

Justin Shaw

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The Great Exchange
Eastern Graphic, December 2020
By Justin Shaw

There are many words I'd use to describe my Mom: provider, caregiver, joker – but 'fighter' is not one that immediately springs to mind. That is not to say she exhibits a lack of strength; she simply knows that some things are just not worth the fuss. She will sit on a powder keg of frustration or cling to a grenade of anxiety before letting it blow up and, God forbid, ruin someone else's day. Because of my Mom, I learned a person's strength is not measured by the fights they win, but by the things they choose to fight for. Every so often, there are of moments where she chooses to pull the pin and let the fury fly.

These moments tend to occur around Christmastime.

When Mom goes grocery shopping, she keeps one eye on the grocery list, and the other on the Sobeys' flier. One at a time, an item on her list is crossed off – but is on the constant look-out for her primary hunt: the Air Miles points. If there is any possible chance of increasing her Air Miles collection, Mom will always take it – even if it means buying things we don't need. Some folks would save these Air Miles for vacation travel. Not Mom. Every year, she saves these coveted points to cash them around the holidays to afford groceries for Christmas dinner for the family. Air Miles in exchange for Christmas groceries: The Great Exchange.

One year, during her annual "cash-in," she spotted a pair of holiday-decorated tea-towels. Frosty the Snowman was adorned on one, and Rudolf the Red-Nosed Reindeer upon the other. She selected these ugly kitchen miscreants from off the shelf and tossed them in the cart next to the Butterball. These tea-towels would allow her to collect an additional twelve Air Miles points for next year's Exchange and would also be her gift for Cousin Shirley.

The closest thing to a sworn rival my mother has is embodied in the sixty-five year old eighty-pound framed Cousin Shirley. They were both bound by familial ties neither one of them chose nor wanted. With these ties, comes the obligation of a holiday gift exchange. Each year, Cousin Shirley would deliver a Christmas gift for my Mom, but she would arrive at a time when Mom was at work, so would leave the gift adorned in a plastic Sobeys bag on the doorknob to the house. Cousin Shirley would leave before receiving her gift in exchange.

The gears of conspiracy were well at work in Mom's mind. She knew in her heart of hearts that Cousin Shirley was well-aware of her work schedule, and therefore, in Mom's mind, was purposefully dodging her holiday receipt to imply that Mom was an unthoughtful person. For seven years this routine of passive aggression continued, and every year, Mom would be so spurned by the gesture she wouldn't even make the five-kilometer drive to her house to deliver her gift.

Mom handed the Frosty and Rudolf tea-towels to the cashier, she muttered to herself in a warlike trance: "not this year."

As she unpacked her groceries at home, Mom took careful audit of her grocery list, and noticed that she did not receive her Air Miles points for the tea-towels. Nobody was going to stand in the way of Mom and her well-earned Air Miles, on the day of The Great Exchange, no less. Especially for the matter of twelve points.

Mom called the Air Miles head office and was prepared to demand satisfaction. She paced around the house with the phone as she waited on hold, an act that was possible because length of the phone cord was roughly the same length as our driveway. She paced to the on-hold tune of “White Christmas” that was occasionally interrupted by robotic interjections of “Please stay on the line, your call is very important to us.” It didn’t matter how long she’d have to wait because she wasn’t just fighting for what she was owed, she was fighting for her family, she was fighting for Christmas, and she was fighting for justice.

After about an hour on hold, Mom stretched the phone cord to the doorstep to fill the cat’s dish. As she opened the door, her heart fell to the pit of her stomach: a Sobeys’ bag was on the doorknob. Her impulse was to scream out of abject horror but worried that’d be the moment someone finally picked up the phone. Instead, she looked to the driveway to see if she could spot Shirley’s burgundy Buick. What she saw instead was none other than Cousin Shirley walking the length of the lane to return to her parked car at the end of the driveway.

The gears of conspiracy spun faster than usual. Cousin Shirley had clearly parked at the end of the driveway so she could walk to the house undetected, drop off the gift, and quietly exit without making a sound. It was a sleeper cell mission of holiday proportions.

