

[00:00:00]

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Welcome to the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast. I'm Bailiff Jesse Thorn. This week, "Clear and Present Banger". Christian and Suni are part of a friend group that loves to discuss pop music. Christian asked the group to name their songs of the summer for 2024, but some members picked songs that aren't even from this year. Suni says this is unacceptable. Christian says any summer counts. Who's right? Who's wrong? Only one can decide. Please rise as Judge John Hodgman enters the courtroom and presents an obscure cultural reference.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

John Hodgman: When the Oldsmobile has got the top down on it, when the catamaran has got the drop down on it, when the flat of the land has got the crop down on it—some things were good before, and some things never were, but that summer feeling is gonna haunt you one day in your life.

Bailiff Jessie Thorn, please swear the litigants in.

Jesse Thorn: Christian and Suni, please rise and raise your right hands. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God-or-Whatever?

(They swear.)

Do you swear to abide by Judge John Hodgman's ruling, despite the fact that every year since 1983, Judge Hodgman's song of the summer has been "99 Luftballons"?

(They swear.)

Judge Hodgman, you may proceed.

John Hodgman: *(Hums a bar of "99 Luftballons".)* That's—you know, that is absolutely a clear and present bane-ger, which is a little riff on our wonderful title. *(Speaking hurriedly.)* Suni and Christian, you may be seated for an immediate summary judgement in one of your favors.

(Chairs squeak.)

Can either of you name the piece of culture that I referenced as I entered the courtroom?
(Gasps for air.) Suni, what's your guess?

Suni: I'm going to go with what I had come in here to guess. It seems like a song lyric, and I'm going to go with a Mountain Goats song lyric.

John Hodgman: A Mountain Goats song—not a particular song, just any one? Any Mountain Goats song.

Suni: A Mountain Goats summer song lyric.

John Hodgman: Oh, excuse me, summer song.

Jesse Thorn: They're all the same, it's just a bunch of singing.

John Hodgman: Just a bunch of beautiful words and music. Christian, what's your guess?

Christian: I also think it was a song lyric. I'm gonna say that it's a west coast rap song about summer.

Jesse Thorn: And crops.

Christian: (*Chuckling.*) And crops. Exactly.

John Hodgman: I mean, the crops is a dead giveaway, because you would never see that in East Coast rap, but that's a big part of West Coast rap. West Coast agricultural rap, agro rap. Was there an artist that you wanted to attach to your guess?

Christian: Well, let's just go with Snoop Dogg. That's always a good guess for anything.

John Hodgman: If I were—now see, here's the thing. Because I got word in the briefing that Christian, you're a music nerd. So, I had to go pretty obscure with this one. If I had said this one, would you have guessed? And Suni, you're also going to get to guess. “And as I think back, it makes me wonder how the smell from a grill could spark up the world's most toxic impulse.” Does it ring a bell?

Christian: No, it does not.

John Hodgman: What's the world's most toxic impulse in the *Judge John Hodgman*-iverse?

Suni: Nostalgia.

John Hodgman: Correct. “As I think back, makes me wonder how the smell from a grill could spark up nostalgia.” “Summertime” by DJ Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince. Song of the Summer, 1991. But okay, I should have gone with that one!

Jesse Thorn: 1991 through 2024 inclusive.

John Hodgman: Yeah, exactly. Probably the song of the summer forever. We just proved Christian's point. But because I was concerned that Christian would be a ringer—or a rin-ger, based on our incredible title for this week's podcast—I had to go all the way back, in fact, to

1983 to not a rap artist, but in fact, the wonderful, beautiful, naïve lyrics of one Jonathan Richman and the Modern Lovers from the fourth album by Jonathan Richman, *Jonathan Sings*. The name of the song is “That Summer Feeling”, and it speaks specifically of that toxic impulse. “That summer feeling is going to haunt you one day in your life. Some things were good before, but some things never were.” And the whole song—I had never heard this Jonathan Richman song before. Have you heard of it? Does it ring a bell to you, Christian or Suni?

Christian: I've heard it, but it doesn't stick in my head.

John Hodgman: Well, it's a real bane-ger. Put it in your convertible when the Oldsmobile has the top down on it or on your catamaran when the dropdowns on it. When you're driving by this land with the crop down on it, because I guess summertime you've brought in the crops? I don't know. But it's a haunting song. It has no drops. Only the catamaran has a drop. No, the song itself does not have a drop, but it's beautiful. And it reminded me that summer kind of often feels like something you really only fully experience when you're thinking about it once it's over. Because it happens—we're coming into the summer right now as we record, and it happens so quick, and yet your memories of it are so prolonged and deep.

[00:05:00]

If they're good memories—and I hope they are for everyone. Have a great summer, everybody. School's out, bye! I'm not doing this anymore. Oh wait, we have to.

(Jesse laughs.)

Sorry, I'm so excited. So excited to run away. But no, school's still in. We gotta hear this case. No one guessed it, so let's get into it. Who brings this case before me for justice?

Suni: I do.

John Hodgman: Suni, it's nice to see you again. You were on our show in Chicago, correct?

(Suni confirms.)

Now, were you the person who ate half an olive from a martini, or hated the person who ate half an olive from a martini?

Suni: I wouldn't go so far as to say I hated the person, but I hated the action of eating half the olive. Which then you proceeded to do ad nauseum on stage in front of me. Thank you very much.

John Hodgman: I love olives by the half. Well, anyway, it's nice to see you again. But Christian, I've never met you before. You're completely unknown to me. We established that.

(Christian confirms.)

We met at the Field Museum in Chicago after a medallion status event.

(Christian confirms.)

But I have no memory of it. So, I'm not recusing myself. Like all the best judges, I refuse to recuse myself under any circumstances.

Jesse Thorn: No matter what flag your wife flies.

John Hodgman: No matter what flag I'm flying. Right now, my flag has half an olive on it, which is the new standard of House Hodgman, by the way. Thank you, Suni. Alright, Suni, what's the dispute? What's this thing about the song of the summer? What's going on?

Suni: So, Christian and I are in a music league that actually he started a number of years ago during the pandemic. It's through a popular streaming app. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Yeah. Alright. First of all, I just need—you're both under fake oath right now. This is my worst—this is what I was worried about. Tell me what Music League is. And are you employed by this company to buzz market this app?

