

# THE JOSHUA TREE



U2

Review by Gavin Dreilich

# Members

## Bono - Vocals

Bono was born Paul David Hewson, in Ballyman, Dublin on May 10th 1960. At the age of 14, he had lost his mother, which played a strong influence on his later songwriting. He shared a connection of this death with his close friend Larry Mullen Jr. He joined a group of kids who called themselves Lypton Village, and it was with that group where he earned the name Bono Vox, meaning "good voice" in Latin and a type of hearing aid. When he joined U2, he played guitar while singing and songwriting, but when The Edge joined, Bono was restricted to vocals only. What really stands out about

Bono is his charitable work around the world, and being a well known activist fighting against AIDS and extreme poverty in Africa.



## The Edge - Guitar

The Edge was born on August 8th, 1961, in East London, and was given the name David Howell Evans. Having moved to Ireland while David was still at school, his family settled in St. Mary Park Road, Malahide. It was here in Malahide where he went to Mount Temple Comprehensive School where he met the rest of the band, but he had grown a friendship with his pal Adam Clayton, having their moms introduce them to each other. There are theories on how David got his nickname, but most people say it was when he was in Lypton Village with Bono and was seen for his "edgy" style of guitar playing. In 2008, Edge got together with Jimmy Page from Led Zeppelin and Jack White from The White Stripes to record a guitar documentary called It Might Get Loud, receiving very high praise.

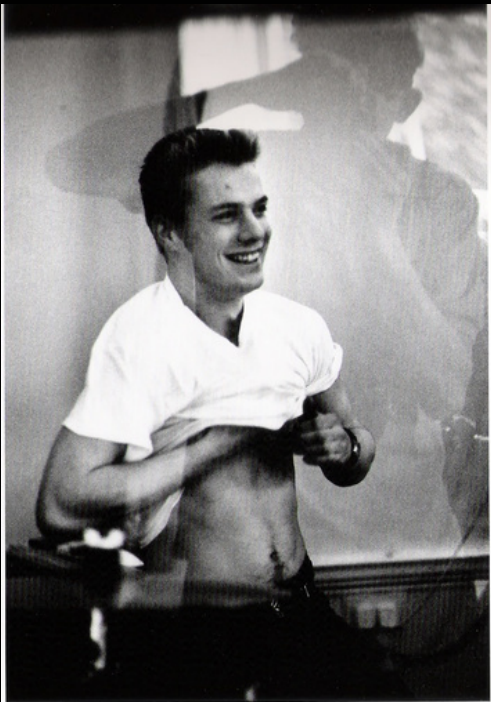


# Adam Clayton - Bass

Adam Charles Clayton was born on March 13th, 1960, in Oxfordshire, England. He was sent to boarding school due to the nature of his father's job (a pilot) which meant the family could be called away at very short notice. Adam hated it and never felt at home in the very disciplined environment there. He left at the age of 16, when he attended Mount Temple School, where Adam had no interest in school work. He decided to join U2 at the time, but Bono has stated that he was the only one to have any experience of being in a band, but he still couldn't play. In fact, Bono said that Adam's inability on the bass meant that he actually came up with some unusual riffs which formed the basis of some of the band's earliest songs.



# Larry Mullen Jr. - Drums



Lawrence Mullen was born on October 31st, 1961, in Artane, Dublin. He had a very tragic childhood, losing both his sister Mary in 1973, and his mother five years later due to a road traffic incident. After Larry received his first drum kit, he posted an ad on the noticeboard in Mount Temple Comprehensive School, where some of the first performances were named "The Larry Mullen Band" for about 10 minutes... that was until Bono showed up. Larry wasn't that much of a front man, so he wanted his good friend Bono to take charge and become the focal point of the band. As U2 gained popularity, Larry decided to adopt the "Jr." to his name so that he wouldn't be confused with his father.

# History of U2

In September of 1976, at Mount Temple Comprehensive School, 14 year old Larry Mullen Jr posted a notice on the school's bulletin board looking for any aspiring musicians to start a band (Image of Mount Temple school found below). Many students wanted to join, Bono, Adam Clayton, The Edge, and The Edge's brother Dick Evans. Their first ideas of a name was Feedback before briefly calling themselves The Hype, then finally settling on U2 in 1978.