As Bing Crosby crooned in Mom’s ear, she muttered in a warlike trance “not this year.”

Phone still in hand, she ran to the upstairs closet and pulled out a laundry basket filled to the brim with seven years worth of backlog presents earmarked for Cousin Shirley. She quickly threw the tea-towels in Sobeys bag, tossed them the basket, and set her sights back on Cousin Shirley. Back on the doorstep, she bellowed not “wait!” or “come back!” but a menacing “I see you!” Mid-way down the driveway, Cousin Shirley froze in her tracks. She slowly turned around and saw Mom waving her down. Cousin Shirley, caught in the act, slowly began marching back towards the house.

Mom grinned in delight. Finally, after seven years, Cousin Shirley was about to get her holiday comeuppance. Just as Cousin Shirley reached the doorstep, and as Mom was about to lay into seven year’s worth of pent-up frustration, she was met with a cheery voice on the other end of the receiver. “Air Miles Canada, how may I assist you!”

Time stood still. What does she do? Take the call? Or exact her sweet revenge on Cousin Shirley?

She tossed the basket to Cousin Shirley’s feet and barked “Merry Christmas!” and slammed the door in her face. Frosty and Rudolf slid out of the Sobeys bag onto the snow looking dumbfounded, but nowhere near as dumbfounded as Cousin Shirley.

Mom took the call, and settled her Air Miles in a matter of minutes. Those were 12 Air Mile points that would begin her next year's journey. Typically, someone collects Air Miles to save for a trip. For Mom, it was, and always will be, about feeding her family. Every single choice she makes is for her family – including knowing what battles to fight.

After another successful Great Exchange, Mom treated herself to a well-deserved glass of wine as she opened her gift from Cousin Shirley. As she opened her gift, she realized the only thing worse than not repaying a gift would be regifting a gift to the person that gave it to you. She sat on the couch, sipped her wine, and wiped her lips with her new Frosty and Rudolf tea-towels.

The Moment of Surrender
RED Magazine – Spring 2021
By Justin Shaw

When my sister, Nicole, was set to marry her fiancé, Eric, she had a million and one things on her list to make the wedding perfect. All she needed was to finalize one more detail to polish an already spotless itinerary. She needed music.

She and Eric loved the song “Young Love” by The Judds. Nicole played the song for me, and I met it with a shrug of teenage indifference. At 17, I had little interest in country or folk music. I was more interested in the absurdity of David Bowie, the defiance of The Rolling Stones, and the rebellion of Steven Tyler. It just didn’t seem like country music was a sound meant for my ears.

“Wouldn’t it be great if we could have Eddy Quinn sing it live?” she asked me.

Eddy Quinn’s music was so prevalent in our household, you’d swear he was a member of the family. I have many memories of sitting in the back of my parents’ car on a hot July evening as Dad drove us home as Eddy and the Fiddler’s Sons, sang a sweet summer lullaby. The music itself is rich in East Coast tradition, and the warmth of the voice, melody, and lyrics takes the listener on an emotional journey that is deeply personal yet somehow universal.

Though I realize this now, at the time I nodded and said, “it’s your wedding.”

Nicole and I paid a visit to John Webster, the guitarist for Fiddler’s Sons. The plan was if we could convince John, John could convince Eddy, and the rest would be history. The three of us sat in John’s living room as Nicole played a cassette tape of “Young Love” for John so that he could determine whether or not it was possible to learn it in time for the wedding. Soon after, John picked up his guitar and strummed what, after only a few attempts, quickly resembled the melody to “Young Love.”

And with that, item one million and one was crossed from her list. She was ready.

On the day of the wedding, I was thinking of all the work Nicole had put into making the event as special as it could possibly be. She made her way down aisle with an effortless grace a little brother doesn’t normally observe in his sister. The vows were exchanged, and the congregation glowed as the pair shared their love under the roof of St. Andrew’s Presbyterian.

