

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.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Five

Welcome to *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

This is Part Five of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part One of the series focusing on the pioneers of the movement in the 1960s and 1970s click [here](#).

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

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Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

Part Five:

Where Do We Go From Here? by Phill Lytle

The mid/late 2000s through present

What has been the point of this series? Why have we spent the past month writing over 4,000 words and creating playlists with hundreds of songs?

To remember.

It really is that simple. As our scope has been laser-focused on the rock music genre, we realize that this leaves many artists unexplored. Many great artists that risk being forgotten just as much as the bands we have covered. There is a whole other series that needs to be written about those wonderful bands, singers, and performers in Christian music history that didn't quite fit into what we were doing. Perhaps one day, we will tackle that topic. For now, we appreciate all the comments, questions, and suggestions we have received as we have released each new installment in this series. Our hope is that we, at the bare minimum, started a conversation. For reasons we will never understand, the Christian music world is seemingly the only one that actively forgets its history. That needs to stop. Based on the massive reaction we received from this series, it is clear there are many others who feel the same way.

That leads us to our next steps. Where do we go from here? Instead of writing another 1,000 words about the Christian bands and artists that are currently making what we consider to be the best music, we would rather let their music speak for itself. We would also like to invite you to join us by telling us about your favorite artists that don't quite fit the CCM mold. We all know the *Hillsongs*, the *Casting Crowns*, the *Toby Macs* of the world. We want to move right outside of that space and show you a world of music created by artists, poets, and visionaries that will challenge and

inspire. Artists like *Andrew Peterson*, *John Mark McMillan*, *Josh Garrels*, and many more. These artists carry the banner first picked up by *Keith Green*, *Petra*, *The 77's*, and *The Call*. They carry on the legacy of excellence, artistry, and creativity. Let us do our best to not overlook this amazing music simply because it does not get played on the local FM station.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Four

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below.

Part Four:

The Road Less Traveled by Michael Lytle

The late 90's to the early 2000's

The late 1990s and early 2000s were a pivotal time in Christian rock and roll music. While it may not have been obvious or even a conscious choice there was a battle going on for where Christian music would go in the future. On one hand, some of the more creative and critically acclaimed artists like *Jars of Clay*, *Sixpence None the Richer*, and *Switchfoot* were also the artists that were selling the most records. This was not necessarily true in the 1980s where critical acclaim and commercial success did not always seem to go hand in hand. The rise of independent record labels like Tooth and Nail/BEC and Five Minute Walk/Sarabellum propelled forward artists like *Dimestore Prophets*, *Dryve*, *Starflyer 59*, and *Plankeye* who were blazing their own trails and not simply following what was popular in secular music. These labels also were reaching a younger audience which the big names of the 80s were starting to struggle with.

At the same time, the rise of modern pop/worship music was starting to gain momentum. If *Petra* and their 1989 album *Petra Praise: The Rock Cries Out* was the John Wycliffe of this new praise and worship music then *Delirious?* was its Martin Luther. (Under this analogy *Hillsong* would be Zwingli.) The boys from across the pond created the blueprint that is still being followed, for better or worse, to this day.

While we here at REO are certainly very much in favor of singing praises to and worshiping our creator, the focus from record labels and radio stations on "worship" music was not all positive. Lyrics that dealt with personal struggles,

social issues, family dynamics, and life in general, were quickly jettisoned in favor of songs that addressed God directly. Again, singing songs to God is not a bad thing, but we lost something along the way when other types of songs were discarded. Today we rarely, if ever, hear songs like *All Star United's* satirical *La La Land*, which took aim at the health, wealth, prosperity gospel movement. It is more difficult to find voices like Steve Hindalong of *The Choir* acknowledging the strain a cross-country move from Los Angeles to Nashville had put in his marriage in *Never More True*. We moved away from bands like *Plankeye* writing about their band breaking up and the uncertainty it created in *Goodbye*. Radio forgot artists like *The Waiting*, who drew inspiration from the opening paragraph of Melville's *Moby-Dick* to write about the Old Testament wanderings of God's chosen people in the song *Israel*.

If you go to a Christian bookstore or listen to Christian radio today it is easy to see who won the battle. Modern worship music dominates the landscape while the more creative artists are once again going underground and using alternative methods to get their message to the public. We will continue this discussion in part five of our series.

