

EPISODE 008

Interview: A Minute for Manny

See the show notes at www.storiesinsongs.com/008

Melanie: [00:00:00] Hey. Welcome back to the stories in songs podcast. This is the podcast for musicians, songwriters, and storytellers who want to change lives and create meaning through the story they tell and the songs they sing. Today we have a very special episode because I have an amazing guest on the show. He's an aspiring songwriter and musician from Canada. It's Emmanuel Robert Gambriel, also known as A Minute For Manny.

He has already released an EP called "They Say" on [Soundcloud](#) and [Spotify](#). That I highly recommend if you are looking for some powerful songs sung straight from the heart.

And if you have tuned in on the last episode of this podcast, then you've already listened to his amazing heartbreaking song "Last Goodbye"

And today I have the wonderful opportunity to talk with him about his music, his songwriting process as well as about how much stories influence his songwriting. So it's going to be very exciting. So let's get started.

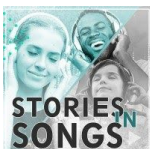
Hey Emmanuel. I'm so glad to have you on the show.

Emmanuel: [00:01:10] I'm so happy to be here.

How A Minute for Manny got into music by filling someone else's shoes.

Melanie: [00:01:12] Awesome. So, let's talk for a second how you got into music. Because I love stories. And since everyone has their own story to tell of how they got into the things they love, I'd love to hear how you got into making music.

Emmanuel: [00:01:26] Yeah, absolutely. For me, I wonder the same thing myself how I got into it. As far back as I can remember, really, I remember singing in a church choir. And this was Christian school I went to and I got the lead part.



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Melanie: [00:01:42] Congratulations.

Emmanuel: [00:01:42] Well, well, it was mainly because I'm pretty sure the lead was sick on the day of. So I was the follow-up, but I still took it.

Melanie: [00:01:55] Sometimes that's destiny.

Emmanuel: [00:01:56] Exactly.

Yeah. It's funny. The same thing happened a few years later. I think it was in grade two or three, and our school was putting on a play and the exact same thing happened.

Our lead was sick that day.

And I was the follow-up. So I got to go on stage.

I played a dog, this super dog. It was pretty funny.

So as far back as I can think, I always enjoyed being on the stage.

But, I never really followed the music. That was just something that I was kind of thrown into like every single time I just fill their shoes.

And so: *"Awesome, cool. I get to do it"*.

The rest of the time though, I didn't really follow music at all.

I spent all my time drawing.

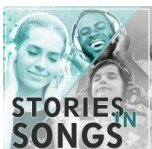
That was my main thing. I would just draw in every single class everywhere, anytime. As long as I had a pencil and paper, all I would be doing is drawing.

But, I guess it wasn't until high school or just before high school when I got my first guitar on my birthday. It was this super cheap, like terrible, absolutely horrid guitar from this pawn shop near my house.

How Iron Maiden changed everything

But I remember, I wanted it so bad because I had just started listening to Iron Maiden and metal music.

After hearing that, and the powerful, amazing riffs and guitar solos, it was like. *"All right, this is what I have to do. This is what I need in my life."*



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So I got that guitar and I remember the weeks leading up to it. I was learning how to read tabs, not even music or anything. And I remember sitting in the car and I had it memorized already in my head.

And I remember just playing those first few notes of - it was "Seven Nation Army", by the way. It's the first song I ever played. And yeah, from there it was just: that's all I wanted to do.

And for the longest time, I just wanted to be a guitar player. I wanted to be a rock star.

I want to play some crazy like face-melting solos. And so I stuck with it.

I kept, playing, and kept practicing. As much as I had, I put into playing the guitar.

And so I was really excited when a friend of mine came to me and he tells me:

"You play, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I'm putting this band together and we want you in it."

"Well, that's sweet."

Obviously. I wanted.

So after school, I go with them. We go to our buddy's house and I'm trying out for the band, but it turns out they already have two guitarists. So all they need is a vocalist.

Well, I was kind of misled there. I was expecting to play some cool guitar, but they only wanted someone to sing. Whatever, I want to be in this band, so I'll do whatever it takes. So I tried out.

"Like all that's pretty good."

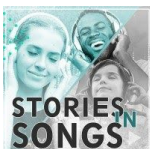
I think I was singing like an Our Lady Peace song. And, yeah, we just had so much fun learning all these songs.

We did a couple of Iron Maiden songs. We did some Soundgarden, Audioslave.

And, it was terrible.

I remember we recorded a lot of them just on my buddies computer and they were so bad. I couldn't even hear myself singing over the sound of the rest of the band.

So when we listened to the recordings, it was just awful. It was terrible. but I mean, I got more comfortable with it.



The impact that one single song can make.

And for me, there was this amazing moment where we were covering the song "**Simple Man**" by Lynyrd Skynyrd.

Melanie: [00:05:14] Right.

Emmanuel: [00:05:14] And that song is amazing. I still think to this day, it just like brings me back to that time: grade nine first band ever.

And I got so into the melody and the lyrics.

Everyone else in the band was saying *"No. You're going way overboard. You're getting too into it."*

I was getting too expressive, like all over the place with the melody and stuff.

And I was kind of upset by that.

I'm singing my heart out.

"No, it's too much. Tone it down a bit."

The mentor steps in and offers guidance

But then, we had all our band practices at our drummer's place. His dad had 13 guitars on the walls and it was his drum set. And it was his band place. He had his friends come over jam.

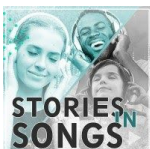
He pulled me aside one day and he told me:

"Don't listen to those guys. You sing, whatever you feel like. You do it yourself. Ignore them all. Sing for yourself."

And that kind of stuck with me and since then I just gave it.

And I think it was a couple of months later, our bass player was taking music lessons at this place in town and they were putting on a show for all their students.

And so he got us in.



The first show - *“It was so bad.”*

That's when I played my first show and it was amazing and it was terrible. It was so bad.

Everything that could go wrong, went wrong.

We showed up and we get on stage and plug our stuff in. We had technical difficulties right off the bat. Nothing was working. The amplifiers wouldn't turn on or the pedals weren't working.

And so I'm standing on stage and I'm supposed to be the frontman for this band.

And I have no idea what I'm doing.

