

# Coping with Climate through Music

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**Ariana Brocious:** This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious. Music often reflects the feelings of the broader society. So in the face of failing government action on climate, why don't we have more climate protest songs?

**Tamara Lindemen:** Part of what's wrong with this issue is people have so many personal feelings about it that keep them away from that feeling of indignance or of power. (:15)

**Ariana Brocious:** And yet more and more musicians are creating work to help them process their own grief and anxiety.

**Jayson Greene:** I started to notice just how many new projects all across the spectrum. People were singing about the climate crisis in a newly direct way (:11)

**Ariana Brocious:** How do the personal feelings of the artist translate to the listener?

**Tamara Lindman:** There's a lot of room for vulnerability because if you hear something and you're alone maybe you can take it in a different way than you could if it's like a speech or a newscast. (:11)

**Ariana Brocious:** Coping with Climate through Music. Up next on Climate One.

**Ariana Brocious:** This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious, filling in for Greg Dalton.

Music and political or social movements go hand in hand. Nelson Mandela described it like this: "Music... uplifts even as it tells a sad tale. You may be poor, you may have lost your job, but that song gives you hope... Politics can be strengthened by music, but music has a potency that defies politics."

If there were ever a threat that needed to defy politics and rally everyone, it would be the climate crisis. It will affect all of us, though not equally. Despite the global implications of the climate crisis, there isn't significant mention of it in popular music.

This episode is supported in part by the Sidney E. Frank Foundation.

Tamara Lindeman is a Toronto-based songwriter and singer who performs under the name The Weather Station. Climate was a central theme of her 2021 album *Ignorance*. In the song *Atlantic*, she sings: "Thinking I should get all this dying off of my mind, I should really know better than to read the headlines. Does it matter if I see it? No really, can I not just cover my eyes?"

Thinking I should get all this dying off of my mind,

I should really know better than to read the headlines.

Does it matter if I see it?

No really, can I not just cover my eyes?"

[End Playback]

**Ariana Brocious:** I asked her why the climate crisis can make us want to avoid the news or ignore what is happening.

## **PROGRAM PART 1**

**Tamara Lindeman:** It's interesting because you know I feel like I would give the stock answer which I feel like has become a bit of a narrative of like, oh, our human minds can't understand the scale of the crisis is so vast it moves too slowly. But I actually don't believe any of that. I really don't anymore. I think it's honestly just because of course we want to look away from anything dark and heavy. You know, but it's no different than, you know, Canadians and Americans turning away from the history of genocide or racism. I mean it's like we tend to turn away from these frightening realities until something or someone forces us to look. And I really think that the reason why we turn away from climate is not because we can't understand it, it's just because there isn't enough cultural and social pressure to look. And I think that other reason is that because for most people they associate this particular issue with the issue of like individual responsibility and individual action. And because most people live in fossil fueled, you know, powered societies, the cost of looking most people kind of consider the cost of looking as if I look at this, then I'll have to you know go off the grid and change my entire life. And most people can't do that; they can't afford to. So, I think that's the other major barrier that stops people from engaging is this association with if I look at this. I mean it's like I think a lot of Canadians didn't want to look at sort of genocide and indigenous issues because we felt that the cost of looking would be oh I can't be Canadian then. But that's not what is necessarily asked it's the looking needs to happen first, So, I think those are the barriers that's my perspective. But in terms of that song, I wasn't trying to do anything, I just happened to write it and then be like that's a real truthful thing that I felt, and that I'm acknowledging in the song. And I feel that if I acknowledge my own less than fantastic feelings. Everyone else will be able to acknowledge theirs. I think something else I was trying to get out there was the way that previous generations all through human history no one has had to carry the full knowledge of something like this ever. And that is an element where you know holding all of that in our minds is really hard for us as creatures.

**Ariana Brocious:** Certainly, yeah. I think that there's a lot touching on those things like systemic racism and genocide. Those are other major things that it's easy to look away from or try to sweep under as you say, because they're extremely difficult to face like climate. And I think the personal responsibility aspect is really interesting because you know there's kind of different schools of thought, there's on the one hand, Americans certainly and Canadians probably, first world nations have a bigger carbon footprint have more responsibility than others collectively for contributing to the climate crisis. And yet there are of course these major actors, oil companies and others that have been way more responsible in direct terms for contributing and creating the actual emissions that go into the sky. And so, I wanted to visit another song of yours as I understand an article about Exxon Mobil inspired you to write the song Robber. And let's hear a little bit of it and then again, we can chat about kind of maybe the role of that in terms of the songwriting itself.

