

CLASSIC ROCK & HEAVY METAL  
**ROCK HAMMER**  
PRESENTS  
10 YEARS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD  
THE  
**'90s**  
NEW  
The Ultimate  
Decade.  
The Ultimate  
Magazine.  
**ROCK**  
COLLECTION



*STARRING*  
Nirvana, Metallica, Pearl Jam,  
Foo Fighters, Green Day,  
Tool, Nine Inch Nails  
& the bands that built the 1990s

**Digital**  
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*James Addiction* METALLICA NIRVANA GUNS N' ROSES NIN **tool** Foo  
Stone Temple Pilots RAMMSTEIN garbage Slipknot Gre  
nu-metal \*RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS SKA-PUNK **rage against the machine** TA  
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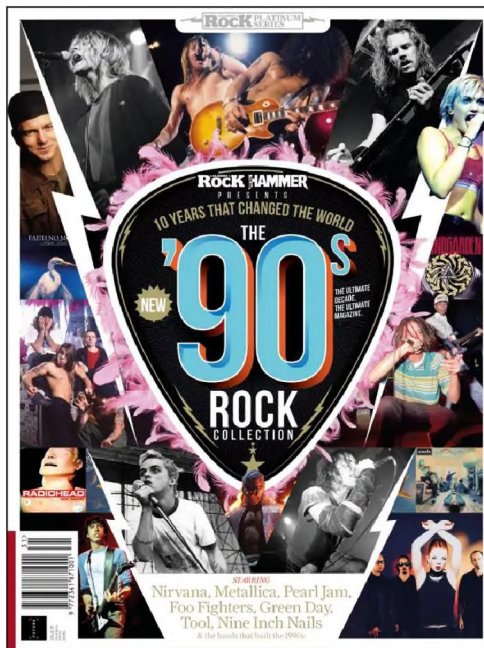
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# W

hat does the 1990s mean to you? Was it the grunge explosion at the start of the decade spearheaded by Nirvana, Pearl Jam, Soundgarden and Alice In Chains? Was it the rise of nu metal and the success of angst merchants such as Korn, Limp Bizkit and Slipknot at the end of it? Was it the unstoppable, all-conquering dominance of Metallica, the

blockbusting success of punk-pop rabble rousers Green Day or the incendiary emergence of next-gen noisemakers Rage Against The Machine and Tool? Was it outliers and mavericks such as Jane's Addiction, Sublime or The Wildhearts? Or maybe it was all of them and more?

Looking back on the 90s from the vantage point of today, it's astounding to think how revolutionary those 10 years were. It was a decade when a bunch of unshaven no-hopers from Seattle could become the decade's biggest band, when rock'n'roll – itself already 30-odd years old – could be stretched and pummelled into thrilling new shapes and sounds, when genres were smashed together in the musical equivalent of some giant Large Hadron Collider. It was noisy, it was chaotic, and above all it was as exciting as hell.

Of course, you know all that. This 132-page magazine is for you. Inside, you'll find the full story of this epic, sprawling, game-changing decade, told via the bands who built it, from the ones who burned out before they could fade away to those who are still out there today, building on the astounding work they did back then. Immerse yourself in the artists and music from the 10 years that changed everything. As someone once said: here we are now, entertain us...

Dave Everley – Editor



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# 1990

At the start of the decade, arena rock and hair metal still ruled all. But in the far reaches of the Pacific Northwest, something was stirring.



**N**ew decades don't just spring into life. Slates aren't wiped clean overnight, stopwatches aren't suddenly reset. There's always a carry-over from the end of the previous 10 years – culturally, stylistically and especially musically.

Yet more than 30 years on, it seems like the 1990s started with its own mini-Big Bang. Sure, the glam metal scene which had dominated the second half of the 80s still ruled radio and MTV, and New York and Los Angeles were still the twin hubs of the music industry. If you were a band who wanted to be rich and famous, you had to look and sound like *this*. Anyone else could just forget about it.

But the winds of change were blowing strong. A new wave of bands were silently marshalling to displace the old order. Chief among these were San Francisco's Faith No More and LA's Jane's Addiction. The former were a bunch of weirdos, misfits and oddballs playing an unlikely hybrid of metal, funk, post-punk, hip-hop and anything else they could get their grubby hands on, whose unpigeonholeable third album, 1989's *The Real Thing*, sounded like the new decade had arrived a full year early. The latter were fully-fledged rock'n'roll bohemians whose second album, 1990's dazzling *Ritual de lo Habitual*, sounded and looked like it had beamed in from another dimension. Together yet separately, they were inadvertently paving the way for the rest of the decade.

Yet the most significant change was happening at the top of America's Western seaboard. Seattle was most famous for its prodigious rainfall and being the birthplace of both Starbucks coffee and Jimi Hendrix. But in the late 80s a tiny upstart label called Sub Pop had become the epicentre of a new underground movement. Bands such as Soundgarden, Green River, Melvins and a little-known trio named Nirvana were unknowingly sowing the seeds for a brand new movement that smashed together punk,

metal and garage rock, and would eventually be christened 'grunge'.

By 1990, the small tremors emanating from the Pacific Northwest were becoming detectable throughout the rest of the USA and across the Atlantic in Europe. Major labels had begun to take notice, releasing landmark albums by the likes of Soundgarden and Mother Love Bone (whose singer, Andrew Wood, tragically died of a heroin overdose before his career had even got started). Yet it would be a bunch of ex-glam rockers named Alice In Chains (singer Layne Staley, pictured left) who became the first band from Seattle to gatecrash the mainstream, thanks to their breakout single *Man In The Box* and debut album *Facelift* – the latter the first grunge album to sell 500,000 copies in the US.

By the end of the year, the entire music industry had pivoted away from glam metal and its gnarlier, uglier cousin thrash metal and decamped wholesale to Seattle, where they were hoovering up any band with a goatee and a wardrobe full of plaid shirts – among them Nirvana and Mookie Blaylock. Within 12 months, the latter had renamed themselves Pearl Jam and both were on their way to becoming two of the defining bands of the decade.

Of course, pop's barricades weren't quite ready to fall just yet. The biggest selling artists of the year included MC Hammer, Michael Bolton, New Kids On The Block and world-renowned mime artists Milli Vanilli. Even arena rock's old guard were hanging in there, thanks to the likes of AC/DC, Scorpions and Poison while outliers such as funk-metallers Living Colour and 70s obsessives The Black Crowes proved hard rock wasn't quite spent. But it was a brand new strain of bands wielding thrilling new sounds and mould-breaking attitudes were about to serve notice on the world that change was coming. And 1990 was the year that change would begin. 🗨

# LOOKING IN THE REAR-VIEW MIRROR

On October 22, 1990, a new group from Seattle called Mookie Blaylock rose out of the ashes of tragedy to play their very first gig. Within months they'd changed their name to **Pearl Jam** and embarked on a journey that saw them become one of the most famous bands of the decade.

