

# *Playlist*

## Michael Costello

### **I. A Mouse on the Wall**

She was required reading / Virginia Woolf  
was / when you discovered your *name* / on  
her pages / a literate alliteration / the sound  
of life's melancholy / sweetness found in  
the parting / of the sensory / at the dark  
center of your verse / Issaquah / 1993 / you  
began building / something out of nothing /  
it's history / now, a willful suspension / of  
disbelief / intention / nasty parlor tricks /  
contradiction / and invention / run through  
your songs / like a wild pack of family dogs /  
a soundtrack to a trucker's atlas / to the late  
night travelogue / the moon and Antarctica  
/ (inspired by novelist Cormac / McCarthy)  
is a triumph / in the musical pantheon of  
Isaac / slogged by years / cosmic *fuck yous*  
do not deter / your guttural optimism /  
finding so much beauty in the dirt / brazen  
emotion / like yours does not readily exist  
/ in an age when / talking shit about pretty

sunsets / is hard to resist / you release the  
world's anxiety / in your barbaric yawps /  
the emotional purge / fiery surge / once fired  
up doesn't stop / living up to your name /  
is a claim no one else can boast / in scope  
greater than most / expanding beyond the  
coast / ocean and space / past this 3rd planet  
/ beyond youth / inside the mind and heart /  
every song touches truth

## **II. Bermana Americana**

Following random rules / and trains across  
the sea / from *Ectoslovakia* you came / in  
search of music / and poetry / with walkie-  
talkies / you and Stephen started out / at  
the Whitney / guarding art / writing and  
drinking / your indie philosophy / singing  
into answering machines / cassette tapes /  
of improvised sound surprise / your nightly  
escape / "You should go study with James  
Tate in Massachusetts." / good advice to a  
graduate / from Charles Wright / back then /  
scribbled on stationary / you coined "slanted  
and enchanted" / now you fuck around / with  
words all day / permission granted / with an  
MFA in hand / you honed your wits / devising  
psychedelic soap-operas / and the overlooked  
Starlite / Walker / to err is your write / as  
an heir / to Americana defined / as a cultural  
cul-de-sac / in the gated community / at  
the end of the mind / punk rock died / when  
the first kid said / "punk's not dead" / your  
signature listless monotone / and incidental  
acumen / changed and strangled / clichés  
turned / on their deathbeds / resurrected  
in literate country- / tinged nomenclature /  
never a side project / or an afterthought / in  
the beerlight / lyric to lyric / so much is in it

/ the actual air / and bright flight / into the  
good morning / of the new word / this Jew's  
world / trapped inside a song / the absurd  
is the mundane / unfurled / resist the MGM  
endings / and people who say / it's all been  
done / standing for many / you are / a limited  
edition / of one

### **III. Blacked Out**

Brackish boy that he was / John Lennon said  
/ "Scream when you can't sing" / so you set  
out / to go / leaving UMass / loaded like an  
angelic pistolero / his advice / exploding in  
your head / a sonic awakening / with the  
force / of El Niño / if you can take this town /  
I say good show / Charles / Francis / Frank /  
apocalyptic / modern age triptych / crashing  
against crowds / your acerbic surfer epics  
/ album by album / surreal you feel it / the  
strange space / in which Billy Radcliffe exists  
/ quirky punk and westerns / for you / pop  
narcissist / reflecting pools / on this planet  
of sound / you inhabit / Hermaphroditos / is  
a classic Lynchean affair / elsewhere aliens  
appear / in your Area 51-like career / call  
them oddballs all / your songs and lyrics /  
they're triumphant / characteristic / not  
anachronistic / these songs are gothic tales  
/ and music penned Black / ghosts in my  
headphones / every single track

### **IV. Every Song, the F Train**

From everywhere / you moved to New York  
City / where you studied with Sekou / at  
the New School / studying poetry and place  
/ nights at the Factory / knitting lines / in  
a tapestry of sampled sounds / cool on the

