her keyboard, acoustic guitar and harmonica. From this permanent tour stop, she has streamed dozens of live performances to promote her release and keep live music alive. She shared what money viewers can spare with live venues, most recently the City Winery in New York, to help keep the heart of the live music industry beating.

In tackling mental health and urging people to come together, Mendelson unintentionally orchestrated a score to the COVID-19 outbreak. Over 40% of college students struggle to function under the weight of depression, according to the American College Health Association's 2018 National College Health Assessment II. The coronavirus displaced college students from their campuses in the spring, many of whom are trudging through their homebound fall semester over Zoom. Throughout the spring and summer, masses of anti-lockdown and Black Lives Matter protesters took to the streets despite stay-at-home orders designed to "flatten the curve," or slow the rate of infection.

The Press recently had the opportunity to speak with Mendelson about *If You Can't Say Anything Nice...*, its newfound significance regarding current events and how she continues to reach audiences despite her canceled tour.

• • •

This is your first record on vinyl! How does that feel?

Aww, it's great. I actually wept when I got it in the mail. I was so happy 'cause it looked better than I thought it was gonna look, the packaging and the detail. It's everything.

You play with a lot of different textures on this one. The title track is electric-driven, and you wanted to make "Speed of Light" sound like you were floating in space. Was there a particular moment that led you to experiment with the different sounds on this release?

Yeah, we were inspired by *Plastic Ono Band*, that first John Lennon solo record, with "Mother" and "God." The sound of that record made such an impact on me 'cause the lyrics were so clear, and the production really supported [them]. I loved how it worked together, and so when I went in thinking about production, we used that as a template. So, we kept it really simple and tried to obviously do our own thing with it. We definitely moved away from it a little bit by using different reverbs and guitar sounds that were a little bit more lush. That was kind of where we started from.

So that album, *Plastic Ono Band*, was very much aware of the atmosphere of its time, especially with "Working Class Hero." What is it like working on tracks like "Medication" and "Would You Give Up Your Gun?" that address very palpable issues today?

Well, it's so funny because it all happened before the pandemic, right? And everything's so heightened right now. But that's how I felt going into making this record, that some of these issues are so heightened right now. I never wanted to be preachy, and I don't think it is. I think we're living in such a time that it's either you're on the left or you're on the right, and there's no middle ground for conversation and so some of these topics [are] my own desire just to open up and have feelings about [them], and be okay with that.

Do you think there's a song that you're most proud of on this record?

I have certain moments that I'm really fond of, but overall, I think "I Need Something to Care About." It kind of was the beginning of where we started 'cause it [came] from such a dark place, but wanting to get better.

And that song is very poignant, especially right now. A lot of people, especially college students, are feeling this numbing depression to what's going on in the world. Could you talk a little about that song and its message in light of current events?

Well I think, especially today, a lot of people have been laid off. A lot of people are a little bit directionless. There's a lot of people that are a bit confused, not knowing what to do, thinking [about] when's their next paycheck and how to get creative in this time. But sometimes it's hard to find that... spark. Or that moment. And that's where depression falls, and when depression kicks in it's so hard to find the light, and you succumb to those feelings. So I think that it's harder even now. It's a struggle to find a purpose, but we have to find our purpose or it's just... the days are so long. And we have a lot of time on our hands right now.

Is there a particular artist or album that you turn to in times like these, the way that someone could turn to "I Need Something To Care About?"

I have a few artists that I feel like really rip my heart out (laughs). I love Simon and Garfunkel. You know, a song like "Bridge over Troubled Water," or Cat Stevens. Those two just come to mind, and Bob Dylan and Neil Young. With those artists, I feel like there's that time period, that golden era of songwriting [when] there was no messing around. It was so clear, and maybe because [at] the time, there was such unrest, and either you were with them or you weren't. And people were fighting for social justice and things they believed in, and maybe we're coming back to a time like that now.

Your sound is often compared to a lot of the artists that you're talking about, those '70s singers and songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Bob Dylan. Do you think those comparisons are a good fit, or are they a bit reductive?

Oh no! (laughs) I'm honored, that's the golden era of songwriting for me. I mean that's the playbook. That's how I learned and how I want to write songs.

Is there any way that you'd describe your style outside of those comparisons? Do you think you consider yourself indie, or singer-songwriter oriented?

Maybe a classic, modern singer-songwriter. I'd fall into the singer-songwriter mold, if there was one, more than indie. It's hard to define it. I feel like I know that my influences come from that era. I think [*If You Can't Say Anything Nice...*] sounds like a modern record, but it has classic songwriting elements.

One of the other tracks that is very timely is "All Come Together," which you've been playing live for a couple of years now. Do you think it's taken on a new life, now that it's been released in the current state of affairs?

Yeah, and that's the one thing that's always constant, I guess even more now, because of what we've been asked to do

today. They say “alone, together” because they’re asking everybody to do this thing together, even though there’s self-isolation and we’re staying home. But it’s everybody together. I go food shopping, but I really don’t leave the house.

I’m really trying to do the right thing, flatten the curve, but I know there’s tons of people that are not wearing masks and hanging out in large groups, and that to me is so selfish. I’m like, “Why do you get to do that?” We all have to be in this thing together. We got to get it together — make some sacrifices so we can get out there and do things again. So even though it’s a different “all come together,” it’s spiritually, mentally, “let’s all do this.”

I’d like to talk about your guitar playing. Is that you playing the electric on the title track?

That’s Steve [McEwan]. He’s such a great guitar player, his electric guitar playing especially. I’m better at acoustic. I can strum, and guitar picking is something I’ve become better at. I love to play electric, but I haven’t ventured into solo territory. I love rhythm playing, so I love to play along. And that’s a fun song to play electric guitar on. I love to play loud too. As much as I love a ballad, it’s really fun to be able to turn up.

Did you write that song knowing it was gonna be electric?

We wrote that song so quickly because we needed an upbeat song — and it’s so funny how it turned into something that helped define the record. We were actually in the studio when we wrote that song. We felt it would be great to get something that’s really like UGH! where we could kick it up a notch here. We just started playing it and then we were just kind of having fun with the lyrics and then it wrote itself so quickly. Yeah, that was a fun, easy one.

What would you say was the most challenging song to write?

I’d say “Would You Give Up Your Gun?” had a couple of incarnations. I think it started out as an upbeat song, and I think that’s why we actually wound up writing “If You Can’t Say Anything Nice...” ‘cause “Would You Give Up Your Gun?” was originally an upbeat song that we recorded a couple of times and it just wasn’t working. It was too on the nose; it didn’t have the right feeling. It wasn’t what we wanted to convey so we went back to the drawing board. Steve started playing more of a Leonard Cohen vibe, so then we started to shift the melody and make it into a ballad. I also think “Lay It All On Me,” emotionally, was really difficult to record. That one was just... that was a difficult birth. It was a struggle to get that to a place where it felt right.

That song really makes the record hit

the ground running.

Yeah. I say Side A is like a slap in the face; Side B is like a nice warm hug.

So that was intentional? The placement of that song to kick off the record?

Yeah, we knew we had to start with that song. Once we started mixing, maybe even before we started mixing, we were just like, “Yup, we got to start that way.” There was no other place to put that song. We also wanted to make that statement of “This is what this is. This is different. This is urgent.” But yet, the subject matter is heartfelt. So I felt like it had a lot of elements I wanted. That was a good way to introduce a record.

Were you trying to balance some of the heartfelt songs with the more poignant, timely songs?

Well, there’s a mixture of a few different feelings. We had written a bunch of stuff and then I had some songs that I already wanted to record. Every time I do an album, I think, “Is there anything that would work, that I play live and just haven’t done the right version of?” With “All Come Together” I was like, “It’ll have to come out eventually, where is it going to go?” And “Speed of Light,” these songs found homes here because they matched tonally. The subject matter wasn’t that far off. I feel like you don’t have to be topical on every single song — I think balance is healthy — but I think there’s just a vibe and a tone, that these songs could work together.

So we talked about opening the album. What led to the decision of using “My Dark Peace” to close the album?

That was a song that’s been around for a while. It’s almost like a hymnal and a meditation. It felt a little bit rough. Somebody that I admire very much, Judee Sill, with her drug addiction, and the way she would write was very hymnal, and so I was inspired by her. But just also being able to find a place of peacefulness in a very turbulent time. So I felt like it was a good piece for this record.

Now that venues are shut down, you’ve been doing the next best thing, which is conducting livestreams. How has that experience been?

At first I was pretty nervous about it. I think any time I do anything I don’t know how to do I’m nervous, like anyone. But once I did my first one, I was so blown away by everybody because it was just this moment. Because we were in isolation for a little while and all [of a] sudden I go live, and all these people start watching, and then they start commenting and we’re in this dialogue, and I actually started to tear up because I think it has been so hard for so many people.

This thing is taking such a toll on people’s

emotions, but to be able to be together for that hour, and to feel all the love of the community — it was the first time I’d felt normal in a long time, and I know that I wasn’t alone. A lot of people wrote [to] me saying that they got to forget about things for a little while, and I feel like as an entertainer that is my job. So if this is the way forward, I’m happy to do it because I feel like it’s all we have to work with right now, and I’m thrilled that this platform exists.

Last night, you got to perform at the John Prine tribute for the “Live From Out There” series. What do you think these organized efforts like “Live From Out There” or the “One World: Together at Home” broadcast suggest about the music community at large?

That we don’t want to stop — we can’t stop. It’s important for us, it’s important for people. Art has to keep going. Art thrives in times of upheaval and unrest. I think that it’s more important now than ever, so we just got to keep doing it and getting these people together on these platforms and these events, whether we’re honoring somebody or if it’s just a concert... we have to keep it going.

For your album release party, you teamed up with Rockwood Music Hall to give them 50% of the funds that viewers contributed. Are you going to have similar arrangements going forward that allow you to tour and also support the live entertainment industry?

I love that they do that. As important as it is to support your [favorite] artist[s], we got to support the businesses in the community as well and the venues that always have supported artists. I like that we all can benefit from this. And I think people are willing to contribute because when we get out of this mess, we want these venues to still be here for us.

To try to transition back to how it was?

Yeah (sighs)... when. When. I don’t wanna say if, I’m gonna say when.

You’re thinking positive.

Yeah, I’m trying... It’s hard.

You’ve had some pretty interesting collaborations in the past. You’ve worked with Jackson Browne; you’ve worked with Bob Weir. Are there any artists you admire that you would love to work with if time allows it?

I would love to write a song with Paul McCartney. He’s just one of my favorites, and he’s still vital.

Is he your favorite Beatle?

Oh, that’s like picking children! I love them all. I mean, John, Paul and George’s songwriting. They’ve all written some of my favorite songs. It’s really hard to

pick one over the other. I mean, John Lennon obviously for so many reasons and then George Harrison has written “Something,” which I think is one of the greatest songs ever written. It’s hard to pick a Beatle — I can’t.

You grew up on Long Island, right?

Yeah, I went to Ward Melville. I grew up in South Setauket. I had a band called Mother Freedom; we used to play at The Spot and local places. I used to see a lot of live music [at] Port Jeff Village Pub, places like that. Yeah, I’m a local girl. (laughs) I live in Brooklyn now, but you know, technically still on Long Island.

Since you are a native New Yorker, did that make playing Madison Square Garden all the more special?

It’s extra. ‘Cause you know even going there — I’ve been there since I played there — I got to play there twice [opening for] The Who. And I sang the national anthem there for The Knicks once in 2017. It never ceases to amaze me after you get your ticket, you go through, and then you find your gate, and as you walk through the gate, all [of a] sudden the arena reveals itself. That is still a really special feeling. And I always feel like AHH! ‘cause it’s such a massive, awesome venue. It’s just incredible. I would take the Long Island Rail Road and see a show. And you think around the world Madison Square Garden is held in such high regard, but I think because it’s ours, it’s even more special.

So once this is all said and done, do you think your personal experience and our collective experience of the COVID-19 outbreak will have an impact on your songwriting?

I can’t imagine it wouldn’t. Whenever it comes to a topic like this, you don’t wanna hit the nail on the head. Maybe I already did it and I didn’t realize it with so many of these songs. I’m sure something will come of this. There’s too much. I think when it passes, maybe after the dust settles, [I can] give it some time to process and figure [it] out.

Once things are back to normal, and social distancing isn’t a necessity, what’s the first thing you are going to do out of quarantine?

I miss hugs.

That’s so sweet! (laughs)

It’s so true, though! (laughs) I just miss hugs. I miss hugging my friends. I’d really like to have a drink with a friend and give them a hug. Don’t you miss that?

If You Can’t Say Anything Nice... is available now to stream and for purchase. ■



“Art has to keep going. Art thrives in times of upheaval and unrest.”

U M M C U O H C B D Z D

Rediscovering my
passion for anime
by Pamela Wong



For years I've avoided long anime series like the plague — when I was younger, I enjoyed the 2002 series *Fruits Basket*, yet since then I've balked at the idea of investing time in shows like *One Piece*, *Dragon Ball Z* and *Detective Conan*. But this quarantine, I chose to battle the whole *Naruto* series. I finished the original anime and I'm working towards the end of *Naruto Shippuden*, which takes place after the events of the original series.

The original anime has 220 total episodes, with 89 filler episodes throughout. Although the filler isn't canon, or part of the original manga storyline, it was added because the anime might have caught up to the manga, while the *mangaka*, or manga artist, was still creating the storyline simultaneously. *Naruto Shippuden* has 500 episodes and 210 filler episodes. This doesn't include the spin-off movies that were released during the series.

I don't know what pushed me to even start it, but I decided to plunge head-first into the *Naruto* universe during quarantine.

Since then, I have become emotionally invested in *Naruto*, occasionally bingeing episodes during the summer and even shedding tears over the most poignant ones. *Naruto* tells the story of young ninja Naruto Uzumaki, who dreams of becoming the *hokage*, or the leader of his village. This show has taught me so many lessons — lessons about friendship, sticking up for your friends, people learning to change, knowing your strengths and weaknesses and becoming a better version of yourself.

Anime as a medium reverberates among so many people and so many languages. I didn't even know Russians were big fans of the show until I bought a couple hoodies from Nikifilini, a Russian streetwear brand that makes hypebeast *Naruto* fashion. That's what makes *Naruto*, and so many other anime and manga, so special — they're timeless.

Anyone who wants to watch can easily start and get into the lore. I didn't even think about how much of an impact *Naruto* had on me until I was crying in almost every episode, sharing memes online and finding online communities to learn more about the series. I don't think I can say that about any other anime I've watched so far.

The *Naruto* series is a rather old anime classic. The manga was first published on September 21, 1999, and the first anime episode was released on October 3, 2002. To put things in perspective, I was four years old when the first anime episodes came out. The series turned 21 years old at the end of September.

