THE COMPLETE BOOK OF

POP MUSIC

WIT & WISDOM



TONY RUFO



Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.
CAROL STREAM, ILLINOIS

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The Complete Book of Pop Music Wit and Wisdom

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Rufo, Tony.
The complete book of pop music wit & wisdom / Tony Rufo.
p. cm.
Includes indexes.
ISBN-13: 978-1-4143-0731-2 (sc)
ISBN-10: 1-4143-0731-4 (sc)
1. Meditations. 2. Popular music—Religious aspects—Christianity—Meditations. 3. Bible—Meditations.
I. Title.
BV4832.3.R84 2006
242—dc22 2006010400

Printed in the United States of America

12 11 10 09 08 07 06
7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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For Elissa and Anna,

Thank you for adding music to my life.

I thank God for you.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I wish to thank God for creating music. He did so for his own good pleasure and, in the process, gave the world this incredible gift. Music was part of my heritage, for I fondly remember my dad playing the piano and singing "You Are My Sunshine" when I was young. Every time I hear that song, it brings back warm memories. As a youngster hearing music on the radio for the first time, I wondered why there was no applause at the end of each song. I was told it was a "record" and that the artist wasn't really there. I loved music, tried playing several instruments to no avail, and became a record-buying teen. Little did I know the part music would play in leading me to a relationship with God.

I am grateful for the friendship of Tyndale's Dan Balow, a fellow "radio refugee," who believed in the concept of this book enough to point me in the right direction. Thanks are also in order to Jon Farrar, whose patience, "fine tuning" skills, and keen insight helped shape this project. He brought together Carol Traver, MaryLynn Layman, and Randy Petersen, each of whom provided important touches to a fun project that produced a finished publication. Their efforts and teamwork have helped bring this book to life.

Tony Rufo

INTRODUCTION

Like many of us, music has been an important part of my life. When I was young, I became interested in many types of American music by listening to the radio. As a teen, I began buying and collecting records and following my favorite songs on the charts. In college, I pursued a career in the media, eventually working in radio and television, and I even worked for a brief time in the music industry.

Not surprisingly, music played a part in my becoming a Christian in 1980. Until then, I was a nominal Christian, thinking, perhaps, that if I attended church and "lived a good life," my ticket to heaven was assured. I had learned a good deal about God, Jesus Christ, and the Resurrection, but it was simply "head knowledge," not saving "heart knowledge." I was unaware that I could have a personal relationship with Christ. To use a musical analogy, it was as if I would listen to recordings of my favorite artist for years and years, and then when the artist walked into my home—in person—I would turn away, preferring the recordings instead.

My relationship with Jesus Christ began after an invitation to a seeker service and concert featuring former secular rocker Richie Furay. (Before becoming a Christian, he had been a member of three prominent secular rock bands: Buffalo Springfield, the Souther-Hillman-Furay Band, and Poco.) Totally unmoved by the invitation, I assumed the service would consist of "traditional church-organ music." However, my interest was piqued when I learned that Furay would be there. Hearing his contemporary Christian music, preceded by a number of praise choruses from the church band, the gospel was then presented in the clearest and simplest manner I had ever heard. I *knew* this was the truth. Within a few days, I made a conscious commitment to trust Jesus Christ's full payment for all my sins. My life was changed forever!

The germ of the idea for this book began not long after that special day in 1980. Not that I was thinking of immediately writing a book—I was too busy experiencing the joy of growing as a new Christian. For a time, I avoided listening to secular music, wanting to drink in as much Christian music as I could. When I returned to some of the previously loved secular tunes, I found that prolonged listening tended to drain my spirit. Nevertheless, I wanted to discern what was being said. Some of what I heard was disturbing, but some songs contained nuggets of truth. Many of the tunes seemed innocent and neutral, like cotton

candy . . . a little won't hurt you, but a daily diet of it will harm even the strongest body. I found that many songs were excellent illustrations for biblical truths. I have grown to realize God's Word is so pervasive and his truth so potent that it has value, even when embedded in a secular song.

