

# Unpopular Opinion: Christmas Music

“I love Christmas music but I don’t want to hear it on the radio until December.”

“Christmas music before Thanksgiving should be against the law!”

“I hate Christmas, joy, peace, and every good thing all the time because I am a miserable, unhappy, grinchy Scrooge.”

I have heard variations of those statements every year for as long as I can remember. (I will concede the third one is probably just my loose interpretation when I hear people whining about Christmas music.) Each year around Thanksgiving, radio stations begin to play “all Christmas music all the time” and for some people, that is the worst thing ever. They rant and rave about it on social media. They write long Facebook posts about how awful it is to play Christmas music too soon. They bemoan. They complain. Then they pontificate about how it cheapens the season or some such nonsense.

They are wrong.

In their twisted little world, they believe that it is only acceptable to celebrate the birth of the Savior of the world for about three and a half weeks in the month of December. Don’t you dare celebrate the SALVATION OF HUMANITY for longer than that! Don’t you dare sing songs to commemorate the incarnation – the coming of the Christ – until after Thanksgiving!

Is that really the world in which we want to live? Do we want to confine our celebration of this most sacred event to only one month of the year?[1. And if we are honest with ourselves, we don’t even get the whole month of December because as soon

as the 25th comes and goes, Christmas music disappears again.] Do we want to be the kind of people that would mock and ridicule others for wanting to enjoy this time of year for all that it signifies?

In the spirit of the season, I am willing to be gracious and concede a minor point to the haters and scoffers. If you are ranting about hearing songs like “Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer” or “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” then I’m with you. Those are flimsy, superficial things. They are the candy to the more spiritually robust songs main course. Mock those type of songs as much as you want – or at least, mock the too-soon playing of them as much as you want. They have a specific time of the year to be played and heard.

However, the same cannot be said about spiritually deep songs like “O Come, O Come Emmanuel” or “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” Those songs have eternal value far beyond one month of the year. Why is it okay for us to sing and listen to songs about Christ’s death and resurrection any month of the year but we recoil when we hear a theologically rich song like “Joy to the World”?

Stop being joyless Scrooges. Instead, be joyful Ebenezers[1. We used to sing a song in Panama called “Ebenezer – which the chorus translates to “So far the LORD has helped us.” That is what I think of every time I see that name.] recognizing all the wonderful things God has done for you – which includes what He did on that first Christmas two thousand years ago. Don’t confine that celebration to a few weeks of the year. Let it spill over to every time of your life.

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# The Influence of Job in Modern Worship Music

I feel things deeply. And I'd definitely describe myself as a melancholy. That surely lends itself to why Job has been my favorite book of the Bible since 1999, my second year at Bible College.

And as a result I long for music that speaks to the darkest aspects of the human condition and how to deal with them. I could listen to the Caedmon's Call song "Center Aisle" – a haunting, depressing testimony [which I wrote about here](#) – on repeat. I have listened to Mark Schultz's "He's My Son" – written from the perspective of a parent whose child has leukemia – dozens of times. I have often said that The Fray's "You Found Me" has phrases you rarely hear Christians say...unless you read the Bible.

So when people look for ways to make verses and themes from Job into worship music, I am all ears. Even if not the dark aspects of the book. Job does, after all, speak clearly to themes of reconciliation and God's sovereignty. In the last twenty years, several Christian artists have drawn inspiration either directly or indirectly from Job's words, and God's words to Job. Today I want to celebrate a few examples.

## **"Though You Slay Me" (Shane and Shane)**

Taken directly from Job 13:15 where Job says, "Though you slay me, yet will I hope," Shane and Shane has blessed the church with an extremely biblical and worshipful response to suffering. Also, they draw from chapter 19 when they write:

*My heart and flesh may fail*

*The earth below give way*

*But with my eyes, with my eyes I'll see the Lord*

This reference comes right after Job has declared that his Redeemer lives and at the end of time He will stand on the earth. The thought of this overwhelmed Job emotionally and hearing this lyric does the same for me. The mere thought of seeing Jesus one day with my physical eyes instead of by faith moves me to tears. It is with this thought that H.G. Spafford concluded "It Is Well".

"Though You Slay Me" is not upbeat or jovial. It doesn't make me happy when I hear it or sing it. Which I think is appropriate for a Job-inspired song. It also references God in Deuteronomy[1. Or perhaps Job 5:18, though I hope not] and quotes from Jesus in Gethsemane. And in all of these passages, there is a heaviness that cannot be avoided. "Worship" when we are suffering may mean cries of faith in spite of anguish and a heart that has been destroyed by our circumstances.

