

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs. Chill, grooving instrumentals.
00:00:08	Oliver	Host	Hello, I’m Oliver Wang.
00:00:10	Morgan	Host	And I’m Morgan Rhodes. You’re listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> , and a hood episode of <i>Heat Rocks</i> , as we are taping in the kitchen. Every episode we invite a guest to talk to us about a heat rock, you know, fire, combustible, an album that bangs eternally. And today, we will be scrolling back together into the 1974 album, <i>+Justments</i> , by Los Angeles’ own Bill Withers.
00:00:31	Music	Music	“Ruby Lee” off the album <i>+Justments</i> by Bill Withers. Smooth, steady funk. <i>Staring at shadows on the wall</i> <i>Wish I knew of someone I could call</i> <i>[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]</i>
00:00:47	Morgan	Host	In some ways, the story of Bill Withers’ career is a numbers game. He started with his first hit, released in his Jesus year, when he was 33. Over the span of his career, he’s been nominated for four Grammys, won three, this across eight albums. But when you ask most people about Bill Withers’ discography, they’ll more often than not reference just one of seven songs. You know ‘em. “Lean On Me”, “Ain’t No Sunshine”, “Lovely Day”, “Use Me”, “Grandma’s Hands”, “Who Is He (And What Is He To You)”. To be sure, all of those are jams, heat rocks. But the story of Bill Withers’ career has to include his story of a Black man growing up in coal mining country in the 40s. Of a Black man and his stint in the Navy, his 9-5 as an airplane mechanic, his battles with Columbia records, and A&R men who he famously called “antagonistic and redundant.” And of that voice. <u>That</u> voice. Yes, <u>that</u> one. <i>+Justments</i> was his third album, and it debuted in the spring of 1974, just before his label, Sussex Records, went belly-up. It’s heavy, introspective, pointed, and powerful, about the responsibility of choice. This is grown folks music, not because of explicit lyrics, more because of implicit content. Content that made me wonder how much of this was observational, and how much was personal. Was some of this about the state of his union? Either way, <i>+Justments</i> , in my opinion, is an intimate experience, a conversation and some tea between just the two of us. In some ways, the story of Bill Withers’ career is the story of this album. Quietly prolific, perhaps tragically underrated, but still Bill. Full of heat rocks from a free thinker, born on the Fourth of July.
00:02:37	Music	Music	<i>[“Ruby Lee” plays again]</i> <i>Packing up and going different places</i> <i>But I show miss having you around</i>

I listen to the noises down the hall

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

- 00:02:59 Oliver Host +*Justments* was the album pick of our guest today, singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist, Joey Dosik. Last year, when I was watching the Brett Haley film, *Hearts Beat Loud*, a song came on during a scene, and it had gorgeous Gospel piano chords and dulcet vocals that instantly gave it a mid-career Donnie Hathaway feel. One web search later, and I was introduced to *Game Winner*, Joey Dosik's composition from 2016.
- 00:03:22 Music Music "Game Winner" off the album *Game Winner* by Joey Dosik. Slow, melodic, ardent singing.
- Fourth quarter, baby
It's not over, baby
And I'm not afraid...*
- [Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]*
- 00:03:45 Oliver Host A Los Angeles native, Joey began gigging locally as a high schooler, but his career really took shape when he left the Southland for Ann Arbor, Michigan—shout-out to my birth city—where Joey played with Build an Ark and Dear Disco, and other groups, including the core musicians that eventually returned to Los Angeles in the form of the group Vulfpeck, who Joey has frequently collaborated with, when he hasn't been busy with his own releases. The most recent of which was his solo debut LP from last year, *Inside Voice*, an album that includes stories originally written and recorded by one William Withers on the album +*Justments*.
- Joey, welcome to *Heat Rocks*.
- 00:04:23 Joey Dosik Guest Thank you so much for having me.
- 00:04:26 Oliver Host I think we can all collectively say that we are so glad that you picked a Bill Withers album. Speaking just for myself, I celebrate the man's entire catalogue. And before we get into the specifics of this album, can we just talk a little bit about how you discovered Withers, and more to the point, what does his music mean to you? Especially as someone who's covered one of his songs.
- 00:04:45 Joey Guest I feel like we all kind of discover him around the campfire, sort of. It's like there's—you said it—there's songs that we all know. You know, I think you mentioned seven songs, but if we were all in a bar and we all needed to sing a song together in the bar, like, "Lean On Me" is probably up there as one of the first choices. So I think we kind of all find out about him through just this sort of—this cultural knowing,. We all just know the—know the songs. It's a part of our collective culture somehow.
- Um, but that's not how I found +*Justments*, which is one of his kind of hidden records.
- 00:05:22 Oliver Host Yeah, yeah. Speak on it.

00:05:23 Joey Guest Well, I found *+Justments* in my uh, ex-girlfriend's record collection. I was dating someone at the time who was working at the hospital. She was in med school, and she would spend a lot of time away from the apartment. I was kind of crashing with her at the time. And uh, *+Justments* was one of the records I found in her record collection, and I would put it on and play along with the record.

And it was just like, "Oh, this was a Bill Withers album," it didn't really—it didn't necessarily stand out to me, because I wasn't familiar with his whole catalogue. And then later I found it and had an ex—you know, the kinds of experiences where you have to like—the first time I heard "Stories", where I had to like, pull over and listen to it a few times.

Whenever an album kind of does that to me, it usually is one that is gonna last my whole life.

00:06:15 Music Music "Stories" off the album *+Justments* by Bill Withers. Melodic, gentle, almost fairy tale-like instrumentals. Music plays for several moments, then fades out as dialogue resumes.

00:06:32 Oliver Host I mean, Morgan, you were telling us before we started taping that until you prepped for the show, you actually had never even known about the album. And to be fair, I mean, this was his third studio album, but it was one that was not released on CD until 2010. So for a lot of people who probably know the first two albums and all the songs on there by heart, it's easy to see how this would have flown under the radar. So I am dying to know what your thoughts were, listening to this for the first time. I'm kind of jealous, actually.

