

[A Minute to Breathe: 2016 Mix](#)

Track 1: “Meet Me In The City (Live)” by Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band

This my first musical memory of 2016. I became a big Bruce Springsteen fan six or seven years ago, but I had yet to see him in concert. My wife bought me tickets for a surprise gift but then became too ill to accompany me on the day of the show. I arrived at my designated seating area just as the song was beginning. So The Boss yelling out, “meet me in the city tonight” had very literal and specific resonance. And, of course, he is “as advertised.” If you haven’t seen a Bruce Springsteen concert and have any remote interest in doing so, I couldn’t recommend it more. I also love that line, “I’m just searching... for the blood, for the bone, for the muscle, for what’s real.”

Track 2: “Ain’t No Man” by The Avett Brothers

In a roundabout way, I actually came to the Avett Brothers by way of Bruce Springsteen. I read [a blog post](#) in 2011 by Darren O referring to Bruce Springsteen’s songs as “Belief Music.” That’s the aspect of Springsteen’s work I respond most to and what I look for in music in general. In O’s post, he posits that the Avett Brothers are carrying on The Boss’s legacy. I tried them out then, but their music didn’t resonate with me the way I’d hoped would. More recently, I was compelled to click on [an interview with them](#) promoting their most recent album, TRUE SADNESS, and I really liked what they had to say. I liked their attitude about what they do, and through [NPR’s “First Listen,”](#) I previewed the album on drive one evening. This song, and several others, really stood out for me. I love the resilience and joy of this one in particular.

Track 3: “Way Back in the Way Back When” by Glen Hansard

Way back when I made my first annual mix CD in 2004, it was in part (and it still is) a place for me to put songs I really like whose albums I might not otherwise listen to. And at the time, I had just seen Glen Hansard’s band, The Frames, open for Damien Rice. I was really taken with their music, but the songs I loved most live, weren’t on any of their available albums at that time. The one CD I did take home, 2001’s FOR THE BIRDS, had a couple tracks I did want to hang onto. Plus, I wanted to have a remembrance of that concert. Little did I know that Glen Hansard would make an appearance on every annual mix I have assembled since. He is one of the artists I relate most directly to in terms of approach and attack. He’s kind of the “Irish Springsteen”—at least to me. Whereas The Frames are a rock band, Hansard has spent the last decade performing more acoustically-based solo work or with The Swell Season, the duo that grew out of what was initially the title of his first solo record in 2006. The Swell Season was essentially The Frames with Markéta Irglová. Regardless of the name of the project, Glen’s always got a spot on my playlist. His solo work has been much more reserved than the visceral roar of which he is capable, so to hear a blues-based Glen Hansard song in which he belts out every line from beginning to end is thrilling to me.

Track 4: “I Need Something New” by Savages

Savages are a group that caught my attention based on their aesthetic. When I first became aware of their debut album in 2013, I rushed out to my local record store to grab myself a copy of their clear-vinyl LP. Their visual presentation had the vibe of a female Joy Division. While I do very much appreciate the atmosphere and intensity they generate, my taste are very lyrically driven. I’m looking for words that speak to my own experience, and a lot of their music is coming from a very different place than I recognize personally. I’m

happy to represent them on this year's mix because I literally came across this song looking for "something new." It's something outside of the familiar artists I usually listen to from a group I've been eager to connect with in a way that I feel hasn't quite happened yet. If you enjoy this song, definitely dig into their catalogue.

Track 5: "Momma Sed" by Puscifer

My brother hipped me to this 2007 track as a reference to a sound he was going for in one of the remixes he was working on for our [Furious Light Remix EP](#). Puscifer is the side project of Maynard James Keenan, who is otherwise known for his gigs fronting the bands Tool and A Perfect Circle. Keenan says this band allows him to step out of the confines of those acts and explore his "creative subconscious." I instantly connected to the lyrics and vibe of the song. Having never gotten into Tool or even other Puscifer music, I'm very happy to have a place to find this tune and hear this message.

Track 6: "Call To Arms" by Sturgill Simpson

I stumbled across Sturgill Simpson [when he performed on The Daily Show](#). The first song he played on that appearance was a laid back version of Nirvana's "In Bloom." With all due respect to Mr. Simpson, his natural singing voice has a kind of Kermit The Frog quality. It's genuine but seems a little odd, so I wasn't sure if I liked him. Then he played this one, in which he busted open the stereotype of what a "country artist" has meant to me. He was a dude standing on stage backed by a band of young guys (including a 3-piece horn section), wearing a plain black sweatshirt, mom-jeans, and sneakers while talking to the host. Then he busts out with this rebellious rock-rant about all kinds of things that bother me, probably you, and everyone else reading this. After that, I was curious about his record, which he describes as a letter to his infant son. And then I heard his interview on Marc Maron's WTF podcast, and that sealed the deal for me. I was on board with Sturgill and bought his SAILOR'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY LP. As I was sequencing the mix here, I realized it was a nice paternal companion to the maternal advice of the "Mama Said" song preceding it from Puscifer.