Words: **Niall Doherty** Photos: **Lance Mercer**

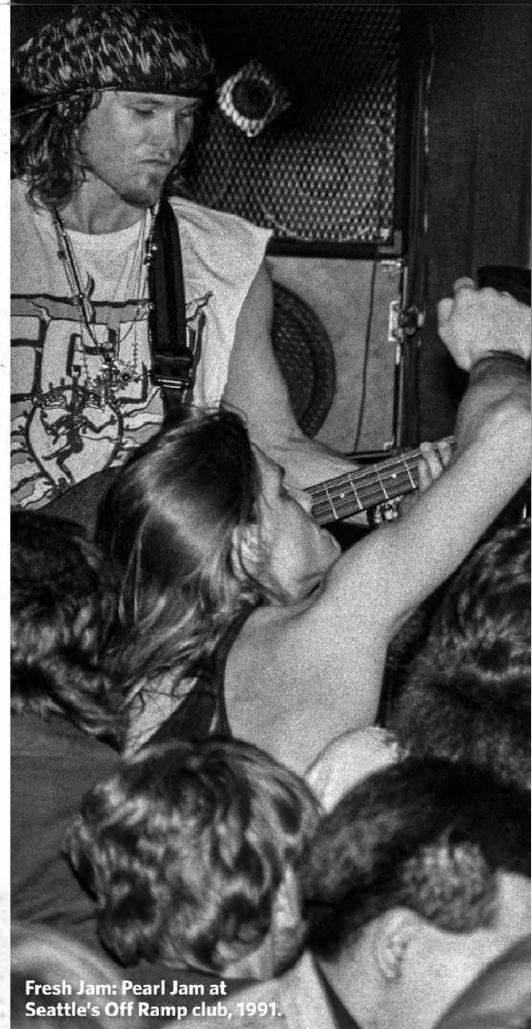


# PEARL





The pre-PJ Jeff Ament (bottom left) and Stone Gossard (top middle) with Mother Love Bone, 1988.



Fresh Jam: Pearl Jam at Seattle's Off Ramp club, 1991.

**W**hen Eddie Vedder watches a music documentary, it's never the early years or height of success that he's interested in; he doesn't want to see The Beatles at the Cavern Club, or The Who at the Marquee. The Pearl Jam frontman is curious about the period way, way after all that; he wants to know what his favourite bands were doing 20 years down the line – when there's some scar tissue, when they've made it big and worked out where to go next, the risky left turns, the break-ups, the reunions. That's what Vedder wants to dig into.

His own band turn 30 this year. Pearl Jam's debut single *Alive*, an astonishing first release by any stretch of the imagination, came out in July 1991. Their first album, *Ten*, followed a month later. Who could have known what would happen back then? Not Vedder, nor guitarists Stone Gossard and Mike McCready, bassist Jeff Ament and then-drummer Dave Krusen. At that point Pearl Jam were just another very promising rock band from the American Northwest – a region teeming with very promising rock bands. It didn't take them long to get ahead of the pack, though, and now it's difficult to imagine anyone else like them. They are one of a kind.

Since that first release in the summer of '91, there has been success stretching way past what any of them could have dreamed of. Pearl Jam have sold more than 85 million albums, their songs going far beyond what something put together from some wood and strings and a man singing over the top has any right to do. Their music has become

a pillar of rock culture. There has been pain, too, and death, tragedy, fallouts, political wrangling and drummers – quite a few drummers, actually. But throughout it all, Eddie Vedder has held on to the panoramic perspective with which he viewed his heroes: what did *they* do next?

"Music ain't a swimming pool, it's an ocean," the singer said in 2011. Vedder was sitting opposite me at Pearl Jam HQ, on the outskirts of Seattle. He was working his way through a box of American Spirit cigarettes and reflecting on the imminent release of the *Pearl Jam Twenty* film. "Music is not contained," he continued, "it moves. Even the business of music and digital, it's always moving and the tides are changing. It's more interesting now to see how a band navigates an open field of music."

All the looking back required for Cameron Crowe's career-spanning documentary had the nostalgia-wary frontman feeling uneasy. His band were about to enter their third decade, and Vedder wanted to face forwards again. He was more

interested, he explained, in what Radiohead or Guided By Voices frontman Bob Pollard were doing than in gazing back to rock'n'roll's Big Bang. He wanted to know what the future looked like.

In 2021, Pearl Jam are still huge. They feel more important than ever too. It's not just in the fact that they still put out great new

records (although their output has slowed somewhat), or even in their euphoric, communal live shows. Pearl Jam seem to go beyond that. Their very existence feels like a reassuring thing. "We're into long-term relationships in this group," Vedder explained, "in our personal lives, with each other as bandmates, and with the audience. That's a long-term relationship right there."

**"The minute we started rehearsing, I was like: 'Wow, this is a band that I'd play at home on my stereo.'"**

Jeff Ament



Seattle, 1990. The city's tight-knit music scene is still reeling from the death of one its favourite and most flamboyant adopted sons, Mother Love Bone frontman Andrew Wood. Stone Gossard, one of his devastated bandmates, is dealing with the loss in the only way he knows how: making more music. He has joined up with his friend and fellow guitarist Mike McCready and the two are holed up at Gossard's parents' house, fleshing out early versions of the songs that would become *Alive* and *Even Flow*. The former is a leftover from Mother Love Bone. Originally titled *Dollar Short*, the glam-rockers had even played it at a show in Portland, Oregon but never got round to recording it. "When Andy passed away we hadn't done anything with that song," Gossard recalled in 2013. "It stayed in my pile of demos. I liked the way it had this nice minor/major shift in it."

Preparing to get the songs down on tape, McCready persuaded Gossard to enlist his Mother Love Bone bandmate Jeff Ament on bass, and Soundgarden's Matt Cameron offered his services on drums. They emerged with a set of instrumentals titled the 'Stone Gossard demos', and set out to find a vocalist. There wasn't exactly a local shortage – Seattle was in the midst of an 'everybody's in a band' boom, and Gossard and Ament's stock was high after their work in Mother Love Bone and grunge prototype rockers Green River. But singers were tried out and not invited



**“We turned down every kind of merchandise you can think of. I got a call from Calvin Klein, wanting Eddie to be in an ad.”**

**Manager Kelly Curtis**

back. The problem was not finding a vocalist, it was finding a vocalist whose voice they liked.

