

Jason Tougaw's Memoir Mixtape, illustrated by Jorge Colombo.  
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"SHE'S APPARENTLY FROM AROUND HERE, Rock Hill I think," Sylvie, one of my employees at my restaurant in Mountain Dale, NY, tells me. Sylvie's 18, born and raised in Fallsburg, NY—I had just introduced her to some of my musical favorites: Mazzy Star, Cat Power, Phantogram. Now, she has an idea for me—a local singer. I'm skeptical, but Sylvie punches in Computer Magic on Spotify. "About You," comes on, and instantly, I'm hooked. We spend hours silently binging on all of Computer Magic's hits. Music is magic. It's the one art form that can connect, heal, inform and bring memories flooding back. Every chapter in my life can be bookmarked by an album or an artist, every moment triggered by a beat or a song. Music is the one thing we all have in common these days, the one language that we, as people—as divided as we sometimes seem—can appreciate. Music doesn't choose sides.

In this issue, we made a special point to highlight not only the individuals who have come from elsewhere and made our region their home but also the inspiring few who were born and raised here and had stars in their eyes. I'm incredibly humbled and excited to have one of my favorite bands, Phantogram, on the cover of this issue. Hailing from Greenwich, NY, Sarah Barthel and Josh Carter beat the odds and proved that you don't need to be in a big city to hit it big. We feature emerging artist Danielle Johnson of Computer Magic, born and raised in Sullivan County, NY, in our Style section. And, we sit down with Melissa Auf Der Maur, the former bass player for Hole and The Smashing Pumpkins, to discuss her enormous contributions to the region through the Basilica Hudson. Multi-instrumentalist Marco Benevento introduces us to his rural life comprised of parenting, peacocks and plenty of pot. We tour rock royalty Malu Byrne's (yes, that Byrne) brand new home in Catskill, NY, complete with unpacked boxes and drying paint. Finally, we get a glimpse of what goes through the mind of one of my favorite DJs, Jason Tougaw of WJFF, as he compiles his Mixtape sessions. Like his musical taste, his stories are intimate, honest and incredibly human.

NHI MUNDY *Editor in Chief*

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# DVEIGHT

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**“WHEN I DO MY SHOW I’M  
USUALLY IN THE STUDIO ALONE.  
I LIKE THE LIGHTS DIM AND THE  
VOLUME HIGH. AN OLD SCHOOL  
MIXTAPE IS INTIMATE.  
YOU MAKE IT FOR SOMEBODY YOU  
REALLY LIKE,  
A CRUSH OR CLOSE FRIEND.  
IT SAYS DEVOTION AND RESPECT.  
I KEEP THAT IN MIND WHEN I’M  
PUTTING TOGETHER MY SHOW”**

JASON TOUGAW is a writer and the author of the books “The One You Get” and “The Elusive Brain.” He hosts The Mixtape, a weekly radio show on WJFF 90.5FM, on Friday nights at 8pm. Tougaw’s contribution is a love letter to the people who tune in, from across the station’s broadcast in upstate New York and northeastern Pennsylvania.

**A MEMOIR MIXTAPE/  
BY JASON TOUGAW**



“SOMETIMES PEOPLE CALL TO TELL ME THEY LIKE A SONG or that they’re having a family dance party. More often I’m left to imagine what’s going on in households with the radio on.”

### Life on Mars/DAVID BOWIE

That enterprising guy Isaac has been filming town hall meetings. People yell over each other, about zoning laws, fracking, pipelines, work, survival, family history, and wealth disparity. Bowie described America’s tortured brow a long time ago. Everybody from Barbra Streisand to Phish has covered the song. Now we know there is probably life on Mars—microscopic life at least. All those covers remind us that from the vantage of the universe, human squabbles are basically microscopic. They will pass. Particles have their version of town meetings and squabbles. It’s how they mix, how they make new life. It’s how we mix, too. But maybe we can let some of the torture out of our brows. I think that’s what Isaac is hoping.

### What Can the Matter Be?/THE POPPY FAMILY

“Is this an anti-cop song?” Barry asks me. We’re building a deck together. “People don’t know how hard it is to be a cop,” he says. I believe him; he did the job for 25 years. “It’s not anti-cop,” I say. “It’s about racism. It’s about a kid going to prison for just smoking pot.” That doesn’t happen to many white kids. “I’m with you there,” Barry says. “Anyway, they were Canadian,” I say. We laugh at my dumb joke.

### People Make the World Go Round/MICHAEL JACKSON

Tom likes to dress up in elaborate costumes. He loves makeup and stacked heels. He’s eleven now, and he knows anything is possible. His mom and dad help him build his looks. Michael Jackson was just two years Tom’s senior when he covered The Stylistics’ song about how people make the world go ’round, the ups and downs, the carousel. It’s a very grown-up kind of song—political and philosophical. The soul MJ embodied at a tender age means anything is possible. Michael struggled, of course. Tom will likely have his struggles. Everybody does. But they won’t be like Michael’s. He’s got this.

### The Promise/STURGILL SIMPSON

Part of me is in the DJ booth, but another part is at the Delaware town hall, where Dave and I got married. We did it right after it became legal. The clerks were atwitter, their first same-sex wedding. The judge told me three or four times that he was “fine with it.” He meant that to be supportive. Simpson’s version of this song—soulful, clangy country—hangs on to some of the melodrama of the synth hit I loved as a teen. The layers of history and feeling in Simpson’s interpretation make me cry, like a good wedding song should.

### I Just Don’t Know What To Do With Myself/THE WHITE STRIPES

Gavin grew up in Guyana, where the radio played hard rock from the ’70s and ’80s almost exclusively. He’s on the back porch of his house in Monticello, near the bus station, waiting for the classic-rock show after mine. The White Stripes will do, but Gavin really wants to hear some Sabbath.