### **Blessed Be Your Name (Matt Redman)**

Taken directly from the fourth phrase in Job 1:21, Matt Redman develops Job's thought that no matter the circumstance he will bless God. Whether my world is filled with darkness or whether it's "all it should be" (always in quotes when I see it, producing a wink-at-the-reader effect of how our idea of what the world should be is not God's), my heart will choose say, "Blessed Be Your Name".

I love how the bridge of this song is the third phrase from the same verse above. The two thoughts should not be separated.

Unlike "Though You Slay Me" when we do this song at my church in Chicago it is upbeat and positive and I think that is

appropriate considering that Job spoke these lyrics before he descended into the abyss seven days after his tragedies.

### **Redeemer (Nicole C. Mullen)**

I don't know if any verse in Job is more important to me than 19:25 because I think it teaches that Jesus is resurrected, two millennia before it happened. And Nicole C. Mullen took that amazing prophecy and penned one of the great worship songs in the modern church canon.

And as with Shane and Shane, she didn't limit herself to one verse to tell the story. She speaks God's heart through his own words in Chapters 38-41 by talking about God's pride in his creation. The line "Who told the ocean you can only come this far?" is directly from Job 38:11 and other lyrics allude to this four-chapter speech by God as well.

This song also would more uplifting than most of what Job would inspire but since it is a testimony to God's sovereignty over creation and death I think it's perfect. I appreciate the awe it conveys. It is a song that truly makes me think outside of myself, much the way God's discourse at the end of Job does. Center that around the most important Christian doctrine—the resurrection of Jesus—proclaimed in the most important Bible book on suffering, and you have a song that needs to be sung.

### **How He Loves (John Mark McMillan)**

This one is a bit of a stretch because there are no overt Job references and as far as I know John Mark McMillan has never said that Job was an influence.

But I include it for two reasons. First, the song was written out of a painful time in McMillan's life, after his best

friend died in a car accident. Secondly, he opens the song by claiming that God “loves like a hurricane” and that “I am a tree”. Whether intentional or not, I will always think of Job 38:1 when I hear that. God didn’t come to Job in gentleness as Jesus speaks in Matthew 11:28-29. He comes in a whirlwind. God brought a thunderstorm to Job’s desired courtroom. And Job’s pride was eradicated and his demand for justice was given a final verdict for all time: God is God and we are not.

Do I think this is God’s love on display? Absolutely. God humbles because he loves and only accepts love from the humble. God’s love isn’t nice and pleasant all the time. As C.S. Lewis taught us, God isn’t safe and he can be terrifying to our sensibilities. Job 38-41 proves that. And Job reacts exactly how God desires, by repenting in dust and ashes. This is a story, in part, of relational reconciliation. Which doesn’t happen without love. Even love like a hurricane to a tree.

As always I’d love to hear from our readers about these songs or any others that you like on this subject. Please comment below!

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## [Why We Can’t Get Enough of the ’80s](#)

Within the span of a few weeks in Summer of 2010, Hollywood

gave us movies by the name of *The A-Team* and *The Karate Kid* wrapped around a 7-game NBA Finals between the Boston Celtics and the Los Angeles Lakers. I posted to Facebook “I’m going to miss the 80s when the Summer is over!”

Oh, 1980s. We love you so much. We love you so much that we’ve never truly let you go.

The meteoric rise of the TV Show *Stranger Things* has proven this true. Don’t worry; this isn’t another article about the show. It’s just to say that for all the hoopla, one recurring theme you hear fans talk about is the nonstop ’80s references. For people like me, who love the ’80s, it is absolutely part of the appeal. Even Will’s bowl haircut.

But *Stranger Things* isn’t even close to alone on this. As people my age have begun to become producers in Hollywood, the love for the decade has become common. There are so many 80s references in *Psych* I cannot even count them or catch all of them. But there’s no mistaking why Ralph Macchio has a guest spot on the show or why Shawn once said “ding ding” to Carl Weathers.

I have often and loudly proclaimed the ’80s as the best decade for just about everything. It was, in a phrase of the times, rad. Here is why:

## **The Music**

I’ll brawl to the death over this one. The only time I have ever felt cool in the history of my life was in second grade riding in the back of my brother Tracy’s T-top Mustang on the way to school, listening to “Money for Nothing” by Dire Straights. And “The Power of Love” by Huey Lewis and the News. And “Eye of the Tiger” by Survivor.

Does life get any better? I submit that it does not!

