

00:00:00	Morgan Rhodes	Host	Hi, this is Morgan Rhodes. We wanted to let you know that when we recorded the Saul Williams episode, he and I went off on an Atlanta, Georgia tangent, as we were both students at HBCUs across the street from each other, he at Morehouse, me at Clark Atlanta University in the mid-90s, and so it took us down a road, and here's a little bit of where that road took us.
00:00:26	Saul Williams	Clip	Yo, but you went to plastics, yo.
00:00:28	Morgan	Clip	Listen—
00:00:29	Saul	Clip	I can't believe you.
00:00:30	Morgan	Clip	There were so many places that I went to in Atlanta where I thought, "How did I get here?" and so many strange nights where anything could happen. Funk Jazz Café and—
00:00:44	Saul	Clip	Atlanta was such an amazing moment musically at that time.
00:00:47	Morgan	Host	If you want to hear more of this, you'll have to stay tuned 'til the end of the episode and check it out on <i>Bonus Beats</i> . You don't want to miss this stroll back down memory lane.
00:00:57	Music	Transition	"Crown Ones" off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:01:01	Oliver Wang	Host	Hello, I'm Oliver Wang.
00:01:03	Morgan	Host	And I'm Morgan Rhodes. You're listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> .
00:01:05	Oliver	Host	Every episode we invite a guest to talk to us about a heat rock, an album that just burns eternally, and today we are rewinding it back one quarter century to 1994 and the debut album by Portishead, <i>Dummy</i> .
00:01:19	Music	Music	"Sour Times" off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. Downtempo, somewhat melancholy trip-hop.  <i>Covered by the blind belief That fantasies of sinful screens Bear the facts, assume the dye End the vows, no need to lie, enjoy Take a ride, take a shot now</i>  <i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i>
00:01:35	Morgan	Host	In my line of work, people say to me often, "Yo, you ain't heard nothing like this. This is on something different." And, for better or for worse, that's generally true. But it was real true in the summer of 1994, three years after three kids from Bristol formed a band named after a coastal property in their hood they described as dreary.  Portishead was its name, a name that will forevermore be synonymous with the dawn of trip hop, a sandwich of a genre made up of sadness and samples and singers like Beth Gibbons, who on song after song sang us from shook to seduction to smithereens. Yo, are we breaking up or making love? Hell, was danger lurking

around the corner, or was that thing that went bump in the night just your baggage?

With Beth, you weren't really knowing all that, but you could say with certainty that Isaac Hayes on a loop was just what you needed your pain to be wrapped in. Jeff Barrow, Adrian Utley, and Beth, on their debut album, *Dummy*, were a lot of things, composers and music supervisors, creators of a sonic aesthetic. Scratches and spooky and reverb and wailing.

00:02:47 Morgan Host The kids today would call it a whole mood, but that would be just the instrumentals. Add in lyrics like, "I can't understand myself anymore, because I'm still feeling lonely, feeling so unholy," and it's a whole confession.

"Wandering Star", "Numb", and "Pedestal" aren't necessarily existential crises on wax. They are, to me, ordinary pain—shout-out to Stevie Wonder—the pain of a woman who knows a thing or two, who's been knowing a thing or two.

To understand the eleven tracks that make up this heat rock is to understand the sour times that created 90s angst, incessant overcast weather, and the phrase "it's complicated". Pitchfork calls this album "straight up discomfort food, curl up and die music, head under the covers music." Agreed. And I call it a heat rock, medicine for melancholy, maudlin, morose dummies.

00:03:44 Music Music [*"Sour Times" begins playing again. It plays for several moments, then fades out as Oliver speaks*]

00:03:58 Oliver Host *Dummy* was the album pick of our guest today, Saul Williams. He is an OG multi-hyphenate.

[*Music fades out.*]

Poet-rapper-actor-author-songwriter-performer. I remember when he first broke out in the mid-90s thanks to his success on the slam poetry circuit and the movie he helped write and act in, *Slam*, from '98. In the 20 years since, his output has been so dense and accomplished that we could spend this entire time just going through all of them, but suffice to say he seem possessed by creative energy that could power a supernova.

In just the last few years, he's been on Broadway with the Tupac-inspired musical *Holler if Ya Can Hear Me*, he starred in the French-Senegalese film, *Tey (Today)*, he published another book of poetry, *Us (a.)*, and he stays recording albums, his most recent having just come out this summer, *ENCRYPTED & VULNERABLE*.

00:04:47 Music Music "Fight Everything" off the album *ENCRYPTED & VULNERABLE* by Saul Williams. Slow, tense, paranoia-inducing rap.

*... surrounds you  
Who can you trust?  
What will they teach?  
What will you learn...*

*To survive?*

- 00:05:07 Oliver Host Saul Williams, welcome to *Heat Rocks*.
- 00:05:09 Saul Guest It's a pleasure to be here.
- 00:05:11 Oliver Host I feel like *Dummy* was one of those albums that landed with such a splash that you would have heard it no matter what your musical taste was. It was just inescapable in, you know, '94-'95. How did you first come across this album?
- 00:05:26 Saul Guest I was living in Brooklyn. I literally had just come back from my first trip to the continent. Um, I had spent about a month in Senegal, the Gambia and Mali. I was starting NYU grad school, moved to New York, August of '94.
- [Both Oliver and Morgan make a sound of acknowledgement.]*
- And across from NYU is Tower Records.
- 00:05:47 Oliver Host Or was, but back then, yes.
- [Saul agrees and starts laughing.]*
- No, I remember the location.
- 00:05:50 Saul Guest Was, and uh, yeah, and then across from that was Other Music.
- 00:05:53 Oliver Host Yes, Other! Oh my god. Taking me back.
- 00:05:55 Saul Guest *[Morgan agrees several times as Saul speaks.]*
- Exactly, and so in fact, I went to Other Music, and I was uh, you know, on the cusp of hearing about and talking about—I was already deeply into drum and bass, I was interested, at that point, in anything coming out of Bristol, and I see this album. And I decide to check it out. I was already—I think I'm already listening to Massive Attack. Um, Young Disciples, there's a bunch of shit popping off. But I check this, I take it home, and my life is changed.
- 00:06:38 Oliver Host Damn.
- 00:06:39 Saul Guest My life is changed. I mean, this album, um, the way that it hit me, the way that I would term it then—because I would bring people over to my house to listen to this album.
- [Oliver laughs.]*
- One person I brought over to listen to this album was Yasiin Bey, for example. People I would bring, like, you gotta hear this. And it wouldn't only be this, it would be like this, uh, album by Tricky, I think *Nearly God* was out then? You know, I'm trying to figure out—
- 00:07:12 Oliver Host Sure.
- 00:07:13 Saul Guest —when all these things came out.

00:07:14 Oliver Host But yeah, Tricky emerges in the same era as well.

00:07:16 Saul Guest Yeah, Tricky, there's a Björk album there, I don't think—*Homogenic* isn't out yet until '96, I don't think.

00:07:24 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Oliver:** Right.

**Morgan:** *Post* is—.

**Oliver:** She's maybe moving in that direction.

**Morgan:** *Post* is close.

00:07:26 Saul Guest *Post* is maybe out?

00:07:29 Morgan Host Yeah, but it's all in a circle, yeah.

00:07:30 Saul Guest Yeah, it's all in a circle and it's all in my five disc changer.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

00:07:36 Oliver Host Which answers the question. You caught this on CD.

00:07:39 Saul Guest I caught it on CD. I caught it on CD and my first thought, "Oh, this must be what heroin feels like."

00:07:48 Music Music "Mysterons" off the album *Dummy* by Portishead. Intense trip-hop with fervent, almost sorrowful, almost mournful vocals.

*Did you really want?*  
*Did you really want?*  
*Did you really want?*  
*Did you really want?*

00:08:10 Morgan Host Um, five CD changers, they've come up a lot on *Heat Rocks*, and let's just take a few moments to just shout that out. That was an early tool of curation that people are really not up on, but it was about your starting five.

00:08:24 Saul Guest It was about your starting five. It was such—I remember what I kept there for months, which was Portishead *Dummy*, I also had that release that they had done for the film that came out before *Dummy*. I don't remember the name of the film, but there was a, sort of a EP—

*[Oliver and Morgan agree multiple times.]*

—that they put out before then with music for this film that they had done. And, uh, so those two were there, and then there's Tricky, there's Björk, and maybe, uh, is it Goldie or something?

00:08:56 Oliver Host Real quick, Morgan, to your point, the thing I always liked about—and I have to imagine we're talking about the same kind of five disc changers. Not the kind that has the vertical cassettes, but rather it's the carousel.

*[Morgan and Saul loudly agree.]*

And when it comes out it's already spinning, and something about the aesthetic of that, I never had one of those but I always loved just seeing—

00:09:14 Morgan Host Oh yeah.

00:09:15 Saul Guest Super cool. It was super cool.

00:09:16 Oliver Host It was. It really was. Shout-out to whoever like, invented them.