Twelve hundred miles south, in the warmer climes of San Diego, Eddie Vedder was at a creative loose end. His band Bad Radio had recently split up, and he was beginning to wonder if that ship had sailed. “I gave myself a timeline,” he said in 2011. “I don’t think I ever would’ve sold my guitar – as Pete Townshend would say, never spend your guitar or your pen – but I would be resigned to being the assistant manager of a drug store.”

As fate would have it, Vedder’s career in the local chemist was not to be. Gossard’s demo landed in his lap after a mutual friend, former Red Hot Chili Peppers drummer Jack Irons, told Gossard and Ament to send a copy to the surfer-dude singer he’d become pals with.

Vedder liked what he heard. He went surfing with the songs lodged in his head, and wrote the lyrics as he rode the waves. He got home, spent a few hours laying down his vocals, and sent the tape back. These days he finds the

flippancy with which it happened a little terrifying to look back on. “It changed our lives in infinite ways, it changed everything. It was the best five hours I ever spent,” he said.

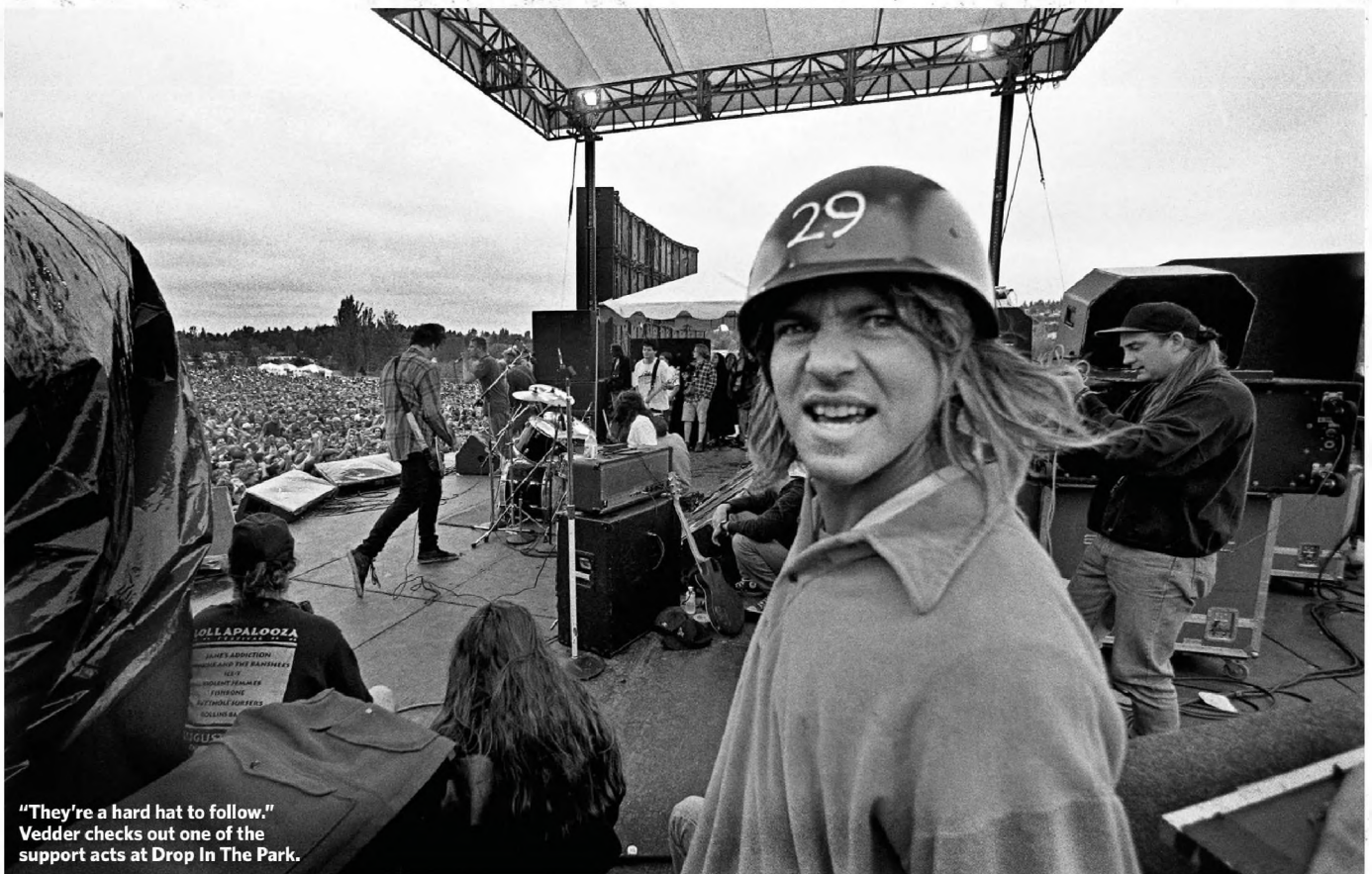
Hearing something promising in the raw, yearning vocal over a trilogy of tracks – *Alive*, *Once* and *Footsteps* – that Vedder had now rechristened the ‘Momma-Son’ demo, Ament and Gossard got him up to Seattle for rehearsals. In a dingy practice room known as Galleria Potatohead by its patrons, Ament knew immediately that they were on to something. “The minute we started rehearsing, and Ed started singing – which was within an hour of him landing in Seattle – was the first time I was like: “Wow, this is a band that I’d play at home on my stereo,” he told *Spin* magazine in 2001. “What he was writing about was the space Stone and I were in. We’d just lost one of our friends to a dark and evil addiction, and he was



Future Pearl Jam members Jeff Ament (far left) and Stone Gossard (far right) with Green River in the mid-80s.

putting that feeling to words. It’s like when you read a book and it’s describing something you’ve felt all your life.” McCready remembers Vedder staying in the rehearsal room, staying up all night writing lyrics. “We’d show up and there was another song,” he said. “I’d never been in a situation where it clicks.”

The group, who now also included recently added drummer Dave Krusen, wrote and rehearsed for six days straight. On the >



"They're a hard hat to follow." Vedder checks out one of the support acts at Drop In The Park.

seventh they played their first gig, at Seattle's Off Ramp Café. It was October 22, 1990, and they called themselves Mookie Blaylock, after the New Jersey Nets basketball player. Their set lasted for 40 minutes and eight songs. Five of the songs would appear on Pearl Jam's debut album, *Ten*.

Their first week set a tone for quick progress that would become a hallmark of the group's early days. Over the next few months the quintet honed their lithe rock anthems playing a series of shows in Seattle that won over locals as well as attracting admirers from further afield. On the eve of signing with Epic Records, and perhaps sensing something big on the horizon that a basketball player might take exception at being forever associated with, Mookie Blaylock changed their name. Over the coming years Vedder would spin an entertaining yarn about how their new moniker came from his grandma 'Pearl's home-made peyote 'jam', but the truth was a little more mundane: 'Pearl' was suggested by Ament at a rehearsal. Not long after, some of the band had gone to see Neil Young at Nassau Coliseum, New York, and discussed afterwards how every song had turned into an extended jam, and – boom! Pearl... Jam. They had their name.



