

# THE SOCIAL GATHERING



WELCOME TO THE ENDLESS SUNDAY



ISSUE 1

SUNDAY 5 APRIL 2020

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

THE SOCIAL



*Caught by the River*

## WELCOME!

When the lockdown began, my local pub repurposed itself as a takeaway restaurant and bottle shop. In doing so, they retained a toehold in the community and strived to keep their name alive for a little while longer. Around the same time, The Social pulled down the shutters as the West End wound down. There's just no need for takeaway in the heart of a ghost town.

It left us wondering what to do about the bar during this uncertain, sometimes terrifying, often quite boring period. Every day, we're bombarded by the phrase 'social distancing'. While understanding and adhering to those words, it got us asking the question - what is a distanced version of The Social?

For twenty-one years, The Social has relied on a few things. Two of the most important being customers and conversation. The bar is somewhere to sit, skive and waste time talking about the important things in life, like records, books, food, art and films. The things that help keep the real world at a safe distance for a few hours a day. Remembering that, we kept coming back to a single idea. Let's keep the conversation going.

We've always seen The Social as somewhere to chat and plot, somewhere where ideas can form from sparks (the last booth nearest the toilet being our preferred plotting spot). Without a bar to physically do that in, we've started The Social Gathering - an online magazine in the loosest form that sits on a repurposed Social website (not a lot of call for monthly listings when the only date in the diary is 8pm every Thursday on your doorstep with a metal pot and a wooden spoon in your hand).

For the last week and a bit, we've been posting pieces daily to the bar's website, continuing the conversation in the vacuum of isolation. We'll post many more contributions from friends of the bar and a few new faces in the coming weeks. There will be stories, diaries, reviews, poems, book extracts, recommendations, DJ sets and playlists from artists and friends. It will regularly take the view out of the window from friends around the world. It will feature stuff to print out for the bare walls of your lovely new home office space (never before used corner of living room/downstairs bog). There will be a gnostic tourism section where we'll attempt transcendental travel via a piece of art - be it a mixtape, a passage in a book, a painting or a Cold War Steve picture. It will, we hope, be a place of positivity, but not irritatingly so.

Some content will be uploaded as podcasts, some as YouTube links to specially made music. Each week, we're collecting it up into a downloadable 'magazine'. All of it will be done with a bit of hope and just a touch of the madness that invariably kicks in around 11pm in that back booth.

The Social has always believed in the power of communities that come together when you cross the streams of music, literature and art. The Social Gathering will basically be one of the booths upstairs at The Social, bringing those communities into your own home, wherever you are.

**This week's Social Gathering was put together by Lee Brackstone, Carl Gosling, Tom Noble and Robin Turner. Huge thanks to Mark James for the logo, Steve 'Frank' Rowland for website work and the staff and customers of The Social, who've inspired us to keep the conversation going.**

### IN THIS ISSUE

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- **Sophie Green's March isolation observations**
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- **5 easy seeds with Richard King**
- **New writing from Fat White Family's Lias Saudi**
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+ *more*

# LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING

An extract from the new book by XL chief **RICHARD RUSSELL**

For almost 30 years as label boss, producer, and talent conductor at XL Recordings, Richard Russell has discovered, shaped and nurtured the artists who have rewritten the musical dictionary of the 21st century, artists like The Prodigy, The White Stripes, Adele, M.I.A., Dizzee Rascal and Giggs. He's now telling his story – a portrait of a man who believes in the spiritual power of music to change reality, and a label that refused to be categorised by genre.

I try to let my instincts dictate what work I do and how I do it. In my musical/working life I cannot help but push myself. This hasn't always been a good thing. But I want to make music that can exist on the same extraordinary plane as the work that inspires me. Usually the goal is unattainable, but the pursuit is enough.

There are moments when it seems easy – when Sampha walks in the studio and I play him an instrumental and he improvises a vocal on it which he is channelling from somewhere else and I know that we will have something that might outlast us. Or when someone plays me a song they have been working on and struggling with and I know exactly what they should do, something that will solve the problem. Or when a sample-based instrumental manifests in moments while I work alone in the studio. These moments of yield always feel like a gift.