And that’s when it happened.

Reverend Stephen Thompson announced “and now, as a surprise from the bride to the groom, please welcome Eddie Quinn and John Webster as they praise the newlyweds with the gift of song.” As if by magic, Eddy and John appeared before a microphone. John strummed and Eddy crooned “She was sittin’ cross legged on a hood of a Ford...”

No words were exchanged between Bride and Groom. Eric’s eyes widened with disbelief. Nicole grinned from ear to ear, as if to say “Yes, this is really happening.”

As the music played, I was immediately overtaken by a feeling of total joy for my sister as I watched her dreams come true. The sound filled the church with humble yet holy reverence – a sound that somehow spoke directly to the heart to tell you that love is real, worth fighting for, and standing right before your very eyes.

As this message reached my soul, it somehow also reached my throat... I could not breathe. My asthma is triggered by moments of extreme stress or anxiety. It's as if there's a tiny operative sitting at the control panel of my brain who goes "What's that? He's stressed out?" and then hits the red panic button that closes my airway and causes an asthma attack. There's never really a good time for an asthma attack, but this moment surely ranks high on the list of the worst.

As if somehow synced to Eddy's voice and John's guitar, my eyes began pouring like a faucet and my nose soon followed suit. I was sitting in a pew drowning in my own head-fluids as this beautiful moment unfolded before the entire congregation. Guests took their eyes from the rural Renaissance tableau at the altar to find the source of the gasping and gurgling coming from the centre pew. I tried to stifle my gasps for air by wiping the ripe combination of tears and snot from my face with the sleeve of my rented suit. Any time I caught someone's inquisitive glance, I managed to croak, "It's so beautiful!"

As happy as I was for my sister, my asthmatic outburst left me feeling deflated. On top of that, "Young Love" had moved me to weep like a child. Country music had done that. I felt like a shadow of my former self. What would Steven Tyler think of me now? I rode home with Dad after the ceremony and apologized for crying, to which he quietly replied, "Never apologize for having the courage to cry."

Music can only be truly personal if it is listened with vulnerability – and that vulnerability comes from a willingness to surrender to how you feel. In those moments, such as my sister's wedding, the moment may introduce you to feelings you didn't know were there.

The magic behind the music of Fiddler's Sons is that they give the listener permission to surrender to a feeling that may be connected to a person, a place, or perhaps a memory one keeps close to their heart. For folks in King's County, Prince Edward Island, the willingness to surrender to these feelings comes from the safety of knowing that they are not alone in this experience. When they listen, they are invited to share in a feeling that is personal yet universal. Humble yet holy. When they feel it in their heart, whatever that feeling may be, they know in that moment that it was something they were meant to feel.

The Secret Language
Island Boy Public Journal
By Justin Shaw

There is a distinction to be made between things *being* the same, and things *feeling* the same. Every time I return home to visit my parents in the rural community of New Perth, Prince Edward Island, I can't help but marvel at how much *feels* the same as it did when I left; how much a feeling of trust and comfort is maintained by a language of love that has no need of words.

This extends itself to a collection of assumed truths upon which the Shaw Family Household is built:

There will always be homemade beets and mustard pickles at hand.

A hush will fall over the kitchen whenever Mom turns up the radio to listen for the day's funeral announcements.

And if Dad ever goes missing, odds are that he can be found in the barn with his horses.

On my last trip home, Dad picked me up at the airport. We had an hour-long drive ahead of us. Catching up, my first question was, as it always is, "How many you got now?"

Dad counted quietly under his breath, then replied, "We got six up in the barn now. Might be eight by the end of the week if I make it to Nova Scotia."

My father, the horse-dealer.

As we pulled down the lane to our home, Dad corrected himself. "Did I say six? I meant seven."

Before we could go into the house, Dad took me to the barn to introduce me to a newborn filly. I often tease him that he loves the horses more than his own son. "Always a Clydesdale, never a Clyde," I'd joke. He never laughs at that. Not because it's untrue, but because he raises Percherons.