All these boys were from Dublin, which provided the best environment for U2's musical adventure. Their first performances were in small, devoted venues like St. Fintan's Hall in Sutton and McGonagle's, a legendary Dublin club that hosted many up-and-coming Irish bands. They started to perfect their craft and build their first fan base, and it was here that U2 played some of their most defining early shows, catching the attention of Paul McGuinness, who would go on to become their manager and play a crucial role in their rise to fame. By 1980, U2 had built enough momentum to sign with Island Records, a pivotal moment that would launch them onto the world stage.

# The Creation of The Joshua Tree Pt. 1

When U2 started having an idea for their following album after *The Unforgettable Fire*, they wanted to try something different. The main theme in their past album focused on war, spirituality, and human tragedy, so they wanted this album to focus on America, because all members of U2 had an intimate attachment to America growing up in Ireland. During an interview with Michka Assayas, Bono said, "The Irish came over from a death culture, of famine, and of colonization, which of course was emasculation. They found a new virility in America. They began a new life in America. And this of course is at the heart of an idea of redemption: to begin again." Bono wanted to put this idea into their new album, but when they wrote and recorded *The Joshua Tree* in the mid 1980s, they would soon realize that their understanding of America was one based on a myth.





# The Creation of The Joshua Tree Pt. 2

U2 originally started working with the title *The Two Americas*, which would eventually result in *The Joshua Tree*. The reason they decided to name the album *The Joshua Tree* was because they wanted to have the desert as a concept for the album, and both The Edge and Bono decided to name it *The Joshua Tree* to focus on the harsh environments of the desert. They wanted the message and main theme of the album to be their complex relationship with America. This would address the darkness Bono recognized within the reality of America that impacted the concept of the American Dream that U2 had believed in. When creating the musical aspects of the album, they realized they had to conceptualize their music in a way they had never done before, and had to break new ground in their musical aspects to fully grasp the concept of America.



# Tracklist

- 1) Where the Streets Have no Name
- 2) I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For
- 3) With or Without You
- 4) Bullet the Blue Sky
- 5) Running to Stand Still
- 6) Red Hill Mining Town
- 7) In Gods Country
- 8) Trip Through Your Wires
- 9) One Tree Hill
- 10) Exit
- 11) Mothers of the Dissappeared

## Where The Streets Have No Name

For this first track, it starts off with some orchestral instruments, building up the tone. Then, at around 43 seconds in, you can hear a faint guitar getting louder and louder, then it keeps building with drums and bass. Bono believed that this song was “The orchestra tuning up,” setting a perfect tone for the entire album.

The lyrics were inspired by a story that Bono heard about Belfast, Northern Ireland, where a person's religion and income were evident by the street on which they lived, which you can hear in the lyrics “I wanna take shelter from the poison rain, where the streets have no name,” and “We’re beaten and blown by the wind, trampled in dust.”

I love all the lyricism and meaning to each lyric, and the repeating guitar chords and melody make this one of the best songs on the album. This is a fantastic way to start off the album, and I have to give it a 10/10.



# I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For

On *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*, it was inspired by gospel music, having a “relentless spirit” as Bono referred to it. Bono was interested in the theme of spiritual doubt at the time, and The Edge created a chord structure that matched Bono's vision of the song. Bono once said to the Rolling Stones that this song is an anthem of doubt more than faith, and it's a song that celebrates wanting.

Like *Where The Streets Have No Name*, it starts off with a 30 second lead up with The Edge and Larry Mullen Jr on guitar and drums, then 20 seconds after you hear Adam Clayton's bass and Bono starts to sing. He sings in a higher register than he normally does, and you can really hear that he pushes his voice on lyrics like “I have spoke with the tongue of angels, I have held the hand of a devil.”

*I Still Haven't found What I'm Looking For* received widespread critical acclaim, and was U2's second consecutive #1 single on the US Billboard Hot 100, and I can definitely see why. This is such a deep and personal song, so I would give it a 9.5/10.

## With or Without You

On *With or Without You*, you can instantly tell this is going to be a different style of song. U2 had started writing a rough demo for *With or Without You* when they were working on *The Unforgettable Fire* tour.

The lyrics to this song resemble a troubled relationship between two lovers, although some lyrics have been interpreted in religious aspects. Bono explained that the lyrics had romantic intentions, saying, "there's nothing more revolutionary than two people loving each other. One, because it's so uncommon these days, and two, because it's so difficult to do."

