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HENRY: Welcome to another episode of the "Talks at Google" podcast, where great minds meet. I'm Henry, bringing you this episode with platinum recording artist and one of my personal heroes, Ben Folds. "Talks at Google" brings the world's most influential thinkers, creators, makers, and doers all to one place. Every episode of this podcast is taken from a video that can be seen at [youtube.com/talksatgoogle](https://youtube.com/talksatgoogle). Ben Folds is an American singer, songwriter, and record producer. From 1995 to 2000, Folds was the front man and pianist to the alternative rock band Ben Folds Five. He has also collaborated with musicians such as William Shatner, Regina Spektor, and Weird Al Yankovic and undertaken experimental songwriting projects with authors such as Nick Hornby and Neil Gaiman. In addition to contributing music to the soundtracks of the animated films "Over the Hedge" and "Hoodwinked," Folds produced Amanda Palmer's first solo album and was a judge on the NBC a capella singing contest "The Sing-Off" from 2009 to 2013.

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He's currently employed as the first-ever artistic advisor to the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. I also invite you to find out more about his music and photography at [benfolds.com](http://benfolds.com). In conversation with Googler Alan Seales, here is Ben Folds and an intimate history of his career.

ALAN SEALES: Good, good, sit over here? Welcome to Google.

BEN FOLDS: Good to be here.

ALAN SEALES: Are you enjoying your--your Diet Cokes and--and snacks from our microkitchens?

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Good--good snack and a good Coke, yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Born--born in North Carolina, in Winston-Salem. I wanna kinda start at the beginning of your life before we get to the career to talk about a little bit of who you are as a person.

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So you started playing piano at age nine. How did you--what did--when did you walk up to a piano and say, "This is what I wanna do"?

BEN FOLDS: Well, I'd sort of done that before. Before I had a piano, I was interested in it. Like, I--there were--there was, you know, one at school, and every once in a while I got to play on that. I had a friend who--who wa--his mother was a piano teacher, and she was trying to get him to learn "Silent Night" on the piano for Christmas, and I--you know, maybe seven or eight, I picked it out by ear in the living room and was playing it, and she came running in very excited that her son had finally learned that song, and she told my mother, you know, "He probably needs to play. He seems to be good at this."

ALAN SEALES: So you always had kind of a natural gift for piano, or just music in general?

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BEN FOLDS: I loved music. When I was two years old, I sat on the floor and listened to 45s, records, up to eight hours a day. That's a lot for a two-year-old. It prompted my grandmother to spring for a child psychologist, who confirmed that I was slow. I'm glad that got a laugh.

ALAN SEALES: Yes. Did you--was that serious? You actually saw somebody?

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Really?

BEN FOLDS: Mm-hmm.

ALAN SEALES: Wow.

BEN FOLDS: Yup, yup, he--he thought--I guess it was, you know, the square pegs and round holes stuff.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah.

BEN FOLDS: I don't know what he did. It was play therapy, probably, and he said I should be held back in school. My mother doubled down in the opposite direction and put me in early, so.

ALAN SEALES: Really?

BEN FOLDS: Mm-hmm.

ALAN SEALES: And obviously it worked.

BEN FOLDS: It seems to have worked, yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Yes. And as--as a two-year-old, you didn't let it hold you back?

BEN FOLDS: No, but I just was--you know, I was obsessed with records.

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I mean, that's an actual obsession, like, you know, eight hours a day for a--for a kid, and I'm--right now I'm finishing up my memoirs, and--and yeah, I was spending some time sort of remembering that and wondering if that--I can remember so much from when I was two years old. Does it have to do--you know, it's possibly the--it's possible it has to do with stimulation of the brain from music.

ALAN SEALES: Mm-hmm.

BEN FOLDS: 'Cause, you know, my parents will say, "Oh, you couldn't be remembering--you know, you couldn't remember two years old," but I'll tell them the house plant at the place that we lived in at two. We moved once a year, so at any year I can tell them where all the rooms were, you know, for, like--if I'm two years old and remember where they put the Christmas tree and where the lights were and the room addition and where they had stuff stored, is--I can remember it. It's good. And I'm not that damn smart. It's just that I remember really early.

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ALAN SEALES: Wow. Yeah, that--if what you're obsessed with as a two-year-old is any indication of what my kids will be, they're gonna be barnyard animals or--or marbles.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Basically. But North Caroli--so I gotta get them into music. That's the--

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, just--

ALAN SEALES: That's the lesson here from this conversation.

BEN FOLDS: Marbles fit in the mouth. Records don't. You might st--

ALAN SEALES: Oh, that's--that's a very good point. North Carolina itself isn't exactly known for producing a steady stream of mainstream artists. How did you navigate the North Carolina scene and kinda get into the mainstream culture?

BEN FOLDS: Well, when you say that, do you mean that--that most of the artists there are known to be out of the mainstream or that it's just not that they play music? I--what's the--

ALAN SEALES: That they're not--well, it's a lot of bluegrass. It's a lot of country.

BEN FOLDS: Right, right.

ALAN SEALES: It's not--well, I guess country is more mainstream, but, like, your alternative, your rock, the genres that you're known for are not f--are not popular, not common in North Carolina.

BEN FOLDS: Right. Well, I think there was a real healthy--when I was a kid, there was a real healthy sort of original band scene.

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There was a group called the DBs that went to my school a little bit--couple years earlier, and they were all sort of tied in with REM and Mitch Easter, and great, great--they made one--well, they made a few records, but they made one record that topped "New York Times," like, new record list, and they were from Winston-Salem, and--and that was really inspiring to me, to see that they could actually get out--you know, get out of town. I think the thing about living anywhere, unless you live in New York or L.A., is that it seems like everything--you know, all of

the famous stuff comes from somewhere else. Like, you don't think of it coming from there, but I mean, Ryan Adams, who we're talking about, and he was from Raleigh, and just within a few blocks of my house there was a band called the Squirrel Nut Zippers, and they were--

ALAN SEALES: Yes.

BEN FOLDS: They were pretty big, and then there was a band called the Archers of Loaf, and they sold a lot of records and was one of Kurt Cobain's favorite. There was a lot of--lot of original bands that were very stubborn.

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You know, like, they weren't--they weren't out to be mainstream. It was more sort of left of center.

ALAN SEALES: So walk me, then, through where you went to form Ben Folds Five.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, I'd been in New York, and it was tough up here for me because I played piano. Like, my options were to play places like the Bitter End, which is great, has a piano, but it's not the most creative--you know, it's not where you would go to really hear something new that was good, and--and, you know, I broke--I met my manager by breaking a piano string at the Bitter End, and I couldn't afford to pay for it, and--and he took care of it for me, and then the next night I played at Sin-e. I don't know if anyone remembers Cafe Sin-e, but that didn't have a piano, and so I had to play an electric one, and I always sucked on electric piano.