The goal of the following playlist is to highlight some of the artists that we feel raised the bar of creativity and originality for Christian rock and roll music during the late 1990s and early 2000s. We realize that many of these artists would have cringed at being labeled a "Christian band". They would have preferred to be called a rock band that happened to be made up of people who were Christians. It may be hard to believe now, but this distinction really was a big deal to some during the time period covered in this article and playlist. While it might make for an interesting article at some point in time this is not that article. We tried to primarily highlight artists who either never got their due even at that time or who may have been popular then, but have

fallen off the radar since. All songs on this playlist were released between 1994 and 2005. As always, there are other songs we would have included if they were available on Spotify. We have now put together four playlists for this series of articles. We expected the playlists that featured more recent music would be easier to put together than those featuring music from several decades ago. This was not really the case. Many great artists from the 1990s and early 2000s are not on Spotify. Some of our favorites that are missing include *Dimestore Prophets*, *The Listening*, *Reflescent Tide*, and *Room Full of Walters*.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Three

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Part Three:

***The Underground Groundbreakers* by Phill Lytle**

The early 80's through the early 90's

There were no platinum records. There were no arenas filled to capacity. And unless your local Christian station was unusually “out of the box”, you rarely heard this music played on the radio. Yet to many, if you were to pinpoint an era of music that justifies the existence of Christian rock, this would be it. Throughout the 80's and into the early 90's, a group of singers, poets, storytellers, and artists reshaped how we experienced “Christian” music. They turned it on its head and opened up a new world to believers, music lovers, and spiritual seekers. It was the time of the underground groundbreakers.

In part two we examined the bands that had major success and popularity during the 80's and early 90's. Bands like *Petra*, *Whiteheart*, and *DeGarmo and Key*. While those bands were playing in front of arenas full of youth groups, churches, and believers, there was another movement happening just outside of the Christian mainstream. Out there, bands like *The Call*, *Daniel Amos*, *The Prayer Chain*, and many others were singing about broken relationships, marriage problems, politics, and doubts. Out there, their songs were in turn angry and frustrated, joyous and hopeful, pointed and prophetic. The music was enigmatic – less definable. It was passionate, messy, and full-to-bursting with life. They avoided the pop rock sounds of their more accepted contemporaries, choosing

instead to blaze their trails with styles and sounds all their own.

This era of music produced some of the most critically acclaimed music in the history of Christian rock. Many of the albums that released during this time frame are still considered some of the best Christian releases of all time. *Circle Slide* by *The Choir*. *Sticks and Stones* by *the 77's*. *Reconciled* by *The Call*. These and more pushed boundaries and expanded what was believed possible for "Christian" music at that time.

Their music was never easy. Whether it was Steve Taylor singing satirically about a deranged ice-cream delivery man blowing up an abortion clinic to preserve his livelihood, or *The Choir* wrestling with the grief of a miscarriage, these bands made their fans grapple with big ideas and complicated emotional reactions. In some ways, they courted controversy, not to get the spotlight as much as to shock their listeners out of their comfort and stagnation.

At every turn, it seemed like these bands could not catch their big break. In a perfect world, many of them would be household names – their music was that good. That is not to suggest that these bands did not have any influence on future generations of musicians and creators. Members of these bands went on to form successful record companies that gave Christian music one of its biggest bands in *Jars of Clay*. They went on to produce albums for much more successful bands like *Sixpence None the Richer* and *The Newsboys*. They eventually wrote and created songs that are sung in worship services all over the world like *God of Wonders*. No doubt, their musical legacy inspired many bands that are being played on the radio today. While few of them ever achieved the kind of success and recognition they deserved at the time, our musical heritage would be much poorer without their contributions.

As stated before, the playlist below is merely a selection of

some of the best music in this era. It is meant to capture the sound and the spirit of this pivotal time in Christian music. Please, take some time to listen and appreciate the music that laid the groundwork and played such a monumental role in our history.

The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part Two

Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

If I want to listen to Christian music I have several stations to choose from as well. Unfortunately, they all basically play the same songs over again and their entire catalog seems to be chosen from music released in the last six to twelve months. It's as if there is a deliberate attempt to pretend that Christian music did not exist before last year. There also seems to be a mandate to play a very limited number of artists who for the most part play the same generic style of pop

worship music. These stations are very proud of the fact that their music is uplifting, upbeat, positive, encouraging, and safe for the whole family. Sadly, it might prove difficult to find music that is challenging, convicting, original, or thought-provoking because those qualities might alienate some of their more easily offended listeners.