00:07:01 Morgan Host I mean, and I'm jealous of you guys, 'cause I didn't hear it until late. So my first thought was like, "Well, damn." You know? And actually, "Damn" was my first thought.

[Oliver chuckles.]

"Where have I been?" was the first thought. And as I said in the intro, it just felt really intimate. Like I listened—I needed to listen to that by myself, how personal it was.

My introduction to Bill Withers was "Ain't No Sunshine", and I don't remember the specific person that bumped it, but I just remember hearing it as a youth, and me and my cousins trying to see how many of those "I know, I know, I know, I know", how many we could do without running out of breath.

00:07:40 Music Music "Ain't No Sunshine" off the album *Just As I Am* by Bill Withers. A mid-tempo, rhythmic, steady drum beat plays under staccato singing.

*And I know, I know, I know, I know,
I know, I know, I know, I know, I know
I know, I know, I know, I know, I know
I know, I know, I know, I know, I know
I know, I know, I know, I know, I know
I know, I know...*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

- 00:07:53 Morgan Host And had I known that he was gonna say it 26 times, I probably just would have not made this a contest. ‘Cause we never lasted, we’d get halfway through and then we’d just start laughing. But I just remember the quality of his voice, and uh, something that we call “smothered”. You know, you can have pork chops, or you can have them smothered. You can have hash browns, you can have them smothered. Bill Withers’ voice is smothered.
- And that was the feeling that I had listening to this album, which was personal to me, ‘cause I felt like he’d let us in on some things on the DL. Like, I’m not gonna tell you what perspective I know these—where these are coming from, but I’m gonna let you in on a little bit of tea. And that was the feeling that I had listening to this album. This is a little bit of tea on him, and what was going on in his life at the time, and I was blown away. It is a thing of beauty.
- 00:08:37 Oliver Host Right, and to Morgan’s point, I mean part—partly what I’m assuming you’re talking about is that he recorded this album and was working on it during the point at which him and his wife uh, Denise Nicholas, were in the process of breaking up and divorcing. And it should be added, because this has been out there for many years, but uh, the rumors have been I think, Nicholas in particular has stated that there was physical abuse happening in the marriage, and that was part of it. And so this is part of the broader backstory that’s going on.
- 00:09:03 Morgan Host He was married to Denise Nicholas, but there are a lot of songs that I think are—are not getting to the specifics of what might have happened, but just a hint of what might have happened. And because they were hints, there were parts of me that felt like, “Should I be—should I be knowing?” But I think Bill wanted to tell without telling, and so it had a very—I just felt like, “Ooh.” Like, this is not an album that you listen to with people. This is an album that you listen to by yourself. At least that’s what I’m feeling.
- 00:09:31 Joey Guest I listened to the album for years before knowing it was a divorce record.
- [Morgan hums.]*
- I had no idea until uh, Bomani Jones.
- [Morgan and Oliver respond emphatically.]*
- He tweeted it out, and I was like, “What? Really?” And then I started to see it a whole other way. There’s so much, I mean, with all the records that we love, that is—that are—that is hidden. That are hidden. You know, including, for me, um, as a musician and a producer, there’s so much even about the band, and the story of Bill Withers and his band that is a hidden story. Like, this album was co-produced by Melvin Dunlap and James Gadson, two members of original 103rd Street Watts Band, which became the Withers Band and really helped define his sound. And those guys are part of this

kind of hidden story, too. This is the only record they really got like, production credit on, even though they really helped define, I think, that kind of smothered sound, as you say. It's an amazing like—it's so funky, but it's almost like, not electric. You know, it's like—I guess I said campfire before, it's like campfire funk.

[Oliver laughs.]

You know, but not like, in a terrible, hippie way.

00:10:45 Morgan Host

I love that.

00:10:46 Music Music

“Can We Pretend” off the album *+Justments* by Bill Withers. Gently upbeat soulful funk.

*There's a light that shine in your face sometimes
That takes my feeling wraps them around your need*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:11:07 Oliver Host

Morgan, I love this idea of the smothered voice, because I think one of the interesting things about Withers—maybe more so on his earlier albums than on this one, but nonetheless—is that of the major soul axe, especially in the early 70s. I think one of the distinguishing differences about Withers as compared to, let's say a Marvin or a Stevie or a Donny or an Al Green, is that Withers didn't come up in the church. He wasn't a gospel singer at any point.

I think that—I think that really distinguishes both his vocal and his musical approach, at least on his early albums, because there's not as much of the gospel feel that you would have gotten from a lot of the other like, Motown-era or some of the Southern singers, who all came out of that background.

And I'm wondering, especially Morgan, for you, as someone who has spent a lot of time listening to gospel over the years, was that apparent to you in listening to Bill, that he wasn't a church kid, unlike a lot of the other 60s-70s guys?

00:12:04 Morgan Host

Absolutely. One is because of how you're taught to sing when you grow up in the church. And I've said this before: it doesn't matter if you're a gospel singer in Black music. It doesn't matter if your song is about rubber bands. You'd better sing about rubber bands like your life depends on it. It's the way you phrase it, right?

I felt like, because he was from a coal mining town in West Virginia, that he was more folksy. And the way he sang was more folksy, and less gospel-y. And I think, unfortunately, that's why he's been so underrated, because we tend to judge gospel R&B singers based on their gospel chops, and it's a part of their biography that's released over and over again.

But I also think that was part of the appeal of Bill Withers, that he didn't sound like all these people that we're talking about, that he didn't have that in his background, and that he was qualified to talk about every man. And we'll get to certain songs, when he starts to

go into railroad, that I don't think that's something we would have heard from Marvin Gaye or Billy Preston or Al Green or Donny Hathaway. That there was a different burden they were singing about, which was different from what Bill Withers was singing about.