00:09:18 Morgan Host Shout-out. Shout-out.

00:09:19 Oliver Host Maybe it was Sony, whatever. But yeah. It was a great design.

00:09:21 Saul Guest They were awesome. Of course, the feature that was awesome was shuffle.

00:09:24 Oliver Host Yes.

00:09:25 Morgan Host Oh my god.

00:09:26 Saul Guest Right?

00:09:27 Oliver Host Instant jukebox.

00:09:28 Saul Guest Yeah. So the shuffle feature was great. Yeah, it was the beginning of being able to listen to that many different albums. Of course, we're still dealing with a time when even the CD, you know, the booklets inside of the CD were kind of thick at times, you know, and so we could like—I remember some of the Tricky artwork, I remember the artwork still, I remember sitting there still, opening up the booklet inside the CD and reading about it and the whole nine, like we were still doing that.

00:09:56 Morgan Host I mean, if it hadn't been, I think, for CDs and CD changers, I don't think I would have invested as much time in listening, because once you committed to putting your CDs in the changer, you didn't touch that thing. You've put in your five, and if you put it on shuffle, you don't touch that thing. And then you hear those songs, you hear the, you know, these are the 90s, we're talking about interludes and intros and all that stuff was important, the liner notes, and if you've gone through all that you had to go through to unwrap a CD—

*[Oliver and Saul both laugh.]*

—you're gonna listen to the whole thing. If you pull that plastic off—

00:10:29 Saul Guest Yeah, you're definitely gonna listen to the whole thing.

00:10:31 Morgan Host You gotta commit to it.

00:10:32 Oliver Host Tower Records, though, used to sell the CD openers, that had a little razor—

*[Saul starts laughing.]*

—safety razors tucked inside and just slide it across and plastic came right off.

00:10:38 Morgan Host I had those, though. I had those.

00:10:40 Saul Guest I didn't have that, either. I just used my nail.

00:10:42 Morgan Host No, so I just had to just like—that's it. So after you go through all that, you know.

00:10:47 Oliver Host So Morgan, did this album cross your path in '94?

00:10:49 Morgan Host It did cross my path in '94, and it crossed my path in Atlanta, because I was living there.

00:10:55 Saul Guest I may have—*[Exhales]* Okay. Cool, cool. You were living in Atlanta in '94? I moved from Atlanta in '94.

00:11:00 Morgan Host Yup. I went to Clark, I was there '92 to '96.

00:11:02 Saul Guest Okay, I was there from '90 to '94 at Morehouse.

00:11:05 Morgan Host Okay. Alright.

00:11:06 Oliver Host Shout-out HBCUs.

00:11:07 Morgan Host HBCUs, for sure. So there was a lot of great music happening during that time period, not just '94—but shout-out to '94—but those years, '92 to '96—

00:11:17 Saul Guest Oh, come on, '92 to me is, like, the greatest hear in hip-hop ever.

00:11:22 Oliver Host Which is funny, 'cause I was gonna say, I feel like '94 would be the other contender for that.

00:11:26 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Oliver:** And we can get into this later—  
**Morgan:** '94 is great.  
**Saul:** '94 is great, but—  
**Oliver:** But '92—  
**Saul:** —nothing touches '92 in my book.  
**Morgan:** Yeah.

00:11:32 Oliver Host Let's go down this tangent. So, what are the albums of '92 that instantly come to mind then, that help designate that year as being the greatest year?

00:11:39 Saul Guest What is it—*Daily Operation*?

00:11:40 Music Music "No Shame In My Game" off the album *Daily Operation* by Gang Starr. Mid-tempo rap.

*They live for the minute and they're all wrapped up in it  
It's an unfortunate state for many it's too late  
Now death stalks the streets and it's right at your gate  
So bug, lose your mind but I ain't going insane  
I'll kick the fly lyrics 'cause ain't no shame in my game*

*[Music fades out as Saul speaks]*

00:11:54 Saul Guest Um, I don't kn—remember if that's the exact year, but I'm talking about '92. I would even run to the new music seminar that year in '92, so you also have leaders of the new school.

00:12:07 Crosstalk Crosstalk *[All dialogue almost completely overlapping]*

**Morgan:** You got Pete Rock—Pete Rock—

**Saul & Morgan:** —and Seal.

**Oliver:** Yup. Mecca and the Soul Brother.

**Morgan:** Smooth, right?

**Saul:** That's what it is.

00:12:10 Saul Guest You have these weird things in '92, like Fu-Schnicken type of uh—

*[Morgan laughs loudly and agrees.]*

—Das EFX.

00:12:19 Morgan Host They want EFX, yeah.

00:12:20 Saul Guest Yeah, you have all that stuff, you have—there's Brand Nubian is still making noise, uh—

00:12:28 Oliver Host Diamond D. Show and A.G.

00:12:29 Saul Guest Diamond D, oh my god. Showbiz & A.G. "I like my pockets fat." I mean, like there's crazy stuff—

00:12:36 Morgan Host Yeah, going on.

00:12:37 Saul Guest —in '92. But all through that, all through that era, 'cause right after that we start getting into like, Nas and Wu Tang and Biggie and all this.

00:12:45 Morgan Host Sure. *The Chronic*, still had that to come.

00:12:48 Saul Guest Yeah, *The Chronic* still—

00:12:49 Morgan Host '93?

00:12:50 Saul Guest It's '93?

00:12:51 Oliver Host '92, but it blows up in '93—

00:12:53 Morgan Host '92?

00:12:54 Oliver Host —because it comes out late '92.

00:12:56 Saul Guest Yeah, okay. Yeah, no, it's a crazy year for me.

00:12:58 Morgan Host And I mean, it was—I mean, you mentioned Bristol, and there was a lot going on in sort of that outgrowth of dance and garage, so the early 90s I was obsessed with like, acid jazz, you mentioned—

00:13:10 Saul Guest Oh, yeah, yeah, Brand New Heavies.

00:13:11 Morgan Host Brand New Heavies, I'm saying. Uh, the year this came out—

00:13:14 Oliver Host Jamiroquai's probably somewhere—

00:13:16 Saul Guest Jamiroquai is doing shit then.

00:13:17 Morgan Host Jalisa, Young Disciples.

00:13:19 Saul Guest Oh, exactly.

00:13:20 Music Music "As We Come (To Be)" off the album *Road to Freedom* by Young Disciples. Smooth R&B with vocals that pull and stretch smoothly over the grooving instrumental.

*... season I must feel  
I'm used to summer year round  
But I see sensations I've found  
To use so much more as it may*

*[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*

00:13:36 Morgan Host And then you've got that whole sort family, that incestuous family of drum and bass garage.

00:13:43 Saul Guest Oh yeah, *Project 23*.

00:13:44 Music Music "23" off the album *Project 23* by Cleveland Watkiss. Fast, frenetic instrumentals with a rapid drumbeat accompanied by much slower piano.

00:13:56 Saul Guest You had to dig to find the drum and bass in the States, and then I started—

00:14:00 Oliver Host It was all White Label stuff, like you narrowed—yeah.

00:14:01 Saul Guest Yeah, and I started listening to drum and bass in Atlanta at that time. That was like when DJ Disciple would come to The Masquerade or Plastics. Do you remember Plastics?

00:14:08 Morgan Host Of course.

00:14:19 Saul Guest You went to Plastics?

*[Morgan starts laughing.]*

Yooo! I tell people about Plastics, they think I'm lying.

00:14:15 Morgan Host Oh, no. No, no, no.

00:14:18 Saul Guest Okay, yeah. The Phoenix.

00:14:19 Morgan Host The Phoenix, early FunkJazz Kafé.

00:14:21 Saul Guest Exactly, FunkJazz Kafé—

00:14:23 Morgan Host Early Ying Yang. I used to sneak into Loretta's. Yeah.

00:14:25 Saul Guest Exactly. Exactly. So, all that's popping off, plus I'm in New York, so

going to all—The Shelter and Kilimanjaro and all those in New York as well, yeah. It's a moment for music, for house music as well. It almost kind of leads you into Portishead, because we had already had, you know, it's late 80s when you have like, Soul De Soul, and I bring that up because in my mind, it's the U.K. that helped me first hear R&B style singing over hip-hop beats.

