Table of Contents

FALL 2020

Middle-Aged Dads Need Harry Styles In Their Life

By Cate Reynolds

Okay, okay, confession: I am not a dad and never will be. I am in fact a 25-year-old woman. But middle-aged dads, hear me out, I really think the music of Harry Styles is for you. If you're wondering why a millennial woman with zero experience in the fatherhood department thinks she has any idea what type of music middle-aged dads would enjoy, allow me to explain.

First of all, I am the daughter of a middle-aged dad. I have a pretty good idea what music appeals to that demographic because it's the same music that was blasting out of my family's minivan my entire childhood. But aside from knowing that music, I also enjoy that music. My siblings and I grew up listening to and loving the same musicians my parents love. Did I have a favorite Jonas Brother? No. Did I have a favorite Led Zeppelin song? "Fool In The Rain." So, while I am not a father nor middle-aged, much of my music taste resembles that of dads, age 50 and up. Keeping that in mind, I *really* think you should give Harry Styles a chance.

Perhaps at this point you're thinking 'but who the hell is Harry Styles and why should I care about him?' Let me enlighten you. Harry Styles is a very handsome English musician. He is also a former member of the wildly popular boy band One Direction. If this is all starting to sound familiar, maybe it's because you recently saw him dressed in Gucci on the cover of Vogue's December issue. But it's probably more likely because your daughter had a picture of him on her wall in high school. However, the modern-day Harry Styles is different from the one you heard on that 2012 song that your daughter and her friends played over and over again. Don't get me wrong, One Direction is iconic. I stand by that. But I understand that for you, a dad, that sound isn't your vibe. That's where solo-career Harry Styles comes in.

In 2017, a year after the members of One Direction went their separate ways, Harry Styles released his self-titled debut album and it was, as the kids say, absolute fire. The Harry that your daughter knows and loves is still there, but he's doing things his way, and that includes drawing inspiration from the bands and musicians he loves, which aren't so different than the ones you admire. If you're a big fan of The Beatles, give "Sweet Creature" a listen. If The Rolling Stones are more your style, check out "Only Angel." Bowie fans will vibe with "Sign of the Times." You'll also hear hints of Elton John, Fleetwood Mac, and Pink Floyd, just to name a few. Do I have your attention now, dads? Solo Harry has that 70s rock sound that you're so nostalgic for (complete with a Mick Jagger wardrobe) with a modern, pop twist.

His second album, *Fine Line*, released in late 2019, leans less on rock and more on an indie-pop and psychedelic-pop sound, peppered with a little bit of funk. Am I losing your interest again? I hear you. But I have a feeling that after you listen to the first album, you'll have a newfound respect for Harry Styles, which will make the transition to *Fine Line* completely seamless. In fact, it might even make you crave more new music. (Have you heard The Killers' new album?) But don't take my word for it! The album also earned itself a spot on the newest edition of Rolling Stone's "The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time." While *Fine Line* just made the cut (#491), it still found a place among Paul Simon's *Graceland*, Bruce Springsteen's *Born To Run*, and The Beatles' *Abbey Road.* If Harry Styles is good enough to be ranked among music legends, then he should be good enough for you.

The time has come, dads, for you to stop writing-off Harry Styles as a former boy-band member. While your daughters' One Direction phase may have bordered on obsessive, your daughters have grown up and so has Harry Styles, and they both have really good taste in music.

Give Harry Styles a chance, dads. Who knows, you might even find yourself hanging his picture on your bedroom wall.

There's No Place Like Home During A Pandemic

By Cate Reynolds

On a warm day in early-September, 23-year-old Emily Cornett lounged barefoot on a small balcony. She was in the midst of her first month of graduate school at Washington University, where she's pursuing a master's in social work. Cornett's atmosphere was, for the most part, that of a typical graduate student: a computer on her lap, a pen in hand, and a sustained look of concentration across her face. Her location, however, was less typical. Rather than curled up in an apartment close to her school's campus in St. Louis, Cornett was reclining on the balcony of her childhood treehouse, perched within a Magnolia tree in the backyard of her parents' Southwest Baltimore home.

Cornett who graduated from Yale in 2015, finished a one-year fellowship with the Alaska Fellows Program in Anchorage, Alaska this summer. The original plan was to head straight to St. Louis at the end of her fellowship, but then COVID hit. Her program offered a fully remote learning option, so she decided to save some money and head back home to Baltimore. But being home has come with a few challenges. The treehouse was the first on a continuing list of spaces that Cornett has escaped to in search of a quiet, distraction-free workspace within an abnormally noisy work-from-home environment.

Cornett's parents, Stanley and Eileen, are both faculty at The Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. As COVID cases in Maryland began to rise again in late July, Peabody decided to backtrack its initial plans for a mix of in-person and online classes and remain fully online for the fall semester. Now, Cornett is attempting to learn remotely while her parents teach opera voice and piano courses remotely. With two balconies, carpeting, and running electricity—the wooden-shingled treetop abode was at first the perfect refuge. Cornett's

childhood haven, which once hosted slumber parties with friends and movie nights with her older sister, was again providing solace. That was until about three weeks ago, when Cornett underwent surgery on her right knee—making the climb to the treehouse no longer an option. The search for a suitable replacement space is still underway.

"I've been doing the screened-in porch, so that I just have a nice, neutral plant behind me and natural light," said Cornett. "But I don't know what I'm going to do when it gets cold."

Her bedroom, she explains, is not an option for class because the background is "too embarrassing." Cornett picked out her bedroom décor in 2008 at the age of 11, and not much has changed since then: purple polka-dot curtains, old baby blankets on her bed. She's used the bookshelf in the corner as a Zoom backdrop that's impressive, to a point: "My friends will be like, 'Oh my gosh. Where are you? You look like someone on the news.' And then I'll be like, 'Okay, but look at what the books are.' And it's the American Girl books, the Clique, and A Series of Unfortunate Events."

Last week, she attended class from the attic, which doubles as a rec room and workout space. It felt like a quiet and relatively disruption-free choice. But amid a class discussion on genocide, Cornett's father came blazing in, ready for his workout. The guest room is also a great option. She's done a few of her Zoom classes there, though she feels the white, lacy curtains and "weird poster of a little French boy" in the background standout in comparison to her classmates' less whimsical surroundings.

"I also know you can do those Zoom virtual backgrounds, but I feel like enough people have to do that for it to be like 'we're all doing this.' I don't want to be the one person who has something to hide."

Despite Cornett's minor workspace dilemma, being home has eased a lot of her anxiety regarding her parents and their health amidst the pandemic. The home-cooked meals and being around her cat, Scout, is another bonus. After eight months away, she was ecstatic to come home and hug her family—which she did after 10 days and a negative COVID test.

She enjoys the luxury of being able to roll out of bed right before class and not have to stress about whether she forgot to brush her teeth. The downside of remote learning is feeling somewhat isolated from her school community. Her life feels "on hold" in many ways, a sentiment which she recognizes reflects many others' current reality. "This is how it is for everyone," explained Cornett. "It sucks, but I'm not actively worried about it. This is just going to be a weird time."

For now, her workspace conundrum remains unresolved. However, there is a small glimmer of hope. Though she moves slowly and with a slight limp, Cornett is no longer walking with crutches. Is it possible that her return to the treehouse isn't too far down the line? "I could probably make it up," she said.

Getting Lit: How One Iconic Christmas Tree Became Twitter Famous

By Cate Reynolds

It was late November, 2010, when Matt Haze saw a photo of a 74-foot Norway Spruce strapped to a large flatbed truck. The tree was leaving its home of Mahopac, New York, a town of less than 8,500, and making the 50-mile journey to New York City. This lucky tree scored the job that many saplings dream of but only few achieve: becoming the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree.

In many ways, the story of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree is a typical rags to riches tale about a small-towner making it big in New York City. But this particular Cinderella story is (sorry) evergreen. Despite the repetitive nature of the tale (small town tree gets lit in the big apple), the lighting of this tree still seems to captivate the nation each year—even earning an annual primetime TV special. But this wasn't always the case. In fact, that day in November ten years ago, Haze thought that the tree was missing an opportunity. Like any big celebrity in the digital age, it needed a social media presence.

Haze took matters into his own hands and created @30RockTree, the unofficial Twitter account of the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree. Its Twitter bio says it all: "Like I need to tell you who I am. The original social media influencer. The photos lie. I look better in person."

The world's most famous Christmas tree has some fairly humble roots. It all started on Christmas Eve in 1931. Much like 2020, the United States was nearing the finish line of a less than ideal year. It was the height of the Great Depression, The Dust Bowl was plaguing much of

the southern portion of the Great Plains, and to top it all off, the end of Prohibition was still two years away. In need of some holiday joy, workers at the Rockefeller Center construction site all chipped in to buy what would be the first Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree: a 20-foot balsam fir adorned with homemade decorations. Two years later, the first official Rockefeller Center Christmas tree was lit. Now, once a year, the tree becomes one of New York City's biggest celebrities.

The story of a small town tree being suddenly thrust into the spotlight was what caught Haze's attention, who was relatively new to the city when he started researching the tree's history. "The story about the tree itself becomes part of the ambience," says Haze. "It comes from this small town, and this family donated it, and you realize it's kind of made into a big star. It's as if you're taking a nobody from a small little town into New York and making it a big star. And I realized there's a whole character with that."

On the outside, the tree exudes elegance. Draped in over 50,000 lights and topped with a Swarovski crystal star, there is likely no tree as glamorous. But don't let looks fool you—the tree's online persona is a bit rough around the edges (and not because of the pine needles.) "Currently being adorned with an amazing crystal star that's worth more than your home and weighs more than your emotional baggage," one tweet reads.

