



## WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

# MUSIC MAKER

Indie-rocker and ultramarathoner Ben Gibbard on building a playlist

→ **It's not unusual** for Gibbard to go for a 25-mile run a few hours before he takes the stage. "I kind of dig having that post-long-run exhaustion on tour," says Gibbard, the frontman of indie-rock band Death Cab for Cutie. Gibbard, who logs 60 to 70 miles per week, has run more than a dozen ultramarathons and has a 100K planned for February. When it comes to combining his passions, he strays from the standard approach of building a playlist based on BPM (beats per minute). "If someone is trying to break a time and needs to keep a certain pace, BPM could help," he says. "But I'm not particularly that guy." Instead, Gibbard prefers songs that are more in tune with his running style—long and meandering.

—GINA DEMILLO WAGNER



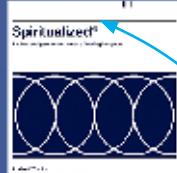
### SET THE MOOD

"I want songs that work as background music and don't dictate my running experience or pace. I love the band **Explosions in the Sky**. They do this beautiful music that's cinematic and lolling."



### GO LONG

"When I'm listening to three-minute songs, I find myself in a panic. Shorter songs are a marker of time, like, 'Five songs have played, and I've only run two miles!' The last time I used music in a race, I listened to 'Sister Ray,' by the Velvet Underground. It's like a 20-minute jam. It hit my mood at a time when I was suffering, and it propelled me forward."



### TRY KRAUTROCK

"One of the defining characteristics of krautrock is that it's driving and hypnotic. The drumbeat is straight and mechanical. You can get lost in it. There's a song I love called 'I Think I'm in Love' by **Spiritualized** that has a long krautrock-trance intro. We have an eight-minute version of 'I Will Possess Your Heart'—our band's attempt at krautrock."

### TUNE OUT, TUNE IN

"I do enjoy being in the woods and having a break from music. But I usually bring a Shuffle for late in a race. The last 20 miles, I really need something else to focus on."

FOR GIBBARD'S PLAYLIST VISIT [RUNNERSWORLD.COM/GIBBARD](http://RUNNERSWORLD.COM/GIBBARD).



→ a crude but sincere imitation of the more fluid riders around me. It wasn't a class, it was a rave. And I was caught up in it.

Expecting goo-goo invocations of the spirit, I had primed my cynicism, but this was less spiritual and more dance party, and my lower brain was taking over. I pushed at the pedals even when my legs pleaded with me to stop and do something easy like run 10 miles. Quitting was as unthinkable as it would be to sit down in the middle of a dance floor. No one could see me well, and I could only see a few shadowy shapes around the glowing Aya, but I couldn't imagine being left behind—even as we went nowhere.

So, in the end, yes, SoulCycle is just a spin class, a \$30 spin class, which, when many gyms offer spin classes with regular membership, is ridiculous. But it is not just *any* spin class—it is a *hell* of a spin class. By the end I was sweaty, exhausted, and, yes, in Aya's words, I had "found my own hill to climb" and "taken the day" and yes, damn it, I felt empowered.

Obviously the class was created by women, with its language of personal journey and growth, and the emphasis on doing it together. Women are blessed with the ability to join in group athletics and not be overwhelmed by the urge to beat each other. A men's SoulCycle might be taught by a drill sergeant, shouting at the class that if they pedaled hard enough, they'd be able to catch something and kill it.

But however goo-goo SoulCycle is, for 45 minutes (and a 10-minute cooldown), I bought it. In the dark of a Chicago winter, when the only way to get a decent cardio workout is to either shuffle miserably through the slush or, God help us all, endure a treadmill while enduring *Morning Joe*, there are worse things than joining a group of true believers in their intense, energetic, joyful ride to nowhere. We were making this journey together! We were heroes, warriors, celebrating the strength of our spirit! Girly bromides, maybe, but without them I couldn't have kept up with the girls.

"So what do you think?" gasped Ann, who had been furiously cranking two bikes over. "Is it a cult or not?"

"I don't know," I said. "But man, did it kick my ass!" 🙏

Peter Sagal is a 3:09 marathoner and the host of NPR's *Wait, Wait...Don't Tell Me!* For more, go to [runnersworld.com/scholar](http://runnersworld.com/scholar).