[Start Playback]

No, the robber don't hate you, he had permission

Permission by words, permission of thanks

Permission by laws, permission of banks

White table cloth dinners, convention centers

It was all done real carefully.

[End Playback]

**Ariana Brocious:** And so, there you are describing, you know, he had permission of thanks permission by laws and banks. And so, if society in one way or another has given these corporations permission to pollute to you know put all these carbon emissions in the sky, we're all guilty for that on some level for allowing it. So, how do we handle that?

**Tamara Lindeman:** I think like everything is an ecosystem and everything is connected. And I think there are so many ways in which you know social license is granted to people who, you know, for example, work at oil companies. And you know that's why a lot of activists argue that we need to revoke their social license. But I think that line I wasn't necessarily talking about like what do we do about it, you know, obviously I have lots of ideas like let's cut off oil companies' ability to advertise, to trade on the stock market. You know what I mean like you have to -- yeah, like just cut them out of you know in every way shape and form. But I think that what I was really talking about there is like why is this possible? You know what I mean like why is it allowed at all? And I think what I was talking more about was this idea of a wrongdoer or a villain. And who do we think is a bad person, you know, how do we think about these concepts and like what I was trying to capture in that song was my own I guess naïveté or like understanding of the world and how it shifts when you realize like it's not just that everybody wants to drive a car. It's that like there are actually people who have committed genuine acts of not just not doing the right thing but like actively trying to stop the right thing from occurring, right? So, I was thinking of like who is that person? And this idea that that act, you know, as was, has been carried out by so many people like politicians and people at the API and people at Exxon, that act is encouraged. It's not just that it's not seen as bad. It's actively encouraged And that's something that like I don't know if I understand or I know how you know; I know how I myself feel about it. But I think it is more a question of like just what a strange world we live in. Like just how bizarre this story is really.

**Ariana Brocious:** Right. And I think that there's a growing awareness now and a much greater public awareness of the role of these companies than there used to be, right. So, there is less at least in among kind of a general population whether that's resulted much in any actual actions limiting their social license to operate, you know, arguable. I read that when you are a kid you had trouble sleeping at night because of climate change and that some of those heavy emotions actually made you avoid the issue for a time. Can you tell us a little more about that?

**Tamara Lindeman:** Yeah. I mean I don't remember when I first heard the words, I mean global warming was what it was called at the time. But I think my parents told me pretty young because I do remember being really, really afraid in a very child way of this idea of the natural world changing irreparably. You know where the idea of the seasons changing and it really did frighten me on a visceral level as I think it does any child that comes in contact with that idea. I just think for a child of the 80s maybe I learned about it fairly young. But yeah it did keep me up at night. It was a very a fear that I couldn't manage. And then through my life, I think, like many people of my generation it's been off and on experience, right. You go through a phase where you're thinking about it a lot and

then you go through a phase where you're not. And part of for me really coming to terms with facing the climate crisis as it truly is and will be part of that was looking at my own life and the ways in which you know through chunks of my adult life I had sort of hidden from that knowledge or hidden myself from it because I didn't want to think about it. And I talk about that a lot because I think that's a very common experience and I think it's what probably most people are doing day-to-day. I always contrast and think of our response to the Covid pandemic which here in Canada has been very robust and common sense and scientific. And the average adult I know is constantly thinking about COVID-19 and the pandemic and what's gonna happen next and what's happening and what legislation is occurring. And yet, most people I know are not thinking about climate at all. So, I think when I look back on my history of avoiding those news articles as I say I bring it up because I think it's very common.

**Ariana Brocious:** I wanna ask, you know, did your parents have good tools to help you navigate that? And I don't mean so much their parenting style or anything, just that it's overwhelming for adults as well as kids. And I'm wondering if did those discussions with your parents maybe change as you grow older and had a slightly you know older understanding of what global warming or climate change meant.

**Tamara Lindeman:** No, I don't think they did not to be negative about it. But you know I think that they didn't know what to say or think about it. And I think too it was an earlier time where it was less prevalent in the news and you know, but yeah, I think that my parents didn't really when I think about being very young and being really afraid of it I don't think my parents had any idea how to respond to that it may be weren't expecting that perhaps. I remember my mom talking to me about being a child of the Cold War you know and the nuclear threat, but that didn't really put my mind at ease, yeah. It doesn't really make it better.

**Ariana Brocious:** You mention naïveté and it's interesting that this album which deal so much with climate and climate grief you've titled *Ignorance*. And I'm curious if you can explain the thinking there.

