

How music helps me Marcus, 2020



We lost our middle child in 2015, following a 5 year battle with chronic epilepsy and neurodegeneration, aged just 16. Our daughter had been fit and healthy up to the age of 10, and despite her severe learning difficulties and the associated challenges our family life was good and happy, as we made the best of our circumstances.

A traumatic and unexpected deterioration in autumn 2012 stole our daughter and the family life we knew, launching us onto an awful 3 year journey. Pinballing around a bizarre new existence, we did our best to cope and juggled the usual challenges of parenting, schooling, careers and domestic life with increasingly complex 24/7 care for our dying child. This surreal existence became our new normal and was compounded with multiple emergencies and neardeath episodes. Our daughter died in December 2015 but in truth we were already 3 years into grieving the loss of the daughter and the lives we had.

In April 2017, on a visit to the Malverns with my wife, we stumbled across The Film Orchestra in final rehearsal for that night's performance in Malvern Priory. Whilst not necessarily fans of film or orchestral scores the experience felt visceral – sitting front and centre as quality musicians finessed their act, my hairs stood on end and tears flowed. Having such close proximity to this live performance proved highly emotional and profound. The evocative scores and favourable acoustics had a tangible quality which triggered a sense of deep joy, something I'd long since locked away and forgotten. Years of coping and compartmentalising feelings had made me numb and immune to the nicer things in life. Instantly aware of the release I allowed myself to let go and simply enjoy the moment.

Throughout my daughter's illness I had been to a fair few gigs, invariably with the same pal who shares similar musical taste. In hindsight, and this is no reflection on either his kind friendship or the quality acts concerned, these gigs were mere distractions amid the organised chaos of our family life. My memories of those gigs are really woolly, each suffocated by the innate anxiety I felt for my daughter and the challenges we faced at each particular moment. I was incapable of experiencing real joy or emotion of any kind.

Some months after the Malvern trip, we camped at Carfest North with our youngest. Whilst the line-up was mixed there were sufficient highlights for all three of us and the Film Orchestra experience had revitalised my own musical sensitivities. On the first evening, stood amongst thousands in the pouring rain I cried tears of joy at having the freedom to enjoy the music and the moment – some 18 months after losing our daughter I finally felt freed from the overwhelming responsibility. It was cathartic.

On the second afternoon I cried again, as a middle-aged mum danced joyously in the crowd with her disabled daughter who was the image of our own late daughter. A mixture of emotions raced through me, both joy and sadness for them in equal measure, deep sadness that our daughter had missed such fun, plus relief for myself albeit tinged with guilt that I was enjoying the fun without the responsibility. Complex emotions indeed.

The following year (2018), determined to enjoy more live music, I booked tickets for Elbow, The Killers and U2 and was gifted tickets for Simply Red for my birthday. None disappointed, with Elbow being the highlight and providing yet another emotional release. Elbow have a Marmite effect on many but as an unashamed Elbow lover I wallowed in their back-catalogue of hits and festival anthems. Their 2008 album 'Seldom Seen Kid', remains a real family favourite and reminds me of happy times when we were all fit and well, heading off on holiday and singing along in the car - particularly to 'One Day Like This'.

Many of Elbow's tunes sound melancholic but are themed with lyrical hope which appeals to my sensibilities. A wholly unrelated and much more recent track (Magnificent She Says, 2017) always brings my daughter to mind with a rush of emotion. It is one of several songs from different artists, that for varied and sometimes unfathomable reasons have a Visit [dads.care](https://www.dads.care) for more Dads' Stories and information about our group trigger effect, which I have learnt to embrace and put to good use. In quieter moments, I choose to play certain tracks knowing the emotional release invariably lifts my mood – things often seem better after a good cry.

And so, regardless of my own personal musical taste, I say with conviction that immersive live music experiences and my deliberate musical listening choices, both genuinely help me navigate grief.

The Film Orchestra

<https://www.thefilmorchestra.com/aboutus>

One Day Like This

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hqsF_-rTdhI

Magnificent She Says

#elbowrooms

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2o51NDg5sck>

Visit [dads.care](https://www.dads.care) for more Dads' Stories and information about our group