## "Vitalogy was the first record where Ed was the guy making the final decisions. It was a real difficult record for me."

Stone Gossard

In March 1991, Pearl Jam began recording their debut album at London Bridge Studios in Seattle's Shoreline neighbourhood. McCready remembers Gossard and Ament, already seasoned studio hands, taking the lead. "Me and Eddie were along for the ride at that time." An early version of *Alive* that captured the

track's expansive sway was already in the bag, but other tracks took a little more work – *Even Flow* took more than 30 takes. Vedder, still new to Seattle, threw himself into making the record in order to distract himself from the unfamiliar surroundings. "It was my first chance to make a real record," he said in 2001, "and I was pretty damn focused. I was in a new town, so that batch of songs replaced my friends and family."

Titled *Ten*, in a nod to the shirt number worn by Blaylock, Pearl Jam's debut album was released on August 27, 1991. It is now rightly regarded as one of the greatest debut albums ever. But its success was a slow-burn, taking until halfway through 1992 for the spark to ignite. By that point, a period of intense touring, both at home and in Europe, had showcased their exhilarating live show and attracted

an ever-growing diehard crowd. Then MTV put the promotional clip for *Jeremy*, a song about a school student who shot himself in front of the class, on heavy rotation, and Pearl Jam were almost instantly lifted to a dizzying altitude of success. Vedder, in particular, started to feel light-headed at their new surroundings.

"When *Jeremy* happened, Sony Music CEO Tommy Mottola was saying: 'You have to release *Black*,'" the band's manager Kelly Curtis said in 2001. "And the band was saying: 'No. This is big enough.' We turned down inaugurals, TV specials, stadium tours, every kind of merchandise you can

think of. I got a call from Calvin Klein, wanting Eddie to be in an ad. I was proud of the band, proud of their stance."

Not everyone felt compelled to applaud, however. Some of their hometown peers had begun to air their grievances with Seattle's newest success story. Kurt Cobain claimed that Pearl Jam were "pioneering a corporate, alternative and cock-rock fusion", igniting a feud that would eventually be settled with a slow-dance between Cobain and Vedder at the 1992 MTV Video Music Awards.

When Vedder looked back to that initial burst of success in 2011, he said it was all about just getting through it intact. "I knew it wasn't graceful, the way we were handling it," he said. "At the same time, it's like being graceful in an alley fight. You're just trying to get out of there alive. We held tight to each other and held tight to music. We were always thinking about not the next record, but what would it sound like in five records." >



"I can see my house from here."  
Vedder (and basketball players)  
with Pearl Jam headlining Drop  
In The Park in Seattle in '92.



Dark times: Pearl Jam at the 2000 Roskilde festival in Denmark.



Stadium rock: at Fenway Park, Boston, August 5, 2016.

The image on the cover of Pearl Jam's second album, *Vs.*, is an angora goat on a farm in Hamilton, Montana, with its face pressed through a wire fence. Ament explained that the image represented how the band had come to feel like slaves. Grunge had become a worldwide success, and a 'thing', and fashion magazines and retailers had taken note. Everyone wanted a piece of the pie. Led by a resolute Vedder, Pearl Jam started to back away. "The whole scene was heavily co-opted, things were changing around us," he said. "They started selling whatever people were wearing in the Northwest, corduroy jackets going for thousands of dollars. I was living in a basement or a one-bedroom flat. It was all very small. But around us it was getting insane."

Gossard says Vedder pushed forwards on the idea that getting bigger wasn't going to make any of them happier. "At that time, everybody was trying to figure out what Pearl Jam was to them," said the guitarist. "Ed was trying to come to grips that he'd started as this shy, quiet guy and was now this guy that everybody recognised on the street."

Unfortunately, in some ways, for all concerned, *Vs.* made Pearl Jam huge. The band had decided not to make any accompanying music videos, do minimal press, and even went as far as giving away a bonus live cassette of the track *Animal* in the UK so that the single release of *Go* was ineligible for chart inclusion. But the tactics did little to dampen the album's impact. A searing,

vital record that mixed furious, urgent rock with acoustic balladry, it cut through their promotional silence and sat at the top of the *Billboard* 200 chart for five weeks, and set a record for the most copies of an album sold during its first week.

Its success only seemed to ramp up growing tensions in the band. Things came to a head while they toured *Vs.* at the same time as dealing with the shock of Kurt Cobain's death and writing and recording their next record, *Vitalogy*.

## "I felt that with more popularity we were going to be crushed, our heads were going to pop like grapes."

Eddie Vedder

"*Vitalogy* was the first record where Ed was the guy making the final decisions," Gossard told *Spin* in 2001. "It was a real difficult record for me, because I was having to give up a lot of control."

Despite the internal wranglings, *Vitalogy* featured some of the band's finest moments: the fragile beauty of *Nothingman*; *Last Exit*'s stripped-down stomp; the gothic march of *Immortality*; the way *Better Man* morphs from hushed slo-mo ditty into a defiant anthem. The strength of the music couldn't paper over all the cracks, though. Drummer Dave

Abbruzzese, who'd played on *Vs.* and most of *Vitalogy*, was fired and replaced with former Jack Irons, the man who'd helped them find Vedder in the first place. There were now other, external, pressures to deal with too.

Shocked by the service charges being added to the prices of tickets for their shows, the band had gone to war with ticketing giant Ticketmaster. In 1994 they testified to US congress that Ticketmaster were operating as a monopoly in the live music industry, and followed up by cancelling a run of shows that were meant to take in Ticketmaster-controlled venues. When it came to the US tour to support *Vitalogy* in 1995, they booked their own venues instead.

"We got to see up close how things work in this country," Vedder said in 2011. "We got to be crushed by a corporate giant right up close." He reflected that while it hadn't killed Pearl Jam, it had certainly robbed them of their idealism. "We thought and believed – and probably still do – that we were fighting the good fight." He looked back on that 1995 tour with exasperation. "We spent more time on where to put the porta-loos than when it came to doing the set-list," he sighed. "You couldn't think straight for link fences and barricades and safety issues and how many roads in, how many roads out, parking. That became part of setting up live shows. And then those were what the reviews were about! It was 'if they'd done it with Ticketmaster, there wouldn't be this hassle'. We had to bring the focus back to music and playing."

For the rest of the 90s, Pearl Jam did exactly that. They got their head down, played music, toured a lot and rarely got involved with the any of the rigmarole around it.