scene / on the scheme / to hipster stardom  
/ every stolen phrase / praise to influence  
/ obscure / or not / like Alan Dugan / your  
lyrics reveal / an idiom / of terse / sad /  
beautiful verse / the shape and nature / of  
words like / quantize / and decathecting /  
accompany / the syncopated gang-a-dank  
/ of your guitar styling / youth held magic  
/ you fulfilled skittish possibility / with the  
millennium / your first solo album / and  
miles / of touring / junked and de-junked /  
*the cough* defunct / you unveiled the acoustic  
side / of you / in the trunk / you kept CDs /  
selling them for / gas money / funny / how  
life gets revised / situations like a song /  
sometimes just life-support / for a killer line  
/ epiphany only comes / when you find it /  
the right home / along the way / “Is it soup?”  
/ Sekou would say / they all turn / into love  
songs / in the end / the anagrammatic one /  
rearranged arrangements / is every syllable /  
indelible / seeking to lose / that cloud that’s  
blacking out the sun / you owe no / allegiance  
to the facts / bridging more emotion / with  
fake words / smang’n’smofe / oon smatagore  
/ we ascend / undeniably / every time you  
sing / close to the close / of every show / on  
Janine’s / falsetto “wiiiiiiings”

## **V. Reclusive Elephant Six-Shooter**

In Ruston, Louisiana / there’s no line  
between / where one song ends / and the next  
begins / blistering free / becoming aware  
of punk / in ’83 / was a musical revelation  
/ that led you to fuzzy / guitars / shooting  
stars / like superheroes from the skies /  
above the moment / in constant movement  
/ you rhapsodize / it was then in ’89 / Jeff /

when you were seen / playing your first gig  
/ in a Laundromat / a sensation / you are a  
collection / of sounds / circling 'round the  
sun / in an aeroplane over / the sea / your  
head filled with combustion/ discovered in  
the disjunction / horns and organs / riding  
cacophony / like a rollercoaster / into the  
ocean / you arrange dreamscapes / to  
unfold / like accordions / the interior / of  
your personal world / you're fiction / lyrics  
juxtaposed / quixotic / and melodically move  
/ in tangles / each record explores / the analog  
world / from all angles / unlike Anne Frank  
/ all we can hope for / is to languish / and  
live / with these soundtracks / of ecstasy and  
anguish / how strange it is / to be anything at  
all / it's true / this world will / never swallow  
/ all the halos / out of you

## **VI. Where the Pavement Ends**

From UVA / you found your way / to NYC /  
with David getting high / in Central Park /  
working at the Whitney in the early nineties  
/ when notoriety was earned / thus began /  
the mark / and march of the critics' / darling  
underground project / with your elliptic /  
cryptic / Anglophilic lyrics / crooked rain  
couldn't wash away / mainstream reject- /  
shun of the white noise / attracting indie boys /  
and girls / long before the pavement crumbled  
/ beneath our feet / the stars were under / the  
influence / of your picks / fun unpredictable /  
directions came with the millennium / songs  
sung solo / and the eponymously named /  
new album / wry and never lost / like the  
sky / you moved above / grave architecture /  
into non sequitur phantasies / saved / from  
the black book / its pages flipping past / your

irreverence / for rhyme and meaning cast /  
shady analytic speculation / and prophetic  
revelations / where neither fit the form /  
dabbling in liberation / inscrutable is / the  
unfortunate scribble / on the label / given  
your arrangements' / bewilderingly textual  
nature / face the truth / you're a pirate  
seeking adventure / in uncharted waters /  
with the cold eyes of a sailor / staring into  
the pitch / past terror twilight / you leapt  
on a whim / from a limb high above / into  
the unknown / for a swim / not just indie /  
you're old school too / a blueprint of a father  
now / who's still making music / cool for us  
now / grown-up kids / somehow

## **VII. Yip Unorthodoxy Music**

Eef / you are no longer "the professional  
asshole"/ culled from the catalogue / of  
hipsterdom's patron saint / for a Jersey  
Jew / chasing stars / with worried shoes  
/ like Chinese babies / we'd cry boo-hoo /  
if not for you / your ludicrous use / of pop  
culture reference / is like a mathematician  
/ counting crumbs / transcendence / can be  
numbing / something else beautiful blurs /  
desperation and salvation / yours are years  
/ of glockenspiels / true American deadpan /  
from the heart / smooth and hooky / sardonic  
lyrics that would outsmart / Descartes / with  
the earnestness of biblical verse / you cover  
Aguilera's hit / which is a favorite / despite  
rotten reviews / every song an epistle / that  
delivers / dreadfully good news / words like  
satellites / in a space / of luscious melancholy  
/ sparse and quaint / arrangements strange  
and intimate / a keyhole / view into the soul  
/ your meditations on lost love / echo the

*E&F V.X*

absence / of tempo from the first album /  
*You Were a Diamond* / beautiful brooding  
details shove / the snide aside / precariously  
balancing / the idiom / with Nashville in  
your heart / beating simple American songs  
/ you join happy / and sad together / like a  
diphthong

8