

Truth be told, I did not listen to much music this year. My drive time was mostly spent listening to audiobooks or podcasts. Shout out to Matt Olson and Kevin Conaway. Receiving your mixes reminded me how much I value this tradition.

Fourteen years in, my “rules” remain the same. All tracks must be new (to me) during the calendar year and act as a sort of diary entry, saying / singing things I feel in some way. Even though most folks seem to stream music these days, I still hold myself to the 80-minute running time of a CD. Please reply with your mailing address if you'd like me to send you a hard copy.

I'm not a casual music listener. I'm looking for something that will make my heart soar... Or break... Or both—preferably both.

I hope you find a song or two here that does that for you as well.

THE PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE: 2017 Mix Album*

1) **“The Path of Least Resistance” by IT** - I discovered this song through the podcast [Tell 'Em Steve Dave](#). At the end of each episode, they tag on listener-submitted songs from unknown bands. This one grabbed me immediately. Clocking in at 11:45, there's a definite Pink Floyd vibe and halfway through something of a rap/rock middle eight.

2) **“Way Down We Go” by Kaleo** - Another podcast find. I co-host a show called [Long Walk Short Drink](#) with my buddy Palmer. On [episode seventeen](#), he was so into this song he was singing it a cappella. At the time, I was so amused by his rendition, I didn't want to hear the actual recording. I've since reconsidered and am glad I did. It's pretty badass.

3) **“Sign of the Times” by Harry Styles** - I was unexpectedly taken with this song when I saw Styles [perform it on Saturday Night Live](#). Much to my surprise, the kid came across like a mix of David Bowie and Eddie Vedder—with a little Joe Cocker added for good measure. I wanted to feature that particular performance, but I couldn't find a high enough quality version online.

4/5) **“Mouthy B” / “Safe” by Hamell On Trial** - Hamell's an old favorite. You can always count on him for a healthy balance of wit, outrage, and compassion. I got all sorts of fired up listening to the titular saucy Aussie's insights in “Mouthy B,” and the great [video for “Safe”](#) pushed me over the edge to include it here. It's a collaboration between Hamell and his teenage son Detroit, and it's well-worth a watch.

6/7) **“Get Out of Your Own Way” / “American Soul” by U2** - These two songs flow together in this way, connected by a few lines from Kendrick Lamar, on the Irish quartet's latest album *Songs of Experience*. I was inspired to include them both by [Matt Olson's mix](#).

8) **“Less Than” by Nine Inch Nails** - Another mainstay of my mixes and my record collection (I've got damn-near all 31 [NIN halos](#)--many in multiple formats). I agree with [columnist Steve Batlin](#). I also appreciated “the fury and expression of NIN in the chaos of 2017.”

9) “Million Reasons” by Lady Gaga - I’m not into all-things-Gaga, but I do really think the lady can sing! This tune caught my attention on (again) Saturday Night Live—though I was pretty distracted by the choreography of that performance. It didn’t occur to me to include here until I saw her play it on the Grammys last month. That rendition reduced me to tears and had me rushing to download this track.

10) “Little Ruin (Live @ Vicar Street)” by Glen Hansard - Mr. Hansard sings on 11 of the 14 yearly mixes I’ve made since starting this tradition. If he’s put something out that year, it’s a very good bet I’ll include a song (or two) from the release on my annual mix album. What can I say? The guy speaks to me. This live version of a song from his 2015 album, *Didn’t He Ramble*, was sent to subscribers of his music mailing list as a “thank you” in September.

11) “In God’s Country (Live from The Joshua Tree Tour 2017)” by U2 - I was fortunate enough to see the tour twice—once [in Dublin](#) and again in Minneapolis. The band performed their 30-year-old album in sequential order with as much passion and artistry as though it had just been released. It sucks how much relevance these songs still have, but I’m grateful Bono and the boys are still out there singing truth to power.

12) “Release (Live)” by Pearl Jam - Taken from the soundtrack of the marvelous documentary [Let’s Play Two](#) from long-time collaborator Danny Clinch, this rendition of the closing track from PJ’s debut album is dedicated (as you’ll hear) to a guy in the front row named John. You catch a little bit of this in Eddie Vedder’s spoken intro, but John has waited in line outside Wrigley Field for four days to be in the front row. He very much wants to hear this song in particular, as he’d recently lost his father. There’s a moment in the movie where it cuts to John as Ed sings the first lines. He’s crying, and his head drops down. Vedder calls out to John, encouraging him to lift his head up and be strong. It’s a really beautiful moment and a really sweet, fun, and rockin’ documentary in general.

13) “Better Believe It” by Hamell On Trial - Another song from 2017’s *Tackle Box*. For all Hamell’s acoustically rendered punk rock fury, he’s also good for a tender ballad now and again.

14) “A Better Way” by Andy Hull & Robert McDowell - One more podcast find. Palmer was fascinated by the movie [Swiss Army Man](#). It’s been described as “the movie with Harry Potter playing a farting corpse—where the first fart makes you laugh and the last fart makes you cry.” We dedicated [episode 36](#) to discussing the movie. This song is from the soundtrack.

15) “13 (There is a Light)” by U2 - The closing track from *Songs of Experience*. On [my first listen](#), this one hit me like a ton of bricks.

16) “In Time” by Robbie Robb - I came across what I thought was a retro-sounding track during the final scenes of a fantastic episode of *Mr. Robot*. I set about trying to find it online, which at the time was harder than I thought it would be. Turns out it’s actually from the soundtrack of *Bill & Ted’s Excellent Adventure*, which is not commercially available online. Thank heavens for the MNLink library system!

--David Ullman
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*A term coined by my pal Kevin Conaway, who makes magnificent annual mix albums.