Why do Christian radio stations seem to avoid anything challenging? Why do they often gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. In [Part One](#) we covered music from the 1960s and 1970s. This article will focus on popular Christian rock of the 1980s and early 1990s. We are including a Spotify playlist that features songs from 1982-1993. This playlist is by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include.

We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. We give you Part Two of *The Forgotten History of Christian Rock*.

Part Two:

Youth Pastor Approved by Phill Lytle

The 1980s through the early 1990s

The hair was long and flowing. The clothes were bright and garish, with neon, pastels, and spandex making frequent appearances. The music was big and bold – loud drums, big vocals, epic guitars, and keyboard and synth liberally sprinkled in for good measure. The early days of trailblazing and rebellion were gone. The banner-bearers of creativity and boundary-pushing were operating under the radar. The music that captured and defined the zeitgeist of the Christian rock scene in the 80s was unapologetically religious and unambiguously mainstream. It was safe rock and roll yet with enough edge and bite that it retained an element of danger and the allure of non-conformity. For the cool youth pastor, it was a dream come true.

As seen in [Part One](#), the 60s and 70s had the passionate trailblazers Larry Norman and Keith Green. In Part Three, we will talk about the underground Christian music scene with counter-cultural geniuses like The Call, The Choir, and the 77s. While those bands and many others like them were carving their paths by different means, the focal point of Christian Rock was happening out in the open for all the world to see. Bands like Petra and Stryper routinely sold out arenas that had previously been considered out of reach. Bands were selling hundreds of thousands and in some cases, even millions of records, getting serious radio airplay on traditional Christian radio stations and were no longer looked at as pariahs by the church as a whole.

And their music made clear that the union of rock and roll and Christian ministry was the formula that worked. Most of the popular bands of this generation were overtly religious, eschewing subtlety in favor of on-the-nose messaging. This is not a criticism per se, simply an observation about the

fundamental truth of the bands that reached the highest popularity during this era. They proclaimed Jesus, the Bible, and the Christian faith with no fear, no hesitation, and no reservations. To some, it did not represent real life in all its ugliness and complications. But to many, this music was a lightning rod for their faith – a boisterous and encouraging reinforcement for their spiritual journey.

This era produced some of the longest-lived artists and bands in Christian music history. Degarmo and Key. Mylon and Broken Heart. White Heart. It was a time that saw Christian bands like Idle Cure and Allies continue down the path forged by the godfathers of the genre. These and many more were rock and roll enough for young people to flock to in droves, while still maintaining a sense of spiritual steadfastness that made them feel safer than anything the world had to offer.

To be clear, the bands that thrived in this era did not do so with complete acceptance by the church. There were still many that attacked and criticized the bands for their hair, their attire, and their music. They were lambasted from the pulpit by more than one nationally televised preacher.[1. Jimmy Swaggart even wrote a [book](#) about it. We are linking it for educational purposes only.] While their path was easier than the generation prior, they still did much to smooth the road for the following generations of Christian musicians. They took the slings and arrows of an unwieldy and unaccepting group of believers, and they kept on moving, creating, and performing. We do well to remember the contributions during this era. Our Church and musical heritage demand as much.

Enjoy this playlist that will serve as a quick snapshot of the sounds and the styles of the most popular Christian bands of this era. In particular, pay special attention to the musicianship and artistry at play in many of these songs – something that seems to be missing from much of the current Christian music scene. Finally, we hope you will allow one minor indulgence. We have included a couple of songs by Rich

Mullins on this playlist even though we realize he does not exactly fit the profile of the bands and artists we covered in the article. We just strongly believe that his music deserves to be remembered and this playlist was the best fit.

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The Forgotten History of Christian Rock: Part One

Introduction by Michael Lytle

When scanning the FM radio dial in any U.S. city you come across a wide variety of stations. In my city, if I want to

hear oldies from the 50s and 60s I have a couple options. I can also listen to classic rock from the 70s, modern rock, alternative/indie rock, top 40 pop and hip-hop, and of course a variety of country options. If I am feeling particularly adventurous, I can check out mix stations that play popular songs from the last four or five decades.

