

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:00:05	Oliver Wang	Host	You are listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> . I’m Oliver Wang.
00:00:08	Ernest Hardy	Host	And I’m Ernest Hardy, sitting in for Morgan Rhodes.
00:00:10	Oliver	Host	Every episode we invite a guest to join us to talk about a heat rock, you know, 300 degrees of musical goodness, and today we are— <i>[Clears throat.]</i> —blessed to be talking about the 1977 hit albums by The Emotions, <i>Rejoice</i> .
00:00:23	Music	Music	“Best of My Love” off the album <i>Rejoice</i> by The Emotions plays. Upbeat, poppy R&B with several voices singing. <i>Whoa, whoa, you've got the best of my love</i> <i>Whoa, whoa, you've got the best of my love</i> <i>Demonstrating sweet love and affection</i> <i>That you give so openly, yeah</i> <i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i>
00:00:41	Oliver	Host	Say this much about the Hutchinson sisters, as a trio known as The Emotions, they got to enjoy a second act that eluded many of their peers. First signed to the Memphis powerhouse label of Stax/Volt in the late 60s, the group—then working with Isaac Hayes—released a pair of memorable, if not chart-topping albums in that era. But when Stax and Volt folded in the mid-70s, it could have left The Emotions permanently stranded like what happened to many of their label mates. But their Chicago roots meant that they still had friends from back home, including the great, undersung producer/arranger at Chess Records, Charles Stepney; as well as one Maurice White, who, of course, had left Chicago for Los Angeles to form the mighty Earth Wind & Fire. The Emotions now had a second lease on professional life, and with <i>Rejoice</i> they went platinum with their first and only number one album, which also yielded their first and only number chart-crossing hit, “Best of My Love”, woah, woah.
00:01:37	Music	Music	<i>["Best of My Love" fades back in]</i> <i>... whole wide world to see!</i> <i>Oh, but in my heart</i> <i>You're all I need</i> <i>You for me and me for you</i> <i>Oh, yeah</i> <i>It's growing every day</i>

My love, my love

Oh...

[Music fades back out as Ernest speaks]

00:01:55	Ernest	Host	<p><i>Rejoice</i> was the album pick of our guest today, Tisa Bryant. This week's introduction was a tough one to pull together because this week's guest is not only a very dear friend of mine, but someone with whom I collaborate often. Trying to figure out where to even begin listing her accomplishments and gifts was daunting. Tisa Bryant is an artist, a scholar, an educator, and archivist, and a pretty fucking fantastic human being.</p> <p><i>[Oliver laughs.]</i></p> <p>I think the best way to enter the multimedia, multi-disciplined world she builds and inhabits is through her groundbreaking book <i>Unexplained Presence</i> from 2007, in which she takes a nuanced, poetic look at Black figures who are in the background or on the periphery of celebrated works of visual arts, literature, and cinema to ask, "Why are they there at all? What purpose do they and their small brushstroke Blackness serve in these imagined worlds in which whiteness is the center and seemingly uncontested norm, both Earth and sky? In what ways might they force us to reconsider that so-called norm?" <i>Unexplained Presence</i> was at the front end of many conversations now being held about Blackness and cultural production by non-Blacks who use Blackness as an accent, in every sense of that word.</p> <p>Working with her on our multimedia project <i>Black Book</i>, in which we use film, literature, music video, and elements scavenged from the internet to explore various themes and issues related to Black life, mental health, what it means to travel while Black, gentrification, and Black love and the endless hour of chaos, I'm constantly blown away by her encyclopedic knowledge across discipline and genre, and by the generosity with which she shares her knowledge and gifts. Currently a professor at CalArts where she teaches the courses in experimental writing, Tisa Bryant is a formidable presence. Tisa, welcome to <i>Heat Rocks</i>.</p>
00:03:34	Tisa	Guest	Thank you. That was amazing.
00:03:36	Ernest	Host	Why <i>The Emotions</i> and why this album in particular?
00:03:40	Tisa	Guest	I don't know.
			<p><i>[Oliver and Ernest laugh.]</i></p>
00:03:42	Oliver	Host	Good answer!
00:03:43	Tisa	Guest	It's probably the sweetest and most emotionally enriching album I can think of. It's unfreighted. You know, there are so many other albums I could think of that had a kind of weight to my life or something happening, and this album isn't marked for me by anything but joy and possibility and aspiration, because those

voices, you know, as a kid, who wouldn't want to sing one of those parts as well?

- 00:04:17 Oliver Host Was this your album—your introduction to The Emotions, and if so how did you actually—were you introduced to it?
- 00:04:23 Tisa Guest I think this was it. You know, The Emotions is one of those things where I wondered if I had been hearing them before I knew it, but definitely the hit single from this album, “Best of My Love”, you know, was why I bought the album.
- 00:04:38 Ernest Host I would be willing to bet you almost anything you had heard them many times, because it wasn't until I was an adult and sort of started digging through back people's like catalogues that I realized so many of their songs from the late 60s, I actually knew.
- [Oliver and Tisa hum in agreement.]*
- You know? But the sound is very different, and so connecting the sound, their sound, from the 60s to their sound with Maurice White is like, oh, and once you realize it's the same group you do hear that—you know, you hear it, but it took a moment to sort of go, “Oh, sh—I know them! I know these voices.”
- 00:05:12 Tisa Guest That's exactly right. You know, when I saw Wattstax and heard them singing “Peace Be Still” and I was like, “Oh, I already know them.”
- 00:05:20 Music Music “Peace Be Still” by The Emotions plays. Mid-tempo, soulful gospel. A live recording with cheering and clapping from a crowd audible in the background.
- The sky is o'er shadowed with blackness
Oh, yes it is
No home nor help is nigh*
- [Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*
- 00:05:46 Oliver Host Ernest, how about you? What was your intro to The Emotions, or when did you first start really making those connections between the sound and the artist?
- 00:05:53 Ernest Host Like I said, it wasn't until I was an adult and sort of like, studying these things as opposed to just sort of like being a passive—not quite passive listener as a kid. For me, I think it was *Flowers*.
- 00:06:05 Music Music “Flowers” off the album *Flowers* by The Emotions plays. Up-tempo pop with R&B notes. A few voices together sing the main vocal line, with a single voice singing the lyrics marked in parentheses.
- God is watching you
(Oh, he's watching you)*
- Think it over
(Oh, oh, oh)
Life ain't a four leaf clover
(No, no, no, no, no, no, no)*

