

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

Hey, are we rolling? Do we have speed? Yeah, we got speed, Sean. Were you going to say something? You were holding up a ball of water.

I was just saying, is anybody thirsty? I got some more. Yeah, well, how can we, none of us can enjoy it.

You can hear it, so maybe it'll do the same thing as drinking. Gargle it real quick. See, can you gargle right now and say welcome to SmartList in a gargle?

Oh my God, Scotty! It's all over him. Scotty! Scotty, get the towel. Welcome to SmartList.

Hey SmartList listeners, before we get into the good stuff, how about a little great stuff from Shawnee Hayes? Go, Sean.

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Now, on to the show.

Wait, Sean's back in LA now?

Yes.

Since when?

Last night.

Or yesterday.

Since last night.

Pay attention.

Sean, I knew it was soon. I knew it was soon.

I know, I'm so excited.

Sean, how does it feel?

Baby angels come back to the nest.

There's no such thing as baby angels, and then they grow up and get older.

Everybody's a baby angel.

A baby angel.

Will said to me last week, he goes, you know you're going to get sick.

And I said, what?

Yeah, you're going to get sick.

Yeah, right when you get home, you'll get sick.

And I'm like, why would you think that?

And boy, I don't feel sick, but oh my God.

Sean.

My body doesn't know it's not over.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

No, so you're going to probably just power down for about a week?

No, just a couple of days.

Sean, you've been up here.

You have been working at this high level every day, getting yourself up to this thing every day.

Every day.

For months and months and months and months.

Is it possible that your body, like you're right?

Because I told myself, I'm not going to get sick.

I'm not going to get sick.

I can't get sick.

Right.

And then now I'm just like shutting down.

My body's like, yeah, I'm shutting down too.

Yeah.

I don't know.

Yeah.

And what about just your instinct to perform and entertain and be charismatic and have presence and whatnot?

Why start now?

Yeah.

You just sit on the couch and Scotty's like trying to have a conversation.

And you're just like, no, not until October.

No talky talky anymore.

I saw this interview.

I'm all bits aside with Miley Cyrus the other day.

And she was talking about how hard it is, how she doesn't like to tour because she creates this.

It's too demanding.

It creates this sort of bloated ego because she has to get ready to get up.

And then her relationship with the audience is being the observed.

And then the audience is the observer.

And what she has to do to create that.

She says it pulls her away from herself, her true self.

And she becomes something else.

And the more she does it, I mean, I'm kind of paraphrasing.

But it made a lot of sense.

And I get that shot every night you're up there.

Yes, it was a lot.

But it was very rewarding.

I'm sad and glad at the exact same time that it's over.

I get to see you guys.

I'm real excited whether you guys like it or not.

Well, I hope that you're giving yourself the atta boy that you deserve and feeling a sense of pride and accomplishment.

And I mean, the accolades are public, so it's unanimous.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

But also just sort of privately and internally over there at the show.
I'm sure that you were also like Tony Award level leader and creating a nice environment.
And you should pat yourself on the back for all.
Well, thanks.
It was easy.
Everybody was great.
Well, here's what Sean said to me the other day, which I really related to.
And he said, you would love the bits that we do backstage nonstop.
He's like, I do it almost just for that.
And I totally get that.
Jay, you know that feeling of like just being there and fucking around in the bits.
We used to have that on a thing that we used to do years ago and we've all had it.
We've shared it together.
It's the bits.
It's the crew.
It's the crew you work with and the cast you work with.
And then the product you push out to the public that you never meet is fantastic.
But it is a very intimate process, right?
Yeah.
I used to do, I would do this bit right before I entered in the show where there's a little platform where the door is.
You have to step up on the platform.
And I pretended I lost all my faculties, like five seconds before I entered.
And I took both my hands and lifted one leg onto the platform and the other.
Then I lifted my arm onto the door handle.
And then my cue was like right there.
And then you come out.
Give us, give us.
Yeah.
Yeah.
I tell you what though, I'm really excited speaking of bits to get into our guest today because he has so many bits to his life that each one of them individually kind of add up to this incredible, each one of them is incredible unto itself.
And then when you look at it, what he's done in its entirety, it's truly, it's epic.
I don't want to embarrass them.
All the bits put together.
Yeah.
And I don't want to embarrass him.
I have never met him.
And I'm in awe of the fact that he's here today.
He's a musical and an American icon for lack of a better word.
We've listened to, here's one of the most amazing things.
He's sold millions and millions, over a hundred millions of records as a part of a band.
And the same amount as a solo recording artist for the last 50 years.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

And he's done, he's sung.

Incredible songs that you know that are such a part of your life at different stages.

Paul Simon.

That are part of your parents' lives.

Yeah.

You know what, Jason?

Is it Paul Simon?

It's Mr. Paul Frederick Simon.

Yes.

Are you kidding me?

Are you kidding me?

Shit.

There he is.

Oh my God.

Wow.

What are we doing?

We don't deserve this.

Good morning.

Good morning.

Paul, when I was, this is like so stupid and you get this every day of your life.

But when I was a kid, I listened to two albums over and over and over and over again.