I'm supposed to ease the audience and introduce us and tell them everything's going to be all right. We're just having some technical issues.

I was just frozen.

I didn't know what the hell to do.

But then finally the technicians, they get it all worked out.

We finally started playing. And right after we started playing. I could actually sing.

All of that, the nerves and everything, went away.

I didn't care about who we were singing for, how many people were there.

It was just such an amazing experience. And I sang my heart out.

We had such a great time and I'll never forget the applause.

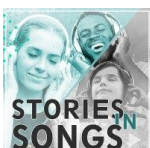
Everyone was just excited and happy. And, after that, I realized, *“All right, I really want to sing.”*

So then I picked up an acoustic guitar and I started focusing more on singing.

“I still have the metalhead blood flowing through my veins”

Melanie: [00:07:30] and did you change what you were singing like from Iron Maiden and metal? Did you go back into the Lynyrd Skynyrd type of songs? Or how did that change?

Emmanuel: [00:07:39] I still wanted to be a rockstar, a metalhead. I still have the metalhead blood flowing through my veins.



But at the time I didn't have a good amp or like any pedals or anything. So I couldn't play the metal that I wanted to.

And so I had this acoustic guitar and I started trying to write some metal and it just wasn't the same on an acoustic.

And then one day, a friend of mine had just shown me Ed Sheeran.

His first album just came out.

And, what was the name of the song?

"White lips, pale face."

Melanie: [00:08:14] Oh, you mean The A-Team.

How writing a pop song started as a joke

Emmanuel: [00:08:15] Yeah, **"The A-Team"**, my God, that really changed things for me.

I like pop music.

And I like acoustic stuff. I really love acoustic, like punk-pop covers.

But when I heard that I was just blown away.

It was simple. And just perfect.

Still to this day, that song is just amazing.

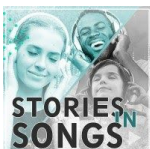
The storytelling is unbelievable. And the instrumentals they're so simple, but that's all it needs to be.

It doesn't have to be blazing solos and crazy melodies and stuff.

And so then, basically, as a joke, because I didn't want to admit to myself that I wanted to write a pop song.

So I did it kind of as a joke to myself, I thought, *"How can I write the most cliché pop song ever?"*

Melanie: [00:09:00] That's a good approach.



“How can I write the most cliché pop song ever?”

Emmanuel: [00:09:01] Yes, exactly. I did it like kind of disingenuous to myself.

I really wanted to write a pop song, but I didn't want to admit to myself that I was writing a pop song.

So I did it as a joke at first, but then as the melody and the lyrics started coming together, I realized that it's not bad. So I put more work into it.

And I think I spent more time and effort into that one song than anything else.

And that ended up being: **“They Say”** which is the title track of my first EP.

And what I love about it: because it started as a joke and because I thought: *“How cliché can I make it?”*, what I did was, I took basically all the clichés I could think of. Like, if you love her, let her go.

And every cliché I could think of.

And I used them as the starting line for every line of every verse.

But then I kind of turned them on their head and made them more personal.

So the first line of the song is: *“If you love her, let her go.”*

“Then if she comes back to you, then she loves you.”

That's too cliché.

And I wanted to switch it up a little, still making it my own.

So all right:

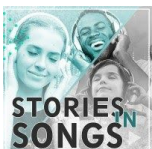
“If you love her, let her go.

She goes back to, she loves you.

I guess she doesn't love me anymore.”

Flipping the coin in songwriting

I think that one song influenced a lot of my writing. Where it starts off saying one thing.



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And a lot of them are pretty cliché sayings, but then I take that and look at the other side of the coin. Just flip it entirely. Just see where that takes me.

What I learned from that - which now that I look back on everything I've written - has all kind of had the same idea.

I may start off a song as being very sad or being very happy. And then it usually turns on itself to be the complete opposite. If it starts off sad, it ends happily. Or if it starts off happy, it ends sadly.

But the thing that I learned through all of that is that they're both two sides of the same coin. There's love and there's hate, but there's really neither one without the other.

Melanie: [00:11:05] Yeah, like black and white.

Emmanuel: [00:11:07] Exactly. There's a contrast and each stands out more because of the other.

You can't have one without the other and the deeper the despair you have, the brighter the joy or delight that comes afterward or vice versa.

Melanie: [00:11:24] Yeah.

That's exactly what I found in your song "**Last Goodbye**" because it was very sad and very heartbreaking. You're talking about: Saying goodbye to the one person that you love so much, but you have to let her go.

In the last line, you've embraced this hope. "*Okay. Then I have to say hello to someone new.*"

And that's just a tiny spark.

But as you said, because it's like love and hate. You were on one side of that coin.

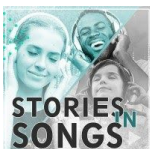
But then you put that light in your song. So it was shining very brightly.

And that's amazing that you do this because that's part of storytelling: to make a scene turn.

Just started at one point. Talk about how it is, but then there's something that happens and it all turns around and it's either going to be more positive or more negative.

Emmanuel: [00:12:14] Absolutely. I try to end it more positively.

Cause who wants to, at the end of the day, feel down. So I try to make it happy by the end.



Quitting a day job to go busking in small towns

Melanie: [00:12:23] We can talk about your songwriting later in this interview again.

But first, because I know, we've already talked about it and this was a huge part of your journey, you said that at one point music became so important to you that you gave up your job just to follow up on making music.

When was that and what did you do before you made this huge decision?

What led to quitting the job

Emmanuel: [00:12:45] So, that was almost to the day, around this time three years ago though.

I was working as a cook in this restaurant, this bar. I had originally gone there because I reached the top as a cook at the other restaurant I was at.

And then this new bar opened and I knew the owner I knew some of the people there.

I was told I could get my red seal by working under the chef there somebody.

Well, that's the next step obviously: is get my red seal, and then become an accredited chef.

So I went there.

And it was just terrible.

The chef ended up quitting because management was not the greatest.

So I had no other prospects there.

I ended up just taking on the job. He left.

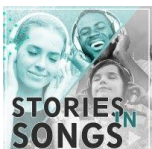
And so I ended up running the kitchen.

I wrote new menu items and I had fun with it for a bit.

I got to create new items, rewrite the menu, and do this and that. But I ended up working six, seven days a week up to 12 hour days. And most of the time I'd be by myself doing everything.

