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The Beginnings, Development and Contemporary Form of the
Most Famous Band of Ireland: U2

(bakalářská práce)

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Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto bakalářskou diplomovou práci vypracovala samostatně pod odborným vedením Mgr. Jiřího Flajšara, Ph.D., a uvedla v ní veškerou literaturu a ostatní zdroje, které jsem použila.

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Tímto bych chtěla poděkovat vedoucímu mé práce, Mgr. Jiřímu Flajšarovi, Ph.D. za vedení mé bakalářské práce.

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the most famous band of Ireland or perhaps of the entire world. For decades, U2 have been considered to be “the biggest band in the world” not only by their dedicated supporters. All the prestigious prizes and nominations the band has been collecting during the past years suggest that such an appellation could be justifiable. Regarding one of the most respected music prizes in general, Grammy Award, U2 belong among its record holders with their 22 awards in total, more than any other band ever had. U2 are one of the interprets that are widely popular across generations thanks to their universally appealing music and themes which are frequently close to ordinary people. It would be probably hard to find someone in our civilized society who would not know at least one of their greatest hits. The reason to dedicate this thesis to the exploration of the band’s music and achievements, however, is that not everyone who likes their music is acquainted with the equally interesting background. Although the group, with Bono in particular, publicly supports charity and participates in political and ecological activism through various campaigns, including fighting for human rights, the general public is able to recognize their songs on radio but lacks the awareness of the band’s contribution to the society. What I find ungrateful is that some people who are familiar with the band’s activism regard this struggle cynically, calling it pretentious and self-seeking and so the band’s, and again especially Bono’s behavior are often criticized. As every mainstream artist, U2 have their dedicated supporters as well as many detractors. The latter might also assume that U2’s worthy musical contribution has been gone since 1990’s after their well recognized masterpiece *Achtung Baby* and that the approaching 40th anniversary of their bright career should be their last one. These ideas of antipathy might result from the recent release of U2’s last album. The band, after a long-term partnership with Apple Inc. Company, decided to release the album for free to every iTunes user. The fact that it was downloaded automatically to people’s iPhones and iPods caused, deservedly or not, a burst of complaints and has been highly discussed on the internet recently. It is certain that such an exceptional act deserves attention as well as this exceptional group of musicians. This thesis will thus provide a general overview of the band’s past and present form, evolution and achievements. The first chapter will explore the group’s development and important moments of their history since their first rehearsal as well as the personal lives of the

four members. The second chapter will observe U2's evolution in terms of the musical and thematic aspects on their complete discography, counting thirteen studio albums in total. Three selected thematically noteworthy songs will be more thoroughly analyzed in the third chapter, while the final fourth chapter will be dedicated to the band's achievements concerning their participation in charity events, political and ecological activism and supported foundations.

1. Biography

The first part of this chapter explores the formation of the band since the day of their first meeting until its current form. The second part is dedicated to the personal biographies of the four band members.

1.1 The History of the Band

The roots of the band date back to 25th September 1976, when Larry Mullen, then at the age of fourteen, realized that he had spent too much money on his drum kit to let it just stand in the corner. Therefore he wrote a notice on the board at the Mount Temple Comprehensive School which he and all U2 members were attending. Then six students responded to the notice and came to Mullen's kitchen where the casting was held. There was Paul Hewson (Bono) on vocals, brothers Dick and David (The Edge) Evans on guitars, Adam Clayton on bass-guitar, Larry Mullen behind the drum kit and also his two friends Peter Martin and Ivan McCormick. That day the young Dubliners played some cover songs by Rolling Stones. The latter two quit the band soon though. Larry Mullen remembers that The Edge could play really well, while Adam rather looked like he knew how to play and Bono was so charismatic that it only took Larry ten minutes to realize he would never be the front-man himself.¹ The band was then practicing at Adam's grandmother under the name Feedback. They won a talent contest at Mount Temple School and they also performed there some small concerts playing cover songs soon after. Adam was then in the role of their "manager" as he was trying to arrange some shows they would also be paid for while the other three lads did not really care about business. They played their first paid show with Rat Salad and Arthur Phybbes Band, which was quite a success. Soon the decision to change the band's came and the boys settled on the name The Hype. As the punk wave came to Ireland, they later admitted the influence by Sex Pistols, The Clash, The Radiators from Space or Buzzcocks.² The Hype played a lot of cover songs of their idols, Bono recalls they were not technically perfect but he felt they had "something special". Some original lyrics were written by

¹ Matt McGee: *U2: A Diary* (London: Omnibus Press, 2006), 10.

² McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 12.

Bono by that time, e.g. “What’s Going On” or “Fool”. The year 1978 was groundbreaking for the band. In March, Dick Evans left the stage at the concert in Howth. He stated that the band had been becoming too serious for him. U2 then won a talent contest in Limerick and they made their first demo session with CBS Ireland. The band was also mentioned in Hot Press, the popular rock music magazine. Adam was trying to find them a good manager; they addressed Steve Averill who, however, declined and only helped them to change their name. The boys agreed on U2 because of its ambiguity. When Bono was asked what it meant, he only answered: “Whatever you want it to.”³ One might consider its meaning to have a connection with the spy plane or think that it is an abbreviation of “you too” but nothing like this was ever confirmed by the members. Soon after, Bill Graham, who wrote for Hot Press magazine, helped them to find a manager, Paul McGuinness. By that time, Bono and his friends from the group called Lypton Village entered Shalom Fellowship which later led to disputes between the members. During the year, U2 performed some more or less successful concerts. In 1979, they signed a contract with CBS Ireland and they wrote several new songs. They also invested in their promotion photography and they recorded their first single, *U2–Three* of which 1000 copies sold out fast and dominated the Irish charts. They got a satisfactory review on their concert at Dandelion Market in Dublin and so they decided to make a tour in London. The London tour, however, was not a success and they felt disappointed when leaving England without a contract. However, soon in 1980 they were visited by Annie Rosebary from Island Records who considered Bono “already a star”⁴. The band finally signed their first international recording contract, promising to release four albums in next four years. Later that year they tour UK and sold out some venues. In October they published their debut album *Boy*, expressing feelings of adolescence and a change from a boy to a man. It received satisfying reviews and the song “I Will Follow” succeeded in the US charts. Soon after, they were lucky to tour mainland Europe and North America for their first time. In July 1981 they started recording their second album and they released single “Fire”. The whole recording of *October* was a hard struggle, as Bono, Larry and The Edge were considering leaving the band. Their doubts resulted from their membership of the Shalom

³ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 13.

⁴ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 27.

Christian commune. Adam felt distant of the band as he was not a member as well, and it only made him frustrated when the other three talked about leaving the band just when they started to be successful internationally. The Edge felt Christ and rock to be mutually exclusive⁵, but finally they decided to quit the commune and stayed in the band, still as active Christians. In March 1982 they released a new single, “Celebration” and two months later they began work on their third album *War*. The single “New Year’s Day” was released in January 1983 and it immediately became a great hit in the US.⁶ The whole album, released in February, is louder and more aggressive than the two previous ones, including their most political song “Sunday Bloody Sunday”. During live performances, Bono waved with a white flag, which soon became a specific feature of the band. In November, the band releases *Under a Blood Red Sky*, their first live album consisted of recordings from three successful shows. This year U2 toured the US again, their fame was increasing but they were still in debts to Island Records. Fortunately, in 1984 their manager Paul McGuinness arranged a new contract with Island Records providing much better conditions for the band. In May they focused on their fourth album, The Edge uttered that they wanted to create something more serious and arty⁷, thus they chose Brian Eno as the producer. Two months later Bono performed with Bob Dylan and conversed about roots of rock and roll with him and Van Morrison. These two idols had a great impact on the whole band and their fifth album, as Dylan had Bono him to “explore the roots of American and Irish music.”⁸ They finished recording of their fourth album in August, *The Unforgettable Fire* which was released in October and got miscellaneous critiques but it was commercially successful. The upcoming year, 1985, was significantly fruitful for U2, particularly thanks to their participation at Live Aid concert in July against famine in Ethiopia. They played two songs in front of over 72 000 fans. Bono demonstrated the closeness between the band and the audience by getting off stage in the middle of the concert to embrace and dance with a fan, which made the group looking even more amicably and they attracted many new devotees. The Self Aid concert also

⁵ Bill Flanagan: *U2: At the End of the World* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1995), 45.

⁶ Neil McCormick: *U2 by U2* (London: Harpers Collins, 2006), 139.

⁷ McCormick, *U2 by U2*, 147.

⁸ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 74.

inspired Bono to go to Ethiopia with his wife Ali, where they spent almost a month doing humanitarian work. The following year Bono pronounced to be incredibly bad, particularly because of the death of their crew member, Greg Carroll. However, even in this year the band registered a great success as they were awarded by Rolling Stone magazine as the band of the year and the performer of the year. They began work on their fifth album, trying to find an inspiration in the roots of rock and roll and blues music while exploring Central America⁹. That year they had to interrupt the recording in order to perform as the headliner of Amnesty International Conspiracy of Hope tour. The release of the new album *The Joshua Tree* was thus postponed to 1987 and it immediately became the most significant success of the band so far. Astounding 300 000 copies sold during just three days made it the fastest selling album in British music history. The album was awarded by the band's first two Grammy awards in 1988, one for The Best Rock Performance by a Group and the other one for Album of the Year. Later that year, *Rattle and Hum* album and movie is released. The new piece of work is an attempt to explore the roots, a mixture consisting of live played songs, new songs and some non-U2 songs. It was quite well accepted by fans, however, it did not obtain positive reviews as it was regarded as a too serious project interfering music and self-importance. Even though the upcoming year brought the band two new Grammy Awards, the members went through a serious crisis. They tried to avoid the US because of the negative response to their last album and they toured Australia, Japan and some European countries instead. However, the Lovetown Tour was quite frustrating due to Bono's voice problems and a poor scheduling. When the tour was over, Bono pronounced that "it's time for U2 to dream it all up again".¹⁰ The ongoing crisis forced the group to changes. In October 1990, they landed in Germany to work on their new album which resulted in the most dramatic shift in their whole production. The members described it as an extremely hard struggle to agree on the conception of the new work. The Edge was fond of experimental industrial and electronic music and he and Bono wanted to let it influence their new work, while conservative Larry and Adam preferred going back to their original sound.¹¹ The weeks of conflicts and

⁹ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 93.

¹⁰ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 123.

¹¹ Flanagan, *U2: At the End of the World*, 51.

tension were finally over when they improvised one of their most popular songs, “One”, and they felt they had just played something special. Before they finished their new album, some recordings had been stolen from the band and soon released. *Achtung Baby* was finished in September of the following year and, although it differed a lot from any other album U2 had ever released, it became an immediate success. The sound was more industrial and the album cover was colorful and vivid, as well as the new Zoo Tv Tour, which seemed even a bit self-deprecating and very cheerful in comparison with previous tour or *Rattle and Hum* project, which was criticized as a conceited and too serious. Zoo Tv Tour satirized television and other media, the dynamic performances included wearing costumes, a visit of Salman Rushdie on stage or a prank call to the president of the US. During this demanding tour, the group engaged in ecological activism with Greenpeace and they played Stop Sellafeld Show to protest against the plan to operate another nuclear plant in England. They also found the time to work on new materials later released as *Zooropa* in June 1993, while the tour continued until December. The following year passed more quietly for U2 as the group needed to rest. Bono and The Edge spent the most of the time with their families while Adam and Larry focused on improving their musical skills. 1995 is the year when an extremely experimental album *Original Soundtracks* is released under the pseudonym Passengers to distinguish this piece of work from U2's previous production. The collaboration with Luciano Pavarotti brings one of the most favorite songs of Bono himself, “Miss Sarajevo”, nevertheless, the album did not bring a great commercial success. Soon after it appeared in stores, U2 returned to their original style, working in the studio on a new album *Pop*. The group did not seem satisfied with their work as the deadline of the release was postponed until early 1997. *Pop* album was again innovative, incorporating techno and disco elements. The following PopMart Tour did not start well, as U2 played some shows for only half-full stadiums in the US, nevertheless, the tour was much better received in Europe, where the group played many great shows in sold out stadiums. The theme of this tour was also criticism aimed at commercialism that could be seen in its typical looking extravagant stage with a tall yellow arch reminding of McDonald's logo. One of the most unforgettable shows in the history of the band for the members themselves was the Sarajevo Concert, as it was the first great concert in the country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, after the Bosnian war and it seemed to have a positive impact on recently war-torn mind of the audience. With the turn of millennium, the band became even more popular than ever before. Bono focused on charity, fighting for debt relief,

which kept him away from the studio, however, when they finally released the new single “Beautiful Day”, it immediately became a huge hit which later won three Grammy Awards.¹² The whole new album *All That You Can't Leave Behind* became one of the most praised albums of U2. The following Elevation Tour was interrupted by the terrorist attacks in New York on Tuesday, September 11, 2001. The band then performed at Madison Square Garden in New York City which remained in their minds as one of their most emotional and unforgettable performances.¹³ U2's Super Bowl halftime performance in 2002 got very enthusiastic reviews and was considered the best Super Bowl halftime performance of all times.¹⁴ This fruitful year also brought the group another Grammy Awards and Bono again showed his humanitarianism as he officially established an organization DATA, concerning debts, AIDS, trade and Africa. Co-working with Chris Tomas as a new producer in 2003 did not result in material the band expected thus they started to work on their new album again in 2004 with their familiar friend Steve Lillywhite. However, Bono continued to work on his humanitarian causes and it was again hard to keep him in the studio when he was supposed to launch the ONE Campaign in May to support the DATA goals. Seven months of struggling in the studio finally resulted in the new album *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*. U2 soon appeared for the first time in a commercial promoting a digital music player of Apple Computer, performing their single “Vertigo”. Despite the discussions of fans that U2 became sold out, “Vertigo” and later the whole album reached the top spots in the US charts and gained some of the best critiques of the band's history. The prepared Vertigo Tour was announced to be postponed until 2006 due to serious illness of a group's family member, nevertheless, after internal discussions the band starts the Vertigo Tour soon in 2005. The group was then awarded their 22nd Grammy Award this year and they even gained their place in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Another involvement in charity took place soon after, this time through Music Rising during the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in collaboration with punk-rock group Green Day. The same year, U2 released their first official biography and another compilation of their songs *U2-18 Singles*. In 2007, the four Irish

¹² <http://www.u2.com/timeline> (Accessed March 15, 2015)

¹³ <http://www.u2.com/timeline> (Accessed March 15, 2015)

¹⁴ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 245.

musicians arrived to Cannes Film festival to perform before the premiere of their new concert film, *U2 3D*. This project was an experiment with a new type of 3D film technology and it caused very positive reactions: “It was like having the best seat in the house at a U2 concert. Quite amazing.” “This is the future of concert films. It’s going to be hard for conventional 2D rock films to make a splash after people get a look at this”¹⁵, proclaimed a journalist Peter Howell soon after seeing an abbreviated version. Working on the next album in 2008 is accompanied by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois again, but for the first time, these two band’s familiar friends and producers contribute also with song-writing. During this year U2 also decided to sign a new 12-year contract with Live Nation, afterwards they started to work on their twelfth album which was being recorded in the US, the UK, Ireland and also in Morocco in order to get a North African music influence. That implies that the album *No Line on the Horizon*, released in 2009, was made intentionally experimental. The following 360° Tour, which name was suitably chosen thanks to the stage configuration that allowed the spectators to surround the stage almost completely. This whole tour was an enormous success, as every date of it sold out fast and so it became the highest grossing tour in history.¹⁶ 360° Tour lasted until November 2011, since the North American leg must have been postponed due to Bono’s back injury. Another U2 documentary, *From the Sky Down*, had its premiere projected in Canada in September 2011. Two years later, U2 contributed a new song “Ordinary Love” to the film *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom* and this soundtrack immediately became a great hit later awarded a Golden Globe. The newest album by U2, *Songs of Innocence*, was released in September 2014 and as the band continues their partnership with Apple, the album has automatically appeared in the iTunes store of every Apple product user at no cost. The prepared Innocence + Experience Tour is going to start in Vancouver in May 2015 and it is supposed to finish in November 2015 in France. The fact that the tickets have been almost sold out since January confirms that the interest in these four extraordinary musicians and their work has been growing for the last 39 years and that they obviously still have a lot to show.