Yours was, The Bridge Over Troubled Water was one I memorized.

And that's when they had the lyrics on that jacket.

And so I memorized all the words to every song, baby driver, like all those songs.

And then, and the nutcracker, but that's neither here nor there.

But I memorized every single word.

I just been, it's wild to meet somebody.

I've never met you.

Whereas we talked about this before on the show where music is actually something that penetrates a person's soul and DNA and it stays with you forever.

And you're one of them for me.

It's pretty wild.

I know the feeling because we toured with the Everly Brothers once.

And I had the same feeling about the Everly Brothers.

I couldn't believe that the Everly Brothers were actually in our show.

And they were completely oblivious to how important the figures they were in my life.

But you know what about music?

It's not, it's not, of course, it's true that it penetrates deeply and we all have this powerful, powerful memories enhanced by music.

But isn't it also so that it's like somewhere really at its zenith between like 12 and 16 years old?

The stuff that you hear then, maybe a little earlier even.

That is what you love for your whole life.

And so it must be that there's something really intense about our senses in that age.

I guess that's not a revelation.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

That's when I listen to it.

No, it is a revelation.

Well, it's not.

But it does seem like those are the years in which you kind of, you open up and you grow up and you start to kind of come alive and have a sense of yourself that is separate from your identity.

As a child of your parents, you have an identity.

You start to under, you start to see the world, I think, through different eyes a little bit, 12 through 16.

Right.

And yeah, so all those things hit and Sean, I'm with you like I, as I was sort of in anticipation of talking to you today, I went back and I've been listening to so much of your music over the last few days.

And it once again kind of, it took me back to very vivid places in time, riding in the car with my dad, you know, just being a kid.

And it makes me emotional now even thinking about it because I can feel that connection.

Yeah, yeah.

And that must be to be, and for you to say that you had that same feeling with the Everly Brothers is amazing.

I guess the question I have for you is, do you, when people come and say these things to you and talk about the importance or where you fit into their lives, their lives, what kind of, what is that relationship like for you?

What does that do to you as a person?

You know, I don't, I understand it, of course, because as I said, I felt it myself, but as far as thinking about myself in the way that others think about me, I don't think that way.

I don't find it helpful.

It's a distraction to think, oh, I, whatever.

It's like you were talking about Miley Cyrus before I revealed myself.

And is that in the show?

What you were talking about?

Yeah, yeah.

It was?

Yeah, yeah.

And she was talking about, you were talking about her thinking about her relationship to the audience.

I don't think about that because I find it, I find it a distraction to be in the audience at the same time as I'm on the stage.

So I think when I'm performing, I'm just interested in listening to what other musicians are playing around me and, and fitting in in the most musical way that gives me the most pleasure.

And interpreting the songs that I choose to sing from my repertoire in a way that makes them still be, you know, accurate or, you know, relevant to my life because I'm sure you'll all understand this. Once you have to say a line many times and for a singer, if I'm going to sing the sound of silence again, I have to have a reason to sing that, or I'm just a Paul Simon cover band.

So, you know, what's the, what's the good at that?

Does that, does that mean like if you were to perform sound of silence, let's say tonight, you would,

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

you would look to sort of channel a current feeling that you have or something that you're thinking about in your life currently and apply that to the song and give that the context of the song and the lyrics as you sing it tonight?

Yeah, maybe if that, if that would work, or it depends as long as you're concentrating, if I concentrate on the interpretation of the song, the phrasing, it's almost, I don't know, you know, I don't want to go into fall into a cliché, but I am about to, it's almost like a little bit of a Zen exercise. You have to find something to concentrate on so that you're not doing it by rote and that, and then it's, then it's of no value. And I also believe that the audience wants to see you do that.

Yeah, they really don't want to see you do the same performance by memory. They won't. And I think that they, they can sense whether you're doing it.

Sincerely, whatever, whatever the sincerity is based on or whether you're doing it.

They want to see you feel it like they're feeling it.

Yeah, you, and then, well, I always say this too about song, about songs, the listener completes the song.

A song, I write a song, you hear it, you heard the Bridge Over Trouble Water album. And what was the song you picked out? You said...

Baby Driver?

So that's interesting. So here's a whole album. It was the album of the year and Bridge Over Trouble Water, the song was the most popular song in the world that year.

But what you remembered was Baby Driver, which is interesting because when we made the album, we weren't thinking that Baby Driver was, I wasn't thinking that Baby Driver was going to be, I didn't know what it was going to be.

But I'm not surprised that you picked that or any other one. And the same goes if I said, well, what's the lyrics of Baby Driver?

Well, I will say that to you. Just give me an example of the lyrics.

And they call them Baby Driver. I just hit the road and I'm gone.

Okay, good. Let's stop. Sorry.

It was a group.

I hit the road and I'm gone.

We say that a lot to Sean.

It was a really good performance. That's what I'm going to take from this show, your performance.

But what you said, what you said Sean was, and they call them Baby Driver.

And they called her or him or something.

They call me Baby Driver.

They call me Baby Driver.

But you remember it as, and they called them Baby Driver.

So, which is just as interesting, a line actually.

Yeah, thanks.

