



Review

ADVANCING THE
CHRISTIAN TRADITION
IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

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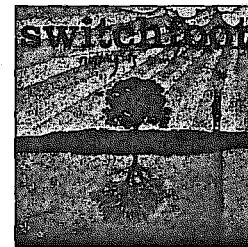
FILM & MUSIC REVIEW

NOTHING IS SOUND

Switchfoot

EMI/ Sparrow

www.switchfoot.com



I was first exposed to Switchfoot about five years ago, when they were on a Christian rock "super-tour," wedged in the middle of a lineup between ska superstars The Supertones, and a then up and coming pop-punk band called Relient K. Their straightforward style of rock and roll seemed musically out of place in that lineup, but this proved to be a strength, not a weakness. As a rock music journalist covering the show for a mainstream publication at the time, I remember thinking that, if this band could stick around long enough to survive the current pop music trends, they had the potential to someday be superstars. I followed their career closely, and in the upcoming months they made waves in the CCM world by denying that they were a "Christian" band. Though they tried hard to fight the "CCM stigma," they never did so by denying their faith or alienating their Christian audience. They embraced their Christian listeners, not shying away from Christian festivals or promoters, while at the same time playing as many bars, clubs, and mainstream venues as possible. The CCM label did follow them, and I remember them confessing once at a press conference that mainstream press often brought up their Christian connection, treating them like they were some kind of weird "alien," even though they never cultivated that image. "We are Christians by faith, not genre" became one of their

most oft repeated quotes. The release two years ago of *The Beautiful Letdown* finally catapulted them into widespread mainstream attention and success. Then, at the close of last year, they released *Nothing is Sound*, which produced an instant top one hundred hit, "Stars."

An initial listen to *Nothing is Sound* brought to my mind modern-rock bands like Hoobastank or Eve 6. Then again, by the time of this writing, Switchfoot has outsold and outlived both of those bands, so the comparisons will probably have to stop there. Five years ago they weren't following modern music trends, and they aren't today as well; they are creating them. Bottom line: this is a *great* pop-rock album, both musically and lyrically. Without being preachy or propagandistic, they manage effectively to bring a Christian worldview into the musical mainstream.

"Politicians," with its driving guitars, reminds us that we are as corrupt and imperfect as the politicians we are so quick to criticize. But it doesn't leave us without hope; the melodic chorus, "I pledge allegiance to a world without borders; without politicians," reminds us that as fallen humans our true allegiance should be to something outside ourselves and outside our government. In "Easier than Love," they present a very bold and somewhat risky commentary on sex and loneliness in our culture; this isn't the typical message you would hear from a top 40 band. But as I have been trying to explain, they aren't a typical band. They aren't afraid to stretch themselves a little either, as evidenced by the background harmonica used to supplement the messianic undertones of "The Fatal Wound."

Their lyrics are witty and insightful and would be a great resource for a class in presuppositional apologetics. For example, the slow-driving "The Shadow Proves the Sunshine" is a great piece that can help deal with the problem of evil in a world created by a benevolent God. Not that I am being strictly utilitarian here; it can also just be enjoyed as a beautiful piece of musical art. But hey, if in addition to that it provides inspiration to someone going through a difficult time, all the better.

Equally apologetic in nature is "The Blues," a slower ballad that examines the worldviews of others. It asks the question, "Is this what they call freedom . . . is this what they call pain?" then

ponders how "they" cope when their world caves in. And, of course, their top 40 hit, "Stars," is a great reminder that we can see the glory of God revealed to us in the stars, and that when we see and acknowledge that glory, we finally are free to be who we were created to be.

My final analysis is this: though Switchfoot could easily qualify as a band that is "safe" for youth group kids to listen to, there is much more to them than that, as their newest album shows. Their mainstream success is a lesson for us all in cultural redemption. It proves that it is possible for Christians to excel in the arts and in the process *redeem* the arts as well. And that is what can happen when, as an artist, you recognize that you are a Christian by faith . . . not genre.

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My final analysis is this: though Switchfoot could easily qualify as a band that is "safe" for youth group kids to listen to, there is much more to them than that, as their newest album shows. Though not explicitly evangelistic, their music does reflect a strong evangelical worldview, and that makes for a huge difference between propaganda and art. And their mainstream success serves as a lesson for us all in cultural redemption. It proves that it is possible for Christians to excel in the arts, and in the process *redeem* the arts as well. Listening to this album brings to mind the words of Francis Schaeffer, who once said, "The Christian is the really free man—he is free to have imagination. This too is our heritage. The Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars." And that is what can happen when, as an artist, you recognize that you are a Christian by faith . . . not genre.

—JOSHUA LICKTER

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