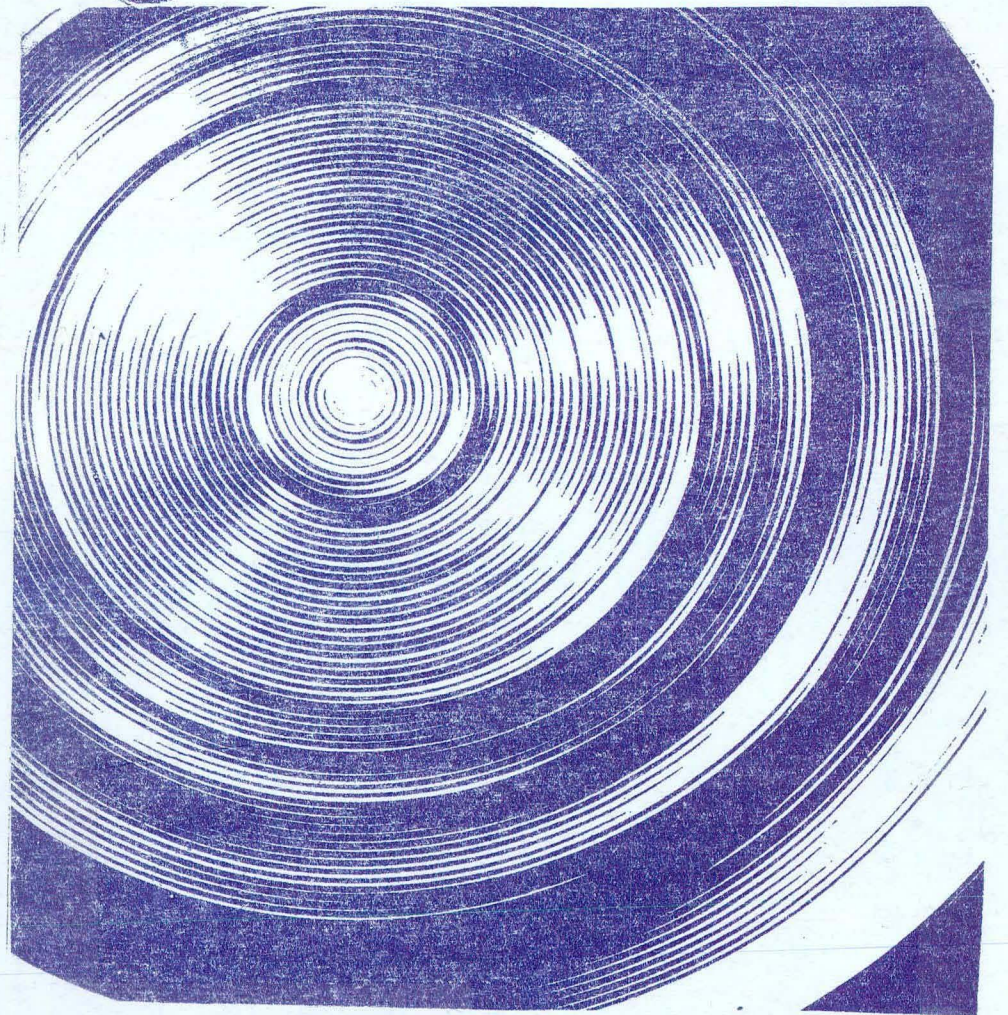


Consequential Lyrics



Why Consequential Lyrics?

I have loved music for longer than I've ever been consciously aware. As an eight year old, I was circling the oval at school, analysing it. As a ten year old, I was taking pop lyrics on board.

As an adult, I have struggled with this idea of artist-fan requitedness, that the dreams and theories we have developed in isolation are in some way, "false and untrue". Ben Gibbard even touched upon this in a Postal Service lyric:

"What if your perfect verse is just a lie,
You tell yourself to help you get by?"

There is a perennial threat of insincerity, that the artist has not invested the same level of meaning and consequence as you have. But I'm curious, what do we want from the artist exactly? Even if a lyric is personally consequential,

Why would the artist feel compelled to reveal that meaning? Surely it would make more sense to make it vague, create some mystery. Give something for the fans, critics and pop historians to pontificate about.

