

DD PRESS

KIRSTEN + FRIENDS
ULTIMATE SUMMER

PLAYLIST, 2022

Kirsten & Friends
Ultimate Summer Playlist
edited by Kirsten Reneau



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Editor's Note

Before I knew of God, I knew of Jimmy Buffet.

Okay - I am willing to admit that maybe I learned about them at the same time. But I can tell you this – I certainly didn't know one before the other.

My father keeps a parrot beanie in his closet and has seen Jimmy and his Coral Reefer Band, who was born on December 25th, no less than 9 times since I was born. I have a tour jacket in my closet. Every Christmas we joke about our lord & savior, James William Buffet, the reason for the season.

If you knew my father, you would find this funny. He is a serious man. He makes chairs in a woodshed, grades papers while John Wayne movies play, and he loves making lists and graphs and inputting. He knows the ins and outs of Microsoft Spreadsheet better than anyone I know.

That's what makes the powers of Jimmy Buffet all the more magical.

Because when we listen to Jimmy Buffet, everything else is shed; he is a man transformed. He becomes 20, when all that mattered was who contributed to the keg and who changed the song from *Fins*; he becomes 30, humming *Come Monday* as he sets up camp in the forest; he becomes 40, singing *He Went to Paris* to his children as they fall asleep.

This is important to know about me. I do not like Jimmy Buffett *ironically*. I do not like Jimmy Buffett *casually*. I know *all the words to his songs and the dance moves*. Jimmy Buffett is a legacy that was given to me.

Which is why for me, every summer playlist opens with *Margaritaville*, and I will not take any criticism of this choice.

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I have a million more stories like these – music and summer, summer and music. They are embarrassing, inhabiting, funny, nostalgic.

Like when I was in 8th grade and listened to *Thunder* by Boys Like Girls for three months straight was I yearned for a boy in a way only middle schoolers on the cusp of being women can yearn.

Or when I was six, and I created a full scale dance scene to Bye Bye Bye at the beach house we rented with friends and I thought this was the most creative anyone had ever been in the history of the world.

Like thinking of *Ole Slew-Foot* by Johnny Horton, the song my friend was learning to play the summer he died and a little bit of me left with him.

Or how when *Brand New Man* by Brooks and Dunn plays on the radio I will always think of sitting in the fairgrounds before the fair was there, drinking bad moonshine that made my mouth fuzzy and how I thought my heart would burst to the sounds of the crickets.

Like when *Rude* by MAGIC! played 18 times in three days the first summer I was old enough to go to the beach with just my best friend, no parents, and we felt like this was what adulthood could be – being ourselves, free, with our entire futures on the horizon like a sunrise.

Like listening to *Young Dumb & Broke* by Khalid or *Stay Together* by Noah Cyrus, thinking about how stupid I was in the summer nights that were always hazy with smoke and humidity, how I wanted to be dead and incredibly alive at the same time, how I felt like a star on the cusp of burning out all the time. How shocking it is to look back realize that in some of the darkest times in my life, I was so painfully happy sometimes, always in the summer.

And some are magic, which sounds cliché but it's true. Like now, driving to Florida and *Come Monday* comes on and my partner laughs because he knows that if I'm in the right mood I might cry because of how much Jimmy Buffett loves his wife and how much I love him.

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Thank you to the contributors for sharing their work and thank you to the reader for joining me and my friends this summer, in this collection of music that we loved to and hurt to and became ourselves within. I hope you can get even half as much from it as I did putting it together.

-Kirsten Reneau, Editor

Kirsten & Friends' Ultimate Summer Playlist

Edited by
Kirsten Reneau



When @calebsaysthings tweeted "life can't always give tongue tied by grouplove vibes & u have to make peace w that," I unplugged the aux

By Samantha Fain

Song: *Tongue Tied* by Grouplove

because with the windows rolled down I can be anything. I can be a little bit gossamer. I can be in love! I can circle dogbone roundabouts for hours & feel centrifugal to my bones. When Grouplove sang *I loved you then & I love you now*, they were singing about how I don't want to die today, honest—life's never been bad enough to stop driving. & I don't care if far objects have shadows, or if this long ride is uneconomical. No matter what I do, people look at me like my heart needs fed less. But I stay fitting tight in this flesh. I always trust happy songs! I believe in the language of my body, in the nights spent making out with myself against the mirror, when I taste like pink lemonsipit & hot rain & the ceaseless motion of giving in to desire. I wipe my happy tears off my face. I love crying in every pretty way it manifests, its vulnerability—ask me anything and I'll admit it. Yes, god, yes, I swear the best part of loving myself this much is the lack of traffic.



You like D&D, Audrey Hepburn, Fangoria, Harry Houdini and croquet.
You can't swim, you can't dance and you don't know karate. Face
it, you're never gonna make it.

By Clem Flowers

Song: *My Cococo* by Stellatarr

Cool my brains and soothe my head

Stimulate me my Cococo

Sneak into my empty bed

And educate me my Cococo

“You know what this song's about, right?”

I pulled my eyes back from gazing up at the night.

“...no?”

“Coke,” said with a mischievous grin.

He would know- he was 15 when he'd gone to rehab.

I laughed with an attempt at a world-weary, jaded cynicism, but I knew he saw through that like
it was the sheet soaked with sweat that we'd make on his bed later that night.

Still, he humored me.

Secret lovers are cool like that.



*And when I was down and failing life
You came to save me, my co-co-co
And when they said I'm telling lies
You believed me, my co-co-co*

He was cool.
He was a ratty hip punk dirtbomb.
He loved Bob Marley, patchouli musk, and horror movies.

I was a weird sheltered nerd who freaked out my classmates at the recitation of all the tidbits of pop culture and history and music and movies that made them not want to beat me up as much, when they kept offering to sign me up for Who Wants to be a Millionaire?

I liked The Hives, *Tales from the Crypt*, Stephen King, and the channel on DirecTv that was 24/7 infomercials.

Mathematically, we should not have been friends- he should have been another in the long line of my fellow kids in high school to slap the books out my hand and call me the hard F word & treat me like the freak show geek that bites the heads of chickens.

The universe has a funny sense of humor, though.

We became best friends.

