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WORD SOUP
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"HOW
TO
LISTEN
TO
JOANNA
NEWSOM"





I will try to keep this somewhat organized and not too ramby *but* understand that I have a lot to say about Joanna Newsom so a ramble is inevitable.

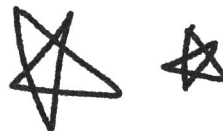
Joanna Newsom is one of my favorite musicians of all time and I usually make a point to mention her if anyone ever asks me anything music related. I will shoehorn her into any conversation that I can. And so sometimes people will ask me how to start listening to her music, since it can seem a bit intimidating at first (I think a total of two people have ever asked me this question, so I am using it as an excuse to make an entire zine about her). so I will use these pages to teach you how to listen to Joanna Newsom.



Joanna Newsom (b. 1982) is an american singer-songwriter and harpist. she started releasing music in the early 2000s and developed a small following after becoming aligned with the freak-folk scene, though she soon outgrew this label. she has released four albums, with the latest having come out in 2015.

her music is known for its unusual song structures, dense lyrics, and for her unique vocal stylings.

I sort of understand why people could be intimidated by her music. it seems like a lot of people want to be able to completely understand a song following their first listen, which I just don't think is possible. there's so much thought and intention that goes into these songs that they're really just packed to the brim with information to take in, whether it be in the lyrics or the song composition. I think part of the fun of Joanna's music is letting a song reveal itself to you over time. there's no need to understand it all at once! you get to savor these songs for years to come (if you want to, that is. we will get into that now). here is how to listen to Joanna Newsom.



HOW TO LISTEN TO JOANNA NEWSOM

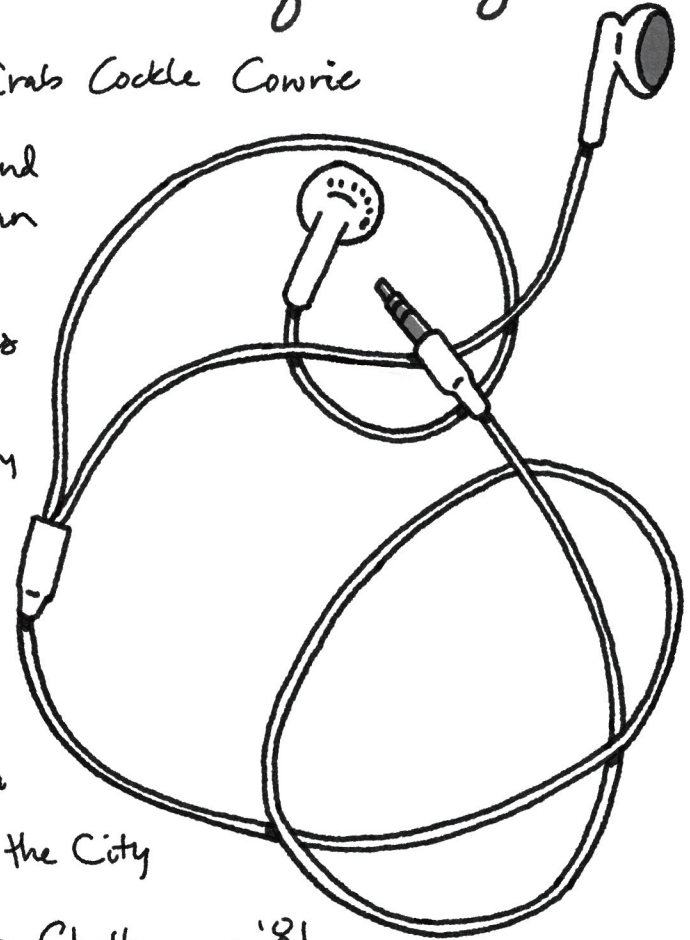
1. pick a song (any song)! the page directly to the right has a list of songs that I think are particularly good, and that work to showcase what Joanna has in store. at this point you can decide if Joanna is someone you want to continue listening to. it is music after all; if you don't enjoy what you're hearing, there's no need to make yourself sit through more of it. pick another song or two, and if you're having a good time, move on to step two!

2. make a playlist of the songs to the right and any other songs you may be intrigued by *OR* choose an album (these are summarized in the following pages). now, this part may be controversial, but I recommend *listening to your playlist as background noise*. or at the very least, a casual listen while you do something else (I spent a lot of time sewing while her songs played in the background). you can read along with the lyrics as a song plays, but I don't recommend hyperfocusing on the words and trying to understand everything she says on your first listen. listen to the song for the sake of the song, get a sense of the song as a whole (this is especially good for the longer songs, of which there are many).