- 00:13:07 Oliver Host Joey, I want to get your thoughts on this in just a second, if I can just quickly add something. I think one of the interesting and distinguishing things about Withers is that, while him and his other contemporaries at the time certainly might have all come from working class backgrounds, Withers, I think, to your point Morgan, speaks about that in a way that's much more direct, which I don't think you necessarily get from a lot of the other musicians that might have—again, might have had working class backgrounds, but in their music you wouldn't necessarily know. But with Withers, that always felt like it was part of it.
- 00:13:39 Morgan Host Right, and not so much civil rights, which I think was another burden of growing up in this era and in this time and in R&B musicians, that there had to be, they were dealing with different things. And it didn't seem like he was dealing with demons, it just felt like he was making—these were working class observations of a life in a coal mining town, that if you're not from there, you wouldn't know what he was talking about.
- 00:14:01 Oliver Host Right, and he was—I think he was a dock worker before he—his music career launched, here in Los Angeles, all the way down in Long Beach, so that's part of it.
- 00:14:08 Joey Guest He made, uh—he installed toilets onto 747s.
- 00:14:13 Oliver Host There you go. Okay, so he's in aerospace, but yeah, like very blue collar. That's—
- 00:14:17 Morgan Host And also the part of his biography that's the most interesting is like, blowing up at 33. That—you know what I'm saying? That most people that blew up that you're talking about had started in the church at 18, 19, and they had come up. But to blow up at 33, when everyone's economy is like, at that point you're supposed to know what you're gonna be when you grow up. And to leave what would be considered a stable 9-5, be a—you know, installing toilets or not, that's a stable 9-5. And to be like, "You know what, I'm gonna try and sing out here," that's one of the most interesting things about Bill Withers, is that his—his rise to fame is so non-traditional.
- 00:14:54 Joey Guest Even his career path, 'cause this is his third album and I feel like the sort of trajectory of so many artists back then was, "Okay, by your third album, that's when you hit."

[Morgan affirms and laughs.]

You know, it's like, your first couple—even your fourth album. Like, your first couple, like we're gonna make you a record and then we're gonna put you on the road opening for somebody, you're gonna build up a fanbase, and then third record, like, someone like Tom Petty or whatever. It's like, that's when it hits. And he hit right off the bat. He had something to say, just like you said. That really blew my mind, the whole—this whole idea of you know, that he's

not really necessarily coming from a gospel place.

And I wonder if that also is one of the reasons that someone like me, that drew from the valley, born years later, can even really um, it was just more accessible on some level for me. I was always related to him also because we have the same vocal range pretty much, so singing his songs taught me a lot about singing. And not only that, it's like, I'm not from the church, and so to sing his song is something that I could more easily kind of embody and try and sort of just—yeah, it was more accessible on some level.

- 00:16:06 Oliver Host Joey, to bring this back to *+Justments* in particular, I mean, you could have brought in you know, *Still Bill* or *Just As I Am*. Why did you want to talk about this one in particular? What is it about *+Justments*?
- 00:16:17 Joey Guest I think it's just like—like I said before, like any time an album makes me pull over on the side of the road, like, I'm gonna be coming back to often. And um, that's what the track "Stories" had done to me. There's other tracks on this record that like, I'm willing—I'm willing to do whatever, for like, if I could have written that song, I'd have given my left arm. Um, like uh, "Heartbreak Road."
- 00:16:46 Music Music "Heartbreak Road" off the album *+Justments* by Bill Withers. Mid-tempo soul with a steady, deep drumbeat.
- ... don't, don't last forever
But it's a lonely road
A road that we all must travel
Once before we go*
- [Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]*
- 00:17:06 Joey Guest I mean, *Still Bill*, timeless album. To me like, *+Justments* has those timeless moments, but it's also so human, it's also so raw. Like, there's so many mistakes everywhere. Like, there's so much out-of-tuneness from the strings sometimes. It's like, it's really, there's so much humanity in it to me. And *Still Bill* also has that humanity, but I mean, it's fun to talk about too, 'cause like, not that many people really know about it.
- 00:17:31 Oliver Host Right. Is this your favorite Bill Withers album?
- 00:17:35 Joey Guest I think, weirdly, we were talking about it earlier, like, maybe my favorite is the *Live at Carnegie Hall* album.
- 00:17:41 Oliver Host That's an amazing album, yeah.
- 00:17:43 Joey Guest Um, just because like, to hear what that music means to so many people in an audible space, like the crowd is so lit on that record.
- [Oliver laughs.]*
- I love it so much.
- 00:17:56 Oliver Host Morgan, I'm curious, as someone who, again, just literally came to this album in the last week, how—and maybe this is an unfair

question to ask, but where would you put it within his broader catalogue?

00:18:07 Morgan Host That's a good question, and it is unfair, because now this has just messed up my whole Bill Withers thing. Thanks a lot, Joey. Damn it. But, before I would've been like, "Hands down, there's nothing better than *Just As I Am*." And now I'm like, "Maybe I would push this above." Because, did I get caught up on the singles? Did I get caught up on the hits of *Just As I Am*, and didn't look further?

And I think, because you brought up this album and it forced me to listen to it for the first time, I can't—I'll never take away from "Grandma's Hands" and I'll never take away from "Ain't No Sunshine", but this—this has made me feel different about his discography. I'm not an expert in ranking albums, but this pushed this a little bit further up the chain than I would have thought of before. And I don't know what the hits were on this album.

00:18:50 Oliver Host There weren't, really.

00:18:52 Joey Guest There were two songs that charted. I think it was uh, was it track two, uh—

00:18:56 Oliver Host "The Same Love That Made Me Laugh" was the only one that I think really charted with any kind of staying power at all.

00:19:01 Morgan Host Billboard?

00:19:02 Joey Guest Yeah.

00:19:03 Morgan Host Wow.

00:19:04 Joey Guest And um, and "Heartbreak Road", I think was on like, the R&B charts.

