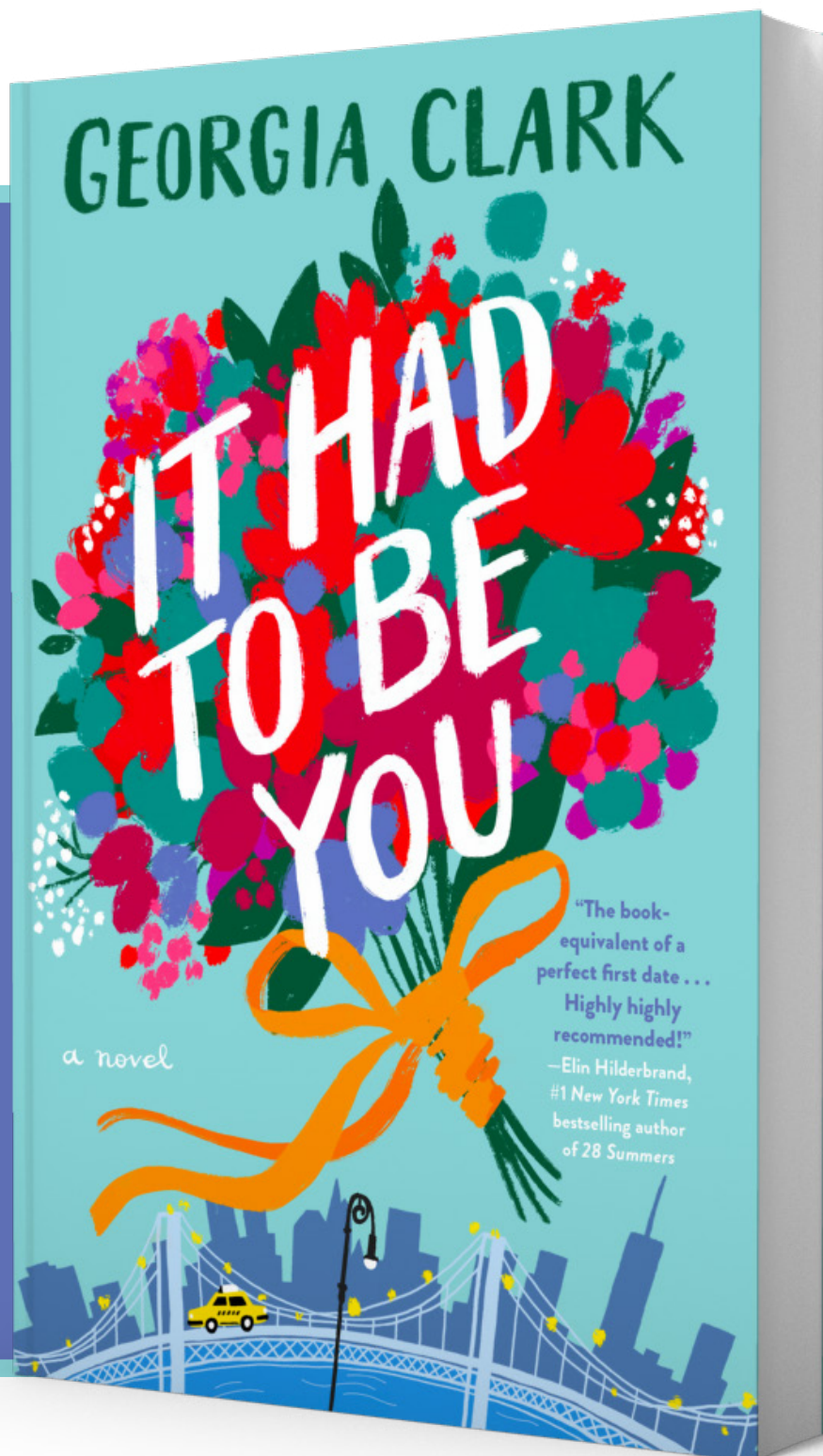


BOOK CLUB KIT





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## INTRODUCTION

The author of the “emotional, hilarious, and thought-provoking” (*People*) novel *The Bucket List* returns with a witty and heartfelt romantic comedy featuring a wedding planner, her unexpected business partner, and their coworkers in a series of linked love stories—perfect for fans of Christina Lauren and Casey McQuiston.