- 00:14:56 Oliver Host Ah. Omar.
- 00:14:57 Saul Guest In that sense.
- 00:14:58 Music Music "Need You Bad" off the album *For Pleasure* by Omar. R&B with nearly-spoken smooth vocals.
- Talk to you softly, make you react  
Yeah, yeah  
As long as it's something you're giving back  
Yeah, yeah*
- [Music fades out as Saul speaks]*
- 00:15:12 Saul Guest *[Morgan agrees emphatically several times as Saul speaks]*
- But yeah, Soul De Soul was the big—however you were, that beat would drop and we'd be like, "This some New York shit, what the fuck?" You know what I'm saying? Like, it was not the expected beat, and so for me, as a New Yorker, leading back to Portishead *Dummy*, the thought to me was, oh this is like a game of telephone.
- Like, it's coming from the South Bronx, and people keep sending that message and it gets around, and it comes back in the form of this white girl from Bristol singing the blues.
- 00:15:44 Morgan Host Yup.
- 00:15:45 Music Music "Mysterons" off the album *Dummy* by Portishead fades back in.
- Strung out until ripped apart  
Who dares  
Who dares to condemn?*
- [Music fades out as Morgan speaks]*
- 00:16:02 Morgan Host This album feels like dating somebody that's really sexy and also really depressed.
- [Oliver laughs.]*
- 00:16:09 Saul Guest Oh yeah.
- 00:16:11 Morgan Host Right?
- 00:16:12 Saul Guest Uh-huh. I remember, I went through this moment here where it was like, okay, there was like this, there's like Fiona Apple, there's a bunch of shit, and I'm—plus the stuff that I'm reading literature-wise, and I'm thinking like—I started questioning myself, like, "What do I have with suicidal white women?"

[Everyone laughs.]

Because this album kind of epitomized that.

00:16:33	Morgan	Host	This is it. I don't think it was just maudlin for the sake of maudlin, and I don't think that it was a schtick, either.
00:16:37	Saul	Guest	No, there's pain in Beth Gibbons' voice.
00:16:39	Morgan	Host	Real pain.
00:16:40	Saul	Guest	There's real pain and prophecy.
00:16:43	Morgan	Host	Yup. As a fan of both sort of this U.K. sound that you're talking about and hip-hop, without the beats, I don't know if I would have stayed with it, either. I needed those beats.
00:16:53	Oliver	Host	Well, that's essential.
00:16:54	Morgan	Host	Essential.
00:16:55	Saul	Guest	Because that's the thing, if you want to talk about '94, is we're talking about premo, we're talking about Pete Rock, we're talking about all this stuff that's popping off in New—I mean, I lived in Brooklyn, you know? I mean, I was hearing Busta Rhymes, Mobb Deep, I was definitely hearing Nas—
00:17:12	Oliver	Host	Biggie comes out that year.
00:17:14	Saul	Guest	Definitely hearing Biggie. I mean like, the streets of Brooklyn were banging because it was fucking Brooklyn in '94. I mean, it was fucking crazy and I was choosing to go home and turn this on, because it was such a fucking vibe, and it was such a winning vibe. Anybody you brought to your crib was like, yo.
00:17:33	Morgan	Host	Who is this? What is this?
00:17:36	Saul	Guest	Yo.
00:17:37	Music	Music	"Numb" off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. An instrumental sample with tense electric keyboard chords quickly joined by electronic record scratches and metallic, echoing drums.
00:17:56	Oliver	Host	I mean, what struck me in revisiting this, listening to it now, is that not only—and this speaks to the points that both of you are making—I mean, this album masters the art of atmosphere, unlike—really, it is the pinnacle of an atmospheric album. And they managed to do it in a way in which, it's really hard to have both consistency but not tip it over into monotony, and this album I think skirts that razor's edge as close as I can imagine without tipping over to the other side, because—
00:18:23	Saul	Guest	It never goes to monotony. Yeah, it's crazy.
00:18:25	Morgan	Host	Because I think once we got into—once trip hop became a thing, and they started putting out compilations, then some of it started to be sameness, that it didn't stand out as much. But we gotta say that—what I liked about this album, and some of the other stand outs, and we can talk about them later, was they did this thing that

we're talking about, marrying beats and marrying vibe and marrying these vocals. They did it well. And the women that were around this movement all had really distinct voices that—

00:19:00	Saul	Guest	Martina Topley-Bird.
00:19:02	Morgan	Host	Sure. Björk, Esthero, we talked about Esthero, “Baby” from Morcheeba, “Trigger Hippie”.
00:19:08	Music	Music	“Trigger Hippie” off the album <i>Who Can You Trust?</i> by Morcheeba. Downtempo pop that begins with the singer vocalizing before distinct lyrics begin.
			<i>Zoom in, cut out at sound...</i>
			<i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i>
00:19:22	Morgan	Host	I think you had to have—and I don't think that was a schtick, but there was something that those voices conjured up.
00:19:28	Saul	Guest	These are also kind of children of Neneh Cherry. I mean, I know that first Massive Attack album was basically recorded in her kitchen. You know, and there's something that—yeah, there's something that relates to her and her voice and vibe as well in this for me, you know, when I think of just the people that might have influenced that moment. But for me, this made me want to visit that city, especially by the time a year or so had passed, because then it was like it was Portishead, then I had to have more, you know, so then I started listening to Tricky <i>Nearly God</i> and <i>Maxinquaye</i> and yeah, it's all that same moment, and then getting deeper into the drum and bass shit, I'm like, “All this shit is from Bristol?”
00:20:14	Morgan	Host	The Metalheads.
00:20:15	Saul	Guest	Yeah, Metalheads, Goldie, all of y'all are from Bristol? What the fuck is Bristol, yo?
00:20:20	Morgan	Host	What's in the water?
00:20:21	Saul	Guest	What the fuck? Yeah.
00:20:22	Morgan	Host	Did you listen to the album from start to finish, did you get stuck on any particular track, or did you just let it go?
00:20:28	Saul	Guest	Okay, so I let it go, and I'm—and in fact, I'm kind of casually cool with it, until I get to one song, the end. This song is really the theme song of my fucking life, in that it's in every relationship I've ever been in, in every—since this song came out, we could turn to this song and be like, yeah. This, for me too, this song, “Glory Box.”
00:20:58	Music	Music	“Glory Box” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. Downtempo trip-hop with a backing that's a little bit blues, a little bit R&B, a little bit rock n' roll.

*For I've been a temptress too long*  
Yes

*Give me a reason to love you*

*[Music fades down and plays quietly as Saul speaks]*

00:21:16 Saul Guest Wait a second though, I just have to say—I mean, that’s really cool what you played, but the thing that makes this song extraordinary is the break.

00:21:26 Music Music *["Glory Box" begins playing again.]*

*For this is the beginning  
Of forever and ever*

*[On “ever”, her voice echoes repeatedly, almost distorted; a deep, heavy drumbeat kicks in; when she resumes, her voice continues to echo]*

*It's time to move over  
It's all...*

*[Music fades out entirely as Saul continues]*

00:21:48 Saul Guest One, the message. “Give me a reason to love you, give me a reason to be a woman.” And then that moment when she goes, “Cause this is the beginning of forever.”

To me, I hear that the same way I hear, “I want all the boys to drop out, dadada, I wanna give the drummer some.” The “Funky Drummer”. That moment when James Brown pulls back and says, “No, no, no, give the drummer some, you gotta—don’t change a thing, you gotta keep what you got, ‘cause it’s a mother.” That’s what he says in the “Funky Drummer”. It’s always been strong to me, the fact that he—the birth of hip-hop and that fucking break beat moment in the song starts with him saying, “When I count to three, I want everybody to drop out. The drummer, I want you to keep what you got, don’t change a thing, because it’s a mother.” And then *[beatboxes]* happens and a whole genre is born.

With this song, when she goes, “This is the beginning of forever and ever.” That beat. In 1994. In Brooklyn? *[Exhales loudly, impressed]*

00:22:58 Morgan Host That was it. That was it. I love that song, but I fell in love with that beat when Tricky used it on “Hell Is Around The Corner” the very next year.

00:23:12 Music Music “Hell Is Round The Corner” off the album *Maxinquaye* by Tricky. Slow, spoken, eerie rap with echoes and distortions over a steady drumbeat.

*We're hungry beware of our appetite  
Distant drums bring the news of a kill tonight  
The kill which I share with my passengers  
We take our fill, take our fill, take our fill*

*I stand firm for our soil*

*[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]*

00:23:30	Oliver	Host	I think it says a lot that this album, even though—and we can get into this later—that it is obviously built from prominent samples, but the fact that so many artists almost instantaneously begin sampling it. Which is not something you heard, right? If you're making an album regardless of the genre in '95, you're not trying to sample something from a year before, because that just makes you look like a biter, right? People didn't care. This album was so powerful, you got rappers, you got drum and bass artists, whatever, they're using this as source material within years, not even a year practically, and that is astounding in terms of if you think about the influence and just the way it lands in that moment.
00:24:09	Morgan	Host	And it feels like they're not just sampling the sample, they're sampling the moment, and part of the way these samples are used, you can't recreate what happened on this album, because you need vibe for that.
00:24:23	Saul	Guest	That's pure vibe.
00:24:25	Morgan	Host	And you need Beth for that.
00:24:26	Saul	Guest	You need Beth. I mean, I even listen to the Beak stuff right now, which is dope, and when it gets really dope, I'm like, woof, if Beth came in right now—
			<i>[Morgan and Saul laugh.]</i>
00:24:36	Morgan	Host	Shout-out to Beth right now. Shout-out to Beth.
00:24:41	Saul	Guest	But the thing, you know, I remember trying to figure out like, 'cause the other thing that's interesting about this moment for me is it's really just before I start making music, you know, and so the reason why I love Tricky for example is because I felt like it was him who gave me license. Because I was like, "Oh, oh, there <u>is</u> room for weirdness. Okay." And so the first shit I ever do like, um, <i>Lyricist Lounge</i> , I'm inspired by Tricky when I go into the studio. I'm inspired by Tricky.
			I remember trying to figure out and finding articles, and of course you couldn't look online at that time so much, in terms of trying to figure out how did—
00:25:20	Oliver	Host	Yeah, Google wasn't around yet.
00:25:21	Saul	Guest	Google wasn't around, so I was buying magazines and stuff to try to figure out how they make this album, how they get this sound.
00:25:29	Oliver	Host	Broken amplifiers.
00:25:31	Saul	Guest	Broken amplifiers. I remember, this was the first time I learned about like, putting an amplifier in a bathroom, filling the tub with water, pressing like, recording something, pressing it on vinyl, and then sampling that vinyl.
00:25:46	Morgan	Host	Oh, man.
00:25:47	Saul	Guest	You know, generations of sound. And so that was part of the secret of this album, was that not everything there was direct. Beth was

direct, you know, but a lot of the music has generations to it.

