

00:00:00	Music	Transition	“Crown Ones” off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs. Chill, grooving instrumentals.
00:00:05	Oliver	Host	Hello, I’m Oliver Wang.
00:00:07	Morgan	Host	And I’m Morgan Rhodes. You’re listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> .
			Like the rest of you, we are all in our social distancing mode, and this of course is an unprecedented time of isolation and anxiety. And I know many of us, myself included, are turning to art and culture as a way to stay sane and connected and inspired. As such, we wanted to create a few episodes around the idea of comfort music, and we’ve already been engaging with all of you in our audience about it.
00:00:31	Oliver	Host	To tackle this, we will be using a format that Morgan helped to inspire, the Starting Five, which is both a reference to basketball as well as a nod to those five-CD changers that used to be all the range back in the 1990s. And so both Morgan and I chose five albums, and the last episode you heard <u>her</u> starting five. And today, it’s gonna be <u>my</u> five in terms of what constitutes my idea of comfort music.
00:00:56	Morgan	Host	In the third installment, that airs next week, we’ll be choosing a starting five from suggestions that you, our audience, has made via our various social media accounts.
			So, you asked me and now I’m asking you, what is your definition of comfort music, or what does comfort music really mean to you, especially now?
00:01:15	Oliver	Host	I really enjoyed hearing what you had to say last week in terms of the albums or the music that reminded you of falling in love with music, or just falling in love in general. I also picked up, at least when you were talking about especially that first album by Earth, Wind & Fire, you were talking about your childhood and the memories of growing up with your father in particular.
			And I think for my starting five, it’s not that each one of them sparks the same kind of emotional memory, but I do think that part of where I started with this, in a lot of ways similar to you, was really taking myself back to a time in which I was falling in love with music as well. And this was all in the early 90s when I went off to college. I was DJing at KALX radio, and that was just a really intense time to be discovering music.
			And not one that one can recreate, because I just know too much now, so even if I were to discover something new, that sense of the enormity of being introduced not just to a specific artist, let alone a specific album, just being introduced to music genres and histories. That was, for me in my early 20s, I was just soaking all of this up in a lot of ways.
			And so I don’t think it’s a coincidence that at least the first two albums that ended up in my starting five were ones that I discovered in that era, and constitute some of the heavy music

listening that I was doing back then. Which was to—what we, I guess, would describe now as classic jazz, and specific jazz balladry and standards.

And so my first pick, taking it all the way back to 1956, is the really well-known, famous duet album between Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong.

00:03:05 Music Music “April in Paris” off the album *Ella and Louis* by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Slow, tender, romantic jazz.

*ELLA:
I never knew my heart could sing
I never missed a warm embrace
'Till April in Paris*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:03:24 Morgan Host A couple of questions. One, I don't think I ever knew this, so what was your format. When you played college radio, was your show a jazz show?

00:03:33 Oliver Host No, when I first started it was definitely much more hip hop with—actually it was mostly hip hop. And I think as the 90s wore on and as I acquired more knowledge about other music styles, especially stuff that I was learning through samples, I began to incorporate much more jazz, but more fusion jazz, per se. And then soul and funk and then eventually Latin by the time we get to the late 90s and early 2000s.

But when I first started, it was primarily a hip hop show. The kind of you know, Ella Fitzgerald and Duke Ellington and that whole era of jazz music was stuff that I was listening to really on my own, but not necessarily stuff I was programming on my radio show.

00:04:14 Morgan Host Were you buying jazz?

00:04:16 Oliver Host That's a good question, and in fact I'm trying to remember—I want to say with this album in particular, I think I might have borrowed this from the library, and then taken it home, dubbed it to cassette tape—because cassette was really the primary way in which I was listening to stuff. I didn't really—I had a CD player, but cassettes was still kind of my primary medium. But as an undergraduate of college, so from '90-'94, I wasn't really buying a lot—a ton of music. Or I should say I wasn't buying a ton of jazz.

And yeah, I'm trying to remember if I even actually have this album on cassette or any original form. I have it on vinyl now, I think. Or I might have just listened to it off of a dub, which might have been the way I went, because I was a broke college student.

00:05:06 Morgan Host I want to read you a quote about this album that I read that Lloyd Schwartz—do you know him? Wrote for NPR?

[Oliver affirms.]

He said, “Fitzgerald's warm yet ultra-cool voice was at the opposite

poll of jazz singing from Armstrong's gravelly growl. There's absolutely no reason their voices should blend so effortlessly, but they do."

Agree?

00:05:32 Oliver Host

Oh, I think that's absolutely the case, is that they have such a really amazing contrast here. Because Ella has, you could argue, the best high head voice out there. The quality of the clarity is unlike that of practically any other singer. I mean, there's a reason why she was known as the first lady of song.

And I think you compare that on the flipside with Louis Armstrong's voice, a voice that has been tempered by years of playing trumpet and having to use, you know, his esophagus and all these other breathing techniques to play the trumpet. As well as him being a lifelong smoker of various substances.

[Morgan affirms.]

This all contributed to the timbre and the roughness and the gravellyness of the voice. But somehow the two paired together, I never even think of it as contrast. I just think of it—when I listen to this, what I think is, "These are two people who are really good friends."

And that even though a lot of these songs are obviously the romantic ballads and we're maybe supposed to think of them as lovers, for whatever reason, even when I first started listening to this album and still to this day, I just think of them as these two incredibly gifted professionals who are also good friends, who got together to make this because they could. And so what I'm hearing really is just the chemistry of what they bring.