I grew up dreaming about the day I would dance with my wife to “Can’t Fight This Feeling” by REO Speedwagon and “Lost In Your Eyes” by Debbi Gibson. And you better believe I fulfilled this dream with Kayla in 2014. I can take you to the exact spot in Walker-Gamble Elementary when I first heard “Every Rose Has Its Thorns” by Poison. And who among us doesn’t automatically feel like dancing without inhibition when we hear “I Wanna Dance With Somebody” or singing in unison with a huge group of people during “Come On Eileen”?

Some of my favorite memories ever are being at karaoke hearing Josh Crowe sing “Total Eclipse of the Heart”. Or singing “You Spin Me Right Round” at the top of my lungs at 9 years old without an ounce of self-consciousness. And to go all Hebrews 11 on you, What more can I say? Time doesn’t permit to tell you about Bon Jovi, Tom Petty, Aerosmith, U2, Prince and Guns N’ Roses.

I’m positive in a Top 100 song decade vs. decade battle, the ’80s would annihilate the competition. And if you still doubt that I offer up the following as a mic drop:







and



## Television

I'll be honest: in any list of my favorite shows of all-time, the #1 show (*Seinfeld*) is from the '90s and most of the rest of the Top 10 will be from this century. Yet despite this, back then we still had no shortage of shows that were perfect for that time. *Family Ties*, *Who's the Boss?*, *Growing Pains*, *The Cosby Show* and even lesser known shows like *ALF* (I had the lunchbox in 4th grade) and *227* (with Hal Williams as Lester Jenkins) were weekly viewing for my family. I have often said

that I know my parents made us work when we were children, and we played outside a lot but it seems like if you name a show from the 80s, we watched it. And we loved it. Who didn't love Tuti from *Facts of Life*?



## TV Theme Songs and Intros

Half of our [TV Theme Song Top 10 list](#) features shows from the '80s. Because that decade was the golden age of introducing shows by putting the perfect music with the actors' names in real life. Some told epic background stories (*The A-Team*), others gave welcoming, feelgood invitations (*Cheers*), some were impossible not to sing along with (*The Jeffersons*) and others just played cool music over cool video (*Magnum PI*, *Miami Vice*). They just don't make TV Intros like they used to.



## Saturday Morning Cartoons

Here is another category where the '80s dominates the field. It's hard to fathom the fact that for a short time in my life I got to watch *ThunderCats*, *He-Man*, *Muppet Babies*, *Transformers* and *G.I. Joe* all in the same week. We all grew up not just watching these shows, but playing them outside, pretended to be the characters, owning the action figures and using our imaginations in a way that seems foreign these days.



And it wasn't just make believe that we learned. We all learned wisdom and life knowledge and that "Knowing is half the battle." (G.I. JOE!!!)



A few years later brought the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and *Duck Tales*, cementing this decade as the most prolific cartoon decade of all-time.

## **Movies**

Again, other decades can compete in this category but any decade that gave us *Back to the Future*, *Die Hard*, *The Goonies*, *Ghostbusters*, *The Karate Kid*, *Rambo*, *Beverly Hills Cop*, *Indiana Jones*, *The Princess Bride*, *Top Gun* and *The Terminator* has to be on the short list for best ever. Not to mention that many consider *Rocky III* and *IV* to be the best of those movies and the '80s introduced us to Yoda and a more authoritative, finalized version of Darth Vader. And that there is widespread belief that *Empire* is the greatest Star Wars film.

Beyond that the 80s brought us timeless coming of age pieces

like *The Breakfast Club* and *16 Candles*, child acting legends like Corey Haim and Corey Feldman, and some of the best fantasy ever in *Labyrinth* and *The NeverEnding Story*. David Bowie was a legend that probably didn't put his pants on one leg at a time. And man I had a crush on Jennifer Connelly. And it's a shame that kids today will never know the thrill of going to the local video rental store and getting *Spaceballs* for the 17th time. Ridiculous speed! My hometown had 300 people growing up, one traffic light and zero fast food places. But we had two video rental stores!

And again, lest there be any doubt, go find *Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure* and watch it. I rest my case.



## **Professional Wrestling**

Ric Flair and Four Horsemen...Hulk Hogan slamming Andre the Giant...Dusty Rhodes, The Road Warriors, The Ultimate Warrior, Hacksaw Jim Duggan (H00000!!!!), The Rock N Roll Express vs. The Midnight Express, Randy Macho Man "000H YEAH" Savage (wrestlers made a lot of random, boisterous sounds but they were super cool), chairs thrown in the ring, steel cages, referees getting knocked out, bad guys cheating, heroes dashing in from the dressing room...what a time to be alive! If my dad wanted to me punish me, a very effective way was to

take away Saturday wrestling.



