

Listen to Lisa Howorth's *Summerlings* Playlist!

In trying to write a historical novel, it's so important to be able to re-create a time and place, and nothing gets you there faster than tapping into the popular culture: films and TV, vernacular speech, clothing, food, political and social issues, kids' games, advertising, cars, and music—all of that. These things seemed particularly important to me for evoking the 1950s, when America was changing so fast post-World War II. And nothing was changing more thrillingly than the music of that time—pop music became the soundtrack for every day! Since *Summerlings* is set in the Washington, D.C. area in 1959, I wanted to use D.C. music where I could. Like Memphis, D.C. had a vibrant gospel scene, and blues and jazz musicians from its large African American population, as well as bluegrass, country, and rockabilly musicians coming in from nearby southern mountain states, the sounds and styles often influencing each other. I guess that goes for American music in general, as you can see from some of the choices in this playlist. By learning about our past, we often find wisdom within the present, and *Summerlings* is the perfect book that allows us to reflect both on the events of previous decades as well as the current moment. Enjoy travelling back in time to the '50s with this playlist!

"Colonel Bogey March" from *Bridge on the River Kwai*, 1957 film (pg. 51)

Although it's 1959, the neighborhood in the novel still has a WWII hangover. Boys are fond of battle reenactments, and this is a favorite. The captured "allies" whistle this song defiantly, pissing off their "captors." The tune, originally "Colonel Bogey's March," was composed in 1914 by British bandmaster Lt. F.J. Ricketts, and became a tribute to the fifteen-thousand POWs who died during construction of the Death Railway through Thailand and Burma. *Rolling Stone* lists the march as one of the fifteen best whistling songs.

The Knife Sharpener's Song, (p. 75)

I made this song up for the novel. As the narrator, John, and his family celebrate his mother's short visit home from the sanitarium, the melodious song is suddenly heard from the street. It's the voice of James, an itinerant Jamaican knife sharpener, offering his services from his truck. His song disrupts the happy dinner, upsetting the adults, which confuses John. He'll understand later.

"Ooby Dooby," written by Wade Lee Moore and Dick Penner, first recorded by The Wink Westerners, 1956 (p. 85)

Although Roy Orbison made "Ooby Dooby" a hit for Sun Records in 1956, I had in mind the rockin' cover by Janis Martin, a sixteen-year-old girl from Sutherlin, Virginia, dubbed "The Female Elvis," who also recorded "Ooby Dooby" in '56. It was a popular song in the Washington area. The song blasts from the Olds '88 convertible of Leonardo, a local hood, who stops to break up a fight between Ivan, Max, and John, and a neighborhood bully, Slutcheon.

"Three Cool Cats," The Coasters, written by Leiber and Stoller, 1959 (p. 87)

As kids, we were obsessed with all the Coasters's songs because they were so funny and singable. "Three Cool Cats" was the flip side to the hit "Charlie Brown" and the aforementioned three boys

adopt it as their theme song. In this case, they sing it with bravado after Leonardo runs off Slutcheon, who had started an unsettling conversation about seeing Elena, Ivan's Ukrainian aunt and the neighborhood goddess, naked, as they march down the street, arms entwined in relieved brotherhood.

"Bony Moronie," Larry Williams, 1957 (p. 108)

Pianist Williams's songs were recorded by the Beatles, the Stones, Simon and Garfunkel, and Little Richard, who was a life-long friend. He led a wild life—he was a New Orleanian—and died of a gunshot to the head, supposedly a suicide. John tries to sing this song with his estranged dad and his pre-teen sister Liz as they head to Rehoboth Beach in an MG TD, John crammed in the tiny luggage space.

"Bye Bye Love," The Everly Brothers, 1957 (p. 108)

Man, do I love me some Everly Brothers! Written by the renowned Felice and Boudleaux Bryant, and Chet Atkins plays lead guitar. This was the first song Paul McCartney ever performed on stage, and has been covered by Conway Twitty and Loretta Lynn, David Lindley, and Ray Charles in that crazy country and western album he put out in 1962. Also sung as the MG whips down the road toward the beach, and disaster for John.

"Enchanted Sea," The Islanders, 1959 (p. 113)

I adored this eerie instrumental, its "buoy bells, lapping waves, high-lonesome whistling and mournful guitar" evoking the Chesapeake Bay and the wonderful times I had there growing up. It was a weird hit for the same summer as "What'd I Say" and ("Til I Kissed You," but it works as a great make-out and slow-dance song, as in the beach party scene in the novel. I love rock trivia: the guitarist, Randy Starr, was a dentist in the Bronx.

"Stagger Lee," LLOYD Price, 1958 (p. 116)

This much-covered number was originally a folk song about the 1895 murder by a pimp of a business rival in St. Louis. The song comes on the record player at the beach party, just after John has gotten into trouble with his dad and his friend, the real-life Lt. Jacob Beser, the only man to have been on both atomic bombing missions over Japan.

