2015

Excerpt from (She's So Heavy)

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Recommended Citation

Korn, Lauren (2015) "Excerpt from (She's So Heavy)," The Oval: Vol. 8 : Iss. 2 , Article 14.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/oval/vol8/iss2/14

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00. Preface

“…Without a soundtrack, human interaction is meaningless.”
Chuck Klosterman, “Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs”

I wonder now whether or not I should have attempted to explain this collection with the
following preface, but it being what it is – something a bit like myself: scattered and unsure, but com-
pletely aware of itself – I will assume responsibility and believe it necessary to have done so.

Here, I have gathered together a number of essays. Introducing each essay is a list of albums
that were released during the year in focus. Admittedly, these lists are long, but I’ve kept them as-is,
pre-edit, because the mere fact that I was unable to reduce them to a more pleasing (read: lesser) num-
ber says a lot about the person (and the very stubborn writer) that I am. I struggled with the image
of myself that would inevitably be projected in these lists: the obsessed girl-child that knows every
Mariah Carey song by heart, the awkward adolescent that loves the boy- and girl- bands of the ‘90s, the
ten-year-old that yearns for a depth that can embody an appreciation for both Bruce Springsteen
and for Dinosaur Jr.

Although this piece was intended to be one about the role music has played in my life, its final
form is and will be more of a reflection on the relationships formed by music than on the music itself.  

...
I should have been an Aries, but my mother smoked cigarettes when she was pregnant with me, so I’m a Capricorn instead. She went into labor three months before my due date — our due date — and was airlifted from Helena, Montana to Salt Lake City, Utah, the night of her older brother’s New Year’s Eve party. She had a C-section five hundred miles from home and celebrated the New Year in a hospital bed.

I was born January 2, 1988, at 12:59AM.
Rush – Counterparts
Iron Maiden – A Real Dead One
Pearl Jam – Vs.
Kate Bush – The Red Shoes
Wu-Tang Clan – Enter the Wu-Tang Clan (36 Chambers)
Iggy Pop – American Caesar
The Cure – Show
Yo La Tengo – Painful

The Lemonheads – Come On Feel the Lemonheads
Salt-n-Pepa – Very Necessary
David Bowie – Black Tie, White Noise
Tool – Undertow
Aerosmith – Get a Grip
Run-D.M.C. – Down with the King
Pat Benatar – Gravity’s Rainbow

“As far as I’m concerned, the ‘90s was the best era for music ever…”
Rob Sheffield, Love is a Mix Tape

The basement in the house that I grew up in wasn’t renovated until I was in high school, and it being an old house meant that I spent my childhood weekends running my fingers through orange and brown shag carpeting, at eye level with wallpaper of the same color, and thinking it completely normal to want to butter the ceiling, add salt.

On one wall of the basement sat a large, wooden case made in haste by my father who needed a space to store his constantly-expanding vinyl record collection. As a five year old, this case was enormous, covering the wall in its entirety. As an adult, I realize now that there’s no way the case could have reached the length of the wall, most likely covering a third of the wall, half at best. On the adjacent wall sat the stereo system and television console. Below the television, VHS recordings of two-in-one birthday parties and pirated movies were somewhat organized by genre; below the stereo, cassette tapes lined up in rows, un-alphabetically and in plastic cases that weren’t their own.

It won’t be until I reach the awkward age of twelve that I will realize that having grown up listening to cassette tapes of Jerry Garcia singing about teddy bears picnicking was something that could (and eventually would) project me into that certain social aesthetic known as the neo-hippie; my full evolution into dreadlocks, Birkenstocks, and marijuana won’t come until two years after such a revelation.

03. Nineteen Ninety Four

Meat Puppets – Too High to Die
Fugees – Blunted on Reality
Green Day – Dookie
Cake – Motorcade of Generosity
Beastie Boys – “Some Old Bull Shit” and Ill Communication
Pavement – Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain

Willie Nelson – Moonlight Becomes You
Beck – Stereopathic Soul Manure; Mellow Gold; and One Foot in the Grave
Cheap Trick – Woke Up with a Monster
Elvis Costello – Brutal Youth
Nine Inch Nails – The Downward Spiral
On top of my father’s wooden vinyl record case sat the first of what would be numerous gag gifts: a jewel case. Inside the case, a photo of a girl-child on a swing shielding her eyes from the sun and looking searchingly at a looming figure in front of her.