If *Vitalogy* put the indicator on, then 1996's *No Code* album is when Pearl Jam really went off-road. It was heralded by a single, *Who You Are*, that didn't sound like a single at all, a loose, hazy





Mike McCready, Jeff Ament, Matt Cameron and Stone Gossard at the Barclays Center, Brooklyn, October 18, 2013.

track built around Arabic-flavoured melodies and Jack Irons's textured drum rolls. Pearl Jam were still alive, all right, but they sounded nothing like their 1991 selves. *No Code* built on *Vitalogy*'s formula (the formula being that there was no formula) of delicate introspection, snarling heavier numbers and peculiar experimentation. Pearl Jam were saying that they still wanted to be a big, important band, but *their* version of a big, important band.

Vedder's retreat from the frontline had more to do with an aversion to commercial success. The frontman had been plagued by a stalker, and chronicled the experience in *No Code*'s punky *Lukin*. He found himself afraid to leave the house, and eventually moved. Fame was not for him, he decided. "I felt that with more popularity, we were going to be crushed, our heads were going to pop like grapes," he told *Rolling Stone*'s Brian Hiatt in 2006. To Vedder, the term 'No Code' meant 'Do Not Resuscitate'. If this was to be the way that Pearl Jam went down, he thought, then they were going to do it on their own terms.

Jeff Ament calls this era of Pearl Jam their "black-hole period". The band made some solid records, each with tracks that would light up their set-lists for years to come – *Given To Fly* and *Do The Evolution* on 1998's *Yield*, *Of The Girl*, *Insignificance* and *Grievance* on 2000's *Binaural* – but sales had dipped and some members struggled to get their heads round the group's uncertain status. "No matter what, you're going to have a time when some people are going to lose interest in you," Gossard said in 2001. "We could still sell out live, which took out some of the ego sting. But there was definitely a sense of us not delivering the goods in the way that the masses expected from us."

Guitarist Mike McCready felt the same, worried that Pearl Jam had taken too much of a step back

and had blown their chance to be the generation-defining group he felt they could be. It wasn't until he looked back years later that he realised they took the long way round because that was the only route that would work. "Maybe we alienated some fans throughout the years, which I feel bad for, but it made us survive as a band," he said in 2006.

As a new millennium was ushered in, things seemed to have settled down for Pearl Jam. A balance had been achieved, a sense that they could still connect on a big scale without compromising any of their hardened morals. New drummer Matt Cameron, who was also their old drummer, summed it up best when he said: "Pearl Jam are kind of in a special league. Punk-rock arena rock is the way they approach it." But the year 2000 would be one of the worst in the band's history.

Pearl Jam were a month into the tour to support *Binaural* when they arrived in Denmark to headline the Orange Stage at the country's famous Roskilde festival, 19 miles outside of

Copenhagen, on June 30, 2000. On that windy, rain-drenched evening, a huge crowd had gathered to see the band. Vedder had already asked the crowd to take a step back and make space. Then disaster struck. There was a crush, and nine people died. It was a tragedy that

changed everything.

"The hardest moment was the day of and the day after Roskilde," Vedder told me in 2011. "You couldn't go thirty seconds without thinking about it. After a week you could maybe go a minute without thinking about it. After a month you could maybe go three minutes... You were constantly

brought back there."

Vedder recalled staying at Sonic Youth's Kim Gordon and Thurston Moore's house soon after, and the then-couple's young daughter helping him deal with the pain.

"She was six or seven at the time," he said. "She was such a bright light. She didn't know about Roskilde, and I wasn't gonna explain it to her. She'd do a drawing for me, or we'd play ping-pong. She'll never know what a cool thing that was."

Vedder will remain forever grateful to the friends who

reached out at that point. "I was in a fuckin' fetal position the day after," he said. "I got a call from Pete Townshend, >

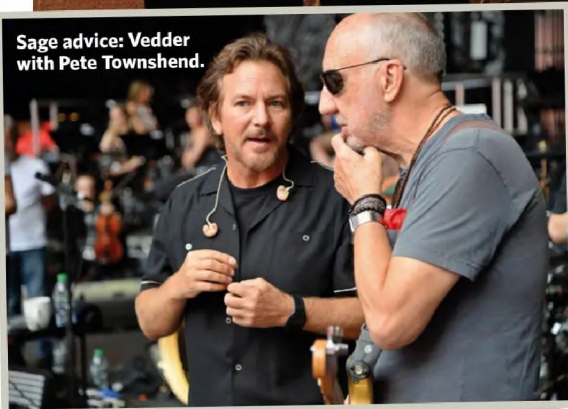
**"No matter what, you're going to have a time when some people are going to lose interest in you."**

Stone Gossard





Sage advice: Vedder with Pete Townshend.



Roger Daltrey, and talked to Tom Waits later. They were important phone calls, and god bless them for staying on the phone, because I was pretty despondent." At one point he said to Townshend: "Why did this happen to us?" "Because you can take it," Townshend said. "It made me think we could," Vedder reflected, "and that he had faith in us that we could."

Some members of Pearl Jam, particularly Gossard, wondered if the band could continue after such a horrific incident. Vedder thinks they became closer than ever as a group because of it. "We hadn't thought about this with our name," he said, "but the pearl is the little organism that has taken the shit, taken the bad stuff, and turned it

## "Maybe we alienated some fans throughout the years, which I feel bad for, but it made us survive as a band."

Mike McCready

into something beautiful. Maybe that's part of what we've been able to do."

After the band had completed the Binaural tour, Vedder disappeared for a year. "I had to live among nature," he explained. "I went almost nine days without saying a word at one point. I did a solitary process that I felt like I had to go through. I felt like any kind of avoidance would've come back to haunt me and there would have been deeper issues, ready to strike at any time." After a period of deep soul-searching, Vedder came home. The next day, Pearl Jam began work on *Riot Act*.

The tragedy at Roskilde diverted the course of Pearl Jam's career, and their next record set a blueprint from which their 'second act' emerged. Gone was the inward-looking contemplation of those mid-to-late-90s records;

*Riot Act* was outwardly facing. Released in 2002, it arrived with an emotional, joyous single in *I Am Mine*, and they even made a video to go with it.

*Riot Act* and their 2006 self-titled eighth album suggested Pearl Jam were back in the midst of a creative purple patch. The release of *Backspacer* in 2009 confirmed it. Produced by Brendan O'Brien, it was their best since the early 90s, a perfect blend of singalong anthems and intricate deep cuts. For Vedder, it was a record that made all the emotional hurdles worth it. After years where it felt that Pearl Jam had become a sort of cult band – admittedly, a pretty big cult band – now they were huge again, playing some of their biggest ever shows. It was their first album to top the US chart since *No Code*.