And I think partly why this was one of the first things I thought of when I was thinking of this topic of comfort music, is because there is something—there's something very comforting listening to both Ella and Louis Armstrong independently, and then you pair them together and you're just doubling up. You're getting even more out of it. It's synergistic in terms of them being um, greater than—the sum is greater than its parts.

00:07:26 Music Music

"Isn't This A Lovely Day?" off the album *Ella and Louis* by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Slow jazz, with Louis' deep, gravelly voice contrasting Ella's higher, softer voice.

LOUIS:

*Baby, long as I can be with you
It's a lovely day*

ELLA:

*Isn't this a lovely day
To be caught in the rain?*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:07:49 Morgan Host When you came to this album, or lets say, how di you come to this album, and when did you end up—'cause you own this album on vinyl, right?

00:07:56 Oliver Host I'd have to go and check, and my gut says I actually don't think I do, which is kind of funny. Yeah. Yeah, I don't know if I do, but it certainly was an album that um, I sat a lot with. And I discovered Ella Fitzgerald in college, and she was really, I think, in a lot of ways the first singer of any genre in which I really fell in love with the voice and began thinking about what is it that the voice can do, where does it take you, what does it bring out of you emotionally?

Um, you know, it's not a surprise or coincidence that my daughter is named Ella, and one hundred percent, she's named after Ella Fitzgerald, because Ella was very formative, not just in terms of my jazz music education, she was just formative in terms of my musical education.

And more than—I mean, I wouldn't even pose it as an education. She was so formative in me falling in love with just music in general, and not the only one by any means, but really, really important, I think. Especially at the age, as I was saying before, the age that I was then, is I was just trying to soak up all kinds of music, and Ella really stuck with me, because, again, she just had that—that incredible, pristine voice.

00:09:10 Morgan Host I remember the um, gosh I don't even know if it was like, the 70s or the 80s, man. But it was like a, um, "Is it live or it Memorex?" commercial, and they'd have Ella Fitzgerald sing. Do you remember that commercial? And then the glass would shatter.

00:09:26 Clip Clip **Music:** Ella Fitzgerald beboping in the background.

Speaker 1: Nelson Riddle, you've been arranging the Ella Fitzgerald jazz sound for years.

Speaker 2: Yes, that's right.

Speaker 1: Can you tell if that's Ella live, or a recording on Memorex cassette tape, with MRX2 oxide?

Speaker 2: No, I can't.

Group: It's Memorex!

Speaker 2: That sounds live to me!

00:09:44 Morgan Host So I remember first paying attention to Ella then, and just like you said, her voice being so pristine. I think you've made me go back and listen to a lot more Ella, because when I think about standards and some of my jazz favorites, I love Shirley Horn, and I love Carmen McRae, I like a little bit of sadness with my singers. And there is an elegance about Ella Fitzgerald that just—that sticks with me, and every time I listen to her, I say elegance.

I didn't know of this whole album. I knew of a couple songs that I

found randomly in some sort of, I don't know. You professors I think call it directed study, right? So, I was doing some sort of like, let me—let me, you know, dip into an area that I'm not as familiar with, and so I stumbled on a few of these hits. And one of the ones that I fell in love with was "Under A Blanket of Blues", which just melts me

00:10:39 Music Music

"Under A Blanket of Blues" off the album *Ella and Louis* by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Mid-tempo, playful jazz.

ELLA:

Covered with heaven above

Let's dream a dream of love for two

Wrapped in the arms of sweet romance

Under a blanket of blue

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:11:04 Morgan Host

Pretty, pretty, pretty. And uh, there is something that's very cool about his smokey, gravelly voice. It's distinguished, and I think they sound great together. You also picked "Nearness Of You", and that's like, you know, jazz 101. Like, hella people have covered that. Why this song?

00:11:24 Oliver Host

Partly because it's a song that I think, if folks are at all familiar with this part of the American songbook, this is one of the songs that you would have likely been exposed to at some point. And just to hear Ella and Louis' particular take on it. As I was saying before, so much of this album is so deeply romantic, and very classic Hollywood.

Um, I think about *When Harry Met Sally*, and I think partly it's actually how I got introduced to Ella Fitzgerald, actually might have come because she sings on the soundtrack in the movie. So, Harry Connick Jr. does the actual commercial release of the soundtrack, but in the movie you hear Ella Fitzgerald sing. I don't think it was "Nearness Of You".

But nonetheless, I think this is sort of—this song and their performance of it evokes kind of an imagined nostalgia for an era of glamor and elegance, which you put very nicely, Morgan, that I never lived through, but that I romanticize and have a nostalgia for on some level.

00:12:21 Music Music

"The Nearness Of You" off the album *Ella and Louis* by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Mid-tempo, playfully tender jazz.

LOUIS:

The right to hold you ever so tight

And to feel in the night the nearness of you

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:12:42 Oliver Host

Ella and Louis only made, if I'm not mistaken, two albums, both I believe on Vrv. Both volumes were collected into a single anthology. And at times, I sometimes thought, "You know, it's a shame that they didn't do more of these." But then I realize, I mean, two

albums' worth is more than enough, and I think it's just enough to kind of give you a sense of how well they work together, without overstaying its welcome.