*In the summer, in the spring
In public places, my co-co-co
On an island far away
Lemonade with my co-co-co*

I hate being cliché, but he was my manic pixie dream boy- rebel rebel with the torn shirts, the fun, wild eyes, who took a hammer to my suburban, sheltered life, and let the night take us up to Atlanta, where every bit of dreams of what happened up there up at night was shockingly true-

Wild nights at record stores, punk shows at dilapidated cafeterias that end with the cops running everyone off, skateboarding into oblivion, weed out of a Coke can bong, shirts all battered up with the hipster grime I secretly always wanted but Mom always denied me- “Kohl's has some cool clothes,” she said, trying to soften the blow while still being a good parent- clove cigarettes, a secret kiss falling into so so so so so so much more-

Heaven.

*And through the noise I heard a song
You were singing, my co-co-co
And when you said that nothing's wrong
I believed you, my co-co-co*

I know you can probably guess what followed:

- Pretending we weren't gay
- Moms were asking questions we didn't want to answer
- He broke up with his girlfriend (another good friend of mine.)
- Depression (me)
- Self-loathing (both of us)
- He gave me tattoos once we were out of high school
- So many tattoos, for cheap or free
- I think he wanted to replace the love marks he used to give
- Love marks eternal, in the ink & memory of the needle
- Long time always surrounded by friends to make it less awkward
- Distance (mental, emotional)
- He got married
- I fell into drinking
- Hard drinking
- No, I mean *hard* drinking
- I was a functioning alcoholic for 2 years
- Closure we both always wanted, but never had a moment to be honest & get it.
- Distance
- No more calls
- No more texting
- No more kind words
- No more hanging out
- Nothing

*I sat alone and I didn't care
I sat two years in the same old chair
I saw three roads and I didn't know
Which way to go-go-go-go*

I got married myself.

And we celebrate 5 years of marriage, 6 years together this year.

She is so talented, so clever, so kind, so tender hearted, and so wonderful.

My true love.

My soulmate.

My darling dear.

My first, my last, my everything.

We have an amazing life together.

But

I can't pretend if/when I hear "My Coco," that my eyes don't get misty & my mind doesn't wander back to those humid nights near Ponce De Leon, when the main drag of Little 5 Points glowed like a pinball machine on TILT, and the world was ours.

I won't forget you Coco
I won't forget you Coco
I won't forget you no, no
I won't forget you no, no

It's the way she talks to frogs

By Téa Franco

Song: *Slide Tackle* by Japanese Breakfast

There's an ache in me, to desire living— Japanese Breakfast, Slide Tackle

I pile powder pink yarn into the hands of a Joann's cashier/I wonder how you know when you're in love/*Back again?/ I've just been having a lot of pink days lately*, I hum/ my second therapist — not the one I ghosted so I could lay on the floor, dreaming of black holes, how they could devour me— loved my feelings/ blanket loved that I was trying/ to get better/ I didn't tell him how I crocheted instead of eating/instead of talking to people because/ nobody/ in the entire state of Ohio /loves me/he called it a coping mechanism/I called it a waste of thirty minutes/ a new blue each day—yes, I know, using blue yarn to indicate sadness is a cliché, but isn't wanting to die a cliché too/but when she coffee shop twirls in a floral dress/I break/ the streak of blue/she's two beers deep/lifts a frog off the sidewalk/its tender bumps/pink/ we hold hands in the backseat of an Uber/pink/at dusk we walk/the sky is/pink/I buy more/pink/yarn on my bedroom floor/we listen to Jubilee/I try/ to tell her that *it's like, a totally happy album*/I tell her it's about /fragments/ of glee in a crestfallen life/she says/ *yeah, that's not a happy album*/when it ends/ we kiss/ engulfed/she takes me to a blooming field/ holds sunflowers over her eyes/she glimmers/on one indigo evening my fears slip through the phone/she holds me/ I cry/I never used to cry/I feel/she sleeps/unconsciously clasps my hand/in the morning gold dust filters through lace curtains/ it constellates her face/sprigs of lavender sprout from my bones/I recognize a feeling I've never had before/



why should I write about us when camera obscura already has?

By Jacqueline Brown

Song: *I Missed Your Party* by Camera Obscura

I. Before

I still remember that
red sweater
cable knit
I think you hated it
feeling brave from the wine
I said it made you look like a Kennedy
you smiled but
I don't think you believed me

II. During

I should have known that
the dopamine rush would be a bit much
and
make your eyes seem brighter
and
your words seem better
better than anything
that came before
my brain may have begun to trick me
but that look when you saw
my heart was putty for you
sealed the deal
(cheeky bastard!)

III. After

I wanted to invite you
— but —
it felt like too much time
had stretched between
you and me
even so
I still wish you knew
no one has ever said my name
as sweetly as you did
that summer



18 Wheelers

By François Bereaud

Song: *Truck Driving Woman* by Norma Jean

Tawny raises kangaroo rats. Tawny lives in a tree house. Tawny has a book contract. Tawny is bisexual. Tawny is asexual. Tawny has an ostrich tattoo on her ankle.

Those were but a few of our stories about Tawny, the woman of mystery in our small MFA program, housed in a crumbling building in the neglected satellite campus of an underfunded state college. Needless to say, our collective esteem was poor, and, some days, only these rumors, shared over cups of Nescafé – solidarity with the Sandinistas! whatever that meant – kept our spirits up.

We knew some things: Tawny attended every workshop, ate buttered toast wrapped in a napkin, spoke little, and was working on a collection of stories about the intersecting lives of women truck drivers. She was tall, freckled, and, despite her name, pale.

One night, after the instant coffee had turned to cheap tequila, straws were drawn and I lost or maybe won. I was to ask Tawny to dinner.

The following week I got lucky. My car wouldn't start so I biked to campus in the rain, arriving just as she did, my front wheel skidding to a stop in front of her green Subaru.

"You're soaked," she said.

"Wanna grab a bite sometime?" I said.

We met on a Saturday at a Vietnamese place she suggested. I looked from the yellow-stained laminated menu to the paint peeling on the wall. Tawny read my mind. "The food's excellent. I'll order."

The shrimp in the spring rolls were so fresh I thought they were still alive. "This is amazing," I said.

"What do you want to know?" she said. My spoonful of pho stopped halfway to my mouth. "This dinner, you were put up to it, right? Did you lose a bet or something?"

The spoon dropped into my bowl and hot broth splattered my beige shirt, my second best one. I fought not to look down. "We do wonder," I said, holding her gaze.

"Ask," she said.

"Do you have a book contract?"

"Fuck no." She laughed. "Do you think anyone wants to read a book about chicks driving rigs?"

I didn't know so I shifted in my seat and moved on. "Do you raise rodents?"

"You'd be surprised what zoos pay for them," she said.

"Do you kiss girls or boys?" I felt silly for even asking.