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So he told me, "You sucked tonight," and I was like, "Great. Would you like to be my manager?"

ALAN SEALES: But you also play drums and guitar, right? I mean--

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, yeah, I play drums, guitar. I started on the drums--I started thinking that I was going to be a--like, a percussionist in an orchestra, like, timpani, timpanist or a battery percussion. I thought that was what I was gonna do with my life, and so I had a plan B as a piano player, but I had always written and made up my songs from a very young age. Before I was playing piano, I was making up songs, and so when I started playing piano, the piano w--promised to facilitate my ideas, and it took a long time 'cause I had to--had to--you know, it was very frustrating having an idea that you know that you could play on the piano if you could only play it, so I had to learn how to play the piano.

ALAN SEALES: So then you sucked in New York.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Or didn't do well in New York, but then--

BEN FOLDS: It was tough, yeah. I found it tough 'cause the places that I wanted to play I had to get a piano into, which is obviously not something you just carry around New York, you know?

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So when I--when I met this guy that became my manager, we just sat down and were like, "You know, why don't I just go back to North Carolina, where I will have some space and can put my piano in a house and practice?" and so that's--and then when I moved back, I met Robert and Darren, who are the other two guys from Ben Folds Five. We met within a month, and we had a record out within a year. We just moved really quickly. So once I got there, things became very easy. I think in New York it was always gonna take a year for me to figure out how to, you know, do anything, like, just get somewhere.

ALAN SEALES: Right. And when you met--when you met the other two guys, I guess how did the collaboration work? How did--were you writing all the songs, and they were adding music to it or--

BEN FOLDS: I'd written everything that we put on the first record, and I'd had that sort of in my back pocket for maybe up to ten years.

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Some of the songs on the first record I wrote when I was 18, 19 years old, and I--you know, I was waiting tables over most of my 20s, and so when we got together, at first we were gonna just, like, do all new stuff, and then I think it just became obvious that a lot of these songs that I'd been sitting on for ten years were kinda hard to beat quickly, so the first album is all--like it usually is. It's all the al--all the songs that you had since you were--since the beginning, and then the second album, "Whatever and Ever, Amen," all had to be basically new stuff, so then that was, like--you know, that started a terrible habit of mine of writing in the studio. That's a terrible habit.

ALAN SEALES: And you composed--but you composed a lot of songs live during your concerts.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Do you have a track record of having things that you've done in the concerts make it--make their way back onto recorded records?

BEN FOLDS: I have a couple times. There are a couple notable ones that are really close.

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A song called "Cologne" was originally freestyled on stage in Cologne as "Rock this Bitch in Cologne," and it turned out to be kind of a sad, soft song. It came about because I was on drugs. I was--I had pneumonia, and I was taking a lot of these codeine drops, and I didn't think they were doing anything, so the doctor said, you know, "Take six codeine drops, and you'll stop coughing," and it didn't really work, so the next night in Cologne I took, like, 20, and so I was trying to freestyle a song, and all I could do was laugh. I could--nothing--it was terrible. It was, like, total waste of everyone's time and money, and after about five minutes--and you can find this on YouTube if you're really bored, but the first, you know, three, five minutes is terrible, and

then all of a sudden something hit me, and I just--it becomes this song, "Cologne," and it's about 75% there, freestyled, like, almost everything that's on the record.

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The chorus is a little different 'cause I didn't wanna say, "Rock this bitch in Cologne," for the chorus. But--and there's another one called "Effington," which was, I'd say--I don't know. How do you quantify this? It's 80% composed freestyle, and usually they're not that tidy, you know? And I'll take an idea that came about at a show, often use that because I think that you're in a different headspace to sort of freestyle in front of an audience. Usually if I've been playing for an hour, I feel comfortable with the audience, and that's the point that I do it. That's a different headspace than sitting by yourself and writing a song. I've found a lot of good stuff has come that way, but recently I was--I was thinking about this because there was a comedian in the U.K. I guess he's famous.

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He had a shit-ton of followers, and he accused me of ripping off one of my songs, and all these people were piling on. This was a couple years ago, and the person they said that I had ripped off I had never heard of. So I went and listened to this person that I had--I had ripped off, and I realized that it w--the song that I had supposedly ripped off was from way later than when I had come up with it on stage. So I just went to YouTube, and I found when I freestyled it, and I sent it to this comedian, and I was like, "Look, this is from 2011. I made most of this up on stage, so stop," and he's like, "Oh, sorry, mate."

ALAN SEALES: Well, yeah. So you've--you were many years with Ben Folds Five, and then can you talk about why you guys decided to go separate ways? Is that something you wanna talk about?

[00:13:58]

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, I mean, I think overall it was because, as I described, we got together really quickly. It was a mercenary thing. Like, I wanted to start a band. These are the first two guys I met. I didn't even hear them play when I committed to play in a band with them.

ALAN SEALES: Really?

BEN FOLDS: I was just in that space. It was like, "I gotta get it done. I gotta get it done." They looked like rock stars. I heard they were pretty good, and--and, you know, we didn't have, necessarily, all that much in common, so it was six years of being, you know, in each other's back pockets financially. You know, you're living in a bus 2 inches from the other guy. We got along fine, but we just didn't have all that much in common, and so I think after our third album, you know, although it wasn't a great commercial success, it was also not a great critical success. Usually you get one of the two. We didn't manage one of them, and it just looked like, "Yeah, okay, well, this is probably g--you know, we should probably sell while stocks are not as low as they will get."

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And so we just called it. I think, you know, we--it was three emails, and we were done, and I didn't expect it, but one day Darren wrote and said, "I don't think I wanna do it anymore," and then Robert said, "Well, if he doesn't wanna do it anymore, then I don't want to," and I was like, "Okay, well, I guess I don't wanna do it anymore," So then I took all my songs which were meant for the band, did them myself for "Rockin' the Suburbs."

ALAN SEALES: And so "Rockin' the Suburbs" actually was released on 9/11.

BEN FOLDS: That's right.

ALAN SEALES: Which I--do you think--was it the--was it the album--was it the songs that you think were responsible for it not doing well commercially, or was it all tied to the 9/11 happenstance?

BEN FOLDS: Ultimately--

ALAN SEALES: 'Cause "Rockin' the Suburbs," by the way, is one of my all-time favorite albums.

BEN FOLDS: Thank you. Thank you.