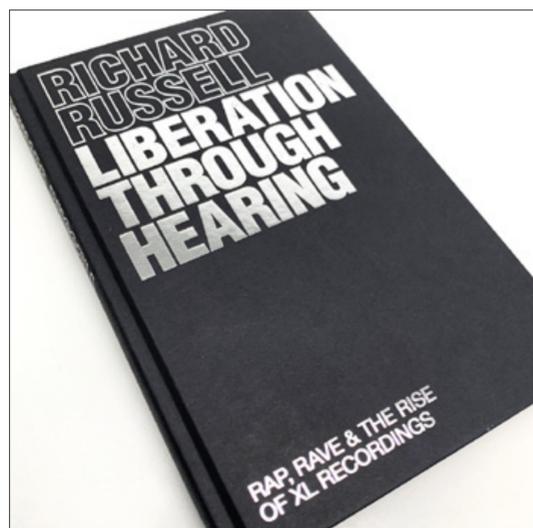
There is a great power in tempering your desires. XL did not resemble the thing I wanted it to until I stopped wanting it to quite so badly. Delusions of grandeur don't lead to grandeur. I had notions of creating an influential record label before I had developed any real breadth of vision. It was ego-based.

When I stopped wanting things for the wrong reasons, they became possible. Now that I'm based full-time in the studio, and developing the necessary craft to be truly effective, the label most closely reflects my idealised vision of it. I let go to concentrate on actually making records.



*Richard's new Everything is Recorded album **FRIDAY FOREVER** is out now from XL Recordings*

***LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING** is available in hardback, ebook and audio from White Rabbit*



The people at the label are empowered and effective. All over the world, people can listen to any of the music released by XL over the last thirty years, anytime they like. I never saw that coming.

In our best moments we are all capable of practising a type of alchemy. Pain becomes art. That the worst experiences of a person's life, the causes of their sorrow, can be turned into the making of their music, is a process possessed of an unutterable, fleeting beauty. It's why the studio is a sacred environment for me; the most magical place in the world.

**Listen to Richard's 140 track playlist, compiled as a soundtrack to **LIBERATION THROUGH HEARING**, at [thesocial.com](https://thesocial.com)**