3. continue listening this way. as you become more familiar with the songs, lyrics will start to become more apparent. words will suddenly start to make sense. you might be intrigued by certain phrases. and *now* is the time where I would recommend looking into the lyrics: after you've given yourself some time to come to your own conclusions, and have developed your own associations with the songs. obviously this is all very subjective and you should listen to music however you like. I just have extremely fond memories of listening to her this way, and 'discovering' the songs' meanings on my own. I also think that people often overlook the musicality and craft that goes into Joanna's songwriting, and instead focus on just the lyrics. But there's just so much to enjoy in these songs, no matter what you prefer to focus on.

a selection of songs

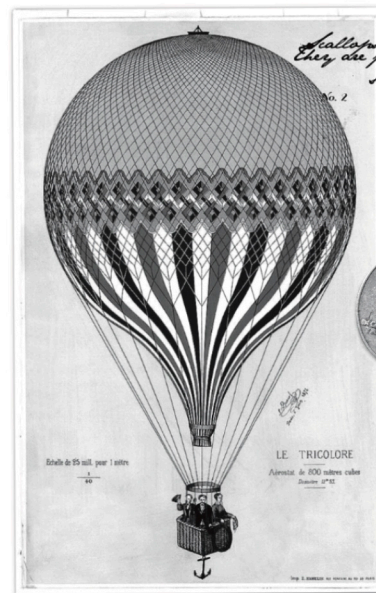
- Clam Crab Cockle Cowrie
- Sprout and the Bean
- Good Intentions Paving Company
- Emily
- Divers
- Things I Say
- Only Skin
- Leaving the City
- Soft as Chalk
- On a Good Day
- In California
- Peach Plum Pear
- '81
- Cosmia
- Have One On Me
- Swansea



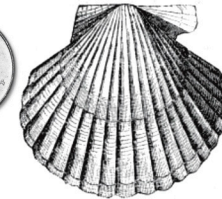


THE MILK-EYED MENDER

1. Bridges + Balloons
2. Sprout and the Bean
3. The Book of Right-On
4. Sadie
5. Inflammatory Writ ♡
6. This Side of the Blue
7. En Gallop
8. Cassiopeia
9. Peach Plum Pear ♡
10. Swansea ♡
11. Three Little Babes ♡
12. Clam Crab Cockle Cowrie ♡



Shallops can swim by clapping their shells. They are part of the Mollusca that includes snails, mussels, and oysters.

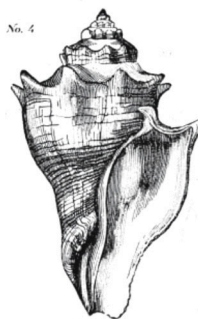


Queen Lough, large part of the mussels. They are clapping of their shells to hear the tip of the shell from as it mussels.

the milk-eyed mender is so charming :) extremely playful and homey, lots of really neat harp lines (this was when she was still very into polymeter and kora music)! I've seen a lot of people say that this is her hardest album to get into just because of her voice, but I think that it's the standout part of the album. it's so in-your-face and carefree. her cover of *three little babes* is so incredible to me. whenever I listen to a song, I'm always kind of subconsciously keeping track of vocal placement, intonation, and resonance, and how those change with each note/word. like I can picture where a note is sitting in someone's mouth or throat, how their tongue is positioned, etc (I have tried to describe this to other people and no one ever knows what I'm talking about but it's a fun way to listen to music and you should try it maybe). but I think that's one of the reasons I like Joanna's voice so much. she plays around so much with the way a note can sound, and seems to use every available part of her voice. it's such a different approach to a vocal than what you would normally find in popular music, and it is showcased so clearly on this album!

Cinderella on the stairs
I spy the Three Bears

No. 4



No. 7





1. Emily
2. Monkey + Bear
3. Sawdust + Diamonds
4. Only Skin
5. Cosmia

It is something else entirely. this is five songs spread over one hour. each song is a masterpiece packed with so much emotion and information that listening to them feels like reading an entire novel. *Joanna was 24 when this was released.*

this being a sophomore album is so astounding. it's laughable. it's like if someone showed you a little wooden figurine they had carved; it's very well done and shows a lot of promise, an excellent effort for their first try! and then the next time you see them, they have carved a series of beautiful marble sculptures, each depicting an emotion that you have never been able to place, let alone convey to others so plainly.