In the barn, the filly was still struggling to stand and was latching at her mother for the first time. My father watched the filly and mare with a quiet smile, undoubtedly the same way he'd watched over them the whole night through.

There was that feeling again, that feeling of trust and comfort. When you spend your entire childhood with some of the most powerful animals on Earth living in your barn and the largest man you've ever known raising them, there's little need to worry about security. It becomes a simple, commonplace fact.

Observing my dad watch over the filly and her mother, I suddenly understood that this was something I'd taken for granted. I also understood why. It was because I'd always seen it in action. My father had always protected the horses, and they in turn, had always protected us.

Dad had only recently taken to horse-breeding, and it wasn't without its challenges. The filly they had just welcomed should have been the second this season, but the first mare had died during the process, and her filly went with her.

The choice to continue with horse-breeding, then, was not one that was made lightly. The death of a family member weighs heavy on the heart, and for the like of a fifteen-hand tall mother and her babe, it is heavier than heaven.

The next day, I stood and watched as Dad hammered in the poles for a new fence, an expansion would lead the mother and filly to a fresh patch of grass near Mom's garden. As the pair grazed in this new area, I noticed that the fence was only marked off with rope, not wire. As Dad hammered in the last of the poles, the mare ducked under the rope and took off into the yard, the whisp of nylon against her back sounded like a snicker. Dad issued a soft sigh of regret in response.

The filly, still new to the world, did not want to be left alone without her mother, and so, followed suit and ducked under the fence. The pair then made their way to Mom's garden for the Blue Plate Special, or as we called them, Mom's tomato plants.

As my mother ran to the barn for the grain bucket to lure the horses with, I was faced with yet another fundamental truth of the Shaw Household: *Dad. Doesn't. Run.* He moves at the sustained pace of a man who only moves when he absolutely has to. This is not the same as being lazy; Dad simply only moves if there is a good reason to do so. The horses are aware of this.

Taking note of Dad moving towards them, and aware that they were the reason he was stepping carefully in their direction, the horses obediently walked back to the barn. Something, however, was amiss. The mother, aware of her transgression, had grown agitated. My father led her back outside from the barn to calm her. I stood from afar, witnessing a meeting of minds, one parent to another, under the blazing July sun.

My father stroked her mane gently, and the mare grew less and less restless. "Now what did you go and do that for?" he asked her quietly, as if expecting an answer. And for all I know, she might have answered. That wasn't for me to know; it was their language.

It takes a strong hand and a gentle heart to raise horses. Every time I come home I feel how lucky our family is to have this as another of our assumed truths. It is something that is maintained by a private language demonstrated by gesture and motivated by compassion. Whether spoken or not, we always know it when we feel it.

The Honeymoon Phase
Island Boy Public Journal
 By Justin Shaw

“If we were in a plane crash and I died, would you eat me to survive?”

After I asked my partner this question on an afternoon drive, I knew the honeymoon phase was over. Historically speaking, the subject of plane crashes has rarely been the key to a lover’s heart, but I asked it anyways because during the honeymoon phase of a relationship, nothing can go wrong. Admittedly, I don’t know if it was the question or the answer that brought the chapter to a close. It was as if I held the nail and she held the hammer as we sealed the fate of this phase of our relationship.

When I asked her *“if we were in a plane crash and I died, would you eat me to survive?”* She said *“well, we’ll have to see.”* Which, to be clear, wasn’t a *“no.”*

The following is the dialogue that was exchanged during that fateful car ride that drove towards the sun setting on the honeymoon phase of our relationship.

“You’d eat me?”

“Only if I had to.”

“What does THAT mean?”

“Well, if I had no other option, what am I supposed to do? Starve and die?”

“Yes! Die with me!”

“Oh, so you don’t want me to survive? I don’t get to live and be happy?”

“Don’t make this about me! You said you’d EAT ME!”

“WHY DID YOU EVEN ASK ME THAT QUESTION”

“I WAS BEING ROMANTIC!”