## RICHARD RUSSELL

**RICHARD RUSSELL  
LIBERATION  
THROUGH  
HEARING**

RAP, RAVE & THE RISE  
OF XL RECORDINGS

IN CONVERSATION WITH HIS EDITOR  
**LEE BRACKSTONE**

**WEDNESDAY 8 APRIL, 7PM**

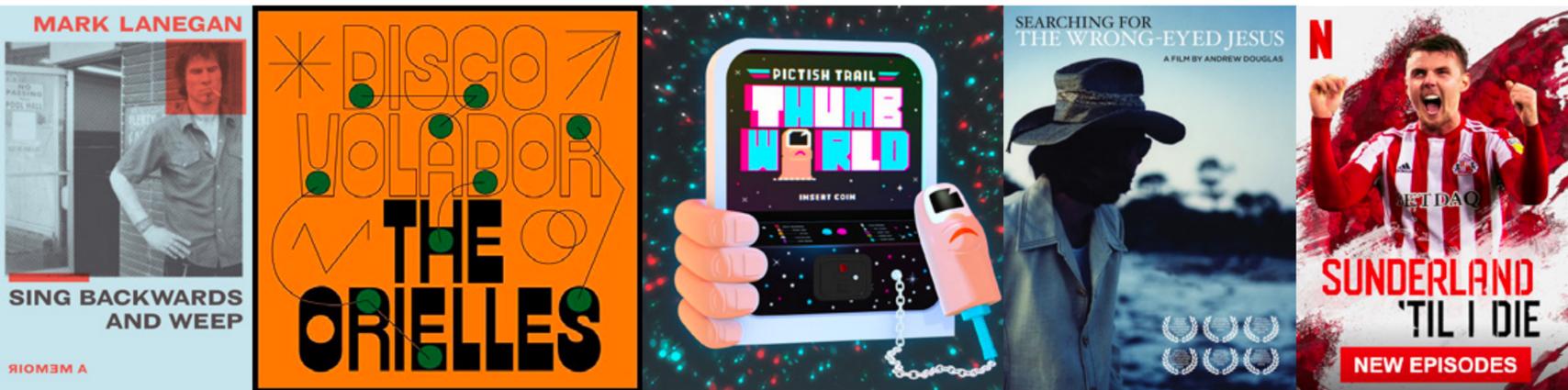
 **MYVLF**

VISIT [MYVLF.COM](https://myvlf.com) TO REGISTER



# MAKING LOCKDOWN BEARABLE...

Maggot Brain magazine/actually talking to your mates again/*Sing Backwards and Weep* by Mark Lanegan/*Lanny*/pint-sized Arbor cans/Turkish Delights/sideburns/*Thumb World* by The Pictish Trail/the rave track off the last Steve Mason EP/*Tales from the Loop*/deep dives into the Weatherdrive/ hilarious name changes on Zoom/‘My New House’/plum tomatoes/The Orielles - *Disco Volador*/Vocation Fen & Vale Sour IPA/*Searching for the Wrong-Eyed Jesus*/Salami/*Sunderland 'Til I Die*...



## WILL BURNS AND MARTHA SPRACKLAND

### Poets in conversation

**Martha:** Will! The virus has taken our book launches. How do you feel?

**Will:** I feel philosophical, I suppose. I'm bound to say it's disappointing; I love an evening surrounded by friends all slapping me on the back and sinking a few as much as anyone does, but equally, as I'd hope anyone in our position would feel, that disappointment is tempered by the knowledge that other people will be going through absolute hell in the next few months. The book's had a long, sometimes hard (or it's felt it) birth, though, so this does feel like yet another aspect of its seemingly innate bad timing.

And how about you? You've been working on your own book for almost as long as we've known each other. How are you feeling?

**M:** It's my own fault for dithering so long, isn't it. Oh, I don't know how I feel. As you say, it's sad not to be looking forward to a party, a big celebration, and to seeing *Citadel* in people's hands. But it's a postponement, not a cancellation. There are so many books this year whose launches will be postponed – we're all in the same boat. I've been half-thinking that once this all blows over we should arrange just one enormous group launch for everyone whose launches didn't happen, like a little festival . . . Is that mad? Could be fun.

Tell me about *Country Music*'s hard birth. Were the poems hard-won? The subject tricky? I knew a couple of these poems intimately, of course, before we started work on *Country Music*, having worked with you on your Faber New Poets pamphlet, back in the day.

**W:** I don't think that sounds mad, it sounds excellent.

I wouldn't say the poems themselves are more hard-won than anyone else's – it's more to do with the whole process of showing what you think might possibly be a book to an editor, the back and forth of that, the doubts, the sense of feeling unfashionable, out of touch with so much else that's going on. A sense of rejection, to speak plainly. And then of course I spoke to you about it and all that dissipated. I did the opposite of dithering, I think, and probably thought I'd written a book a couple of years before I actually had. Matthew Hollis [at Faber] was very thoughtful and astute in his set of notes on the early manuscript he saw, and certainly the later poems that went into the final draft are ones I feel much better about, so in the end I'm very grateful it's worked out how it has. I must just be an impatient bugger, I think. But you asked about the subject matter, and that's something I wanted to ask you about, too. How did you put this collection of yours together? Have you felt that process change from your two pamphlets to full collection?