For the past twenty years, Liv and Eliot Goldenhorn have run In Love in New York, Brooklyn’s beloved wedding-planning business. When Eliot dies unexpectedly, he even more unexpectedly leaves half of the business to his younger, blonder girlfriend, Savannah. Liv and Savannah are not a match made in heaven, to say the least. But what starts as a personal and professional nightmare transforms into something even savvy, cynical Liv Goldenhorn couldn’t begin to imagine.

*It Had to Be You* cleverly unites Liv, Savannah, and couples as diverse and unique as New York City itself in a joyous *Love Actually*-style braided narrative. The result is a smart, modern love story that truly speaks to our times. Second chances, secret romance, and steamy soulmates are front and center in this sexy, tender, and utterly charming rom-com.



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## TOPICS & QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The novel starts with a disastrous wedding day and Liv learning that her husband has passed away—and that he was unfaithful to her with someone much younger. Why do you think the author chose to begin the novel this way? What does this scene accomplish?
2. Liv and Savannah are vastly different people in different stages of their lives who are forced together as business partners. At the beginning of the novel, Liv hopes she’ll “never see or hear from *that girl* ever again” (page 9). How does their relationship grow and how is it tested throughout the novel? In what ways do they learn they’re similar through these experiences?
3. How does working in the wedding industry come across in this novel? Does it match what you believed about it when you began the book?
4. Each chapter in the novel focuses on a different set of characters and their unique dreams, goals, backstories, and relationships. Do you think this was an effective storytelling technique? What overall effect did this have on your reading experience?
5. Age, race, and sexuality are diversely represented through the characters in the novel. How does this rich diversity affect the plot and structure of the novel? What does the wide range of experiences allow the author to express throughout the course of the novel?
6. In the past few decades, Brooklyn has become an increasingly prevalent setting in pop culture; how does *It Had to Be You* compare to your ideas of Brooklyn from other books, movies, and TV shows?
7. Zia, a caterer who keeps her cards close to her chest, is forced to open her heart when she meets Clay, the movie star. How does Clay get her to come out of her shell? How does his fame impact their relationship? Would you be able to date a celebrity and the baggage that accompanies them?

8. Gorman and Henry are funny florists who also struggle with deviating stances on marriage and children. How does this impact their relationship and how are they able to move past these stark differences?
9. Another set of characters are Darlene and Zach, a wedding band duo who decide to fake a relationship that ends up sparking real flames. How does their relationship influence the arc of the story?
10. Savannah follows her own emotional and romantic journey, leading to her relationship with a female fashion student at the end of the novel. Why do you think it was important for the author to include this storyline of Savannah's journey to coming out and finding love in the novel?
11. Reread the lines quoted from Rumi in the epigraph at the beginning of the novel. What is their significance? How do they set the stage for the story to come?
12. At the end of the book, Liv has learned to be more comfortable in her own skin. What changed to make this possible? How have Savannah and Sam influenced Liv's new outlook?
13. Discuss the title of the book, *It Had to Be You*. Who does the "You" refer to? Does it refer to multiple characters? Can it refer to friendships as well as romantic relationships? What effect does the song of the same name have on the final scene when all of the couples are dancing together at Liv and Sam's wedding?
14. The last line of the book is Sam saying, "We're already home" (page 368). Why do you think the author chose to end the book with this phrase? How have each of the characters found their own "home" within each of their relationships?
15. The author has publicly stated, "Can rom-coms save the world? I think so." What does she mean by this? What themes of the book exemplify better ways to live our lives and in turn, positively influence others?



## ENHANCE YOUR BOOK CLUB

1. *It Had to Be You* joins the ranks of great rom-com novels like *Red, White, and Royal Blue* and *The Wedding Party*. Choose one of these books to read in your book club, and compare and contrast their depictions of dating, life, and love.
2. *It Had to Be You* has all the elements of a classic romantic comedy. Poll your book club and see which rom-com film is the group's favorite. Then, as you watch it together, mark down the similarities and differences between the movie and *It Had to Be You*.
3. *It Had to Be You* has an utterly charming cast of unique and relatable characters. What actors would you cast for the screen version? Discuss with your book club whether it should be a film or TV series.
4. Visit [@GeorgiaLouClark](#) on Instagram and [GeorgiaClark.com](#) for more information on *It Had to Be You*. Consider inviting her to Skype with your book club.





