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## Domsday's Neverending Appeal

Friday, December 04, 2009

Hollywood is depicting the end of the world in movies like *2012* and *The Road*, and the upcoming Denzel Washington vehicle *The Book of Eli*. Today: how musicians tackle the apocalypse, from pop to classical. We talk with former BBC 6 Music host and reporter **Gary Burton** and **Elayne Rapping**, professor of American Studies and Media Studies at the University of Buffalo.

**Tell us:** What's the appeal of end-of-the-world pop culture? In music, what genres or artists are particularly good at soundtracking doomsday? [Leave a comment below.](#)

[Apocalypse Soundtrack: Gary Burton's top-10 lists for the end of the world](#)  
[Blog: John Schaefer on a musical eschaton](#)

### Comments

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- [1] sean Micka from Brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:11PM

"Its easier for us to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism" -Fredric Jameson

- 
- [2] sean Micka from Brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:13PM

Godspeed! You Black Emperor is the most tasteful end of times music.

- 
- [3] Soundcheck producer from New York, NY

December 04, 2009 - 02:15PM

Hey SC listeners! We'll be reading your comments today -- tell us what you think!

- 
- [4] Liz C from New Paltz

December 04, 2009 - 02:18PM

December 24th 2012- we're goin down!! Didn't the Aztecs predict that? It's the end of the world as we know it, I feel fiiiiinnnnneeeeeee

- 
- [5] Brett from Williamsburg

December 04, 2009 - 02:18PM

Christmas at Ground Zero by Weird Al. Timely!

- 
- [6] Liz C from New Paltz

December 04, 2009 - 02:19PM

R.E.M- It's the end of the world!!

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- [7] Jerry from NYC

December 04, 2009 - 02:19PM

XTC's Living In Another Cuba. Most apocryphal.

- 
- [\[8\]](#) kris from ny,ny  
December 04, 2009 - 02:19PM

Talking Heads.

Swamp.

no dust. no rocks. the whole thing is over...

- 
- [\[9\]](#) lisa from manhattan  
December 04, 2009 - 02:19PM

Everyone secretly wants to see the Apocalypse. It would be so visually exciting.

- 
- [\[10\]](#) Dinu from New York  
December 04, 2009 - 02:19PM

The end of Fight Club. Pixies. Where is My Mind. The song is not on topic but the feel is right on.

- 
- [\[11\]](#) Jim from Red Hook  
December 04, 2009 - 02:19PM

"Five Years" by David Bowie.

- 
- [\[12\]](#) GR from Sunset Park  
December 04, 2009 - 02:20PM

X "Year One"

- 
- [\[13\]](#) Gene  
December 04, 2009 - 02:20PM

I'm neither a Waylon Jennings nor a Rapture fan, but one of my faves is "Revelation."

It sure sends a chill down your back when he sings at the climax of the song.

"And there stood Jesus Christ in all His glory.

And the saddest eyes I've ever seen were looking right at me."

- 
- [\[14\]](#) Cory from Manhattan  
December 04, 2009 - 02:20PM

Come on John. Go for the gold. The opening bars of the St. Matthew Passion.

- 
- [\[15\]](#) susie  
December 04, 2009 - 02:21PM

"World Destruction" by Time Zone is a classic..

- 
- [\[16\]](#) Andrew from Brooklyn, NY  
December 04, 2009 - 02:21PM

I really love the song "Dead Flag Blues" with its ominous spoken introduction and haunting notes. It's by Godspeed You! Black Emperor from their album *F#&#oo*. Here are the lyrics from the opening, taken from an unfinished film:

the car's on fire and there's no driver at the wheel

and the sewers are all muddied with a thousand lonely suicides

and a dark wind blows

the government is corrupt

and we're on so many drugs

with the radio on and the curtains drawn

we're trapped in the belly of this horrible machine

and the machine is bleeding to death

the sun has fallen down

and the billboards are all leering

and the flags are all dead at the top of their poles

it went like this:

the buildings tumbled in on themselves

mothers clutching babies picked through the rubble

and pulled out their hair

the skyline was beautiful on fire

all twisted metal stretching upwards

everything washed in a thin orange haze

i said: "kiss me, you're beautiful -

these are truly the last days"

you grabbed my hand and we fell into it

like a daydream or a fever

we woke up one morning and fell a little further down -

for sure it's the valley of death

i open up my wallet

and it's full of blood

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- [\[17\]](#) Anna from Brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:21PM

Waiting for the End of the World by Elvis Costello. "Dear Lord, I sincerely hope you're comin' 'cause you really started something"

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- [\[18\]](#) doug stone from brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:22PM

don't forget willie nelson's great "i've just destroyed the world" from "crazy" and "teatro"!

