

Music has always been hugely important to me. From a very early age my parents put a record player in my bedroom, so I grew up listening to, not only nursery rhymes and children's songs, but my Dad's movie soundtracks and my Mum's 50s Rock 'n' Roll records. I think my love of music and my eclectic taste in music comes from those early days of rifling through their record collection and listening to anything and everything.

Music is such a powerful force. Fran Healy of Travis has described songs as being like bookmarks in your life, and I think that's a perfect way to describe them. When you hear a particular song or piece of music, you can be instantly transported back to a moment in time, or reminded of a certain person.

That idea is essentially what my first novel *Trackman* is all about – the power of music, its ability to affect us emotionally, and its healing qualities. The main character, Davie, is like a modern-day superhero. He wanders the streets of Edinburgh, playing songs to strangers in need of help, while also trying to mend himself at the same time. My hope is that the book not only entertains and moves readers, but that it acts as a love letter to music and all that music has meant to me throughout my life.

1. The Haughs O' Cromdale by the Corries

My Dad took me to see the Corries twice when I was a kid and it was my first experience of live music. My sister and I were talking recently about how we learnt the stories and history of our own country from listening to Corries songs in the car when we were growing up. That's the true origin of folk music, that oral tradition of passing on our stories and legends through songs and music. We've become so used to celebrity deaths recently but Roy Williamson's death in 1990 had a profound effect on me. I was only 10 at the time, and I remember thinking how strange it was to feel such grief for someone I didn't actually know.

2. My Favourite Dress by the Wedding Present

I think it's true when they say that most writers are wannabe rock stars. I was a really shy and introverted teenager and I used to daydream about being a kick-ass frontwoman like Courtney Love or Shirley Manson. When *Trackman* came out, I performed a reading from it at The Wedding Present's own festival (*At The Edge of the Sea*) which they put on in Brighton every year. It's pretty cool to say I've supported The Wedding Present and is probably the closest I'll ever come to being a rock star.

3. Good Day to Die by Travis

My sisters and I have loved Travis since we were teenagers and it's a bond we still share. When my youngest sister was still at school, she asked me what a metaphor was as she had to make some up for her English homework. To try and give her something relatable to help, I quoted the chorus from this song as an example. Instead of then using that as a starting point to come up with her own metaphors, she just ripped off the Travis lyrics and passed them off to the teacher as her own work. She came home full of praise from the clueless English teacher.

4. The Rebel on His Own Tonight by Malcolm Middleton and Alan Bissett

This is from the *Ballads of the Book* album, a collaborative album between Scottish musicians and writers. When I was first starting to take myself seriously as a writer, I went to

see Alan Bissett at the Edinburgh book festival and was just blown away by, not only his writing talent, but his ability as a performer too. It made me think that's what I want to do, but also made me despair that I'd ever be as good as that. I occasionally still make compilation CDs for friends and family and I always put this song on, it's just brilliant.

5. In Remote Part/Scottish Fiction by Idlewild

I was working in Virgin Megastore on Princes Street when *The Remote Part* album came out. That Summer I gave it to every single American tourist who came in looking for examples of Scottish music to take home. I feel like I should get some credit for helping the band break America! The main character in *Trackman* works in Virgin Megastore and Idlewild get a wee reference in there too. This track has the beautiful, lilting voice of Edwin Morgan on it. Play it while driving along a single-track road somewhere remote in Scotland and it's just perfect. It makes you homesick for your own country.

6. She's Leaving Home by The Beatles

I became obsessed by the Beatles when I was about 13 and that obsession has never really left me. I love songs where the lyrics tell a story and this is a perfect example of this, with multiple points of view, empathetic characters, and gaps in the narrative which allow the listener to fill in the details. John Lennon said that he based the parents' dialogue on phrases his Aunt Mimi used on him. I try and do the same when writing dialogue – replicate real speech to make it sound more authentic. A lot of people, after reading *Trackman*, said that they could hear my brother in the main character of Davie. I don't know if that pleased him or not!

7. Swim Until You Can't See Land by Frightened Rabbit

I first saw Frightened Rabbit play as a support band at Cabaret Voltaire in Edinburgh, and you could tell even then that they were going to be big. My abiding memory of that gig was an amazing cover they did of *Set You Free* by N-Trance (which I make reference to in *Trackman*). When I wrote my second novel, I struggled for ages to find a title for it. Then, in one of those lovely serendipitous ways, I just happened to be listening to *Swim Until You Can't See Land* by Frightened Rabbit and realised what a great title it would be. It just seemed to fit perfectly with the main themes of the novel.

8. Just Like Anyone by Soul Asylum

I watched a lot of MTV when I was a teenager and this video made a real impression on me. It had Claire Danes in it who I was a big fan of because of the show *My So-Called Life*. In the video she's bullied at school for having these weird lumps on her shoulders, but then finally she sprouts angel wings and soars over everyone. I used that image as a starting point for my sixth year English creative writing folio, and wrote some teenage-angsty stories about misunderstood misfits who were actually angels.