It was horrible. Some people like that, some people are into that, but I realized then that's not what I wanted.

I couldn't continue working like that.



And every single day I'd worked up to 12 hours and then there was a bar. So I finished work and then they give me a free beer too.

And then I would buy several more after that.

And every day blended into the next.

I was getting wasted after work and then I'd show up, wake up and I'd be there again.

And every day, I was there and I was either working way too hard for way too little money and then drinking the rest of the night away.

And it got to the point where I couldn't take it anymore.

“I needed something else.”

I needed something else. And I had no idea what else to do.

I had a little bit of a break, like mentally.

I just knew I didn't want to do it anymore.

And so to me, the only sensible thing was to leave.

Find another job somewhere else where maybe it wouldn't be as bad.

I might be happy because I knew like I didn't want to do this anymore.

I didn't want to work like that anymore.

I quit my job. I sold whatever things I could to make little extra money.

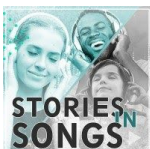
Walking across Canada. Why not ;-)

And I had this crazy harebrained scheme of I was going to walk.

Walk to the East coast of Canada, which is insanely far.

Melanie: [00:15:13] You're in Windsor?

Emmanuel: [00:15:14] Windsor, Ontario.



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And I had this plan of going out to Halifax, Nova Scotia, across the country.

I'm basically in the middle. It's on the other side.

And we're like one of the largest countries in the world, but I had this idea and I stuck with it.

It wasn't hard.

I bought myself this big backpack. I bought a tent. I just said *"This is what I'm doing, everybody. See you later."*

And I hit the road.

I walked pretty far.

I just spent eight hours a day walking. Did nothing but that. And I'd stop in every town along the way.

And all it brought with me was my tent and my backpack, and I brought a guitar.

Melanie: [00:15:49] That's very important. The guitar.

Making money on the road

Emmanuel: [00:15:51] That was the most important part because I ran through my money very quickly.

But I also very quickly found that I could make enough to eat lunch or just grab whatever I needed for the road.

Every place, every town that I stopped in, I would find the city hall, the town center - the place where the most people would be, take out my guitar and I sing some songs.

People loved it.

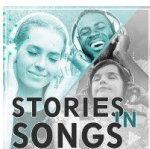
Especially, I went to all these tiny little towns that no one's ever heard of and the tiny little populations.

And no one's ever done that.

There aren't buskers, street performers in these little towns.

And I guess I've found a niche there. No one else is doing this.

I'm doing this.



I'm going to have fun with it.

It was so much fun.

Just the freedom: sleeping under the stars and then playing music.

And people appreciated it. They loved it.

They gave me money and it was such a great time. I eventually made my way all the way up to Ottawa, which for me, that's the farthest from home I've ever been.

And also it was Canada day weekend.

It was Canada's 150th birthday. And I made it to our nation's capital for that, which was gnarly.

And the streets were just packed, flooded every single day of it. And I was cleaning up a bunch of money. I met a bunch of cool people at a great time.

I think it was there that I realized, the journey I had undertaken was kind of foolish.

I had never gone hiking before. I never really camped before.

I didn't know what I was doing just sleeping on the streets.

There was when I realized, I can't do this anymore.

I didn't know what I got myself into.

Melanie: [00:17:28] How long were you on the road?

Learning for Life - Living in eternity

Emmanuel: [00:17:30] Just over a month. It wasn't that long.

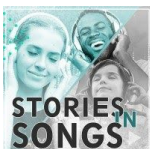
It felt like an eternity.

Every single day, from sunrise to sunset, it's being somewhere new, every single step of the way.

I wasn't gone very long, but I learned a lot.

I think in that short amount of time, the biggest thing for me was that I can make money, playing music on the streets. I eventually, made my way home shortly afterward.

Melanie: [00:17:52] Walk or take a bus?



Emmanuel: [00:17:54] I took a bus home. It was such a relief to finally sleep on something that had padding, which was nice.

And when I got home, I realized I still don't want to go back to work.

Make money by playing music on the streets

I'll just keep playing music. And so I did.

I find a different spot. I'd play downtown for a while. And then I just started walking all over the city every day and I tried to find somewhere new that I could play.

And then, you find your good spots, set up shop and you meet the same people. And it's pretty good. It's a good time. And I made it work for a while.

Then I realized, I was tired of doing the same thing.

Every day I realized I was tired of playing the same songs every day. And I tried to learn at least like two or three new songs a week, but it was all just: I'm trying to learn songs that people are listening to, top 40 hits and this and that. And I don't like that either.

So, I said: *"Well, if I'm gonna put everything I have into making music, I should probably write my own."*

And it wasn't until last year when I decided to start writing my own music.

Recording "They Say"

Melanie: [00:19:00] Was it at that time that you recorded that cliché pop song?

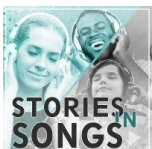
Emmanuel: [00:19:04] Exactly. Yeah.

Actually, I started writing the pop song like years ago when I first bought my acoustic guitar, but it was still kind of a joke to me and I still didn't take it seriously.

Now I'm at a point where I have to write my own music.

So when I look back and I'm like: "That's not bad, actually. That's kinda good."

So I started with that one.



I just went from there and started writing more. And the process was pretty slow.

I didn't push it.

I just waited for either the melody or the lyrics.

And they basically come to me when I'm walking. Sometimes a couple of words would just stick in my head. I gotta write those down and turn it into something.

Eventually, I had three songs, which I thought was pretty solid.

And I went to a friend of mine I met years ago who had a recording studio.

What else would I have to do?

If I'm going to follow music I gotta write my own stuff, so I recorded the three songs really quickly and I put them out and it was great.

I started this.

I finished it.

Saw it all the way through, like I wrote the songs, I recorded them.

I put them online.

And I kind of hated them.

“I wanted to make metal music!”

Melanie: [00:20:12] They weren't what you wanted to write originally?

Emmanuel: [00:20:15] I guess.

I still had this idea of what I wanted to write in my head.

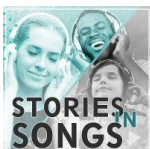
And to this day, it's always been metal. I've always wanted to write this.

And so to be honest, I'm a little ashamed of everything I had written.