Think it over

[Music fades out as Ernest speaks]

- 00:06:21 Ernest Host Oliver mentioned in his intro that this was their first number one album, and “Best of My Love” was their first pop number one crossover hit. But in the Black community, they were, you know, *Flowers* and so many others before that. So, yeah they were a well-known, um, item.
- 00:06:43 Oliver Host Right, a known entity, if you will.
- 00:06:45 Ernest Host A known entity, that’s it. That’s it.
- 00:06:47 Tisa Guest But it was kind of like a back formation for me, to kind of go back to *Flowers* after *Rejoice* came out, you know, that was my introduction to them, and then kind of working backwards over the years like, “Oh, these are the other songs.” Especially *Flowers*, that album had a couple of hits from it that were very popular.
- 00:07:06 Ernest Host Tisa, where would you put them in the ranking of girl groups? Because—
- [Tisa sighs, and Ernest laughs.]*
- 00:07:12 Oliver Host Big question.
- 00:07:14 Ernest Host There are always conversations about the girl groups, the great girl groups, and we have everyone from The Supremes to The Ronettes to En Vogue, but The Emotions seem to sort of not really be mentioned when those conversations arise; so I won’t ask you to actually rank them but just, like, to put them in conversation with other girl groups and sort of evaluate their—like, what they contribute to that figure, the girl group.
- 00:07:37 Tisa Guest *[Oliver agrees several times while Tisa speaks.]*
- Yeah, I’ve been thinking a lot about that because it’s so huge, and thinking about the girl groups, thinking about the call and response that girl groups are known for, and the do-wop, the shoop shoop, the kinds of things, and moving from that to where The Emotions gets us. But I was thinking about The Jones Girls and The Emotions. For me, they’re tied. Les Nubians as a different kind of girl group. Destiny’s Child, of course, I mean there’s so many girl groups, but you know, I think The Emotions are a bit unsung and that was something I was looking for.
- It’s like, “Is there an unsung for The Emotions?”, because I really want to dig into who they are, but they’ve been so sampled. Their harmonizing to me is unparalleled, I guess save for The Jones Girls, you know, there’s something that they’re able to do that makes my heart kind of rise and open. That doesn’t happen in the same way, um, with some of the other girl groups.
- 00:08:45 Oliver Host But I was going to say, to your point, I think there is not the same kind of mythology that we have around them, in the same way that we apply to, let’s say, The Supremes or to Destiny’s Child. And I think in some ways—and I don’t want to overstep or overreach with

this—partly it's because those groups had drama associated with it and that's part of the mythology, whereas even though The Emotions changed singers at different points in their career, we just don't associate them with something that is sort of gossip worthy, and therefore it doesn't merit the same kind of attention.

I think maybe that's partially to explain, because from a—you know, if we're just looking at hit making, it's hard to deny the influence and the importance of The Emotions, but again, they don't linger with us in the same way that we think about Diana Ross and The Supremes or Beyoncé and Destiny's Child or whoever else.

00:09:26 Ernest Host Or The Ronettes, because the Phil Spector—

00:09:28 Tisa Guest Right, right.

00:09:30 Ernest Host *[Laughs.]* Right, there's so much there. You know, I was thinking about this prepping for this show, and I was thinking about The Emotions along with The Pointer Sisters, who also—

[Tisa and Oliver both agree.]

—another like, phenomenal girl group. I almost hate using the term when you're speaking about women who are such women.

[Oliver laughs.]

00:09:45 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Tisa:** Right, or Labelle.

Oliver: Labelle, yes.

Ernest: Right, right, right.

Tisa: You know, you just wouldn't think of them of a girl group in that way.

Ernest: Right, exactly, exactly.

Tisa: Yeah.

00:09:51 Ernest Host But what I was thinking: I have a friend who lives in New York, and we talk about music all—all the time, and he's the same age we are, and one of the things we say is, growing up as children in the 70s and listening to all this music, there were these artists who were like, the A list, the B list, the C list, and the D list, but C and D list had nothing to do with talent, it's just that there was such a wealth of, you know, extraordinary music being made, such a wealth of talent, that necessarily like, someone who was extraordinary was sort of bumped down to the B list because someone else had, you know, so much space, and so on and so forth.

[Tisa hums in agreement.]

And I think with The Emotions and The Pointer Sisters, you know, having sort of hitting their stride in the mid to late 70s, there's just like this glut and embarrassment of riches, and what happens is, you know, certain names often associated more with drama or

gossip-worthy things, those names sort of rise to the fore. And it's not necessarily to do with, uh, level of talent, it's just all these variables that don't really have anything to do with music sometimes.

00:10:52 Tisa Guest Exactly. And it's funny right, because for The Emotions, the height of drama was like, "Where's Jeanette?"

[All three laugh and agree.]

"You know, where did Jeanette go?" But for The Pointer Sisters, Bonnie going solo was, you know, the big deal, then it became newsworthy. I've just been really thinking a lot about girl groups and sisterhood and shared experience on the one hand, and then a kind of specific individuality that they managed to arrive at.

00:11:20 Music Music "A Long Way To Go" off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays. Soulful R&B with a main voice backed by several voices.

Oh!
(Oh, sweet brother)
Sweet brother!
Sister, don't you know?
(Sister don't you know?)
Don't you know?
(We've come a long way)
Oh, we've got a long way to go
We're gonna make it...

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:11:36 Oliver Host Coming back to this album in particular, one of the things I was struck by—and looking through especially just the personnel on it and thinking about a little bit of the backstory is—it's such a Los Angeles record in a lot of ways. And even though Maurice wasn't from LA originally, even though the Emotions are much more tied to Chicago and Memphis than Los Angeles. But yet, I think LA of this era, because of the existence of the music industry and all the ways in which you have this big flow of communities moving out to LA in the post-war era, you know, everyone who's playing on this are primarily transplants, but it—as a result of that, it has this very "only in LA" feel to it.