The tree isn't afraid to get topical. Case in point: a tweet from earlier this year. "Since there's no crowd here to boo Mayor de Blasio, I dropped some sap on his head. You're welcome, New York. <3 u," the tree tweeted during the December 2, 2020, tree lighting ceremony, which, like most traditionally large events, did not allow a crowd this year.

Today, the tree's Twitter account has more than 13,000 followers. That number was considerably smaller until just a few years ago. Things started to pick up in 2017 when *Metro*

New York, a free daily newspaper now known as *AM New York Metro*, published the headline "The Voice Of The Tree" on its front page, along with a photoshopped image of Haze's face on a Christmas tree. While the story helped earn the tree's twitter account some attention, it was a public feud with another Rockefeller Center celebrity that really gave its following a boost.

Despite having some of the best real estate in Manhattan, the tree still has plenty of complaints about its neighbors. "To the NBC employees in 30 Rock peeping out their window and staring at me: That's creepy. Get back to work," reads a tweet from 2014.

The online sass towards NBC employees is what sparked a Twitter "feud" between America's favorite Christmas tree and America's favorite weatherman, Al Roker, following the 2019 Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade. It started when a parade volunteer in a butter costume kept interrupting Roker's live shots. The butter battle quickly became viral on social media. "Fun fact: I paid the stick of butter to annoy @alroker on TV. Oh, it's on, my friend," @30RockTree tweeted following the incident. Roker responded five days later: "I am coming for you, thank you very mulch."

It's no surprise a quarrel between two of New York's highest-profile celebrities quickly gained press. A few days after the feud began, it was a topic of conversation on the 3rd Hour of TODAY. "You've been in this war with the tree since the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade," said Dylan Dreyer, one of Roker's co-hosts. "Well, the tree started it," replied Roker.

This year, Roker took the first shot. "Oh, how I have been pining for you, @30RockTree," he tweeted the day the tree arrived at its holiday home in Rockefeller Plaza. The

tree struck back: “We're all happy you are home recovering from your surgery, but needling me with a ‘u up?’ text at 1:36 in the morning? Go to bed.”

Managing fame is not an easy task, Haze knows this firsthand. The job of social media manager became increasingly more difficult as the tree’s social media following continued to grow. It was no longer a one man job. Managing the online reputation of such an outspoken and notable figure required a team. Luckily, a long-time friend of the tree was willing to help out.

Robyn Roth-Moise is a born and bred Manhattanite, a photographer, and the great-granddaughter of the renowned New York architect Emery Roth. The Rockefeller Christmas Tree has always been special to her. Roth-Moise began ice skating at Rockefeller Center at the age of three, and often skated at the tree-lighting ceremony as a child. She is still a season pass holder at the Rockefeller Center Ice Rink.

It was around 2015 that she first stumbled across the @30RockTree account. Her time spent at the ice rink meant she had plenty of access to the tree, which made it easy for her to snap pictures. She started tweeting the photos and tagging the tree, and eventually became the unofficial photographer for the unofficial Twitter account of the Rockefeller Plaza Christmas Tree. It wasn’t until 2017 that Haze and Roth-Moise first met face-to-face. Keeping with the theme, they made plans to rendezvous at the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree site.

Roth-Moise acknowledges that the tree’s taunting can be off-putting to some. But for her, it’s part of the charm. “I know that there are definitely people who had to get insulted. But then you have no sense of humor, if you're getting insulted.”

With Haze now living in Puerto Rico, Roth-Moise, along with a small team of unnamed sources close to the tree, are his eyes and ears on the ground. While Roth-Moise primarily handles photography, other sources feed Haze important information, which allows him to get ahead of potential stories.

Sometimes, part of the job involves dealing with bad press. And, for a symbol known for bringing hope and joy, there may be nothing more humiliating than getting bad press in a year already bursting with negative news.

What does it take to be a Christmas tree? Essentially, there is only one requirement: to look good. This year more than ever, many were craving the joy and familiarity brought by the beautiful and sparkling Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center. Which is why when the 2020 tree was finally unveiled after its road trip to the city, New York, the nation, and the world were in utter shock. The tree, like many of us this year, looked disheveled, tired, and all around sad.

After a series of negative articles were published about the tree's not-so-festive appearance, Haze was tasked with reputation management. "Rockefeller Center's scraggly Christmas Tree deemed 'a metaphor for 2020,'" read a *Washington Post* headline. "Peak 2020: Early Christmas cheer hilariously crushed by 'saddest' Rockefeller Christmas tree," declared *USAToday*. Twitter users drew comparisons to the Charlie Brown Christmas Tree. More criticism erupted when images emerged of branches being added to the tree. ("They always trim it and add fake branches. They do that every year. That's nothing new," says Haze.)

@30RockTree clapped back: Yes, they're adding branches to me. I'm getting extensions. So what? Who in New York City hasn't had a little work done? (anyone that says "not me" is lyyyyiiiiing).”

Haze admits that being the social media manager for such a public figure is no easy feat (it also doesn’t pay well). There were several years where he considered completely throwing-in the towel. His reasoning for keeping up with the account for so long is solely based on the joy it brings others, specifically after this year. “It's not about me, it's about the people that read it,” says Haze. “If I can add a laugh for people, if I can be able to share that with people and they get a kick out of it, then great. That's definitely worth the time.”

When the tarp and scaffolding were finally removed, this year’s tree proved the critics wrong. The tree emerged from the makeover just in time for its primetime special, looking as camera-ready as ever. Over 1,500 miles from Rockefeller Plaza, Haze was stationed in his living room, live-tweeting the tree’s commentary of the event for the tenth consecutive year. When the festivities concluded, @30RockTree posted once more before calling it a night, tweeting out the before and after of its 2020 transformation along with a few words of wisdom.

“It’s been a rough year. Our world was turned upside down. You may feel like how I arrived here two weeks ago. I feel you. But remember one thing: If *I* can do this, so can YOU. Now go make it happen.” Sporting its classic multicolored lights and signature crystal star, America’s favorite Christmas Tree was ready to provide some much-needed holiday magic. All it took was a little sprucing.

SPRING 2021

Parting Ways: How Two Generation Are Splitting Hairs

By Cate Reynolds

Am I old? Over the past few weeks, I, along with many other millennials, have been left pondering this very question. For me, it all started with a text in a group chat with my college friends. *GEZ Z BETTER STOP PLAYING WITH ME*, said the message. With it, an image of a 28-year-old woman in a pair of skinny jeans with her hair parted to the side and the words "anatomy of an old person" written below her.

Gen Z has officially dubbed millennials old based on the way we part our hair. The debacle started with a TikTok video from @ladygleep claiming that "there is not a single person who looks better with a side-part than they do a middle-part." While the video was posted last July, it's blown up in recent months, racking up over two-million views. The video spurred a full-blown TikTok feud between Gen-Zers and millennials which eventually spread to other social media platforms. Having never been on TikTok, I was late to the party. Here I was, completely unaware that the Hilary Duff-inspired side-part I had been rocking since at least 2004 was now a faux-pas.

The middle part is not a new invention. The 1920s and 1970s saw their fair share of middle parts, and most millennials will recall the middle parts of the 1990s. But sometime in the early 2000s, perhaps in an attempt to rebel against the middle-parted feathered hair-do many of our mothers were still sporting, things started to go sideways. The side-part, specifically the deep side-part paired with a side pony or side-swept bangs, reigned supreme. While millennials have (thankfully) moved past most of their early-2000s trends, the side-part has remained a fixture for many. Has this staple in millennial culture finally run its course?

Needing answers, I turned to the youth. I decided to text my 17-year-old cousin. *Is parting your hair in the middle trendy now?*, I asked. Unsure of the specific trends, she offered to pose the question to her friends and send me the screenshots of their group chat.

It was a thing back in the 90s and 90s stuff in general has been a trend for the last few years.

I mean, I think it's a weird "fuck millenials" thing, but I try not to get involved.

I'm pretty sure to find the answer you'd have to delve into the depths of TikTok hell.

It was time. I needed to download TikTok. I created an account and immediately searched for @ladygleep, wanting to see the video that started it all. The video was tagged with #middlepart which, when I clicked it, led me to a treasure trove of middle-part vs. side-part debates, commentaries, and hot takes. One of the top results was a video by user @haleyblazek. "Do you wanna know why it has taken me so long to bring back my middle-part?" she asks in the video. She proceeds to open up her third-grade diary to an entry from a day when the boy who said he liked her went and told another girl that he liked her, too. She turns the camera to show sloppy, all-caps handwriting on the floral-bordered page of a small, spiral notebook: *I AM SO HURT!*

MY HEART HURTS! NO BOYS LIKE ME BECAUSE I AM FAT AND STUPID AND MY HAIR IS PARTED IN THE MIDDLE!

"As you can tell from that diary entry, I'm a little dramatic," Haley Suddick told me on a Zoom call a few days later. "But, I just remember these boys at school would say the meanest things. With the middle-part, they would say it looked like a butt crack. That was like the main insult. They'd be like 'oh, you have a butt crack on your head.'"

Suddick, who is now 25, says her switch to the side-part happened shortly after writing that diary entry. By high school she was sporting what her now sister-in-law, who is also her hairdresser, called the "emo look": a deep side-part paired with dramatic, side-swept bangs. She decided then and there that she would never part her hair in the middle again. But, all it took was a few teenagers on TikTok declaring side-parts outdated to convince Suddick to give the middle-part another go.

"At first I was like, 'Ooo I love the middle-part,' but I truthfully am a little less confident with it than when I have my side-part. If I'm going somewhere where I feel I'm going to be judged by Gen Z, sometimes I'll do the middle, but I'm pretty much sticking with the side-part."

While the debate started on TikTok, it didn't end there. Millennials were outraged, and the feud eventually leaked from social media into mainstream media. In early March, James Corden discussed the matter on the *Late Late Show*. "Like it or not, the youth have spoken," said Corden. "The side-part is dead." Two days later on the TODAY show, Carson Daly, Savannah Guthrie, and Hoda Kotb joined the challenge, each trying out both the side-part and the middle-part.

