

# STRAND



September 2023



Noise Music • Hayao Miyazaki • Climate Activism •

The Economics of Women's Fashion • The Sari As (R)evolutionary Symbol •

Alternative Tourism • Navigating London • New Flatmates • Student Photography





# EDITOR'S LETTER

A very warm welcome to the Strand Magazine's Freshers' Week print edition for 2023! In this issue, you'll find everything from travel recaps to fashion tips, to recommendations for the best board games to buy for your student accommodation, and so much more. We hope you'll enjoy it as much as we've enjoyed putting it together.

This edition doesn't have a particular theme, but while I was editing, I thought a lot about 'journeys'. A lot of journeys have been documented in these pages, including the journey to (and through) university, or journeys around the world — from Japan, to India, to Portugal, and all the way back to London: this bustling capital city we all have in common. It also led me to think about the journeys of our growing team at the Strand, both individual and collective.

I first joined the Strand just after Freshers' Week myself, in October 2021, after holding a print edition much like this one in my hands. When I attended my first-ever meeting for the magazine's Music section, bright-eyed and willing to interview the first person that came up (whether or not I'd ever heard of them), I never once expected the journey it'd take me on — or that that journey would end with me becoming Editor in Chief!

It might sound like an exaggeration, but it's completely true: working on the Strand not only changed my whole experience of university, but my life beyond it. It's opened up so many doors I never knew could be there for me. The same is possible for anyone reading this right now, just as it was for me, and for all of the editors on our board. So, I hope you'll join the Strand's team this year; you're always welcome (and as you can see from the page next to me, there are so many sections to choose from)! Every journey starts with a step — and who knows where yours will take you?

Talia Andrea, Editor in Chief





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# Can Noise be Considered Music? A Deep Dive into Japan's Underground Noise Scene

Akane Hayashi

**In 1985, Japanese noise band Hanatarash drove a bulldozer through the back wall of a venue and onto the stage.** Just when you thought it couldn't get more feral, the main vocalist tried to throw a lit molotov cocktail onto the debris. This mythicised story of Hanatarash, a legendary band from Japan's underground noise scene from the 80s, has become symbolic of the genre's extremity and notorious onstage behaviour.

The Japanese noise scene is characterised by loud feedback, distortion, unorthodox vocals and instruments (such as a bulldozer), electronic equipment and anarchic performances. So, how did the genre start and what impact has it had on the course of music? To delve into these questions leads to a more fundamental question of whether noise can be considered music.

Noise music originally dates back to early 20th century Europe, when Futurist and Dadaist artists responded to the horrors of World War I and rapid industrialisation by rejecting establishments and traditional values. The movement reflects how humanity tried to process difficult events in a fast-changing world by adopting an amoral and nonsensical attitude towards established art forms. For example, Luigi Russel (1885-1947), an Italian Futurist painter, composer and designer of noise-generating devices, looked into the untapped territory of noise and technology for a new musical vocabulary which was more suited to modernism, and in turn shifted 20th century musical aesthetics.

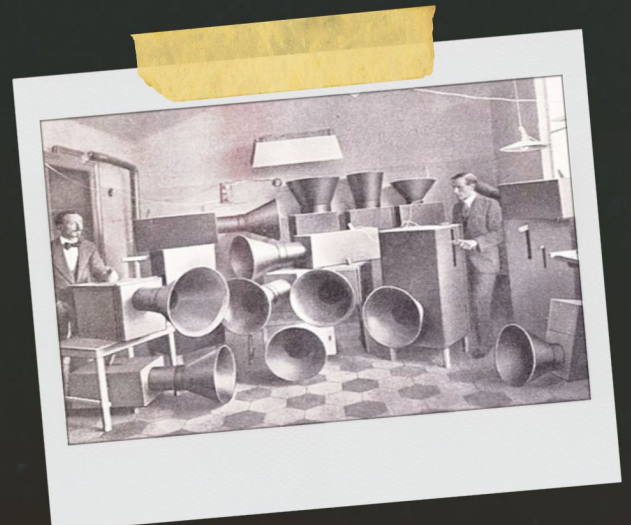
His non-traditional sounds that flirted with the boundaries of music served as a backdrop for many artists and movements, such as John Cage's polarising '4'33', the French Musique Concrète movement in the 1940s, and most notably, the Japanese noise scene. The extremity and vast growth of Japanese noise artists was pivotal in leading noise to become a genre, and significantly influenced the genre's direction.

During the 1970s, Japan's energetic underground music scene was fertile ground for the growth of noise music; independent venues, supportive communities and small labels like Alchemy Records provided the water for the artist's creativity to swim. During the same period, Japan was also fast becoming an economic juggernaut. Their rapid reconstruction of the country post-WWII transformed its society and urban landscape, perhaps explaining the anti-capitalist resonances in its music at the time. As the punk movement lost its momentum in London and New York, it arrived in Japan in 1978 and became a point of departure for many artists. The explosive increase of avant-garde artists in Tokyo and Osaka was driven by a general sense of alienation from the prevailing music scene and desire to transcend beyond the heap of punk imitators.

For example, the Kansai "No-Wave" scene was the Japanese counterpart of the US scene with the same name, both of which abrasively rejected the commerciality of new-wave music and the recycling of rock 'n' roll tropes. The intensity of spirit within the subculture would eventually lead to a more hardcore scene where artists took their broad inspirations to the extreme: the result of this was the emergence of Japan's noise scene.

The scene soon became characterised by anarchic on-stage behaviour and extreme experimentation. Bands like Hijokaidan and Hanatarash pioneered this brand of wildness and high-level chaos.

Hijokaidan's brutal, loud, distorted and highly improvised music was reflected in their equally unadulterated performances, their gigs typically including band members smashing venue lights, emptying fire extinguishers and throwing trash bags at the audience. Their performances made the Sex Pistols' punk antics look domesticated in comparison. And in the words of Jojo Hiroshige himself, a member of the band, "we were willing to be ugly".





Meanwhile, Merzbow was another Japanese artist who played a monumental role in popularising the noise scene, often dubbed the 'godfather of noise'. Not only did he pioneer noise in the 80s, but his overseas releases have connected the underground Japanese scene with the rest of the world. Among his relentless number of releases, his seminal album *Pulse Demon* (1996) stands out for its uncompromising and strident nature, with Pitchfork describing it as "simply pure sound, viciously unadulterated static". Throughout his career, he has collaborated with many artists and explored noise through various genres including tape manipulations, found objects, death metal and grindcore. During his career, Merzbow has sent shockwaves across the underground art rock scene, inspiring artists like Dälek, Matmos and Yellow Swans with his philosophy that music can never be too extreme.

Japan's underground noise scene has since travelled dynamically through time and space due to its successful overseas releases and collaboration with other genres. During the 90s when Japan's music industry thrived, indie music was seen to have as much value as the mainstream, so underground scenes attracted a solid international listener base. As the noise scene gained attention from the Downtown New York scene, leading Japanese noise artists to co-headline with overseas artists like avant-garde composer John Zorn and noise rock band Sonic Youth, the cross-fertilisation of crowds and artists connected their cultures and aesthetics worldwide. Eventually, the vast growth of the noise scene inspired other genres like Industrial Music (with bands like Einstürzende Neubauten and Throbbing Gristle) and Noise Rock (with Sonic Youth). Today, many prominent artists incorporate the noise-inspired techniques of heavy distortion and intensity of sound, as exemplified by cutting-edge artists like JPEG Mafia and Melt-Banana, proving the integral role of Japanese noise in the history of the noise genre.

