

Stopped Me in My Tracks

I was in third grade and I was sitting at our local Pizza Hut with my family. We didn't eat out much, being poor missionary types, so it made occasions like this extra special. I remember the moment as clearly as I remember what happened to me a few minutes ago. A song I had never heard started playing on the jukebox. I was completely captivated – totally at the mercy of the music ringing out from the old speakers, which on that day, sounded like a million dollars. I was frozen in that space and time, hearing a song that felt like a splash of ice water in my face while at the same time like the warmest hug I had ever been given. I looked across the table and saw that my older brother was experiencing the same thing. We locked eyes and we both knew. We knew.

The song ended, we ate the rest of our meal, and we rushed out of the restaurant while my parents paid. As soon as we got outside, we both started gushing about the song we had heard. Who sang it? What band was it? What was the name of the song? We had a million questions and no Google or internet search to figure it out. Eventually, we did find out. It was Bon Jovi's "Livin' On a Prayer." I know. After all that build up, I just admitted to falling head over heels to one of the quintessential 80s, hair-band anthems. I regret nothing. I still love this song. At that time, my music world was made up of a few Christian rock cassette tapes, and whatever my parents listened to. And for the most part, it was music that I enjoyed. Singers like Steve Green and Sandi Patty. "Livin' On a Prayer" was different. It was big, bold, and seemed ready-made for my nine-year-old sensibilities. It was my "heart music", as my father would put it and it connected to me in a way that no other music could.

That is one story, in a lifetime full of similar stories, on the profound effect music has had on me. My life has been shaped by songs. From my earliest memories, I have responded

to music. I have fuzzy memories of dancing in my backyard when I was very young, four or five at most, listening to “I Love Rock ‘n’ Roll” being blasted by my neighbors. I had no idea what rock and roll was, but if what I was hearing was rock and roll, I too loved it. Music has always spoken to me in ways that nothing else can. Over the next handful of paragraphs, I hope to spotlight a few more stories on specific moments when music cut through the noise of my life and fulfilled its divinely created purpose. Hopefully, these stories will tell a bigger story that goes beyond my specific memories and speak to the greater truth about the power of music in all of our lives.

God’s plan of redemption like I had never heard before.

I said this in my review of [Andrew Peterson’s *Behold the Lamb of God* concert](#) from 2016:

“I love the second half, hearing the biblical narrative of grace interwoven in the Old and New Testaments. But from the moment “Labor of Love” is played, until the final “amen” is sung by the audience, I am a mess. I lack the words and the skill to say why exactly. My best guess is that the words and music and truth speak so clearly in those final songs. They speak directly to my heart, mind, and soul.”

I stand by that. Music moves me. Always has. That is kind of the whole point of this article. I am touched by music in a way that very little else can manage. It effortlessly connects my emotions and my spirit. So when Andrew Peterson and his merry band of musicians reached the climax of the concert, it nailed me to the floor. I’m not sure if I even breathed for much of it, I was so overwhelmed. With loving care and creativity, Peterson crafted an album that journeys through

the pages of Scripture to recount the unbelievable and impossible story of our redemption. The final few songs are everything. I had heard the album numerous times. I had even seen the concert once before. But this time...this time it stopped me in my tracks. When the creator of the world decides to peel back the curtain just a bit, using those things that speak most clearly to us, we need to take notice. That December night, I did pay attention. I cried and sang with the band, *Hallelujah, Christ is born!*"

***The New World* and breaking down walls.**

As I sat in my darkened living room, I had difficulty processing the film I had just experienced. *The New World* was unlike any film I had ever seen. It was poetic – barely concerned with traditional storytelling devices. Most of the dialogue is delivered by narration – meditative, prayer-like voiceovers to reveal the deepest spiritual longings of the characters. It is an unconventional film and has proven to be very divisive to most of my friends. Some love it as I do while others, whose opinions I highly value, dislike it. Yet, there is something about the film that I respond to on an almost subconscious level. I am convinced that much of that is due to the music of the film.

