

What I Love About U2

Allie McClaskey | September 26th, 2019

As I sat down to write this essay, I realized that no one has ever asked me: “What do you love about U2?” This band means so much to me. I have been a diehard fan for over 10 years, traveled hundreds of miles and seen seven of their concerts, plastered my walls at work and at home with their posters and photos, wear their shirts every chance I get, and yet—I struggle to answer that question. I love so much about U2. But what keeps me enthralled year after year?

Perhaps it has to do with my age when I was initially exposed to the band. My parents are both lifelong, if casual, U2 fans, and some of favorite memories are of family car rides where we would belt out tunes from *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (yes, the much-maligned *Bomb*). But I was 10 and had no knowledge of the band’s vast musical catalog or the rhetoric around their 21st century output. I just knew that I loved singing along to “Miracle Drug,” that the message of hope and love in “Yahweh” moved and comforted me. Though I enjoyed the songs, I did not delve any deeper into U2 until several years later. At 15, fresh out of a Jonas Brothers phase, I was determined to explore the “cool,” “real” music that my mom and dad listened to: groups like Van Halen, the Beatles, and U2. In the waning months of 2009, I devoured U2’s albums, attended my first concert, and joined the @U2 Forum. Getting to interact with other fans as passionate as I was only enhanced my fandom. After a few months of membership, there was no going back: I would be a U2 fan for life.

I have never heard music quite like the kind U2 makes. It is all a study in dichotomy: some pieces big and bombastic, others quiet and soothing, still others plaintive or despairing, and all of them downright *transcendent*. And the lyrics! I spoke before of my love of “Yahweh;” as I heard more songs, I found Bono’s words moving me as much as did the music of Edge, Adam, and Larry. These musical and lyrical talents are entwined on *Pop*. It is my favorite U2 album and my favorite album by any band, ever. I know that *Pop* is not a favorite of the public, much less the band themselves, but I will defend—and love—this record until the day I die. It is U2 taking risks musically, conjuring European discotheques and Floridian summers, and it is U2 nakedly showcasing fear or despair: “Jesus... I know you’re looking out for us, but maybe your hands aren’t free,” “Love is big, it’s bigger than us, but love is not what you’re thinking of.” I can talk for hours about *Pop* and their other albums, debating lyrics and musicality with fervor. But none of that answers the question posed at the beginning of this essay.

So, what *do* I love about U2? Ultimately, it is the way they make me feel. I want to be clear that my love for the band does not give me rose-colored glasses and prevent me from criticizing or questioning them—for example, I feel that they are far too concerned about radio hits and should instead focus on making records of substance that their current fans will enjoy. But this complaint is tangential to the joy I derive from their music and words. They are my comfort in times of fear or stress, my anthem of hope and excitement. I am a spiritual person, and all I can ultimately say is this: when I play U2, “God walks into the room.”