00:26:02 Oliver Host It's been engineered with decay, in a kind of way. Yeah.

00:26:05 Music Music "Glory Box" off the album *Dummy* by Portishead plays again.

*I just wanna be a woman*

*[Music fades down and plays quietly as Morgan speaks]*

00:26:24 Morgan Host We'll be back with more of our conversation with Saul Williams about Portishead's *Dummy* after a brief word from a couple of great MaxFun podcasts. Don't go anywhere.

*[Music continues to play, then fades out.]*

00:26:48 Promo Promo **Music:** Upbeat rock plays in the background.

**Announcer:** *Dead Pilots Society* brings you exclusive readings of comedy pilots that were never made, featuring actors like Patton Oswalt—

**Patton Oswalt:** So the vampire from the future sleeps in the dude's studio during the day, and they hunt monsters at night. It's Blade meets The Odd Couple!

*[Audience laughs]*

**Announcer:** —Adam Scott and Jane Levy—

**Jane Levy:** Come on, Cory. She's too serious, too business-y. She doesn't know the hokey-pokey.

**Adam Scott:** Well, she'll learn what it's all about.

*[Audience laughs.]*

**Announcer:** —Busy Philipps and Dave Koechner.

**Dave Koechner:** Maybe this is family.

**Busy Philipps:** My Uncle Tal, who showed his weiner to Cinderella at Disneyland, is family. Do you want him staying with us?

*[Light audience laughter.]*

**Dave:** He did stay with us, for three months.

**Busy:** And he was a delight!

[Audience laughs harder.]

**Announcer:** A new pilot every month, only on *Dead Pilots Society* from Maximum Fun.

00:27:39 Promo Promo

**Carrie Poppy:** [Making static microphone noises] This is NASA, uh, I see a flat Earth, but we should lie to everybody about it and say it's round. 10-4.

**Ross Blocher:** Maximum Fun brings you the latest podcast, an exposé on the flat Earth.

**Carrie:** I want to take advantage of humankind and make them believe a lie so that they will trust us with the government.

**Ross:** It's all an elaborate lie, and when you get on a plane they purposefully fly you farther than you need to go.

**Carrie:** It's disgusting. It needs to be stopped. And if you listen to *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*, we will tell you the truth behind the lies.

**Ross:** Just kidding!

**Carrie:** No, we won't do that. We will just tell you the truth behind the truth, because what we do is we look at extraordinary claims!

**Ross:** That's right, we've gone undercover with alternative medical treatments, fringe religious groups, fringe science claims, the spiritual, paranormal. We're there to check it out and let you know what happens.

**Carrie:** Is the Queen Mary haunted? I don't know! Find out!

**Ross:** We show up. We make friends. We learn what happens when you ask questions, and we tell you all about it.

**Carrie:** And we get all that funky stuff done to us.

**Ross:** It's *Oh No, Ross and Carrie!*

**Carrie:** At [MaximumFun.org](http://MaximumFun.org).

00:28:47 Music Transition

"Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs

00:28:48 Oliver Host

We are back on *Heat Rocks*, talking about *Dummy*, the debut album from Portishead, with our guest, Saul Williams.

00:28:55 Morgan Host

Did you get stuck on any favorites? Did you allow yourself to get stuck on any favorites?

00:28:59 Saul Guest

Yeah, "Wandering Star", "Numb". My favorite was always "Glory Box." It remains. When I make playlists now, I'll still put "Glory Box" on it.

00:29:11 Morgan Host

Still.

00:29:12 Saul Guest Oh, yeah.

00:29:13 Oliver Host Morgan, how about you?

00:29:16 Morgan Host I think “Glory Box” is unquestionable fire, um.

00:29:21 Oliver Host Is that your fire track though?

00:29:22 Morgan Host No. My fire track is “It Could Be Sweet.”

*[Oliver hums delightedly.]*

00:29:26 Saul Guest Can I hear two seconds of that?

00:29:27 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Oliver:** Of course.

**Morgan:** Go ahead.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

00:29:29 Music Music “It Could Be Sweet” off the album *Dummy* by Portishead. Trip-hop with an electronica/R&B backing and nearly-raspy, almost quiet, ardent vocals.

*Gotta try a little harder  
It could be sweet*

*[Music fades out as Saul speaks]*

00:29:46 Saul Guest It’s always that double time in this that always got me. This beat is one of my favorite on this album, and yeah, “It Could Be Sweet” is a—*[exhales.]*

00:29:54 Morgan Host And not to say that um, not to say that I don’t love her vocals on all of these tracks, but there’s something about this and “Pedestal” that, you know, if you’re in something complicated, you’re like, it’s okay, because it could be sweet, and you don’t get something for nothing is—in and of itself doesn’t mean as much as when she sings it and she sings it on this song, and that, for me, is the stand out track on here.

00:30:21 Saul Guest I’m with you. I’m with you. I also remember that I was probably doing a lot of correlation between the way she was effecting me and the way Shaday was effecting me—

*[Morgan and Oliver both agree.]*

—at this time. It’s true, actually—

00:30:36 Morgan Host Close.

00:30:37 Saul Guest —she was hitting me in similar ways. I love Sade’s writing. I mean, her voice is extraordinary, of course, but her writing is fucking extraordinary. She’s like, maybe my first favorite poet as a teenager is Sade.

00:30:51 Morgan Host And I’m, as you’re saying this, I’m hearing the discography, and I’m like, “Oh my god, there’s a lot of closeness here.”

			<i>[Everyone agrees.]</i>
00:31:00	Music	Music	“No Ordinary Love” off the album <i>Love Deluxe</i> by Sade. Soulful R&B with fervent vocals—bearing a distinct similarity to “It Could Be Sweet”.
			<i>This is no ordinary love No ordinary love This is no ordinary love...</i>
			<i>[Music crossfades into...]</i>
00:31:18	Music	Music	“It Could Be Sweet” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. “No Ordinary Love” fades into it so seamlessly it’s almost hard to tell exactly when the fade happens, mostly distinct by “It Could Be Sweet” being notably slower.
			<i>It could be sweet...</i>
			<i>[Beth Gibbons sighs, barely audible. Music continues for a moment, then fades out as Oliver speaks]</i>
00:31:34	Oliver	Host	I’m always the basic one on this question about the fire track. I just go with kind of the obvious pick.
			<i>[Morgan laughs.]</i>
			So, I’m just gonna cop to that, but for me, I mean, it’s “Sour Times”.
00:31:42	Morgan	Host	Oh, yeah.
00:31:43	Oliver	Host	It’s certainly the first track that I ever remember hearing from Portishead. It might be because I don’t think I ever got the album in, but I got this twelve-inch in this promo because I was working at the radio station at the time, and I mean of course those opening bars are so mysterious and alluring. You just want to know, what is this, number one, and where is it going? Where is this taking me?
00:32:05	Music	Music	An instrumental section of “Sour Times” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead plays for a moment before fading out as Oliver speaks.
00:32:22	Oliver	Host	Just everything about it—
00:32:23	Saul	Guest	Yeah, her flow on that is crazy.
00:32:24	Oliver	Host	—her flow, the Lalo Schifrin sample, and we gotta come back to that in a moment, because it does a lot of the work here, but certainly not all of it.
			<i>[“Sour Times” begins fading back in]</i>
			The way that Beth’s voice floats in.
00:32:33	Music	Music	<i>[Music increases in volume, playing clearly]</i>
			<i>To pretend no one can find The fallacies of morning rose</i>

*Forbidden fruit, hidden eyes  
Courtesies that I despise in me  
Take a ride...*