Suni: No.

John Hodgman: Christian?

Christian: I am not.

John Hodgman: Alright. What is it, Suni?

Suni: Basically, over the course of—I think we do 10 weeks. I don't know if that's just standard.

John Hodgman: No, no, no, no. I need you to go back and tell me what is Music League, because I did not bother to do any homework to find out. 'Cause why? I'm not being paid by them.

Suni: So, Music League is available through this streaming app where you can sign up with a group of people, and you get a prompt every week.

John Hodgman: What is it? A game?

Suni: Yeah, it's a game, but there's no prize really. It's just, you know, you rack up points, and it's for bragging rights, I suppose.

John Hodgman: Okay. Alright. So, you sign—a group of friends sign up. And all the friends get a prompt every week, and a prompt might be something like...?

Christian: What's a song that you listened to in high school that you still listen to now?

John Hodgman: Uuuh, okay. Tom Waits. All of them. Good. Got it. That's what I put in. And then everyone in the team puts in their own answers. And then what happens, Suni?

Suni: And then there's a voting period. And you have—we have 10 votes. You can put them all on one song. You can distribute them amongst different songs.

John Hodgman: Each person has 10 votes?

Suni: Each person has 10 votes.

John Hodgman: Oh, it's like if you live in Wyoming.

(They laugh.)

Suni: Something like that.

Christian: Very much.

John Hodgman: I understand.

Suni: And then at the end of the voting period, you get to see the results and who—and the voting is anonymous. You don't know which person put in which song. You just are blindly voting on the song itself. And then at the end, you get to see which song wins. You get to see who put in which song.

John Hodgman: So, you're saying that if Jesse and I were doing Music League, and the prompt was to name a song that you listened to at high school, and I said, "Ruby's Arms" by Tom Waits, Jesse would put all 10 votes against me to try to deny my reality that I listened to that song simply to spite me? I mean, you would do that, right Jesse? If you had a chance?

Jesse Thorn: I'm not familiar with the artist, but yes.

(They laugh.)

Suni: There is a downvote option. We don't use that anymore, but you can have everybody gets 10 votes plus a downvote. So, I would assume in that case—

John Hodgman: But it's not something like "Tell me a song you remember." It's like "What is the best A-ha song? Or what is the best Tom Waits song?" And people would vote on that. It's a matter of opinion, but not a matter of fact. So, the example you gave me, Christian, was very bad.

Suni: Well, they're all kind of a matter of opinion to a certain degree.

John Hodgman: Yeah, but Christian said name a song that you listened to in high school.

Christian: That you still listen to today. Then what happens is you get that playlist, and you listen to it, and then you vote on which song—whatever your voting criteria are, you vote on the songs or for the songs that you think are either the best interpretation of that prompt, or maybe the song you like the best. The points get tallied up, and then somebody wins the round.

John Hodgman: Got it.

Suni: I think maybe like a better example of a prompt—

John Hodgman: Thank you, Suni.

Suni: (*Laughs.*) One of the prompts we had a while ago was a song with a name in the title. So, everyone picks a song with a name in the title. You get the playlist.

John Hodgman: “Ruby's Arms”, Tom Waits. That's one I put in.

Jesse Thorn: “Jackie Wilson Said” by Van Morrison.

John Hodgman: Right. And then everyone gets that playlist. They listen to the songs, and then they vote for the ones they like the best or thinks it's the best representation or whatever it is.

[00:10:00]

Jesse Thorn: Hold on! Hold on. I'm changing it! “Jackie Wilson Said” by Dexys Midnight Runners.

John Hodgman: “Come on Eileen” by Dexys Midnight Runners. Alright, so then I understand the game. And this sounds like a lot of fun, but I'm not going to say that, because they're not sponsoring this. And I'm afraid I'm giving them free advertising. I'm still afraid that both of you are shills for this thing.

Christian: It's not actually run by the streaming service. It's actually just one guy who like created this and gets it out there. So, he wouldn't even be able to pay us or pay me.

Suni: But the songs have to be on that streaming service.

Christian: Right. ‘Cause that's where the playlist comes from.

John Hodgman: Okay. Well, look, I like a thing that's built by one guy. So, good job, one guy. Music League sounds like fun. So, you're part of Music League with a group of friends. Okay, Suni, now I understand. So, tell me what happened.

Suni: So, again, we've been doing this for a number of years. I think we're on the 18th iteration of this Music League. Members have come and gone, but there's a pretty much a solid core group of us who've been doing this since the pandemic. Yeah. So, we've had a number of categories. Some of these prompts we have recycled or reused. Christian normally comes up with all of them, but sometimes some of us chime in with prompts that we think should be in future leagues.

So, anyway, recently in this league, we had a prompt. And the prompt was “2024 Song of the Summer”.

John Hodgman: (*Chuckles.*) And who came up with that prompt?

Christian: I did.

John Hodgman: Christian did. Okay, good.

Suni: And so, I put in my 2024 song of the summer.

John Hodgman: Which is?

Suni: “Bodyguard” by Beyonce.

John Hodgman: “Bodyguard” by Beyonce. Very popular song. A true bane-ger.

Suni: From an album full of bangers. Anyway, I was surprised when the playlist opened up to see that the vast majority of the songs were not from 2024. I would say less—fewer than 50% were from 2024. The rest were from—I think one went back to like the '70s.

John Hodgman: What was that? “Summer Madness” by Kool and the Gang?

Suni: I don't remember what it was, offhand.

John Hodgman: That's the one it probably was. Ten votes up for that one.

(Suni agrees with a laugh.)

Jesse Thorn: It was probably “Summer Madness” by Kool and the Gang.

John Hodgman: “Summer Madness” by Kool and the Gang.

Suni: I'm pretty sure it was not that.

John Hodgman: Christian, what was your pick?

Christian: I honestly don't remember.

John Hodgman: There was no way you could have prepared?

Christian: (*Chuckling*) In my defense—

John Hodgman: Did you know you were coming in today?

(*They laugh*)

Jesse Thorn: Do you know where you are right now?!

Christian: I remember now. It was “Espresso” by Sabrina Carpenter.

John Hodgman: Alright, that's one that I saw on a list of summer songs when I was trying to do my homework, but I didn't listen to it. I'm gonna listen to it right now. I'm gonna tell you if it's a banger or not.