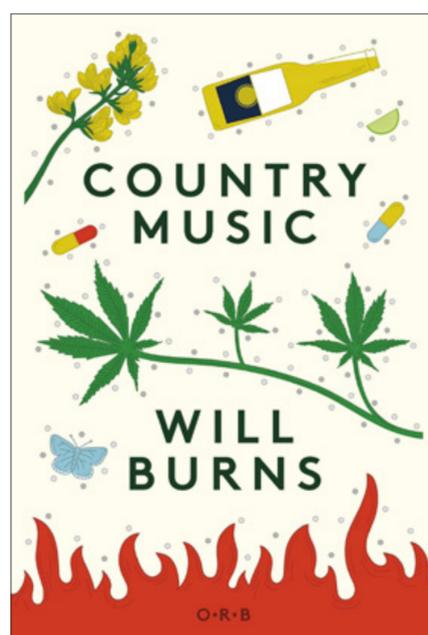
**M:** If you're an impatient bugger I'm an absolute snail. I've had a manuscript ready to send out five, six, seven times over the last few years, and always pulled back at the crucial moment. It's amazing it's happening at all, with me as a roadblock. Speaking of editors, mine was brilliant – Deryn Rees-Jones, at Pavilion. I was quite flighty, I think, and she was great at anchoring me.

The two pamphlets were different, for sure. The first, *Glass As Broken Glass*, which came out on Rack Press, felt much more like a rattlebag; a gathering-together of all the things that seemed strongest that I'd ever written, so I didn't have to think much about theme or narrative (though I definitely see unconscious threads through it, now). And then in 2018 I did *Milk Tooth* on Rough Trade Books, which was totally thematic – that one was a bit more hard-won, I guess. The subject matter was tougher, slightly embarrassing, painful, or exposing, at any rate, so publishing it felt like a real flag-planting. *Citadel* couldn't have come about without Milk Tooth – moments, conversations, and events that are only ever alluded to in *Citadel* actually exist in Milk Tooth, as if the one can be read as a key to the other.

I needed this other voice to write it, I think – the poems in *Citadel* are a sort of collaboration between the narrator, the city of Madrid, and Juana la Loca, the sixteenth-century queen of Spain. I suppose it adds a layer of plausible deniability for all the voices – it's both exposing and shielding, which is partly what the citadel is in the first place. It's about both attack and shelter.

If Madrid and Merseyside are the 'places' of *Citadel*, maybe Buckinghamshire is one of yours, right? But not the only one – *Country Music* has a strong American flavour, too. Where does the book roam, do you think, and what do those different places do for it?

**W:** I like that double-sense the word 'citadel' carries, I suppose I'm trying for those kind of slippages with my places as well. As you say, there's Buckinghamshire, where I grew up; London, where I was both born and then later spent most of my adult life, and there's some poems from France and from Jersey, where my wife's from. That's been an interesting place to spend time in the last couple of years while we've been dealing with the implications of the EU referendum and excavating our relationship with Europe. If you could describe the process as one of fragmentation, then the Channel Islands are a kind of physical embodiment of that – little fragments of land floating off the continent, loaded with all this post-Norman history, a very specific experience of World War II, dying languages, tax havens. All good, heavy stuff.



Then there's this sort of version of America. I think most people my age, growing up here, experienced almost all our culture as drenched in this Americana – the era of MTV, Spielberg films, and clothes, even fast food. It seems quite different if you happen to be teenaged now, so much more inclusive, global. There were exceptions then, of course – notable ones, too, like rave culture – but I think the extent to which America permeated the Western imagination since rock'n'roll, say, is quite strange, quite profound and also discomfiting, unhealthy, and ultimately open to all sorts of exploitation and violence.

We're living through a particularly nasty hangover from all that, I think.

I don't try to get that big, socio-historical stuff in deliberately, though. I'm with Richard Hugo when he says that if what he calls the 'triggering subject' is too big, the mind shrinks. I want to start from the very local, the small, the specific.

## THIRTEEN

by **WILL BURNS**

The train stations of middle England  
with their 'Parkway' epithets,  
fried breakfasts and untidy homeliness.  
A couple of buzzards, farmland.  
Almost nothing to see.  
I notice a certain harmony  
for the first time on an old song.  
Something I must have been missing  
for years – as if it had never been.  
I wonder what it would feel like  
to talk to you once more about that small noise –  
that near inaudible voice.

