

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## 13 Questions for Singer-Songwriter Mason Summit

Susan Hayden · Wednesday, January 17th, 2018

Singer-songwriter Mason Summit's new album, *Summer Cold* (release date: January 19th), which Parcbench calls "quite simply, the best new album of 2018," is cause for celebration. And who better to interview this edgy, rising young star than Mason's talented, famous-in-her-own-right mom, Susan Hayden aka Library Girl.

Here's the remarkable, in-depth interview that resulted from my invitation. – Alexis Rhone Fancher

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1/ I've chosen the Number 13 as tribute to a song we both love by Big Star, and because it's our so-called family number. You've been playing guitar and singing songs in front of people for as long as I can remember. What do *you* remember about your first performance in public?

*I think my first public performance was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, so I would have been around 8. I played "Folsom Prison Blues." It was a huge deal for me at the time, because I was a pretty shy kid. But from that point on, I loved the thrill of performing in front of people.*

<https://www.culturalweekly.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/song1.mp3>

"Summer Cold"

2/ Early on, the background music of your life was what your parents listened to: singer-songwriters from the late 60s and early 70s. But it didn't take long for you to veer from our taste and go on your own quest, immersing yourself in earlier eras, like the mid-50s to early 60s. So it makes sense that your songs possess a kind of retro quality. Was there a singer-songwriter you heard, way back when, that clarified your own fate?

*I've always been the kind of music fan who goes through intense, obsessive phases of listening to one artist exclusively. When I started playing guitar, that artist was Johnny Cash. Soon after that, I went into my Buddy Holly phase, and I would say he got me started writing my own songs. He did it all: writing, singing, playing, and producing, and his rhythm guitar playing influences my technique to this day.*



**3/** In 2008, our house fell silent when we suffered the tragic, sudden loss of your father, my husband. You were just eleven then. He had shared with you his great love of nature as well as his huge passion for making music. He secretly dreamed of being widely known for his singing and songwriting. I'll always treasure the times the two of you performed together, at the coffeehouse around the corner, on Open Mic night. When your father died, we had to find meaning in our lives again. How has his death informed your creative life? Has songwriting been your main source of healing from grief?

*I'd say his death was a catalyst for getting involved in songwriting, as was his life – growing up, observing him in the process just made it come naturally. Songwriting has definitely been an outlet, but it definitely shouldn't be the only outlet. For a long time, singing about issues like that in a song was a way for me to avoid actually talking about them.*

**4/** You've accomplished A LOT in a short span of time: Creating four, self-produced records of critically acclaimed, original work; your first, Absentee, released at 15, followed by Loud Music and Soft Drinks at 17, and Gunpowder Tracks, at 19. You're 21 now and your 4<sup>th</sup> album, Summer Cold, is about to come out. Parcbench wrote, "Quite simply, the best new album of 2018...Not since the musical poetry of Simon & Garfunkel has there been so intimate and intelligent a listening experience as Mason Summit." What's different about this new album?

*What I realize in retrospect is that I publicly documented my evolution as a songwriter and musician from an early age, and that makes it easy to trace my progress and growth. With Summer Cold, I've reached a point where I'm confident in my artistry and it's less about getting better and more about trying different things.*

**5/** You attended independent, progressive schools that seemed to fuel your curiosity and satisfy your hunger for knowledge and understanding. What were the important lessons from that long-term learning experience?

*My schooling shaped me as a person to a far greater extent than I realized at the time, particularly Wildwood, my middle and high school. I appreciate that my teachers valued and encouraged opinions and original thoughts.*

**6/** Your love of U.S. history shows up in your songs sometimes. You've always been fascinated by our Presidents and their various approaches to running the country. How does the current political climate shape your work?

*Some songs that I've written more recently (that aren't on the record) are more pointed in terms of the way I express my viewpoint, because there are a lot of people in this country (read: members of the Republican Party/certain members of the Democratic Party) I don't mind offending. I would love for a GOP candidate to use a song of mine in a campaigning day, just so I can send them a cease & desist.*

7/ You grew up as part of a diverse, creative community filled with poets, authors, actors, musicians, filmmakers, photographers and painters. Within this larger circle, did you find a mentor?

*I had so many mentors and positive influences; too many to name, but some that come to mind are Zander Schloss, Skip Heller, Michael C Ford, Rob Schnapf, David Jenkins, and my teachers: Tony Rhambo, Aaron McClaskey, Jahna Perricone, and Sean Holt. Just being raised in such a creative environment, with two parents who write, perform and act, as well as my multitalented brother, made me want to be a part of it as soon as I could.*

8/ You defy categorization, musically and otherwise. A few critics have called you a “pop prodigy”; others would file you under “indie rock.” I recently read a quote from Blake Mills that reminded me of you: “I would way rather be on the side of something that is beautiful and never catches on than the alternative.”

*I couldn't have said it better. My goal with every album, and even with every song, is to do something different. This makes it more difficult to market my music but definitely makes it more exciting to create.*

9/ When you were a teenager, you had the rare opportunity to travel, and on more than one occasion, to volunteer. In high school, vis-à-vis International Community Involvement (ICI), you helped build a home for those in need in Guatemala, and through the Unatti Foundation, you worked at an orphanage and a school in Nepal, teaching music to young children. How did these experiences redefine your world view?

*Traveling has made me a more empathetic person, as well as writer.*



10/ I think you have more guitars than I have pairs of boots, if that is even possible. Some are heirlooms; some are everyday-life instruments. Which one is your absolute favorite and why?

*Such an impossible decision! At this point I really feel that I have acquired my dream guitars; a 1963 (I think) sunburst Epiphone Texan and a fiesta red 1997 Fender California Series Telecaster (to which I made several nerdy modifications). But my favorites for sentimental reasons are the three that belonged to my dad – this Taylor that he played the hell out of, a Collings D3 that he splurged on the year before he died (a guitar which is so nice I'm afraid to go near it), and an early 60s Gibson Country Western that a family friend gave us in New Mexico, just weeks before he died. He and I wrote a song on it the night we got it called “Hillbilly Hop.”*

11/ You’ve been producing your own, quarterly live show, Mason’s Noise Parlour, for several years, featuring other young adult artists. How did this come about?

*I'd been opening your show, Library Girl, for a long time and kind of learned how to produce and curate events from watching you. In 2013, Richard Modiano at Beyond Baroque asked me to do*

*something similar, but with a youth focus, and the rest is history!*

<https://www.culturalweekly.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/song2.mp3>

“Stick It Out”

**12/** I love how you love Los Angeles; you’ve been a great contributor to the community and culture here. Your songwriting has such a strong sense of place and is chock-full of references to film noir, ghost towns, old buildings and unsolved mysteries. You have the soul of a preservationist. What’s your latest LA discovery? Have you found some unknown establishment that serves all that you wish for: big steaks, red booths, old-tyme cocktails?

*Hmmmm, I think my most recent obscure discovery is the Velaslavasay Panorama around the corner from USC. As far as cocktails go, I stumbled upon the hidden tiki bar, Pacific Seas, at Clifton’s Cafeteria a couple weeks ago.*

**13/** You have taught me about heart and diligence and honor. (And politics. And history. And grammar.) I anxiously await the next mix-tape you make for me. You’re living your father’s dream and he would be beaming. So where are you headed? What matters most to you now?

*Thank you, Mom. I’ve learned so much from you. I can’t say exactly where I’m headed —hopefully on tour! I’m at a really good place in my life, emotionally, and what matters to me are my relationships and my music.*

*(All photos by Alexis Rhone Fancher)*

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