It wasn't the style of music that I would listen to myself.

I listened to pop songs or what's on the radio.

But it's not something I look for.



It's not something I choose to listen to. So when I listened to my songs, I realized, yeah, they might be good, but it's not what I want to do.

And that's when I started the song a day challenge.

A song a day challenge - over 100 songs written in 100 days.

Melanie: [00:20:50] Yeah. Tell us about that. Everyone who follows you on Instagram and Facebook, they know you used the time of COVID-19 quite effectively.

Participating in the song, writing challenge, writing one song a day for over a hundred days. How did that work out for you? Did you write your metal songs?

Emmanuel: [00:21:10] Well, it had nothing to do with COVID. I started it a little beforehand.

I made a point of not writing anything that had to do with that. Just because I was trying not to do things that people wanted to hear, you know?

Melanie: [00:21:23] Yeah.

How 'A Minute for Manny' got his name.

Emmanuel: [00:21:24] I started the challenge.

I figured I'd put it on Instagram.

And at the time I thought your posts on Instagram could only be a minute long.

And so that's where A Minute for Manny came in the first place.

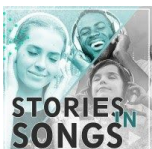
The songs I wrote, in the beginning, were only a minute long.

Melanie: [00:21:40] So it's a fun story.

Emmanuel: [00:21:43] I learned a lot from that. The songs were very different, because to a lot of them, I had tried to add a metal sound to them.

And if you listen to some of the older stuff, there's a few that have some pretty wicked guitar riffs.

And sometimes I came up with a cool riff. And I thought I'm just going to post that - no lyrics or anything. Just the music, just the guitar.



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But for some reason, it just didn't feel complete.

I think there was only one song that I posted that was just the guitar. And then an hour later, I posted the same guitar with lyrics over it, because I felt compelled.

Then I realized that you're allowed to post longer than a minute.

And at the time it was perfect because one minute is not long enough.

I'm sure a lot of people can write an amazing one minute song.

But it just didn't seem like long enough for me to tell a story.

I felt I had a lot more creative freedom. I can make them seven-minutes long if I want to.

Most of them are around three minutes, but I can do what I want. Until I think that it's finished.

The troubles of keeping up with writing a song each day

Melanie: [00:22:47] But what was the hardest challenge you had to face during this time?

Emmanuel: [00:22:51] Every single day, to be honest,

Melanie: [00:22:53] How did you get through it keeping up writing all of those songs?

Emmanuel: [00:22:56] I just did it. I just forced myself to do it. And so many days, I would hate everything that I would write.

That's what drove me. I don't need perfection. I wasn't expecting anything perfect to come out of this, out of any single day, any single song that I wrote.

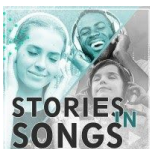
All I was looking for was the bare minimum.

I need a decent melody. I need some lyrics. I just need the day to be over. And so some days I would just rush through to get it done because I had this conviction that I need to do it and whether good or bad, as long as I finished it, as long as I see it through to the end, then that will be good enough.

It might be a terrible song. The music might suck, the lyrics might be terrible, but at least at the end of the day, I can tell myself that ...

Melanie: [00:23:40] You did it.

Emmanuel: [00:23:41] I finished it.



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Melanie: [00:23:42] Yeah.

Emmanuel: [00:23:43] You saw it through to the end. And so a lot of the songs were basically just putting the bare minimum in and seeing what came of it.

Sometimes I opened the flood gates and all these ideas kept coming out.

I wasn't really thinking at that point about whether it's good or bad or whether it's this or that. I wasn't thinking about what's the story going to tell. I wasn't thinking about what style am I going to write?

Finding freedom in songwriting

I was just simply thinking I need to write something today.

And so I did. I think that's when I found the most freedom in it. Not necessarily that I didn't care about writing because obviously it did, I have to. I had to write something. But I didn't care what it was. And I don't care how it sounded.

The first thing that came to my head, I just wrote down or played it on the guitar.

And there was a point that none of it mattered.

I wasn't writing anymore to even do the challenge or to please anyone, even to please myself. I had this compulsion, I needed to write something and I did. And sometimes, I think they worked out pretty well.

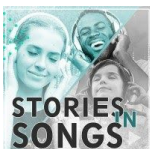
What the songwriting challenge taught him

Melanie: [00:24:52] Yes, there are some very great songs among them.

So what did you learn in this whole process? Do you think this challenge has helped you become a better songwriter? Or prove to yourself that you actually can put in the work and pull it off?

Emmanuel: [00:25:06] Probably more the latter. I think the biggest thing that it taught me, is seeing the same things through, finishing what you start.

As far as being a songwriter I never really even considered myself a songwriter. I started it because I did want to become a better songwriter because I thought that was my only option. If I'm going to follow music, better you try and hone the craft. But through it all, I never really consider myself a songwriter.



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It was just this silly challenge I was putting myself through.

Melanie: [00:25:36] But you've written over a hundred songs.

Emmanuel: [00:25:39] I think even more. To be honest, 110 days. But there were a few days that I wrote multiple songs, but through it all, I didn't do it to be a songwriter.

I can't even explain it. It's hard to describe, I just had this urge to write.

Melanie: [00:25:54] You are still like trying to find yourself. You still think about metal and that's what you're going to do, but you still haven't tried it out completely.

Emmanuel: [00:26:03] Yeah,

Melanie: [00:26:04] Maybe that's why you weren't so happy with this challenge or that it didn't prove to you what you really want to do. Because you feel like: *"Okay, I did it, but that's not it. I'm still searching. I love music. I love being on stage, but okay, where's my place in this world, right?"*

I want to start a metal band

Emmanuel: [00:26:21] You're absolutely right. I think one of the big parts that I need is a band. I've worked on my own this whole time on an acoustic guitar.

It's not the same as playing electric with some distortion and stuff. And then also having a band behind you to help you shape the melody and change how everything is.

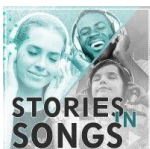
A lot I've done on my own and in a lot of the lyrics and everything, it shows I want someone to help me out.

I need a band.

Melanie: [00:26:51] So whoever's listening to this podcast. If you're close to Windsor, Ontario, please reach out to A Minute for Manny.