You know, if they had been making duet albums by the dozens, I think it would've lost something. It would have watered down what made those two albums so special. So, I'm actually very appreciative of the fact that they did not overload us, but just gave us enough to really sit with and enjoy. And yeah, for those of you who have never heard these two before, trust me, pick up that, the complete *Ella and Louis* on Vrv anthology. It'll keep you warm, even in the dead of winter.

00:13:39 Music Music

"Moonlight in Vermont" off the album *Ella and Louis* by Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong. Gentle jazz with light, gentle instrumentals under Ella's crooning voice.

ELLA:

*People who meet in this romantic setting
Are so hypnotized by the lovely
Evening summer breeze*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:13:58 Morgan Host

Next up, we've got Duke Ellington. You chose *Indigos* from 1958. And I had a hard time finding this. Is this a compilation album?

00:14:07 Oliver Host

You know what, that's a really good question, and I should know a better answer to that. But I always thought of it as being an original album, rather than an anthology. I could be completely mistaken about that, um, but it's—

00:14:19 Morgan Host

'Cause I couldn't find it. There was like, *Mood Indigo* and some other stuff, but I couldn't find this one. I had to go to—I think I finally found it on YouTube, and it wasn't on Spotify, and it wasn't on iTunes.

00:14:30 Oliver Host

Ah. It could be simply that Ellington's catalogue is so large that not everything makes it to the streaming services. But as far as I can tell—I'm actually looking right as we speak, I'm looking online—this was an album, an original composition album, recorded in the spring to fall of 1958 um, it came out, the name of it is *Indigos*. Um, and it's primarily—I don't think there's any—I'm trying to think if there's any vocals on here. I'm pretty sure it's a purely instrumental album. And in a lot of ways, I mean, I realize now in hindsight that choosing, going from *Ella and Louis* to Duke Ellington, it's all—all really part of that same moment of me discovering jazz, and this kind of particular style of jazz music, in the early 90s when I was a college student.

But partly because—I mean, to be honest, I just love the word "indigo". Uh, I wear, these days, I wear a lot of stuff that's indigo shades in terms of dark blue. But, I think—and maybe it's because I love the idea of an indigo and what that color and that tone communicated back on a musical level when I was in my 20s, now that I'm in my late 40s, I still am literally now draping myself in shades of indigo. So it never occurred to me, there might be a

connection between those two things. But perhaps it's not a coincidence.

But, so yeah, I discovered Duke Ellington the same time—around the same time I was listening to Ella Fitzgerald, and I think, for me, it's because I wanted to give myself this crash course lesson in American jazz. And for whatever reason, I actually never took a jazz history course—at least, I don't think I did—as a—as an undergrad. Or maybe I did and I just forgot, but in any case, you know, Duke is—you cannot talk about the history of American popular music, specifically jazz, without talking about Duke Ellington.

00:16:27 Oliver Host He is as genius, as important, as influential, as masterful an artist as you can imagine, and you know, he covered a huge, huge array of styles just within that. For me, even though his rise to fame came on this really big, big band sound, the *Indigos* album is him working with a much smaller collection of artists. I think it's maybe a trio. Actually, I take it back, it's more than a trio, it's about a dozen players.

But it sounds super intimate, which I think makes sense given that the notion of the title of it, and I think that's why I always fell in love with this album, was because so much of it was this intimate melancholy. Even though I do love a good set of vocals. I think I've talked on this show previously about John Coltrane and Johnny Hartman's album, for example, which is just an amazing collaboration.

But I think, for this, what I really liked is that, for the most part, except for maybe one or two songs, there are no vocals. This is a purely instrumental album, in which case then you're really just soaking in listening to Ellington on the piano when he's soloing, or listening to his saxophonist, Paul Gonsalves, or Shorty Baker on trumpet.

And it's about—I mean, it's about mood, and that might be a really obviously point to make, given that this album, I'm sure, derives its title from *Mood Indigo*, a really well known composition. I don't know if it was an Ellington composition, but I always associate it with Duke Ellington. Um, but a song like "Solitude" for example, you just—you just want to soak into it, and let yourself be surrounded.

00:18:06 Music Music "Solitude" off the album *Indigos* by Duke Ellington. Mid-tempo, gentle jazz with a piano and horns. Music plays for several seconds, then fades out as dialogue resumes.

00:18:24 Oliver Host One thing I just wanted to say here is that, you know, why I would pick this for a comfort music set is because, for me, I think part of what I find comforting is music that makes me slightly sad. Like, I don't want to be sobbing listening to this stuff, but there is something about melancholy.

And this is gonna be reflected in some of my later choices, but there's something about the melancholy of it that does feel comforting, because it allows you to kind of sit in your feelings and... I'm not really sure what about it I find comforting but none of

the albums I picked is what I would describe as happy music, per sound effect. It's really stuff that really hits more of that melancholy note, that mood indigo. Because for whatever reason, that's what I associate with a sense of coziness, a sense of comfort, it has to have that hint of sadness.