## A CONVERSATION WITH GEORGIA CLARK

**Q: *It Had to Be You* is your first rom-com. How did the writing process differ from how you approached writing your previous Atria novels, *The Regulars* and *The Bucket List*?**

**A:** In the first draft, the story was more laser-focused on Liv, who was a much darker character. In the first scene, Liv (who back then was “Jude”) showed up drunk and wild with grief to Eliot’s funeral, where she doesn’t recognize her own mother (a purely comic character I ended up cutting) and then gave an epically *awful* funeral speech. I thought it was blackly funny: my agent Allison described it as “prickly.” Regardless, in the fall of 2018, we sold the book off a 25,000-word submission (we call that “a partial”). Over drinks, Allison suggested making Liv less angry and more vulnerable, and leaning into the warmth of the book’s premise. When my editor Emily agreed, I decided to change tack.

I’d never written a rom-com but felt quite jealous of people doing good ones. I loved the genre, and as a sensitive, romantic queer girl, rom-coms are political for me: representation matters. Because this was my fifth novel, I was feeling confident that I could pull off something more ambitious. How about not just one love story; how about five? I’m a sensation seeker: I liked the extravagance of the idea. I wanted to see if I could pull off.

I started from scratch on a new outline in early 2019 at the blessedly indulgent Rowland Writers Residence. I wrote the (new) first and second drafts that year, all while planning, then having, my own wedding. The final edits were completed in March 2020 as the world was starting to change forever.

I loved playing in the genre and finding ways to subvert it while still delivering what readers of romance want. While *It Had to Be You* features five romantic couples, the pairing at the center of the story isn’t a man and woman, nor is it romantic. It’s Liv and Savannah, two women a generation apart from entirely different backgrounds whose mutual lover’s death ultimately allowed them both to form truer identities. That felt unique in a rom-com. It wasn’t until I finished that I realized I’d told a story about people coming together across deep ideological divides.

**Q: There’s a long tradition of romantic comedies set in New York City, on-screen and in books. Were there any movies or novels you drew on during your writing? How much did you want them to influence your book, if at all?**

**A:** Why is New York so synonymous with romance? Perhaps because finding happiness in this city requires imagination, generosity, and a degree of cool practicality, not unlike maintaining love itself. Love is an intangible shared act of will: where better to conjure it than the city of dreams? Perhaps it’s because the city is so antithetical to love (just ask anyone on the apps): love in New York is a victory, against the odds.

I’m a Nora Ephron devotee. I rewatched her classic rom-com trio (*When Harry Met Sally*, *Sleepless in Seattle*, *You’ve Got Mail*) to channel timeless, witty, romantic repartee. *When Harry Met Sally* is probably my fave: the characters still feel so real and fresh and modern (some minor gender politics aside). Having my editor compare my writing to Nora’s in the editor’s letter in galley was my greatest triumph as a writer to date.

I revisited *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Serendipity*, and *Notting Hill*; the latter helped inspire Clay and Zia’s story. I liked the idea of working straight from a well-known trope—waitress meets movie star. It’s a classic; it’s compelling. It was sexy and fun getting to know Clay and Zia; I enjoy writing about fame and the strange demands it makes on individuals. In early drafts Zia was more of a party girl; my smart developmental editor Sarah helped mature her into someone wise and responsible, recovering from trauma. The simple trope evolved into an entirely believable love story.

And of course, there's a boundless amount of wonderful rom-coms reads. I'm obsessed with the queer/modern/cool vibe of Casey McQuiston's *Red, White & Royal Blue*, the accessible sexiness of Jasmine Guillory's *The Wedding Date*, and the underrated *Star-Crossed* by Minnie Darke, another clever kaleidoscope-of-love-stories. *The Hating Game*, *The Kiss Quotient*, Talia Hibbert for ultimate URST. It's not a rom-com but *The Nest* was a well-executed ensemble story that stuck with me.

I also read a lot about the wedding industry (such as *One Perfect Day: The Selling of the American Wedding* by Rebecca Mead), to get into Liv's more cynical brain, and was necessarily reading wedding planning books for my own purposes (I think every bride-to-be is given a copy of *A Practical Wedding*).

