Welcome...

to a monthly collection of creative writing and chat.

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Hi, this edition means a lot to me; music means a lot to me. I've shared two of my own poems this month, which feels eeeuuuccchhh, and it reminds me of what I want to achieve here: a safe, friendly place to share our scribbles (I choose to remove the diminutive aspect when I use the word- we're writers, we scribe. Yes KF!). Enjoy the poetry and prose you are about to read, and be grateful that this isn't 20 pages of Meat Loaf and Travis. Thank you to those of you who contributed! Love, Rachael xxx
Theme: Music

In every corner of the globe, you will find music. It is a language which transcends all barriers. Music is a totally immersive experience which reaches us from before birth and resonates through our souls in a way that little else can.

From our earliest days, music teaches us about the world around us and helps us to decipher feelings and emotions. Even people who don’t consider themselves to be particularly musically minded will have songs which instantly transport us to another time and place: the nursery rhymes which remind us of sitting on our grandparents’ laps; the opening bars of Cotton Eye Joe which instantly turn us in to a 9-year-old strutting our stuff at the school disco; the random song that we always put on a playlist because they remind us of long car journeys and family holidays; the club classics which take us to the night clubs and questionable decisions of our twenties; the song you carefully chose for your wedding.

We choose music which is meaningful to us for every occasion, creating playlists to give birth to and agonising over which songs are the best ones to use when we say goodbye at funerals. There are songs to cry to, songs to love to, songs which help us to deal with anger and songs which express our most joyful moments.

Music is everywhere. It is just as essential to us humans as breathing.

*Written by @permanently_outnumbered*
Music, I love you
Over and over again,
to the soundtrack of tapping feet,
I try to explain the feeling in my chest
when I fall into
a note; a riff; a chord.

The first time ever I saw your face,
I did not look for
perfection or symmetry or proportion,
rather, the tiny curve of the cupid’s bow
on your top lip;
the dimple, so small between your eyes.

One note, riff, chord.
No choice but to listen.
No rationalising or looking for context.
Who, why, when does not matter.
The note, riff, chord holds me.

Often it is lust: a few weeks on repeat.
Approximate lyrics sung loudly.
Sometimes, it is love: true, evolving and constant.
Ebbs turn to flows; magnetic attraction that lasts.

Guitar, drum, piano, vocal.
Eyes, dimple, shade of red.
Beginnings that grow to crescendos.
Throes.

Slowly, the context, the who, why and when
starts to matter; it adds more depth of feeling
in my chest. Holds me still,
grows with me; changes with me.

Three minutes that remain
waiting between listens
only ever hidden in a shuffle
only a skip away.
Rewind and start again.

To the soundtrack of tapping feet,
we repeat track, repeat all, shuffle,
And you hold me, my love.

And music holds me too:
in the lonely cool before dawn,
when my chest tightens
the note, the riff, the chord,
releases me; reassures me.

They will wait between listens.

Written by @rachael_scribbles
Duet

The vinyl spins in dizzying, concentric circles that translate to sound: string noise, a gentle drumming, a single mournful voice that meets another. Together they sing of paradise, lost, in lyrics that somehow manage to reach toward his very soul – knocking there – tentatively at first, for memories to excavate, the ones relocated to where former joy goes.

It begins to play out while she washes the dishes, the same playlist, for months now on shuffle, while suds soak her bare feet. Clumsily she meets the start of the song, the one she had cried to on the rug, wine-soaked, spongey. She had resisted the urge then to send the chorus, Typed out in a text just before midnight.
They meet now,
a fleeting duet before he stills the vinyl with his forefinger,
risking the damage, anything but meeting the chorus head on.
Yet in its final spin she appears, dream-like,
her fist balled around something hard and jagged.

She sees him too, in the reflective surface of the water,
his drawn face gazing back,
soft-looking, as seen through a window during a downpour.
And then the music stops –
The two voices fade together, along with the brief remembrance.
Lost once more, until the song catches them,
unaware, as it is bound to do.

Written by Katie Huttlestone
Inspired by Taylor Swift's musical deluge over lockdown, specifically 'Coney Island' ft. The National. Listen here.