*[Music fades out again as Oliver speaks]*

- 00:32:48 Oliver Host And it, you know, I think for that reason “Sour Times” is—if there is an enduring hit off of this in terms of what people have sampled, what gets placed in movies and TV shows, it’s “Sour Times.” And this song is really ageless in a way. I think—I mean, the album in general as we’ve been talking is ageless, but this track in particular, every time I hear it, it just takes me back those 25 years; and it’s still just as mysterious and alluring as it was when I was first bumping this at, what, age 22.
- 00:33:16 Morgan Host I mean, it’s chilling, the opening. And to your point, you don’t know that that’s what you’re gonna get from her when she starts singing, and the instrumental by itself is so cinematic. That’s, you know, that’s—I’m sure it’s been placed and I’ll get into some of the placements, but in and of itself, by itself, it sounds like something that would be in one of those *Spy Vs. Spy* movies, one of those detective old movies.
- 00:33:41 Oliver Host Right, but crossed with a spaghetti western.
- 00:33:42 Morgan Host *[Laughing]* But crossed with that. And then when you come into her vocal, by the time she gets to “nobody loves me” you’re just like, damnit, Beth. Come on, Beth.
- 00:33:51 Oliver Host Well, let’s get into the placement. I mean, we’re here, so yeah, let’s talk about this.
- 00:33:54 Morgan Host Alright. So, as you might imagine, Portishead has had placements. I think 44.
- 00:34:01 Saul Guest Woah.
- 00:34:02 Morgan Host 44 placements. Um.
- 00:34:03 Oliver Host I love that you know this, but of course you would, but sure. I love that you know this.
- 00:34:07 Morgan Host Yup, I do, and the number one song that’s been placed has been “Glory Box”.
- 00:34:15 Oliver Host Oh! I was wrong, I thought it was gonna be “Sour Times”. Damn it. Okay.
- 00:34:16 Morgan Host No. “Glory Box” has been placed a gang of times.
- 00:34:20 Saul Guest Wow. Liv Tyler movie, what is that, um. It’s there, anyway.
- 00:34:25 Morgan Host Let’s see, we’ve got *Roseland*, it’s been placed on *Love Island*, it’s been placed on *Flak*, *Top Gear*, *Person of Interest*, *Gotham*, *Defiance*, *My Mad Fat Diary*, *The L Word*, *The Watcher*. Um, I’d like to see the scenes! I don’t know the scenes but it must have been good.
- 00:34:41 Oliver Host I was gonna say, you said *Love Island*, the reality show? I don’t,

actually, I don't want to see that scene where they use it.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

00:34:46	Morgan	Music	I just want to know why!
00:34:47	Saul	Guest	It was the Bertolucci film that got it right. It's the Bertolucci film with Liv Tyler that got it right. I can't rem—
00:34:53	Morgan	Host	Christian?
00:34:54	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<b>Morgan and Saul: <i>Stealing Beauty!</i></b>
00:34:55	Oliver	Host	Shout-out to Christian.
00:34:56	Morgan	Host	Shout-out.
00:34:57	Oliver	Host	Our producer coming through in the clutch with that one.
00:34:59	Morgan	Host	Yes.
00:35:00	Saul	Guest	I would argue that might even be the first one to use it. I don't know.
00:35:04	Morgan	Host	Oh, it may be. That's been the most popular one, and after that has been—well, "All Mine" has had a couple of placements, and uh, "Sour Times" has had several.
00:35:14	Oliver	Host	<i>[Morgan and Saul agree emphatically several times as Oliver speaks.]</i>
			Well, before we move on, I do want to—because I brought his name up—I just want to give some credit here, because I do think that on "Sour Times", a lot of the work in the very beginning is from Lalo Schifrin who was just such a gifted composer from the 1960s and 70s, and certainly a lot of beat diggers back in the 90s were mining his entire catalog. Just going to the store, like other music, going through the soundtrack section and just pulling out anything that had his name on it, and "Sour Times" uses "The Danube Incident", which is from the more <i>Mission: Impossible</i> theme. So the Spy. Vs. Spy thing, Morgan, you nailed it.
00:35:45	Music	Music	"Danube Incident" off the album <i>Mission: Impossible</i> by Lalo Schifrin. A slow, fun yet tense instrumental with a steady beat that was sampled in the beginning of "Sour Times".
00:35:56	Oliver	Host	I wonder if people who are fans of <i>Mission: Impossible</i> from the 60s and 70s would have heard the Portishead and been like, "Oh, that's—" and then have their head blown or something along those lines.
00:36:04	Saul	Guest	That Isaac Hayes sample in "Glory Box", oh my god.
00:36:06	Morgan	Host	Oh, "Ike's Rap", "Ike's Rap."
00:36:08	Oliver	Host	Also brilliant.
00:36:09	Saul	Guest	That's brilliant.
00:36:10	Music	Music	"Ike's Rap II" off the album <i>The Man! The Ultimate Isaac Hayes</i>

1969-1977 by Isaac Hayes. Deep, baritone spoken word over a slow R&B backing.

*I know I abused you  
I took advantage of you  
I used you selfishly*

*[Music crossfades into...]*

00:36:26 Music Music “Glory Box” off the album *Dummy* by Portishead. The transition is seamless, with the only noticeable indication that the song has changed being Beth’s vocals fading in.

*Give me a reason to love you  
Give me a reason...*

*[Music fades out as Saul laughs and Oliver speaks]*

00:36:40 Oliver Host *[Saul is laughing as dialogue cuts back in.]*  
  
You know, listening to the Hayes right now, what’s so interesting is that Hayes has that kind of atmospheric voice on here, and even though his baritone you would, you know, is on the opposite end of Beth’s voice, the affect to me feels—

00:36:52 Saul Guest Oh, it’s very similar. I mean, I’m very into—I’m getting more and more into people who know how to talk over music, you know what I’m saying? Talking over music is a thing, and yeah, he’s definitely build—I mean, he was very much working with orchestras and huge—in the same way that Barry White was, you know? Yeah, it’s a big sound, it’s a vibe. He definitely was building atmosphere, and it is similar to what they’re building there. Of course, he goes a different direction once their music continues, you know.

00:37:24 Oliver Host But if you think about perfect albums in terms of establishing just a vibe, and I want to give credit out to Emily Lordi who just wrote a piece about *Hot Buttered Soul* for The New Yorker, which was fantastic, but that album in terms of setting a vibe, I mean, oh my god. So, yeah.

We started talking a little bit about this earlier, specifically in the first half when Saul was pointing out one of his favorite moments, the break that’s in “Glory Box”. Morgan, do you have a favorite moment off this album?

00:37:51 Morgan Host I want to say “Strangers”, which is the song, but I like that it doesn’t sound like anything else on this album. She sounds very, very far away and I’ve wondered since this album came out who made the decision to make her have that sound? It’s the one that makes her, to me, sound the most distant, and listening to that, it almost sounds like a live album in one sense, and like she’s very, very far away. And to me, because it doesn’t sound like anything else on the album, that’s one of my favorite moments.

00:38:24 Saul Guest Can I hear that for two seconds?

00:38:25 Oliver Host Of course.

00:38:26	Music	Music	<p>“Strangers” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. Bare electric guitar and some kind of percussion or rattling sound under Beth’s distant, nearly tinny vocals, sounding almost as if hearing her through an old speaker playing in another room.</p> <p><i>Can anybody see the light? Where the morn’ meets the dew and the tide rises</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Morgan speaks]</i></p>
00:38:43	Morgan	Host	<p>Sometimes we talk about personnel and I don’t know who the personnel was on here, who the engineers were, was this a studio construct or was this actually a decision, like listen—by her—this is how I want to sound. I want—she sounds childlike and small. It isn’t intimate, and it isn’t sexy. It’s innocent and it’s small.</p>
00:39:01	Oliver	Host	<p>So the moment is really when you hear her in that, almost like filtered through the A.M. radio sound.</p> <p><i>[Saul harmonizing in the background.]</i></p> <p>And it’s funny, ‘cause when I was listening to “Strangers” and the beat drops in, and <i>that</i> moment on “Strangers”—</p>
00:39:12	Morgan	Host	<p>Oh, yeah. Yeah.</p>
00:39:13	Music	Music	<p><i>["Strangers" fades back in]</i></p> <p><i>Did you realize for why this sight belongs to you?</i></p> <p><i>[The bare instrumental continues for a moment, then stops. Three buzzing sounds happen in succession, each one more distant than the last. As the last one fades out, heavy instrumentals kick in as Beth begins vocalizing]</i></p>
00:39:29	Oliver	Host	<p>You go from A.M. trying to get the signal through the mountains to just full-on—</p>
00:39:33	Morgan	Host	<p>Bazooka tune.</p>
00:39:34	Oliver	Host	<p>—full stereo F.M. right there.</p>
00:39:35	Saul	Guest	<p>Oh my god, yo.</p>
00:39:38	Morgan	Host	<p>That’s it.</p>
00:39:39	Saul	Guest	<p>That is it.</p>
00:39:40	Oliver	Host	<p>It’s interesting because you’re saying how this for you, Morgan, was your favorite moment because it didn’t sound like anything else in the album, and I picked—my favorite moment on the album is also something that I thought didn’t sound like anything else I heard on here, which is on—it’s uh—it’s on the song “It’s A Fire”, and it comes during the hook, where Beth is singing, “So, breathe on sister, breathe on,” and there’s the organ chords in the background, and something about the combination between what she’s saying vocally but especially those organ chords in the back.</p>