It is usually considered *the* Joanna album (at least from what I've seen), and I can certainly understand why. it is a triumph. if you do listen to a full album by Joanna, I do recommend this one. I could say a lot about it, but I don't think any of what I have to say would be more worth your time than just listening to it.

rs

AN ABSURD REASONING
Absurdity and Suicide
Absurd Walls
Philosophical Suicide
Absurd Freedom

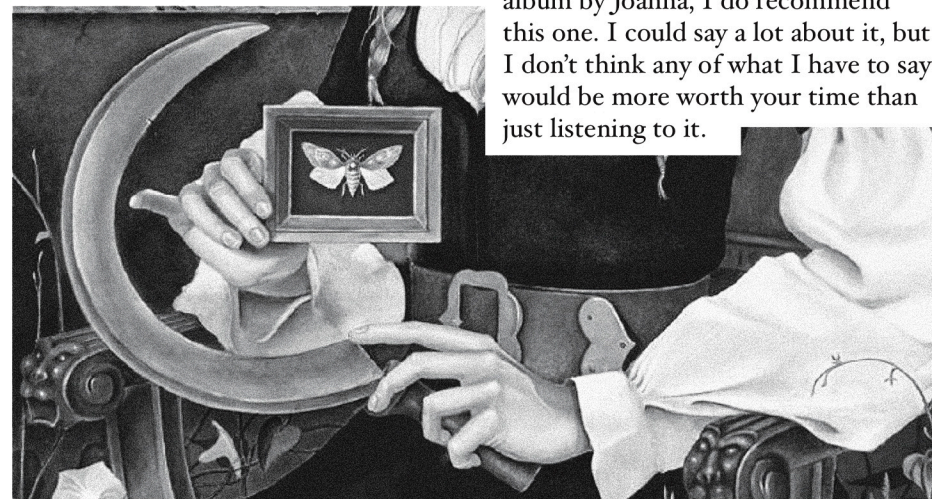
THE ABSURD MAN
Don Juanism
Drama
Conquest
ABSURD CREATION

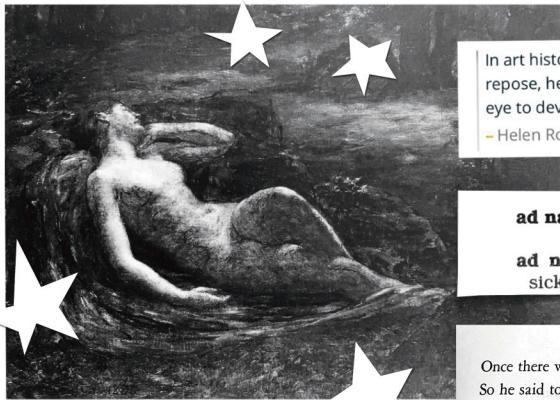


adhesion, a growth of scar tissue resulting from an incision.

¹ I was the shadow of the waxwing slain
By the false azure in the windowpane;
I was the smudge of ashen fluff—and I
Lived on, flew on, in the reflected sky.

He ran about the room, searched in every cupboard and in every possible place for a little bread – even dry bread. He would have been grateful for a crust, or a bone left by a dog, for a fishbone or a cherry stone – in short, for anything he could chew. But he found nothing, just nothing, absolutely nothing.





In art history, the *odalisque* is a female figure in repose, her body splayed out for the viewer's eye to devour.

—Helen Rosner, *The New Yorker*, 23 Apr. 2024

ad nauseam

4

ad nauseam, to the point of being sickening.

Once there was a little bunny who wanted to run away.
So he said to his mother, "I am running away."
"If you run away," said his mother, "I will run after you.
For you are my little bunny."



Have
One
On
Me

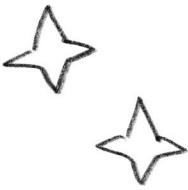
1. Easy ☆
2. Have One On Me ☆
3. '81
4. Good Intentions
Passing Company ☆
5. No Provenance
6. Baby Birch ☆
7. On a Good Day ☆
8. You and Me, Bess
9. In California ☆
10. Jackrabbits ☆
11. Go Long ☆
12. Deciduit
13. Soft as Chalk ☆
14. Esme
15. Autumn
16. Ribbon Bows ☆
17. Kingfisher ☆
18. Does Not Suffice



Have One On Me was released in 2010. it is a two hour long triple album. don't run away. this is the first spread that I made for this zine, since I knew right away what these pages would look like. this album has such a set identity, from the odalisque/venus in furs inspired cover art to the instrumentation of every song.

