

= Running to Stand Still =

" Running to Stand Still " is a song by rock band U2 , and it is the fifth track from their 1987 album , The Joshua Tree . A slow ballad based on piano and guitar , it describes a heroin @-@ addicted couple living in Dublin 's Ballymun flats ; the towers have since become associated with the song . Though a lot of time was dedicated to the lyrics , the music was improvised with co @-@ producer Daniel Lanois during a recording session for the album .

The group explored American music for The Joshua Tree , and as such , " Running to Stand Still " demonstrates folk rock and acoustic blues influences . The song was praised by critics , many of them calling it one of the record 's best tracks . It has since been included in the regular set lists of four U2 concert tours , in two different arrangements and with several possible thematic interpretations . Since the song 's release , the phrase " running to stand still " has become more widely used .

= = Background = =

" Running to Stand Still " was written by U2 in the context of the heroin addiction epidemic in Dublin of the 1980s , much like " Bad " ( and to some extent " Wire " ) had been from their 1984 album The Unforgettable Fire . Bassist Adam Clayton has referred to the song as " Bad Part II " . Thin Lizzy frontman Phil Lynott 's decline and death from addiction also resonated with Clayton at the time .

Until their 2014 album Songs of Innocence , U2 had written relatively few songs directly related to their growing up in Dublin , often giving higher priority to works about The Troubles in Northern Ireland or to international concerns . When they have written about Dublin , allusions to it have often been disguised . But " Running to Stand Still " was one of those with specific Dublin connections :

This lyric was a reference to the Ballymun flats , a group of seven local authority , high @-@ rise residential tower blocks built in the Ballymun neighborhood of Dublin during the 1960s . Paul Hewson ( later known as U2 's lead vocalist Bono ) had grown up on Cedarwood Road in the adjacent Glasnevin neighborhood , in a house across fields behind the towers , near his friends and future artists Fionán Hanvey ( later known as Gavin Friday ) and Derek Rowan ( later known as Guggi ) . Bono had played in the towers ' foundations as they were being built , then traveled in their elevators for the novel experience . Over time , poor maintenance , lack of facilities for children , transient tenancies , and other factors caused social conditions and communal ties to break down in the flats . The place began to stink of urine and vomit , and glue sniffers and used needles were common sights , as were appearances of the Garda Síochána . Guggi later lived in the towers during years that he was struggling personally with drugs . It was through his exposure to people without hope in the flats that Bono began to develop his social consciousness .

Bono may have used Ballymun as the inspiration ( without any explicit lyrical references to it ) for the 1980 U2 song " Shadows and Tall Trees " , and later likened living in the area to some of the scenes portrayed in the 1992 Mike Newell film Into the West . Driving by there in 1987 , Bono said , " See the seven tall buildings there ? They 're ' the seven towers . ' They have the highest suicide rate in Ireland . After they discovered everywhere else in the world that you don 't put people living on top of each other , we built them here . "

= = Writing and recording = =

The song 's title phrase originated from Bono asking his brother how his struggling business was going , and the brother responding , " It 's like running to stand still . " Bono had not heard the phrase before , and he thought it expressed what heroin addiction and the effects of the drug on the body were like ; a writer later described the title as a " perfect distillation of the dynamic of feeding on addiction . " Bono had heard a real story about a pair of heroin addicts , a man and a woman , who lived in the Ballymun towers . Out of money and unable to pay the rent due to their habit , the man became a heroin smuggler , operating between Dublin and Amsterdam and taking enormous risks for a big payday . Bono felt the man was decent at heart but was constrained by his squalid

living conditions , as well as poor choices , and Bono wanted to illustrate how these poor conditions affected their lives . The resulting lyric does not describe any of this explicitly , but instead limns the emotional atmosphere that the couple live in . In doing so , the song is not judgmental and shows sympathy for the woman . A character monologue from Wim Wenders ' 1984 film Paris , Texas , was also a significant influence on Bono 's writing of the song .