And let's talk a little more about songwriting and storytelling.

Emmanuel: [00:27:05] Yeah,



What can you learn from listening closely to songs?

Melanie: [00:27:05] Because you've already started talking about it and how you can really make a difference in people's lives.

When you take them on the journey of a song, you start at one point and you lead them to another, that's going to be good or bad. But as you said, you'll try to turn it a little more into the positive.

In your opinion and the experience you've made, what can people learn from listening closely to songs?

How does it affect them? Or how did it affect you?

Music can be the pinnacle of storytelling

Emmanuel: [00:27:31] You like books, you like stories. Music can be the pinnacle of storytelling.

You can get lost in a book you read a story and you have a voice in your head that narrates it all.

It's not necessarily your voice. Every single character has their own sound.

And where do all these voices come from?

I don't know, but when I read a story, sometimes I think, I can close my eyes and think about it and I can picture every character in the scene.

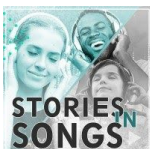
And I can hear all their voices so distinctly. And sometimes they're from maybe an actor or someone that I've heard before. And, that will be the voice of this character,.

But when you read it's all in your head. I love that. There's such an amazing, cool kind of freedom in it where you're kind of creating the story yourself as you go, as you read someone else's story, but with music ...

What I love there's your own imprint on it.

When you read a story, you read it as you want to hear it.

Melanie: [00:28:26] Right.



Giving up control when you listen to music

Emmanuel: [00:28:27] When it comes to music, you hear it as the artist wants you to hear it. And sometimes that can be so much more impactful because it's something outside of your own head. It's something that you have no control over.

You can interpret the lyrics as you will. But when you hear it, it impacts you in such a different way.

Because it's out of your control. It's a ride that you're taken on so that you completely let go of the steering wheel.

Melanie: [00:28:55] Right.

Emmanuel: [00:28:56] You let them take you on this journey.

Melanie: [00:28:59] That's the beauty of songs you really nailed it.

Music is about empathy

Emmanuel: [00:29:01] I think the main thing with music is empathy. It's you're able to feel someone else's feelings and words as if they were your own.

Sometimes you can relate to them in such a way, but you know that it's someone else you're listening to.

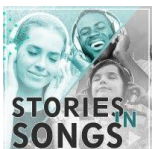
It makes you feel less alone.

It kind of opens your world to think I can relate to this person, and this is a real person. This is someone else out there in this crazy world who has maybe gone through the same things I am, or they're going through something that I could never understand. And they're sharing their story.

I guess through the music, it has a bit of a deeper impact because it's different, it's someone else. And, it shows maybe more humanity, different facets of life that we don't quite get through. There are different kinds of storytelling.

Melanie: [00:29:47] . Yeah. I think the beauty of it is when you're feeling down or you can't express what you're feeling, but a song can. You more easily listen to a song than finding the right book or the right story. So a song is immediate, it's there for you.

Emmanuel: [00:30:02] Yeah, I guess it's kind of like effortless too because you sit there and you let it take you as opposed to reading book where you're doing a little bit of work actually reading it.



Even watching a movie. There's a slight bit more work there cause there's the visual to it. You have to focus more on it.

Where if you listen to a song, you can be walking, be jogging. You can be laying in bed with your eyes closed. You can just let the sound take you away in a completely different way.

Name the one song that has changed your life

Melanie: [00:30:30] So what's the one song. set has changed your life. Can you name one that really made an impact on you?

Emmanuel: [00:30:36] Ooh.

Melanie: [00:30:37] Oh, more

Emmanuel: [00:30:39] There's probably too many to count. It's hard to say.

My favorite song, I think ever written has to be by Iron Maiden: **"Hallowed Be Thy Name"**.

It's like the backbone of what I want to write for this concept metal album that I have in mind. It's about this guy. He's on death row. Basically, he's about to be brought to the gallows and be hanged.

It just tells the story of his journey basically from his cell to the gallows and it's written so beautifully because it talks about mortality and life and death.

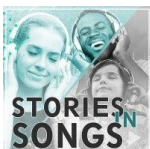
And it's just so heavy and ridiculous. And the music's amazing obviously, and the vocals are ridiculous, but the story it's so dark and almost morbid. This guy's going to die, but it's beautiful.

Melanie: [00:31:28] Yeah. And he's also expressing hope in it, right?

Emmanuel: [00:31:32] Yeah.

Melanie: [00:31:32] It says like his soul is gonna live on.

Emmanuel: [00:31:35] Exactly. That was one of the most impactful songs ever. It's on "Number of the Beast" - the first Iron Maiden album I ever got. And it's the final song and that one just stuck with me forever.



“I’m still here” truly resonated with me

But aside from that - this is actually kind of a funny one that really got me - it's called “**I'm Still Here**”. It's by John Rzeznik of the Goo Goo Dolls. And it was on the [Treasure Planet](#) soundtrack. It was a Disney movie. It was a Disney song.

Melanie: [00:32:06] They have some great songs.

Emmanuel: [00:32:09] The most amazing songs ever. I don't care what anyone says, Disney can pull it off.

Melanie: [00:32:16] And they can tell stories like straight the hero's journey. It's amazing what they're doing.

I fell in love with Moana.

Emmanuel: [00:32:24] Oh my God. I love every single song. Actually the main song: “*I've been staring at the edge of the water.*”

I used the busk that one whenever families come by with their kids. I played that one.

The [Treasure Planet](#) song. “I'm still here”. Goo Goo Dolls is one of my favorite bands ever.

And then this song comes out and I don't know, I must've been like 13, 14 when the movie came out and I heard it and for me, it was too much. The lyrics plus the music video, it's about John Hawkins not knowing his dad and stuff. And for me, that was just too much. I could relate to that

Melanie: [00:33:03] “*I'm a question to the world.*”

Emmanuel: [00:33:06] Oh my God. It was unbelievable. Now this guy. He's lost. He feels alone. He doesn't know who he is. What is out there? He wants some answers and he's looking for hope. He finds hope in someone that understands him.

And that can help him carry his burden. And that's just one of the most beautiful songs I've ever heard, like to this day.

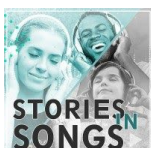
Melanie: [00:33:27] I think it still resonates a lot with you.