So not only do we have Maurice White producing it, but of course it's got players from Earth Wind & Fire, as well as a lot of the original rhythm section to the Watt's 103rd Street Rhythm Band, all of whom had been transplants to LA from the 1960s. And so, you know, as a homer for this city, I just love that that constellation of talents that are able to meet and generate something that—again, I don't think we think of this album as being a particularly LA album, but—when you kind of dig beneath the surface... it is something that, it embodies something about where LA, how LA had become this center of Black music, I think, by the 1970s if not sooner than that.

00:12:50 Ernest Host Y'know, another thing I think that makes their work with Maurice

White and Earth Wind & Fire like, so radiant is that the collaboration exists in a place where religion and spirituality are one.

[Tisa and Oliver both interject to agree while Ernest speaks.]

Right, because The Emotions came from a classic gospel background, and while we can hear the artistic training that provided them in those amazing, flawless harmonies, they were also true believers in Christ in his love and mercy, and that was the engine and the artistry, right? While at the same time, Maurice White and Earth Wind & Fire were sort of like these missionaries for spirituality that transcended all racial, cultural, geographic boundaries. You know, you bring those two factors together, right, and you just have magic.

00:13:29 Tisa Guest Yeah. And I kind of love that too, because what Earth Wind & Fire, what Maurice White and Earth Wind & Fire were doing was a very kind of Africanized spirituality in a lot of ways as well, and I've been thinking about this as well, like what it was about that meeting that made the spirit and the message of The Emotions so palatable.

We didn't grow up going to church, you know, I don't have pastors in my background or any of that, and this music, and Earth Wind & Fire, it just spoke to me on a level that wasn't—it just wasn't punishing.

[Oliver laughs.]

There's nothing connected to it that was about, like my salvation, you know, or sin or those kinds of things, whereas there are other gospel groups that had kind of had crossover hits, but are—you know, like BeBe and CeCe Winans for example, that song "Heaven" from the 80s is, you know, it's a great song, but it's very explicitly about the rules that you must follow to be let into the Kingdom.

00:14:40 Music Music "Heaven" off the album *Heaven* by BeBe and CeCe Winans plays. Soulful, slightly poppy gospel.

*It's what I live for
A place where love will never cease
Willing to die for
Heaven is where I want to be*

[Music fades out as Tisa speaks]

00:15:00 Tisa Guest And, you know, Emotions can impart those kinds of lessons without the same scaffolding, you know, definitely about how to be honest, how to speak the truth of your heart, how to manage your relationships with people or with yourself. Um, a song like "Blessed", it's—it is overtly religious in a lot of ways, but then it's—

00:15:22 Oliver Host But it's not heavy handed.

00:15:23 Tisa Guest Exactly. Exactly.

00:15:25 Music Music "Blessed" off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays. Mid-tempo R&B/pop with distinct soul influences and several voices

harmonizing together.

*My soul feel good about the ties that bind
Me and you and all mankind
Together
Together
My soul feel good about the ties that bind
Me and you and all mankind
Together*

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:15:45 Oliver Host I think a lot of—even a song like “Best of My Love”, it would not be difficult to imagine that being covered or redone in a gospel context with just very minor—I mean, you wouldn’t need to necessarily tweak it, like, you can easily hear how it could be turned from just a generic radio dance love song to something that is about, you know, singing love to Christ or singing love to religion or those things. So I think it allows a lot of these songs to go those both ways without it—as you’re pointing out—being so ham-fisted about it, as you might hear in other cases.

00:16:14 Ernest Host *[Tisa agrees several times while Ernest is speaking.]*

I think another thing about a lot of the Black music of this era, especially as you were saying Deniece Williams, Earth Wind & Fire, um, The Emotions of course, is that this is a period where for a lot of folks, we could still hold on to the belief or hope that the civil rights struggles of the past several decades was going to actually blossom into something real for Black people, right, so there was still that element of hope in the air, and it’s before crack and AIDS and those things, like sort of just like—sort of just—drained so much and presented different textures in the music and in Black life, and so for me this music is really a time capsule of a time of hope and possibility, and you hear that in their voices, you hear it in the songwriting, you hear it just across the board.

00:17:02 Tisa Guest Yeah. And also to Oliver’s point about LA, we could listen to it as recuperative, and *Flowers* as well for 1976, just ten years after Watts Rebellion. You know, the kind of continued influx of musicians and artists to LA to try to rebuild and rehabilitate Black life, cultural production, you know, in the aftermath of that moment as well. Which was, you know, that moment was happening all over the country. You know, there were lots of rebellions. A lot of neighborhoods lost to fires and violence.

So, there is also something quite special about Earth Wind & Fire and Rotary Connection as well, like there’s a lot of the kind of—I think a lot about this too—the kind of choral richness of the productions of the albums that Charles Stepney worked on. There was a lot happening through him that really shifted once he passed away.

00:18:12 Oliver Host Right. One more thing that I just wanted to add, in particular bringing this back to White, and in the second half we’ll certainly get back in The Emotions, the album, but it is staggering how busy he

was in this era, and how he had his hands—I mean, obviously he’s still producing the Earth Wind & Fire work and this comes out, you know, a year, maybe less than that after he puts out *That’s The Way of The World*. Um, he’s working on Deniece Williams’ first and sophomore album, and unfortunately because Stepney passed away around the same time, all the work fell to Maurice to have to kind of take it up.