My most important musical hero did just that. Freddie Mercury was vague. And flippant. Annoyingly vague and flippant. At times, he spoke of the difficulty and imitation associated with lyric writing. Other times, he stressed the disposability of his work, fanously likening it to BIC razors. He always stressed that fans should create their own interpretation, "the meaning is there if you look".

I've talked to lots of people about Freddie's attitude towards lyricism and

creativity. Collaborators, writers, documentarians, representatives from Queen Productions. Some fascinating revelations emerged from that research, one contributor even suggested that Freddie was reluctant to describe the intricacies of his creative process because he was superstitious - fearful that if he described how he created his work, he would lose that ability to create it. It was a compelling theory (and one I had never heard before).

In writing and researching about Freddie's lyricism, I became increasingly aware of my own feelings and interpretation. There was always that anxiety, in discussing the lyrical themes and patterns in your favourite artist's work that someone will come back with that dreaded line:

"Are you sure this isn't just you? Are you sure you're just not making something out of nothing?"

The suggestion hits me, it depresses me. However, in many ways it has inspired the consequential Lyncs project. Yes, it is just me, like it is just you too. It is something that we've all done, listened to a song and tripped upon a lync that resonates and illuminates. We revisit that line over and over again, marvelling in its relevance and insight. I suppose there is an implicit vanity associated with that and a yearning that tends to come from closely aligning your life with art. Even disposable art. Of the BIC razor persuasion.

I want to become comfortable with

that prospect, something out of nothing. So, Consequential Lyncs will feature those poetic fragments, out of context, free from citation, and the stones attached to them. There are Lyncs that have made me courageous or lachrymose, curious or confused. I've infused my own meanings and I intend to explore that here and in the audio series over at cassettesandchocolate.blogspot.com - you can contribute your own Consequential Lync too for the final podcast. Details are on the site!

I'm coming to terms with the fact that I'll never know what Freddie meant. There won't be an unearthed David Wigg interview where he suddenly reveals all. I can only take responsibility for faithfully articulating that personal consequence

Advice

"Six weeks gone and not a word,
This means the end,
I never should have held up hope."

The Poppuns, Waiting for
The Winter

I felt passionately about this song before it ever became personally relevant. It was something about the video, a cold English seaside, some boys and a grief stricken brunette (accompanied by a 330 Rickenbacker guitar). It was the sound and the mood I wanted for my band - if I ever had a band.

I returned to this song when I knew it was over, but I had so desperately wished it wasn't. There was something in the silence, in its ambiguity that made me hope for a return for more blissful days, free from loss and anxiety.

"I shiver and recall the way you sighed,
The day we said goodbye,
With your relief you could not hide.
And I know you'll forget about,
The things that I despair about,
They never meant a thing to you."

It was chilling in its level of detail, it was like Wendy Morgan had been in the car with us, a witness to my grief and his indifference. Waiting for the Winter contained a longing, a wish for time to pass, a wish for life to start again. I got what she meant. It was around this time I dubbed a cassette tape for the car. Legacy, I called it. I was hopelessly grief stricken and stubborn to boot, refusing advice from friends and family. I listened to Waiting for the Winter though, I understood those feelings, in stasis since 1989. It provided much solace, it got me through the grief.

The Sentimentalists

"For I dream of a different life,
Oh how I dream of a different time,
Oh but let me rest in peace, my dear,
I'll let you know if I'm coming back,
I'll let you know..."

New Rhodes, A Different Time

I'm a sentimentalist, I have been dismissed as a sentimentalist. I have yearned for the past and had that ghastly self awareness that, in time, I will yearn that time when I was yearning for another time. Yes. I know it is stupid, but we are hard-wired sentimentalists, my family and I. We will always be like this.

A Different Time has always resonated with me for that very reason. Not only are New Rhodes a largely esoteric post-punk revivalist band no one else remembers, but A Different Time contains

sustained F# notes, which always breaks my heart. Whenever I listen to it, I am deftly aware that this is us, this how we live, this is how we love. We love things we have lost, that we can never recapture.

The odd thing is that like Waiting for the Winter, A Different Time underwent a change of consequence over the course of many years:

"You take all that is not rightfully yours,
You lie, you tell me you're moving on
without me,
When you think moving is good
most every time."

