

Track 1

INTRODUCTION

“Here’s one that needs no introduction.”

The singer grips the microphone with both hands.

One! ... Two! ... Three! ... Four!

Carousel keyboard. Gimcrack backbeat. Spot fires of applause. Then recognition hits and a roar rides the hall. The bass bumbles and the percussion plunges into a coronary rumba. Guitar gate-crashes, riffing off the merry-go-round melody. Cheers and whoops roll and rumble through the—let’s face it—modest audience. This is the one they’ve been waiting for. Everyone succumbs to the Big Hit and—bam!—I’m in four hundred heads.

Yeah. I said yeah.

I’m fervid in the id; a-go-go in the ego. Skating on the dark ice of the subconscious. Feeding fantasy. Nourishing nostalgia.

Some visits are brief. Dropping by to say hi. I’ll be there while the band, JayJay, perform me on stage, only to be shunted by the next number. Other visits are homecomings: triumphant returns. Feeling cosy in the consciousness.

Rubbernecking—if I had a neck. Seeing how things have changed. A new paranoia here, a clutch of regrets cluttering that corner. A divorce—that’s sad. But also a promising new relationship. All right now!

For some, I’m a long-term lodger. When the performance of me begins, I’m already there. I burgeon brighter, snuggle in more comfortably. We’re closer than a folk duo, brotherly as a barbershop quartet. They don’t always know I’m in residence—sometimes they find themselves tapping their toes to something but they don’t know what. They’re asked to stop whistling even though they’re convinced they weren’t. That’s me, crouching in their cache. Ever-present. Effervescent.

They’re the ones that screamed for me during the lull between numbers.

“Empty Fairground! Emmmpty Fairrrground!”

I’m voltage in the veins, arcing in the arteries. I ripple their hips, sashay their shoulders.

I’m tethered to treasured times. That cautious kiss risked during my chorus on a murmurous summer night; that fondle ventured; that grope gambled. That close dance at a mythic party in a distant decade. The thrill of hearing me in the back seat of a stolen car. The first harsh swig of booze as I warble from the radio. Friendships revisited, break-ups rebooted. Virginity revived. I’m awash with acne and tufty stubble, fake ID and training bras. I’m the dorky photo on the probationary driver’s licence.

The lurch and surge of my beat is a pace for living: leashed urgency; a freedom of spirit barely restrained. My lyrics—pleasingly opaque with firecracker flashes and an undercurrent of melancholy—offer an attitude, an axiom. The more meaning I manifest, the greater the grip. The more I express a facet of a listener’s character, the harder the hold. They invest in me, and I give dividends of identity.

Yeah, c’mon.

Whirligigs of noise hector the humid air. Despite the swelter, couples draw closer. Hands squeeze, bodies cleave, Siamese. Meeting each other’s soft gaze. Ooh, baby baby. Because deep down, beneath the wreathing, wraith-like words and barrel organ groove, I’m a Love Song.

And I’m busy, busy, busy, Miss Lizzy. It’s not just these four hundred fresh awakenings—there are thousands around the globe at any one time hearing, humming or hypothesising about me. I rattle in their attics, shimmy in their psyche. Ahhh, take me. Imagine you’re poking at an anthill. Thousands of black dots scribble around you. You have them all in sight, but if you wanted to, you could concentrate on just one. Trace its squiggly progress. When you get bored, switch to another. Of course, humans are more complex.

Often.



There's Marla—mature-age journalism student. She interviewed Jones and Jones—the two gentlemen who gave birth to me—a week or so ago. All the usual questions about the heyday of JayJay and this reunion show, about them being twins and how they composed me while separated by an ocean. There's a jolt of joy as I jostle between her ears, but she's conflicted. This is not the version she's familiar with. At the back of her brain she hears the speed metal cover of me she loves so much. That deranged arrangement. Being in her head makes me schizoid.

It's widely known that the Joneses are twins. So why is Johnny Jones, the singer, casting obscurely ardent glances at Morris Jones, the keyboardist? He's considering pashing him. Tongue tussling. More on that later.

Spencer stands close to Marla, gripping his phone. He doesn't like to like me but he can't help himself. I fill him with longing and trussed lust. He's afraid of what he is about to do. His knuckles whiten around the phone. I urge him on, nudging his need for revenge.

Lily leaps and squeals. She's overexcited. Adrenaline floods her, short-circuiting her sparking intelligence. Sometimes I feel I need space from Lily. She's too clingy. She knows more about me than I know myself. It's creepy and unnerving. The sooner she finishes her PhD on me, the better.

Ahhh, Rosemary. She's oppressed by the heat. It's a pressure enclosing her. I've been reacquainting myself with Rosemary. I was once her favourite song, fused to that

long-gone summer when she couldn't stop listening to me. There's a Rosemary mentioned in my final verse: that's what hooked her. She's been indulging in me again recently but I'm crippled in her mind. She has a vinyl single of me and it's badly scratched. It makes me drunk and jerky. Wounded. And right now she's hardly registering me. I'm snubbed. She scans the crowd. Wiry red hair filigreed around her damp face; fevered eyes. She's worried about her daughter.

Concerned for Nicole.

There's Bryce, Nicole's boyfriend. He's looking for her too, shoving between punters, presto agitato. His broad handsomeness is harrowed; his forehead creates canals of sweat. He swipes it free, squinting, seeking. He cries her name but his distress is swallowed by my bellicose decibels.

"Nicole!"

Where is she? Nicole should be in da house. The hall is empty without her. All this fervour for me pales and puffs away. I should be exploding in her head.

I call Nicole home. Chez Nic. Her consciousness is Access All Areas. Her mind is my playground, my lounge ... although there've been some renovations recently. Usually I suffuse Nicole. Dwelling in her cells, twining in her mind.

Ah, there she is, in the women's toilets. Cowering in a cubicle. Slipping away from me. She's in terrible danger. And there's nothing I can do to help.

Nicole.

Lemme tell you 'bout Nicole.