00:19:07 Oliver Host But I don't think anything off of here is really considered part of Withers' like, greatest hits portfolio, which is unfortunate, because I think, song for song, I would take this over *Still Bill*.

[Morgan affirms.]

As good as the songs on there. I think part of it—and not to go too far off on a tangent—Joe, I was thinking about your campfire comparison, and I think perhaps because we've heard "Lean On Me" too many times around the campfire. I'm not saying it's a bad song, I'm just saying I never need to listen to it again. Like it's—at this point, because of overfamiliarity, it's perhaps my least favorite Bill Withers song. And it's not for any intrinsic deficiency in terms of song craft. It's like, I just don't need to ever hear it again.

00:19:45 Morgan Host Oh, "Lean On Me"?

[Oliver affirms.]

Yeah. I want to say something about um, about "Heartbreak Road" and also just in general that they're some of the best lyrics on this album, and I paid attention to them in a way that I haven't. And, I just want to be honest with you guys, I have been really caught up

on the hits of Bill Withers.

So when I was talking about most people referencing those hits, I was sort of talking about myself, right? Even though I know a lot about Bill Withers, but I tend to like, those come up right away. And in prep for this chat, because I had no introduction to this album besides getting ready for this, I paid a lot of attention to the lyrics. And there's some of the best one liners on this album.

"Heartbreak Road", I like when he says—

00:20:24 Music Music

["Heartbreak Road" plays again]

*I believe that love's a good teacher
When you're in it
Hey Lord, and even if it don't work out
You ain't gon' never understand it
'Til you been all down in it
And find out what it's all about*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:20:43 Morgan Host It's just a beautiful, beautiful song from start to finish, but I love how it ends.

00:20:49 Music Music

["Heartbreak Road" plays again. Vocalizations over instrumentals. Music plays for several moments, then fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:21:06 Morgan Host Any impressions listening to it now in prep for this chat, any new things jump out at you that might not have jumped out at you the first time you listened?

00:21:14 Joey Guest

Um, well, I feel like—I feel like I got a bit bolder with some of my like, judgmental opinions, you know what I mean? You know what I mean, like, before I was just kind of like, listening to it and—and—with a certain reverence, and in prepping for this, you know, we are talking about amazing song, "Can We Pretend".

[Morgan responds emphatically with "oh my god."]

Which I know you wanted to talk about. Which is incredible, but also like, my producer brain is like, "Can somebody like, not give José Feliciano so much cocaine before he records that acoustic guitar?"

00:21:49 Oliver Host What? You're taking shots at José Feliciano in this?

00:21:53 Joey Guest

I know, I'm sorry.

00:21:54 Morgan Host

Worldstar.

00:21:55 Joey Guest

I'm sorry, I'm gonna start, okay? And I love José Feliciano, but he's kind of—he's playing all over the track, sort of.

00:22:01 Music Music

"Can We Pretend" plays again.

*Paint a portrait of tomorrow
With the colors bright and gay*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:22:16 Joey Guest It's kind of cool. Like, it's kind of cool, it's also kind of not. *[Laughs]*
So like—

00:22:21 Oliver Host I guess if you ever got your hands on the master tape, you're just sort of taking that slider on José's guitar track and just like, taking it down.

00:22:28 Joey Guest Yeah, can we just like, can we just—someone gave him too much coffee.

[Morgan and Oliver laugh.]

So that's just what happened. That's one of my favorite tracks still.

[Morgan responds emphatically.]

Which says something about that song. It's like, despite the kind of like, noodly guitar, for me like, I love that song. That's maybe of my top two, three favorite songs on that album.

00:22:47 Morgan Host Same.

00:22:48 Music Music "Can We Pretend" plays again. Music plays for several moments, then slowly fades under Oliver's dialogue.

00:23:01 Oliver Host Well, we will be back with more of our discussion about Bill Withers' +*Justments* after a brief word from a couple of our sibling Max Fun podcasts. Keep it locked.

00:23:11 Music Transition "Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs

00:23:14 Promo Promo **Music:** Fun, jaunty, upbeat music.

Renee Colvert: Hi! I'm Renee Colvert.

Alexis Preston: I'm Alexis Preston!

Renee: And we're the hosts of the smash hit podcast *Can I Pet Your Dog?* Now, Alexis.

Alexis: Yes.

Renee: We got big news.

Alexis: Uh-oh!

Renee: Since last we did a promo, our dogs have become famous.

Alexis: World-famous!

Renee: World—like, stars on the Hollywood Walk of Fame! Second big news.

Alexis: Mm-hm?

Renee: The reviews are in.

Alexis: Mm-hm?

Renee: Take yourself to Apple Podcasts, you know what you're gonna hear? We're happy!

Alexis: It's true!

Renee: We're a delight! A great distraction from the world!

Alexis: I like that part a lot.

Renee: So if that's what you guys are looking for...

Alexis: Mm-hm.

Renee: You gotta check out our show! But what else can they expect?

Alexis: We've got dog tech, dog news, celebrities with their dogs. All dog things!

Renee: All the dog things. So if that interests you, well, get yourself on over to Maximum Fun every Tuesday!

[Music ends.]

00:23:55 Promo

Promo

Music: Upbeat, cheerful music plays in the background.

Allie Goertz: Hi, I'm Allie Goertz!

Julia Prescott: And I'm Julia Prescott. And we host—

Both: —Round Springfield!

Julia: *Round Springfield* is a new *Simpsons* podcast that is *Simpsons-adjacent*—

Allie: Mm-hm.

Julia: —um, in its topic. We talk to *Simpsons* writers, directors, voiceover actors, you name it, about non-*Simpsons* things that they've done. Because, surprise! They're all extremely talented.

Allie: Absolutely. For example, David X. Cohen worked on *The Simpsons*, but then created a little show called *Futurama*!

Julia: Mm-hm!

Allie: That's our very first episode.

Julia: Yeah!

Allie: So tune in for stuff like that with Yeadley Smith, with Tim Long, with different writers and voice actors. It's gonna be so much fun, and we are every other week on MaximumFun.org or wherever you get your podcasts!