The continuing legacy of noise is exemplified by Boris, a three-piece experimental sludge-metal band who have acclaimed a legendary worldwide status. Their incorporation of noise can be heard in their abrasive pulse-pounding 'Akuma no Uta' and conceptual 65-minute track 'Absoluteego'. Merzbow and Boris have worked on many projects together since 1997, with recent album *2ROI2PO* (2020) demonstrating Boris' thrilling and doom-stomping rock elements and Merzbow's



hellish noise soundscapes. Recently, on June 19th 2023, Boris and Merzbow performed together in Tokyo.

It is noteworthy that the gig's audience had many foreign fans, symbolising how noise has travelled internationally. The genre's enduring legacy was also evident from the various age groups in the crowd. Younger fans were head-banging at the front whilst older fans, who most likely got into noise during its first wave, were now salary-men on their way back from work. As I watched audience members interact after the show, recognising each other from previous noise gigs, it was clear that a distinct noise scene was palpable today.

The rich history of noise music hinges on the question: what distinguishes noise from music? It can understandably be difficult, almost punishing, to listen to a piece of noise music that is completely devoid of melody, harmony or rhythm. But listening to noise music can make us feel aware of the musical features and formations we have become accustomed to: by judging what we don't like in music, we can judge ourselves for our capacity (or incapacity) to take on sounds that lie outside what we consider music.

Most importantly, I believe what distinguishes music from noise is the artist's intentionality. Noise is defined as the unintended signals in transmission whilst expressing something, whilst music is any intentional omission of sounds. So, if an artist intends to transmit a deliberately noisy signal, this is considered music. Overall, an element of risk and friction ensures that the music doesn't just enter one ear and go out the other. Of course, perfect, clean performances are respectable and pretty, but the music is arguably unfeeling and antiseptic. The presence of noise, on the other hand, catches on to our ears like grit, and creates a human point of entry that allows a connection with the listener.





# **MITSKI'S 'BUG LIKE AN ANGEL':**

**Bianca Layog**

**SAYING SO  
MUCH IN SO  
LITTLE**



Mitski's latest single, 'Bug Like an Angel', shows what Mitski has done best: saying so much in so little. It's reminiscent of the sparse final tracks which have closed her previous albums, like *Puberty 2's* 'A Burning Hill', or *Be the Cowboy's* 'Two Slow Dancers'. It's interesting, then, that 'Bug Like an Angel' is the lead single of Mitski's upcoming album *The Land Is Inhospitable and So Are We*. Most artists would choose a more upbeat track—even from Mitski's own discography, 'Nobody' or 'The Only Heartbreaker' stand out as recent examples—but I can't help but admire her for this choice. In her latest era, Mitski seems to be willing to start from the end of the world, to start from the lull of destruction and desolation and discover what's left.

On 'A Burning Hill', Mitski sings: "I've been a forest fire / I am a forest fire / And I am the fire and I am the forest / And I am a witness watching it / I stand in a valley watching it / And you are not there at all". The brilliance in this song lies in its perspective. There's something so clean about the way Mitski splices time—from "I've been" to "I am"—and the image of the forest fire. She embodies it, only to say in the line afterwards that she is a witness watching herself burn. Because the 'you' is absent, Mitski has been forced to fulfill all these roles: to watch the suffering she (the fire) is inflicting on herself (the forest) from outside of her body.

'A Burning Hill' shows what 'Bug Like an Angel' does so well. In the music video for 'Bug Like an Angel', Mitski plays guitar in what looks like a religious choral group as an elderly woman stumbles on the cobblestone street in front of them. On a table, a cardboard sign reads: CHRIST OFFERS FORGIVENESS FOR EVERYONE EVERYWHERE. The woman then stumbles into their table, tipping over a glass bowl that spills marshmallows onto the street. She is pushed under the loving arm of the choir conductor, as the choir sings "They break you right back". The conductor holds her hand and places her palm flat on the woman's cheek. For a few moments, the woman seems comforted.

The camera then focuses on Mitski, who sings: "When I'm bent over, / wishin' it was over / makin' all variety of vows I'll never keep / I try to remember the wrath of the devil was also given him by God". The elderly woman, who at this point is still bent under the conductor's arm, sticks her tongue out at the choir group and then stumbles away. When focused only on the song itself, it's difficult to discern which interpretation of "bent over" feels most correct: are we seeing her bent over the toilet, after a night spent drinking? Should we be focusing on the line's sexual undertone? Or is Mitski bent over in prayer?

The presence of religion in this song—angel, vows, the devil, and God—hints at its inclusion in the overall theme of the album. Mitski's latest project comes during an ever-worsening time for American and global politics, where ecological activism is becoming more and more relevant. It is impossible to portray the hostile environment of the United States without mentioning God primarily because it is tied so closely with Americans' political identities.

'The wrath of the devil was also given him by God', perhaps the most striking line on this track, is accompanied in the video by an intensifying red light on Mitski's left, bathing her face in a half-red, half-blue glow. The visuals of the video recall American politics—red for Republican, blue for Democrat—and the fraught battleground that is religion. It's fascinating to watch how the visual complements the music. Many times, music videos fail to add anything fresh to the songs they accompany. In this case, every second of the video feels vital to understanding Mitski's vision behind the song.

On the surface, 'Bug Like an Angel' seems to be about alcoholism and escapism— and it is! But it's also a window into 2023, a year full of apathy and isolation even three years out from the beginning of the pandemic. Perhaps Mitski is suggesting that we shouldn't so quickly assign fault to a singular party and instead question the systems that enable apathy. Of course, making this conclusion is the neat solution. More than anything, I think that Mitski would hate any easy answer, mostly because the most accurate catalogue is the human one, with every grey perspective and inflection. Nothing is promised, not even the bliss of ignorance. "Amateur mistake" she sings, "You can take it from me".



**Hayao Miyazaki, who turned 82 in January, is unquestionably the wizard of the animated film format.** The Japanese animator behind Studio Ghibli classics like *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), *Spirited Away* (2001) and *Howl's Moving Castle* (2004), has always astonished the world with his unique artwork, receiving massive respect and accolades. Miyazaki's animation is particularly beloved and respected because of its liminality between fantasy and realism. Despite their beautiful artwork and cute characters like Totoro, Catbus and Ponyo, Miyazaki's narratives also convey realistic and relatable themes like environmentalism and war.

Dedicating his life to the audience, Miyazaki has refrained from drawing exactly what he wants to draw for 60 years. Now, the question is; what happens when Miyazaki is relieved of the restrictions of a Studio Ghibli animator, so he can finally, frankly and unapologetically make a film for himself that depicts his mind? The answer is *The Boy and the Heron*.

This film can be seen as a biography of Hayao Miyazaki. He projects his life onto the fantasy narrative of a young boy, Mahito, who loses his mother during World War 2. After his mother's death, Mahito's father remarries his aunt and they move from Tokyo to the countryside.

While struggling to adapt himself to his new life, Mahito encounters a heron, who leads him to an abandoned tower deep in the mountain. The adventure Mahito encounters inside the tower symbolizes Miyazaki's life, reflecting on his childhood, confronting loss and loneliness, and his turbulent animating career (it is entertaining to see many moments and elements in the film that remind us of classic Studio Ghibli films). The film is loosely based on *How Do You Live?*, a book by Genzaburo Yoshino which inspired Miyazaki's childhood and life (and which inspired the original Japanese title of the film). Yoshino's book is about someone experiencing spiritual growth while witnessing and tackling social inequality, and learning from his mistakes. The book, which gives a great insight into the protagonist's way of life, overlaps with Miyazaki's portrayal of his own life. Through Mahito's journey, it feels like Miyazaki is guiding us, and giving us some tips for how to live during the chaotic and dark age in which we find ourselves.