She leaned forward, grabbed the back of my head, and stuck her tongue in my mouth. I tasted basil. She pulled away, biting my lip. It hurt just enough.

"Do you think my stories are any good?"

"No," she said.

She was right and, a week later, I was an MFA dropout, hoping my car would make it across the Texas panhandle where a job awaited me as a high school English teacher in a rural school district.

I rented a shack with a prime view of the highway. Nights, struggling over lesson plans, I'd feel the house shake as eighteen wheelers rumbled past.

During cigarette breaks on the porch, I'd spot their incoming headlights and wave.

Sometimes, I'd swear I could see a pale hand waving back.

If You Want to Sing Out, Sing Out

By Emily Cotman

Song: *If You Want to Sing Out, Sing Out* by Cat Stevens

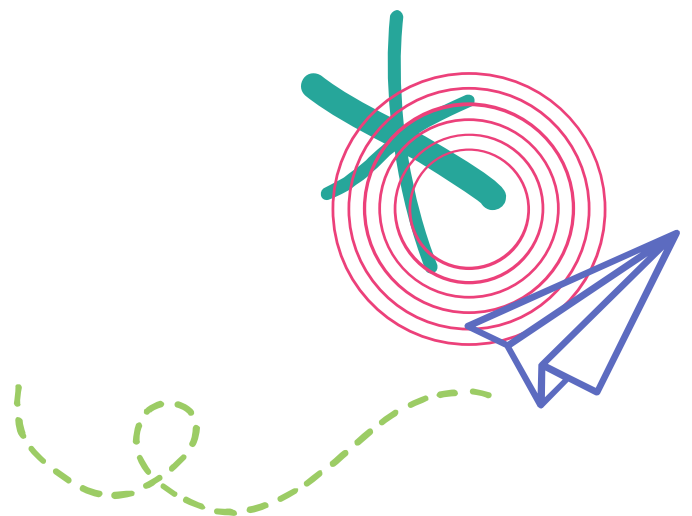
Sat in the rec room of an old convent
nudging the pegs on my Spanish guitar,
classmates cross-legged, perched and splayed,
that queer lightness in the air
like after a storm or a mutual breakup,
I strum the nylon strings C/G6/Fmaj7

and I'm 8 years old singing *Sad Lisa*
at the talent show, dad on guitar,
really bringing the room down;

and I'm 12 mining jewel cases to play
at his 40th birthday party, and he sees
that smoldering witch-pirate crowning the stack,
and gently teaches me the word "mellow"
as we swap *Tillerman* for *Milagro*;

and I'm 13 in the cafegymatorium
with a crush on a clown who is not impressed
so I request the DJ play *Wild World*
which he says he does not have, so I press
the poor freelancer – "What about *Moonshadow*?"

and I'm 18 and I'm
three months from free so fuck it
I *Sing Out* an original medley –
Cat with with *Kaze ni naru* (I think it's clever) –
and my strings buzz and my voice cracks
but in the end my classmates clap and ask
"Who *are* you?" and I'm surprised to realize
I might know the answer.



My Life in 25 Records

By Nikki Ummel

Song: Many

After Questlove's "My Youth in 27 Records," an excerpt from his memoir, Mo' Meta Blues.
<https://www.vulture.com/2013/06/questlove-my-youth-in-27-records.html>

1994:

LESLEY GORE, *I'LL CRY IF I WANT TO*

It is my 4th birthday and I am having a meltdown. Nothing is going how I want it to go. Why aren't we swimming? I want my presents. Where is my best friend, Ashley Balkee? Tears stream down my face as my parents, all smiles, burst into song. Someone changes the cassette in the boombox. "I'll Cry if I Want To" fills the space between the swimming pool and the patio. The adults laugh and crack open more beers.

1995:

GEORG SOLTI, *MOZART REQUIEM KV 626*

State testing time. Breakfast consists of microwaved oatmeal packets, mixed nuts, and blueberries, all things my mom says will make our brains better. We listen to Mozart nonstop: getting ready in the mornings, on the drive to school, while falling asleep. She says Mozart makes us smarter, so I listen real hard.

1996:

SPICE GIRLS, *SPICE*

My first CD, though I am told to share it with my 3-year-old sister. I don't and she doesn't care. I play the songs on repeat, so loudly my brother threatens to snap it in two. I love Posh Spice because she's alluring and feminine, but I relate the most to Sporty Spice, her jogger pants and athletic physique already resonating with my tomboy persona thrust on me at school. "2 Become 1" is the first time I hear about sex, and my brother's friend, Elliot, shows me on his fingers what the phrase means, shoving his right pointer finger in a hole formed by his left pointer finger and thumb.

1997:

ODETTA, *GONNA LET IT SHINE*

The church is quiet as I sing my solo, three lines from “This Little Light of Mine.” My mom is standing in the front row, her head bowed, so she does not see me glance at her. Her sponsor, Vera, stands to the left, places one hand on my mom’s back, and raises the other in the air. I spend the next few years dabbling in church attendance as my mom slips in and out of recovery, but I will never get on that stage to sing again.

1998:

MATCHBOX TWENTY, *YOURSELF OR SOMEONE LIKE YOU*

Summer break stretches on and on like those sticky hands I throw at the ceiling and then blame on my sister but our parents know better. It takes months for the hands to plop. Between endless cartoon mornings on the couch--so thoroughly endless my dad asks if I have friends--and creating synchronized swimming routines to Matchbox Twenty songs, the days begin to stack. As break yawns to an end, I make flyers and declare a performance. My mom, home from a double shift at the country club, watches from a porch chair while removing her high heels and pantyhose. She rubs her bunions but walks away before my favorite song, “Girl Like That.” It’s not her fault but I blame her anyway.

1999:

CHRISTINA AGUILERA, *CHRISTINA AGUILERA*

Deer Park Elementary School’s Winter Dance is crowded with kids I don’t know. Those of us in the gifted program are isolated, traveling as a pod while the rest of the students in school trade classes and teachers throughout the day. Still, my feelings of isolation do not prevent me from asking the DJ to play “Come On Over,” which I dedicate to Alex Hill. When the rumors circulate that I like him, I lock myself in the bathroom until my teacher calls my mom to come get me.

2000:

ENYA, *A DAY WITHOUT RAIN*

My mom tucks us in, every night, and before leaving the room, punches the play button on the electric blue boombox on my dresser. Surrounded by kitty wallpaper, my sister and I, snug in our bunk bed, fall asleep to the dramatic tones of Enya’s “Only Time” and “Wild Child.” If I am still awake when the CD ends, I climb out of the top bunk and hit play again. On the nights

when my parents break bottles and slam doors, I crank Enya up to full volume and let her voice drown out the cries from the kitchen. I join my sister in the bottom bunk.

