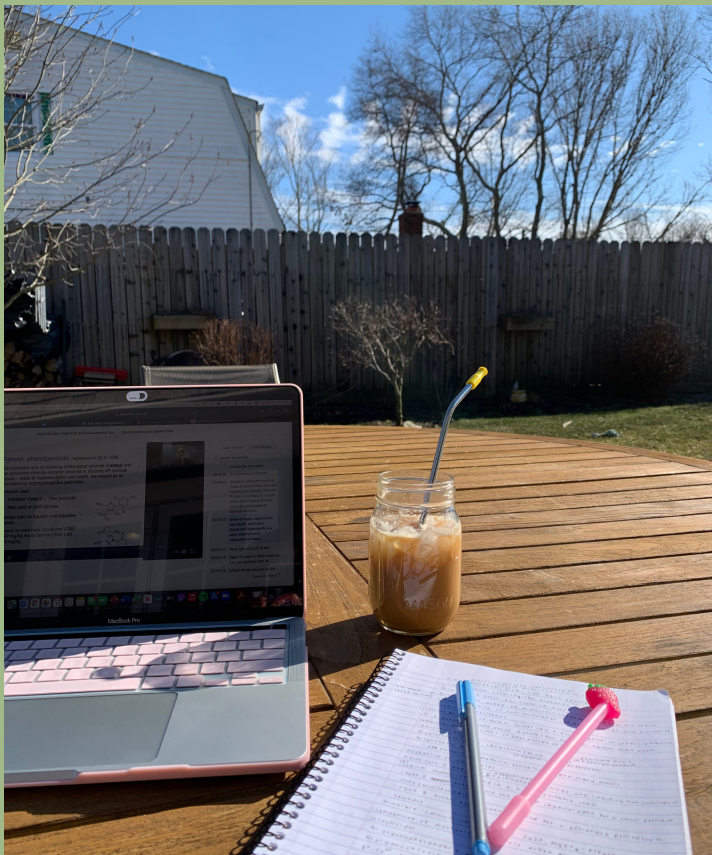


MUSIC, NATURE, & OTHER REFLECTIONS

FRIENDS OF THE ASHLEY SCHIFF PRESERVE
SPECIAL WRITING SERIES



A photo of a snowy beach in Hampton Bays



I took advantage of a sunny day and decided to move my office outside.

The Sun Will Come Up, The Seasons Will Change

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY SAM AYALA

You can find the Spotify Playlist [here](#)

Songs:

“Dust” – Oh Wonder

“it’s time to go” – Taylor Swift

“The Sun Will Come Up, The Seasons Will Change”
– Nina Nesbitt

“The Cave” – Mumford and Sons

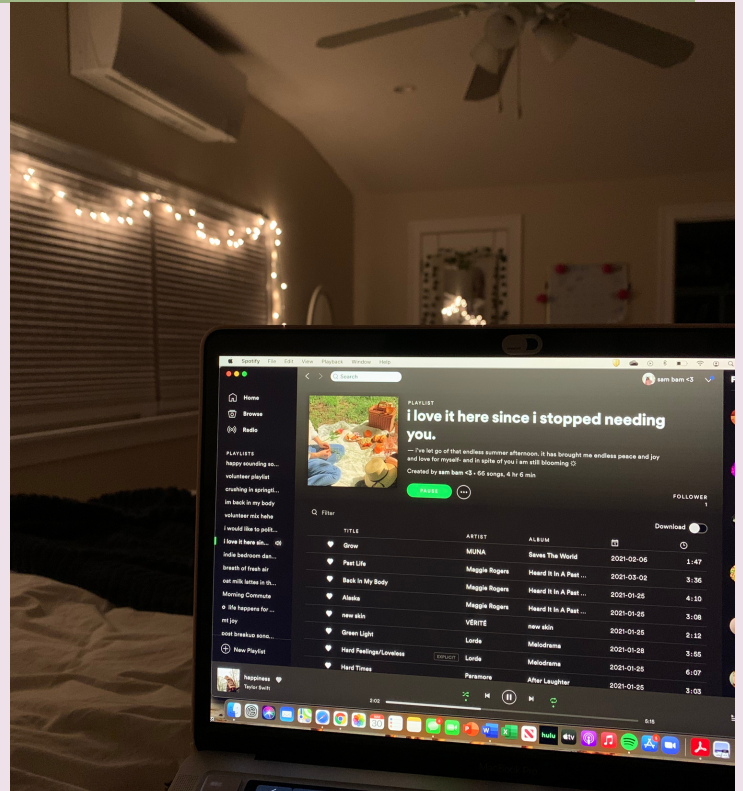
Happy Spring!