Scribbles Loves:
‘Folklore’ and ‘Evermore’ by Taylor Swift
I want to be in a crowd

I want to be in a crowd.
Bodies
Strangers
Spilled drinks
Floor stuck to my shoes
Shouting to be heard
Low lit corridors to push through to get to the loo.
Figures silhouetted on the stage
Feedback isn’t schoolwork it’s
guitars too close to the amp
Reverb.
Hands on waists and arms to pull close
Ears to mouths to hear
About the last time and
What did we say, when the need to say it outweighed the effort it took to be heard?
Next day is far away, here is the
Music, the band, the bodies, the beer.

“They’re good!”
“Another drink?”
“The train leaves in two minutes!”

Just one more.

Written by @rachael_scribbles
Images by Al’s Gig Photos
Music

Music,
A mirror, a blanket, a megaphone.
The words you can’t express
And the emotions you can’t convey.
The reason your feet still pound the pavement,
When you think you can run no more.
The reason you start breathing again,
When life feels so raw.

Filling the void of love lost,
Comfort, healing,
Illustrating life’s meaning.

It inspires
It elevates
It transports

Evoking not just memory
But feeling.
Teleporting you
With a single rift or rhyme.
Cradled in a melody,
Lost within a line.

Written by Kate Ratcliffe
So what, jazz
Jazz, So what
Not incantations
Entries in a search engine
Familiar and other world
Old standards and exotic
The shape of jazz to come
Takin' off, jazz
Jazz, Takin' off

Anonymous

Poetry: Your Turn

Agh did you enjoy those? I did! I loved writing mine, both revealing themselves quite carelessly and hurriedly. I hope you like them. (Credit to Bruce Springsteen and Ewan Macoll for the lyrics that came to me after I let Jim Steinman know he has enough of my attention.)
I’m in awe of the way Katie embroidered her ideas through these lines, if you haven’t listened to the music she refers to, please do! Kate’s ‘megaphone’ is so familiar to me, I’m sure a lot of you see it too. And I don’t know a lot about Jazz, but we watched ‘Soul’ on Disney+ recently and I think I understand ‘Anonymous’s’ poem a bit more as a result.
So, for your poetry prompt. Try this:

Put on your favourite song, you know which one it is, your death row song, your last supper song. Listen to it once and then a second time, but this time write down the lyrics that you know are the ones you love. It might be a whole line or just a phrase, maybe a whole chorus or verse.
When you’ve finished, look at the words you have written— that is your prompt. It may make a poem, or you may see the basis of a short story or more. Whatever it is, enjoy and we would love to see the results!
MEMOIR: MY FIRST GIG

It was their latest hit. We had spent every ‘playtime’ that week singing the chorus at full volume in the school yard. Everyone knew the song and to me, aged nine, the song was just another great sound by the group. For the mining village of Silksworth, however, the sound of children screeching the chorus at the top of their voice EVERY ‘playtime’ had led to complaints from nearby houses. The Head said we had to stop.

The mania was put on hold for the next few playtimes. That didn’t bother me. I had another outlet to look forward to. This weekend would be my first live gig in front of a real audience. I’d been rehearsing for weeks. The tickets were sold and the queueing system along the side of our house leading to the back door had been approved by the venue owners: mum and dad.

Two years earlier, on a shopping trip to Sunderland, my dad dragged me and my mum into Marks & Spencer. He bought the latest single by the group. Their latest 45. Over the next two years we collected every single they put out: six singles; twelve songs.

The Mania was relentless. The group were more than famous, promoted and seen everywhere and to me, television was their best connection. On our small black and white TV they could be seen performing, dressed in ‘Paris Fashion’ designed suites with trendy German coiffured haircuts. They looked like a futuristic puppet show of perfectly crafted marionettes, but without any strings, except for their guitars.

But back to my gig.

The venue: 79 Nursery Road, Silksworth Lane, Sunderland, just one address on a new 1960s’ housing estate. Many of the houses were occupied by families with young children. I was lucky enough to make many friends. ‘Playing out’ together in the adjoining woods meant long days with ‘The Gang’ singing together. We were tight.
The Sunderland Echo did a feature about the estate after one of the mums started a door-to-door newspaper, produced entirely by the children (with a little help). She arranged a visit to the Sunderland Echo so that we could see a real newspaper being made. Sometime later we all featured in the Echo, they had recorded our visit for an article in the paper.

Nursery Road was an apt name and an apt title for the article. My audience at the gig were to be the children featured in that article. “The Estate Gang”, my friends aged from 3 to 11. I had invited them all. As they queued up on our driveway, I double checked the PA.