The film was released in Japan in July, and opinions are polarized. Most negative reviews online claimed the film was "weird," "not making any sense," and, in particular, "not Ghibli-like". Honestly, they are actually right. It was a bold decision for Miyazaki to make his 13th film a film about himself. Miyazaki's own comment on the film, directed to its audience, was: "You probably didn't understand what you saw, did you? I also didn't understand some of it" (Asahi Shimbun, 14 July 2023). How can we understand this film about Miyazaki when Miyazaki himself does not even understand it?

It is definitely the most intricate Studio Ghibli film ever, and you cannot expect this film to be fun and family-friendly like Totoro. But does that make it a disappointment?

Absolutely not. With legendary *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1996) animation director Takeshi Honda on board, the animation is vivid, beautiful, and lively but (as always) bizarre. In fact, the first 10 minutes is Studio Ghibli at its best. You will also hear Joe Hisaishi's serene piano-based soundtrack. It isn't guaranteed that this film will be on everyone's favourite Ghibli film list, but it is still a breathtaking experience; the aesthetic legacy and the essence of Studio Ghibli still firmly present.

At what is likely the end of his career, Miyazaki chose to expose himself emotionally in *The Boy and the Heron*. Despite there being no correct answer in the lessons to be taken away, we can clearly see Miyazaki's hope for the audience to create a better world. With the audience having what they felt and thought from Miyazaki's self-portrait, the film asks us in the end, "how do you live?" The answer lies within us. It is a majestic farewell from a genius who has been perfecting his craft for 60 years, asking an earnest question to the coming generation..



Yuki Fujiwara

# 'THE BOY AND THE HERON' REVIEW:



**HAYAO  
MIYAZAKI'S  
SELFISH  
BUT  
COMPELLING  
FINAL ART  
PIECE**



# "Is Climate Activism Working?": A Panel Discussion At The Southbank Centre

Ariunzaya Batkhuyag

"...Let's turn the fierce force of our love / To saving life on this planet / March and sing / And do the tough thing..." recites Ben Okri from his latest book *Tiger Work* as a prologue to the panel discussion titled "Is Climate Activism Working?". As a part of Southbank Centre's climate crisis-focused summer programme Planet Summer, the forum raises the question of whether climate activists' disruptive measures are effective ways of communicating climate emergency, or counterproductive actions that might alienate the public from the discourse. Four climate advocates, in their own rights, dissect this rather heated topic in Queen Elizabeth Hall at the Southbank Centre.

Chair of the debate Ritula Shah begins by welcoming the speakers: Phoebe Plummer, a Just Stop Oil activist; Tom Harwood, a deputy political editor of GB News; Ben Okri, a Booker Prize-winning novelist and poet; and Dr Rupert Read, the co-director of the Climate Majority Project. Each speaker is given three minutes to present their argument for the titular question, "Is Climate Activism Working?". After this, the debaters respond to each other and the questions from the audience.

Phoebe Plummer starts the discussion by questioning the debate prompt itself. She says, "I don't think we should be asking the question 'Is Climate Activism working?'. I think we all need to be talking about why there is such an urgent need for action on the climate crisis." By referencing an estimation on climate refugees in 2030 published in *Nature Sustainability* journal, she earnestly argues that ordinary people are taking radical actions to convey climate emergency since the government is willingly making decisions such as launching new fossil fuel licences that will worsen what is already a dire situation.

While listening to her speak, I find myself sympathising with Phoebe Plummer in some aspects. Her anger and frustration with the government's actions fuelling the climate crisis and their inaction towards combating it might be a little too familiar to young people who are struggling with climate anxiety.

From then on, Tom Harwood presents his perspective by celebrating how much the UK government has done to decrease the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere since 1990.

Afterwards, he lists climate action agreements the UK has pledged to before the Just Stop Oil group formed. He weaves his overt appraisal of the UK government for how much they have already done with his disapproval of the radical activist group Just Stop Oil. Moreover, he contends that such "extreme" activism could have a polarising effect. Harwood rhetorically asks, "...could it be that people start to question the need for Net Zero more than they currently do because this [radical activism] politicises a debate that currently holds consensus in this country?".

This pat on the shoulder for doing the bare minimum does not come across as a testament for climate action but an excuse for negligence of climate responsibility. Also, Harwood's distrust in the public that people would be dissuaded from the possibility of having a sustainable future warns us about how vulnerable our mentality can be.

A former Extinction Rebellion spokesperson Dr Rupert Read begins his argument by responding to the preceding speech with the old phrase "Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics". He states that if the calculation is done correctly, the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> reduction the UK has done is less than 10%. Similar to Plummer, he rejects the question and reframes it to whether activism is the only approach or not. Read recognises that most people are not activists, which does not mean they are ignorant of the climate crisis. Far from it, he says the Climate Majority Project believes that "there is a silent moderate majority in this country which is yearning to know what to do to put right the terrible wrongs that our government and our civilisation are currently engaged in." Thus, he advocates for implementable climate actions and adaptation to the new climate on a community level. He believes that individuals campaigning for a change of action in their workplaces and communities will amount to making a big difference.

Ben Okri finally answers the debate question, "Is Climate Activism Working?" by saying that it has to exist for the necessary actions to be initiated. He reminds us that every social rights movement began with a radical action. From Suffragettes to Nelson Mandela, activists have always been confronted with



the question of whether their actions are fruitful or counterproductive. Okri expresses his annoyance with such doubts by professing, "I think the level of the question being asked for those who are trying to draw attention to it is unfortunately rather pathetically small." An all-encompassing change begins with activism that grasps people's minds and hearts; hence, in order for there to be a sustainable earth that involves every breathing being, people need to feel the urgency, which is why activism has to exist and evolve. The novelist says, "...it [activism] has to catch our imagination to annoy us, to irritate us, to keep the issue constantly in our mind and above all to saturate the atmosphere, so that this issue is completely unavoidable."

In the midst of these strong arguments for climate activism, we also need to acknowledge the inconveniences such disruptive acts are causing to the common people. Disturbances that occurred from the blocked roads and bridges indeed reveal that the civilians are the ones who bear the brunt of the government's failure in climate action. As such, Tom Harwood's concern about climate activism's potential polarising effect proves to be relevant.

While the measures are distressing, the cause of climate activism should not be overlooked. One could disapprove of activist groups' methods; however, we cannot reject the idea of living on a habitable planet in the future. As Phoebe Plummer responds, "Just Stop Oil's disruption will end the moment that the government makes that statement [ceasing the new oil, gas, and coal licences]".

In essence, Southbank presents four distinct views on climate activism. A movement for sustainability cannot be achieved by only one approach. We need a plurality of voices and actions to save this planet. We need not debate about how to talk about the climate crisis but what to do to solve this issue. As Dr Rupert Read advocates, we ought to educate ourselves to prepare for the future and implement climate actions in our communities, whether that be neighbourhood, university campus or workplace. Lastly, engaging with climate crisis-related events might be the most straightforward action we can take. As Ben Okri eloquently portrays, "Collective change is only possible when we believe it on an individual level, so please support these events and spread the spirit".







# Stock Prices VS Hemlines: How The Economy Influences Women's Fashion



**Megan Shears**

Look at any pre-Fall 2023 collection, whether it be the collections of Christian Dior or Chanel. You will notice three things: incredible looks, long hemlines, and low heels. That is, if any heel at all. Look at the economic forecast and you will find that, according to *The Economist*, a global recession is "inevitable". Whilst the two seem mutually exclusive, it has long been a question amongst economists whether there is a link between the two. How true can this be? Can the fashion forecast reliably predict the state of an economy?

The Hemline Index is a theory suggesting that the length of women's skirts can be used as a barometer for the economy. According to this theory, when the stock market is thriving and the economy is strong, hemlines rise and women's skirts become shorter. Conversely, during times of economic hardship, hemlines fall and skirts become longer. The origins of the Hemline Index can be traced back to the 1920s when fashion designers began to experiment with shorter hemlines in response to the rise of modernism and changing social attitudes towards women. During the Great Depression, hemlines dropped as a result of the economic turmoil. By the end of the 1930s, long skirts had become a symbol of austerity.