Jesse Thorn: He's listening, he's listening.

John Hodgman: Jesse, it's a bane-ger.

Jesse Thorn: Confirmed. John's dancing. You can't see that on the audio, but—

John Hodgman: I'll be listening to that in my car this summer, for sure. 2024, song of the summer, possibly.

Jesse Thorn: Doors off, volume up.

John Hodgman: What makes a good summer jam, the two of you?

Christian: I think it's got to be upbeat. I would say, you know, light subject matter, although the song that won this did not have light subject matter.

John Hodgman: What was the song that won?

Christian: “Hind’s Hall” by Macklemore, the anti—the protest song that Macklemore, of all people, put out.

John Hodgman: Right, of course. Got it.

Christian: But yeah, it has to be light, fun, upbeat. And like I think it has to be a pop song, whatever that means. Like, it has to be sort of the type of music that is—

John Hodgman: What does it mean?

Christian: Whatever's on the radio right now, I think—

John Hodgman: Jesse, you know, music. What does pop music mean to you?

Jesse Thorn: Uh, it used to be R&B music performed by white people. That definition has expanded somewhat in the last couple of decades. I mean, I think it is a topic of much discussion among musicologists and culture studies enthusiasts, to say nothing of music critics. But I think it tends towards music with a broad appeal, but also it tends towards music that, in a historically raucous context, might have been looked down upon. Which is to say music that appeals to young women and queer people in particular.

John Hodgman: Got it.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

John Hodgman: So, Suni, what were some of the songs that surprised you, because they weren't from 2024?

Suni: I think one of the more surprising ones—we have one member of the league who, whenever possible, will put in a Weird Al Yankovic song. So, “Party in the CIA”. Look, I love Weird Al Yankovic, don't get me wrong. But that was—so, “Party in the CIA” was one of them.

John Hodgman: I have heard that song.

[00:15:00]

Anyone who's seen this weird dad cruise down a lane in Maine in an open jeep listening to that song knows that I know how to get down. That is truly a song of a summer, for sure.

Suni: Of a summer. Not of 2024.

John Hodgman: Right. Any other ones? Roger Miller's “Summertime in the Summertime”, by Roger Miller?

Christian: There are a few songs that are about summer. So, there's an Iris DeMent song called “Hotter Than Mojave in My Heart”, for example. Not what I would consider a pop summer song, but a song about heat and the desert.

John Hodgman: Sure. Was it a 2024 song, just out of curiosity?

Christian: 1992.

John Hodgman: Were you surprised, Christian, when you saw songs that were not released in 2024?

Christian: I think I was surprised that there were so many that weren't. I wasn't surprised that some of them weren't out from this year.

John Hodgman: And when you saw these non 2024 songs, were you like instant disqualification? Do you have that power?

Christian: I do have that power! I don't think I've ever used it, and I did not—

Suni: I don't think I realized you had that power.

Christian: I can do anything.

John Hodgman: Here we go.

Suni: Wow!

Christian: I did not—I didn't think that there was anything wrong with the songs that people had submitted.

John Hodgman: But Suni, you did.

(Suni confirms.)

And you lost.

Suni: I did.

John Hodgman: So, you are a disgruntled person.

Suni: *(Laughs.)* Well, is that not true of every plaintiff?

John Hodgman: You're saying the vote was rigged, and you deserved to win.

Suni: I demand a recount.

John Hodgman: Mm! Well, I do not recuse myself.

(Suni laughs.)

And with your argument being what exactly, Suni?

Suni: The prompt was 2024 Song of the Summer. That, to me, is obvious. It needed to be a song from 2024.

John Hodgman: Not necessarily the best song to listen to this summer, no matter when it's from.

Suni: Right. The best song to listen to this summer from this year.

John Hodgman: Yeah, I don't know why I'm making that stupid argument. That's Christian stupid argument. And all these other people's stupid argument. I mean, it seems pretty clear, Christian. How do you defend not disqualifying all of these non 2024 songs?

Christian: I just feel like I just want everybody to get along.

Jesse Thorn: (*Laughs.*) I mean, if this'll do it, I say we should go for it!

(*They laugh.*)

Christian: It's very low stress, low stakes. And so, I just wanted to—I didn't feel the need to call anybody out.

John Hodgman: Especially since it seems like a minority of members of the league actually submitted current 2024 songs. You know, when I was educated in literary theory at Yale University, I was taught that the author was dead by Roland Barthes. So, therefore authorial intention has no meaning. But I am going to ask it in any case, Christian, because I don't think you're dead. When you wrote the prompt, 2024 Song of the Summer, what did you have in mind? What was the framer's intent? I'm a strict Music League originalist.

Christian: The framer's intent was a song from 2024 that represents—that is the song for the summer. Basically, my intent was what Suni went with.

John Hodgman: Uh-huh!

Suni: Uh-huh!

John Hodgman: And yet, it was within your power to disqualify those people, but you were afraid to! Because you thought their feelings would be hurt. Is that not right, Christian?!

Christian: That is not exactly right.

John Hodgman: Well, then tell me what's exactly right.

Christian: We've never had any sort of conflict in this league. This started out during the pandemic. We were all sort of, you know, stuck. And this was an opportunity to kind of get together, have a little bit of community online when we couldn't be face to face, learn some

new songs. I have another music league that's a lot more cutthroat, and people say bad things about people's songs.

(John laughs.)

And so, this one was just like a—this was just more nice. Like, you know. And I will also say that there is a way to express your displeasure. And that is don't vote for those songs.

John Hodgman: You have another music league that you say is more—do these music leagues have names?

Christian: Sort of. I mean, this one is called Mischief, and that one is called Maserati. And I honestly don't even remember why I chose those names.

John Hodgman: You just insist on M words.

Jesse Thorn: What was the worst conflict ever in Maserati? The cutthroat league?

Christian: Well, the very first league was actually all the people from what ended up being both of those leagues together. And after a few rounds, it became very clear that some of those people were much more rockist and sort of serious and were looking for—tended to go with more obscure, kind of point scoring types of songs. And some of the people were definitely more—

[00:20:00]

“Hey, this is fun. Let's put this together. I don't really want to argue. I don't want to, you know, say anything bad about anybody or any other song.” So, after that first league, that's when I split him into two, so that those of us who wanted to go one way could do that, and those of us who wanted to go the other way could do that.