"*Backspacer* was a really good record," Vedder said in 2011. "We were all happy with the way it came out, and we reached a certain amount of people and they were good songs to play live." He





21st-century Pearl Jam: (l-r) Matt Cameron, Jeff Ament, Mike McCready, Eddie Vedder, Stone Gossard.

had finally grasped how to appreciate mainstream success. "I think you can enjoy it for a day, and get back to work the next," he said. "I wish I'd known a little earlier that it's more about the process of getting to where you're aiming to go, cos it's not about the destination, it's about the journey."

In the same way that *Riot Act* energised Pearl Jam in their second decade, *Backspacer* seemed to give them the confidence to take time in their third. There have been only two records since then: 2013's *Lightning Bolt* and last year's *Gigaton*. They take a moment these days, working on other projects and coming together when it feels right.

"I think we went into this with the idea that we wanted to be brothers in a band," Gossard told Sirius XM in an interview ahead of *Lightning Bolt*'s release. "And part of what we were attracted to is that being in a band is like a commitment you kind of have to make. It's built into our DNA and it's carried us through a lot of times where it's been more difficult."

They are still a band leading by example. They were one of the first to pull their tour dates when the pandemic hit last year, as the US government dithered about how to respond. "We wanted to be responsible," Gossard told Tidal. "You live and fight another day. Trying to get in ten shows before a tour was cancelled didn't make much sense to

us." Gossard felt proud that the band were in a position to take a stance, but he's itching to get back out there. "Having not been able to play for so long, we're never going to look at a live show the same way again."

Before we finish, how about a quick tour of Pearl Jam's HQ? It's a nondescript, two-storey warehouse that sits on a corner in the industrial district of Seattle, a few miles from Sea-Tac airport. But inside there's nothing nondescript about it. Downstairs there's the Ten Club, a hive of activity, dispatching merchandise orders to fans across the globe. Walk through that and you enter a vast room filled with row upon row of flight cases, a perfectly ordered ecosystem of Pearl Jam inventory. In the odd space that isn't taken up by a guitar or a drum kit, there are parts of Pearl Jam stage props from over the ages. Against a wall sit the giant letters from the cover of *Ten* – ARL JAM. "I think Ed and Stone have the P and E," our guide George (who also has a proper job as Vedder's guitar tech) explained. Head through there, past the rehearsal space, up the stairs – not the ones that lead to the band's management offices, the other ones – and you come to the comfy lounge area. This is where Vedder greeted me in 2011.



Alive and kicking: at London's O2 in 2018.

**"We've always looked out for one another. We want to make each other proud. We're a f\*\*king rock band!"**

Eddie Vedder

He was in friendly, charismatic form that day, dressed how you imagine he always dresses – like a man who might on the off-chance have to embark on an impromptu hike. There was no doubt he'd earned the right to be comfortable in his own skin. "Before it felt like we were five little boats all tied together," he said, "and now it feels like it's one big boat and we're all on it, and we take turns at the wheel and we take turns in the engine room and we have a good understand of being crew members and captains and sharing the load."

He thought that, with hindsight, the band were galvanised by those early years. "On that level, when people start dying," he said – "and it wasn't just Kurt, there was Stefanie from 7 Year Bitch, Layne years later – it brings you together."

The loss of Chris Cornell, an early mentor to Vedder, in 2017 would have been another huge blow. But Pearl Jam keep finding new ways to cope, to overcome and inspire. Walking around their base, their own little world all housed under one roof, makes you realise that they'd achieved what they set out to do. This place was exactly the sort of thing they were aiming for when they were turning down pant commercials in 1991.

"We've always looked out for one another," Vedder concluded. "We want to make each other proud – I want them to be proud of their guy, and I'm proud of mine. It shouldn't be that hard. We're a fucking rock band!" They're into long-term relationships, in their personal lives, with each other as bandmates and with their crowd. That's how Pearl Jam keep turning the page. 🗨



# Jane's Addiction

## Been Caught Stealing

How a song that started with the accidental sound of a barking dog turned LA's weirdest band into the godfathers of alternative rock.

Words: **Dave Everley**

**T**he voice which introduces the song that invented the 1990s wasn't a human one. It belonged to Annie, a dog picked up from a rescue centre by Jane's Addiction singer Perry Farrell. It was Annie's rhythmic barking that ushered in *Been Caught Stealing*, the track that would give the alt-rock visionaries their biggest hit yet.

"She was quite needy, so I brought her down to the studio that day rather than leave her at home," Farrell told *Classic Rock* in 2000. "I'm singing in the booth with the headphones on and Annie gets all excited and starts going, 'Ruff! Ruff! Ruff!' The fact that she ended up on the track was just pure coincidence."

Coincidence or not, it was the perfect opening hook for the song that sparked the alt-rock revolution. *Been Caught Stealing* and parent album *Ritual de lo Habitual* brought the left-field into the mainstream, positioning Jane's Addiction as pied pipers for a wave of bands that followed.

Jane's were formed in Los Angeles in 1985 by Farrell, guitarist Dave Navarro, bassist Eric Avery and drummer Stephen Perkins. Glam metal was cresting, but the music they made was a world away from that scene's Aquanet-choked frothiness. Farrell and his bandmates didn't just walk on the darker side of life, they lived it.

Amazingly, that wasn't enough to put off major label Warner Bros, who signed them on the back of 1987's self-titled live debut album, released through independent label Triple X. The follow-up, 1988's electrifying *Nothing's Shocking*, sounded like nothing else around, drawing on everything from 60s psychedelia to 70s hard rock to early 80s British post-punk.

But with *Ritual de lo Habitual*, Jane's Addiction's musical ambitions jumped a level. The album was broadly divided into two halves. The first side of the original LP was filled with short, terse rock songs,

**"There was something romantic about splitting up when we did. But we were killing each other."**



### THE FACTS

#### RELEASE DATE

November 15, 1990

#### HIGHEST CHART POSITION

1 (US Alt), 34 (UK)

#### PERSONNEL

Perry Farrell  
Vocals  
Dave Navarro  
Guitar  
Eric Avery  
Bass  
Stephen Perkins  
Drums

#### WRITTEN BY

Perry Farrell and Eric Avery

#### PRODUCER

Dave Jerden

#### LABEL

Warner Bros.

albeit filtered through the band's unique prism, while the more expansive second side found them taking their sound into places few other bands were going.

*Been Caught Stealing*, with its dog-bark introduction, closed side one of the record. Written by Farrell and Eric Avery, it put a characteristically sideways spin on the funk rock sound that the likes of the Red Hot Chili Peppers and Jane's themselves had helped pioneer, while the opening line – 'I've been caught stealing, once, when I was five' – was rooted in reality.