The sound system at the venue was State of the Art. Up to eight 45s could be loaded above the turntable for automatic play. I had six for the gig. The ‘musical instrument’ needed for the performance was very basic. A tennis racquet, with a ‘coloured in’ cardboard cut-out of an electric guitar tied to the racket strings, it did the job!

Once my audience were seated in the front living room, I waited for the first 45 to drop onto the turntable. The needle hit the vinyl and scratchy crackles filled the air. I steadied my guitar and the opening number began:

“She loves you yeah yeah yeah ... She loves you yeah yeah yeah .. Y E A H!”

Moving my lips and strumming my guitar in time with the song, for a few brief moments that afternoon, I was ‘the group’ and at age 9 I had brought them to Nursery Road for an exclusive concert.

Many years later while driving to work, chatting to my wife, with radio 4 in the background, we approached a roundabout just outside Wilmslow Cheshire:

“Be quiet.” I shouted.

“Pardon?”

“SHUT UP! Please!” I turned up the radio.

“...breaking news, the former Beatle John Lennon...”

Written and illustrated by Mike Parkinson
Memoir: Your Turn

Do you have a song that takes you back to a very specific time and place in your life? Mike has recreated a moment from his 60s’ childhood perfectly- I would be first in line to read more memoir from such an evocative writer.

Take that song (the one you thought of just then- and start writing. 1st person, present or past tense. We would love to see some or all of what you write. Have fun!

Nature’s Symphony.

Bright light streamed in through the French windows, dust motes danced in the warm, still air of the home’s lounge. An indistinct chatter emanated from the disregarded television set in the corner, accompanied by various tenors of snores and the distant clatter of crockery. Armchairs creaked as post-lunch snoozes rested and quiet polite conversations ceased.

As she sat there, her creaking bones settling into the soft, squishy cushions, Martha’s mind relaxed and thoughts flooded her brain. Her china cup of builder’s tea cooled in her hand and tilted alarmingly. Her lined face took on a serene mien and her eyes gazed into the distance. It was her mind’s eye that took dominance. The corners of Martha’s lips curved upwards and her curls nodded in time to the beat only she could hear. This was no ordinary beat though...

Martha was revisiting a night many years ago – a night when Nature’s music played. Martha loved these nights, not that there had been many in her short life. She was tucked up under a mountain of warm blankets in an old-fashioned brass bed; feather pillows billowed beneath her sleepy head and she sank, safe, secure into the sagging mattress. Positioned under the eaves, she was centre-stage. The concert started with a pianissimo – the wind whispered amongst the leaves; a shimmer and shiver of
movement. A light rustling, as if fingers were stroking the leaves, touching the ebony and ivory, wafted on the breeze in through the ancient window, opened on the first latch during early evening. As the wind played its song, it lulled Martha into that first dreamy state before deep sleep took over. She lay on her back, eyes fluttering like a summer butterfly’s wing and she allowed the wind’s sophorous notes to soothe her. In the distance, the last of the blackbird’s trilling chorus soared and swooped in the twilight. A soft pink and golden glow suffused the night sky as the light blue gave way to black. Long grass in the meadow danced, trembling and swaying to and fro, sea waves of movement.

After the initial soft notes of evening had died away and the cockerel had croaked its goodnights, the wind picked up its baton, deciding that it was the person best placed to act as the conductor. Waving the baton, the wind instructed the leaves of the eucalyptus tree in the garden to pick up the pace. Scratching against each other, the leaves flailed about and shook fiercely. As the wind increased, the rusty red clay tiles lifted in turn and settled again, only to repeat the action. From an intermittent sound, the tinkling tiles became a regular rhythm, de dum, de dum, de dum. A tra la lar was added in every now and again as the wind rattled the window on its latch. Martha slowly surfaced from her slumber and turned onto her side to face the window. The steel grey clouds scudded across the darkening sky. Yesterday’s sun was a hazy memory. Martha sighed. She settled herself, snuggling into her cocoon; her left cheek brushing against the cool cotton; her left arm flung out straight at right angles to her body, fingers closing around the edge of the mattress and her right hand tucked beneath her right cheek. Her eyes were half closed and her breathing settled into a consistent beat – in, slow out, in, slow out. Sleep was minutes away.

Somewhere in the distance, a collision of ice particles discharged an electrical charge and lit up the sky. An almost imperceptive, Martha sensed, rather than heard, roll of drums added its elegy.