Certainly there are many references to music in the Bible. There are songs of praise, worship, woe, victory, and defeat. God once used what I'd like to call an "instant oldie" as a promise, a prophecy, and an indictment of Israel's rebellion. God warned Moses that once Israel entered the Promised Land, they would eventually begin to worship foreign gods and turn from him. To emphasize his words, God instructed Moses to teach a song to Joshua and have it read throughout the generations as a witness against them (see Deuteronomy 31:19–32:47).

Modern songwriters are poets of this age, and we can't escape the fact that music is one of the most powerful cultural forces today. We associate certain songs with events in our lives. Couples have "their song," or our hearing an "oldie" may immediately trigger a flood of memories. Music is so ingrained in our society that it affects our speech patterns and drives the entertainment industry. Christians and non-Christians alike have a large "memory bank" of these songs, and they remain a prominent part of modern life.

Popular songs are short slices of life, and because they may contain a bit of truth, they are often useful for spiritual illustrations. Even tunes that contain untruths can point us to the truth. In referring to oldies tunes, someone once warned that it was okay to visit the old days, as long as we don't stay there. Instead of ignoring the subject and huddling out of the mainstream, we can discern truth in popular music and make the lyrics a useful spiritual tool.

In the ensuing pages, we will look at some music from our past—including pop, rock 'n' roll, rhythm and blues, jazz, and country. Much of the music was fun and innocent, but some of the songs were dark and foreboding. Let's examine what was being said, and in some cases, why it was being said.

Each of the two hundred songs covered in this book will begin with a few lines of lyrics and—in keeping with the musical theme—will be followed by commentary consisting of three sections. Though the term *Backbeat* often refers to "a sharp rhythmic accent on the second and fourth beats of a measure," we use it as a kind of flashback glimpse of the artist and the circumstances behind the recording. A *Riff* refers to a short rhythmic musical phrase that captures the essence of a tune. While a recording may express a particular truth about something such as love or making peace, it does so from a cultural perspective. In this book, we take that "riff of truth" and play it from the viewpoint of God's Word. That is the ultimate, deeper truth. Then, we've listed some parallel Scripture references for your own follow-up in a section called *Harmonies.*

We hope you will enjoy seeing truth in the songs discussed in this book and discovering truth in the other music in your life.



"CALL ME"

Chris Montez

Call me, don't be afraid, you can call me
Maybe it's late but just call me
Tell me and I'll be around

Backbeat

Ezekiel Christopher Montanez grew up in Hawthorne, California, and learned guitar from his older brothers. He met Ritchie Valens before that singer's untimely 1959 death and decided to follow in Ritchie's footsteps, writing and recording under the name Chris Montez. He soon became popular in the Los Angeles Hispanic community. Once signed to Monogram Records, he had his first national hit, the intense rocker "Let's Dance." At seventeen, he was touring with the likes of Sam Cooke, Tommy Roe, the Drifters, and the Beatles.

When he became disillusioned with the music business and was ready to quit, a friend introduced him to Herb Alpert, who signed him to A&M Records. Alpert convinced him to pursue a more conservative, soft-ballad sound instead of harder rock tunes. In 1966, his first A&M release, "Call Me," reached the number 22 spot on the charts. It was followed by three other Top 40 hits that year: "The More I See You," "There Will Never Be Another You," and "Time After Time." But after a few years and a few more hits, Montez's pop formula faded, and he changed his focus, recording songs in Spanish. As an international

artist, he enjoyed successful tours of Europe and Japan, but the gentle pop song "Call Me" remains one of his best-known hits.

Riff

The song's popularity may hinge on wish fulfillment. Don't we all want a friend who will be there for us, night or day, ready whenever we need some comfort? Montez (or the songwriter, Tony Hatch) taps into a basic human need for support. But where can we find a friend like that?

