

How to Listen to “Indiscipline” by King Crimson

First, find a desert hot enough to softly bake your skin and sweetly split your lip in polite company, but deny you heat in the intimacy of night, like it would straight up yank it like a rug out from under you, the kind of desert that would get up and leave you in the middle of sex, the kind of sex where you are blindfolded and shoved on your stomach and the desert is in the middle of yanking your hair back when it walks away without a word, taking the sheets and pillows and blankets with it. What I’m saying is you need a cruel desert, a fickle one. Stand in this desert, put on your headphones, fall back into the sand while the song whips into storm and rages. Don’t try to breathe. Open your mouth and allow the song to cram your throat with dirt and bugs and sticks. Swallow it. Let it pin your arms and darken you, a darkness flecked with shards of red that moves in and out from the sides of your eyes, as if your retina has popped off the anchor of your eyeball and the red is your blood, the blood of vocal chords, shrieking, slapping together, or the blood of fingertips slamming the guitar neck until the fingers split and the guitar neck bends to the will of the sound. When it is finished, the song has blown the skin off your bones, your bones have turned to stone, and the desert has up and left again. You are blind. You are spent. You are petrified, and although the silence attempts to be a balm, don’t let it.

Synesthesia: Listening to Bach Cello Suite #1, Played by Pablo Casals

Light, expertly hewn logs, burnt and wet brown, floating in three dimensions, sawing forty-five degrees across your field of vision, low vocal chords beating together loosely, high notes squeezing your throat and the space along your ears with a pressure that makes you want to smack your own face in a good way, notes that throb raw and bold with flecks of rusty gold, like the piece was recorded on the lam in a commercial loft above a Chinese noodle factory, a little sloppy, the low notes thrown out like someone discarding a white dress in the dirt, the high notes sustaining just a little too long, as if Pablo Casals is tipsy and subtly telling Bach to go fuck himself. The gold is on steroids and the logs are on acid, riding the vibrato of each sustained note, then back through gel, with white sheets undulating in the slowest of motion, the grey shadow of the sheets telling a truth about something you can’t quite put your finger on until you listen again, then again, each truth as slippery as a vein.

How to Listen to Panama by Van Halen

First put aside your own intellectual snobbery because, unless you are buzzed at the beach, listening to Van Halen is like reading a dirty book whose cover you hide in embarrassment because you usually read literary fiction and historical biography about great wars and despotic political leaders. Just to be safe, listen to it only through your headphones, where, at first, you feel a thickness on the roof of your mouth, like the surface of your hard palate has turned into the texture of a cat's tongue, then a small flagpole grows up in a straight line up from your uvula to the center of your head, and thick, rubber flags flap heavily, some with nubs, black shiny rubber waving to the fast and slippery blues that you have to run behind to catch. Then you realize that, behind the pheromone-saturated voice of David Lee Roth that makes you want to go out and have sex with strangers, there is a level of musical skill that is almost mind-blowing, and that the interplay and coupling between the Van Halen brothers' drums and guitar has turned your pulp porn into D.H. Lawrence, and you have been graced by an art that is real. So you turn it up, desiring, when you can, to understand how it is composed by puzzling out the time signature, and imagining each of the drum sounds in their own particular point in space, and drawing lines between them, is the guitar, which, when complete, makes a full representation of every constellation known to man. Sink into it. Give it over. Dream of driving away under the night sky with someone you don't know well at all.