Sean, you were saying yesterday that you loved his, their song, Sound of Quiet.

That's how you remember it.

The sound of quiet.

By the way, it should be known. I just have to, while we're on the sound of silence, I have to bring this up because it's kind of crazy.

Jason, you'll remember this. Sean, this is news to you.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

Jason and I worked on a project a few, over the course of many years.
And we had a moment when we were in the fourth incarnation of this project we were working on.
We're in the middle of a strike pause. We're not naming anything.
And in this project, the camera at various times would push in on me, my character, as I was having these sort of existential moments and of sort of fear and doubt and confusion, whatever.
Introspection.
Introspection, they play Sound of Silence and it would push in and they licensed the song for this program.
And they push in on my fate.
Hello, darkness, my old friend.
And it happened about six or seven times during the series.
Sounds very expensive.
I know, it was very expensive.
My favorite being this one, and it ended up becoming a meme that they did with Ben Affleck for a long time, starting like 2016.
But there's a great one at one point.
All of a sudden, you hear the music start up and I say, my character says something, it pushes in on my face.
And you hear, and you see a mariachi band go behind me with a trumpet.
And they go, oh, it's not us.
And then the camera stops pushing in.
Anyway, just to say that that song had a huge impact.
It has had a huge impact on my life.
Hey, Paul, on the licensing thing, does every single request for licensing for stuff from music, television, commercials, anything, does it get directly to you?
Or does that go to your manager?
Does it go to your label?
I mean, do you have hands-on on who gets it and who doesn't?
Well, it doesn't anymore because I sold my publishing company about two years ago.
Well, it was a mix, partly good and partly not good.
But before that, when it was up to me, kind of, sort of went to management and they would filter out some request that's totally inappropriate.
You know, you can pick any kind of inappropriate combination you want.
But otherwise...
Yeah, there was some sort of a clamp for your nose for getting rid of snoring.
They probably wouldn't get you the request.
Right, for sound to silence.
I would say, yeah, that's right.
Well, I would say just out of curiosity, how much of a...
Of course, always.
Not going to say yet, but just out of curiosity, how much for the nose clamp on sound to silence.
To the extent you're comfortable, can you elaborate on what the good and what the bad was of selling a catalog at the risk of getting into the weeds?
Yeah, sure.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

The good part about it is, none of my children are interested in running that company or managing that company.

And I wouldn't want them to.

I can understand.

It's not of interest to them.

So there's no use to leave it to them because they don't want it anyway.

And then they'll just...

So that means they'll go and sell it.

So I'm better off selling it now and giving them the money rather than holding on to it.

That's the good part of it.

The bad part is, you actually sort of lose contact with the thing that's part of you.

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

It's weird.

It's a little bit...

Put it this way, it's good financially and psychologically.

It's a tiny bit of a wound, you know.

Yeah, it's like a divorce probably or something.

No.

Okay.

And we will be right back.

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[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

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Don't golf like me.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

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All right.

Back to the show.

You know, Paul, I remember that one sketch you did on this one sketch show.

It's very, it's very famous now.

And it has to do with what we're doing right now.

Which is everybody, you're standing in line to get into like a movie or something.

Oh yeah.

It's a very famous.

And they say something like, I'm going to get this wrong.

But like, you know, hey Paul, I played in your band of a lot.

Do you remember me?

No.

Hey Paul.

I was like, you know, I was a friend of yours back in high school.

Do you remember me?

No.

And then somebody, it builds up to the last person going, Paul, I was sitting on a little red rug in the middle of the night.

I was sitting on a little red rug in the middle of the night.

I was sitting on a little red rug in the middle of Central Park,

like about 10,000 feet from you during your live concert.

And you're like, Jim, how are you?

It's so great.

That was funny.

And it was such a, it's such a.

That was funny.

Speaking of Central Park, is there any chance that you'll ever play Central Park again?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

No.

There's no chance that I'll, I don't think there's much chance that I'll play again.

No.

Well, I don't, well, I'll just say it and get it over with.

I lost the hearing in my left ear about a year ago.

It's just about one year now.

Oh, I'm sorry.

And I can't, I can't hear when drums and electric guitar are playing.

I can't sing with it.

I can't hear my voice in the, in the, in the mix.

So I can't perform with a band.

I might be able to perform this new, this piece that I did seven Psalms, which is just acoustic guitar.

I'm going to try that next month with two guitarists playing the parts that I wrote and see if I, because I think I can handle that much sound.

But more than that, no, it's blown me out.

It's, it's, it's a drag.

Yeah.

I mean, I'm sorry.

No, that is a dragon.

But anyway, you can't play Central Park.

They won't, they don't want anybody to play in Central Park.

And I think I'm the reason too.

Why?

The concert that I did there in 1991 had by the police estimate 750,000 people.

I think there was just so much damage done to Central Park from the just people walking over the great lawn that they, they've restricted concerts there.

And they, and when they do have them, they restrict the size.

So there won't be any of those events like, like the Simon and Garfunkel concert.

And also it took up a lot of valuable space from, you know, from drug dealers and, and, and, you know, pimps and stuff.

They got had to move to different areas.

