

I

feel it in my fingers, I feel it in my toes... plays obnoxiously in a crowded pub. Your eyes meet, she arches her back and flashes her "I'm so lucky to have you" smile. Before the putrid chorus ("my mind's made up by the way that I feel!") she's promised wild

sex and hour-long foot rubs, while you've muttered a royalty of thank yous to Wet Wet Wet. Such is the power of The Relationship Soundtrack.

The music we live with each day becomes life's soundtrack – shaping our relationships, burning emotions onto the intimacy CD. It starts innocently: shortcutting memories to a song-skip away. You hear "Angels" when you fetch her from the airport, so you pop on some Robbie Williams to flood her with happy chemicals. If Ronan Keating played in the lift when you met, a nip to the CD store for some Boyzone off the bargain rack renders you "romantic". This all lead me to wonder: what came first, Ronan Keating or loving thoughts?

The answer is Ronan – two buck naked people can't sustain a relationship alone. Their mutual affection needs a warm carcass to lay its eggs in and The Top 40 is a Jeffrey Dahmer's basement of suitable tunes for you and your lady to incubate your love.

Incubate and stagnate, that is, because what will catch you, like a crazed junkie, is the no-brain comfort. After stacking up a few years with someone, a lifeline of shared listens stretches back, letting you resort to squeezing affection from dozens of replays. You'll bask in the incest of reminiscing about moments you spent reminiscing. Know what I mean? It's like we get attached to the time we watched a movie, rather than the movie itself. The original spark for the song (when you were first shopping for each other's Christmas presents) becomes an event too crass and clichéd to keep harping on about.

And such is The Soundtrack's power: it helps stretch out those quality moments like the first chewing gum you passed from mouth to mouth. But when it snaps you're going to choke like it's a squash ball. And swallowed gum takes seven years to digest, at least.



"I feel it in my penis..."

Back Track

The moment two people get it together, music defines their most intimate moments – if they let it

Here's how the crunch happened: we split up in the wake of a raging row, I drove away, happy at the opportunity ahead and the emotional wreck ditched behind. I turned on the radio and at that exact moment Enrique Iglesias sang "You can run, you can hide, but you can't escape my love". I practically rolled the car into a lamppost. This surgical grafting of emotions to pop lyrics created a dozen songs that released agony on tap.

Remember, these aren't photos you can burn or restaurants you can avoid, these bastards will still be circling party playlists and radio line-ups for the next 50 years. And by nature of the contrived way that "meaningful moments" occur in a relationship (usually, in my case, dipped in alcohol) it will be the party, radio and shopping mall music that gathers significance and haunts you on Greatest Hits albums till the day you die.

So, with public gatherings a doomed emotional minefield, you need to construct, early on, an impenetrable barrier around your personal collection. Pitch it to her as an auditory pre-nuptial agree-

ment: "I love you, but we're going to break up some day and I have to be able to listen to The Clash without thinking of you. So, no, you can't borrow it." What if she becomes a diehard fan, learns all the lyrics and starts humming "London Calling" in the shower? You'll be binning the lot in tears and she'll go back to her Simply Red unscathed.

In my next relationship, I learnt to pathologically absorb myself in her collection. I made her taste, my taste. Her music became ours and she loved every second. Until it was too late.

MI

Trauma tunes

Your iPod playlist to soothe a break-up

1. "Love on the Rocks with No Ice" – The Darkness
2. "Take Another Piece of My Heart" – Janis Joplin
3. "You Oughta Know" – Alanis Morissette
4. "Love Bites" – Def Leppard
5. "I Hate You So Much Right Now" – Kelis