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# WEEKEND BREAK



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AP Photo  
From left, Ringo Starr, Paul McCartney, John Lennon and George Harrison of The Beatles appear at a press conference in New York in 1966.

## A shared love of **music**

### Remembering a bond on Father's Day

By RICH BROWN  
For The Astorian

**M**y father wasn't a musician, but he was musical. Other than a year of violin lessons when he was 10, he never formally studied music.

But for some reason he could play the piano by ear, knocking out many of his favorite jazz standards from the '40s and '50s.

However, it was his record collection that layered my childhood — and, indeed, my life — with a musicality that to this day often resonates as strongly as my sense of smell.

His collection was filled with many of the usual suspects of his era — Sinatra, Bennett, Como, Crosby. But there also were obscure jazz artists, soundtracks from musicals, folk music and the New York Philharmonic playing the classical repertoire. It was an early and foundational introduction of the power of music to lift you up, calm you down, make you think and transport you to another world.

When dad would come home from his office job, he wouldn't sit down and watch Walter Cronkite like a lot of parents did then. He would go to his stereo in the living room, put on a record and relax. Today we might call it "decompressing." But he was just relaxing and enjoying his music.

On winter Sunday nights, he would build a fire in the fireplace, put on some Sinatra and play games with us. Like any family, we had ups and downs, but to this day, Sinatra's "September of My Years" takes me to that living room and wraps me in a security blanket of all that was right in my childhood.

When The Beatles landed in America in February of 1964, I was 5 years old. Their music was different from anything I'd heard coming out of my dad's stereo. Even at that young age, it captured me — in no small part, I know, because I had already been exposed to so much variety in his music.

Like many young boys, I wanted to be like my dad. So at age 6, I asked him if he would buy me a Beatles record. Though he was not yet a Beatles fan — the hair, the screaming girls — he got it. He could see that glimmer of a future record collection inside me. And he knew the importance of that.

We went to J.C. Penney, and he let me go to the "45" section to pick one out. I selected "I Feel Fine" — not one of The Beatles' biggest hits, but notable for the initial fuzzy feedback that leads into a rocking riff by George Harrison.

I came home and put it on a little portable record player that just a year before was playing musical nursery rhyme records. It was an evolution for me and my dad. But I was off. Off on a journey that would be uniquely my own, but which was paved by my father's footsteps before me.

As I grew, my record collection grew, filled with some of the best the '60s and '70s had to offer. Yet I never forgot what was in my dad's collection and the way certain songs made me feel.

I remember coming home from college one time. But instead of putting on an Eagles or Doobie Brothers album, I searched out one of my dad's obscure quiet jazz piano records. I just needed to hear that song to remind me how fortunate I was to grow up in the home that I did.

One of music's great powers is to discover emotion and connect it to a time and place. There are songs that connect to old girlfriends, songs that connect to high school dances, songs from my childhood that bring my father to life in a way a simple story cannot. Music can remove the haze from old memories and can awaken the best moments of life's journey. And music's ability to create emotional connection ensures I won't forget even seemingly small episodes from my past — because the soundtrack was there.

When my dad passed away in 2015, my mother and my siblings began the unavoidable task of going through his possessions and deciding who wanted what. There was only one thing I wanted: his record collection. I needed that connection to my past and to him. While my two brothers and my

sister had record collections of their own, they knew my connection to that music ran deep, and they acceded to my only request.

Today, the collection sits in boxes in my basement. I don't often play them. Though I almost hate to admit it, if I want to hear one of those songs, I can usually search it out on Apple Music. But the physical presence of those albums ties me — gratefully — to my past in a way a song magically pulled out of the air never will.

The other night I decided was not a night when an Apple Music version of one of my dad's albums would suffice. I headed to the basement and searched through the boxes until I found it — Sinatra's "September of My Years" album. I poured a glass of wine and placed the vinyl on my turntable. Cut number one is the title track. I sat back, closed my eyes, and thought — "I feel fine."

*This essay was produced through a class taught by Tom Hallman Jr., a Pulitzer Prize winning reporter at The Oregonian.*

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