"There was a candy store on the corner by my house in Queens, and I would go there all the time," Farrell told *Rolling Stone*. "I thought I was pretty good at stealing, but a guy caught me stone cold while I was taking a Pennsy Pinky [a kids' sports ball made out of pink rubber]. I guess I got in trouble, but that was the only time I ever got caught stealing."

The song's lyrics found Farrell and his girlfriend embarking on a shoplifting spree, picking up skirts and razors and laughing as they added them to a pile of stolen goods. The singer batted away suggestions that he was encouraging kleptomania – or that he was preaching much of anything in any of his songs.

"I didn't get into this to make sermons or set up structures for others to live by," he told *BAM* in 1990. "My intent has nothing to do with teaching. It's to amuse myself on this completely boring planet."

While the song sounded breezy, sessions for the album at Hollywood's Track Record studio were anything but. The band's drug use was part of their mythology – Farrell, Navarro and Avery were all enthusiastic heroin users. But by the time of *Ritual*, their chemical proclivities were beginning to drive them apart.

"Eric, Perry and I were all dealing with the same demons at different times and not talking to each other about it, which was really weird," Dave Navarro told *Rolling Stone* magazine. "So in certain ways, there was this level of secrecy and being at odds with each other, and in other ways, there was this sense of understanding and

unspoken knowledge. All of which really made for a bizarre dynamic."

Somehow, that dynamic worked. *Ritual de lo Habitual* was released in August 1990, and *Been Caught Stealing* followed in November. It was accompanied by a video directed by Farrell's then-girlfriend Casey Niccoli in which an array of weird and wonderful characters acted out the song's lyrics in a mini-market in LA's Culver City. The clip went into heavy rotation on MTV, helping propel the single to No. 34 in the Billboard chart and

*Been Caught Stealing* wasn't just Jane's Addiction's biggest hit to that point, it was a watershed moment for the burgeoning alternative rock movement. R.E.M had risen from the college rock underground to become mainstream darlings and Faith No More had bagged their own breakthrough hit with rap-metal anthem Epic earlier in 1990. But Jane's Addiction were something different: a full-on unfurling of rock's freak flag.

Their status as cultural figureheads was rubber-stamped the following year when Farrell conceived groundbreaking festival-come-travelling circus Lollapalooza. Headlined by Jane's Addiction and featuring Nine Inch Nails, Living Colour, the Rollins Band and more, it acted as a lightning rod for the alternative nation.

It also proved to be Jane's swansong. The cracks which appeared during the album sessions had become an unbridgeable chasm. On August 28, 1991, the inaugural Lollapalooza festival came to an end, and so did Jane's Addiction.

"There was something romantic about splitting up when we did," Farrell told *Q* in 2018. "But we couldn't have gone on anyway. We were killing each other."

It may have been over for Jane's Addiction, at least until a reunion later in the decade, but their success had uncorked the bottle and the genie was out. In September 1991, less than a month after Jane's played their final date, Nirvana released *Nevermind* and the steady drip of change became a torrent. The 1990s were truly underway. 📍



Jane's Addiction in 1991:  
(l-r) Eric Avery, Perry  
Farrell, Stephen Perkins,  
Dave Navarro.

# 1991

It was the year of blockbuster albums from Metallica, Guns N' Roses, the Red Hot Chili Peppers and a little-known trio from Seattle called Nirvana.



1990s rock had a banner year, 1991 was it. It had begun with Operation Desert Storm and the first Gulf War, but a no less significant carpet bombing took place several months later. In the space of just seven weeks between the middle August and the beginning of October, a barrage of albums were released that wouldn't just become the biggest selling records of the year, they'd go on to shape the decade and beyond.

Those records were Metallica's self-titled fifth album (aka the Black Album), Nirvana's *Nevermind*, Guns N' Roses' *Use Your Illusion I and II*, Pearl Jam's *Ten*, the Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* and Soundgarden's *Badmotorfinger*, and together they amounted to the greatest run in rock history since the golden days of the early 70s.

Things were in dire need of a shake-up. Old fashioned hard rock was clinging tenaciously onto its cultural perch. Baby boomer favourites Van Halen, Bryan Adams, Ozzy Osbourne, and Scorpions were all over the charts. Boston funk rockers Extreme struck big with saccharine acoustic ballad *More Than Words*, while New Jersey hair farmers Skid Row muscled their way to Number One in the US with their second album, *Slave To The Grind*. The biggest single of the year was Queen's 1976 hit *Bohemian Rhapsody*, reissued in the wake of frontman Freddie Mercury's death. The more things changed, it seemed, the more things stayed the same.

Things were about to be upended on multiple fronts. Metallica and especially Guns N' Roses were already well-established big hitters, with some serious major label weight behind them by the time they released their albums, and no one was surprised when they hit big. The Red Hot Chili Peppers, likewise, had been building a following since the middle of the previous decade, overcoming drug addiction and the death of former

