



When I originally started this project

in May 2014, the idea was to make it a weekly vehicle to keep my design gears moving by illustrating one of my favorite songs and/or lyrics. I felt like my design skills were atrophying as I took on more and more project management at BBM&D (where I worked for my first nine years as a professional creative) and then jumped to Oniracom (my current employer) to focus on web development, which I did pretty heavily for the first six months there. All that copywriting and coding seemed to dull my creativity when it came to actual illustration and design, most noticeably in some truly horrible pieces I'd created for AIGA Santa Barbara when I first joined their board in 2012.

All that contributed to a general malaise about my design career, so I tried doing something about it and figured that jumping into the trendy "project of the week" posts that grew to dominate social media would do the trick. I was inspired by actual good work, though, namely my friend and colleague Tad Wagner's periodic illustration binges and holiday "Tadvent" series on Instagram. Another inspiration was the collaborative Project 52 series by Liz King and many of her CSUCI design students (several of whom interned for me at BBM&D).

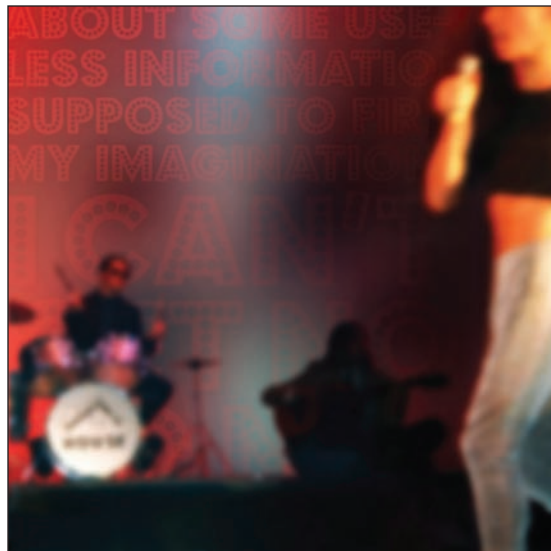
My series started well and I created some good pieces, but the slog set in sooner than I expected. I learned all over again that I don't work well this way—regularly churning out lots of pieces instead of concentrating on making fewer, better pieces—and struggled to stay inspired while taking on more responsibility at

both Oniracom and AIGA SB. Another issue was, predictably, the overwhelming dominance of white male rock artists (mostly from the 1980s onward) in this project. Far better or worse, that's what I listen to the most—but I still feel like there aren't enough women or artists of color included, and not much hip-hop, jazz, or country either. Furthermore, I left out many favorite songs for lack of a good illustration idea, but that's probably for the best.

I do have favorites; "Big Dipper," "Synchronicity II," "Red Tide," "St. Francis Dam Disaster," "Dream Brother," "Ana," "Hell is Around the Corner," "Watch That Man," "Goin' Against Your Mind," and "The Way" are probably top ten, though not in that order. Some of the rest were pretty good, and a few were great, but most were poor and several were downright bad. Still, when mashed all together they do make for an interesting playlist, whether by the order published, the reverse of that, or by chronology of when each song was actually released (which is how I compiled this PDF booklet).

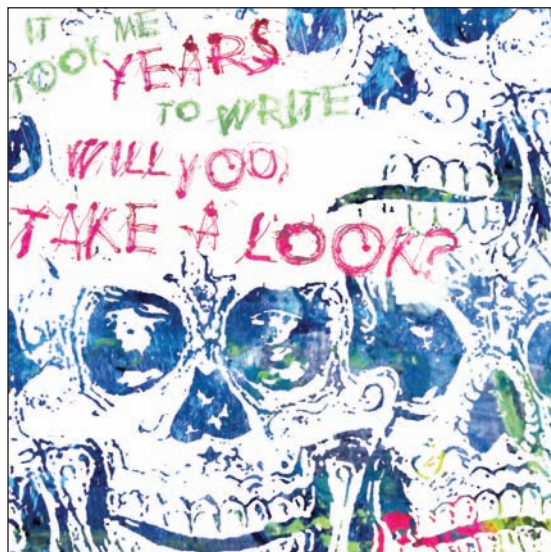
The series was always going to end after a year's time, but it felt like a chore long before that. By the time I'd wrapped it up I was ready to ignore it for a while, and now when I finally have some proper distance from this project to evaluate it, the value seems truly dubious. Unlike many of my other projects, I probably won't go back and look at these much, so a slapdash compilation like this seems the best way to put it to bed and move on to the next creative time-suck.

