



Music to My Ears (Like a Gun to My Head)

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More than once I've wanted to post about the occasional Van ride I've taken to an outside hospital. I've meant to do it but let it slip away every time. Not this time. Sometimes the inspiration has been

Something I saw out the window or in a waiting room, or maybe it's some emotionally-jarring absurdity I've heard that left me gape-mouthed and lost for words. For example, perhaps ~~some~~ ludicrously cheery transport piggy energetically shouts (at 6:00 AM): "Good morning! How's everything going today!?" (um, fine, sir, I suppose? Just, you know, waiting for you to lock those chains around my body so I can be paraded through the land of the living like a circus freak ~~as~~ you follow right behind me with a gun full of bullets with my name on them. You know, the yewzh.) Those types of things often beg for some sort of memorializing, but even more than sightseeing and stupid statements, almost every trip in the van has something about music that digs especially deep and makes me think, "Gosh, I'd really like to share this with someone." So finally, I'm sharing some with you.

Ah, distinctly I remember it was in the bleak December of my second year of captivity, on a prison bus shuttling inmates from southern San Diego county to the north end, and as you might guess, many songs were heard in that traffic-clogged span of time. I frequently found myself fighting tears — fighting and losing — as I was forced music that utterly devastated me. As much as I dislike R&B and country, it was a great relief when that music came on because then I was much less likely to hear something that dug its claws deep into the fattered remnants of my broken heart to shred it up even worse. But all too often the sonic invaders were songs with great relevance to me, like how the Moody Blues' "Knights in White Satin" would come on in this place of degradation and torment and bring to mind the face of my mother as she visibly got lost in those lyrics while driving me to school one day. Or hearing It's a Beautiful Day singing "White Bird" over the clattering of metal bars and chains that kept me prisoner while I thought of how this was my father's all-time favorite song. But other times the music was connected to my forcibly separated friends, like when Kelly Clarkson sang about hazel eyes, eyes the color of my friend Coby's eyes, which I missed so much and longed to look into one last time. Or hearing the Stone Temple Pilots croon about "Leaving on a Southern train, only yesterday you lied...", lyrics reducing me to a blubbery mess as I drown in the memory of that song on repeat in my bedroom where I sat teary-eyed after yet another falling out ~~with~~ my best friend Darrell when I was 17 or 18. The truth is, I am almost comically emotional, everything

affects me in outsized ways, and music can be the deepest, most gut-churning trigger of them all.

(Proposal: Radio on prison transports should be outlawed as cruel and unusual punishment.)
Change.org??

But beyond the purely personal and adding some radical offensiveness to the usual injury, prison guards often play music that's just shocking in its situational incongruity. The first time I experienced this was with a couple coppers listening to an obviously custom playlist that included Cypress Hill and Rage Against the Machine. I was listening to the songs and watching those pigs tap their trotters to the beat, and all I could think was — do you people have any self-awareness at all? These songs are for people on my side of the bars, not for you. Have you ever listened to the lyrics, much less considered the artists' own overt values? What would Zack de la Rocha say about his music being played by armed agents of modern slavery as they haul their human cargo down the freeway? I think he'd feel sick... and full of rage.

Here are a few specific songs I've heard in prison transports and said to myself, "WTF??"

- Korn: "Freak on a Leash" (Cops rocking out to a song about feeling degraded, constrained, and outcast, while they themselves are collecting paychecks for ferrying prisoners around. WTF... you ever think you're the one holding the leash to make people look and feel like freaks?)
- Cypress Hill: "How I Could Just Kill a Man" (WTF — does ANYONE imagine the minds behind that song are cop friendly? Then again, as Neo-Authoritarianism rises around the world... ? :))
- The Who/Limp Bizkit: "Behind Blue Eyes" (Is there any chance at all the person behind those blue eyes is ok with coppism? WTF?)
- Kid Rock: "Cowboy" (OK, granted, Kid Rock clearly abandoned his anti-authoritarian roots, but consider the song and not the artist. "I can smell a pig from a mile away." And that's your jam, man? WTF?)
- Rage Against the Machine: "Killing in the Name Of" (Seriously? WTF?? "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me." That's the anthemic chorus, one tiny step from "Fuck tha Muthafuckin Police". So, truly a cop's song, right? Double WTF. Stupid pigs.)

And finally, while that last one is kind of a Mike-drop on this point, I'll just add that plenty of prison van music is hip hop, and while I haven't actually heard NWA's classic on the road yet, one fine fascist's playlist sure had a lot of Dead Prez on it. How does he look at himself in the mirror? While the exact songs weren't on it, this is still the group that cut the tracks "Cop Shot" and "Police State." So yeah, dummies — crank it up.