## **NBA Basketball**

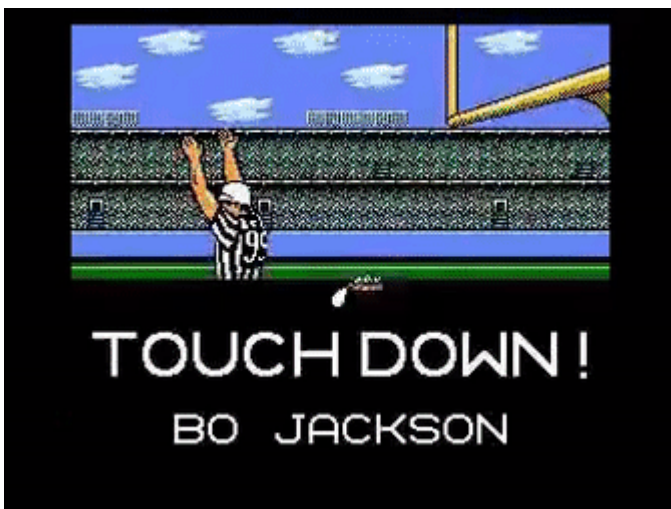
There were great moments all across sports this decade by people like Jordan, Montana and Kirk Gibson, but all decades have great moments. Only one decade has ever given us Lakers vs. Celtics, Celtics vs. 76ers, Lakers vs. Pistons, Celtics vs. Pistons, and Larry vs. Magic. The modern NBA era is close, closer than any other. But the NBA in the '80s is about as white-hot as any league could be. Somewhere between Bird telling all of the Lakers he was going to make a three in all their faces in a Finals game and Kevin McHale giving Kurt Rambis a Russian Sickle (classic 80's wrestling move), the league entered rarefied realms of entertainment. Hearing the Garden Crowd chant "BEAT L-A!! BEAT L-A!!!" is something I'm thrilled to have witnessed live.



## Video Games

Two Words: TECMO BOWL

And before that there was John Elway's QB. And before that "Ten Yard Fight". And before that the Atari football game where you had to make the block men face forward before each play. What an evolution!



And there is so much more! In some ways, I miss the 80s the same way Toto misses the rains down in Africa. Yet in others, I don't really have to. Thanks to *Stranger Things* and *Psych* and the magic of the internet, I can transport myself back in time on a whim.

Do you remember the '80s? What did you love most about it?

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## Being Petty: A Tribute To a Legend

On Monday, October 2nd, we lost the heart and soul of American rock and roll. Tom Petty's career and influence spanned decades, leaving hit after hit in their wake. Everyone knows a Petty song. Everyone has a favorite. There are innumerable articles out right now highlighting his music, his career, and his legacy. We won't pretend that our take is the best you will read, but we do hope that for those that loved his music, it will serve as another opportunity to reminisce and reflect on an artist that helped create the soundtrack for many of our lives.

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### **Josh Crowe**

The American spirit is vast. It's hard to nail down. Many artists have tried to do so and several have failed. Some who have succeeded are Bruce Springsteen with *Thunder Road* or Bob Seger with *Against the Wind*.

For me, Tom Petty's *Free Fallin'* also gets the job done. From the first chord to the fade out, I'm swept away to the life of a Southern California teen in the 80's. It's broad and simple. It's full of tension. The girl is good and the boy is bad. How many 80's romance movies played this situation out for us? Yet, Petty made us feel it again.

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## Mike Lytle

When thinking of which Tom Petty song to pick it is very easy to fall back on the old joke that I can't narrow it down to one song since I celebrate his entire catalog. In this case, it is not a joke though. *Free Fallin'*, *Runnin' Down a Dream*, *I Won't Back Down*, *The Waiting*, he has so many great songs that it is very difficult to pick one to pay tribute to. So instead of choosing a song, I am going with a Tom Petty movie. That movie is none other than the Kevin Costner classic *The Postman*. For those too young to remember (or those who have tried to forget) Kevin Costner decided in the mid to late 90s to focus his acting energies on three hour, post-apocalyptic epics. *Waterworld* received the most attention because it cost so much to make and went so far over budget, but *The Postman* is the better movie. A primary reason for this is Tom Petty and his role as Bridge City Mayor. He actually plays himself in the movie, but since it is set in a world that no longer cares about famous rock stars he is content to inspire people in other ways. Whether it is for his singing, songwriting, guitar playing, or acting, Tom Petty will be missed.

