

San Francisco and San Diego though both in California seem to exist much further apart than the 501 miles between my current address and my previous one indicates. This is a distance that if you have spent any amount of time in one place, that when you are in the other you invariably miss it. It's close (or far), but not really. This is not an especially unique experience—it is the nature of 'existing actually'.

It is what allows a song downloaded a week ago in San Diego to remind you of the feeling you had the first day of your second year in San Francisco. It's that sort of thing. But for me it is also the action of listening, the attempt to (not to build this up too much) listen actively. To take what I believe most people consider a passive act and engage with it (not to build this up too much). That is part of the 'location longing'.

I spent plenty of time in San Francisco laboring over mixes; trying to capture some feeling or moment or place (to the extent that they can be differentiated), to varying levels of success. Knowing, or at least believing very strongly, that there were perfect songs for a particular mix and that they had a perfect order as well.

They functioned as soundtracks to weeks, to walks, to seasons, to meals. They reminded me of drinking at the park, at the bar, at the other bar, at school, in someone's room, at someone's house. They were associated with drinking with friends, with girls I liked, with professors, and with people I hated.

I would play each one endlessly. Play it until I couldn't stand it any longer and the thought of hearing some track following another was offensive. Then I'd try to lose them. I'd delete the track listing. I'd give my friends a new mix in hopes of burying the previous one. How uncomfortable but probably common! Trying to bury one set of things with another as soon as you're done with the first.

Eventually I couldn't take it anymore (not to build this up too much) and the idea of versions of me existing, albeit digitally created compact disc versions, made me incredibly uncomfortable. I couldn't confiscate the mixes that I had already given out but I could choose not to make any new ones, for others or myself. I chose to have whatever I was listening to be just what I was listening to. No themes, no memories, no conscious associations—there was nothing of me in the listening. I wanted to consolidate my existence bro, and it worked.

The other day though I made a new mix and it was ok. In an attempt to have less of a conscious me I came up with constraints. The mix would only feature songs that I added to my iTunes in the last three months that were played over seven times in the last month. I shared it with a friend and I felt sufficiently consolidated. What seemed 'significant' about the experience was that it wasn't the songs themselves that triggered the nostalgia—they were empty of any personal associations, at least initially. It was the process of arranging the songs that reminded me of San Francisco. The more I listened the more that the initially absent nostalgia permeated the songs; until it was there completely. Here are the songs:

### **Dirty Gold – California Sunrise**

The song runs through just about every single cliché about California imaginable. They do it in a 'knowing' way that allows you to forgive at least this instance of 2010 musical 'California-isms'. *"Trying to decide are you really worth my time. I've been playing this game so long. But the cold is coming through, there's nothing left to do. How am I going to prove myself to you?"* There seems to be a longing for the stylized version California despite the awareness that it doesn't really exist, which strikes me as 'genuine'.

### **James & Bobby Purify – You Can't Keep a Good Man Down**

The guitar and bass at the start of this song is perfect. The song does a great job of capturing the futility of crushing on someone that probably doesn't really crush on you, but you still do things hoping that they'll start to crush on you. *"I know baby that you'll never look my way. But I'll keep searching for the right little words to say."* Dang, that's some pathetic stuff but crushes are pathetic too in a way.

### **Veronica Falls – Starry Eyes (Roky Erickson Cover)**

The original version of this song is definitely worth checking out as well. What I like so much about this cover is the little male/female vocal harmony that's happening throughout the song. I'm a sucker for that sort of thing. This seems to be more crush futility. *"Starry eyes, what can I say to make you listen. Starry eyes, what can I do for your attention?"* and then *"When I'm at home I hear and feel you. I wish that I could reach right out and touch you."* Dang.

### **Gino Washington – Around the Town**

This is another classic r&b song with a really great intro. Gino does this really kind of dramatic but super cool thing where he extends words. I'd describe it like a vocal stutter or something. I've heard a version of this song that's a bit sped up—but this one is superior.

### **Phantom Power – Oxycodon//Whatever You're Into**

Phantom Power are two dudes that record everything in a bedroom probably. The vocals begin with *"You say..."* which I can't help but hear as accusatory. The combination of the music and the layered/echoed vocals make for a welcomed contrast. Everything seems to slow down while this track is playing. Just as everything is slipping out of focus the guitar becomes very pronounced at 1:12 pulling the listener back from the haze. Only a few of the words are easy to make out: 'you' 'always' 'are' 'say' 'I' 'but', leaving us to try and construct our own narrative based on our associations with the word.

### **Teen Daze – No Regrets**

This track is similarly 'unfocused' as the Phantom Power track there seems to be an intentional 'edge'. The distinction: while Phantom Power opens out in a way that seems endless the Teen Daze tracks is concentrating into a single point. There's a definite sense of culmination given the lyrics: *"I know what you wanted/ I know what you said/ I know that I'm parted/ By the dreams of the day."* The second portion of vocals are noticeably less clear. The listener is unsure whether the line is: *"Where did you want to control?"* or *"Where did you want to go?"* It's unclear how they are different and if the difference matters. The final line of the repeated mantra-like second verse is equally ambiguous with: *"Are you on your way?"* or *"I hope you're on your way."* No doubt the group had something specific in mind but the resulting lack of clarity only enhances the experience of listening to the song.

### **PENS – Love Rules**

I don't really have anything to say about this song: *"Hear you outside. Heard the sound of your voice. Went to the doorway. No one was there but me."* :(

### **Dark City Sisters – Intombi Yembazo**

This song is amazing! Every single track from this record is pure 100% joy to listen to. Some of the best harmonies I've heard on record. I used to have some translated liner notes, but I can't seem to find them. Sorry dudes.

### **Tennis – Marathon**

I got really obsessed with this song for a while. Now listening to it I'm realizing how 'wordy' it is. Not in a really annoying overrated obnoxious The Decemberists way but in an interesting way. It also features

some hokey rhyming that make it sound a little bit like a children's song, "*on the sand out keel is heaving/ but tonight we've got to be leaving/ travel through the day and into the evening*". I know that it's been really popular to obscure the tracks in like fuzz and what not but this is a song I think that would have benefited from better production. They probably could have been in an iPod commercial and it would have brought out all the really cool vocal harmonies that seem to mirror the experience that is being conveyed about sailing.

### **Mickey & Sylvia – Love is Strange**

The guitar on this song is really really good. Mickey & Sylvia lay it on pretty thick in the middle of this classic song when they break into dialogue, but it's perfect. Especially great is when they go right back into the singing at the conclusion of the exchange. I'm pretty sure most everyone has heard this song so I won't go on too much about it.

### **Wanda and Wonder – Best Coast**

This track is definitely in conversation with Dirty Gold's "California Sunrise", not so much in response as much as in agreement. Anchored by a ridiculously great vocal sample, the lyrics appear to articulate how experiences related to quotidian are what seem to trigger our 'location longing'. It's the seemingly inconsequential things in one place that causes one to be reminded of the things elsewhere. There's a really tenuous balance between the sort of 'unrestrained' nature of the vocal sample and the kind of regimented (but nonetheless effective) nature of the singers vocals. Eventually though they seem to switch roles and it's the sample that you rely on for consistency as the singer starts varying his cadence between that of the chorus and new ones. Super legit.

-- Junior Clemons