2001:

BRITNEY SPEARS, *BRITNEY*

I listen to this CD on my Walkman while wiping down tables at my dad's hot dog shop, Coney & More. As payment for starring in a commercial for the liquor store next door, I receive three tickets to see Britney Spears in concert. My mom takes us. About ten minutes into the performance, Britney sings "Slave 4 U," complete with a pole dance and anaconda. Before the song ends, my mom grabs our hands and drags us out. Later, while my sister sleeps in the bottom bunk, I imitate Britney's moves on the poles of our bunk bed.

2002:

NSYNC, *NO STRINGS ATTACHED*

At Girl Scout camp, my cabin learns the "Bye, Bye, Bye" dance for the talent show. We practice our routine daily, even spend time learning the personas of each member. I am Justin Timberlake because of my blonde hair, which we twist into little curls and rubberband in place. At the end of the summer, I tell my troop about the performance. We stand in my backyard, wait for parent pick up and practice my old routine. My mom, our troop leader, laughs, full-throated; I can see her shiny eyes. She is proud of me for making friends. We do a performance for the parents, and my mom corrals the girls into a group hug. This is the last year we are a troop.

2003:

THE POSTAL SERVICE, *GIVE UP*

Perusing the CDs at Walmart, I notice the austere cover of The Postal Service's debut album. An older kid, probably college-aged, walks by and nods. "Great album, you've got good taste." I buy it with the last of my Coney & More money and play it while my sister and I paint the walls of our new bedroom. This room is smaller than our last one, but at least we're not living in the garage like our brother. We get bored of painting so we stop. A year later, when we lose the house and everything with it, the walls will remain half pink, half green.

2004:

GREEN DAY, *NIMROD*

It is Homecoming and my last evening in New Port Richey. My mom died a week ago. When I return to school, everyone knows, including Jimmy. Even though I see him daily for drumline practice, I know this is the last time, so I walk up to him after the DJ declares the last dance. I can barely hear myself ask him, the thumping in my ears is so loud. We sway to “Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)” and Jimmy looks everywhere but at me: the floor, the banners, the back of another girl’s head. His hands leave my waist the second the song fades and I am out the door, out the front door, spilling onto the sidewalk, onto the asphalt, my face is wet so wet and I am alone.

2005:

THE AQUABATS, *THE FURY OF THE AQUABATS!*

My godmother, Anna, flew down for my mom’s final days. Tired of watching me watch my mom’s beauty wilt and bruise, Anna took me to the mall, bought me CDs. It was the first time I’d left the hospice center. I listened to “Super Rad!” on my Walkman while cirrhosis wrinkled my mom from the inside, out. While I bathed her jaundiced body with tiny orange sponges. It’s been a year since she died. The Aquabats are playing in St. Pete and a kid from the bus agrees to take me. I tell my dad I’m working a late shift at the dollar theater. Later, the kid from the bus will drop me off and remark, “I didn’t know it was possible to cry and skank at the same time.” I never talk to him again.

2006:

COLDPLAY, *PARACHUTES*

The new hire at the movie theater wears her hair in short spikes. Throughout the night, we rotate positions; every employee spends time in the box office and concessions. She leaves lyrics for me in the box office, scribbled on a receipt. By the end of the night, we’ve completed “Yellow” and “The Scientist.” When it’s time to clean the theaters, we hold hands in the back as the credits roll.

2007:

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE, *TRANSATLANTICISM*

Due to conflicts with drumline practice, I run my cross country miles in the morning, before school. My goal is to break into the 300 mile club at Southeast High, a distinction typically

reserved for male runners only. I rise at 4:30am to pound pavement, Walkman in my left hand, it barely skips if I keep my tempo consistent. I run the golf cart paths outside of our apartment complex despite the signs that explicitly forbid it. One of these mornings, a neighbor hangs himself on the railing to the left of our door, but it is too dark outside for me to see him.

2008:

JACK'S MANNEQUIN, *EVERYTHING IN TRANSIT*

Lindsey Bressi. We write notes and pass them in the hallway, devour them, write more. I cannot get enough of her, her words, her touch. She wears coke bottle glasses that grow her eyes and I swear I can stare into them for eternity. We see Jack's Mannequin perform in St. Pete but her buddy James wants to come along too. As the night wanes I see James lean in and Lindsey doesn't look back to see if I'm watching. The band plays "Bruised" as I realize I love her. As I realize I already lost her.

2009:

BOB DYLAN, *THE FREEWHEELIN' BOB DYLAN*

College is all consuming. Double major, double minor? If there was a way to get paid to go to school forever, I'd find it. My Volkswagen Beetle barely gets me to class, but I don't mind as long as the sunroof and CD player still work. At some point, both break, and I listen to the stuck Bob Dylan CD for years while water leaks in, spider cracks its way down the lining until I sell the car for parts in Washington, D.C. "Don't Think Twice, It's Alright" still brings tears to my eyes.

2010:

BLACK EYED PEAS, *THE E.N.D.*

Summer in Spain. The discotecas are body to body and I relish it. It is nice to disappear in a crowd, especially after long afternoons in class or wandering streets. Catcalls follow me everywhere; do blondes have more fun? "I Gotta Feeling" is the song of the summer and it trails me from bar to bar. Man after man: so proud to know the lyrics, to lock eyes with an American to shout the words in unison. Feeling comes in at the eyes. I break eye contact before the song is over.

2011:

STARS, *SET YOURSELF ON FIRE*

D.C. in the winter is lonely. I sit outside on my break and smoke cigarettes, put them out in dirty snow piles, icy bricks. I check my cell phone but he has not called. It has been a month since Albert said he'd meet me here but he has not called. "Your Ex-Lover is Dead" plays through my headphones. I mourn: a year gone, a lease I can't afford, the feeling of safety. He will call, eventually, and apologize, profusely, but it will not matter. It will not matter.

2012:

DRAKE, *THANK ME LATER*

Absalon only fucks to Drake songs. He sets up his Ipad on the bedside table and sets the album to repeat. I know this is not forever, but I allow myself to believe it could be, in these moments. On the metro, on the way home from Absalon's or on my way to hook up with another, I listen to "Find Your Love."