I wanted to absorb the warmth and wisdom from these rom-com classics in order to create my own.

**Q: The wedding industry is multifaceted, from planners to florists to caterers to musicians, and you describe them all in such detail. Can you talk about the research you conducted in this sphere for the book? Were you familiar with it before you began your research?**

A: My research adventure for this book began when I shared an Uber Pool with a wedding photographer, Alea Lovely. We struck up a convo and a few days later, she let me take her out for lunch. At an outside table at Enids in Greenpoint, she took me on a deep dive into working as wedding vendor. Alea also connected me to a handful of wedding planners who I started interviewing, some over the phone, and a few in-person here in New York. I struck up a friendship with Amy, the founder of Modern Rebel, a very Brooklyn-esque planning company, and was even able to moonlight as an assistant on a wedding they were working to get a true behind-the-scenes look.

The other profession I really wanted to get right was the musicians, Zach and Darlene. I reached out to my friend Jill Lamoureux, lead singer of the band Scavenger Hunt. I am in no way musically talented (despite the fact that my dad is a musician), Jill helped with the band specifics and the shifting space two working musicians who are also attracted to each other would operate in. Darlene also required research to help me articulate her race consciousness. For that, I worked with women of color beta readers to write her take on race and racism in a way that felt honest and accurate.

I really enjoy research—it's essential to creating authentic characters and scenarios. It really does make your writing richer; the extra effort is always worth it.

**Q: Why did you choose to write the novel in a braided narrative-style and focus on five different modern love stories?**

A: This question presumes that I have slightly more control than I feel I have. It feels less about choices being made and more like listening closely to characters or ideas to understand what they already are or could be. There's a degree of push-pull between myself (as writer) and the idea itself. If you impose too much of your own will (your own agenda), the idea can get overburdened, and fall flat. Too light a hand, and it romps off in another direction like a puppy off its leash. When things are going well, I feel like a director working with a really talented and committed cast. I'm in charge, I call "action," but it's a group effort made possible by everyone's willingness to open up or be funny or whatever the scene calls for. I love that feeling, that my characters and I are all in this thing together, trying our best to create a story we can all be proud of. Novelists are thought to be solo creatures, but really we're team players.

So maybe the question is more like, why do you think this story wanted to be told through five couples? In a novel that asks big questions about love, it felt right to hear a variety of perspectives. Stories validate existence and are a way to claim cultural territory. I wanted to claim that territory for a cast varied in race, sexuality, age, and background. I was interested in the idea of a *Love Actually*-style structure, and to be honest, updating that story for modern readers. Of course I like *Love Actually*, but as is well documented on the interwebs, the stories don't really hold up: they're almost all straight-white-male fantasies about women with very little agency. I thought we deserved better.

Working with an ensemble cast broadened the conversation about marriage, love, and commitment. These big ideas mean something different to everyone: why? The braided narrative allowed me to explore different voices and the psychological nuances that give us our various perspectives and personalities. Plus, it let me have fun with multiple meet-cutes and first kisses and grand gestures: the stuff all romance readers love.

**Q: Ironically, you were planning your own wedding as you were writing *It Had to Be You!* How did planning your own wedding influence the book, and vice versa?**

A: I never had any doubts about getting married to my wife, but to be perfectly frank, I found wedding planning incredibly stressful. Not just the overwhelming logistics and financial burden: turns out getting married to an American in America brought up a lot of family and identity issues for this Aussie ex-pat.

Of course it helped the work, making Savannah's understanding of the industry authentic. But the best thing about writing this book over planning my wedding was the escape it provided! It was a true balm: the tone and humor and heat of this story were very soothing and fun. It was a pleasure to spend time in these character's worlds, doing all the careful writerly work of making something feel airy and honest and beautiful.

The opening page of the story states the thematic territory: *tradition and ritual didn't arise from some universal experience of love and commitment*. Rituals were reinvented and reinterpreted all the time. All of the characters are negotiating the tension between tradition and modernity: between who they should be vs. who they are. That's essentially the conflict most couples wrestle with in wedding planning, and I was no exception: Do I want to wear white or do I feel I should wear white? What is my true desire? Who am I?