John Hodgman: So, you're saying Maserati is full of rockist, music snob weird-beards who like to paz and jop each other on the head, and you wanted to isolate them from the nice people in Mischief.

(Christian confirms.)

Okay, got it. And let me—and now let me ask you a question, Suni. There had been a downvote option in Mischief, right? And that you eliminated the downvote option, correct?

Suni: Yes.

John Hodgman: Was that due to some conflict in Mischief?

Suni: I think actually when we realized we didn't have to use it, the majority of us were like, "Yeah, let's not do it." Because it does feel mean spirited. And there were some times where I'm like I may not vote for a song, but I don't want to actually have to downvote a song.

John Hodgman: Is Mischief the conflict-free utopia that Christian tried to engineer?

Suni: I would say for the most part, yes.

John Hodgman: Until now!

Suni: Until now. I'm rocking the boat.

John Hodgman: You're mixing it up. Why is it important to you?

Suni: Because I feel like words have to have meaning. And 2024's Song of the Summer is a very—like, some of the prompts—like, you know, with "a song that you listen to from high school", like there's a lot of subjectivity to that, and what song. Because it could be a song that came out when you were in high school, or it could be a song that you just discovered when you were in high school, but it came out years before. So, there's a lot more flexibility, wiggle room, with that category.

But with a category like this, it's very clear. 2024 Song of the Summer means—again, it didn't even—even if it said just Song of the Summer, that's questionable. Right? Typically, I think Song of the Summer means the song of the summer that you are entering. But that at least maybe could have been a little bit more flexible. But the fact that it had 2024 Song of the Summer to me makes it very clear of what it was supposed to be.

John Hodgman: Christian, did you take this dispute over to the hipster nitpickers over there in Maserati?

Christian: I did not, but everybody in that league posted a song from 2024.

John Hodgman: Oh, so you posted the same prompt to both leagues?

Christian: A lot of times I'll do that. Yeah. The same prompt goes to both leagues.

John Hodgman: So, they all picked 2024 songs.

(Christian confirms.)

It would seem like they're speaking with their votes that it should be 2024 songs.

Christian: I think that if you are tuned in—no pun intended—to sort of the conversations around music, if you're extremely online about music, you know that—or you know that Song of the Summer means a song that's going to be big this summer. I think if you're a more casual music listener, you're not necessarily knowing that like record companies put millions

of dollars into promoting specific songs to be the Song of the Summer. You just remember the songs you liked in the summertime.

John Hodgman: So, you're accusing the folks in Mischief of being lovable simpletons who aren't particularly discerning.

Christian: I think that's fair.

John Hodgman: But on the other hand, they were the ones who were more creative in their interpretation. They weren't simply swallowing the music labels' propaganda by saying the biggest songs that have been marketed for the summer specifically. They were coming up with interesting ideas.

Christian: Yes, and they also were putting out songs that were from this year, but that weren't the big pop songs. They were more sort of underground, rocky kind of stuff that happened to be from this year.

John Hodgman: Sounds like Mischief is a pretty cool group of people.

Christian: It is!

Suni: For the most part.

John Hodgman: What is the title you hold running this thing, Christian?

Christian: It's probably Commissioner.

Suni: I was gonna, I think I'd call you the Commissioner.

Christian: Yeah, probably.

John Hodgman: Who elected you Commissioner of Mischief?

Christian: I seized the title myself by creating the league.

John Hodgman: By the way, Commissioner of Mischief is my favorite Metallica album.

(Jesse laughs.)

Suni, is this all a play for you to become Commissioner of Mischief?

Suni: Oh no. I don't want that responsibility.

John Hodgman: Why? Why? It seems like you'd do a good job. What does the job entail?

Christian: Not much.

Suni: Well, coming up with the prompts.

Christian: Well, coming up with them. But I mean, I just basically look at other people's music leagues and find prompts that seem good.

John Hodgman: Yeah. I mean, look at Christian. He's commissioning two different music leagues, but he's giving the same prompts. He's lazy, wishy washy. It's time for new blood.

Christian: It has been 18 leagues.

John Hodgman: 18 leagues!

Suni: Yeah, I know. I still feel like I don't want that responsibility. There are also other like—

John Hodgman: What if I were to rule in your favor under the condition that you take over?

Suni: Oooh, I don't know. I don't know if I like that.

John Hodgman: Why? Why are you afraid of leadership?

Suni: Oh, I'm not afraid of leadership. Not by any stretch. But in this case, I don't want to have to deal with people who think they can do a better job than me.

[00:25:00]

John Hodgman: Oh, you think that if I open the door to a power struggle, you're not going to be able to hold the commissionership for very long, because people will be coming after you.

Suni: (*Laughs.*) I don't know that anybody else really wants to do it besides Christian. He's been doing a good job, you know, for the most part. And he has—you know, you had asked before if there were any other conflicts, and I actually thought of one.

John Hodgman: Go on.

Suni: We used to—and again, we've kind of had to abandon this, because we've been doing this for so long. But for a while, there was sort of the unofficial rule that you weren't allowed to select a song that had been selected in a previous prompt in a previous round. Like, we had to come up with completely new songs. So, Christian used to have—and maybe still maintains—a spreadsheet of every song that was submitted for every prompt in the league. And so, you were supposed to like go check that, make sure the song you want to do hadn't been submitted before, before you submit it. And if it had been, then people wouldn't vote for it. We got dinged for it.

John Hodgman: In other words, over 18 iterations, you were not ever supposed to submit the same song twice?

Suni: You were—so, the league, when you enter your song, if you've entered it before, it tells you that. So, you can't really put in your own song again. But we weren't even allowed—like, I couldn't submit a song that Christian had submitted before.

Jesse Thorn: It's important to have these rules, John. 'Cause otherwise I'll just submit “It's Bigger Than Hip-Hop” by Dead Prez over and over and over.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: But according to Christian, this should be a self-regulating mechanism where you would eventually be downvoted. So, it wouldn't matter. So, why do you have this spreadsheet, Christian?