Towards the end of the film, Pocahontas is faced with the decision of her life. Her first love, John Smith, has come to pay her a visit, desperate to be loved by her again. At this point in the film, she is married to John Rolfe, a landowner and godly man. She fell in love with Smith when she was quite young. It was a romance that fundamentally changed who she was. It also broke her when Smith left her to seek out other new worlds. He was a raging tempest that caught her in its winds and waves for a time but left her lost and floundering

when it was gone. He loved her, in his own way, but not enough to quell the storm that continually churned in his own spirit. At her lowest point, John Rolfe found her, gave her a new life, and a new opportunity for love. That love was not fully reciprocated until she met with Smith one last time.

There is a moment in this film that wrecks me every time I see it. John Rolfe is terrified he will lose his love. The film takes special care to show him on his knees praying, hoping she will make the right decision. Without spoiling the ending, her actions, coupled with the beauty of the James Horner score, moved me to tears that first viewing. They have moved me to tears each subsequent viewing. Great music can do that. It breaks down our defenses. It leaves our souls bare to experience truth and beauty in a way that almost nothing else can.

Yearning for home.

A few weeks ago, I was sitting in the office of my pastor, Allen Pointer, after Wednesday night service. We were both waiting for the youth group to return from their activity. It is one of my favorite times of the week, sitting there, talking to a man I respect so much. We talk about the church, the Tennessee Titans, the Nashville Predators, and everything else under the sun. That night, we spent most of our time talking music: *Keith Green. Second Chapter of Acts. Petra*. He had preached a sermon a few months before about home. He referenced two songs that had focused his thoughts while preparing to preach. I had not heard one of the songs so he played me a Youtube video of it. We sat there and listened. When the song ended, I was speechless. Even though he had

heard the song any number of times, when he looked at me, his eyes were filled with tears. It wasn't a "Christian" song. It was "From Now On", one of the main songs from the recent film, "The Greatest Showman." It's a song about finding a purpose for our lives. Finding something noble and true to commit to. And when that happens, we find our way home. There is a spiritual longing saturating this song that hits me hard every time I hear it and it struck me that night like a slap to the face. You can see it all over the faces in the video as well. I do not know the spiritual state of anyone in the video but as the song swells and the refrain about coming home begins, every person in the room is longing for something much bigger than them. They are desperately reaching for home. They are crying out to a God they might not even believe exists. That is the power of music.

Allen and I had a worship experience that night watching Hugh Jackman sing. It was a moment I will never forget.

**Rejoicing with all of creation at the resurrection of our
Lord.**

*Did the grass sing?
Did the earth rejoice to feel You again?
Over and over like a trumpet underground
Did the earth seem to pound, "He is risen!"
Over and over in a never-ending round
"He is risen, hallelujah, hallelujah!"*

I can honestly say that I have no specific memory of hearing this Easter classic for the first time. It feels like it has always been a part of my life. Sandi Patty's *Morning Like This*

album was a favorite in the Lytle household. My parents liked it. The children enjoyed it. If I was putting together a greatest Christian albums list, I am pretty sure this would make it. I have so many recollections of hearing this album – whether in the car, in our home, or hearing my mother sing a few of the songs in churches. For my money, the standout song is the title track – “Was it a Morning Like This?” And even though I have always loved this album, and this song specifically, it wasn’t until I was in college, when I revisited it, that I truly found myself in awe. The combination of the music – the orchestral string and percussion arrangement, Patty’s one-of-a-kind voice – and the poetic beauty of the lyrics creates an Easter celebration few songs can match. I remember vividly when the power of the song finally seared its truth into my heart. The very rocks would have rejoiced at our Lord’s resurrection. It was truly the day of days. The day that death was defeated. The day that redemption became a reality. The day the King of Glory conquered sin and the grave for all of eternity. “He is risen, hallelujah!”

Do we have ears to hear?

Perhaps, this all sounds like a bunch of touchy-feely garbage. If so, I’m sorry to have wasted your time. Hopefully, for even those that do not respond to music as strongly as I do, this has still been a pleasant read. But for those that do respond to music like I do, isn’t music awesome? I am fully convinced that our ability to create and enjoy music is something built into us as part of our *Imago Dei*. Scripture is full of “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs.” We are exhorted and commanded to sing praises to our God. The love of music is woven into the very fabric of our souls. So I keep listening. I keep searching for music that will teach me. Music that will

challenge me. Music that will usher me into the throne room to worship. I keep my ears open for the next song that will strike me like a bolt a lightning. I keep hoping to be stopped in my tracks.