

# ROCK MUSIC STILL TROUBLING CANDIDATES

From staff reports

**T**his week, singer John Mellencamp politely asked Republican presidential frontrunner John McCain to knock off using his song "Our Country" at campaign appearances, which is no surprise: Anyone remotely familiar with Mellencamp's political leanings would know that he's about as likely to endorse a conservative candidate as he would be to record a New Kids on the Block cover. But McCain is hardly the first candidate to run into trouble regarding the selection of campaign songs:

## "BORN IN THE U.S.A.," BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

**Used by:** Ronald Reagan (1984), Bob Dole (1996), Pat Buchanan (2000)

**What the song sounds like to a candidate:** WOO! AMERICA IS THE GREATEST AND I'M PROUD TO BE FROM HERE!

**What the song is actually about:** Homeless, jobless, broken Vietnam veterans. It's amazing what you can learn by listening to lyrics.

**Better choice for campaign song:** "Video Killed the Radio Star," The Buggles.

## "PINK HOUSES," JOHN MELLENCAMP

**Used by:** John McCain (2008)

**What the song sounds like to a candidate:** America is all about interstates and teenagers who work in auto shops.

**What the song is actually about:** Crushed hope. "They told me, when I was younger, 'Boy, you're gonna be president' / But just like everything else, those old crazy dreams just kinda came and went."

**Better choice for campaign song:** "Mack the Knife," Bobby Darin.

## "AMERICAN GIRL," TOM PETTY

**Used by:** Hillary Clinton (2008)

**What the song sounds like to a candidate:** Girl power.

**What the song is actually about:** Guys are jerks. Some people think it's about suicide, which is rarely an association you want with your campaign. Also, Jeff Spicoli is wasted.

**Better choice for campaign song:** "Right Here, Right Now" by Jesus Jones, because, hey, remember the '90s? And how good things were? I wonder who was in charge then ...



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**JOHN-JOHN:** Oh, sure, it looks like a dream ticket, but Sen. John McCain and John Mellencamp aren't exactly close.

## "FORTUNATE SON," CREEDENCE CLEARWATER REVIVAL

**Used by:** John Kerry (2004)

**What the song sounds like to a candidate:** It's a rallying cry against the entitled rich to stop sending the poor to fight wars.

**What the song is actually about:** Well, that IS what it's about. But, you know, it was used by a guy whose wife owns ketchup.

## "OUR COUNTRY," JOHN MELLENCAMP

**Used by:** Kind of everybody.

**What the song sounds like to a candidate:** A highly patriotic truck commercial.

**What the song is actually about:** Taken in context, which is to say on the album and not in truck commercials, it's more of a rallying cry; i.e., this is our country, not yours. Hands off.

**Better choice for campaign song:** Anything by Nickelback

or Daughtry, music that is devoid of any hidden subtext

## "NO SURRENDER," BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN

**Used by:** John Kerry (2004)

**What the song sounds like to a candidate:** Victory.

**What the song is actually about:** Not abandoning the dreams of youth, which is the opposite of what the Kerry campaign accomplished for anyone who voted for him.

**Better choice for campaign song:** "Surrender," Cheap Trick.

## "CRAZY," PATSY CLINE

**Used by:** Ross Perot (1992)

**What the song sounds like to the candidate:** An ironic statement on the longshot odds of an independent running for president.

**What the song is actually about:** A jilted lover questions the sanity of ever trying in the first place. As in, "Wait, we wasted six months supporting the conservative Perot only to win the election for Clinton? Wow, that was not a good decision."

**Better choice for campaign song:** Actually, this is pretty much dead on.



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## Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, "Echo" (1999)

Younger readers of this publication might have been confused by the halftime entertainment at the Super Bowl Sunday. Who was that shaggy bearded hobo? Why did he seem so mellow? And how did he write such great songs with all the time it takes to catch the right boxcar these days?

The answers are: Tom Petty, he's always mellow for reasons that must be perfectly legal and who rides boxcars anymore?

Petty's halftime set was full of classics, but his newer stuff doesn't get as much respect. His 1999 record "Echo" isn't his happiest album — much of it was recorded during his divorce from his wife of two decades, and Heartbreaker bassist Howie Epstein was dealing with a drug addiction that would eventually cost him his life. But as much of a drowning-the-sorrows kind of album as this is, there still are some signature Petty fightin' moments like the feisty "Swingin'" and the redemptive "Billy the Kid."



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**DON'T HAVE TO LOOK LIKE  
A REFUGEE:** A bearded Tom Petty tears up halftime.

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