Christian: I think to make things a little more—I don't want to say challenging, but to kind of get people to expand their kind of universe of music. It would be easy to go back to the same favorites all the time. Right? And if a song wins a round, a previous round, you might be like, “Oh, I can put that in, and I know I'll get points.” We eventually abandoned that. Never officially, but 18 leagues, 10 rounds each, 10 people. I mean, we're well over 1,800 songs picked. So, at a certain point—

Suni: The spreadsheet was getting very long.

Christian: Yeah. And it was just like nobody wanted to go and like stroll through and say, “Oh, somebody did that song.” But for the most part, people don't—I don't think—resubmit songs very often.

John Hodgman: You know, Suni, if I were to appoint you Commissioner of Mischief, you don't have to have a spreadsheet.

Suni: Oh no, I wouldn't.

John Hodgman: You can do whatever you want. Suni, do you consider your group of friends to be serious about music?

Suni: To varying degrees. I think some are, and some aren't. Christian, I think is an example of a friend who is serious about music, but not all of my friends are.

John Hodgman: What about you?

Suni: I think I'm pretty serious about music.

John Hodgman: You did not win.

Suni: I think I may have come in last that round. *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Well, that was my question. I was just trying to establish if it was just a winner take all situation, or if there are rankings, ultimately, and just how badly Beyonce was dealt injustice in this situation.

Suni: And I also take offense on behalf of Beyonce. Because really, come on. That was the right answer.

John Hodgman: You know, Weird Al Yankovic is the nicest guy in the world and truly one of the superstars of music. I mean, a person who enjoys fame across multiple generations and has absolutely earned it. Obviously a parodist by trade, but a truly creative genius and someone who—I'm just going to brag—sends me a perhaps automated, but still heartfelt-seeming email on my birthday every year. I love Weird Al Yankovic. I will do anything for him, but I would not rank “Party in the CIA” above “Bodyguard” for Song of the Summer 2024 under any system of government. Doesn't that seem like there's something profoundly corrupt in the system, Christian?

Christian: It does. And I will say that actually “Bodyguard” did beat “Party in the CIA” in that round.

Suni: Did it? Oh, I'm sorry. I thought I came in last.

Christian: Nope. No, actually “Party in the CIA” did. No offense, Weird Al.

Suni: Okay. My apologies.

Jesse Thorn: I have a question. I don't want to ask it indelicately, but I can't think of a different way to ask it. How old are the people in the Music League?

Christian: So, the majority of them are about our age. Which is—we are Gen Xers.

John Hodgman: I think I understand that age range.

Christian: There are a few who are a little younger, probably around 40. And then there is the one guy who's like 25.

Jesse Thorn: To what extent do you think that the Song of the Summer—the released this year, hot this year, coming out of everyone's car windows, Song of the Summer—is defined by the music tastes of 47-year-olds?

[00:30:00]

(John laughs.)

And to what extent do you think 47-year-olds might be sensitive about whether or not they are defining what that song is?

Christian: I think it's being defined by 47-year-olds who think they know what 17-year-olds want to hear. Whether or not they do, I don't know. But I don't know a lot of 47-year-olds that are listening to "Espresso" on a regular basis.

John Hodgman: Real brag from Christian there. Do you think that the strict adherence 2024 rule among the Maserati group may have to do with the fact that those—I'm going to go ahead and say guys—are trying to prove that they know the latest music? Whereas maybe in Mischief, people are a little bit more playful and personal and like "I'm gonna interpret this in a little bit of a funny way"?

Christian: To some extent, yeah. I think that all the (*briefly hesitates*) guys who are in Maserati—

John Hodgman: I was right.

Christian: —are really into music in a specific way that usually involves a guy with a guitar, a guy with a drum, and a guy with a bass. Or maybe some keyboards. And they're looking for songs that aren't maybe what everybody else is thinking about.

Jesse Thorn: There are, in other words, music fans who consider other people enjoying a song to be a demerit towards that song. And there are music fans who consider more people enjoying that song to be a positive quality of that song.

Christian: I think that's true, although I don't want to cast dispersions on the guys in Maserati.

John Hodgman: Yeah, what was the top song in Maserati? Do you remember?

Christian: So, the song that won 2024 Song of the Summer for Maserati was "Starburster" by Fontaines DC.

John Hodgman: Okay, never heard of that. I'm going to take a listen. I'm going to audition that right now. "Starburster" by Fontaines DC.

Transition: Fanciful, trilling chimes.

John Hodgman: That's a good—that is what I would say is definitely a rockist song. That is a banger in the sense of an Irish banger, because it's an Irish post punk band. Christian, what were you afraid of? Why were you afraid of bringing down the hammer? I think that Suni makes a lot of good points, in particular that one. Like, why not push Mischief a little bit further in the correct direction here?

Christian: So, I think that the role that Mischief plays is doing that wide—you might want to think about it as wide but not deep, versus deep but not wide. And so, I worry that if I were—

John Hodgman: So, you're saying that the group exists solely to suggest new songs for you to listen to?

(Suni laughs.)

Christian: That's why I started it.

John Hodgman: Okay. Suni, did anyone else express frustration with the outcome of the league?

Suni: No.

John Hodgman: You're the sole malcontent?

Suni: Yes. Well—yes.

Christian: The only one who said something on the Discord. Who knows what the other people are thinking.

John Hodgman: And when you said something on the Discord, did anyone respond?

Suni: Just Christian. I think.

John Hodgman: And what was Christian's response? I will not change the outcome.

Suni: It was like, you know, "People can interpret it however they want to."

John Hodgman: People can interpret it however they want to.

Suni: And I will say for the most part, I agree with Christian. I think for the most part, he's right. The fact that this is a more laidback league, and that people can be a little bit creative with how they want to respond—so, for example, there was one league where all the prompts were emojis. And it was great. Like, the way people responded to those? Like, each playlist you had no idea what you were going to get, and it was fun to kind of see, "Oh, some people put these kinds of songs, and other people responded in this way." Like, that was fun. I appreciated that. And for the most part, I appreciate that.

But I do think there is a narrow ruling to be had that if a prompt includes a year in it—so, for example, if prompted said 1975 Song of the Summer, of course, everyone would have found a song from 1975 to put into it. If it has a year in it, then that year has to mean something, and we have to put songs in from that year.

