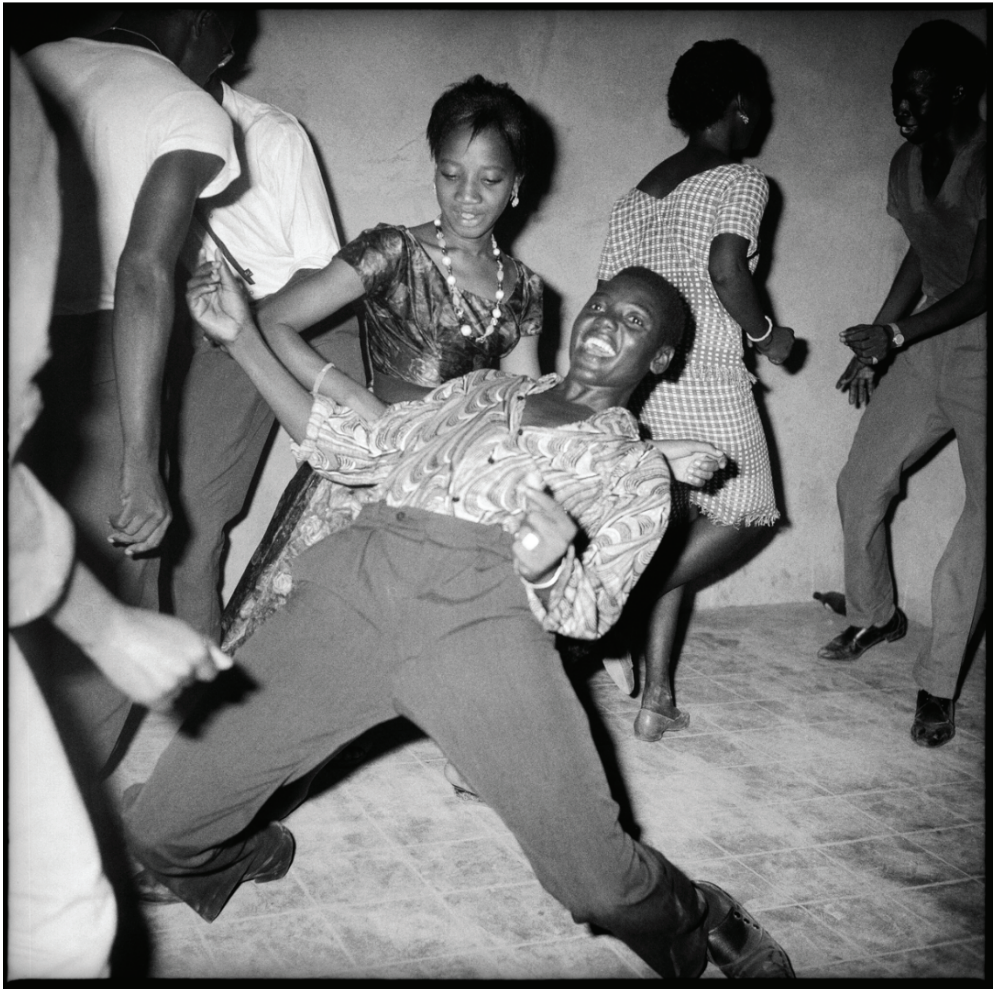


Songs to Accompany a Dreamy Summer Dinner Party

John Cale, Sharon Van Etten, Donavon Smallwood and other creative types make suggestions for an eclectic playlist sure to help set a festive mood.



Malick Sidibé's "Regardez-moi!" (1962). Malick Sidibé. Courtesy of the artist's estate and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York. All Rights Reserved.

By Daniel Wagner

July 23, 2021, 5:00 a.m. ET

When creating a playlist for a dinner party, it can be useful to think ahead and imagine the end of the night — should things conclude with whiskey and delayed goodbyes on the couch or with dancing into the wee hours? Because music, after all, can not only set the tone but also help determine the entire trajectory of an evening. Where to begin, though? Curating the perfect lineup can feel like a daunting task, and even music obsessives can fall into ruts and benefit from others offering up song suggestions. Recently, we asked a range of artists, musicians and other creative types to do just that, and to share a few tips on putting your selections together.