When I watched the first episode back in May, I wasn't sure if I could personally relate to Naruto,

a 12-year-old child. I found him to be obnoxious and troubled, but his behavior was explained by his upbringing as an orphan and a *jinchuuriki* host, a person with one of nine monstrous tailed beasts living inside them. Despite my initial hesitation, I carried on watching the show and got invested. I found myself shedding tears with the characters, crying for their situations and the realizations that came with the decisions they made. I felt like I could relate to each and every one of them. With the downtime I had from quarantining in a pandemic-stricken state, I found solace in a new ninja world.

Naruto Uzumaki taught me that one should never give up. He is faced with such hardships throughout the series and never asks anyone to pity him. He strives to rise up and become the *hokage* to show everyone he is capable, even when people look down on him for being the *jinchuuriki* of the nine-tailed fox Kurama. Naruto always stands by his ninja way — he doesn't cut corners and does his best to become stronger and better in order to reach the level of his rival and best friend, Sasuke Uchiha. Naruto isn't a perfect character and he has his faults, but he stands by what he believes and keeps his promises. He protects his friends and those he cares about. He loves everyone regardless of where they are from and can relate to anyone, even if he only meets them once. Even villains in the series have their own redemption arcs and go through positive change. I couldn't help but love them as well. Each character in the series is well-written, and each has their own story to tell.

Even though *Naruto* is the first "long" anime series I've watched, I've had my fair share of anime since middle school. I've watched a variety of anime on Netflix, but my dad only let me watch it dubbed, with the Japanese voice acting replaced by English, because, as a nationalistic Chinese man, he didn't want anything to do with Japanese language and culture — including anime. So I watched these "cartoons" in English, which is humiliating to say in front of true anime lovers, but it's true. I know better now, and watch in Japanese with English subtitles.

In my initial anime days, I didn't like telling my friends I liked to watch because I was afraid I would be ostracized and labeled as the weird kid. Think of the kid who would Naruto-run in the playground, play Yu-Gi-Oh or Pokémon cards and fight with the other weird kids.

Years since I feared this stigma, I think it has died down with all the anime TikToks people have been making. Seeing attractive people making TikToks about their favorite anime series makes me feel like there was never anything to be afraid of. I was afraid of liking something that I really enjoyed as a child, yet these girls gain popularity online for their *otaku*, the hardcore tendency to fall in love with a 2D character. Some people have been making TikToks and photo edits featuring their favorite anime characters. I think it's a little cliché, but it's cute. They've become very trendy and somewhat easy to make if you know your way around Photoshop. I'm glad TikTok has allowed people to represent their niche communities and hobbies, and show who they really are. Social media is partly responsible for the growth of anime, transcending those stereotypes of the weird anime kid, and I think that's something to be proud of.

Now, I'm not so alone. I can share this fun little hobby of mine with a supportive community online. Beyond the connections I've made through anime, life lessons from these shows and characters have taught me what it means to be human. ■

THIS SHOW HAS TAUGHT ME SO MANY LESSONS — LESSONS ABOUT FRIENDSHIP, STICKING UP FOR YOUR FRIENDS, PEOPLE LEARNING TO CHANGE, KNOWING YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND BECOMING A BETTER VERSION OF YOURSELF.

POWER LINES RENTALS



**THE POWER LINES
DEFINED SUBURBIA.
AND NOW WE MAY NEED
TO TEAR THEM DOWN.**

BY JOE AMENDOLA

"The Nature of our construction is in every way
A better fit than the Nature it displaces

What other tree can you climb where the birds' twitter,
Unscrambled, is English?
True, their thin shade is negligible,

POWER LINES, MORE THAN THE LAWN OR EVEN THE STRIP MALL, DEFINED SUBURBIA. THEY DEFINED IT PARTLY BY ITS ALL-IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE SUBURBS' FUNCTIONALITY: HARNESSING AND TRANSPORTING ALL THE ENERGY NEEDED TO FUEL THE SPREAD-OUT NEIGHBORHOODS, BRICK AND MORTAR MEGAFIRMS AND PROPERTY TAX-FUNDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

defined it partly by its all-important role in the suburbs' functionality: harnessing and transporting all the energy needed to fuel the spread-out neighborhoods, brick and mortar megafirms and property tax-funded public schools.

Power lines are hardly limited to suburbs, of course. City streets in urban centers are lined with telephone polls and the like. But suburbs are marked by their more interspersed, zoned districts; neighborhoods go over here, strip mall-littered commercial zones over there and so on. The story of the suburbs is the story of property ownership, in a sense. Homeownership — originally a cynical proto-red scare tactic marketed to Americans as markers of freedom through private property ownership — was crucial in distinguishing the burgeoning, freewheeling capitalist empire from the cold, austere collectivism of nascent Soviet communism, or so the story goes.

The result was, for the first time, a working and middle class made one with the market through homeownership. These new residential neighborhoods, and the main streets they were connected to, needed massive amounts of energy infrastructure for relatively few people, and so the sprawling pseudo-wildernesses of the suburban powerline were born.

As the logic of the power line extended its way from Levittown across the continent to suburban California, so did its potential for

disaster. The speed that made it possible for the lightning-quick transportation of energy also lent way to potential for collapse — and even worse, potential to spread hazardous wildfires — to spread almost as quickly.

Climate change, of course, is — and will — be the main factor in exacerbating this potential for disaster. And these disasters will be the result of unruly convergences between the natural and man-made: the hurricane toppling the power line, causing power and commercial life to stop for extended periods of time; tornadoes and other strong winds doing the same. The events as they exist now, even with a much overdue sense of urgency bought on by its relation to climate change, have been so absorbed into the fabric of our understanding of modern regional life that the enormity of their damage isn't fully comprehended: The collapse of the power lines means, momentarily at least, the partial collapse of commercial society.

But the most dangerous potential disaster brought on by the power lines is also its most presently-felt horror: the increasing proliferation of wildfires in American suburbs.

In the fall of 2019, California saw a record-setting wildfire season. The season started in May and lasted the rest of the year, burning over 250,000 acres of land and costing the state \$160 million in suppression efforts alone. The wildfires, like most, were caused by human factors — chief among them being the fall of

various power lines.

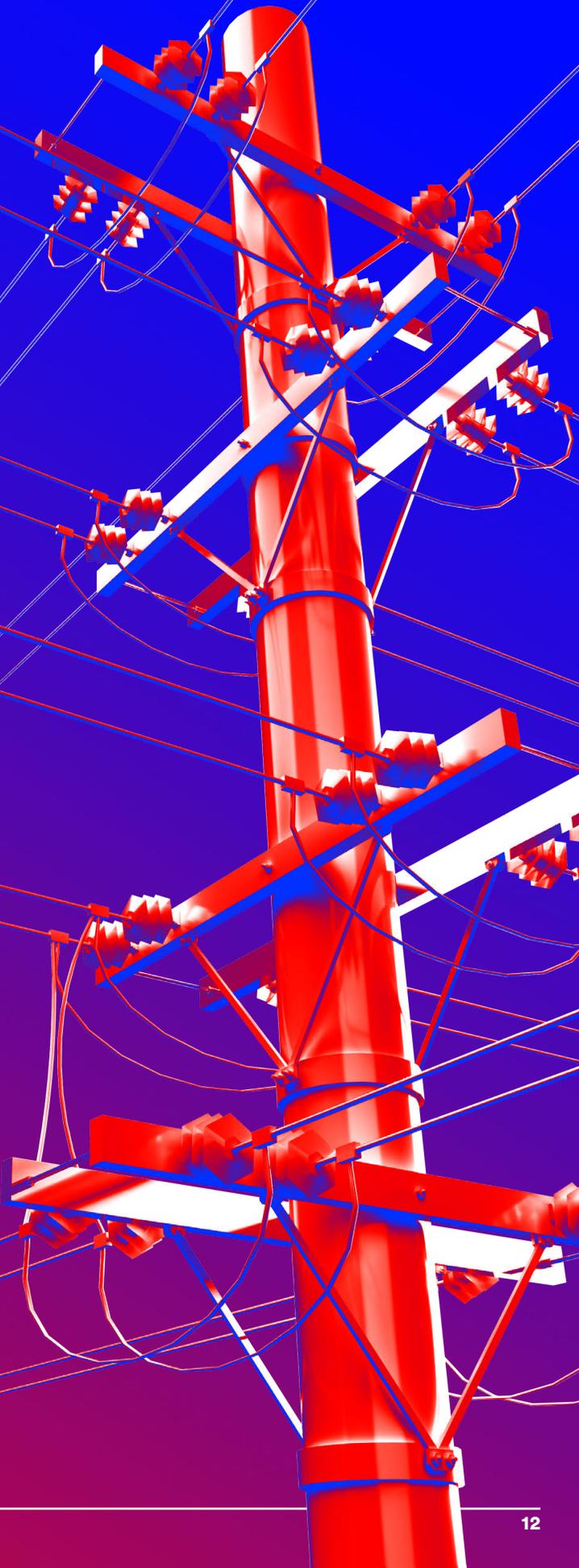
As the effects of global climate change become more broadly felt, it is not a stretch to imagine these sorts of disastrous events exacerbated by power line collapses occurring outside the west coast. While wildfires are specifically due to the west coast's drier tree climate (which is the reason wildfires also occur in, say, the New Jersey and Pennsylvania pine barrens), an increase in other natural disasters like hurricanes and tornadoes and windstorms could contribute to the same problems in the rest of the United States as well. The entirety of our energy infrastructure is now at the mercy of climate change exacerbated by Western and capitalist institutions.

The power lines defined suburbia. And now we may need to tear them down.

If suburban sprawl in the immediate postwar period was defined by the allure of self-segregated incubators for the upwardly mobile to reap the benefits of middle class life, we are now living under the suburban sprawl of the post-crash period: As many exurbanites are priced out of increasingly expensive major cities, many are shuffling into the suburbs. The suburbs, as a result, are far more diverse than ever before, meaning that the nearly all-white enclaves of yore are slowly disappearing. But the arrival of a multiracial and class-oriented American suburb collided with the arrival of climate change's effects in the global north. The result is a grim, almost machine-

like process of institutional failure: people driven from their home cities, by way of gentrification and financialization, into suburban centers whose initial promise of homeownership is eroding, rendering an expanded, multiracial class of suburban renters newly vulnerable to wildfires and other disasters, which are in turn exacerbated by increased needs for energy. Such failures follow a common thread of injustice under capitalist culture: Those who contributed least to the problem often end up on the brunt end of its consequences — as in the global south, and now even at home. Those driven to spaces that were initially defined by their implicit exclusion — through either race or class — are now finding themselves privy to the consequences of a system's devil's bargain: endless growth, development and nominal consumer convenience in return for the degradation of the natural world. At the center of this will be the American power line.

Potential remedies for such a threat to our energy infrastructure and way of life has been the topic of much debate. One obvious solution, such as what is practiced in Europe, would be to replace above-ground power lines with underground ones. This seems simple enough, except for the fact that the mere process of tearing down power lines is enormously expensive. In the case of California, removing such power lines — which are held by PG&E, an investor-held utility and the region's energy provider — would cost approximately \$3 million per mile for conversion alone. Such a massive energy conversion under the profit imperative is obviously both unrealistic and untenable. In one pithy, yet accurate remark by U.C. Berkeley Business professor Severin Borenstein, being quoted as a source in *The Palm Springs Desert Sun*, the energy expert quipped that “when you are starting from scratch, it is much cheaper if all the houses have burned.” Other obstacles to this are the way we bury utilities in general. Unlike in Europe, who bury their lines in trenches relatively cheap, American utility providers prefer other, more costly methods. Part of this, ironically, is because trenches are more conducive to communities who remain tightly bound together. European homes — even suburban — tend to be closer together, even



connected, as in Britain's social housing program. But the mass of America's suburban sprawl renders this method counterproductive. Bound by its original sin of seclusion, American suburbs demand the most costly of energy provisions.

A slightly more fatalist approach proffered by some arborist groups has called for the partial culling of trees near power lines, so they do not interfere with the man-made creations. Taming nature in service of industrial infrastructure, as if the infrastructure was nature itself. Such measures could momentarily mitigate the spread of wildfires, energy outages and property damage, but do nothing to address the underlying problem itself.

More straightforward, yet "politically risky" (as determined by punditry and Washington consensus), are social democratic measures such as utility nationalization (putting energy grids under public — and therefore, non-profit motivated — control) and various "Green New Deal" (an increasingly vague policy proposal that often proposes large-scale production and transformation of our infrastructure to make it sustainable and therefore "green") efforts. This seems to be the only pragmatic solution at this point, if past efforts at curbing emissions and converting to clean energy have been any indication: An actual, meaningful mitigation of future climate catastrophes will obviously not happen under the profit motive. It's an illusion. No private firm will ever feel the necessary balance of incentives, no tax credit will be cheap enough to rely on them — at least not on the scale we are going to need according to most experts. Any proposal that doesn't engage with these possibilities isn't being serious.

In order to curb climate change through any institution, it will have to follow a completely different set of institutional values: a formation rooted in opposition to eradication, not finding the ideal mix of market and public incentives. Such goals sound overly simple or un-nuanced, but that's exactly the point: The answer is simple and un-nuanced. Mainstream pundits and existing liberal orthodoxies dismiss these as politically tenuous and oversimplified, because those same people prefer a sort of Rube Goldberg machine-like approach to politics: They fetishize complexity

within tediously small technocratic policy tweaks, and shun complexity in the political realm. These are the same people who think the reason injustice and inequality exist is because a policy wonk forgot to carry the one. What's not realized is that such fights are worth fighting precisely because they are complex and risky — because they challenge orthodoxies and try to reposition the world on new institutional and conscious footing. Ambitious, straightforward and strong goals, coupled with action, help mold the public imagination; the support is what forms after people are mobilized. This sounds overly precious, but these sorts of challenges require platitudes and mission statements, as every other mass movement did.