But is one type of part really better than the other? I can't deny that a middle-part, when done right, can be absolutely fierce. For example, Billie Eilish, H.E.R, Zendaya, and Dua Lipa. And while you might think that the middle-part on short hair could give off a bit of a Dwight Schrute vibe, it works for Timothee Chalamet. But we shouldn't ignore the fact that there are plenty of millennials who rock a middle-part. Beyonce has been parting her hair down the middle for years, and we wouldn't dare speak ill of it. On the flip side, I don't see Gen Z coming at Harry Styles for his beautiful side-part.

This leads me to believe that this has nothing to do with hair. Maybe Gen Z is trying to assert themselves as functioning and influential adult members of society. Maybe they're ready to be taken more seriously, and that starts with setting trends. Or, perhaps millennials are feeling their age. Maybe their joints hurt for no reason or they're realizing that hangovers hit a bit different after 25, and they're struggling to accept that they are no longer the "hip" generation.

With this in mind, I decided to leave my own stubbornness behind and give the middle-part a try. I stood in front of the bathroom mirror, comb in hand, and gently parted my hair down the middle. As I leaned in closer to examine my new look, I spotted my very first gray hair.

The Next Plague Is Going To Bug You

By Cate Reynolds

Ah, New York City in the summer. Hot, humid, sweaty, and smelly. After what's felt like a lifetime, many New Yorkers are now vaccinated and ready to finally emerge from their quarantine cocoons and spread their post-pandemic wings. But beyond city limits, something else is emerging. Not to be an alarmist, but the next plague is upon us, and it's straight out of the book of Exodus.

Unfortunately, no, this is not a joke. As if the past year hasn't been enough of an apocalyptic nightmare, many states are just a few weeks away from an actual plague of locusts. Okay, technically they're called "periodical cicadas." When soil levels reach 64 degrees Fahrenheit, billions (not hyperbole) of these horrendous creatures emerge from the ground where they've been chilling for the last 17 years and take over the world (at least that's what it feels like.) There are several "broods" of periodical cicadas across the United States, which come around every 13 or 17 years. Sometimes their presence can go largely unnoticed, but the brood that is emerging this summer, known as Brood X, is famous for being one of the largest swarms of cicadas in the world.

If you think New York in the summer is uncomfortable, you've likely never experienced a "cicada year," as they are more commonly known. I, unfortunately, know the horrors of Brood X personally. When I was 10-years-old, I experienced my first and only cicada year. My parents warned my siblings and I about what we would experience that coming summer. The last time Brood X emerged was the year my parents got married, and my mom told us stories about their wedding photographer having to remove cicadas that had latched themselves to her lace veil. We braced ourselves for the impending invasion.

In late spring the first signs of Brood X began to appear. As they started tunneling their way out of their underground hibernation, small holes appeared in the flower beds beneath the trees in our yard. My sister and I attempted to solve the issue by spending an afternoon filling in all the holes with soil. But, much to our dismay, our best efforts to deter Brood X were unsuccessful. By early June, the invasion was in full swing. There were giant bugs everywhere, and they were impossible to avoid. Cicadas are about 2-3 inches in length, with horrifying, red beady eyes. They'd fall from trees onto my head, or food, or into my drink. I can remember riding my Schwinn down the hill at the top of my street, with the hot June air dramatically blowing through my side-pony and The Lizzie McGuire Movie soundtrack blasting from my Walkman, when, out of nowhere, my Disney Channel-worthy summer montage would be interrupted by a cicada hitting me square in the face—the collision was usually lethal for it, and always very gross for me.

Cicada years are not fun. They are *so bad*, in fact, that when Brood X last emerged in 2004, I swore I would live somewhere cicada-free when they emerged again in 2021. Which is why I'm warning and urging you to wait a few more months before you venture beyond the safety of New York City.

Oh, what? You've been looking forward to escaping the sounds of the city? Yes, between the sirens, construction, drunk yelling, and upstairs neighbors doing whatever the hell they do up there, there is no shortage of noise in New York City. But I would argue that being woken up at the crack of dawn to the sound of giant bugs screaming for sex is slightly worse. The mating call of these cicadas—an obnoxious high-pitched buzzing sound—can reach 100 decibels. For reference, city traffic and leaf blowers are typically between 80-85 decibels.

And if you believe there is nothing worse than having water from an air conditioning unit drop down your back as you walk down the street, I can promise you there is something worse. I think you know where I'm going with this. Imagine trying to walk from your car to your house, and, all of a sudden, an ugly, winged, red-eyed insect drops from a tree and falls on your head, or down your back, or, at the very worst, into your cleavage.

Perhaps the only thing worse than the actual cicadas, is the cicada merchandise. During cicada years, the cicada theme seems to be every local businesses' marketing tactic. There are cicada t-shirts, cicada jewelry, and cicada figurines. Local bars attempt to incorporate cicadas into the names of their specialty drinks or the clever little quotes they put on their sidewalk chalkboards. And as if everything about a cicada year isn't fucked up enough on its own, some people will actually make cicada food. No, not cicada-themed food. I mean *actual* snacks and dishes containing cicadas. I'm talking chocolate-covered cicadas, candied cicadas, cicada kebobs. A few years ago, one ice cream shop in Missouri actually sold ice cream containing candied cicadas, an endeavor that health officials quickly shutdown.

The good news is, the Brood X nightmare doesn't last long. The party typically starts in late May. After they mate, the male cicadas die (#dramatic), and the females follow suit once their eggs hatch. The new cicadas then head underground where they'll hangout until they harass us again in 2038. By mid-July, the only evidence left of Brood X is their exoskeletons, which they leave behind as a fun little parting gift. So thoughtful.

Brood X will pop up in 15 states, including parts of New York. *But*, miraculously, the cicadas are considered extinct in New York City. (I guess even they hate the city in the summer.) New York City is a cicada-free haven. While there are plenty of things to hate about summertime in New York City, giant, flying, yelling, red-eyed, sex-crazed bugs are not one of them, and I think we can all consider that a win.

Psychics, Mediums, and A Global Pandemic—Oh My!

By Cate Reynolds

In December 2019, Heather Carlucci briefly questioned her own sanity. Carlucci, a psychic medium, was putting together an email to send to her clients with predictions for the year ahead. She couldn't quite make sense of what she was seeing for 2020, but she knew it didn't look good. "I could not grasp the enormity of it," says Carlucci. "I was seeing like an Armageddon."

Around the same time, psychic medium Melissa Nieves was packing her bags and getting ready for a big move. Nieves, a native New Yorker, was relocating to Sedona, Arizona, a decision she claims was prompted by a message from the spirits. "The spirits were warning me that a time was coming where there was going to be this intense shift of dark and light," says Nieves. "They didn't tell me it was a pandemic, but they kept telling me that New York would have a lot of problems and I wasn't meant to be there while this happened."

Reverend Stephanie Wild, a psychic medium and minister of the Spiritualist Church, claims she saw a dark energy approaching in her mind's eye. It first started when she heard news of the first community-transmitted case of COVID-19 in Europe. "I remember thinking, *Oh, it's coming*," says Wild. "It just felt heavy and very solid, like a thick smog."

It's been said that no one could've predicted the events of 2020, but maybe some people could, and did. By tuning into the energy around them, psychic mediums say they are able to gain information about the past, present, and future, as well as connect with the spirits of people who have passed. Months before toilet paper shortages, mask-wearing, and social distancing, those who claim to have these types of abilities were preparing for a year unlike any other.

Take, for instance, Carlucci's 2020 predictions. The absurdity of her predictions caused her to, for a moment, question her own intuition. "I was like, 'I must be out of my mind. I cannot write that.'" She did write it. Her predictions discussed a "unrecognizable flip née Salvador Dalí type impression" that will begin in the middle to third week of January, which was when the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) confirmed the first United States COVID-19 case. Her predictions also touched on social change, "burning of streets, literally....along the lines of the Twin Cities," and "huge shake ups with new vaccinations."

When COVID hit, Carlucci says her predictions started to make sense. "I almost couldn't accept it. Like it took like a few days to be like, *Oh my god, this is that thing I was talking about?* It was hard to sort of wrap my head around."

As lockdowns began, many psychic mediums felt the impact on their businesses. In most cases, unlike the majority of Americans, this impact was a positive one. People were looking for answers and, with so much unknown about COVID-19 at the time, they weren't getting them. Some turned to more unconventional sources for solace. In early March 2020, the same week the CDC first began issuing guidance on COVID-19, Google searches for "psychic" reached a one-year high. According to an economic impact report published by Yelp, psychic mediums saw a

74% increase in business in 2020. The reason for this increase, however, isn't necessarily something to celebrate. Their clients were dealing with fear, anxiety, isolation, guilt, and a whole lot of grief.

In normal times, Carlucci says her schedule is typically filled up to a week and a half in advance. Now, she is completely booked for two to three months out. Many people, she notes, are requesting her medical intuitive services. "People still have a fear of even going into a hospital, so they'll come see me before walking into a doctor's office," says Carlucci. As a medical intuitive, Carlucci claims that she can see, hear, and feel the ailments that people have. The fear of contracting COVID, especially towards the beginning of the pandemic, prompted many people to seek out Carlucci's services. As unemployment numbers rose, Carlucci says there was also a large increase in the number of restaurateurs and CEOs coming to her for business-related psychic guidance. Rev. Stephanie Wild saw a similar trend.

Wild saw a surge in requests for her psychic services during the start of the pandemic. People who had lost their jobs wanted to know that they would be okay financially, so they turned to Wild. As the months went on, though, the concerns shifted. Wild, like Carlucci, says many people were worried about their physical health, but she also notes that people seemed increasingly more concerned with their mental health. "There was some panic and fear of like, 'I am all alone and I am freaking out,'" recalls Wild. "It was much more immediate and urgent."

