



(From left) Jerome Fontimillas, Jon Foreman, Drew Shirley, Chad Butler, and Tim Foreman

The Switchfoot Saga & The Concert worth Waiting For

There are not many bands in the world whose music can literally make someone's life better. Something about Switchfoot's music makes me content with life and the poetry makes me see the world in a completely different perspective. I began listening to the band when

their popular songs started to play on the Christian radio station I listened to, LOVE 89.1 FM in Knoxville, in the late 1990s. Granted, I was about three-years-old and growing up in the small town of Talbott, Tennessee at the time. However, from the moment I first heard the insightful masterpieces of Switchfoot's music, that was the day the band and I began a grand adventure together through life. The song that fully captured my attention and love for Switchfoot was

Genres: Alternate Rock, Post Grunge, Hard Rock, Christian-Rock

Formed in California (1996)

Date of Concert: August 29, 2015

Location: Behind CPA Building of East Tennessee State University

Current Activity: In the process of recording album #10

“Stars,” which was released in 2005. It is a song about looking to Heaven and focusing on God in our chaotic world in order to feel complete again.

But when I look at the stars,
when I look at the stars,
when I look at the stars I see someone else.

When I look at the stars,
the stars, I feel like myself.

It was not until this past August that I actually saw the band play live in concert, but I think the twenty years I spent dwelling on the beauty of the music prepared me for the day I saw Switchfoot in person.

The Story Behind Switchfoot

The contemporary music band started in Southern California in 1996 when Jon Foreman, his younger brother, Tim, and their good friend, Chad Butler, decided to join together to create music. (Since I feel as if the band members and I are close friends, I refer to them in a first-name basis.) Jon is the lead vocalist and plays guitar as well as the harmonica. Tim sings back-up harmony vocals and plays the bass guitar. Chad plays the drums as well as other percussions he finds when the band tours in foreign countries. The band’s original name was Chin Up, but the name later changed to Switchfoot, which is a term from one of the band’s favorite pastimes: surfing. In order for a surfer to find a new perspective on the wave that is approaching, he or she has to switch the positions of their feet. The band thought this term defined the major theme of what their songs are about, so they switched the name.

Unlike most bands, Switchfoot had a relatively easy start in the beginning of their musical journey. They signed to their first record label, Re:think Records, after playing a few

shows. Switchfoot's popularity grew after the release of their second album, *New Way to be Human* (1999), when four of their songs, "You," "Learning to Breathe," "Dare You to Move," and most importantly "Only Hope," were showcased in the movie *A Walk to Remember* (2002), starring Mandy Moore and Shane West. By this time, keyboardist, guitarist, and background vocalist, Jerome Fontimillas, joined the band in the album *The Beautiful Letdown* (2003). Jerome's style of music made the band sound more alternate-rock, and shifted band's genre slightly away from Christian-contemporary. This widened the listening audience as well as the band's popularity.

Drew Shirley joined the band later on in the album *Nothing is Sound* (2005), contributing his amazing electric guitar talents. His contribution to the now five-member team made the band's music more guitar-heavy and darker than their previous work. The band, once again, gained more popularity with the songs "Stars" and "We Are One Tonight." After the release of *Nothing is Sound*, Switchfoot wanted to experiment with what they could do with their music, which later became the album *Oh! Gravity* (2006). After the album's release, the band decided to leave the record label they were loyal to for so many years in order to start their own company called lowercase people records. Switchfoot meant for the label to be titled with lowercase letters in order for it to be self-referential. As a farewell to their former label, they released the album *The Best Yet* (2008), which consists of their most successful and favorite songs that range from their first recorded album, *Legend of Chin* (1997), to *Oh! Gravity*.

As Switchfoot began its own label, Jon Foreman took the liberty of creating his own solo EPs as a side project in late 2007 to early 2008. He created four albums entitled *Fall*, *Winter*, *Spring*, and *Summer*. In 2008, the band as a whole was promoted in the movie *The Chronicles of Narnia: Prince Caspian* with their song titled "This is Home," which was released as a single as

well as on their *Best Yet* album. Switchfoot continued recording albums under their new label such as *Hello Hurricane* (2009), *Vice Verses* (2011), and their most recent album *Fading West* (2014). Jon has also finished with another solo project released this year called *The Wonderlands*, with the subtitles on each of the four albums named *Sunlight*, *Shadows*, *Darkness*, and *Dawn*.

Before *Fading West*'s release, Switchfoot created an insightful eighty-four minute documentary of the same name about how they became inspired to write the music for the album during their tour around the world. The film also documents the band's love of surfing as well. The album *Fading West* contrasts from the musical structure Switchfoot was used to playing. The music contains unusual instruments, back-up vocals from the band members' children, African chorus singers, and an indie-like vibe much like the band's music when they first started out. Up until recently, Switchfoot finished touring with the bands Needtobreathe, Drew Holcomb and the Neighbors, and Colony House in the 2015 "Tour De Compadres" tour.

The Concert

Switchfoot agreed to have a concert at East Tennessee State University on Saturday, August 29, 2015, with their tour-mate Colony House before they returned home to record their tenth album. This day made my life. Ever since I heard about the Student Government Association's Welcome Week Concert choice for Switchfoot at Orientation, I could not wait for the day to come.