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- [\[19\]](#) susie

December 04, 2009 - 02:22PM

"World Destruction" by Time Zone.

- 
- [\[20\]](#) TJ from NYC  
December 04, 2009 - 02:23PM

Check out 'Two Suns In The Sunset' from Pink Floyd's THE FINAL CUT. It's the last song on the album (and the last Roger Waters song to appear on a Floyd album) An utterly brilliant song about nuclear holocaust.

- 
- [\[21\]](#) Darrell from Astoria  
December 04, 2009 - 02:23PM

This is somewhat speculative, but perhaps our fixation with the end of the world has something to do with the fact that we're now living in arguably the most heavily atheistic era of human history. Maybe the apocalyptic paradigm is a way of confronting and dealing with the notion that there really is no wonderful and glorious afterlife - that, in the end, everything just dies.

- 
- [\[22\]](#) Marielle from Brooklyn  
December 04, 2009 - 02:24PM

Messiaen - Quartet for the End of Time (Quatuor pour la fin du temps) - written during his incarceration in a Nazi POW camp - stunning - I feel like I am gasping for breath between every movement.

- 
- [\[23\]](#) Gary from Big Island Hawaii  
December 04, 2009 - 02:26PM

My favorite end of the world scenario is a giant bugs bunny coming up on the horizon saying "That's all folks".

- 
- [\[24\]](#) Brian from Bronxville, NY  
December 04, 2009 - 02:26PM

In another realm of media, I love Yeats' poem "The Second Coming." Some say it's political and many others see it as Yeats' skepticism of God and the notion that an apocalypse would ever happen.

THE SECOND COMING

Turning and turning in the widening gyre

The falcon cannot hear the falconer;

Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;

Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,

The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere

The ceremony of innocence is drowned;

The best lack all conviction, while the worst

Are full of passionate intensity.

Surely some revelation is at hand;

Surely the Second Coming is at hand.

The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out

When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi

Troubles my sight: a waste of desert sand;

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,

Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it

Wind shadows of the indignant desert birds.

The darkness drops again but now I know  
That twenty centuries of stony sleep  
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,  
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,  
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

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- [\[25\]](#) TJ from NYC

December 04, 2009 - 02:26PM

Lyrics:

"Two Suns In The Sunset"  
in my rear view mirror the sun is going down  
sinking behind bridges in the road  
and i think of all the good things  
that we have left undone  
and i suffer premonitions  
confirm suspicions  
of the holocaust to come  
the rusty wire that holds the cork  
that keeps the anger in  
gives way  
and suddenly it's day again  
the sun is in the east  
even though the day is done  
two suns in the sunset  
hmmmmmmmm  
could be the human race is run  
like the moment when your brakes lock  
and you slide toward the big truck  
and stretch the frozen moments with your fear  
and you'll never hear their voices  
and you'll never see their faces  
you have no recourse to the law anymore  
and as the windshield melts  
my tears evaporate  
leaving only charcoal to defend  
finally i understand  
the feelings of the few  
ashes and diamonds  
foe and friend

we were all equal in the end

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- [\[26\]](#) Gene from Long Island

December 04, 2009 - 02:27PM

Vera Lynn, We'll Meet Again, the end music in Kubrick's Dr. Strangelove.

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- [\[27\]](#) Martin from Manhattan

December 04, 2009 - 02:27PM

XTC - This World Over.

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- [\[28\]](#) Jeff from NYC

December 04, 2009 - 02:29PM

Wasn't there a song like "In the year 2525". Pretty dark as humans devolve into toothless eyeless blobs.

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- [\[29\]](#) rob from jersey city

December 04, 2009 - 02:29PM

Mad Max---> Tina Turner Song

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- [\[30\]](#) yourgo from astoria

December 04, 2009 - 02:29PM

In greek apocalypse means 'lifting of the shroud or veil' to reveal whats underneath or hidden. The book of Revelations was written in Greece on the island of Patmos. The apocalypse isnt going to be what everyone thinks it is. Its going to be something different. something wonderful.

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- [\[31\]](#) Suki from Williamsburg

December 04, 2009 - 02:31PM

I saw "The Road" last night and LOVED what Hillcoat did with the soundtrack.

It was hopelessly, painfully, beautiful. It felt like a breakup soundtrack - one is dying inside while the other is being born.

Also - Lisa, I do NOT want to see "The Apocalypse."

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- [\[32\]](#) Larry perlstein

December 04, 2009 - 02:31PM

Zager and evans. 2525. From the 1970s

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- [\[33\]](#) Michael Cohen from Long Island

December 04, 2009 - 02:31PM

There is Massien's Quartet for the End of Time

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- [\[34\]](#) John Baker from brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:33PM

What about Scythian Empires by Andrew Bird

"their halliburton attache cases are useless"

beautiful song

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- [\[35\]](#) Timothy Stutters from New York

December 04, 2009 - 02:33PM

"A Strange Day" by The Cure could be considered an end-of-the-world song. At least that's one possible interpretation. Their entire album, "Pornography" has an apocalyptic tone... sort of the Revelations of rock albums.