Keir DuBois, 6/28/15



#27 “Like a Rolling Stone” by Bob Dylan (1965), because 1) it’s an overplayed classic for a reason, 2) designing with Dylan imagery can’t escape *Milton Glaser*, 3) Dylan replied to the infamous “Judas!” taunt with this song, 4) the lyric itself is an awesomely nasty kiss-off, and 5) once you know that Judas/Jesus slashfic exists, it cannot be un-known.

#29 “(I Can’t Get No) Satisfaction” by the Rolling Stones (1965). Bit of an inside joke for this one, since you kinda had to be there, but most people will understand that time tends to blur goofy things like sparkly silver pants into the stuff of legend.



#16 “Paperback Writer,” the classic Revolver-era single by the Beatles (1966), falls victim to a lazy inside joke. Read any good self-released vanity pulp lately? Sure you have.





#45 “And It Stoned Me” by Van Morrison, from “Moondance” (1970). So many memories for this song (or indeed anything by Van the Man), but for some reason the one that sticks out the most was a weird, awkward visit to Imperial Beach with my siblings, dad, and stepmom from ~21 years ago. This song on the car stereo was a calming thing in a frustratingly strange time.

#30 “Fortunate Son” by Creedence Clearwater Revival (1969). I won’t earn any subtlety points here, but neither did John Fogerty, so since NBC invited the Big Dick to crawl out of his hole onto Meet the Press this morning and unrepentantly snarl about torturing people, I dedicate this one to our former VP and his five Vietnam deferments.



#36 “Roadhouse Blues” by the Doors, done to mimic the cover color palette of parent album “Morrison Hotel” (1970). I’m not a big Jim Morrison fan, but I’ve always liked this song. What can I say, I’m a sucker for unpretentious twelve-bar blooze, even when the band has no bassist.