- 00:18:45 Music Music “Free” off the album *This is Niecy* by Deniece Williams. Light, soulful, poppy R&B.
- ... there's nothing too good for us*
- But I want to be free, free, free*
And I just got to be me, yeah, me
- [Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*
- 00:19:05 Oliver Host And then he’s also producing—co-producing *Flowers*, and then fully produces this album, and so it’s just—I—you just think about the magnitude of his talent, it’s not like Maurice White is remotely slept on in that regard, but how much he had to juggle here and how adept he was at doing it and producing all of these different albums in addition to his own group is really, really a marvel in terms of just the level of genius that he was bringing.
- 00:19:31 Ernest Host When you listen to the work that he was doing, you listen to Earth Wind & Fire, Deniece Williams, The Emotions, there is, you know, there’s similarity just in terms of, as you were saying, the optimism or the uplift; and yet he really leaves space for his group and for The Emotions and for Deniece Williams to carve their own identities and their own sound and their own space within what he was bringing to the table.
- 00:19:55 Tisa Guest Absolutely. Because those later albums of The Emotions from the 80s, they sound very different, and maybe *Rejoice* is just a specific kind of album because of how orchestrated it is. I mean, there’s like, six violas. Three violins.
- [Ernest and Oliver laugh.]*
- 00:20:14 Oliver Host She counted!
- 00:20:15 Tisa Guest I did! I did. You know, and the other albums on either side of it don’t have that approach at all. And I also want to make sure we talk about Paulinho DaCosta and percussion, I mean—
- 00:20:29 Oliver Host Go in!
- 00:20:30 Tisa Guest All I have to say is, as a kid reading liner notes, his was a name that came up often for R&B albums, you know, this Brazilian percussionist from Rio who moved to LA. He worked with Quincy Jones, who produced lots of things, like his name—he’s probably like, the first Brazilian I actually, without knowing he was this Brazilian percussionist, you know, you just kind of keep threading together, this guy’s popping up all over the place and providing like, his—the range of percussive instruments he can play alone is like

40 of them.

And so the kind of, what I was saying earlier about a very um, perhaps diasporic if not African bottom that Earth Wind & Fire imparts to the kind of—well, Maurice White imparts to the albums that he produced. Um, and Charles Stepney as well. There's something that, you know, for another show to dig into in terms of how an African sound can come through even with all of these strings and this other kind of perhaps more Western, Christian approach to a gospelized sound. There's a real percussive bottom to the music that I keep thinking about Paulinho in particular, but Maurice White as well, kind of taking that and making it a signature of the sound.

00:22:00 Music Music "Blessed" off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays. Gentle but purposeful percussion is heard under the singing.

... the ties that bind
Ooh, yes, the ties that bind
Whoa
Blessed!

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:22:24 Oliver Host It's funny because now that I'm—now that you—I just heard you describe it, I can hear like, the congas and everything there.

[Tisa and Ernest laugh.]

But I—and I love "Blessed" and I think what always struck me about the percussion was really more in terms of how deep in the pocket James Gadson is on this, because it has that thump which sounds a lot like some of the Barry White productions from that time. Which is one reason why this stuff was sampled so heavily by later hip-hop artists is because it just had that umph to it, but you take away the Brazilian or the Afro-Caribbean influences and the song is very different. I think it's—the subtlety of it really helps make it work in a way that I just don't think I appreciated until listening to it just now.

00:23:03 Tisa Guest And I'm glad you brought up, uh, Barry White, because if anything going back to the girl groups and how we think about them, what I saw on the online YouTube chatter in the comments was really this battle that never occurred to me between The Emotions and Love's Unlimited Orchestra.

[Oliver repeats, agreeing.]

Like, Love Unlimited. I just—you know, someone was saying, "Well, you know, Glodean could never sing as well as—"

[Oliver and Ernest laugh.]

and I was like, it's come to—I did not know that it had ever even come to that at all, like they, to me, occupied their spaces, but for certain generations of people or certain kinds of listeners, you know, they need a battle.

00:23:45	Music	Music	<p>“Key to My Heart” off the album <i>Rejoice</i> by The Emotions plays. Upbeat, staccato pop with several voices singing together.</p> <p><i>You're the key To my heart You're the key To my heart You're the key To my heart You're the key To my heart</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Ernest speaks]</i></p>
00:23:57	Ernest	Host	<p>We'll be back with more of our conversation with Tisa Bryant about The Emotions' <i>Rejoice</i> after a brief word from a couple of MaxFun podcasts. Keep it locked.</p>
00:24:03	Music	Transition	<p>“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs</p>
00:24:06	Promo	Promo	<p>Music: Gentle, rhythmic music underscores the dialogue.</p> <p>Janet Varney: We are <u>so</u> thrilled at your interest in attending Hieronymous Wigenstaff's School for Heroism and Villainy! Wigenstaff's beautiful campus boasts state-of-the-art facilities and instructors with <u>real</u>-world experience! We are also proud to say that our alumni have gone on to be professional heroes and villains in the most renowned kingdoms in the world!</p> <p>But of course, <u>you</u> are not applying to the <u>main</u> school, are you? You're applying for our sidekick and henchperson annex! You will still benefit from the school's <u>amazing</u> campus, and! You'll have a lifetime of steady employment. Of course... there's no guarantee how long that lifetime will be.</p> <p>Travis McElroy: Join the McElroys as they return to Dungeons and Dragons with <i>The Adventure Zone: Graduation</i>. Every other Thursday on Maximum Fun, or wherever podcasts are found.</p> <p><i>[Music ends.]</i></p>
00:24:58	Promo	Promo	<p><i>[Wolf howls. Dramatic piano and organ music. Throughout, the wolf howls again, and a crow caws.]</i></p> <p>April Wolfe: Hello there, ghouls and gals. It is I, April Wolfe.</p> <p>I'm here to take you through the twisty, scary, heart-pounding world of genre cinema on the exhilarating program known as <i>Switchblade Sisters</i>.</p> <p><i>[Sinister echo on the title.]</i></p> <p>The concept is simple: I invite a female filmmaker on each week, and we discuss their favorite genre film. Listen in closely to hear</p>

past guests, like *The Babadook* director Jennifer Kent, *Winter's Bone* director Debra Granik, and so many others every Thursday on MaximumFun.org.

Tune in! If you dare...

[Thunder booms, something growls over April as she cackles evilly, and then all sound abruptly cuts.]

April: *[Rapidly]* It's actually a very thought-provoking show that deeply explores the craft and philosophy behind the filmmaking process while also examining film through the lens of the female gaze.

So, like, you should listen.

[Same sinister echo effect] Switchblade Sisters!