On the flip side, while weddings are steeped in tradition that can be stifling, they're also a Bacchanalian space outside of regular life where change happens and surprises occur. And there was something interesting about seeing all that through the lens of people not getting married, but helping others get married, as a day job. How does constantly assisting with the performance of love affect your own love life? I'm always interested in paradoxes like that.

**Q: You've created a beautifully diverse and authentic cast of characters who are navigating love in different ways. Who was your favorite character to write and why?**

A: I truly enjoyed being in every single one of these character's heads: I'm a Pisces, prone to fantasy, so all I really want to do is lose myself in a dreamy otherworld...It was fun being in Zach's head: not only is he outrageously charming and funny and a total horndog but as I spent time with him, I realized how deep Zach's river ran: he's a sensitive soul, and more complex than people give him credit for.

I also really enjoyed channeling Gorman. I relate to his ambivalence about marriage as an institution, his artistic ambition, and his dry-as-a-bone sense of humor. Gorman's a dark horse; maybe I am, too.

**Q: Do you have a favorite scene?**

A: I still tear up every time I read Vanessa's and her dad's father-daughter dance scene...and I've read the manuscript a lot. That scene moves me because it speaks a simple truth: that life is better if we love and accept each other, and it's never too late to make amends. When something moves you in fiction, it's because you're sensing a truth or a hope. I love connecting with people in this way. Comedians want to make you laugh. Novelists want to make you *feel*.

**Q: What do you hope readers take away from this novel?**

A: Because meaning-making is personal in art, it's tricky for me to project any hope about it. But, okay: I hope you swoon. And laugh. And fall in love with my characters (and, by extension, me). I hope it makes you feel good, and hopeful, and happy. We're living in a dark and complex time: I hope this book reminds you that, to quote famed therapist Esther Perel, "the quality of our lives are defined by the quality of our relationships." Even

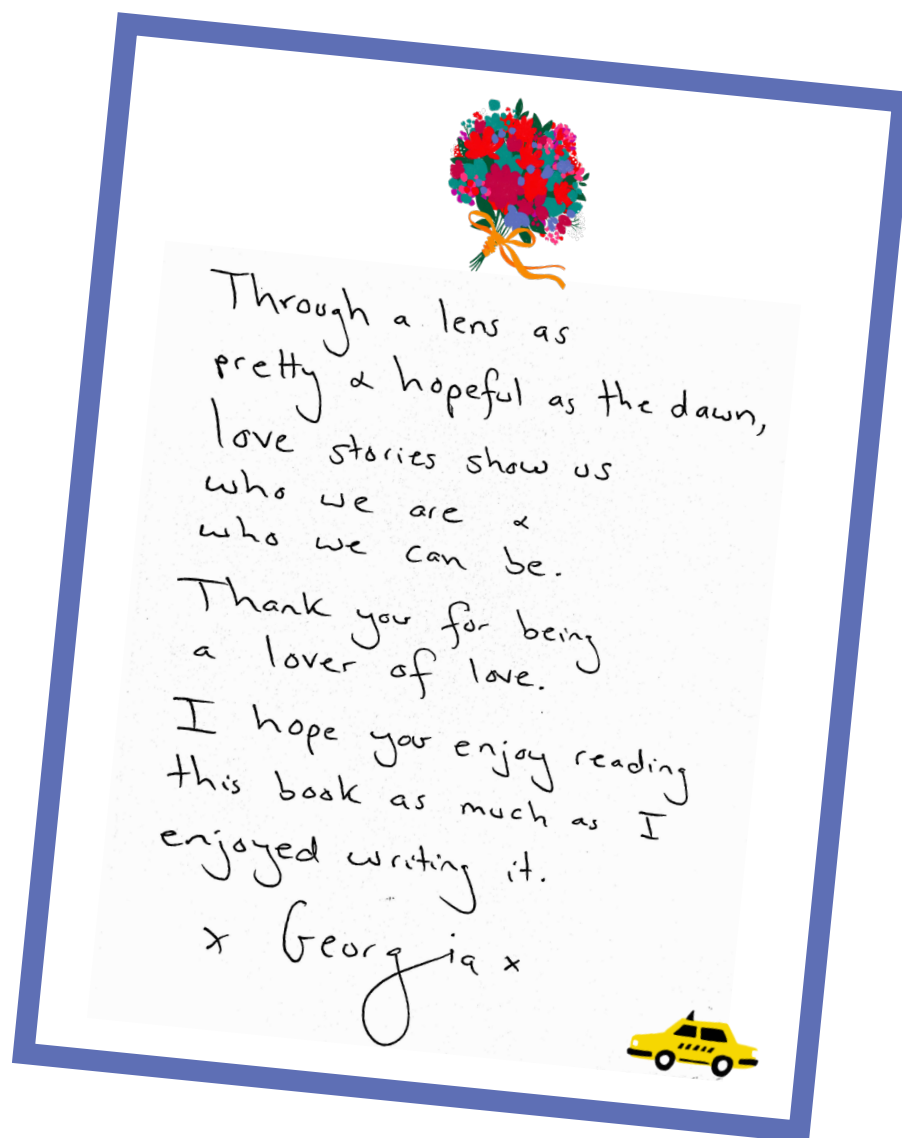
though they are never perfect, our ability to love and forgive is in us, always. That's what I was circling around in the epigraph, "*Lovers don't finally meet somewhere. They're in each other all along*": so much about loving and being loved is allowing it to happen in ourselves. Maybe falling in love with someone is, in part, about falling in love with yourself? Or maybe believing in love is like believing in something like New York City: an act of imagination, courage, and a dash of total delusion...

