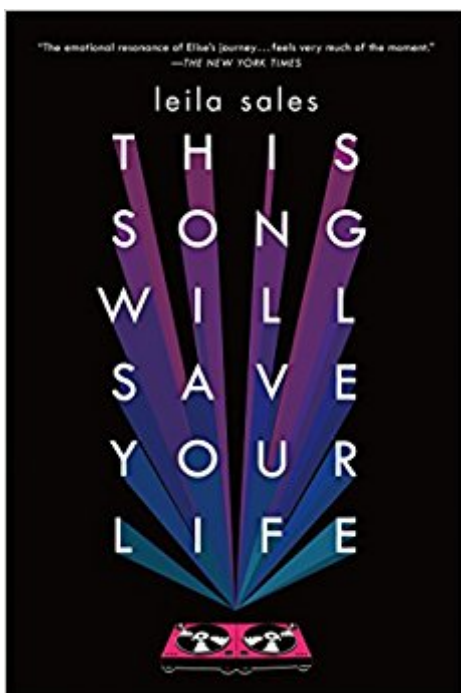


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# This Song Will Save Your Life: A Novel



## Synopsis

A powerful coming-of-age story about an outsider who finds herself when she enters the underground music scene. Making friends has never been Elise Dembowski's strong suit. All throughout her life, she's been the butt of every joke and the outsider in every conversation. When a final attempt at popularity fails, Elise nearly gives up. Then she stumbles upon a warehouse party where she meets Vicky, a girl in a band who accepts her; Char, a cute, yet mysterious disc jockey; Pippa, a carefree spirit from England; and most importantly, a love for DJing. Told in a refreshingly genuine and laugh-out-loud funny voice, Leila Sales' *This Song Will Save Your Life* powerful young adult coming of age novel is an exuberant story about identity, friendship, and the power of music to bring people together. "Heartbreaking, heartfelt, and eventually heart-lifting, this YA novel is one I won't soon forget. If you're a music junkie who also loves YA, read it alongside Len Vlahos's *The Scar Boys* or Rainbow Rowell's *Eleanor & Park*." "Pulsates with hope for all the misfits." "Readers will be fascinated and touched by the first-person voice because of what is roiling beneath it. . . . Teens will connect with [Elise] viscerally." "Sales gets everything right." *MTV.com* A YALSA Best Book for Young Adults A BuzzFeed Best YA Book of the Year A CCBC Choice

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 - 18 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

\*Starred Review\* Elise Dembowsky will not be unfamiliar to readers. The girl most likely to be picked on. A halfhearted suicide attempt. Broken family, no friends, no future. But then something happens. While wandering the streets one night, Elise comes across a warehouse party. The joint is jumping, and to Elise's amazement, some of the people there are interested in her. Vicky, a singer, takes Elise under her wing, and Char, the amazing DJ, takes her to bed. But Char does something for Elise that's more important than making her feel attractive: he tutors her in the art of DJing, and, it turns out, Elise is a natural. So much so that she soon outshines her mentor. What sets this apart from so many problem novels is how honestly and deeply Sales probes the life of a miserable 16-year-old, from her cringe-worthy attempt at learning how to be popular to the observational, rather than emotional, look at what it feels like to be with a guy. Readers will be fascinated and touched by the first-person voice because of what is roiling beneath it. Whether Elise is cynical, despairing, or even exhilarated, her hurt and confusion are the feelings that underlie everything, and teens will connect with her viscerally. That Elise finds something that awakens and restores her will also give readers hope. Grades 7-10. --Ilene Cooper --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"The emotional resonance of Elise's journey . . . feels very much of the moment."  
"The New York Times" "Pulsates with hope for all the misfits."  
"Kirkus Reviews, starred review" "Readers will be fascinated and touched by the first-person voice because of what is roiling beneath it. . . . Teens will connect with [Elise] viscerally."  
"Booklist, starred review" "Sales gets everything right."  
"MTV.com" "A wild, witty, funny, thumping good read."  
"Adele Griffin, two-time National Book Award Finalist" "Edgy and irresistible. If this book were a song, I'd have it on repeat with the volume all the way up."  
"Sarah Mlynowski, author of Ten Things We Did (and Probably Shouldn't Have)" "A perfect harmony of laugh-out-loud moments, heartbreak, and hope."  
"Eileen Cook, author of Getting Revenge on Lauren Wood" "A vibrant, powerful dance party of a novel."  
"Jess Rothenberg, author of The Catastrophic History of You and Me" "A remarkable story about the power of truth, friendship, and music to transform us, to inspire us, to guide us back to who we are."  
"Rebecca Serle, author of When You Were Mine" "A

sweet, funny story about finding yourself in a crowd, owning your talents, and rocking out on the dance floor of life. **•** **•** **•** Madeleine George, author of *The Difference Between You and Me* **•** “Heartbreaking, heartfelt, and eventually heart-lifting, this YA novel is one I won’t soon forget. If you’re a music junkie who also loves YA, read it alongside Len Vlahos’s *The Scar Boys* or Rainbow Rowell’s *Eleanor & Park*. **•** **•** Janet Geddis, *Avid Bookshop* **•** *YALSA Best Book for Young Adults* **•** *BuzzFeed Best YA Book of the Year* **•** *CCBC Choice*

Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2013. Once, at the start of her junior year of high school, Elise Dembrowski attempted suicide. The thing about committing suicide is you’ve got to have the right playlist, that is, you do if you’re Elise Dembrowski. Elise’s attempt doesn’t succeed--she didn’t mean for it to--but it does start her on a new path. When Elise returns to school, she gives up once and for all on school social life and launches herself more firmly into her music and the midnight walks that calm her. When one night she comes across an all night dance party, Elise finally finds a life in which she can be a star rather than a misfit, but she’ll have to sneak around and deceive her parents to keep up her new lifestyle. Will Elise manage to make her new dreams come true? I loved this book about a high school misfit who finds her passion and ends up to be the coolest kid around. I think the story will resonate with many teens who are trying to navigate the waters of high school social pressures and life as a young adult. This one would make a great addition to personal, classroom, and library collections.

In high school, I was very similar to Elise. I was the weird, quiet girl in the back who read novels when she was supposed to be studying, and got in trouble for crocheting in class. I spent my lunches in the library most days. I didn’t *\*want\** to be alone, though. I desperately wanted to fit in, to be accepted, to belong. I dreamt of having a gaggle of girlfriends to gossip with over lunch and a boyfriend to cuddle and kiss and go on fun dates with. So from the first page of *This Song Will Save Your Life*, I felt like I was looking into a mirror to my past, and it definitely hurt. Unlike Elise, I did manage to keep one friend in high school, and I truly believe that we saved each other from a very dark fate. Elise doesn’t even have that, however. Everyone picks on her, hates her, and basically treats her like s\*\*\*. She basically spends the summer studying how to fit in--what kind of clothes to wear, what celebrities the cool girls talk about, how to do her hair and makeup "the right way". It backfires the first day back to school--she realizes that by trying to study up on what cool kids do, she’s already turned herself into the awkward outsider once again. So after an awful lunch with the

so-called "nice girls" who still exclude her and leave her to pick up all their trash, she decides to go home and kill herself. This first scene really resonated with me. A lot of the time, there isn't one big thing that makes someone want to die. It's all the little things, the ones that build and build on each other until that last straw--the one that breaks the camel's back, so to speak--finally pushes you over the edge. I truly felt for Elise. To me, she felt more like a real teen than a lot of other novels I've read lately. I just wanted to reach in and give her a hug. I loved her transformation over the course of the book. Her love of music and DJing is what helps her open up and finally make some friends that love her for who she really is, not who she's pretending to be. There were a couple things that bugged me--I didn't like the way she treated her dad or her little sister-- but they still seemed like a true teen reaction to me. Also, I had a hard time believing a girl so young was able to get in to Start without once showing her ID. I also didn't care for Char much, but I think that was intentional. However, none of that took away from my enjoyment of the story and watching Elise finally embrace who she is. *This Song Will Save Your Life* is a powerful novel, and I think it could give hope to those out there like me, the ones who've always felt like they didn't quite belong.

Grade: C Bullied and unpopular, Elise has never figured out how to make friends. One night, sneaking out to take a walk, she stumbles upon an after hours club where she makes friends and discovers she has a passion for DJing. The only problem--if her parents decide she's out in the middle of the night, her new life could be over. If we're to buy into Leila Sales' premise that Elise is the most unpopular girl ever to walk the halls of her high school and a target for bullies, I wish there was more of a reason other than wearing uncool clothes. I didn't find realistic that she sneaks out of her house in the middle of the night for months without anyone realizing. Also, her parents' reaction (this isn't a spoiler because anyone would know this had a major point of conflict) was completely unrealistic. I liked her humorous voice, but overall she treated others poorly including an incident with her little sister that would have had me dragging Elise to a therapist to figure out her behavior. *THIS SONG WILL SAVE YOUR LIFE* will appeal most to outsiders interested in music. Sales' writing is engaging. Aside from Elise, the characters were interesting. THEMES: music, family, divorce, self mutilation, high school, bullying, friendship

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