00:25:44	Music	Transition	"Crown Ones" off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:25:46	Oliver	Host	We are back here on <i>Heat Rocks</i> talking about <i>Rejoice</i> , the 1977 album by The Emotions with our guest, Tisa Bryant. What is the fire track off this album for you?
00:25:57	Tisa	Guest	Oh..
00:25:58	Oliver	Host	And is it not "Best of My Love"? Like, how can it not be "Best of My Love?"
00:26:01	Tisa	Guest	It's not "Best of My Love."
00:26:02	Oliver	Host	Oh, I love this. Alright, what is it?
00:26:04	Tisa	Guest	Yeah, um. I knew this question was gonna come and I thought I had the answer and I'm somewhere—I'm torn between "How'd I Know That Love Would Slip Away" and "Rejoice". I also like "Don't Ask my Neighbors."

[Oliver laughs, and agrees several times while Tisa continues.]

So, I think so many songs besides "Best of My Love". They're all so strong, and, you know, there's a lot of fire on this album for me, so I was appalled to read that Robert Cristgau said that this album was lazy and gave it a C+ and you know, that it was just pretty voices relying on being pretty. And I was just like, there's so much work happening on this album that, there's no laziness to me. And "The Best of My Love" was the danceable, you know, single that made sense, but the quieter songs are the ones that get me.

00:26:59	Music	Music	"Don't Ask My Neighbors" off the album <i>Rejoice</i> by The Emotions plays. Friends only guess They can't say, really
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Don't ask my neighbors
Don't ask the friends I hang around
(Never ask the friends I hang around)
Uh-uh, don't be afraid

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:27:26 Oliver Host Well, let me come back to this, since you have multiple choices here, right?

[Tisa laughs.]

Not to make you kill your dawl—kill your darlings but, if—let's say, imagine someone who's never heard this album before, or in fact imagine someone who's never heard The Emotions before. What's the song off of this album that you would have them start with as a way to kind of get a sense of this is their essence? Either—whether it's for their album, for them as artists, whatever.

00:27:50 Tisa Guest "A Feeling Is."

00:27:51 Music Music "A Feeling Is" of the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays. Upbeat pop with several voices singing together in harmony.

*A feeling is a thing you can be sure of
Even if it's singular or plural
No matter what kind or mood of
You'll only know the real true meaning
You don't have to tell anybody
What's keeping you in a way
Whatever the day*

Whether it stays...

[Music fades out as Tisa speaks]

00:28:14 Tisa Guest I love the way their voices just glide, and as an introduction to someone who had never listened to Emotions before, I think it kind of showcases their virtuosity. It's a simple song, but their vocals aren't simple. You know, the beats are pretty straightforward and solid, but the way their voices kind of move.

00:28:38 Oliver Host Glide's a great word. It's a perfect word to use with what they're doing with their voices in this one.

00:28:42 Music Music *["A Feeling Is" fades back in. Several voices sing the main line together, while one voice sings the lyrics in parentheses]*

*A feeling is
(I said a feeling is, I said a feeling is)*

*A feeling is
(Something precious)
A feeling is
(Something special)
A feeling is*

(Ooh, remember, this is a feeling)

[Music fades out again]

- 00:29:00 Oliver Host I mean, look, I will be the conventional person and just say that the fire track for me is “Best of My Love”, because it’s the first song that I ever heard off of this album, and it is just one of the singular best dance tracks of this era. I think it—I used to put it up against Cheryl Lynn’s “Got To Be Real”, but the more I listen to The Emotions on this one, I think this one actually, it kind of handily wins between two songs that have similar production styles. But part of it is—it’s the added element of having that chorus of voices here, and just the arrangement and the production is just so perfect.
- I was saying in the first half that listening to the song is, to me, it’s just the distillation of joy in a lot of ways, and as a DJ it’s one of those things where, if everything else is flagging, you just drop this in and it just does the work for you.
- 00:29:48 Music Music “Best of My Love” off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions.
- Doesn't take much to make me happy
And make me smile with glee
Never, never will I feel discouraged
Cause our love's no mystery*
- [Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*
- 00:30:06 Oliver Host And listening to it again just now, certainly the bass and percussion do a lot of the work, but let’s not forget the relevance of the horns, which of course is something—if you’re talking about Earth Wind & Fire, you gotta talk about their horn section, and the ways in which they kind of just punctuate moments in it I think also adds to that. The song also yields my favorite moment, but before we get to that question, Ernest, so did you have a fire track?
- 00:30:28 Ernest Host Well, you know, like I said, I couldn’t pick just one because everyone has like these moments that just like, you know, you’re thinking, “This will be my pick, this will be my pick.” But I was thinking when you asked what would be the track that you would play for someone, you know, to introduce them to The Emotions. For me, it would be “Don’t Ask My Neighbors”. Um, one, because it wasn’t a huge pop hit, but it was a huge hit—I mean, it’s like a staple in Black radio, right?
- [Tisa hums in agreement.]*
- But also because I think it’s the one that—it’s the track that most easily sort of tracks backward to their earlier work as well. So listening to this just sort of get a sense of like, who they were and the evolution of that approach to singing and the approach to songwriting and all of it. So I think that one sort like—there’s so much embedded in it.
- 00:31:18 Music Music “Don’t Ask My Neighbors” off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays.