2013:

BEACH BOYS, *THE GREATEST HITS - VOLUME 1: 20 GOOD VIBRATIONS*

The call comes while I'm in the Czech Republic, and while United is kind enough to rebook my flights for free, it is still too late: dad goes under as I go up, and while I am without cell phone service for eight hours, I drink as much airplane booze as the flight attendant allows me. After weeping while watching the dragon in *The Hobbit* defend her precious treasures (who gets to determine what is worth loving?), I play Beach Boys songs until I fall asleep, sticky with tears. When I make it to the hospital after my dad's emergency brain surgery, I lay my head on the side of his bed and sing "Kokomo," the way he used to.

2014:

SYLVAN ESSO, *SYLVAN ESSO*

I don't believe in ghosts. I don't believe in ghosts but I cannot explain why street lights flicker when I run by, always have since my mom died. I listen to Sylvan Esso's album, hit the running path outside my partner's condo as the sun sets and the lights, one by one, turn on. I time it so that, when the song "Come Down" finally plays, I am able to walk and cry the last half mile, far enough away for tears and sweat to dry before returning inside. I never tell her my routine. She never asks.

2015:

JIMMY BUFFET, *SONGS YOU KNOW BY HEART*

My dad decides to die. All three kids gather in the emergency room, approve the DNR request. His feeding tube is removed. We play “Margaritaville” on my brother’s phone, place it next to our dad’s head. When we slip out for pizza, he slips out of existence. We should have known he’d choose to die alone.

2016:

SUFJAN STEVENS, *CARRIE AND LOWELL*

An HVAC technician comes over to fix the air conditioning. I let him in then turn on the shower. I sit down in the tub as “Death with Dignity” begins and remain there until the album stops playing. It clicks and clicks in the record player but I do not care. The water loses its warmth but I do not care. The HVAC technician leaves.

2017:

FRANK OCEAN, *BLONDE*

New Orleans on a whim results in a cross country move. I am fractured but here, in this new city, I feel hope. My neighbors help me carry my futon three stories up, keep me company while I unpack. It is here that I feel hope. I wake every morning to Frank Ocean’s “Solo.”

2018:

BON IVER, *FOR EMMA, LONG AGO*

My tent sways in the wind as I stiffly stand, pull my pants down and pee. I hold it for hours, attempt to avoid the cold. The race was yesterday but I booked the campsite for five days to soak in the canyons. I find a brewery in Page, twenty minutes from Lonnie’s land on the rez. I order a flight and sit down at the bar, book in hand. Over time, I peel off my gloves, beanie, jacket, vest. The snow on my boots melts. “Re: Stacks” comes on the brewery’s radio, and I cannot help but laugh. It’s my fiance’s favorite song. I text him, *I cannot wait to come home.*





Don't Worry, Baby

By Jessica Brasseur

Song: *Don't Worry Baby* by The Beach Boys

In 2018 I was working at a vintage clothing and record shop in St. Petersburg, Florida, just after graduating from art school. The store owners and I had become friends and often traded music and watched movies together after closing in the apartment they lived in attached to the back of the shop.

“Can you bring me the iPod when we close up tonight?” they’d ask, so we could load it up with The White Stripes or Paul Simon or whatever the mood of the moment called for. For weeks at a time, we’d collectively obsess about a band, artist, or album. I fell in love with The Beach Boys during one of these such weeks and was ordered to watch the 2015 biopic, *Love and Mercy*, which, more specifically follows the trajectory of Brian Wilson’s mental health in the 1960s and 1980s.

When I got to work, the owners and I decorated the shop for Valentine’s Day – everything in various shades of pink and red – and blasted Don’t Worry Baby with the shop doors swung wide open. The easy, cool weather of early Spring breezed into and out of the store like a breath. I dipped behind the counter to check my phone – there was a strict no-phone policy – as I did occasionally, and I discovered several missed calls from my dad and several more unanswered texts in haphazard group chats my (probably frazzled) dad tried to form between myself and my siblings.

“Hey Jess,” my dad spat out on a voicemail. He cleared his throat and explained something about “mom,” “ambulance,” “heart,” and “hospital.” He asked if I could let my sisters and brother know what was going on. I don’t know why he left the voicemail for me and no one else. I don’t know why he entrusted me to deliver news when there was barely anything to tell, but I accepted the task.

In a rare showing of public emotion, I burst out crying in the middle of the store. I thought first of the terror of losing my mom. I thought second and much longer, cried much deeper about the idea of my dad losing his best friend. She was only 58 at the time, and my dad, 60. In my estimation, any age was too young for them to leave me or each other. My brain produced images of my dad’s loss of interest in daily activities like cracking open a beer and settling into his overstuffed chair to watch *M.A.S.H.* I hallucinated him in thick cloud of emotion I’d never seen him experience in real life.

The owner and her mother who occasionally helped out at the store rushed over to me. I don’t remember, but I must have choked out that my mom was on her way to the hospital. The owner’s mother asked if I felt safe driving and when I squeaked out yes, she told me to “Go. Drive fast and safe, but go *now*.”

I drove fast, but I'm not sure it's safe to drive with your eyes half-shut and filled the rest of the way with tears in the Florida afternoon sun. I got to the hospital, parked in the tall parking garage, the car faced towards the 5th Avenue entrance. I played The Beach Boys to get my mind off my mother's heart – though it just made me think of her joyful yet passive performances of Kokomo and Wouldn't It Be Nice on any given Sunday in the backyard of the house we grew up in, drinking a beer, sitting around our above-ground pool.

I flipped through apps on my phone, opening and closing them all on repeat because nothing else mattered. I answered my sibling's texts – I think we'd have just cried if we tried calling each other.

"We're waiting to be brought to a private room, so you don't need to come in." my dad reassured me. "She's gotta stay overnight for some tests, you can come by later."

He told me to go home. I asked if I could come inside instead and he said there was nothing I could do, that it likely wasn't a heart attack, and that I should try to rest, that I sounded like I was in shock.

I felt pathetic and defeated – I wasn't even the one with the almost-heart attack and I was being told to calm down. I drove home and talked to my friend on the phone. "When my mom was in the hospital last year, my brother and I just tried to keep ourselves busy at home," she offered, "It might help your brain from going to the worst-case scenario."