Emmanuel: [00:33:30] Absolutely.

Melanie: [00:33:31] But the great thing about it is that it pulls you right into the song.

It hooks you with the first line. “*I'm a question to the world.*” Who doesn't feel like this?

Emmanuel: [00:33:40] “*Not an answer to be heard.*”



Melanie: [00:33:42] Yeah.

Emmanuel: [00:33:42] Yeah. It's too much. There are too many songs. A lot of them actually are probably from the Goo Goo Dolls. I think John Rzeznik in my opinion is one of the best writers ever.

Everything changed with Bruce Springsteen

Recently I have been listening to Bruce Springsteen though.

Last year they came out with a movie called: **Blinded by the light**.

And probably it's my favorite movie of the year.

It's about this Indian guy. He's born and raised in Britain and feels like an outcast. He doesn't understand the world is living in.

He just doesn't get it.

But he finds Bruce Springsteen. A friend of his shows him this tape and he loses himself in the music. It's like this guy he's writing for me. He understands what I'm going through. And this guy, he's an American. He's 20 years older, is a thousand miles away, but this guy understands me.

After that movie, I just listened to Bruce Springsteen nonstop.

And I still do to this day, because that guy can weave a story like no one else. He just released a new album. And he made it a documentary. Oh, what was it called?

Melanie: [00:34:50] Western

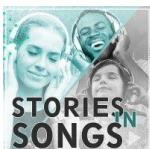
Emmanuel: [00:34:52] Western stars.

Learning storytelling from Bruce Springsteen

So I'll watch that thing. And every single song was almost too much to take. He kept prefacing every song. He narrates how he wrote it. And then he plays it live in his big barn. And it's one of the most beautiful things ever.

And there's one of the songs. He talks about how he wrote it and where he was coming from.

And how he talks about, how he was so scared and hurt and he felt everyone that he loved and dear to his heart, that he knew that he would hurt them.



He had to push people away that loved him. Whether it's because he didn't love himself or he was scared that he would hurt them later.

He decides it's best just to hurt them now and get it over with and put it out there.

Every single word he said, in the prefacing and then the song it's just too close to home, too deep and amazing and beautiful.

He does that with all the songs too. He writes about hurting the people he loves, but the best part is, he's writing about the people he loves.

He's writing about love.

He's writing about the hurt and everything that comes after it. But like I said before, love and hate, love, and hurt, love and depth. Any of it, they're all two sides of the same coin.

The more you love someone, the more it is going to hurt, but then if it hurts, the more it hurts, the more you can love again.

And it's this weird kind of vicious cycle.

What I like to think, is that in the end, it's always love. It's always the good, that ...

Melanie: [00:36:28] prevails.

Emmanuel: [00:36:29] Exactly. Yeah. That's some of my favorite music right now.

How to make a song meaningful?

Melanie: [00:36:33] What do you think is the key to making a song so powerful, engaging, relatable, hard stirring. Meaningful. What do you think what's the secret sauce on it?

Emmanuel: [00:36:46] Well, you already said it.

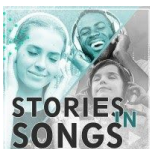
I think the relatable part is the most essential component.

You need to be able to relate to what you're listening to. If you're writing, you need to be able to have your audience relate to what you're writing about,.

Melanie: [00:36:58] But how do you achieve that?

Emmanuel: [00:37:00] So I guess just being true.

There are so many easy ways to write songs that encompass a bunch of different points of view.



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You can pander to an audience. You can make things really vague where kind of anyone can relate to it because you know, it's so vague, but if you want to make an impact, in my opinion, you have to be true.

"If you want to make an impact, you have to be true."

You have to stop trying to relate to someone.

You have to write what you feel. You know what you know.

And not worry if anyone else even gets it or cares about it.

You need to read it for yourself because in the end there's going to be someone out there that knows what you're going through and knows these feelings.

And they will relate to it much more deeply and impactful than if you were to just be bland and broad, trying to engage everyone in a small way.

You need to stop caring about how many people are going to listen and how many people are going to relate.

You have to write it for one person.

Usually, I would imagine it's for yourself, but sometimes yeah, you can write a song for one specific person, but I think the more true, the more narrow the story is, the deeper, the connection someone is going to make with it. You might not engage as many people, but that shouldn't matter.

It should be, how deep you touched some of them.

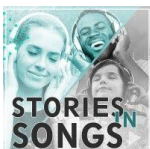
Melanie: [00:38:14] Yeah. I like your take on that because I can relate to this. Whenever I write stories, I have to write those stories that I can put myself into the shoes of the characters.

The story has to mean something to me. And whenever they say, especially in book writing, they say, you have to write for your audience, not for yourself, write for your audience.

But when I'm talking with writers, then what motivates someone is writing that story for themselves because it's the story they want to write.

Emmanuel: [00:38:42] Yeah.

Melanie: [00:38:43] You can pull your heart out and get what's inside of you, the power and the strength. And put it on paper, only if you let yourself release it.



How the art flows through you

Emmanuel: [00:38:52] Yeah. You need that personal drive like any artist in the world.

You have to make art. It has to be.

Some of that comes from you almost unwillingly. Like obviously you set out to write a book, a song or poem, or whatever. You have an idea. You set out with your intentions writing something.

You have to let it do it itself.

Almost every single song I've written. I don't think there was a single one that I planned out.

I never sat down ahead of time and thought, all right, I'm going to write a love song, or I'm gonna write a story about a guy who loses everything.

None of that. I sat down and I wrote and the stories developed themselves. The characters found their own way.

None of it was preplanned. I had no idea what I was writing at the time.

I let the stories run through me and wherever they came from, they did go through me like this prism of my consciousness where the light hits and it breaks off into the spectrum.

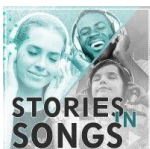
A lot of it is personal to me. And like through the way that I write it, it is me, but at the same time where it started was completely not me. I'm just kind of filtering through these ideas until it's something that I can kind of relate to.

Melanie: [00:40:10] Just start something. You just start writing and there's this energy that flows through you and you're the medium. You write and everything you write down, it takes a form of its own.

And if you have characters in your song or in your stories, they make their own decisions. It's not you anymore who can influence it. You're just writing it down.