Also, Prince's 1999 is a classic end-of-the-world song, even if it didn't really happen. Prince has quite a few of them, actually, from "Annie Christian" to "Sign of the Times."

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- [\[36\]](#) Eric Singer from Pittsburgh, PA

December 04, 2009 - 02:34PM

Apocalypso by 80's new wave band Monochrome Set

and a different

Apocalypso by ska band Bim Skala Bim

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- [\[37\]](#) david linton from greenpoint brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:34PM

hey john maybe plodding chord progressions really do contain the key to the end of the world?

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- [\[38\]](#) Cynthia Vos from Brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 02:34PM

Not everyone "loves to see things blow up."

There are millions who hate this.

I think it is damaging to our national psyche.

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- [\[39\]](#) Jim Beckman from Central New Jersey

December 04, 2009 - 02:34PM

For the real "end of the world" atmosphere, I'll put the "Dies Irae" from Verdi's "Requiem" up against just about anything else.

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- [\[40\]](#) Eric Singer from Pittsburgh, PA

December 04, 2009 - 02:34PM

Apocalypso by 80s new wave band Monochrome Set and a different

Apocalypso by Boston ska band Bim Skala Bim

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- [\[41\]](#) john from Annandale, NJ

December 04, 2009 - 02:38PM

so many good choices, but my vote is for Genesis "Supper's Ready." It has a fairly positive ending, after a thousand mile journey through some dense lyrics. "There's an angel standing in the sun..."

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- [\[42\]](#) Soundcheck producer from New York, NY

December 04, 2009 - 02:40PM

Suki [31] mentions "The Road" soundtrack. We heard a clip from the soundtrack today. Anyone else see the film? What did you think of the music?

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- [\[43\]](#) Fred from New York

December 04, 2009 - 02:41PM

"The Last Mall" - Steely Dan ... delivered of course, with irony and wit.

Roll your cart back up the aisle

Kiss the checkout girls goodbye

Ride the ramp to the freeway

Beneath the blood orange sky

It's last call

To do your shopping

At the last mall

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- [\[44\]](#) Tony from Ossining, NY

December 04, 2009 - 02:43PM

I missed the early part of the show. Has anyone mentioned the song "Eve of destruction" ?

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- [\[45\]](#) Soundcheck producer from New York, NY

December 04, 2009 - 02:47PM

Hey Tony [44]: "Eve of Destruction" by Barry McGuire did make our guest Gary Burton's list of songs.

<http://www.wnyc.org/music/articles/145578>

And don't forget: you can listen to today's Soundcheck online by about 5 p.m. today ... or listen again tonight on FM 93.9 at 10 p.m.

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- [\[46\]](#) Francesca from Bronx, NY

December 04, 2009 - 02:49PM

"Wooden Ships" by Crosby,Stills, and Nash or Jefferson Airplane (don't remember who did it originally) and in movies "Twelve Monkeys.

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- [\[47\]](#) Doug Walker from Brooklyn

December 04, 2009 - 09:57PM

To the Bach, Verdi and Messiaen

references I would add Strauss'

'Four Last Songs'.

'Wooden Ships' was co-written by

David Crosby, Stephen Stills and

Paul Kantner (of JeffersonAirplane)

and each band's version was re-

corded and released nearly simul-

taneously.....(grammar, grrr...)

The Airplane's album 'Crown of

Creation' yields the amazing title

song (criticizing the masters of



destruction, among others) and  
 the startling 'House at Pooneil  
 Corners', truly a picture of the end  
 times. A friend calls the imagery  
 2nd-rate William Blake, but I would  
 not know, never having been  
 to university :-> And the album  
 cover artwork leaves nothing  
 to the imagination !

- [\[48\]](#) Fabio Carasi from Montclair  
 December 05, 2009 - 10:27AM

Check out "We won't be there" (in original Italian: Noi non ci saremo), video with subtitles by cult band "I Nomadi", a mix of 1960's precursor of U2 Greatful Dead Cosmic Consciousness, Kierkegaard's pessimism and some basic loud scruffy rock. Lyrics sound and live performance with audience sing along: what else do you want?

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=40efwx7yrgI>

- [\[49\]](#) Steve  
 December 05, 2009 - 11:51AM

"Everything's Cool" by Pop Will Eat Itself is a good apocalypse song or, at the very least, about the crumbling of civilization into dystopia.

## Leave a Comment

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