Track 7: "5:30A.M." by David Gilmour

Every other year, my day-job has enabled me to travel to Las Vegas for a conference. While I was out there last time, I was staying up late in my hotel room glued to VH-1 Classic. If I had that channel with the cable package available to me in Minnesota, I don't think I would have accomplished much of anything since moving here. I caught WIDER HORIZONS, the documentary about the album from which this comes, and gained a real insight and appreciation for Gilmour and the music he makes now. I'm a real fan of singers. The voice is usually "it" for me. Whether or not I'm into a band comes down to: who they are, what they're saying, and how they sound saying it. Gilmore's guitar, as evidenced here *is* his voice. This track, and the lyrical melodies presented in the guitar lines I often listen to—along with the album's closer, which continues the same motifs—on long cycles of repeat. In fact, I'm listening to it right now.

Track 8: "Spiral" by Eric Clapton

From one British guitar master to another. I, again, encountered this music via [a behind the scenes video](#). I think I was grabbed by a headline reading, "Clapton says: I still do." That's the title of his latest record, and I was intrigued by "you still what?" So I looked up the lead single on YouTube and was instantly struck by Clapton's classic tone and tasteful guitar licks coupled with just the type of earnest lyric ("You don't know how much this means / to have this music in me") that really connects with me. Though not of every single record, I am a great fan of Eric Clapton's playing, his singing and songwriting—even going back to when I

was a pre-teen. It just so happens none of the music he's made in the last 13 years since I've been compiling these mix CDs has expressed something I needed to say but couldn't (or hadn't). This one did. I learned in the documentary the origin of the album's title comes from Clapton's aunt, who raised him. On her deathbed, he was thanking her for looking after him as a kid. She said, "I liked you, and I still do." Me, too.

Track 9: "Collage" by Phil Little

I met Phil the first time I attended an open mic in Minnesota in 2012. He is a 77-year old retired businessman who writes 40-some songs a year. Phil usually composes "plain old crazy country monkey business songs," but he's been on a kick on of writing meditations on a single word--this one, of course, being "collage." It features the excellent guitar work of Lonnie Knight. There's a wonderful moment at 3:27 where Lonnie does a flourish so much to Phil's liking that he breaks the lyrics to exclaim, "yes!" Phil previously appeared on my 2014 mix with his four-on-the-floor thumper, "Change It Up" and just recently published a song of his my brother recorded that he wrote in 1982. We're hoping to turn that song into an EP later this year, so more on the Ulman/Little collaboration anon...

Track 10: "Freedom" by Beyoncé Feat. Kendrick Lamar

This may seem like an uncharacteristic choice for me, but Beyoncé grabbed ahold of me in a big-bad way last year. First with the "Formation" video, which set the tone for her latest album, LEMONADE. I'm not sure the last time an artist this popular in the mainstream has infused his or her music with as much personal, social, and political significance while still managing to be as hugely and spectacularly entertaining as we, the public, expect. I have always respected Beyoncé's talent; but with this album, she moved onto the short-list of musicians who can reduce me to tears—not because I'm sad, but because I'm so profoundly moved by their passion, confidence, honesty, and vulnerability. I'm also happy that it features verses from Kendrick Lamar. I don't know much of Lamar's music, but he seems to be firing on all cylinders here. I had heard his name but never his music until I saw him perform on the Grammy's last year, and I was floored. I continue to be every time I hear this song, too.

Track 11: "Purple Rain (Live)" by Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band

As a kid, I was not allowed to listen to Prince. His persona and lyrics were considered to risqué by my parents, and I never got into him on my own. Well, with the exception of the Purple Rain film, which I only recently watched in 2014 with my friend Brian Yost during a break from recording while he was in Minnesota to track drums for our Furious Light album. In 1984, that song, that album, that movie was on top of the world--alongside Madonna, Michael Jackson, and Bruce Springsteen. So, something about Springsteen covering this song and paying homage was extra-special to me and is the way I wanted to personally commemorate The Purple One's passing.

Track 12: "The Moth & the Flame" by Les Deux Love Orchestra

This is a song that I encountered on the excellent tv series MR. ROBOT, which is about a troubled young cybersecurity engineer who gets "recruited by an insurrectionary anarchist" to erase all debts by hacking a megacorporation. The show is super-well done. As soon as the episode featuring this song ended, I looked it up on iTunes, downloaded immediately, and am very happy to include it here. The track reminds me of the remarkable Gary Jules cover of "Mad World" by Tears for Fears in DONNIE DARKO, and I love the fatalistic resilience of the lyric.

