

Why is this video so powerful?

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Why is the video of Mumford & Sons' single "I Will Wait" so powerful? When I feel lousy, I dial the thing up on YouTube:

Everyone I've sent it to has a similar response. And this isn't even the best song on *Babel*. Whence its power? Why was it one of YouTube's most watched videos of 2012?

You can tell the impact of the rootsy band—which appeared out of nowhere in 2010 with *Sigh No More*—by the vitriol of its many critics. In [a particularly nasty slime job](#), Matthew Schmitz accuses the Brits of being posers, with their waistcoats and stage-stomping reverie. "The real Marcus Mumford has no sons at all," his post whines. (This just in: the Beatles were not insects, and the Rolling Stones are not inanimate objects in motion.)

Some critics have been more laudatory. Ashley Feters [praises with a memorable phrase](#): the band's early material often "sounded [like] it had spontaneously erupted from behind somebody's barn." For me, their work is poetry in Emily Dickinson's sense: it takes the top of your head off.

Sometimes the band is explicit in its language of faith; sometimes it professes world-affirming wisdom without being specifically religious. My own favorite recurring Mumford theme is [friendship](#), with God or otherwise:

But I will hold on hope,

And I won't let you choke

On the noose around your neck.

And I'll find strength in pain,

And I will change my ways.

I'll know my name as it's called again.

Marcus Mumford is a son of Vineyard Christian leadership in the U.K., and his voice suggests he has led worship. He uses it not to wow but to drag a song out of the reluctant. Many in the church have embraced the band with enthusiasm.

I asked a campus minister friend if he's into *Babel*. He rolled his eyes: of course he is. All his students are listening to it. This is somewhat surprising for a band that drops f-bombs in some of its most powerful songs. (I so wish I could use "[Little Lion Man](#)" at church, as a confession of sin.) But Mumford is, quite simply, the most important band for the church since U2. Mumford's songs approximate worship in a similar way, but more consistently.

I find myself belting their tunes on the way to church—and wishing the effect was like that in Red Rocks Amphitheater in Denver, where the "I Will Wait" video was shot. The spectacular setting may help explain the video's power, but not even that satisfies. The unadorned video simply shows the band playing with its normal exuberance, the lead singer's usual droll expression, the requisite ecstatic fans with glowing phones. Again, why?

Maybe it's the distinctive sound that drives the band's engine: Marcus Mumford's joyfully booming kick drum, with which he keeps time while also playing guitar and singing. Part of the appeal is how far past cool they are. They play like musicians in love with their music and unconcerned about how they look playing it. They show a puppy-dog dorkiness about the upright bass, the banjo, the keyboard, the microphone, the occasional brass section. They look lost in the music, like worship at its best. They look like they're having as much fun as anyone in the house.

One commentator pointed out the deep pathos in "I Will Wait." Its lyrics are so simple as to be barely quotable here; the chorus repeats the title over and over again. ([One critic complains](#) that the band's first album is so spiritually earnest that it "weeps holy water.") But you can't belt that line unless you've had someone fail to wait for you before. Unless you've been betrayed, left hanging, shut out—and you're making a promise not to do that to someone else. It's a song about friendship. And not much else is worth singing about with that kind of self-forgetful ecstasy.

My wife and I took an anniversary trip to Paris recently, enabled by frequent flyer miles and grandparents' babysitting largesse. At an Irish pub one night we noticed "I Will Wait" on the TV, a video of a British band recorded in America. The barkeep changed the channel, and we shouted involuntarily. He turned it back on and turned it up, and we shouted along, not a few Parisians joining in. It was a Pentecost moment, more dorky than cool. Song ended, we raised our glasses, tipped well, and

left—resolved to reenter the world-repairing practice of friendship, accompanied by a song we couldn't stop singing.