

The following is an introductory post from Dave Marsh to the DaDooRonRon email list, which was run by Alexander Shashko from the mid-1990s through the late 2010s.

From: Dave Marsh <marsh6@optonline.net>

Subject: Introduction and required post

Date: January 22, 2016 at 3:17:43 PM EST

To: dadooronron@yahogroups.com

I'm Dave Marsh, I've been writing about music for a very long time (1969-present seems long to me, anyhow). Most of what I've written about is, I guess, driven by an urgent sense of needing mileposts to live my life by. And I have to say that for me, if not you or her or the guy hiding in the other corner, trying to narrow it down to one is a nice parlor game. But the fact is, at least for me, that the whole reason I write about, and listen to, so much popular music is that if you dive deep enough, often enough, you really do find concepts to live by.

It seems to me that the danger of our mutual assignment is that we all take it as a chance to talk about lyrics.

But if you really want to find those songs that make you understand why it ain't no sin to be glad you're alive, I don't think it's the words. Or if it is, it's what the words sound like, the noises that surround them, their cadence, the textures of the voice or voices, the slash of a hand against strings that can and sometimes do cut to the bone, the sheer exhilaration the combination of these elements and more can produce in so many different ways. These things remain amazing across decades, and new ones take us all by surprise (often leading to dismissal, disdain, outright loathing). A new approach, a new voice, a new instrument, a new way of juggling the parts so that the focal point changes (think James Brown, Afrika Bambaataa, Dr. Dre, who's next?) Out of that emerges, at the best of times, a voice or several voices and what they are seeking by singing is a way forward to find something that seems much more elusive to me now than ever it did when I was younger and the world still simple. Each new wrinkle offers an array of things: a perch from which to observe, a stillness

on which to reflect, a sonic chaos to match the inner one, a way to look at something important in a different fashion, or something that seemed trivial blown up to monumental proportions. (Kisses! Glances! Stumbles!)

And all of that is about living your life, and all of it is a kind of guidance, or at least a map made by someone. Might be a short journey (but how would you live without those one-hit wonders; I'm thinking Afroman at the moment), might be a long one (I am about to shoot the rapids of a river with some old friends). Might be just around the corner to the light of day.

I don't think I can really answer the question without feeling like a traitor in the morning, but I can give you a couple of examples. One is "Closer to Free" by BoDeans. Forget what Sammy's singing— it's really about that opening "yee-hah," so hick it has to be true, and the way Kurt and Sam sing "free" at the end of the verses, as flat truth, no exaggeration, the noise is all the action but less than half the truth. It's just what it feels like— people who've known each other long enough to get past the bullshit and look each other in the eye and say it. It's my favorite love song and it's not about love at all. Maybe. It is literally true that I have never listened to it once without repeating it another two or three (or five or ten) times. And then, "Everyday People." No getting around those lyrics, whether you're listening to rawness of Joan Jett or the thrilling desperation of Sly and his family. Listen to Larry Graham's bassline, changing the game for everybody. Sly built it as (or from) a child's song, and it's just about that basic, right down to a "scooby dooby dooby" so perfectly rendered that to this day, nearly 50 years after I first heard it (and I can tell you exactly where I was and who I was with), I don't know if it's sarcasm or the real call to arms. It's going nowhere—it's already where you or I or they or all of us need to be. "Everyday People" is generally regarded as merely homiletic—the proacher proclaiming that we can live together. But that's not what it's about, and if it were, then it would be just hot air: that version of "Everyday People" is nothing anyone's lived yet, and there's precious little reason to think that we ever will. But Sly is not a preacher so much as a prophet, here to warn not what will happen (that is bogus prophecy) but what may befall those who are inattentive.

So I have gradually come to the conclusion that what matters, what really matters, is "We got to live together." It's not a dream, it's not optional, it's the essential thing for survival. And that is why most of the lyric is a litany not of how many different ways people accept and love one another, but a

list of the many ways in which we hate, disparage, abuse one another. And then, when you've absorbed that, faced up to our, which means your (not to mention my) own capacity to ruin everything in the service of nothing, then you get to know what a horror it is to declare "I am everyday people."

Because we are the same whatever we do. So ... why don't we do better? The song doesn't know and doesn't try to pretend it knows. Other than that one piece of what might be news: we're all the same. The music is unquestionably joyous, at least most of it, but if that's all you take away ... it justifies Sly's every sardonic smile.

It took me a long time that accept that this truth was in this beautiful song. But I guess that's the part I want to live by. Or rather, I don't want to live without. We could probably live together if all that was wrong with our lives was just you lying to you and me lying to me. But lying to ourselves...

(I love false endings.)