**Tamara Lindeman:** I mean there's a lot of like layers to that title. And that's part of why I chose it because there are so many different meanings and I couldn't really pick one as being you know, the more important one over all of the others. And it's interesting that that album came out during the pandemic and really resonate during the pandemic because I think one of the strongest threads of it, you know, when I wrote it, and when I made it was it was 2019. You know, and the world was really just charging forward into the 2020s as though nothing was happening. And ignorance of the climate crisis is so widespread and it's so common. And think what I was really trying to hit in that record, is the moment where you allow yourself to break through that veil of not wanting to know not wanting to see and not wanting to look and then you can't not. But I think I also was thinking about how ignorance works in the world. I think of misogyny, for example or racism or climate where it's like all these things are powered by a sort of like manufactured ignorance where we say like I know what a woman is and you're that. And whenever you have one of these ideas between you and reality it creates a warping where you can't actually see what's in front of you. And I think with climate there are so many of those that are making it difficult for the average person to see the most obvious thing because there are these sort of ignorances that are like almost like physical things in the way.

**Ariana Brocious:** You're listening to a Climate One conversation about coping with climate through music. If you missed a previous episode, or want to hear more of Climate One's empowering conversations, subscribe to our podcast wherever you get your pods. Coming up, how should musical artists use their platforms to advocate for climate action?

**Tamara Lindeman:** I definitely believe that you know there's lots of moments where you know

musicians use their cultural power to push forward social issues and this should be no different.

**Ariana Brocious:** That's up next, when Climate One continues.

**Ariana Brocious:** This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious, and we're talking about the role of music in the climate crisis with Tamara Lindeman of The Weather Station.

The Weather Station's album Ignorance deals with many themes related to the climate emergency. One of the most prominent themes is climate grief. Yet, the music itself doesn't sound grief-stricken. I asked Lindeman how emotion influenced her songwriting.

## PROGRAM PART 2

**Tamara Lindeman:** Yeah, I mean I think that was always my intention for that record to be kind of like in, and it's the wrong word but in my mind, I just like thought of it like a dance record or like you know have this grooving rhythm. And, part of that was that I was thinking about how popular songs if they're well-made they're very powerful and they're very, they're very palatable and they kind of move through space in this way that something more avant garde can't, you know. And I kind of love the idea of lyrics as like the passenger you know on this thing that just moves through people. And so, I thought it would be interesting to sort of combine some of these feelings that are more tangled and gnarly with something so approachable. So, that was absolutely my intention. But I think to that you know I think the only song I've really written or maybe I've only written like two or three songs that really, I would say like about climate grief like in particular like that specific feeling. And I think like the song on the album Trust is very much that you know that's a very heavy song and it was hard. I still haven't been able to play that song live really because it's too heavy. So, you know, that's still part of why. But, yeah, I think, you know, climate feelings like there are so many you know and grief is only one of them. And I think the album is about so many of those feelings.

**Ariana Brocious:** Yeah, I really like what you said there about lyrics riding along like a melody or a song that carries people and reaches people just on the music alone. I think there's a lot of really good examples of that and you can think of like you know protest songs and others that have if you stop and listen to the lyrics you think oh my gosh this is actually about something much heavier, you know, but the tone carries you it's like, you know. So, social and political movements have this history of being strongly linked with music and musicians themselves from the civil rights movement, the antiwar movement. And I'm curious how you see yourself in the context of the climate movement in that sense.

**Tamara Lindeman:** I don't see myself as being a part of a movement at all, but I definitely think and hope that I'm playing some role out there in the world and I think too like having so much opportunity to talk about this in interviews, which is really surprised me. I mean that's something that I feel like I've ended up in spaces that aren't the climate activist world you know talking in the music section of the newspaper instead of the science section. And I think that's part of what I've been trying to do and I think I really want to if I think about what I want to do next and like or like what type of activism I would like to engage in. I think it's more about reaching people who are outside of that movement because I think that the movement unfortunately hasn't been able to reach enough people. But I do think that the average person and statistics bear this out. The average person cares deeply about this issue. And if I can show up at, you know, on their doorstep in a Spotify playlist then that's great.

**Ariana Brocious:** We've been questioning here at Climate One why there aren't more climate anthems, right, or sort of songs that kind of represent the movement help galvanize people in the

way that there have been for a lot of other movements. And, you know, you've written this album. I'm curious where you would place music along the spectrum of climate action from things like self-expression to actually encouraging others to act more directly.