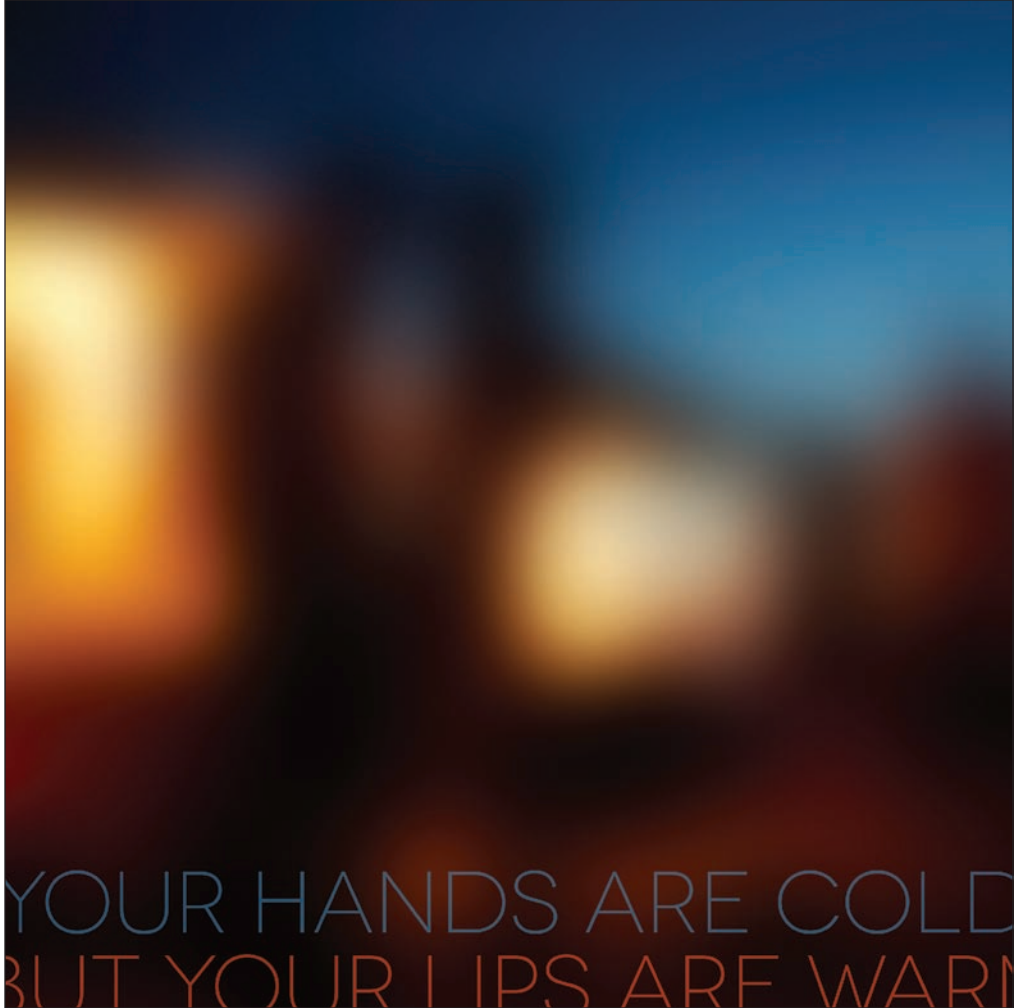




#17 "Watch That Man" by David Bowie, lead track for his "Aladdin Sane" album (1973). That cover is so iconic that I just decided to go with the deathless lightning bolt and goofiest line, because the whole song teeters between silly and awesome in the glorious way that only Bowie can.



#23 "Coney Island Baby" (1976) by Lou Reed, from the album of the same name. Went with a more literal & contemporary interpretation, but put in a few hints of the original "nostalgia-laced-with-awkward-pain" take on it as well.