it took me a really long time to listen to this album in full. for a while, I would always stop after disc two (if I remember correctly?). but I still remember the first time I actually listened through disc three, hearing the *la la las* slowly fade out during *does not suffice*, only for them to fall back into a frenzy of piano chords and strings. I felt so silly for not listening to it sooner.

one of my favorite things to do is to sit in a dark room and just listen straight through *in california*, *jackrabbits*, and *go long*. that run of songs is soooo incredible. I could go on and on about those three, but I am running out of page space. if you try listening to hoom, take your time. there's no need to listen through it all at once, and I think it is easier to understand when you give yourself the time to digest each section. it is definitely worth it.



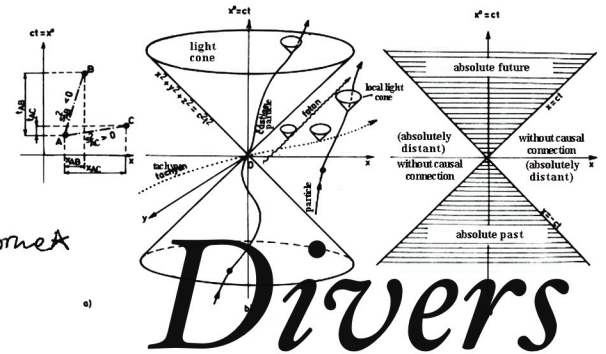
divers <3 if I'm remembering correctly, this was the first Joanna *album* I ever listened to and set out to understand as a self-contained project, so it always feels a bit nostalgic to me. I remember on some days I would get to college a few hours early and I would paint in the studio when no one else was around. it was always so peaceful. just me working on a painting, listening to albums, enjoying the light that came in through the windows. *divers* was a new favorite at the time.

divers goes on forever. I think that this is Joanna's most accessible album. it's also one of her most thought provoking, conceptual, and abstract works. I think that these ideas can coexist. it reminds me of a seurat painting.

this album is about time and war and love and memory and everything else. it is very beautiful and can change your life if you let it.



Time, as a Symptom
 Anecdotes ★
 ↳ Sapokanikan ★
 Leaving the City
 Goose Eggs
 Waltz of the 10th Lightborne ★
 ↳ Things I Say
 ↳ Divers ★
 Same Old Man 55
 You Will Not Take
 My Heart Alive
 ↳ Pin-Light Bent.
 Time, as a Symptom ★
 Anecdotes
 Sapokanikan



antemortem, before death.
antenatal, before birth.
antepartum, before the onset of labor.

A way a lone a last a loved a long the

The conservator later found that Streeton had inscribed "Florry Walker is my sweetheart" into the wet paint using a pin or needle, and her name several more times.

THE OTHERS



Joanna has a decent amount of bonus songs spread across older EPs, some singles, some unreleased tracks, and some bonus tracks.

Her very first EP, *Walnut Whales*, was self-released in 2002 and features *Erin*, *Flying a Kite*, and *The Fray*, as well as earlier recordings of several songs from *The Milk-Eyed Mender*. *Yarn and Glue* was released the following year and includes the title track and *What We Have Known*. *What We Have Known* was later re-recorded and released as a single. These early EPs offer a very cool look at the development of Joanna's voice, seeing where she started and what she sounds like now.

Joanna Newsom & the Ys Street Band is a live EP released in 2007 and only features songs that start with the letter C. was this intentional? probably not! this EP has *Colleen* on it, which instantly makes it good. *Colleen* is an incredible 'hidden' song, and I've never come across a Joanna fan who doesn't like it.

Make Hay is a sort of bonus song that was released shortly after *Divers* came out. It ended up being cut from the album, but it's a very cool song and I'm glad that it exists somewhere.

Joanna performed a bundle of new songs at the Spring Recital in 2023 (this was a fleet foxes show where Joanna was a surprise opening act). these include: *Bombs are Whistling*, *No Wonder*, *The Air Again*, *Marie at the Mill*, and *Little Hand*. Additional songs *Rovenshere* and *Home Economics* have also been performed since then. All of these were bootlegged and can be found on youtube! and that's the last of the Joanna songs (for now(?)).

and also there is the muppet song.