**Tamara Lindeman:** Yeah, I mean it's hard to know right like I feel like the time when music really played a role in political movements, you know, like I think a lot of us sort of romanticize the 60s and yet like when you listen to some of those songs they're really strange songs to be anthems. And I don't know what role music has to play. I do think that the reason that the fact that we don't have a climate anthem or that we don't have better protest songs on this issue I do think about how that reflects on how we view this issue. And I just really think so much that it just always comes down to our own barriers with this issue. You know, in particular where it's like you know when I think of great protest anthems, I think a lot about there's a lot of great like union anthems and a lot of great like workers' rights and all of these things where it's like people anything that can charge people up and make them feel indignant or angry or like powerful is often sort of the role of protest music of like a song that everyone can sing as they march. Like that sort of what traditionally protest music is about. And I think part of what's wrong with this issue is people have so many personal feelings about it that keep them away from that feeling of indignance or of power or of a collective experience. I think that's why we don't have the climate anthem yet that people can jump onto because there are so many barriers.

**Ariana Brocious:** The band The 1975 released a song in collaboration with Greta Thunberg. It's a pretty powerful piece. She states, "We have to acknowledge that the older generations have failed. All political movements in their current form have failed. But homo sapiens have not yet failed. Now is not the time for speaking politely, now is the time to speak clearly." And after recording that collaboration the lead singer of The 1975 said, other artists didn't want to do it. Didn't want to record this collaboration with her, bigger artist than his group. So, why do you think that's the case that something like partnering with someone who's been such a leader in the movement didn't appeal to bands that have maybe bigger stature?

**Tamara Lindeman:** That's interesting. I mean I think it just comes down to once again I mean the fact that of having a carbon footprint. I mean, I think that and, you know, I think most bands probably don't feel that they deserve to collaborate with someone like Greta, you know, because that's always the barrier, right. And I think that she is such wonderful speaker and so clear and she takes no prisoners. I'm sure everyone was just intimidated. And that's you know I'm not saying that's right I'm just saying that's probably what happened.

**Ariana Brocious:** You mean, so obviously touring has a big carbon footprint itself and a research paper published in Popular Music followed five artists on their tours to track their carbon output and collectively they added the carbon equivalent of about 20 flights back and forth from New York to London in a period of six months. I mean is that what you're talking about where bands feel their own kind of climate guilt because of the work of touring and what impact that has or are there other things you think might be, in the way of them focusing on climate as a subject?

**Tamara Lindeman:** Yeah, that's specifically what I was to give was touring. And obviously like it does depend on the band and in what way they're touring I mean, the van is better than a bus is better than a plane. But I'm sure, I'm sure. And I've had plenty of personal conversations with musicians and that's unanimously what everyone expresses is that they want to say something about it but they don't feel that they should because of touring. And I think that's why I personally am just like can we let go of that as an idea, not to say that emissions are like neutral or even okay but just like can we make it so that everyone can be vocal regardless of what they do, but I don't think we're there yet.

**Ariana Brocious:** An open letter was released by the group Extinction Rebellion covering the hypocrisy that is often discussed when musicians broach the subject of the climate emergency. The letter reads:

Alongside these people who are already paying the price for our fossil fuelled economy, there are millions of children – called to action by Greta Thunberg – who are begging us, the people with power and influence, to stand up and fight for their already devastated future.

We cannot ignore their call. Even if by answering them we put ourselves in your firing line. The stories that you write calling us climate hypocrites will not silence us.

**Ariana Brocious:** The letter was signed by over one hundred celebrities including musicians Thom Yorke, Imogen Heap, David Byrne, Brian Eno and others. Let's get back to my conversation with Tamara Lindeman. You hosted a series called Elephant in the Room where you discussed climate issues with other artists and musicians. What were those conversations like? What did you all talk about?

**Tamara Lindeman:** It was really interesting. I only did it four times and it was really powerful every time and I really have been wanting to bring it back that sort of my hopefully, like when this record is done. My next project or potentially moving online, but I just find it so interesting like I find it so interesting how people respond to this issue. And a lot of it was what I wanted to do with that as I made it a live show because what I wanted was people to view each other's feelings in real life and confusions, right. Because a lot of people are like they have so much insecurity and shame, you know, and that was a big part of what I wanted to. But also, I wanted people to see others in their community expressing any climate feelings regardless what they were just because I wanted to get it all out in the open. Yeah for sure other artists I know definitely have struggled on how to talk about this issue and how to be, you know, especially on social media or whatever it is. A lot of people feel very whereas they feel very comfortable voicing concerns about social justice online. Climate is one that they just they can't do it like there's like a barrier a lot of different barriers. Those conversations were more private conversations that I've had with people as to why, but you know I think it's just such a big multifaceted issue, and there's so many, there's so much flak you're gonna get so that's why. I mean there are a lot of reasons but those are some. Though I will say that a lot of people in the past couple years who had never voiced anything on it have voiced things about it. There's definitely been a real resurgence of people I know and artists I know are really starting to show up for sure.