From 1994 – the year KoЯn released their full-length, self-titled debut album – until 2006, the cluttered top shelf of my parents’ record case became home to their schizophrenic CD collection, which included numerous copies of the seven albums had KoЯn released during that time, as well as copies of Enya, Amy Grant, Willie Nelson, The Beatles, and sound recordings of cowboy poets in Nevada.

04. Nineteen Ninety Six

Nick Cave & the Bad Seeds – Murder Ballads
Iggy Pop – Naughty Little Doggie
Hanson – MMMBop
The Decendents – Everything Sucks
Neutral Milk Hotel – On Avery Island

The Cranberries – To the Faithful Departed
Paul Westerberg – Eventually
Backstreet Boys – Backstreet Boys
Butthole Surfers – Electriclarryland
The Cure – Wild Mood Swings
I was eight years old the Christmas I was given my first compact disc, and I don’t remember knowing about the technology before the moment I tore the wrapping off of Elton John’s Don’t Shoot Me, I’m Only the Piano Player. It seemed odd to me even then that my parents would choose this particular album, as neither of them had or have any particular affinity for it or for Elton John. I do know my mother fairly well, however, and have surmised that there must have been a 3-for-1 deal at Wal-Mart the Friday after Thanksgiving that year; LeAnn Rimes, The Spice Girls, and Elton John seem, in this context, logical picks. (EDIT: As it turns out, although Don’t Shoot Me… was released in its original format in 1989, it was released on CD in 1996. Perhaps Jane Fisher just snagged a handful of New Releases.) Also, apparently, worth noting: it may have been the first CD I can claim to have owned, but it wasn’t until a friend wrote “Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid” on a dollar bill and passed it to me in English class as a sophomore in high school that Elton John played even a minute role in my life; my romantic entanglements with the film Almost Famous (in which Kate Hudson croons Elton’s “Tiny Dancer” to a moon-eyed Patrick Fugit and a bus full of pseudo rock stars) are copious (but not to be dwelled upon here, in this particular tangent).

This was also the year that my mother gave our family’s outdated desktop computer – in all its black screen, neon green type perfection – to her own parents, believing this to be the most appropriate way to teach clueless sexagenarians the technical skills associated with owning one’s own word processor. [Insert reference to the 1990s computer game, The Oregon Trail, here.]

With the advent of the compact disc came the birth of the many people who play songs on repeat. With cassette tapes, listening to the same song twice was hard labor. Not only did you have to have the patience to sit in front of your stereo (or in the passenger seat of your father’s sand-colored Toyota Land Cruiser, or hand-to-hip with your Walkman) with your index finger pressed down on the rewind button, but you had to be familiar enough with the album to be confident in your ability to
rewind (the frustration associated with rewinding a tape too far past your chosen song’s beginning, to
have to listen to the preceding song – a song you didn’t like all that much to begin with – was palpable
(to all parties involved), and having to continually press the rewind button if you happened to miscal-
culate a song’s length was just as crushing to one’s fragile I’ll-pick-the-music ego). Vinyl records posed
a similar problem, except the price was much higher: not only does one run the risk of scratching a
record (and as an eight year-old, this risk was high), but one’s tolerance for the sound of that scratch
only extends so far.

So, when rewinding became a matter of a one-touch press of a << track button on a CD play-
er, or even on the remote to that CD player, abusers of such a luxury surfaced. My sister was such an
abuser, and in my own moon-eyed or love-sick moments of elementary school, I was, too. One year
after Don’t Shoot Me…, I will insert the Titanic soundtrack into my three-foot SONY boom box and
play Celine Dion’s My Heart Will Go On on repeat for hours.

I will insist (read: pretend) that I have grown out of this teenage habit, but my sister will utilize
the repeat button on every one of her car’s stereo systems and break her way through a handful of
iPods with her constant use of the Repeat One option.