I love a live performance. here are a few of Joanna's that I think deserve some extra attention (all of these can be found on youtube, and are mostly fan recordings. audio quality might not be the best!):

- *Cosmia* and *Sawdust & Diamonds* performed at the End of the Road Festival in 2011. both of these songs sound so unbelievable, the emotions seem so heightened, there must have been something in the water that day.

- *The Air Again*, from the Spring Recital in 2023. The Spring Recital songs were the first Joanna songs I ever got to hear *as* they came out (*divers* had been out for four years by the time I started listening to her!), so these were especially cool to experience. by 2023, I had basically accepted that Joanna would never release new music. her discography up until that point could definitely stand on its own, and I was perfectly content with *divers* being her final work. and then suddenly there were all these new songs?? and they were *really good*!!! it was such a surprise. I think that this song is especially good; the piano/chords near the end were literally jaw dropping for me.

- Any performance of *Only Skin* from her String/Keys tour in 2019/2020 is so fun to watch just for the audiences' reactions to hearing the first words being sung. Hearing people gasp and *giggle* with excitement over this 16 minute song is so sweet. Sometimes in verses with a lot of S sounds, you can hear people whispering the words to themselves (*scrap of sassfrass, eh Sisyphus?*).

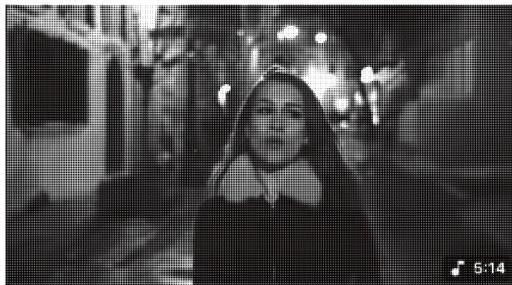
- Similar to the *Only Skin* performances, any version of *Time, as a Symptom/Anecdotes* during that tour is equally delightful, featuring a quick switch from piano to harp

- *Peach Plum Pear* has so many great versions, and to hear it change over time is also very cool. my favorites are the 11.16.06 version, performed at the first unitarian church sanctuary in philadelphia, and the 31.05.2010 version, performed in paris.

- *Soft as Chalk* on late night with jimmy fallon. this one is a biggie.

LIVE VERSIONS

I used to watch this person on youtube who would make videos about tattoos, tattoo care, tattoo culture, etc. and every so often she would talk about a musician named Joanna Newsom. and she always talked about her with this sort of reverence, or like she was a deity. something very special. and after hearing about her enough times, I was intrigued enough to find out more. so I typed Joanna Newsom into the youtube search bar for the first time and clicked on the first video that came up:



Joanna Newsom
"Sapokanikan" (Official Video)
Drag City · 4.4M views · 9 years ago

Sapokanikan was the first Joanna song I ever heard. but to be honest, I don't remember what my first impression of it was. I must have enjoyed it somewhat, because I moved on to the next video in the results : a live performance of *soft as chalk*. and boys... that one got me good.



Joanna Newsom - Soft as Chalk Live
HD
Liliana G. Coimbra · 913K views · 14 years ago

I remember sitting at my desk a minute into the video, still a bit skeptical of her voice and the song as a whole. but by minute five, I was a new man. by the end of the video, I was convinced that Joanna was the smartest, most charming, most talented person I had ever seen. I didn't know what the song was about. I didn't need to. I just wanted to listen to it again and again forever (and I still do)! after that, I loaded a random assortment of songs onto my ipod touch (I remember *on a good day*, *baby birch*, *have one on me*, and *Emily* being some of the first I would listen to regularly). and eventually I made my way through her entire discography (this took a while. I think I went divers > part of hoom > ys > mem > remainder of hoom over the course of a year or two).

so all this to say: thank you Qcknd for shoehorning Joanna into your videos. you got me.

lastly, here is a curated selection of comments left on youtube videos of her music that I think adequately summarize her work. please enjoy.

Jesus, feel like I've been in a beautiful carcrash after that. How does she do it?!

This song makes me bawl. The passage of time is unforgiving and humans are so small.

I'm
Afraid of her music but like in a good way??

👍 78 💬 📖

she really just sat there and did that to me

joanna newsom is made out of stars and her voice is shiny and infinite

Imagine being this good at something.

An ad in the middle of the song ooo Youtube I'm stealing something out of your headquarters

ok girl thanks I'm crying

👍 24 💬 📖

I don't understand what she said but I'm so sad now

👍 682 💬 📖

This song changed my life more than once.

im sobbing, ugly crying. This is beautiful.....You dont know my name Mrs Newsom, but i know yours.