You think I'm changing, oh

*Don't ask my neighbors
(Don't ask my neighbor)
Don't ask the friends I hang around
(Never ask the friends I hang around)
don't be afraid
(Never...)*

[Music fades out as Ernest speaks]

- 00:31:41 Ernest Host It sort of struck me that their annunciation is so crisp, and it made me—you know, Nancy Wilson did a cover of “Don’t Ask My Neighbors” and it’s really quite fantastic, and so Nancy Wilson, like this jazz Goddess legend, and it made me realize you can hear her influence on them. Which is not necessarily something that you immediately think of, but having her cover their record and put her twist on it, you can sort of see the sort of cross-generational exchange that takes place.
- 00:32:13 Music Music “Don’t Ask My Neighbors” off the album *A Lady with a Song* by Nancy Wilson plays. The same tune, but slower and jazzier.
- You don't understand
You think I'm changing, oh*
- Don't ask my neighbors
Don't ask the friends I hang around
(Never ask the friends I hang around)*
- [Music fades out as Ernest speaks]*
- 00:32:35 Ernest Host What’s really wonderful about that song is there’s a tenderness and a vulnerability, right, and it’s not only—it’s not only in their vocals, but it’s also in what they are encouraging in a lover, right? You know, come to me, talk to me, ask me what you want to know, you’re safe with me. And they’re saying all these really like sort of reassuring, comforting things, but it’s also really sexy.
- 00:33:00 Tisa Guest And that’s also something that’s a bit different from the Stax/Volt years to this that there’s a—there’s a lot more expansiveness to that sensuality.
- 00:33:10 Oliver Host Right, and they’re older, which—and maybe it’s reflecting part of their life experience. I was just going to add too, I think that having those other voices besides just the kind of sonic contrast that we’re talking about here, it’s also what separates something like this from, let’s say the work of Minnie Riperton in this same era, who has an angelic voice, but without the same kind of richness of the background singers, it just produces a different feel, I think, compared to some of what we hear on this album.

And I think we’re also getting into my next question here, which is about if either of you have a favorite moment on the album, and for me I still have to come back to “Best of My Love”. And originally I thought it was at the opening part of it, which is when you have just that bass curl that goes from the horn intro into the main track—

00:33:55	Music	Music	<p>“Best of My Love” off the album <i>Rejoice</i> by The Emotions plays. Several joyful notes from a horn with a drum backing that slides into the aforementioned bass curl. Music continues for a moment, then quickly fades out.</p>
00:34:01	Oliver	Host	<p>—but when I think about the voices, it’s actually later in the song. I think it’s probably the bridge where you have that same kind of breakdown I think with the horns, but then also the three women in unison going, “Ow!” and then it kicks back into the main track, and I think that is just like—you know it’s—when you hear the song enough times, you know it’s coming, but it doesn’t matter if you’ve heard the song three dozen times, like it always gets you right there.</p>
00:34:25	Music	Music	<p>“Best of My Love” off the album <i>Rejoice</i> by The Emotions plays. The horns play again followed by...</p> <p><i>Doo-doo-doo, doo-doo-doo</i> <i>Doo-doo-doo, doo-doo-doo</i> <i>Ow!</i></p> <p><i>Oh! Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh</i> <i>You got the best of my love!</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Tisa speaks]</i></p>
00:34:35	Tisa	Guest	<p>In “Don’t Ask My Neighbors”, that back—I don’t know where it is in the song, but there’s the—the way they fall back and down.</p>
00:34:45	Music	Music	<p>“Don’t Ask My Neighbors” off the album <i>Rejoice</i> by The Emotions plays.</p> <p><i>Don't ask my neighbors</i> <i>(Ooh, ooh, ooh)</i> <i>Come to me</i> <i>(Come on, come on)</i> <i>Don't be afraid of what you'll see</i> <i>(I'll make you feel at ease, baby)</i> <i>You'll find I love you</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Tisa speaks]</i></p>
00:35:02	Tisa	Guest	<p>But then also that moment in “Rejoice”. There’s so many—every single song has something. I think that’s what I love about listening to this album, is the kind of surging moments, and the moments of surprise, and the moments of differentiation between the three sisters singing and what sisterhood sounds like.</p>
00:35:24	Oliver	Host	<p>How about you, Ernest?</p>
00:35:25	Ernest	Host	<p>I think for me, you know, we’ve discussed so much about the soaring voices and the blending and the harmonies. For me, it’s the lead vocal on “Don’t Ask My Neighbors,” because so often when we talk about singing we sort of get hung up—and I’m not saying in this conversation—but when people talk about great singing, they talk about blasting the roof off, they talk about just like, you know, long—</p>

00:35:47 Oliver Host Going big, yeah.

00:35:48 Ernest Host Yeah, yeah. And there's something about that lead vocal, you know, it's understated and yet very emotional, and there's a way in which , you know, before the backing vocals kick in, it's sort of sparse, so there's an intimacy there, and there's so much shading of emotion and intellect and experience and all of that in this vocal performance, and it just really reminds you that the best singers, you know, might be able to just like shame any opera singers right, in terms of volume, right, but there's something to be said for that understated, tender moment or performance as well.

00:36:26 Tisa Guest I find the same in "A Long Way To Go". As a lead vocalist, she's amazing. Um, that song does kind of open and explode in lots of ways, but it's also kind of a hand extended out to community, you know, to keep pushing.

00:36:43 Music Music "A Long Way To Go" off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays.

(Oh, sweet brother)
Sister, don't you know ?
(Sister, don't you know? Oh!)
We've come a long way
We've got a long way to go
Oh!
(Oh, sweet brother)
Sweet brother, don't you know?
(Sister, don't you know? Oh!)

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:37:03 Oliver Host This may or may not be a sacrilegious question to ask here, but: is there a song off of here that you would like to hear a contemporary artist cover? If so, what is the song and who would the artist be?

00:37:14 Ernest Host You know what, I'm not going to—I'm not going to pick a single track, but I would say I would love to hear Lalah Hathaway do whatever she wanted to do off this album.

[Tisa hums in agreement. Oliver laughs.]

You know, her voice is fantastic. And you know who else would be interesting would be Rachelle Ferrell.

00:37:31 Tisa Guest Yup. And now I'm forgetting her last name, because I watched a little bit of *Twenty Feet From Stardom* this morning, because I kept thinking about it in relation to this album even though they're not background singers per se, but Lisa... Pierce? Lisa—

00:37:45 Ernest Host Oh! Um, oh my God—

00:37:47 Tisa Guest Lisa—

00:37:48 Ernest Host —this is embarrassing.

00:37:49 Tisa Guest It is.

00:37:50 Ernest Host Fischer! Lisa Fischer!