Initially, I was going to start off my music writing series with songs that remind me of nature to celebrate spring. But I decided to change course a little bit and write about songs that bring me comfort and remind me that things are going to be okay, songs that feel like sunshine and the overwhelming reassurance that things are going to be fine. With the semester in full gear and no spring break in sight, I think it’s important to take moments for ourselves and just remember to take care of ourselves.

Whether taking care of yourself means listening to music or taking a nap, it's important to remember that you deserve time to breathe. So take a break and listen to these songs with me – I promise it won't take too long.

While this list of songs is in no particular order, this first song makes me feel like someone's on my side even when I feel all alone in this big, confusing world. The soft music backing the reassurance that comes with hearing "when all you want to do is hide, I'll be there right by your side". It makes me feel like someone hears the confused and quiet overwhelmed cries for help that I find myself exhibiting and is reminding me that I am not alone. Another one of my favorite lines is "we're all made up of each other, from dust to dust to dust". I think we all get really caught up in how different we are from one another and tend to think that no one else could possibly understand anything that's going through our beautifully unique minds. I guess it's true that other people can't fully comprehend our experiences, but so many people are willing to try (we can all learn from each other!). And while we are different from each other in so many wonderful ways, we all still have the same marvelous stardust flowing through our veins. We're all just people trying to navigate our way through a world with so many twists and turns without any map on how to make it to our destination. And honestly? I don't think there's any set destination. I think, sillily enough, life is about the journey. It's about what you make of all the small moments – and big ones, too, of course – because those are the things you remember. And if worse comes to worst, just remember – the world is constantly moving towards disorder and chaos, and somehow the stars aligned for you to be here right now, and if that isn't proof of the magical stardust still inside of you, I'm not sure what is.

The next song on my list is "it's time to go" by Taylor Swift. Now, hold your opinions on Taylor aside for a second to listen to the song and the lyrics. I love this song because of the message it has and the reassurance it brings to me. I think a lot of us tend to think that leaving something – or even someone – behind is "giving up", and we've all been taught that giving up is a bad thing. Well, I'm here to argue that giving up may sometimes be the best thing for us. One of my favorite lyrics in the song is "sometimes giving up is the strong thing, sometimes to run is the brave thing, sometimes walking out is the one thing that will find you the right thing". Sometimes we stay in situations we don't necessarily want to be in because we think giving up shows weakness. And that's okay, it's what we've been taught. But I think it's important to listen to yourself and know when you have to leave a situation or person for the sake of your own health, whether it's physical or mental. It's okay to drop a class, quit a job, break up with a significant other, and/or take a mental leave of everything.



Listening to music at night as a way to end my day

Another one of my favorite lines in the song is "that old familiar body ache, the snaps from the same little breaks in my soul, I know when it's time to go". The only person who knows what the limits are is you! You set the boundaries and are free to do what serves you. It's okay for something to not serve you anymore. Things can be ridiculously hectic, as we've all seen in this past year, so be kind to yourself and remember that putting yourself and your needs is what matters the most. You never know—changing circumstances and paths can bring you to people and places and opportunities that are full of promise that you might've never even imagined.

Let's ignore that this next song is a bit romance-centric, unless that observation serves you. I love this song for multiple reasons, but I love the title especially. "The Sun Will Come Up, The Seasons Will Change" feels like an omen for better things to come. I for one find myself in a dreary slump of hopelessness in the winter, so the sun and the seasons changing feels like the perfect metaphor to describe the ever-changing circumstances that surround our unpredictable, chaotic, magical lives. I love this song so much for the reaffirming lyrics and mantra in it, as if listening to this over and over means things really will be okay. My favorite line in this song is "my life's uncertain and sometimes it's strange, but one thing I've learned is it won't stay this way/ even in the darkness, I'll be okay". When I think back on moments that felt so bleak and lonely and void of any joy and then think to my life now with the (mostly) sunshine filled days I now dance through, I realize that things have (mostly) always worked out.