The mitigation of these ever-looming horrors is, like everything,

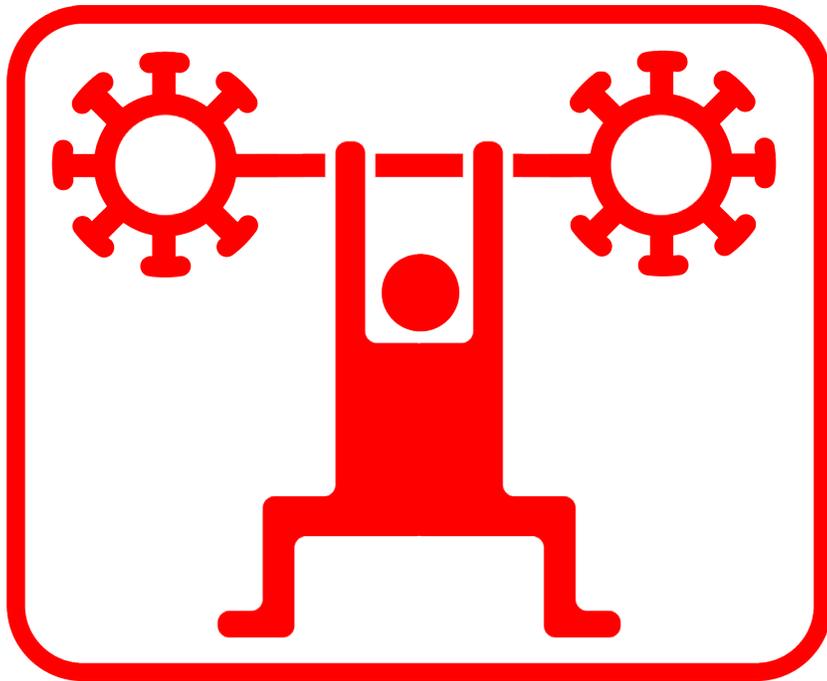
within the grasp of collective imagination and ingenuity. But the reorientation of how we live will have to be exactly that: We must tear down the vulnerable, mid-century, pre-Anthropocene infrastructure for more safe and sustainable kinds, but we must do away with it symbolically as well. We must do away with institutions and social forms that are defined by access barriers and the subjugation of others; we must do away with the logic of half-measures that limply rely on a mix of market incentives, public-private partnerships and technocratic tweaks; we must do away with a social consciousness that defines freedom through the most superficial, easily depreciable forms of private property; we must move forward in a wounded world with a new collective consciousness. We need to tear it all down. ■

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The New Physical Fitness Normal

By Kerry Quinn

With Gov. ←

Andrew Cuomo's announcement that gyms would be allowed to reopen on Aug. 24 in New York State, relief is in sight for those whose fitness routines and physical and mental health have been upended due to COVID-19.

This announcement does not mean people can simply rush back to the gym and pick up where they left off prior to the shutdown. There are new restrictions on fitness facilities that, among other things, limit the capacity of gyms, require new sign-in procedures including health checks and mandate that all members and staff wear PPE. Still, some gym members will not yet feel comfortable about returning to indoor exercise, and resourceful exercise addicts have found new ways to work out away from the gym while quarantining.

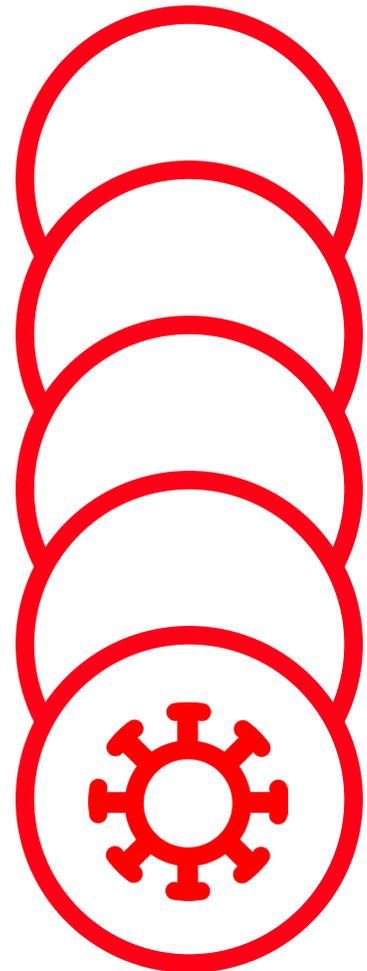
Those who found new ways to exercise certainly faced challenges, and may continue to find challenges ahead keeping to their regimens as the weather gets colder. As New Yorkers were confined to their homes, some looked to recreate, as much as possible, the exercise routines they had prior to the shutdown — although they found it difficult to get started without access to their usual resources.

"It took me a few weeks just to get outside for a jog," Joe, a 53-year-old member of the Equinox Fitness Club in Great Neck, N.Y., said. "The weather was cold, and I struggled to force myself outside to exercise in the morning."

Joe also did strength training with weights at Equinox, but he didn't have the equipment he needed at home to continue that program. He explored purchasing the equipment he needed, but quickly found there was no inventory available from any of the popular online retailers.

"I did manage to find some used dumbbells through a local site, and it's not ideal, but it's allowed me to do some of the exercises I did at the gym," he said.

Others looked to alter their routines and find new ways to stay in shape. Prior to the pandemic, 51-year-old Cindy had a few different fitness options. She purchased group sessions at a local gym for strength training classes, bought packages at SoulCycle and had memberships at OrangeTheory and The Bar





“I struggled to force myself outside to exercise in the morning.”

Method.

“I liked being able to mix up my routine to keep it interesting,” Cindy said, while attending an outdoor yoga class on the beach in Long Beach, N.Y. “I was also able to balance my exercise routine between strength and cardio training.”

Much like Joe, she found it difficult to get back into a routine without the structure and support provided by the programs and instructors she was accustomed to. Cindy said she felt her stress levels begin to build without having the regular exercise she needed to release it, and was determined to find some other methods to replace her normal routine.

“This yoga class has been great because it’s replaced part of what I was doing previously and it’s so beautiful here on the beach,” she said. She has also taken out her old bike and started biking and jogging outdoors — along with weight training, using the weights and bands she had at home.

Cindy said she’s not sure how the change in weather, coupled with the changes to rules at fitness clubs as they begin to reopen, will affect her fitness routine.

“Obviously it will become more difficult to exercise outside as the weather changes, so I’ll have to think about how I replace what I’ve been doing outdoors,” she said. “I’m not sure how comfortable I’ll be going back into the gym, even with the new measures in place, and I’m still worried about a resurgence of the virus over the winter.”

Some of her friends have purchased Peloton exercise bikes and have been happy with the interactive spin classes the company offers, but Cindy is waiting before making a purchase.

Peloton has been a popular option for those who have been confined indoors during the shutdown in New York State. The fitness equipment maker, which specializes in stationary bikes, has seen a jump in sales over the last six months and its stock price has jumped from below \$20 a share in mid-March to over \$90 in September. Although Peloton and other companies that specialize in at-home fitness have benefited from the pandemic shutdown, gyms and fitness clubs have not fared as well. Recently Town Sports, the owner of New York Sports Club as well as other fitness chains, filed for bankruptcy protection. Other fitness companies including Gold’s Gym and 24 Hour Fitness have also filed for bankruptcy protection.

as revenues have dried up due to the pandemic. But even as clubs reopen, capacity limits and continued concern about the spread of the virus could limit the number of customers who return — which would, in turn, continue to constrain revenue.

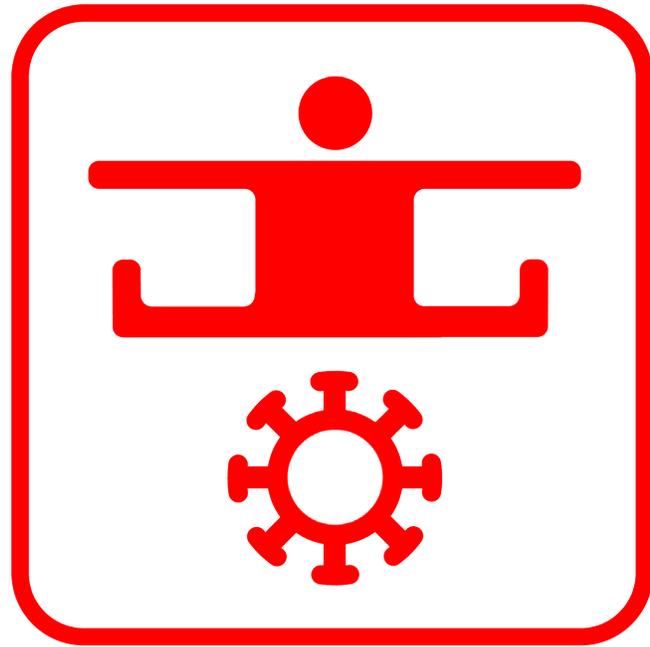
With health restrictions and financial strain on clubs, fitness instructors are finding themselves without work, and now must find new ways to replace lost income. Some are setting up private classes in people's homes. Irina, a yoga instructor from Long Beach, N.Y., teaches free yoga classes on the beach four times a week that are open for anyone to join.

"I feel like yoga can help people with anxiety, depression and all the things we kind of need right now during this craziness," she said.

With all of the connections Irina has made, she was also able to expand her business to include virtual and private in-home classes.

"With colder months approaching, my classes will most likely be completely virtual and private classes in homes with parties of five or under," she said.

Serious fitness addicts have been finding new ways to exercise around the constraints put on them by the pandemic. With the colder months looming, and the effects of the virus still pervasive, they will likely need to continue to be resourceful in finding ways to keep up with their routines. ■



Even as clubs reopen, capacity limits and continued concern about the spread of the virus could limit the number of customers who return.



THE TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS OF BEING THE ‘FAT GIRL’

BY EMILY SCOTT

Most memories with my grandma revolve around slumber parties that almost always included a midnight snack. She had an abundance of choices, from sugary sweets like Hostess CupCakes to savory goodies like Chex Mix, all chased down with a fruit punch or strawberry kiwi Capri Sun. She showed her affection with food; I never left Grandma’s house hungry, because if I did, that was an abomination in her eyes. A fed grandbaby was a happy grandbaby.

Most of my family growing up had the same idea about affection as my grandma. Family birthday parties, summer barbecues, even just stopping by to say “hey” almost always included some type of food: cakes, hamburgers, macaroni salad, Grandma’s potato salad, cups of coffee — if you can think of it, we probably had it at an event at some point along the way. For us, food was a well-loved member of our family.

My love of food, coupled with being an unathletic kid, led to me being the “fat girl.” My clothes were always on the bigger size chart, or had to be ordered online because the store didn’t carry them. And for a while, it would bug me, because who wants to be the token fat kid everyone feels bad for?

And then I learned to embrace it.



Baby's first Christmas, December 1999

I branded myself on being the token fat girl. Yeah, I would still get nasty looks no matter what I ate — but fuck it, I was having fun. I had friends, and, in my opinion (which I later questioned) “stylish” clothing. Sure, I wasn’t skinny, but that didn’t matter. Grandma didn’t treat me any different, and that’s all that mattered.

When you’ve been shown affection from one of your favorite people in the form of food, how do you cope with their death?

By eating, of course.

When said person also passes six weeks after the ship holding your parents’ marriage together has sunk, how do you cope with the combined grief of both?

Another obvious answer.

Between Grandma dying and my parents’ divorce, I turned to food for comfort because it wasn’t going to hurt me. Or abandon me in the way I felt like my grandma had, by dying at what could’ve been the worst possible time for me to lose her. Plus, whenever there’s a death in the family on my dad’s side, we coped with the grief by eating because, as my uncle John once proclaimed, “Grieving food doesn’t have calories!” We would be gifted plates of hot Italian food, six-foot-long heroes, boxes of coffee, cakes, cookies, even an Edible Arrangement showed up at my dad’s house the night between the wake and the funeral — from someone in the union my dad and uncles worked in. With this abundance of food, we all ate to deal with the passing of such a vital piece of our family.

I learned to live with the fact that no matter how badly I wanted my grandma to come back to life, she simply wasn’t going to. Once I processed that, dealing with the rest of the shit life was throwing at me was doable, with the comfort of eating. The turbulence from my parent’s divorce and the addition of a new sibling, dealing with the idea of life beyond high school, just stress in general was all solved with an iced coffee and a nail or hair appointment. I used food and hair dye as my coping mechanisms because if I was a different person I couldn’t be hurt in the same way I was.

And when my dad proclaimed he no longer wanted anything to do with me because I’m a “selfish bitch,” how do you think I handled that? A bottle of hair dye and, of course, more food.

But then the repercussions of being overweight and using food as a coping mechanism started to rear their ugly head. I was sixteen, sitting in a gynecologist’s office when I was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). The little Russian doctor looked me in the eyes and said, “There’s a good chance you could be infertile.”

That crushed me.

The next health scare came at eighteen, just a few weeks after high school graduation. I was

diagnosed with pseudotumor cerebri, which is medical jargon for an insane amount of pressure inside my skull. I had a spinal tap done, which led to three weeks of bedrest. Obviously I ate, because I was doing nothing all day, but I also revisited an old hobby.

I started to crochet again, something I hadn’t done in years. Looping the yarn kept my hands busy so I wasn’t just eating and playing Candy Crush Saga — and it helped me connect back with my grandma too. I would think back to the times when I sat with her when she lived with us, *Law & Order: SVU* on in the background, while she crocheted a baby blanket for whoever was pregnant at the time. She never

DEALING WITH THE REST OF THE SHIT LIFE WAS THROWING AT ME WAS DOABLE, WITH THE COMFORT OF EATING.

The Dynamic Duo, September 2011



finished that blanket. Maybe that's why they're some of my favorite projects to make.

After I got cleared to go back to work and start school, a week before the fall semester, I had strict orders to "lose weight."

What did I do in response to this order?

- A) Go to the gym!
- B) Change my diet!
- C) Lose weight and keep it off!
- D) Lose 13 lbs and then gain it all back and then some!

If you picked 4, you're the lucky winner!

I t wasn't until this summer that I got serious about dealing with it.

When my family went on vacation this past summer, we flew. And for the first time in my entire life of being the token fat girl, I needed a seatbelt extender.

I was mortified. I'd always been able to squeeze my fat ass into a regular seatbelt, but here we are waiting to begin the safety instructions for the flight because I needed an extender. I remember crying across the aisle from my mom because I'd never felt so embarrassed in my life. For the first time ever, I felt like the fat people you see on TV.

Needing that seat belt extender was the final straw.

I had called a surgeon's office three days prior to inquire about a weight loss surgery seminar. After the flight debacle, my choice was clear. Something needed to change.

What's funny, though, is that no matter how well you color in the lines and follow the rules, things still don't always go according to plan.

I attended the seminar and cried because, well fuck, I was the youngest person in that room. I changed my diet. took the stairs everywhere — which technically I always tried to do because fuck elevators. I had dropped 27 pounds, the most I had ever lost and kept off, when I got the news.

"The doctor who took your insurance is leaving the practice. We don't know when we can do your surgery."

Not even going to lie, I cried. Blubbered like a baby in the nurses' office. I was angry. I had followed their instructions to a T, yet they were taking away the one thing I had been working towards.

In a perfect world, I'd be eight weeks post-op right now, and my stomach would be the size of a banana. But, spoiler alert, we don't live in a perfect world. Hell, my sinus infection from last week threw off using the cute new CPAP machine I need to use pre-op — because

I got formally diagnosed with sleep apnea. Am I annoyed? Sure, but I found a surgeon who takes my

insurance, and has no plans on leaving NYU-Winthrop in the future.