00:37:51	Tisa	Guest	Lisa Fischer.
00:37:52	Ernest	Host	Lisa Fischer.
00:37:53	Tisa	Guest	Lisa Fischer.
00:37:54	Ernest	Host	Don't get old, people.
00:37:56	Tisa	Guest	Yes. Yeah, she could have all of it. And I also would say, even though it might be kind of a reach, I'm really influenced by—I watched um, Esperanza Spalding create an album on Facebook Live over the course of like 24 hours or 48 hours or whatever it was, and she had Lalah Hathaway come in, and I kind of wonder if those two collaborating on a cover of a track from this album could be interesting as well, because they were—they were amazing, what they did.
00:38:29	Ernest	Host	Yeah. That would be amazing.
00:38:31	Oliver	Host	I think along those lines, one of the qualities about this album is that other albums are very much fixed in their moments, so trying to move it outside of the moment, time moment, that they were recorded in sometimes doesn't really work very well, and we've talked about this in some of our previous shows. I don't feel that this album is weighted in the same way. I mean, maybe "Best of My Love" only because it's such a distinctive 70s hit, but something like "Neighbors" or "Key to My Heart" or "Blessed", I could easily imagine someone tackling today and it would never—it wouldn't sound anachronistic to me, it wouldn't sound like someone deliberately trying to do a throwback song, which speaks a lot to just the quality of the songwriting, the quality of just the sound of it is that, yeah, you could pluck a lot of this and put it in 2019 or 2020 and with the right singers—I like the collaborations we've invented here—I think it would totally work.
00:39:19	Tisa	Guest	And there have been a lot of covers of Emotions songs. I'm not recalling them off the top of my head now but—
00:39:26	Oliver	Host	Oh, sure.
00:39:27	Tisa	Guest	—there were a number of covers of "Don't Ask My Neighbors" and one other track, and then tons of sampling, but there have been a number of covers and I was curious about that, because I've never heard any covers of any other tracks on this album or of any Emotions song, actually. So I'm—
00:39:46	Oliver	Host	Good opportunity.
00:39:47	Tisa	Guest	—in a bubble. <i>[Laughs.]</i> Like, "Will it hurt or will it be okay?"
00:39:52	Oliver	Host	Well, one way to find out, I suppose. If some intrepid listener out there wants to tackle that.
00:39:56	Tisa	Guest	Yeah.
00:39:57	Oliver	Host	Tisa, if you had to describe <i>Rejoice</i> in three words, what three words would you choose?
00:40:02	Tisa	Guest	Oh. Sly, spiritual, sensual.

00:40:09 Oliver Host I like the alliteration with that as well—
[Everyone laughs.]
—very nice. We have a writer in the room. Several.

00:40:15 Tisa Guest That was the sound of panic. Say something!

00:40:18 Music Music “Rejoice” off the album *Rejoice* by The Emotions plays. Upbeat, slightly funky, fairly poppy R&B.
Rejoice!

00:40:36 Oliver Host As always, we want to leave our listeners with a next listen on their playlist, so if you really liked *Rejoice*, this is what you might want to check out next.

This is kind of a lazy choice, I suppose, but I really do love and ride for The Emotions’ earlier Stax/Volt stuff, and handily the folks have compiled their first two albums, *So I Can Love You* and *Untouched* into a single anthology, which should be relatively easy to find. And, I mean, A) it’s just really great music on there, and I think it does provide—as we’ve been discussing today—really, I think, interesting contrast in the differences between not just how they’re singing, but also—I think this is a point that we’ve really touched upon—the ways in which the group was part of, I think, a much bigger kind of label machine coming out of the 60s model of Motown and Stax and Volt wasn’t all that different, as opposed to some of the more creative freedoms they might have enjoyed working with White on *Flowers* and on *Rejoice*. And I think there’s just really interesting contrast to be made there, but really it just comes back to those Stax/Volt albums had some great, great material on there, and it has one of my all-time Stax/Volt songs by any group, any artist, which is “Blind Alley”.

00:41:48 Music Music “Blind Alley” by The Emotions plays. Up-tempo R&B/pop with horns, drums, and bass.
Hey, boy!
What you want is temporary
But what I got is gonna last
One day we’re gonna marry
[Music fades out as Oliver and Ernest speak]

00:42:04 Oliver Host Ernest?

00:42:05 Ernest Host There’s so many things that immediately pop to mind, but I think I’m gonna be—and I have something written down, but I’m gonna go back to—I’m gonna stick with it, even though it makes me sound even lazier than Oliver.
[Oliver and Ernest both laugh.]

I’m going to piggyback what Oliver said and recommend the compilation that he suggested, and I would say to really check out the track “Show Me”, um, which was a huge hit, was played on the

			radio throughout the 70s, and it's one of those that you sort of realize, oh, I know this group, right?
00:42:35	Music	Music	<p>"Show Me How" by The Emotions plays. Gentle, tender, poppy R&B with soft, crooning vocals.</p> <p><i>You know I want you How bad I need you I want to kiss you right now</i></p> <p><i>If I don't move you Wanna try to soothe you</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Ernest speaks]</i></p>
00:42:58	Ernest	Host	<p>What I would also recommend that anyone who hasn't seen Wattstax, check out Wattstax, and there are so many phenomenal live performances by so many artists, and yet The Emotions almost steal the movie with "Peace Be Still", um, and I think it really gives you a sense of their foundation, and just what vocal powerhouses they are, and what they can do live without any sort of studio wizardry, just their voices, it's phenomenal. So I would say check out Oliver's recommendations, and then hit up YouTube and check out "Peace Be Still".</p>
00:43:41	Music	Music	<p>"Peace Be Still (Live at Wattstax)" by The Emotions plays.</p> <p><i>(Peace!) When you're burdened (Peace!) You need a friend (Peace!) All over the world they're looking for (Peace!) If you need him, call on him (Peace!) Be still (Peace!) Oh, be still! (Peace!) Oh! Be still!</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Tisa speaks]</i></p>
00:44:11	Tisa	Guest	<p>I definitely would echo that, and I would say to check out Wattstax the film, because going back to Oliver's earlier point, you get a visual sense of the context for Los Angeles. You get to—you know, it's not just a concert movie.</p> <p><i>[Oliver and Ernest both agree.]</i></p> <p>You know, there—you get to see Los Angeles at that time, post-Watts Rebellion, people gathering at the—it's at the Forum, right?</p>
00:44:45	Ernest	Host	Mm-hm.
00:44:46	Tisa	Guest	I think it's absolutely valuable for the kind of record it is, for the

context of the music but also that place in time. I would also say to listen to *Flowers*. I think there's some really interesting DNA in the structure of that album that you could trace to Solange's *A Seat at the Table*, only in how there's interstitial moments of harmony in between tracks that are listed as tracks, they're not skits, but it's—I'm really interested in how they use their voices to kind of thread these songs together, and the way that album is structured. It's really good.