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## Gowdy Cannon

Chances are you have heard *American Girl* not just on the radio but on any number of TV shows or movies, usually during a climax of a story about a woman triumphing. Americans have heard it in everything from sitcoms like *Scrubs* and *Parks and Rec* to movies you'd expect like *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and movies you wouldn't like *Silence of the Lambs*. I read even *The Handmade's Tale* recently made use of it. We can't get enough of this song to help tell our stories. Musically it makes you want to cut loose and "dance all night," even if you can't dance or normally don't (like me). But it's deeper than that, which is why Hollywood keeps calling and why it's been covered dozens of times the last 40 years. It's so versatile it can tell any number of stories but I find it quite

appropriate that the song didn't catch on for a while but later became a mega-hit. Because that is probably the story we love best. The story of Ben Carson and his library card, of Kurt Warner and his grocery bagging, of America being the underdog in its revolution. *American Girl* is, like the song's author, as American as apple pie and absolutely what is great about this country.

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### **Phill Lytle**

I don't have a singular story to share – no transcendent moment when a Tom Petty song knocked me over and captured my heart. What I do have is decades of unreserved love for *Learning To Fly*. From the opening guitar to the triumphant, drum-laced bridge, the song is a revelation every time I hear it. It's a simple melody, played with precision and care, wonderfully mixed to bring out the most of each instrument. The guitar solo is reserved and understated, fitting perfectly with the song's laid-back vibe. Petty's voice sounds as confident as ever, singing about living, failing, and trying again. It is a song with redemption echoing in every corner and it is as beautiful a song as I will ever hear.

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### **David Lytle**

A couple weeks ago I was listening to Tom Petty and talking to my wife about him. I made the comment that Tom Petty was my go to if I wanted something that made me feel good. I never get tired of the sound of Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Their sound makes a bad day bearable and a good day great. Then Petty died, and while the loss of a legend saddened me, I am grateful that the magic of recording allows the music to live on. For my dime, *Runnin' Down a Dream* is the quintessential feel-good song of an artist that never failed to make me feel better. It describes driving a car with music on and presumably the windows down. It's about life on the road

encountering both the rain and the sunshine. The guitar riff “drives” the song so effectively that just hearing the guitar makes you want to jump in a car. Let’s celebrate Tom Petty driving down the freeway as we hope for “something good waitin’ down this road.”

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## **BREAKING: New App Unveiled To Eradicate Devil Music**

A powerhouse consortium including Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and Bob Jones University, has unveiled a new app to combat the proliferation of worldly music. The app, “Sacred Fire” ingeniously updates the well-loved tradition of youth groups burning their secular music for a modern, digital age.

“It has become clear, to those of us with eyes to see, that our society is racing to Hell in record time.” Robertson said at the recent unveiling. “We looked for possible causes and the answer was so obvious we were surprised we had not realized it sooner. Once music went digital, with iTunes and the like, churches lost the ability to hold good, old-fashioned CD burnings. We knew that something had to be done. So we got together and we created “Sacred Fire.”

According to the press release for “Sacred Fire”, when launched, the app appears as a large bonfire on your device’s screen. From there, you simply drag and drop the offending songs or albums into the fire and they are removed from your music library forever.

Robertson continued, “We wanted to make sure the process was simple but also with a tactile sense of achievement. Back in the day, when you threw a record, cassette tape, or a CD into

the fire, you would see it melt and crack and you could hear it pop. We knew we needed to re-create that as much as possible. Instead of sound effects like crackling and popping, we have added words of encouragement taken directly from the pages of the Bible.”

A few examples were given by Robertson during the announcement for these words of encouragement. “For instance, if you were to drop a song like Bon Jovi’s ‘Living on a Prayer’ you would get the basic, ‘Praise the Lord!’ response, since that song is only moderately offensive.” Robertson added. “A song like Beyoncé’s ‘Sorry’ would get a stronger response, possibly ‘Well done good and faithful servant.’”

For the most evil and demonic songs, “Sacred Fire” includes the ultimate response to give the user the strongest sense of accomplishment and righteousness. “There are certain songs and artists that are so far beyond the pale that we just had to acknowledge that and reward those holy young believers in their spiritual walk. When you toss a song like Madonna’s “Like a Prayer” or Hozier’s ‘Take Me to Church” into the fire, the screen will go black and you will hear weeping and gnashing of teeth. That is extremely satisfying. We believe it is important to communicate how truly evil certain music is. AC/DC’s entire catalog gets that response.”

The app will be available for download on both IOS and Android devices in the spring of 2018.