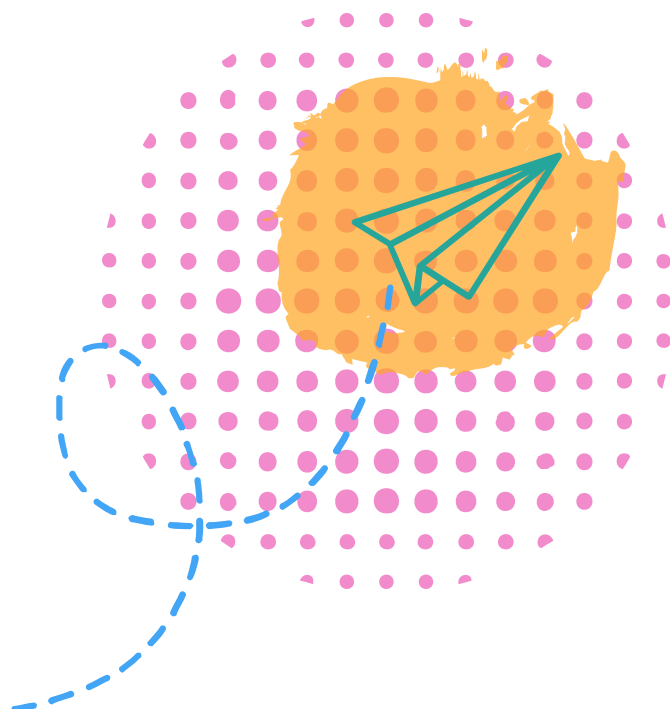
While we talked, I washed dishes and did my best to keep my hands and head busy, following instructions like a good student. Once off the phone, I needed something else to divert my attention. I made my bed and sat on it, beckoning my cat to come. He did not. I settled on watching *Love and Mercy*.

Later, just before visiting hours were through, I navigated the near-empty parking lot near the emergency wing of the hospital. The sharp feeling I'd experienced earlier in the parking garage had dulled. At this point, we were told the issue was not her heart, but instead, an esophageal spasm brought on by stress. I walked into the main doors of the hospital and moved toward the wing where she was. I'd had a vision of crawling up into the motorized bed with her and falling asleep. Like I was a small child again, awakened by a bad dream and needing comfort. Monitors beeped and hummed. My mom's neighbors, separated by thin hospital linen curtains, breathed in pure oxygen. I imagined that the night nurse might come by, see us, smile silently, and turn out the lamp.

This was not the case, as I was a 21 year old, and too large to fit in the crevice between my mom's arm and ribcage; the ribcage which contains both her heart and esophagus. Instead, I sat near the end of the bed with one leg tucked under me and the other stabilized by the floor.

The hospital sounds of beeps and breathing machines kept a strange, syncopated rhythm about us as I regaled her with trivia about The Beach Boys and lyrics and fictionalized histories that appeared in the movie. She laughed politely and then yawned – signaling impending disinterest and general exhaustion, willing me to wrap it up.

She knew that we were the same in that regard – we'd learn something new, become obsessed with it for some undetermined period of time and all the while it would become a moral imperative to share it with everyone we know. Somehow the sharing of knowledge and therefore a certain kind of passion and curiosity, eclipses the sharing of emotions when comfort is needed. Perhaps we share the need to help preoccupy others' minds with details and facts in order to keep them from going to the worst-case scenario.



Margaritaville

By Josh Sherman

Song: 5 8 6 by New Order

“The next station is Christie,
Christie Station”

That’s what the automated
subway announcement says
as I realize
it’s just over two years
(to the day)
that I was getting off
at Christie Station
to meet you
that first time

It was Tuesday,
the year was new,
fresh starts, etc.
but I admit
I wasn’t expecting much:
based on your pictures,
I assumed
that you’d leave
the bar
(Northwood)
after humouring me
with a quick drink
—it wouldn’t be
the first time

Just a few months prior
this Russian girl I’d met
off Tinder
stayed for a single
margarita

at the same bar
before ditching
There's something
especially humiliating
for me
about that drink choice
A margarita is
a statement drink
It says you're planning
on making a night
of it,
or at least
trying

I'm now convinced
she was a sociopath

Like,
who does that?

Well, not you

You ordered
top-shelf tequila
with soda
and after three
or four
or five
or six
we went back to your
place
But no matter what
signs you gave,
I still waited for you
to make the first
move
—I'd misread

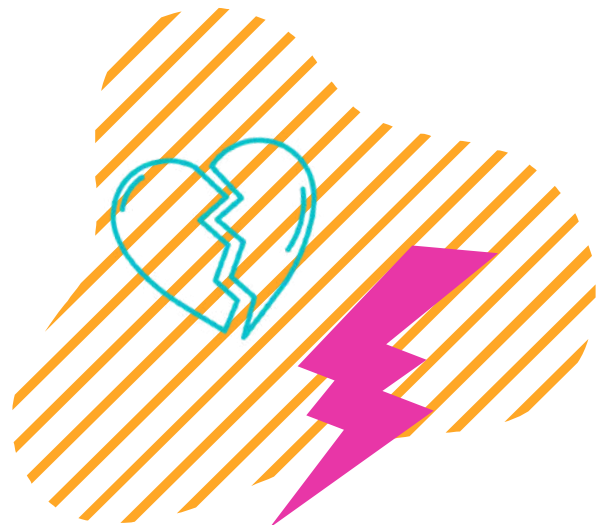
the room
too many times
before

Want another margarita?

So at some point
later
you tackled me
onto your rug,
and we started making out
to New Order's
"5 8 6"

For a long time,
I'd recalled
that moment
all wrong;
I'd misremembered
the song
as Gaz Nevada's
Italo-disco
classic:
"I.C. Love Affair"
But you corrected me
in one of our final
text exchanges,
since deleted

And now, 735 days
in the future
of that night,
it's another Tuesday,
I'm pulling out
of Christie Station,
heading home,
and wishing



I had
my headphones
—and a tequila-soda,
or at least
a margarita

for ****

The River

By Rachel Alarcio

Song: *The River* by Good Charlotte

A golden shovel after Good Charlotte

The concrete jungle has a concrete river I've
never actually swam in. Too shallow. I've seen
so many unspeakable things in this city, done enough
to drown me in sin until the end of time. Until now
my memories have eaten me alive. To
breathe means to believe and to believe means to know
who is an angel and who is a devil in that
tailored masquerade disguise. I believed that more beautiful
are the wretched things

those tempting things. Don't
you jump into the arms of any mother; always
exercise caution and stay
on the more trafficked roads so that
florescent lights illuminate the way

home. The old sanctum, I've
forsaken. Thy will be done
so that enough
of us will be reborn now

and forever, amen. But. To
bathe in the river Lethe and forget, to know
nothing of this
wretchedly beautiful
place—
what if amnesia isn't
everything
they
say



What The Thunder Said

By Fahad Rahmat

Song: *Crying Lightning* by The Arctic Monkeys

I repeated the magic word again and again. I repeated the magic word again and again under my breath so that only I and the gods could hear it. I sat on the front steps of the building I lived in, reciting the magic word, knowing it was silly. I knew that that kind of prayer was silly. On a beautiful summer afternoon while other kids were out riding bikes, picking through brush in parks, and kissing for the first time, it felt silly for me to sit on the stoop of the building I lived in, silently chanting a magic word that I read in a comic book again and again. I wanted to believe that if I said it just right, that maybe a crack of otherworldly lightning would blind the world to me transforming into a tall, beautiful, strong, kind man. I didn't want to be tall or strong: as a kid, I already was those things. I wanted the things I didn't have - I wanted to be kind. I wanted people to see me as beautiful. So, one day, one summer, I sat on the steps of my childhood home, repeating a magic word: blaspheming, waiting for lightning to strike and make me better.