In a June 2020 survey conducted by researchers at the CDC, 40% of U.S. adults reported struggling with mental health, almost four times higher than reports of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation from the year prior. Psychic medium Marina Margulis says one of the most difficult parts of her work during the pandemic was experiencing these statistics first-hand. "In the last 10 months or so, I have had more and more people on the other side that I talked to that have committed suicide," says Margulis. "To me that's striking, and I just wish people would talk more about the mental and the emotional impact this lockdown has had on our society."

Before the pandemic, Margulis says she would typically have two or three clients a year who were looking to connect with a loved one who took their own life. Now, she gets two or three a month, all of which are losses from 2020 and 2021. Margulis admits that these sessions are always more difficult, primarily due to the level of guilt associated with this type of death. "I'm sitting across from a person who's carrying the weight of this death on their shoulders."

According to Nieves, the feeling of guilt has also been prominent among her clients during the pandemic, specifically among those who lost someone to COVID. "Maybe they took them to the hospital and are regretting it, or they didn't take them to the hospital and are regretting it," Nieves explains. "So people are looking to heal and process their own guilt about their loved one's passing."

This type of reassurance is what makes the services so popular. Whether it be proof of an afterlife, connection with a loved one who has passed, or insight into one's life purpose, psychic mediums claim to be able to offer things that therapists and religious leaders cannot, and more and more people are buying into it. A recent study by Pew Research Center found that four in ten American adults believe in psychics.

The flipside of this is that belief doesn't always mean acceptance, and there is still plenty of fear surrounding this type of work. The stereotypes have been around for decades, maybe even centuries, ever-present in books and pop culture. *The Exorcist* showed viewers exactly how dangerous it can be to mess with the supernatural. *The Shining* introduced the world to a young intuitive plagued by his supernatural abilities, and *The Sixth Sense* gave us the famous and bone-chilling line "I see dead people." Stories involving clairvoyants aren't usually uplifting and typically don't end well.

This fear is further compounded by many religious institutions, most notably the Catholic church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which outlines the beliefs of the church, states that mediums and psychics are connected with the demonic, and that such practices "contradict the honor, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone." In August 2020, The Diocese of Rockville Centre, New York released a letter from Bishop John O. Barres which acknowledged the temptation of seeking these services in a year of so much loss, but reminded church members that such practices "directly violate the first of the Ten Commandments" and demonstrate a lack of faith.

Even though she asserts that such statements are false, Margulis says these types of beliefs don't negatively impact her or her work. "It makes no difference to me. Burn me at the stake if you want."

While this fearful view of mediumship remains prominent among many who consider themselves to be religious, especially within the Catholic faith, people are moving away from typical religious institutions. A study done by Pew Research in 2017 found that more Americans now say they're spiritual but not religious. Carlucci believes that this is directly related to some of the more outdated beliefs that many Christian-based religions still hold. "We just need more community in general and the ethics behind a lot of Christian-based religions right now are not backed in community, they're backed in exclusivity," says Carlucci. "I think people are looking for connections without being played."

Some might argue that psychic mediumship is exactly that: getting played. There have been several successful attempts to expose psychic scammers. Fraudulent claims of supernatural abilities date back to the 1800s. There is no scientific evidence that such abilities are legitimate. In fact, there is an entire field of psychology called anomalistic psychology which is dedicated to studying phenomena, experiences, and behaviors considered to be "paranormal." When fraud can't be proved, scientists say that supposed psychic abilities are the result of hypnotism, magical thinking, and suggestion. Nieves admits that there are plenty of scammers out there, and that's likely the biggest contributor of distrust towards psychic mediums.

"I understand some of the backlash, because there are a lot of people who are false who will take advantage of people's vulnerability," says Nieves. "And that takes away from the people that really are coming as messengers with the intent of helping people elevate and connect."

Prior to becoming a full-time medium, Carlucci spent 30 years as a chef and restaurateur in New York City, Margulis had a successful career working in corporate America, Nieves was a

devoted educator for 25 years, and Wild worked in marketing on Madison Avenue for two decades. While they all admit that it wasn't easy or necessarily practical, these women chose to re-shape their lives around what they believe to be their true calling.

"This was never something I wanted to do for a living," says Margulis. "But very few of us can connect with the other side, so I felt that this was something that I needed to do. I took a leap and it's become very satisfactory to me, to say the least."

People often seek the services of psychic mediums when they're experiencing extreme grief or emotional or mental turmoil and they aren't sure where else to turn. Sometimes they're believers and sometimes they're skeptics, but Margulis says that the end result always seems to be a positive one—and not just for the client.

"Even if it's only one person a week, who comes in saying, 'Well, I don't know what to believe, but I need closure,' and if they walk out of here knowing that we don't just turn into dust, and that something beyond this stupidity goes on that continues to carry that feeling of love—that means I did my job," says Margulis. "That's the purpose of why I do this."

Fall 2021

An Identifying Shame

By Cate Reynolds

I was sitting at my desk on my weekly video call with my therapist. We were talking through some of the events that have triggered my panic attacks over the years. Typically, I told her, feeling as if I had disappointed someone would trigger my panic attacks. Anything that made me feel as if I was being a bad daughter, sister, friend, girlfriend, etc., would throw me into a full hyperventilating-in-fetal-position type of panic. It was an overwhelming feeling of guilt, I told her. I fidgeted with my hair tie as she began offering her observations, twisting and weaving it around my fingers. *Is it guilt?* She asked. *Or is it shame?* I pondered the question, not necessarily sure I knew the answer. She went on. *Guilt is 'I did something bad.' Shame is 'I am bad.'*

That's it, I told her. It was definitely shame.

After my session that day, I texted my sister Maddie:

Me: Therapists are really something. Today I learned I'm filled with shame!

Maddie and I both started seeing new therapists around the same time. Coincidentally, our weekly standing virtual appointments occurred simultaneously—every Wednesday at 2:15 p.m. Which meant our weekly therapy debrief text exchange usually occurs around 3:15 p.m. every Wednesday. This has become the routine. My phone pinged.

Maddie: I am too!!

Me: Omg!

Apparently, I think I'm a bad person. In a certain sense, I think I always knew I thought of myself this way, but I had different names for it: guilt, imposter syndrome, self-doubt, selfishness. It's manifested in different ways in my life, but it wasn't until recently that I realized it was all the same thing: shame. Now, I have a name for this feeling. It's a feeling that seems to be the driving force behind most of my anxiety, depressive episodes, panic, and insecurities. It weaves its way into every aspect of my life and every decision I make. It's the reason I overthink the words I speak and actions I take.

I was ridden with shame, and so was my sister, and my brothers will likely have the same realization if they ever decide to go to therapy (at least that's what my therapist tells me.) Our parents are loving, kind, and supportive. They have never once told us we are bad people, or even hinted at that idea. In fact, no one has ever told me I'm a bad person. But that feeling is there, controlling my inner dialogue and self-worth. Now, I just needed to find the source.

—

Around the same time I began my mental health self-discovery, I grew a sudden fascination with my family history. I should probably say "re-fascination." I've always been extremely interested in my roots. I've always loved family photo albums—the creaky sound they make when you

open them, the brown edges on the pages, and their old, musty smell. I love watching my parents and grandparents point to photos and say, "This is the day when…" or, "Do you remember that?" Like most family photo albums, mine tell a story. Moments and choices and relationships that have led to now—that have created a family. When I flip through these images, however, I can't help but notice the parts of my history that are missing.

It's unusual to find two people who look alike in my mom's family albums. My maternal grandmother, Gram, was adopted as an infant, as was her sister. My mother and her brother Walter are both adopted as well. My Aunt Brenda is the sole biological child. I've never heard that I have my grandmother's smile or my great-grandfather's eyes, because I don't.

The Clancy albums, on my father's side, are the opposite. The pages are filled with generations of Irish-Catholic people who look exactly the same. My great-grandmother's thin lips and the prominent cupid's bow is a feature present in practically every relative. Yet there are some irregularities there, too. Once you reach the pages filled with baby photos of my dad, it's clear someone is missing. There are torn edges and odd cropping on some of the images where someone has been removed—my dad's father, it turns out. This erasure continues in the baby photos of my dad's sister Margaret and his brother Patrick. After the birth of those two, however, my grandmother remarried a man named George Reynolds, whose last name I bear. There are no jagged edges or odd-crop jobs on my Aunt Jessi's baby photos, just my smiling grandparents with their now complete family.

All of this is to say that I share little or no genetic connection to the people I call family, but that has never diminished the love or familial bond between us. There is still a curiosity, however, one that has tapped on my shoulder most of my life—a want, or maybe need, to explore my origins. This led me to an ancestry.com deep dive right around the time of my shame-revelation therapy session. I signed up for a subscription—the most expensive one. I spent an afternoon scrolling through pages of address records, marriage certificates, and yearbook photos. I took screenshots of photos I found of my biological relatives and saved them to a folder on my desktop titled "family." I'm not sure why I saved them. I'm not planning to do anything with them, but I like that they're there.

I've forced friends to look at the images, noting who I think each biological stranger looks like. They indulge me, agreeing that my mom's biological mom looks like her twin and that my dad's father is the best-looking of his brothers. They don't completely understand my excitement over these images, but I find comfort in seeing parts of myself in these photos. Most of these relatives are complete strangers, but I feel anchored to them. They are the missing fractals of my own identity.

—-

I had the 2009 conversation today in therapy, I texted my sister after my Wednesday session. The 2009 conversation is a topic that comes up at least once with every therapist my sister and I have had. It's not our favorite conversation to have, not because it's a difficult one, but because our sessions would be better spent unpacking bigger, more present issues.

