

## Opinion Father's Day

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# Being invited into my son's music appreciation group was the best Father's Day present

*Paul Mitchell*

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We started chatting about deep stuff, things we normally wouldn't find a way to discuss



‘As much as I knew Joy Division were seminal, cool, tragic, luminescent and every other alt rock cliché, I hadn't listened to them much. And I decided to risk telling my son why.’ Photograph: Rob Verhorst/Redferns

In the lead up to Father's Day this year, my 20-year-old son gave me one of the best gifts a man my age can get: an invitation to join his exclusive online music appreciation group.

Along with him and his locked-down millennial buddies, I now get to add to the group playlist the songs and albums that have made my life. “Because Dad,” he messaged me, “we're listening to a lot of old stuff at the moment.”

For them, that means Nirvana, The Smiths, Joy Division and **Smashing Pumpkins**. I developed immediate posting paralysis, worried I'd suggest an album that would embarrass me.

“How do I do this, son? Can I just anonymously stick something on there?” No, what I had to do was type a little intro into the Messenger group then post a link to a song or album.

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*Anna Spargo-Ryan*

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So, I tried: “Teenage Fanclub, band that supported [Nirvana](#) in early ‘90s and Cobain described as the best in the world. I like to imagine Kurt standing beside the stage listening to The Concept and just gaping in amazement.”

And I sent them a link to the Scottish outfit’s 1991 album, *Bandwagonesque*. I received *four* love heart reactions, plus some welcomes to the group.

I got my Father’s Day present because I finally caught the beat - my son wanted to connect with me through music. I’d been fretting about how to maintain a relationship with him - a young adult in a share house during Covid-19 - while he was sending me messages about the music he was listening to in lockdown. And I kept bouncing messages back: “great album” or “nice track”. Instead of going deep.

The deep conversation started when he messaged me asking if I had a favourite [Joy Division](#) song. I came straight back with “Love Will Tear Us Apart”. He responded with the laugh-‘til-you-cry emoji and “Come on, branch out a little!” The trouble was, I couldn’t. As much as I knew Joy Division were seminal, cool, tragic, luminescent and every other alt rock cliché, I hadn’t listened to them much. And I decided to risk telling my son why.

In the early ‘90s, there was a recession on, just like today. I couldn’t get a job after finishing my journalism degree, so I fudged my way into working as a nurse’s assistant at a nursing home. I was alone after midnight in the Alzheimer’s ward, silent, but for the occasional murmur from a sleeping resident. I patrolled eerie corridors and, when I came to the dark lounge room, a TV was playing *Rage* at low volume. I hunched in close, listened to mournful singing and synth sounds, watched cloaked figures in black and white carry large photographs of people through a desert scape. And I got the chills.



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I found out later it was the 1980 film clip to Joy Division’s *Atmosphere*, but as I watched it then, I knew I couldn’t listen to that band. Struggling with mental health issues that remain never far from view, it felt to me that Joy Division could soundtrack me to a place I didn’t want to go.

I explained all this to my son.

“well that was far more than i bargained for hahahah but that is actually extremely interesting to hear” he messaged back.

It got us chatting about deep stuff, things we normally wouldn’t find a way to discuss, especially the impact of mental health on lives and careers. The music appreciation group my son started is one way he’s trying to help keep his friends’ spirits up. They’re all nearing the end of their university degrees and heading into one of the most uncertain job markets in Australia’s history.

But that conversation was for another day. He wanted to know what *Velvet Underground* I’d listened to.

● Paul Mitchell is a Melbourne writer. His latest book is a novel, [We. Are. Family](#). (MidnightSun Publishing)

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