You know what I didn't do in response to the entire collapse of my surgery plans?

I didn't turn to food. I started crocheting again. In a way, it's how I know my grandma is with me, and supporting me throughout this journey despite the fact that it's been

nearly six years since we last spoke. I don't use food as a coping mechanism anymore. Therapy is wonderful for finding new coping mechanisms.

So yes, the token fat girl I once was may soon be a distant memory — preserved only via Instagram and family photos. But that's okay, I'm more than that.

As my friend Lexie put it, I'm just Emily. ■



Same shirt, six months apart. July 2019-January 2020.



Photos, left to right and top to bottom, by Ashley Landis, Hollie Adams, Mott Haven, Alyssa Schukar, Maddie Meyer and Kerem Yucel



Seventeen-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse went to a counter-protest on Aug. 25 in Kenosha, Wis., armed with an AR-15-style rifle. He claimed in video interviews before the shooting that he was a medic in a militia group — the Kenosha Guard — inspired to protect property during protests. After killing two people and injuring another, Rittenhouse was charged with homicide. His lawyers insist it will be an easy self-defense trial. Donald Trump Jr. said on Extra that “everyone does something stupid when they’re that age.” Donald Trump defended Rittenhouse, saying that “he was trying to get away from them, I guess ... and he fell.”

Sure, it’s stupid. Reckless. Criminal. Menacing. Is it excusable if groups of grown men decide to counter-protest in Kenosha, and Rittenhouse follows suit? Any one of those men could have committed murder, and we have seen it happen before.

The Second Amendment solidifies militias as a way to rebel against tyrannical leaders, but the law simultaneously deputizes vigilante groups as an extension of the police. The armed counter-protesters in Kenosha declared they were militiamen, but Wilbur Miller, professor emeritus of history at Stony Brook University and author of *A History of Private Policing*, disagrees.

“They complain about the black helicopters coming down and taking away their guns and the tyranny of the federal government, all that sort of crap,” Miller said. “They’re never rebels.”

It’s hard to disagree with Miller, as the police gave out water to Rittenhouse and his group 15 minutes before the shooting.

The legality of militias and vigilantes has shifted over time, as Black slaves were emancipated in the 19th century and the Second Amendment changed to support individual gun rights in the 20th century. The Ku Klux Klan, and groups like it, could have been a vigilante group one year and a militia the next. For these groups, the lines between public and private sectors blur as well.

San Francisco created a private “vigilance committee” in 1851 that was more concerned with politics than crime, and eventually ceased operations permanently after 1856. Nearly 20 years later, in 1879, the San Francisco Police Department assigned vigilantes to crack down on criminals in Chinatown — without bothering to get warrants. The Chinatown Squad rounded up people simply for looking suspicious.

As San Francisco law enforcement lived in a void between the public and private sectors, the KKK did too. Started by ex-Confederate soldiers, it still exists in a militia-vigilante limbo: it is only considered a terrorist group in local towns or cities, and there’s no federal law against lynching.

Ida B. Wells spoke at a forerunner NAACP conference in 1909 about lynching in America. She talked about the end of lynching in the West and its rise in the South.

“This was wholly political, its purpose being to suppress the colored vote by intimidation and murder. Thousands of

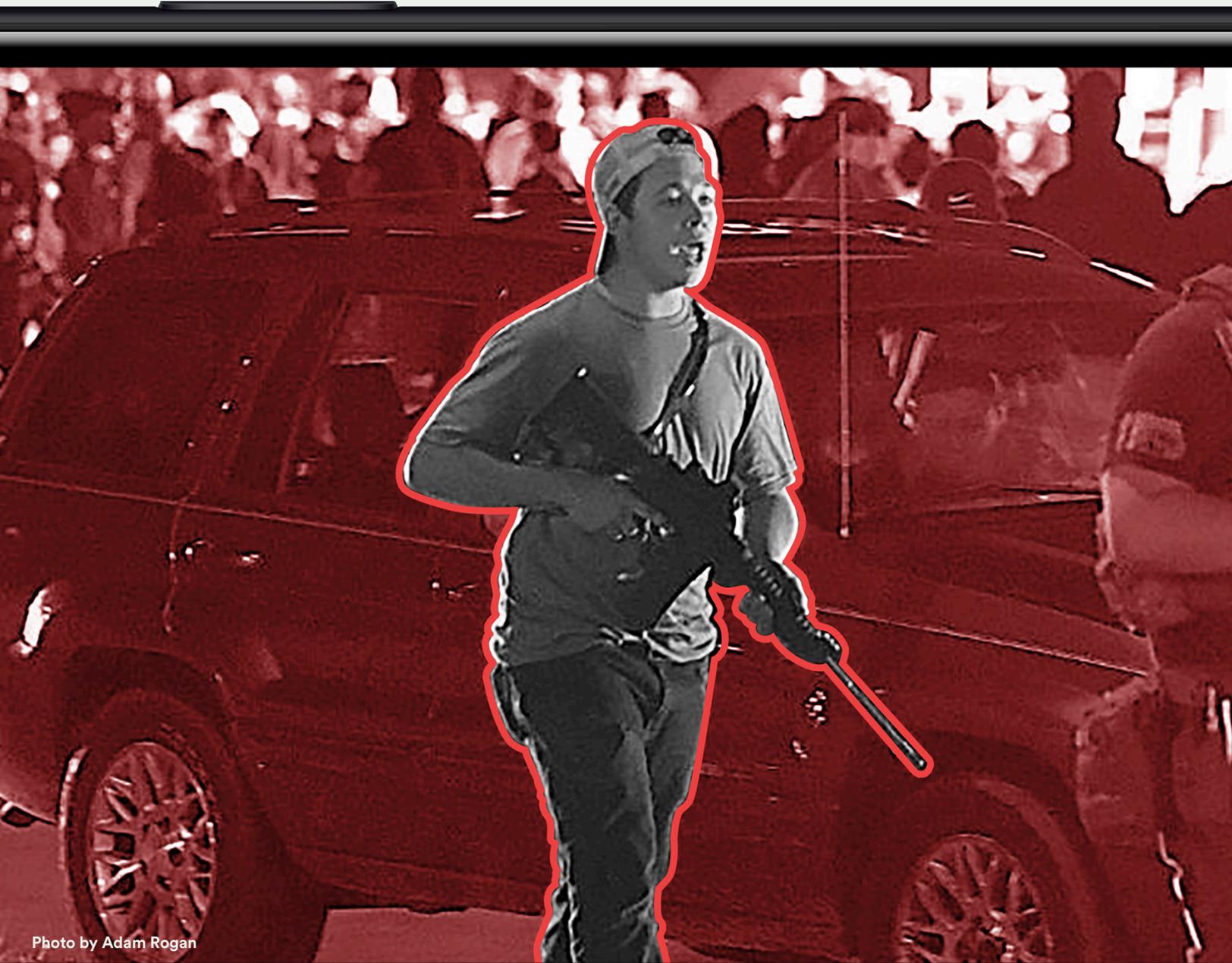


Photo by Adam Rogan

assassins banded together under the name of Ku Klux Klans, 'Midnight Raiders,' 'Knights of the Golden Circle,' et cetera, et cetera, spread a reign of terror, by beating, shooting and killing colored people by the thousands. In a few years, the purpose was accomplished, and the black vote was suppressed."

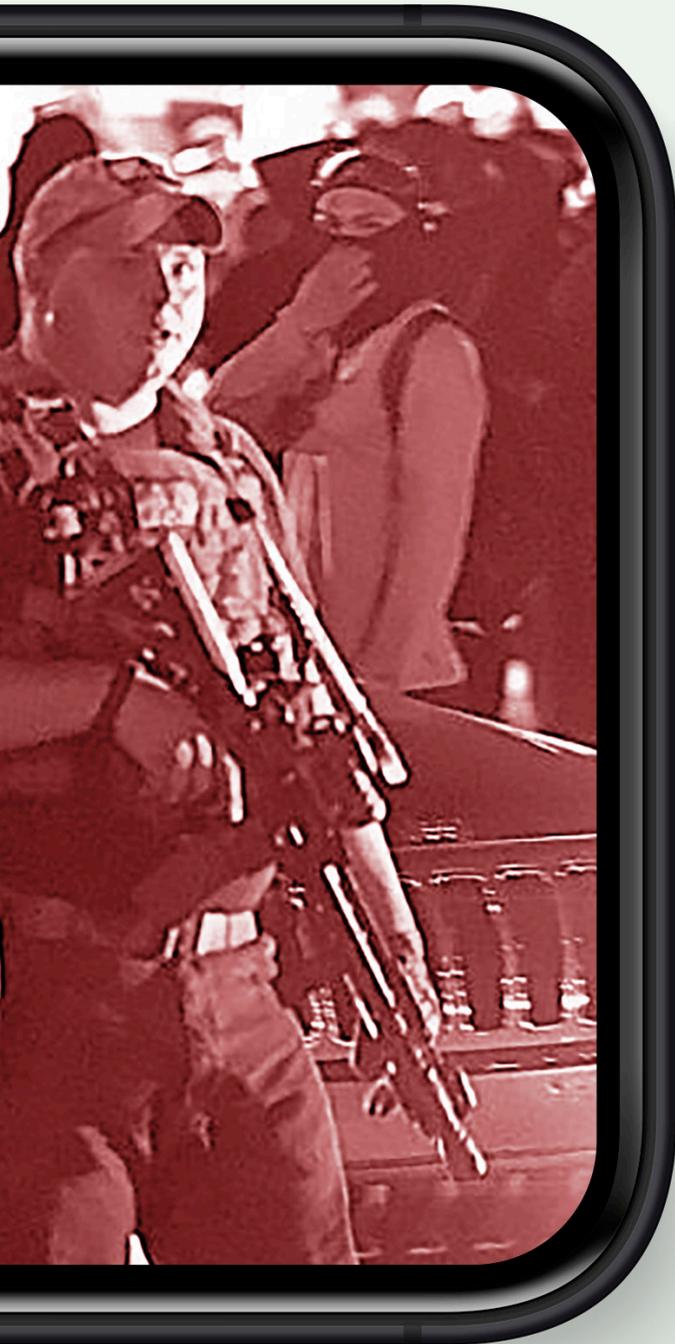
These were the beginnings of systematic racial violence in America.

As Black Lives Matter protests erupted in late May to end police brutality, Blue Lives Matter counter-protests became a breeding ground for "militias." Rittenhouse's group, the Kenosha Guard, wanted to be deputized by the Kenosha Police Department before the counter-protest. They so desperately wanted to be vigilantes. If they were truly a rebelling militia, what was the supposed oppressor the Guard was rebelling against?

Donald Trump, and his administration, supports white supremacist ideologies, not only refusing to denounce them, but even telling the Proud Boys to "stand back and stand by." The police support them. Internet subcultures support them. Facebook struggled to remove misleading campaign ads, let alone fact-check them. The company has recently tried to prevent misinformation and disinformation on the site after the 2016 presidential election by removing disinformation networks and now plans to ban political ads after the 2020 presidential election.

Banning political ads won't remove social media's stain on democracy.

Since its invention, the internet has become a public resource. Almost everyone has a social media account, but private internet companies are not required to hold people accountable. Russia's Internet Research Agency, or "troll



RITTENHOUSE DID NOT STAND ALONE WHEN HE SHOT THOSE PEOPLE.

factory,” is credited with spreading disinformation in memes, ads and conspiracies. Russia isn’t alone in this. Andrew Marantz wrote *Antisocial*, a book in which he describes how white supremacists push disinformation to their advantage. Rittenhouse is no different from others Marantz describes, radicalized by 4chan, 8chan, Reddit or Facebook. What about the supposed lone wolves that commit shootings at malls, schools, and places of worship?

Early in 2019, Brenton Tarrant emailed his manifesto to New Zealand’s prime minister and media outlets, drove to the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, and broadcasted himself gunning down mosque attendees over Facebook Live. Just a few months later, Patrick Crusius drove 11 hours to an El Paso, Tex. Walmart with the goal of shooting and killing members of the Hispanic community there. In his manifesto, Crusius wrote that his actions would be a catalyst.

“The Hispanic population is willing to return to their home countries if given the right incentive. An incentive that myself and many other patriotic Americans will provide.”

Cassius wrote in his own manifesto that he was inspired by Brenton Tarrant’s killings.

Rittenhouse was supposed to be an impartial medic that night, but the usernames that fed him conservative memes and talking points incited him to shoot three protestors. If other armed people weren’t walking around Kenosha that night, would Kyle Rittenhouse still call himself part of a militia in those interviews? White supremacist shooters are not lone wolves at all; they have people like Rittenhouse touting support in likes, comments, videos and presidential tweets. Rittenhouse did not stand alone when he shot those people. ■



DOMINIC FIKE
and the lack of time on

WHAT
COULD
POSSIBLY
GO WRONG

by Sarah Beckford

The opening of Dominic Fike's debut record certainly is an attention grabber. It opens with a droning, energized electric guitar, a clear sound breaking through the silence. Fike sings with emotion and slight braggadocio on "Come Here," which, at its conclusion, left me wondering why the song wasn't just a *little* bit longer. Brevity is clearly a theme on the singer's debut, *What Could Possibly Go Wrong*. The album has a Ramones-like conciseness to it — clocking in at only 34 minutes long. Still, it's enough time for Fike to sing about a variety of topics, all while developing a sound that's a mix of modern pop and alternative rock.

Fike's debut has been two years in the making, and the result is a decent collection of songs that differs from his former work. His most famous project, *Don't Forget About Me (Demos)* featured guitar-heavy ballads and some tracks inflected with a 2010s alternative feel — think of his song "Westcoast Collective." *What Could Possibly Go Wrong* has much more personality and a completely different musical aesthetic.

Despite the personality it packs, I felt like I wanted more. Take "Chicken Tenders," the catchy lead single in which Fike explores his vocal register while singing about love, relationships and, yes, chicken tenders. The song doesn't fit sonically with the album at all. Fike runs from his falsetto to his chest voice, then marathons back and forth between the two for the rest of the song, with a few singsong rap verses mixed in.

The album closes with the thoughtful tracks "Wurli" and "Florida," where Dominic Fike shines the most on the record. Both are songs with depth. "Wurli" recounts a toxic relationship and feelings of unwantedness, and "Florida" is a great ballad that demonstrates the best of Fike's lyricism as he reflects on his life and his rise to becoming a musician — and how life can change so fast.

Though Fike still has time to grow as an artist, *What Could Possibly Go Wrong* makes for easy listening that at times feels forgettable. Extending his ideas could have turned these snippets of songs into fuller, more nuanced music.