Theme music from *Peter Gunn* TV show, Henry Mancini, 1959 (p. 128)

This menacing, noir theme won Mancini an Emmy and two Grammys. John and his grandfather, Brickie, are waiting for the show to come on as they both drink scotch, eat Honeymoon ice cream, and discuss Russia, America, and war.

197. Flamenco number, Laurindo Almeida, 1959 (p. 129)

The famous Brazilian guitarist and composer appears in a club scene in the *Peter Gunn* episode, "Skin Deep," exciting Brickie, a huge jazz fan, whose sketchy State Department job allowed him to help put together the Jazz Ambassadors program bringing top African American musicians to

Europe and Russia. Almeida was a creator of bossa nova, and also played with the Modern Jazz Quartet.

"Rumble," Link Wray and His Ray Men, 1958 (p. 135)

Link Wray! One of my all-time favorites. A North Carolina guy of Native American descent, his distinctive power chord changed rock. "Rumble" was the only instrumental ever banned in the U.S. because its scary, malevolent sound might have inspired juvenile delinquency. (Giant eye roll.) It certainly deeply inspired many musicians like Iggy Pop and Jimmy Page, and is used in quite a few film soundtracks. "Rumble" "twangs darkly from the car radio" as the hood Leonardo pulls up in a nasty scenario involving his "scag" girlfriend, Dawn, Tim, the goodhearted Good Humor man, and a rubber.

"Ride of the Valkyries," Richard Wagner, 1856 (p. 139)

The three cool cats are hanging out, hatching a plan to break into a museum for nefarious purposes. Max is humming this ominous tune from a favorite *Merrie Melodies* cartoon featuring Elmer Fudd killing Bugs Bunny. Wagner is "verboden" in Max's Jewish home because of Wagner's anti-Semitic writing and the Nazi association with his music, played at Nazi events, and Dachau.

"The Battle of New Orleans," Johnny Horton, 1959 (p. 150)

Written by Jimmy Driftwood and based on a fiddle tune, "The 8th of January," the date in 1815 when we kicked British ass, the song went to #1 in 1959. Naturally, kids loved it. The boys listen to it on Max's transistor radio late at night to psych themselves up for the heist. Ivan the Tenderhearted doesn't want to hear it because the part about using the alligator as a cannon is so cruel to the gator.

"On My Way (Home)," African American gospel tune, sung by Lucille Banks Robinson Miller (p. 157)

Madame Robinson was D.C.'s second female gospel radio announcer, performing and promoting a flourishing gospel scene in the city on WOOK, WUST, WOL, and WYCB. She was also an accompanist to Mahalia Jackson, Sister Rosetta Tharpe, and Thomas A. Dorsey. For her religious work and service to her community, she was invited for an audience with the Pope. In the novel, the real-life James Hampton, a Black veteran and one of America's greatest artists, is listening to this song on his truck radio as he goes about his late-night janitorial duties at one of D.C.'s museums while the boys wait for an opportunity to break in.

***Kind of Blue*, Miles Davis, 1959 (p. 192)**

This experimental album by the legendary composer and trumpeter is one of the greatest jazz records of all time, influencing jazz, rock and classical music. The composition was based on modality, not chord progression, which Davis believed gave the musician more freedom. Brickie is very excited about the new record, and plays it first to show it off to the neighbors at the Fabulous Family Fiesta, organized to improve relations in the international neighborhood. John

is worried that Brickie won't play any R&B or rock 'n' roll, thinking, "Nobody normal can dance" to *Kind of Blue*.

***Melody's Bar*, album, Don Barreto and His Cuban Orchestra, 1932–1946 (p. 193)**

Don Barreto was born in Havana but spent most of his musical career in Spain and Paris. He played jazz violin, guitar and banjo, mostly appearing at Melody's Bar. I could find no evidence that he played in the U.S., or that he returned to Havana, but I've decided that Brickie, who traveled a good bit as a young army linguist, had seen him perform in Paris. (I'm playing the fiction card here). Anyway, a Cha Cha number on this album is Brickie's choice, but one that everybody can dance to, and they all do.

"Take the A Train," Duke Ellington, 1953 (p. 195)

James Edward Ellington, grandson of a former slave, was born in Washington where his family lived at 2129 Ward Place, NW. His band played everywhere around the city, from pool halls to embassy parties, and it's likely that Brickie heard him play at the popular club, Bohemian Caverns, at the intersection of 11th and U Streets NW. Eventually Duke landed in NYC at the Cotton Club and became an international sensation featured in several films. Duke was awarded a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969 and the French Legion d'honneur in 1973. Check out the tribute songs to him by Dave Brubeck, Miles Davis, Charles Mingus, and Stevie Wonder. "A Train" was composed by Billy Strayhorn in 1939 but became the signature tune of the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

"The Stroll," The Diamonds, 1957 (p. 196)

This hit, recorded by the Canadian band that also had a second 1957 hit, "Little Darlin'", was written by Clyde Otis, a Mississippi native—Huzzah!—who was one of the first African American A&R executives. At the fiesta, Brickie finally plays a number the kids love, although only the pre-teens Liz and Maari can properly perform the Virginia reel-like Stroll line dance, and teach everybody else. The song and dance were standard on *American Bandstand* and later, *Soul Train*, where Don Cornelius proclaimed it "The Soul Train Line."