[00:15:54]

Well, it was a--it didn't do well over its first year, but it had a w--it had an interesting way of hanging on for a long time, and it--and so it's become kind of one of my--you know, if I had to run out of a burning building with, you know, two albums to my name, it would have to be "Rockin' the Suburbs" and the band's first album. I don't think I could have a career without either one of those. You know, like, those are necessary for me to--to exist, I think. But I don't know. I mean, a lot of it was the release. I mean, already when you go solo from--from a band, you're--you're at a--it's not an easy place, you know? It's assumed that you're not gonna do well, I think.

ALAN SEALES: Well, people--I feel like people want soloists to fail when they leave the band 'cause they'd rather have the band.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, I think so. I mean, I think I've always been like that too, so I knew that when I--when I was--when I put the album out. It's like, "Okay, have at it."

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But, you know, and also you feel like--you know, I made that record when I was 33. I felt like I'd aged out of the music business. I don't know why I thought that was aged out, at 33, 'cause I'm older than that now, and I'm okay. But yeah, I think too, it was--you know, the other thing was at the end of--at the end of each decade, there's a--there's a obvious sort of changing of the rock and roll guard. Like, everyone--you know, all the hairy chest, screaming guys of the '70s were out as of the '80s, and all the--all the--you know, the sort of new wave artists were out as of the '90s, and the grungers were out, you know, when the '00s came. It just always--and when you put out a record in, like, 2001 and you're a '90s band, it's--you know, it's not--it's uphill from there.

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ALAN SEALES: Right.

BEN FOLDS: But I think what's really been good for me is just doing different things. Like, I--at that point I didn't try to just--you know, just do solo records. I tried to do other things.

ALAN SEALES: Well, that's what I was gonna get into. It's a good segue. Thank you.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah. I had a feeling.

ALAN SEALES: That you've done--you've done tons of collaborations.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: I mean, collaborations with other artists, but also you're crossing genre boundaries all the time, often with these collaborations. Like, you've--you've helped William Shatner produce a record. You've worked with Weird Al, Amanda Palmer, Sara Bareilles, which, of course, has done her own Broadway-to-pop crossover, Cake, and, of course, Nick Hornby. How do you--how do you choose what you want to work on and who you wanna work on it with?

BEN FOLDS: Well, it's usually--it's the who first, and it's usually circumstantial, you know? Like, I'll--like, Weird Al, he was buying frozen pizzas at the str--at the grocery store, and we were standing next to each other in line, and he's like, "Oh, I'm a fan of your music," and--

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ALAN SEALES: I imagine that like, "Weird Al?" "Ben?"

BEN FOLDS: Really.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah? yeah? "Weird." "Ben." "Weird." "Ben." Yeah?

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, it was just that weird, and--

ALAN SEALES: Ba-dum, bum, psh.

BEN FOLDS: And--and I think that that is--like, I like the personal first because I mean, like, with William Shatner, you know, I was--I was interested in him, and what--what did we really know about William Shatner bef--you know, at that point? He's an actor, and he's odd, you know? So you don't really know who you're--who you're talking to, and I felt an album of, you know, a 75-year-old man who everyone knows who he is but don't really know him gives him a chance to tell a story, and a musical story is a compelling story if it's done well, and--and then I think, you know, Shatner's--is a great recording artist.

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He was one of my favorite mu--he's not a musician, but he's one of my favorites to ever work with because he's--he's so brave about every take. It's always different, and yeah, I really enjoyed working with him.

ALAN SEALES: Do you have another favorite? I was gonna ask who your favorite was, but.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: He's one of them. Do you have a--

BEN FOLDS: He's certainly one of them. I mean, they're--they're all my favorites 'cause it's--you always pull something really interesting. I mean, one--one thing I think that all artists have in common--or a few things. One is I think we're all hacks, you know, and it's really great to see--to see your favorites hacking around in the darkness. They don't seem to know what they're doing, and that's a wonderful thing to see because if you're collaborating with someone who's not famous, it's good to remember that they may have a good idea. They seem like bad ideas when they come out at first, you know? I noticed that about Joe Jackson, who was one of my favorites when I was growing up, and working with him, I was like, "Well, that's--that's an abysmal idea."

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"That's terrible," and then I thought, "You know, I like everything he does. Maybe there's something to this," but when you allow the idea to see the light of day, and I think I learned from collaboration that way.

ALAN SEALES: Who do you think that you've worked with that--worked with that's influenced you the most as a solo artist?

BEN FOLDS: Mm, well, I certainly learned from watching Shatner do every take completely different. That's really something that we all need to learn from, is if you've already done the past one way, really, you don't need to do that again, and I think that that's really interesting. You know, working with Sara Bareilles is inspiring and slightly depressing because she nails everything absolutely perfectly on the first pass.

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She's the most technically proficient performer I've ever worked with in that there's nothing that you want more out of it than what you hear on the first pass in any way, and that made me really--really have to work hard because if I don't find something wrong--I was producing her record. If I didn't find anything wrong, then I got skewered, you know? It's like--so I got really careful about it. Like, she'd do a pass. I'd be reading the lyrics, and I'd circle stuff, just like, "Slightly flat. Not really, but okay, slightly flat. Okay, she's making some kind of mouth-smacking noise. You going to the salad bar here?" And a couple thing--and then when she'd come out, I'd--I'd say, "Here are your problems," and I'd list them and go phew. She's, like, relieved, "I'm glad someone's listening with a critical ear," and then I'd say, "And we're keeping the pass 'cause it's beautiful."

ALAN SEALES: But that's the only way you could--

BEN FOLDS: That's the only way someone that good, you can--and I've played with plenty of classical musicians and all sorts of musicians, but she's just sort of a freak that way.

ALAN SEALES: Freak and an amazingly good, talented person, yeah.

BEN FOLDS: And--yeah, and she's also talented, yeah.

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ALAN SEALES: Yes. And you--so you've performed solo, with bands. You've obviously got a love for orchestras and a capella music. Do you have a style? Obviously, you're known for the rock, but do you have a style that, if you could just live forever--you have water over there somewhere.

BEN FOLDS: Over there s--oh, it was obvious, so.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, "Here's the water."

BEN FOLDS: Spilled water.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, if you had a style that you could do forever and just make unlimited money, which one would it be, out of everything that you've done?

BEN FOLDS: I'm still on the unlimited money part. I never thought about that. I--you know, I wouldn't. I don't have a favorite anything. I don't have a favorite style. I--I don't rage against style. I mean, like, I think it's cool 'cause when I go to buy a record, I kind of like to know if it's a country record or a jazz, or, like, I don't--I'm not one of those artists who's like, "I can't be defined," but I do think that--that not worrying about that and residing somewhere between them all is a nice place.