**Q: Do you have any plans for future projects? Will you stick to writing rom-coms (we hope so!)?**

A: I had so much fun working in rom-com, of course, I had to do it again. My next book is another ensemble comedy/drama that takes place in a wild and beautiful setting: I promise you will have never read a book set there before. Its centered around two families, one Australian, one American, with a sweet-and-sexy queer rom-com at its giant beating heart. As someone who came out at nineteen, it's bizarre to me that I haven't written a central girl-on-girl love story yet. My next book will remedy that: fans of queer rom-com will fall hard for Liss and Amelia. I'm having a ridiculously good time hanging out with this funny, charming cast, telling a beautiful, feel-good story surrounded by the natural world. I'm incredibly excited to share it with everyone, as soon as I can.



## A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR





## HOW TO RUIN A WEDDING (AND ALMOST END YOUR CAREER AS A WEDDING PLANNER) IN UNDER AN HOUR:

1. Every good wedding planner knows to release white homing pigeons instead of actual doves into the air. But when scrappy, gray city pigeons turn up, you have a real problem.
2. Birds Birds Birds, the company who provided the pigeons, won't pick up the phone to replace the gray pigeons with white ones.
3. The bushels of lavender the bride had insisted upon start attracting unwanted bees.
4. You start getting stung by the bees.
5. Find the DJ making out with a bridesmaid an hour before guests start arriving.
6. When the DJ is discovered, he trips and grabs for the nearest structure, which happens to be the reclaimed wood arbor, which is destroyed in the process. There is now no arbor for the ceremony.
7. A couple of the pigeons get loose in the kitchen.
8. The bride walks in to find her bridesmaid still all over the DJ and sees the broken arbor.
9. Then the pigeons fly by the bride's head.
10. A bee stings the bride's bottom lip. It turns out that she's allergic to bees and her lip starts swelling immediately.
11. Then you get a phone call with some really, really bad news.



## THE IT HAD TO BE YOU PLAYLIST:

- “Shoop” - Salt-n-Pepa
- “At Last” - Etta James
- “London Boy” - Taylor Swift
- “Brown Eyed Girl” - Van Morrison
- “Debaser” - The Pixies
- “Rehab” - Amy Winehouse
- “(I've Had) The Time of My Life” - Bill Medley and Jennifer Warnes
- “Let's Do It (Let's Fall in Love)” - Cole Porter
- “I've Got a Crush on You” - Frank Sinatra
- “Yes Sir, That's My Baby” - Frank Sinatra
- “9 - 5” - Dolly Parton
- “I Will Survive” - Gloria Gaynor
- “You've Got a Friend in Me” - Randy Newman
- “Curious” - Hayley Kiyoko
- “Crazy” - Patsy Cline
- “Stay With Me” - Sam Smith
- “Dreams” - Fleetwood Mac
- “Voodoo Child” - Jimi Hendrix
- “Here Comes the Sun” - The Beatles
- “It Had to Be You” - Frank Sinatra