**Ariana Brocious:** Yeah, you know, I think about we talked about the power of like protest songs in some of the earlier social movements. But, you know, you can also just think about the social capital that a lot of really big artists have and how many people they have paying attention to them. And it is kind of striking to me that more of them don't use their platform for this issue because it does affect all of us globally and there is a real opportunity it would seem to communicate with people who actually are in some cases, depending on what kind of music can really cut across a broad spectrum of people too, politically, ideologically. So, I'm kind of just wanting to return again to what you think the power is of music specifically and musicians to create change and possibly drive action around climate.

**Tamara Lindeman:** Yeah, I mean I think that it's like almost like two separate powers. Like I think music itself the power of music is how intimate it can be. You know, because we listen on headphones. You know, we listen, the words and music go directly to us and there's no intermediary. And I think that's a very powerful force and I can think of so many things in life that I learned through a song or I thought I learned through a song. And so, I definitely believe really strongly in lyrics and in the intimate relationship between singer and listener. I think there's a lot of room for

vulnerability because if you hear something and you're alone maybe you can take it in a different way than you could if it's like a speech or a newscast. So, I think that as time goes on, and people are beginning to write more about climate in music. I do have hope that that will you know, maybe a song makes it through somewhere where like a speech could not, you know, because it's so intimate. And I think that but I think that music you know ultimately like it has to it's an emotional medium it has to talk to the emotions and I think it's like finding where the emotions are that need to be witnessed is like the interesting part of if I think about climate music I guess. And then musicians themselves like absolutely musicians have a platform and especially big musicians have a lot of cultural power. And I definitely believe that you know there's lots of moments where you know musicians use their cultural power to push forward social issues and this should be no different. And I really hope that more musicians do show up on the issue and show up in meaningful ways and use their cultural capital to talk about it

**Ariana Brocious:** Tamara Lindeman is a musician and singer-songwriter behind The Weather Station. Thank you so much for joining us today on Climate One.

**Tamara Lindeman:** Thank you.

Music: in

Intro to second Station ID break:

**Ariana Brocious:** This is Climate One. Coming up, a critic gives his take on the state of climate messaging in music

**Jayson Greene:** As the news grew more and more dire it worked its way deeper into everyday people's subconsciousness and it started making its way out into the art just like your worries show up in your bad dreams.

**Ariana Brocious:** That's up next, when Climate One continues.

**Ariana Brocious:** This is Climate One. I'm Ariana Brocious. Climate as a theme in popular music has been largely absent until recently. As more and more people are experiencing the effects of the climate emergency, music is reflecting that reality.

Jayson Greene is contributing editor and former senior editor at Pitchfork and the author of the memoir *Once More We Saw Stars*. He wrote a piece titled *What Can Music Do During Climate Collapse?* Where he listened to over 20 hours of music contained climate as a theme. In that piece Greene wrote, "Music is the sound of human activity on Earth, after all, the hum our feelings make as we live."

Climate One host Greg Dalton asked him what music has meant to his life, and how it helps process emotions related to climate.

### **PROGRAM PART 3**

**Jayson Greene:** I think that I was trying to wrestle with just that question because I had noticed that many, many, many artists were newly addressing climate in their music. When that sort of thing happens especially if your job is to listen to 5, 10 new albums a week and think about what it is that you're hearing it's very noticeable it happens, you know, it might not be as noticeable if you pick up one song one album you're listening to this artist, but I started to notice just how many new projects, whether they were commissioned song cycles by string quartets or whether they were albums of rock by singer-songwriter independent indie rock acts, you know, all across the spectrum. People



were singing about the climate crisis in a newly direct way, a newly frank way and in some cases, a newly brutal way given reflecting in some way the brutality of the headlines. And I couldn't help but turn from there to ask myself whether or not I had considered whether or not music, which was my number one emotional support in life that isn't another human being. I mean when it comes to things that I rely on to feel like I know where my place in the world is and to feel safe and to feel comforted: my wife, my kid and then it's music.