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So I like--I like being able to not worry ab--and that--those are--that's very low-resolution creativity if you're thinking about you've got five styles, and there's so much that falls between the crack of all those. If you're just gonna pick those five points and live inside it, I'm not sure how--how that could happen. I made a little single recently for "The Washington Post," of all projects. I thought it was interesting 'cause they wanted me to be a reporter as a songwriter, which I thought was fascinating. I liked the idea of doing that, and what wasn't noticed, which I thought was kind of interesting about the song, is I felt like it was resoundingly--it resided in, like, folk music, and no one said--most of the time I've--I make something that I feel like is in a style, people will comment, and I felt, well, that either means that I can do whatever style I feel like, and no one even notices it anymore, or--or I don't know what, but I thought it was an interesting thing 'cause I expected--I mean, it has, like, a tap dancer being the drummer.

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It had fiddle and banjo in it, and I would have thought that would have been a notable--like, you know, the peanut gallery would have been like, "Oh, now he's gonna make country records," but no one said a thing, so.

ALAN SEALES: Hmm.

BEN FOLDS: Maybe I can do what I want now. I don't know.

ALAN SEALES: For your next album, then, I'll plant the idea to write the song as an engineer.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: So--

BEN FOLDS: It's not a bad idea.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, right? It's--you can call it "Ones and Zeros." There you go. There's your title.

BEN FOLDS: That's pretty good.

ALAN SEALES: In 2009 you were a judge on "The Sing-Off," and you also released "Ben Folds Presents a Capella." Do you have a special place for a capella music?

BEN FOLDS: I was really--I mean, I still am interested in it, but I--my interest in a capella was, you know, kinda self-centered because they were--so many university a capella groups were covering my music, and when I started, ri--you know, a little bit before Ben Folds Five, my ambition was to be a songwriter that other people covered. That's what I wa--that's what I thought I would do, and Bette Midler covered one of my songs, and then no one else did, and that's not bad.

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I mean, Yellow Card did, so Bette Midler and Yellow Card. That's--that has been the extent, and hundreds and hundreds of a capella groups from--from universities, so I just wanted to, you know, visit these a capella groups, bring some microphones and a sound engineer, and record it, and that's where the album came from, the university a capella record. When I was a kid, I really loved National Geographic field recordings, and this was molded and--I tried to make it like that because they were obviously just a couple of mikes, and they were in the--you know, they were in the natural habitat of the natives, which is what I wanted to do with these college kids.

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I wanted to record it in their natural habitat, which would have been, like, you know, the lunchroom or, you know, like, a--there was a synagogue on campus that we recorded on in that sounded really great. I didn't mind about external noise, and I didn't mind about it sounding like a record. Oddly enough, there was a s--there was an a capella scene, it turns out, and--of, like, people who were really into a capella recordings, and they didn't like what I did.

ALAN SEALES: Really?

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, because it was--it wasn't perfect. They--they were cultivating kind of a--a style that involved perfection, which had all the singers, like, doubled and tripled and auto-tuned within an inch of their lives, and they were imitating instruments. It's like, "But what I love about the voice is it sounds like the voice." Like, that's what's interesting about it, so that's where I went with that, and my interest in that led to being recruited for NBC's "Sing-Off" show.

ALAN SEALES: Mm-hmm.

BEN FOLDS: So those two were kind of connected, in a way.

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ALAN SEALES: Right. Did you enjoy that? Do you enjoy being on TV like that, or is that, like, "I don't wanna be on--on the big screens"?

BEN FOLDS: I--it was interesting because it's so cheesy, and--but so many people love it. But that's what I was gonna say. Like, I actually kind of embraced that, like, because I had to ask myself, like--'cause I was trying to decide whether I was gonna accept this or not, and at the end of the day, listening to great music and commenting on it with the hopes to possibly improve it or add perspective for the people who performed it didn't seem cheesy at all, you know, and the format itself, you know, is a formula, and so I was judging it from--from that perspective, and I was hard on it, but once I got in it, you know, I really did enjoy it, you know? You have a very short period of time--window with which to hear precisely what's going on with the entire group, like, the whole rhythm section.

[00:29:00]

It's not like, you know, one of the--you know, like "American Idol" or something where they're not judging the band, the arrangement. They're just judging whether the singer, you know, brought it or not, and--and in this case, I got to really listen and do what I feel like is one of the things I'm best at, which is listening to a performance and having some clarity as to what might be the next step because people that perform, especially on television, they don't know what they've just done. No idea. They feel like they've just gone backwards through a car wash with a bag over their head. They have no idea where they are, and they come out, and, like, it seemed like two seconds, and it was 2 1/2 minutes, and they're like, "Tonight! What the hell just happened?" you know? It's--to have someone in front of you say, "I know you were wondering where you were sliding. You know, your tenor wasn't flat. Your bassist was sharp, and so then you started moving that way. You got nervous, and these things--the legs got pulled out from underneath it, and over the course of 2 1/2 minutes you rushed."

[00:30:00]

So just tell them the basics that are really, really obvious to--you know, obstacles to communicating. The songs were really interesting to me, and I really enjoyed doing it. It's really hard, too, because you have two other judges, and they're noticing things.

ALAN SEALES: Mm-hmm.

BEN FOLDS: And you never know what order you're gonna get chosen in, so, you know, [inaudible] to the show would say the two others first, and they'd say everything that I was gonna say, you know? So then I just have to make up some stupid joke and move on, but if it got to me first, then I got--I got to--you know, I had a wider field of what to say.

ALAN SEALES: Right.

BEN FOLDS: But no, I enjoyed it. I thought it was good. We lasted--I think I did it for four seasons.

ALAN SEALES: Mm-hmm.

BEN FOLDS: And--and then they replaced me on the last one, and then I think they threw the set away, and that was that.

ALAN SEALES: So talking about education as well, you're a outspoken champion for arts education and music therapy funding in our--in the nation's public schools.

BEN FOLDS: Mm-hmm.

ALAN SEALES: 2016 you held the--you were the only one to hold the distinction to appear in both national political conventions?

[00:31:02]

BEN FOLDS: Yup.

ALAN SEALES: Advocating for arts education. How did that happen?

BEN FOLDS: Well, you know, Americans for the Arts, who I work with a lot, had a slot on both and said, "It's kinda weird, but if you wanna do both, that might be a good idea," and I thought it was a good idea, and in fact, I learned a lot that way. I mean, my--my sort of--you know, my buddy for the day was Mike Huckabee at the--at the Republican National Convention, and I found him to be a really--very eloquently-spoken about arts funding.

ALAN SEALES: Hmm.

BEN FOLDS: Outside of that, I don't know, but for--for that he's very good at, and it made me realize--

[00:31:53]

It kind of--it kind of drove home that as a musician, if I'm gonna go and sit across from, you know, senators and congressmen and try to convince them to keep public schools--you know, arts education healthy in public schools, and arts funding in general, it's best if I also can come from the economic perspective.

ALAN SEALES: Mm-hmm.