- 00:19:18 Morgan Host I agree wholeheartedly, and in fact one of the songs that I really love on this album is called "Where or When". And they—you mentioned there's no vocals on this album, but this one sounds like Duke Ellington and his group of musicians are singing. It does have that melancholy that I like, and what he does with the arrangements stands in the gap for for not having a vocalist there. But I feel like someone is serenading me, and it is that sweet melancholy that I'm really attracted to.
- 00:19:50 Music Music "Where or When" off the album *Indigos* by Duke Ellington. A mid-tempo jazz song composed of several instruments lead by a complex trombone piece. Music plays for several seconds, then fades out as dialogue resumes.
- 00:20:16 Morgan Host There's just something. It's just intimate, and I feel like they're saying a lot, whoever's playing that horn is speaking a lot, and speaking in a voice that I can recognize. But similarly to you, I love that melancholy. And I came to Duke Ellington's catalogue late, but the first time I heard of him or even heard his name mentioned was on *Songs in the Key of Life* and "Sir Duke", the reference. That was the first time, and you'd see his picture and a little bit of his story growing up in Black history, he would always come up in Black history plays and skits and magazines. I didn't come to his catalogue until I became an adult, but hell, better late than never.
- I want you to talk a little bit about "Willow Weep For Me", because it's a song that I've heard all my life.
- 00:21:03 Music Music "Willow Weep For Me" off the album *Indigos* by Duke Ellington. Slow, sweeping, dramatic jazz with horns and piano. Music plays for several seconds, then fades out as dialogue resumes.
- 00:21:22 Morgan Host Why this one, and what's comforting about this one for you?
- 00:21:25 Oliver Host It's another one of my favorite standards. There's certainly quite a few versions of "Willow Weep For Me" that I like. Um, I think partly because of just, well, the title itself evokes, as I was saying a moment ago, it fits in with that theme of sadness or melancholia.
- Um, Shorty Baker is the trumpet player that you heard in that part. And I was gonna actually say this earlier about listening to that little bit of "Where or When", you know, this album, because it's more stripped down, it's not—it's not the most intimate setting in terms of its—he's playing with, like I said, about a dozen players. But it's not his big band and it's not the big band sound, and so you really hear Duke at the keys, and how he speaks with the keys.

[Morgan affirms.]

And that's part of what I just love about this album, is that. And it's not to say that you lose him in his other work, but I think this album

really centers, for an album that's not a solo LP, it really centers what Duke—what he does with the keyboard, and how he—again, I'm trying to find way to say thais without repeating myself. But really just communicate an express mood.

And it's, you know, he's an incredibly evocative, chatty conversationalist as a piano player, and I think this album, whether it's "Willow Weep For Me" or really any song on here, I think heps illuminate his gifts as a musician,, not just as a bandmate but as a musician.

00:22:49	Music	Music	<i>["Willow Weep For Me" plays again. Music plays for several seconds, then fades low and plays beneath dialogue.]</i>
00:23:11	Morgan	Host	And we will be back with more of our conversation with Oliver on comfort albums after a brief word from a couple of our great Max Fun podcasts. <i>[Music ends.]</i> Don't go anywhere.
00:23:21	Music	Transition	"Crown Ones" off the album <i>Stepfather</i> by People Under The Stairs
00:23:24	Promo	Promo	Music: Straightforward, thump-y electric bass guitar beat with light drums. Laurie: Hi. I am Laurie Kilmartin. Jackie: And I'm Jackie Kashian. Laurie: Together we host a podcast called: Jackie: <i>The Jackie and Laurie Show.</i> Laurie: Uh, we're both stand-up comics. We <u>recently</u> met each other because women weren't allowed to work together, uh—uh, on the road or in gigs for a long, long time, and so...our friendship has been unfolding on this podcast for a couple years. Jackie <u>constantly</u> works the road; I write for <i>Conan</i> and then I work the road in-between. Jackie: We do a <u>lot</u> of stand-up comedy, and so we celebrate stand-up— Laurie: Yes. Jackie: —and we also...bitch about it. Laurie: We keep it to an hour; we don't have any guests. We somehow find enough to—to talk about every single week. So find us—you can subscribe to <i>The Jackie and Laurie</i> show at MaximumFun.org, or wherever you get your podcasts. Jackie: <i>[Nonplussed]</i> K, bye.

[Music ends.]

00:24:10 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 Yeardley 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.]

00:24:53 Music

Transition

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

00:24:55 Oliver

Host

We are back on *Heat Rocks* talking about comfort music, with me!

00:25:00 Morgan

Host

[*Laughing*] Who you got up next? Who'd you bring?

00:25:04 Oliver

Host

So, originally in this slot I had Al Green and *I'm Still In Love With You* from 1972, which is my favorite Al Green album. It is— whenever I've been asked for my five, you know, desert island discs, that is always on there. I might change one or two albums, but the Al Green is in there.

But then I realized that if we're really talking about comfort music, there's actually a better 1972 album, and that is by the British singer-songwriter, Labi Siffre, with an album called *Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying*.

00:25:40 Music

Music

"Gimme Some More" off the album *Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying* by Labi Siffre. Upbeat, cheerful pop with drums and guitar.

Oh, it's a beautiful day

*Oh, I never felt this way before
Gimme some more*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

- 00:25:58 Morgan Host A little bit of that pounds like the beginning of uh, Stevie Wonder, "Boogie On Reggae Woman". It sounds a little bit, the musicianship there.
- 00:26:06 Oliver Host Sure, but the thing about this album and the thing about Labi Siffre is that you jump around his albums across the 70s—and he recorded I think six albums between 1970 through maybe '75 or '76—um, and you can't pin him down stylistically. He has songs that are certainly influenced by funk. I think a lot of people are probably most familiar with him because of a song called "I Got The..." which is not on this album. It's from an album from a couple years later. That was sampled by Jay-Z. Most famously it was sampled by Dr. Dre for Eminem's first big hit.
- 00:26:42 Music Music "I Got The..." off the album *Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying* by Labi Siffre. Mid-tempo, funky pop. Music plays for several seconds, then fades out as dialogue resumes.
- 00:26:55 Oliver Host But you would be really mistaken if you thought, "Oh, Labi Siffre does funk music," because, yeah, he does funk music. He also does um, ballads. He does a lot of folk music. And the thing I love about this album in particular is that stylistically he just is all over the map, and you just get a sense of the incredible amount of talent that he had as a songwriter, as a, you know, as a composer.

