

I miss my flannel and grunge rock

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"It's tearin' up my heart" every time I turn on the radio these days. I can't even twist the dial without giving myself a pep talk first.

"Just ignore it, it'll go away." But it's always the same, no matter what I tell myself. There are always some pre-pubescent 12-year-olds whining about their long-lost love.

Or even worse, five 25- to-30-year-old men painstakingly professing their undying devotion to their first love, some teen-age virgin, because that's where they get their money.

What happened to music with meaning? It doesn't seem to have any place on Billboard's charts these days. I feel like a middle-aged hippie complaining about how my kids don't appreciate good music. But someone comparing the Beatles to Nirvana is a bit different than trying to compare Led Zeppelin to the Backstreet Boys.

While my parents weren't exactly big fans of grunge rock back in the early 1990s, they at least recognize the fact that most of the lyrics are more intelligent than Britney Spears wailing, "You drive me crazy/I just can't sleep/I'm so excited, I'm in too deep."

Very deep. Moving, in fact — if you're 15. But what about the rest of us? Those of us who managed to graduate high school might want to listen to slightly more intelligent lyrics.

Sure, the boy and girl bands have catchy tunes, but more than half of them don't even write them or play their own instruments. Wait, who learns to play their own instruments these days? That's why we have studio musicians.

When I was only 14 or 15 myself, I fell in love with Nirvana. Not because other people did, but because their music spoke to me beyond the ramblings of some heartbroken teen-ager. Most of their lyrics, in fact, are very simple, but not completely familiar and definitely unique.

In "Serve the Servants," Kurt Cobain wrote, "I tried hard to have a father, but instead I had a dad/I just want you to know that I don't hate you anymore/There is nothing I could say that I haven't thought before." There's nothing flowery about these lyrics, they're highly relatable and they have made many people like myself take a second look into their lives.

Anyone can relate to a lovesick teen-ager, but there's a deeper level of relation that Nirvana and other bands have offered that is neglected in today's popular music.

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One artist who earns my respect for saying whatever is on his mind, whenever he feels like it, is Eminem. Like the grunge bands I loved 10 years ago, he connects with people on a more intimate level by saying anything, by taking personal and often painful experiences and releasing them out into the open.

Some of my favorite lines comes from the song "Criminal," when Eminem shows what he thinks of religious and moral hypocrites.

He states, "Please Lord, this boy needs Jesus/Heal this child, help us destroy these demons/Oh, and please send me a brand new car and a prostitute while my wife's sick in the hospital/Preacher preacher, fifth grade teacher, you can't reach me, my mom can't neither/You can't teach me a goddamn thing cause I watch TV and Comcast cable."

Not only are Eminem's lyrics funny and bitingly cynical, but many people, whether they admit to it or not, can relate to his social commentary.

And if you don't relate, Eminem doesn't care. He's not in the industry just to sell records; he wants his voice to be heard. At least artists like him realize that music is a form of free expression, and to simply say whatever a record company is paying them to say isn't enough to satisfy them.

So while I'm not so unrealistic as to say that boy and girl bands do not have their place in today's music, I wish that powerful, lyric-driven rock music could find some room on the charts today for those of us over 16 and under 60.

Meanwhile, I'll be wandering the streets wearing an old flannel, humming the words to Pearl Jam's "Jeremy" as a car speeds by blasting, "I'm a genie in a bottle, gotta rub me the right way, honey."