ROCK AND ROLL MOUNTAINS

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Categories: Observations, Reviews

Some Saturday evening in an the upstairs room of a pub in Sunderland in early 1977. The disco music stops, and wonder of wonder, those haunting guitar notes and the gentle sound of the flute starts up - and immediately the floor clears of people who just want to 'strut their funky stuff'. Amongst the few brave souls who take to the floor are my girlfriend and I - dancing as close as we can to the slow haunting melody. For five minutes we are lost in the music and each other, then the guitar starts to pick up and we start to move apart still holding hands, and swaying slowly. Suddenly the vocal comes back in and the band moves into overdrive and we are standing apart shaking our heads, hair flying (I had some then - lots), and screaming out the words of the song, till we smile and softly sing the closing words - *and she's buying a stairway to heaven.* And we leave the floor to those who think that dancing the hustle is fun.

A Sunday afternoon, around the same time on the top of Glaramara in the English Lake District. My best mate and I are tucking into our sandwiches, shivering in the snow and wondering if we really can get back to the road in time for the last bus. We are tired and aching from carrying our heavy packs and a bit confused about directions as the air and ground are all white. We know we've got enough money for our bus fair, and perhaps a bar of chocolate, but that's all. It's going to be a long trip home and we need to be back at school the next day. But, man, it's good to be on the hills.

Thirty years later, I'm sitting on an aeroplane flying to Africa, listening to *Stairway* on an MP3 player and smiling because this time next week I'll be up in the hills again! Somewhere in those thirty years I'm supposed to have grown up but rock and roll and climbing mountains still provide me with some of my happiest times in life.

This twin love is wonderfully captured in the book Rock and Roll Mountains. This is the story of an internationally famous rock guitarist who conquered his addiction to booze and drugs and found personal fulfilment climbing the mountains of his native Scotland. It's a wonderful book full of good stories and almost poetic writing. If you like rock and roll or mountains - and especially if you like both - you will love it. The book is funny, poignant and well worth a read. It's also rather profane and doesn't spare the reader's blushes.

You might wonder why I'm recommending a book which has a fair bit of sex and drugs and rock and roll, so let me give a couple of thoughts.

It's a wonderfully creative book, swimming in love for the art form that is rock and roll, and for the Scottish mountains. I believe that a creating and creative God likes the arts - he made us to be artistic - and he likes people to admire his work of art which is the world. As Christians we spend too much time sometimes talking about the fall of man, without appreciating the wonder that comes from mankind being made in God's image.

Secondly, this book poses a real challenge. We have a here guy who has played live on stage with Rory Gallagher and gazed in wonder at Scottish hills by snowy moonlight. If we, as Christians want to offer him something better and more fulfilling than this we need to get our acts together. Too often

we think that by making our worship more exciting and interesting we can bring people to God. I'm sorry, no communal singing of soft rock worship songs will ever match the excitement of dancing to a great live band or watching a thunderstorm build up over a distant range of hills. I have no doubt that a relationship with Jesus Christ is the single most fulfilling thing this planet has to offer but we need somehow to disentangle that fact from all the baggage that goes with it.

In the meantime, read a great book!