¹⁵ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 326.

¹⁶ <http://www.u2.com/timeline> (Accessed March 16, 2015)

1.2 The Biographies of the members

1.2.1. Paul 'Bono Vox' Hewson

Paul Hewson was born on May 10, 1960 in Dublin. He grew up in a Christian family, however, his mother, Iris Hewson, was the member of the Church of Ireland and his father, Brendan Robert Hewson, was a Roman Catholic. Both Bono and his older brother Norman were raised Anglican. Paul attended the local primary Glasnevin National School when he had to face the sudden loss of his mother who died of a brain hemorrhage while attending the funeral of her own father. At only 14 years old, Bono felt his loss immensely and he later described it as a huge change in his life, as he even had thoughts of suicide when the house he had been living in was no longer a home, as he said, "it was just a house".¹⁷ In this hard time, Paul became more interested in questions of God and faith, life and death. This tragic experience was probably one of those that only strengthened his faith and he also dedicated few song to Iris, like "I Will Follow" or "Tomorrow". By that time, he attended Mount Temple School and Lypton Village, which was a group of teenagers who liked to entertain themselves by watching Monty Python, inventing their own language or new nicknames instead of sitting in a pub. In the end, they formed two bands, U2 and Virgin Prunes. The Lypton Village membership gave Paul Hewson his stage name Bono, originally "Bonavox of O'Connell Street", after a hearing aid store in Dublin. Bonavox suitably means "good voice" in Latin, so Paul finally accepted this nickname, only making it shorter to "Bono Vox" and later simply to "Bono". He could be grateful for this nickname to his childhood best friend Derek Rowan, "Guggi". At the Mount Temple School, Paul met the rest of the band members, but also his wife Alison Stewart, who he married in August 1982 and later have four kids with her, daughters Jordan and Memphis Eve and sons Elijah Bob Patricius Guggi Q and John Abraham. Since the very beginnings of the band, Bono was seen as a very charismatic front man who attracted attention to the whole group which could be regarded as a quite ordinary one without him. In 1979, Chas de Whalley, a recognized British

¹⁷ Flanagan, *At the End of the World*, 21.

journalist, wrote that “this kid is either gonna be big and burn out quick, or he’s gonna be the new David Bowie. He’s got that kind of thing, which people are only born with and never learn.”¹⁸ Later on, Bono truly won a reputation of a great and heartfelt performer, always amicable with the audience. His strong faith in God, which also caused friction among the members when almost leaving the band, finally resulted in political and ecological activism and charity which became iconic for the singer. He was even criticized for his activism and honest philanthropy, which was by many regarded as false and self-seeking. It also caused some disputes among the members as they had to interrupt recording sessions or a tour because of Bono’s political and charitable activities. His philanthropic career started in 1984 when he collaborated on the Band Aid single “Do They Know it’s Christmas?” A year later, he participated in Live Aid dual concert, which inspired him and his wife to go to Ethiopia, Ajibar, where they spent one whole month doing humanitarian work in orphanage. This month influenced their lives forever, as Bono has focused especially on the prevention of Africa’s greatest problems since then. They came back to Europe moved. He once recounted the story of Ethiopian man who brought his son to see Bono and Alison, asking them to take his son with them to save his young life. Bono said about his return from Ethiopia: “I had no culture shock going, but I had a culture shock coming home. I saw the spoiled child of the Western world.”¹⁹ This was probably the moment when he fully realized and felt how terrible it is that people are dying of starvation unnecessarily and he devoted a great part of his life helping the Africans through charity. Concerning Bono’s political activism, in 1986, U2 played at Self Aid beneficial concert that should have highlighted the high unemployment in Ireland. Then in 1992, Bono met the then president of the US, Bill Clinton, with whom he supported Rock the Vote to engage the youth vote. Six years later, Bono was decided to provide the band’s name to support the campaign of The Good Friday Agreement and to play another beneficial concert, as he had grown in religiously mixed family and he detested religious fanaticism. The same year, he performed “Perfect Day” song with other artists for the BBC Children in Need. A year later, he was awarded with Free Your Mind Award at MTV Europe Music Awards. With his friend,

¹⁸ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 22.

¹⁹ Niall Stokes: *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song* (London: Carlton Books, 2009), 63.

activist and philanthropist Bob Geldof, they were received by the Pope John Paul II to talk about debt forgiveness for developing countries. What became became another project in which Bono participated was Jubilee 2000, a coalition movement which asked for cancellation of third world debt by the year 2000. Bono soon supported also NetAid, performing a beneficial concert in New Jersey that focused on fighting extreme poverty too. The year 2002 was very significant concerning Bono's activism, as he and Bobby Shriver founded the DATA (Debt, AIDS, Trade and Africa) organization which should have been successor to Jubilee 2000 in the US. Bono became more involved in politics, he spent time with politicians to persuade them about the importance of financial help to developing African countries. He said he took a photo with George Bush only because he had promised to contribute 10 million dollars for the next three years, which was a substantial increase of foreign aid within Millennium Challenge Corporation.²⁰ In 2004, he participated as a key-person and a spokesman of the ONE Campaign also fighting against extreme poverty and preventable diseases, particularly in Africa. Again with Bob Gedolf, they helped to organize Live 8 concerts in 2005 to force the world leaders to augment aid, cancel Third World debt and ameliorate conditions of the trade with the world's poorest countries. During the same year, Bono and his wife Ali also founded clothing line EDUN that seeks to promote fair trade. In 2006, Bobby Shriver and Bono co-founded Product Red, which is a brand that serves to increase awareness and raise funds to help to fight AIDS in Africa. This brand is a licensed partner of many popular companies, such as Nike, The Coca-Cola Company, Apple Inc., Starbucks or Converse. Especially thanks to all these philanthropic deeds, Bono was awarded or nominated for various prestigious prizes. The year 2003 brought him his first Nobel Peace Prize nomination and he received a rank of Chevalier dans l'Ordre de la Légion d'Honneur (Knight of the Ordre of Honor) by French then President Jacques Chirac. Two years later he became the Knight of British Empire and he was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for the second time and finally for the third time in 2006. With Bill and Melinda Gates, Bono was chosen the personality of the year by *Time* newspaper. One of the most recent homages, that Paul Hewson received, was another precious french rank, this time Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des

²⁰ Michka Assayas; Bono: *Bono in Conversation with Michka Assayas*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), 97.

Lettres (Commander of the Ordre of Arts and Letters) in 2013. Apart from Bono's political and humanitarian activities, this charismatic renaissance man engages in sports as well, which unfortunately caused him a serious injury in November 2014 as he broke his arm during a bicycle accident. According to his recent statement in the BBC interview, he pronounced he was afraid he might not be able to play guitar anymore.²¹

1. 2. 2. David "The Edge" Howell Evans

David Evans, being referred to especially as "The Edge", was born on August 8, 1961, in Barking, England, into a family of Welsh descent. His parents, Gwenda and Garvin Evans, decided to move to Dublin, where he has been growing up since then with his younger sister Gillian and older brother Richard. After primary school, he started attending Mount Temple School, where he met the rest of U2 members. However, before he could think of becoming a brilliant musician, he and his parents had planned for him to go to university and become a doctor or an engineer. Nevertheless, his musical skills were outstanding since his childhood and because of the band he did not fulfill his academic ambitions. He is admired by his colleagues for being so endowed for playing musical instruments. Not only that he masters playing guitar excellently, having his typical distorted sound lavishly using delay-effects, he plays piano and keyboards in many U2 songs too (e.g. "New Year's Day", "Miss Sarajevo", etc.). The Edge also proved to be a good singer and songwriter, as we can hear in songs "Seconds", "Van Diemen's Land" and "Numb". For his extraordinary contribution to the album *Zooropa* (1993), he is named as its producer, too. Concerning his individual work, we should mention his solo-album *Captive*, containing soundtrack for the film of the same name, *Captive* (1986). All 10 tracks were written by him, 8 of them being instrumental, especially in his favorite ambient styles. He later collaborated with stars like popular female singer Rihanna, rapper Jay-Z but also classy icons such as Tina Turner or Johnny Cash.

²¹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30654731> (Accessed April 17, 2015)

His well-known nickname, The Edge, comes from the times when he and his friends, including Bono, were attending the Lypton Village group. Because of his Christian ideals and his membership in the Shalom Group, he almost left the band during the October Tour.²² Fortunately, both he and Bono decided stay in the band, realizing that they can be Christians and rock musicians too, using their stardom and means to help people in need. He is well known not only for his great talent concerning very characteristic play on guitar, but also for his philanthropy, even though he seems to be, as well as the rest of the group, in the shadow of the grand Bono. He was involved in many beneficial concerts and other charity events with the band, of course, but apart from band activities, he also co-founded Music Rising, the foundation which aims to provide replacement of instruments for those that were lost in Hurricane Katrina in November 2005. The original idea was to help professional musicians, but they soon expanded this charity for churches and schools too.

Regarding his personal life, he is a father to five children. He married his girlfriend from secondary school, Aislin O'Sullivan, in 1983. They had three daughters, Hollie, Arran and Blue Angel. Nonetheless, this couple separated during recording of *Achtung Baby* in 1990. During that tough time, David moved to Adam's place, realizing that his colleagues are definitely his best friends, even though there had been times when he and Adam did not share the same opinions.²³ Three years later, he fell in love with band's choreographer from the Zoo Tv Tour, Morleigh Steinberg, with whom he has two more children: a daughter, Sian, and a son, Levi. The couple got married in 2002.

1.2.3 Lawrence Joseph "Larry" Mullen, Jr.

Larry Mullen, the founder and initiator of the group, was born on 31st October 1961 in Artane, suburb of Dublin. His parents, Laurence Joseph Mullen Sr. and Maureen Mullen, has raised him and his two siblings, older sister Cecilia and later younger sister Mary, who, however, tragically died at the age of nine. Before Larry started attending Mount Temple School, his parents payed him piano lessons. Nonetheless, Larry was not very keen on learning notes and he became much

²² McCormick, *U2 by U2*, 117.

²³ Flanagan, *At the End of the World*, 22.

more interested in drumming. As his parents did not want to waste any more money on some instruments their son would stop playing after a while, Larry had earned his own money to be able to pay lessons of drumming by Joe Bonnie, a well know Irish drummer.²⁴ He grew interested in having a band and so he joined the Artane Boys Band but after three days, he realized he preferred to have his own band. Thus he initiated the first casting in his home. Before Bono came, he thought it would be the “Larry Mullen’s Band.” As well as Bono and The Edge, he too was a member of Lypton Village and got a nickname Jamjar, but it did not catch on. Everyone simply calls him Larry, he only added “Junior” to the end of his name in order to distinguish himself from his father, Larry Mullen Sr., so that his father would not receive Larry’s tax bills anymore. He suffered two tragic losses during his youth. Once when his younger sister Mary died in 1973, and then five years later when his mother was killed in a car accident. This shared life-changing tragedy made a special bond between Larry and Bono who had lost his mother only four years earlier. Larry described their strong friendship: “I didn’t have any brothers, my father was out of whack anyway, so Bono was the link. He said: ‘Look, I understand a bit what you’re going through. Maybe I can help you.’ And he did. Through thick and thin he’s always been there for me. Always.”²⁵ After leaving the school, Larry did not want to continue his studies. He worked in a purchasing department of an American company where he was supposed to become computer programmer. His career with U2 was in danger when they signed their first contract CBS Records. During the first year at Mount Temple School, Larry met Anne Acheson, his partner with whom he has spent more than 30 years. They never got married but they raised three children, two sons, Aaron Elvis and Ezra, and a daughter Ava. During The Joshua Tree Tour, Mullen had an injury and suffered from back pain over the years since then and underwent back surgery before recording sessions for Pop, which made the healing process slower and complicated. Moreover, the pain would not stop. Finally, a German doctor has brought quite curious but effective solution – injections of bull’s blood. Larry since then has been applying this method and he suffers no more.

Concerning Larry’s individual projects beside U2, he co-wrote and co-produced the anthem “Put

²⁴ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 16.

²⁵ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 19.

‘Em Under Pressure’ for the Irish National Football team on the occasion of the World Cup in 1990. Three years later, he and Adam are approached by R.E.M. members who ask them to play at the MTV’s Inaugural Ball for Bill Clinton’s Presidential Inauguration, which Larry described as something impressive that he will never forget.²⁶ Then he and Adam collaborated again, this time on a soundtrack “The Theme for Mission: Impossible” for the film’s release in 1996. Except drumming, he occasionally contributes by playing keyboards and synthesizers during live performances, but he rarely sings. Larry has always been the quietest member of the band who does not enjoy the fame as much as the other three. He does not give many interviews and he always tried to keep his privacy. When he was asked why he does not like giving interviews his answer was: “My job in the band is to play drums, to get up on stage and hold the band together. That’s what I do. At the end of the day that’s all that’s important. Everything else is irrelevant.”²⁷ Even though he does not like being exposed to public, he has starred in few films, including *Man on the Train* and *A Thousand Times Goodnight*.