Throughout the Bible, God sings a similar song. The Psalms overflow with testimonies about the loving Lord who responds to our 911 prayers: "I call on the LORD in my distress, and he answers me" (120:1, NIV). "I will rescue those who love me. . . . When they call on me, I will answer; I will be with them in trouble" (91:14-15).

But it's not all about rescue; it's also about relationship. In Jeremiah, the Lord talks about his future plans for the people he loves, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you" (29:11-12, NIV). As in the pop song, when we need a friend, God says, "Call me." He longs for us to turn to him in times of need.

In fact, *calling* is the basic act of salvation. You can't earn eternal life with good behavior or heroic deeds. All you can do is call on him. He promises "everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved" (Romans 10:13).

Harmonies

> PSALM 17:6
> PSALM 55:16
> PSALM 91:14-15*
> PSALM 120:1, NIV*
> ISAIAH 65:1
> JEREMIAH 29:11-12, NIV*
> ROMANS 10:13*
> 1 CORINTHIANS 1:2
> 2 TIMOTHY 2:22

"GET TOGETHER"

THE YOUNGBLOODS

C'mon people now
Smile on your brother
Ev'rybody get together
Try to love one another right now

Backbeat

Though not considered a major musical force in the late sixties, the Youngbloods did provide some interesting folk-rock tunes for several years. The founder was New Yorker Jesse Colin Young (real name Perry Miller), a singer/songwriter who started out in Greenwich Village and Boston-area coffeehouses. Some of his solo albums featured backup work by John Sebastian, who would later create the successful group Lovin' Spoonful.

Once the Youngbloods were formed and signed to RCA, they had a moderate 1966 hit with "Grizzly Bear." A year later, they recorded a tune written by Dino Valenti, who intentionally tried to write a "different" song about brotherhood. He wanted his song to stand out from the many current pop songs he felt were predictable and stale. The result was an idealistic folk anthem, "Get Together," which was released to lackluster sales in 1967. That seemed like the end of the song and perhaps the group's future on RCA. However, when the National Conference of Christians and Jews used the song in a 1969 brotherhood promotion, the renewed airplay brought such resurgence that "Get Together" made the Top 5 and sold two million copies.

Riff

The chorus of "Get Together" sounds a simple call for unity. The verses go a lot deeper, contrasting love and fear in poetic, sometimes biblical language. But these were the sixties—peace, love, and all that—and the flower children gladly grabbed this inspiring tune as an anthem.

Of course, "love one another" didn't start with the Youngbloods. At the Last Supper, Jesus gave his followers this "new commandment": "Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples" (John 13:34-35). He also prayed that his disciples would get together and stay together—and not only those disciples but "all who will ever believe in me through their message." That's us; Jesus specifically prayed "that [we] will all be one" (John 17:20-21).

Of course, that's never quite as easy as it sounds. We can "*try* to love one another right now," but there are all sorts of pet peeves and me-first attitudes that make it tough. Unity starts with humility. That's a principle that appears throughout the Bible, especially in Paul's writings: "Make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose. Don't be selfish. . . . Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:2-3).

A few verses later the apostle quotes what could have been a hit song during his time, the one about Jesus leaving heaven and becoming a servant. (Scholars really do think Philippians 2:6-11 was a song sung by early Christians.) "You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. Though he was God, he did

not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being" (2:5-7).

Only with that Christlike humility can we truly "Get Together" in any meaningful way.

Harmonies

> Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
> Matthew 22:37-40
> John 13:34-35*
> John 17:20-21*
> 1 Corinthians 1:10
> Philippians 2:2-3*
> Philippians 2:5-7*
> Hebrews 10:24-25
> 1 John 2:7-11

"HELP!"

The Beatles

Help! I need somebody
Help! Not just anybody
Help! You know I need someone
Help!

Backbeat

Was there any group more popular than the Beatles? When John Lennon and Paul McCartney first met in 1957, who would have guessed that their collaboration would become the standard of pop music success? Though they broke up in 1970, the Beatles' musical influence remains strong.

