

Songs of the 2010s



BRIAN SUTORIUS · TUESDAY, DECEMBER 24, 2019 · READING TIME: 5 MINUTES

I listened more to podcasts and talk radio than music these last ten years. I still love music, even if my tastes haven't broadened much. I know what I like, and I'll get to that in a minute. At least some podcasts are *about* music. You probably know [Song Exploder](#), which is excellent. [Switched on Pop](#) can also be really good, and you have them to blame for any musical terminology I grossly misuse in the following paragraphs. Closer to home for me are certain episodes of [The Sound and the Story](#), or the multi-episode run about Hellogoodbye on [Stereo Confidential](#).

Perhaps because I listen to so much talk, the songs I put on repeat were mostly because of their melodic elements. The era of loving songs for lyrics you can put in an away message is over (in no small part because [AIM shut down this decade](#) too). When I sing along in the car, it's more humming along with the hook. And I think that's the common thread between these songs, presented in chronological order instead of a top ten countdown:

Robyn – [Dancing On My Own](#) (2010)

We played this song together the night I moved in with Brandon and Vinny, trading between guitar, bass, and drums, and we didn't need to practice much before jamming all the way through. The bones of it are simple, the stylistic finishes make it a standout. I especially enjoy the sound effect used instead of a cymbal crash after each chorus, it reminds me of LP3-era Ratatat.

see also [Fifth Harmony – Work from Home](#) (2016)

The entire melody is seven notes, played in the same sequence over and over, by all the different instruments. It's like the upside-down (rightside-up?) version of Seven Nation Army. Has any other pop song ever done so much with so little? Only half kidding.

The Gaslight Anthem – [45](#) (2012)

Every Gaslight Anthem review must mention that Brian Fallon is the next Springsteen. Whether he is or isn't, this is rock and roll. I find myself looping the outro, where Fallon does a call and response with the lead guitar. He changes the way he sings his line, and the guitar melody matches.

The 1975 – Sex (2013)

One of my two favorite bands of the decade, changing their style to keep pace with my changing taste. Or was it the other way around? From the too-cool opening line “and this is how it starts,” the song feels like it wants to exist in the beat *after* the one coming out of the speakers. It’s consistently moving forward, it’s plaintive, it’s excellent.

see also **The 1975 – It’s Not Living (If It’s Not With You)** (2019)

The first twenty seconds of this song, on the other hand, are so bright. Combined with the title, it sets itself up to be one of the all-time great love songs. Alas, the titular “you” is heroin.

Limbeck – Million Years (2016)

This song is an anachronism. First, it’s a fresh Limbeck track released almost a decade after their last album. It feels like a trip back even farther to their mid-2000s apex as twang-aspiring labelmates of pop punk juggernauts. The dopey space lyrics appeal to me, especially delivered via their trademark harmonies. And I’m always a sucker for the singer segueing to the guitar solo. Second, it’s a standalone single with a purchase price in the era of subscription streaming services. The proceeds went to cover healthcare costs of the original artist. A real sign of the times.

The Naked And Famous – Higher (2016)

Call this the platonic ideal of my musical taste this decade: a driving beat, electronic flair, and little staccato melodies sprinkled throughout. I sing along to the hook that plays after the “higher, higher” in the chorus and the digital whirs after that, instead of the lyrics. Their three full length albums all arrived this decade and there are high moments in each of them. This one was the most consistently enjoyable.

CHVRCHES – Graffiti (2018)

My other favorite band of the decade, who also released their three full length albums in this ten year span. Even though I think there were fewer good songs on the most recent one, what good songs there were, were truly *great*. Replacing digital drum kits with a live drummer evens out their sound, and Lauren Mayberry has real oomph behind her voice. It all makes for my favorite track of theirs, and that's a difficult choice to make.

see also **CHVRCHES – Empty Threat** (2015)

A very close second, only held back by a slight downer of a bridge. At least it ramps back up

into the final chorus at full energy. I also have a particular fondness for this video after first watching it over weak WiFi in a hotel room in India with my brothers and cousins.

Charly Bliss – Capacity (2019)

It's convenient for me that this is the most recent song on the list, so it can slot in where the traditional #1 pick would go. It's likely recency bias at play, but as I write this, Capacity is my favorite song of the decade. I have yet to skip it when it comes on shuffle. This song [has everything](#). The beat is simple and consistent. There's a little arpeggiated guitar melody layered under the verse vocals, which drifts in and out of being in sync with the vocal melody. The reverb guitar chord that transitions the song from verse to chorus hits hard every time, and is even matched to a scene cut in the video. Some fans of their first album were disappointed with the direction this song took, in an apparent veer away from "what if blue album Weezer were fronted by a woman?" To them, I point out that this song has a simple, silly guitar solo that I air-guitar along to, just like Buddy Holly. And after that, a bridge that I actually like! The clean strumming is an effective break, and then it doubles upon itself as the vocals do the same, each line punctuated with pounding on a bass drum. Finally, the lyrics are destined for retweets here at the turbulent end of this decade: "I'm at capacity / I'm spilling out of me."

Spencer Todd, Catherine Windecker and 4 others

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