The year 2008 was the year the housing market bubble burst. My dad is a realtor and, at the time, had four teenage children in private school. We were living in a beautiful, six-bedroom, brick home in a historic neighborhood on the outskirts of Baltimore. We moved there when I was four years old, so it was the only home I ever really knew. By late 2009, our home had been foreclosed on and we were renting a four-bedroom cape-cod in Baltimore County. My sister and I transferred to the local public high school. Despite being out of his control, this situation was something my father was clearly ashamed of. We left our old home quietly, leaving neighbors to wonder what exactly happened. My dad asked my siblings and I not to tell our friends that we moved because of financial issues. It was too embarrassing for him.

What was that like for you? My therapist asked me. I felt bad for my parents, I told her. Sometimes I would tell friends I couldn't go to the movies or a football game just because I didn't want to ask my parents for money. I knew they'd feel bad if they couldn't give me any. If a friend offered to cover for me, my dad would get mad. We didn't need charity, he would say to me. He didn't have a good dad, and I knew he was always worried about whether or not he was being a good dad. I knew he felt like he was failing.

So your dad felt he was being a bad dad. My therapist said. *And it sounds like you felt that asking for anything money-related while knowing your family was struggling financially made you a burden, or a bad daughter.*

I paused for a moment to process what she just said. Yeah, I replied, I would say that is definitely accurate.

Last week we talked about trying to pinpoint where this feeling of shame comes from, and I think we just found a very crucial moment. There's a cycle of shame happening here.

I gazed upward as I processed her insight. It's interesting to me, I told her, that I could trace this back. That my emotional response is a direct result of my dad's emotional response, which comes from his fear of turning into his own father, a man I barely knew.

My therapist nodded. *It seems like intergenerational trauma plays a large role in your family dynamic*, she said.

—

For most of his childhood, my dad went by the name Jackie Gambino. This has always made me laugh, because it sounds like a character from *Goodfellas*. Yes, I am a member of the Gambino family, but not *those* Gambinos. As far as I know, I have no direct relatives that are or ever have been affiliated with the Mafia. My branch of the Gambino family is much more wholesome—a bunch of Irish-Italians from the D.C. area who use old bathtubs as coolers during family reunions and typically get *really* good service at Italian restaurants. My relationship with this portion of my family is complicated, but not because of any *Sopranos*-like backstory.

John Francis Gambino Sr. was born on August 16, 1936. He never went by John, just Jack. He was an alcoholic, one with a bad temper. He was abusive, a pathological liar, and a complete jackass. He was also my grandfather.

This is the extent of what I know about Jack. He has always been the villain in my family tree. The man responsible for the scar on my dad's nose, my grandma's bad shoulder, the pile of trauma that still reverberates through my family, and, according to my grandmother, any negative traits in her children or grandchildren. My father, Jackie Gambino Jr., eventually took his stepfather's last name: Reynolds. He never goes by Jack, only John.

I remember meeting him once when I was about six years old. After 30 years without speaking, my dad was making an attempt to reconnect with him. We were at a family picnic and Jack knelt down next to me and opened his arms. "Come give your grandpa a hug!" He smelled like booze and had a lit cigarette between his fingers. I stared at him blankly. "You're not my grandpa," I said.

It's easier for my family to think of Jack this way—as an inherently bad person. I don't know if they necessarily believe this, but believing anything different comes with even more complicated emotions. But I often find Jack impossible to ignore, even twelve years after his death. I can't ignore that parts of my dad, and parts of me, come from him. I see Jack when I look at my dad and when I look in the mirror—in our blue eyes and the two small wrinkles between our eyebrows that become more prominent when we're deep in thought.

A few months ago my great-aunt Ree, one of Jack's eleven siblings, passed away. Now, there is only one person in the world who has known Jack Gambino since the day he was born. Camille Gambino Noel, Aunt Cammie as I know her, is his only surviving sibling and the matriarch of the Gambino family. She shared the 10th-born spot with her twin brother James, Uncle Jim. She's 86, has a practically perfect memory, and communicates primarily through Facebook messenger. I sent her a message:

Hi Aunt Cammie! This might be an odd ask, but I was wondering if you could tell me a bit about Jack. Obviously, my dad didn't have much of a relationship with him and the relationship he did have was complicated, to say the least. I realized I know absolutely nothing about him or his interests or what he was like, and I thought you might be able to offer some insight.

—--

During a session in late fall, my therapist asked me what the aftermath of my panic attacks looked and felt like. I always feel afraid, I told her. It's worse when I'm alone. I triple check the locks on my front door. I overthink every slight sound I hear, convincing myself it's some sort of intruder. If my roommate is gone, I'll sleep on the couch. It feels safer there. She nodded slowly and said *This makes a lot of sense to me*.

The perplexion on my face must've been noticeable, because she let out a small laugh. I knew what I just described to her made no sense. I knew it made me sound like a crazy person. My logical mind knew these actions were driven by anxiety, and that there was no real reason to be afraid, but anxiety doesn't heed logic. I stared at my computer screen waiting to hear my therapist's observations

So, you convince yourself that you've done something wrong. You've hurt someone or made someone you care about feel bad. You feel bad, you feel shame, and this triggers a panic attack. What you're doing is trying to exorcise this bad part of you out of your body. And when you're done panicking, you're scared. But I don't think you're scared of someone else. You're scared of the part of yourself you think is bad. You're afraid that bad part is going to come back. So you lock your doors and stay on alert.

—

Knowing so little about my genetic background leaves room for the imagination. Sometimes, it's fun. When friends tell me I resemble a celebrity I can say things like "who knows, maybe we're related." Other times, it's not so fun. Like when WebMD convinces me I've inherited some rare, genetic disease.

Up until recently, I didn't know a single good thing about Jack. I grew up believing that he was an inherently bad person. My dad grew up being told the same. What I hadn't put together is just how traumatic it is to grow up feeling that badness is in your blood.

I know, just like my dad knows, that there are parts of him that come from Jack. So, what if I inherited the bad part? What if it's lying dormant in us, waiting for an opportunity to take over? It's a notion that's influenced my dad's actions throughout his life, and now mine.

I've always wanted to believe that Jack is more than the part of him I know. I've always wanted to know more of him. I've always wanted to see parts of me or my dad or my siblings in him. Parts that aren't bad. But it's a curiosity I've mostly ignored up until now. It felt like some sort of betrayal to attempt to understand him more completely. He doesn't deserve that. He doesn't deserve my time and effort and understanding.

What I wasn't recognizing is that making this choice was only harming me. I've been living my life in constant fear of turning into the bad man whose eyes I see everytime I look in the mirror. I am continuing the cycle of shame. In granting myself permission to gain some answers, maybe the cycle can stop with me. In allowing myself to believe that my grandfather may have been more than the bad things he did, perhaps I can begin to shed the negative part of him that haunts me. In hating him, I am hating parts of myself. Maybe it's time I begin simply hating the things he did and give myself space to see the potentially positive pieces of Jack that live within my dad, my siblings, and me.

—-

Jack Gambino, through the eyes of his big sister, Camille Gambino:

Jack was the 11th child and third boy of the family, and 14 months younger than Jim and I. When he was very little he had longish blonde hair, and, of course, those blue eyes. Jack was baptized John Raymond Gambino. He never liked "Raymond" and chose his Confirmation name, Francis, for his middle name.

Jack was very smart, and did well in school. Being some teachers' pet and, still the comedian, some teachers' nemesis. He was easygoing and had many friends. To my knowledge the only time he ever got into real trouble was when he was at DeMatha High School, and talked during the

Pledge of Allegiance. The priest teacher threw an eraser at him to get his attention and grazed his face. Yikes. The priest was mortified - he hadn't meant to actually hit him! (For all I remember, Jack might still have had that scar.)

One day Jack came home and called me into the dining room. He had just bought a record by a new artist. "You gotta hear this," he said. I think this person's gonna be really big in music." It was Elvis Presley. And we all know how that turned out. Jack loved country music. Merle Haggard, George Jones, Johnny Cash, all the old masters of Country. Because of Jack, I cultivated quite an appreciation of Country music along the way.

Jack liked to read, and was a really good writer. I think Patty has a poem he wrote that's pretty darn good. Very verbally articulate. He loved to sing, and had a pretty darn good voice. We had that in common. I know he sang Karaoke. (I love doing that, too!)

I know Jack had a dark side - and even though it never presented to me personally, I did see signs of it. There were times I wondered whether he might be bipolar. It was kind of like the "little girl who had a little curl....." Our Dad had severe depression, a result of WW1 in 1918. They called it Shell Shock. He was in and out of VA hospitals for a good part of his (and our) life. I often wonder if maybe he didn't have some of it to begin with - it was most definitely in his family. Dad and Jack and the other brothers never seemed to have a comfortable relationship. Dad was distant, sometimes even remote. As he and they got older they did seem to get somewhat closer. Dad died at 57. Jim and I were 22, Jack 21. Bad timing.

As you've probably gathered, I loved Jack very much. We remained close until his death. I hope I've given you at least a glimmer of Jack. He was Personality Personified; he was charismatic; he was (oh, yeah, I forgot, a rebel) a singer; a comedian; and one of the best storytellers ever. Lots of positive, great traits. And he was always really happy to see me, and I him.

I think your dad probably has told you what he knows about Jack's dark side and his abusiveness until his mother left with them to live with her parents. I hate that it became necessary for your grandma to take them away from us. She had very little choice to do otherwise, with Jack the way he was, and for their safety.

I meant to edit that last paragraph. She didn't take them "away from us." She took them away from where Jack could get at them.

We all loved your grandma. I remember one Easter they came over, and we were about to go to Mass. She hated how her hat looked on her, and I felt the same way about mine. So we traded. Just a small thing, but we were that close and comfortable with each other.