The Beatles' huge popularity spilled over from music to movies. Their number 1 hit from 1965—"Help!"—was also the title tune to their second feature film. Though listed as a Lennon/McCartney piece, it was actually John Lennon who wrote this song. When asked what motivated him to write it, he responded that it was autobiographical—he truly *was* asking for help.

Riff

How can this be? A young musician sitting on top of the world, cofounder of the most popular musical group ever, was asking for help? Idolized by millions, he had fabulous wealth. Yes, by the world's standards, John Lennon had it all . . . but he still felt empty inside. This songwriter had many emotional scars from childhood, beginning when his father abandoned him and his mother. As a young adult, Lennon saw his own marriage heading for disaster. Not even the

vast fame and wealth of the Beatles could heal these hurts or fill the void in John's spirit.

John Lennon knew he needed somebody to help him, but "not just anybody." When we ask someone for help, we need to know the person we ask can do the job. That concern appears in the Bible, too. Where are you turning for help?

"I look up to the mountains," the psalmist wrote. "Does my help come from there?" Well, no. The mountains were the sites of idol altars. True assistance came from a higher source. "My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth!" (121:1-2). Isaiah looked forward to a day when people would turn to the Creator: "They will no longer look to their idols for help" (17:8).

It's always good to know when we need help. It's even better to know that "not just anybody" can help us. Lennon's song can teach us these lessons quite well, but it's best to turn to the Creator for the help we need.

Harmonies

> EXODUS 14:10
> 2 CHRONICLES 14:11
> NEHEMIAH 6:16
> PSALM 121:1-2*
> ISAIAH 17:8*
> MICAH 7:7
> ROMANS 8:26

"I NEED YOU"

AMERICA

I need you
Like the winter needs the spring
You know I need you

Backbeat

Few took notice when Gerry Beckley, Dan Peek, and Dewey Bunnell met in 1969. Sons of U.S. Air Force officers stationed in England, they formed an acoustic guitar trio, Daze, in 1970. The next year, they renamed their group America, borrowing the name from a jukebox brand. After opening for established acts such as the Who and Elton John, they landed a recording contract with Warner Brothers.

Though acoustic guitar folk-rock trios were rarities in the early seventies era of electric country rock, they hit it big with their first release, "A Horse with

No Name" (and they fiercely denied that the song was a pro-drug anthem). In the spring of 1972, America's second hit, "I Need You," reached the number 9 spot on the charts. With an appealing clarity, this song spoke of a deep need for love.

America received the Grammy Award for Best New Artist in 1972 and registered five more Top 10 hits in the following years, including "Ventura Highway," "Tin Man," and "Sister Golden Hair." In 1976, Dan Peek became a Christian and left the group to pursue contemporary gospel music.

Riff

You can say many things about romantic love, but America boiled it down to the basics. With simple repetition they made their point: "I need you." That's what love feels like, a hole in your heart that only your beloved can fill.

The Bible often compares romantic love with our love for God, and we find this sense of longing for a relationship with him. "O God, you are my God," David wrote. "I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you." At the time, David was a fugitive, scampering through the Judean desert. He felt pangs of hunger and thirst, but he knew he needed God even more. "Your unfailing love is better than life itself," he added. "You satisfy me more than the richest feast" (Psalm 63:1-5).

It was surely in happier times that David wrote his well-known Shepherd Psalm. We can imagine him as a teenager leading a flock through the grassy foothills, but the same idea inspired him even then. "The LORD is my shepherd; I have all that I need" (Psalm 23:1). It wasn't that the Lord just provided green pastures and still waters, but the Lord offered *himself*. Even in perilous times, the psalmist said of God, "you are close beside me" (Psalm 23:4).

It's lovely to witness the romantic yearning of someone saying to a sweetheart, "I need you." But that's also a picture of the basic human longing for our Creator. One philosopher wrote about a "God-shaped vacuum" in the human heart, and another said that our hearts are "restless" until they rest in God. We were made to know him, and so, like the winter needs the spring, we need him.