“EXPECTING ME TO STARVE AND DIE NEXT TO YOUR CORPSE ISN’T ROMANTIC!”

You get the idea.

We argue back and forth for a solid ten minutes. I play the *Romeo and Juliet* card, implying that our love is pure, and we could die together like they did. She plays the *Romeo and Juliet Is A Cautionary Tale* card, reminding me that they were teenagers who killed each other by accident after being in love for half a day after meeting at their friend’s party. The argument has now escalated to the point of it becoming ‘Who Remembers Grade 11 English class better?’ It was a war of sentimentality versus realism. Eat or be eaten. A battle of the ages.

The argument settled, and the car was silent with a palpable tension. I wished we weren’t in a car, because part of me wanted to just open the front door and dive out, but with my newly acquired knowledge, I was worried she’d turn back and throw me in the trunk for leftovers. It could have only been worse if we were in a plane.

The silence was more revealing than anything that was actually said. The cold shoulder treatment was invented as someone’s last ditch effort to win an argument. A tactic that screams *“I bet I can*

go longer without talking to you!” which implies *“I don’t really need you as much as you think I do.”* I sat in silence knowing that couldn’t be further from the truth. I yielded.

“*Okay,*” I said.

“*What?*” she replied, through her teeth.

Here we go.

“If I died in a plane crash, I’d let you eat me to survive.”

“... well, you’d be dead, so you wouldn’t be letting me do anything.”

“Yes, I know, what I’m saying is... I’d be okay with it now.”

I could hear the argument in her mind. Having dueled with her before, I know she’d parry to the *“well, I’d do it anyways”* but she would know I’d counter with *“It’s not permission, it’s simply acknowledgement”* when I could have just as easily struck with *“why do you want to eat me so bad?”* We know each other’s moves too well. I just wanted it to be done. I cared more about her than the argument.

After a beat of deciding her next move, she said *“thank you.”* And it was done. The car was filled with a slightly softer tension. What followed was the post-war shrug of *“what now?”*

We were both frustrated, but more frustrated at the moment than at each other. We were frustrated because we knew the honeymoon period was over when we learned our relationship wasn’t about dying with each other but dying for each other. We were frustrated because, without either of us knowing it, we were falling in love.

Western Canadiana: The Story of Darn Yonder
Parton & Pearl Online Publication
By Justin Shaw

During the 1950's, iconic tailor to the stars Nudie Cohn ushered in an era of high fashion of that would impact country music and Western wear forever. Casual fair was set aside for high-end suits with decorative embroidery, wild patters, and, of course, rhinestones. These legendary designs were born by Cohn, and worn by the likes of Gram Parsons, Hank Williams, and Polly Parton.

While these stunning outfits may shine on stage, they might turn some heads if worn as day-to-day attire. Is there a way to harness the essence of iconic Western designs to make it palatable for a contemporary audience?

Enter: Darn Yonder Garment Company.

Darn Yonder is a small clothing company based out of Halifax, Nova Scotia, and is owned and operated by Jen Boyne and Trish Forbes. This formidable alliance aims to transform vintage treasures into one-of-a-kind Western and Canadiana inspired wear. Utilizing classic Western embellishments, Darn Yonder strives to make their pieces palatable to a modern audience while making them look equal parts stunning and charming in the process.

The clarity of roles within Darn Yonder is perhaps the company's greatest strength. Forbes acquires the vintage clothing as the base material for the piece, and Boyne creates and applies the designs.

Boyne is a seamstress by trade and designs and builds custom attires that have been sold to clients across the world. The process of creating a custom outfit, from conception to completion, is an incredibly time-consuming process, resulting in a high price point for her products. Because of the investment from both Boyne and the client, a considerable amount of communication is required through the piece's construction to make sure it suits the client's needs. While the final product is a rich piece of material, the process of manufacturing it can, at times, be very challenging.