00:40:09	Music	Music	<p>“It’s A Fire” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. Haunting, soulful trip-hop, sounding nearly gospel, with an organ playing behind a drumbeat.</p> <p><i>... a farce</i>  <i>I can't breathe through this mask</i>  <i>Like a fool</i>  <i>So breathe on, sister, breathe on</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:40:33	Oliver	Host	<p>It’s almost like, I feel like she actually lowered her voice a bit, because she’s so high on so many other songs, and this one she’s bringing it down. And—but, and again, it’s the combination between lowering the voice, just the idea of breathing on, I don’t even know what that means in this context but it just feels like something, but those chords.</p>
00:40:51	Morgan	Host	<p>Haunting.</p>
00:40:52	Saul	Guest	<p>Haunting, ominous. 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>
00:41:21	Crosstalk	Crosstalk	<p><b>Oliver:</b> Which is fundamental to the sound of it.</p> <p><b>Saul:</b> Yeah.</p> <p><b>Oliver:</b> I mean, that’s kind of an obvious point here—</p> <p><b>Morgan:</b> Sure.</p> <p><b>Saul:</b> Yeah.</p> <p><b>Oliver:</b> —but it really, it matters in this case, yeah.</p>
00:41:25	Saul	Guest	<p>It matters, and it’s not every album that’s like—it’s actually a rarity for albums.</p>
00:41:29	Oliver	Host	<p>Absolutely.</p>
00:41:30	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>
00:41:40	Morgan	Host	<p>I’m just glad you’ve brought that up because I was gonna say, you know, it would be great to talk to the engineer or find out about the engineering that goes into this album, because it is what adds something onto the album.</p>

00:41:53	Music	Music	An instrumental selection from “Pedestal” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead. Trip-hop with a steady drumbeat and high-pitched record scratching sounds, sounding nearly distorted.
00:42:13	Oliver	Host	This is obviously an album that you have spent much, much time with, and when you listen to it now, what do you hear differently, if anything? Or is it the same effect as when you were listening to it 25 years ago?
00:42:26	Saul	Guest	This album does not get old. It feels as fresh now when it pops up on my shuffle, and I’m like—and now I’m shuffling like, gigabytes of music as opposed to five CDs, you know, but still, I’m always happy. And I have to say that also, as a group, Portishead has not gotten old. Like, they need, you know, definitely much—I give them much respect for consistency, like every Portishead album to date, and all the remixes, and I used to go to the U.K. and find all the remix stuff. There’s bootleg live albums, I’m not talking about the live album that came out officially. I think my favorite “Glory Box” remix might be called “Sheared Box”. Their best remixes are done by them.
00:43:24	Morgan	Host	<i>[Laughing]</i> That’s gangster.
00:43:26	Saul	Guest	Yo, straight up, you know? And so like, I would get the singles, I would get the pieces—same thing I was doing with Radiohead, you know, like all the B-sides from like, the “Pyramid Song” single, like all the—there’s so much shit, you know what I’m saying worm holes. They—it still feels fucking amazing. It still feels amazing when I listen to it now.
00:43:46	Morgan	Host	Why do you think trip hop didn’t last?
00:43:48	Saul	Guest	I wouldn’t argue that it didn’t last, you know what I’m saying? Trip hop is extremely present. I mean, when I listen to Frank Ocean <i>Blonde</i> , I hear the influence of Portishead <i>Dummy</i> .
00:44:01	Morgan	Host	Sure, but the output of albums like, we went from this to Lamb, Morcheeba, Funki Porcini, DJ Shadow, blah blah blah.
00:44:07	Saul	Guest	I don’t think, one, the trip hop cats were never really trying—they were never cool with that term.
00:44:15	Morgan	Host	Sure.
00:44:16	Saul	Guest	They weren’t calling themselves trip hop artists. I saw Tricky almost like, you know, knock somebody out, ‘cause they called his shit trip hop. He’s like, “I make music, yo.” So one, the sound and the desire of what you want to hear, it’s the same thing with the boom bap in hip hop, you know what I’m saying?  So yeah, you can hear in Joey Bada\$\$ shit or something and be like, “Oh, he likes boom bap,” you know what I’m saying? But, you know, like, it’s—the sound evolved. And trip hop is at the same moment as the boom bap. And so I think it’s just an evolution of sound. I think some of that evolved from that beautifully, you know like, a lot of the drum and bass cats are still making extraordinary experimental music, you know, um, I still am in contact with a great many of these artists from Bristol like Roni Size, like Crus, and they’re still doing amazing stuff. I think Massive Attack’s sound has

even evolved, and you hear some of the stuff they do with groups like Young Fathers or what have you and you—yeah, you see that it's taken up the space differently, whereas drum and bass to me also has not gotten old.

I still don't know if drum and bass has peaked. Because when I hear it—I mean, I was just at festivals in the U.K. over the summer and whenever I would hear it I would be like, "Fucking hell, this shit is so damn hard." I'm not certain trip hop ever died, it's just the labels that died. But that attention to music and sound, that—I mean, like, the only thing that could kill that is like, I don't know, three Swedish guys in a studio writing a song for a pop star.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

00:45:57 Morgan Host Don't call it out, 'cause I will leave here tonight, get in the car, I'll be like, "Aw, damn, Saul told us, Saul prophesized this was gonna happen."

But uh, but shout-out to 1994, and for the year it was.

00:46:12 Saul Guest It's a crazy time, because this is also, you know, the Rwanda genocide happens in '94. It's uh, I mentioned my first trip to the continent at that time. There's a lot of shit going on that this album reflects in terms of its depth and beauty, because that's the other thing is that it was the first album perhaps that I—maybe not the first, because I was definitely listening to Sade long before this thing came out. Hauntingly beautiful, you said it earlier, it's really—which is sometimes my favorite description of a film. Like, if something is described as hauntingly beautiful, I might be the one to check it out. I want to know what that is. Is it, you know, does it live up to it?

But this, this is definitely that. You know, it's hauntingly beautiful, and it—yeah, it's still very much alive for me. It doesn't sound old to me. It doesn't sound old to me at all, and I still feel like a lot of artists who fuck around in this area got a lot of catching up to do.

00:47:17 Morgan Host Why did—I hadn't listened to it for a while until prep for this chat, and that was one of the first—my first observations, like, "This still sounds just as fresh as the day—" I didn't listen to it and be like, "Oh, damn, it's 1994." It just sounded just as fresh to me as the last time that I heard it.

00:47:33 Saul Guest Yeah. And this is, you know, '94 is around the same time as like, "you're all I need", Method Man and Mary.

00:47:49 Morgan Host And Mary, yeah.

00:47:40 Saul Guest I remember because I remember that on the CD changer as well.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

00:47:44 Morgan Host It sounds like you had fire in your starting five.

00:47:45 Saul Guest Oh, yo, yo, yo. We were crushing it in the house, yo.

*[Oliver laughs.]*

If I did less, the people that I brought in even to listen to this album—because we would have arguments. I remember having an argument with Yasiin about this album and, you know, Yasiin Bey is Mos Def to some people, duh duh duh.

But we're, at this time, we're all performing at a place called the Brooklyn Moon Café which is right down the street on Fulton Street in Brooklyn, it's still there, and so the people that we're vibing with at this time are Erykah, Talib Kweli who worked at the bookstore, Nkiru Books, around the corner, the Dead Prez guys, they're all there, and we're all coming by the house, we're all listening to exactly this. This is what I played in my house. I didn't play any of that New York shit in my house, because this existed, and I could hear that shit in the street, and that's all I heard in the street. So this was the vibe of the house, was this trip hop and drum and bass shit, and having arguments about like, "but this is hip hop!" And I remember like, Yasiin being like, "Eh, is it hip hop, duh duh, I don't—"

00:48:49 Saul Guest And actually, my favorite moment with this dude to this day is one night, maybe a year, a year and a half later, we had listened to some Portishead. Um, not Portishead, to Björk *State of Emergency*, okay, and it's in the same disc changer at this time, it might be a year later or so, but I know I'm still in Brooklyn, so somewhere between '94 and '96, right? And so we're coming back to Brooklyn in a cab from Manhattan and we had had an argument about a year earlier like, "I don't know if this is hip hop", I'm like, "this is hip hop, yo, it's a game of telephone, it's just the shit coming back," "but they white". You know, we were having this crazy—

*[Everyone laughs.]*

And I remember the windows are down, so it must be spring, and Mos—Yasiin—starts singing—

*[Singing]* "State of emer—" and I feel like it's the best Yasiin Bey concert I've ever been to, is in that taxi with him singing Björk. But it's definitely in that CD changer with Portishead *Dummy*.