Let me just, Paul, I wanted to talk to you mentioned seven Psalms, which I just think is pretty remarkable.

I just listened to it and it's hard to, I was like, you guys haven't heard it yet.

It's, I don't think, but it's, it's sort of part song and part album.

It's kind of one, and forgive me, Paul, if I'm not doing a good job of describing it.

It's like a one long piece, it seems like.

And it starts with these, what I think are bells and then kind of ends with the bells as well.

Am I right in that, Paul?

Almost the, it is a long piece, it's a 33 minute piece.

And it's meant to be played in its entirety.

But the sounds that you heard as bells, they do, they do sound something like bells.

They're actually an instrument called a cloud bowl that was invented by a composer named Harry

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

Parch.

And Harry Parch is kind of a very interesting cul-de-sac composer.

He said, the vision of an octave into 12 notes, you know, if you look at a piano and you start with C and you play to C,

and you include the white and black keys, you have 12 tones in an octave.

He said, that's a European conception that an octave is divided into 12 tones.

It's arbitrary.

Actually, he thought it was divided into 42 microphones.

So in order to play the music that he heard, which was divided into these 42 notes in an octave, he had to invent instruments that could play in that small of an interval.

And one of the instruments that he invented was this cloud bowl, which was a picture, a wine glass that's maybe three feet in diameter

and another three or four feet high, hung upside down and you hit it with a mallet and it produces that tone.

You'll cut all of this out because it's...

No, no, are you kidding?

It's only interesting to musicians.

It does start with those...

If you're using all of those tones that are in the middle of the chromatic scale, then how would that blend in with any chord?

It would just sound so dissonant.

It does.

If you blend it with tonal music, it's going to sound dissonant.

But it doesn't necessarily have to sound dissonant in a way that is not pleasing.

For example, if you're playing whatever your keyboard or you're composing or you're making something, and in the distance you hear a church bell ringing,

and maybe in another further distance you hear a second church bell, the sound of those two bells, they don't make what you're playing sound less interesting.

They probably enhance it.

There's something about that, those overtones that we really like.

And I think that's maybe what was parched was onto.

But in this piece, Seven Psalms, I use a lot of different bells and percussion instruments that are not really in the key, but they enhance the acoustic guitar.

Yeah, have you ever heard of the German term playing pharmon music?

I haven't. What's that mean?

It's kind of what we're talking about. It's an overall term that means, you know, it's more color in a song rather than within a chord.

It's just for atmospheric kind of feeling.

Well, that term applies to Seven Psalms.

There is a lot of that to create a certain atmosphere.

In the same way that I said, oh, the listener completes the song.

I believe that when the listener listens to things, if you give them a certain sound and you place it just far enough so that they can just hear it, it creates a depth in your hearing.

And that depth, just like if you imagine the church bells in the distance.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

There's something about that that opens the listener or maybe I'm just speaking for myself personally, but I think I'm not.

I think it's true for a lot of people.

There's something about these distant sounds that open us up emotionally.

And if as a writer, a songwriter, if I can produce sounds that allow the listener to open themselves emotionally, then whatever it is that I have to say lyrically has a chance of being really meaningful. Of landing.

Yeah.

Right.

You've laid the groundwork for them to really absorb the lyrics.

It's interesting to hear you talk about it in this way.

I'm fascinated in listening to Seven Psalms.

It is a really remarkable piece in that I feel like albums are often meant to be heard in their entirety, at least they used to be.

And this kind of in a lot of ways forces you to listen to it as one piece because it is kind of one continuous piece that's made up of all these different peaks and valleys.

And it occurs to me listening to you talk about it and talking about people and really how important actually the listener is to you.

I really believe it now more than ever.

Has that changed or evolved at all when you started first making records or recording?

I mean, before you were recording with, I guess you had been recording with art, but when you were you recorded a lot of stuff and had some hits on your own under different pseudonyms like Jerry Landis, I think was one of the names you used and you had a bunch of different names.

When I was a teenager, yeah, but none of that were hits.

You had a few charts, but did you always have that approach to this approach to music and just got more refined or when was it that you started to really understand or I don't know?

Yeah, I understand this right.

When were you cognizant of?

I think what I had naturally, I think, was this understanding, but I didn't intellectually think of it.

So when I was 23 years old and I wrote The Sound of Silence, I didn't think anything other than that's probably my best song up till now.

I didn't think about anything.

It's only later, and maybe in the last 15 years or something like that, that I begin to think, why do we like this sound?

What is it about this song that makes me love it and remember it from all the other songs that were happening at the same time when I was of that age, when I was really receptive to music?

And if I were to throw the question back to you on a comedic level, if you're setting up a comedic environment where what you can do is going to achieve what you want, which is to get people to laugh and also to think that's true.

I'm laughing, but I also know that's really true.

It's part of my enjoyment is that, well, in order to do that, I mean, you can do it.

When you're young, you do it naturally.

And later on, you think, why is that funny?