[Music fades out.]

00:24:38	Music	Transition	"Crown Ones" off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:24:40	Morgan	Host	Alright, and we are back on <i>Heat Rocks</i> with Joey Dosik, talking about Bill Withers' third album, <i>+Justments</i> . And this is the gentrified version of this episode, because the power's back on.
00:24:52	Oliver	Host	And we're back in our studio. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:24:53	Morgan	Host	That's it.
00:24:55	Oliver	Host	Before we get back into the specific songs, though I'm dying to get back to those, but can we just talk and pull the scope back for a second? You had mentioned in your intro, Morgan, the idea of this album as being a bit of an allegory for just Withers in general, the idea that maybe, like the album, Withers is slightly under-regarded.

Which seems like, on the one hand, a weird thing to say about someone who has such a great—like a potent greatest hits catalogue. But on the flip side, if you were to ask, I think, the average person, like, "Name the most important, or the best soul singer—male singer from the 1970's," you would get Marvin. You would get Al Green, you might get Downy, whatever. You're gonna get Stevie.

[Morgan affirms.]

You know who you're not gonna hear? You're not gonna hear Bill Withers. And maybe this speaks a little bit to some of the things we were talking about in the first half, the differences in his voice, the kind of difference in his working class background, the fact that he was in his 30's when he first hit. But it's really weird to me to think about him being someone who is enormously successful, yet kind of overlooked. Like, in how to reconcile that dichotomy, if you will. I'm wondering how each of you think of this?

00:26:00	Morgan	Host	I'm always surprised that his name doesn't come up. And in some instances, I haven't brought it up. We've talked about R&B, great R&B albums, and great R&B artists even on this show, we also haven't mentioned him. That's no slight on us, I think it's just to the point that we tend to associate great R&B singers and albums with gospel bases, and with the hits. I'm not surprised that this went under everyone's radar, this isn't even a highly regarded breakup album. If you think about breakup albums and R&B singers, you're gonna go with <i>Here, My Dear</i> .
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[Oliver affirms.]

This isn't *Here, My Dear*. But this isn't *Here, My Dear* because, to me, Bill Withers didn't carry his feelings on his sleeve. That's what's so surprising about this album, is that it's so intimate for someone

that presents as very stoic, to me, and guarded, and anthemic. I think it's unfortunate that he doesn't get regarded as in the same light as these artists. It doesn't take anything away from his talent. He's just a different type of soul singer.

00:27:01 Joey Guest Absolutely, he didn't fit into that classic mold, as a Black soul singer. As you said earlier, I think when we weren't recording, I think you mentioned the fact that he had a guitar, you know? An acoustic guitar. And how that really separates him, too. He really was different.

00:20:18 Morgan Host Different.

00:20:19 Oliver Host Yeah, I didn't think about the guitar aspect. I think, and this kind of gets into the ways in which we code music racially, depending on instrumentation. And the acoustic guitar, for reasons that I don't think really hold up to just history, but for whatever reason, it gets coded as white folk and rock.

[Morgan agrees.]

And somehow, like, soul singers and R&B don't have access to acoustic guitars? But nonetheless, I think part of those associations are what weighs on Withers in terms of how he gets remembered within the kind of canon, if you will, of soul artists.

00:27:50 Joey Guest But he did have as much crossover success as any of those, kind of, big names that we mentioned.

00:29:56 Oliver Host Huge! Getting back into the individual songs. So, Morgan, you were saying that "Can We Pretend" is your fire track.

00:28:02 Morgan Host That's my fire track.

00:28:03 Oliver Host Yeah. Joey, how about you, what's your fire track off this album?

00:28:05 Joey Guest Is this like, fire track like...? *[Laughs.]*

00:28:09 Oliver Host You can attribute it anyway you want. Generally, I would say it's the song that, every time you hear it, it just charges you. It lights you up.

00:28:16 Joey Guest Okay. Then I'm gonna make my own rules, and make two fire tracks.

[Morgan and Oliver affirm.]

I'm gonna say "Stories" is the one that changed my life. And I'm gonna say "Heartbreak Road" is just the banger on this record.

00:28:27 Oliver Host Right, you mentioned the banger aspect. What's going on with "Heartbreak Road", what is it about it that just has you juiced?

00:28:32 Joey Guest It's so, like—first of all, like, the bass and the drums sound almost like a drum machine. Like, it's just so tight, and simple, and it's just like, all beaten together at the same time.

00:28:45 Music Music "Heartbreak Road" plays again. Music plays for several seconds, then fades low and plays behind dialogue.

00:28:48	Joey	Guest	<p><i>[Beatboxing along].</i> It's just, like, all right there.</p> <p><i>[Music grows louder, plays for several more seconds, and then fades out.]</i></p> <p>And then, as a song, like I said earlier, it's just like, any generation, stylistically, you could take that song and do it any kind of way. Like, if that song had been in the 50s, if that song had been in the 80s, like, it's still what it is, like, it's timeless.</p>
00:29:14	Music	Music	<p><i>["Heartbreak Road" plays again]</i></p> <p><i>Wonder who is waiting for me At the end of Heartbreak Road Hope that she'll be tender Someone I can know</i></p> <p><i>[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]</i></p>
00:29:37	Oliver	Host	<p>I never thought about the drum machine comparison, but now that I hear it, I can't unhear it.</p> <p><i>[Morgan laughs.]</i></p> <p>Once again, shout-out to James Gadson for just being in the pocket always. Absolutely. And then, your other one is "Stories", which would make sense, because you covered that song. We'll talk about that in just a moment.</p> <p>Um, I mean, for me, "Stories" is the fire track. I mean, not because it's necessarily the most energetic, but simply that it is the song that, to use your analogy earlier, Joey, that, it's the song that kind of just stops me dead in the tracks.</p> <p>And, you know, I was trying to parse apart what is it, and I think part of it is the intro. And we talked about how he doesn't have, necessarily, a church or gospel background. But I feel like those intro piano on this song in particular draws from that.</p> <p>And I did notice that I think that one of the pianists that played on this album—I don't know if he's playing on this song in particular—but John Myles was one of the personnel on this album. And Myles had his start with the Swan Silvertones in the 1960s, which was a big, big gospel group. So I'm kind of wondering if maybe Myles brought some of that in.</p>
00:30:38	Music	Music	<p>"Stories" off the album <i>+Justments</i> by Bill Withers. Slow, gentle piano. Plays for several seconds, then fades down and plays quietly as Oliver speaks.</p>
00:30:51	Oliver	Host	<p>But then, man, when he comes in with those first set of vocals.</p>
00:30:56	Music	Music	<p><i>["Stories" increases in volume. Bill Withers' vocals come in, bare and smooth over the piano]</i></p> <p><i>Who will buy a glad story That a young man has to tell?</i></p>