1.2.4 Adam Charles Clayton

Adam Charles Clayton was born on March 13, 1960, in Chinnor, England. At the age of four, Adam spent a year in Kenya where his parents, Brian and Jo Clayton, found a job in East African Airwaves. A year later, they moved to Dublin where he spent the rest of his life. Adam Clayton had discovered rock'n'roll as a thirteen year old, buying his first acoustic guitar. Then two years later, he persuaded his parents to buy him a bass guitar instead which he preferred: “It just sounded good to me. Deep and fat and satisfying.”²⁸ Adam started to play bass guitar at the age of fifteen, shortly before he founded the band with his three schoolmates. At the beginning of the band’s success, Clayton often felt far from the other three boys who were enthusiastic for the Shalom group while Adam was much less concerned with religion and its importance. He worked for the band as their first manager before more experienced Paul Guinness agreed to

²⁶ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 157.

²⁷ Flanagan, *At the End of the World*, 15.

²⁸ <http://www.u2.com/timeline> (Accessed March 18, 2015)

collaborate with the young band. Adam is considered the “most rock and roll” member of the band as he was the only one from the who ever was busted because of drugs. The possession of small amount of marihuana was led to a donation of £25 000 to the Dublin Women’s Aid Refugee Center to avoid conviction. He also realized and admitted he had problems with alcohol in November 1993, after he could not get on stage to perform a concert in Sydney. His rock-star image was emphasized by his extravagant blond voluminous haircut, colorful clothes and a presence of supermodels, of whom he had a relationship with Naomi Campbell in the early 1990’s. They got engaged, but soon they broke up. Adam was a bachelor until 2013 when he married a Brazilian model Mariana de Carvalho. Before that, he had had another longterm relationship and engagement with Suzanne Smith, but they broke up in 2007. For a long time, he was the only one from the band who did not have a family, until 2010 when he admitted he had fathered a son.²⁹

Concerning Adam’s musical contribution, together with Larry’s drumming his bass provides the rhythm section. Apart from the U2 activities, he and Larry Mullen collaborated with an American singer and songwriter Maria McKee, or an Irish accordion player Sharon Shannon. In 1996, he and Larry cooperated on the soundtrack “The Theme for Mission: Impossible”. Three years later, he performed on *Born Again Savage* album of Little Steven.

²⁹ <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/achtung-baby-adam-is-the-proud-father-of-a-little-boy-26614531.html> (Accessed March 21, 2015)

2. Discography

This chapter is dedicated to the band's complete discography, observing each album in terms of its thematic and musical aspect. Except the listed studio albums, the band has released many singles and some live albums. *Under the Blood Red Sky* (1983) being their first live album, containing songs from *Boy*, *October* and *War*. In 1985 they also released an EP *Wide Awake in America*, containing two new songs "The Three Sunrises" and "Love Comes Tumbling". Some more the noteworthy singles that were not released on studio albums (and thus are not mentioned below) are "The Sweetest Thing" (1998), a song written as an apology for Ali after Bono forgot her birthday; an outstanding love song "Electrical Storm" (2002), "Ordinary Love" (2013), which is a very popular single dedicated to Nelson Mandela, or "Invisible" (2014) of which a part of the proceeds was donated to Product RED foundation to fight against AIDS.³⁰ All the excerpts of lyrics cited below were copied from the band's official web page.³¹

2.1 *Boy* (1980)

The debut album *Boy* started U2's successful career in October 1980. Describing both spiritual and physical transformation of a boy to a man, it attracted a wide audience. All lyrics, written by Bono, are claimed to be autobiographical³². It was not only teenage themes of falling in love, confusion, longing, anger or faith, but also emotional vulnerability caused by Iris Hewson's death, which still was the most dominant life changing experience for Bono. Although U2 played the most of the songs for over two years, their first recording sessions were not as easy as they had expected. However, the explosive burst of their enthusiastic adolescent and a slightly aggressive energy interested Steve Lillywhite, since then their producer and a close friend, enough to lead them to success. Bono was finally pushed to finish definitively the band's songs and some new pieces were written in the studio. U2 admitted early influences by The Clash, The Skids, Penetration or The Cure and many other bands, but they always tried to have their original

³⁰ <http://www.u2.com/discography/index/album/tagName/Singles/albumId/4146>

³¹ <http://www.u2.com/discography/lyrics> (Accessed April 20, 2015)

³² Stokes, *The The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 6.

sound to avoid becoming “neo-something”. *Boy* as a whole is categorized as post-punk or rock, nevertheless the colorful aggressive style of merging lead and rhythm shimmering guitars, Bono’s pleading vocals in combination with spiritual lyrics created an extraordinary piece of work that deservedly brought the young artists fame. *Boy* obtained generally positive reviews and it was often acknowledged with superlatives. According to *The Village Voice*, the New York newspaper, it was placed on 18th position in the Pazz and Jop Best Albums category in 1981. The timeless quality of this album was later confirmed by *Rolling Stone* magazine, which ranked it 417 in 500 Greatest Albums of All Time in 2003, stating that the album was “too ingenuous for punk, too unironic for new wave”, and I would add too romantic for neo-psychedelic, (as it was often falsely classified). Moreover, Amazon.com, a popular American electronic commerce company, appointed *Boy* as the Best Debut Album of All Time. The album, counting 11 songs in total, starts with the single “I Will Follow”, a hit dedicated to Bono’s departed mother Iris. Bono revives his early memories when he sings:

A boy tries hard to be a man
His mother takes him by the hand

The central refrain expresses painful emotions accompanying the separation of the beloved mother and her child:

If you walk away, walk away
I walk away, walk away
I will follow

The following song “Twilight”, with rather symbolic lyrics, even made a part of the world consider U2 a homosexuality supporting band. Especially in America, the gay community understood lyrics, e.g. the verse “In the shadow boy meets man”, thinking that it deals with sexual relationship between a boy and a man. However, Bono perhaps wanted to express that he was trying to avoid his father's protection.³³

The following song, “An Cat Dubh”, meaning A Black cat, is smoothly converted into the next one, “Into the Heart”, and these two were always played live together as well. “Out of Control”

³³ Bill Graham and Caroline von Oosten de Boer: *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, (London: Omnibus Press, 2004), 8.

is the fourth song which presents an idea that “the two most important decisions in your life have nothing to do with you - being born and dying”, how Bono explains, adding that the whole “song is written from a child’s point of view and it is about a vicious circle.”³⁴ The next song “Stories for Boys” was, too, for the ambiguous interpretation of the title and some verses appreciated by gay community. What follows is “The Ocean”, where Bono uses an allusion to Oscar Wild’s famous novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which reveals his avocation in Wild’s writings. “A Day without Me” is concerned with a serious theme of suicide that again resulted from Bono’s own experience with thoughts of leaving this world behind and also from his then recent encounter with a man who had attempted to commit suicide. “Another Time, Another Place” is a song suggesting romantic feelings, singing “I’ll be with you now/We lie on the cloud” as well as Bono’s refusal to pretend a tough male when he is still on the borders of boyhood, awaking “with a tear on his tongue”. The title of the following popular song “The Electric Co.” contains a pun, referring to Electro Convulsive Therapy, in that time a frequently used treatment for mental disorders and depressions. The last song of *Boy* is called “Shadows and Tall Trees” which again implies Bono’s fondness for literature, as the lyrics are inspired by William Golding’s *Lord of Flies*. The main theme seems to be the rejection of adulthood in favor of keeping innocence and purity of childhood as Bono accepts that “adolescent angst and autonomy are effectively inseparable.”³⁵

2.2 *October* (1981)

The second album, released in October 1981, was unfortunately not as well recognized as *Boy*. Its contradictory critiques resulted perhaps from the lack of the time to create it. While the songs for *Boy* had been being thoroughly prepared and perfected for three years, the whole *October* album must have been written from scratch in only 12 weeks.³⁶ This deficiency in time resulted from an unhappy incident when Bono's brief case with all the materials for the prepared new

³⁴ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 12.

³⁵ Bill Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 9.

³⁶ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 22.

album was stolen from him while they were on tour. An urgent need to write the songs in such haste and under pressure left its marks on the quality and so on the popularity of the album. It is still considered as the least popular one of all U2's albums. However, even *October* has its outstanding peaks that became frequently played live and impressed their audience. Especially the first song, "Gloria", with its famous refrain in Latin:

Gloria...in te domine
Gloria..exultate
Gloria Gloria
Oh Lord losen my lips

As the extract from the lyrics above implies, the theme of this song, but also of this whole album, is concerned with faith in God. The lyrics of "Gloria" also describe feeling of confusion and inability to express oneself correctly without God:

I try to sing this song
I...I try to stand up
But I can't find my feet
I try, I try to speak up
But only in you I'm complete

The reason of such a theme was again the then personal experience of Bono, The Edge and Larry, who entered the Shalom Fellowship commune and fell for it completely. It was a hard time for the band, as they had just became rock musicians and their catholic friends kept telling them that Christ and "devil's music" were decidedly exclusive.³⁷ The theme of faith and allusions, e.g. to Jesus Christ (#6 "Tomorrow") or a holy city of Jerusalem and crucifixion (#8 "With a Shout") recur throughout the whole album mixing with expressions of adolescent confusion and anger (#3 "I Threw a Brick through a Window"). Regarding their instrumental innovations, The Edge takes a seat behind a piano for the first time, in songs such as #2 "I Fall Down", #7 "October", #9 "Stranger In a Strange Land" and #10 "Scarlet". They also experiment with dance rhythms in #8 "With a Shout" while in #4 "Rejoice", the sound of The Edge's guitar becomes more noisy and blurred. As well as their first album, also *October* contains a song devoted to Bono's departed mother Iris. It is the sixth song called "Tomorrow" which laments her sudden death, singing:

³⁷ Flanagan, *At the End of the World*, 46–48.

I want you to be back tomorrow
Will you be back tomorrow
...
I'm gonna be there mother
I'm going out there
And you're gonna be there

The fifth song “Fire” was the first single of *October* and it was ranked on 35th place in the UK singles chart. Listeners, who would not know about their interest in Bible would probably understand it as a song about a nuclear Armageddon, but it is in fact apocalyptic in tone, implicitly signaled the underlying biblical frame of reference. The last song of the album #11 “Is That All?” was not considered a good and necessary end-piece by critics. Larry’s drumming sounds incoherent and confused while Edge plays a creative riff, which is, however, borrowed from their previous work, a song called “The Cry”. Even Bono himself declared that they realized it was not a good idea to add this song to the rest of *October*.³⁸

2.3 *War* (1983)

The third album in order, released in February 1983, brought the band their first commercial success outside of *Union Jack*. U2 did not only show that they could play hard enough against synthesized pop even when punk descended under threat, but also that they could create some meaningful and deep lyrics expressing not only feelings of adolescence, but also their personal political beliefs commenting on adult matters. The name for the album was characteristic as the band decided to declare war on everything that was cynical, hypocritical, limiting or defeatist.³⁹ They became more aggressive, harsher and louder in sound, as Edge’s guitar became more “sharp” and “rugged”, Adam’s playing sounded more assertive and Larry’s drumming became more emphatic too. But also concerning their lyrics we could state that they proved themselves to be able to publicly spread their message with the theme of their political beliefs which partially

³⁸ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 33.

³⁹ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 35.

replaced adolescent matters and faith. After not so successful *October* album, the four young musicians regained their confidence as rebellious rock and post-punk artists. This album contains some real hits that are played live until these days, especially their famous political song “Sunday Bloody Sunday” or the single “New Year’s Day”⁴⁰. Particularly thanks to these popular songs the Rolling Stone magazine ranked the album on 40th place on the list of “The 100 Greatest Albums of the 80’s” in 1989 and in 2012, it was again ranked number 223 on the list of “The 500 Greatest Albums of All Time” in the same magazine.

Starting with “Sunday Bloody Sunday”, the album contains 10 songs in total. Already the first song became a huge hit, with Bono’s symbolic waving a white flag during live performances. This is their most political song alluding to Bloody Sunday, an incident that happened on 30 January 1972 in Derry, Northern Ireland, when British soldiers shot 26 unarmed citizens of whom 14 people died. This song will be analyzed in chapter 3 (3.1).

The next song called “Seconds” is the first one where The Edge sings leading vocals. It deals with the danger of nuclear proliferation. Bono expressed his fears concerning nuclear catastrophe saying: “We are the first generation of people to have live with that possibility. It’s all around us, it’s in our heads. And it affects the way people feel about the world. I always saw it in apocalyptic terms. For the first time, it became possible – it is possible – to destroy everything.”⁴¹

“New Year’s Day”, the third track in order was the first single of this album and it immediately gained the position 10 in the UK single chart. This hit might be considered a love song, but one of an extraordinary depth. It was inspired by all the unrest that was shown in the media, all the conflicts that seemed to be everywhere, Adam recalls.⁴² This song was also understood as an allusion to the Polish Solidarity movement, but it was more of a coincidence, as the song was already recorded when U2 became informed about the situation in Poland.⁴³ The fourth song called “Like a Song” is noisy, full of anger, trying to prove that U2 still play punk even in the

⁴⁰ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 15.

⁴¹ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 38.

⁴² Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 39.

⁴³ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 16.

days when it was synthesized pop what grew more and more popular. Bono himself later commented on that saying “I think ‘Like a Song’ was addressed to the critics, who didn’t get what we were about, who thought we weren’t really punk enough. That’s a subject that comes up again and again because people really do fall for this rebel thing.” He even adds, that this fact had become a cliché and that rebellious manners had sense in 50’s and 60’s, being against the conservative backdrop, while in these days it was just about dressing up.⁴⁴ The following song “Drowning Man” is different from the rest of the album. It is a very quiet atmospheric song exploring the themes of higher spiritual love and selflessness. #6 “Refugee” was probably inspired by Bono’s stay in America, where he realized a similarity of the experience of an Irish emigrant in America with that of an Afro-American. As the next song’s name suggests, “Two Hearts Beat as One” is a love song which was written by Bono on his honeymoon with his new wife Ali. However, it is not a typical love song full of romantic or plaintive words or melodies, singing:

Well I can't stop the dance
Maybe this is my last chance
I said, 'I can't stop the dance
Maybe this is my last chance'

It is very energetic, but as Niall Stokes: *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song* observes in his *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, the refrain sounds as if Bono excuses himself to Ali, maybe because he has not written something more serious and romantic. “Red Light” was inspired by U2’s visit in Amsterdam, where they observed renowned Amsterdam Red Light, a destination where prostitutes offer their services. Even though it has an unusual theme for U2, the song was never recognized very well.