*Taken from Will's long-awaited debut collection **Country Music**, which was published this week by Offord Road Books.*

*Martha Sprackland is a poet and editor at Offord Road Books, Poetry London, La Errante and Unbound. Her first collection **Citadel** is due to be published by Pavilion Poetry on April 27th.*

*This is an edited extract of their conversation; read the full-length discussion between Will and Martha over on [thesocial.com](https://thesocial.com)*

# LIFE BEYOND THE NEUTRAL ZONE

by Fat White Family's LIAS SAOUDI

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Arthur Schopenhauer, it was reputed, would stick to a strict daily routine. He would reveille at 7am, drink a strong coffee, take a bath, write until noon, luncheon, read for four hours, practice the flute for half an hour, go for a two hour walk, dine out, then take in a play or a show in town. Intermittent visits from prostitutes and the odd trip to the doctor aside, this is how the German pessimist chose to conduct himself each day without fail until death came to release him from the torments of consciousness, the torments upon which he erected his fame.

When incessation from alcoholism a startling feature of your recovery is that suddenly you can remember your dreams; with a wicked clarity you can suddenly peer in through the chinks in your armour of delusion right on down into your subconscious, stumbling unawares upon the mess of a soul languishing therein. My dreams/nightmares are horribly obvious analogies for the lack of character I've been able to muster up over the course of a semi-lifetime. Fetid, sour self-interest intermingled with a hands-off and irrepressible sense of entitlement, of hollow ambition. The pretence of snobbery, a sort of desperate bid to escape my background, what I half assume to be my 'class' (culturally working/Algerian immigrant, economically lower middle) and a furious desire for attention and approval, perhaps emanating from my middle child status. There are some holes you can fill in this life, and then there are some you cannot. The gaping chasm lingering at the core of my most cherished sensibilities is of the latter variety. It's not possible to garner approval from everyone alive AND fuck them all off at the same time, or is it?



I fantasise about depth. I consider the knowledge sealed away in my own head; there's still a fair bit of it there I suppose, despite my best efforts to obliterate it all with alcohol and chemicals. Don't get me wrong, I wouldn't for a second put myself forward as one of those so wounded by the early stages of life that I was forced into 'numbing the pain', I'm not Saul. My infatuation with such measures springs from an intense desire to be near people; it is only when you are near your fellow human beings you can get them to bow down at the altar of your superiority, it is only with actual proximity you can truly get inside your fellow sacks of meat, forever turning the tide within your shitty favour one simpleton at a time. For me it's about control I suppose, something I am of course too ashamed or scared to let on about or confess to, hence the subterfuge of art. Hence the fantasies of depth. My starting point as an artist was really Egon Schiele I suppose, and what a depth he had! Narcissism brought to its purest and loftiest conclusions, stopping at nothing in search of self-actualisation, not even paedophilia. Egon perished in the last great flu pandemic of course, probably a stroke of luck as far as he and the little girls of Vienna were concerned, no?

I have given up smoking, five days now, I have given up alcohol, 4 days now and I haven't access to drugs. There is no possibility of sexual endeavour either, save for the automatic kind. It is the first week of what appears to be a worldwide social lockdown in response to an assortment of Chinese microbes that got a little bit carried away with themselves a few months ago after someone ate a Pangolin in Wuhan or something absurd of that nature. I for one, am all for these draconian measures; for starters I'm in Cambridge not the dreaded metropolis. Without social interaction the city is a devastatingly bleak place.

I recall my first trip to London at around age 17 to make my application at the Slade school of art, before I knew a soul there. Ravines of towering monolithic tedium rendered in dull grey clay, endless miserable faces shunting up and down the streets in ridiculous, blue whale-

sized red buses. Drizzle without, drizzle within; at the time I hailed from Northern Ireland which in retrospect was probably the only place in the world, save perhaps Gaza, depressing enough to render London appealing in some way to the newcomer. No, I am safely tucked away upstairs at my father's house in suburban Cambridge right now, it doesn't get any more rock and roll than that, right? Lemmy who?