BEN FOLDS: And it's actually kinda more interesting, in a way. I mean, everyone knows-- everyone likes art, you know? Every senator's son and daughter is gonna go to a school somewhere that has good music and good art. They're gonna make sure that they have access to it, so you don't have to convince them of the importance of it. What you're trying to convince them is the importance of investing in it and the importance of the symbolism of having invested in it.

ALAN SEALES: Right. So if anybody has questions for Ben, please start lining up in the mi--at the mics there. Well, great. I want to go back real quick. Tell us about what you're doing with the Kennedy Center in D.C.

[00:32:59]

BEN FOLDS: My main project--well, they call me the artistic advisor, which was nice. I got a three-year--

ALAN SEALES: First ever.

BEN FOLDS: I--first ever, yeah. They made the position up for me. That's kinda cool. I do a lot of stuff, but my main project that I sort of could bite off what I wanted is a series hoping to improve--not hoping, improving Pops concerts because symphony orchestras have to bring in new audiences.

ALAN SEALES: Mm-hmm.

BEN FOLDS: And there's a lot of ways you can do it. One of the models has been the Pops concert where they bring in, you know, a rock musician or a pop musician, and the orchestra plays with them. There's--they're riddled with problems, and they're systemic.

[00:33:53]

There's stubborn--there's stubborn, embedded, easy-answer sort of solutions that they've got going, and they're--they're not getting anywhere, and so what I've aimed to do is almost kind of create a--you know, I have an experim--I have a group that's willing to experiment. I've got their budget, and I've got all my rowdy rock friends, like Sara Bareilles, who I can bring in. We can do pop shows the way that I think they should be done, and sort of creating a manifesto is how you do that because combining the two is a--is a technical nightmare. It's a--it lies over a cultural fault line that we don't think of, that the pop world and the orchestra world, even in terms of their contracts and their language, are almost just--they're just raring for a fight. Like, they really don't get along, and so I felt like we--there are--there are enough cultural divides these days without having one be in music, so maybe--maybe my job could be to sew those things together, and I think we've done a lot of really good stuff.

[00:34:58]

The shows are working.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, they're on YouTube. I've wa--I watched a few, and I also watched a clip of you composing a full orchestral piece in under ten minutes.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Which--live. Just like he rocks this bitch in his concerts, he rocked the orche--rocked the bitch of the orchestra, I guess.

BEN FOLDS: Yup, yup, yup.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, it was crazy. What--you read--you read something from the program about, like, emergency exits are to be used in case of fire only or whatever it was that were the lyrics, yeah.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, it was incredible.

BEN FOLDS: Yup.

ALAN SEALES: Okay, let's do a question here.

PERSON: Hi. I really, really like your music.

BEN FOLDS: Thank you.

PERSON: But your lyrics--

BEN FOLDS: Are terrible.

PERSON: So that's actually what I'm gonna ask. I--I don't think they're terrible, but I wonder if they are you always and--or when they're not, and when they are about you and your life, is it true?

BEN FOLDS: Mm. It's either true, or sometimes it's not true.

ALAN SEALES: Next question, yeah.

[00:35:59]

BEN FOLDS: And--but it's always something that I'm interested in. I think when it comes to--to lyrics, you know, the things that we notice that--are observations, and when they're observations, I feel like if you follow those really faithfully to when they occur to you, a picture forms that's an--it is a picture of you, but--but, you know, if an event occurs and I'm going to--like I just did with "The Washington Post" piece, if something happens and I'm going to relay that in song, your problem is, is that, you know, just your s--the real estate for your--the syllables involved is

really limited, you know? Like--like, you've got three minutes, and you're expected to rhyme, and you're expected for it to be iambic pentameter sometimes, and the cadences is difficult, so you have to cheat with a lyric, you know?

[00:36:58]

You have to do things that put--that put the listener in that place. So I have a song about my father dying. He's still alive, but the song isn't necessarily about that, but it's about the feeling of that, and it needed to sound literal for me to be able to extract the abstract part of it. So all that to say that it's always something of me in it. There's always something that I'm very interested in or wanna say. Probably it is about myself, but often I'll make up a complete false scenario in order to get it across.

PERSON: Okay.

BEN FOLDS: One thing I would say is that I think it's a fascinating and really interesting opportunity for a rock lyricist, especially in the U.S. Our culture here, we kind of expect our writers, our rock writers to be singing the truth.

[00:37:58]

You know, if Bruce Springsteen says something about starting his car, breaking up with his girlfriend, going to the badlands, whatever, you kind of expect there's some truth in it, you know? But if David Bowie sings about going to Mars, we can guess that that's probably not true, and, you know, the thing is, is that in America we like our songwriters to be--like, have credibility to what it is that they've said, and I love exploiting that by saying things that aren't true but sound like they could be true. I like that, yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah. Question over here.

PERSON: Hey, thank you so much for coming today.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

PERSON: My name is actually also Ben, so I've always felt a special connection. Yeah.

BEN FOLDS: Is it spelled the same way?

PERSON: Yeah. So there's that saying that good artists borrow and great artists steal, and there's a lot of musicians--

BEN FOLDS: I steal all the time. Yeah.

PERSON: There's a lot of musicians that get accused of theft or rip-offs, like, even, like, Led Zeppelin's "Stairway to Heaven." Do you think there's a concrete distinction between what constitutes a rip-off, what constitutes a remix, and what is truly original work?

[00:39:04]



BEN FOLDS: Well, there's certainly a lot of musicologists that--you know, the guys that are brought in to--you know, to these lawsuits that have parameters about it, and at the risk of sounding kinda rude 'cause I don't mean it like that, but I literally don't care because I've had people rip me off before, and I can--like, really close, and I can safely say I just was flattered. That was all. In one case it was so close where they had kept the key. They kept some of the lyrics. They had changed certain important parts and kept other really distinct things. This fellow was up for a Grammy in Brazil for Record of the Year.

[00:40:00]

I've never won anything like that before, so out of jealousy, I might have been inclined to sue this guy, like a lot of people said I should, but all I could think was one, I was really flattered, and secondly, I kinda felt bad for him that he didn't have any better ideas because, you know, I think it is more fun to steal from a lot of things and try to get something that's personal across. That strikes me as kinda empty and sad that you do that, but really, I don't mind. I really don't mind. I was listening to some blues music the other day, and it was one of those--you know, it was, like, a--kind of a Pandora-style station of some kind. It was just playing. I guess it was in a--on satellite radio, and I don't know. I'm kinda sitting there waiting for my latte, and I must have heard three songs that started with, "Woke up this morning." Awesome. Like--like, why is one thing, you know, almost like, oh, that you have to say you woke up this morning in this--and this same chord, same melody and everything, and I enjoy it.