The ninth song “Surrender” deals with the themes of ego and selflessness. The guitars, bass and drums do not sound very loud, they seem to fade away to create the right atmosphere for Bono’s surrendering vocals. The last song on *War* is called “40”. Is is a short track which was recorded in their last hour in the studio, as Bono recalls:

When we were making our third record, the War LP, we were

⁴⁴ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 40.

being thrown out of the studio by the studio manager because we had overrun or something and we had one more song to do. We wrote this song in about ten minutes, we recorded it in about ten minutes, we mixed it in about ten minutes and we played it, then, for another ten minutes and that's nothing to do with why it's called '40'.⁴⁵

It became a closer to the most of their shows in the 1980's. This last song perfectly suits with the opener "Sunday Bloody Sunday", of which the pleading request transforms into a peaceful prayer

2.4 The Unforgettable Fire (1985)

Released in October 1985, the fourth album *The Unforgettable Fire* brought the most dramatic shift in U2's direction so far and has been often considered their most pivotal album. After the aggressive punk-rock *War* album, both the band and their producer Steve Lillywhite knew it was time for change. Even though Brian Eno was not their original idea for a new producer, and he neither wanted to accept their offer at first, their collaboration resulted in a brilliant piece of innovative work. The whole band wanted to create something more arty and serious⁴⁶, maybe something more experimental. The Edge had admired the work of a famous musician and producer for a long time, Brian Eno, who is mostly known as a principal innovator of ambient music. Eno brought his assistant and a talented producer too, Daniel Lanois. The result was a bit experimental and improvisational but cohesive album of a rich symphonic sound. The album was being recorded in Windmill Lane Studios, but especially the first half of the recording also took place at Slane Castle. The group of musicians was even living there, recording in a gothic ballroom to let draw inspiration from the atmosphere. In combination with Eno's knowledge concerning avant-garde and ambient music and Lanois' experience with rhythms, the newly recorded album was atypically atmospheric and innovative for the punk-rock band. Larry's

"TranscribedU2".http://web.archive.org/web/20110723125526/http://fneep.fiffa.net/?page_id=136 (Accessed April 15, 2015)

⁴⁶ McCormick, *U2 by U2*, 147.

drums lost its martially march-like rhythm from *War* in favor of funkier and lighter sound and the emphasized bass became more subtle as well, while The Edge's guitar got an ambient sound. There was again a problem with lyrics, or more likely with finishing texts until dead-line. However, even though some lyrics remained "sketches-like", they perfectly correspond with the dreamy atmosphere of the instrumental part of the work. Bono improvises or uses free associations. Brian Eno intended to teach U2 some European experimental musical vocabulary and so he did, helping to create their most "European" record.⁴⁷ However, *The Unforgettable Fire* embodies various themes, some of the lyrics revealed Bono's admiration for American icons. Especially the greatest hit of the album, but also the most successful song of the band so far, #2 "Pride (In the Name of Love)", which was a tribute to Martin Luther King. This song will be analyzed in depth in the chapter 3.2. The last track of the album, #10 "MLK", named after an abbreviation of initial letters of his name, was composed as an elegy to Martin Luther King too. Another allusion made to an American idol can be found in track #9 "Elvis Presley and America", which demonstrates how much the new producers were fond of experimenting. Eno and Lanois slowed down the backing of the first song, "A Sort of Home Coming", and told Bono to improvise⁴⁸ – just like Elvis would do. It was a reaction to an unflattering portrayal of Elvis Presley in his biography written by Albert Goldman, but the song was maybe misunderstood as it was not well recognized by the critics and it did not become the band's classics either. Although it sounds like an unfinished song in progress, we can still appreciate Bono's charismatic improvisation. A purely ambient piece of improvising is the track #6 "4th July". Even though one might expect it as an attempt to celebrate the Independence Day, this short instrumental song is probably just another pensive experiment of Eno, who enjoyed recording Adam's and Edge's relaxed strumming. Another improvisation appears with the fifth song "Promenade" which offers wide imagery and open interpretation.

There are various themes merging on the album. An example of a recurring theme of the album is also the danger of heroin abuse which had just become widely spread in Dublin, also among Bono's friends. It is not perfectly explicit from the lyrics, but Bono later admitted that he was

⁴⁷ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 22.

⁴⁸ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 26.

fascinated by the “flirting with death that’s a part of heroin use”⁴⁹, expressing these thoughts in the third song “Wire”:

Such a nice day
Throw your life away
Such a nice day
Let it go

The other song that deals with drugs abuse is #7 “Bad”. This song has even more implicit lyrics that Eno decided to leave unfinished. They seem to represent fragments of thoughts of a drug user who is “wide awake”, wishing “he could just let it go”:

If I could, you know I would
If I could, I would let it go.
This desperation, dislocation
Separation
Condemnation
Revelation
In temptation
Isolation
Desolation
Let it go
And so to fade away
To let it go
And so to fade away
I’m wide awake

“Bad” became one of the most frequently performed songs. During the Joshua Tree Tour in 1987, Bono presented the song as dedicated to his departed friend who over-dosed himself with heroin and he warns the audience of this dangerous kind of amusement. I personally find this song the most impressive one of the whole album, as it deals with such a serious theme in a very peculiar way. It was criticized for being too fuzzy, confused and unfinished, but I suppose that its form perfectly suits the main idea. The stream of consciousness seems to express the feelings and states of confused and desperate drug addicts just plausibly.

The name of the fourth song, “The Unforgettable Fire”, alludes to a travelling Japanese exhibition to commemorate the catastrophe of Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing. The soft

⁴⁹ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 51.

nostalgic melody, however, does not seem to correspond with the horror of nuclear holocaust. Also the lyrics that Bono wrote do not seem to have a connection with such a tragedy. The lyrics are more of an emotional travelogue which could be also regarded as a love song.

2.5 *The Joshua Tree* (1987)

The band was becoming more and more famous, especially after their unforgettable performance at Live Aid in 1985. However, after releasing *The Joshua Tree* album, their fame increased dramatically. The album immediately became a sensation, the singles attacked first places in the US Single Charts and they have been still frequently played on the radio until today. The album also brought the band their first two Grammy Awards and many other less or more prestigious prizes. In total, more than 25 million copies were sold, and it became the fastest selling album of all time in the US.⁵⁰ Such an enormous success was also a great merit of musical legends as Bob Dylan or Van Morrison, who had just befriended U2 and inspired them a lot. Talking with them, U2 realized they did not really know the roots of Irish or American music, such as gospel and blues.⁵¹ While The Edge was fond of European music and he wanted the album to continue where *The Unforgettable Fire* stopped, Bono preferred to explore different genres. He was already set on America as a theme, the country he loved for its open space, freedom, ideals and literature but he also felt antipathy to its foreign policy. The musicians went the US to explore the country and Adam Clayton later recalled that the desert had been immensely inspirational to them as a mental image for the record.⁵² It also provided them an idea for the name of the album, as “Joshua Tree” is the hardiest cactus in American deserts that is able to endure extreme droughts.

To contrast with the popular growing synthesized pop and new wave music, this time they decided to experiment with blues and gospel. This tendency can be regarded in the single

⁵⁰ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 60.

⁵¹

⁵² Stoke, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 72.

“I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” where we can hear choir-like vocals of Eno and Edge accompanying Bono’s heartfelt singing. Tracks “Running to Stand Hill” and “Trip through Your Wires” features harmonica and bluesy rhythms which were atypical for U2. Throughout the whole *The Joshua Tree*, Edge’s guitar got its present-day characteristic sound, using the delay effect. Its ambient sound became echo-laden, which we can notice in “With or Without You” or “Where the Streets Have No Name”. What changed as well was the song-writing. Bono himself later proclaimed that he had used to consider thorough songwriting old-fashioned so he mostly improvised behind the microphone, used imagination and associations and he never devoted much time to writing “poetry”. But as he had been always fond of literature, it was a matter of time when he would himself become a real “poet”. The lyrics of *The Joshua Tree* are not just unfinished symbolic fragments of Bono’s thoughts and ideas, but he became more precise with what he wanted to express. The themes of the album are various, again reflecting Bono’s recent experiences and feelings, also of sorrow and crisis. The first song and a brilliant single “Where the Streets Have no Name” was being prepared for too long until it was precisely recorded. Brian Eno even wanted to delete it from the album as he was angry for how much time the band needed to perfect it. It implies a desire of anonymity. A desire to cut and run somewhere where the streets, nor celebrities like Bono, have no name.⁵³ The following songs in the order, #2 “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” and #3 “With or Without You” have demonstrated that U2 are not only a great post-punk and rock and roll musicians but that they are capable of producing pop songs too. However, the deep meaningful lyrics and creative instrumentation of these two hits could be hardly compared with the most of present mainstream pop music. “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For”, as the name suggests, deals with a quest, which seems to be the quest for faith. For the first time, Bono as a religiously interested song writer expresses his possible doubts and disillusion, singing that he still has to search. Nevertheless, the spiritual choirs in the background do not evoke any kind of despair or depression. On the contrary, Bono’s soulful singing suggests pleasure from looking forward to the spiritual challenge ahead.⁵⁴ “With or Without You” became immensely popular in the US and worldwide. It is not hard to

⁵³ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 62.

⁵⁴ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 31.

find out why - it is their first “adult” love song dealing with a crisis that arrives a in every serious long-term relationship. Bono’s heartfelt vocals admit his surrender and the state of ego loss when singing: “She’s got me with/Nothing to win/and nothing left to lose.” But when he sings: “And you give yourself away/And you give yourself away”, it reveals also Bono’s feeling about the band. It is not only a love song concerning serious relationships, but it can be regarded as a song describing feelings of the band members, describing crisis within the group of friends and dear colleagues as well.

The following song, #4“Bullet the Blue Sky” was inspired by Bono’s traveling experience in Nicaragua and El Salvador where he observed the terrible living conditions of inhabitants of Central America and their justified fear. This song will be analyzed in chapter 3.3. A similar theme recurs in #11 “Mothers of the Disappeared” which is a lament dedicated to Asociación Madres de Plaza de Mayo, association supporting the mothers whose children were kidnapped or killed during the civil war at the hands of the local government.⁵⁵ As well as the previous album, also *The Joshua Tree* contains a song dealing with drug addiction. Bono was inspired by a story of an addicted couple when writing #5 “Running to Stand Still”. The following song #6 “Red Hill Mining Town” was inspired by the Mining Strike of 1984 in England which affected families severely. Another single, first released in North America, #7”In God’s Country” is again inspired by America, being personified:

Desert rose
Dreamed I saw a desert rose
Dress torn in ribbons and in bows
Like a siren she calls to me

The next song #8” Trip Through Your Wires” is one of the songs that are heavily influenced by blues and folk music, reminding of busker’s songs. The ninth song “One Tree Hill” is dedicated to the departed member of U2 crew, Greg Carroll. The track featuring exotic Maori rhythm alludes to a hill – volcano – in New Zealand where Carroll’s funeral took place. The following track #10 “Exit” was inspired by protagonist of Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song*.⁵⁶ It is

⁵⁵ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 98.

⁵⁶ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 73.

quite atypical song for U2, discordant, loud and angry but very impressive. It perfectly evokes the sense of evil as it portrays a mind of a serious killer careening into psychosis:

His head it felt heavy
As he came across the land
A dog started crying
Like a broken-hearted man
...
He went deeper into black
Deeper into white
He could see the stars shine
Like nails in the night

2.6 *Rattle and Hum* (1988)

After the innovative *The Joshua Tree*, U2 decided to release a live album accompanied by a *Rattle and Hum* documentary concert film. Because the band only had one short live album so far, *Under the Blood Red Sky* from 1983, they wanted to make a dramatic and revealing rock movie. Both the album and the film were quite well recognized by their fans, nevertheless, it obtained contradictory but in general not very positive reviews. They were accused of self-importance; the whole project was regarded as an act of haughtiness, “blasphemously elevating the band to the pantheon of rock gods.”⁵⁷ It contains some cover songs, starting with “Helter Skelter” by Beatles. It seems to be an appropriate beginning of an album by which the band wanted to express the chaos of becoming “super rock stars” suddenly. The song is loud, noisy and full of energy. The following track #2 “Van Diemen’s Land”, an immigrant song, had its lyrics written by The Edge, alluding to the Great Famine, a social and economic catastrophe in 1847 in Ireland after which thousands of Irishmen immigrated to the US, trying to save their lives. The third song in order, #3 “Desire” gained the first place in the UK Single Charts quickly which made The Edge very satisfied, as he said: “I liked about ‘Desire’ the fact that it was totally not what people were listening to. It was a rock’n’roll song, not a pop song.”⁵⁸ Some of the songs

⁵⁷ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 36.

⁵⁸ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 77.

could be regarded as tributes. #4 “Hawkmoon 269” is in a part a tribute to Sam Sheperd, the author of *Hawk Moon*. The number 269 is the number of times the group mixed the song, they claimed to work on it for three weeks⁵⁹, which is highly unusual for U2. The following cover song by Bob Dylan, #5 “All Along the Watchtower” was too improvised and thus not very well recognized by the critics, perhaps because of the lack of its rehearsals before the live performance. The album then contains three live played songs from previous albums: “Pride (In the Name of Love)”, “I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” and “Bullet the Blue Sky”. A short excerpt “Freedom for my People” by street buskers Sterling Magee and Adam Gussow was placed on the album as well. Its point seems to be to show that even big rock stars as U2 can get inspired by rough street performers. The eighth song “Silver and Gold” is an attack on apartheid, a system of racial segregation in Africa. It is aimed against imperialism, race superiority and dominance, repression and exploitation. Some new songs were recorded in Sun Studio on Memphis, which is where legends such as Johnny Cash or Elvis Presley used to record. One of them, #10 “Angel of Harlem” was a tribute to Billie Holiday, an American jazz singer nicknamed Lady Day. This song became a “jukebox” song, as Bono said: “That’s the one that people play in bars.”⁶⁰ #11 “Love Rescue Me” was co-written with Bob Dylan and it deals with a spiritual quest. The following duet #12 “When Love Comes to Town” was written by Bono for B.B. King, American blues musician. It merges gospel and blues, as King sings:

I was there when they crucified my Lord
I held the scabbard when the soldier drew his sword
I threw the dice when they pierced his side
But I’ve seen love conquer the great divide.

The next song “Heartland” was originally written for *The Joshua Tree*, but its release was postponed. As the name suggest, it could be regarded as a love song to a country. The fourteenth song, “God Part II” is partly a tribute to John Lennon, who wrote a song “God” with a very similar lyrical structure. Bono also assaults on Albert Goldman in the lyrics, the author of

⁵⁹ McCormick, *U2 by U2*, 203.

⁶⁰ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 83.

controversial biographies of Elvis Presley and John Lennon. Goldman expresses his highly unflattering subjective opinions on these two respected musicians, to which Bono reacts:

I don't believe in Goldman
His type like a curse
Instant Karma's gonna get him
If I don't get him first

The next short excerpt #15 “The Star Spangled Banner” is taken from famous Woodstock performance of Jimi Hendrix. The final track of *Rattle and Hum* is a popular single “All I Want Is You”. This track featuring Van Dyke Parks string arrangement features a romantic melody and Bono’s vocals are soft and calming. This love song seems to be about his early relationship with his wife Ali, concerning the matter of commitment and marriage. Both musically and thematically, it seems to protrude from the rest of the album, but it is a soothing and pleasant ending of all the “rattle and hum”.