In Robin Givhan's *The Battle of Versailles: The Night American Fashion Stumbled into the Spotlight and made History*, Givhan writes, "The Americans' clothing was simple, accessible, and easy to wear. It reflected the times, and it resonated with the audience." The times being, in this case, the 1970s, a time distinguished by a high number of coups, domestic crises, civil wars, and other military conflicts that resulted from, or were connected to, decolonization, as well as the fight between the West, the Warsaw Pact, and the Non-Aligned Movement.

So we've seen miniskirts make a comeback within the last few years with brands such as the Miu Miu Micro-Mini skirt from their SS22 collection, and the Diesel Fall 2022 Belt Skirt. These 2022 collections could have been the result of the post-pandemic celebration: a world remerging within a new environment. One that is rebellious after months of guidelines and rules. To a generation that, for the first time in a long time, could finally express themselves.

The Hemline Index assumes a simple correlation between hemlines and the economy, but an assumption so bold can hardly stand alone. Fashion can indeed express the zeitgeist but it is also impacted by a wide range of other elements, such as societal trends, personal tastes, and technological breakthroughs. For example, in the 1960s hemlines rose dramatically as a result of the cultural revolution, the rise of the women's movement and the availability of new materials and manufacturing techniques.

Similarly, in the 1990s, the popularity of miniskirts was driven by the rise of grunge and hip-hop, rather than the state of the economy. This brings into question whether or not this influence is something that is solely economic.

We've also seen an increased awareness of what TikTok is dubbing 'recession-core', a sub-genre to the 'core' trends that have been circulating social media platforms for quite some time now. This essentially points out the lack of opulence and a turn towards simplistic designs, such as scarcity of jewellery on recent red-carpet award shows. This has been seen most recently at the Golden Globes. Though this isn't the first time 'recession-core' has been popularised, this movement was also present during the 2008 financial crisis. This look downplays the notion of excess and materialism and emphasises cosiness, functionality, and simplicity while frequently including second-hand or vintage pieces.

In the end, the Hemline Index provides an interesting perspective on the relationship between fashion and the economy but should be viewed as more of a cultural myth than a scientific indicator. Fashion is a complex and multifaceted industry, influenced by a variety of factors, and the length of women's skirts should not be used as a sole measure of the state of the economy. And whilst it could be considered an indicator of an economy's vitality, we cannot be so bold in assuming that it forecasts this, but merely reflects it.



# Offbeat Sari - A Journey of Evolution and Revolution

Aaliyah Ahmed

The heady aroma of chai spices filling the air, memories of filling masala dhabas and the unmatched taste of our Nanima's cooking – these are the sensory imprints that echo in the hearts of the South Asian diaspora in the UK. Amidst the shared cultural experiences, the sari stands tall as a symbol of identity, resistance, and empowerment. Over the summer, the Design Museum Kensington played host to an extraordinary exhibition, *The Offbeat Sari*, curated by Priya Khanchandani. This collection of saris showcased their multifaceted nature and explored their revolutionary and contemporary growth, challenging prejudices and celebrating their re-emergence by a new generation.

Growing up as a second-generation Indian immigrant, the sari to me represents not just a piece of clothing; it is an embodiment of tradition and heritage. Whether it is wrapped, folded, pleated, or draped – the sari is a rich cultural legacy, passed down through generations. Families in the diaspora often cherish moments of learning from their parents and grandparents, primarily around food, clothes, and values. The exhibition triggered this nostalgia and educates visitors with the journey of the sari; and how it has transformed into the symbol it has become today.

The exhibition displayed almost 100 saris loaned by designers and studios across India. These masterpieces showcase the creativity and innovation in sari design. The likes of Raw Mango, AKAARO, Bodice, NorBlack NorWhite, and more, brought forth their unique interpretations of this iconic garment.

From being seen as formal and uncomfortable, to being a form of identity and resistance, the sari has undergone a remarkable transformation over the last decade. In the post-industrial period in India, the material experienced a decline in popularity due to its association with restrictive wear and domesticity.

Bollywood's portrayal further complicated matters, often fetishising and objectifying sari-wearing women. However, recent years have witnessed a creative resurgence of the sari. Social media platforms like Instagram have given rise to the 'Saree Not Sorry' movement, encouraging women to embrace the sari as a statement of individuality and empowerment. Today, the sari has been taken back and is largely worn with pride.

The exhibition showcased the shift from traditional-wear

of the sari, to a more adaptable and modern take that has entered the West, like Indian Businesswoman Natasha Poonwalla's groundbreaking outfit at the New York Met Gala in 2022. The new age of sari design has also played around with material, as shown by Lady Gaga's jersey sari worn in 2010 designed by Tarun Tahiliani, and Rimzin Dadu's astonishing craft of imitating cloth with hair-thin stainless steel threads. These more wearable and eco-friendly designs have shown the youth that we have taken back the sari, and they are not a piece from the past – I never expected to see a sari styled with a graphic tee and Air Forces during my visit!

The sari has played a pivotal role in reshaping social narratives and empowering marginalised communities. By divorcing it from its colonial gaze, what was once a symbol of social class and environment has become an outlet for creativity and individuality. It has evolved into a vehicle for expressing oneself, challenging conventions, and rejecting the status quo. The sari has defied conventional associations with passivity and formality: the exhibition showed this, by displaying some pieces in less conventional contexts, such as skateboarding and rock climbing. Moreover, the eye-catching garments have drawn attention to urgent issues like gender rights and ecological crises, amplifying under-represented voices and strengthening their presence in Indian society. From curating pieces that have represented political movements such as the pink fabric of the Gulabi Gang and stork headpieces worn by the Hargilla Army, to Sari designers reclaiming and reusing fabrics to combat the carbon emissions produced by the fashion industry, *The Offbeat Sari* shows how the piece of clothing has been used as a symbol of mobility and advancement in the political realm.

The sari is not just a garment; it is an evolving symbol of cultural identity, resilience, and adaptability. It transcends time, culture, and geographic boundaries. Personal experiences shape its meaning, and its versatility allows us to represent our uniqueness. As we educate ourselves about how our ancestors used saris in the past, we also witness their transformation and reclamation in the present. The exhibition's takeaway is that we, the new wave of youth, are embracing our cultural identity and adapting the sari to suit the needs of the future. The sari's journey is an ever-changing, personal tale of women owning themselves and taking control, uniting generations in celebration of this iconic garment.







# My Top 5 Picks From *The Offbeat Sari*: Celebrity Couture, Symbols of Resistance, and More

Stefi Komala

## 5. *HUEMN's Quilted Sari*

HUEMN is an award-winning fashion label based in India. The brand has become known for creating unisex streetwear. Some of these garments explore the intersection between traditional fashion and streetwear. This quilted sari falls under the latter category. The sari's quilted texture reminds me of the North Face puffer jackets donned by hundreds of students in London. I like how HUEMN adapted the sari for colder climates without stripping it of its fluid nature. The quilt can also be draped in multiple ways.

## 4. *Rimzim Dadu's Gold Sculpted Sari*

Many of Rimzim Dadu's saris have a shimmery, metallic look which catches the eye from a mile away. This look is achieved through the manipulation of thin steel wires. A sewing machine is used to stitch the wires together, creating a smooth, fluid surface which glimmers under the light. It was difficult not to appreciate the technique needed to create such an elegantly draped pallu.