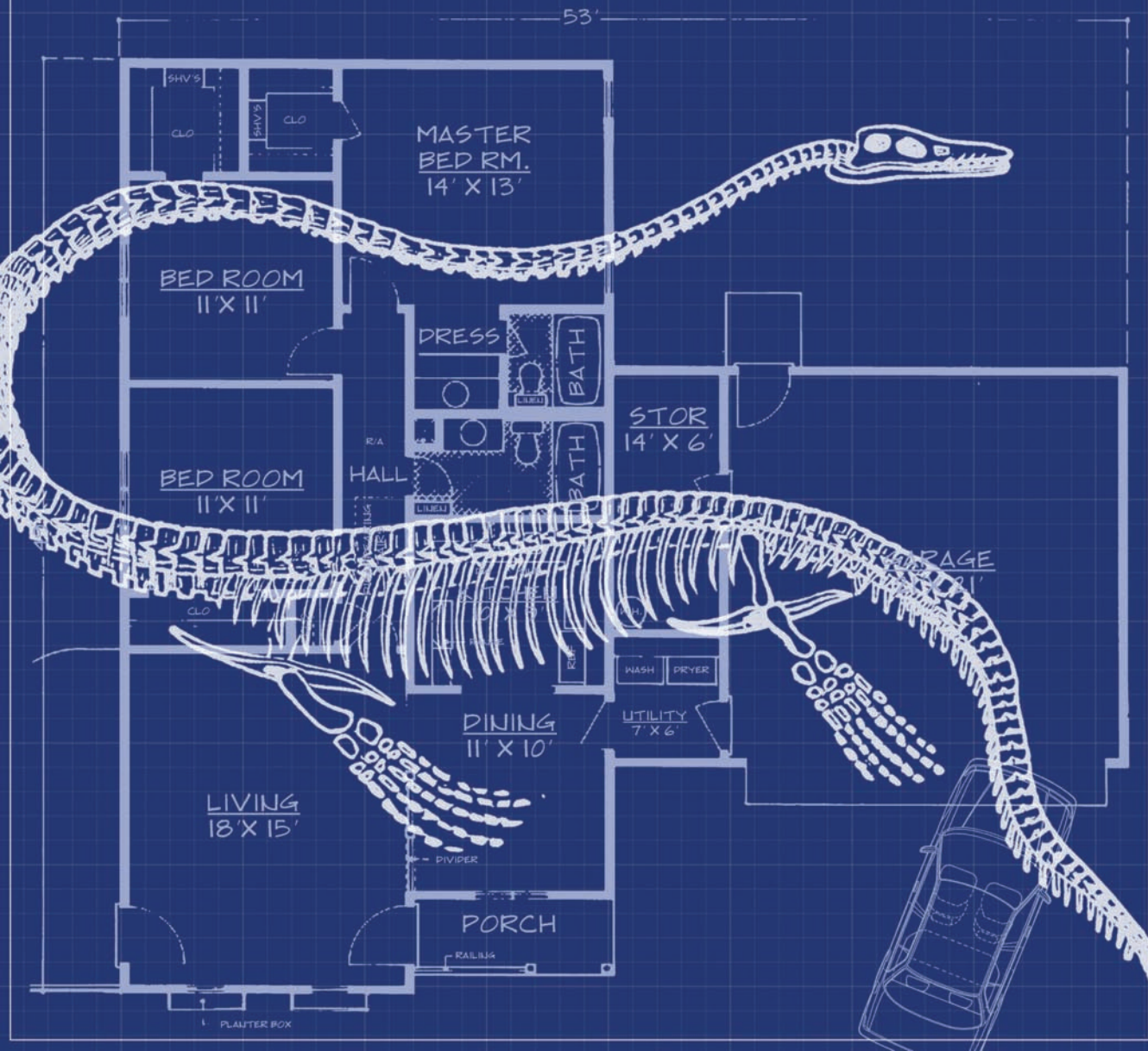


#18 “Down to the Waterline” by Dire Straits, a hazy piece of rueful nostalgia that led off their self-titled debut album in 1978. This image is derived from a fantastic shot by German photographer Jorg Badura.



#10 “Beyond Belief” by Elvis Costello & the Attractions, a pop-arty melodrama allegedly about Costello’s obsession with model Bebe Buell. I used to work with a woman named Wendy who memorized these lyrics as a teen to impress a guy she liked (a Costello fan). This is how I imagine her face after she sang it to him.

DADDY ONLY STARES INTO THE DISTANCE.
THERE'S ONLY SO MUCH MORE THAT HE CAN TAKE.

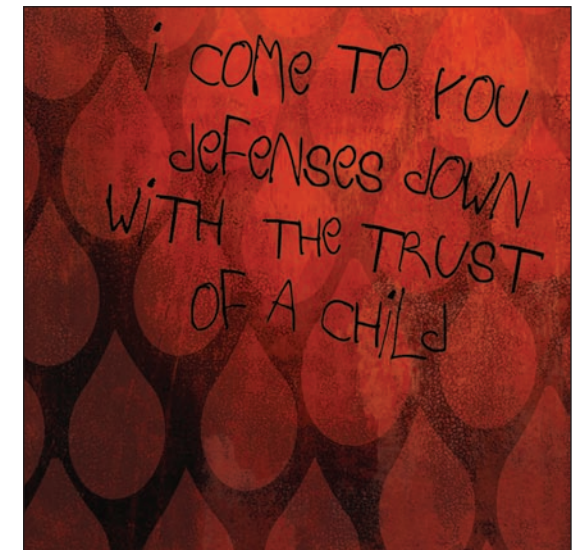


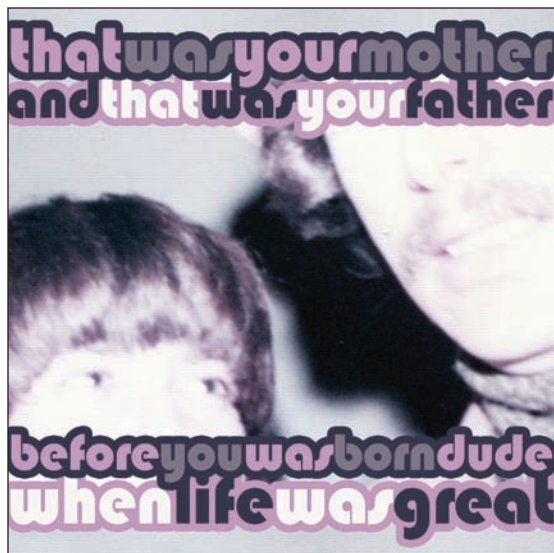
#7 "Synchronicity II" by the Police (1983). Pretentious psychological melodrama + the Loch Ness Monster = my favorite song when I was about 8 years old.

#47 Simple one for "This Must Be the Place" by Talking Heads (1983). Inset is an old photo of my siblings and I on the first day of school circa 1985. The shot of the house we grew up in is from 2008, 12 years after my family moved out of it. No apologies for the contemporary, Mac-Classic-era Chicago typeface.



#44 "Red Rain" by Peter Gabriel, lead track from his 1986 album "So." What I did is a bit too close to the original single sleeve, but it's hard to do this without alluding to acid rain or nuclear fallout or Rosanna Arquette (the alleged topics). The song itself is truly epic, teetering on the edge of taking itself too seriously—a balancing act I've tried and failed to emulate with my own songs.





#22 “World Leader Pretend,” often my favorite R.E.M. song, from their “Green” album (1988). It’s one of Michael Stipe’s self-consciously moody interpretations of rock star as kind of a potential cult leader or totalitarian dictator.

#42 “That Was Your Mother” (1986) by Paul Simon, from “Graceland.” Now, I don’t think my parents actually believed this—it’s just a funny line from a funny song—but my mom did play this album frequently when I was young, so I had plenty of time to absorb it long before I appreciated how great it was for practicing bass guitar.