2.7 *Achtung Baby* (1991)

After the contradictory reception of *Rattle and Hum*, U2 needed to rest for a while. They did not want to dismiss the band as many fans were afraid after their longest pause so far, however, during the recording of the new album in newly reunified Germany, Hansa Studio in Berlin, they had a serious crisis which almost led to breakup. The main reason were frequent disputes concerning the band’s new direction. While Edge was inspired by industrial and electronic dance music and Bono seemed opened to experimenting with new genres too but Larry and Adam wanted to stick with their original style, they still preferred classic rock. Even their producers, Eno and Lanois, had disputes with the band members as they were trying to come up with something different than the band had been producing so far. Finally the weeks of tense atmosphere were broken when the band improvised “One” for the first time. Edge recalls: “At the instant we were recording it, I got a very strong sense of its power... ‘One’ is an incredibly moving piece. It hits straight into the heart.”⁶¹ The recording of *Achtung Baby*, held partly in

⁶¹ McCormick, *U2 by U2*, 221.

Berlin and then in Dublin, was a hard struggle for U2 and probably for the whole team, also because some demo recordings were stolen from the band and they leaked before the album was released.⁶² However, the album brought incredible success; it obtained a Grammy Award and other prizes and nominations. Its singles, especially “The Fly” and “One” dominated UK Single charts. “One” was then chosen as The Best Single and Bono was named as The Best Songwriter by The Rolling Stone Magazine. It is categorized as alternative rock; some of the tracks are experimental, featuring industrial sounds and influences of electronic dance music. Already the first song “The Zoo Station” is intentionally very experimental and industrial in sound, perhaps to shock the listeners immediately by the change the band went through. Bono’s voice is changed by distortion, Larry’s drums are hard and industrial, Edge’s guitar is heavily distorted too, having sort of broken sound. In some songs, Bono’s voice is not so open throated and full as on *The Joshua Tree*, but more whispering, breathy and in lower vocal register. The Edge enjoys using special effect pedals, e.g. in a popular single #2 “Even Better than the Real Thing” or when playing the funky optimistic riff in #7 “Mysterious Ways”. These two hits are about extraordinary women, one, who is “even better than the real thing”, being pleased to give “him” another chance. “Mysterious Ways”, being one of the most optimistic tracks of the album, deals with a mysterious woman and the way she entrances men and it is addressed to the seduced man. Thematically, this album is the much more personal and introspective than any previous one by U2. They usually included some politically or socially engaged lyrics, however, *Achtung Baby* is more concerned with themes of love, relationship and its crisis (“One”, “Love is Blindness”), sexuality (“So Cruel”, “Even Better Than the Real Thing”, “Mysterious Ways”), commitment, obsession and possessiveness (“So Cruel”), hypocrisy and weakness (“Acrobat”).⁶³ The album as a whole has slightly depressive mood, inspired by disputes of the members among themselves, but also by personal crisis of Edge who had just moved out from his wives and his three daughters and has been staying at Adam Clayton’s place instead.⁶⁴ An outstanding piece is the thematically interesting fourth song, “Until the End of the World”. Its main theme is betrayal, it

⁶² McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 136.

⁶³ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 93–105.

⁶⁴ Flanagan, *At the End of the World*, 15.

could be applied to a marriage or a relationship, but it is in the form of a fictive conversation between Jesus and Judas of Iscariot.

We were as close together as a bride and groom
We ate the food, we drank the wine
Everybody having a good time
Except you
You were talking about the end of the world

The first strophe alludes to the last supper while the second stanza describes betraying kiss in the garden of Gethsemane:

In the garden I was playing the tart
I kissed your lips and broke your heart
You...you were acting like it was
The end of the world

Although it is concerned with such a spiritual biblical theme, or in general a serious theme of betrayal, it features quite an easy melody and creative guitar riffs. The next song “Who’s Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses” is again concerned with relationships, this time it seems to be about sexual jealousy⁶⁵, a couple disputing: “Well, you lied to me/cause I asked you to”. It, as well as “Until the End of the World” starts with loud industrial distorted noises. Another song dealing with jealousy, but also a scary possessiveness, is #6 “So Cruel”. It is a desperate lament of a hurt lover who is still in love with his torturer, probably inspired by the torment The Edge had to go through when splitting up with Aislin. The following song #7 “The Fly” perfectly contrasts and clashes in style with its preceding song. It is very playful as Bono changes his vocals from whispering, using distortion and then changing his soaring male voice into female falsetto, all that while wearing oversized sunglasses to represent “the Fly”. The ninth song “Tryin’ to Throw Your Arms around the World”, featuring a not very expressive calm melody, is sang from a drunkard’s point of view, heading home early in the morning, inspired by Bono’s dark “rockstar” side and it is dedicated to The Flaming Colossus club in Los Angeles.⁶⁶ The last three songs are

⁶⁵ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 104.

⁶⁶ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 50.

again concerned with long-term relationship and the painful feelings that always arrive with its crisis. #10 “Ultraviolet (Light My Way)” expresses tense atmosphere and suffering from forcing obligations in a dysfunctional relationship. In #11 “Acrobat”, the singer reveals himself as hypocritical, warning his love, singing:

Don't believe what you hear
Don't believe what you see
If you just close your eyes
You can feel the enemy
And I must be an acrobat
To talk like this and act like that

The last song #12 “Love Is a Blindness” closes the album with a conclusion that love is blind, causing “the inability to distinguish day from night”.⁶⁷

The third song, and the best recognized single of the album, “One”, is an outstanding and still extremely popular song about love. It literally saved the band, as they were considering breaking up before Bono and The Edge improvised the moving melody and words. For the first sight, it seems to be a classic love song about strong feelings of guilt and forgiveness. Being very universal, the interpretation of the lyrics may vary, though. Three video clips were filmed, each drawing on a different interpretation of the song.⁶⁸ “One” was also understood as a conversation between a father and HIV positive homosexual son. Alternatively, as Bono stated, “One” was written about the band, that had just went through a great crisis. Following excerpts from lyrics suggest that even these interpretations are suitable:

Is it getting better
Or do you feel the same
Will it make it easier on you now
You got someone to blame
...
Well it's
Too late
Tonight
To drag the past out into the light

⁶⁷ Flanagan, *At the End of the World*, 20.

⁶⁸ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 95.

We're one, but we're not the same
We get to
Carry each other
Carry each other
...
Have you come here for forgiveness
Have you come to raise the dead?

2.8 *Zooropa* (1993)

During a break in the Zoo TV Tour, the band, who just regained their confidence, felt full of relaxed creativity. They were still being influenced by alternative music genres that deviated the new album from rock. This surreal pop album finally contains 10 songs, even though they originally had intended to release only a short one. However, it was not an easy work, as they had to perform concerts per day and come back to the studio at night. Zoo TV Tour was an immense madness; it was different from previous tours. Bono enjoyed himself wearing costumes of “The Fly” or “Macphisto” during performances which made the band look more self-deprecating (which was probably a good way to make people forget all the critics about being too haughty and serious). They were satirizing television and media and funny prank calls were made during concerts on stage. As well as the tour, also *Zooropa* is more concerned with materialism, media, celebrities and nightlife. These themes also make the album the least emotional album of U2. Already the first song called after the album, “Zooropa”, starts with advertising slogans of famous world brands, such as Audi, Colgate or Zanussi. The second song “Babyface” is, too, inspired by advertising and media. But the greatest inspiration resulted probably from the band’s new friendships with supermodels Kate Moss and Christy Turnington or Naomi Campbell, Adam Clayton’s new partner, as the lyrics say:

Babyface, babyface
Cover girl with natural grace
How could beauty be so kind
To an ordinary guy?

Also songs #5 “Stay (Faraway so close) or #6 “Daddy’s Gonna Pay for your Crashed Car” deals with nightlife and girls. While “Stay” features a sentimental melody and the lyrics seem to sympathize with the nightlife woman, the sixth song, starting with Soviet Melodia fanfare⁶⁹, portrays the protagonist as a spoiled girl who never has to suffer the consequence of her fails, as the title suggests. The third song, “Numb”, written and sang by The Edge seems to reflect his own actual emotional numbness caused by the end of his relationship with Aislin. The following dance song “Lemon” is about imagination and muse itself. This time, it was again Bono’s mother⁷⁰, who inspired him to write it, even though it is not very well recognizable from the lyrics. Other themes appearing on the album seem to be everyday life routine, Bono singing “Some Days Are Better than Others”, revealing his moody nature. The eighth song called “The First Time” deals with a loss of faith, as Bono explained, adding: “I haven’t lost my faith. I’ve a great deal of faith. But that song expresses that moment a lot of people feel.”⁷¹ #9 “Dirty Day” started as band’s improvisation was lyrically influenced by Charles Bukowski, as the last line is borrowed from him: “The days, days, days run away like horses over the hill”. It deals with responsibilities and a feeling of guilt when not respecting them. The last track “The Wanderer” features an American legend, Johnny Cash, on vocals. This humorous epilogue alludes to the Bible, being a parable of a lonely wanderer seeking for truth:

Now Jesus, don't you wait up
Jesus I'll be home soon.
Yeah, I went out for the papers
Told her I'd be back by noon. Yeah
I left with nothing but the thought you'd be there too
Looking for you

2.9 Pop (1997)

After alternative *Zooropa*, the thousands of fans were awaiting the new album impatiently. However, it was expected with certain nervousness, prejudice and concerns. Partly because the

⁶⁹ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 54.

⁷⁰ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 111.

⁷¹ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 117.

band postponed the date of the release twice and also because there were speculations concerning the band's genre direction. Media reported that U2 were making a dance music album which shocked their devotees.⁷² *Zooropa* was alternative and funky, featuring industrial, electronic and techno sounds, but the stalwart fans who had liked U2 since *Boy* album perhaps wished they would stop experimenting in this modern area. The name of the album was chosen on purpose to show they are not afraid to be accused of playing some lower form of music. And they were right, even this not very rock and roll album gained them position 1 in charts of 21 countries in the first week after release. But *Pop* is definitely not a dance music record. It has funky rhythms and, as some of the songs are left over from *Zooropa* recordings, there are themes as nightlife again and some songs are very playful, combining heavy rock guitars and electronic and distorted sounds.

Already the first single "Discotheque" fuses rock and electronic sound in an amusing way evoking euphoria from dancing and parties. U2 were accused that this song is inspired by drug experience, but nothing like that was ever confirmed. Only that it is about euphoria, no matter if caused by love for God, sex, music or even drugs. The following track "Do You Feel Loved" is a strange kind of love song, featuring shallow simple melody, nothing serious. From the lyrics and its tone, we can guess that it is concerned with sex and conversations of lovers. Similarly erotic atmosphere is included in the tenth song of *Pop*, "If You Wear That Velvet Dress". Bono's relaxed low whispering vocals are accompanied by slow jazz melody, evoking feelings of late night.

When The Edge was asked what the central themes of the album were, he answered: "Love, desire, the crisis of faith. Usual stuff." The crisis of faith is strongly expressed in the fourth song, "If God Will Send his Angels". The preceding song "Mofo" is another song concerning Bono's departed mother Iris. This plea to Bono's mother starts with line "Looking for to fill that God shaped hole" alluding to Blaire Pascal's theory, that everyone has a God-shaped vacuum in his heart that cannot be filled with anything but faith.⁷³ The fifth song, "Starring at the Sun" succeeded in the UK single charts with its third place. Its catchy positive melody with acoustic

⁷² Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 62.

⁷³ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 64.

guitars remind of Oasis' hit *Wonderwall*, which might have inspired U2 as Bono saw their live performance in March 1996 and felt very impressed.⁷⁴ "Last Night on Earth", discarded from *Zooropa*, found its place on *Pop*. Bono's best friend Guggi likes this song for expressing the feeling of meeting a special female stranger who gives one a "vibe, a charge of energy", which suggests that its theme is again clearly sexual and concerned with nightlife and parties. A sorrowful event, death of the band's old friend, the *Hot Press Magazine* writer Bill Graham, influenced the band's thinking too. The seventh song named "Gone" is very emotional regarding the lyrics but also its echoing fuzzy atmosphere. When the four musicians lacked inspiration, they decided to change the environment and spend some time in Miami. That is also the name of their eighth track, "Miami". Even though the place was perhaps impressive and amusing, the shallow song does not seem to evoke the same sensation. The following song "The Playboy Mansion" is another relaxed track but this it is funkier and the easy mood is done better. Bono starts the song by naming American clichés and slogans of pop culture, accompanied by Edge's clear guitar and backing vocals. As the album starts optimistically with "Discotheque" cheerful rhythms, it ends in desperate melodies and pleas. The eleventh track "Please" is a song of disillusionment, self-indulgence and hypocrisy.⁷⁵ Also its melody is sad and bitter. The final song "Wake up Dead Man" is not very different in mood. Bono is speaking to God, he feels that people do not believe in him, because he is dead. And if he is not, they would like to ask a few questions. Another song dealing with loss of faith and doubts even starts with cursing and Jesus' name within the same stanza, which is quite surprising and daring for our Christian band, implying that Bono is probably desperate and annoyed:

Jesus, Jesus help me
I'm alone in this world
And a fucked-up world it is too

⁷⁴ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 182.

⁷⁵ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 133.

2. 10 *All That You Can't Leave Behind* (2000)

With the approach of the millennium the band reunited with their old friends and former producers, Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno. The tenth album of U2, returning back to more conservative rock, brought the band incredible seven Grammy Awards, especially thanks to popular singles “Beautiful Day”, “Walk On” and “Stuck in the Moment You Can’t Get out Of”. Looking back at the past decades, the band thought of all the people, events and things that one cannot just leave behind, so the themes are typically dealing with love, family, friendship, help, faith or death. The first song, “Beautiful Day”, belongs between U2 classics. Starting with heartbeat and Edge’s ringing riff, it evokes fresh air atmosphere and a great feeling which comes when one is waking up with a great mood into a sunny day. Even though it is a song about a person who lost everything, it stays positive and hopeful in tone, as well as the most of the album. The person knows he might have lost all but he does not need anything more to be happy.⁷⁶ The fact that it won three Grammy Awards confirms that this song is simply excellent and able to attract a wide audience. Following track “Stuck in a Moment You Can’t Get out Of” is a smooth rock ballad featuring a simple comforting melody. Even though Bono claimed that the song deals with “an argument between mates”, to me the song seems to present an affectionate consolation to a friend or a partner who is still in worries for some reason and cannot move on.

I never thought you were a fool
But darling look at you
You gotta stand up straight
Carry your own weight
These tears are going nowhere baby

The third song “Elevation” belongs among those super energetic songs bursting with optimism and good vibes. It was awarded a Grammy Award and it gave its name to the upcoming album supporting Elevation Tour. According to The Edge, “Elevation” is a sort of relief among “Walk

⁷⁶ Graham, *U2: The Complete Guide to their Music*, 71.

