

Break-Up Songs: The Musical Cry of a Broken Heart

JUNE SIMMS: Welcome to AMERICAN MOSAIC in VOA Special English.

I'm June Simms. This week on our program, we tell about an old Roman Catholic mission in California, once known for getting winged visitors each spring.

And we listen to some songs about the different ways humans experience the end of love.

Swallows of Capistrano

JUNE SIMMS: San Juan Capistrano is one of the oldest Roman Catholic missions in California. The religious center was established in the seventeen seventies.

San Juan Capistrano is not just famous for its age, however. Its history also includes some extraordinary visitors. Shirley Griffith has our story about the American cliff swallows of San Juan Capistrano.



AP

John Mione, playing Father Serra, looks skyward for swallows following the ringing of the bells in March 17 at the Mission San Juan Capistrano

SHIRLEY GIRFFITH: The swallows migrate in March from Goya, Argentina, to spend the spring in San Juan Capistrano. For years and years, the birds built nests under the top of

buildings at the Catholic mission.

But no more. In the nineteen nineties, workers repaired and secured the old buildings. Hundreds of old nests were removed. The swallows returned in fewer and fewer numbers. They were not found at the mission at all in the past ten years.

The little brown birds with the white triangles on their faces still fly back to the city of San Juan Capistrano every spring.

But, the swallows no longer make their home at the mission.

Pat March is a volunteer at Mission San Juan Capistrano. She says there have been many attempts to get the birds to return, including setting out food.

PAT MARCH: "What they would do is they would put out ladybugs to attract the swallows."

Employees also dug shallow holes in the ground around the mission and added water to make mud. The birds make their nests from wet earth.

Workers also placed man-made nests under the roof line of mission buildings. None of the attempts worked. So officials decided it was time to seek professional help. Enter scientist Charles Brown.

CHARLES BROWN: "I've been studying cliff swallows for about thirty years."

Mister Brown is an ornithologist from the University of Tulsa in Oklahoma. He says forty years of development around San Juan Capistrano has led to a fifty percent reduction of the swallow population in southern California.

CHARLES BROWN: "That is the one part of North America where the numbers have been going down."

The bird expert offered an unusual idea to mission operators about how to get the swallows back. It centered on the sociable nature of the animals.

CHARLES BROWN: "The social species, they often look to see if others have settled there and have others been successful there. So we have to fool them into thinking that birds have been there recently."

Charles Brown made recordings of swallows in Oklahoma. The mission hid sound systems in bushes. Soon, swallow song filled the air.

The swallow recordings played for two months this spring. The birds did not return to nest at the mission. But, there were signs that they might in the future.

Walter Piper is with Chapman University in nearby Orange, California. In early May, he found about one hundred swallows nesting on buildings just a half-kilometer from the mission.

WALTER PIPER: "This is the first indication that cliff swallows were nesting nearby the mission. Bit by bit, they build these huge nests. So that's what we're seeing. It's cute to see them poke their heads out of there."

Mister Piper says any of these birds could be nesters at the mission in the future. He says they could make the move as early as next spring. And the San Juan Capistrano mission plans to again play Charles Brown's swallow welcome song.

(MUSIC)

Break-Up Songs

JUNE SIMMS: When love ends somebody usually feels really bad. Sadness, anger, distrust, and disbelief are some of the feelings that often go along with a break-up. It is emotionally powerful stuff.

Maybe that is one reason why break-up songs are so popular. They seem to pour out of the radio more often than songs about lovers staying together.

Today, Christopher Cruise and I play some break-up songs from today and yesterday and look at the language used in them.



AP

Gotye performs in April at the 2012 Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in Indio, California

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: That song is "Somebody That I Used to Know" by Australian singer and songwriter Gotye. Singer Kimbra from New Zealand also is heard on the single. Right now, it is the number one song on

Billboard Magazine's Hot 100 singles chart. It has been on the chart for twenty-one weeks.

Why is this song so popular? For one thing, it uses a phrase common to break-ups. Gotye sings "you said we would still be friends."

(MUSIC)

Men and women often say this during a break-up, but it is not usually true. And it definitely is not the truth in this song.

Gotye sings about being treated like a stranger. He sings that the woman acted as if they never had a relationship. The song expresses anger felt from betrayal and dismissal. It is hard for the listener to not feel sympathetic.

JUNE SIMMS: But then we hear from the former girlfriend. She feels she was "screwed over" or treated unfairly. And yet, she says, he always made her feel

like she was to blame.

Finally, Kimbra sings, "I didn't want to live that way / reading into every word you say." Her part expresses a tired defeat and is also easy to sympathize with.

(MUSIC)

But, the position of the woman almost did not get written. In fact, Gotye almost gave up on the song. Gotye says he felt blocked after finishing the first verse. And the songwriter says he spent weeks deciding if he should add the female part.

(MUSIC)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Now we hear a break-up song from an earlier generation. "Don't You Want Me," by the Human League came out in nineteen eighty-one.

(MUSIC)

It also includes a male and female point of view. And, as in Gotye's song, the girl is the one who ends the relationship. The boy is hurt.

JUNE SIMMS: The song tells the story of two people who have been together five years. The male character is shocked by the break-up. He suggests the girl owes him something. He says that when they met, she was serving drinks in a bar. He argues that he made her a better, more successful person. "I picked you up, I shook you out / Turned you into someone new."

But the woman argues with him. The only thing she agrees with is that when they met she was working as a cocktail waitress.

(MUSIC)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Pride and strength in the face of break-ups are also a common theme. Songwriters often tell of people who are determined to recover after heartbreak. A major favorite in this group would be "I Will Survive," a nineteen seventy-eight hit song for Gloria Gaynor.

(MUSIC)

One of today's versions might be "Stronger (What Doesn't Kill You)" by Kelly Clarkson.

(MUSIC)

CHRISTOPHER CRUISE: Finally, we leave you with a song about how hurt and distrust of a past relationship can affect chances for a new relationship.

In the Drake song "Take Care," two people are hurting from break-ups. The singer Rihanna opens the song with the words: "I know you've been hurt by someone else / I can tell by the way you carry yourself / If you let me, here's what I'll do / I'll take care of you ..."

Can the two repair each other? Listen and decide for yourself.

JUNE SIMMS: Are there break-up songs that have touched you deeply? Any that helped you get over your ex and move on with your life? We would love to know about them. Send an email about your favorites to mosaic@voanews.com.

I'm June Simms. Join us again next week for music and more on AMERICAN MOSAIC in VOA Special English.