But, everything in time. ■

THOUGH FIKE STILL HAS TIME TO GROW AS AN ARTIST, WHAT COULD POSSIBLY GO WRONG MAKES FOR EASY LISTENING THAT AT TIMES FEELS FORGETTABLE.

Most of the album has an alternative pop feel, with a great helping of guitar solos and the occasional choral harmony, yet "Chicken Tenders" is an upbeat pop song that sounds more comfortable as a standalone that could have been left out.

What Could Possibly Go Wrong does have a few standout tracks that distract from the album's underwhelming vibe. Most of these songs are near the album's conclusion. In its second half, I felt like I was listening to more complete songs. "Joe Blazey" is a fun, peppy track that changes moods halfway through, and the album's other single, "Politics and Violence," holds up as well. It's an easygoing, simple song, carried by harmonies and skeletal instrumentation. At first, the song feels slightly aware of current events — "Why switch like different seasons?/I give that shit a weekend/Hollywood don't need a reason/To make you think you look bigger than you are" — before it becomes a love song of sorts near the middle.

The Non-Linear of Modern Spirituality

**A conversation with Gabi Abrão
By Tuhin Chakrabarti**



How spirituality exists in America today

Over time, religious thinking in the United States dissolved and sequestered itself to places of worship, cults and personalized practice. A swelling irreligious attitude has manifested itself since the 1990s, with 18% of the population identifying as not religious or spiritual, 27% not religious but spiritual and 26% completely irreligious.

Today, discussions of spirituality and the immaterial aspects of the mind exist exclusively in academic disciplines, most notably motivational and cognitive-behavioral psychology and philosophy. We've dug ourselves into an array of assumptions about human behavior, falsely introduced by pop psychology. These assumptions come in the form of self-help books, myths like the "learning styles," generalizing personality tests and that smiling in the mirror makes you happier. Pop psychology comes from the "replication crisis," the phenomenon in which a lot of replicated experiments get different results. Shoddy research methods are pretty common as well — the barrier to entry for psychology research is low in comparison to something like medicine.

This research colonized public conjecture surrounding mental wellness, childhood and adolescent psychology and pedagogy. It also created an ideological disjunct between us and our unlabeled selves — a dislocation between knowledge and mysticism.

The language of this kind of thinking includes terms like trauma, manifestation, emotional intelligence, toxicity and mindfulness, and revolves around the notion of an "inner child" and a "higher self." In the U.S., meditation apps and classes are on the rise, boosting these perspectives on psychology and creating a Western gaze upon Eastern expressions of spirituality.

Psychology has always been on our minds, but it took a while to become the kind of academically rigorous, medicalized, diagnosis-adherent supplement to Western medicine it is today. We've always questioned our inner labyrinths through literature, poetry, music, theology, philosophy and a range of other disciplines. At the core of all human creation, thinking and organization, there are always invisible motivations.

Every human culture developed alongside the notion of the supernatural and the invisible. While it is difficult to define the development and trajectory of human spiritual practice, it's easy to see that spirituality is a cornerstone of human life. But spirituality is simple. It's the notion of immateriality, of a mind separate from body — and a lot of people in the postmodern world seem to be missing it.

After the European Enlightenment created a rationalism-high and the scientific method finished sowing radical skepticism about the Church's canon, philosophers boasted that "God is dead" and made other damning premonitions about the future of human life after dogmatic religion crumbled. During the psychoanalysis boom at the turn of the 20th century, the influence of traditional religion further degraded and the psychiatrist Carl Jung identified a "spiritual problem of the Modern Individual" — widespread feelings of

In the U.S., meditation apps and classes are on the rise, boosting these perspectives on psychology and creating a Western gaze upon Eastern expressions of spirituality.

inadequacy and aimlessness that are a product of the spiritual void religion left behind. The "death of God" was a warning against profound uncertainty.

In this irreligious, anti-spiritual, scientific method-adherent society, we're experiencing a resurgence in spiritual thought, one that sometimes feels like a desperate yearning for new spiritualities. We're in a heyday for astrology, reformed religion and personalized spirituality. Through desperation, we've developed a new, customized melting-pot spirituality. Organized religion and personalized spirituality differ in their accountability, sense of community and dogmatic rigor. Gabi Abrão, a digital artist and spiritualist, embodies this kind of neo-religion, and how it intersects with meme culture.

Personalized spirituality? Why?

"The structure and accountability in organized religion can do wonders for some, yet be restrictive and limiting for others," Gabi said. "Organized religion also boasts a shared, definite experience, which can limit the potential for one's abilities and exploration. Personalized spirituality can become too free-form, even lazy for some, yet liberating and ideal for others. I believe in personalized spirituality with structure."

For Gabi, this means borrowing structure from existing, established religions and modifying it to one's circumstances. "That is where I believe balance is found," she said. "Exploration is key. I think you only find out what you need by trying different forms of spiritual practice out."

New age spirituality can feel pretentious, even mocking of older spiritual traditions. But there's a pleasant rhythm to it — it can manifest itself in monthly "challenges"

This “new spirituality” will use all the leftover information from spiritual leaders to create a new model, something possibly not as rigorous or rigid. Something that “caters to our current society,” in her words.

that easily mobilize people into a single, ritual task. Specifically the “No Fap November” challenge, or no-masturbation-November challenge. The challenge is geared towards men and grounded in the incorrect belief that retaining your sperm repurposes its life force back into your spirit. The truth is, sperm doesn’t carry life force, and abstinence doesn’t send it anywhere else. Examples like these prove that we’re hard-wired for ritual and yearn towards our former allegiance to self-improvement grounded in faithfulness.

The fact that Gabi’s Instagram page @sighswoon has 100 thousand followers and 428 subscribers to her paywalled content proves the same. It shows us that spiritual language is compelling and profitable.

“My current expression of spirituality is playful, explorative, and aspirational,” Gabi said. “I believe that following globalization and the internet, we have more knowledge and awareness of spiritual practices from all around the world. There are truths and flaws in every single one. Passed down research.”

Her Instagram page is an expedition into this kind of neo-spirituality, and is representative of our creative habit of collaging information from the past to create something new. Gabi believes in “the hunt for a new spirituality.” A spirituality that “compliments the digital” — the new modes of communication and massive media upheavals. This “new spirituality” will use all the leftover information from spiritual leaders to create a new model, something possibly not as rigorous or rigid. Something that “caters to our current society,” in her words.

The comment sections under @sighswoon’s posts act as a self-help forum, where she creates a “positive language with the invisible,” and independently monetizes her content through Patreon. She offers advice, her takes on astrology and insight into other spiritual trends. Her spirituality is an eclectic mix, borrowing dictums from East Asian philosophies, Western mysticism and cognitive, maybe even pop, psychology.

Exploring Gabi Abrão, @sighswoon and the language of memes

People discover their spirituality in many ways — some people use psychedelic drugs, some abide by religious dogma and some just want to achieve ritual stillness, a reprieve from the chaos of the workweek. For Gabi, her spirituality came from her Austro-Brazilian heritage and mobility.

“I believe being born in Los Angeles to immigrant parents informs many of the themes in my work — first, a sense of in-betweenness one feels when she does not fully belong to one culture or country, to have three languages in the house,” she said. “I believe this informs my interest in all that is shapeshifting, ever-changing, in-between, unknown. Also, my father is a very spiritual man who centers mysticism and spirituality over all else. This informs my desire for the mystical, the invisible — my fascination with it.”

Creating “a language with the invisible” is a deeply powerful goal, and her obsession with it manifests itself in various visual and textual projects. In a recent art project called “Relationships With The Ether,” individuals sent Gabi images of themselves with an ex-lover, the ex cut out and replaced with an image of clouds in the sky. The project emphasizes that “the feelings our eyes give us are so nuanced and ever-changing,” and that “their presence turns into this open space up for interpretation,” she said. The point is to emphasize invisibility, or all immaterial aspects of relationships and mind.

Her expression of self-help through humorous memes demonstrates her philosophy on comedy itself, and an appreciation for quickness, accessibility and stealthy penetration. Humor is very important to her. “It’s a great release to me, and so necessary to grow and navigate this wild life,” she said. “There are so many paradoxes, so many surprises, so many ways we play tricks on ourselves and others. There is a lot of nonsense and confusion to living, I think laughter is one of the main ways to release it.”

Beyond the humorous substance of memes, she maintains deep appreciation for their form as well. “They’re accessible, quick, funny,” she said. “They sneak into your feed and your consciousness effortlessly! They always feel like they are from a friend because they are the inside jokes of the internet. You feel like you’re in on something when you understand a meme or enjoy it, like

a club. It's nice. "Memes push you to simplify an idea with help from a comical, visual aid."

She professed this equation for further understanding: simple text + visual aid = accessible.

The language of self-help and wellness can be airy and presumptuous, but Gabi's work democratizes it through the literal accessibility of Instagram's content, and conceptual accessibility of memes and Instagram.

Instagram and memes often get dismissed as cultural tokens. "Like film in the '60s, Instagram's newness (and the volume of content it holds) sometimes tricks us into overlooking its cultural value," to quote an article in *The Outline*. But @sighswoon is a performance, a statement towards the dismissal of past spiritual authorities through memes. Self-help through this new format helps simplify difficult thoughts into one-liners, and reassures through brevity. It's almost like the power of journaling negative thoughts. It simplifies nebulous feelings and creates intense relatability between Gabi and her audience.

Like most artists, her process involves obsession and attachment to a simple idea. But unlike most artists, her work manifests itself just as simply as the original idea existed.

After studying conceptual art at Santa Monica University, Gabi is now 25, living in L.A. and learning Portuguese to ground her ethereal linguistic toolbox in reality. She's trying to see where this reconnection to her Brazilian heritage will take her. It's all been very inspiring and riveting for her.

Advice and recommendations from Gabi

We'll close off with art and aphorisms, to extend some self-help and to paint a clearer picture of some of the books and musicians that help lead her creative thinking to fruition.

Gabi defines our relationship with technology with the notion of a "cyborg." This is by no means a condemnation — she recommends we accept and appreciate our technology. An example she gave is using our GPS to get somewhere and then hugging the loved ones at our destination. The use of navigation services represents our reliance on our technological side, and the emotions we feel once we've expended the technology and gotten there represents our humanity. To reconcile this sort of neophobia against cyborgitude, she said we should understand "that all technology, including the internet, was invented by humans and is maintained by humans," she said. "It is an extension of humanity, a tool. An alien species didn't arrive on earth and force any of this on us, we created it, collectively, little by little. And that's beautiful. It is human to evolve, to create, to push boundaries. And we are experiencing this every day, in real time."

But we should also be careful of the pitfalls to digital life. "The digital age makes things move very quickly — trends, attention, influences, calls to action... it can be a very emotional and stressful experience, this overload of info," she said. "I think it is more important than ever



Image created by Gabi Abrão

"It is human to evolve, to create, to push boundaries."

to ground yourself in what and who you love, what you trust, because our generation will give you new things to obsess over every single day if we aren't careful. With grounding, with a strong sense of self, all this information can be channeled into wonderful personal projects and opportunities for growth and entertainment."

If you want to know Gabi better — an album and two books to check out, in her words:

"*The Jungle is The Only Way Out* by Mereba is an incredible album that came out in 2019 and was an absolute gift to my life. I find this album to access emotions to everything I find interesting about being alive now — spirituality, romantic confusion, self-empowerment, a new momentum, the need for freedom in all of it. Even the sound feels digital-meet-earth. I highly recommend the whole album.

Plus, *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success* by Deepak Chopra is my #1 book for lifestyle and mindset.

And lastly, *Sculptures for the Blind* by Lenka Clayton is a wonderful book that discusses pretty much everything I am interested in through the medium of an art sculpture — it discusses perceived value, varying perceptions, the invisible stories that exist in objects and transactions." ■

Tips for an International Student

by Falah Falali

After keeping myself semi-happily alive 8,000 miles away from family and all things familiar, I think I am eligible to give some advice to international students like me.

I moved to America from India a few years ago to pursue journalism. During these years I have failed, won, laughed and cried myself into the person I am today. I've learned a lot and I wanted to share what has worked for me. So, here are some of my tips on how to survive and find your worth in an unfamiliar place.

Show up.

First, and seriously I cannot emphasize this enough, go to your classes. Show up. I wish someone sat me down and told me this sincerely. When you're in a new country, you have to build your community. Professors and peers with whom you keep in touch become a part of that community. Classes also help create the all-important first step of getting used to a new place — settling into a routine.

Secondly, go to club meetings and events on campus. This is where you can meet like-minded people. Stony Brook has involvement fairs and job fairs that enable students to interact with the university's larger community. Applications like SBengaged and Corq also help students discover groups and events in a new place. I wasn't active in campus life until the end of my sophomore year, and I wish I had started earlier.



Check yourself.

If you're a student at Stony Brook, you're exposed to people from all around the world. You're also exposed to your own prejudices and biases. Question why you think the way you do and whether it is something that should be changed or not. Being aware of your own biases opens you up to fruitful interactions with diverse people, ideas and thoughts that can add meaning to your life.

Also, literally check yourself. Make sure to give yourself at least 10 minutes of "me time" to see if your mental health is okay. Sometimes, we can get so caught up between classes, work and keeping up with everyone back home that we forget to check in with ourselves. Try to make some time for yourself every day.

Accept yourself.

I like to eat with my hands. This is something I tried to change but I am done denying myself simple pleasures for other people's validation. Accepting my accent was particularly tough — I never realized I had an accent until I came to America. Then, once someone pointed it out, I heard it every time I spoke. I faked an American accent for two years. Now, I sound like an American in India and like an Indian in America. I regret rolling my rs and softening my ds to comfort people who did not like my accent. I have accepted my peculiar accent as a part of the journey. Make space for change in your life, new experiences, people, art and words — make space for all new things. Embrace the change that comes with moving to a foreign country. Be true to yourself. Don't change yourself for the sake of assimilation to a point where you begin to disassociate with your identity.

Do it for you.

Make sure you do the things you had on the list you made before you reached New York, with or without company. I don't know who taught us that we need the company of others to enjoy a good meal or a movie, but they were wrong. So go to the museum, even if all your friends flake and eat cupcakes at Magnolia, if that's what you want to do. Exploring a new place by yourself at your own pace is an underrated adventure. With enough solo outings, you will learn to trust yourself and this will build confidence rooted in experience.

Learn the culture.

A great way to explore a place is by starting local. Start learning about the history, cuisine, art and economics of where you are living to better understand the place. Explore the art that came from the place you're at — Long Island has given the world Walt Whitman, Mariah



Carey, Billy Joel and LL Cool J, to name a few.

