

I'm only seeing bands I loved when I was 14. Am I in a musical rut – or is this growing up?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Match these musicians and bands with the decade in which they had their first success.

1. Foo Fighters	a. the 1960s	uni The Tube the mod cons the telly bog paper = toilet paper bikies = biscuits
2. Blackpink	b. the 1980s	noughties 000 nought
3. Guns and Roses	c. the 1990s	
4. The Rolling Stones	d. the 2000s	
5. The Killers	e. the 2010s	
6. Ed Sheeran	f. the 2020s	

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

catastrophe evoke evolve gig heritage high
intertwined intoxicating nostalgia rut stagnate weird

1. A gig (engagement) is a public performance, usually of popular music.
2. If you feel weird, you feel strange.
3. nostalgia is a mixture of thoughts about happy times in your past and a wish to be back in that past.
4. If you are in a rut, you are in a situation that is boring and difficult to change.
5. When things stagnate, they stay the same without growing or developing.
6. If things evolve, they gradually change and develop over a period of time.
7. If things evoke a memory, they make you think of something that you experienced in the past.
8. A high is a feeling of great happiness or excitement.
9. An intoxicating feeling is one that gives you a lot of happiness or excitement.
10. If things are intertwined, they are closely connected with each other.

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11. If you catastrophise something, your mind makes it seem much worse than it is.
12. heritage consists of the things that a society considers important to its history and culture.

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I used to be devoted to discovering new music. Now my gig-going is mostly driven by nostalgia – and I'm not alone

Sinéad Stubbins

5 December, 2023

- 1 I was standing in a field with my friends, drinking from a flask as Interpol played, and it wasn't 2006. A man in front of us was dancing wildly. "This was my wedding song!" he shouted to my friend, as Bloc Party started. "Oh wow!" she said politely.
- 2 It was at this moment that I had a thought: should I feel weird that lately I've only seen bands I loved when I was 14?
- 3 The last concert I'd gone to was Yeah Yeah Yeahs, where lead singer Karen O remarked that it had been two decades since their debut album. "No way!" I heard myself say, as I joined a chorus: an entire stadium of other 32- to 52-year-olds saying "No way!" to each other.
- 4 To discover that nostalgia was driving my gig-going was confusing. Am I in a musical rut? Am I approaching my wine-country era, where every gig I want to go to is exclusively held at a regional vineyard at 2 pm on a Sunday for \$300 instead of a dirty backroom? I used to seek out new music like it was a personal mission. I hadn't even noticed that this mission had stopped. When you reach a certain age, does your musical taste stagnate?
- 5 Probably, it means nothing because a lot of what we do means nothing. It might just be a normal part of getting older. In 2018, *The New York Times* studied Spotify data to analyse how our musical tastes evolve as we age. They looked at every hit song released between 1960 and 2000 and calculated that the most "important period for forming musical taste" is 14 for men and 13 for women.
- 6 If nothing hits you like it hits you when you're a teenager – and there have been studies showing that music sticks to autobiographical information about our lives and evokes those times – it makes sense that I would want

to chase that high. And I found it at those concerts: Bikini Kill was electrifying, I cried when Yeah Yeah Yeahs did 'Maps' and, as the saying goes, hearing a 60% good Reptilia is still better than no Reptilia at all.

- 7 There's science behind it, too. When we listen to a song we used to love, the reward centre in our brain is flooded with dopamine, serotonin, and every other chemical you might have tried to artificially conjure in a midnight field. You put on the White Stripes, and your brain is like, "Let's go, boys!" "Musical nostalgia, in other words, isn't just a cultural phenomenon," says *Slate*'s Mark Joseph Stern. "It's a neuronic command."
- 8 But what does that mean for finding new music? When I was younger, I dedicated time and effort to discovering bands – and when I found one, the thrill was intoxicating. Who knew where my next favourite song might come from? It was like falling in love. Studies have found that when you reach your thirties, though, your musical curiosity evaporates. A study found that your music discovery peaks at 24 and by 30 you simply stop looking for new tunes. Of around 1,000 music listeners, 47 per cent said they wanted to find new bands, but thanks to jobs and kids, they didn't have the time. I get it – I too have less time these days – but I also have greater resources: vast rivers of algorithms providing endless new music, just waiting to be discovered. The music is out there! Why am I not looking for it?
- 9 If I'm disturbed by all of this (I'm fine!), there might be a little bit of ageism at play. I don't want to eventually become a Keith Richards figure and decide that music I don't understand is just "people yelling". Musical taste is so intertwined with the formation of our identities that it's an easy thing to catastrophise. Besides, my nostalgia may just be a case of access: the return of indie sleaze has made the popular bands of the early to mid-2000s big business again. And even if it hadn't, heritage acts have always funded the musical economy. Heritage to me is Elton John, but I guess it's Bloc Party, too.

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10 At least when I *do* actually put effort in, I can still find stuff I love. It might not produce the high it did when I was 14, but the thrill of connecting with something completely new remains immediate. There's still some life in this leather jacket yet. But if you're wondering if I want to see the Chemical Brothers and the Presets while enjoying a crisp Riesling, the answer is yes. A thousand times yes.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Answer the questions using information from the article.

1. What does the author of the article find weird?
2. According to the author, what drives her desire to go to gigs?
3. According to *The New York Times*, what age is the most important for forming musical taste?
4. What happens when we listen to a song we used to love?
5. What does the author compare to falling in love?
6. According to some studies, at what age does your interest in finding new music peak?
7. And at what age does your musical curiosity disappear?
8. Why can't 47 per cent of the respondents in a survey find new bands?

4 Key language

a. Complete the phrases from the text using the prepositions *in* or *at*. Then, complete the sentences using the phrases.

1. _____ that moment

2. _____ a rut

3. _____ other words

4. _____ play

a. I think I'm _____. I hate my job, but I can't be bothered to look for another one.

b. It was _____ that I realised I had lost my keys.

c. You never know. Some other factors might be _____.

d. I feel a bit weird. _____, I'm feeling rather strange today.

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5 Discussion

a. Discuss these statements.

- “Modern music all sounds the same.”
- “Going to a live gig is much better than listening to music at home.”
- “Listening to music is the best way to relax.”

6 In your own words

a. Use an internet search engine to find more information about these bands and the musical genre mentioned in the text or choose another popular band or singer that you haven't heard before.

- Bloc Party
- The White Stripes
- Yeah Yeah Yeahs
- Indie Sleaze

b. Listen to some of the songs and research their origins and how they became popular. Report your findings to the class.