V2 is in progress here ↓ *(I like preserving the V1 comments)*

Article 3-Curation-TLee-V2

Preamble

Resisting my fiddle+finesse DNA to adopt the work-in-public mentality I've seen others embrace. There are so many fascinating posts I want to read + give feedback on. Can't do that till I have my own stab out into the ether, so here it is!

These are things I intend to do but haven't yet due to time constraints:

- Each album title will be a hyperlink to that album on Spotify (for now I just did the starter pack, piano + mixes)
- There will be a taster sentence for each album
- Album art will be visible for each
- The bullet point intro outline will evolve into paragraph form

Qs / Focus Areas for Feedback

- UX Sages of WOP! I humbly request your wisdom + counsel!!
    - How do you recommend I make this an easier resource to engage with?
    - I'm pretty sure Squarespace will make embeds easier, so the main focus is the headers that group albums for now.
- Do you prefer this title?: *Music for Work, Writing, Study + Flow*
- Are the brief taster sentences helpful? Do you want more writing for each?
- Would it be helpful to have some kind of tag system? I struggled to sort into headers as each album can be filtered many ways, ie)
    - instrumental → lyrical
    - calm → intense
    - organic → electronic
- Would you appreciate me making sampler playlists for each category?
- Would it be helpful if I gave a broader sense of my musical taste at the start? The artists here are intentionally lesser-known to introduce new good albums. But would it be helpful to give the reader a sense of "oh he likes w,x,y,z - cool me too! I'll give this a shot" kinda thing? Or do you prefer the current show rather than tell approach?

Blunt constructive criticisms encouraged — Thank you for reading!

Albums that Work: Write, Study, Focus + Flow (V1)

Article #3: Curation

Tommy Lee

Why Albums?

- Yes, Spotify can seem almost entirely built to curate focus playlists.
    - Every time I listen to a Spotify official playlist, even when its good I start to get this hard to describe dread that I am a Sim whose artistic pleasure is being curated by a machine
        - I also find that even the best playlists eventually give me fatigue from jumping around through all these artists
- Albums create an arc that lends a unit of time to your writing
- Rather than playlists, I prefer mixes that are structured with an arc in mind and made as a defined sequence by a particular artist
    - That said there are exceptions to the rule, and I'll include them

- I do digital work, indoors on a laptop, so the overall tone of the music tends to skew electronic
    - I'd curate a very different set of albums for the trenching labour I did in the Yukon mountains

- Everything here has been thoroughly vetted by me. I've worked to each of these at minimum 4-6 times, most 10+ times and many 20+.
    - This is not just a list of albums I like and sometimes play while working. It is albums specifically vetted as a reliable work music backdrop.

- I confess part of this post was a force function for some long-overdue Spotify organization. When I started my DO WORK playlist folder was at just under 200 albums/playlists. Through this piece, I distilled that sap into a syrup of 54 items:
    - 47 albums
    - 3 playlists
    - 4 mixes

Newcomer Suggestions

- Do a quick scroll and you'll see this is a long list, this is a resource to be enjoyed over time
    - I say this a guy who's been savouring his way through Rolling Stone's 500 Greatest Albums of All Time for years

- If this post is helpful or a particular album resonates, please let me know. I could do a similar thing with cardio playlists/albums + just good music in general if ppl enjoy.
- I love getting good music recommendations, so if there's an album that's a regular companion to your focus + flow, I'd love to know it!

Starter Pack

1. **re:member — Ólafur Arnalds**
   Calm piano-driven music that gradually picks up momentum. This album has an excellent arc to wake up your mental faculties. (Most listened to focus albums 1/2.)

2. **Migration — Bonobo**
   I'm full Pavlov with the 'dluu-duu-duu-duu-duu-duu-duu-doum' synth pattern on the first track — I hear it + instantly shift into GTD mindset. (Most listened to focus albums 2/2)
3. **Knock Knock — DJ Koze**
   I love artists that feel like their own genre. DJ Koze is that. The world-building of this album is a metaverse I'd happily live inside.
4. **Onism — Photay**
   Simultaneously one of the most organic + electronic-sounding albums I know.
5. **Mosaik — Camo & Krooked**
   Melodic, hook + rhythm-driven drum'n'bass. Really catchy syncopations.