The verses detail a dispute, abstract in form and in nature, between a sentimentalist and a stubborn partner, in denial. The lyrics include regrets: "I told you things I should never have

told you..." and suddenly the yearning for A Different Time becomes apparent. For me, the conversations were imagined but the dispute was real. For a time, I had imagined that the past had been erased and I had been wiped out in one swift damnatio memoriae motion. This song helped to convince me that sentimentalist or not, we can never truly delete the past. His endless temper tantrums and demands I be excluded from various events was not necessarily indicative of the fact that I had been deleted for that abuse of friendship. It was only evidence that I was still here. Thinking of the past...and wanting it back so badly.

Vengeance

"Oh, you'll suffocate on the things I say."

Mood Six, What Have You
Ever Done?

It's what you would expect from Mood Six, if you knew them. Minor arpeggios and jangly guitars. Music historians would call them neo-psychedelic. I would call them Mood Six.

I love this song, as I love many songs by Mood Six. I have never looked up the lyrics, but I have always been obsessed with that line above. It's just so bitter, so visceral and so clever, really. It's like the expression, the breath of one person can take the breath of another away. It gives me hope that words have currency, with some hope they can sully you up or rip you apart. I indulge in provocative writing too much.

Domination

"I don't want to be your lover,
I just want to be your victim."

Elvis Costello, The Beat

I had always imagined that "he" had introduced me to this song, one night, many years ago. We were sitting in his car and he put it on his new (very new) model iPod, I seem to remember the tiny avatar of This Year's Model.

I don't know if and how that memory has influenced my obsession with The Beat. I've since figured out that I form attachments to songs which feature that Bm - G - A (or Bm - A - G) chord progression. In any case, I could listen to The Beat forever, live or studio versions. I love its sophisticated aggression.

Most of all, I am obsessed with (and in love with) that line. I have thought about it for years, trying to understand why I am so attracted to its confrontational, almost masochistic quality.

I could argue that, on some level, yes. I do want to be a victim, I'm intrinsically drawn to that role, where sympathy is a million times more intoxicating than empathy. Yet it still doesn't sit well with me. I don't identify with it absolutely. Perhaps it would take a more honest and less romantic person to commit themselves to that maxim.

It doesn't mean I'm any less fascinated with it, though. I really think the line (and the song) is genius.

Preoccupations

"C'était lui que je quittais,
Mais c'était toi que me manquais."

("It was him that I left,
But it was you that I missed.")

France Gall, *Faut-il
Que Je T'aime*

It is a mere breath of a song, sublime even without the knowledge of anything she's singing about. Upon reading "les paroles", you can see that we're dealing with a young girl, preoccupied with heartbreak. Although she is in the company of a nouveau beau mec (French for "new hunky spunk"), she cannot stop dwelling... and le beau mec is friendzoned. Her grief is never so apparent that it becomes obscene, she is always 'present'.

during their outings, dinner, go-karting and bowling. Yet, there is always some distance... and although we are never privy to the reasons why "she must love him", you can see she is a girl in repair.

That was me, once. It was my eternal state of affairs, yet ironically, I can't recall who I was mourning for and who I was with when I was mourning for them. I know I can recall it if I pause for a moment or two, but I don't like to devote myself to the past, as I once did.

Now, I have greater empathy for le beau mec. I know how wretched it is to be around a girl, preoccupied. There are better ways to live: love those who are with you now. There is a reason why the others aren't here.

Brevity

"With or without words,
I'll confide everything."

Depeche Mode, Here is the House

I was young, teenager young. He was old, old enough for it to be a problem. We talked about music infrequently and I always followed up on his suggestions, listening to Depeche Mode, The Cure, The Smiths, Erasure and Pet Shop Boys to fill the void.

I wanted to talk more, I always wanted to share music, ideas and stories, but I find we'd always be cut off... and people would always be around to make it abundantly clear that "that was enough". I had already made a fool out of myself.

Depeche Mode lyrics (and those lines in particular) comforted me, it comforts me now even to think of it. It made me imagine that despite the infrequency and brevity of our encounters, I could still convey something quite meaningful and important.

I could say that not much has changed in these 13 years, I still live for those brief encounters, my imagination is dominated by "the possible" and the prospect of a musical connection.