00:49:56 Morgan Host See, your CD changer was fire. We just need a show on that.

00:50:00 Oliver Host What, the starting five?

00:50:01 Morgan Host Your starting five.

00:50:02 Oliver Host Alright, alright. We'll book that for later. Saul, if you had to describe *Dummy* in three words, what three words would they be?

00:50:10 Saul Guest Does "of" count as a word? *[Laughs.]*

00:50:12 Morgan Host Whatever you want. Whatever you want to put in your—

00:50:14 Saul Guest No, I'm just thinking of the beginning of forever.

00:50:17 Oliver Host I'm with that.

00:50:19 Morgan Host Absolutely.

00:50:20	Music	Music	<p>“It Could Be Sweet” off the album <i>Dummy</i> by Portishead.</p> <p><i>... could be sweet</i></p> <p><i>[Beth sighs, almost inaudible. Music continues for several moments, then fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>
00:50:37	Oliver	Host	<p>If you loved hearing <i>Dummy</i>, we have some recommendations for the next thing you should check out. Morgan, you want to start us off?</p>
00:50:44	Morgan	Host	<p>I would say if you like <i>Dummy</i>, um, and you have not heard this album—and I will not assume that you have, there’s no judgment if you have not, but—you need to go immediately to Esthero <i>Breath From Another</i>. Comes out in 1998, so it’s later, um, it doesn’t have the same level of beats, but it has the same level of intimacy. It has Esthero’s inimitable voice, and it is, I think, the daughter or the son of this album.</p>
00:51:11	Saul	Guest	<p>Who’s the first to place Esthero in a movie? I’ll tell you. I am.</p>
00:51:16	Oliver	Host	<p>Oh!</p>
00:51:17	Morgan	Host	<p>Whaaat.</p>
00:51:18	Saul	Guest	<p>Yeah. I fought for that album. “Country Soul” I think is the name of the—</p>
00:51:24	Morgan	Host	<p>Yeah.</p>
00:51:25	Saul	Guest	<p>—to be in <i>Slam</i>.</p>
00:51:27	Morgan	Host	<p>Shout-out to you right now. It’s a great album, and it’s one that I wish someone would come on <i>Heat Rocks</i> and want to talk about. I’m surprised no one has picked that album yet.</p>
00:51:40	Saul	Guest	<p>People need to know the connection right, because Esthero’s voice, well—</p> <p><i>[Morgan sighs.]</i></p> <p>I’ll just leave it at that.</p> <p><i>[Everyone laughs.]</i></p>
00:51:46	Music	Music	<p>“Superheroes” off the album <i>Breath From Another</i> by Esthero. Downtempo trip hop with electronic elements and a steady drumbeat mixed with elements that sound nearly classical, including a chord played on a harp (or something similar).</p> <p><i>If I weren’t so old and used And wet and wet, I am wet</i></p> <p><i>I try not to ruin the moment Tell me all your secrets and your torments</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]</i></p>

00:52:08 Oliver Host This is a tough one because I just feel like from Portishead, you can jump in a lot of different directions. And I'm gonna call an audible and actually reference back to an album that came up during our conversation, which is Isaac Hayes' *Hot Buttered Soul*, because I think you want to talk about the ability to establish a sound, a vibe, an atmosphere, and have a voice be such an integral part of it. And Isaac's been on my mind for just, for a couple weeks now, because we recently taped an episode which will either air close to this one where we're talking about The Emotions and talking about *Rejoice*, which was a group working with Maurice White. But of course The Emotions start with Stax and Volt, they're working with Isaac.

And just—you think about everything that Isaac touched in his life, someone who was certainly taken away way too soon in terms of just the talent he had to share, and when you go back and listen to those albums, and when we—I feel like, you know, we talk about—talk about James Brown, we talk about Marvin, we talk about Stevie, we talk about Curtis. I mean, all legit. I feel like Isaac doesn't get enough credit for just the pure genius of music that he was able to produce, and especially in that moment. The level of symphonic and orchestral soul and weight that he brought to the album

00:53:19 Saul Guest Well, yeah. The thing to me with Isaac Hayes, because I remember—and it's directly connected to this, because of course I sought out where the sample came from and all this stuff, and so this is '94. I signed my first record deal in '98, and I'm working with Rick Rubin, and I'm telling him, "I want to make hip hop music with movements. I want to have movements." You know, because at that time the boom bap is like, the beat that you hear at the top of the song—

00:53:45 Oliver Host Right, it's very straight. Yeah.

00:53:46 Saul Guest It's straight. It's one loop that's gonna go all the way through, and I'm—and Isaac Hayes had me thinking like, holy shit, what happens if we do this shit with movements? Can there be more changes, can there be you know, yeah, definitely. Definitely.

00:54:00 Music Music An instrumental selection from "Walk On By" off the album *Hot Buttered Soul* by Isaac Hayes. Grand, soaring, orchestral soul.

00:54:21 Oliver Host Saul, where should people go after *Dummy*?

00:54:23 Saul Guest Yo, if you're listening to Portishead *Dummy* and it's your first time and you want to just keep the vibe, first of all, I would say listen to Tricky *Nearly God*. *Nearly God*, which is not *Maxinquaye*, which is not *Pre-Millennium Tension*, or *Angels With Dirty Faces*. *Nearly God* was another thing I purchased at Other Music—

00:54:45 Oliver Host Shout-out to Other Music, that was a great store.

00:54:47 Saul Guest Yeah, that was just one of the weirdest albums in this genre, but at the time it was so fucking weird. I mean, it was on Divine Styler type level—I don't know if you guys know Divine Styler—

[Oliver and Morgan both chime in, affirming.]

—but, I mean like making the first maybe psychedelic hip-hop album back in like, ‘89 or some shit. *Autumn Spirals of Light*.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

Um, but *Nearly God*, it’s got Björk on there, there’s this song “Poems” on there, “You promised me poems”, which is just beautiful.

00:55:29 Music Music “Poems” off the album *Nearly God* by Tricky. Slow, melodic, and mournful.

*I rue the day that I ever met you  
And deeply regret you getting close to me  
I cannot wait*

*[Music fades out as Saul speaks]*

00:55:51 Saul Guest And then, maybe, I’ll do like—this is ‘98, but I’d say, um—but so is the Esthero album—I would do, um, Goldie *Saturnz Return*.

00:56:02 Morgan Host *[Morgan makes excited “oo-ee!” sound repeatedly.]*

00:56:04 Saul Guest Hello! Yo! Yo, and I say that for one song.

00:56:12 Morgan Host Which one?

00:56:14 Crosstalk Crosstalk **Morgan and Saul:** *[In perfect unison]* “Mother.” “Mother.”

*[Oliver laughs in the background as Morgan begins laughing through her words, delighted.]*

**Morgan and Saul:** “Mother”!

**Morgan:** Yeeees! Yes!

*[Someone begins clapping.]*

**Saul:** Ho-ly shit. Yo. Yo.

00:56:23 Saul Guest I can tell you right now, New Year’s Eve, was it—no, yeah, 1998 into 1999, still living in Brooklyn, everybody at my crib is a different—I used to be on Clermont, now I’m on Clinton or whatever, um, but I’m still in the same neighborhood, Fort Green, Brooklyn—bunch of people over, New Year’s Eve, we sit around. “What are you thankful for?” Whatever the fuck, you know, corny shit that people wanna do, joking, blah blah blah.

But at 11:30, I started “Mother”, and that was because I knew that the beat would drop at midnight. “Mother” is a perfectly-timed, beautiful fucking song that—is it Goldie singing? “I can feel my mother surrounding me.” I mean, it’s so intimate, and raw—

*[“Mother” by Goldie begins fading in]*

—and it takes exactly 30 minutes for the beat to drop, but it builds.

00:57:18 Music Music “Mother” off the album *Saturnz Return* by Goldie. Frantic, frenetic,

energized electronic sound. Music plays for a moment, then fades out as Oliver speaks.

00:57:39 Oliver Host That will do it for this episode of *Heat Rocks*.

*["Crown Ones" begins fading in]*

Extra-large episode of *Heat Rocks* with our special guest, Saul Williams.

00:57:46 Saul Guest Yo.

00:57:47 Morgan Host "You ain't right. You ain't right, brother."

00:57:49 Saul Guest You know, I'm ready to go in if you do that Jazz shit too. *[Laughs]*

00:57:54 Oliver Host What are you working on, now?

00:57:56 Saul Guest Uh, so I'm about to go direct my first feature, which is called *Neptune Frost*. It's a musical that I've written and am directing in Rwanda. I'm leaving in three weeks, I'll be there for five months, I have to build a set. It's a story of an intersex runaway from Uganda, and a coltan miner, who run away from their separate realities for different reasons. And in the time that they run away, they encounter this avatar who visits them in a dream, and leads them to this village that, um, essentially is a village made of old computer parts, and when they arrive, it turns on. And the rest is the wind.