Although the lyrics of " Running to Stand Still " were worked on a great deal , the musical composition was essentially improvised by the band during the recording process at Dublin 's Windmill Lane Studios . Guitarist the Edge began playing some chords during a session for another song . Producer Daniel Lanois joined in on guitar , and the rest of the group followed . This initial improvised version incorporated all the elements of the final song structure , and the sound and feel of the group playing in a room together without overdubs contributed to the track 's effectiveness . Lou Reed 's " Walk on the Wild Side " and Elton John 's " Candle in the Wind " , both of which had served as end snippets for " Bad " on the Unforgettable Fire Tour , were loose inspirations . The influence of Reed 's works can be felt throughout the song , as can Van Morrison to an extent . Indeed , in a published tribute following Reed 's 2013 death , Bono offered " Running to Stand Still " as " red @-@ handed proof " of the influence that Reed and the Velvet Underground had had upon U2 .

= = Composition and interpretation = =

Much of The Joshua Tree showed the band 's fascination with American culture , politics , and musical forms , and while the lyrics of " Running to Stand Still " were Irish @-@ based , the musical arrangement for it began with touches of acoustic blues and country blues that represented an idiomatic stretch for the group . Although producer Brian Eno was known for introducing European textural music into U2 's sound , he also had a strong fondness for folk and gospel music . Indeed , writers have seen echoes of Bruce Springsteen 's stark acoustic 1982 album Nebraska in the song 's sound .

" Running to Stand Still " is a soft , piano @-@ based ballad played in a key of D major at a tempo of 92 beats per minute . The song follows a traditional verse @-@ chorus form . In the introduction and conclusion is a mournful slide acoustic guitar in Eno and Lanois ' production that Rolling Stone called both grim and dreamy . Most of the piano part alternates between the D and G chords , an example of the Edge 's longtime practice of composing around two @-@ chord progressions . The part gives the song an elegiac feel . Accompanying the piano for much of the song is Lanois ' soft playing of a so @-@ called electric " scrape guitar " , which he contributed to add texture . Soft , echoing drums from Larry Mullen , Jr . , enter after the second chorus . A harmonica part from Bono takes the song to its faded conclusion . Bono 's vocal range in the song runs from A3 to D6 .

In the song , the woman 's addiction and misdirected desire for transcendence are reflected in lines such as " She runs through the streets / With her eyes painted red " and " She will suffer the needle chill " . Bono 's lyrics evoke helplessness and frustration in the lines " You 've got to cry without weeping , talk without speaking , scream without raising your voice " . The title phrase is not used until the last line of the song . This compositional technique relies upon delayed gratification and is heard in a few other popular songs , such as the Cure 's " Just Like Heaven " and George Michael 's " One More Try " .

U2 songs often have multiple interpretations , and " Running to Stand Still " has ones beyond its immediate context . On the website SongMeanings.net , there are several posts from readers who never realized the song is about drug addiction and heard it instead in contexts ranging from personal challenge to religious salvation . A staffer for the fan website atU2.com found the song to be a very meaningful inspiration towards personal discovery . In the liner notes to the 20th anniversary reissue of The Joshua Tree , writer Bill Flanagan stated , " ' Running to Stand Still ' is for anyone who feels trapped in an impossible circumstance by overwhelming responsibility . " Uncut magazine writer Andrew Mueller noted that the theme was effective in depicting " the drug as another bogus escape , another fraudulent promise that there 's ever any evading the truth . "

= = Reception = =

" Running to Stand Still " earned critical praise upon The Joshua Tree 's release , which itself received very favourable reviews and went on to become the group 's best @-@ selling album . Rolling Stone wrote , " After the first few times through [ it ] , you notice the remarkable music ... It sounds like a lovely , peaceful reverie ? except that this is a junkie 's reverie , and when that realization hits home , the gentle acoustic lullaby acquires a corrosive power . " In Time magazine 's 1987 cover story on the band , Jay Cocks wrote that " A U2 tune like ' Running to Stand Still ' , with a trancelike melody that slips over the transom of consciousness , insinuates itself into your dreams . " The Uncut magazine Ultimate Music Guide to U2 described the character sketch in the song as one of Bono 's best . The 1991 Trouser Press Record Guide , however , said that the song " has mood but no presence " .