6. **Hardly A Day, Hardly A Night — Cubicolor**
   Similar cool pensieve clarity to Radiohead, but more melodic, calm + EDM-y. Novelty bias: I discovered this group during WOP + have edited parts of each of my pieces to this album.

I. Tracks of Momentum

These are albums that lean to the instrumental side of the lyrical spectrum. Some are fully instrumental, others have occasional guest vocalists + several are producer + vocalist collabs. What unites them is they're more about momentum than a verse → chorus → bridge flow of songwriting.

I structured the subheaders in an overall tempo escalation from calm/clarity/melody to high voltage/chaotic dissonance. Most of them lean electronic, but nothing is what I'd classify as EDM.

Piano

We'll start with the most foundational, classic + time-honoured of focus music categories. When my ears begin writing at 8:30 am, they want a soft backdrop. The albums are presented here on a spectrum of calm, starting with the most gentle.

- **Music for Silence — Nick Murphy**
  This is a perfect album title. If I'm trying to build productive momentum from a place of scattered fatigue or fragility, the delicate notes of this album are my go-to.

- **Solo Piano — Chilly Gonzales**

- **Trance Frendz — Nils Frahm and Ólafur Arnalds**
  The first track on this is my all-time favourite song to work to. I often listen to it on repeat.

- **re:member — Ólafur Arnalds**
  Most listened to focus albums 2/2. Calm piano-driven music that gradually picks up momentum. This album has an excellent arc to wake up your mental faculties.

Texture Poets

These are the 3 most artsy albums on this list. Presented in order of abstraction, from most ethereal (Jaar) to more conventional (Photay)

- **Space is Only Noise — Nicolaas Jaar**
  This is a sometimes eerie but always poetic alien world of electronic explorations. This is the most arthouse album in this post.

- **Rounds — Four Tet**

- **Onism — Photay**
  Simultaneously one of the most organic + electronic-sounding albums I know.

Synth Storytellers

Gorgeous synth-driven songwriting. Each of these albums is a poignant example of how much heart + soul can radiate from a MIDI keyboard.

- Nurture — Porter Robinson
  A stunning exploration of the downside of early success and the needless weight of expectations. A life-affirming exploration of creating art as a beacon for others to follow. Sonically, it's a masterclass showcase of what's uniquely human through contrast from digital sound elements.

- **Our Love — Caribou**
- **Migration — Bonobo**
  I'm full Pavlov with the 'dluu-duu-duu-duu-duu-duu-duu-doum' synth pattern on the first track — I hear it + instantly shift into GTD mindset. (Most listened to focus albums ½)

Groove

For when you want the texture of Hip-Hop/R&B without the rap. From jazzy/soulful, to beats + loops, the groove reigns supreme.

- **2012-2017 — Against All Logic**
  One of Nicolaas Jaar's many aliases, this set of tracks feels like dusting off a record from the past + future

- **Welcome to the Hills — Yussef Dawes**
  I discovered Yussef Dawes on his collab track 'Strange Habits' with Maribou State + had to get more of this euphoria rush of rhythm. This album delivers on that. Mood well summarized by the album art.

- **What Kinda Music — Tom Misch, Yussef Dawes**
- **Silver Linings — Catching Flies**
- **Work — Marcus Marr, Chet Faker**
- **No Geography — The Chemical Brothers**
- **Suddenly — Caribou**

Intergalactic Vibes

Each of these glide with the cool metallic glint of space crafts + gleam with the open starry space of distant galaxies.

- **Vessel — OVERWERK**
- **BRONSON — BRONSON**
- **Junk — M83**
- **Endtroducing..... — DJ Shadow**

Wind Sprints

These albums are like the wind. The tempo surges + then goes still. They range from total stillness to abruptly high speed.

- **2017-2019 — Against All Logic**
- **II - Moderat**

Spark the Fuse

When you're fired up, this music will keep you burning forward.

- **Up in Flames — Caribou**
- **Surrender — The Chemical Brothers**
- **Nite Versions — Soulwax**
- **Born in the Echoes — The Chemical Brothers**

DJ Koze

I love artists that feel like their own genre. DJ Koze is a prime example of that. The world-building of his albums create a metaverse I'd happily live inside.

