

## U2 is more than a band; it is a voice for peace and justice



**BARB GUY**

When you disagree with people, especially politicians whose actions you abhor, when in your very soul you think they're killing the world with their policies, how do you invite them to lunch?

I want to learn to be a person who could do that.

My muse and role model for this is Bono, lead singer of the band U2.

A lot of people admire pop stars - they're rich, they're famous, they're attractive; many of them even have talent, so they're easy to admire. I try to reserve admiration for people truly worth emulating, not those who just sing well or make a lot of money, or are beautiful, but folks whose lives improve the world.

Bono is a voice for global peace and justice. He bridges chasms of difference to work effectively and amicably with opponents,

improving and saving lives. He's been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize.

For Bono, co-founder of DATA.org (Debt Aid Trade Africa), stacks of reports from the World Bank, UNICEF, and the World Trade Organization are bedtime reading. To influence American policy, he traveled throughout Africa with a Harvard economist and Paul O'Neill, the Bush administration treasury secretary.

He has met with and lobbied Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Tom DeLay, Karl Rove and Orrin Hatch. President Bush had Bono at his side last year when he announced the U.S. aid package for Africa. Jesse Helms, often characterized as a mean-spirited arch-conservative, is said to be friends with Bono. The octogenarian senator attended a U2 concert in 2002.

Bono has amazing interpersonal skills. He's had the same three bandmates, Larry Mullen Jr, Adam Clayton and the Edge, for nearly 30 years. Their respectful collaboration is legendary. To get to be an insanely successful band is a good enough trick, but to remain one for more than a quarter-century is a miracle.

Imagine starting a band in high school. Now imagine that close to 30 years later you're all jillionaires (each U2 member is

said to be worth in the hundreds of millions) and you're still together. Nobody acts spoiled, nobody is in rehab, nobody left the band over artistic differences.

The guys in U2 still wake up loving what they do, their fans still find them relevant, and their manager has been with them since their days scrounging for bus fare and Guinness money in the late '70s. That's impressive. And, through it all, in possibly the pinnacle of interpersonal accomplishment, Bono has stayed married to his high school girlfriend.

Still at the peak of their game after a generation on the charts, U2 won Grammy Awards last Wednesday for Song of the Year, Album of the Year, Best Rock Performance, Best Rock Song and Best Rock Album.

The first time I saw U2, they played New Faces Roadhouse, a now-defunct bar, for a couple hundred people. It was 1981 and I wasn't yet 21. More surprisingly, neither were three of the four in the band. Only bassist Clayton was old enough to be there that night; the rest of U2 (and I) would turn 21 in the ensuing months.

U2 was a group of boys then, traveling the States in a van, happy to be seeing America. That night, a few fans stayed and chatted with the group. Against

# The Salt Lake Tribune

the backdrop of constant religio-political terrorist bombings in Ireland, where they lived, someone asked if they were Protestant or Catholic. I picture now that it was Bono who replied, "We're both; we're neither."

I wish I remember what I paid to see U2 in that State Street bar. I wish I had the Boy album they autographed for me. Someone stole it years ago. (Keep your eye out - Bono wrote my name on it.) I do remember what I paid at the Delta Center several weeks back. You don't want to know. And we didn't have good seats.

We were directly behind U2 and on the second-to-highest row in the entire arena. We were closer to John Stockton's jersey than to the group, giving us new perspective on U2's songs "Elevation" and "Vertigo," but it didn't matter. We had a blast.

That night last December, a fan brought a large American flag. When Bono came nearby, she offered it to him. He draped it, upside down (an act said to imply the country is in distress), on the stage and sang "Sunday Bloody Sunday," a song inspired by the deadly Irish "troubles."

Afterward, he said the song belongs to America now.

Then he implored, "Co-exist, co-exist."

Did he mean the civil war is in America rather than Ireland now, or that we've created a civil war in Iraq, or that we have no

business dominating the other sovereign countries of the world, or that we need to curb our destructive insatiability for the world's resources, or was it an invitation to look for common ground - even with those political leaders who make us go crazy? Yes.

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*Barb Guy is a frequent contributor to these pages. © Salt Lake Tribune.*