I love the bass line and the drums in the beginning, and there's a really weird but well placed synthesizer following the bass. Personally, this is one of my favourite songs on this album. Bono's higher register really stands out when he sings the lyrics "With or without you, oh, oh", and it's so beautiful. The change in feel for the album really sends us on an emotional rollercoaster, and the feel and rhythm to this song really makes it stand out on the album. Because of this emotion, I give it a 10/10.

## Bullet The Blue Sky

This song kicks off with an amazing drum beat by Larry Mullen Jr, setting the tempo and environment to the song. It is then followed by a distant bass line by Adam Clayton, and a standout riff by The Edge. Bono's vocals in *Bullet The Blue Sky* are very gritty and rough, and he wanted to have these vocals to put emphasis on the human rights issues and wars in El-Salvador, and how America is doing little to help them.

Bono wanted to put all the pain, blood, and suffering into every single note, and oh boy did he do a good job at it. Midway through the song, Bono starts to speak, sort of like a poem. He tells of a figure approaching him. With a rose-red face strewn with shades of a royal flush, the figure starts to slap down hundred dollar bills.

The figure then plays a saxophone, and Bono wanted the figure to represent Ronald Reagan, the president at the time, to symbolize the power Reagan had, and how he's using the power he has incorrectly. This track has really grown on me, and it's such a killer song. I would give it an 8.5/10.

## Running to Stand Still

*Running to Stand Still* is a much different feel than *Bullet The Blue Sky*, and it has such a slower and calmer feeling. The guitar makes you feel soothed, and Bono's voice turns from this rough, raspy tone into this soft, gentle style that makes you feel comfort in his singing.

The context of the song is about the heroin addiction epidemic in Dublin of the 1980s, and Bono thought the phrase "Running to stand still" fit perfectly on the effects drugs had on the body. Even though the lyrics of *Running to Stand Still* were worked on a great deal, the musical composition was essentially improvised by the band during the recording process, but you can hardly tell because they play the song so beautifully.

Bono's voice just sounds so angelic in this song, so I would give it a 9/10

## Red Hill Mining Town

*Red Hill Mining Town* is a very interesting song, because the inspiration of the song comes from the National Union of Mineworkers in 1984. They declared a strike in response to the British National Coal Board's decision to close down a large swathe of the United Kingdom's coal mines, which had become unprofitable. The dispute led to civil discord politically, socially, and violence.

Bono wanted to incorporate these feelings into the song, just like *Bullet The Blue Sky*. In the end, U2 was not completely satisfied with the final result, and producer Steve Lillywhite who mixed the track said “it never got finished the way they wanted it. They always thought it could be a little bit better.”

This could have been due to the brass section being out of key, or the synthesiser track being a “bit off,” but I personally think it’s great, and I’ll give it an 8/10 due to the killer bass line and Bono’s subtle messages about the mineworkers from lines like “Through hands of steel, and heart of stone, our labour day has come and gone.”



## In God's Country

*In God's Country* starts off with a rapid-quick tempo, accompanied with both electric and acoustic guitars in the first eight seconds, then it picks up with the lead guitar from The Edge. When Bono was writing the song, he didn't quite know whether the song was about Ireland or the U.S, but eventually he wanted it to be dedicated to the Statue of Liberty.

The lyrics "Desert rose, dreamed I saw a desert rose. Dress torn in ribbons and bows, like a siren she calls to me," show the seductive side of America. It references the desert again, like *Where the Streets Have no Name*, because U2 really wanted to make this album to have a "cinematic" feel, and really establish the sense of location.

The rhythm and feel to *In God's Country* is really catchy, and can easily get stuck in your head. The hidden messages about America are really well hidden, and the song has really grown on me, so I'm going to give it an 8.5/10.

## Trip Through Your Wires

*Trip Through Your Wires* starts off with a very southern feeling, especially when you start to hear the harmonica after a great performance on the drums by Larry Mullen Jr.. This is one of their more up-tempo songs, and it sounds like Bono tries to put on a southern accent, especially when he screams "hee y-e-a-h" at around the 1:30 mark.

The use of the harmonica comes from Bono knowing how to play it, and they were inspired to play it when they attempted to cover *Heart of Gold* by Neil Young. The title is a play on "trip wire," a low-placed wire that often sets off a trap. Bono sings about being caught up in all her "wires."