And it was a real revelation. I've often times in the past, I've described Labi Siffre as an artist I've been waiting my entire life to discover. Um, and I know that might sound kind of hyperbolic, but for whatever reason when I first started listening to his work, beyond just the stuff that got sampled, I was like, "My god, who is this person?"

And there's a reason why I think most Americans probably are not familiar with him at all is because even though he did have those six albums, they were never—none of his albums in the 70s were released in the United States. They came out of the U.K. He was a British artist. None of them came out—were distributed in the U.S. The only way that you could've gotten his albums back then in America would have been as an import. But it wasn't like he was picked up by any domestic um, label here and distributed, which is quite striking.

And I don't know the full backstory, but it is worth knowing—noting that Labi Siffre is Black, he is gay, and he is British, and it could be that a combination of those three things might have made American labels reluctant to distribute his stuff here. But he's really well known in the U.K. and throughout Europe. A lot of his songs have been covered by artists across the pond, as they say. And it's a real shame that he has not necessarily gotten the same amount of attention here in the U.S., because, again, his work is really, really incredible.

I think if there's one song besides "I Got The..." that people would know, one of his compositions that people would know, it comes off of this album, which is the song "It Must Be Love". It's—that's a tune that most folks would have known from the early 80s cover version done by the British new wave band, Madness. This is actually a Labi Siffre original from 1972.

00:29:05 Music Music "It Must Be Love" off the album *Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying* by Labi Siffre. Upbeat, steady, light pop.

And I never thought I'd feel this way the way I feel about you

[More instruments kick in, joining the backing]

As soon as I wake up, any night, any day

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:29:22 Oliver Host You know, one of the things that really grabs me, and especially when we think about talking about comfort music, because this song just transports me someplace that I don't even—I can't even describe. It's a song called—I hope I'm pronouncing this right—"Cannock Chase", which apparently refers to this very forested part of England. And it is very much in a folksy vein, and it always—every time I listen to it, and I've been listening to this for years now, but every time I hear it, I feel like I'm in a car someplace, and it's just trees and open sky going by. And there's something about this song in particular that just makes me feel so incredibly safe.

00:30:04 Music Music "Cannock Chase" off the album *Crying, Laughing, Loving, Lying* by Labi Siffre. Gentle, upbeat folk with a moderately fast tempo.

*Nothing around just the trees and the ground
There's a bird in a tree singing a song just for me
Just for me*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:30:26 Oliver Host So, like, I think my favorite stuff by him—you know, the stuff that he does that's more in a soul-funk vein, certainly love a lot of that. But a lot of his more folksy stuff is actually really my favorite, because there's something, as I was saying a moment ago, there is something about it that is transporting. And I'm not even sure where it's taking me, but it's someplace different, and it's someplace—like I was saying a moment ago as well—someplace I feel very safe. And that's why this album in particular came to mind in terms of—it takes a lot to bump Al Green, you know, off—

[Morgan laughs.]

—out of the starting and putting Al Green on the bench. But I think partly it's because there is a particular magic to Siffre in general, but especially on this particular album that it, for whatever reason, it just takes me someplace else. And especially these times—in these days, I would much rather be someplace else than where we are

right now.

00:31:19	Music	Music	<i>["Cannock Chase" plays again. Music plays low beneath dialogue.]</i>
00:31:20	Oliver	Host	And this album does it for me.
00:31:22	Music	Music	<i>[Music swells in volume, plays for several seconds, and then fades out as dialogue resumes.]</i>
00:31:43	Morgan	Host	So, we've gone from jazz to soul-funk, and I knew we would get to hip hop somehow. I just knew we would. And we did. You chose Tribe Called Quest's <i>Midnight Marauders</i> , going back to 1993. Why is this a comfort album for you?
00:32:02	Oliver	Host	<p>I think like you said in last week's episode about songs that you think about—about the first time you fell in love with a particular album or artist or whatever else, or just falling in love with people, a person, and you know, <i>Midnight Marauders</i>—</p> <p><i>[Sighing]</i> I mean, what hasn't already been said about it that I could find novel to add? But I think—and this goes back to what I was saying earlier about, for me, comfort music has to have a little bit of a tinge of melancholy. And certainly there is a whole tradition, I think, of albums in hip hop that have some level of melancholy with it. Um, when I was thinking about wanting to put a hip hop album into this number four spot, part of me thought about, you know, "Maybe I could go with The Pharcyde and either <i>Bizarre Ride</i> or <i>Labcabin California</i>." You know, some of Common Sense's albums came to mind.</p> <p>But then Tribe is like—it's so foundational for so many of us. There's a reason why they're considered to be one of the greatest hip hop groups—I mean, forget that, one of the greatest <u>groups</u> in pop music history. You know, full stop. And I don't—I'm not saying that <i>Midnight Marauders</i> is necessarily their best album or my favorite of their albums.</p> <p>I feel very strongly about <i>Low End Theory</i>, which we talked about in that episode when we taped it. But <i>Midnight Marauders</i> in terms of where it brings me emotionally, through the kind of samples that it uses, the tone that it sets, it hits that melancholy chord that I've been talking about with all of these albums.</p> <p>Um, and you know, you take a song like "Electric Relaxation", which is actually a kind of lowkey raunchy song about sex, but I always forget it because it doesn't sound raunchy to me. It sounds comforting. It sounds like someplace I just want to—I just want to escape and sit within that groove for as long as possible.</p>
00:34:00	Music	Music	<p>"Electric Relaxation" off the album <i>Midnight Marauders</i> by A Tribe Called Quest. Mid-tempo, rhythmic rap with a steady drumbeat in the background.</p> <p><i>... Uncle L and swing an ep in my jeep Keep it in the down, yo, we keep it discrete See, I'm not the type to kid to have my biz in the streets</i></p>