I pressed fists into my lips, elbows on my knees, and my head resting forward, pressing into my hands. From my throne, I scanned slowly the clear sky while slight vanilla filled my nose. My fingers were sticky from ice cream run-off. The cone had belonged to a smaller boy, Adam, or Ahmed, or Ameer before I made it mine. Once the other boy had run away and I had his cone in hand, the sweet, soft liquid started to drip onto my fingers and my knuckles. I throttled the cone, angry at how good it was - angry at how much it was what I wished my summer tasted like. The biscuit cone cracked and oozed melted ice cream, staining the front of my shorts before I dropped the syrupy mess in a small grass tuft.

I looked down the hot, sticky street. Cars drove lazily past and pedestrians rushed, eager to step into somewhere air conditioned. I tried the magic word again. Nothing. I still felt wretched. Ahmed, or Omar, or Aiden - whoever the boy was had come back. He made his presence known to me suddenly: it was an eclipse passing in front of the mid afternoon sun. I turned my face up and there he was - backlit with hands on his hips, feet set wide apart, and his jaw set. Next to him, what was really casting the shadow, was an older boy: his brother, who was older than us both.

Wordlessly, the brother lifted me off the ground by the front of my shirt. Before I could even yell, the brother swung me around and pinned my hands behind my back. The owner of the ice cream cone that started all of this rained blows against my midsection and around my ears. What started as a drizzle quickly became a patter, and then a storm. The blows around my ears were thunder strikes that left me dazed. When the boy was tired, his brother kicked my feet out from behind me. From my knees, I yelled out the magic word again believing that

this time I would change. I believed that I would step out of clearing smoke and take a heroic pose - one of a hundred that I had stamped onto my mind. And as the smoke in my mind cleared, I heard faint laughter in the distance. It sounded like my own, but was just too far away. I looked up, still on my knees and felt a smack against the side of my face. Things went dark and very cold. I heard the two others leave and pulled my aching arms around to clear fresh ice cream out of my eyes. The sweet, icky liquid trailed into my mouth. It was still wonderful and saddening.

The taste never left my mouth. Every meal after was tinged with artificial vanilla. And over time, I forgot the word. I folded and tucked away the word I worked so hard to learn and repeat and whose meaning I committed to memory. Its pagan magic had waned and what was left was something more quotidian: something more reliable. I started saying, "I'm sorry." The word "sorry" took on its own chalk-like texture whenever I said it that dampened the sweetness of the vanilla without ever dousing it entirely.

It was in that era of apology that I came across my comic books again. Another summer had come and I visited with my parents. While they dozed, I picked through the apartment slowly, reminding myself of the jagged cracks in the paint and the water spots on the ceiling. The sound of rain clattered against the window panes, punctuating the sounds of my parents' light snores. I slipped into my old room and pulled out old drawers that I'd forgotten had even existed. In them were my old books. The colors were still thick and the lines bold. On the cover of every one of my old favorites, the old magic word leapt off the page at me, as though imploring me to say it out loud one more time. I picked up the top issue, looking at the handsome man it showed. Through vanilla lips, only loud enough for me and the gods to hear, I read the word again. And nothing changed.

I put the issue back down into the drawer it came out of and slid it shut. I looked around the room, and breathed the taste out. I had a mirror precariously placed on top of my dresser, leaning back against the wall. I looked into it and ran a hand through my beard. If I shaved, would I look like the man from the books? Would it help me act like him? I wondered what I had to do to be the man soaring above a sky line. The kind of man people smiled when they saw. In that musing, I silently shut the building door and found myself back out on the steps of the building. the rain hammered the ground, so I stepped back into cover.

Pressed up against the glass, I stared at the uninviting gray just beyond. In that, I let an illicit thought slip through. Another blaspheme that I didn't even dare share out loud - "Nuff." Far away, I heard the thunder roll. And the taste of vanilla in my mouth dripped slowly out, staining my front a rainbow of conflicting, wonderful colors. I smacked my lips, savoring the salt that flooded my parched, stale mouth.

I think God Is Moving Its Tongue

By Jack Bedell

Song: *My Own Summer (Shove It)* by Deftones

And the clouds swirl around in the sky. And I want to reach into that blue like Jacques Cousteau reaches into a hole in the coral. Knowing there might be an eel waiting there for my fingers. Also knowing my fingers might find a starfish to pull out of that blue into this world so we can all share its waving arms. And it won't matter how hot today is. Or how far away the sky. Not while my air tank is so full and Abe's snare keeps finding the two and the four.



Everlong

By Leah Rantz

Song: *Everlong* by The Foo Fighters

And then, as it has since the Beginning of it all,

Summer had come again.

The sun burned bright and reassuring from the window in my apartment as it had before. But this time, the warmth couldn't touch me from my empty bed. The rays stretched out across the apartment, searching for me. They beckoned me, but I didn't budge from my side. I faced a gray wall. I wasn't interested in a new season.

Last summer had been different. I couldn't wait to get out of bed, couldn't wait to run outside to my car. I always seemed to be running late. Maybe it was from the deep, black, thoughtless sleep the sticky nights provided. I would wake up groggy and quickly dash to the gas station to pick up our energy drinks. Purple one for me, blue one for her.

By the time I would get to the counter, like clockwork, my phone would typically buzz incessantly. I looked away from the cashier to my phone. She never liked to text in just one bubble.

HELLO

IM WAITING HERE

FOR

YOU

As always, I would reply some snarky response like

Sorry are we meeting today?

But she'd catch the sarcasm, despite the text with a middle finger emoji

SEE YOU

IN

Then I would head to the boardwalk, the condensation of the sweating drinks wetting my fingers. And I'd turn the corner on 9th and she'd be there waiting expectantly for me on the park bench.