I miss all of you, and send much love. I hope what I wrote about Jack did not offend. I know I said I love him still - and that might be hard for your Dad to understand. But I didn't say that I approved. There is just no excuse for Jack's behavior and the way he treated your Grandmother. Maureen is one of the sweetest persons I know, and she put up with more crap from him than anyone should have to.

I know your Dad doesn't feel Jack gave him anything - well, okay, except for those gorgeous blue eyes - but he gave us something: he gave us all of you.

Emmy Awards Review

By Cate Reynolds

For a night dedicated to celebrating the year's best television, the 73rd Annual Emmy Awards were the absolute worst. Host Cedric The Entertainer opened the program with a television-themed rap set to the tune of Biz Markie's "Just A Friend," joining a dancer on stage dressed as a TV. "Imagine you get to be on the Emmys and then you find out your head is going to be a TV screen," my roommate commented. The opening number also featured LL Cool J, Lil Dicky, and, in an uncomfortable turn of events, a rapped verse by Rita Wilson. It was at this point I questioned whether I was having a fever dream.

Apple TV+'s *Ted Lasso* started strong with Hannah Waddingham winning "Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series" and Brett Goldstein taking the award for "Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Comedy Series." After the first two awards were presented, Cedric The Entertainer returned for a monologue, which started strong with some chuckle-worthy quips about vaccinations. "I got Pfizer because I'm bougie," he said. "That's the Nieman-Marcus of vaccines." But three minutes into the over four-minute monologue, I struggled to stay engaged as Cedric joked about WandaVision being about Wanda Sykes as an optometrist. He wrapped things up with a bit about baby Archie teaching the Queen of England TikTok dances. I was confused and exhausted.

As the show went into a commercial break, I checked my phone. "Where are you watching the game tonight?" read a text from my dad. My Baltimore Ravens were playing the Kansas City Chiefs in primetime. I had the game streaming on my iPad, I told him, but I needed to watch the Emmys for a class assignment. "Oh wow. That sucks," he said. "#journalismsacrifices."

The show stuck to the typical formula: award presentations peppered with sketches and jokes by the host and other celebrities. *Are the Emmys always this cringe?* I wondered as Cedric did a bit about the Buccaneers Super Bowl boat parade. The cast of Schitt's Creek was the unfortunate subject of another uncomfortable and droned-out bit, this one involving a blank teleprompter, before presenting the award for "Outstanding Writing In A Comedy Series" to the team from *Hacks*.

By 10:26 p.m., I was having some sort of crisis, perhaps fueled in part by the bottle of Cabernet that was getting me through this show. At this point, my roommate called it quits and went to bed. I popped some popcorn. *Why do the Emmys exist?* I thought. The concept is absurd. Here I was, lounging in my modest apartment donning my best Target pajamas, watching a bunch of rich people stroke each other's egos while wearing fancy outfits. People willingly tune in to watch three hours of unentertaining television that celebrates the most entertaining television.

Around 10:45 p.m., my cousin from Missouri took a break from football smack-talk to ask "How are the Emmys?" I told her they suck and she asked who the big winner was. "Ted Lasso," I replied. "Hmmm," she said. "Never heard of it. Had to google. Lol."

I felt a sense of relief as *The Queen's Gambit* won "Outstanding Limited Series," the last award of the night. I quickly flipped the channel to watch the end of the football game. Kansas City was down by one and in field goal range. It wasn't looking good for us, but a KC fumble in the last two minutes left the Ravens victorious. Now *that's* good television.

Concert Photographer Wrenne Evans Discusses Building Her Career In A Male-Dominated Industry

By Cate Reynolds

Wrenne Evans admits that a career in concert photography hasn't come without its challenges. The photography industry and music industry are notoriously male-dominated. The pay isn't great—most tour photographers average $745 a week, according to recent data from ZipRecruiter—and the job is both physically and emotionally taxing. The COVID-19 pandemic created even more stress, leaving many in the music industry, including Evans, jobless for months. In terms of perks, there don't seem to be many.

For Evans, it's all about passion. She began shooting shows as a teenager in Nashville and soon realized her love for photography and love for music made concert photography a natural choice. "I felt very in my element doing it, so I kind of just pursued that and listened to that. I've really always wanted to be a photographer, but I kind of fell into music because it was just around me," she says. Evans has photographed numerous musicians including Lorde, Cage the Elephant, Mumford and Sons, and Maggie Rogers and her work has been featured in publications like *Rolling Stone*, *Esquire*, *Pitchfork*, and *Billboard.*

Cate Reynolds:
Was there a specific moment you can remember that you really realized photography was something you wanted to do as your career?

Wrenne Evans:
I think it was kind of timed with when we started using Instagram. It was like "Well, this is a thing that I do and I like sharing these images with people, and then like, bands and people that I take photos of share these photos, this is kind of like an organic way of just putting work out there." And it was sort of just that, but then paired with the adrenaline and kind of excitement of shows. I kind of grew up in this like, garage rock, like DIY punk scene in Nashville. Just going to basements and shooting people just being insane was like really fun. And what was going on in Nashville at the time was really exciting as far as music goes, so documenting it felt significant, and like something I needed to do.

CR:
So what would you say was your first project or something you did where you were like, "wow, this is like super cool. Like I'm so excited to get to do this."?

WE:
It's hard because I get excited over and over again about different things and new experiences. But I think when I started touring with Maggie Rogers that was a big break for me. It was social media, really. Like it came down to the visibility and how that kind of changed my work and who saw my work and, since then, how I get jobs. So I do say that that's probably the biggest

thing thus far, but I've done so many things that I'm very proud of, or have changed the course of my life. But in recent years, that's definitely the one.

CR:
What specifically would you say in terms of, you know, documenting, like, what do you think is the importance of is of music photography and concert photography?

WE:
I think it's really good for archival purposes when it comes to like, seeing where a band is now. I've always kind of thought in that way. Like, archivally, this could be significant to the history of this band or this venue or this city. Being a part of that history, that's why I do what I do. Because that's a moment in time, in history, that maybe someone will see as significant or, I don't know, cool, maybe legendary.

CR:
Do you prefer being on a tour rather than you know, just kind of like shooting in the pit with other photographers?

WE:
Absolutely. I feel more protected in my bubble, I guess. I've come back from tours and done like a few one-off gigs and I'm like, “Oh my god, I don't know if I could go back to this.” It's insane. Like some of the male photographers will ask you which member of a band you're sleeping with or something like that. If they don't see you wearing a tour laminate they're going to say something disrespectful as if you don't belong in this space. But if they do see that they're going to be very accommodating, and almost suck up to you. So, I do prefer to be on tour more. Also because live music can get dull as far as what your photography might look like. It could look the same every single night, so switching it up with behind the scenes stuff is something I like.

CR:
It's interesting that there's that kind of divide within the same occupation, just based on gender rather than it being like a camaraderie over the fact that you’re all trying to do the same work.

WE:
Absolutely. And it's rooted in insecurities and I recognize it as that. I don't hate men. I don't hate all male photographers, but you do get a lot of this one type of insecure man in those situations. And it kind of like, it sticks in your head. And I can't really like forget those things. So I'm very guarded and protected when it comes to how I approach that situation.

CR:
Women are very underrepresented in the music industry and photography, too. Have you noticed those types of inequalities in your time doing this as a career?

WE:
Yeah, absolutely. It can be really easy for me to feel that inequality in things like photo pits, and that can be a really hard thing to navigate because you're in this small space with a bunch of men. And, for some reason, they get it in their head, that they are supposed to be there more than

you and they have to occupy that space, both in an abstract way and physically. I was very shocked by that from an early age, and then kind of just was like, I have to find ways to ignore this. There seems to be this outlook that a woman on tour has some sort of ulterior motive. I think we're getting better about it, but it is unfortunate that it still has to play out.

CR:
What would you say has been the biggest learning experience in your career?

WE:
I think a lot of it came with the pandemic, because so much of my life was completely screeched to a halt because of touring not happening. So I would say to, like, not make it my entire identity my work and to set boundaries for myself and others as far as what my expectations are. I need to be able to say no to things and know when I'm burned out. So, just trying to like see myself as a human being, as an artist, and somebody that can have an identity outside of what they do for a living.

CR:
Yeah, I was curious about that. I mean how did you adapt during the pandemic? What was that like?

WE:
It was the hardest thing I've ever had to do honestly. And that's because I had spent the past five years of my life on the road, past two pretty much straight on tour with Maggie, and was then just stuck in my house. I wasn't doing my routine and I wasn't on the road. It helped me reset eventually but there was so much panic and I was so lost within that.

It’s hard to be still, and to sit in that stillness is very uncomfortable for so many people and many people in touring. And then to also still have tons of bills to pay and you don't have your usual means of that, many people had to go through that. A lot of people in the touring industry kind of had to join together to get through it.

CR:
How has the transition been back into the touring lifestyle been for you?

WE:
I'm going on tour next month, and it's just a week-long tour, so I am kind of dipping my toes back into it. I’ve been to a few shows and that's still really hard. I get overstimulated really quickly. The reaacclimation to even just being in that general gathering space has been pretty intense. I have to get a lot of rest, and you know that's just how it'll be for a little bit until we kind of like strengthen that muscle again.

CR:
How do you think this career path could be more accessible?

WE:
I think that's a really interesting question because, within the touring part of it, there's not a lot of money for photographers right now because people are trying to make up for the past year and

it's not necessarily prioritized. But they need to be paid enough. People are leaving behind our lives for weeks on end. And you know, we have rent to pay, bills, etc.

CR:
That seems to be this a common conversation in a lot of creative communities right now. This issue of people not being paid for their art and for their work.