[Music fades out as Oliver speaks]

00:31:10 Oliver Host Ooh! I mean, I still get shivers with it. And is this not one of just, his best vocal performances?

[Morgan and Joey agree enthusiastically.]

00:31:18 Morgan Host Definitely one.

00:31:19 Joey Guest Well, you know who was also on this track was Dorothy Ashby.

[Morgan and Oliver affirm.]

Yeah, playing harp. Like, the fact that he had Dorothy Ashby and José Feliciano on this record, kind of like, an amazing—this being a cult album to like, total cult heroes, musically. Um, which I think is really cool. But, I agree with you that this may be—this is an all-time Bill Withers vocal performance.

[Morgan affirms.]

00:31:48 Oliver Host When you tackled your cover for this song, how did you decide to approach it?

00:31:53 Joey Guest Well. I had started using the song before I recorded it. I used it in my live shows. I'd been opening for a lot of bands. When you open for bands, you're playing for a crowd that's not yours. And so, you have to either win them over, or give them a reason to shut up when you're playing shows. And so, I took that song, and I would start shows, and I would just come out and sing that song acapella. And it would quiet the whole room.

00:32:25 Music Music "Stories (Live)" by Joey Dosik. The same tune as the Bill Withers version, but singing acapella.

*Come into my house of lonely
And I will treat you well*

*Young and old, we all have stories
That we all must try to sell*

[Music ends.]

00:32:51 Joey Guest I mean, being on tour, it made me feel and connect with my job, which was like, I am here travelling to tell my stories in general. And that song, it sets the table.

[Oliver affirms.]

And so when I decided to record it, and uh, it kind of just felt like it should be part of the record. I think it being my first full length record sometimes, like, having a cover would be good juju, to have just one tasteful cover on it. So, I try to do my best with it.

00:33:27 Oliver Host I'm curious, though in terms of you did not want—you didn't record it very loyal in a sense that you weren't trying to copy the

instrumentation, or the original arrangement. You were using primarily the choral voices more, rather than piano and the other instruments. So I'm just curious, what was behind some of those creative choices?

- 00:33:45 Joey Guest Well, I also wanted to have some moments on my record that didn't have any piano, because that's one of the main things I do, I sit down at the piano and sing. And I like to write song that can just be done, just piano and voice. And so there's so much piano in my record that I tried to make something that did not have that. So that track is just percussion, and claps, and voices.
- 00:34:09 Music Music "Stories" off the album *Inside Voice* by Joey Dosik. Vocalizations and rhythmic clapping over smooth vocals.
- And I will treat you well
And I will treat you well
And I will treat you well
And I will treat you well*
- [Music ends.]*
- 00:34:25 Morgan Host In terms of favorite moments on this album, mine is the beginning of "Railroad Man". Because it starts out with a conversation between Bill and José, which to your point, thinking back now that you brought it up, somebody might have been high in that moment.
- [Oliver laughs.]*
- But, I love that it opens up a little bit of spoken word.
- 00:34:47 Music Music "Railroad Man" off the album *+Justments* by Bill Withers. Funky music under spoken word.
- When I was a little boy back in West Virginia
We lived very close to a railroad track*
- [Music volume decreases slightly as Joey speaks]*
- 00:34:56 Joey Guest That's José on congas.
- 00:34:57 Music Music *["Railroad Man" continues.]*
- And I remember I used to dream about them trains
And where they might go
And the people that worked on the trains*
- [Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]*
- 00:35:07 Morgan Host One of the things that I like about it is, it is personal, that he's interacting with one of his band members, that yes, um, José, that heretofore is always known for the guitar thing is on congas. And on top of that, I love this song in general, because I think this song in general is about pain. It's about a man of mystery who changes his name based on him going to different cities. But I also think it's about the grueling nature of having to travel to different places all the time.

And I don't know if he fell in front of the train, or he stepped in front of the train on purpose, and that—Bill Withers is, to me, is talking a little bit about depression. That—not just that I know this life of a working class man working on a train, but I know what it's like to be isolated, to have to be in different cities, and to perhaps consider choices that everybody else wouldn't consider.

And that it starts out so instrumental, with just a conversation, and I think what he's asking José is, "Do you know what this life is about? Do you know what it's like to travel all the time for your career, and to be sad, and to be someone different from city to city?" But I love the banter between them. And to your point, just listening back, you know, I think that some sort of pharmaceuticals might have been involved at the beginning.

[Oliver laughs and Joey affirms.]

'Cause they sound hella relaxed, right? Hella relaxed. But—but I love that. I think it's intimate and I think it is a story about one man's pain.