## 3. *Sampat Pal Devi's Pink Sari*

Despite its simple design, I couldn't turn away from it. The sari had a commanding presence. Perhaps this is due to its bold, fiery colour—or perhaps the sari takes after its owner, Sampat Pal Devi. Sampat Pal is an Indian social activist who leads the Gulabi Gang. The gang is a feminist vigilante group which aims to address issues of domestic abuse. They focus on violence against women in rural areas, where there tends to be a lack of support from law enforcing bodies. The gang is widely recognized for wearing bright pink saris; the very fabric they wore became a symbol of resistance against oppressive patriarchies.

## 2. *Amit Aggarwal's Seamless Sari*

Amit Aggarwal is an Indian couturier who creates saris with a modern touch. His designs are known for having sculptural shapes which flatter the body's natural curves. In order to create these silhouettes, he experiments with industrial materials and recycled objects. Aggarwal's seamless sari was made using vintage patola saris. These patola saris were incredibly difficult to make: only an experienced artisan could create complex patterns by tie-dyeing yarn and weaving it by hand.

With the Earth's atmosphere currently soaring to hotter temperatures than ever, sustainable fashion has become an equally hot topic. I loved seeing how vintage clothing was repurposed for haute couture.

## 1. *The Sabyasachi x Schiaparelli MET Gala Sari*

Before leaving the exhibition, I walked all the way back to the first room. I couldn't leave without taking a final glimpse at this sari. It was designed by Sabyasachi, a luxury designer whose specialty is bridal fashion. The bustier was created by Schiaparelli, a brand which recently went viral for creating dresses with taxidermic animal heads.

When designers go overboard with shiny details, the final product can end up looking cheap. However, this sari strikes a perfect balance between glamour and elegance. Its miniature sequins and gleaming pearls create patterns which don't overwhelm the eyes; Sabyasachi's sari belongs on the red carpet. Secondly, I'm a fan of the bustier's abstract shape. It resembles the planetary rings of a celestial body, and this otherworldly element makes Poonawalla look ethereal. Juxtaposing Schiaparelli's bustier with a traditional sari makes for a truly intriguing look.





# A Tale of Two Holidays: How to Spend the Summer in Portugal

Sophia Dex

It feels as if Portuguese holiday posts have been dominating Instagram this summer, with each feed refresh and story swipe furthering an onslaught of colourful buildings, beautiful tiles, and winding narrow streets. Even face-to-face, mentions of trips to Lisbon seem peppered into every other conversation when the topic of summer plans surfaces. While Lisbon in particular has certainly been a popular Portuguese destination this summer, I am likely just experiencing the Baader-Meinhof phenomenon, or “red car syndrome”, as I have recently spent over a month in Portugal, and I am planning to return soon. While I have experienced the ever-so-popular Lisbon, Portugal’s travel offerings extend far beyond the typical city break, and can suit travellers with more constrained budgets, as well as the desire to connect with nature and other young people: as exemplified by my Workaway experience outside of Guarda.

## LISBON

Lisbon is vibrant and energetic, rife with things to see and do, alongside thousands of friendly strangers. Admittedly, it feels very touristy, as the streets are overrun by visitors during the summer high season. In Lisbon alone, skirting around these rowdy groups in the sweltering heat could be frustrating, but visiting with my best friends from high school, we opted to lean into our unshakable identity as American tourists and embrace what the city had to offer us, without trying too hard to masquerade as locals.

Our trip to Lisbon was born out of an aspiring graduation trip, sidelined until after we began university thanks to the pandemic’s impact on international travel. As such, it was truly marked by teenage exuberance—a cathartic representation of our childhood dreams of adventure and freedom far from the quiet Seattle suburb we grew up in.

Most days began with decadent meals at one of Lisbon’s plethora of brunch spots (Mila and Nicolau were two of the best, especially for vegan options). Very well-fuelled, we explored the city’s extensive second-hand shopping options in between lengthy museum visits. The museums of Lisbon are an efficient way to spend the day away from the tourist crowds and blazing sun, learning about topics spanning from the country’s fight against dictatorship to the generation of energy and technology and the evolution of art. The best three were the Museu do Aljube Resistência e Liberdade, the Museum of Art, Architecture and Technology (MAAT), and the Museu Coleção Berardo, both of which were the most enjoyable in Lisbon but also some of the most interesting I’ve ever visited, irrespective of location.

Internet recommendations heavily influenced our itinerary, which were generally pleasant but occasionally less than satisfactory. Time Out Market in particular, touted by most recommendation sites and lists, is overcrowded and underwhelming - nothing special or noteworthy in a city full of better food in nicer atmospheres. A further journey from the



city centre, LX Factory has much more to offer, full of small shops, restaurants, the occasional art exhibition, and most importantly, the phenomenal Ler Devagar bookshop. Exceeding all expectations, however, was Ponto Final—Lisbon's less-than secret waterfront restaurant. While most restaurants frequented by tourists tend to serve up disappointing and overpriced fare, Ponto Final's food is delicious and generously portioned, in addition to being deceptively affordable considering the unbeatable views that accompany the meal. We then took a ferry ride across the Tagus to watch the sunset; even though you need to book months in advance for a sunset slot, it was worth it to watch the sun go down over Lisbon, casting a golden glow from the yellow tables teetering on the edge of the pier all the way to the city.

While our girls' trip was resoundingly successful and we enjoyed our time immensely, the week was neither relaxing nor particularly explorative, and our experience of Lisbon generally failed to scratch below the generic attractions and activities of moderately savvy travellers. Nevertheless, it was the perfect setting for a long-awaited getaway and a welcome catchup after our first year at universities an ocean apart. We indulged and revelled to our hearts' content, satiated by the revival of our teenage sisterhood. For those who don't mind the ever-increasing droves of tourists and the inflated prices that come with every popular destination, Lisbon guarantees a picturesque and uncomplicated holiday.

## GUARDA: VINHA DA MANTA

A month after my initial visit, I returned to spend July in central Portugal's Mondego Valley — a place unfathomably removed from the sterile office internships I had envisioned (and dreaded) spending my summers undertaking. A month at Vinha da Manta, a Workaway located on an old Portuguese farm-turned-glamping holiday spot, provided everything that Lisbon could not. While staying in hostels has always been heralded as a cheap source of accommodation and companionship while solo travelling, the rising cost of a bunk and pervasive safety concerns as a woman travelling alone lessen the appeal. Thus, the cost of transport and a few hours a day of free labour is a small price to pay for a bed, three meals a day, and the friendship of a dozen other young travellers. While the tasks of this particular Workaway had us spending considerable time washing mountains of dishes, pulling weeds in the scorching sun, and painting weathered furniture, our time was characterised by intense relaxation, true camaraderie, and joy. Once our daily work was complete, we were free to do as we pleased, whether it was swimming in the frigid river or lily pad-strewn natural pool, taking the horses out to gallop through the countryside, or lounging with a cold beer in hand for hours of gleeful conversation.

To engage in this type of getaway is to dive out of one's comfort zone and plunge straight into the deep end, embracing the uncertainty of travelling off the beaten track to a place full of strangers, where you must quickly adapt to the expectations and procedures of a foreign environment. Our hosts, a lovely Dutch couple, provided little structure





for us aside from weekly chore schedules, but the ambiguity this left us with was alleviated by the climate of flexibility, safety, and cooperation. Mistakes were expected and even embraced as we became acclimated; a plate I shattered while drying dishes was met with quick reassurance that breaking dishes was considered lucky to the Dutch — though it would be appreciated if most of the crockery was kept intact, as multiple sets of hands appeared to clear the shards off the floor. Close quarters and the necessity for teamwork knit us together, and within days we were gallivanting about the hillside and endlessly babbling like old friends.