[00:41:01]

I think it's totally fine. People can rip off--I mean, look, my lawyer wouldn't agree with me, but I--I don't mind for myself, and I just think it's about expressing yourself, and if expressing yourself uniquely, oddly, for some reason would be copying someone note for note and changing one note, and that particular note said something really solid, I'm down. I'm fine. I don't like this ownership stuff even though the ownership stuff obviously affects my livelihood, you know? So it's hard for me to reconcile the two. But no, I don't mind. Like, I don't see a--any distinctions. I think ripping off, borrowing, it's all the same. It's all music. I'm fine with it.

PERSON: Got it. Thank you so much.

ALAN SEALES: That's been something that I--thank you. Oh, that's something that I've always respected about you, actually, is it's never come across to me as you've been doing things just for the money. It's because you love the arts. You love music. You love helping and educating, so I...

[00:42:01]

BEN FOLDS: Thank you.

ALAN SEALES: Applaud you for that, and I also want your help with my song. I thought--it starts with "I thought about the navy."

BEN FOLDS: Oh, yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah.

BEN FOLDS: You've got it. You've got it. Put it in A-flat.

ALAN SEALES: All right. Yeah. Question over here.

PERSON: So "Lonely Avenue," your collaboration with Nick Hornby, I think, is one of the maybe greatest concept albums of all time.

BEN FOLDS: Why, thank you.

PERSON: Brilliantly executed in that bridging an author and a musician into this thing. So A, is there gonna be a "Lonely Avenue 2?" Like, it seems like there was a whole lot of stories he wants to tell, and if there were another author you were gonna collaborate with, who would that be?

BEN FOLDS: Well, Neil Gaiman and I have been talking about making a record for a long time.

PERSON: Yes! Yes, do that. Do--leave now and do that.

ALAN SEALES: It's good advice. It would sell.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: Two bits.

[00:42:52]

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, I mean, Neil's actually got a neat voice, and Neil thought he might want to be a rock star when he first started out, when he was--when he started out, you know, making comic books or graphic, you know, pieces, and--and that's where his heart was, and he thought he would--he thought he would be a rock star, and he's--his voice is, I think, outstanding. I love it, so I would just play piano for him. We'd write the songs together. I see him once a year on average, and we talk about how we're gonna make the record, and this has been about ten of those now, so it's been a l--you know, we really do need to do it. Thank you for reminding me and encouraging me, and--and as far as Nick Hornby, you know, it's the same with us. We--we talk a lot about making another thing. I think that we felt like the next step would be to make a musical, and so, you know, we've--we've been procrastinating on that for some time, but I think we're both scared of--probably have--unfortunately have the same fear of musicals, which is not good.

[00:44:02]

Your colla--some--one of the two has to--has to be fearless, but we're really--we're really both scared to death of the genre, both for how it could get out of control and be like that, you know? Like, some people have control over it. Like, you know, I mean, there's--there's nothing at all cheesy about "Hamilton." It's just brilliant, and there are some that can be big without the gestures, but I don't think Nick and I know enough about it. Anyway, that's--

ALAN SEALES: You need a creative team.

BEN FOLDS: We need a creative team.

ALAN SEALES: That--yeah, I mean, that's actually one of my final questions for you, was what's next? And I know that Broadway has been on and off your radar for a--

BEN FOLDS: A long time.

ALAN SEALES: For a long, long time.

BEN FOLDS: Mm-hmm.

ALAN SEALES: And you were originally asked--I don't know if I'm allowed to say this. Sorry if I'm not--to write the whole score for "Spongebob."

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: "Spongebob Squarepants: the Musical," which was recently closed.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: That would have been a completely different musical.

BEN FOLDS: I know.

ALAN SEALES: Why did you not wanna get into that at the time?

[00:45:01]

BEN FOLDS: That was one of many I've been approached with. It--it looked--I mean, I liked Spongebob and everything, and those guys are--they're hip. Like, they get it. They--I don't know. I mean, it has to really be something that resonates with me. That's all. I don't know. I don't know what it's gonna take, but something. I mean, it--the whole--if the first--the first, you know--I've had lunch meetings with them all since, like, 1997, you know? Like, I've been thinking about this for a long time, and I think the longer it goes and the more choices I get, the less likely it is I'll ever do it because if I just walked into town as a 20-something and I got any one of these offers I've ever gotten, I would put everything into making that musical, but then you're like, "Well, that guy's pretty good, and that one is pretty good, and that was a great musical, and I really like this one." I don't know anymore. I'm totally confused.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah, you gotta find a producer, set of producers that's gonna, like, light a fire under your ass. How many people here wanna see him write Broadway?

[00:46:02]

Yeah? Yeah. There's a couple people, couple people. So we're running short on time, so let's-- quick questions, yeah?

PERSON: Yeah, I think it's a quick one. So I'm a big fan of the show, "You're the Worst," and in particular, your performance on the show, and I'm just curious, like, how you ended up there and any sneak peeks into the next season. Are you alive?

BEN FOLDS: Has the n--has the last one that we filmed come out? Oh. I did another one. I'm sure they don't mind me saying that. I think it's towards the end of the season, and yeah, I still have a pulse in this one, and we've also talked about if it ever goes further, how close we can get to me, like, not being alive. But they--for anyone that doesn't know, they just turned my character into some guy who moves straight from North Carolina, where I'm really from, to L.A, is very jealous that Moby is recognized and I'm not, and I'm just really impressed with mixed drinks.

[00:47:06]

The weird thing about that is--is just this sort of--he creates this weird little world where, for some reason, they don't have mixed drinks in North Carolina. I'm like, "Wow, you can get alcohol here!" and I just drink everything. Yeah. This next one, we went crazy, yeah, yeah. It's fun. Thanks for watching. I enjoy--I had--I had a kid the other day ordering coffee, and she goes, "Are you the guy that plays Ben Folds on 'You're the Worst?'"

ALAN SEALES: "That's me."

BEN FOLDS: It's the best way to get recognized.

ALAN SEALES: Yeah. Over here.

PERSON: Another Ben over here, hello.

BEN FOLDS: Are you Ben?

PERSON: I'm also a Ben. I think most of your fans are named Ben, apparently.

BEN FOLDS: That's awesome.

PERSON: I actually have two questions. I know time is short. Maybe you can choose one or combine them into one mega answer of some sort.

[00:47:57]

One question is that you're one of the few people that's been on the radio for the last 30 years who knows lots of chords and jazz chords and knows how to drive from a verse to a chorus. How do you feel that pop music has sort of left all these different chords behind?

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

PERSON: Most songs have one repeating chord progression. Number two, quite different. I always admired that when you sang, I felt like it was actually you, like, your voice, a part of your talking but on notes. How'd you find your singing voice?

