

Three-Chord Lectionary

*All I Have is Three Chords
and the Truth*

By Benjamin C. Squires

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**Revised Common Lectionary:
Proper 4A/Ordinary 9A
Matthew 7:21-29**

“Westside” by Athlete

From the album, *Vehicles & Animals* (2004)

You can hear Athlete trying to stretch themselves beyond Britpop or what I’d call the quintessential English Rock sound. This stretching yields a fully rounded Britpop sound. They’ve taken the sounds of Oasis, et. al., and furthered it with their compositional style. The sound is original even when finding comparisons with Turin Brakes and Coldplay.



When I first got Coldplay’s *Parachutes*, I couldn’t stop playing it. I normally like to keep listening to a variety of music, rarely repeating an album in the same week. I couldn’t stop listening to *Parachutes*. I feel that same way about *Vehicles & Animals*. The album fully envelopes me in its sound. It paints broad strokes with vocal lines and overarching melodies; it paints with splatters and jagged lines with the drum breaks, tempo changes, diverse directions, and beat programming.

Other places in the album have some great retro aspects—some of the keyboard effects, harmonies, guitar styling, all brings the 60's and 70's to mind. The band's sound is wearing retro T-shirts even while jamming on an old Stone Roses song and listening to the crazy beats coming from today's radio.

I've read review that compare Athlete to Polyphonic Spree and the Beta Band, and in places like the chorus of singers on the chorus of "Vehicles & Animals," there's clearly some shared sounds. However, where Spree and the Beta Band move towards creating an Electronica-like with their combinations of live and programmed instruments, Athlete remains mainly driven towards a more traditional rock song approach.

"You Got the Style," the UK Top 40 single, has that backbeat sound, a rock song that has a hip-hop feel, but doesn't try to have anything but a Britpop vocal. "Out of Nowhere" has got a world beat, a rap-sing bridge, a good, ol' Clash-like "Hurrah!" but again doesn't ever shake off the Britpop sound. Yet, that's a good thing for a lover of Britpop. Take Britpop in a different direction, yes, but still give me that Britpop. That's why Oasis caught my attention; that's why Coldplay took up residency in my CD player; that's why I can't stop listening to *Vehicles & Animals*. I'll just be singing along to tracks like "El Salvador" and "Westside," singable anthems of English Rock.

Proper 4A/Ordinary 9A

Matthew 7:21-29

I suppose, taken at face value, "Westside" is about being a rock 'n' roll band. The swaggering chorus says, "We sing/whenever you look you can see that everybody wants to be part of the rockscene." Athlete was getting caught up in a rush as their popularity in the UK swelled in 2003-2004, so that the song's lines rise out of their experience: "the show it must stay strong" and "are we all part of the latest craze?"

Yet, that desire to be part of the rockscene is coupled with a bridge that lifts a biblical image: “house on the rock/surely it will last forever?” Now we might not talking about rock 'n' roll; we could be talking about Christ the Rock. That's a check against the idea that being at the top of the craze in the rockscene is really just shifting sand. There's only one Rock on which to build a house.

Tablature: Playing Three Chords and the Truth

1. What other Scripture passages could also match up with this song? Why?
2. Why do people want to be part of the rock ‘n’ roll scene?
3. Does this song mention any problems with being in the rock ‘n’ roll scene?
4. What would be the reason to be part of God’s rock scene? How can we be part of that?
5. What is the house on the rock that Jesus talks about?
6. What would be the reason to be part of God’s rock scene? How can we be part of that?
7. Which is the rock ‘n’ roll scene—on the rock or on the sand? Does the singer seem to know this?
8. What scene do youth want to be part of that might really be sand?
9. How can you be part of God’s rock scene?

Liner Notes

Three-Chord Lectionary is a project of Pastor Benjamin C. Squires.

More can be found at Music Spectrum
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The goal of the Three-Chord Lectionary is to lift up songs which are not pre-determined to be Christian but still speak truth in a way which can illuminate Scripture.

The interpretations of the songs in this series do not represent the interpretations of the artists themselves. Seeing music as art and open to interpretation, I am offering one opinion on what these songs mean. Most of the artists probably never imagined the songs being used in a sermon or Bible study. The lyrics and thoughts of songwriters and others are retained by their rightful owners; their inclusion here does not necessarily imply agreement with the interpretation of Benjamin Squires. Any quotations are included according to the fair use clause of U.S. Copyright Act.

“Westside” by Athlete
from the album, *Vehicles & Animals*
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