**Greg Dalton:** This is quite different. in your fabulous piece *What Can Music Do During Climate Collapse?* You write "Environmentalism as a thematic concern has been nearly vacant from the mainstream stage for the last two generations." So, contrast that with you notice a sudden burst of creativity in climate awareness and that followed a real void.

**Jayson Greene:** I didn't know that until I started examining the outburst of new art and I mean now we're in the year 2022 and I'm thinking about music that's first started surfacing around 2016. When I went to sort of track back how recent this sort of explosion, if I could find a singular point in these things aren't that simple. I was really struck that year by a project by the singer-songwriter Anohni, formerly of Antony and the Johnsons. Anohni, she released a project with the very frank all capital letters, title, HOPELESSNESS, and the first track was called 4 Degrees, and on that song Anohni howls "it's only 4 degrees it's only 4 degrees." And Anohni has, a similar wrenching pleading emotional quality that you might associate with a classic singer like say Nina Simone. So, when this person is sort of howling in that voice about how it's only 4 degrees and I want to see the animals starve is a bitter sort of quality to the lyrics where Anohni is almost like being a Cassandra reeling off all these scenarios and bitterly ironically is insisting that she wants them. It's almost as if to say, bring the destruction down upon us. And it was so stark its power in its visceral anger that it just cut straight through. And I don't know for sure whether or not Anohni's song and it was only one song on that album that addressed the climate crisis specifically but that song to me, has assumed the quality of the sort of opening salvo where it seems to me that after that song I started noticing many new projects where people were not just singing about the environment and I think this gets at the crucial distinction that you are asking about where you said you noticed that you know I had written environmentalism had disappeared from the main stage. And I think what changed is that environmentalism has gone in the popular music sphere from being a sort of trendy topic to touch on if you want to record a simple and easy message song which had been the sort of song you might hear in popular music 20 years ago. Michael Jackson was someone who in the you know latter stages of his career recorded some very big budget, flashy protest songs about what was being done to mother earth. But you didn't see people grappling with it on an emotional individual level, and I think if I were to offer a hypothesis as to why, it's that as the news grew more and more dire it worked its way deeper into everyday people's subconsciousness and it started making its way out into the art just like your worries show up in your bad dreams. And so, then you have people who were reckoning with true visceral hysteria and panic and fear, and all these really dark and intense feelings. The kind that are so powerful that they overwhelm us and they often render us unable to express ourselves by traditional means. And in some ways, I think this is what the impulse to make music is all about. It's to make sense of feelings that are too big, too bad, too good as well. I mean there's lots of music made in joy. But as the news grew extreme and people's awareness grew, I think it was inevitable somebody would stand up and start screaming you know whether or not they took the form of a music that sounded like a punk rock album or it sounded like Anohni or any of the other artists. Some cases it's actually a whisper. I discovered so many different musicians who are making music and the common thread was a sort of desperation. This had gotten too far for them not to start speaking on it. And I think that as you know, and just as art imitates life or let you know in every other respect that mirrors the public awareness of this issue. The transformation of global warming and the climate change alone, I think. I don't necessarily know how others have felt about that. I'm 44 years old. Global warming was something happening in the early in the 1990s. And by

that I'm being deliberately ignorant. But global warming was a soft worry in my mind as a child. It was something that needed to be dealt with eventually and obviously the adults would take care of it because everyone knew it was a problem but no one expected to be affected by that in the 90s that I knew anyway, I certainly did not. And then it became more of an anxiety, but only if you really were the type of person who sought out hard news to read in efforts to inform yourself and this is the common theme I think with everyone you probably speak to about this is that it was easy to ignore.

**Greg Dalton:** So there is this cultural critical mass that happened and music captured and reflected that.

**Jayson Greene:** That's what I think happens with music all of the time. And this firmly how I believe music works. I think it's entirely a response we formulate to the feelings we don't know how to process. And yeah, so that's what I meant when I said that music is the hum our feelings make as we live. Because I really believe that's what it is. And we're all feeling pretty bad about what we see. But yeah, I think that 20 years ago if you recorded an environmental anthem, you are liable to get people rolling their eyes at you for your self-importance. Because it was assumed, I think maybe because of people grandstanding in like in the popstar world that if you were just being grandiose and self-important. And, you know, people would make jokes about you in the same way that they used to make jokes about Bono, someone who was a rock star trying to save the planet. It wasn't a lingua franca of all of these different genres as you know as sort of it starting to become now.

**Greg Dalton:** You listen to about 20 hours of music about climate change what kind of spectrum is there from John Denver to, I don't know, you know, protest anthems, they're angry, and want radical punk rock change.

