

Tasting music



May 19, 2020

By Nate Smelle

Throughout the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic so far I have been making a conscious effort to physically distance myself from social media as much as possible. Not that I was immersed in it up to my ankles prior to the outbreak, however the fact I live in an area notoriously known by internet providers as a "Dead Zone" has made this endeavour much easier and more enjoyable than I expected. Sure I appreciate the unceasing flow of high-quality information disseminated via such channels. There definitely is a lot to be learned from our various media feeds whether the information being shared is accurate or not. But, for me at least, the peace of mind, knowledge and wisdom flowing from nature, especially at this time of year with so many species returning to North Hastings, is far more valuable. Still, once or twice a week, in order to keep the money machine rolling I log in and scroll through what has been shared over the past week. Checking in on my accounts last Friday, I noticed that I had been nominated to participate in one of the many online challenges that always seem to be floating around. While usually I would scroll past such notifications without a second thought, my curiosity was successfully activated by a familiar image that caught my eye - the album cover of Led Zeppelin II. Anticipating that I would find the usual challenge of listing the top 10 albums on your "Desert Island List" I read on anyways. To my surprise the post took the conversation up a level, challenging music lovers to name the 10 albums that most influenced your musical taste and upbringing. Although in order to maintain my physical distance from social media I do not plan to post my 10 albums one at a time each day for 10 days, as a certified music freak I could not resist the challenge of coming up with my own list. Looking back upon my own musical upbringing and how it has shaped my taste in music, I realized how influential certain people have been in terms of introducing me to various artists, songs and albums. Searching through my record, CD and tape collection to put together this list over the long weekend I discovered that at the root of my musical tastes were two people - my father and grandmother. Growing up on the south shore of Lake Ontario, and summering at my family's cottages near Lindsay and Gananoque I spent a lot of time on the water with my Dad. As important, if not more important than having the right gear to reel in a big salmon or walleye was always the music we listened to in the boat. Days before heading out on the water I remember my father spending hours leaning over the stereo system as he carefully crafted the soundtrack for our adventure. It was through his mixed tapes that I was introduced to the first five albums on my list - Muddy Waters's King Bee, The Rolling Stones's Beggars Banquet, Frank Zappa's Joe's Garage, Black Sabbath's Paranoid, and Led Zeppelin's first album. Of course the tapes did not feature each of the albums in their entirety, just enough songs to whet my appetite. While learning to paint with my grandmother as a child I also developed a love for jazz. As I prepared the brushes, paints and pallet, she would take care in putting on the right music to set the tone for our creation. The first album that comes to mind when I think of this time in my life is Diz and Bird by Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie. It was at this point in my contemplation that I realized that there is no way in hell that I could cut the list down to 10 albums. Thinking of jazz alone I could finish of the list with John Coltrane's A Love Supreme, Wynton Marsalis's Black Codes

(From the Underground), Michael Franks's The Art of Tea, Miles Davis's Miles in the Sky, and Louis Armstrong meets Oscar Peterson. Especially considering my list would be incomplete without including: Neil Young's Harvest, The Grateful Dead's Workingman's Dead, Wilco's Being There, The Tragically Hips Road Apples and Day for Night, The Beatles' Abbey Road, The Stooges, Funkadelic's Maggot Brain, Bruce Cockburn's Night Vision, Run DMC's Raising Hell, Michael Jackson's Thriller, Beastie Boys' Check your Head, Paul Simon's Graceland, Never mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols, Snoop Dogg's Doggystyle, Nirvana's Nevermind, Captain Beefheart's Mirror Man, Tom Waits's Swordfishtrombones, Prince's 1999, Ween's Chocolate and Cheese, and Pavement's Wowee Zowee.OK I give up. The more I think about it, this is why I stay away from these kind of social media challenges. That said, to avoid the blackflies and make the most of your social distancing over the next few weeks, punch these albums into the YouTube search engine and enjoy.