#19 “Housequake” by Prince, from his “Sign O’ the Times” album (1987). Cartoon voices + mild swearing + bad puns + a throwaway Dr. Seuss line = my favorite song when I was about 12. This one’s quick & dirty but I’m not sorry.





#20 "All Her Favourite Fruit" by Camper Van Beethoven. This is a Google-map-fied take on David Lowery's elegaic, pathos-drenched epic ballad from the "Key Lime Pie" album (1989). The lyric seems beamed in from another time, with simple but powerful opening lines.



#35 "I Am the Resurrection" by the Stone Roses (1989). Ian Brown is a mediocre lyricist at best, but the glorious instrumental jam during the end of this song is worth enduring him. I ripped the song, exaggerated what I liked, downplayed what I didn't like, and inflicted it on my bogus negative impression of this dude.



#33 "Three Days" by Jane's Addiction (1990). Struggled with reinterpreting this one for a while before giving up and just letting it be the 11-minute bonkers overblown classic/epic love triangle/threesome death/rebirth monster that Perry Farrell apparently always meant it to be.



#34 "Ana" by the Pixies (1990). One of several surf-sprinkled tunes from the "Bossanova" album, a then-gauche style just a few years ahead of the "Pulp Fiction" revival of all things reverb. Black Francis' lyric was viewed as either really clever or really phoned-in: it's simply an acrostic poem that spells "surfer."



#5 "The Fly" by U2. You never really grow out of the songs you love at 16. Well, maybe some people do, but I didn't. Can you name all sixteen famous faces here?



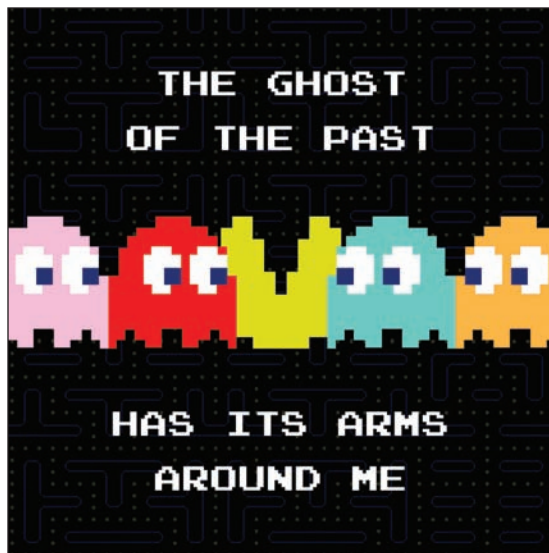
#21 "Apart" by the Cure, from the "Wish" album (1992). Quick take here gives a nod to the original album artwork, and tweaks the moepy Mr. Smith with a plate tectonics pun, because those never get old.



#28 “Television, the Drug of the Nation” by the Disposable Heroes of HipHoprisy (1992), Michael Franti’s band before Spearhead. It’s also known as U2’s walk-on music for the Zoo TV tour that same year. This design’s quick and dirty, but you all should know by now that I can’t resist stupid map puns.



#8 “Saints” by the Breeders (1993). This is St. Kim of Ohio, who will always be a big deal.



#14 “Dream Brother” by Jeff Buckley (1994). My favorite song on the “Grace” album (which turned 20 this weekend), but I always found it to be one of his more frightening lyrics, not coincidentally because I’d originally misheard this line as “black leather wings,” which is even scarier.

#25 “The Devil You Know” by Jesus Jones (1993). Parent album “Perverse” was perceived as a techno-rock failure, but I bought it on the strength of this (great) song and liked it. As for Pac-Man, nostalgia may be death but it’s also marketing gold—and 8-bit nostalgia is just about ready to die itself, I think.



#13 Quick and dirty ham-fisted metaphor for the predatory “Sharks” by Morphine (1995). There are better Morphine songs, but this is a great tune and the first one of theirs I ever heard, via the eternally cool Sarah Denton, during our freshman year at UCSB. Parent album “Yes” was easily my favorite record that year.





#26 “Red Right Hand” by Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds (1994). The ancient symbol of Ulster is older than the Irish Troubles but the red hand has been appropriated by both sides in that conflict. It’s also the theme song for the ‘20s gypsy gangsters of “Peaky Blinders” on TV.



#15 “Hell is Around the Corner” by Tricky (1995). Not much of a design here on my part, but this brilliant photo I found, by James Castro of Revenant Publications, perfectly illustrates a typically creepy Tricky song from the classic “Maxinquaye” album.