What do I need to do that?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

And a lot of it has to do, I think, with attention span of the listener or the viewer.
So I think a lot about attention span, because my attention span, well, it is what it is.
When I'm writing, I think, oh, I'm tired of this.
It's time for me to change a pattern, maybe change a rhythmic pattern, maybe change the key that I'm in, maybe change whatever.
My attention span is saying that I'm bored and I'm about to bail out.
That's what I think the listener does all the time.
You listen to most music or most comedy.
And if you're not drawn into it, if you're not hooked, you're leaving.
You're mentally leaving.
And with a comic, if they're not funny for a long enough period of time, and that might be a minute and a half, maybe it's five minutes, whatever.
That set is blown.
You're gone.
Same with the song.
The component to comedy is surprise and lack of predictability.
And you do that, I would think, without even trying.
There's nothing predictable.
There's nothing boring about your music.
In fact, you're constantly changing your sound and things just become even more sort of sophisticated and layered.
And I'm not sure what the right words would be, but it never seemed common.
I mean, in all the decades you've been making music, and in fact, there was something very, very human and vulnerable and connecting to the real deep and small part inside of me always.
And can you attribute that sense of...
By the way, JB, kind of to what you're saying, and maybe you can put this in, think about all the different types of music, the world music that Paul got into and all that stuff.
And all that still spoke to us, even though it was different.
My response to that is, it's not different.
They put a name on it and call it world music, but I thought, I don't see why any of this is different from any other piece of popular music that I like.
And I thought that way, going back into the Bridge Over Troubled Water album, which has a song called El Condor Pasa, which is like a 400-year-old Peruvian...
Well, maybe that's, maybe it's two, 300-year-old old Peruvian melody.
And it's lasted that long.
I heard it performed in Paris in 1965 by this folk group.
And I loved it.
And I thought, oh, I really love that.
Why not?
Why can't I write a lyric to that?
I'll just get the permission from the people who recorded it and I'll put a lyric onto it.
The same is true with Mother and Child Reunion.
It's not like I said, oh, I'll do this because it's reggae.
No, I just like, I like that sound.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

It didn't sound incompatible with other music sounds that I liked.
And if you go, I guess I'm, in a way, by my age, I'm privileged in that the music that I listened to, that I fell in love with, which is in the 50s, is really world music.
I mean, you have, as I said, the Everly Brothers.
Well, that sound is Appalachian music, you know, those harmonies.
And those harmonies are Celtic.
They come from Ireland.
They come from England.
That's that sound.
Dewop comes from gospel quartets, those gospel quartets from the black church.
That's another culture.
Elvis Presley is combining country with rhythm and blues.
Music from Louisiana is being, is syncopated because it's drawing from rhythms from that's come up from the African diaspora of the drum.
It's coming up through the Caribbean, finds its way into Louisiana.
That mixes with French accordion and fiddle music and becomes zydeco.
All of these were put together.
They were all hits in the 50s and they just called it rock and roll.
And I was 13 years old and I just thought it's all the same music.
What do you attribute your, I mean, your taste is not, it's not common.
You know, like you never seem to write a common song or put up with something that is easy and commercial.
And what do you attribute your taste, your confidence, your sophistication in music?
Like, did your parents encourage you to like stuff that's a little bit more challenging?
Or is it just the bands, as you said, that you ended up falling in love with as a kid?
And then that just identified and built your taste?
My father was a musician and I would say he didn't like the music that I liked.
There was a huge division between his generation and mine.
He loved music from the big band era and that's what he probably grew up playing.
And he wasn't interested at all in rock and roll.
So, no, he didn't encourage me or give me any of that.
I guess he did, but I wasn't interested, you know, like he loved classical music.
He loved Mahler, you know, and I remember him playing is for me, not when I was a kid, but you know, when I was like already in my 40s or something, maybe your early 50s, he said, this is what I love, this Mahler's fifth.
So I listened to it and I thought it's so, it's inexplicable why people love what they love, but I don't love it, but he does.
So anyway, no, they didn't have anything to do with it.
But you said something that was interesting, Jason.
Oh boy.
We probably marked it because it's rare.
We're going to circle the day.
I was just basically asking, you know, what can you attribute your non-common taste to and your confidence in always putting out something that never sounds the same as the last?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

Okay, so let's go to the confidence thing first, okay?

Because I don't have confidence.

I don't.

I don't buy it.

I quite often think this is no good, you know?

But then I say to myself, it's just a distraction to think this is no good.

It's not improving anything.

Just go ahead and do what you feel, you know?

And by the way, it takes a battle to get rid of that voice that says this is no good.

That's no good.

That's no good, you know?

We all have it.

We all have that, right?

Yeah.

So I don't really have confidence.

What I feel is, it's like people used to say at a certain period of time when I was writing hits all the time, oh, you have your finger on the pulse.

And I would think my finger is out there and the pulse is running under it at the moment.

But it's going to, the pulse is going to leave.

But I'm still going to have, I'm still going to be exploring with my finger to see where I want to go.

Sometimes I'm going to go to a place that's less well-known, like South African music, and many, many people will say, oh, I love that.

And they'll agree with me.

And then sometimes I'll go to a place like a combination of Latin music and doo-wop, like what I wrote in *The Cape Man*, which is a musical that I wrote for Broadway, which is a gigantic flop, critically, commercially, everything.

