

THANK YOU MUSIC

by Marley Starskey Butler

Subscriber Marley is a multidisciplinary artist and social worker based in Birmingham, raised by Wolverhampton, nurtured by Derby and born in Leeds. He's also the producer of the One Grey Tick podcast, which was featured in February's Friendship issue. I knew I wanted to get Marley involved in this issue, as music seems to play a big part in his life (as it does for many of us), and judging by his Instagram Stories he not only has a rather impressive music collection but enjoys making music too.



Zabby asked me to write to write an article for this issue just hours after I went for a hearing test with an audiologist. The universe is funny like that.

I had started to develop persistent tinnitus, which is the perception of sound that originates inside ones head involuntarily. The outcome of the test was that my hearing was fine and there were some areas of my hearing that were actually above average, which was a relief. The audiologist's advice to remedy the symptoms of tinnitus was to choke myself of silence and stress, in order to counteract some cortisol with endorphins. He went on to explain in layman's terms that I need to do more of the things in life that I enjoy... and also listen to more music.

This was all in order to start the process of habituation, whereby the brain filters out sounds that it doesn't feel are important to hear. An example of this is a clock ticking in a room. Generally if you are busy and engaged in that room you won't hear the clock, but the clock itself is not making any more or less noise. Another example being when there is a fan on in a room. Over time you'll stop hearing the fan because your brain feels it's not an important sound to hear, but when that fan turns off, suddenly the silence is very loud. So if I follow the audiologist's guidance, one day my brain will filter out the ringing in my ears or not deem it so important and I won't hear it.

My brain is perceiving sounds inside my head as important which it previously did not. These

sounds can be triggered by multiple factors including neurophysiological and psychological influences, which is utterly fascinating to me. This was the first time in my life that I had to consider sound in a very physical way as it relates to the organs that ensure I can receive and interpret it.

I was anxious in the months leading up to the appointment because sound saved my life in a very real and tangible way. The ringing in my ears made me think I could be beginning to lose sound as I knew it.

I became an artist through sound, my relationship to giving and receiving creativity all started with (and continues to flow through) music. I took for granted the physical aspects of hearing because the emotional elements were (and remain) a foundation to my wellbeing and survival in this world.

As the years have gone on I have realised, as with most people, that the music you first connect to (generally in your adolescence to early adulthood), continues to have a real strong attachment to you throughout your life. For me this is not just through a form of nostalgia, where sounds become Polaroid pictures of past times. I too have this, but what I'm talking about are the songs and albums that acted as best friends and direct forms of therapy as a child.

As I became an artist myself I thought about what meaning others discover from the art you create. An artist's intention behind a creation, and the meaning ascertained by the receiver are two things that don't have to necessarily align

directly. I'm a believer that both the receiver and the creator are right in whatever meaning they feel. What's interesting to me is when you add a time dimension to this. There are songs that were very vital and important to me at 17 years old, that I listen to now, in my 30s, and derive entirely different meanings from. Maybe I had to have a certain amount of life experience to fall into these meanings that the 17-year-old me would not be able to fully grasp. Maybe it was just because I was listening to music mostly made by people much older than me? Is it this simple linear thing? Where as you grow closer to the age and experience of the writer when they wrote it then you get closer to their intention? Yes to an extent, but I don't think it's that simple, I think it's the area outside that margin that forms part of the beauty of music.

The 17-year-old me, the person in his 30s, and the artist themselves who may have a third meaning are all correct. In addition, there's a fourth meaning - what the universe intended when originally using the artist as a vessel to express itself. Maybe that fourth meaning is not separate, it's actually the energy that surrounds meanings one, two and three, giving them the ability to all exist together somewhere in the universe under a big warm coat. Music that leaves enough space for you to insert yourself and move around inside of it is the music that holds me forever and changes alongside my growth and development as a human.

The irony is that these foundational early musical attachments are the songs I would listen to the least in my everyday life. As your music collection grows and grows you forget how much you love certain things or how they help you. You almost take them for granted or think it is too obvious of a choice when you reach for something to listen to. Just as we can take for granted the people in our lives we love the most.

There were albums and pieces of music that meant too much to me to listen to casually. I felt there had to be the time and space to fully embrace the sound in a space.

But lately, since acting on the audiologist's advice to listen to more music, I have been

revisiting and sitting with those old sound friends and holding their hands more regularly, more casually, on walks, whilst working, whilst just sitting around, whilst crying, whilst laughing. There has been an enormous benefit to that, alongside writing more music and putting together an album to express and document the process of my psychological and emotional voyage in the last year.

Thank you music. I will try to never take you for granted again. Thank you for sending sounds to my brain via tinnitus to remind me, and to point me further down a path opened up by psychotherapy, art, and the loves of my life. The loud ticking clock of trauma will always be there, but you can do something about its sound when its expression is destructive. Thank you music for supplying me with lifelong sound friends that grow as I grow. Thank you music for inspiring me in times of pain and equally in times of gratitude, beauty, and play.

The audiologist gave me a booklet as I left the appointment and at the bottom of the front cover it read "Making Life Sound Better". My dyslexia just poked its head around the door and added; "Making sound makes life better too".