John Hodgman: (*Beat.*) Yeah, that seems pretty obvious. Christian, do you wanna continue running this group? How would you feel if I were to rules that Suni takes over as Commish of Mischief?

Christian: I mean, I wouldn't have a problem with that. I think that Suni might have a problem with that.

John Hodgman: Yeah, and let the record show Suni is making a lot of noises and a lot of drawing her hand across her neck, as in, "Let's shut this down right away."

(*Suni laughs.*)

Suni, you really don't like this. You really would rather snipe from behind rather than take the lead.

Suni: In this case, yes.

John Hodgman: Suni, if you don't want to take over, what would you have me rule if I were to rule in your favor?

Suni: Again, I think a very narrow ruling—

[00:35:00]

—that says that if there is a year in the prompt, we have to—that the year has to mean something. That that is the—we have to select songs from that year.

John Hodgman: But I mean, how do we account for the damages so far? I mean, you're just going to let this go?

Suni: Oh. I mean, I would like maybe on the Discord, for example, for Christian to publicly say that he should have clarified and that they should have been songs from 2024.

John Hodgman: You want Christian to be a little bit stricter and a little bit clearer in his instructions, and yet you do not want the grave responsibility of entering things into a website.

(*Suni confirms.*)

What do you think would happen if I were to rule in your favor in the group—right?—and just say, "Sorry, it's Beyonce. Everyone's wrong." What would happen on the Discord if I, Judge John Hodgman, a person who used to be on television, said, "Hey. Excuse me, Discord. Your opinions are wrong. It all should have been 2024 songs. And of the songs that are left, it's Beyoncé."

Suni: I'd be fine with that.

John Hodgman: No, I know. That's how you would feel.

(Suni laughs.)

What do you think would happen with the other people? Do you think you would face retribution?

Suni: Oh, me personally?

(John confirms.)

I mean, I may face some retribution for bringing this.

John Hodgman: Would there be fallout?

Suni: There might—I don't know what that would mean, though. I think people would be—

John Hodgman: Would it turn into a street fight?

Suni: No, it wouldn't turn into a street fight.

Christian: I think people would be like, “Yeah, if that's the what the prompt should be, then yeah.” It'd be a fight between Beyonce and Macklemore. But I think we all know how that would end up.

John Hodgman: Well, if I eliminated all of the non 2024 songs, then we know that there would be at least three. But I'm just saying it's Beyonce. Sorry.

Suni: Thank you.

John Hodgman: My opinion. It's weird.

Jesse Thorn: But I feel like I'm living in a world where “Not Like Us” by Kendrick Lamar doesn't exist.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Well, I didn't even know that was a nominee.

Suni: It wasn't, surprisingly! It should have been, probably.

John Hodgman: Everything seems wrong with what happened, but I'm going to have to figure out how to straighten it out and bring justice to this world. I think I've heard everything I need to in order to make my decision. I'm going to go into my LP listening booth at Cutler's Records in the past at New Haven, Connecticut. I'll be back in a moment with my verdict.

Jesse Thorn: Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Suni, how do you feel about your chances?

Suni: I mean, I think if the judge hears my plea for just a very narrow ruling about years mattering in the prompts, then maybe I have a chance. But I am a little bit concerned that he's going to make me take over this league.

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, you're obviously shirking the responsibility that you desire in this instance.

(Suni laughs.)

You claim it's not your ordinary way of being. Are there other leadership positions you can point to? Are you in the Kiwanis or the Soroptimist?

Suni: I used to be the Kiwanis president of our local schoolboard. So.

Jesse Thorn: There you go. Now we're talking. Christian, how do you feel?

Christian: I wouldn't be surprised if I get ruled against. I think that, you know, maybe it's the situation of not being clear enough upfront that caused this confusion. And the year thing—you know, the fact that it had a year in the title probably should have been clarified. So, it wouldn't surprise me. But I mean, I'd love to be considered right also. That's, you know, also very important to me.

Jesse Thorn: What are you president of?

(They laugh.)

Christian: Nothing. Nothing. I'm a—you know, that's too much responsibility.

Jesse Thorn: Well, we'll see what Judge Hodgman has to say about all this when we come back in just a moment.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Judge John Hodgman, this may be the single most exciting time in the history of our podcast. We've been doing this podcast over 35 years.

John Hodgman: 39 to—I mean, and who's counting?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah. And this is the peak of thrill ride adventure time. The Pasadena Goth Club t-shirts are here, but this is a contest, folks! Two will enter, only one will survive. If you heard last week's program, we created a club for goths in the Pasadena area, called Pasadena Goth Club. It is, of course, welcome. It's open to non-goths and people anywhere in the world.

John Hodgman: All t-shirt wearers are welcome to join and vote with their torsos as to which will be the final and forever Pasadena Goth Club t-shirt design. We have two designs.

[00:40:00]

One is a white on black design for our Belial-worshipping audience. And then we have a pastel Pasadena themed shirt with the Pine Burger logo evoked on it as well. They both say Pasadena Goth Club. Two great vibes that really encompass both the goth and the Pasadena in the Pasadena Goth Club. Get them over at MaxFunStore.com.

Jesse Thorn: Here's the deal. Two-week order window. During that two weeks, you can get either one of these t-shirts. Once that two weeks is over, only the champion t-shirt will remain. So, if you want to ensure that you can get in on this and get your preferred shirt, you're going to have to get it now. And then if your shirt wins, you can get it for everybody for Christmas. In fact, I encourage you to do so.

John Hodgman: And you'll be very proud of yourself. That's right. After July 1st, the losing shirt will be gone forever. So, go over to the MaxFunStore.com, and go vote with your torso.

Jesse Thorn: I loved getting to send a text to my friend, Brian Fernandez, who designed these shirts, saying, "I like it, but more brutal. Make it more brutal," I said.

John Hodgman: *(Laughs.)* That's the MaxFunStore.com. And hey everybody, if you're a member of Maximum Fun, thank you first of all. And second of all, make sure to keep an eye on the BoCo feed, because we've got another Members Only Mailbag coming out at the end of the month. And this one is a true ban-ger. Bane-ger. It's a clear and present bonger.

(Jesse laughs and agrees.)