On” or “Kite” that are “farewell songs of one type or another.”⁷⁷ The first mentioned, “Walk On”, deals with a painful but reasonable end of a relationship and moving on. “Kite” is concerned with even more painful theme, as Bono also introduced this song during some live performances by saying: “This song’s about letting go of somebody you don’t wanna let go of... Could be a lover, could be a father, could be a child, could be a friend.” It is dedicated to Bono’s dying father Bob Hewson and inspired by flying a kite – a family activity that one can eventually miss when saying goodbye to his closest. But we can also feel a kind of self-consolation probably resulting from Bono’s strong faith, as he sings: “I know that this is not good bye”, implying the hope of meeting the departed loved one in heaven. The next track “In a Little While” is a pop song inspired by Bono’s wife Ali, as her husband recalls their beginnings:

A little girl with Spanish eyes
when I saw her in a pram
they pushed her by
Oh my, my how you've grown.

The seventh song “Wild Honey” is very easy and playful and, as the producer Lanois said, it is also a “song of appreciation”. The following “Peace on Earth” differs as much as possible. It is one of the songs with graver themes, reminding of the Omagh bombing of 1998⁷⁸ and its related questions of fait resemble this track to the preceding album’s final song “Wake up Dead Man” as Bono asks Jesus: “Jesus can you take a time/To throw a drowning man a line?”

The next track #9 “When I Look at the World” is a tribute to all good people trying to make the world a better place, like Bono’s wife Ali, who has helped the people from Chernobyl after the destructive nuclear catastrophe. Similarly, the last peaceful song “Grace”, created from a relaxed jamming and lyrical improvisations⁷⁹, is a tribute to women that change the world with their kindness. The penultimate song “New York” is, as the name suggests, an ode to the city and partially a tribute to Frank Sinatra.

⁷⁷ McCormick, *U2 by U2*, 370.

⁷⁸ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 143.

⁷⁹ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 147.

2.11 *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004)

The two years long prepared album was an attempt to go back to U2's beginnings and play pure rock music. It is true, that The Edge has louder sound than ever before and one would hardly search for dance music rhythms or electronic sounds. Compared to U2's previous work, their eleventh album is more conventional than *Zooropa* or *Pop*, however, it features louder and more distorted sound than we can hear on *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. After the great reviews that the last album had obtained, the band suffered from a sort of creative crisis.⁸⁰ They had to postpone the date of release for almost a year and even though they collaborated with eight producers, the four perfectionists were still not fully satisfied with the new material. Finally, the album was released in November 2004 and, as one would expect, it immediately became a sensation, reaching the first position in the charts of 34 countries and sell over 10 million copies.⁸¹

The first single "Vertigo" had been being prepared for a long time, having several titles such as "Native Son", "Shark Soup" or "Viva La Ramone" before getting its final name. It is a lively and swift rock song full of energy, starting with mathematic intro counting in Spanish: "Unos, dos, tres, catorces!", which was kept from the "Viva La Ramone" version. The catchy refrain of the song is well-known, probably also outside of the fan club of U2, as it featured in Apple iPod television advertisement. The themes of the album are various, some are already typical for U2, as love and relationships (#7 "A Man and a Woman"), a plea for a world peace (#4 "Love and Peace or Else"), thanks to Bono's mother and all mothers in general (#6 "All Because of You) or a religious theme (#11 "Yahweh). The eighth song "Crumbs from your table" is a vicious criticism of Christian community, and the Church in general, who are not generous and willing enough to fight the AIDS pandemic in Africa.⁸² However, the strongest theme recurring throughout the whole album is the slow approach of death that Bono knew was slowly touching

⁸⁰ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 149.

⁸¹ <http://www.u2.com/discography/index/album/tagName/Albums/albumId/4068> (Accessed April 15, 2015)

⁸² Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, p 159.

his father Bob Hewson who suffered from cancer. The feeling of depression because of upcoming loss of Bono's father is most obvious in songs #3 "Sometimes You Can't Make it on Your Own" and #9 "One Step Closer". The latter was inspired by the conversation Bono had with Noel Gallanger, the singer of Oasis, who had an intimate dialogue with Bono, concerning the seemingly lost faith of Bono's dying father. When Bono said he was afraid that Bob no longer believed in after life, Noel Gallanger answered: "Well, he's one step closer to knowing." His statement gave the song its name and it recurs throughout the whole track. This song is quite outstanding from the rest of the rock album thanks to its slow soft melody and moving lyrics expressing pain:

Well the heart that hurts
Is a heart that beats
Can you hear the drummer slowing

One step closer to knowing
One step closer to knowing

An interesting theme occurs in the second song, "Miracle Drug", which was inspired by the story of Christopher Nolan, a young Dubliner who also attended Mount Temple School, too. He was paraplegic since the day he was born, but thanks to a "miracle drug", a medical breakthrough of his life, he became able to write by a unicorn on a band around his head. His book of poetry and an autobiographical novel were awarded many prestigious prizes.⁸³

Even though the album gained enormous success in the world, I consider it probably the least original and worthy one (along with October), as if it was perceptible that the band had put too much effort to finally complete it. Maybe it is the endeavor to make it sound rock and hard again when the band's direction had been heading somewhere else.

2.12 *No Line on the Horizon* (2009)

The twelfth album called *No Line on the Horizon* was released after 5 years long pause. After all those more or less successful years and albums, the band again desired to create something innovative, surprising and simply new. However, it is not very probable for a band to publish a

⁸³ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 153.

groundbreaking album after thirty-two years of existence. *The Joshua Tree* and *Achtung Baby* seemed to be never surpassed, but still the album obtained satisfactory reviews and it includes some noteworthy songs. It was again recorded with the help of U2's long-time producers Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois. For the first time of the band's history, these two producers contributed also as songwriters, co-working on some lyrics. Since 2006, U2 had been working on the new materials for with Rick Rubin instead of Eno and Lanois, but none of the then recorded songs were finally used as they humbly returned to their old producers, including also Steve Lillywhite. The slightly experimental mood and ambience results from the decision to record the album in Morocco where they could draw inspiration from North-African music. The album opens with loud drumming, heavy guitar sound and an optimistic melody in a song "No Line on the Horizon" evoking a vision of infiniteness of possibilities in life. The second song in order is probably regarded as the greatest hit of the album, being really "Magnificent". Originally called "French Disco", this is a song of a swift melody and euphoric mood. Bono's singing implies, that "Magnificent" is a love song of grateful tone or praise for God:

Only love, only love can leave such a mark
But only love, only love can heal such a scar
I was born
I was born to sing for you

The third song called "Moment of Surrender" with its soft melody and Bono's pleading and heartfelt vocals is the longest track of the whole album. As well as the following song "Unknown Caller", it is concerned with a drug addict character. The band's friend, Gavin Friday, aptly described it as a new age "Bad". The fifth song "I'll Go Crazy if I Don't Go Crazy Tonight" was recorded in collaboration with Will.i.am of The Black Eyed Peas resulted in a successful rock love song of pleasant and optimistic catchy melody. The same was probably intended with the following song "Get on Your Boots", however, its dance-like fast melody, rollicking lyrics and tone does not seem convincing and it does not fit in the rest of the album either. #7 "Stand up Comedy" is a witty self-ironic song pointing to the fact, that all rock stars musicians are quite megalomaniac. Unlike its not very successful preceding track, this song features a very innovative guitar riff. Nevertheless, the most outstanding and experimental song of the whole album is definitely the eighth song "Fez-Being Born", heavily influenced by African music rhythms and featuring an extraordinary guitar and symphonic keyboard sound.

This song starts with a slow Moroccan melody of “Fez” and suddenly turns into energetic “Being Born”, describing a journey of a Moroccan-French policeman. Another impressive piece is the following “White as Snow” ballad written from the perspective of a soldier in Afghanistan.⁸⁴ It is a calm song of rather sad and nostalgic mood. The following #10 “Breathe” was particularly a contribution of The Edge and it always belonged to Eno’s most favorite songs of U2. I regard it as the peak of the album with its rock guitar riffs combining with piano and an easily memorable creative central melody. What could one also find impressive is the “stream of consciousness” kind of lyrics. This form of expression typically used by modernists such as Virginia Woolf or James Joyce perfectly suits the thematic side of the song, as it opens with a line: “16th of June, 9.05, doorbell rings”, which is mentioning the date celebrated in Dublin as Bloomsday, the day when the story of Joyce’s *Ulysses* takes place. The album closes with “Cedar of Lebanon”, another track featuring a theme of war emphasized by Larry’s soft martial drumming. During this generally calm and soft song, Bono rather recites than sings the lyrics, expressing critical mediation on war.⁸⁵

2.13 *Songs of Innocence* (2014)

Thirteenth and so far the last album, released in September 2014, was well known long before its release, thanks to huge expectations and broken deadlines. *Songs of Innocence* is U2’s most personal and intimate album so far, and it is very innovative too, especially in the way it was released. Every user of iTunes could listen to it for free as it was automatically downloaded to his iPhone or iPod and even though U2 are considered the “greatest rock and roll band” alive, there seems to be a lot of people who strongly dislike them. These antipathies unfortunately increased right because of this automatic download, which was by some people regarded as grossly imposed. It has been being widely criticized and justified again. One could regard it as a very friendly gesture towards the band’s devotees and an opportunity to make new fans. I can

⁸⁴ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 173.

⁸⁵ Stokes, *The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 175.

imagine being more skeptical about the whole concept under certain circumstances, as if the album was another average standard for U2, like the last previous ones. However, *Songs of Innocence* immediately surprised me by its great imaginative, dreamy and vivacious melodies and creativity, echoing vocals, various distorted and treble guitar sounds combined with U2's classic themes as well as some new bold ideas. Thematically, the musicians went back to their childhood memories, exploring the young innocent world of their souls, as well as William Blake in his *Songs of Innocence*, a collection of poems he had wrote in 1794. Maybe it was also the collaboration with new producers, particularly Danger Mouse and Declan Gaffney, which brought the fresh melodies and words that make the album possible to compete with the long-time praised as the best albums *The Joshua Tree* and *Achtung Baby*. What increases the good impression of the album is also its beautiful cover. A picture of Larry Mullen protecting his adolescent son by an embrace implies one of the central themes of the album, parental love. The special unbreakable bound between a child and his parent is connected with more general theme of childhood memories or adolescent restlessness.

Some of the songs might need more time to be understood and appreciated perfectly, but already the first single "Miracle (of Joey Ramone)" is immediately appealing, bursting with optimism and vivacious energy. It is, as the name of the song suggests, a tribute to Joey Ramone, the lead vocalist of the punk rock band The Ramones that had a great impact on young U2 founders. The second single in order, "Every Breaking Wave", was originally intended to be released on *No Line on the Horizon*, but it fits into this album just well. It is not as energetic as the first track, but it seems to be the emotional peak of the album. It describes the feelings of lovers who are afraid to surrender completely to the other person, suffering from fear of defeat or disappointment. This track has been the one most frequently played on radio, probably becoming the greatest hit of the album. The third track "California (There is no End to Love)" sounds as a carefree love song to the sunny California. The following "Song for Someone" is a love song too, featuring soft drums, Edge's relaxed strumming and Bono's vocals that together create a beautiful simple song of admiration, probably written for Ali, but it could be as well sang as a grateful expression to a special friend. However, this song might strongly remind one of Coldplay's music; especially the refrain seems to be heavily influenced by the famous band from London. The idea to come back to youth and childhood memories is first seen in the fifth song,

“Iris”, named after Bono’s mother. After a while, this is another moving song dedicated to her, expressing the wish and hope to their future reunion:

Iris... Iris...

Once we are born, we begin to forget
The very reason we came
But you
I’m sure I’ve met
Long before the night the stars went out
We’re meeting up again

Its dreamy celestial intro with echoing vocals and marvelous melody makes it so far the most beautiful tribute of all of the songs dedicated to Bono’s mother. While “I Will Follow” of *Boy* expresses the pain from the loss in restless adolescent punk-rock way, “Iris” brings a comforting certainty of the reunion. The sixth song, “Volcano” was described as the album’s “Elevation” in Hot Press magazine review⁸⁶. Even though it does not feature such a strong burst energy as the above mentioned hit from *All That You Can’t Leave Behind*, it is definitely the album’s vivacious peak. The aptly chosen name of the song indicates that it deals with an impending eruption, some burst of emotions of lively young man, Bono’s younger self, who “has been out in the wild, night and wind”, exclaiming “You and I are rock and roll”, all that suitably accompanied with rock and roll loud bass and Edge’s treble guitar. The next songs “Raised by Wolves” and “Cedarwood Road” again refer to the times of Bono’s childhood. The first is concerned with the Dublin and Monaghan bombing of 1974, the latter is a sweet nostalgic memory dedicated to Bono’s childhood best friend, Guggi. Named after the street Bono was growing up on, it is carefree in tone and the reference to “cherry blossom tree” creates a fragrant memory of his neighbors’ welcoming garden. The ninth song “Sleep Like a Baby Tonight” might sound like another lullaby as “MLK” from *The Unforgettable Fire*, but already its first synthesized tones imply a kind of chilling atmosphere. The seemingly calm and soft song refers to a pedophile priest whose victim commits a suicide while he is calmly enjoying his breakfast and sleeps “like a baby”. The

⁸⁶ <http://www.hotpress.com/music/reviews/albums/U2--Songs-of-Innocence----Album-Review/12548606.html> (Accessed April19, 2015)

excessed falsetto might sound a bit grotesque until one realizes it is the voice of the abused child singing: “Hope is where the door is/ When the church is where the war is”.

The following track named “This is Where You Can Reach Me Now” featuring bluesy guitars is another tribute to the band’s great inspiration, this time to Joe Strummer of The Clash. Bono recalls how he and the other three young musicians “joined the army of rock’n’roll world” when they visited their concert in the late 70’s. The final song “The Troubles” brings a feminine spirit to the album, as it features swedish singer Lykke Li whose hypnotic soft vocals flawlessly suits the melancholic atmosphere of the song dealing with domestic violence.⁸⁷

In conclusion, the last album is miscellaneous in musical ideas as well as the themes, and it has been deservedly nominated for a Grammy Award in the category of The Best Rock Album.

⁸⁷ <http://www.u2.com/news/title/this-is-about-songs/> (Accessed, April 18, 2015)

3. Analysis of Selected Songs

In this chapter, three selected noteworthy songs will be analyzed in terms of their themes, musical aspect and context.

3.1 “Sunday Bloody Sunday”

This popular single is perhaps the most famous explicitly political song of U2. It is aimed against armed warring and violence in general, alluding to Bloody Sunday incident that happened on 30 January 1972. On that day, 13 people were shot dead by British soldiers in Derry, Northern Ireland. Many other unarmed civilians participating in protest march were wounded and one of the men died because of the injury few months later, which made the number of victims increase to 14 in total.

