

He's a customer at the West Village coffee shop where I work, a fellow artist (I'm a writer; he's a musician) who attended a reading of one of my screenplays and gave truly helpful notes, a tall guy with a boyish face and steampunk style, with cherry-dyed hair, elaborate boots and epaulets, and yet announcing his presence most resoundingly with his seemingly ever-present smile and earnest, enthusiastic greetings. Benjamin Scheuer (pronounced SHOY-er) is storyteller with a guitar, sharing through song his own very personal trials and triumphs as well as those of others. I already knew this when in his presence I complained to a coworker, as we listened to the Foo Fighters song "Sean" (also my fellow barista's name), that there were no popular songs about "Samantha," the name I had taken as my own about a year before (though I'm *still* not sure this oversight of songwriters throughout contemporary music history is actually true).

"I Am Samantha" was conceived in that moment of everyday food-service-industry banter, both songwriter and subject knowing this wouldn't be just another lighthearted serenade or would-be rock hit in which the name was chosen simply because it rhymed with something or had the right number of syllables. This was highlighted for Benjamin when I told him the origin of "Samantha," that it had been the only name my parents could agree on prior to my birth, not yet knowing what was between my legs—which would ultimately lead to a name I went by for decades before all but erasing it from identifying documents (Ohio being one of four states that don't allow changes to one's birth certificate.)

Benjamin and those involved in every aspect of the recording, producing and upcoming release of "I Am Samantha" have each endeavored to understand and do right by the story of my transition from [dead name] to the fully realized, confident person I am today. Each of them I've had the pleasure of meeting is just as evidently excited as I am to share this song, this story of struggle and self-discovery, with the world—so that it might do what art uniquely can, which is to increase empathy by revealing the world through someone else's eyes, while also, I can attest, making some of us feel just a little less lonely.

Samantha Williams

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