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Why do Christian radio stations avoid anything challenging? Why do they gravitate to easy and safe music? And more importantly, why do Christian radio stations and even Christian music listeners want to ignore their history? Regardless of whether you are a fan of the music that continues to be released in the Christian Rock or CCM genres, it is critical to recognize that there is plenty of great Christian music that has been made over the last several decades. Unfortunately, nearly all this music has been forgotten or ignored.

We want to do our part to shed some light on this overlooked music. We decided the best way to do that is a series of short articles spotlighting different time periods and styles of Christian rock music. We are including a Spotify playlist with each article featuring some of the music from each era. These

playlists are by no means exhaustive. While Spotify has a vast library of albums and songs they don't have everything we would have wanted to include. We hope you enjoy reading these as much as we enjoyed writing them. Without further ado, we present part one of The Forgotten History of Christian Rock.

Part One:

***Why Should the Devil Have All the Good Music?* by David Lytle**

The 1960s through late 1970s

Rock 'n' Roll was rebellion—rebellion from social conformity, rebellion from moral standards, rebellion from the church. Sure artists like Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis, and Chuck Berry infused blues with the sounds of both black and southern gospel, but the outcome was far from the music of the sanctuary. It was the music of the night and the nightclub. As the rebels of the 1950s gave way to the hippies of the 1960s, this rebellion became increasingly clear.

Rock 'n' Roll was sinful. Both the church and the artist agreed. It was rhythmic, sexual, and broke every tradition. Teens gyrated and shouted, while fundamentalist preachers fumed. When John Lennon contrasted the popularity of the Beatles with that of Jesus he did more than make an observation—he drew battle lines. It's no surprise that this same man later found it so easy to imagine a world where there is no heaven. It was a world Christians found unimaginable.

More importantly, Rock 'n' Roll was the soul of a generation. What a generation it was! Their parents had grown up during the Great Depression and sacrificed mental and physical health to defeat the war machines of Germany and Japan. They were coming of age in the suburbs that sprouted in the soil of this post-war economic boom. The older the baby boomers got the more it became clear that they were not their parents. Their

music, more than anything, was what made them different.

In this context, a handful of young people experimented with the idea of Rock 'n' Roll that was about Jesus. This first generation of Christian rockers faced a serious dilemma—the dilemma of existence. How could rock music even be Christian? How could a Christian play rock? For most churches, it was easy to dismiss rock as sinful, but there was a minority who understood that Rock n' Roll was the heart language of the new generation. They understood that rebellion from some of their parents' values (namely materialism and racial segregation) could be virtuous. They understood that Jesus transcended cultural expression. They were the Jesus Movement.

Some have tried to locate the origin of the movement to one church, like Chuck Smith's Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, CA, or one artist, like Larry Norman. Yet, the origins of Jesus Rock, like the origins of Rock 'n' Roll, are much more difficult to pin down. All over the Country musicians were melding the message of Jesus with the music of the times. Although a minority, churches in various parts of the country encouraged Christians to redeem Rock 'n' Roll. Likewise, many artists would forsake a lifestyle of sexual promiscuity and drugs for a radical relationship with Jesus Christ. They were known as Jesus Freaks. Their movement: the Jesus Movement. Their music: Jesus Music. Elton John even sang about them. They were Christian Hippies. Their message was about salvation, but their music would still rock.

Well, it would sort of rock. The fact remains that much of the Christian Rock music of the 1960s was never recorded. Recording costs were prohibitive and quality was low. Low quality was especially a problem for the heavier music of the late 60s. No matter, folk music was where it was at anyway. This was the era of Bob Dylan, Neil Young, and David Crosby. Much of the memorable Christian Rock from this era reflects these influences. Love Song, Sweet Comfort Band, 2nd Chapter of Acts, Randy Stonehill, and Larry Norman are just a few

examples.

Speaking of Larry Norman. Norman is to Christian Rock what Elvis Presley is to Rock n' Roll. He wasn't the first but it is impossible to tell the story without him. He, more than anyone, is associated with the origins of Christian rock. His "Why should the Devil Have All the Good Music?" attempted to reconcile the dilemma of Christianity and Rock. His "Sweet Song of Salvation" became the anthem of the Jesus Movement and his "Great American Novel" is a scathing challenge to American values in the age of the space race in the tradition of Bob Dylan.

By the mid-1970s folk-based Christian music was well established and even accepted in some circles. Rock n' Roll, however, had gotten edgier. It was time for Christian Rock to really rock. It was time for Petra and the Resurrection Band. These bands attempted to preach the gospel with the blues-rock of the Rolling Stones and Led Zeppelin. Both had remarkably long careers and while their styles changed with the times, they consistently made their music about the gospel of Jesus. Petra would go on to make their name synonymous with Christian Rock throughout the 80s and 90s. They would also continue to rock.