The song was unfortunately misunderstood by both parties in Ireland, of which Republicans considered the song a pacifist attack against IRA while Protestants blamed the band for celebrating Bloody Sunday as nationalists did in their propaganda. That was why Bono always provided a disclaimer that the song was not a rebel song but more of a peace anthem, typically waving a white flag during live performances. That could be seen on its first official video clip filmed at Red Rock during War Tour. Many other video clips have been filmed to this song from live performances, but the show in Slane Castle during Elevation Tour in 2001 gave the song a new meaning. Bono alluded to the Omagh Bombing that happened on 15 August 1998 in Omagh, Northern Ireland. At the end of the song, he exclaimed names of the victims, adding “Twenty-nine people. Too many!”

Lyrics copied from: <http://www.u2.com/discography/lyrics/lyric/song/127/> (Accessed April 23, 2015)

“Sunday Bloody Sunday”

I can't believe the news today
Oh, I can't close my eyes
And make it go away
How long

How long must we sing this song
How long, how long
Cause tonight, we can be as one⁸⁸
Tonight

Broken bottles under children's feet
Bodies strewn across the dead end street
But I won't heed the battle call
It puts my back up
Puts my back up against the wall⁸⁹

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday

And the battle's just begun
There's many lost, but tell me who has won
The trench is dug within our hearts
And mothers, children, brothers, sisters
Torn apart⁹⁰

⁸⁸ In the opening lines, Bono expresses his disgust of shattering news about violence of Bloody Sunday and unnecessary deaths of innocent people, he says he cannot just rest, having his eyes closed and just imagine that such terrible things do not happen. He asks himself a rhetorical question, and it is also up to the audience to think: How long must we sing this song? How many times will such a sorrowful incident happen again, and for what reason? He appeals to the audience to unite forces against violence.

⁸⁹ The second strophe begins with the dreadful description of a street after the violent incident, dead victims lying on the street and innocent children walking on broken glass. But he says he ignores the battle call as it “puts his back up against the wall”, by which he refuses weapons and armed warring. He compares the fact that the soldiers shot unarmed people to an execution where the condemned stood helplessly back to the wall.

⁹⁰ The third strophe deals with the idea that no victory is worth human lives. It does not matter who wins when both sides suffer loss and painful “trenches in hearts” dug forever. The last two lines offer ambiguous interpretation, one suggesting bodies of mothers, sisters or children torn apart physically, the other one involves suffering from being away from the rest of beloved family.

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday

How long
How long must we sing this song
How long, how long
Cause tonight, we can be as one
Tonight, tonight

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday

Wipe the tears from your eyes
Wipe your tears away
Oh, wipe your tears away
Oh, wipe your tears away
Oh, wipe your blood shot eyes

Sunday, Bloody Sunday
Sunday, Bloody Sunday

And it's true we are immune
When fact is fiction and TV reality
And today the millions cry
We eat and drink while tomorrow they die
The real battle just begun
To claim the victory Jesus won⁹¹

Sunday Bloody Sunday
Sunday Bloody Sunday

Concerning the musical quality of the track, one could consider the song capable to attract a wide audience. Its “catchy” refrain will appeal to masses preferring commercial music as well as its politically engaged lyrics might attract those who search for some deeper and more demanding content in music. What might be found extraordinarily winning is the onomatopoeic merging of

⁹¹ The last strophe suggests that we humans are immune, very little concerned with suffering unless it is us who suffer. We accept the information from media even though we feel deep inside the truth might be elsewhere. We accept to pretend that everything is like we are told unless it touches us personally. The end of the song alludes to the Holy Bible and to the victory of Jesus Christ, which seems to be the only real victory that matters.

the theme and the rhythm. The style of Larry's drumming suggests marching rhythms that seem to appeal to fighting. The bass guitar plays quickly changing groups of tones that might evoke the sound of shooting sub-machine guns alluding to the Bloody Sunday killing. Edge's guitar, providing melodic riff recurring from the intro throughout the whole track, harmonizes and corresponds with Bono's assertive vocals. As the song grades Bono's singing is more pleading, his voice intensifies and sharpens. The climax comes with the guitar solo before the last strophe. The refrain is not firmly delimited, as there are several verses recurring within the whole song.

3.2 "Pride (In the Name of Love)"

After this song was released in September 1984 as the first single of *The Unforgettable Fire*, it immediately attracted a wide audience. Deservedly, as the band put extraordinary effort into recording this particular song. Its essential conception originated in Hawaii, then the final recording took place in Dublin. However, the sooner prepared backing melody was recorded in Slane Castle but the band did not consider it good enough after they continued the recording in Dublin.

Bono himself, in that time fully devoted to pure rock music, proclaimed to song to be a 'pop song', as it immediately became a hit and this usually happens to music which is attracts its audience easily and one comprehends it almost immediately⁹². It is true that musically, the song is not very demanding. It consists of three strophes, each having 4 lines, and a recurring profound refrain featuring appealing easy melody.

However, the lyrics are not as explicit and simple as today's most pop song dominating the charts globally. It might seem a bit abstract but one could easily notice the biblical allusion in the second strophe, quite a typical feature for U2's work. The song does not only refer to Jesus, who came and died in the name of love, but it seems to be a tribute to every being who have throughout the history preached his meritorious ideal, like equality of all men, and became a

⁹² <http://www.u2.com/discography/lyrics/lyric/tagName/Albums/albumId/4006/song/106>
(Accessed April 14, 2015)

martyr. The “pride” Bono sings about does not mean the egoistical sort of trait but an inner pride of all humanity, the thing that could not be taken from a martyr dying for his good ideals.

This song is, in particular, a tribute to Martin Luther King, an American activist and the leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. He contributed to the society by leading non-violent protest in order to reform the law and terminate racial discrimination. Unfortunately, this humanitarian was assassinated on April 4, 1968 in Memphis. Bono alludes to this event in the third strophe. However, as the songwriter himself admits, he wrote the time wrong, as Martin L.uther King was not shot in the morning but in the evening that day.

Lyrics copied from <http://www.u2.com/discography/lyrics/lyric/song/106/> (Accessed April 17, 2015)

“Pride (In the Name of Love)”

One man come in the name of love
One man come and go.
One man come he to justify
One man to overthrow.⁹³

In the name of love
What more in the name of love.
In the name of love
What more in the name of love.⁹⁴

One man caught on a barbed wire fence
One man he resist
One man washed up on an empty beach
One man betrayed with a kiss.⁹⁵

⁹³ The first strophe introduces a man who comes to spread love, justice and good ideals. A man who might change the world.

⁹⁴ The refrain asks a rhetorical question, what more one can do to make a world better place than to start with himself by bringing and spreading love, equality, fraternity and good.

⁹⁵ The last line, alludes to the Holy Bible, specifically to the betrayal of Jesus by Judas Iscariot in the Gardens of Gethsemane. It seems to highlight the similarities between Jesus Christ and Martin Luther King, both martyrs who died for their ideals.

In the name of love
What more in the name of love.
In the name of love
What more in the name of love.

Early morning, April four
Shot rings out in the Memphis sky.
Free at last, they took your life
They could not take your pride.⁹⁶

In the name of love
What more in the name of love.
In the name of love
What more in the name of love.

In the name of love
What more in the name of love.
In the name of love
What more in the name of love.

3.3 “Bullet the Blue Sky”

Although “Bullet the Blue Sky” was not even released as a single, it became a very popular song frequently played during live performances, especially after releasing its popular *Rattle and Hum* version. At first, this song might seem simple and musically a bit tedious, as the central melody is not very inventive, recurring refrain is loud and expressive but the strophes are almost recited. Nonetheless, Bono knows how to keep the thrill by his aggressive voice revealing strong

⁹⁶ The third stanza is most explicitly alluding to Martin Luther King, mentioning the day and place of his tragic death. As Bono pays tribute to this American icon, singing “Free at last, they took your life/ They could not take your pride”, he suggests that even though the assassinator had tried to silence him and his ideas when committing a murder, King’s worthy groundbreaking message was heard and will never be forgotten. Even though pride is, according to Christian principles, seen as a capital sin, this “pride” represents a tribute and profound recognition deserved by the martyr being sacrificed for his ideals and the good of the world.

emotions and anger throughout the whole track. The Edge's guitar of distorted and screechy sound provides a great accompaniment to support the suspense or emphasize the lyrics. For the full understanding and appreciation of this protest song is, nevertheless, important to know the context. Bono wrote this song after he had been traveling across Central America in July 1986 where he witnessed extreme poverty and fear. The dreadful conditions for living in countries like Nicaragua or El Salvador, where Bono spent several days with his wife Ali, had resulted from the US support of the Contras as well as the economic blockade of the country. Bono was fascinated by the strong faith of people which became crucial for them during the revolution. Typically, there are also Biblical allusions in the lyrics. However, even strongly believing inhabitants of Nicaragua were desperate and frightened, as they had no supplies of food and were in ceaseless danger. He personally experienced this feeling when he heard gunshots in the distance and saw fighters overhead in a mission when they were in El Salvador.⁹⁷ In the song, he strongly criticizes American policy providing guns to local insurrectionists who then exploited the poor inhabitants.

This overtly political song inspired other artists to perform it as cover song, the best known and very well done version was recorded by Brazilian metal band Sepultura, featuring harder sound and coarse vocals.

Lyrics copied from: <http://www.u2.com/discography/lyrics/lyric/song/27/> (Accessed April 18, 2015)

“Bullet the Blue Sky”

In the howlin' wind
Comes a stingin' rain
See it drivin' nails
Into the souls on the tree of pain.⁹⁸

From the firefly
A red orange glow

⁹⁷ Stokes, *The The Stories Behind Every U2 Song*, 67.

⁹⁸ The first strophe contains a reference to the Holy Bible; the nails driving into the tree of pain symbolize the suffering and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The stinging rain might be a metaphor for the bullets shot from the American guns.

See the face of fear
Runnin' scared in the valley below.⁹⁹

Bullet the blue sky
Bullet the blue sky
Bullet the blue
Bullet the blue.¹⁰⁰

In the locust wind
Comes a rattle and hum.¹⁰¹

Jacob wrestled the angel
And the angel was overcome.¹⁰²

You plant a demon seed
You raise a flower of fire.
We see them burnin' crosses

See the flames, higher and higher.¹⁰³

Woh, woh, bullet the blue sky
Bullet the blue sky
Bullet the blue
Bullet the blue.

Suit and tie comes up to me
His face red like a rose on a thorn bush

⁹⁹ It is not quite sure, what Bono means by the firefly and red orange glow. Knowing the context, we could assume that it is a reference to fire, “red and orange glow” caused by flying “firefly” – a bombing fighter. Bono tries to describe the hostility and dread of the place by saying that even fear itself is scared running through the valley.

¹⁰⁰ The refrain was inspired by Bono’s own terrifying experience from El Salvador when they heard shooting guns in their proximity.

¹⁰¹ The second line of the third stanza gave the name to U2's next album and movie, *Rattle And Hum*.

¹⁰² The latter two lines of the third strophe are again referring to Bible, mentioning the fight of Jacob and the angel found in Genesis 32:22–32.

¹⁰³ The fourth strophe seems to refer to a fire caused by American fighter planes. The first two lines imply that even a little amount of evil, the “seed”, can cause destroying flames.

Like all the colours of a royal flush
And he's peelin' off those dollar bills
(Slappin' 'em down)
One hundred, two hundred.¹⁰⁴

And I can see those fighter planes
And I can see those fighter planes
Across the tin huts as children sleep
Through the alleys of a quiet city street.¹⁰⁵
Up the staircase to the first floor
We turn the key and slowly unlock the door
As a man breathes into his saxophone¹⁰⁶

And through the walls you hear the city groan.
Outside, is America
Outside, is America
America.

See across the field
See the sky ripped open
See the rain comin' through the gapin' wound
Howlin' the women and children

Who run into the arms
Of America.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ This stanza describes an encounter with a formally dressed man, perhaps an American officer. According to some open interpretation, by the man with a blushed face Bono meant the then American president, Ronald Reagan, against whom the song is speaking out strongly.

¹⁰⁵ Here Bono describes what he saw – extreme poverty and danger.

¹⁰⁶ According to Bill Graham's *The Complete Guide to U2's Music*, this strophe refers to the liberating spirit of John Coltrane, a famous saxophonist.

¹⁰⁷ With the final stanza, the violent “bullet rain” is back, hitting the women and children trying to escape – but America is everywhere.

4. Campaigning and activism

The band is well-known for its musical contribution, but many people who enjoy their songs played on the radio might not be informed about the band's political activism, supporting and establishing humanitarian foundations. Particularly thanks to Bono, the band has been collaborating with more than 20 charitable organizations and foundations, supporting various causes, counting especially fight against AIDS, famine and extreme poverty of the developing countries. U2 are known for their overtly political song "Sunday Bloody Sunday", but there are more of those that are politically engaged, such as "Mother of the Disappeared", "New Year's Day", "Miss Sarajevo" or "Bullet the Blue Sky". Also the songs "Walk On" and "Ordinary Love" were dedicated to support political prisoners, the first one Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma's National League of Democracy, the latter dedicated to Nelson Mandela. This chapter will summarize the most successful charity and politically engaged projects of the band or Bono himself. What appears a bit ungrateful is the fact that Bono is often critically regarded as a megalomaniac thinking that he could change the world because he tries to use his and the band's fame for a good purpose to share awareness concerning world's greatest problems and offering solutions. Fortunately, despite all the cynical critics, his ideas of making the world better place has been fruitful.

4.1 Band Aid and Live Aid

Bono's interest in charity commenced probably in 1984, as U2 participated in Band Aid project, a charity aimed group of famous musicians, including Freddy Mercury, Sting, David Bowie or Phil Collins. Together, they worked on a song "Do They Know it's Christmas?", released on 3 December, 1984. The track immediately gained the first places in the charts in the UK and other twelve countries, raising £8 million for Ethiopian famine relief.¹⁰⁸ To raise the funds, the founder of Band Aid, Bob Geldof, decided to hold a live concert too. Live Aid took place at Wembley Stadium in London in July 1985 and with its 72,000 spectators, it gained approximately £150 million to fight famine in Ethiopia.

¹⁰⁸ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 81.

4.3 Self Aid

In order to raise the awareness of the high unemployment in Ireland, a beneficial concert was held on 17 May, 1986 in Dublin. Even before the concert was performed, media accused U2 of hypocrisy, as the *In Dublin* magazine writes “Rock Against the People: The Great Self Aid Farce” with photography of Bono on the cover page. However, at least 1 200 jobs were pledged and more than £500 000 donated to prevent this problem.¹⁰⁹

4.4 Conspiracy of Hope Tour

In June 1986, U2 headlined a two-week Conspiracy of Hope Tour across America for Amnesty International. The main aim of this tour was not to raise funds, but to spread the awareness of human rights, in which the tour succeed. The number of members of Amnesty International increased approximately about 45,000 people after the tour ended.