A month at Vinha da Manta provided an opportunity to dedicate plenty of time to existing interests and talents while tackling new ones. For the first time in years, I was able to go riding, but the vast scenery and freedom of these horses presented a wholly different challenge from the equitation I was accustomed to. A few of us learned how to make the perfect cappuccino, and others learned the correct way to uproot lily pads when they began overtaking the pond. When outdoor activities weren't as appealing, we could find solace in the kitchen, where massive, marvellous meals were cooked for guests throughout the week. Our host was a truly talented chef, as was one of the volunteers, and between the two of them we ended each day with extravagant spreads: green curry, beetroot soup, wild mushroom risotto, lasagna, colourful salads, woodfired pizza, and more. The food was made with as much as we could harvest from the garden each week and there was always room to lend a hand and learn new methods and recipes in the process.

## THE FINAL VERDICT

The polar opposite of my first foray into Portugal, my Workaway left me feeling invigorated and transformed as I returned to London. An extended break from the city provided a welcome sense of calm and clarity, imbued with motivation to expand my horizons. Possibly the greatest reassurance I left with was comfort with uncertainty—at 19, I was one of the youngest of the group, which extended from 18 to 30 years old—as even the oldest were in some sort of transition. The example of perfectly happy and adjusted adults still taking time between jobs or before additional study to travel, seeking alternative lifestyles and cultures, is a welcome change from the narrative of adulthood I've grown up with. What began as a way to pass the summer and escape the challenges of finding housing in London or paying for longer-term travel without running my savings dry ended up surpassing all expectations multiple times over.





# An Introvert's Guide to London: Navigating the Bustle and Isolation of the Capital

Faye Elder



**London has long been a city that welcomes the outgoing and extroverted.** Endlessly hectic, the streets of central London always seem to be overly crowded and brimming with life. This can be daunting for an introvert, leaving them drained and overwhelmed. Learning to find a balance between the city's fast-paced lifestyle and your own well-being can be difficult in such a busy capital, but doing so allows you to thrive.

I've always considered myself to be more of an introverted person. The transition from living at home to university halls was a somewhat difficult one for me. Especially within Freshers' Week, I felt daunted by the idea of never truly feeling 'alone'. There was always a social event occurring, whether in the common room or with new friends on my course, and the FOMO was real. I found my social battery becoming more and more drained, yet I had increasingly less time to recharge.

However, on reflection, I don't believe this is a negative thing. In fact, London has continued to challenge my introverted nature and urged me out of my comfort zone. I find myself approaching people I don't know and engaging in conversations. I catch myself confidently strutting around the city, unfazed by what others may think of me.

I quickly realised that in London, nearly anything passes with little to no reaction. You can wear the wackiest outfits and hardly anyone takes notice. You can eat dinner by yourself in a restaurant and it is normal. London seems to defy the norms ingrained in most of the UK, including my small hometown on the outskirts of Manchester, where I often battled with feeling unconventional. I desired to leave my hometown and get as far away as possible from the judgement that is ingrained in its small-mindedness.

Since moving to London, I no longer feel like an outsider. As I moved without knowing anybody, London allowed me to control my own narrative and embrace myself without being conscious of people's preconceived ideas of me.

London is a city that welcomes difference and embraces it. Its uniqueness is what makes it the perfect city for an introvert: it allows you to exist without judgement or being noticed.

Living in London also allows you to find comfort in solitude. For an introvert, it is easy to shut yourself in your room and not engage in events at halls or try to make new friends. However, it is important to not entirely exclude yourself from a thriving community. I found that it is essential to find a balance between being introverted and extroverted. It is important to challenge your introverted nature by meeting new people and trying new things.

Instead of burning yourself out socially, you should choose to spend your time doing things that interest you, such as attending meetings of societies that you want to join or events that align with your interests. For instance, I joined the Baking Society, where I met people who were like myself and shared my interests. Finding like-minded people lets you make friends easier, as you already have so much in common!

Exploring the whole city at once can also be overwhelming. I would suggest that you begin by exploring the area you live in. In my first year, I lived in student accommodation near London Bridge. I started to explore the area by myself, going to nearby parks and coffee shops to experience going out alone. Once I felt comfortable with this, I was able to visit other boroughs and explore the parts of London I'd been excited to see. By assessing what it is you want to gain from the city, you can choose where to explore and ultimately find places where you feel at ease.

It is important to do so on your own terms and within social settings that you feel comfortable with. Finding a comfortable balance between solitude and engagement is key to enriching your experience in such a diverse city. Remember, it's about exploring and finding your own unique place within the capital and all that it has to offer.



# The Ultimate List of Board Games for New Flatmates

## Gio Eldred Mitre

**Moving to halls of residence and meeting new flatmates was both thrilling and daunting for me.** The idea of university life excited me but figuring out how to get along with my flatmates seemed like a big challenge, especially when we didn't share the same schedules or hobbies. I wanted to create a friendly atmosphere with these strangers who would now be my living companions. I was eager to get to know them, but I didn't know where to start. Then, it hit me - why not organise a game night? I love board games and card games and I thought they could be a perfect way to have fun and bond with my flatmates. Moreover, games can spark playful rivalry, teamwork, and humour, which would be great for breaking the ice and making everyone feel more comfortable. In this article, I'll share some of my games to break the ice.

### ***Exploding Kittens* by The Oatmeal**

A whisker-raising game that combines the suspense of Russian Roulette with the playful flair of Uno. A deck of cards brimming with explosive potential and it is your mission to avoid drawing the dreaded exploding kitten that could spell catastrophe for your game. You and your new flatmates will take turns drawing cards, hoping luck is on your side. Peek at cards to evade the detonating danger, force opponents to draw multiple cards, or shuffle the deck to tempt fate. As the deck dwindles, the tension escalates and the odds of encountering a fiery feline fiasco increase. This delightfully absurd and quick to pick up game guarantees laughter and adrenaline as you embrace the art of chance and strategy.

### ***Exit The Game* by Thames & Kosmos**

A fantastic series of escape room games designed for home entertainment. Get ready to unleash your problem-solving skills as you crack codes, solve riddles, and unravel puzzles to escape from intriguing imaginary rooms and environments. But beware, the clock is ticking! Among my personal favourites are 'The Abandoned Cabin', where you find yourselves unexpectedly locked inside with only a spinning code dial and a mysterious book to guide your escape. Or how about 'The Haunted Roller Coaster', where the ride takes an unexpected turn, leaving you trapped in a world of horror? For those who fancy a classic murder mystery, 'Dead Man on The Orient Express' puts you aboard the iconic train, racing against time to catch the culprit before they vanish at the next station.

### ***Anomia* by Anomia Press**

This exhilarating game that taps into our minds is filled with a wealth of random information - from favourite foods, catchy pop songs, and obscure websites. Here's how it goes: Draw a card from the centre pile and reveal a symbol. Does it match a symbol on another player's card? If yes, then it is time for a face-off! You must quickly give an example of the person, place, or thing on their card before they do the same for yours. Victorious? You claim their card and the game continues. But hold on, it is not all straightforward! Wild cards spice things up by allowing non-matching symbols to become matches, keeping you on your toes with even more things to focus on. Brace yourself for cascading face-offs when you hand over a lost card, revealing a fresh top card on your play pile. The action never stops in *Anomia*, making it a must-play game for you and your new flatmates.

### ***Taco Cat Goat Cheese Pizza* by Dolphin Hat Games**

An uproarious card game that will leave you in stitches. Bursting with hand-slapping mayhem, it shares the spirit of classic games like *Snap* and *Dobble*. As the game unfolds, each player places a card from their hand face up into a communal pile while chanting the hilarious mantra of "taco/cat/goat/cheese/pizza" in sequence. But beware, when a card matches the mantra, it is an explosive moment — everyone races to slap their hand





on the deck, with the slowest slapper picking up the cards. The goal is simple; be the one to shed all your cards first and claim victory!

Special action cards like the gorilla, narwhal, and groundhog come into play, prompting players to perform amusing gestures before dashing to slap the deck.