- **Knock Knock**
- **DJ-Kicks**
- **Presents**

Movie Soundtracks

I generally don't listen to movie soundtracks. They're created as a countermelody to a visual experience that isn't being experienced when listening to them exclusively. That said, these two are so good that they're exceptions to the rule.

Beasts of the Southern Wild — Dan Romer, Benh Zeitlin
My favourite movie soundtrack. The film is a beautiful, fantastical journey — the music embodies that.

Tron Legacy — Daft Punk
Tron Legacy is in my top 3 in-theatre movie experiences. The soundtrack is a huge part of that. It's such a powerful work of world-building.

II. Lyrical

Sometimes you want the opposite. You're labelling files. You've batched a bunch of technical but fairly mindless repetitive tasks. You're keen for some more narrative inputs to accompany you. I tend to

discover new music of all kinds in these circumstances, cuz I'm more open with bandwidth for novelty. Once I've listened to an album enough times it can be a backdrop regardless of what I'm doing.

Guitars, Drummers + Choruses

Most of the albums to this point have centred on piano/keyboard/synthesizers + programmed drums. Here is the counterbalance for when your ears need something less digital. Presented on a spectrum of the time of day the music evokes from morning (Colter Wall) to night (The National)

- **Imaginary Appalachia — Colter Wall**
  Next-gen Johnny Cash hollerin' out of Saskatchewan with a mighty bellow. This album is the grandest pattern break from everything else on this list.

- **Whitney — Light Upon the Lake**
  This album sounds like chai tea with jam on toast

- **Electric Guest — Plural**
- **They Might've Even Loved Me — NoMBe**
- **Origin — Jordan Rakei**

- **Your Hero Is Not Dead — Westerman**
  Very spacious melodic music — lots of room for your thoughts between the notes. Think millennial Phil Collins.

- **I See You — The xx**
- **Resistance Radio — Danger Mouse**
- **Blue Weekend — Wolf Alice**
- **Yesterday Park — Island**

- **Sleep Well Beast — The National**
  A great album for evening/end-of-day journaling.

Hip-Hop

Welcome to full send lyrical terrain. These are best played when you want to get into a repetitive flow (photoshop detail work, during file organization etc). Presented in order of lyrical density.

- **We got it from Here... Thank You 4 Your service — A Tribe Called Quest**
  The grooves on this are so good.

- **Eternal Sunshine — Jay Electronica**
  A short film for your ears

- **A Written Testimony — Jay Electronica**

- **Madvillainy — Madvillain**
  If you want the farthest thing from passive background listening music, this is probably it. Brilliant wordplay.
  - **Madvillain Four Tet Remixes**
    The album art shows it well — an 8-bit remix take on a classic.

III. Mixes

Mixes curated by musicians I love are the ultimate gift in new music discovery.

- **Late Night Tales: Bonobo**
  This mix embodies everything I love about the Late Night Tales mix series. It's a carefully curated flow of songs that reveals the diverse inspirations of a brilliant artist.

- **fabric presents Maribou State**

- **Nicolaas Jaar BBC**
  This is a work of high art. It's a narrative experience + best listened to while doing something artistic/intuitive (non-cerebral) so you can enjoy the mastery of his transitions

Steve Jobs' Strawberry Arc

Steve Jobs had a Strawberry Fields Forever tape. On it was a progression of takes that showed as the song evolved from a catchy pop piano track to a collage of orchestral psychedelia. He'd listen to it as a reminder of the iterative nature of the creative process. That quirk was one of the most fascinating things to me in Walter Isaacson's spectacular Steve Jobs biography, so I made this playlist from the song's available versions on Spotify. I concur with Steve, it's a great musical arc for generating ideas.

IV. Morning Playlists

My gripe with 92.17% of Spotify playlists is that 15 songs in I get the metallic aftertaste of the algorithm in my mouth. It becomes apparent what song references are the source + I can predict the patterns that will repeat.

Both of these playlists are extraordinarily eclectic in tempo + genre. Great sources of new music discovery. They also each nail the type of music I want to hear in the morning.

A.M. – playlist by Photay

Early Mornings – playlist by Catching Flies