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Pop Candy

Whitney Matheson

Heard any good movies lately?

During my first week in college, an English major I barely knew handed me a cassette and told me to listen carefully.

"This is not just a mix tape," he warned. "It is the soundtrack to my life."



In *Broken Flowers*, Bill Murray grooves to tunes by Holly Golightly, Mulatu Astatke and the Brian Jonestown Massacre.

By David Lee, Focus Features

As it turned out, *Matt: This Is My Life!* was a pretty decent soundtrack, albeit a little heavy on the Simon & Garfunkel. (He included *America* twice.) I lost touch with Matt years ago, but I still have his tape — and I can't help but wonder if he had a role in any of the thoughtful movie soundtracks I've been hearing all summer. (**Related item:** [Chat with Whitney at 1 p.m. ET](#))

The flawless [Broken Flowers](#) soundtrack, for instance, is partly a mix tape compiled by Winston, a character in Jim Jarmusch's film played by Jeffrey Wright. It's one of those rare CDs I can enjoy while doing anything: scrubbing the toilet, burning casseroles, playing Scrabble, making out with my spouse.

And, like the perfect mix tape, *Flowers* exposes me to some [artists](#) I wasn't [familiar](#) with, provides insight about its creator and maintains the perfect vibe from start to finish. These may seem like simple goals, but my CD collection says otherwise: *Flowers* included, only

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four [movies](#) in the last five [years](#) have compelled me to purchase their soundtracks.

This week, I may pick up the music from [Me and You and Everyone We Know](#). Filmmaker Miranda July recruited *Donnie Darko*'s Michael Andrews to create the score, which weaves the same sort of blips and idiosyncrasies that her characters experience.

Or there's the [Mysterious Skin](#) soundtrack, which also feels like a labor of love. For that score, director Gregg Araki recruited composer Harold Budd and former Cocteau Twins guitarist Robin Guthrie to develop the movie's sleek, and sometimes sinister, second skin.

The list goes on: The just-released [Murderball](#) is a documentary about wheelchair rugby, yet it's packed with tracks by Ween, Ministry, The Polyphonic Spree and other performers I never hear in the same place. Actress Maggie Gyllenhaal croons three songs on the soundtrack to [Happy Endings](#) (a movie which received mediocre reviews) ... and yet, somehow, it works.

Even big-budget flicks *The Wedding Crashers* and *Sky High* have delivered above-average releases by incorporating rockers like Spoon, Rilo Kiley, The Flaming Lips, Elephant and They Might Be Giants into their mixes.

So what's behind this renewed appreciation for soundtracks? I give some credit to Zach Braff, who attracted platinum sales and a Grammy with the *Garden State* album. The compilation is often compared to a mix tape, since Braff himself has said it merely consists of artists he loves.

In the next month or so, several other flicks are expected to deliver sweet sounds — maybe even sweeter than the movies themselves. Among them:

[Elizabethtown](#). Has Cameron Crowe ever compiled a less-than-perfect soundtrack? This time around, Elton John, Tom Petty and My Morning Jacket tunes serve as backdrops to Crowe's bittersweet tale about a guy who goes home for his father's funeral. (Orlando Bloom and Kirsten Dunst star.) "*Elizabethtown* is probably even more of a musical than *Almost Famous*," Crowe explained in a recent press release. "The music is as important as any of the characters — it's the movie's inner voice, a friendly guide and a secret muse." (Movie release date: Oct. 14. Soundtrack release date: Sept. 13.)

[The Chumscrubber](#). Cat Power, Eels, Snow Patrol, The Like and Muse contribute aural pleasure to this disc, compiled by *American Beauty*'s Chris Douridas. And what bands could better accompany a dark tale of suburban teen angst than O.C. royalty Rooney and Phantom Planet? (Out now in selected theaters.)

[Thumbsucker](#). A boy gnaws a digit into his teens, and The Polyphonic Spree's cheerful and cult-like Tim DeLaughter scores the pain. Makes sense to me. *Thumbsucker*'s album art promises "additional songs by Elliott Smith," which all but guarantees tearful moments. Considering the flick stars Vince Vaughn, Keanu Reeves and Benjamin Bratt, I can't imagine what they might be. (Movie release date: Sept. 16.)

[Junebug](#). I can't wait to see how this critically acclaimed film mixes a Yo La Tengo score, classical pieces by Vivaldi and Haydn and a storyline about a family in a small Southern town. While no official

soundtrack has been announced, you can see a rundown of the classical works and download *George's Hymn*, as sung by actor Alessandro Nivola, on the movie's [Web site](#). (Out now in selected theaters.)

[Daltry Calhoun](#). What could make you happier than a CD of songs by Wilco, Johnny Cash, Dolly Parton, Dusty Springfield and Bob Dylan? How about "original score by *Napoleon Dynamite*'s John Swihart"? Yesss. Accompanying the tracks is Johnny Knoxville as a golf club owner in small-town Tennessee. (Movie release date: Sept. 25.)

"I have this fantasy of working as a music supervisor for films," Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore said in a recent interview with *Last Days* director Gus Van Sant. "It's really like a higher-bracket DJ gig." If more artists start harboring this fantasy, we could be in for another wave of memorable soundtracks.

And who knows? One day, I may hear one as heartfelt as *Matt: This Is My Life!* — though part of me hopes I never do.

Pop Question: What soundtrack will you never get tired of?

[Send me](#) your answers by Aug. 19, and I'll share some next week. Don't forget to include your name, city and state with your reply.

[Click here](#) to read answers to last week's question, "What's your favorite show that was cancelled before its time?"

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