Going to a local band performance, Saturday brunch or farmers market can really help you get a feel for the place and people. My favorite spots near Stony Brook are BB & GG Farms in Saint James, Stony Brook Beach and the Avalon Nature Preserve.

Let it change.

There will be changes, big and small, changes within you and around you. Accept them. You might move houses a couple of times or lose friends you thought were for life. Let these experiences teach you and change you. Exchange your comfort for adventure. You will not regret it. Don't hold grudges against people who hurt you along the way; we cannot grow if we are bitter. Understand that you are privileged to have this opportunity and it took effort. Don't pay attention to people who don't have the capacity to understand your duality. ■





THE STORY
OF JA'KING

BY JULIO
TAKU

Christopher Goodwin was in his senior year of high school when he began falling out of love with the sport that had come to define him.

At 6 feet 2 inches, the Uniondale native was a senior shooting guard for the Brooklyn Collegiate High School varsity men's basketball team when he started to feel his heart was no longer in shooting hoops.

"I was the kid that actually did wake up at six to go run, actually hit the gym earlier than everybody else," Goodwin said. "You know, that was my thing. But it wasn't doing it for me anymore."

In his junior year, he averaged 12 points and two assists per game. He scored a season-high 22 points against St. Anthony's High School. This prowess on the court, combined with his high academic performance, resulted in scholarship offers from a slew of D2 and D3 schools, and even interest from some D1 schools, including Boston University, Weber State University, Loyola University Chicago and Bucknell University.

He would eventually decide to attend Bloomfield College in September of 2018 on the highest scholarship the school had ever awarded an athlete.

"I was covered for four years," Goodwin said. "All I had to do was make layups."

During his transition from high school to college basketball, Goodwin spent more time in a Brooklyn recording studio than the gym.

He battled with feeling unfit for the sport.

"I don't think I got the passion certain people do for this... like how I used to," he said.

"It's just a bad week," his father would say to reassure him, but Goodwin disagreed. "It's deeper than that."

Upon his arrival at Bloomfield College, things were somber. He barely socialized, seldom leaving his dorm except for class and basketball, returning at times tearful and angry. On campus, Goodwin was constantly coached on how to dress around certain people, how to speak to certain coaches and how to act. At home he was being told how he should chart his future, and although his parents gave this advice with his best interest in mind, it wasn't in his personal interest.

Desperate phone calls home were met with encouragement to stay and tough it out.

"You can't do this," his parents said. "You're supposed to be the one that goes to college for free."

He was effectively *done*.

Goodwin's strife also affected his practices, resulting in lackluster performances. His teammates questioned

why he had been given such a large scholarship.

He agreed.

"These guys are so passionate about what they're doing," he said. "They love this thing and I'm someone who doesn't appreciate it. So I don't deserve to be here."

Goodwin's feelings boiled down to one simple question: "If I was to be gone today... would I be happy with what I was doing?" At that point, the answer was no.

"I want to die pursuing some shit I actually wanted. I want to at least try."

He decided to pour his all into rap the same as he had done with basketball.

Goodwin's love for rap began from the early age of eight. "I would study rap and take it as seriously as schools would want you to be with textbooks. I did bar breakdowns, syllable counts, researched and practiced abundant styles of poetic rhetoric and studied the greats and their delivery."

One such example for Goodwin is the opening line in Nas' song "Nas Is Like."

"Freedom or jail, clips inserted, a baby's being born

Same time a man is murdered — the beginning and end"

"In a complex way, Nas speaks to life cycles," Goodwin said. "There's tragedy in death, but at the same time there's beauty in new life. Also, the line "the beginning and end" can be related to reincarnation or the soul being infinite."

Some of his other influences range from Nas to George Mulligan, Jay Electronica to Miles Davis, Joey Bada\$\$ to Bill Evans, Wu-Tang Clan to Sade, Griselda to Gil Scott Heron.

"It takes the right ear to hear how brilliant some of these artists are — these guys are like modern-day Shakespeares."

This close-listening approach allows him to pick up on more than the casual listener. "If you really sit with their music you will hear how they construct complex, philosophical and at-times existential rhymes that make you stop and think."

After a trying semester and a lot of introspection, Goodwin quit the Bloomfield College men's basketball team in January 2019.

This decision would send him back to his family in Brooklyn, where he had to earn the rap success he wanted bit by bit. There would be no more coasting on layups alone. His friends, who he thought would be there for the long haul, abandoned him. Goodwin also faced indifference from his family members when he told them of his issues and aspirations.

"I ain't gonna believe in shit you doing until I see something," his grandmother told him.

It was around this time that he formed his alias, "Ja'King The Divine." Ja'King, the name he was almost given at birth, had spiritual connections to the Five-Percent Nation — a group that believes 10 percent of the people of the world know the truth of existence, and those

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"YOU CAN REP OR
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BOY WAS HE WRONG.

elites opt to keep 85 percent of the world in ignorance and under their controlling thumb. The remaining five percent are those who know the truth and are to enlighten the rest. Goodwin crafted himself in this image.

“I felt that using that name made me closer to my culture and roots even if I’m not a Five-Percenter myself,” he said. “I think that’s where the enigma in me comes in, because it’s an ‘if you know you know’ type of thing on a spiritual tip...I like the idea of enlightenment and proximity to God through experience and cognitive development.”

Returning to Uniondale from a stay with his mother in Durham, North Carolina, Goodwin reconnected with an old friend.

They grew up playing basketball together at Benjamin N. Cardozo High School in Bayside, Queens. His friend’s troubled home life would eventually force him to drop out.

In March of 2019, Goodwin posted the music video to his song “Mind Game” from his first mixtape, *GEM\$ EP*. The friend reached out to him on Instagram in disbelief at Goodwin’s raw ability as an artist and MC. A week later, they got together to catch up and wound up talking about music. He produced beats and offered his services for a collaboration.

“We can really cook together and make everything from scratch in your basement,” he said.

They spent the following three weeks brainstorming ideas and creating music.

As they spent more and more time together, he would have what Goodwin described as “schizophrenic episodes” in which he would bring up his dead mother. He was also insecure about his abilities and had a contagious anxiety that made Goodwin feel uneasy. He would falsely accuse him of using him only for music and not caring about him.

“We don’t have to work together or anything,” Goodwin told him. “I’m not trying to use you.”

By the end of their chaotic sessions, they had created a 14-track mixtape.

Matters came to a head when Goodwin and his friend had an argument about Goodwin’s girlfriend’s presence during recording sessions. He accused Goodwin of trying to show him up and make him feel like less of a man. Goodwin called the collaboration off, and they officially separated. His friend disappeared with the mixtape on his laptop.

Goodwin reached out to him, asking for the files — he planned on finishing and releasing it himself. In an angry rebuttal, he told Goodwin that he sold the laptop with the beats still on it. He didn’t even save them on a thumb drive.

“I needed bread,” he said.

He moved to Atlanta — but before he left, he told Goodwin, “You can rap or whatever, but you don’t have any substance in your music.”

Boy was he wrong.

Goodwin put his head down and created his debut album, *Growing Pains*.

He found a job, registered for classes at Nassau Community College and got even more serious about his music. He worked for the money to finance his performances and studio time, and to purchase beats. He also began researching branding — how his name could be tied to his image and the principles he stood for. At Nassau, he met like-minded people who were studying music, like Sean Valentine (@soundvalentine) who would help produce *Growing Pains*. Kedar Nestor-Ulysse (@autheniq_), another Nassau student, would become good friends with him, collaborating on their song “WOO-SAH.” Goodwin also sharpened his business acumen to avoid any financial pitfalls, which are all too common for musicians.

Goodwin released *Growing Pains* on October 25, 2019 to high acclaim within his local community of artists and fans.

Within the underground scene, he received recognition from Milo The Cat, a well-known New York MC. His music began to circulate more as he was reposted by popular Instagram rap pages like @hiphop_pioneers, @bennyonthebeat, @ughhblog, @artistspot_, @escape.realitytour and @grindorstarveshowcase. In Sept. 2019, he performed at an open mic event at Stony Brook University that unlocked his confidence and aided his stage presence. He was invited to perform at a show in Buffalo, NY for the Buffalo East Coast Connect Show and at the popular New York City club Sounds of Brazil. He even met well-known rapper Westside Gunn, from the rap supergroup Griselda. To him, this was further proof that his hard work and dedication to the craft was paying off. He was finally getting recognition and respect from the scene that inspired him since childhood.

Goodwin’s relationships with his parents improved as they saw him being productive in school and heard the quality of music he was creating.

“I almost cried listening to your album, because we never knew you took it this seriously,” his step-mother told him.

It was a complete surprise to his family, who watched him give up substantial scholarship money to pursue what they saw as a hobby. They heard substance in his music and appreciated his art.

Upon the album’s release, Goodwin began marketing *Growing Pains* on social media and designing merchandise. To his surprise, he was contacted by fans as far away as Australia for hoodies and music. The success of the album was truly unprecedented for him, and has fueled him to do even more.

He has since started a collective of other musicians and creatives called Divine Records, and released a mixtape, *THE Marvelous R7ght Wrist*. His sophomore effort, *Pray for New York*, is out now on all streaming platforms.

“Everybody hears the lyrics and they interpret them differently, but they still feel it,” he said. “They all take from it what they want and have a different favorite song or line. That’s how you know you’ve got something — at least to me.” ■

Sucking a lollipop in the middle of Circle Road, I am waiting for you but thinking about him. To an 18-year-old girl, the nostalgia of her earlier liaisons is a form of comic relief enjoyed in secrecy. Loving him at 16 was a lot like sucking this lollipop, I think. I have tasted the sweetness of this cruel infatuation for the past two years. Today I am chewing it to bits, until nothing remains but the harshly bitten stick of white, reminding me of something that once was — something that no longer remains.

You arrive along the curb like a new beginning. Around us, the leaves are beginning to change color. The browning of the hawthorns signals the evanescence of a torrid summer. As you lean over to unlock the passenger door of your car, we are met with a rush of the crisp autumn breeze. I slide into your car, pausing to observe the specks of honey in your eyes. In the bark of the orchards and the stark husk of the mahogany branches beside us, I see a likeness to those gleaming flecks of brown.

You greet me with urgency. You taste like coffee.

The cityscapes in my wistful recollections wither to dust the way naïve memories do at the hand of sudden revelations. At 16, I was certain that he would never

see an unspoken but bold declaration of love.

I see it in our adventures across the city, in the days of Barleycorn and Madman Espresso, when we got lost in the labyrinth of Manhattan's jagged roads and even more deeply in one another. I see it in the seeming insignificance of passing assurance, in those moments of comfort within enclosed walls, when you promised me the universe would fall into my palms if I willed it to. I see it in those moments, now lost in translation, when we hollered "Home is wherever I'm with you" at the top of our lungs as we drove across long, unwinding roads into tangerine sunrises. I see it in our stolen kisses and our impromptu trips to Red Tiger Dumpling House at the end of every business week. I see it in the hope that never seemed to go astray.

At 20, I find myself sucking the same lollipop and I taste in its cherry flavor the remnants of my youthful innocence. I laugh over the stubborn convictions I once held about life and my foolish jurisdictions about love. I relish in a newfound certainty that is not as sightless — a certainty that begins and ends with you. It is a certainty I wish upon everyone when they are in love.

We laugh over nonsensical realities as time goes by.

Cherry

by Jeni
Dhodary

leave me hollow. At 18, the word hollow has taken on a new form as I envision the unformidable possibility of losing you. Now at 19, I am attempting to memorialize our love within the lines of futile literature because the world deserves to know that love is a fairytale. We are still living in the age of tenderness.

More than a year later, the anticipation of seeing you after a long day fills my stomach with butterflies. I find solace in your touch. In your late-night fascination with art and your gripes about society, I sense an understanding that flows with a greater urgency than the currents of time.

I find peace in the love letters we crafted for each other on thin parchment out of the blue. Then in our undertaking to write to each other every week until we had enough letters to bind into a book, my heart softens. On that September day when I told you I missed you and you drove 241 miles to see me, I see conviction — and when you did it every other week in the name of faith, I

We find comfort in the habits we fall into. And I begin to wonder if our future will be as kind as our past. You do everything you can to convince me it will be. Even when I fly across the ocean in an impulsive pursuit to explore the world, you venture the 3,582 miles from New York City to Madrid to see me. We lose ourselves in the Spanish streets and find ourselves again at the taqueria in Calle de las Fuentes at ungodly hours, where we stay until we finally abandon the claustrophobic vicinity for the violet April night. We carpool to Cuenca with an absolute stranger, occasionally amusing him with our broken Spanish, and part with him to climb to the very top of the city, resting only to take in its unhinged beauty.

From the avenues of Madrid to the boulevards of Venice and Paris, we subsume ourselves in the adventures we pursue. It is hard to think, during our midnight runs for grappa in Firenze and our chillier days in Montmartre, when we explore the rainy Parisian hills with just your one umbrella as we wait for the cleaning lady to finish clearing our Airbnb, that what we have is not infinite.

**At
20, I find
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ing the same
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ry flavor the
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cence.**

You teach me that some love stories are viscerally beautiful up until the very moment of their end,

We do not consider that we are merely young and in love — and just as old age wears away the novelty of youth, perhaps our exuberance is a fleeting phenomenon confined to these moments lost to time.

I begin to consider this when you are away, when I am forced to reckon with my being independent of your presence. Still thousands of miles across the sea, I ruminate on the idea that maybe, just maybe, the woman you met two and a half years ago is no longer the person unraveling before you today. Yes, time has certainly changed the both of us, but I feel in me a newfound restlessness to break free: to experience the novelties of youth independent of the commitments that bind us — independent of this relationship.

So why is it that when I see you, I suppress my considerations into the forbidden recesses of my mind? Maybe it is comfortability. After all, comfortability is a lethal drug. We do not realize our acts of resignation until it is too late. I let you become my greatest act of resignation.

I tuck away my restlessness and leave for the suburbs every now and then to see you, but the summer is the hardest that it has ever been for us. Dare I admit that I am unhappy, even though I am home? But maybe home as I had envisioned it, the home I saw in you, was a mere rumination, a derivative of my yearning for refuge. And maybe home is not a place or an entity bound to a time and space, but the feeling of freedom that overwhelmed me while I was still in motion, finding myself along the endless beauty this world has to offer. Home as a person or a place to permanently occupy, home as stationery and tethered to time and space — maybe that doesn't exist. And if it does exist, it does only as a form of bondage. Maybe I am a vagabond to this existence, born to roam freely; to find home in the moments that are so painfully ephemeral, moments in which I am whole. Maybe my home is my mobility. When I tell you this, you laugh. I was a language you could never understand.