*If my mom don't approve, then I'll just elope
Let me sink the little man from inside the boat
Let me hit it from the back, girl I won't catch a hernia
Bust off on your couch, now you got Seamen's Furniture*

*Shaheed, Phife and the Extra P
Stacy...*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:34:19 Morgan Host

Do you prefer *Midnight Marauders* to *Low End Theory*?

00:34:23 Oliver Host

Tough. Tough call. I'm trying to remember what I—I'm pretty sure we got into this during that episode with Mr. Porter about *Low End Theory*, and I'm sure we went around the horn. And I feel like whatever I said then could be completely different than what I'm gonna say now.

[Morgan laughs.]

Because I just keep going back and forth. I think *Low End Theory*, the first half of that album is one of the—the most perfect sequenced albums that's in existence. Immaculate. And it's not to say that *Midnight Marauders* is also very well sequenced, but I think just that first half of *Low End Theory* is just as incredible and miraculous an achievement in music making as any genre in any time.

With *Midnight Marauders*, though, I think it's more it has some of the songs that I love on here, I probably love harder than any other *Tribe Called Quest* songs. Um, you know, song—to go back to *Low End Theory*—like, a song like “Butter”? Great. Really nice. “Vibes and Stuff”, super great. But they don't hold necessarily a candle to songs off of here like “Award Tour” or “Stir It Up”.

Or really, I mean, one of my, I think, at least top three Tribe songs of all time, if not number one, is the song that ends this album, which is “God Lives Through”. And I think it wasn't the kind of song I expected to be the closer, and because there was this surprise element of what you're hearing through it, even to this day it's one of those, you get chills, you get goosebumps when it just kicks in from jump.

And it's so powerful to me, and maybe that makes sense for a song is called “God Lives Through”. It's meant to evoke something spiritual from you. And I'm—I'm an atheist. Like, I don't—I do not carry a conventional faith. But I believe in this. This is what I believe in. My faith is in Tribe.

00:36:21 Music Music

"God Lives Through" off the album *Midnight Marauders* by A Tribe Called Quest. Mid-tempo rap with a smooth, grooving instrumental backing.

*We got the funk doody don shit, clearly it's the bomb shit
So recognize me, kids memorize me
Everyday, I be scrounging, really I be lounging*

*I play the down low, very very incognito
Aries is my sign, I know that I can rhyme
Sometimes I rhyme in riddles, plus I make the honeys wiggle
Intellect is the major, some heads like to wager*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:36:41 Oliver Host And again, Morgan, I keep thinking about that really brilliant insight that you brought last episode about what you find comforting is thinking back to when you fell in love with things. And *Midnight Marauders* is an album that I did fall in love with from jump, but what sealed the deal, what consummated everything, was reaching that last moment in “God Lives Through” and just thinking, “This is incredible. This feeling, whatever it is I’m feeling right now, I just want to feel like this always.” And I think for those of us who love music—and of course all of us love music, right?—but when you love music, you’re always chasing after that sensation when a song just hits you upside the head, and shakes you, and demands its attention, and says, “Love me.” And that is what this song and this album does.

00:37:28 Morgan Host I think in that conversation that we had with Mr. Porter, I might have said then that I preferred *Low End Theory*. I can’t remember. *Low End Theory*, to me, is a very heady album. It almost feels like um, how do I say this? I spent more time with that album. I enjoyed the album, the headiness of it, the jazziness of it. With *Midnight Marauders*, I enjoyed—I was enjoying that album and my life in 1993. I was going to Clark then.

It was the feeling of experiencing that Tribe album in 1993, going to a Black college, so the experience wasn’t mine alone. It was shared with a demographic. It was shared—I heard this album—I think this brother was from Philly, and we took—we could cross-register at HBCUs, so I took an English lit class at Morehouse, and I was the only girl in the class. And he was one of the best students, and I think we had to write about *Paradise Lost* or something like that. He had a hell of an essay, and um, he got higher marks than I did.

But I liked that about him, and so I just wanted to talk to him about it. Just pick his brain a little bit, like, “Why did he win?” You know, whatever. And so he was like, “I’ll give you a ride home,” ‘cause I didn’t have a car. I was just trying to get why the brother went over me, ‘cause I thought my essay was amazing, right?

[Oliver laughs.]

We get up—I get up in the car, and I’m prepared to just like, you know, not really come at his neck, but just be like, “What were you really thinking on certain, you know, parts?” And this was playing, and I was like, “Oh my god.”