The first generation of Christian Rockers faced opposition from all angles. They were scorned by the mainstream because of their commitment to Jesus and their denunciation of drugs and illicit sex. They were rebuked by much of the Church for even trying to redeem the music of the world. Still, they kept on message. They focused mostly on salvation and the change brought by Jesus. As can be seen in the playlist, there also seems to be a significant interest in eschatology, which was apparently brought about by the fear of the atomic bomb.

The desire to redeem Rock n' Roll made it necessary to create a musical subgenre in which the lyrics set Christian Rock apart from "secular." While this created a false dichotomy

between the sacred and the secular that Christian artists still face today, their singular focus on Jesus made their movement a success. Thousands came to a saving faith through the Jesus Movement. Today the instruments and rhythms of Rock can be heard in the majority of churches across the country.

This is most certainly an epoch on the history of the Christian church worth noting. For those Christians who enjoy rock music, this is your story. We hope you enjoy this less-than-exhaustive playlist. Sadly, due to the age of these recordings, and other issues, many great songs and artists are not available on Spotify. We did the best we could with what we had available. Please, seek out these trailblazing artists and bands we highlighted above. We also hope you leave your comments and share this series of articles. Let's not forget our past.

This is Part One of a five part series exploring the history of Christian Rock and Roll Music.

To read Part Two where we looked at the popular rock bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Three covering the visionary bands of the 1980s and early 1990s click [here](#).

To read Part Four covering the music of the late 1990s through the early 2000s, click [here](#).

To read Part Five recapping the series and introducing readers to the new music being created today, click [here](#).

Thank you so much for reading. Please feel free to comment below.

Five Reasons “Away in a Manger” is the Worst Christmas Song Ever

I love Christmas music. I believe my unblemished record of staunch Christmas musicophilia on *Rambling Ever On* [says](#) it [all](#). Yet, not all Christmas music is created equal. For every transcendent *O Come, O Come, Emmanuel*, there is a painfully awful *Last Christmas*. For every majestic *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*, there is the horrifyingly terrible *Christmas Shoes*. So, while I love Christmas music and celebrate it every year, I don't embrace every Christmas song out there. Case in point: *Away in a Manger*. As bad as the previously mentioned songs are, they aren't nearly as terrible as the manger song, due to its insidious nature. It poses as a beautiful, sacred song. It gets played on Christian radio. It gets sung to small children. It even has the audacity to get sung in church! I reject it. Yet its soul is as black as night. I reject all of it. Here are my five main reasons.

It is biologically fraudulent

Let's get the most obvious one out of the way. Jesus was fully God and fully man. Which means He was fully baby. If Jesus had been born and then placed in a manger, and did not cry at any point, as the song states, something would have been terribly wrong with Him. Babies cry. It's a good thing they cry. Doctors make sure they cry as soon as they are born to test their lungs. Babies cry when they are hungry and thirsty. They cry when they need to be held. If Jesus did not cry then He

was developmentally stunted. And we know that is not true. Which leads me to point number two.

It is emotionally manipulative

At its core, *Away in a Manger* is a lullaby. It seems to have been written for the express purpose of convincing children to go to sleep. So the wording used in the song is deliberately manipulative to that end. The thinking behind must have gone something like this – “Good little children want to be like the “little Lord Jesus”, right? Well, He didn’t cry so they shouldn’t either. And if they do cry, then they are not like Jesus at all.” That is almost unconscionable.

It is poorly written

I get really irritated with songs that change perspective. *Away in a Manger* is a big offender in this regard. It starts off third person for the first three stanzas but suddenly goes into first person on the three final and climactic stanzas. Why? Because the writer ran out of more drippy examples of insipid, idealized first-century life? Or because the writer wanted to really pour on the guilt trip for the listening children that were struggling to go to sleep like good little boys and girls? Or was it because the songwriter wanted to include some lame declaration of love to the “Lord Jesus.” I say lame, not because loving Jesus is lame, but because tacking it on at the end like that is sloppy, ham-fisted, and obsequious, not to Jesus, but to the listeners in an attempt to convince them that this is truly a good, Christian song.

