



# Songs About Photography: 11 Great Options (+ Link to Playlist!)

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**11** GREAT SONGS

# GREAT SONGS ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY

Looking for songs about photography? You've come to the right place.

In this article, I share 11 inspiring songs, all of which feature cameras, photographers, photography, and photographic themes.

So if you're in need of some songs about photographs – whether you're a photographer looking for inspiration or a casual listener who likes photography – then read on!

# 1. “Kodachrome,” by Paul Simon



“Kodachrome” is the lead single from Paul Simon’s third studio album *There Goes Rhymin’ Simon* (1973), named after the 35mm film format introduced by Eastman Kodak in 1935.

Referring to the unique characteristics of the Kodak film and its effect on visual culture, Simon sings, “They give us those nice bright colors / They give us the greens of summers.”

Interestingly, while the album version of “Kodachrome” states that “everything looks worse in black and white,” Simon later went on to perform the song live with different lyrics: “Everything looks better in black and white.”

In an interview with Daniel Levitin for *Grammy Magazine* in 1997, Simon stated, “I can’t remember which way I originally wrote it, better or worse, but I always change it.”

## 2. “Picture This,” by Blondie

*“All I want is a photo in my wallet, a small remembrance of something more solid...”*

Blondie’s “Picture This” touches on the driving force behind a considerable amount of photography: the desire to preserve memory.

Blondie’s first two albums were hits in many parts of the world but failed to garner much attention in America.

However, “Picture This,” the band’s first overseas single in 1978, became Blondie’s breakthrough track in the U.S.

## 3. “This Is Not a Photograph,” by Mission of Burma



Short and to the point, Mission of Burma's "This Is Not a Photograph," is probably a reference to *La Trahison des Images* (*The Treachery of Images*), painted by surrealist René Magritte.

Magritte's piece, which pairs the image of a pipe with the phrase "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" – *this is not a pipe* – illustrates the duality of the artistically rendered subject matter. The artwork also speaks to the intention and power of the artist.

As the lyrics declare, the song "This Is Not a Photograph" is clearly not a photograph – though it maintains photographic qualities as a marker of a specific moment in time.

## 4. "Camera," by R.E.M

A pioneer of alternative rock, R.E.M. is known for hits such as "Losing My Religion," "Everybody Hurts," "Man on the Moon," and "The One I Love."

But before their breakthrough stardom, songs like “**Camera**” established the distinctive lyrics and jangly riffs that would mark R.E.M.’s approach to music.

Featured on the 1984 album *Reckoning*, “Camera” was written about the death of photographer Carol Levy.

The lyrics, “Will you be remembered? Will she be remembered?” refer to memory and perhaps even the power of the camera to stop time.

R.E.M. also released a second song about photography, entitled “**Photograph**” (done in collaboration with Natalie Merchant).

The song speculates about the story of a photograph found “in stacks between the old joist walls / In a place where time is lost.”

## 5. “Swap Meet,” by Nirvana



Formed in 1987, American grunge band Nirvana rose to fame with the success of “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” “About a Girl,” and “Come as You Are.”

The song “[Swap Meet](#),” featured on the 1989 album *Bleach*, paints a moody picture of a couple who “make a living off of arts and crafts.”

The song’s chorus illustrates the entanglement of keeping cigarettes (addiction), photographs (memories), and bitterness close to the heart.

## 6. “Distant Camera,” by Neil Young

Released in 2000, *Silver & Gold* is Neil Young’s 23rd studio album.

For a Reprise Records promotional piece, Young wrote a comment about each new song.

When discussing “[Distant Camera](#),” Young explains, “There was one thing I let go on this album.

It's on this song and it still bothers me. There was a misplaced beat and nobody liked it but me, and I wanted to leave it in because that's just the way it had happened originally. But I took it out, and to this day, whenever I hear this song I think about that kick drum. And I probably always will. That's just the way my mind works."

Despite Young's dissatisfaction, *Distant Camera* is a touching song about love, change, memory and time.

## 7. "Kamera," by Wilco



"[Kamera](#)" is a song by Chicago-based indie-rock band Wilco, featured on the 2001 album *Yankee Hotel Foxtrot*.



The subject of the song appears to view the camera as a tool to remind them of “which lies I have been hiding / Which echoes belong.”

In other words, the camera is presented as a revealer of truths, a property that has been extensively explored – and debated – throughout the history of photography.

## 8. “Seventeen,” by Ladytron

“Seventeen” is featured on Ladytron’s 2002 album, *Light & Magic*.

The song is made up of a single repeating verse:

“They only want you when you’re seventeen / When you’re 21, you’re no fun / They take a Polaroid and let you go / Say they’ll let you know, so come on.”

Paired with a robotic musical score and voice modulators, “Seventeen” could well be about the exploitative, youth-obsessed culture of the entertainment and fashion business.

“They take a Polaroid and let you go” indicates the process used by those who select models, but it could also refer to a part of a person’s psyche being stolen by the industry.

## 9. “Paparazzi,” by Lady Gaga





In 2008, Lady Gaga dropped her debut studio album, *The Fame*.

“Paparazzi” was released as the album’s fifth and final single, and the song quickly rose to the top of music charts across the globe.

Speaking about the song’s meaning, Lady Gaga has said, “There are a few different interpretations...It’s a love song for the cameras, but it’s also a love song about fame or love – can you have both, or can you only have one?”

“Paparazzi” alludes to the camera as a tool that drives the trajectory of fame.

## 10. “Itchin’ on a Photograph,” by Grouplove

American alternative-rock band Grouplove formed in 2009 and released their debut album, *Never Trust a Happy Song*, in 2011.

The third single off the album, "[Itchin' on a Photograph](#)," reached number 43 on Australian national radio station *Triple J's Hottest 100*. The song also reached number 10 on Billboard's *Alternative Songs* and number 30 on Billboard's *Hot Rock Songs*.

"Itchin' on a Photograph" delves into the emotional and physical experience of dwelling on the past.

Building on a central theme of memory, the photograph represents a source of discomfort, but also a stepping stone from which the subject alights.

## 11. "Taro," by alt-J



"[Taro](#)" is written by English indie-rock band alt-J and features on the 2012 album *An Awesome Wave*.

The song is about war-photojournalist couple [Robert Capa](#) and Gerda Taro.

In 1934, Endre Erno Friedmann met Gerda Pohorylle, a German-Jewish refugee. In Paris, the pair invented the name and image of Robert Capa.

For a while, Friedmann and Pohorylle both published their photographic work under the Robert Capa name. Pohorylle eventually took the name “Gerda Taro” and became successful in her own right, while Friedmann retained the Capa identity.

Sadly, both Taro and Capa died during conflict.

Taro was killed in 1937 while covering the Republican Army retreat at the Battle of Brunete. Capa died in 1954 when he stepped on a land mine in Thai Binh in Indochina.

Alt-J’s song “Taro” describes the lives of these two pioneering photographers and their reunification in the afterlife.

## Songs about photography: final words

I hope you’ve enjoyed this list of songs about photographs. Photography and music are similar in many ways; perhaps that’s why the combination of photographic themes and music creates such compelling listening.

If you’d like to treat your ears to plenty more photography songs, you can check out this wonderful [Songs About Photography Spotify playlist](#).

And if I’ve missed your favorite photography-based song, share it in the comments!

Happy listening!

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