And it was just—it just synthesizes everything that was happening to me in 1993. Just unabashed Blackness, going to an HBCU in the glory years of Atlanta and the golden age of hip hop. In my mind, the golden age of hip hop. It just couldn’t be a more perfect situation. And I was there—I mean, he had me at “Midnight

Marauders Tour Guide”, which is what, like 40 seconds? And from then on, I was like, “Yo, my man Al B. Sure is in effect mode.”

Although I love the headiness of *Low End Theory*, *Midnight Marauders* brought me so much joy. There was so much joy to this album.

00:39:50 Music Music "Award Tour" off the album *Midnight Marauders* by A Tribe Called Quest. Steady rap with a heavy drumbeat in the background.

*... 'cause we almost there
You can be a Black man and lose all your soul
You can be white and blue but don't crap the roll
See my shit is universal, if you got knowledge and dolo
Of delf for self, see there's no one else
Who can drop it on the angle, acute at that
So, do that, do that, do do that that that (come on)
Do that, do that, do do that that that (okay)*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:40:10 Oliver Host I had never thought about that until now, but this album came out in November of 1993, very famously on the same day that Wu-Tang Clan's *Enter The (36 Chambers)* came out. So you talk about just what a release date. But in any case—

[Morgan laughs and affirms.]

—in that fall of '93, that would've been my senior year at Cal. I was nursing a broken heart. I had broken up a couple months before that, from my first relationship, so you know, I was just devastated. And I'm pretty sure this album probably helped me get through some of the darker moments of being young and having one's heart broken, but listening to Tribe and maybe—again, maybe that's partly why I have such strong associations with a lot of the songs on here—is because of where I was, to your point, where I was in my life in that moment.

00:40:56 Music Music *["Award Tour" plays again.]*
*We on Award Tour with Muhammad my man
Going each and every place with the mic in their hand
Chinatown, Spokane, London, Tokyo
We on Award Tour with Muhammad my man
Going each and every place with the mic in their hand
Houston, Delaware, DC, Dallas*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:41:17 Morgan Host We are going to uh, come back to LA. I love LA. And you picked uh, Frank Ocean, *Blonde* from 2016. Okay, this is the most current in either of our picks, I think. No, no. Braxton Cook was 2017. But oyu went right from the 90s to 2016 and Frank Ocean, *Blonde*. Why this one?

00:41:39 Oliver Host Because this album really literally brought me a lot of comfort. I think we talked about this a little bit in our episode about the Tribe—

speaking of A Tribe Called Quest—about um, *We Got It From Here... Thank You 4 Your Service* about how that coming out so soon after the 2016 presidential election. I mean, literally dropped the same week. And for a lot of us, we just needed something to kind of wash away just the stink of the election results. And *Blonde* came out a couple of weeks after that, but it was still in this kind of late fall or early winter of 2016, and just needing something to feel—just to feel good about something.

And *Blonde*, like a lot of albums from—that we’ve heard over the last few years, this is an album that kind of, it seemingly dropped out of nowhere. It came out at midnight. Everyone’s on Twitter being like, “Oh my god! New Frank Ocean album!” And like everyone else, I immediately figured out whatever streaming service, or I might have downloaded it from surreptitious sources.

But regardless, I wanted to get my hands on it as soon as possible. It gave me something that I needed. It was a feeling of comfort, of escape, of just being taken someplace away, that wasn’t just thinking about *[Laughing]* America the fall of 2016.

So, *Blonde*, to me, was an obvious album to put here, because it really—it’s not just a theoretical comfort album, it was a comfort album for me when it first came out, what, like roughly three and a half years ago. Um, and it, you know, again, I don’t want to keep using the word “mood”, but Frank Ocean just sets a mood on this album. For me, it really hit, I think it was about maybe three songs into the beginning of the album, with “Pink + White”.

00:43:25	Music	Music	"Pink + White" off the album <i>Blonde</i> by Frank Ocean. Mid-tempo, poppy, slightly melancholic R&B with multilayered vocals. <i>Climb trees, Michael Jackson, all in this year</i> <i>Say what up to Magic, just shoot</i> <i>Say what up to Penny</i> <i>Say what up to life one more time</i> <i>[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]</i>
00:43:45	Morgan	Host	Ooh, and that also has a little bit of the melancholy that we’re talking about.
00:43:49	Oliver	Host	Oh, one hundred percent.
00:43:50	Morgan	Host	That has a little bit of the melancholy.
00:43:51	Oliver	Host	Yeah, no, I think this whole album is deeply, deeply melancholy, and you know, Frank, most of his songs do. If you go back to <i>Channel Orange</i> , you can—you have that same vibe to it as well, is there’s something about Frank where he always sounded older than he actually is chronologically. There’s kind of a—almost a tired wisdom.

And I mean that in a good way. A weariness is kind of what I’m saying. It’s that he’s someone who, a lot of his songs seem very observational, um, and so there’s kind of this elder statesman quality to it, even though he’s a very young man. But he brings—

you feel like this world of experience and thought to it.

And *Blonde*, to me, is maybe not as cerebral as *Channel Orange* was, because a lot of *Channel Orange*'s songs, I think, were more topical. What I feel like Frank Ocean was going with on *Blonde* was really about—you could say colors in a palette, right? I mean, and maybe that's because "Pink + White" literally evokes colors.