**Jayson Greene:** It was very clear to me when I look back, that although as like a mainstream concern environmentalism had basically disappeared from the you know the stage with Joni Mitchell and Neil Young in some ways. After that again, you get the occasional Beds Are Burning, Midnight Oil song. But what was interesting to me was to sort of go back through the years, what was happening in punk rock. And I remember that oh yes, the genre that was all about consumer waste and societal rot and the damage we do to our environment without thinking about it thoughtlessly is punk rock. Those are the things that punk rock was born to point out it was born of those conditions neglected you know urban places and kids who don't have work. And so, you have someone like Poly Styrene of the band X-Ray Spex who sang about climbing over mounds and mounds of polystyrene foam. I mean her name comes from polystyrene and she named herself that as a sort of ironic tribute. Fugazi sang about burning from the sky and the Dead Kennedys had songs about toxic waste dumps and about acid rain. So, then in metal you have an entire genre of metal bands who choose ecocide or veganism as their rallying cry. I think if you're not a metal listener and you're only familiar with metal from it sort of public awareness, you know, it's sort of image, you might not expect that like a thrash like a full-blown metal band like a hard-core metal band would be singing about how you shouldn't eat meat. But in fact, it's true that you have many bands basically that adhere to that idea. So, the more you look, the more you see that there is a you know, you just have to trace the throughline. One of the emotions underneath this you've spoken about is grief. Trying to come to terms with amidst the climate crisis.

**Greg Dalton:** You wrote the memoir *Once More We Saw Stars* where you discuss the unfathomable tragedy of losing your daughter. I cried when I read that book about what happened to your Greta. And so connect for us your capacity I just wonder how that hits you. And Greta is the iconic young leader of climate and you lost your Greta.

**Jayson Greene:** Well, you know, I didn't know who Greta Thunberg was when my daughter Greta was alive. My daughter was born in April 27, 2013 and she died on May 17, 2015. So, her life was

very short. We lost her suddenly in a tragic accident. And after she was gone, I remember when I learned that there was a young girl who was standing up to world leaders and yelling in their faces that they needed to act that there was this unbelievably young and fearsomely, frighteningly charismatic and intelligent child who had assumed the mantle of the entire climate emergency. And I could not help but immediately see that her first name was the name of my daughter. And I had not met many people who were named Greta or had heard of many people. I mean it's not uncommon, but it was just uncommon enough that it wasn't like you'd met 300 people with that name and could assign no significance to it at all. And I didn't entertain the thought at the time, mostly because it felt like a vaguely self-important connection for me to be making between my private loss of my daughter and the climate crisis and this girl who has no connection to me or to my family in any way or you know. But I remember, when she spoke to the UN I believe and she yelled "Shame on you." I turned to somebody who knew me well and I said, if anyone's named Greta I'm glad it's her. So, for me that was a moment of private sort of a meeting of a place in me that had spent a long time learning how to process loss and meeting another part of me that was learning again freshly how to process new loss or the idea of loss. I think that we're contending with people who are not directly affected right now by climate change in ways that are so obvious and so brutal that they can stare it in the face every day. I live in New York in Brooklyn and I live near the water, but my community doesn't look at that water every day and think about what's going to happen to them. Whereas I think in other places and other areas of the country and the world that's much more of a way of life to live next to water to be near water to contend with what water can do to your environment. So, I don't live in the sort of ongoing awareness of the possibility of destruction that climate change poses to so many different places. And for me it exists in my mind climate change exists in my mind. I know it exists in the world but and I know that it's growing ever more urgent, unstoppable and in many if not most ways irreversible. And yet, I move through a world that feels like it's a perfectly preserved snow globe of what the world is without. I think that for many people who are trying to come to grips with their emotions, they're looking around their world for evidence of the apocalypse that they know from reading must be coming their way. And I think that this describes the emotional state of a lot of people that might be fighting through confusion, despair, guilt, any number of complicated emotions they can't process.

**Greg Dalton:** And as someone who's had to go through that kind of personal grief losing your Greta, what would be your advice on dealing with grief in general and climate grief in particular?

**Jayson Greene:** I have learned to grieve the loss of my daughter, and that meant that I had to come to grips with living happily in a world where something unspeakable happened. I had to learn to live in a world that could and had taken everything away. And that is the painful journey that all who lose a child have to go along. And I think that it was an intensely a harrowing sort of internal process that could not necessarily be measured by anything other than Greta's ongoing absence after death in the world. It was a personal apocalypse.