“I’ll start off with ‘Clair de Lune’; it invokes Paris and New York in equal parts, with mixed drinks clinking and obligatory salutations on display,” said the musician [John Cale](#), a co-founder of The Velvet Underground. Personally, I’d recommend including any of the songs from Cale’s own 1970 album “[Vintage Violence](#),” which is full of upbeat grooves with an effortless delivery, for the beginning of the evening. You can also use songs to subtly signal transitions. As you move from cocktails to dinner, for instance, try playing something mid-tempo, soulful and longish, like Gram Parsons’s “[She](#)” (1973), which, as the guitar slides past the four-minute mark, might subconsciously induce hunger. For the meal itself, keep in mind, as the musician [Sharon Van Etten](#) says, that “it’s important to pick songs that don’t take over the conversations. If it’s too loud or bumping, it’s impossible to talk to your friends or sit over dinner in a relaxing way.” A close friend and host extraordinaire recently recommended Arooj Aftab’s quietly haunting album “[Vulture Prince](#)” (2021) to me, and it’s become my new go-to.

But don’t be afraid to experiment and switch things up as you go. I was recently at a gathering where we were listening to Bob Dylan’s album “[Nashville Skyline](#)” (1969) until the conversation turned to our favorite albums of the last 20 years and our host started playing Ghostface Killah’s “[Fishscale](#)” (2006) instead, a catalyst to raucousness that no one knew they needed. To bring some renewed excitement to the room once dinner is beginning to wrap up, Paolina Leccese and Julian Taffel, the duo behind the fashion label [Leorosa](#), recommend the jubilant “Gigi l’amoroso” (1974) by Dalida. “People will pretend to know all the words as they sing along while pouring more drinks at the table. Always more pasta, more Campari, more singing!” Hopefully, the below will provide inspiration whatever your preferences for any and all parts of the event, but, as far as Cale is concerned, “the great send-off is Kendrick Lamar’s ‘HUMBLE.’ (2017),” which he describes as “food for thought.”

T Magazine's Dreamy S...
nytimes

- 1 **ZaZa and Some Runtz (Smo...** 3:19
Terry Presume
- 2 **My Girls** 5:40
Animal Collective
- 3 **Angst in My Pants - Remast...** 3:27
Sparks
- 4 **Se mi compri un gelato** 2:01
Mina
- 5 **Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu** 3:39
Domenico Modugno
- 6 **Gigi l'amoroso - French Vers...** 7:29
Dalida

Donavon Smallwood, Photographer

“ZaZa and Some Runtz (Smoke Break)” — Terry Presume

“After over a year of being in lockdown, when I step outside, I need music with a groove. This song is the one. It’s what a hot summer sounds like: everything drenched in the orange of the sun as you sit on a stoop blasting music through a speaker with friends — irresistible stuff!”

“My Girls” — Animal Collective

“I love a bit of nostalgia in the summer, and this song has an incredible hook, even though I have no idea what they’re singing and at this point I’m afraid to ask. Plus, the production sounds like some sort of fractal tie-dye houndstooth explosion.”

“Angst in My Pants” — Sparks

“No playlist is complete without a Sparks song.”

Paolina Leccese and Julian Taffel, Co-Founders and Designers of Leorosa

“Se mi compri un gelato” — Mina

“Nel Blu Dipinto Di Blu” — Domenico Modugno

“Gigi l’amoroso” — Dalida

“Luglio” — Riccardo Del Turco

“Just the titles of ‘Se mi compri un gelato’ (‘If you buy me an ice cream’), by Mina, and ‘Luglio’ (‘July’), by Riccardo Del Turco, set the tone for enjoying the season and being completely carefree.”

Danielle McKinney, Artist

“Blue Bell Knoll” — Cocteau Twins

“Best of Us Go Down” — Aquilo

“Two Men Down” — James Blake

“The perfect ambient mix to wind down the evening with, whether you’re with friends or solo. These songs are among my top plays

Jerome Byron, Architect and Designer

“Glow (feat. Raphael Saadiq)” — Kelis

“A nice throwback to play as the table begins to clear and people enjoy a post-dessert cocktail, when the night is starting to become less of a dinner and more of a party.”