This energy, it's part of yourself, but then it's not. But you start with an emotion and you write a song. And it forms itself into whatever it's going to be or into other characters in that song.

And sometimes it's still very personal to you because it's an experience you went through and sometimes you're a little more distant to it because it's something you've experienced or saw someone else going through.



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The Sandman by Neil Gaiman and what it teaches songwriters

Emmanuel: [00:40:57] So you've read the Sandman series, right?

Melanie: [00:41:00] Not complete

Emmanuel: [00:41:01] Me either. I'm just on book six now and I've been reading it like crazy lately.

So I just got to book six. I can't wait to start the next one. But for me lately, I'm reading these books and they're hitting me so hard.

It's ridiculous.

And they hit me in this weird way where I'm realizing there are all the different facets of different emotions like there are destiny and death and dream and destruction.

Melanie: [00:41:28] Right.

Emmanuel: [00:41:29] So, yeah, just started realizing these are the endless. These are the gods that came before all of us, but they came at the same time as us, without us, there wouldn't be them. What I was thinking is we are every facet of our personality. It is based on every one of these beings.

We are all built up of destiny thinking where are we going to go of death? We all die. We all fear it. We all know it's coming. We all dream of what we can be, what we have. We all have desires and we have despairs. We have every single one of these and every single facet of that makes us who we are.

We all have the worst parts in us like we all have despair, but because of that, we all have desires. Every single thing that we feel, there's another side too. There's like an equal opposite. There's happy and sad. There's love and hate, there's life and death.

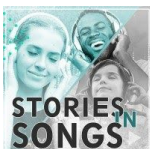
Two sides of the coin

And we need each and every one of them because, without the other side of it, there's no contrast. We can't hate unless we know what love is. Hate is such an extreme opposite of love.

Without love, you couldn't hate anyone. Without hate, you couldn't love anyone.

Without being able to dream for something you can never despair because there would be no reason for it.

What I'm trying to say through everything that I've written is that there are two sides to everything.



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And we need to be able to embrace both: the good and the bad.

When I write a sad song, I try to make it happy in the end.

When I write a happy song, I usually throw in some flavors of depression/despair, because it adds to the contrast.

It makes me much happier if you had a bad day and then maybe something happy happens like you got a free ice cream cone, whatever.

You feel so much happier because you had a bad day, whereas, opposed to say you're having a great day already and then someone gives you a free ice cream cone. It's like: all right, that's free ice cream. That's good.

But free ice cream is gonna taste sweeter if it's at the end of a bad day.

For me, everything goes both ways.

We need the good and the bad. We shouldn't be scared of writing about the bad stuff, because that will just make us feel that much better.

Why we need to show change to make an impact

Melanie: [00:43:44] That's beautifully said. That's why we have stories because stories show us this change.

You would never have a story that stays on one level because then we would not be invested in the story. We would not be interested because we want to see the ups and downs and how it's all going to turn out in the end with all the decisions the character has to make.

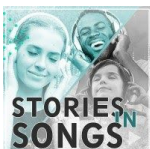
Because if you want to reach your goal, what you want in your life, your purpose, you have to go to a certain amount of struggles. And you always have to make decisions. Sometimes you may even go further away from your goal to make other decisions that help you in another part of your life.

You can gain something, you can lose something.

And I think that's what you're saying because we can never have one thing completely.

Even if we are alive. Then we know that death is coming at one point - for us or people close to us. There's going to be change in our lives.

And with everything that we do, even if we are in a marriage, in a relationship, it can end.



We think we are a good person, but when there's a kind of horrible situation and you need to make a decision, then you can even turn into a bad person for the things that you think are right.

So yes, that's totally relatable.

And that's what's stories are about. Showing that change and sometimes, or most of the time, those stories end positively.

They are like a prescription. If you do this in life, then you can hope for this positive outcome.

But we also know stories like the Great Gatsby. Then they are cautionary. Don't do this, or you're going to end up like him.

So we always see those two sides of the coin. And we are playing with that, especially in stories when we talk about story genres. We have crime stories. They are about justice and injustice. Action, thriller, and horror are about life and death. Love stories are about love and hate. We have that.

We have status stories. They are about success or failure. So that's the biggest part of storytelling that you need to have those two sides.

And you have all is black and white especially when you have maturation stories. The characters start out very naive. They have a very particular worldview. Mostly it's really black and white. And then they go through all of those struggles and they change their worldview and they see everything's not as they thought it was.

They are growing up. We see that nothing is black and white. It's all those shades of gray in between.

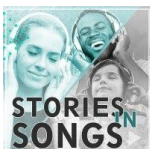
Emmanuel: [00:46:20] Yeah. It's such a hard thing to write about or pinpoint the shades of gray because it's easy to see the opposite ends, but how do you write something that depicts the middle? It's hard to explain. It's hard to relate to. It's so easy to see black or white

How to make the shades of gray visible?

Melanie: [00:46:36] I consider it like a scale. Like you have hate or hate masked as love which is even worse than hate. So you can put it all on a spectrum from very negative to positive.

And your character or you, you're at one place of that spectrum. So in those shades of gray, you start out in the center and then you meet someone. And this is either positive, and it turns a little more positive or they despise you. Then it turns the other way, but you can always move around on this depending on how you act.

Emmanuel: [00:47:14] Yeah, that was good. It's like we all start off in the middle of a tight rope or in the middle of a seesaw.



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Melanie: [00:47:20] Right.

Emmanuel: [00:47:21] Just every experience we have tilts us one way or the other.

Melanie: [00:47:24] Yeah. And sometimes we make a decision to save a loved one, but there's always something we lose when we make that decision.

Emmanuel: [00:47:32] Yeah.

Melanie: [00:47:33] Maybe we wanted to get this one job that was so important for us because that's self-fulfillment. It's my dream job. But if I am deciding I wanna pursue this person because I love them, then I have to renounce the career option. So then you move back on that scale with your career and your self-fulfillment, but you move further to the positive when it's your own personal love story.

So it's always going back and forth and back and forth. It's brutal. You can never have everything you want. You always have to let go of other things. That's life.

Emmanuel: [00:48:08] Yeah. I think I write more about loss than anything because to gain anything, you have to lose something.

And unfortunately, I put more emphasis on what you lose than what you gain.

