

ON WHY NICKELBACK IS ONE OF THE
GREATEST BANDS OF ALL TIME

By Daniel Um

8/10/2019

The spectacle.

In the face of it all: the roaring fans, the invitation to comfort, and a myriad of other external factors – Nickelback has kept its head on straight. There aren't many bands that have maintained this level of consistency (especially when platforms of this magnitude are involved), both in terms of sonics and band roster (since forming in 1995, only one member out of the current four is relatively new – and he joined in 2005). They've been a band for about 24 years, and they're still going strong. Selling out full-blown stadiums, doing world tours, and continuing to record music that speaks to the universality of the human condition.

The spectacle. Some might have scoffed when I used the word "consistency". Some also don't seem to appreciate how simply honorable and difficult (for many) it is to be that consistent, in the midst of intense ridicule and indifference – sometimes, even disgust.

Examine your own personality. Examine your mannerisms. How much of them do you think have been formed, at least subconsciously, as a response to others' judgments towards you? As a response of your need for validation? For acceptance? For the

comfort of others? I should note that I don't want this piece to be read as a pity-defense for Nickelback. They don't need it. But I love them. And you can't really have love without the context of hate, pain, and the cruel things happening in the world around it. So it is necessary for me to address this.

Despite whatever your definition of success is, there is no denying that Nickelback has been and is one of the most consistent bands out there. Not even just sonically, but in terms of core principles and their never-wavering advocacy of the personal, the intimate, the prideful, the dirty, and the anger. Even if you're not a fan of the music itself, at least try to recognize that in the face of trends, artistic chew-toys, and pandering, this band has been fiercely themselves. And that's all that you can ever really ask for from anyone worth paying attention to.

You get the feeling that they'd be making this music and doing what they're doing no matter what the situation was. Whether or not people were paying attention, I bet they'd still be jamming it out, taking part in their eternal journey of carving out ways to express whatever the fuck they feel like. And that's why I think they're so great.

Simply that. I have an enormous amount of respect for them and how they operate.

Sure, the actual surface content of their work – like their heavy use of themes of prostitution and drugs – might not be the most relatable and universal, but if you dig deep enough (just like with anything else), you find common ground and you see themes on yearning for connection and escapism. They're not afraid to showcase all aspects of their personalities – like the prideful ("Rockstar").

Let's take their "Photograph" song as an example. In my opinion, it is one of the most, if not the most, quintessential song on nostalgia, self-reflection, and the bittersweet quality of having moved on to a new chapter in life. Again, the specifics of the past life Kroeger is reminiscing on might not be the most relatable, but all you have to do is look past that and you'll see a beautiful work of art that articulates what everyone has felt inside – and that's why it's so damn popular.

The spectacle. The western world is largely obsessed with this existential-productive fetish, where we're all never ceasing to stop and take a breath. To reflect on where we are now, where we've come from, and where we'd like to be. So many of us

are obsessed with what other people are doing, and looking to see what other people have done as a reference or justification of what paths we ourselves should take in life. This isn't necessarily even a social media thing – this theme of constant distraction and stimuli seduction has been around for ages and ages.

But even in the midst of the distracting world around us, whether we like it or not, we find moments in the day where we have no choice but to be with ourselves and think about where we are. Whether it's taking a shit, taking a shower, or being in bed and getting ready to sleep, our brains find a way to process these thoughts.

So, in a sense, Nickelback is in itself a photograph. They're the perfect embodiment of all the emotions and flaws and desires that they choose to showcase. It's something that anyone from any time can listen to and be immediately warped into, something that we as a species can comfortably rely on to be consistent and thus the perfect data backup of the times. It's the perfect vessel, the perfect photograph of a thousand words, for us to look at and see that the universal human experience is within them, too. They just have their own language in which to articulate it – and dammit,

they're going to keep using that language regardless of what you think about them.

In an increasingly rapidly ever-changing world, Nickelback stands its ground and maintains that being human and what it's like will never change, despite what may be happening on the surface level. Some of us might feel overwhelmed, or increasingly isolated, but like a college graduate who's moving across the country for a job and finds a photograph of a long-lost childhood friend, we can look to Nickelback as a photograph, reflect on it, breathe the music in, and use it as fuel for strength to move on and look to the future.