WE:
It makes me so angry, that people even suggest working for "experience" or whatever. We're having these union discussions right now, which aren't a part of my life, but it is for a lot of people I care about in the film and television world, and it's all related. People are working long hours and not being paid enough. And then there are people who are maybe more financially stable from other means who get opportunities because some of these big artists aren't willing to pay photographers what they deserve. So people say no, and then they find these people who are willing to do stuff for a lot less because they've got something else keeping them afloat.

CR:
What would your advice be to someone who's in a position where they're trying to make a name for themselves in the industry, but they're also trying to have their integrity and make sure that they get what they should for their work?

WE:
I think it definitely depends on the gig, but I think it's always important to bring it to the table to whoever's asking you to work for free being like, "Hey, listen, like do you have budget?" I think ultimately if they know you're not willing to work for free, and you can give them good work, even if it's a little money, it still maybe makes them kind of respect you in a way and not walk on you. And oftentimes that is more important. Like, just to even have opened up the conversation instead of being like, "Sure I'll do that for free."

Kristen, where the hell have you been, loca?: Kristen Stewart Shines As Princess Diana in Pablo Larraín's *Spencer*

By Cate Reynolds

There are moments in the opening scenes of Pablo Larraín's *Spencer* that feel familiar. The movie, written by Steven Knight, depicts a reimagined version of a Christmas weekend in the early 90s at the British royal family's Sandringham House, a massive countryside estate where the family traditionally spends its Christmas holiday. The movie labels itself a "fable from a true tragedy," the tragedy being the confinement Princess Diana felt as a member of the royal family, the isolation that came along with it, and the deterioration of her relationship with both Prince Charles and the royal family as a result.

The film opens with scenes of the royal staff arriving at the massive Sandringham estate to prepare for the three-day holiday weekend, lugging an absurd amount of decadent food into the estate's kitchen. These are not the moments that feel familiar. The familiarity comes during the scenes in between the royal holiday preparations, showing a small green convertible meandering through the countryside. In the driver's seat is Princess Diana (Kristen Stewart), who is running late to the Christmas festivities. She's lost and visibly flustered, fiddling with a map while cursing under her breath: "Where the fuck am I?"

It's a moment that will likely resonate with anyone who has ever run late to a family function, or who has sat in the back seat of their mother's car while she, noticeably lost, cursed under her breath while glancing back and forth between the road and her map or mapquest directions. It's an ordinary moment that fully showcases why Diana was and remains so beloved—she seems relatable. It's only when she stops at the petrol station to ask for directions, gaining the attention of everyone in the room as she walks in the door, that the viewer is reminded that Diana is anything but ordinary.

This is the central conflict of *Spencer*—the unhappy wife of a future king and the loving mother of a future king wanting an ordinary life, and feeling more and more trapped by her extraordinary life with every attempt at normalcy.

The biggest triumph of the film is Stewart as Diana. Those who were initially uncertain about this casting choice will have no qualms. Aside from nailing the shy smile and somewhat bashful, downcast looks (which are only more believable when made underneath the signature Diana fringe,) Stewart perfects Diana's accent and mannerisms. Her performance in this role is a reminder that Stewart is much more than that teen actress from those vampire movies. She is an actress with unbelievable range and serious talent.

The film succeeds in doing what many depictions of the royal family do not—making the royal family a secondary element. While the popular Netflix series *The Crown* does manage to explore Diana's struggles as part of the royal family, this narrative is not at the forefront. *Spencer* keeps the focus on Diana, using the royal family only to highlight its role in exacerbating her internal

struggles. The only members of the royal family that are prominent in the film are the only two that Diana cared about, her sons William (Jack Nielen) and Harry (Freddie Spry). It's in these moments with her young boys that we see Diana thriving in her favorite role: mother. One particularly heartwarming moment occurs when Diana wakes her sons on Christmas Eve to give them each a gift to open on Christmas morning like normal people. (The royals traditionally open gifts on Christmas Eve.) The three then sit in a circle pretending to be soldiers, laughing and asking each other questions.

Though the film is a fictional account of true events, the extreme dramatization is its weakness. The writing does no favors for Diana. Aside from the moments with her sons, Diana appears overly neurotic and paranoid, and a bit whiny. The film is not so much a biographical drama exploring Diana's mental and emotional turmoil as it is a psychological thriller. There are several scenes where Diana is depicted as completely unstable. She keeps seeing the ghost of Anne Boyelan (Amy Manson), cuts herself with wire cutters, considers throwing herself down a set of stairs in her childhood home, and imagines another maid is her favorite dresser, Maggie (Sally Hawkins), who was recently sent away. The high expectations and lack of sympathy from the royal family is largely presented as the result of Diana's instability, rather than the driving force behind it.

The film's final scenes show Diana interrupting the royal family's Boxing Day hunt, a tradition she didn't want her sons participating in at their young age. William and Harry happily join their mother, and the three run off hand-in-hand. The viewer is brought back to that feeling of familiarity as Diana and the boys drive away in the green convertible singing along to Mike & The Mechanics' "All I Need Is A Miracle." They make a pitstop at the KFC drive-through window and eat their meal on a bench by the London Bridge, three unordinary people basking together in an ordinary, joyful moment.

Trash Times Call For Trash TV—The New "Gossip Girl" Is Not That

By Cate Reynolds

The saying goes "one man's trash is another man's treasure," but sometimes those two things aren't mutually exclusive. Sometimes, trash can be trash, but nonetheless a treasure. The original "Gossip Girl" is just that—a trashy treasure. First airing in 2007, the show follows a group of wealthy teens living in Manhattan's Upper East Side. At the center of the show is *the* Gossip Girl, an anonymous blogger who continuously spills the tea about the teens and all the horrible things they are doing.

The show is complete garbage. Aside from the fact it depicts privileged, white teenagers being absolutely horrendous human beings, it's also completely outlandish and the production value is laughable. And let's not be mistaken, I'm a smart woman and I was a smart teen, I always knew this show was bad, like *really* bad. It's the type of show that prompts the question "Why are you watching this trash?" from mothers. But the showrunners knew that. In fact, they thrived on that. In a stroke of marketing genius, the show used bad reviews and quotes from concerned parents to promote its second season. Things like "Every parents' nightmare" and "A nasty piece of work" were plastered across scandalous images from the show. Everyone seemed to know it was bad, but nevertheless, I along with many others have watched every season at least once.

So naturally, my interest was piqued when it was announced in 2019 that there would be a reboot of this beautiful piece of filth. On the surface, the reboot could be seen as an improvement from the original. The cast is much more diverse and there's a noticeable shift away from much of the sexist dialogue and slut-shaming storylines that were featured prominently in the original. The production value is also drastically better, which is no big surprise given the move from The CW to HBOMax. But despite these progressive changes, the show is still trash, and not the good kind. The reboot lacks the essence of what made the original so captivating, and what is at the core of good trash television—absolute, drama-filled absurdity.

This was the appeal of the original "Gossip Girl" and other teen dramas and reality shows of the early 2000s, including "The O.C.," "One Tree Hill" and the "The Jersey Shore." The good type of trash television serves an important purpose in society—escapism, which was very much needed at the time. As if millennials weren't screwed up enough from witnessing one of the worst terrorist attacks in history at a very impressionable age, we were now barrelling into The Great Recession. We'd walk into the kitchen to find our parents bickering over finances and, needing some time alone to finish the discussion, they'd tell us to "go watch TV for a little bit." So we did. And it was easy to momentarily forget that your childhood home was about to be foreclosed on when Chuck Bass just sold Blair's body in exchange for ownership of a hotel. (I still can't believe that was an actual storyline.)

Today's teens are in a similar, perhaps more stressful, boat. There is a deadly virus spreading across the globe and they've just spent two years in social isolation. The world is on fire, bees are dying at an alarming rate, and no one is getting along. They deserve an escape and they deserve good trash television, but the new "Gossip Girl" is not that.

Instead of horrible, one-dimensional rich kids who are wildly disconnected from the real world, the characters in the reboot are more well-rounded, and this somehow makes them less appealing. In theory, yes, it's great to have characters that are socially aware and morally complex, but it doesn't work for "Gossip Girl." The entertainment and humor of the original come from the scandal, the shock factor, and the characters' inability to look beyond their privileged lives. The reboot ditches the low-brow, soap opera-esque structure for a more dramatic tone and subdued conflict. It's too realistic, too believable, which ultimately makes it unbearably boring.

If the new series took a more comedic tone or somehow stood alone away from the expectations cemented by its predecessor, it could potentially be a decent show. But the name "Gossip Girl" implies outrageousness, it implies good trash, and the reboot misses the mark. It fails to give its audience the one thing good trash television should: a temporary distraction from the real world shit.

The Rise Of Sad Girl Autumn: How Tears and Inner Turmoil Became The New Fall Trend

By Cate Reynolds

Hanging in a row on the wall of Hallie Torris' art studio are three acrylic paintings, two finished and one unfinished. The middle painting is titled "Girls in Purple." Next to it, another finished piece titled "Gold Rush," inspired by the song on Taylor Swift's album *Evermore*. The painting closest to her is still a work in progress, a process more than 2 million viewers have followed along with her on TikTok account. "I'm kind of overthinking this one a tiny bit," Torris admits. "This was my most popular video so I'm like *okay, this has to be good.*"

The inspiration behind the painting is the 10- minute version of Taylor Swift's song "All Too Well." Torris, a Swiftie — as the longtime Swift fans call themselves —, frequently creates art inspired by Taylor's songs, and knew she had to do an "All Too Well"-themed painting the moment she listened through *Red (Taylor's Version)*, the re-recording of her 2012 album *Red*. The song is about Swift's past relationship with actor Jake Gyllenhaal. Torris says it's always been more difficult for her to paint from a place of happiness and joy—which is why "All Too Well" initially inspired her. The mid-October release of the song only further motivated her. The fall months are Torris' favorite time to paint.

"Autumn just makes me want to paint all the time because I feel like I can access emotions that I don't feel as much in the summertime," says Torris. "I love when it rains, I love when it's gloomy, I love when it's dark. I love painting from pain and that sad space."

