

U2

Perhaps one of the most acclaimed bands to come out of Ireland in recent years is the Dublin based U2. They are a unique band, with a sense of social conscience and purpose that sets them apart from others. Their moral standards are revealed eloquently through their music and lyrics, some common themes being human rights, war and religion. Such morality is refreshing and atypical of the amoral music industry. Most bands today are concerned more with love, sex and drugs.



U2's commitment to human rights is a theme which runs deep into the foundation of the group. Most of the songs allude to recent political incidents and injustices which they feel strongly about. For instance, the song "Sunday, Bloody Sunday" alludes to the massacre of Irish civilians by British troops. Then there is the allusion to Soviet domination in Poland and the emergence of the Solidarity Union in the Song "New Year's Day." The best example of U2's concern for human rights is their tribute to the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in the song "Pride (In the Name of Love).

The strong feelings of the band are emphasized by the very violent, vivid imagery in many of the songs. For example, in "Sunday, Bloody Sunday":

*Broken bottles on the children's feet/Bodies
strewn across a dead end street.*

Another example in the song "New Year's Day":

*Under a blood red sky / a crowd has gathered
black and white.*

The phrase "blood red sky" suggests that the "red" of communism is the cause of much bloodshed. The song is very supportive of the Solidarity movement:

*Say it's true / Thats true / We can break the rule /
Thrown in two -- we can be one..../*

There is a sense of urgency in this song, felt through the imperative lyrics and anxious baseline. This sense of urgency reflects U2's views on the situation in Poland. U2's commitment to human rights is actively apparent in their involvement in Amnesty International. They headlined the benefit tour last summer as well as donated some of their own concert revenues to the organization. They were also involved in the Band Aid / Live Aid projects for famine relief.

Obviously, U2 is anti-war. The fact that they named their third album "War" is quite paradoxical considering that the overall message is one of Pacifism. The musical- style on the album leans towards the militaristic with the march-like rhythm of the drums, anxious haS1jne and powerful, angry guitar. These sounds of militarism are instruments of U2's pacifism in order to fight moral battles. The waving of the white flag, the flag of surrender, has become a trademark of U2 in concert. This brings out their belief that it requires much more bravery to surrender than to simply fight.

U2's views on nuclear war come through in the song "A Sort of Homecoming" filled with horrible imagery of a nuclear holocaust:

*On the side of a hill as the valleys explode / dislocated /
suffocated / the land grows weary of its own..../ ... a
bomb blast lightning waltz.. ./ no spoken words / just a
scream. /*

Opposition and fear of nuclear war is clearly felt throughout the song. The title of the album in which this song appears, "The Unforgettable Fire," also suggests the horrors of a nuclear explosion.

Another bold statement that U2 has dared to make concerns their vue of religion. In a business in which religion is unfashionable and moral standards low, U2 is the exception. They dare to proclaim their faith in Christianity and maintain Christian values. The perfect example of religion as one of U2's top priorities is the song "40" from the "War" album. It is simply the fortieth psalm, "A Song of Praise," put to music. There are frequent religious allusions in their songs, such as in "Sunday, Bloody Sunday":

To claim the victory Jesus won/

and there is the biblical allusion in the title of their latest album "The Joshua Tree."

As musical performers, U2 are virtually unparalleled. Few successful artists have such regard and respect for their audience, as well as genuine love for them. There is no vanity, no all important image to U2. They simply give 100% of themselves while on stage and get an overwhelmingly warm reception in return. That is probably their greatest reward.

(Written, May 1987)

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