For the most part my father and I are capable of cohabiting in relative peace, the only real misunderstandings we have are born of the cultural divide implicit in our having grown up in different worlds. I regularly accuse him of having treated his wives like second-class specimens born to prop up his ability to software engineer and thus make money and thus retain 'power'. Of course, where he comes from, the mountains of Kabyle, this is firmly business as usual.

Algerian men by and large in my experience are a fairly belligerent breed, my father is no different, in fact he is a prime example as far as I can see. The difference between him and almost all of the others I've encountered is his eternal fish-out-of-water status; torn between cultures, there is an inherent lack of resolution in the man. Still, I can live here in Cambridge quite easily and have done so many times over the years; after my numerous tour-related hospitalisations this is where I would come to recuperate. Taking full advantage of the Algerian housewife affection my father bestows upon himself; my stepmother, who is basically a slightly softer-spoken version of Mother Theresa, brings me back to life time and time again with a whole array of north African cuisine and unquestioning care. The servitude is built in over there, they stop at nothing to make your life easier to bare.

Back in the day when I would get really sick in between tours she would practically be waiting outside my door with cups of tea, fruit salad, homemade cakes, soups, breads, tagines, couscous etc. It's difficult to keep feeling guilty about it, eventually you just allow yourself to slide into the same kind of complacency you despise in the other Algerian men you've encountered. I remember we attempted to do the washing up at the house in Maillot while we were out there with the Saudis ten or eleven years ago, the women folk went ape shit. It's not even an option, you can't fuck with that code. I suppose the only real difference between myself and my father that is I tend to get my stepmother flowers for her birthday if I'm around; he's more inclined to get her a new iron or something of the sort.

*'Seeing as there is nowhere to go out and eat and I'm off the sauce, I guess I'll just be bunkered down with my pile of reading until the sun metaphorically shines again on the musical class.'*

One positive aspect to living with my father is that I don't really have to spend any money while I'm here, which is good because everyone, save for the software engineers of course, just had their livelihoods cancelled overnight. The only things I spend money on are eating out, alcohol, drugs and books. Before this lockdown I'd gotten into the awful habit of buying more books than I could possibly read, a disgusting fetishisation of the written word I'm sure you'll agree; something I despise when I see it in other people. Maybe this whole pandemic is nothing more than a karmic reflex, a necessary repercussion imposed upon me by the gods of my solipsistic realm in lieu of my betrayal of that core ethic. Thou shalt not use literature as decoration!

Seeing as there is nowhere to go out and eat and I'm off the sauce, I guess I'll just be bunkered down with my pile of reading until the sun metaphorically shines again on the musical class. At least I'm not rotting in some hovel in South London arguing with a landlord over the non-dispatch of my precious, precious pennies. No, I have never been a 'stuff' person, I do not care for 'things'. This goes part and parcel with the wilfully rootless nature of my existence. If I cannot settle on anything, anybody or anywhere, why would I then therefore burden my back with an assortment of vintage shoes, bespoke furniture or a record collection? My comfort in a state of transience is utterly precious to me. I loathe becoming attached to anything, hence keeping my list of actual friends to a number I can probably count on one hand, not including the thumb....

Thanked God I didn't have to tell my children Tom Hanks had died.

Wore a lot of big earrings. Extended my loungewear collection beyond its already excessive levels. Maintained my lipstick schedule. Missed wearing suits.

Ordered flea treatment on a monthly subscription at 5am one day because it was an anxiety I could easily manage.

Considered decorating. Finally reorganised that cupboard and judged myself throughout for being so clichéd. Felt really good when it was over.

Gave thanks for JK Rowling.

Thought about writing a book but the only ideas I could think of would probably upset my loved ones.

Spent a while thinking about what the coolest pseudonyms are.

Burnt large candles in every room.