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**500 Words or Less Reviews:**

# Hammock – Mysterium

I have long loved the music of *Hammock*, the band comprised of guitarists and sound-scapers, Marc Byrd and Andrew Thompson. Perhaps one day I will write a detailed exploration of their entire discography. For now, I will say this: I love the mood and energy they create with their particular brand of post-rock ambient music. They craft sound and emotion by using guitars, pedals, piano, cello, and various other tools. For the uninitiated, their music floats and sinks; built around droning guitars. You will not hear them on your local radio station. I do not know enough about what goes into making an album like this, I just know that whatever they do, they do it better than most.

*Mysterium*, their eighth full-length album, continues *Hammock's* mastery of their chosen art form. In some ways, it is their biggest album to date – with choral and orchestra components used to complement the already stunning melodies they play with guitar and piano. In other ways, it is their most personal and vulnerable album. They composed and dedicated the album to Clark Kern, Marc Byrd's nephew, who died in 2016 after fighting with a rare disease for his entire life. This creates an album full of arresting melodies tenderly worked into subdued and serene numbers.

Music, at its very core, is supposed to make us feel. When we listen to a song, we should sense what the artists felt when they sculpted it from air. If an artist can do that well, they will capture our imaginations and our deepest emotions. *Hammock* does that and does it in remarkable fashion. *Mysterium* is built on converging layers of grief, sadness, and hope. These mostly wordless songs speak volumes about life, death, and the struggle each of us face when we experience a profound loss. *Hammock* is so gifted at writing emotionally resonant music they rarely need words to communicate, and on this album, they take that a step further by using silence to

capture the full weight of grief and reverence.

The songs are ethereal, poignant, and sacred. At times as I listened, it felt as if the sadness of a particular song would completely overwhelm me. Then the song would introduce a new melody and the entire mood would change. What had been a grief so deep it ached became a hope so powerful it soared. I have loved *Hammock's* music from the first note I heard, mostly because their music speaks to both parts of my life – the here and now and the yet to come. *Hammock* has one hand digging deep into the soil of the human condition while the other is reaching, grasping, straining for the heavens above.

If these descriptions do not explain what their music sounds like, I am truly sorry. I do not have the skills as a writer to explain my reaction to their music. I just know I long for spiritual nourishment of this kind and *Mysterium* is a veritable feast for my soul.

Listen to the album below or click this link to buy it – [Mysterium](#).

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## [500 Words or Less Reviews: Look What Taylor Swift Made Me Do](#)

I am not a fan of Taylor Swift. Never have been. Her only album I have been able to tolerate is *1989*. I feel that disclaimer is necessary from the outset.

Unless you live under a rock, you probably noticed that Taylor released a new song a few days ago. It is titled, “Look What

You Made Me Do.” The song is awful – filled with all the poorest elements of modern pop music. However, looking beyond the melody and the beat, the song is emblematic of the very worst of our society. It is the quintessential anthem of our narcissistic and victim culture. If there was any doubt before, we can now crown Taylor Swift as the Queen Victim of our age.

The song is a list of the times Taylor feels she has been slighted, wronged, offended, judged, criticized, and blamed. It is whiny and screechy and so inwardly focused that it is difficult to take any of it seriously. There isn't a whiff of self-awareness. No trace of self-reflection. She even sees herself as a Christ figure in the music video – arms outstretched with a crucifix behind her. In Taylor's fantasy world, there are many who have lied about her and stabbed her in the back, so hers is a righteous anger. It's hard to hear all this self-pity coming from a 27-year-old woman who is worth nearly \$300 million. The end result of the song is to declare that due to all the horrible, unfair, mean stuff that has been said about or done to her, that the old Taylor Swift is dead and she has become someone else – someone angry and vengeful. The problem with that declaration is that Taylor Swift has been a “mean girl” for a long time. You only have to listen to her older albums to see the spitefulness with which she has always operated. But in her warped view, she is the put-upon victim, the innocent, the martyr. In her mind, her enemies forced her to create and release this song and now that she has taken all she can, she is ready to get down in the mud with all those “liars and dirty, dirty cheats of the world.” So, we have that to look forward to...

We are a society of self-aggrandizers, self-promoters, and self-congratulators who in our minds can do no wrong, bear no responsibility for any of our actions, and are in a constant state of victimization. Everyone is out to get us. So if no one is on our side, then we have to do everything we can to

get ours. We are “me monsters” of the highest order. And society will praise us for that. Society will champion us until it has no more use for us and then it will destroy us. That is the end that is awaiting Taylor Swift. And based on the reception to her new single, it is an end that could be here sooner than she expects.

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## Eternity In Our Hearts By Way of Arcade Fire’s No Cars Go

Ten years ago today, *Arcade Fire* released the final single from their groundbreaking sophomore release, *Neon Bible*. The song? *No Cars Go*. While the album was thematically dark and despairing, *No Cars Go*, the penultimate track, was full of life, energy, and hope. That is not meant as a critique of either the album or the song. I love both. But the contrast was clear. It was unmistakable for those that had ears to hear.