I don't think I can convey everything implicitly, not like Mark Gore suggests. It's certainly not how I like things to be left, I want the dialogue to be all-consuming, I want it to be endless.

I know, however, we have to settle for that which is unsaid. Sometimes.

Apprehension

"I'll go back, if you ask me."

Bloc Party, Little Thoughts.

It's so desperately insecure, so hopelessly neurotic and yet so completely anthemic.

It was on my first driving tape, along with Interpol, The Departure and Arctic Monkeys and we sang those lines and I felt them and maybe even said them once or twice. When my feelings were so clear that I feared they may have bordered on unwelcomed.

I was assured it was ok, I need not stop whatever it was I was doing. Long emails and MSN exchanges probably. It never cured that anxiety though, they just want me to go away. I'd never be brave enough to say it now.

Defences

"And just to lay with you,
There's nothing that I wouldn't do,
Save lay my nyle down."

The Decemberists, Here I Dreamt I
was an Architect

Yearning over vast distances, it smashes you. Colin Meloy simulates that yearning in far-off lands, antiquated cancanes and quirky scenarios. All sepia-toned, of course.

It was a carplet that could correlate with what was going on at the time. I would have done anything to be there, half way across the world, bowl of coropops in hand. The nyle (only metaphoric, of course) meant something too. It represented some unspoken fear, a demand to be safe and on guard, in case of heartbreak. You can never be safe.

Denials

"I succeed very well by not looking at the world around,
By not looking at myself,
Gang on, moving, constantly."

Dyva, Leftover Love

I felt quite a desperate need to listen to this song, riding on a local bus to Worcester last September. We were stuck in traffic in the middle of the English countryside and I knew only emotional, early Italo Disco could cure me. The bass is bouncy and the vocals cloudy and you just want to cry, listening to it.

"People can't invert
Their loves and friends
It's life which gives these
And also takes them away sometimes."

It's not articulated particularly well, but that is central to the appeal of Italo. A friend once said to me that it's that language barrier which makes for more pure, expressive lyricism. Leftover Love is just that for me, a girl trying to get "past it" in a way I have never known how. Yet I feel for her and her desperate avoidance techniques. I feel for her desire to move on:

"I want to say yes,
Want to say yes to life!"

I have known others who have lived like this and listening to this song on that bus made me feel for them. The song, although tragic, operates on a whole other level for me. It is a duet, suggesting that with friendship we will all recover in time.

Portraits

"I submit my incentive is romance,
I watch the pole dance of the stars,
We rejoice because the hurting is painless
from the distance of passing cars
I am married to your charms and grace,
I just go crazy like the good old days.
You make me want to pick up a guitar
And celebrate the myriad ways that I
love you..."

Interpol, Slow Hands

Oh, how I love this verse so completely.
It is us, across dancefloors, across time
and space. There is an eternal uncertainty
whether Slow Hands is better than
Evil (or whether Evil is better than
Slow Hands), but we are there and
we are together and it is perfect.

I love this verse, for its unusually
romantic imagery (pole dance of the
stars, indeed). For me, it represents
our own attitudes towards romance.
More than that, it represents a
group of friends who actually read
and appreciated lyrics. We would
actually discuss this verse and
sing it loudly whenever it came
on at Ding Dong or Rochester Castle.

There was a time when I thought
I would never find anyone who
would "get it". That's a part of
the reason I dreamt of all those
conversations and connections.

Singing these lines with those people
filled me with such love and appreciation.
I felt as if I had found my niche...
and they connected with music as I did.

What next? How can I get involved?

- 1) Head to Cassettes and Chocolate Milk's Facebook page to download a mixtape of the songs mentioned in this zine:

facebook.com/cassettesandchocolate

- 2) Visit Cassettes and Chocolate Milk to download the Consequential Lyncs audio series:

cassettesandchocolate.blogspot.com

- 3) You can submit your own Consequential Lync for the final episode of the series. Simply record 30-60 secs of yourself, speaking of a song's lyrical significance in MP3 format (192 kbps, 44000 Hz) and email it to:

elle.gray@gmail.com

Don't forget an MP3 of the song too! I can't wait to hear your contribution!