

Mix Tape

“When I was young, younger, when boys were still an alien species to be avoided, when bras were still as foreign as the moon. My sister and I spent the summer in pursuit of music. Our tools were the blank tapes we were supposed to use for piano lessons and our big black boombox always set to 101.5 the “Zone”. There is nothing quite so good as listening to a completed tape. The scratch of erratic radio signal, intros and outros of the announcer’s voice, and most of all, our own arranging participation. In the fall I went to middle school. Middle school where one minute you’re shy in the locker room hastily changing after gym, and the next doing your best to announce your flesh to the world with your right, flared jeans and creeping midriffs. In the halls walking from gym to algebra I would meet a boy, the first ‘boyfriend’, at my locker. We were still learning to talk I guess. One time he handed me a mixed CD with no explanation, no title on its shiny case. At home in my room I shut the door and played it softly sitting on the floor in front of the same old boombox. Sounds emerged, dark and jarring, entirely unlike the music you hear walking the halls. It was startling for that contrast, but mostly that the song could have the sound so angry and violent. But I listened to it, and I listened to the subsequent mixed CDs that boys inevitably in tow with their expressed, or unexpressed, efforts made for me or my heart, or some other piece of me. The boy with clean fingernails who sweetly says hello to your mother before taking you in his white truck on a date he’s been detailing all week. A senior who you loitered around for his attention would only see at parties after basketball games. Or the one whose CD you never listened to. And then there was that one, the educator. My malleability aside, he had taste, a rare authority among dilutants. I remember when sitting in his ’91 Honda, he played for me 3rd Planet and just as I was coming down from the heights of inner-planetary wonderless captivation he told me he wasn’t so into Modest Mouse anymore. I should have known he would have been a heart breaker. I can’t know how much he let me into his mysterious world that lied within his first generation iPod but he showed me how he loved the greats and as much as it is something that can be taught, he showed me how to love them too. He introduced me to territory, though unfamiliar, seemed to be something that I had been looking for. Playlist by playlist I learned to explore the cosmos of those musician/storytellers. And somewhere in there, he, the educator, had carved for us a niche. Using the names and the arrangement of the playlist he had designed with me in mind.”

Music playing

“Even though he would never say anything to connect his feelings to the song and me.”

“As the stories go, we departed our corner of the universe. Each at different times for different places. Other boys would come and go, leaving behind their musical offerings. Some I took the time to understand and others I didn’t need to. None of them altered my world like the playlist he had made and like the ones I learned to make after he was gone, for myself and for boys who for some reason or other would inspire me to extend some of myself to them. Today I’m with one whom I like a lot more than I like his music taste. But even if I cringe when he plays the Counting Crows song that reminds him of me and even if he doesn’t hear the polyphonic subtleties of Yo LaTango’s new single that knocks me to the metaphysical floor of

my consciousness we've discovered those other ways of knowing each other and that sharing of self requires more than musical representation. We still exchange music and try to understand what the other loves but these days I am satisfied to be alone with this song."