This fast-paced game serves up a tongue-twisting, matching, and visual cue extravaganza, making it an absolute riot.

### ***Wits & Wagers* by NorthStar Game Studio**

No need to be a trivia guru, as this fun-packed game lets everyone join the party. In *Wits & Wagers*, players pen down their guess to a question and put it on the betting mat. Feeling confident in your knowledge? Go ahead and bet on your own guess. Or, perhaps you have a hunch about your flatmate's expertise. Bet on their answer and watch the excitement unfold. The key is to get as close as possible to the correct answer without going over and you will be rewarded with big payouts according to the odds on the betting mat. It is like bringing the thrill of the casino right into your living room. So, whether you're a trivia whiz, a risk-taker, or a master at reading your friends' minds, *Wits & Wagers* promises endless laughter and memorable moments.

### ***One Night Ultimate Werewolf* by Bézier Games**

Mornings after a full moon reveal mysteriously dead villagers and the word on the street is that a cunning werewolf is hiding amongst us. But fear not! Enter *One Night Ultimate Werewolf*, the fast-paced, no-elimination game perfect for 3-10 players. Everyone gets assigned a unique role, from mischievous werewolves to helpful seers and tricky troublemakers, each with their own special abilities. In just ten minutes, your village must work together to pinpoint the werewolf, and with no moderator needed, the hunt is on! Lynching the werewolf secures your victory, making each game a thrilling challenge. The best part? It's an addictive and engaging experience, leaving you wanting more and crafting unforgettable moments of bluffs and outright lies.

### ***Sushi Go!* by Gamewright**

A lightning-fast card game that brings the excitement of a sushi feast right to your table. Your goal is to craft the perfect combination of delectable sushi dishes as they whiz by. Will you scoop up the most sushi rolls or assemble a mouthwatering set of sashimi? Don't forget to dip your favourite nigiri in wasabi for a triple taste explosion. And, of course, save room for all the sweet pudding you can get your chopsticks on. It's a breeze to set up and a joy to learn, making it perfect for game nights when everyone is still getting to know each other. The blend of luck and memory challenges ensures that both newcomers and seasoned gamers will keep coming back for seconds and thirds.

The decision to organise a game night with my new flatmates turned out to be a game-changer itself. Whether you're a uni freshman or simply seeking to bond with new acquaintances, board games prove to be an unbeatable icebreaker that brings joy and camaraderie to any shared space. So gather your games, snacks, and drinks. It is time to have some fun.





# The Arduous Quest of Buying Tickets, and Why it Sucks

Arjan Mann

**Ever since a friend sent me the Instagram post that Critical Role would be making their long-awaited return to the UK, I've been going through a lot of emotions.** For those unfamiliar, Critical Role is the name of a group of self-described “nerdy-ass voice actors [who] sit around and play Dungeons & Dragons”. When I saw the post, there was an immediate rush of excitement, a strange kind of anticipation-induced panic in the pit of my stomach.

But it wasn't long after until the excitement and anticipation washed away that the feelings from 2018 came back.

I was around 15 or 16 years old, still in secondary school. I was excited for their UK convention debut, but knew I stood no chance of getting to see their panel at the show in person, let alone getting a ticket to the convention at all. I had friends at the time that tried to get convention passes to see the panel, and I encouraged them. I told them that it wasn't for me—I knew it would be near impossible and so I didn't even try to secure tickets. Other people were more deserving, had better luck, better internet connections, and deeper pockets. That's how these things tend to go. And I was right. It was near impossible—even when watching the recording of the MCM panel online, you can hear the faint muffles of fans chanting “let us in” from outside the room.

For the rest of the day, after seeing the Instagram post, I festered in the emotional torture of going through those same thoughts and experiences again, five years on. I have a love-hate relationship with the ‘Criticter-Hug’, as it is known within the Critical Role fandom

It's the name given to the overwhelming support and excitement that leads to merchandise or tickets selling out and charity initiatives far exceeding their fundraising goal. It's the reason why the Critical Role animated series raised \$11.4 million with an initial goal of \$750,000.

When it's working for a force for good—like a charity fundraiser of some kind—I'm all for it, it's one of the best things to come out of the world of social media and streaming. However, when it comes to tickets for events or convention announcements, it's the thing I fear more than anything. Websites crumble at their foundation with the pressure and traffic they receive from the Critter-Hug and that's what I feared for Thursday July 13th, 2023—when tickets were set to go on presale.

Wembley Arena, the OVO Arena as it is known now, can hold roughly 12,500—but there are far more Critical Role fans in the UK and mainland Europe than that, all vying to get their hands on tickets for the live show. I'm only after 2 of those 12,500—but even that sounds unreasonable. The show and fanbase are definitely a niche within a niche but that is something that should not be underestimated or belittled, going by previous live show sales and audience receptions.

Would I like to meet the cast and crew?

Absolutely—it would be an honour to shake their hands and tell them what their show has helped me through. Would I love to work with them in some capacity in the future? Without question. But do I feel I deserve either of those things? Absolutely not. My mind travels directly to the reality that there are more deserving individuals who should get those things.

My mind isn't the kindest place in times like this. It flips and flops between “I feel I'm meant to do something good in the world, to meet/work with them in some capacity, etc.” and “How could I think that—I don't even feel I deserve to be studying at my university; I don't even feel I deserve to be a writer (or even write what you're reading right now)!”

I suppose I just have to put things into perspective as best I can. If I get the tickets, great. If I don't, it will be extremely disheartening, but I can always try again next time (if there is a next time).

As you can see, putting things into perspective is still being influenced by my instinctual pessimism, but I'm trying to do better; to be better. I've got some lofty goals, and I'm still clinging on to that ounce of hope that I can achieve them.

**UPDATE (Thursday July 13th, 2:12pm):**

I got the tickets.



# Shooting the Stage: Being a Theatre Photographer at KCL

Elizabeth Grace

"Love is a many splendoured thing!" sings Christian, gushing to Satine about the vitalising joys of loving someone in *Moulin Rouge*! I've always felt my profound love of theatre photography to be just like that. As a nerd obsessed with film and television, I grew up perpetually in awe of extraordinary visuals in movies. When I later discovered the comforting exhilarations of musical theatre, theatre photography naturally married the two together. Learning about the phenomenal work of Danny Kaan, Matthew Murphy, Evan Zimmerman, and Marc Brenner led me into the wondrous world of live entertainment photographers, who capture the profound essence of theatrical stories for time immemorial. From there, I wanted to be like them and make production shots too.



The King's Musical Theatre Society production of *RENT* was the first time I had ever photographed a production... or any human subjects for that matter. Once I got the job, I instantly felt the weight of the assignment; not only would I be responsible for the quality of mementoes a huge cast would get to keep, but this would also be my first calling card in the professional field.

The story of *RENT* is one that is deeply personal to me. At its core, the musical interrogates the personal sacrifices that we make in pursuit of our passions and asks whether the vicious realities of survival make them worth it. It's a question I struggle with when I am forced to confront the bitter truth that whichever career path I walk – be it film editing, broadcast journalism, or technical theatre – life will never be a bed of luxurious roses.

When I moved to London, I made several rules to build my career, vowing to never break them. Most of them (such as not selling out into commercial video) I've stayed faithful to, but the sole principle I broke was never to shoot Shakespeare. And I wasn't intending to, until a friend asked if I'd be available to shoot the King's Shakespeare Company production of *Twelfth Night*. Who was I to resist a calling? I dove in.

Creatively, *Twelfth Night* was a lot simpler than *RENT*; Shakespeare, by nature, has fewer moving parts and stage elements. But, I must admit that I struggled with this far more than I did with *RENT*. I couldn't figure out the emotional beats and character nuances when I was shooting and, in the edit, I didn't understand the heart of the story well enough to represent it visually.