Forbes sells and collects vintage clothing with a specific focus on Western and men's attire. "A lot of vintage clothing sellers don't really focus on men's wear," says Forbes, sitting her emphasis men's wear. The interest in buying and selling vintage clothing came from her personal interest in thrift shopping. Many times, when shopping for herself and her family, she would come across items that stood out to her and she would buy them. Overtime, this amassed to quite the collection of materials, which lead to lead her to begin selling them. A challenge that Forbes continually faced was finding garments that were fine in material, but somewhat plain or stark in overall complexion.

Boyne and Forbes had been aware of each other's work for quite some time and became friends through a shared love of music. With a mutual understanding of the challenges they each faced

with their respective businesses, they soon realized they might be the answer to each other's problems. This past year, they decided to combine their strengths to help their products reach a broader market while creating superb pieces of Western wear. With Forbes responsible for acquiring the garments, and Boyne designing the Western embellishments, the product line of Darn Yonder was born. This strategy allows for their pieces to be sold at a lower price point using ethically sourced materials while giving otherwise drab articles of clothing a unique Western flair.

"I'm a terrible vintage shopper," laughs Boyne. "(Forbes) comes out of these stores with the most incredible stuff that I drool over. It's been a great combo of my work and her thrifting talents... she finds the greatest stuff. I don't know how she finds what she finds. It's an art, and she has mastered it."

As Forbes is busy collecting items from thrift stores, this gives Boyne time to research styles and aesthetics from the 1940's, 50's, and 60's to come up with more designs. From there, the pair meet and review Forbes collections and Boyne's designs to determine what will be their next pieces for the Darn Yonder collection.

Another strategy Darn Yonder applies to their work appealing is the inclusion of 'Canadiana.' Instead of cactus and desert imagery, Darn Yonder incorporates moose and canoes as well nature landscapes into their design themes to give the pieces a distinct 'Canadiana' Western aesthetic. Thus far, the response has been positive from their clients and fan base, and the team sites the success on there not being much in terms of men's wear that offers what they provide.

Thus far, the response from clients and supporters has been positive. "I think people have fun with them," says Boyne, aware of the balance of class and camp in their products. "Some people laugh and say 'Look! My shirt has pine trees on them!'" "I haven't seen anything around here of anyone doing anything like this," says Forbes, aware that their product offers something unique and different to men's wear, which could be a credit to their positive response.

One of the pair's favourite part of Darn Yonder is that products have an inherent one-of-a-kind quality because even if one of Boyne's designs happens to be repeated, it will still be a distinct original piece by virtue of it being on another vintage garment provided by Boyne. A goal for the pair is to have built up a collection of vintage clothes and design options so that customers can choose which design is placed on which garment, allowing the customer to have an investment in the creation of their one-of-a-kind Darn Yonder product.

The Western style of clothing is both bold and classy, but not necessarily a style that is universally embraced by a contemporary audience. Boyne's initial foray into Western design was when her friend Willie Stratton, Halifax based country musician, continually asked her to build him a suit. Once Boyne began in the process, she was hooked. "I remember saying to him 'people actually wear this stuff? Like, is it a trend?'" And he said "Jen, no. It's *not* a trend. It's not new. *You're* new to it." The more I'm involved and the deeper I get into this lovely amazing world of old school country, it's very clear that it's not new. It's not trendy, it's not going away."

It was the appreciation of Western wear is what brought Boyne and Forbes together. Now, the pair utilize their respective skillsets in order to both engage and enlighten customers with the wonders of Western wear.

Darn Yonder operates through social media. For more information about their product line, visit their Instagram account - @darnyonder. Also check out Jen Boyne's designs at @j.boynewesternwear and Trish Forbes' vintage clothing at @secondhandsaloon.

8 Easy Steps to Building a Mixtape
By Justin Shaw
Maritime EDIT – November 2020

Music can take you on a journey. It can take you to memories of people, places, and moments - those memories all come flooding back the moment you hear that song. Perhaps it's a Bon Iver song that reminds you of your first real heartbreak. Perhaps it's a Tragically Hip track that was playing on your turntable as you were unpacking in your first college dorm. Or perhaps it's a ballad by The Fiddler's Sons that you remember nodding off to sleep to as you sat in the back of your parent's car driving home on a hot summer evening. The memories attached to these pieces of music can be vivid, and the feelings associated are just as powerful. Ultimately, music has the capacity to take you a deep, personal journey of reflection and catharsis.