It is a slow process — the process of decay — and it is painful even though it is right. It is only a matter of time before we part ways as lovers and find each other again

that very night as friends. We accept that this is how our love story will end because although we are strangers to this existence, we cannot convince ourselves that we are strangers to each other. But maybe we are. Maybe that is why this is ending after years of swearing it never would.

I make a list of all the things I resent about you to make it easier, the reasons I should know better than to stay. But I know in my heart that the list is an effort in futility, for I do not need it to remind me of how you vanquished my idealism, how your precautions spoke me out of my convictions and how you understood me only as an intellectual concept, an ideation, but nothing more. What else would explain how we made it to so many cities but neglected a territory far closer, the territory of each other's hearts? Swept up in the ember of our moments, I had given myself up to an illusion — but it is not all in vain. You teach me that some love stories are viscerally beautiful up until the very moment of their end, but that does not mean they are meant to last. They are meant to be experienced only as a precursor to the other things life has in store for us. So wherever this rich and unpredictable life takes you, I hope it finds you happy.

With endless possibilities swarming in my idealistic head, I bid you farewell and approach life the way I approached you that midsummer day when we first met, behind the pink ice cream truck by Central Park: full of hope, optimism and a trickle of fear. Somehow I find myself in aisle two of Stop & Shop, stopping before a bag of cherry-flavored Tootsie Pops. I pick them up by the bucket load. At 21, I finally buy myself another pack. ■

**But
that does
not mean
they are
meant to last.**

KYRIE IRVING IS THE NEYMAR OF BASKETBALL



BY
JAMES
BOWEN

Uncle Drew is a walking highlight reel. Lightning in a bottle. “Must-watch TV.” His ball-handling skills have broken more ankles than rollerblades — and he’s not done yet. The 28-year-old is heading into the prime of his career, albeit during an injury-prone period, but he won’t compete for championships alone. Co-star and longtime rival Kevin Durant will be the Robin to his Batman. Or is it the other way around?

Ever since being drafted by the Cavaliers in 2011, Kyrie Irving has dealt with the pressure of being the co-star of a franchise — the bridesmaid, but never the bride. In 2016, he was reportedly frustrated by the acclaim LeBron James received when he brought Cleveland its first-ever NBA championship — despite the fact that Irving sank the series winning three. He allegedly wanted to be showered with the same love as King James, but to do so, he needed his own team, his own city.

So on Aug. 22, 2017, Kyrie took his talents to Boston. The basketball world was in awe; why would a player want to leave the side of the league’s kingpin? But the idea is not as far-fetched as some may think.

Over in the soccer universe, just 19 days prior, Brazilian footballer Neymar da Silva Santos Júnior made a similar career move. On Aug. 3, Neymar left Barcelona to join Paris Saint-Germain (PSG). The superstar was tired of being number two to Lionel Messi, arguably the world’s number one. He wanted to prove he could carry his own team — that he could be the head honcho.

And why not? Neymar has the samba skills and dazzling tricks to split defenses and raise crowds, just as Irving does. His name garners the attention of millions of kids across the globe who want to replicate his “Jogo Bonito” (Beautiful Football). Like Irving, Neymar possesses the flair and agility to weave through defenses and break ankles. Their swagger is comparable across sports,

on and off the pitch. But their play styles and personalities aren’t the only things that draw comparisons. Their common desire to be the best, to be loved, is what motivates them. Likewise, it’s also what breaks them.

After leaving their world-class mentors, Messi and LeBron, Neymar and Irving have gone on to compete on their own teams, but things haven’t panned out the way they wanted, and their ex-teammates have overshadowed them.

In 2018, during his first season in Boston, Kyrie missed the Eastern Conference finals against his former team, the Cleveland Cavaliers. Friend-turned-foe LeBron James delivered his team a ticket to the finals in a seven-game spectacle — while Kyrie could only watch from the bench as his relatively inexperienced teammates took on the King in their own TD Garden. Although current teammate DeAndre Jordan has described Irving as emotionally unpredictable, there’s little doubt he must have been feeling at least some remorse during the series.

THEIR COMMON DESIRE TO BE THE BEST, TO BE LOVED, IS WHAT MOTIVATES THEM. LIKEWISE, IT'S ALSO WHAT BREAKS THEM.



Similarly, in 2018 Neymar was knocked out of the Champions League in his first season. Paris Saint-Germain were defeated 5-2 by Real Madrid, a thrashing administered at the hands of arguably the world's best soccer player, Cristiano Ronaldo.

But it's the adulation that they both really yearn for. Surely they'd have the backing of their own fans? Not quite.

In May of 2019, Neymar fell out of favor with the PSG Ultras, the club's most passionate and aggressive fanbase. At games, they held up signs telling him to "go away." The once-beloved prince of Brazilian football was now hated, not just by PSG fans, but around the world. Neymar, who signed with PSG in 2018, has missed 42 matches due to injury the past two seasons. But his off-the-pitch antics suggest a lack of commitment. Frequent parties and delayed rehabilitation also made fans unhappy. It's no wonder why PSG fans want to offload Neymar to recoup some of the \$240 million the team spent for

him.

But PSG isn't the only club that Neymar has burned bridges with. In 2018, Neymar sued Barcelona for \$26 million in unpaid bonuses. The lawsuit killed his legacy in the eyes of Barcelona fans, who dubbed him "Moneymar." Facing hate from both clubs, the Brazilian has found himself in limbo.

Irving has a similar problem. Although his departure from the Boston Celtics was seemingly amicable, his disagreements with the team were hidden from the public eye.

DeAndre Jordan said it best: Irving's "mood swings" drive him to scold his teammates and hog the ball during games. Similar to Kobe Bryant, who was told he couldn't win without Shaquille O'Neal, Irving is trying to prove critics wrong. But in his case, the output isn't there yet — and time is running out.

While Irving isn't necessarily hated by fans, he has shifted his persona from a quiet, articulate, and well-kempt

professional into an arrogant, outspoken critic of his teammates. Neymar underwent a similar fall-out with his former club, FC Barcelona.

In 2017, Neymar's first with PSG, he took a penalty kick away from his teammate Edison Cavani, who was and still is the club's leading goalscorer. The fans booed Neymar, despite his incredible four-goal performance that day.

Irving and Neymar are similar in their diva personalities. They want all eyes on them and feed on the adulation of carrying their teams to victory. Their dribbling skills and flashy play draw crowds and their diminutive frames allow their agile, quick bodies to drift past opposing players with ease. But their lack of definitive success, mixed with their tendencies to showboat and reject teammates, make them luxury players who end up hurting their teams more than they help.

Also, taking into consideration the massive money moves they made to join these teams, it's clear why fans may be upset with the supposed superstars.

Although Neymar has won with Brazil before, he suffered injuries that ruled him out of the 2019 Copa America in his home country. Brazil won that year without him. His frequent injuries, which have accumulated over the past three seasons, make him a financial liability to current and future suitors.

Similarly, Irving has also suffered injuries nearly every season. In 2015, he was ruled out of the NBA finals almost completely, leaving the Cavaliers to battle — and win — without him. These victories suggest Irving and Neymar may not be as valuable to their teams as they might think.

Time is ticking. Unless both deliver on their own, their legacies will be cemented with an asterisk — forever in the shadows of bigger, better superstars. ■



Smoke engulfing the room. Dark pieces of hair circling the white tiled floor. The smell of burning and chemicals. The salon was sandwiched between a laundromat and a bodega defaced with graffiti. On Sunday mornings for 11 years, I got my hair straightened there, sitting in a leather chair and flinching at the burning and blistering heat against my scalp. The pain was necessary to conceal my natural appearance.

Pelo malo, which literally means “bad hair,” was a constant refrain in my home. The term is part of what it means to be Dominican, yet it was meant to be an insult. Naturally, my hair is a bed of unruly dark brown ringlets, unmanageable and dense. When I bathe, thick strands collect in my bathtub. The weight of several thousand curls means never being able to properly tie my hair — because gomitas, hair ties, would always pop on the first attempt to get them around it all.

Meanwhile, pin-straight hair was always the hallmark of beauty. When I watched Telemundo or television commercials, I saw news anchors and models with that look — never anyone with hair like mine. Having straight hair seemed to be society’s standard of beauty and acceptance, while anything contradictory was automatically deemed ugly and alien.

The salon was my gateway to this ideal. The straightener was my ticket to America’s concept of beauty. At the salon, I created the presentable version of myself. Sundays were for assimilating. Sundays were for erasing part of myself.

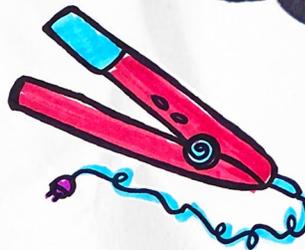
The straightener was my ticket to America’s concept of beauty.

In elementary school, having straight hair meant an overflow of compliments and “Can I touch your hair?” moments. It was the ultimate vindication of my Sunday routine: My sleek and manageable hair meant that I could finally be recognized and admired. I finally resembled those girls on television. I became obsessed with conforming to these ideals, in ways that made me reject the most obvious form of my heritage by passing a hot comb through my culture.

On days I couldn’t afford to visit the salon, the air around me felt more enclosed and the looks were no longer in admiration. “But your hair was so pretty straight!” classmates would tell me. I struggled with recognizing the beauty in my natural hair because of its stigma, but also because of the absence of successful women of color in traditional media outlets.

But social media changed everything.

Across newsfeeds and timelines, there were women that shared my same skin complexion and my unruly kinks. For once, I saw myself in these women, who might have also struggled with their own appearance. They were unapologetic and proud of their identities, encouraging natural coils as they celebrated being people of color. I traded in my straightener for a curl activator cream. I traded in my fears of not being taken seriously for celebratory feelings of proudly wearing my culture.



At the salon, I created the presentable version of myself. Sundays were for assimilating. Sundays were for erasing part of myself.



My hair is now in a transitioning state. The damaged ends are obvious, yet so are the ringlets. The way my hair curls at the top but remains straight on the ends is a reminder of the 13 years that I spent trying to erase parts of myself. Through the transition, I’ve learned to embrace my kinky roots, and what it means to be Dominican in a world that only praises straight and manageable hair. Taking ownership of my natural identity forced me to differentiate myself from society’s perceived norms. My transition is empowering for me: It lets me wear my culture freely without fear of judgment. The curls, the coils and the kinks are all parts of what it means to be Dominican. ■

Every year, we
compile our favorite
songs of the summer
into a piece that
explores our feelings.
This is that.



The Stony Brook Press
Songs of the Summer, 2020
Oil on canvas

Phoebe Bridgers I Know The End

by Deanna Albohn

Phoebe Bridgers' newest album *Punisher* was a perfect soundtrack to a not-so-perfect summer. What was supposed to be a few months of fun and relaxation was filled with hundreds of hours spent wallowing in my room.

In the three years since her debut album *Stranger in the Alps* was released, Bridgers formed the bands boygenius and Better Oblivion Community Center. *Alps* was filled with sad emo-folk songs, whereas on *Punisher*, the songs are grungier and full of contradictions — often switching between violence and romance.

"I Know The End," the cinematic ending to Bridgers' sophomore album, highlights the extreme lows of life on tour with the lyric "*there's no place like my room*," and parallels the mundane cycles many of us have been stuck in for months.

In an interview with Amoeba Records, Bridgers called herself a "sucker for a huge outro," and "I Know The End" is a colossal conclusion to an otherwise melodramatic album. The track crescendos from a hushed and contained first half about homesickness to a third verse littered with doomsday references inspired by a real drive she took to Outside Lands Music and Arts Festival in San Francisco, during which she saw a SpaceX rocket launch she compared to a government drone or alien spaceship.

During her drive through dystopian America, she talks about fearing God

while passing by slaughterhouses and outlet malls, all while listening to "*some America first rap country song*."

"I Know The End" grows to its climax in its last minute, with wailing guitars and background vocals from her boygenius collaborators Lucy Dacus and Julien Baker, who yell "*the end is near*" while Bridgers screams at the top of her lungs.

I listened to this song on repeat for weeks after the album came out, and found myself watching the music video over and over just to feel the build-up and release of that final minute of screams and guitar. Something about her making out with her future self — while dressed in her signature skeleton suit — really stuck out.

I stress-screamed along to distract myself from quarantined days that all blended together.





Shake
some ass!

ppcocaine
PJ

by Emily Scott

If you're like me, you spent most of your summer on your phone because going out wasn't really an option. Spending most of my free time like this led me to TikTok, where I discovered Trap Bunnie Bubbles herself, also known as ppcocaine, the artist behind these iconic lines:

Let's get it poppin' with all my ladies
Hold on

Bitch, did you hear what the fuck I said
Shake some ASS, hoe!

• • •

Aye aye, tell lil' shorty come here
I'm tryna blow her back out
Walkin' funny for the year

• • •

For you! Imma let you hit it for free
For you! Imma let you hit it for free
For you! (I probably shouldn't though)
I might let you hit it for free

These lyrics, when scream-sung in ppcocaine's raspy tone, just unlocks something inside me that makes me want to go feral. Not only does she refer to her listeners as hoes, but she talks about sex in a way that is comical, even if it is vulgar and a little out there. Something about being told to shake my ass makes me go feral, I guess.

While "PJ" isn't ppcocaine's first viral song on TikTok, the serotonin I get when I hear her yell "*shake some ASS, hoe*" is unmatched. All of Trap Bunnie Bubbles's songs are raunchy and remind me of a song from none other than CupcakKe, but for some reason, "PJ" just hits differently. Maybe it's the fact that the song opens with "*hey bitches...get up! Trap Bunnie Bubbles!*" Or maybe I've just been on TikTok for so long that I've fried my last three brain cells to the point where any song with a beat that I can shake my ass to gets a gold star in my book.

That being said, "PJ" is hands down my song of the summer.

Need a
911, can you
patch the
line?

Lady Gaga Chromatica II & 911

by Jackson Scott

This summer, I felt like I was falling. I was full of anxiety, which manifested as self-doubt, and trying to find a way to keep it all together. Who didn't feel like that though, honestly? Luckily for me, I found a new song that really clicked with me as soon as I heard it and helped me understand that this is all temporary. That song was "911" by Lady Gaga, from her sixth studio album *Chromatica*. The preceding musical interlude, titled "Chromatica II," also deserves a special shout-out.

"Chromatica II" is an orchestrated instrumental highlighting how dramatic a string section can sound — not what you'd expect to find on a dance album. As the bass and violins play away, the looming anxiety of something new and unknown brews. Then, with an explosion of synth and string, the song pushes you down the rabbit hole into an unexpected sea of synthesizer. The first time I listened to *Chromatica*, I gasped at the transition between the two songs. It also turned into a meme used when something incredibly unexpected or drastic occurs, such as when Wendy Williams had heat stroke on-air.