And now nobody was interested in what I was thinking.

So really, what can you do other than just to go to what you're interested in?

Because if you decide you're going to go and see, now I wonder what people are interested in, and I'll go and do that.

You'll just fail.

You'll never get it right.

And if you do get it right, well, then if you do figure that out, well, then you're not an artist anymore.

It's hollow.

It doesn't have any heart.

And if you believe that it's essential to have heart, then you discard that as a choice.

And if you don't believe in heart and you're just interested in success, well, then you pursue another path towards success.

Yeah.

We'll be right back.

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[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

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So I've been checking out Atomic Habits by James Clear.

I love his last name. It's so apropos.

It's a great, great audiobook.

It'll teach you exactly like how to form good habits, break bad ones,

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

and master kind of like the tiny behaviors that lead to amazing, amazing results.

I really, really highly recommend it.

You know, we always joke about on the podcast how we don't read, but listening to an audiobook seems to be more time efficient for us.

And I really, really enjoy actually listening to books. It's fantastic.

I'm reading again with my ears.

And now back to the show.

Did you ever get close to pursuing acting even more than you did?

Because you're fantastic at it. You seem very, very comfortable at it.

You know, I have some skillset in doing comedy.

I don't think I could do any other kind of serious acting and play anything other than myself.

I couldn't submerge myself.

Paul, that's not surprising to me because you brought up comedy before

and there is a connection there with music and comedy because they're both about rhythm, right?

Yeah.

At their core.

And I think that there's, you guys feel the same, tell me the same thing.

You know, over the years I've met so many bands who are really into comedy and I know so many comedians who are really into music.

As you guys know, I'm a music nut.

I'm like an absolute, and I think that that's a natural sort of a correlation between the two.

It is. Musicians are very funny.

Yeah, they can be.

Musicians really like to laugh and some of the funniest people that I know are musicians.

And, you know, as funny as any professional comedians.

So, yeah, there's a connection there.

There are many connections between comedy and music.

Timing, attention span, pitch.

You know, I mean, think of, they used to call him the beast.

You know who I mean?

Sam.

Sam Kinnison?

Yeah.

Yeah, Sam Kinnison.

Think of how he made people laugh and the volume level that he was at.

That he used as a comedic device.

And then think of someone like Steven Wright, you know?

Yeah.

So, so volume.

Yeah, there are a lot of connections.

I mean, I also found a great affinity with painters.

Some of my close friends were painters.

And the way they thought about how they resolved issues on a canvas was not very different from the way I thought about resolving.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

Questions that were song questions.

And you know what?

I mean, Joe Tory is a friend of mine.

Oh, wow.

And so is Bernie Williams.

Wow.

These, the way they think about baseball and hitting.

It wasn't any different from the way you guys are thinking about comedy and I'm thinking about music.

It's like all of it is connected.

Actually, Paul, that's interesting because Bernie Williams is also a guitarist.

Isn't he a musician as well?

Yeah.

Very good guitarist.

Good musician.

You sound like a Yankee fan.

We won't torture you and talk about this season, but there's always next year.

Yeah, let's not bring up the subject this year.

Jason, why would you even mention it?

He's a huge baseball fan.

You know, it's amazing.

Go ahead.

Go ahead.

You talk.

You're the guest.

I'm going to take a second into how much I like baseball and think about baseball and, you know, how much of my identity has to do with baseball.

Like I'm, I play guitar right handed.

And, but I throw and I bat left handed or I kick a football.

Yeah.

I'm ambidextrous.

But sometimes if I go to as an exercise, go to a really, really pleasant memory from childhood.

Go there, you know, as a meditation.

A lot of them are baseball memories.

And it's always Yankees never Dodgers.

No, no, it's no me playing.

No Dodgers.

No, I went to a Dodger game once when I was nine.

My grandparents lived in Brooklyn and they took me to Evans field, but I wore a mask because I did not want to be associated in any way.

Wait, can I, Paul, can I read you this quote?

Maybe you remember this quote from, from Donald Fagan.

Do you know the quote I'm going to say about baseball?

No, I don't.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

But I know, I know Donald, but go ahead.

Apparently he said that he described you as a certain kind of New York Jew, almost a stereotype really to whom music and baseball are very important.

I think it has to do with the parents.

The parents are either immigrants or first generation Americans who felt like outsiders and assimilation was the key thought.

They gravitated to black music and baseball looking for an alternative culture.

And apparently upon hearing his description, you said that it isn't far from the truth.

Yeah, I'll stick with that.

Is there a question in there?

No, no, I just wanted to say that.

No, I know.

Are you a, are you, I would imagine, and I'm sure you're going to say yes just out of politeness, but I would imagine you'd be a pretty big Steely Dan fan.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Steely Dan is a very musical band, both of those guys.

Well, it's only Donald now.

Yeah, that was one of my favorites.

Do you feel like, do you still feel when you get up in the morning or right before you go to bed or whenever you felt like when you were younger writing songs?

Do you still feel the same urge and pull?

Like if something inspires you, do you run and grab your guitar or sit at the piano or something like that to get it out before you forget?

