

How to make a soundtrack for your life

Sure, this is often the stuff of fate. But there's no reason to listen to the same 10 records until you're dead. Here are some tips for blowing your sonic horizons wide open.

1 Take a YouTube trip

“Going down YouTube holes is one of my favorite ways to find weird shit,” says Georgia-born singer-songwriter Hite. Case in point: she discovered jazz-influenced Ethiopian pop music “in a YouTube vortex”—an amateur rapper from New Zealand whose lyrics are both unprintable and unforgettable.

2 Follow record labels

Like museum curators, wine importers, and book imprints, labels release what they like. Love a band? Check the label. Ba Da Bing in Brooklyn was the springboard for indie stars Beirut, Sharon Van Etten and Xenia Rubinos; Blood Orange started on Domino.

3 Try out music you hate

“If I hear something I don’t like, I force myself into a space of letting the thing I don’t enjoy happen to my ears,” says Hite. “It’s pushed me into truly unexpected directions.” You just might make a discovery best-described like this: “Music that’s bad for you, like Doritos, but addictive, like cocaine for your ears.”

4 Ask your friends

“What are you listening to?” That simple question has the power to blow up your social media. People *love* recommending music. And next time your friends come over for prestige TV, let them DJ while you prep the pre-viewing dinner.

5 Listen to the radio

Not just Spotify! (“The algorithms are boring,” says Hite.) KCRW’s Eclectic 24 streams music across genres. Try dublab, KEXP, and, for a taste of New Orleans, WWOZ. On the *Song Exploder* podcast, artists tell the story of a single track; *No Jumper* covers under-the-radar rappers.

6 Catch the opening act

Today’s unknown could be tomorrow’s Beyoncé. Take a risk even if you can’t sing along (that’s obnoxious anyway). The artist you’re seeing may have chosen the opener, and ideally, acts in a line-up complement each other.