Harmonies

> JOB 34:14-15
> PSALM 23:1*
> PSALM 23:4*
> PSALM 42:1
> PSALM 63:1-5*
> PSALM 84:2
> ACTS 17:25, 28
> REVELATION 4:11

"LEAN ON ME"

BILL WITHERS

Lean on me, when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on

Backbeat

Born in the coal-mining community of Slab Fork, West Virginia, Bill Withers was the youngest of six children. His mother and grandmother raised him after his father died. After a nine-year navy stint, he moved to Los Angeles, worked at Boeing during the day, and cut demo records at night. After coming to the attention of executives at Sussex Records, he was signed to that label.

In 1971, his first recording, "Ain't No Sunshine," sold a million copies. He soon had two other million sellers to his credit, "Use Me" and "Lean on Me," which hit number 1 on both the pop and R&B charts in 1972. As a songwriter, singer, and guitarist, Bill Withers was a triple threat. His plaintive voice, once described as "crystalline," contains elements of soul, blues, and gospel. And his honest and sensitive songwriting quickly established him as one of the all-time greats; others continue to record his material.

In most of his songs, Withers displays an exceptional ability to mirror the hearts of people with his lyrics. In "Lean on Me," he weds deep-felt emotional support with a chord structure borrowed from hymns he heard in church as a youngster. In fact, the entire tune has the feel of a hymn.

Riff

For this inspiring song, Withers mined some childhood experiences from his coal-mining town. People in the community would have their ups and downs, physically, emotionally, or financially, but it seemed that everyone would pitch in to help those in need. That made a deep impression on young Bill.

Christians know what that's about. We serve a Savior who said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28). At various times we have found ourselves weighed down with burdens of emotional pain, of addiction, of brutal guilt, of a punishing desire to prove ourselves. The struggle to get through each day can leave our souls weary. But Jesus says we can lean on him. As the Lord told Israel, "I will strengthen you and help you. I will hold you up with my victorious right hand" (Isaiah 41:10).

And God asks us to do for others what he does for us. We become his ambassadors, showing his love, joy, and peace in our world. Burden bearing is therefore a task that we can share. "Carry each other's burdens," Paul wrote, "and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2, NIV). So "Lean

on Me" becomes our song as well as God's song. When we encounter people who are struggling with different types of burdens—physical, emotional, financial, or spiritual—we are called to pitch in and help.

Harmonies

> Exodus 18:17-23
> Psalm 40:1-2
> Ecclesiastes 4:9-10
> Isaiah 41:10*
> Matthew 11:28*
> Romans 14:13
> Galatians 6:2, NIV*
> Colossians 3:12-14

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tony Rufo is a communications and ministry executive, marketing consultant, and writer. He has spent over twenty years in ministry in broadcasting and fundraising and a number of years in general-market broadcasting, television, and marketing roles.

He has been a student of American pop music since his childhood. At an early age, Tony became interested in radio and pop music, eventually starting a record collection that numbered over twenty-thousand albums and singles. Receiving a BA in Advertising and Psychology from Roosevelt University, Chicago, he held positions on the campus radio station, hosting and producing oldies and jazz radio programs.

He has spoken at schools, colleges, churches, seminars, business meetings, and on radio and TV. He has had stints in the music industry, as well as served as a radio programming consultant. He conceived and appeared in a miniseries, "Fifty Years of Music America Loves Best," a look at popular music since 1945 from a spiritual perspective, for the nationally syndicated program *Among Friends* with Jerry Rose. Operating a strategic marketing and consulting firm, Tony assists ministries in developing new sources of income.

His published works include media and music articles and book reviews, as well as radio and television commercials and scripts. *True Tunes* News (Summer 1994) featured his article "The Gospel According to John, Paul, George, and Ringo—Good Time Rock 'n' Roll or Religion for the Undiscerning?" He has met and interviewed a number of artists ranging from rock legends to those in contemporary music.

The father of a grown daughter, he lives in the Chicago area with his wife. He spends his time reading, writing, and biking.