

## Season 2, Episode 7

### Rock on the Moon

Matt:

Do people even make mixtapes anymore? Do people know what a tape is?

Nick:

Mixtape has become the catchall word for playlist.

Matt:

Okay.

Emily:

So what would you put on your space travel mixtape?

Matt:

Oh man, that's a tough question, there's so much music to choose from.

Emily:

But you only have a cassette tape front and back.

Matt:

Does it have to be a song from 1969?

Emily:

No.

Matt:

Maybe Bodak Yellow. Cardi B. Because I make money moves.

Nick:

Joey Ramone's cover of What a Wonderful World. I think that would be powerful and stirring to see earth orbiting below you while listening to such a positive song. Also, it used to be my phone's ringtone for when my wife called me. So it would prevent me from getting homesick.

Emily:

I'd probably play Who Runs The World.

Matt:

Girls.

Emily:

Girls.

Speaker 4:

(singing).

Nick:

Welcome to AirSpace. This year marks the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11, which was of course the first moon landing. And today we're going to talk about music that made the trip to the moon and back, as well as music that's been played in space since then. The music of the cosmos coming up next on AirSpace distributed by PRX.

Brainstorming space mixtapes is fun and all, but we don't have to let our dreams be dreams. Listeners may know that there is an international space holiday that is held in hundreds of places and in very different ways around the world. But it all basically boils down to a space party, which is a really wonderful excuse to get together and listen to space songs. It's called Yuri's Night.

Matt:

And it takes place every year around April 12th on the anniversary of the first human ever to go into space. Who was that guy?

Nick:

Yuri Gagarin.

Emily:

Yuri Gagarin.

Matt:

That's right. He was a cosmonaut from the Soviet union.

Speaker 4:

The Russians pushed a man across the threshold.

Matt:

First guy to ever go into space and come back down alive.

Nick:

Just to fly the flag, the anniversary also celebrates the first space shuttle flight. Took off on the same day, 20 years later.

Emily:

But what's really cool about this party in particular is it's an international event-

Nick:

World-wide. The most salient fact to know about Yuri's night is that it does happen all over the world and that we have the biggest one here. It's the only thing you need to know.

Emily:

How do you know it's the biggest?

Nick:

I count.

Emily:

So we all went to Yuri's night here at the Air and Space Museum, which is probably not a surprise in since we all we work here and we kind of like it.

Nick:

So we didn't just go for the actual party. You guys walked around and talked to some of the guests, right?

Matt:

And can we set the scene a little bit? These were people in some pretty cool costumes.

Emily:

Yuri's night. Isn't so much a costume party, but people are certainly encouraged to get dressed up in anything that they think might be really fun.

Matt:

Everything from astronauts, to aliens and satellite dishes on top of the head.

Emily:

Yes. So we had an opportunity with our assistant producer, Lizzie, to walk around and chat with other party-goers to find out what kind of music they would be excited to listen to if they were to get lucky enough to travel into space.

Speaker 5:

Oh, we are walking through the Air and Space Museum. It's Yuri's night and the place is packed with people who are ready to party. So we'll just go up this escalator. So we want to ask you a question. If you were going into space and you could take one song or one album, what would you take?

Ian Anderson:

Greatest hits by the Eagles?

Speaker 7:

It seems like some ethereal floating around space music and sing along songs. I know it's cheap and cheesy, but [inaudible 00:03:48] and Zero-G. Why not?

Speaker 8:

So probably something like disco or something more "make me dance."

Speaker 9:

... they have the Hamilton original cast album, because I could listen to it over and over again.

Speaker 10:

Let's say I would bring April + VISTA album because they're super atmospheric and chill, and it would be very soothing. And I feel like they would be a great sound to listen to while I'm looking at the universe.

Speaker 11:

Jay-Z, Reasonable Doubt, his first album. He definitely had to be on there because it's gotten me on a lot of good road trips. So I guess it would work in space.

Speaker 12:

I would take some Beach Boys, the original Pet Sounds album, maybe a little bit of Bluegrass, just in case I run into aliens. It's always good to share our culture.

Emily:

Those were the voices from Yuri's night, recorded earlier this year.

Matt:

And the astronauts from the Apollo program did carry music with them into space on cassette tapes. In case you're wondering, those tapes were then reused for recording the astronauts' logs. So this was not extra weight that they were carrying.

Nick:

This is during the Apollo era. So this is the late 1960s when cassette tapes were not to be taken lightly, not like the heyday in the 1980s.