"911" is a killer dance song that carries on the same feeling from the preceding

interlude with a new synth sound, and a darker edge. I closely identified with its opening lyrics:

Keep repeating self-hating
phrases

I have heard enough of these
voices

Almost like I have no choice

It's truly difficult to wrangle all the things in our minds that push us down. Some days I feel like I'm on autopilot, going through the motions just to do the bare minimum. Here, Gaga sings about exactly how I have been feeling — which is probably why I love the song so much. There's one particular part of the song, towards the end, that I really like. Gaga sings:

Please patch the line

Need a 911, can you patch
the line?

Some days, all you feel you can do is call for help. "911" is a message from Gaga on her confrontation of mental health and how taking medication allows her to better manage herself. The music feels almost robotic and automated, which pulls me in with a groove. While "911" may be a song about processing and handling self-doubt, *Chromatica* is a beacon of self-love and communicates the understanding that while things may not be okay right now, eventually they will be.





**Why did
you take it
all away?**

Fiona Apple Drumset

by Josh Joseph

Looking back at last year's Songs of the Summer write-up, it's bitter but funny to see my fellow editors complaining about how bad the summer of 2019 was. If that summer was a dull moment, then this one was a slow, dreary sludge that was at once too long and too short.

Although quarantining at home brought unexpected inconveniences, it also brought some good surprises. In April, Fiona Apple popped out of an eight-year hiatus to announce her album *Fetch The Bolt Cutters*, with a cover that looked like a manic arts-and-crafts project.

Seeing the cover and tracklist plastered across social media gave me flashbacks to 2012, when her previous album, *The Idler Wheel...* (whose full title is too long to write concisely here),

was released. I remembered flipping back and forth through its tracks on Spotify, back when the free service was impossibly ad-free. And I remembered the intricate, spiraling self-portrait on its cover, and the way that each raw, passionate song coalesced into an earworm despite its unpleasant themes and demo-like production.

This new album felt the same way. Each song was built on homemade percussion tracks, with lyrics and melodies inspired by chants. Picking one track to represent the varied terrain of the album wasn't easy, but "Drumset" is one of my favorite distillations of that chanting, repeating, percussive energy. Here, Apple unpacks the concept of absence and the anger, the confusion and the neurotic tendencies that it can bring on. The song was written as a voice memo and recorded verbatim in a single take, capturing feelings about her recently ended relationship and her bandmates.

The drumset is gone
And the rug it was on
Is still here screaming at me
Why did you take it all away?

The melody is sweet and the composition is a beautifully ordered clatter. A two-note organ loop hums in the left channel. Percussive claps and thumps come from all directions. A chorus of Fionas join her plaintive cry — "why did you take it all away?"

Although the subject matter seems desperate at first glance, the song is more about stewing, mulling, composing, rationalizing and all the things we do to distract from loss. The key is undoubtedly major, and the tune swings in a seeming contradiction to the troubled lyrics. Yet Apple's refrain seems to reach the heart of our collective struggles in quarantine, as we contemplated memories of a past that was impossible to recreate. Alone in a dorm room on an empty campus, I still feel the resonance of her message.

Billie Eilish my future

by Makeba La Touche

Being optimistic was one of the hardest things to do this summer. Having spent a majority of the past six months stuck in my room, a wave of hopelessness came as no surprise. The summer usually comes with a mental break from school and numerous nights out with friends — maybe even a trip to the beach — but isolation came with fears of the future, both for myself and the rest of the world.

“My future” came to me not as a cute little Band-Aid to cover up the negative feelings that settled in these

past few months, but as a window for a new perspective to shine through. Billie Eilish’s new track starts off almost melancholic, calling on someone who doesn’t seem to notice her. As she leaves her subject’s gaze, however, the song takes on a more self-appreciative tone. Her signature soft and soothing vocals float throughout the entire track. She croons and lilts her voice in tribute to herself.

I think about my future and I’m met with all these anxieties, but what’s stopping me from wishing for happier days? Why not look upon it more fondly and hope for better? Although she’s speaking for herself here, Billie opens up the idea of falling in love with what lies ahead.

The ease of the beat and its pickup midway through the song reflects Billie’s new outlook. The transition

into the second verse is slightly more upbeat but still manages to maintain a soft pop sound. The echoes of her backing vocals create a surrounding atmosphere throughout the song that allows for an amazingly immersive experience. The last few lines really pull it all together. It’s a love song, but not for anyone else.

And I, I’m in love
But not with anybody here
I’ll see you in a couple years

I want to fall in love with what’s to come.

As college students, it’s so natural for us to look upon our futures with fear, as the pressure to be something great looms overhead. These feelings are expected, but we deserve a break from time to time too.





Don't
worry 'bout
making sure
they won't
forget...

Orville Peck & Shania Twain Legends Never Die

by Melody Lin

I had often throughout my life uttered the words, “You couldn’t get me to listen to country even if you locked me in a room alone with it.”

And so, when COVID-19 had finally rolled into my little county of Rockland with its tenacious agenda, fate would have it that after a couple months, I’d be locked in my room listening to country. Yes. Willingly.

I gave in after three and a half months of quarantine, 12 pounds unhealthily lost, my perception of time obscured and a particular resentment and heavy-heartedness over my lost senior year of high school and summer — F.O.M.O. for things that never happened, but could have been. It was mid-July, with its high summer heat I hadn’t known in the coolness of my home, when I first watched the music video for Orville Peck’s “Nothing Fades Like the Light.” The video serves as a little time capsule of him and his friends, doing what youth do best — being stupid and somber, a fragment of life before quarantine. I wasn’t even aware that I had been listening to country music.

I was immediately compelled.

“Legends Never Die” was released towards the end of summer. A lighter, more empowering song, it came at the perfect time, at the end of a bleak personal era. I had moved out of my home for the first time. I was passing a coveted milestone I’d fantasized about for years.

It was more country than anything I’d listened to before — but then again, I never listened to much country — and I loved it.

There’s a warmth in Orville’s sound, despite the grim front of slow lyricism and echoing instrumentals that seemed irreplicable to me. That twang and hospitality soothed my tensions through such an unprecedented time in history.

It’s something I held onto when things got rough. Although Orville may not be traditionally “country,” with his free-form expression of identity and rhinestone cowboy hats, it’s a comforting thing to see that sometimes exploration can be very, very good.

**Stand up,
'cause you are
standing for
nothing!**

**Tom Morello & co.
Stand Up**
by Nick Grasso

This is what the song of the summer looks like:

Black Lives Matter.

Black Trans Lives Matter.

Tom Morello's signature guitar playing.

Guttural vocals demanding change.

Morello never set out to grace the summer season with a fiery protest anthem. The Rage Against the Machine guitarist and activist simply passed guitar riffs along to Bob Rifo of EDM outfit The Bloody Beetroots to turn them into a track. From there, Dan Reynolds of Imagine Dragons penned lyrics that coincidentally spoke to the Black Lives Matter movement. The group then reached out to Shea Diamond, a Black trans activist and songwriter who injected her vocals into the mix.

"This is what the movement should look like, in music and beyond," Diamond said in a live stream with Morello, Reynolds and Rifo to discuss the track and debut its music video.

Talk is cheap, and the foursome demand that the American people take action against police brutality:

Stand up

'Cause you are standing for nothing

Just shut up

'Cause your words mean nothing!

The eclectic group brought various perspectives to the fight for justice. Reynolds examines his privilege, asking:

When I call the police, will they just kill me?

Will they just kill you?

When I call the police, will they just protect me

'Cause I'm white-skinned too?

Diamond expresses how:

Everybody stares like I'm just my gender

I'm a living soul with my own agenda

One hundred percent of the track's proceeds are being distributed to four anti-racist groups: the NAACP, Know Your Rights Camp, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the Marsha P. Johnson Institute.

In the livestream to debut the video, Morello shared what he tells people who want to make change and be anti-racist: "You are an agent of history. History is not something that happens in books. History is something that you can make."





**Does she
even miss me?
I just wanna
know...**

Preston Wu Believe Me by Pamela Wong

I had a hard time finding new music to listen to this summer. I tried to listen to my Release Radar playlist on Spotify each week, but nothing sparked my interest. However, lo and behold, my friend and fellow Stony Brook University student, Preston Wu, wrote a song called “Believe Me” that connected with me deeply. Preston uses the lyrics from both the chorus and bridge of Ali Gatie’s “What if I Told You That I Love You” that was released on Jan. 23, 2020. Despite the fact that Preston’s version is a cover and follows the same instrumental and chorus, I think his additional rap verse helped bring the emotions to life.

This song made an impact on me because I understood where Preston was coming from. He was going through heartbreak over an ex for a

good amount of time — and I felt a little at fault because I helped set them up. Writing his rap lyrics helped get his feelings off of his chest from his past relationship. With all the verses and rhymes he came up with, he seemed to finally come to terms with the state of his relationship:

Does she even miss me
I just wanna know
We had a lot of history
But I think she let it go

These lyrics made me think about how a lot of broken relationships are usually left with each person left wondering, “Are they even thinking about me? They probably don’t even care or miss me like I do.” I’m in a happy relationship at the moment, but I thought back to my previous heartbreaks, and his words resonated.

What we had was beautiful
That’s something I won’t deny

When I told you that I loved you
That was never a lie
But it’s over and I needed just a
little more time
To accept the fact that you’re no
longer mine

This verse made me think of couples who decide to go away from each other and think of happier times. In “Believe Me,” those two people loved each other, but it just wasn’t the right time or thing they needed.

Overall, I really enjoyed the song, not just because Preston’s one of my closest friends, but because he put a ton of work into it. I’m proud of him for putting his mind into his rap to help alleviate the pain he felt about this relationship. He’s come a long way since those tough times. I hope he continues to work on music — but until then, he’s pursuing a technological systems management degree with a minor in electrical engineering.

Troye Sivan Rager teenager!

by Keating Zelenke

Summer 2020 was kind of a bummer to say the least. With no parties, no concerts, no trips and no flings, many of us were lucky to see our friends once every few weeks from a safe distance. Troye Sivan's August release, "Rager teenager!" captures what was lost this year in a sad, synth-driven pop song perfect for crying alone in your bathroom at 2 a.m. The song was the second single off his surprise Aug. EP, *In A Dream*.

The meaning behind "Rager teenager!" is sure to hit home for a lot of us right now, as Troye explained in a video on his TikTok account: "I feel like I started re-meeting myself a couple weeks ago where I'm like, oh fuck, I forgot that I had this in me." In a voice memo recorded during the writing process, he described the track as "a letter to your old self kind of thing."

The song speaks to every aspect of life that we've missed out on in the past seven months, trapped alone inside our homes, and every aspect of life I know I'll no longer take for granted when things finally return to some semblance of normal. In the pre-chorus, Troye sings:

I just wanna go wild
I just wanna fuck shit up and just ride
In your car tonight
In your bed tonight
I just wanna sing loud
I just wanna lose myself in a crowd

The song feels like a memorial to all the could-have-beens of this year — a memory of something that never happened. Immediately after listening, my friends were drawing comparisons between "Rager teenager!" and Lorde's massively popular "Ribcage," thanks to the reverb, layering and heavy use of synthesizers. Because of these effects, both songs are able to sound like distant, fuzzy memories commonly

shared by a whole audience of listeners.

In A Dream is reminiscent and remorseful. It's Troye's first release following a break-up with his boyfriend of several years. Not only does "Rager teenager!" speak to the things we have missed out on during quarantine, it's also representative of both the loneliness and the exhilaration of being single for the first time following a committed relationship. Troye wrote to listeners about the single on Instagram: "There's a fire in you that you've had your whole life. It might dim to a pilot light when you're comfortable, and you might forget it's there, but make no mistake." While the lyrics celebrate the return of this fire, the sadness and loss that accompany it are evident in the music. The instrumental outro is able to detail the highs and lows of such a raw time in life without any lyrics at all.

"Rager teenager!" isn't what we might normally consider a song of the summer. It's not exactly upbeat or overtly fun, but it is able to capture and express a feeling on many of our minds right now, with the nuance and complexity that accompanies real-life emotion.



Moses Sumney Bless Me

by Sarah Beckford



**Bless
me before you
go. You're goin'
nowhere with
me...**

Moses Sumney's *græ* is a double album released in two parts this year — the first part arriving in February, and the second in May. "Bless Me" is a favorite — a tender five-minute track near the album's end. The remarkable thing about Sumney's voice is that it contains multitudes of emotion. In a single phrase or breath, his emotion is tangible — whether you listen through headphones or regular speakers. He creates this bubble in each song, like a galaxy in which his voice is the North Star, and every harmony is another star that fits perfectly in its specific place. His vocal control is so masterful that at one point he could whisper sweetly in your ear, then extend it into a plaintive, fierce cry you feel in the depths of your soul.

In "Bless Me," his voice is backed by simple instrumentation that hits deep. Sumney starts with a whisper. Then, with the help of a rising, steady bass, his voice rises to an authoritative, yet calm volume. He cries out in the chorus so shortly as if it's a final plea.

Bless me
before you go
You're goin' nowhere with me

It's fitting that the track is near the end of the second half of *græ*. The song feels final, even if I cannot pinpoint what exactly feels finished.

He paints this picture of lovers or partners separating, but one still holding on. There's also a spiritual piece of the song — I think of the Bible story in Genesis 32:22-31, in which Jacob wrestles an angel and demands a blessing. It's an interesting thought, of a mortal man fighting the supernatural — despite the finite features of humanity, man craves higher things. He craves good despite the inherent shame of humanity. Sumney asks to soar with wings and lets his voice persuade you to allow him that goodness.

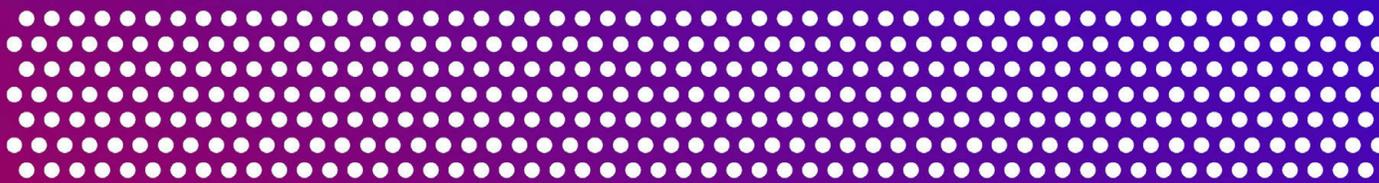
Sumney's ability to make a whole world in a song with just his voice and instrumentation is remarkable. Even as Sumney asks for a blessing, it doesn't sound like begging at all. He sings with a nobility that's dually vulnerable, knowing full well he can still stand tall no matter the outcome.

IN MEMORY OF
**Louis
Marrone**
1996-2020



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