Listened to all the saddest songs from John Grant's back catalogue and cried thinking about watching him on the Sunday at Green Man with Carl.

Cried a lot.

Laughed involuntarily when the 'Boris Johnson tests positive for Coronavirus' notification came up on my phone.

Cultivated my alcohol dependency. Same as everyone I guess. Doesn't require any elaboration.

Drew many parallels between enduring a global pandemic lockdown and being a new mother. The suffocating, monotonous domesticity; the anxiety; the desire for life to go back to normal; the guilt about not making more of it.

Enjoyed music. Lewsberg, Bob Seger, MGMT, Prince, US Girls, Elvis.

Gave thanks for Nigella Lawson.

Worried every day about the global rise in domestic violence.

Bought staple grocery items at a more decadent price point than usual – butter, bread, booze.

Cooked elaborate breakfasts. Fried a shitload of eggs.

Missed being in a sweaty club with heavy bass. Missed being in a cramped bathroom with my friends and then complaining about it taking too long to get served at the bar. Missed restaurants.

Vowed never to regret another all-nighter.

Felt so lucky to have my job and the people I work with. Felt like I was doing an okay job.

Decided to get into gardening. After 37 years. Lol.

Planned all of the celebrations I'm going to organise when this is over. The Manchester night, the London night, the house party night, the night in. Thought about all the dinners and the Sunday lunches.

Bought those enormous pots of Greek yoghurt you see in the supermarket – the ones I always wonder how anyone manages to get through in 3 days.

Resented everyone who is in isolation with the person they love. Everyone who can have tea in bed and cocktail hour and sex and romantic dinners together whenever they want.

Appreciated my children more than ever and marvelled at their resilience. Spent more time with them than I have since they were 9 months old.

Gave thanks for Bob Mortimer.

Found solace in routine. Set my morning alarm, did 6pm Social drinks, did Pilates, documented the things I enjoyed that day and inflicted them on my Instagram followers.

Tried to set 2 children up on 6 different educational apps on inadequate devices while working.

Browsed Chromebooks on eBay for approximately 7 hours.

Acknowledged that I can't read or watch anything new. Remembered that this has happened to me before and that eventually it passed. Rewatched stuff I know I love.

Admired the magnolia at the end of my garden.

Muted everything on WhatsApp.

Tried to remember that one day this will be over.

**SOPHIE GREEN**

*Follow her @fishlill on Instagram  
for daily Isolation Observations*

# SEEDS AND STEMS

Five easy seed recommendations from **RICHARD KING**

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*Richard is the author of **The Lark Ascending**. Follow him on Twitter: [@richard\\_king](#)*

The escalation of the virus has coincided with the Vernal Equinox, the immediate prospect of the clocks going backwards (time will be joining the current reality field) and the official commencement of what has already been a wonderful and restorative early spring. There is now more daylight than night; at least we won't have to endure this crisis in the darkness. We may be experiencing a lockdown, but nature, as Larkin wrote is the final line of *The Trees*, one of his most celebrated poems, is urging itself to 'Begin, again, refresh, refresh refresh'. Re-reading it I was struck by the resonance of two lines that appear earlier and now speak to our current situation:

The recent buds relax and spread,

Their greenness is a kind of grief.

All of us are currently experiencing grief of various forms, the actual or prospective loss of loved ones; the loss of regular familiarity and fellowship with those we know; the loss of a sense of order and certainly, the loss of a sense of safety however misplaced, that we previously took for granted. People have always found solace in gardening and growing. Nature follows its own course while our own frequently seems either out of control or stuck. Raising food and flowers from seed allows us to participate in their growth and vitality especially during moments, such as now, when we are questioning our own.