#2 "Big Dipper" by Cracker (1996). It's David Lowery's paean to the Santa Cruz of his young adulthood.



#32 "The Way" by Meshell Ndegeocello (1996). Meshell is an awesome bassist, and this song has a fantastic bass line, super fun to play. The tune kicks off "Peace Beyond Passion," one of the the most fervently questioning, soulfully spiritual albums of the '90s, and an all-time favorite of mine.

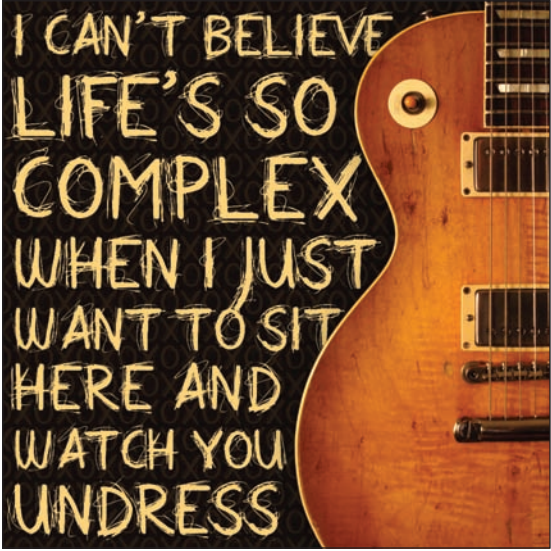


#49 Yet another quickie, for Elliott Smith's 1997 song "Say Yes," but I couldn't help myself in this case. Em had just discovered Elliott when we met 18 years ago, so you can guess how happy she was, as a longtime fan, to finally take her turn at his "Figure 8 wall" in downtown LA yesterday.

#46 "Cheapskate" by Supergrass, from "In It For The Money" (1998). Favorite song by my favorite '90s Britpop-era band. Nothing much to it except a killer groove, and since this is yet another belated piece, I needed something as quick and dirty as its gloriously simple bass line. A candy-apple red Fender J-bass headstock did the trick.



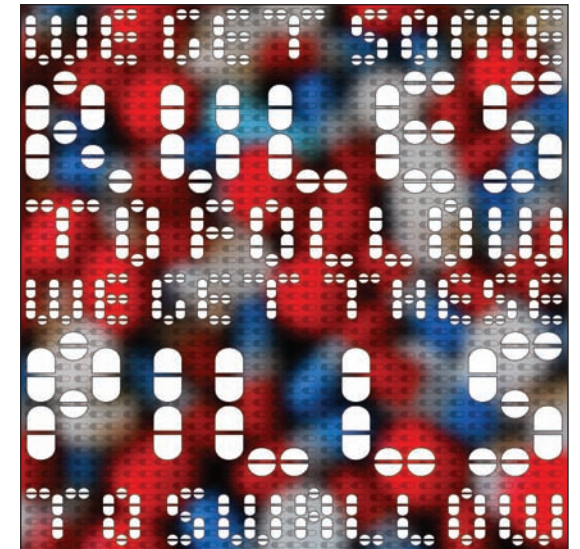
#12 Underwhelming and bland one for "This is Love" by PJ Harvey from "Stories from the City, Stories from the Sea" (2000), a favorite of mine. I'm a Fender fan for life, but that doesn't make all the other guitars ugly. For example, this lovely Gibson Les Paul.



#4 “St. Francis Dam Disaster” by Frank Black & the Catholics, about the 1928 dam failure & Ventura County flood, but from the river’s point of view.



#6 “Comfort Eagle” by Cake (2001). Ham-fisted extrapolation of their epic music biz marketing takedown. If I turn into the guy in this song, I know I’ll be going to hell, dude.



#50 In the home stretch now, with only 3 left, so here's "No One Knows" by Queens of the Stone Age (2002). I don't like most metal, but I love the Queens, so they probably deserve better than this pill-powered quickie for their biggest hit song.



#38 “One Hundred Days,” by Mark Lanegan (2004). This ominously mellow groove by the Screaming Trees frontman uses a design cannibalized from a fake poster I made when trying to land a client for BBM&D circa 2008. All the designers chose separate local festivals to posterize; I chose the Channel Islands Harbor Tall Ships. Can’t remember if we actually got the client, though.

#43 “The Seed 2.0” by the Roots, from “Phrenology” (2002). It’s a fun song and one of my favorites, not least because it sounds like they bashed it out in one take. Lo and behold, Questlove admitted that in his recent memoir, saying something like he was playing drums with one foot out the door since he was late for a hot sexy date and they had to record it quickly.