Down in the valley, a train whistled its lament, as the concert’s conductor gave the instruction for the xylophonic rain to begin playing. Great, fat drops of rain fell, first a
patter, then metallic dings. Splats of water hit the ground, spreading rapidly on the bone-dry earth; a pitter patter, drop drop, until it reached a crescendo, a roaring so loud that the trilling of the tiles was drowned out. The rusty red turned to a deep terracotta as water streamed over them like football fans executing a pitch invasion. The guttering overflowed and the downpipes gurgled as the rain surged, pushing onwards, eager to reach the sea once more.

Closer to home now, the sky was ripped apart by lightening; a crash of cymbals quickly followed. Sleep forgotten, Martha slipped from her bed, feet tiptoeing across the honey-coloured floor boards, worn smooth over centuries of use, to the window. She threw the window wide open and lent out over the windowsill, pulling the care-worn, woollen coverlet tight over her shoulders. The wood was cool to the touch and a night breeze sneakily wound itself around her bare legs.

The rain attacked the exposed window, sending globules of drops through the aperture to find Martha. The rain was stair-rododing it down; a constant trumpet blast of rain-soaked sound filled the air. The wind added its own voice; no longer a whisper, but now shouting, pouring its anger out, roaring, gusting, pushing that invisible force to make itself known. Martha pulled back a little, frightened by the sudden change in the ferocity of the wind. Her long rope of white, blond hair coiled over her shoulders and strands escaped her plait, flying around her face. She dragged them behind her ears, an automatic, quick and impatient movement made by lithe fingers. In defiance, the wind flung more stinging rain drops at Martha, wanting to hurt her for her fear, to make her angry too. However, Martha relished the wind now, laughed at it, wanted its breath to breathe new life into her - to make her feel alive! She lent even further out of the window, not caring that her nightwear was being soaked - she just wanted to feel the storm, be the storm, enjoy the storm.

Out of nowhere, a screech, like a wounded animal, rose up from the surrounding hills. Martha shuddered. The storm had upped the tempo and sent a lightning bolt into the trunk of an ancient tree. Flames licked the sky; vivid oranges and reds. A crackling sound mingled with the creaking and popping of snapping branches - their notes intermittent, sharp then soft. Black smoke hurried into the sky, fingering the billowing
black, grey clouds racing each other across the heavens. Wind thrummed the crackling branches and rain drops sizzled as they landed. Another round of thunder crashed around the house, a fortissimo of sound, a drum solo by Metallica that shook the foundations, sending shock waves of violent ripples through Martha’s feet. A tremolo followed; the storm was overhead. A sudden spark of light, a princess of the night, sprinted to earth, its pathway jagged and angular. Static increased Martha’s heart rate, made the hairs on Martha’s bronzed forearms soldiers on parade. She felt alive. An oratorio of rain pounded the roof, knocking frantically to be let in. Wind howled its desolation. Somewhere in the house, an unlatched window banged hysterically, backwards, forwards, wood crashing against splintering wood, the glass finally shattering, sounding like a glass harmonica being struck repeatedly. Martha paid no attention, her excitement centred only on being in the moment, her moment, of the storm.

Then, the coda - one last blinding flash of white light, an explosion of sound rolling around overhead, a race of rain, a blast of icy wind through the wind, as if saying goodbye - the storm wandered away, a pizzicato of notes dancing down the hills to the town.

Martha withdrew from the window, suddenly aware of her soaking nightgown, her bedraggled hair and her chilly feet. But she was happy. She slipped off her nightgown, letting it slide into a sodden heap at her feet and abandoned it, then clambered into the warm sanctuary of her bed, snuggling down under her mountain of blankets. Sleep quickly overtook her, drifting away to the patter of rain on the leaves of the aging eucalyptus in the garden, the wind a whisper once more. Clouds scurried away, leaving a dark navy blue blanket overhead dotted with a string of twinkling lights. Calm was restored.

‘A princess of the night’ lyrics courtesy of Saxon taken from ‘A princess of the night’ Written by Marie Arrowsmith
ALBUM REVIEW
Susanne Sundfor – Ten Love Songs

Music is weird, right? A uniquely human endeavour. We might wonder what a visiting alien would make of our indulgent noise making tendencies. Would they get it? Should we assume all intelligent life in the universe would have some equivalent practice? Or would our soundscapes not translate? We might never know. There’s plenty of speculation out there already in the scientific community around the presence of music in human society and its purpose. That’s not what we’re here to discuss today. Or is it? No, today we are going to have a chat about the ethereal music of one Susanne Sundfor and her album “Ten Love Songs”.

