

■ OFF CAMPUS ■

# WHAT MUSIC LETS US KEEP



ILLUSTRATION: AZRA HUMAYRA

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The summer of being 12 was the first time I learnt to savour the taste of life through music. It was a blend of ambition and a strong hope that belonging awaited me somewhere in the future. I taught myself to look at my mundane youth through a gaze I shaped with endless playlists filled with Queen songs. Yet time, with its cleverness, found the gaps between my fingers and diluted that summer into a distant dream.

Music has its own way of absorbing moments into its symphony, taking a delicately precise grasp of even the most prosaic sentiments of one's life and creating an artefact of an old, raw soul. It all happens so seamlessly that we remain utterly oblivious to the riveting phenomenon: our present gradually metamorphosing into an intangible, melancholic echo of the past, a peculiar, aching time capsule.

Looking back at the days of your childhood is a mixture of hollow loveliness and estrangement. It sometimes feels far, blurry, and fragile, like reminiscing over a completely different person who used to be you. Like everything cherished and longed after, childhood days have a golden dust settled over them — the kind that only falls on things you can never quite return to. In the endless haze of this human transience, all we can do is hold the arts of our “then” and “now” close to our hearts.

For most of my time after that summer, I spent it in retrospect. Everything used to feel larger than it was, and I was unaware that things wouldn't always be like this. Some days, I even tried living through it once more with futile attempts. I found a new, more present loveliness in music once again, but it was different. Something vast and invisible had changed. I felt myself grow up, the golden age of rock turned into shoegaze, and there was no honey-softened edge, just solid reality.

It was during an internet cut-off that I found it again. Amidst a forced dopamine detox, I discovered an old folder full of MP3 files. Each had a title of jumbled numbers, but it didn't take me long to mentally translate them to a beloved relic, Queen. Nothing but Queen songs, 60 of them, all heavy with something bittersweet. The years folded, and for each of the four-minute durations, I was 12 again with a fascination for Brian May.

Encountering songs that store parts of you, after a considerable time, is a wistful experience to be devoured by old songs, by notes drenched in nostalgia. Suddenly, everything feels cold and distant, with your heart beating in your ears. A wonderful gnawing void is evoked by such songs, longing and yearning. As the smoke of memories threatens to dissipate, we race against our minds, striving to hold onto the blurred fragments of what once was.

The song ended. The room came back (though the internet did not). I sat there with my hands on the keyboard, a little older than I was a few minutes ago and much older than I was allowed to be inside the music. It doesn't make me 12 again; it only reminds me that I once was.

Music, however magical, doesn't resurrect the past or bring back what we lost. There is something merciful in being allowed to remember so vividly, in learning to live with time instead of trying to defeat it. Perhaps that is and always has been enough from one of humanity's most beautiful creations: to remember, to ache and to keep going with something golden still ringing in our ears.

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