At the end of the day, I don't think I did this show justice. This is my greatest regret of the year, although I am grateful that I would get a second opportunity with King's Shakespeare Company to produce shots that I'm incredibly proud of.

As an amateur holding a basic camera, I had long assumed that my work would be confined to the walls of KCL's Greenwood Theatre. I never really got the sense that I'd have the chance to witness a magical theatre moment until this happened.

The night before *Come From Away* closed in January, the cast held a special event at The Theatre Cafe where writer-lyricist David Hein surprised actor Alice Fearn (Captain Beverley Bass in the show) with the real Captain Beverley Bass. Bass was the first female captain of an American Airlines plane, and was famously stranded with her passengers in Gander, Canada, on 9/11.



I had fought my way into a half-decent spot through the sea of fans that packed the cafe's bottlenecked interior. Taking this photo made it so worth it. Getting to meet the hero whose lived experience you had honoured eight gruelling times a week is a once-in-a-lifetime moment, and Fearn's reaction moved me so deeply. The privilege of capturing such a monumental occasion is one that I'll eternally cherish.





I fell in love with musicals because, for me, they are the most authentic reflection of the grittiness of the human condition. Seeing *Captain Bass* in person was a visceral and profound reminder that the good, the bad, and the ugly of humanity are real and powerful stories that matter. We, as actors, creatives, or crew members, bear a duty to ensure that those stories are forever told and heard.

I always pause to stand in the middle of the auditorium before I start shooting, to take in the stage, the set, the story, and be grateful for the opportunity.

Coming to university was the first time that I was able to pursue so many of the aspirations that I had always dreamed of, but never had the opportunity to fulfil while I was growing up. I'm often asked what I hope to accomplish with theatre photography or what I see myself aspiring towards. My answer is always that I want to see my name in the credits of a souvenir brochure someday. My first introduction to theatre photography, and the fuel of my burning desire to continue shooting, has been all the jaw-dropping production shots that West End, Broadway, and tour photographers publish every single day. I'd like to think that these shots I took from *Cynbeline* are the first ones I'd be proud to put in my own souvenir brochure.





# SHUNPIKE

Bianca Layog

This year, I'm a drug addict. I mean that I've neglected to re-organize my shelf, that I leave my bed unmade in the mornings because I feel like I'm supposed to— to preserve this. This means that mother's hair is black, mostly, and I prefer not to look at the rest. Lately the summers have been shaped differently. They've stopped being slow or sticky, and outside is only worth going to if it gives me something in return. But again I'm unseeing. Again it's the last week of July but yesterday my shoulders weren't too wide for this jacket. Anyway, why am I putting this on in the middle of summer? My mother taught me to cry with my eyes closed, to look forward and never at my face in the mirror. *Hurry*, I tell myself, always afraid my soul will leave bloodshot. The bed remains unmade but the closets need cleaning out. They always do.



# TODAY'S GENDER

Isabella Stephenson

Is man-just-home-from-work who isn't a man - but has accidental breasts to accent her briefcase. Who can put down the briefcase but not the breasts. She (they?) were called 'sir' earlier and her voice dropped faster than that briefcase off a skyscraper. Yes sir. Yes I am co-opting the capitalist aesthetic but making it sexy. Yes my body doesn't feel right in words, just in blazers with shoulder pads. Don't ask why I cut my hair. Or my arm. I'm going to be a gender today and I don't give a fuck if you understand it. I wish I did.



# To Be Loved Is To Be Changed: A Continuing Journey Of Nostalgia

Ellie Dempster

**It's September 2022, I am freshly 18 years old, I've never really been away from my small northern village for over 2 weeks, my mind was absolutely spinning at the idea of moving away.** My older sister had given me every piece of advice she could on how to survive in your first year of university: keep the kitchen clean; take the bins out on time; always be stocked up on orange squash, etc. In all honesty, aside from the crippling fear of being lonely, I felt prepared - surely, I could function as an adult?

For the most part, yes, I could. I made friends, I got drunk, went to my lectures, and even managed to fit a big Tesco trip in there, so all of those trivial battles family and friends had drilled into me before I left seemed to be okay: a small element of a big journey. So what was that gut feeling burrowing deep every night? That tug, that grip that made me feel 8 years old again, when my Mum would drop me off at school after the summer holidays? Initially I was sure it was circumstantial. I had faced my fear of rejection, I was 3 hours away from my long-term best friend and had fallen into the deep end of London life. Although now I reflect using the safe distance of time, I think it was something wholly different, a scarier notion indeed. The pangs of childhood nostalgia had wrapped themselves around every part of my body.

When I say nostalgia, I don't mean reminiscing or fondly laughing at childhood memories. I mean a longing, an intrinsic urge to run away, to return and to stay where mum makes you jam sandwiches and dad reads you a book about unicorns. This nostalgia is a loss, a grief - we can't go back, we can't entrap ourselves in a room where we revert into a younger version of ourselves, unfortunately we are stuck with what we are now; older and not really that much wiser.

Don't mistake my pessimistic tone for a way of instilling fear into anyone who may be transitioning into a new era of their lives; it is scary enough as it is without some critical voice inhibiting itself into one's brain. Maybe I should reword some of what I feel.

Nostalgia is not something to be feared, neither is loss or grief, it comes for us all eventually. Rather, I like to think it's an extremely beautiful, powerful tool we have been equipped with as humans. It allots us the ability to preserve, to create, to understand - to live. Just because we have grown into a bigger body and don't live in our childhood home anymore, doesn't mean we

can't revive our inner child, after all it hides away in every element of our existence. I recall a month into university, I felt sad and lonely and had an unbearable urge to decorate my room for Halloween. So I did. I got fake candles, haunted house ceramics, and pumpkin decorated bedding and drowned my flat in a room spray that reminded me of being 13 years old and obsessed with Autumn. A few weeks later me and my new beautiful friends sat and watched *Hocus Pocus* with snacks and hot chocolates. Did I feel cured of the burrowing nostalgia in me? Not really. But I felt like I was looking after myself, not just 18-year-old me, but younger me (who, according to my Dad, watched *Hocus Pocus* every single morning for a few months). I could almost feel myself reaching out to her and telling her that those simple pleasures will always be there and will always be simple.

After that moment early in semester one, I made a promise that I would look after myself and my inner child. I would make my comfort meals, reread my favourite books, and decorate my room for every occasion - the latter tradition becoming notorious in my flat when the 'Happy Birthday' banner would remain on the kitchen wall until we all moved out. But, as life typically goes, this act of preserving and nurturing was halted by the loss of my childhood dog, a loss which seemed to signify I had truly grown up.

As sad as I was, I learnt something important, something so simple and so cliché and overused - life happens. Unfortunately, loss comes in physical forms, as well as metaphorical experiences, and we have to equip ourselves as best we can to deal with that. Believe it or not, we can use nostalgia and childhood to do this. Cry it out, like you would have when you were 5, or have a tantrum, be totally furious and enraged and stamp your feet and proclaim "It's not fair!". Then, see your friends, or boyfriend, or sister, or mum, or aunty, laugh with them and cry on their shoulder and let them look after you, let them look after that small child that lives inside of your brain, because it will need nurturing and healing, whether you believe it or not.

I suppose, at the crux of it all, when we've cried and shouted and laughed about growing up and facing a world that is, at most times, unfair, lonely, challenging, and scary, the one thing we learn is the good moments in between the bad ones change us more than we expect. The moments when we are cared for, when we care about others, when we care for ourselves, transforms the sadness of nostalgia into a tool for survival, a tool which makes us a better friend and better human. And I'll use this as a reminder that nostalgia is not a villain dictating our sadness, it is there for a reason, to remind you that good things have happened and will continue to happen, and if you really need it, nostalgia is there as a home you can always return to.



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