4.5 Stop Sellafield

The band had been collaborating with Greenpeace before, but they were never involved in a protest until June 1992. They performed at the Stop Sellafield show in Manchester organized in order to sabotage the plan to operate a nuclear plant. It was planned to be built as the second nuclear facility on the northwest coast of England. The next day, U2 participated in the protest, holding placards saying “React – Stop Sellafield” and wearing white radiation suits. However, in spite of all this effort, the nuclear plant began operating in 1994.

4.6 War Child

After collaboration with Luciano Pavarotti on “Miss Sarajevo” song, U2 performed its premiere at War Child charity concert in the former Yugoslavia torn by war in 1995. War Child is an organization providing help to children in areas suffering a conflict or its aftermath since 1993.

¹⁰⁹ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 95.

4.7 Chernobyl Children International

After the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl, this medical and humanitarian organization was founded in 1991 and since then it has been helping families in affected regions to protect them from poverty, poor health and mental impact of the aftermath of the catastrophe. The band with Bono's wife Ali had donated all the proceeds gained by the successful single "The Sweetest Thing" written for Ali Hewson.

4.8 Net Aid

Bono and Wyclef Jean recorded "New Day" as a theme song for Net Aid charity concert in October 1999. The concert was held to raise funds for various anti-poverty projects and to spread awareness of extreme poverty and connected Jubilee 2000 program.

4.9 Jubilee 2000

Already in February 1999, Bono commenced the support of Jubilee 2000, originally a celebration of the 2000 years of the Church, and a global movement demanding the cancellation of the Third World debt by the year 2000. At first, Bono supported this campaign by writing an editorial for *The Guardian*. Surprisingly, his effort was again regarded critically. He also participated in the G8 Summit in Germany, presenting a petition with 17 million signatures supporting Third World debt relief. Later, in September 2000, Bono presented a petition with 21 million signatures at United Nations Millennium Summit. Finally, Bono's efforts were appreciated too, as Bill Clinton said that his "passionate devotion brought Democrats and Republicans together to make the debt cancellation possible."¹¹⁰

4.10 DATA, ONE

As the successor of Jubilee 2000, Bono has co-founded the DATA organization in 2002, with Bobby Shriver and other activists from the Jubilee 2000. The campaign is again supporting cancellation of Their World Debt, but also Fair Trade with Africa and fight against AIDS.

¹¹⁰ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 223

In 2007, DATA and other Bono's foundation ONE Campaign joined forces and together created the ONE organization with the same aims.

4.11 Live 8

In July 2005, after two successful concerts of Live 8, successor of Live Aid founded by Bob Geldof, the G8 leaders commit to spend 25 billion dollars more a year on Africa¹¹¹, which was again an enormous success.

4.12 Music Rising

In the case of Music Rising, it is The Edge who came with the idea and co-founded this organization which helped to provide replacement of instruments for those that were lost in Hurricane Katrina in November 2005. The original idea was to help professional musicians, but they soon expanded this charity for churches and schools too.

4.13 EDUN

In 2005, Ali Hewson and Bono co-founded this fashion brand supporting fair-trade in Africa. The name EDUN is taken from the combination of backwards spelled "nude" and an allusion to the Garden of Eden. EDUN cooperates with luxurious brands such as Luis Vuitton, however, it has not been very fruitful so far.

4.14 Product RED

The most recent brand founded by Bono, together with Bobby Shriver, is the Product RED. This brand collaborates with many popular and luxurious brands in the sphere of clothing, electronics or food etc. Among the partners, there is Apple Inc., Nike, Starbucks, Microsoft, *Vanity Fair* and *The Independent*, Giorgio Armani, Motorola or Converse. Each of the Product RED marked items contributes a percentage of the proceeds to fight AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis in Africa. In February 2014, U2's official website announced: "Over 36 hours on Sunday and Monday, the 'Invisible' download raised more than \$3million for (RED) to help fight AIDS.

¹¹¹ McGee, *U2: A Diary*, 292.

Every time the new track was downloaded, Bank of America paid \$1 to the Global Fund to Fight Aids, TB and Malaria.¹¹²

¹¹² http://www.u2.com/news/title/three-million-and-counting/handm_news/ (Accessed April 14, 2015)

Conclusion

The main aim of this work was to present a general survey of one of the most popular and influential contemporary bands. Hopefully, the provided information could clarify the meaning of several lyrics concerned with Bono's personal experience, such as the frequent allusions to his mother throughout their whole career or the importance of knowledge of certain politically engaged events in order to understand the band's production better.

The thesis also explores, especially in chapter 2, the evolution of genres and styles U2 has gone through. Their work could be referred to as a sort of universal mainstream music, because of its wide popularity and ceaseless commercial success, but one could hardly call it monotonous. It would be wrong to classify U2 into one category of genres, as they started with relentless adolescent energy enjoying the post-punk merging with rock during the first three albums of a rather rough sound. With the success of *The Unforgettable Fire* they slowly moved from alternative rock with symphonic elements of ambient music to classic rock influenced by American bluesy rhythms and gospel music with their groundbreaking *The Joshua Tree*. Later they even drew inspiration from experimental rock influenced by techno and electronic music on *Zooropa* and *Pop* to finally settle with what suits them the best - classic rock full of creative melodies alternatively affected by foreign influences, as on *No Line on the Horizon* featuring the elements of Moroccan rhythms. Their last musical contribution, *Songs of Innocence*, of which the free release to iTunes caused such a tumult, is a perfect example of flourishing development and creative minds of these deservedly respected musicians. It also shows the evolution of themes and lyrics that had always been personal and often autobiographical. Nonetheless, Bono grew more and more intimate and outspoken with the time. The cliché that nobody expects a band to record a groundbreaking album after almost 40 years of successful career seems to be, surprisingly, broken by U2. Even though its success cannot be completely measured yet before the supporting Innocence + Experience Tour ends, the fact that many venues have been already sold out only confirms that U2 do not have to worry about their fan club and, hopefully, vice versa. As regarded in the final chapter, the ways of activism and charity U2 has been participating in are various. Whether it is self-seeking and ostentatious or not, it brings results and that is what counts. It is certain that if every popular band or celebrity followed U2's footsteps in devot-

ing their time and money while using their fame to inform and inspire people to help the needed, it would be welcomed more than this useless cynical criticism.

Resumé:

Předmětem této bakalářské práce je přehled vzniku, vývoje a úspěchů Irské hudební skupiny U2. Tato populární kapela, která za rok oslaví své čtyřicáté výročí, je už po desetiletí mnohými považována za největší rockovou skupinu na světě. Ale jako každá masově populární formace, i tato má vedle svých příznivců odpůrce, kteří tvrdí, že po více než třiceti letech úspěšné kariéry by měli přenechat místo mladším nebo originálnějším. Přestože jsou U2, ať už s hanlivým podtextem nebo bez, označovány jako mainstreamová hudba, rozhodně se nejedná o standartní pop-rock. Prošli od svého založení výrazným vývojem hudebních žánrů i témat, který je obecně popsán v první kapitole zabývající se vznikem a historií skupiny od jejich první zkoušky až do současnosti. Popisuje také všechny důležité momenty z osobního života jednotlivých členů, které měly na vývoj formace a její tvorbu významný vliv. Málokdo o slavné skupině ví, že tři z jejich čtyř členů jsou silně věřící a jejich prvotní entusiasmus při vstupu do křesťanské komunity Shalom měl málem na svědomí rozvrat skupiny začátkem osmdesátých let, právě když se těšili nadějným vyhlídkám po vydání druhého alba *October*. Jejich přátelé z komunity měli za to, že rocková hudba není v souladu s jejich křesťanským vyznáním. Naštěstí se však Bono, Larry a Edge rozhodli v nadějně kariéře pokračovat dál, aniž by se nutně museli vzdát své víry. Ta je naopak přítomná v textech skupiny napříč celou jejich tvorbou a stejně tak se projevuje i v jejich chování, a to účastí na nespočtu benefičních koncertů i podporou a zakládáním humanitárně zaměřených nadací. Stejně jako opakující se téma víry se v textech písní často objevuje vzpomínka na Bonovu matku Iris, která zemřela, když bylo zpěvákovi pouze 14 let. Bono tuto ztrátu nesl těžce, a proto se k tématu stále vrací, od jejich prvního úspěšného singlu “I Will Follow” (1980) až po loni vydanou skladbu “Iris (Hold Me Close)” (2014), kde vyjadřuje naději a touhu po opětovném shledání.

Už začátkem osmdesátých let U2 dokázali, že kromě textů o problémech dospívání, kterým se věnovali na debutovém albu *Boy*, jsou schopni se v písních vyjádřit i k vážnějším tématům. Skupina je známá svými politicky angažovanými texty, z nichž se první velký hit “Sunday Bloody Sunday” objevil na třetím studiovém albu *War* (1983), hlásajícím antimilitantní postoj, který se dále objevuje napříč celou jejich tvorbou. Té se podrobněji věnuje druhá kapitola, která analyzuje všech třináct studiových alb nejen z tematického hlediska, ale zachycuje i evoluci hudebních žánrů, kterou U2 prošli. Přestože bývá skupina často označována jako mainstreamový pop-rock, jejich tvorba by se nedala charakterizovat zařazením do jedné žánrové kategorie. Čtveřice mla-

dých Irů vyrůstala na punkové hudbě legendárních The Clash nebo The Sex Pistols, což ovlivnilo jejich ranou tvorbu, která by se dala označit jako punk-rock a post-punk. Příchodem čtvrtého alba *The Unforgettable Fire* (1984) se skupina odklonila od punku k atmosferickému rocku, na čemž měl velký podíl jejich nový producent, Brian Eno, zakladatel ambientního žánru. Dále jejich tvorbu ovlivnily i hudební ikony jako jsou Bob Dylan a Van Morrison, kteří je pobídli k čerpání inspirace z počátků moderní hudby, díky čemuž vzniklo průlomové album *The Joshua Tree* (1987) mísící prvky blues a gospelu s klasickým rockem. Album obsahující nejslavnější hity skupiny, jako jsou “With or without You” nebo “I Still Haven’t Found what I’m Looking For”, se ihned stalo senzací a nejrychleji prodávaným albem v USA. Po ne příliš dobře hodnoceném albu *Rattle and Hum* (1988), na kterém se objevily starší písně skupiny z živých koncertů či převzaté písně, například od skupiny Beatles, se U2 na tři roky odmlčeli, než fanoušky potěšilo dlouho očekávané album *Achtung Baby* (1991), na kterém lze slyšet vliv elektronické a industriální hudby a tak by se dalo zařadit do kategorie alternativní rock. V tomto duchu pak pokračovali s alby *Zooropa* (1993) a *Pop* (1997), které, jak už napovídá název prvního singlu “Discotheque”, se ještě víc přibližují k popové a taneční hudbě, ale díky zachování rozostřeného zvuku kytar a výrazné basové linky mohou být obě alba označena jako alternativní či experimentální rock. S příchodem milénia se U2 vrací k čistému rocku a vydávají album *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* (2000), jehož single “Beautiful Day” okamžitě obsadil první příčky britských i amerických hitparád. Po čtyřech letech se objevuje podle Bona dosud nejrockovější album *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* (2004), jemuž dominují ostré kytarové riffy například v populárním singlu “Vertigo”, který se proslavil také díky reklamě na výrobek značky Apple Inc., s níž skupina už léta spolupracuje. Zatímco přijetí dvanáctého alba *No Line on the Horizon* (2009) by se dalo považovat za průměrné, nejnovější a dlouho očekávané album *Songs of Innocence* (2014) vyvolalo rozporuplné reakce a rozruch, a to nejen díky svému obsahu, ale zejména díky nekonvenčnímu způsobu jeho vydání. Kapela se totiž ve spolupráci se společností Apple Inc. rozhodla album zdarma poskytnout všem uživatelům iTunes, což však kromě vděku fanoušků vyvolalo u mnohých uživatelů silné rozhořčení a počín byl kritizován jako okázale prospěchářský a vtíravý. Ať už byl záměr jakýkoli, album svou textovou i hudební originalitou dosahuje kvality průlomových *The Joshua Tree* a *Achtung Baby* a tak se může suverénně zařadit mezi nejlepší počiny skupiny.

Ve třetí kapitole se tato práce soustředí na rozbor tří vybraných písní, “Sunday Bloody Sunday”, “Pride” a “Bullet the Blue Sky”, kde je popsán především jejich kontext, bez jehož znalosti by interpretace písní mohla být nesprávná či neúplná, a také lyrická i hudební stránka. “Sunday Bloody Sunday” odkazuje na Krvavou neděli, incident z irského Derry, při kterém bylo 30. 1. 1972 zastřeleno 14 nevinných občanů, účastníků protestního pochodu pro občanská práva. “Pride” je věnována památce Martina Luthera Kinga a “Bullet the Blue Sky” kritizuje zahraniční politiku Spojených států amerických.

U2 patří mezi skupiny, které se velmi aktivně podílí na konání charitativních koncertů a podporují mnoho humanitárních nadací, většinou zaměřených na boj proti AIDS a extrémní chudobě, bojují za lidská práva a podporují i ekologický aktivismus. Dík patří obzvláště zpěváku Bonovi, který charitativní činnosti a politickému aktivismu věnuje nejvíce času a úsilí. Dokonce sám založil několik nadací, mezi nejúspěšnějšími ONE a Product RED, což je však mnohými kritizováno jako póza a ostentativní získávání si publika. Proto se poslední kapitola věnuje právě shrnutí těch nejvýznamnějších humanitárně, ekologicky a politicky zaměřených akcí a počinů této aktivní skupiny, které jsou, ať už okázalé nebo ne, pro společnost přínosem.

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ANNOTATION

Author: Alžběta Váňová

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Abstract: The thesis explores the formation and development of the popular Irish rock band U2. The first chapter is concerned with the band's history, as well as the members' personal biographies. The following chapter is aimed at the evolution of genres, styles and themes across their complete studio production. The third chapter occupies with the analysis of three selected songs which might be easily misinterpreted without knowledge of the important political context. As the band is engaged in many projects, including foundations fighting extreme poverty or AIDS, the final chapter deals with their most significant achievements and participations in benefit concerts and humanitarian campaigns.

ANOTACE

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Abstrakt: Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá vznikem a vývojem populární Irské rockové skupiny U2. První kapitola je zaměřena na historii skupiny a také na osobní biografii každého ze členů. Ve druhé kapitole je rozebrán vývoj žánrů, stylů a tematiky písní napříč celou hudební tvorbou skupiny. Třetí kapitola obsahuje podrobnější analýzu tří vybraných písní, které by bez znalosti politického kontextu mohly být interpretovány nesprávně nebo nekompletně. Jelikož se U2 podílí na mnoha humanitárních projektech, jako jsou například nadace bojující proti extrémní chudobě či AIDS, poslední kapitola se věnuje právě benefičním koncertům, humanitárním kampaním a nadacím, na kterých se skupina podílela.