“Love Me Tonight (Love, Love, Love)” — Fern Kinney

“Some disco energy to match the euphoria of seeing old friends for the first time in a long time.”

“Snooze 4 Love” — Todd Terje

“This will always remind me of late nights and early mornings with friends. It’s good for the very end of the night, when you’re saying

goodbye and opening the windows to let the house cool down.”

Tanya Tucker, Singer-Songwriter

“Maybe You’ll Be There” — Diana Krall

“Diana Krall is such a great musician and singer — I love anything she does, really, and this song especially.”

“Ashokan Farewell” — Chuck Leavell

“A beautiful piece of music — very soothing.”

“A Moment of Forever” — Kris Kristofferson

“Kris’s wife, Lisa Meyers, sent this to me several months ago and told me it reminded her of her father. We’re both daddy’s girls so she thought I would enjoy it and think about my dad. And just a few days ago, my boyfriend, Craig, played it for me and I said, ‘oh my gosh, this song is haunting me.’ I would love to record it some day.”

Brooks Headley, Musician and Chef

“Cmon Let’s Go” — Girlschool

“A fist-pumping rager that’s fun, fun, fun. Who doesn’t want to listen to something like this while hanging out with pals and eating barely cooked Greenmarket corn straight off the cob in someone’s backyard?”

“Far From Right” — Habibi

Rahill Jamalifard, Habibi’s vocalist, is a Superiority Burger alum from way back when we first opened in 2015. This track is from 2014, and it still hits really hard in 2021. It has a very difficult to achieve kinetic nonchalance with a vocal delivery that asserts the influence of Rahill’s Michigan upbringing.”

“Dressed in Black” — Teengenerate

“Greatest band of all time? Tokyo’s Teengenerate. No question. And Fifi, the former guitarist and vocalist, currently operates the greatest bar on the planet — Poor Cow, also in Tokyo.”

“Wiwasharnine” — Mdou Moctar

“This plays pretty much once every other day on the Superiority Burger iPod. The groove on this track is relentless. They are playing in Brooklyn in mid-September, a not-to-be-missed gig.”

John Cale, Musician

“Clair de Lune” — Claude Debussy

Various — Sly & The Family Stone

“When you’re listening to folks nattering about, talking over one another and getting louder and louder, it’s time for Sly & The Family Stone to take over the room — quick! Take your pick — ‘Family Affair,’ ‘Everyday People,’ ‘If You Want Me to Stay,’ ‘Everybody Is a Star’ — or just put on all of them!”

“HUMBLE.” — Kendrick Lamar

Sharon Van Etten, Singer-Songwriter

“Reason to Believe (feat. Courtney Barnett)” — Vagabon

“As if the Karen Dalton version weren’t dreamy enough, this one makes me tear up instantly.”

“Open Eyes” — duendita

“Hot summer days, hazy hangs with friends and feelings of love.”

“No Perfect Focus” — Kindest Lines

“This song belongs on the soundtrack of ‘Memories Being Made.’ It makes me feel like I’m in the end scene of a movie.”

Penny Arcade, Performance Artist

“I Fly Tonight” — Church of Betty

“Pop music with Indian folkloric rhythms and Chris Rael’s soaring vocals. It’s so enlivening and will lift your dinner party midway through!”

“Risk Of Change” — Holcombe Waller

“This has Holcombe’s smooth and dreamy voice with lyrics that will make your smarter if unaware guests ask, ‘Who’s that?’ Secret history: I am the ‘Penny’ mentioned in the song and the ‘Jeff’ is Jeff Buckley.”

“God’s Little Acre” — Rachele Garniez

“Rachele is a whimsical storyteller — ‘God’s Little Acre’ is a quintessential New York tale — and a multi-instrumentalist whose songs will cheer you right up.”

Mdou Moctar, Songwriter

“Chet Boghassa” — Tinariwen

“Takamba” — Baba Salah

“Adounia (Life)” — Bombino

“These songs are good for any kind of party. They have lots of energy and will make people dance.”

Quotes have been edited and condensed.