And it's terrific, and it's just for members. So, go check it out. And if you're a member of MaximumFun.org, you can send me an email at MaximumFun.org/jjho and say "I want to be part of the Members Only Mailbag." this is a place where we can answer etiquette questions, advice questions, or just read your comments. So, go. It's a lot of fun, Members Only Mailbag for, guess what, members only in the BoCo feed. And if you want to become a Maximum Fun member, you can always do it at MaximumFun.org/join.

Jesse Thorn: Judge Hodgman, at the end of this week's program, I will reveal my Not Released in 2024 Song of the Summer 2024, officially endorsed by Jesse Thorn. Right now, I'm going to release my Song of the Winter 2024, not released in 2024, as endorsed by Jesse Thorn.

John Hodgman: Okay, let's hear it.

Jesse Thorn: "Away in a Monger".

(John snorts.)

Okay, let's get back to the case.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Please rise as Judge John Hodgman reenters the courtroom and presents his verdict.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

John Hodgman: Well, I've given it a lot of thought. And I have to say, I obviously share Suni's distress at the outcome of this particular iteration of Music League. The prompt was obvious and clear in its intention. Unfortunately, there had been precedents set where people would just ignore that and put in whatever they wanted, whatever they felt like listening to this summer. And because of a lack of oversight and a general wishy washiness of leadership on Christian's part, that precedent has been allowed to stand. And consequently, it has poisoned the results of this year's Song of the Summer 2024 Music League.

That said, you know, I feel like it is fairly cowardly of Suni to come to me, an outsider, to try to invalidate this year's results without her taking on any responsibility going forward. The fact is, she does not want to be the Commissioner of Mischief. Christian, in all other respects, seems to be a good Commissioner of Mischief. I feel like, you know, double dipping in prompts over different groups feels a little bit lazy, Christian. But I get it. You probably have some other job than this too that you have to pay attention to. And for the most part, you're very happy to have him lead unless it doesn't go your way and Beyonce's way.

(Suni laughs.)

And frankly, if it doesn't go Beyonce's way, like that's Christian's problem. 'Cause he's going to get swarmed. You know what I'm saying? Like, now the world knows that Christian allowed this to happen; it's going to be bad news for him. And you just get to waltz away, Suni, into the next Music League or whatever it is, and try again. I have to say that I don't like the outcome of this, and yet it's done. What's done is done. Everything was done by the rules and according to precedent, and Christian had a chance to step in and correct it. Chose not to, and you don't want to step up and do it. And therefore, I have to say that it was properly ruled, even though I don't like the outcome.

Hey, guess what? Sometimes when an election happens and we don't like the outcome, you just have to acknowledge it rather than try to break into my courtroom and hang me or whatever! That's just how I see things.

(They laugh.)

You know what I mean? Like, I don't understand why you're outside of Four Seasons Total Landscaping, Suni, yelling at the sky.

Suni: Oh no! *(Laughing.)* Oh no! This has taken a terrible turn!

[00:45:00]

Jesse Thorn: You would not believe the flags flying outside Judge Hodgman's house.

(They laugh.)

John Hodgman: Yeah, I now have to fly my half-eaten olive at half-mast in protest for your even bringing this to the court. But look, I understand it was wrong. And Christian, I think, should in future consider being a little bit clearer in the instructions. Because I think that Suni is absolutely correct that, you know, this was an opportunity for the group to explore music that has been released this year, rather than try to come up with the funniest or most interesting or most favorite-est things that they want to listen to or sneak through. The funniest interpretation of Song of the Summer is a great prompt, so long as it's clear. Like, have it be a Song of the Summer, but it doesn't come out in the summer and never says summer. You know, like whatever it is. Like, that makes for a more interesting prompt.

I'm sorry that no one understood the simple instructions that you gave them, Christian. And going forward, I hope that you give them more precise instructions, so that everyone's playing on the same page, and everyone has a good time. I'm not going to order you to rerun this particular league, because what's done is done. We move forward in this lifetime, moves in one direction. Despite what some of the people in your group want to believe. They listen to old songs during the summer, when we obviously wanted a new song for the summer. But I have not yet pronounced my sentence, and here it is. This is my sentence and my verdict.

You're going to run Song of the Summer 1975. That's a great idea, Suni. That's what it's going to be. Can't be 1974, 'cause that's "Summer Madness" by Kool and the Gang. That's the obvious winner. 1975 Song of the Summer. Any song that was released during or in the run up to the summer of 1975. Run it, and put me down, 'cause I want to be a part of it.

This is the sound of a gavel.

Clip:

Music: Upbeat music.

Speaker: Hey! Have a good summer! *(Laughs.)*

John Hodgman: Judge John Hodgman rules, that is all.

Jesse Thorn: Please rise as Judge John Hodgman exits the courtroom.

(Chairs squeak, followed by heavy footsteps and a door closing.)

Christian, you're vindicated. How do you feel?

Christian: I feel pretty good. I think that's a pretty good—I like the—I think that's a fair ruling. I understand the, you know, *(stammering)* that it was the previous round. Maybe if I had done something differently, we wouldn't have had this problem. But I think that I will take the judge's recommendation and just be a little more specific on prompts, as long as I can find a way to do that and still not stifle the creativity of the group.

Jesse Thorn: Suni, how do you feel?

Suni: So, interestingly enough, I also feel somewhat vindicated. Because I think the judge clearly agrees with the interpretation of the prompt the way I saw it, and so that is—you know, I feel good about that. But I'm also a little, tiny bit confused. Did the judge just give us prompts for our next league?

Christian: I believe so.

Suni: That's kind of amazing. I love that. Thank you.

(Christian agrees.)

Jesse Thorn: Thank you both for joining us on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Christian: Thank you.

Suni: Thank you.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Jesse Thorn: Another *Judge John Hodgman* case is in the books. Before we get to Swift Justice, our thanks to Redditor u/GreatMuppetKvetcher for naming this week's episode.

John Hodgman: *(Laughs.)* That's a good one.

Jesse Thorn: All Reddit names are good. At least that we've ever read.

(John agrees.)

But I think that we have a—I think we have a special selection of especially good Reddit names, because they're also the people who come up with the dumb puns that name our episodes.

John Hodgman: Yeah. I mean, as someone who is on the record for disliking puns and wordplay in general, I love going to the Reddit to see what people suggest for titles. They're all so funny and clever, I have to say. And it's a shame we can only pick one of them.