### The Long Way Round/THE DIXIE CHICKS

Carol and Bruce both took the long way to Bethel. Carol moved from Long Island in the ’70s, after her aunt died and she married her uncle. She’s a devoted Jehovah’s Witness. One thing that means is that she mingles with people of all ethnicities. The Witnesses are diverse. Bruce was born in Pakistan, but he never really lived there. He lives on Carol’s road. He’s not religious. He helps Carol with chores. She hardly leaves the house, hardly leaves her favorite reclining chair. She even sleeps in it. Bruce is pretty sure she won’t live much longer, and he’s right. She invites him to the Kingdom Hall every week. As he declines, he wonders if she’s hoping to convert him before she passes.

### Bidi Bidi Bom Bom/SELENA

“Remember when Selena came on in the car?” Emma asks her sister Frankie. “He’d sing so loud,” Frankie replies. The sisters live together outside Liberty. Their dad’s been gone a while. “He let us believe she was still alive,” Emma says. “It was the nicest lie anybody ever told.”

### It’s a Man’s Man’s Man’s World/YOUNG THE GIANT

“Man’s world? The fuck it is,” Sheila says to her son. He’s singing along as he does the dishes. “Don’t you ever believe that.” He’s 15 now. “It’s ironic, mom.” He loves this band. “They got a lotta balls covering James Brown,” she says. “But listen, mom, Sameer can sing—maybe better than James Brown.” “Better?” she says. “He can sing, okay. But better? I got more important things to do than argue about that.”

### Strawberry Letter 23/SHUGGIE OTIS

Anthony is visiting for the weekend, eating in a restaurant in Narrowsburg owned by a DJ, with a view of the Delaware. “I fucking love this song,” he says. “Reminds me of my dad. He had an afro just like Shuggie back then.” The song sparkles. It’s about gardens, blue flowers, cherry clouds, rainbows, waterfalls, and pretty music. Utopian stuff. The stuff the people in this restaurant want to believe in, even if it’s a long shot.

### Idol BTS

“Hilary, this song has more YouTube hits than any other in history.” Sid is 14; she calls her mom Hilary. She’s lived in Lake Huntington all her life. She’s into Manga, singing, and gay romance novels. She’s schooling her mom. “More than Michael Jackson?” her mom asks. Eye roll. “More than Taylor Swift?” Double eye roll. “It’s not the 20th century, mom. People don’t just listen to music from their own culture anymore. K-pop is the future.” Hilary isn’t up for the lecture, but the song’s got a beat. She can dance to it.

### I Am Chemistry/YEASAYER

Two brothers, super-long, shiny hair, are sitting by a bonfire. “Whoa,” one says. “I set up the session for this song. They recorded it at Josh’s studio over in Rock Hill. Check out the harmony. Sick.” The flames from the fire, lighting their faces, is not a bad reminder that we are all just chemistry, after all.

### Astonished Man/THAO AND THE GET DOWN STAY DOWN

This song gets me. It’s about Thao Nguyen growing up without her father, like I did. My father was astonished, too, even when he was high—or maybe especially then. She recorded it with Merrill Garbus from Tune-Yards. Garbus encouraged her to take the emotional risk and saw her through it, down to the last mixing session. Friends who push and support are important. I’m choked up thinking about this alone in the studio. I need to thank my friends more.

### O-O-H Child/THE FIVE STAIRSTEPS

We’ve got lovely neighbors. They’ve been on the street decades longer than we have. We exchange Christmas goodies. Our chickens graze on their lawn. They like that they eat the ticks. We give them eggs. They text us when we’re out of town to let us know the critters are okay. We don’t vote for the same candidates. We know because of the sign on their lawn. We don’t know how to talk to each other about our deepest beliefs or what scares the shit out of us, but we do know how to talk about chickens, growing vegetables, and the seasons. And we do know that we have reasons for our beliefs and that our fears genuinely terrify us. We do walk in the same rays of the beautiful sun, on days when the world is much brighter.

### Once in a Lifetime/ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO

Sam grew up in Honesdale, Pennsylvania. She moved to New York, became an artist, bought a building in her hometown, and moved back to renovate it into a multi-purpose art and performance space. Her “Paper Caves” are legendary. So are her dance parties. Angélique Kidjo reclaiming the polyrhythms the Talking Heads borrowed from the place she’s from is the perfect soundtrack—volume up, bass pumping—for the mingling of longtime residents and newcomers Sam makes real.

### Freedom Is Free/CHICANO BATMAN

Don told me his pastor said people needed to arm themselves, because a civil war was coming. I said that sounded pretty far-fetched. He agreed, in a grumbling way. As game warden on the Pennsylvania side, he likes his guns for hunting. A rich neighbor gave him a thousand-dollar rifle. He issued the guy a summons when he shot the wrong turkey. He can’t be bought, but he doesn’t really believe freedom is free. I guess I don’t either, but I appreciate the musical fantasy. And the groove.

### Say a Little Prayer/ARETHA FRANKLIN

It’s the end of a rowdy day at Skinners Falls: coolers, tattoos, sweat, and inner tubes. Some guy is blasting cheap pop on a Mammoth bluetooth speaker. People keep asking him to turn it down, not always politely. Somebody gets sneaky and hijacks the guy’s Sonos. Everybody recognizes the floating duet of the piano and guitar intro. As Americans, the Queen of Soul is in our DNA. “Turn it up,” somebody yells. He does, smiling. Aretha is running for the bus, dear; while riding thinking of us, dear. She says a little prayer for us. Her voice floats downriver.