But if the feelings attached to certain pieces of music are so deeply personal, how can you invite someone to share this experience with you? Answer: the mixtape.

I don't know many folks under thirty who make mixtapes. Millennials grew up with iPods and iPhones, not cassettes and number 2 pencils. See? I just made a reference only a mixtape-maker would know! I started becoming obsessed with music when I was in junior high and wanted to impress a girl I liked by giving her some music. I couldn't afford to buy my own music, so I had to steal (borrow!) my older sister's tape deck, and steal (borrow!) from her CD collection to be assemble a mixtape. While I was too young to afford music, I was old enough to appreciate that investing time and energy into a careful process of selection and curating a music experience would be a meaningful gesture.

At least, it would have been if my music options at the time weren't limited to Alanis Morissette, Clay Aiken, and the *Armageddon* soundtrack.

My musical tastes have matured since junior high school (despite what my friends may think) and I take a lot of pleasure in constantly building my library. I love sharing music with people I care about, and I choose specific songs in a specific order to cultivate a rich listening experience. Often times, the nuanced placement of a Marty Robbins or Joe Strummer song might go unnoticed, but it is akin to the unseen brushstroke on a painting – a thousand invisible choices to create one complete artistic experience.

Granted, I wasn't thinking in quite such lofty terms when twelve-year-old me was listening to Alanis Morissette for the first time.

Anyone with a love for music and someone to share it with can make a mixtape – all it takes is choosing a collection of songs that mean something to you. The listener won't feel exactly how you felt, but they may feel that you felt something – they may even be taken on a journey of their own. Consider your listener – who are you sharing this mixtape with? When will they listen to it? And most importantly – *why* are you sharing it with them? As a tribute to Miss Alanis Morissette who guided me on my junior high mixtape journey, here is an easy guide to help you build your own mixtape – in eight easy steps.

1. *The One-Two punch*: Tracks 1 and 2 are vital. The first track needs to be your thesis for the listening experience – something that grabs the listener’s attention and forecasts the kind of journey they are about to experience. The second track needs to double down on whatever it is your promising – raise the stakes! My advice would be to pick the first track on your favourite album and follow it with the second track on your second favourite album.
Justin’s picks:
 1. *Coma Girl* by Joe Strummer & The Mescaleros
 2. *Drunk Teenagers* by Joel Plaskett Experience.
2. *The 180*: Track 3 is where we need to change the tone entirely. Pick a song that is the stark opposite of the first two on the list. If you picked something metal, try something acoustic. If you picked two male vocalists, try switching to a female vocalist. Changes such as this show the range of your storytelling, and also keeps your listener engaged.
 3. *New Romantic* by Laura Marling
3. *The Wedding Day*: Tracks 4-7 are pretty straightforward – something old, something new, something borrowed, and something blue. Pick a track that was released before you were born, then follow it with something released within the past five years. For something borrowed, select a cover song. To me, a good cover sounds completely different from the original – the artist was able shine a new light on a familiar tune, and give it new meaning. Finally, something blue. Pick a song that makes you feel sad. If no songs make you sad, then you’ve clearly never had your mixtape rejected by your junior high crush. Pick a song with “blue” in the title then, you lucky punk.
 4. *El Paso* by Marty Robbins (1959)
 5. *Dead of Night* by Orville Peck (2019)
 6. *High & Dry* by Jacksoul (Radiohead)
 7. *Skinny Love* by Bon Iver (so sad)
4. *Go Local*: Track 8 should be saved for a local sound, so select a song from your home province. Bonus points if you pick a song from your *hometown*. For those in Atlantic Canada, I can’t tell if this is really easy or really hard... so many options to choose from...
 8. *Heroes of the Sidewalk* by Two Hours Traffic (PEI)
5. *A Song For All Seasons*: A song that reminds of you of each season - summer, autumn, winter, and spring. The order of Tracks 9 to 12 should begin the season you were born, then move forward to the next season.
 9. *Marry Me, Archie* by Alvvays (Summer)
 10. *Cleopatra* by The Lumineers (Autumn)
 11. *Winter White Hymnal* by Fleet Foxes (Winter)
 12. *The Darkest One* by The Tragically Hip (Spring)
6. *Unlucky 13*: Track 13 should be saved for a song/artist that everyone seems to hate except you. Now is the time to prove them wrong!
 13. *Surrender* by U2 (*I am Bono’s only fan*)
7. *Send Us Home*: Your choice! The final track is a ‘free choice’ because, by now, you should understand the value (and hopefully the joy!) of curating a list of songs with intention. Choose wisely, this is the last thing your listener will hear to conclude the journey you’ve just taken them on.
 14. *Shoulder of the Road* by The Fiddler’s Sons
8. *Review*: Once you’ve made the list of songs, listen to them from beginning to end all the way through. This is the time for last-minute alterations or perhaps even rule breaking. These rules were only designed to make you more aware of the power of selecting songs with intention. Add songs, remove songs – we didn’t even discuss B-Sides! The most important thing to keep in mind is to pick songs that mean something to you. Odds are, if there’s someone in your life worth sharing music with, if the song means something to you, it just might mean something to them.