While this is in no way meant to be comprehensive, a little background information is probably needed about *Arcade Fire* for the conclusions I draw to have any lasting value. *Arcade Fire* is an indie rock band from Montreal, Quebec. They have released five studio albums. Their sound is eclectic, mixing classic rock and roll with electronica, disco, indie, and boisterous anthems. Thematically, they infuse their songs with a “voice crying out in the wilderness” sentiment. There is a prophetic urgency to their lyrics, decrying greed, religion, and any other aspect of modernity they find troublesome. With piercing clarity and exacting specificity, they denounce society’s constant grasping for more, more, more. As often as not, their barbs are aimed at themselves as much as anyone



else.

When I reviewed the album *Neon Bible* over ten years ago, I used words like haunting, damning, anxious, angry, and hypnotic to describe what I heard. I was so taken by that album, I poured out 2,000 words in an attempt to grapple with it. Listening to it again more recently, I stand by my initial reaction. The album is dark and brooding. It's angry and accusatory. It's full of rage, confusion, and hopelessness. It's within that context that I fell in love with *No Cars Go*.

I love everything that comes before *No Cars Go* on *Neon Bible*. I love the questions. I love the razor sharp criticism of America, Christianity, and the ungodly union of faith and money. I love how pointed it all is. It is powerful and challenging. At its best, it is convicting and a conduit to self reflection and change. Yet after nine songs the band makes a dramatic turn. Instead of leaving the listener hopeless, they opt to throw caution to the wind and dive head first into a song that in some ways is the most hopeful and optimistic song I have ever heard.

Sometimes, one song can make all the difference in the world. Perhaps because they wrote *No Cars Go* a few years earlier, there is less despair and more optimism. Perhaps, deep down, they still believed that somewhere, some time, some place, things can and will be better than they are now. Lyrically, *No Cars Go* is deceptively simple – It almost feels silly and childish. And because of that, I could see some listeners just overlooking the spiritual depth of this song. The song begins whimsically; playfully. When the band yells "Hey!" it would be easy to think they are just having fun; that this song is not meant to be taken as seriously as everything that has come before. I believe that line should be seen as a passionate attempt to get our attention.

The crux of the song is that they know a special place where no cars can go. It is that simple lyrically. No plains,

trains, automobiles, submarines, or spaceships can get to this place. You can almost see it “*between the click of the light and the start of the dream*” and they urgently invite everyone to come with them. When the triumphant denouement begins, the music swirls, elevating the song to a transcendent level. Lead singer, Win Butler exclaims, “*little babies – women and children – old folks – Let’s Go!*” The accordion and keyboard flow in and around each other. The drums methodically build to the climax. When the horns come in, and the bass takes that rhythm the drums started to a more intense level, it takes your breath away. Then, they unleash heaven. We “*don’t know where we’re going,*” but we have to go. They tap into something so human, so urgent, so eternal. A choir of singers joins the band and the music swells to a crescendo of pure spiritual longing. Hyperbole, probably. Do I believe every word, absolutely.

*No Cars Go* is further proof that God has placed “eternity in our hearts” as image bearers. We long for more. We long for Eden, for paradise, for the Kingdom. Most of us don’t even realize it. I’m not convinced *Arcade Fire* even understands this longing they are desperate to see realized. Yet God will make His name known and His truth heard even through the voices of fallen, broken, unbelieving vessels.

Ten years ago today, *Arcade Fire* released *No Cars Go*. I am thankful that *Arcade Fire* is seeking, asking, and knocking. They still haven’t found what they are looking for, but it is clear that their questions are pointed in the right direction. Though their vision is clouded and veiled, it points to a place where God will live among his people. A place where He will wipe every tear from our eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things will be gone forever. He will make all things new in this place where no cars go.