Or are you just like, you know what?

I'll get to it when I get to it now.

Well, now going to Seven Psalms, that idea came to me in a dream.

The dream said, I can't remember whether it said you are working on a piece called Seven Psalms or you should write a piece called Seven Psalms.

And it was such a strong dream that I got up and wrote it down.

I don't, I don't usually, although I did the other day actually write something down.

It's good that I do because otherwise I forget.

But just because you wake up from a dream and write something down doesn't mean it's any good.

Yeah.

In fact, a lot of the stuff that you think up in your dreams is no good at all.

Right.

Especially funny stuff.

Paul, have you ever been approached or been curious or interested in scoring movies?

Dude.

Yeah, I am.

I was going to get to it.

I haven't been approached too often, but yeah, I am.

I like it.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

I would like the challenge of it.

Yeah?

All right.

Here come a bunch of...

Well, Jay, remember he, Jay, remember he...

Oh, sorry.

I'm going to get into the movie thing because he worked with, obviously with Mike Nichols back in the day.

Mike asked us to do the, you know, to do the graduate.

Yeah.

Well, I was a big fan of Nichols and May.

Yeah, for sure.

Were you guys fans of Nichols and May?

Oh, of course.

Oh, of course.

Yeah.

Massive.

You know, it's a...

Here's a question for you.

It's an interesting dividing line.

You know, you can find it in music, but you can find it in comedy too.

There are certain comedians that you love.

It's like when I said, are you fans of Nichols and May?

You all say, oh yeah, of course, you know, of course.

Yeah.

But that line, I wonder what that line means because if I said, were you a big fan?

Were you all a big fan of Red Skelton?

Yeah.

See, there are different kinds of humor, right?

Yeah, one's reality based, one's broad, yeah.

Oh, that's interesting.

I never thought about how you would, what the different humor...

But your humor, you know, when you were talking about how you would never want to be a dramatic actor, I was going to say that your humor is very...

No, I couldn't.

I'd love to be a dramatic actor if I had the ability, but I don't.

Yeah, but I'm here to tell you that you're doing it already and your brand of comedy is very reality based.

It's very sort of...

Dry.

Yeah, it's dry.

You're not performing.

You're not throwing to the back row.

You're kind of in it and real and grounded, and that's a certain kind of humor, right?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

It's Woody Allen humor versus Mel Brooks humor, both great, but completely different.
Mine would be...
The first comedic thing that I remember that I fell in love with was Bob and Ray.
Did you ever hear of Bob and Ray?
No?
I've heard of them, but...
No, I don't know Bob and Ray.
You should do that because that's like me saying, did you ever hear of Louis Armstrong?
If you're a Miles Davis family...
I can't, I'm drawing a blank.
That's the guy who landed on the moon, well...
Yeah, that's exactly what I thought.
Well, Bob and Ray, they were very deadpan.
It was...
By the way, Paul, you're not referring to Bob Ray, the former NDP Premier of Ontario, right?
He's a natural guy, sorry.
Oh, yeah, I mixed it up.
Lord knows who Bob Ray is.
Lord probably does, yeah.
No, well, you guys are in for a big, big treat when you rediscover Bob, Elliot and Ray Goulding.
They were incredible.
I heard them on radio.
I used to hear them in the morning before I was going to school.
I guess my mother used to like them.
But it was the same kind of sort of school, not exactly because they were verbal, all verbal,
but it was Jack Benny would be out of that world.
It was a very dry kind of deadpan humor.
Which is a very close cousin to dramatic acting, you know, because you're not winking.
You're trying to be real.
You're not being goofy and winking to the audience.
Nobody hates to wink more than Jason.
You're going to learn that quickly.
I get hit for it.
I think for, you know, it's not to be a name dropper, but I was having a conversation with Jack
Nicholson once.
Jesus Christ.
Oh, Paul, it's so tacky.
Yeah, I'll tell you my biggest name drop story in a second.
But I was having this conversation with Jack Nicholson.
And what I remember out of it was he said, at this point, I could play anything and get it right.
I could play my mother and get it right.
So there's, for great actors, they have an ability to become something.
I don't know how they do it.
It seems like magic.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