00:36:28	Oliver	Host	Joey, do you have a favorite <u>moment</u> off of this album?
00:36:30	Joey	Guest	I actually—I really love the way that the whole album starts. Like, there's—there's some patience there, I think. I used to listen to this album on—when I'd go on runs, and I actually love the way the table gets set on this record.
00:36:45	Music	Music	"You" off the album + <i>Justments</i> by Bill Withers. A mid-tempo, smooth, funky beat under smooth vocals.
			<i>You want to take me to a doctor</i>
			<i>[Music fades down, playing quietly under Joey]</i>
00:37:01	Joey	Guest	The band comes in and they're already burning, but they're not maxed out yet.
00:37:06	Music	Music	<i>[Music increases in volume again]</i>
			<i>To talk to me about my mind</i> <i>To try to give directions to some places</i>
			<i>[Music fades out as Joey speaks]</i>
00:37:01	Joey	Guest	I think it's a really special first track, that's just so hypnotic; and like I said, it doesn't have a chorus, it's just like, "I've got some shit I need to talk about." Just like, "I need to get this off my chest, and I'm going in, and like, I've got my family here to support me, too." Like, really supportive.
00:37:34	Morgan	Host	One of the best lines from that song is when he says, "You're pouring muddy water on me, trying to convince me that it's rain." Man.
00:37:44	Oliver	Host	Gems.

00:37:45	Morgan	Host	He's got <u>bars</u> . Bill's got bars on here. And it is—to me, it is about perception, but also about hypocrisy. Like, while you're judging, pointing a finger at someone, you got three fingers pointing back at yourself. And it is about choice, and he talks about smoking up and you know, coping, and—damn, pharmaceuticals come up a lot through this album, or in this discussion. But um, again, I just think it's so powerful.
00:38:11	Oliver	Host	Joey, is there a slow burner off of this album for you? Something that maybe took time to really grow on you, or, yeah, along those lines.
00:38:17	Joey	Guest	Um, probably the last track, the "Railroad Man". Which I feel like I rediscovered upon listening to this in preparation yesterday. That track is fire. And it's the last track on the album, so it's like, you know, did you have time to listen to the whole thing?
00:38:33	Oliver	Host	Right, it's long. It's like a 6+ minute song, and so it might be that by the time you get there, you're a little bit exhausted. I kind of feel like the whole spoken—the monologue intro, which of course was a big thing in the 70s, has not really aged well.
00:38:45	Morgan	Host	No.
00:38:46	Oliver	Host	It's one of those, like, I just want you to get to the singing part. I don't need you to explain stuff to me necessarily.
00:38:50	Joey	Guest	Right, it might be time for a spoken intro comeback.
00:38:53	Morgan	Host	Bring it back, Joey. Go on and bring that back.
00:38:55	Joey	Guest	I think so. That and skits on the album.
00:38:57	Morgan	Host	We've got to bring those back. I mean, I love a spoken word intro. I always think about Cameo and some of their intros. So, if you're an aspiring musician or a musician out there, and you're thinking about it, just bring these intros back. Go on and do it.
00:39:10	Joey	Guest	It's time.
00:39:11	Morgan	Host	Just be out there. I think one of the sleeper tracks on here, or something we haven't talked about today, is "Green Grass."
00:39:17	Music	Music	"Green Grass" off the album <i>+Justments</i> by Bill Withers. Grooving funk with playful instrumentals. <i>Looking up at the people looking down</i> <i>Taking tranquilizers by the pound</i> <i>Looking down at the people looking up</i> <i>[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]</i>
00:39:34	Oliver	Host	More pharmaceuticals.
00:39:35	Morgan	Host	<i>[Laughs]</i> Yeah, I'm saying.
00:39:38	Oliver	Host	Man.
00:39:39	Morgan	Host	Tranquilizers he says. I think in "Railroad Man", smoking those

funny cigarettes. That's a whole 'nother show.

00:39:46 Joey Guest This is a classic like, Bill Withers lyric song. Like, when I think about the movie *Still Bill*, and they show him kind of like, with these little phrases on notes, this whole song is those Bill Withers phrases. Those kind of quirky little sort of like, paradoxes. These opposites, these kind of like, explaining it all, through the differences.

00:40:09 Morgan Host Yup, the grass is greener. The rich looking at the poor, the poor looking at the rich. Love it.

00:40:14 Oliver Host Great groove, too.

00:40:15 Morgan Host Grrreat groove.

00:40:17 Music Music "Green Grass" off the album *+Justments* by Bill Withers. Mid-tempo funk with a steady drumbeat.

*We all have our own confusion
We all have our own confusion*

*Rich people watching the people poor
Trying to figure out how to get some more*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:40:39 Morgan Host Do you think this album was right on time, ahead of its time, or timeless?

00:40:44 Joey Guest I think it's both right on time and also timeless. I think the timeless qualities of it have to do with the issues that are timeless issues. Um, I also think some of the songwriting is timeless. I also think that it's very much like, you know, even the fact that "Ruby Lee", which has a Melvin Dunlap composer credit because of that kind of like, funky—funky kind of slithering bassline. Like, that bassline, to me, is very much a product of just that time. You hear that and you're like, "Oh, okay. I know when this album was recorded."

[Morgan affirms.]

So I think it's sort of both.

00:41:26 Morgan Host Um, we ask our guests um, to describe the album that they've chosen in three words. If you had to describe *+Justments* in three words, what would they be?

00:41:36 Joey Guest Human, heartbroken, and therapy.

00:41:41 Oliver Host Hmm! For the listener or for the singer? For both?

00:41:45 Joey Guest I think for both, but I think really for the singer. I mean, definitely both. It's like we all project our own situations.

[Oliver and Morgan affirm.]

But the record is called *+Justments*, right, which is short for adjustments, and there's not really—you don't really get a sense

that—you don't really get a sense of what those adjustments are necessarily. He's just kind of like, taking stock of everything.