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# Sometimes He Calms the Sea

African-American pastor and songwriter of the past century, Charles Tindley, used a common metaphor of the time to reference the trials, tribulations, dangers, and snares of the Christian life: "When the storms of life are raging, stand by me...when the world is tossing me like a ship upon the sea, thou who rulest wind and water, stand by me." [1. "Stand By Me" Charles A. Tindley]

Another song writer-poet expressed similar sentiments: "Jesus Savior, pilot me, over life's tempestuous sea, unknown waves before me roll, hiding rocks and treacherous shoal, wondrous sovereign of the sea, Jesus Savior, pilot me." [2. "Jesus, Savior Pilot Me" Edward Hopper]

Songwriter Scott Krippayne, echoed these thoughts in a song he wrote in 1995:

*All who sail the sea of faith  
Find out before too long  
How quickly blue skies can grow dark  
And gentle winds grow strong  
Suddenly fear is like white water  
Pounding on the soul  
Still we sail on knowing  
That our Lord is in control  
Sometimes He calms the storm  
With a whispered peace be still  
He can settle any sea  
But it doesn't mean He will  
Sometimes He holds us close  
And lets the wind and waves go wild  
Sometimes He calms the storm*

*And other times He calms His child*"[3. "Sometimes He Calms the Storm" Scott Krippayne]

Traveling by boat or ship, or being out on the ocean, rivers, or lakes was a dangerous thing for many centuries, since ancient times. Storms could arise without notice, and the wind, strong waves, thunder, and lightning menaced travelers, and could capsize a ship and cause many deaths. This has been symbolic of trouble in the Christian life. Storms symbolize illness and disease, financial disasters, broken relationships, and anything else in life that threatens us, either physically or emotionally. Can God not step in and save the day? Can he not send a miracle our way?

In Mark 4, the disciples on the Sea of Galilee found themselves caught in a sudden storm, helpless and in grave danger, while Jesus was asleep in the boat. They woke him, frightened out of their wits, and He stood, extended His hand, rebuked the wind, and said "peace, be still." Immediately the storm ended. Instantly. There was a "great calm." Jesus then rebuked his followers for their lack of faith. Sure, He can calm storms. He's God.

A few years later, Paul was traveling as a prisoner to Rome, on board a ship in the Mediterranean Sea. Suddenly, a Euroclydon, a powerful, cyclone-type wind arose, and for the next two weeks the ship was tossed and battered until all hope of survival was gone. But suddenly Paul appeared and said to all on board with him: "The God whose I am, and whom I serve, has appeared to me." He gave Paul the peace he needed, and the assurance that all would be well (Acts 27:23). But they had to ride out the storm and suffer shipwreck. Life's like that sometimes.

Yet another song repeats for us the same truth:

*Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me  
Sometimes the storm still rages on but I feel the sweetest*

*peace*

*It's such a joy to know that my Lord knows just what I need  
Sometimes He calms the storm sometimes He calms me*[4. "He Calms me" sung by the McKameys]

Here are some lessons we can learn.

God is sovereign over every storm life brings our way. He is capable of doing the miraculous; healing, provision, removing obstacles, and certainly doesn't mind His child asking for those things. He may not do what we wish He would, but He always, always, always, will be with us, and will speak peace to our heart if we call upon Him. "Therefore, we will not fear..." (Psalm 46:2) At the end of the day, He will "get us to the other side."

Here's the point. We all face storms. God can miraculously still them, and sometimes will, but often we will have to go through them. However, even in the storm He is with us, can speak peace to our heart. The loss of our beautiful daughter-in-law two years ago – my health challenges the past few years – standing with friends and family during severe trials. I'm so glad He is there. The song by *Casting Crowns*, "Praise You in This Storm," states it beautifully:

*And I'll praise you in this storm*

*And I will lift my hands*

*That you are who you are*

*No matter where I am*

*And every tear I've cried*

*You hold in your hand*

*You never left my side*

*And though my heart is torn*

*I will praise you in this storm*[5. "Praise You in This Storm"

Mark Hall and Bernie Herms (Casting Crowns)]

Prayer: Father, even now be with your dear children who are caught in one of life's raging storms, whatever it might

be. Please calm the storm, according to your will, or please calm them, and assure them of your love and presence. In the powerful name of Christ, Amen.

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## [Listen Now! A Rambling Ever On Spotify Playlist](#)

Seven members of the REO staff helped put this playlist together. The theme is place, as in geographical location. Each song mentions a place or places. It could be a city, state, country, or region. Sometimes the places in these songs are integral to the meaning of the songs themselves. Other times they may be mentioned, almost in passing, to provide added depth and texture to the song choices. Popular music of all styles and genres seems to be fascinated with this theme. There are separate Wikipedia pages dedicated to all the songs about cities like New York, New Orleans, and Nashville. For the most part we stayed away from many of the obvious choices and picked songs that resonated with us personally whether they are popular or not. That doesn't mean you won't immediately recognize some of the song choices. As with all our playlists we limited it to 30 or so songs selected by a handful of people. There are literally thousands and thousands of songs we could have chosen, so we know we left out plenty of good stuff. Let us know what some of your choices would have been.

One final note, this is the REO playlist debut of our very own Gowdy Cannon. We hope to hear more from him in the future!