Review: Inn Echo, *Winter's End*
Parton & Pearl
 By Justin Shaw

Combine a guitar, a fiddle, a concertina, and a cello, and you have Inn Echo – a four-piece instrumental band that fuses modern elements of indie and jazz sounds with folk Celtic traditions. This band is a unique blend of cultural backgrounds taking a modern approach to traditional folk. Their latest EP *Winter's End* delivers a diverse collection of sounds that takes the listener on a rich journey filled with imagery, history, and feeling.

The EP begins with '27/5,' an instrumental that leads with a cool, sober tone that soon shifts into quicker, more exhilarating tempo commonly found at a cèilidh. From there, 'The Wreck of the H.M.S. Phoenix' conjures nautical imagery and pays homage to folk legends passed on through song. Finally, 'In the Nick of Time' is perhaps the most daring, if not mischievous, piece, beginning with a jazzy groove that soon invites the listener into a warm landscape laid down by fiddle strings, then taking us into the high-spirited energy of an East Coast kitchen party.

While a modern approach to traditional folk may sound something of a paradox, *Winter's End* pays homage to many of the rich traditions of Celtic folk music, while melding modern musical elements, treating the genre with an irreverent reverence.

Review: Taggart & Torrens, *BAHDS*
Parton & Pearl
 By Justin Shaw

What happens when you let antics of Jeremy Taggart and Jonathan Torrens loose in a recording studio? You get *BAHDS* – the musical comedy brainchild of Taggart & Torrens. This album is equal parts hilarious and engaging, offering a broad range of musical genres, while maintaining a consistent, fun tone.

The album begins with shades of *This Is Spinal Tap*, where the listener is introduced to Donovan, a "music producer" whose reoccurrences serve as a framework for the album. This element not only gives the album a sense of story, but also gives the listener a taste of the fun they're about to experience.

From there, the album delivers a mix of straight laughs and catchy tunes. 'You Sellin? I'm Byron' and 'Weekend Bumsies' are stand-out character driven songs that highlight the pure silliness of Torrens' imagination. Musically, the pair deliver some exceptionally fun beats and melodies, notably in 'The Score' and 'All Day Long.' The album is at its strongest when the pair balance a strong comedic premise with a memorable hook, making 'Terry Got Wasted' the summertime campfire jam that proves to be the gem of the collection.

For the optimal *BAHDS* experience, be sure to check out Taggart & Torrens' music videos. Come for the laughs, stay for the *BAHDS*.