It's like musicians where you say, how do you, how do they do that?
Where'd that come from?
It's a, it's really a gift.
It's a great gift for those, you know.
What's your, what's your biggest name drop story?
My biggest name drop story is, and it's not going to, it's not going to be what you think.
Because it's, it was, I was, I was talking to the Dalai Lama.
It's, that's not the name.
Okay.
That's still pretty big.
But he said to me, he said, you know, I remember Mao Tse Tung once said to me.
And he said, that's, that's the best one.
I could, I could give you John Lennon, but I cannot, I cannot give you Mao Tse Tung.
That's the best one.
That's amazing.
That's pretty good.
Listen, I feel like we could talk to you all day.
I do, I do want to mention, because I think it's, it's interesting to me and I don't know if it, if it resonates or if there's any connection here.
That hearing you talk about music and playing when you were young and you were saying your dad had no influence.
But I know that your dad was, because he was a musician, it sort of laid the groundwork for that to be part of, okay, to be part of your life or maybe how you got into it.
And then I now listen to Seven Psalms and your, and your wife, whom you mentioned is Edie is also participates on Seven Psalms.
And I'm like, you've had a lifetime of making music and being around people who are family and people whom you've known forever.
And what a great, again, I don't know if there's much of a question there, but does that resonate at all with you?
Well, it's a great privilege to make music with people who, whose music you respect, you know, so. I'm married to a really, really great songwriter and singer, Edie Brackell, and she sings two duets with me on the Seven Psalms.
But again, you know, to go back to, like, these choices about where, you know, why would, how did you think of doing this thing or that unusual thing?
It's about musicians.
Like, it was strange for a little bit to be playing with musicians from South Africa, but it was just a little while and then everything became just about the music.
And then it all blended, everything blended in and the differences evaporated for the moment.
They never really go completely go away, but yeah, it's a cliché, but music is the universal language.
It's true.
Paul Simon, my gosh, I could listen to you.
Thanks Paul.
Such an honor for you.
I know.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

You've taken some time to talk to us.
It's such a pleasure to meet you.
Yeah.
Thank you so much.
I enjoyed it too.
Thank you.
Thank you, Paul.
All right, guys.
Thank you, Paul.
What a pleasure.
Thanks Paul.
Bye.
Thank you, Paul.
Have a great rest of your day.
Thank you.
You as well.
So you guys cool with me bringing Paul Simon on?
Yeah.
Do we owe you any money for that?
I mean, what the hell?
I mean, I used to, you know, the la la la.
Is that the boxer?
Is that that song?
Yeah, I think so.
I think that's right.
I used to run around as a kid.
By the way, I love you.
La la la.
Right?
Yeah.
La la la.
La la la.
I used to pretend like I was doing those sounds myself
from my hands.
Sure.
I was a kid.
Oh, really?
With your hands?
Yeah.
All alone in the backyard.
Oh, the sweet baby angel in the baby angel backyard.
I wanted to recite the lyrics to Baby Driver on his way out,
but I forgot.
I mean, they're so...

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

Do you remember the lyrics to Daddy Driver?

Yeah, I guess you do.

Well, I know it was really fast.

Will, can I...

How do you...

Is it through Lauren that you know Paul?

No, I don't know about it.

I don't know about it at all through Lauren.

And I just...

I mean, they're very good friends,

but I just...

We just reached out and, you know,

it's one of those kind of a long shot

and you just hope that he responds.

That's so crazy.

You know, he's kind of like the, you know,

one of those icons where when he came onto the show just now

and you're looking at him, you're like,

wow, all those songs came out of his head.

Yeah.

They're so nuts.

Dude, I was going through...

Like I said, I was going through it

and I kept calling like,

oh yeah, 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover.

Yeah.

Oh yeah, Bridget and the Trouble Water.

Yeah.

Oh, the Sound of Silence.

Yeah.

And like all the stuff he did, you know, he had...

He had...

Homeward Bound.

Remember Homeward Bound.

Homeward Bound, number one albums as...

Albums as both a band and a solo artist

and number one singles as a band and a solo.

Do you know how fucking rare that is?

I know it's so rare.

And I'm like, you know,

and Franny, 16 years old, she's listening to all this.

She's discovering all...

Hey, have you heard this song?

Have you heard that?

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

I'm like, oh my God.

Wow.

Well, she's...

Yeah.

You're so much.

Remember all this stuff?

Oh, dude.

So it brings me back to when I was a kid.

I know.

I love him.

I love that you got him well.

It was so cool.

I could have asked him like, you know,
so many questions.

I didn't want to bore him.

I found myself when somebody like that comes on,
like him or Paul McCartney or something.

You want to ask him all the fan questions,
but you don't want to be a jerk about it.

So it's like, you know.

Yeah.

I found myself like, you did too.

Like you're like, not really a question,
but I just want to say...

Exactly.

Hey, I like you.

I like the way you did that.

Exactly.

It was so...

That's how I felt.

You know what it made me think about?

This is on what he was saying about...

It's kind of off topic on this,
but if you think about the Jack Nicholson thing
and Jack Nicholson saying...

And by the way,
obviously I think Jack Nicholson,
one of the greatest actors ever,
certainly film actors.

Amazing.

I mean, massive fan.

And he was saying that he could play his mother
at this point.

He could do anything.

[Transcript] SmartLess / "Paul Simon"

And I thought, yeah.

And you know what part of it is?

It's kind of like what Paul was saying
about the music lays the groundwork
so that the lyrics could then land.

You buy that credibility.

And I think Jack Nicholson has bought
so much credibility over the years culturally
so we know who he is.

So if an alien came down from outer space,
they might not appreciate him playing his mother
or doing something insane the way that we would go,
yeah, but it's Jack Nicholson playing this.

Because we have a built-in thing where we're...

He's laid 50 years of work on us.

If he's built so much bank with his audience.

Yeah.

He's got 50 ways to leave his lover.

Yeah.

You know what one way to leave your lover is just go,
bye.

Bye, Lucer.

Bye.

That was a left hook bye.

Smart.

Live.

Smart.

Live.

Smart.

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