And the line, “no crying He makes” is just bad poetry on every level. Did Yoda get co-writing credit on this or something?

It is patronizingly ordinary

The incarnation of Christ is one of the most miraculous and amazing things to ever happen. It is good to sing songs about it. It is good to be brought to worship thinking about it. What *Away in a Manger* does is take that magnificent event and turn it into a sickly-sweet, mushy, touchy-feely mess. Shepherds, angels, and kings worshipped this child, and the best this song can do is celebrate his sleeping, his sweet little head, and that he didn't cry? O come let us adore Him indeed!

It is theologically bankrupt

I don't expect deep theological truths from every song. One of my all-time favorite Christmas songs, *O Holy Night* is not the most theologically impressive song out there. But it is poetic and beautiful and contains enough truth to make it worthwhile. *Away in a Manger* is none of those things and is most definitely not worthwhile. Beyond the silly stuff about Jesus not crying – which contradicts the rest of the Scriptural account of His earthly life – the final stanza is a hodgepodge of pseudo-religious sounding phrases mixed with shockingly modern day spiritual sentimentality. Let's unpack it, shall we?

First, Jesus is not "looking down from the sky" and if He were why would he look down from the sky "and stay by our cradles til morning is nigh"? I guess you could argue that the writer is trying to say that Jesus is everywhere, but if that is so, why start with the idea that Jesus is looking down from the sky?

Second, the penultimate stanza has the singer asking Jesus to

be near them, or us. We don't have to beg Jesus to stay near us. He has promised to be with us in his Word. Many times, actually.

Third, when you further examine that stanza, you come upon an even worse question – “love me, I pray.” Once again, not necessary as it has already been promised. And to make this even more ridiculous, this song is about Jesus as a baby – His incarnation. What more proof did this writer need of Jesus' love than this act of complete sacrifice? “Look, I realize that you just gave up Heaven and your power, and you came to earth as a human baby, with all the awful stuff that entails, but do you think you can do something else to prove to me that you love me?”

Finally, the last stanza closes things out in spectacularly wrongheaded fashion. It starts off okay with a request for blessing for all the children that are in Jesus' care. I can get on board with that. It ends with a request for Jesus to take us all to Heaven to live with Him there. It doesn't work like that. Jesus doesn't just take everyone to heaven. That's where repentance and salvation come into play, but let's not get hung up on the very foundation of the Gospel or anything!

This Christmas, listen to as much music as you can. It is a profitable and worthy endeavor. Yet, for the sake of your soul, and the souls of those around you, avoid garbage songs like *Away in a Manger*. While there are probably more aesthetically offensive Christmas songs out there – I'm looking at you *Christmas Shoes* – there is no song that is as deviously evil as *Away in a Manger*. It cloaks itself in religious language and holy imagery, in a vain attempt to hide the utter darkness of it's twisted and corrupt heart. Flee from it my friends. Flee for your lives.

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.

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 Hosea 6:1[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!

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

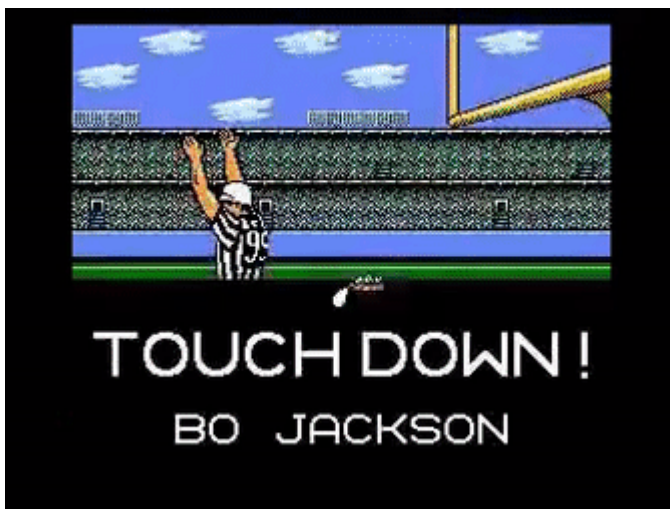
There were great moments all across sports this decade by people like Jordan, Montana and Kirk Gibson, but all decades have great moments. Only one decade has ever given us Lakers vs. Celtics, Celtics vs. 76ers, Lakers vs. Pistons, Celtics vs. Pistons, and Larry vs. Magic. The modern NBA era is close, 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?