But what sticks with me more is what you gain, you always have.

And then it's because of what you lost that makes it that much more special.

I guess for me, that's why I write more about what you lose because it puts more emphasis on what you have gained. It's brighter that way.

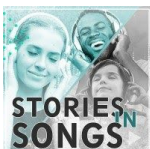
Melanie: [00:48:35] Yeah, that's a great thing to give people hope again, because there are many people out there in despair. They need this tiny spark of hope that you can ignite with your songs because they can relate to the bad. But when you give them this spark of hope, then their world is not that black anymore.

They can see it shining through. So that's a pretty good thing because everyone can write a happy song. But if you want to resonate with people, they turn to music especially when they're feeling down because music can express what you feel in a completely different way.

Emmanuel: [00:49:13] Yeah.

Melanie: [00:49:14] So, yeah, it's great that with your songs, you give your audience on all of us, those sparks of hope.

That's a great thing you do. And I'm really excited to see how that's gonna turn out when you write your metal album.



Emmanuel: [00:49:27] it's going to be very conflicting and contrasting. I hope so anyway,

Cast your own songwriter group. Who will be in it?

Melanie: [00:49:32] If you could pick some musicians, and throw them together into your metal band, like songwriters and guitarists or whoever, who would you choose?

Emmanuel: [00:49:43] So obviously number one, Bruce Dickinson, lead singer of Iron Maiden.

Then there's gotta be Freddie Mercury, obviously, from Queen.

And Elton John and whoever writes his lyrics, Bernie Taupin.

And John Rzeznik of the Goo Goo Dolls.

And two more. I can't remember their names but Rise Against and Billy Talent.

Two of my favorites, their lyrics are just ridiculously good. They always hit home.

Melanie: [00:50:13] What about Bruce Springsteen?

Emmanuel: [00:50:16] There's so many, I can't list them all. So yeah. Bruce Springsteen and Ozzy Osborne.

I could go on all day.

Melanie: [00:50:23] Cause this would be a great combination.

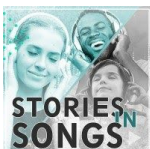
Emmanuel: [00:50:25] Oh, I can imagine if we got them all in the room together. Insane. Neil Young,

For me personally though, those are the most influential to me. And they all kind of write completely different styles, which I like, which is also probably a bad thing for my writing, because I still haven't been able to decide on a single cohesive kind of writing style that makes sense.

If I was to put an album together, none of the songs I wrote, would make sense on an album together. I'm trying to find something that puts them all together in a way that would make sense.

How to find your unique voice?

Melanie: [00:50:57] And maybe that's your unique voice - the combination of all of those musicians. Like *"That's kind of what I want to express with my music."*



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And now you just have to find your way to release those words that this combination would trigger.

Emmanuel: [00:51:11] Yeah.

Melanie: [00:51:11] So that's going to be your unique style. You just have to find it, and I know that's going to be very hard, but it also means you just have to keep doing what you're doing. Keep writing music, keep writing songs.

And if one day you're going to have that song. That first song will be the milestone and door to all of the other songs that are going to come.

Emmanuel: [00:51:31] Yeah, I'm working. I'm going to keep on writing. The last song that I wrote though, I called it "[Tunnel of Love](#)". The title was based on a Bruce Springsteen song called "**Tunnel of Love**".

You know, it's just using a roller coaster as a metaphor for love. And it's been done a million times.

I'm going to keep writing, but I think that one kind of encapsulates the kind of style I might be going for, obviously, I'm still gonna do a metal album and it's going to be totally different and crazy and weird. But aside from the metal, that song really captures the sound that I want to go for.

We'll see. Maybe that'll be my own solo thing. And then the metal album will be a different, completely different thing I do with a band.

Melanie: [00:52:14] So whoever's listening, get in touch with A Minute for Manny.

And is there another way how people can support you and your music to get this crazy great metal album out?

Support a Minute for Manny

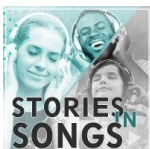
Emmanuel: [00:52:26] I'm hoping. So yeah, soon. I set up Patriot.

I'm going to posts some of the lyrics or maybe some of the guitar riffs and just show off like how metal and operatic this album is going to be.

And if anyone likes it, they can help support me there. There will be new stuff coming.

Melanie: [00:52:46] And I'm looking forward to it. I like your stuff. I like not all of your hundred and nine songs, but I have some personal favorites.

And even you don't have to like them, but if you have people out there who dig your songs and who you've given something in return for the time they spent listening to that song, I think that's



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something amazing. That you've made a difference in their lives, just even if it was just for that one moment, but if they enjoyed it and that was worth it.

Emmanuel: [00:53:17] Absolutely.

Melanie: [00:53:18] And I even think for all of the songs you've written, just for that one song "Last Goodbye", it was all worth it.

Emmanuel: [00:53:25] Thank you.

Melanie: [00:53:25] Thank you so much for being a guest on my podcast. And I had an amazing time talking with you and I'm looking forward to hearing more, especially about that album.

Emmanuel: [00:53:38] That was fun. Thank you.

Melanie: [00:53:40] So, and for anyone who wants to listen to A Minute for Manny's EP "They say", you can do that right now. So give him a follow and a like.

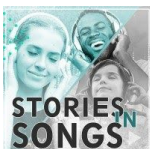
Thank you, Emmanuel, for being on the show.

Emmanuel: [00:53:53] Thank you Mel for having me.

Melanie: [00:53:55] That wraps up our podcast for today and tune in next time when we talk about how you can make the idea of your song resonated with your audience so that it sticks.

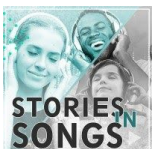
Links mentioned in this episode:

- MannyG (A Minute for Manny) on [Soundcloud](#)
- A Minute for Manny on [Spotify](#)
- A Minute for Manny on [Instagram](#)
- [Tunnel of Love](#) by A Minute for Manny
- [Simple Man](#) by Lynyrd Skynyrd
- [Hallowed Be Thy Name](#) by Iron Maiden
- [Treasure Planet](#) Movie
- Treasure Planet Song: [I'm Still Here](#)
- [Blinded by the Light](#) Movie
- [Western Stars](#) Bruce Springsteen
- [The Sandman](#) by Neil Gaiman



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