" Running to Stand Still " became a Dublin anthem of sorts , immortalizing the Ballymun towers . It has been considered by pop music writer Brent Mann as one of the more powerful songs written about drug addiction , joining the likes of Jefferson Airplane 's 1967 " White Rabbit " , Neil Young 's 1972 " The Needle and the Damage Done " , Martika 's 1989 " Toy Soldiers " , and Third Eye Blind 's 1997 " Semi @-@ Charmed Life " .

Irish music writer Niall Stokes considers " Running to Stand Still " to be one of the most important songs on The Joshua Tree , not only on its own merits as a " mature and compelling ... haunting , challenging piece of pop poetry " , but also because its moral ambiguity and lack of condemnation of its characters presaged the chaotic direction the band would take a few years later with Achtung Baby and the Zoo TV Tour . Rolling Stone 's 2003 list of " The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time " ? which placed The Joshua Tree at 26th ? said that while the album is remembered for the Edge 's trademark guitar sounds and the group 's spiritual quests , " Running to Stand Still " remains one of its most moving songs . This latter sentiment was echoed by the Irish Independent .

= = Live performances = =

Throughout its live history , " Running to Stand Still " has nearly always followed " Bullet the Blue Sky " , matching the order they appear on the album . It was first played live on the Joshua Tree Tour , with the Edge playing keyboards and Bono playing guitar , usually acoustic . During the 27 May 1987 show at Rome 's Stadio Flaminio ? the opener of that tour 's second leg , and the first in Europe ? 35 @, @ 000 people sang along to the song 's " Ha la la la de day " refrain , bringing a side @-@ of @-@ stage Brian Eno to tears . One performance of the song was captured on the 1988 filmed documentary of the tour , Rattle and Hum , but was not included on the accompanying album . A different tour performance was included on both the DVD and album Live from Paris , released in 2007 . On the Lovetown Tour , during one Dublin show that was broadcast worldwide , the song segued into a verse of Ewan MacColl 's classic ode to industrial bleakness , " Dirty Old Town " ; this show was released in 2004 as Live from the Point Depot .

During the Zoo TV Tour , the song 's performance was significantly altered . In these shows , the Edge played guitar on his Fender Stratocaster with the band on the main stage , while Bono sang the song on the B @-@ stage with a headset microphone . Bono mimed the actions of a heroin addict , rolling up his sleeves and then spiking his arm during the final lyric , after which he would sing " Hallelujah " over and over while reaching up into a pillar of white light . Writer Robyn Brothers sees the addition of the " Hallelujah " coda as indicating that while organized religion may act in the role of a sedative , a notion akin to other Zoo TV themes , the role of personal faith may still have a " desiring , affirming , and ' deterritorializing ' force . " At the culmination of the " Bullet to Blue Sky " to " Running to Stand Still " sequence , red and yellow smoke flares came out from either end of the stage ( an idea of U2 's security chief , who was a U.S. Vietnam veteran ) , as the coda segued into " Where the Streets Have No Name " . This arrangement and performance of " Running to Stand Still " was included in the 1994 concert film Zoo TV : Live from Sydney .

" Running to Stand Still " was not played on the PopMart Tour or Elevation Tour , but it returned to U2 concerts on the 2005 Vertigo Tour , with the original combination of the Edge on keyboards and