Matt:

Yeah. So this isn't like your walkman that you had when you were in high school, if you're my age. This is more like something that if you were an audio file back in the sixties, or if you were doing a lot of interviews or something, you might have a cassette tape recorder, a portable cassette tape recorder.

Nick:

What were some of the songs that the Apollo astronauts took with them to the moon, were they immune from novelty, were their puns aplenty?

Matt:

Yeah. So, they were not immune to novelty at all. So for example, one of the bits of music that was on Neil Armstrong's mixtape was this really trippy Theremin music from 1940s called Music Out of the Moon.

Nick:

A lot of the astronauts were into country western music. So there was a fair bit of that up there, and addition to Fly Me to the Moon.

Matt:

That was Fly Me to the Moon?

Nick:

Oh yeah. I mean, come on. If you have a tape deck, you're going to take Fly Me to the Moon on the first flight to the moon, right? That's just a gimme.

Matt:

Well, and some of it wasn't even music that they took up themselves, but music that mission control would play for them over the radio and Fly Me to the Moon was one of those ones that mission control liked to play for the astronauts.

Emily:

Because it was very punny.

Matt:

It's very on the nose music selection-

Emily:

It is very on the nose. And what I think is really interesting is that there was a lot of astronauts, I think maybe who were more, as you would say, audio files or sort of bigger music fans that sort of made their own mixtapes. But there was a guy who was really kind of well known. He had sort of gotten this little cottage industry of making mixtapes for particular Apollo astronauts.

Matt:

Mickey Kapp. NASA is mixtape maker. He was actually the one who put the music from the moon music on Armstrong's mixtape.

Nick:

NASA had a mixtape maker in 1969.

Emily:

Well, it wasn't so much that he was the mixtape maker hired by NASA, but Mickey Kapp actually worked for his father's record label and had lots of connections. And so after spending quite a bit of time with these different astronauts, he would get a sense of what kind of music they were really excited about. And he would put together these mixtapes for the astronauts who wanted to bring music, but either didn't have the time or the sort of ambition to make their own mixtape.

Nick:

So in addition to carrying music with them to the moon, the first astronauts who voyaged to the moon also inspired a fair bit of art themselves. Is that right?

Matt:

Yeah. In fact, one of my favorite bands is Jethro Tull and a song that they released-

Nick:

You don't say, you've never mentioned them on the show.

Matt:

You know, it might come up every now and then. But yeah, in 1970 they released an album that had a song on it called For Michael Collins, Jeffrey and Me, that was actually inspired by the story of that one member of the Apollo 11 crew who didn't set foot on the moon.

Nick:

And that man's name?

Matt:

Well, Michael Collins, it's in the title.

Nick:

Who was also the first director of the National Air and Space Museum.

Matt:

Oh, yeah. I heard about that.

Emily:

So Matt, you actually got to-

Nick:

We've already said our scene.

Emily:

So Matt, you actually got the opportunity to interview Ian Anderson and actually talked to him a little bit about the writing of this song.

Matt:

Yeah. So having this job finally paid off. I was able to talk to one of my childhood heroes and let him know that I was a big nerd about his band and also ask him about this song and how it was written.

Ian Anderson:

July the 20th of 1969, when Neil and Buzz set foot on the moon. I was actually enjoying a day off, having played the night before at The Kinetic Playground in Chicago, as an opening act for Led Zeppelin.

At that point in time, I was... Whatever I was, 25 years old? I couldn't possibly imagine what it would be like to be an astronaut then or indeed now, but you try to have some empathy is the words for that situation.

I thought that could be a song in this, but I won't make it about Neil and Buzz.

My instinct and my sympathy and my general feeling of, I suppose, wanting to lord the perhaps unsung hero was to write a song for Michael Collins and who I thought had probably about the loneliest

job in the world. He's up there alone and his two buddies for whom he was ultimately, incredibly responsible were grabbing all the glory while he was perhaps the forgotten man. At least he had the return tickets. If they were stuck down there, he had to come back alone and imagine anything else that you might have felt in that situation to have come home without your buddies, he would have been perhaps the most vilified and hated person on planet earth.

Well, I wanted the song to be a little bit dreamy in the way that it perhaps echoed that lyrical silence and calm of being in orbit around another heavenly body. But if it just continued with the same slightly dreamy kind of thoughtful and considered message, it would be a bit one dimensional as a song. So it needs that moment where it breaks into something a bit more defined, a bit more of a proclamation.