Torris isn't alone in feeling this way. After more than a year spent masking, social distancing, and quarantining, summer 2021 offered a glimmer of hope. COVID-19 vaccination rates were on the rise, restaurants and bars began reopening, and the world started to feel a bit more normal again. "Hot Girl Summer " became the unofficial motto for summer 2021, a phrase coined by Megan Thee Stallion's 2019 song of the same name. But as summer began to wind down, the changing seasons gave way to a less jubilant era —: sad girl autumn.

While the phrase itself isn't new, it's become increasingly popular this fall, in part due to the slew of breakup albums released by female musicians the past few months, including Kacey Musgraves, Adele, and Swift. Being sad, and liking it, seems to have become as autumnal as the Pumpkin Spice Latte.

Nate Sloan, a professor of musicology at the University of Southern California and co-host of Vox Media's podcast *Switched On Pop*, notes that this seasonal shift in music preferences may have less to do with the seasons themself and more to do with the change in the listening experience. "Summer releases tend toward high tempo, lyrically positive dance tracks that are meant to bring people together in large outdoor celebrations," says Sloan. "With cooler temperatures people might spend more time indoors on their own, and seek out softer and more contemplative sounds."

Typically, sadness is an emotion humans prefer to avoid, so it might seem paradoxical that so many people seem to enjoy sad music. A study published in the journal *Music Perception* in

2012 found that, unlike sad events in real life, the emotion of sadness is not usually experienced negatively when listening to sad music. The study also found that listening to sad music elicits numerous positive emotions, including nostalgia, peacefulness, and wonder.

Matthew Sachs is a postdoctoral fellow at Columbia University's Center for Science and Society. His research focuses on understanding the neural and behavioral mechanisms involved in human experience and emotion, specifically in response to stimuli like music and film. According to Sachs, there can be numerous psychological benefits to listening to sad music. “Some people in certain situations find that sad music is able to induce strong emotions, and that there is a cognitive benefit gained by reconfirming one's ability to feel, or even more simply, that experiencing strong emotions, regardless of their valence, can be meaningful,” Sachs explains. “Other people listen to sad music to purge themselves of certain negative emotions, by diving more deeply into the negativity. Others can listen to sad music to gain the cognitive benefits associated with sadness without having to experience any real-world tragic event, a sort of vicarious emotional experience.”

This seems to be true for Kasey Gelsomino. “For me personally, sad music is more calming than it is actually sad,” says Gelsomino. “All the really melancholy, chill, very emotional songs, like in my brain they are very calming and relaxing.” Gelsomino’s day job is as an Internal Playlist Coordinator for Nettwerk Music Group, but she also runs a successful side hustle curating playlists, which she promotes on TikTok. Her Spotify account has more than 65,000 followers and is filled with dozens of unique playlists that attempt to encapsulate a mood, feeling, or location. When creating her playlists, she often thinks about where and how people will listen to them. “In the summer, if I have people over and we’re sitting on the roof playing music, I’m obviously not going to play Hozier for everyone and be like ‘Hi everyone! Let’s all cry!’” She notes that slower and sadder songs appear more frequently on her fall playlists because she pictures people spending more time alone.

Serenity Bogart sees this trend play out in real time. Bogart is a singer, songwriter, and audio engineer who spends her days working at Waterloo Records in Austin, Texas. According to Bogart, people commonly purchase more moody, atmospheric, or sad music on vinyl. She attributes this to the listening experience of vinyl as a medium. “Vinyl is definitely an at home, intimate experience. Because you’re there with just the album, so it becomes more intimate because of its setting.”

Similarly to Sloan, Bogart notes that oftentimes the shift in listening experience seems to be prompted by the change in seasons. The colder weather leads to more time indoors, and offers the opportunity to experience music differently. “It’s quiet and you can hear the little nuances in the music. We’re listening to the lyrics more because they’re right there and we can hear them clearly.”

The Billboard charts seem to support Bogart’s hypothesis. In the week ending December 2, vinyl album sales were up 39%, making it the second-biggest week for vinyl album sales since MRC data began tracking sales in 1991. The same week, vinyl accounted for 46% of all albums sold in the United States and 54% of physical album sales. Adele’s *30* currently tops the charts for the second week in a row with 225,000 copies sold across all formats. Of those sales, vinyl

represented 50,000, making it the seventh-largest sales week for an album on vinyl and biggest second week for an album on vinyl in MRC data history. *Red (Taylor's Version)* follows *30* on the charts. Swift's *Evermore* is this year's top-selling vinyl album with over 215,000 copies sold.

But this fall in particular, there seems to be a collective willingness, even excitement, to bask in heartbreak and melancholy. On a recent episode of *Switched On Pop*, guest Brittany Luse notes that aside from the slew of breakup albums, the rise of "sad girl autumn" could be in part a result of an unfulfilled "hot girl summer." "I think this past summer of 2021 is what many people, at least in the United States, thought of as a great reopening," Luse explains. "I think for a variety of reasons, that didn't pan out for everybody the way that they hoped. It's kind of interesting that there's this musical sad girl autumn that is hitting upon a real sad girl autumn that I think a lot of us are feeling in real life."

Sloan makes a similar point, attributing the rise of "sad girl autumn" in part to the current state of the world. "Music provides a form of catharsis for listeners. Hearing an artist express their pain and sorrow can actually help us process our own emotional trauma. At a moment of global pandemic, political instability, and planetary climate crisis, it's no wonder that people are turning to sad songs to work through their own fears and anxieties."

Sachs and his colleagues recently published a study that examined how people used music to regulate their mood and emotions during the early days of the pandemic. They found that people who were feeling more depressed and/or anxious reported listening to sadder or more negative-sounding music to help purge themselves of negative emotions, and people who used this strategy reported feeling better. "While these results are all correlational, they suggest that the anxiety and stress caused by the pandemic could have an influence on the types of music people are engaging with," Sachs explains. He went on to note that while he hasn't studied the relationship between musical listening preferences and seasonal preferences, he believes that both the ongoing pandemic anxiety and the seasonal shifts could play a role in why people may be gravitating towards sadder music. "I would probably say that people's interests in writing and listening to slower, melancholic music in the fall and winter might peak because it matches their feelings and situations, but that's why this trend became such a big online sensation this year probably has more to do with things beyond my knowledge. "

Music fans have their own theories on why the sad girl aesthetic has become so popular this year. Claire Macauley runs a Swift-devoted TikTok account, one with over 84 thousand followers and over 2 million likes. "I could not be more excited to feel like I got hit by a truck," reads the caption of a video posted by the 21-year-old, announcing that *Red (Taylor's Version)* was less than a week away. Like many other Swifties, she was most looking forward to the 10- minute version of Swift's popular breakup song "All Too Well," and was not disappointed when she finally heard it. "I figured it would be good but I didn't expect that," Macauley admits. "I just sat there and my jaw dropped for like the whole 10 minutes. It reminded me a lot of my most significant highschool relationship. I felt like I was getting gaslit all over again."

Macauley says her surrender to sad girl autumn isn't primarily motivated by Taylor Swift, but that *Red (Taylor's Version)* fit perfectly into her typical fall aesthetic and the overall mood of this fall in particular. "I think whether it's autumn or the pandemic itself, people just want to feel.

The past year just felt numbing, like, there's just so much going on and you can't process it all at once," says Maccauley. "I think there's like this melancholy nostalgia around fall and winter time and the holidays. And personally, it just kind of helps me process things that I went through. Music helps you do that, but especially the sad songs, the ballads, the ones that are the most powerful."

While Swifties may be the loudest supporters of sad girl autumn, they aren't the fandom enjoying the melancholy vibes this fall. Reba Hayes is a longtime Adele fan. She was originally drawn to the artist due to their close proximity in age. Adele's albums, which are named after the age she was when writing them, tend to correspond with Hayes' age when they're released. But what really drew her in, and what has kept Hayes a devoted fan more than a decade later, was the music. "There were virtually no female singers in my age range releasing albums that weren't heavily skewed to pop or party music," Hayes explains. "It was vintage but also felt fresh and relevant with lyrics and melodies that meshed with modern life."

Hayes notes that she was both excited and curious about the release of *30*, knowing that the tracks would likely reflect how the artist and her life has grown and changed over the years with becoming a mom, getting married, and then getting a divorce. She says her favorite tracks on the album is "My Little Love," noting that it weaves in new musical elements that Adele hasn't used before. She also loved the inclusion of the musician's conversations with her young son on this track. "It gave so much depth to the work that I was really touched by," says Hayes. "I felt like I understood a lot about divorce even though I have never been through one. The mourning of love even if you are ready to let it go."

Hayes says she typically isn't an avid sad music listener, though her listening preferences do tend to skew more melancholy in the colder months. However, she has found herself, like many others, enjoying sad music this fall. Hayes believes that the slew of new sadder-themed albums by female performers this fall along with the collective grief from the pandemic created the perfect environment for the rise of "sad girl autumn." "In the last couple of months we've gotten some real powerhouse albums from female performers and it just so happens they are sharing the themes of divorce, love lost, nostalgia, grief," Hayes explains. "It jives with where we are in our society, grief for all we have lost the last two years, nostalgia for how things were, divorce in the literal sense for some people but also in the figurative, too. The pandemic has made these more apparent especially with how much time we spent at home and often alone. Embracing the sadness became mainstream."

With the winter equinox just a week away, "sad girl autumn" is coming to an end. Perhaps the melancholy will extend into the winter months. Indie-rock musician Mitski, another artist known for sad music, is releasing her new album in February. Or maybe the chill of January and the music of the new year will inspire a new era. While it's impossible to know for sure what music and mood the seasonal shift will bring, Sloan has his sights set high. "Hopefully a new Rihanna album!"