BEN FOLDS: Well, thanks. I think those are two, like, really neat points about music in general. The--the singing thing is that I didn't think I was gonna be a singer. I thought I would write songs for other people, and so the bands that I played in to begin with, I made sure I was--you know, they had singers. Like, I always--you know, I played in various bands, and we'd always--one or two of the guys in the band would have great voices, and they would do singer-y things, like they sang loudly. They used vibrato. They did little riffs and stuff, and I thought that would be a good thing, you know?

[00:46:58]

Like, I hear the song in my head, and I think, "Oh, this--if this has a great singer, then that'll be a great thing," but it wasn't that satisfying to hear them do that. I would make tapes for them where I would say, "Here's how the song goes," and the song would just be humbly speak-singing, would be it, and I think that the--the recordings started showing themselves to be a lot more interesting than what we were coming up with, and so I would try to get the singers to not sing, you know? To speak on pitches. I also had a sort of a--a little bit of a piano mentor for about a year at school. I wasn't majoring in piano, but for one s--one year before this guy retired, he gave me a full scholarship to just study piano with him, and most of the time we didn't study piano. We just talked about music, and he asked me if I'd considered how great this guy he had just heard--he goes, "I recently heard a young man by the name of Eric Clapton."

[00:50:02]

"Have you heard of him?" I was like, "Yeah, I've heard of Eric Clapton," and he said, "he seems to me to speak on pitches, which is interesting because it gives more weight to the things that he's singing about. Why would a man like that be singing at all unless he had something to say?" and I thought, "That's kind of interesting," and I think that those things, I adopted those things. As far as chords go, I've always loved--I've always loved harmony and chords, and, you know, it can be its own puzzle, you know, the harmony and moving--even moving key centers, and they mean different things, and I think that rock and roll music has--

[00:50:47]

Sort of like with the voice, there can be an assumption that someone who just plays one chord must have more to say and that by distracting yourself with, you know, the frivolity of, you know, trying to drive yourself through different key centers and, like, you know--like, you've--like, you're making music into a Rubik's Cube somehow, or you're--it's too much ornamentation. I think there is a--you know, I think Bob Dylan might have had a lot to do with that in that you--here's someone like Dylan who--the simplicity is part of what's great. He seems like he knows what he's talking about, and he sounds wise and almost sounds like, "I can't be bothered with all these chords, and I've got something to say. I don't have time for this little hobby," and so by the time that came through, it was really not cool to play any more than a couple chords, couple-three chords, and this was during the grunge period, and so that's all I needed to--to use more chords. That kinda pissed me off. I felt like, "Oh, I'm not allowed? All right, punk rock. Let's do this."

[00:51:54]

So I would just really flex that part because I thought it was pretty, and, you know, there's all sorts of subversion in the--you know, sort of in the--in the punk rock culture. Playing piano in itself was offensive, so, you know, we would play--that's what we booked. We just booked punk rock, kinda grunge clubs during most of the '90s, and I loved looking out and playing jazz chords and, like, you know? It's like, that's nice. I enjoyed that.

ALAN SEALES: Cool. All right, yeah, final quick question, and then we can get to some performances.

PERSON: All right. So I was always interested in how just creative a lot of your music is, and I'm a hobbyist composer, and sometimes I get stuck into doing kind of similar song structures or similar chords, so I was wondering if you had any tips that maybe you use to try and get yourself to be more creative [inaudible].

BEN FOLDS: Well, I don't think that--I don't think that using the same structure over and over again necessarily has to do anything with the creative part.

[00:53:03]

I think you can be really, really creative within a really confined sort of structure. You could decide that you were the guy who was AB, you know, guy, and you were gonna write it all in the same key, and that would be fine. If you feel like that's limiting you in some way, then I don't know. I think it's important to remember that a song is there to communicate a thing and that it needn't do any more than that. I think that that can free you up a lot in form and key and everything because the necessity to communicate the thing that you're coming up with means that that drives--that drives things, you know? Like, you might have a cadence where you thought you were going to end on--I don't know.

[00:53:57]

If you went--had gone--and that was really similar, and just, like, that's all it's--and then you get stuck in something way too long, there's nothing complicated about that, but the fact that you got stuck in it so long says something about how you were stuck in your life or your--or your ideas or the way you felt about it or that you were scared to progress in your life or you were scared of what's next or you just--you know, you were high, and you couldn't remember the next chord. Who knows what it might be? But it's always your--that was really nothing to--I shouldn't have even played that. I think that's the first thing, is, like, always how do you feel? How does this moment feel? How can you get that across? Then if you need more vocabulary, you'll find it. If you can't find the word, doesn't come out, then, you know, that's when you reach for the thesaurus, you know?

[00:54:58]

Like, you think about those things, and I think the same is true of song structure. I always like to play with song structure. I like to question it too much. So while I'm writing, it's always a concern of mine that it doesn't have the same structure, and a lot of times I find that the sort of--the effect that the song was having on me emotionally before I messed with it so much was there,

and then I messed with it and tried to do something odd with it, so what I do then, because I'm not getting the chill at that point, or I'm not hearing applause in the back of my head at the end of the song, it's not doing the thing, I go back, and I put it into a really predictable song structure, and I mean down to the point where I'm timing the--the intro, like, 'cause--so if the intro's not falling between 12 and 15 seconds, then maybe I should lay out the song so that it falls at the right time.

[00:55:56]

For some reason, we want to hear a chorus at one minute. I don't know why, but sometimes you wanna hear--there are certain songs that it works so well because they start with the chorus, and, like, you know, I don't know, something like "Dancing Queen" by ABBA, which that's a fun song 'cause it starts with the bridge. "You can dance. You can--" it's like they're--you--like, the party was just going, and then the doors open, and you were in it, you know? And there's something really compelling about that, you know? That's when you mess with form. Otherwise, I think the form can be your friend. That's as much as I--that's my whole upload on form there.

PERSON: That's great.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: So yeah, we're out of time. We'll wrap it up and then give us a couple songs, but when is your book coming out, real quick? You can plug that.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah, right now I'm in this--the hell of editing it, which I didn't really think about that part. It should come out in September of next year.

ALAN SEALES: Great. Everyone, September 2019, buy the book, and then we didn't get into photography.

[00:57:00]

You're an amazing photographer.

BEN FOLDS: That--don't--

ALAN SEALES: Which can see on [benfolds.com](http://benfolds.com) online, get your music. You're on Instagram up here, @MurkanPianist, and then, of course, I'll keep an eye out for you on the Broadway stage.

BEN FOLDS: Yeah.

ALAN SEALES: It's gonna happen, man.

BEN FOLDS: At some point.

ALAN SEALES: It's gonna happen.