If you have never tried growing vegetables, flowers or herbs before, now, for all sorts of reasons may be the opportune time. No previous experience is necessary. The only tools required are your patience, a little of your time every day or so, some soil or compost and some seeds. If, like many people, you don't have access to a garden, you will also need something in which to raise and grow your seeds on

a window ledge or any similar light-filled

space. Growing plants indoors from scratch is perfectly straightforward – don't let the lack of a garden discourage you. In one of his earliest books Monty Don demonstrated that he had successfully grown carrots in an upturned top hat. (In early editions of this work the author was credited as Montagu Don making this particular publication the Full Monty). Any sort of medium-sized container or vessel will do, all you have to ensure is that the water you feed your seeds is able to drain away. The top of Monty's hat would have been holey.

By the end of March the gardener's year gets underway in earnest and the seeds for this year's season are sown. In warmer areas seed will now germinate fairly quickly. The most important thing to remember about seeds is that they want to grow; they contain all the information they need to turn themselves into plants. The gardener just has to provide them with the right conditions to get going. These are something to grow in – soil or compost – water, heat and light.

In terms of choosing seeds the only rule to follow is to grow what you would like to eat or look at. Gardening convention rightly states that sunflowers are an excellent flower to choose if you're introducing children to the concept of growing. They germinate reliably and tracking their progress from seedling to flowering plant is very enjoyable and satisfying for the novice of any age. The long stems and bright leaves of the sunflower are also a very cheering presence. Vegetables such as spinach and runner beans are equally straightforward to raise and take up far less space than you might imagine. Beans can be grown successfully in a large container next to your front door. Baby tomatoes, peppers and flat leaf parsley can brighten any windowsill. The growing of squash and pumpkins on top of compost heaps is actively encouraged. Root crops such as carrots and parsnips are best grown in soil, but any small patch of scrub can be dug up and raked over and put to serviceable vegetable-growing use.



*Thank you to Peter Turner,  
Southerndown, Wales for the image*

Seed suppliers are currently experiencing unsurprisingly high demand, but this shouldn't stop you from ordering a packet or two of something you'd like to grow. Follow the instructions on the packet closely and watch your seedlings flourish under your care; to do so is one of the most satisfying feelings in the world. Sowing seeds provides you with an immediate means of slowing down during this strange time and allows you to absorb yourself in a rewarding, everyday biology. By the time it comes to harvest you will have grown your own food or flowers and learnt the strange seed-growing lexicon of 'pricking out', 'potting on' and 'hardening off', the phrases of a contented grower, one who has uncovered some secrets about themselves while immersed in the secret, joyful, contented life of plants.

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## FIVE EASY SEEDS

**COURGETTE: 'Defender'** – as the name suggests, something of a reliable warhorse courgette. Heavy cropper, harvest when young.

**RUNNER BEAN: 'Scarlet Emperor'** – the most popular runner; an allotment classic. You should really wear braces when picking its long, tender beans.

**ZINNIA: 'California Giant'** – Zinnias are related to Sunflowers. Easy to raise once the weather warms up in May. Their colours have a nice psychedelic, consciousness raising presence in any garden or tub.

**TOMATO: 'TUMBLING JESTER'** – a baby tomato variety. Easily grown on a window sill; a couple of plants will keep you in tomatoes from August to the end of September.

**SPINACH: 'Renegade'** – spinach is really easy to grow, although it's important to keep the plants watered as they will bolt. You can eat the leaves straight from the stem. A vivid green, spinach is vitality in leafy vegetable form.

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## SONIC CATHEDRAL: **bdrmm**

Earlier this week, our friends at Sonic Cathedral announced that 'Bedroom', the debut album by the brilliant Leeds/Hull-based band **bdrmm**, will be released on July 3 2020.

*'We have put a lot of hard work into creating this record', says frontman Ryan Smith. 'It's been really difficult, too, we all have personal things going on. I know Joe has tried to quit three times, but I'll never let him. Everybody needs an escape from the bleak reality of modern-day existence and, for us, this band is it – and I really hope we can be somebody else's, too. We're all very excited by this record. We've come a long way and we haven't even started yet...'*



*And bdrmm's Ryan Smith has put together a special playlist just for us, featuring Angel Olsen, Daniel Avery, Nas, Lewsberg, Aphex and more. Head to [thesocial.com](https://thesocial.com) to listen.*