But each of these songs is him just freestyling composition, so there's a looseness to *Blonde* that I know some people didn't like as much compared to *Channel Orange*, which is certainly a much tighter album. It's better conceived and executed from a certain point of view. But *Blonde* is something that—it just, to me, you get suffused in it. You're like bathing in this atmosphere that he creates on the LP, and I think that's partly why I found it so comforting.

00:45:23	Music	Music	"Nikes" off the album <i>Blonde</i> by Frank Ocean. R&B with light, somewhat magical instrumentals and rapid vocals. <i>Rain, glitter</i> <i>We laid out on this wet floor</i> <i>Away turf, no Astro</i> <i>Mesmerized how the strobes glow</i> <i>Look at all the people feet dance</i> <i>I know that your n-gga came with you</i> <i>But he ain't with you</i> <i>We only human and it's humid in these Balmain</i> [Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]
00:45:40	Morgan	Host	I don't know if you got a chance to see the film <i>Waves</i> , did you see that last year?
00:45:44	Oliver	Host	No, I didn't. Yeah.
00:45:45	Morgan	Host	Okay. It's a—it's a film about a young man. I don't want to spoil it for anyone, 'cause it's a beautiful film, but almost all of the music was exclusively Frank Ocean. The music supervisor is one of the greats, Randall Poster. But once you see the movie, you'll understand a lot more about <i>Blonde</i> , and uh, why it worked.
00:46:05	Music	Music	"Seigfried" off the album <i>Blonde</i> by Frank Ocean. Slow psychedelic pop. <i>I'd rather chip my pride than lose my mind out here</i> <i>Maybe I'm a fool</i> <i>Maybe I should move</i> <i>And settle, two kids and a swimming pool</i> [Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]
00:46:25	Morgan	Host	You know, there's been this thread lately in the last couple years, and maybe you know more about it than I do because you're a professor, but I've seen a lot of professors talk about how they're teaching certain artists. Classes taught on Beyoncé. Classes taught on this and that artist. Um, you know, I think Frank Ocean would make an interesting—you know, there'd be an interesting case

study, an interesting class. And if you had to teach something on Frank Ocean, what would be the focus? And would you—would you focus on *Blonde*, or would you focus on *Channel Orange*?

00:46:57 Oliver Host Even though *Blonde*'s the album that I would probably sooner want to sit with, I think *Channel Orange*, partly because it is a debut album, partly because, as we were saying earlier, it's a very topical album. It's one that reflects his observations about growing up in Los Angeles, and in particular a very specific part of Black Los Angeles. I think it's one, from a sociological point of view, makes more sense to get into.

But if you're gonna do a course about Frank Ocean, there's no way I'm gonna leave *Blonde* off of that, because it's part of his career arc. He's in just a very different space as an artist by the time he gets to *Blonde*. He is now you know, the person—the kind of artist that people are desperate to collaborate with. They just want to get him as a feature, because what he brings, what he evokes as a creative person, it helps to you know, you get this halo effect by simply having him on your project.

[Morgan affirms.]

You know, one of our old jokes on *Heat Rocks* has always been that if you had to update a song from any album that you've talked about and you needed to find someone to do a cover version of whatever it is, Frank Ocean is the go-to.

[Morgan laughs.]

Because there's nothing that he can't tackle. And I can't really explain to you why he's able to do that, but I will listen to him—I'll listen to him do Louis, Ella and Louis. I would listen to him do a Labi Siffre song. In fact, he'd be a great person to cover Labi Siffre. Um, I would listen to him doing Tribe. Like, one hundred percent, Frank can do it. And so I don't know if I would—I would feel intimidated about trying to teach a Frank Ocean course, but it would be an enjoyable thing to try to struggle through at the very least.

00:48:37 Music Music "White Ferrari" off the album *Blonde* by Frank Ocean. Slow, psychedelic R&B with one voice layered over itself.

*I'm sure we're taller in another dimension
You say we're small and not worth the mention
You're tired of moving, your body's aching
We could vacay, there's places to go
Clearly this isn't all that there is*

[Music fades out as dialogue resumes.]

00:49:01 Morgan Host Well, we gotta get you to teach a Frank Ocean course. I for one would definitely be there, in the front, with popcorn, with a Frank Ocean t-shirt on. Or maybe Oliver would have a t-shirt on. But yeah, that album is fantastic, and a great pick.

00:49:15 Music Transition "Crown Ones" off the album *Stepfather* by People Under The Stairs.

00:49:16	Morgan	Host	Well, that's gonna do it for this comfort music episode of <i>Heat Rocks</i> , and next time it's gonna be us talking about some of <u>your</u> comfort music picks. And it's not too late to turn those things in, so if you have comfort picks, send them on, we'll get to it next time.
00:49:32	Oliver	Host	You've been listening to <i>Heat Rocks</i> with me, Oliver Wang, and Morgan Rhodes.
00:49:35	Morgan	Host	Our theme music is "Crown Ones" by <i>Thes One of People Under The Stairs</i> . Shoutout to Thes for the hookup.
00:49:41	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.
00:49:48	Morgan	Host	Our senior producer is Laura Swisher, and our executive producer is Jesse Thorn.
00:49:53	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.
00:50:04	Speaker 1	Promo	MaximumFun.org .
00:50:06	Speaker 2	Promo	Comedy and culture.
00:50:07	Speaker 3	Promo	Artist owned—
00:50:08	Speaker 4	Promo	—Audience supported.