**Greg Dalton:** Have you been able to find joy afterwards and can other people find joy even in climate collapse?

**Jayson Greene:** I would never have written the book I wrote. I would never written any book at all if I had a story to tell that was rooted in or about despair. in the act of choosing to tell people about my daughter and what we went through was an act of sort of wanting to heal, wanting to be healed and be healed myself, you know, but I also know that presenting this is what people do with grief must be witnessed. And when it is witnessed it can be processed and I absolutely, I live through a harrowing dark time but have come out and I live in a joyful world. Part of the dissonance of knowing that the planet is in such dire shape is that I view it from a place of relative abundance and plenty

**Greg Dalton:** I've come to learn to enjoy beautiful days and sunny days. And yes, there can be beauty right here right now even though I know the climate collapse is happening and the sixth grade extinction is happening and all these things are happening. In some ways if we take this opportunity presented to us, we can embrace and enjoy the things that we might've otherwise taken for granted because we know that they're fleeting or disappearing.

**Jayson Greene:** Yeah, I mean absolutely true. And I think that I had to face my anger and my despair in order to be able to process my grief having lost Greta, and to move on with my life. And I think in order to process and move on with my fear around the climate collapse, it's the same process. Can you name your fear? When I'm feeling overwhelmed by fear it is helpful to be reminded that I should probably name my fear. And by doing that I take it out of the realm of the unnamable into the nameable. And I think that that's a really powerful tactic for dealing and yes it also makes you help able to enjoy when you face your fears you let go of them for a moment and you get to enjoy the experience of your life again. This is what persistent fear and anxiety can do, they can rob you of your ability to enjoy sunny days. it speaks again to the insane abundance and prosperity through which I have lived that this feeling is so completely foreign and unfamiliar and that I am being forced to reckon with what millennia of humans have had to live with every day of their lives.

**Greg Dalton:** Right. And that naming is very powerful and oftentimes music gives voice to those things. How do you think climate will be representative music going forward as the climate crisis continues to hit people in more obvious and accelerating ways.

**Jayson Greene:** I have always felt and I do believe that music is not a great container for political statements. You can put them in but they leak out the minute you give them to somebody. You can't believe that they're going to receive the message that you loaded in there like a message in a bottle because music is so personal, it speaks to that person. You're not there with them when they're hearing it. You're not in the room with them and you can't control their reaction or how they interpret it, right. So, I have always thought that it's a leaky container for things like ethics or morals or political messages. But I think it's the most effective one we have for speaking to our feelings. And mourning and I mean what is music for if not for remembrance and mourning. It's for celebration, remembrance and mourning. Those are the three things that we turn to music for. And I think that in some ways the music will respond to the climate crisis is the way it responds to all crises: in the language of personal loss in the language of defiant hope. Think about the way that music has you know worked in other times of great upheaval. Think about the way that music responds to the civil rights crisis, you know, the civil rights movement and decades of injustice. The music that spoke most powerfully say, Sam Cooke, A Change Is Gonna Come. That is a song of personal anguish. It's an anthem not because it was a song about wrong being done and action that needed to be taken, but it was one person's impossibly massive sounding yearning for better times. And I think that's the same sort of way that musicians will respond to the climate crisis. It's with their humanity in some ways it's the only way to be reminded of what it is that we stand to lose.

**Greg Dalton:** Jayson Greene is a music critic, editor and author of the memoir, Once More We Saw Stars. It's a very touching tribute to your daughter, Greta. Thank you, Jayson for coming on Climate One and sharing your story.

**Jayson Greene:** Thank you so very much for inviting me.

Music: In

**Ariana Brocious:** On this Climate One... We've been talking about coping with the climate crisis through music. This episode was supported in part by the Sidney E. Frank Foundation.

**Ariana Brocious:** Climate One's empowering conversations connect all aspects of the climate emergency. To hear more, subscribe to our podcast on Apple or wherever you get your pods. Talking about climate can be hard-- but it's critical to address the transitions we need to make in all parts of society. Please help us get people talking more about climate by giving us a rating or review if you are listening on Apple. You can do it right now on your device. You can also help by sending a link to this episode to a friend. By sharing you can help people have their own deeper climate conversations.

**Ariana Brocious:** Brad Marshland is our senior producer; our producers and audio editors are Austin Colón me, Ariana Brocious. Our team also includes Steve Fox and Sara-Katherine Coxon. Our theme music was composed by George Young (and arranged by Matt Willcox). Gloria Duffy is CEO of The Commonwealth Club of California, the nonprofit and nonpartisan forum where our program originates. Our host and executive producer Greg Dalton will be back next week. Thanks for listening.