A photo of my dog and I getting ready for the day

Maybe this is an overly optimistic take, but I think that we're all leaves on a stream, floating on an unknown course that is sometimes choppy and sometimes calm. And like the leaves, we're part of something bigger, despite all of the unknowns. I like to listen to this song and picture the day when things are okay. I try to remember the feeling of calm and joy that comes with sunshine whenever I feel like there's a raincloud over my entire existence, and it usually helps me. I hope you do the same, whether you do it with this song or one of your own.

Maybe I cheated a little when I said there would be no nature songs, because this last one feels like a nature song. To be fair, most Mumford and Sons songs sound like they were made in the middle of a forest, with pieces of nature itself infused inside of each line. "The Cave" by Mumford and Sons feels to me like a song of empowerment, full of understanding that while there lives fear and faults in all of us, it doesn't define us and we can follow whatever call we hear for our lives. One of my favorite lines is "cause I need freedom now and I need to know how to live my life as it's meant to be". I think a lot of us, or at least me, get caught up in societal conventions and expectations for what defines success or happiness when all it really is, is what gets you up in the morning, what makes you feel like you have sunshine flowing through your veins, what makes you feel comforted even when everything else in the world is absolutely horrible. The only person who knows what makes you feel that way is you, and we eventually learn how to live our lives authentically despite any fears we may have. This song makes me feel like I can find myself, even when I have no map to guide me (I think we find small pieces of ourselves along the way).

These songs, and tons of others that didn't make it on here, do a great job at making me feel more in tune with myself mentally – and I hope they do the same for you! But, if they don't, here's some tips for taking care of your mental health that I've learned. Engage in self-care, whether that's doing a face mask or having ice cream, because it's the first step to taking care of yourself.

Read, listen to music, draw, paint, write – do it with whatever time you have and do nothing but that to really focus on yourself for that moment, whether it's 5 minutes or 60. Go for a walk! Being out in nature is so beneficial to our mental health. A study found that "even low levels of key components of neighborhood nature can be associated with better mental health..." [1], showing that being exposed to nature even minimally has a beneficial effect on our mental health. The Ashley Schiff Preserve is a lovely place to start, and there's even guided nature walks occurring this month (more information on the Ashley Schiff Preserve Facebook page [here](#)). You can learn about the preserve and watch spring fully creep into a space tucked away from all of the messiness of our everyday lives. And, if you find yourself in a really difficult space, don't be afraid to ask for help! Whether that's from friends and family or someone like a therapist, there is so much strength in knowing when to ask for help. As much as it may feel like it, you're never alone. You've got this— I'm rooting for you!

Mental Health Hotlines (just in case):

National Help Line —1-800-662-HELP (4357)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

Trevor Project Lifeline now at 1-866-488-7386.

[1] Daniel T. C. Cox, Danielle F. Shanahan, Hannah L. Hudson, Kate E. Plummer, Gavin M. Siriwardena, Richard A. Fuller, Karen Anderson, Steven Hancock, Kevin J. Gaston, *Doses of Neighborhood Nature: The Benefits for Mental Health of Living with Nature*, BioScience, Volume 67, Issue 2, February 2017, Pages 147–155, <https://doi.org/10.1093/biosci/biw173>



A photo of my dog and I celebrating spring!



A nature walk to the "Cartas Al Cielo" in the Avalon Nature Preserve for cathartic writing.

Sam Ayala is a senior at Stony Brook University doing a double major in Environmental Studies and Political Science. She has always had a passion for advocacy, especially regarding environmentalism/sustainability and environmental justice. She's excited to be a volunteer at the Ashley Schiff Preserve and hopes to continue spreading the message of environmentalism and environmental justice

*The photos and the article were produced by Sam Ayala.
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