Ten Love Songs is a journey through electronic orchestral cathedrals in space. Through it’s merging of thumping synthesisers and reverb heavy orchestral strings, Ten Love Songs projects (as a shimmering hologram) a space age opera across the face of a gleaming chrome spaceship. With Sundfor’s powerful vocals elevating the whole affair to the stars.
Often you will hear music snobs insisting that albums be listened to in their entirety from start to finish, and as a snob that’s exactly what I am going to insist on here. As I was saying, the album is a journey, a love story with a beginning, middle and end. The album opens softly, erupts into the second track, ducks and dives through light and shade, then becomes reflective before finally blowing up in your face like a star going supernova. There is something truly unique here and it’s never afraid to be its own thing. To me this album is very sci-fi and, if you’ll humour me, I’m going to talk a little about that...sorry.

The science fiction might not leap out at you straight away when first hearing this album, but it will. It isn’t until about half way through the album, with the track “Memorial” that we get any overtly sci-fi content, with the lyrics – “Blasting, blazing. Stars exploding. A cosmic war raging in the sky...” So cool! Prior to this moment, the songs have an almost new retro wave feel. The electronic instrumentals help to ground the album in a futuristic world. To the extent that the whole album has a feeling of being from an era of space exploration. Think dashing spaceship captains, laser guns...think retro sci-fi comic book covers and Logan’s Run. It is within this context that the album discusses love. And like all great sci-fi it takes very human experiences and places them in an alternate context that allows us to see them from a different perspective...out the window of a mother flippin’ spaceship!

Love is hard. In Ten Love Songs love is colourful, dramatic, volatile even. Sundfor presents that angst of relationships stretched over interstellar
distances. She sings, “Cos you took off my dress and you never put it on again”. This lyric perplexed me at first, I’ll admit. Allow me to go off on a bit of a tangent here. What I think she is talking about is how love exposes us, changes us in the eyes of those who expose us. The dress is symbolic of the masks we wear, our outward facing representation of ourselves. When we get close to someone this mask is removed and we are vulnerable. The idea of unmasking a person and leaving but never returning that mask, that’s powerful. We are never seen the same again after that threshold is crossed. Sundfor achieves this reflectivity in her lyric writing constantly throughout this album. Isn’t it wonderful when music takes us on these reflective journeys into the human experience. Talking sci-fi and love in under a thousand words seems awfully jarring doesn’t it. Wait for it...

I started out talking about what aliens would think of our music. If I had to choose an album to play to them it would be this. Maybe I should choose some piece of classical music, or some folk album, maybe that would be better. I don’t know. What I do know is that “Ten Love Songs” captures something about how we are with each other. It holds a torch to our flaws and our passions, shows our humanity, ugly parts and all. It feels like it comes from another world, a galaxy far far away, but reassures us that there is something universal about the experience of love. Music is weird, right?

Written by Joe Parkinson
Wow, wow. I read Joe’s review before I listened to the album, which isn’t something I would normally do— but, maybe you agree, after reading his take on the tracks, I had to listen. Let us know what you think if you do listen— it’s special.

I’m an enormous fan of everything Marie writes, what a journey we went on with Martha in this vignette. Beautiful.

Thank you to everyone who has contributed this month, you’re all amazing and inspiring.

Next month’s theme:

Next month, the broad theme will be ‘handwriting’, but as always, I hope you’ll take it freely and create whatever comes to you. One quick and easy way you could be involved, if you’d like to be, is to send me your favourite short quote or lyric in your handwriting, this would be an anonymous way to share.

Alternatively, we’d love to share writing on any subject that you have written out by hand. If you could do that on white paper and photograph it on a plain flat surface that would be amazing! Maybe you have a story or a memory that relates to handwriting. Do you have a collection of handwritten letters that you’d like to write about?

How to get in touch.

This newsletter will quickly grind to a halt without your contributions, so if you have felt inspired to write as you read these pages, please get in touch. You can email submissions@rachaelscribbles.com, or send me a message on Instagram @rachael_scribbles.

Thanks for coming,

Rachael xx

www.rachaelscribbles.com