



[HOME](#) [ABOUT](#) [PODCAST](#) [BOOKS](#) [SIDE GIGS](#) [CONTACT](#)

Still in Rotation: Soul Mining (The The)

SEPTEMBER 24, 2014 BY NANCY DAVIS KHO

6 COMMENTS

Still in Rotation is a guest post feature in which talented writers tell Midlife Mixtape readers about an album they discovered years ago that's still in heavy rotation, and why it has such staying power.

Susanna Donato and I crossed paths when we had music themed essays published back-to-back in the literary mag Hippocampus a couple of years back (mine on [children's music](#), hers on [adolescent heartbreak and redemption at Stardust Skate Lanes](#).) When she got in touch to write a Still in Rotation post, I knew we'd all be in for a treat. And this is the day for it.



Soul Mining (1983)

By Susanna Donato

When *Soul Mining* came out in 1983, I was roller skating and playing the flute in Pueblo, Colorado, listening to “Thriller” and Journey. I had no clue that darkly reflective English music was a thing, let alone that it might become my thing.

Fast forward to 1992. I'd dropped out of college in New York after my sophomore year. My parents had split up and moved away from me and each other. My friends were back at school. Alone in Denver, I spent long, broke weekends in my first apartment with my turntable. Used records cost \$2.50 at Wax Trax Records, less at the thrift store, so I could afford a lot of them. On one of my forays, I bought *Soul Mining*.

I already had The The's 1989 album *Mind Bomb*. That album's liner notes say something like “play this album very loud, very alone, very late with the lights very low.” What can I say? I often needed to listen to loud music in the dark. I snapped up *Soul Mining* when I saw it in the rack at Wax Trax.

Now that I heard the lyrics, I found they encapsulated my secret dread that I might die from love—of my imploding family and the boy I thought was my soul mate.

“ All my childhood dreams
Are bursting at the seams
And dangling around my knees
I've been deformed by emotional scars
And the cancer of love has eaten out my heart...”

From the first crackle of the needle on *Soul Mining*, the record felt like home. I realized I already knew the opening track, “I've Been Waitin' for Tomorrow (All of My Life).” I recognized it as the intro music from Teletunes, the locally produced music video show I'd watched obsessively through my teen years.

Track 2, “This Is the Day,” sounds upbeat, but listen closer. The insomniac protagonist is watching his friends and family slip away. He's hoping “this will be the day / when things fall into place.” But you know it probably won't.

The The bridged my Goth-y teens listening to The Cure and Sisters of Mercy, and my life as a once-and-future English major. I read the first line of James Joyce's story “Eveline”—“She sat at the window watching the evening invade the avenue.” But I heard “The Twilight Hour,” which opens *Soul Mining*'s B-side:

“ You're lying on your bed
And making shadows on the wall
It's almost too hot to move
Outside your window
People are driving home from work
For the weekend...”

The narrator has admirable intentions of standing up to his neglectful girlfriend and reclaiming his independence. Waiting for her call, though, he crumbles, panics, and makes promises he'll never keep. It's the Offspring's "Self Esteem" for garment-renders rather than headbangers. (I put this track on a mix tape for the college boyfriend, who had gone back to school. In retrospect, TMI.)

At age 20, I was just a couple years younger than Matt Johnson was when he wrote these songs. Yet they seemed so adult in their self-reflection—with a vaguely Latin-and-blues-infused, synth-pop backbeat that keeps the listener from sinking too far.

I saw The The live in 1993 at the Paramount Theater in Denver. My memory was that Matt Johnson had a cold because it was something like November. In fact, it was June. Maybe I remember it as winter because I felt chilly and alone. I told my then-long-distance boyfriend that he would appreciate the Cranberries, the opening act, but I don't remember raving about The The's show. I didn't know then that the boyfriend and I were about to crawl deeper into each other's hearts and then break them. Either way, I kept The The more or less for myself. I'm glad.

Wikipedia says Johnson intended the album to end with "Giant," a nine-minute anthem of existential angst. Halfway through, Johnson laments, "I'm scared of God and scared of hell / And I'm caving in upon myself." A long drum section finally grants absolution through philosophy—he must know himself before anyone else can know him. It's like Socrates, man.

Now, the boyfriend is long gone, and a husband has long-since replaced him. Still, *Soul Mining* offers absolution when I listen loudly, alone, in my room in the dark . . . or more likely these days, running errands in my car or picking my kid up from school. Either way, *Soul Mining* is timeless. Who knows? Maybe this will be the day.