BEN FOLDS: I'll make one at some point.

ALAN SEALES: All right. How do you--how do you want everyone to ask you what songs to play? Shout it out?

BEN FOLDS: Politely.

ALAN SEALES: Favorite airplay--

PERSON: "Landed."

PERSON: "Army."

PERSON: "Army."

PERSON: "Lullabye."

BEN FOLDS: Okay, got it. Those are the three.

ALAN SEALES: Oh, wait, you got a--you got an actual paper airplane.

BEN FOLDS: Oh.

ALAN SEALES: There you go.

BEN FOLDS: If it's something that I don't wanna play, then that's a--okay, all right. Yeah, see, I did this whole tour, the Paper Airplane Request Tour, and I found two distinct camps. Either they're--well, maybe three.

[00:57:52]

They're either the songs that everyone knows, that are the most popular, which makes sense for a request, or there's a type where they're trying to fool me and find something on the internet that I wrote when I was 16 that--and then, of course, depending on where you play, it's--a lot of people wanna hear "Piano Man." I still don't know that song. Okay, let's see here. Let's see. I'm trying to remember what I--what I was asked for. Okay, yeah, okay. I know what the three were, yeah. All right. So let's--I hope I can do this. I've just been editing a--in my room all by myself. I haven't even had to talk to people, much less sit down and play music, so we'll see what happens. If it's no good, then I'm sorry.

[00:59:05]

We'd hit the bottom. I thought it was my fault, and in a way I guess it was. I'm just now finding out what it was all about. We moved to the west coast, away from everyone. She never told me that you called. Back when I was still, I was still in love till I opened my eyes, walked out the door, and the clouds came tumbling down, and it's bye-bye, goodbye, I tried. And I just did it wrong, trying to make it right, had to leave myself behind. I've been flying high all night.



[01:00:05]

So come pick me up. I've landed. The daily dramas she made from nothing, so nothing ever made them right. She liked to push me and talk me back down till I believed I was the crazy one, and in a way I guess I was till I opened my eyes, walked out the door, and the clouds came tumbling down, and it's bye-bye, goodbye, I tried.

[01:00:59]

Tending the sea of a troubled mind, had to leave myself behind singing bye-bye, goodbye, I tried. If you wrote me off, I'd understand it 'cause I've been on some other planet, so come pick me up. I've landed, and you will be so happy to know I've come alone.

[01:01:51]

It's over. Yes, I opened my eyes, walked out the door, and the clouds came tumbling down, and it's bye-bye, goodbye, I tried. Down comes the reign of the telephone czar. It's okay to call. I will answer for myself. Come pick me up. Ba-ba, ba-ba, ba-ba, ba-ba, ba-ba, ba-ba, ba-ba, ba, I've landed. Thank you.

[01:02:58]

There's something funny about--something about playing where no matter which way I look, I see me, and it's like--and then right in front of me, it's like there's a screen of me now just sort of mocking my looks. All right, I'll try this one. Some--two people asked for it. One I would have ignored 'cause I don't play it that often, and there's a middle part, and I don't know if I can remember it. We'll find out. I always said I hate when I play with--by the way, with musicians who make disclaimers, and I've made two of them, so I'm gonna smack myself. Mm, good night, good night, good night, sweet baby. The world has more for you than it seems.

[01:04:01]

Good night, good night. Let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams. We took a small flight in the middle of the night from one tiny place to another, and my parents, they remained at the shack with Lorraine and my aunt and my grandpa and brother.

[01:05:00]

We walked past the tarmac and boarded the craft. The rain had me chilled to the bones. Just the three of us took flight that night, Uncle Richard, me, and James Earl Jones.

[01:06:01]

And this is the part. Here we go. Mm. And I can't do it anymore. And the pilot, he gave me a blanket, and the tall, dark man sang to me in deep, rich tones.

[01:07:07]

Good night, good night, sweet baby. The world has more for you than it seems. Good night, good night. Let the moonlight take the lid off your dreams. Thank you. So that little--that little riff I totally screwed up was something that I came up with when I was about 13 and I could do when I was 13.

[01:08:03]

My mother had taken me to a--to a piano teacher, seemed like the fun piano teacher in town. It was, like, a younger guy, played rock music, and she'd heard outside the door as I showed him how to do this riff for half an hour, and she fired him. But it's this real--it's funny because if anyone plays piano, it involves hitting the same notes several times with the same finger, but it's like--God, listen to that. I can't do it. That's what I was doing at 13, and I--I think I--anyway. All right. The next--thank you. And this one by request as well, and I guess that's the third and last one. I'm not gonna count the riff. Kids, that's for free.

[01:09:00]

Well, I thought about the army. Dad said, "Son, you're oh, so high." Can you say fuck over this--that's okay? Well, I thought about the army. Dad said, "Son, you're fucking high," and I thought, "Yeah, there's a first for everything," so I took my old man's advice. Three sad semesters, it was only 15 grand spent in bed. I thought about the army. I dropped out and joined a band instead. Grew a mustache and a mullet, got a job at Chick-fil-A. Citing artistic differences, the band broke up in May, then in June reformed without me, and they got a different name. I nuked another grandma's apple pie and hung my head in shame.

[01:10:01]

Oh, no. I've been thinking a lot today. I've been thinking a lot today. Whoa, think I'll write a screenplay. Whoa, think I'll take it to L.A. Whoa, think I'll get it done yesterday.

[01:11:12]

Nah-da, da, da, da, da, da-da-da, da-da. Nice.

ALL: Ba, ba, ba, ba, ba.

BEN FOLDS: Beautiful. Da-da, da, da-da, da. Da-da, da-da.

ALL: Da-da, da, da, da-da.

BEN FOLDS: Da-da, da-da.

ALL: Da-da, da-da, da, da, da.

BEN FOLDS: Da-da, da. In this time of introspection on the eve of my election, I say to my reflection, "God, please--"

ALL: Spare me more rejection!

BEN FOLDS: 'Cause my peers, they criticize me, and my ex-wives all despise me. Try to put it all behind me, but my redneck past is nipping at my heels.

[01:12:01]

I've been thinking a lot today. I've been thinking a lot today. I've been thinking a lot today. I thought about all y'all's mommies. Thank you very much.

ALAN SEALES: Keep it going!

BEN FOLDS: Thank you.

ALAN SEALES: Thank you. That was wonderful.

BEN FOLDS: Thank you very much.

ALAN SEALES: So good.

BEN FOLDS: Thank you.

HENRY: Thanks for listening. If you have any feedback about this or any other episode, we'd love to hear from you. You can visit [g.co/talksatgoogle/podcastfeedback](http://g.co/talksatgoogle/podcastfeedback) to leave your comments.

[01:13:01]

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