Jesse Thorn: [MaximumFun.Reddit.com](https://www.maximumfun.com/reddit) is where you should do it. That's where we ask for our title suggestions. Evidence and photos from the show are on our Instagram account, [@JudgeJohnHodgman](https://www.instagram.com/judgejohnhodgman). They are also on [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org), if you go to this episode's page if you don't have social media. We're also on TikTok and YouTube, [@JudgeJohnHodgmanPod](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJmHodgmanPod), where you can watch John's—this is the only popular genre of YouTube videos, so I'm glad we got into it—John's Old Man Music React videos.

John Hodgman: (*Laughs.*) What?

Jesse Thorn: Yeah, this is like the top genre of music is “I made my grandpa listen to this Beyoncé song”. And it's just—it's an outrageous grandpa saying what they think of this Beyoncé song they'd never heard.

John Hodgman: Now, look, if I were a real entrepreneur, I would do a video channel where our children react to me singing “Roll Out the Barrel”.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

You should please go over to the TikTok and the YouTube, and please follow and subscribe and hit that bell to indicate that you'd like the notifications.

[00:50:00]

We have full episodes there. We also have video only content there. And guess what? Anytime—and believe me, I've noticed—anytime you comment on the YouTube, I get an email with your comment in it.

(*Jesse laughs.*)

So, if you're looking to get a message to me, that's one way to do it. Hey, thank you to PhelpsofRestarting over on Apple Podcasts. PhelpsofRestarting is a listener who gave us a 5-star rating. They say that *Judge John Hodgman* is their favorite podcast. They recommend it to friends and family members. They also say, quote, “I can put it on in the car with kids who are now aged 14 and 20 and know that I will have a laugh and a discussion. Thank you for your thoughtful, caring, and wise judgment.” End quote. Thank you so much, PhelpsofRestarting!

And if you're listening to us on Apple Podcasts, it really helps if you go over there and give us a rating and drop a few words of comment there as well. It won't get emailed directly to me, but you can tell we're watching. And what's more important is other listeners are checking those things out. And these are the ways that the show is discoverable these days. Liking, subscribing, smashing buttons, leaving reviews. It's very, very, very helpful. So, if you're in the mind to help, that's very helpful. Thank you very much.

Jesse Thorn: And you know what? No matter what app you're using to listen to this, if this is an episode you think might appeal to a friend of yours, send it to them! That's the surest fire away for our show to grow. It means the world to us. When you tell somebody, "Hey, I think you might like this show," or "Hey, I think you might like this episode." Because you know what? They might. I think we make a good show.

Judge John Hodgman was created by Jesse Thorn and John Hodgman. This episode, engineered by Max Fabian at Tightrope Recording in Chicago, Illinois. Our social media manager is Nattie Lopez. The podcast is produced by AJ McKeon. Our video editor is Daniel Speer. Nattie and Daniel both sitting in on the recording this week!

John Hodgman: Hi, friends!

Jesse Thorn: Hi, Daniel. Daniel's here beyond the other side of the window. Nattie is secretly hiding in the video conference. Our producer, Jennifer Marmoor!

Now, Swift Justice, where we answer your small disputes with quick judgment. MeanAdeptness4998 on the MaxFun subreddit says, "I want to get a minivan to accommodate our need for cargo space and low loading deck for pets. My wife thinks it's weird for childless couples to have a minivan. She's also worried that I will have it painted with a big cool wizard or maybe have it painted like the A Team van. She's right, I would! But I don't think that's enough to nix the minivan. Should we get a minivan?"

(They chuckle.)

John Hodgman: You know, I got into a minivan last night to take me to another part of the city. And I was like why do people hate on minivans? This is great! Very comfortable ride. So versatile. I understand that they're associated with non-coolness, MeanAdeptness wife. I get it. It doesn't feel cool to be in a minivan, especially if you don't have kids. But this does seem like a reasonable car for you. And it does seem that it would be helpful with your animal children as well. So, I'm going to say you should give it a try.

And if you're worried about it not being cool. I have the solution for you. Don't paint a wizard on it. Don't paint it like the A Team. Paint a post-apocalyptic landscape on it, and hovering over it is a skull head, and it's winking at you. And in gothic lettering it says, "Commissioner of Mischief". That's a cool minivan.

Alright, we love hearing disputes between friends. Suni's one of our rare litigants that we've had on the show twice, and both times she has sued a friend. I hope everything's going well in her friend groups. She's not the only one beefing with her pals. I know that there are other friend groups out there who get into the same debate over and over again and want it settled once and for all. And now is your chance to have that happen. Is your friend group split about where your next hang should be? Maybe you're all going to go on a trip together, and you don't know where to go. Did your best friend call you the Rhoda to her Mary, even though that you know that you are the Mary?! And who's the Phyllis by the way? And what am I even talking about, says Generation Z?!

Did one of your friends Venmo request everyone for something so absurd that no one wants to pay? Send me your friend group disputes at MaximumFun.org/jjho.

Jesse Thorn: This means you, my mother-in-law, Beth, and her friends from high school that go on a trip every five years together.

John Hodgman: Yeah, I want to hear from your mother-in-law, Beth, for sure. And the whole friend group. And I want to hear all of your disputes. Right, Jesse?

Jesse Thorn: Maximumfun.org/jjho is the place to send them into us. John, I got a non 2024 Song of the Summer 2024 for you.

John Hodgman: Let me hear it.

Jesse Thorn: It's "Low Rent Rendezvous" by Ace Spectrum.

John Hodgman: Okay. I'm writing it down.

Jesse Thorn: Everybody enjoy that.

John Hodgman: Ace Spectrum, Pet Detective. Got it.

Jesse Thorn: Ace Spectrum.

John Hodgman: Ace Spectrum.

Jesse Thorn: Ace Spectrummm.

John Hodgman: I wrote it down. Check it out on YouTube.

[00:55:00]

Jesse Thorn: We'll talk to you next time on the *Judge John Hodgman* podcast.

Sound Effect: Three gavel bangs.

Transition: Cheerful ukulele chord.

Speaker 1: Maximum Fun.

Speaker 2: A worker-owned network.

Speaker 3: Of artist owned shows.

Speaker 4: Supported—

Speaker 5: —directly—

Speaker 6: —by you!