#41 a derivative slapdash mash for “Handshake Drugs,” my favorite one by Wilco (2004). If I can’t sit through the fake fake debates on House of Cards, I’ll never endure the real fake debates between Snow White and the Seven Dwarves in 2016. No, I don’t think Jeff Tweedy wrote this about the political kind of handshake drugs, but who cares? This thing destroys in concert.

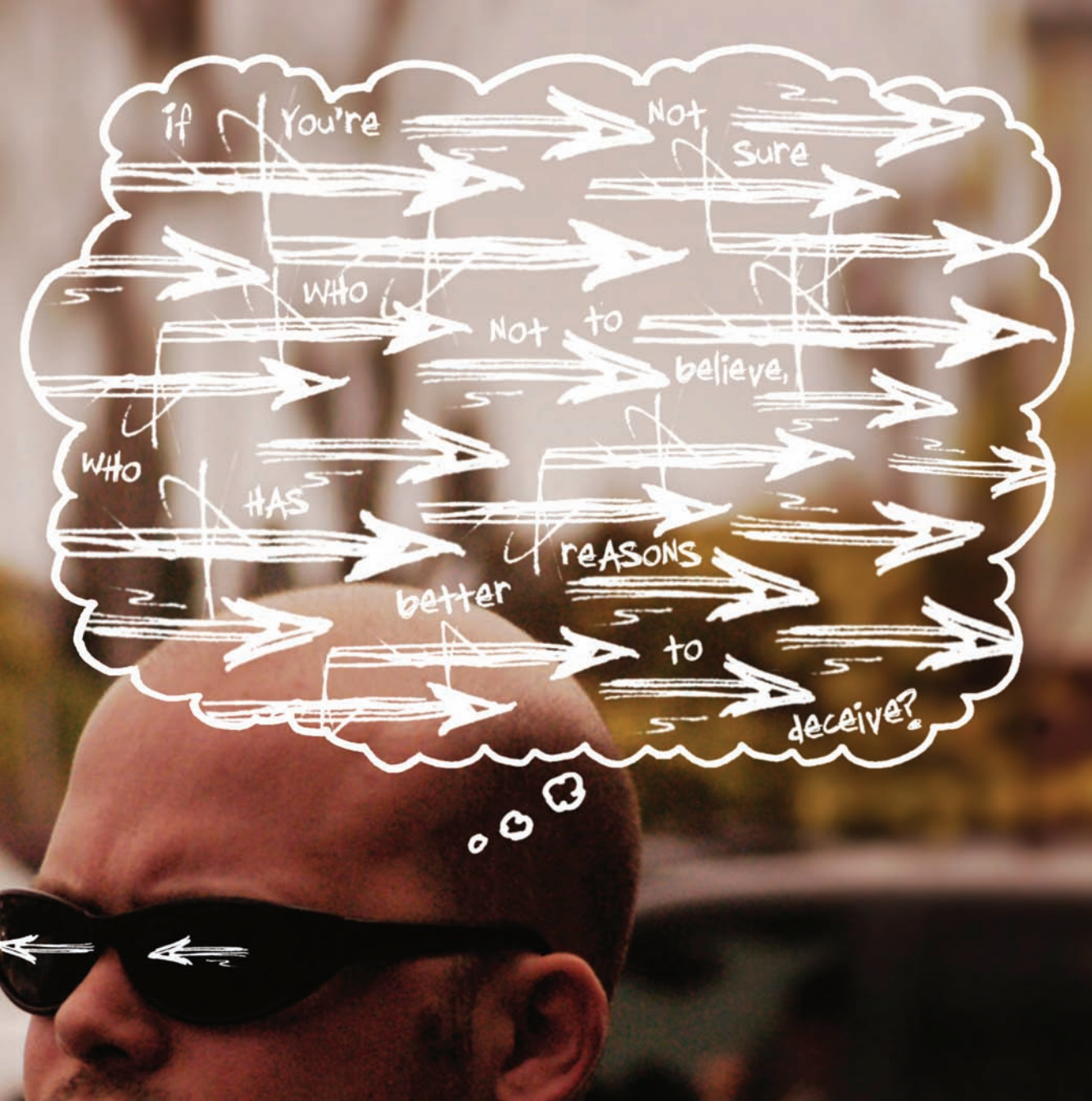




#24 “Mr. November” (2005) by The National, because it’s my birthday, it’s a 25-hour day, and 20 years ago I really was carried in the arms of cheerleaders. Sort of.