So yeah, "I'm with you L.E.M, just a shame that it had to be you," in other words, I didn't get to come with you, but go safely my brothers. There had to be that little bit of, not anger, but a little bit of jealousy.

But that's how I imagined astronaut Collins must've felt. And I called the song For Michael Collins, Jeffrey and Me. To Jeffrey in the title of the song is Jeffrey Hammond, who became our bass player in 1971. And I suppose his sense of being rather private and essentially rather lonely guy echoed a little bit of my personality too. So I decided to try and fuse all three persona into the song. So it is indeed not just for Michael Collins, it's for Michael Collins, Jeffrey and me.

Nick:

That's awesome. Really great having Ian Anderson on the show. He's our first big musical guest and that's pretty exciting. Hopefully we have many more over the years. Matt, what other moon inspired songs are there, inspired by the Apollo program?

Matt:

Yeah, well, I mean, there's several songs that I would put on what you would call in my Apollo soundtrack. There's the music that kind of led up to Apollo 11-

Nick:

In case anyone ever asks.

Matt:

Yes. In case anybody's asking or wants to look on the website and around the anniversary time. There's the music that kind of sets the scene for Apollo, like David Bowie's Space Oddity that actually was not inspired by the Apollo program, but by the movie Space Odyssey, 2001, A Space Odyssey.

Nick:

I'm sure it was entirely coincidence that it came out the week before they launched.

Matt:

Yeah. So his record label actually pushed to have the song come out right around that time. And someone at the BBC heard the song and thought it was appropriate. So they actually ended up playing it during their coverage of the Apollo moon landing. So, it ended up forever associating that song with Apollo 11.

Nick:

Is that the thesis behind all of the music of the era, were they just providing a soundtrack for this triumphal mission?

Matt:

So some of the music was actually quite critical of Apollo and of the idea of spending such massive amounts of money ongoing to the moon, when there were other problems that needed to be solved. And when you're living in a country that is in the middle of a war and has issues surrounding civil rights and equality. And so Gil Scott Heron song Whitey on the Moon is one such song where he really takes Apollo to task for being such a big expenditure on a big technological display.

Gil Scott Heron:

Taxes taking my whole damn check. The junkies make me a nervous wreck. The price of food is going up. And as if all that crap wasn't enough, a rat done bit my sister Nell, with whitey on the moon. Her face and arms began to swell and whitey's is on the moon.

Nick:

Eagle-eared listeners will remember us mentioning Whitey on the Moon from First Man. The song was in the movie, right?

Matt:

Yeah. The song was in the movie, even though the actual song didn't get released until later. The poem already existed at the time of the launch and landing.

Nick:

So we've talked about actual music that went into space. We've talked about what they were doing when they listened to it. We've talked about music that was inspired by space. What future space events will demand a soundtrack?

Emily:

Astronauts are already starting to spend close to a year up in the international space station and we're contemplating long duration missions on the surface of the moon and then eventually to Mars. So we're talking about trips into space with small groups of people that you're going to be with for well over 18 months. And I think-

Matt:

Are you thinking what I'm thinking, that they could just form a band and play their music, their own music all the time?

Emily:

So not what I was thinking.

Matt:

Oh!



Emily:

I think people are going to spend a lot more time plugged into their own devices during those missions because they're working all day every day.

Nick:

So it's going to be just like any other open office, open floor, plan office like, "If I'm floating here with my earbuds in don't bother me."

Yeah.

Emily:

Yeah.

Nick:

So as a fan of space history who isn't a rocket scientist or a geologist, it's really great to dive into topics that occupied the popular consciousness of areas in history. And I'm really excited that we were able to do that for Apollo on this episode.

Matt:

And this is the 50th anniversary of the moon landing this year.

Emily:

Next episode, we'll be starting our special Apollo science series looking at what we didn't know about lunar science when we launched humans to the moon.

Nick:

And then the episode after that, we'll look at how the science of Apollo continues to inspire and inform research today.

Matt:

That's it for this episode of AirSpace.

Nick:

AirSpace is produced by Katie Moyer, Jocelyn Frank, Ellen Rolfes. And a very special thanks to producer Lizzie Peabody who helped with this episode and is taking up the host chair herself as the new host of Smithsonian's Sidedoor podcast.

Matt:

Thanks to Tarek Fouda for mixing this episode.

Emily:

And as always thanks also to Jason Orfanon, Genevieve Sponsler and John Barth. follow us on Instagram @airspacepodcast.