Bono claimed this tune was meant to be heard in coexistence with *Sweetest Thing*, a song he wrote for his wife, Ali, that ended up as the B-side of *Where The Streets Have No Name*. There are multiple different meanings and messages you can find in this song, which just goes to show how talented U2 is with their lyrics. And for that I'll give it an 8/10.

## One Tree Hill

*One Tree Hill* has such a sad meaning behind it because it was written in memory of Greg Carrol, a New Zealander the band first met in Auckland during *The Unforgettable Fire* tour in 1984. When they were on the tour, Bono had trouble adjusting from the time difference between New Zealand and Europe. He left his hotel and met some people who showed him around the town, one of those people being Greg.

They ended up taking Bono up One Tree Hill, one of the highest of Auckland's largest volcanoes. Greg worked as a stage hand gently stopping people from getting on stage, and was described as "this very helpful fellah running around the place." Sadly, on July 3rd 1986, just before U2 started the recording sessions for *The Joshua Tree*, Greg was killed in a motorcycle accident while on a courier run. All members of U2 were heartbroken, The Edge even stated that he was like a family member to them. Bono wrote some lyrics for his funeral titled *One Tree Hill*, and he wanted to share the story of Greg to the entire world.

The somber feel hidden by the upbeat tempo really mixes well together, and each lyric really hits you in the heart. *One Tree Hill* deserves a 10/10.

# One Tree Hill, Auckland, New Zealand



## Exit

*Exit* starts off really quiet, making you wait for the song to play. It was created on the final day of recording the album, and was made in one long jam, which turned into this artwork of a song. The Edge said, "It started off as an exercise in playing together with a kind of mood and a place in mind. And it really, for me, brought me there, it really did succeed as an experiment."

The lyrics to *Exit* were inspired by the novel *The Executioner's Song* by Norman Mailer, written about serial killer Gary Gilmore. Bono wanted to try and write "a story in the mind of a killer." You can hear that message in the lyrics, "He went deeper into black, deeper into white, he could see the stars shine, like nails in the night." Adam Clayton said that the line, "He saw the hands that build could also pull down," was a jab at the US government's conflicting roles in international relations.

The mood and atmosphere are just outstanding, every member of U2 knowing how they fit into making this song. It's got a great groove to it, so I'll give *Exit* an 8.5/10.



## Mother of the Disappeared

*Mother of the Disappeared* is a great way to end this magnificent album. Just like *Bullet the Blue Sky*, this song was inspired by Bono's experiences in El Salvador following U2's participation in the *Conspiracy of Hope* tour of benefit concerts for Amnesty International. He learned of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo, a group of women whose children had "forcibly disappeared."

While in Central America, he met members of COMADRES, a similar organization whose children had been abducted by the government in El Salvador. Bono sympathized with the Madres and COMADRES and wanted to pay tribute to their cause by incorporating their pain into a song. Bono wrote the song on his mother in law's Spanish guitar, and the melody came from a song that he wrote in Ethiopia in 1985.

The soft, gentle feel of *Mother of the Disappeared* is really touching to the heart, and focusing on bringing light to the horrible things in El Salvador is a perfect way to finish *The Joshua Tree*. It has really sad and deep lyrics, a great arrangement for all members of U2, and I'll give it an 8.5/10.

## Final Thoughts and Reviews

*The Joshua Tree* holds a very special place in my heart. It was one of the first things of U2 I heard on the radio, and because my parents are big U2 fans, I heard it a lot. However, that didn't stop my recent love for the album. My appreciation of *The Joshua Tree* mainly comes from how each member uses their unique skills to create this awesome album. The emotion that Bono has in his voice is just phenomenal, showing off the sheer power of his talent. The Edge's guitar skills stand out so well, demonstrating the musicality of U2, and his natural talent.

Adam Clayton always sets the tone on each song with his stunning bass lines, which have a natural groove to them. Finally, Larry Mullen Jr. does a fantastic job of creating the background of sound with his fills and complex rhythms on the drums, and he just does it with such fantastic skills.

My final thoughts for *The Joshua Tree* is that it does such a great job of storytelling. The idea of having a perspective on America that is different from our usual narrative is very interesting, and that is why it's so well done. Now, there is the term that some people believe that "nothing is perfect," but I believe that *The Joshua Tree* is pretty darn close to it. 10/10.