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Billy Bragg: The Song in My Head

By Dennis Cook

Artist: Little Feat

Song: "Willin'"

"It's a monumental song, and it comes and goes in my head at difficult times. Although it's one of the great choruses, it's the openings of each verse, the pledge that's in those lines—"I've been stung by the rain/Driven by the snow/I'm drunk and dirty but don't you know/I'm still willin"—that speaks to things you need in order to do the job of a musician. You can't do this job if it's all too much.

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If you're not willing to leave home, leave the person you just met in the last town, this job will eat you up. Sometimes you find yourself unable to sleep in the back of a 747, forced to watch *The Devil Wears Prada* 'cause it's on in the cabin, and you think to yourself, 'Fuck me! But, I'm willing to do this if that's what's required. This is a great job and I'm free as that guy in his truck.'

None of us have been from Tucson to Tucumcari, and if I did I was asleep in the back of a bus! There's an affinity with truckers. We all work on the road. We're somewhere between truckers and circus people. We're night workers. We peak at midnight.

One time, I was going to make a TV program for the BBC in Bolivia, a documentary about the Conquistadors. It had been an arsehole flight to San Paulo where we changed planes. I hadn't slept for 15 hours and I'm on this little plane with no drinks. We were flying towards the Andes and I'm sitting there with my headphones on, feeling maximum sorry for myself, miles away from everyone I love. Then, "Willin'" comes on, and the plane banks, the clouds open, and there below is Lake Titicaca, shining in the Andean sunlight. And I thought, 'I'm willin', I'm here.'

When I'm lying in the back of a tour bus in a little coffin-shaped bed, rolling around at night, trucks going by literally 6 feet from my head, I think of Lowell George. I think he's hugely underrated, one of the lost boys of rock 'n' roll. He should be getting the Gram Parsons treatment. It's well past his time."

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