Track 13: “Play God” by Ani DiFranco

I don't know if I've ever included a song like this in one of my mixes. Usually the words of my selections are ones I could imagine singing myself and/or wish I'd written. However, I can't claim lines like “Mr DiFranco's” [lyrics here](#) as my own experience. So... I thought it best to let this most Righteous of Babe[s] speak for herself and her song:

“Play God' is a song that recognizes reproductive freedom as a civil rights issue. As a society, it is time to acknowledge that unless a woman is in control of her own reproduction, she is not free, and it is the responsibility of our American government to protect and ensure the freedom of all American citizens. It is time we get serious about addressing and achieving this great unfinished business of civil rights in America. The true emancipation and equality of women is dependent on it.” - Ani

Track 14: “Windows on the Ceiling” by Sean Kammer

As you may or may not know, the outfit under which I've published my creative endeavors for the last 17 years is called “Dreaming Out Loud Records & Productions” It was even an LLC for a while—though never a profitable one. I've been building a back catalog of definitive digital editions over @ <https://dreamingoutloudrecords.bandcamp.com>. Dreaming Out Loud grew out of a collective of friends from a small town in rural Ohio—all creating art of various types with each other's help. The 10th anniversary of my old pal Sean Kammer's STARGAZER album was coming up, and I asked him if there is anything he had (demos or the like) from the time during which he was recording that CD. This simple request grew into a full-blown “10th Anniversary Expanded Edition” for which Sean even recorded new versions of a couple of the tunes to go along with some live demos, a killer remix from my brother, and (of course) the re-mastered album. Sean lives in South Dakota and came out to Minnesota for a visit and to collaborate on this commemorative edition of his first album. He and I had fun putting together the tracklisting and the artwork, and I really made a case for including this instrumental portion of the new rendition of “Believe” he recorded for the release. If you dig this, I highly recommend you download the whole album for free @ <https://dreamingoutloudrecords.bandcamp.com>.

Track 15: “You Want It Darker” by Leonard Cohen

I've been a Leonard Cohen fan for years, mostly from encountering his music through movies like PUMP UP THE VOLUME and NATURAL BORN KILLERS growing up, and then eventually hearing he influenced seemingly every songwriter I like. With very little company, he created the gold-standard for literate and poetic lyrics over the course of his 50-year recording career. While he crafted truly great songs, I would argue he didn't often make especially good albums. With titles like *Songs Of Leonard Cohen* (1967) *Songs From A Room* (1969), *Recent Songs* (1979), *Ten New Songs* (2001), *Old Ideas* (2012), and *Popular Problems* (2014) there often didn't seem to be much thought or artistry to his stringing together of separate tracks. Nonetheless, I was very excited to hear he had a new release last fall, especially as it was contextualized on the October 21 episode of FRESH AIR during which they re-aired an old interview with Cohen and revealed the meaning of the song's Hebrew refrain “Hineni, hineni.” Terri Gross's tease from the show's introduction really wet my appetite to want to hear more. Thankfully, NPR featured the record on one of the free First Listens they do. I was pleasantly surprised by how much I liked not only the songs but also the album as a whole; which, incidentally, was co-produced Cohen's son Adam. The other thing about Leonard Cohen's recorded catalog... The production is not always to my liking. My favorite is 1992's THE FUTURE. That, I think, was the last of his records to feature a live percussionist. The programmed drums

(fake kits, not so often “beats”) arrangements, and the vocally weighted mixes of much of the last 20 years of his studio work did not measure up to the live shows he performed. Thankfully, the man also released eight live albums. While there are some of those studio “problems” I mentioned on YOU WANT IT DARKER, there’s also a lot of the classic elements of his best recorded work present as well and a real theme, which turned out to revolve around a resilient, living requiem. Much like David Bowie, he knew he was on his way out. He pretty much says, “bring it on, God!” It’s pretty badass.

Track 16: “Wishing Well” by Joseph Arthur

Joseph Arthur has been making regular appearances on my mixes since 2005. He’s a profoundly prolific musician and painter whose most recent album, THE FAMILY was composed sitting at a newly acquired 1912 Steinway Vertegrande (Arthur is a guitar player). I was intrigued by [this video interview](#) he gave in which he described the inspiration for the song. He’s singing about “[that freaky well in the center](#)” of [Rolling Acres Mall](#) in Akron, Ohio! I actually grew up very near there, going to the same mall and can very easily picture those fountains.

Track 17: “A Minute to Breathe” by Trent Reznor & Atticus Ross

The song from which this year’s compilation takes its name is from the soundtrack to the climate change documentary BEFORE THE FLOOD Trent Reznor did in collaboration with Atticus Ross, Gustavo Santaolalla, and Mogwai. I’m embarrassed to say I’ve still yet to see the film, and I wasn’t even initially very taken with the song. I’m a huge Reznor fan, though, and I thought for sure I would be including something from the much harder-edged NIN EP he sprang on fans in December. But as I was going back through the tracks I’d set aside throughout the year, I was thinking less about what I knew this song to be about and more about the lyrics in a broader context. I started to form some very specific associations with them that made the track essential to this mix and really spoke to the general way I was feeling at the end of 2016.

- David Ullman
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