Bono on guitar . During most of its performance on the Vertigo Tour , it once again followed " Bullet the Blue Sky " and culminated with a video clip of several articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights being read . ( After July 2005 , it was replaced in that role and in the set list by " Miss Sarajevo " . ) During the 19 June 2005 show on Burmese democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi 's birthday , " Running to Stand Still " included snippets of " Walk On " , a song originally written for her . Author Steve Stockman felt that in this tour 's uses , " Running to Stand Still " was one of the band 's songs from the 1980s that had lost its original meaning and was no longer about drug @-@ dealing in the Ballymun towers . Rather , it was now being used to develop the show 's theme that a belief in faith and in human potential could overcome the bleakest and most desperate situations ; in this , it fit within the Vertigo Tour 's emphasis on coexistence and the ONE Campaign . This assessment agreed to by an eFestivals review , and author John Jobling has called the new interpretation an " anti @-@ persecution paean " that was used to remove the sting of " Bullet the Blue Sky " being used to criticize American behavior during the Iraq War . In contrast , USA Today 's veteran rock writer Edna Gundersen found the song 's performance still established a " devastating " mood and the New York Daily News said that the group " thinned ' Running To Stand Still ' to give it a new mourning " . Two other U.S. reviewers remarked that the song was lesser known to audiences , with Variety saying its inclusion helped the band connect with the past while avoiding cliché . One tour performance of " Running to Stand Still " was included on the Vertigo 2005 : Live from Chicago DVD , during which Bono dedicated the Hallelujah coda to members of the American and British militaries fighting overseas . The song was not performed during the U2 360 ° Tour , with The Vancouver Sun bemoaning the absence of this " stone @-@ cold classic of the U2 canon " .

= = Legacy = =

The use of the phrase " running to stand still " dates to at least to the 1920s and 1930s . It comes from the image presented in Lewis Carroll 's 1871 children 's novel Through the Looking @-@ Glass . Since the album and song 's release , use of the phrase seems to have increased . Between 1851 and 1986 , the phrase occurred four times in The New York Times ; from 1987 to 2009 , the phrase has occurred ten times ( not counting mentions of the song itself ) . The phrase occurs many more times in Google News archive searches from 1987 on ( excluding those to the song itself ) than from 1986 and before . The phrase has been used in connection with drug addiction and closely related issues a number of times , including in academic papers and in New York magazine 's description of the heroin @-@ centric 1993 Irvine Welsh novel Trainspotting .

Future music video director Dave Meyers wrote a movie script to the song while a film student at Loyola Marymount University . The 2004 first @-@ season episode " Running to Stand Still " of the U.S. television series Desperate Housewives was named after the song . It featured the Lynette Scavo character resorting to taking her children 's ADD medication in order to cope with the overwhelming demands of her domestic life . A fifth @-@ season episode of the U.S. television series One Tree Hill , itself named after a U2 song , was called " Running to Stand Still " .

By mid @-@ 2000s , the Ballymun towers were in the process of being torn down , and the Ballymun area was the target of a ? 1 @. @ 8 billion regeneration scheme intended to create a self @-@ sustaining community of 30 @, @ 000 people that would be more successful than the original 1960s plan . Despite their failure as housing , the towers had left a long cultural legacy , of which " Running to Stand Still " was the first and perhaps best @-@ known exemplar ; the link between the towers and the song was mentioned in some tourist books about Dublin . Former towers residents were not always happy with the song . Lynn Connolly , whose 2006 memoir The Mun : Growing Up in Ballymun detailed her raising there in the 1970s and 1980s , readily acknowledged the problems there and also wanted to get out at the time . But she later came to realize that there had been much that was good at the towers ? in terms of a collective wit among residents and a helping sense of community ? which had been ignored by the media . She thus wrote , " regardless of what U2 say in their song , ' Running to Stand Still ' , there was certainly more than one way out . " In a newspaper interview , Connolly suggested that the song might have had a deleterious effect : " It doesn 't take a lot of imagination to picture an unemployed person , living alone in a flat in Ballymun

, listening to that song and agreeing with what their hero was saying . " She further noted that some websites erroneously state that Bono grew up in Ballymun itself , and said , " Perhaps it gave him a sort of street @-@ cred to associate himself with the estate he could see from his bedroom window in nice , safe , respectable Cedarwood Road in Glasnevin . "

The Ballymun area was still so associated with " Running to Stand Still " and the drug problem of the time , that local backers of the regeneration went to pains to point out the recent progress . A Bono remark that it was dangerous to walk in Ballymun at night found a good deal of publicity . A fansite listing U2 @-@ related Dublin area sights in 2004 mentioned Ballymun 's connection to the song , cautioning , " do not go here on foot ? this is a bad area " . U2 's official website noted that the area was much changed now ; Bono himself said " he 's very proud to come from the Ballymun area " ; the fansite subsequently modified its listing and said an on @-@ foot visit to Ballymun was warranted .