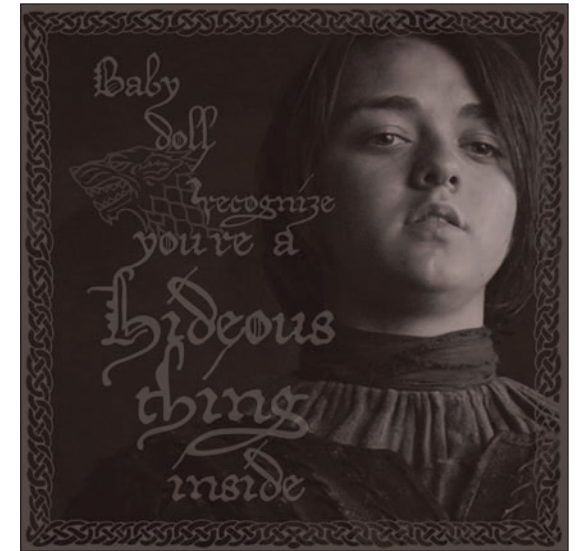


#40 “Night Light,” my favorite Sleater-Kinney tune (2005). Image courtesy of the New Horizons probe on its way to a meeting with Pluto this summer. The two big lights are Pluto and its largest moon Charon. The smaller two are Pluto’s moons Nix and Hydra, discovered in (funnily enough) 2005.

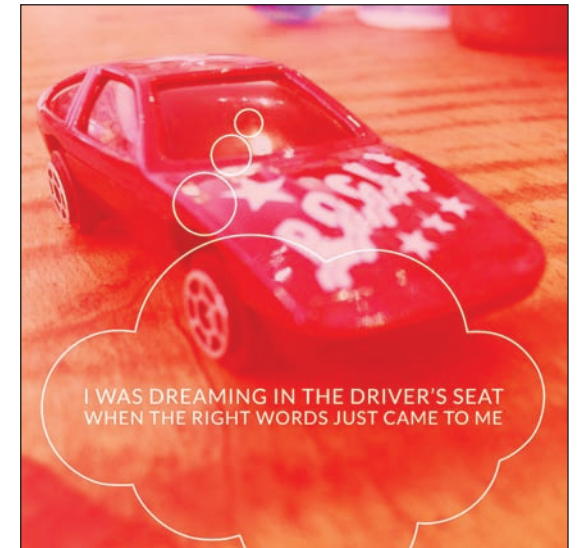


#11 "Goin' Against Your Mind" by Built to Spill (2006), a great tune with plenty of room for all possible emotions in its propulsively epic 8 minutes. Original photo of yours truly by Owen Salisbury circa May 2007.

#37 "Wolf Like Me" by TV on the Radio (2006). Not thrilled with it. Seemed like a good idea when I started, but ended up like cheesy Game of Thrones fan art. Kinda burned out on the overall project as a whole; there are a few I like, but the overall quality this far in is questionable.



#39 "Finer Feelings," by Spoon (2007). Britt Daniel's Costello-like lyrics are almost as sharp as the glorious rhythm machine he calls a band. As a commuting creature who used to be a good lyricist, this is one of my favorite lines he's ever sneered. Sadly, when they pass through SoCal this year I'll be in Michigan.





#1 New fun thing: “Design a Song,” a weekly series in which I illustrate my favorite tunes! This is “Red Tide” by Neko Case from her “Middle Cyclone” album (2009). This series is inspired by Project 52 (by CSUCI alumni) and by Tad Wagner.

#48 Working quick to catch up, so I decided to do just what the song asks for in “We Used to Wait” by Arcade Fire (2010): messy, clichéd nostalgia. Not sorry either, because 20 years is a long time and I’m a sentimental, tacky person who can’t resist doing sentimental, tacky things.



#51 “Palaces of Montezuma” by Grinderman (2010), Nick Cave’s glorious dirty-old-man side project. This song’s acoustic and relatively tender vibe is (of course) shot through by some pretty morbid imagery as well as a few famous names, both ancient and modern. Seems like it would be fun to play.





#31 “The Night Will Always Win” by Elbow (2011). Guy Garvey is a phenomenal lyricist, and this ominously somber tune is only one example. Apparently other people agree; this song is part of the “Call of Duty: Black Ops” video game soundtrack.



#9 “Would That Not Be Nice” by the Divine Fits (2012). Antony and Cleopatra in Minneapolis powered by the greatest big dumb bass line of all time. What’s not to love?

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