- 00:42:07 Oliver Host We haven't gotten into the album title, can I just raise this point? It's—it is *+Justments*, but there's the plus symbol in front of it. What is the plus symbol doing there? For all these years, I don't understand.
- 00:42:17 Morgan Host That was weird.
- 00:42:18 Oliver Host And when you file this, where do you file it? There's no place for like, you know, the top level of shift-key keyboard keys and punctuations.
- 00:42:25 Morgan Host I always thought it was math, you know what I mean? My first—'cause I'm not good at math, I was like, "It's okay for you to be confused, you're not good in this." But I think the cover art—the cover art is him writing on a board, which to me, I thought immediately, "Math." But also, too, it's sort of—it's like, "This is what this is about, I'm gonna tell you what it's about." And I think he explained that on um, I think I can bring it up real quick.
- 00:42:49 Joey Guest There's—yeah, 'cause there's nowhere on the record that has the text of what he wrote on that chalkboard, but I think I did find it online and copy-pasted it on my phone of what he writes, and it's—
- 00:43:02 Morgan Host Yup, I'm gonna read it to you. Let me find it here. Alright. So, the album cover shows Withers writing the following explanation of the title:
- ""Life like most precious gifts gives us the responsibility of upkeep. We are given the responsibility of arranging our own spaces to best benefit our survival. We have the choice of believing or not believing in things like God, friendship, marriage, love, lust or any number of simple but complicated things. We will make some mistakes both in judgement and in fact. We will help some situations and hurt some situations. We will help some people and hurt some people and be left to live with it either way. We must then make some adjustments, or as the old people back home would call them, + 'JUSTMENTS.'"
- In other words, it's complicated.
- [Joey laughs.]*
- 00:43:51 Oliver Host Fair enough.
- 00:43:52 Morgan Host It's complicated.
- 00:43:53 Music Music "Ruby Lee" off the album *+Justments* by Bill Withers. Soulful funk with impassioned vocals.
- Ruby Lee, I sure wish you was here with me*
- [Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]*
- 00:44:10 Oliver Host If you like Bill Withers' *+Justments*, then me and Morgan have some suggestions on other albums you might want to check out.

My pick would be *Inspiration Information* by Shuggie Otis from 1974. It is certainly slightly more obscure compared to Withers, but both artists share, I think, a very similar, very eclectic sensibility to their style, including vocally. And also just *Inspiration Information* is a sublime, sublime album on its own merits.

And it's an album that was rediscovered, I think, sometime in the 00s, because of a reissue, and very deservedly. It is one of—just the best albums from the mid-70s, and I think, again, if you like Bill Withers, if you like what you heard on *+Justments*, you will also like Shuggie with *Inspiration Information*.

00:44:51	Music	Music	"Inspiration Information" off the album <i>Inspiration Information</i> by Shuggie Otis. Light, staccato vocals over a steady beat.
			<i>...while I'm with you I got to be heavier 'Cause I am happier, when I make you Oh, my little should phone you</i>
			<i>[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]</i>
00:45:07	Morgan	Host	Um, my pick would be to revisit Stevie Wonder's <i>Innervisions</i> , 1972. A ton of hits on there, and I wouldn't call this an obscure album, but I think some—
00:45:17	Oliver	Host	Stevie. I mean. <i>[Laughs.]</i>
00:45:18	Morgan	Host	It is Stevie. Wouldn't call it an obscure album, but it has some of the songs, to me, that are my favorite, and sometimes don't get mentioned in the canon. "Jesus Children of America" immediately comes to mind. I love "All in Love is Fair" and—but I also love "Visions". So, if you wanted to s—if you wanted to get into something that, to me, is a little bit <i>+Justments</i> reminiscent, I would recommend that Stevie Wonder album.
00:45:44	Music	Music	"Visions" off the album <i>Innervisions</i> by Stevie Wonder. Slow, gentle, melodic instrumentals, conveying a sense of gentle wonder. Music plays for several moments, then fades out as dialogue resumes.
00:46:03	Oliver	Host	Well, that will do it for this episode of <i>Heat Rocks</i> with our special guest, Joey Dosik. What are you working on right now?
00:46:09	Joey	Guest	Uh, I'm in Los Angeles off of tour right now, so I'm working on new music. I'm in—in the lab, just writing and recording right now.
00:46:10	Music	Transition	"Crown Ones" off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:46:16	Oliver	Host	And where can people find you out there on the interwebs?
00:46:18	Joey	Guest	Oh, they can find me any which way out there on uh, your social media or on your Spotify or if you want to hold my records.

[Morgan laughs.]

All you gotta do is type in my name.

00:46:30	Oliver	Host	So, just Joey Dosik in all those places?
00:46:32	Joey	Guest	That's right.
00:46:33	Oliver	Host	Very simple.
			You've been listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> with me, Oliver Wang, and Morgan Rhodes.
00:46:37	Morgan	Host	Our theme music is "Crown Ones" by <i>Thes One of People Under The Stairs</i> . Shoutout to Thes for the hookup.
00:46:43	Oliver	Host	<i>Heat Rocks</i> is produced by myself and Morgan, alongside Christian Dueñas, who also edits, engineers, and does the booking for our shows.
00:46:51	Morgan	Host	Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and our executive producer is Jesse Thorn.
00:46:55	Oliver	Host	We are part of the Maximum Fun family, taping every week live in their studios in the West Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles.
			One last thing, here is a teaser for next week's episode, which is the first in a three-part series that Morgan, I, and all of you helped to contribute to, where we talk about our comfort albums. And next week's is gonna feature Morgan, with her starting five comfort albums.
00:47:19	Oliver	Host	What does comfort music mean for you?
00:47:22	Morgan	Host	You know, we say in the church, and we sing in the church, "how I got over, my soul looks back and wonders how I got over." And usually we're talking about being carried or being lifted, you know, spiritually. What lifted us, what took us from point A to point B, and obviously the inference is about God. But when I think of comfort music, I think—I will think back on this like, how I got over, sonically. What were the albums, what were the sounds that—that carried me through?
			I think comfort music is music that makes the world seem different. It presents the world differently and it allows you to experience whatever you're experiencing in the world with a soundtrack. And so, comfort music, for me, is that thing I know that I can go to that makes me feel alright when the world has gone mad, and in a lot of ways right now feels like the world has gone mad.
00:48:13	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:48:15	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:48:16	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:48:17	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.