The concert was held outside of the Wayne G. Basler Center of Physical Activity building, or CPA. The "backyard" behind the building is big enough to have a decently sized concert. I thought we were going to need to relocate to a bigger concert area with how popular and great I think Switchfoot is. I arrived forty-five minutes early to grab a good seat, and I was

fortunate to get into the concert free for being a student at ETSU. I was happy to see a good crowd size of about 150 people already there either sitting in lawn chairs they brought, buying merchandise, or gathering in front of the stage where the student section was. Since I am too fond of close gatherings of people, I chose to stand near the people in the lawn chair section.

Alex Cassell, Ryan Bairdalong, and Cynthia Faircloth, ETSU's Student Government President, Vice-President, and Secretary, along with the coach of the new Buccaneers football team, Carl Torbush, thanked us all for coming to the concert and pumped us up for what the bands had in store to perform.

Colony House opened the concert with their indie rock musical talents. The band of two brothers, Caleb and Will Chapman, and their good friend, Scott Mills, is officially from Franklin, Tennessee. The Chapman brothers are the sons of popular Christian music artist Steven Curtis Chapman. Colony House has released one album so far, *When I Was Younger*, and is beginning to gain popularity. I enjoyed the band's music, but I soon grew impatient for the main reason I came to the concert. I wanted to see Switchfoot. I was sad to see Colony House leave. They are a very good band. However, my priority for this night was Switchfoot, and I could not have been more excited.

Switchfoot came out on the stage with enough energy to make the whole crowd, including myself, more fired up than we already were. I was wrong about the extent my excitement could go. Switchfoot's opening song from their album *The Beautiful Letdown* was "Meant to Live," an inspiring song about reflecting on your own life to discover the endless possibilities you could do with it.

We were meant to live for so much more.

Have we lost ourselves?

Somewhere we live inside.



Switchfoot logo graphic

The band was sure to incorporate colorful lighting and video graphics to emphasize the music as well as create visual appeal to the crowd. The lights were an array of color and moved around to focus on the band as well as the crowd. The graphics consisted of the band's logo flashing in different colors and subtle,

yet beautiful, background images. The lights and graphics were not as distracting as I thought they would be from my past concert experiences with other bands. I think the lights and graphics actually helped emphasize the meanings of the songs.



Eye-appealing blue graphics



Jon standing on Chad's drum set

Switchfoot continued to play their most popular songs, such as "Stars," "Gone," "Hello Hurricane," and "Dare You to Move." During these songs, Jon Foreman made sure to move around the whole stage instead of standing in one spot the entire time. He went beyond the normal performance routine and climbed on top of Chad Butler's drum set. Jon knows how to interact with his audience.

Instead of simply performing, he makes his audience feel as if they are all a family making music together in the living room. As the band began to play their most recent songs from their album

Fading West, I greatly anticipated the performance of my favorite song, “Saltwater Heart,” which composes their love of surfing with the abstraction of what it means to be human and the feeling of being alive.

We’re on your shore again
I can feel the ocean
I can feel your open arms
That pure emotion
I’m finally free again
By my own explosion
We’re on your shore again
I can feel the ocean



"Saltwater Heart"

After they played “Love Alone is Worth the Fight” and “Fading West,” they began to play my song. Everything was right in the world.



Jon in the crowd of people

Towards the end of the concert, Jon interacted with his audience more by coming off the stage to sing “Let it Out” with the crowd. I was disappointed that he did not make it over to where I was on the right-hand side of the audience. He mostly stayed in one spot. I can understand why because he was surrounded by fans to the point where he could not move anywhere else. He then saw an empty chair and stood on it so the whole crowd could see him. Practically everyone had his or her phones out to document what was happening. Jon took advantage of this and grabbed

someone's phone to video himself with the crowd. When he made it back to the stage, he took it over once more by climbing a support beam. I found that to be quite amusing.



Jon climbing the stage

Switchfoot closed the concert and left the stage. I was not ready for them to leave, and neither was the rest of the crowd. We kept cheering and clapping, wishing for an encore performance. We did not stop. The cheering and clapping kept growing louder along with my hopes they will come back out. Then, Jon poked his head out from the side of the stage, and he along with the other four guys came back out to perform one last song. I am certain this exit was intentional, but I like to think it was our unending anticipation that made them come back out. They performed one last song, "Where I Belong," which has an obvious meaning from its title that we are trying to find our place in the world.

Until I die I'll sing these songs
On the shores of Babylon
Still looking for a home
In a world where I belong
Where the weak are finally strong
Where the righteous right the wrongs
Still looking for a home
In a world where I belong



The end of the concert

As they finished the song, someone in the crowd threw Jon a banner with "Where I Belong" painted on it. Jon kept holding it as the band gathered around him to say farewell to the crowd. Then, the band of five left the stage for good.

I left the concert feeling alive and entertained by Switchfoot's music, and I wish it never ended. I could listen to them play their music and sing their poetic verses forever. It was a pleasure to see Switchfoot live in concert for the first time after listening to their music for twenty years. My expectations of how I thought the concert would be were exceeded beyond what I could imagine a small concert would be behind the athletic center of a university. I look forward to what Switchfoot has in store for their next album, and I definitely plan to attend another concert in the future.