"Reet, Petite, and Gone," Louis Jordan and His Tympany Five, 1947 (p. 198)

Love Louis Jordan! So does my mom, and his crazy, raucous songs were family themes in our house. The adults at the party are thrilled to hear it, and serious jitterbugging begins. Jitterbug, akin to swing and the Lindy Hop, was first popularized by African Americans and by Cab Calloway's movies like *Call of the Jitterbug* in 1934, and *Cab Calloway's Jitterbug Party* the next year.

"Me Rock-a-Hula," Bill Haley and His Comets, 1958 (p. 202)

Written by Haley, Milt Gabler, Rusty Keefer, and Catherine Cafra, this is classic Bill Haley, but with Hawaiian guitar and jungle drums. Beatriz, Brazilian tomboy, spectacularly hula-hoops to this song at the fiesta in honor of the new fiftieth state. The guys are wowed.

"Hey! Bo Diddley," Bo Diddley Mississippian (*Huzzah again!*) backed by Peggy Jones and The Flamingos, 1957 (p. 203)

The jumpingest party music ever. Bo Diddley took his name from the diddley bow, a one-string instrument that was of West African origin and popular in the deep south. Another native Mississippian (*huzzah again!*), he came to D.C. from Chicago and had a home studio at 2614 Rhode Island Avenue, NW (Marvin Gaye sang there and was his valet!). They played with every cool act in the world and influenced everybody. In England, teenagers were forbidden to stand up and dance (how could you *not?*) so they danced with their hands, hence the Hand-Jive, probably derived from juba or hambone slap beats, and children's clap-slap rhyming games. Liz and Maari do it at the fiesta.

"Reet Petite," Jackie Wilson, 1957 (p. 203)

Mr. Excitement! Although he borrowed the song title from Louis Jordan, Wilson's "Reet Petite" is not the same song, though it is the song the kids want to hear at the fiesta after having been taken to see *Go, Johnny, Go*, by their idol Elena, where Wilson is featured. A Detroit guy with Mississippi roots, Wilson was instrumental in the evolution from R&B to Motown soul. The song ratchets up the frenzied Fiesta dancing, and all sing the *Oh, oh, oh, oh, A-oh, oh, oh* refrain. Ever popular, the *Reet Petite* album was re-issued in 1986.

"You Send Me," Sam Cooke, 1957 (p. 205)

Born in Clarksdale, Mississippi (ok, I won't say it), Cooke's family took that old Great Migration route to Chicago, as so many African Americans continued to do. He developed his lovely voice singing gospel when he was young. Cooke was a civil rights activist, and his iconic 1964 song, "A Change is Gonna Come" has always been a part of the movement, and no doubt will be heard even more universally now. Sadly, like Jackie Wilson, Cooke died way too young, shot by a female motel manager under murky circumstances. The Fiesta crowd, exhausted from rum and beer, dancing and summer heat, all fall into bearhug swaying while Brickie will play one slow song after another.

"Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," The Platters, 1959 (p. 205)

Originally composed and recorded by Jerome Kern and Otto Harbach for a 1933 musical, the song has been recorded by generations of musicians, but you can't beat The Platters' version, sung by Tony Williams.

"Mona Lisa," Nat King Cole, 1950 (p. 205)

This beautiful ballad was written by Ray Evans and Jay Livingston for the film *Captain Carey, U.S.A.* in 1950. My very young parents loved the song so much they named me for it! Chicagoan Cole recorded over one hundred songs that became hits, and was the first African American to host a TV series. His enormous popularity with white audiences riled racists—the KKK, active in Los Angeles in the fifties, burned a cross on his front lawn, and in Birmingham, Alabama, he was attacked onstage by a group of men intending to kidnap him. Brickie is very fond of Nat King

Cole and saw him perform at the Tropicana nightclub in Havana, before the revolution. He happily slow-dances to it with Elena.

"Twelfth of Never," Johnny Mathis, 1957 (p. 205)

Written by Jerry Livingston and Paul Francis Webster, this dreamy love song is borrowed from a traditional ballad known in Appalachia and fifteenth century England as either "The Riddle" or "I Gave My Love A Cherry." The charismatic Elena, sitting on the grass with the boys as the Fiesta winds down, is caught up by the song and Mathis's "honeyed voice" and sings along, though Max chides her because it's "kind of corny." The song is still playing, everyone in "a sweaty reverie," when the Fiesta erupts in terror and comes to a shocking end.

"Taps," 1862, created by U.S General Daniel Butterfield, formerly titled "Extinguish Lights" (p. 212)

It came to be used by Union and Confederate forces at dusk to signal bedtime. The mournful bugle call is standard at military funerals and memorial ceremonies. Max, devastated by events at the end of the novel, attempts to hum the tune, but doesn't get far before the song chokes in his throat.

Thanks to Google, Wiki, and the many other sources consulted. Rave on! LH