00:45:38 Music Music "We Go Through Changes" off the album *Flowers* by The Emotions plays. Simple and keyed down—clear, slow vocals, completely a capella.

*We go through changes, changes we go through
We go through changes, changes we go through*

[Music fades out as Ernest speaks]

00:45:58 Ernest Host *[Oliver agrees several times while Ernest speaks.]*

I'm going to cheat and give one more recommendation, just based on something that Tisa said earlier. You know, we've been talking about girl groups and groups that sort of make you hesitate to use that term, but I would recommend also checking out Love Unlimited, if you're not familiar with them. You know, amazing harmonies, great songwriting, and Barry White's production, it's just top notch. So, you can see where you would fall on the battle between—

[Tisa laughs uproariously.]

—Love Unlimited and Emotions. But yeah, check out Love Unlimited as well for another really great, great girl group.

00:46:33 Oliver Host And if I may recommend a song by them, which is "If You Want Me, Say It", which I think—I can see the album cover, I forget the n—which LP title it is, but it's one of my favorite songs by them.

00:46:44 Music Music "If You Want Me, Say It" off the album *Love Is Back* by Love Unlimited plays. Mid-tempo R&B with several voices harmonizing together.

*If you want me, say it
Don't waste time, don't delay it
If you want me, say it
Don't be shy, don't delay it*

*If you want me, say it
Don't waste time, don't delay it*

It's hard to say you wanna play but that's okay

[Music fades out as Ernest speaks]

00:47:05 Ernest Host That'll do it for this episode of *Heat Rocks* with our special guest, Tisa Bryant. Tisa, what are you working on now, and where can people find you?

00:47:13	Tisa	Guest	You can find me at school. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:47:15	Oliver	Host	Shout-out to CalArts.
00:47:16	Tisa	Guest	Shout-out to CalArts.
00:47:17	Music	Transition	“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:47:18	Tisa	Guest	I’m teaching a class called Conjurations. It’s a lab for new writing and it’s—
00:47:21	Oliver	Host	Great. Great title.
00:47:22	Tisa	Guest	—really fantastic. I am working on a book-length meditation on grief, longing, and desire in archival research, that uh, parts of it will be getting published soon. I don’t want to say where yet. But I do have work online. If you just Google “Tisa Bryant”, you’ll find some recent work.
			I am working on an essay, actually, for this great book that’s coming out on the 40 year history of the Black Doll Show at the William Grant Still Center here in Los Angeles, in the West Adams area. So, there’s something about listening about listening to this album and Black dolls and social justice that’s happening here, so when it happens, you’ll know. I’ll get it out there. Thank you.
00:48:10	Oliver	Host	Thank you so much for coming through today.
00:48:11	Tisa	Guest	Thanks for having me here. This has been fantastic.
00:48:15	Oliver	Host	You’ve been listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> , with me, Oliver Wang, and our guest co-host, Ernest Hardy, sitting in for Morgan Rhodes. Our theme music is “Crown Ones” by Thes One of People Under The Stairs. Shoutout to Thes for the hookup.
			<i>Heat Rocks</i> is produced by myself, Morgan, and Christian Dueñas, who also engineers, edits, and books for the show. Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and our executive producer is Jesse Thorn.
			We are part of the Maximum Fun family, taping every week live in their studios in the West Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles.
00:48:43	Ernest	Host	Be sure to follow us on Twitter and Instagram @HeatRocksPod. You can find a link to our Facebook group on our web page, HeatRocksPod.com . That’s where we’ll post show notes for every episode, including a track listing of everything you’ve heard today, and more goodies. Again, that’s at HeatRocksPod.com .
00:49:01	Oliver	Host	As we ask every week, if you haven’t had a chance to leave a review for us on iTunes, it is a big, big way in which new listeners can find their way to our humble little show. So, if you can just take out a minute and leave us a review, please do so.
00:49:16	Christian Dueñas	Producer	Hey, it’s producer Christian. Just wanted to quickly jump in and give you guys a tease to next week’s episode. Musician and writer Saul Williams comes down to the studio to talk to us about Portishead’s <i>Dummy</i> .

00:49:27	Saul Williams	Guest	<p>The thing that also tripped me out about Portishead is that it was the first time, like I said it's right before I started making music, and I remember being blown away by the fact that their engineer was a part of their group.</p> <p><i>[Oliver hums in agreement.]</i></p> <p>Geoff Barrow. You know what I'm saying, like yeah, I mean like, we usually like, "Well, so and so mixed this album, so and so mixed this album." But the person who mixed their album, their engineer, is a member of the group.</p>
00:49:54	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<p>Oliver: Which is fundamental to the sound of it.</p> <p>Saul: Yeah.</p> <p>Oliver: I mean, that's kind of an obvious point here—</p> <p>Morgan: Sure.</p> <p>Saul: Yeah.</p> <p>Oliver: —but it really, it matters in this case, yeah.</p>
00:49:58	Saul	Guest	<p>It matters, and it's not every album that's like—it's actually a rarity for albums.</p>
00:50:02	Oliver	Host	<p>Absolutely.</p>
00:50:03	Saul	Guest	<p>It's a rarity, you know? So, that's the first time I had ever heard of that, and that's the first time I ever thought about album engineering.</p>
00:50:13	Speaker 1	Guest	<p>MaximumFun.org.</p>
00:50:15	Speaker 2	Guest	<p>Comedy and culture.</p>
00:50:16	Speaker 3	Guest	<p>Artist owned—</p>
00:50:17	Speaker 4	Guest	<p>—Audience supported.</p>