Sometimes she would hop up, guitar in hand and pretend to bash me over the head with it. Sometimes she'd lay, eyes closed, mouth open dramatically, and pretend to be asleep. One time she hid entirely, and, knowing my routine- crept up and scared me from behind.

Then we would head to our bench. I'd joke about the guy at the gas station. She'd vent about the traffic. We would take sips of our energy drinks sometimes in complete comfortable silence, watching the tourists begin to clog up the boardwalk. The sun would hit a certain height in the sky, and we would get to work.

Without warning, always without warning, she would begin to strum on her guitar. I'd throw my lucky bucket hat at our feet. Automatically, I would let my mind pick up and remember the song and I'd sing. Strangers passed by with smiles, admiring us. Some would entirely ignore us, too wrapped up in wrangling sandy kids. Some would ride by on their bikes, sunglasses on, blazing ahead.

I know she loved when the dogs would stop by. Especially Dalmatians. Like draws to like, after all. The dogs loved her magic laughter, her excitable seated bouncing, her dimples. Sometimes she would stop our performance entirely simply to pet a dog, as their owner would toss a tip into our hat.

And so it went, for hours on end. Our skin would redden and sting. We would take our tips and grab lemonades for our raspy voices. Or we would get ice cream and fries at the dock and vent about the dumb tourists that would feed the seagulls.

If we were feeling particularly lazy, we would stop busking all together and go get margaritas at the Mexican place on 12th. She would flirt with the waiter or waitress, and, as usual, they would melt for her. Our drinks would be *particularly* strong.

One time we had gone to the fortune teller on 20th, holding back our snickers as we went through the beaded entrance. The fortune teller had held her palm and grinned, "You have a raised Mount of Venus. You're passionate. It's easy for you to attract people."

At this, she turned to me and wiggled her eyebrows. I had scoffed and laid my palm flat on

the table for the fortune teller. Her smile had faltered when she noticed the broken lines on my palm.

The best part of the day typically would be when we would head back to our bench, as the sun would set to lavender. The sweltering heat would break, cooling the sweat from our foreheads. People would lift their sunglasses from their heads, gazing around without squinting. I always felt our final song was our strongest.

I remembered, one non special twilight, I had looked over at her. She was strumming her guitar like always. She was smiling at a passerby. She was singing along with the same familiar trail of words. I had felt my chest cave with yearning. I blinked and tried to keep a mental picture of her and the sand and the sky and the bench. I wanted it burned behind my eyelids like when one looked at the sun for too long. I wondered if anything could ever feel this real forever. If anything could ever be this good again.

The days got colder and the tourists became fewer. They now were bundled in sweaters. They couldn't stand and watch for long. One by one, the shops began to pull down their metal doors shut for the season. She took longer to reply to my texts. She always had a reason.

Sorry I can't today.

I'm busy.

I'm tired.

Read 10:29am.

Days went by unanswered. Then weeks. The nights grew longer. The bench sat empty. And one day I woke up, and suddenly that familiarity was just gone.

The string had snapped and broke. The song had ended. And I didn't see her or her dimples or her guitar or her laughter anymore. All I saw was night. All I felt was a yawning stretch of without. I didn't want to sing along to the songs in my car anymore. I wanted to ride in silence.

And I wasn't interested in a new season, in a new summer. I turned my back from the light, curled up in my bed. I remembered this all, staring at the wall.

But I also remembered the fortune teller again, who had grabbed me by the shoulder, just before we left the shop. I had lingered behind alone, and the teller had looked me in the eyes, a little too deep for comfort.

“You’ve gotta promise not to stop. Don’t give up,” the teller had pleaded, softly, their voice barely grazing above a whisper. I had laughed a little because I was taken aback. And I had shook the hand off my shoulder. I had not understood the warning because I had not wanted to.

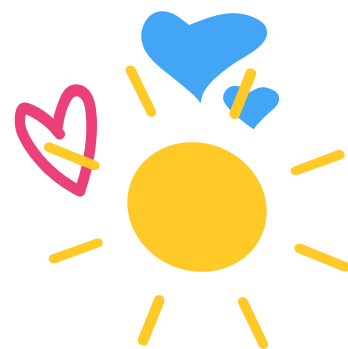
But the clarity came to me now from my gray bedroom, in the light of a new summer. I groaned and rolled out of bed. I lingered anxiously at the door of the gas station. I only bought the purple drink for me this time and bit back the familiar pang of yearning.

But then, at the counter, I met the cashier’s eyes. In all my days of coming, I had never noticed they were blue. They crinkled with a familiar smile as they looked back at me, and he greeted,

“Hello! I was waiting here for you to come back.”

I couldn’t help but grin back.

Summer had come again.



Contributors and Playlist Makers

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François Bereaud is a husband, dad, full time math professor, mentor in the San Diego Congolese refugee community, mountain biker, and mediocre hockey player. His stories and essays have been published online and in print. The Counter Pharma-Terrorist & The Rebound Queen is his published chapbook and the realization of a dream. You can find links to his writing at francoisbereaud.com. He tweets stuff @FBereaud.

Casey Dawson put this zine together. Isn't she talented, folks? Give her a round of applause at @caseylikekc on twitter.

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Emily Cotman (she/they) writes in the margins of the work week and dabbles in reanimating the dead. Her words appear in Lumpen, Zero Readers, Travesties?! Press & elsewhere, and are forthcoming in Dollar Store Mag and DEAR Poetry Journal. TW/IG @emilycotman

Fahad Rahmat is a writer of mysterious origin, who is not NOT an eldritch monster in the making. He is on twitter sometimes, but you have to be willing to search to find him.

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Leah Rantz is based out of Western Massachusetts. When she's not writing, her full time job is being on the air on a rock station, Lazer 99.3 & 98.5

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Shawn Berman did not contribute to this zine, but he is the EIC of the Daily Drunk, which is putting this zine out, and is also my friend. Buy his book *Mr. Funnyman* today.

Samantha Fain is a writer from Indiana. Her chapbooks *Coughing Up Planets* and *sad horse music* debuted with Vegetarian Alcoholic Press and The Daily Drunk in 2021. Her work has appeared in *The Indianapolis Review*, *SWWIM*, *Peach Mag*, and others. She tweets at @smnthfn. Find her at samanthafain.com.

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Thanks for listening!

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Jacqueline Brown

Clem Flowers

Sam Fain

Téa Franco

Leah Rantz

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Kirsten & Friends

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Ultimate
Summer playlist

Rachel Alarcio

Jack Bedell

Josh Sherman

Edited by Kirsten Reneau