00:58:36 Oliver Host Yep, yep. Congrats on having your first directing feature, that's awesome.

00:58:40 Saul Guest Thank you. Yeah.

00:58:42 Oliver Host And where can people find you online?

00:58:44 Saul Guest Saul Williams everywhere. Yeah, just, @SaulWilliams.

00:58:49 Oliver Host You've been listening to *Heat Rocks* with me, Oliver Wang, and Morgan Rhodes.

00:58:53 Morgan Host Our theme music is "Crown Ones" by *Thes One of People Under The Stairs*. Shout-out to Thes for the hookup.

00:58:59 Oliver Host *Heat Rocks* is produced by myself and Morgan, alongside Christian Dueñas who also edits, engineers, and does the booking for our show.

00:59:07 Morgan Host Our senior producer is Laura Swisher and our executive producer is Jesse Thorn.

00:59:11 Oliver Host We are part of the Maximum Fun family, taping every week live in their studio in the west lake neighborhood of Los Angeles.

00:59:17 Morgan Host We also wanna thank our social media fans and family, including the following: @RostopherJ, shout-out to @RostopherJ. Thank you so much for bringing up drum and bas. We talked a little bit about Drum and Bass, we brought up LTJ Bukem, Fabio, 4Hero, Roni Size. Thank you for shouting those names out.

We also wanna thank Gregory The A'ight, who continues to shout us out. A'ight, thank you. He's at @Driven2Drink, um, no judgement.

We also wanna thank AnEarful @AnEarful, shouting out Mark Richardson. We also wanna shank—"we also wanna shank." Yes. We also wanna shank Andre Douady? @NeveraDoubt, love that! Thank you so much for tuning into the show.

01:00:02	Morgan	Host	<p>We also want to thank Shimmering Trashpile. Okay. <i>[Laughs]</i> Shout-out to Shimmering Trashpile. Laid Long Media, thank you so much for the love. As always we wanna shout-out Dadbod Ratpod for the great work they do on their podcast, and for always showing us love, we do so appreciate it.</p> <p>Lastly, we wanna thank Ashley-Dior Thomas, who had listened to Gerrick Kennedy's beautiful episode on Whitney Houston, Fuzzy One, and Fredrick Smith. We do so appreciate the tweezies, and the re-tweezies.</p> <p>And before we get out of here, here's a tease of a forthcoming episode with Dr. Shana Redmond, a scholar who joined us to talk about the 1991 album <i>Forever My Lady</i> from Jodeci.</p>
01:00:47	Dr. Shana Redmond	Guest	<p>I think that the kind of aesthetic practice of Jodeci, the boots, the baggy jeans, the baggy shorts that reach your ankles, the tight tank tops, etcetera, etcetera. I think that type of stuff was a welcome for men, perhaps, in certain types of ways, but R&amp;B has always kind of appealed to women, perhaps, first. Right, that's your first audience. But I do think there's something, to me, about having been drawn to it for that reason, right, because I'm supposed to be, right, because there's a certain pitch toward that type of listening audience, but also something for me about growing up in the Midwest, where hip hop was not as prominent in this moment, unless we were pulling from the coasts. Right? So we didn't have the Kanye's, the Common's, the Eminem's, the folks who were repping hard for the Midwest. So, this was really my lane, as far as popular music was concerned.</p>
01:02:11	Music	Transition	<p>"Crown Ones" off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs</p>
01:02:13	Saul	Guest	<p>Yo, but you went to Plastics, yo.</p>
01:02:16	Morgan	Host	<p>Listen—</p>
01:02:17	Saul	Guest	<p>I can't believe you.</p>
01:02:18	Morgan	Host	<p>There were so many places that I went to in Atlanta where I thought, "How did I get here?" and so many strange nights where anything could happen. FunkJazz Kafé and—</p>
01:02:30	Saul	Guest	<p>Atlanta was such an amazing moment musically at that time. So I moved there from New York in 1990, right? It's freshman week at Morehouse, and one of my boys has a pick-up truck, so we jump in the back of the pick-up truck, and we go to The Masquerade, because DJ Disciple is spinning. Alright?</p>

Go to The Masquerade, freshman week, so this is August 1990. And it's about 3:30, 4a.m., and we're like—my peeps are like, “Yo, we're gonna break out.”

We're heading towards the door, and I hear [*starts beatboxing, imitating song, as “Hot Music” fades in.*]

I'm like, “Yo, what is this?! Wait, hold up, hold up!”

01:03:10 Music Music “Hot Music” off the album *Hot Music* by Soho. Fast, energetic dance music.

Music! Hot!  
Music! Hot!  
Music! Hot!  
Hot! Hot, Hot!  
Hot! Hot, Hot!  
Hot!

[*Music fades out as Saul speaks*]

01:03:27 Saul Guest I hear “Hot Music” for the first time, run to the DJ booth, he's like “‘Hot Music’, ‘Hot Music’! Soho, Soho, House Music, look!”

Every party we went to after that, from that week on, like, “Yo, do you have ‘Hot Music’?” So we dance to that song, and we're about to leave now, after we'd lost our shit, and the next thing that comes on is [*imitates song*] Fela, “Lady”.

01:03:53 Morgan Host Oooooooh.

01:03:55 Saul Guest Fela, “Lady” in a club.

01:03:57 Music Music “Lady” off the album *Shakara* by Fela Kuti. Fun, grooving music with drums and horns.

01:04:14 Saul Guest So—and that encapsulates—

01:04:17 Oliver Host I'm gonna rip this off for the next thing I DJ.

[*Morgan laughs.*]

01:04:20 Saul Guest Yeah, yeah, yeah! That encapsulates my time musically in Atlanta. It's really pure, because like I said, I had no intention of writing poetry or music while I'm there. I'm dancing for a hip hop group at that time, and I'm listening to hella music, I'm starting to buy shit, I'm starting listening jazz and shit like that, but also Lenny Kravitz and all, you know, all the pop shit, and hip hop shit is popping off, and I'm starting to explore a little bit, 'cause some of my friends came with their parents' music collections, and I'm starting to hang with DJs more, and all this shit, and I'm like, “What's that?” “Oh, that's Lou Bond. That's hard—”

You know, just weird obscure shit I'm learning about, digging in the crates and finding all this shit, starting to listen to the shit that the shit I love samples. And Atlanta is that for me. It opens so much for me musically—

01:05:13 Morgan Host Same. And it comes up a lot on this show, because I talk about moments, albums that I discovered that I discovered in Atlanta, and I think it had a lot to do with all these things that you're talking about. Wax n'Facts had a lot to do with—

01:05:27 Saul Guest Wax n'Facts, yo!

01:05:28 Morgan Host WCLK.

01:05:29 Saul Guest Criminal Records.

01:05:30 Morgan Host All of that. Loretta's, Ying Yang, FunkJazz Kafé, Plastics. All these places helped to give me this life, and also, you know, coming out of like house music was sort of a gateway drug for everything else, for all of that other stuff.

01:05:49 Saul Guest Come on, there was no—I mean, it's really about that house music, because most of those clubs were killing it in those terms. I used to be a party promoter in Atlanta, too. I used to promote parties with Lil Jon—

01:05:59 Morgan Host Oh, right. Okay.

01:06:00 Saul Guest Yeah, at a place called The Royal Peacock.

01:06:04 Morgan Host Oh yeah, I know that place.

*[Everyone laughs.]*

I know The Royal Peacock.

01:06:07 Saul Guest And so I threw these parties called Sole, right there on, what is that, Edgemont? What is—

01:06:13 Morgan Host Oh, yeah, yeah.

01:06:14 Saul Guest Where—I forget the name of that street, but yeah, where The Royal Peacock is, and all I did is I stole a concept from a party that I loved in New York and brought it to Atlanta, and it was my first time ever making money, and the party in New York that I—there was a thing in New York called Soul Kitchen.

01:06:33 Oliver Host Yeah. Yeah. Legendary, yeah.

01:06:36 Saul Guest Legendary. Legendary, which I used. It would cost five dollars, and you'd go in there and they'd have free 40s and chicken wings, and all they played at Soul Kitchen was the soul records that hip hop—popular hip hop songs sampled, but popular in 1992. It was the shit, and so I got a bunch of DJs together and said, "This is what we're gonna do."

And so, like, there's mad peeps now who are popular DJs and artists who are the DJs that I put together for this Soul party in Atlanta, and yeah, it's the first time I ever got to like, dump money on my bed and go like—

*[Morgan and Oliver start laughing.]*

—”Oh shit, look at us!” Music, yo. Music.

01:07:27	Morgan	Host	Listen. If you can't get to Bristol, then you sure need to get to Atlanta, 'cause Atlanta was the scene.
01:07:33	Saul	Guest	Oh my god.
01:07:35	Speaker 1	Promo	<a href="http://MaximumFun.org">MaximumFun.org</a> .
01:07:37	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
01:07:38	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
01:07:39	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.