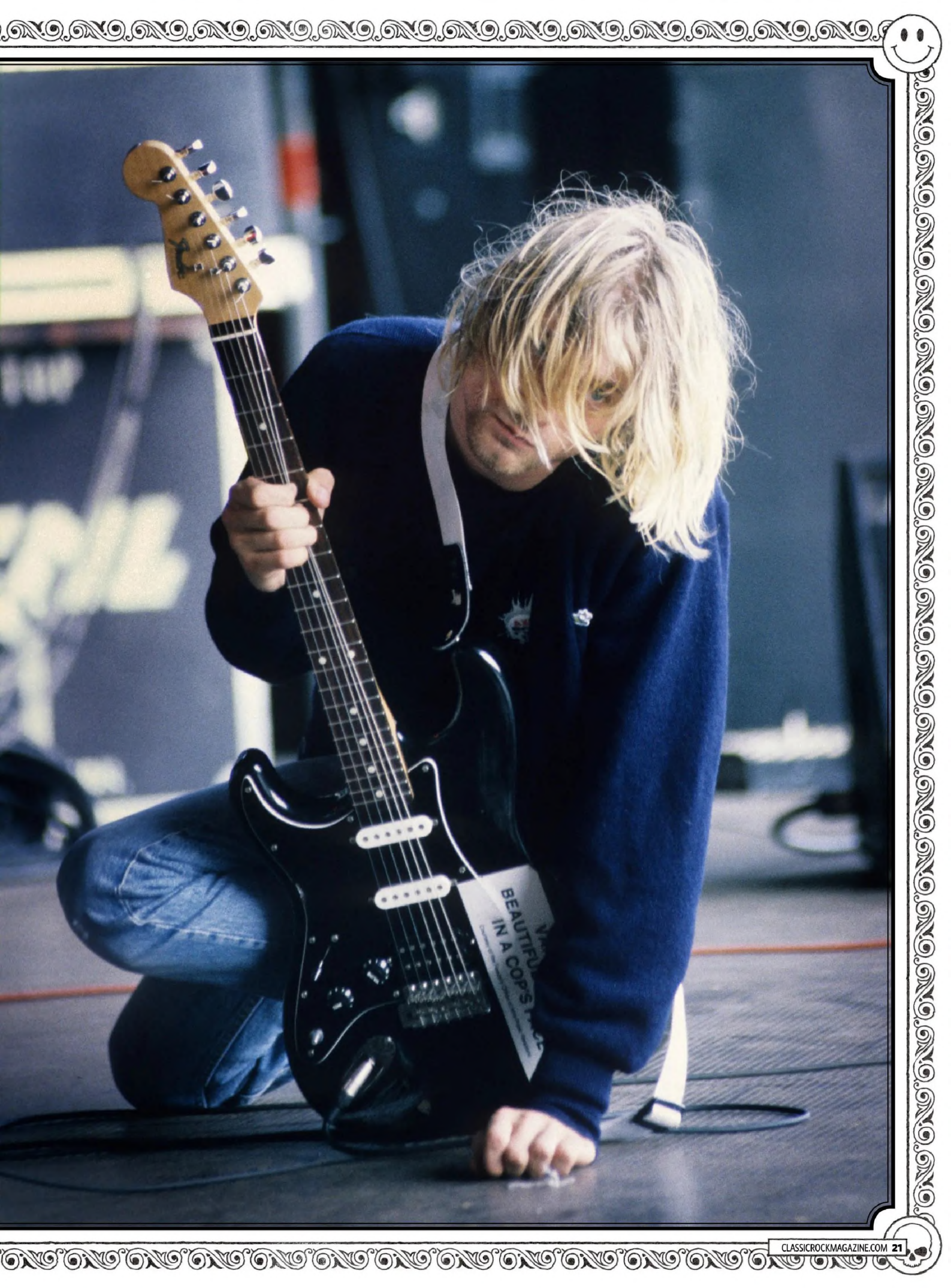
guitarist Hillel Slovak en route to becoming funk rock superstars.

But the simmering grunge scene was about to boil over. Pearl Jam, Soundgarden and Chicago newcomers The Smashing Pumpkins were in the vanguard of this new movement, but it was the second album from a trio of surly, sarcastic 20-somethings that truly put both grunge and Seattle on the map.

Few people would have backed Nirvana to become one of the biggest bands of the decade, even after jumping from Sub Pop to major label DGC Records. But their first single for their new paymasters, a slab of sarcastic, anthemic perfection titled *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, unexpectedly attached itself, limpet-like, to MTV and radio. In its inescapable wake, parent album *Nevermind* rocketed up the charts around the world following its release on September 24, 1991.

It's easy to forget in hindsight that a lot happened in either side of that white-hot streak. Alt-rock was clawing its way onto the radar of the mainstream, with the inaugural Lollapalooza festival kicking off in July and swiftly becoming a surprise success story courtesy of a diverse lineup that featured Jane's Addiction, Siouxsie and The Banshees, Living Colour, Ice-T and more. Interesting things were happening on metal's far fringes too, from Brazilian heroes Sepultura dropping their breakthrough album *Arise* to a group of church-burning malcontents in Norway laying the foundations for the black metal scene.

But all that would pale next to the upheaval that occurred during those seven glorious weeks in late summer and early Fall. Come the end of the year, Metallica had swept all before them in terms of album sales, but Nirvana were the flag around which a new generation of musicians and fans alike were rallying. Change had come, and not a moment too soon. ●





MICHEL INSURICENT



# BACK IN BLACK

It was the record that transformed **Metallica** from the world's most uncompromising metal band into the very biggest. The band members look back on the fraught but triumphant sessions that produced the Black Album. Asking the million-dollar questions: Jon Hotten.

"Waddya mean I'll have to re-learn to play drums?!" But for the Black Album Lars spent weeks doing just that.



It's some time in 1988, almost midnight UK time, and Metallica drummer Lars Ulrich is on the phone from San Francisco. It's his first appointment of the day in promoting Metallica's new album, ... *And Justice For All*. But there's a problem with that famously voluble Danish mouth. In fact I can barely make out what he's saying.

"Man, I've got terrible toothache..." Lars mumbles.

"You what?"

"No joke, I've got to get to a dentist. I'll call you back."

Yeah, right. Except he does. Two hours later, with me slumped red-eyed by the phone, Lars rings back.

"Hey, it's Lars..."

Except it sounded more like, "Hey, id Lards..."

A Frisco mouth mechanic had slammed in some novocaine, drilled a few holes and sent him home with a gobful of blood and cotton wool. And the first thing Lars does is... ring back to talk about his new album.

The point being that Lars Ulrich is a singularly determined man. He may not be – and certainly wasn't then – the greatest drummer ever to pick up sticks. He may not be the guy you'd choose to get trapped in a lift with. But if you need somebody

for whole-hearted, one-eyed and over-arching devotion to the Metallica cause, then Lars Ulrich's your man. He is a giver of the fabled 110 per cent – bad teeth or no bad teeth.

The, frankly, uneven ... *And Justice For All* record that Lars was so keen to talk about was a big record. Big enough for most bands to kill for. It reached No.6 on the US Billboard Hot 100 and sold more than six million copies worldwide. But despite the tangible signs of success – fast cars, flash houses – and the rhetoric of their interviews, Metallica knew that ... *Justice*... was not really good enough at all.

"After listening to the ... *Justice*... album it was pretty apparent that we needed some guidance," James Hetfield later admitted wryly. It was "obvious," he said, who'd produced the record. The guitar and drum parts were disastrously high in the mix. "I'm not knocking it. It was right at the time. But the drums are really loud and the guitars are really loud. That'll be me and Lars, then."

Metallica and their management team at Q Prime – Peter Mensch and Cliff Bernstein – realised that the inherent problem with ... *Justice*... was that the band had attracted a wide new fanbase. If they presented them next with a record that replicated its nine-minute songs, its dusty sound, the law



of diminishing returns would apply. If Metallica were to advance and go global they needed to shape up. Now.

After a nine-month break in 1989, Metallica played nine shows in Europe to knock off the rust. The last of those was in Glasgow. Backstage afterwards, Lars and James made plans to meet in San Francisco in two weeks to start work on the new album. Lars handed James a cassette they called The Riff Tape. The Riff Tape did exactly what it said on the box. It was a collection of riffs that James, guitarist Kirk Hammett and bassist Jason Newsted had made during the 240-odd nights of the ...Justice... tour. Its contents would form the basis of Metallica's next studio album.

Two weeks later, James found himself making the 30-minute drive each day to Ulrich's house in San Francisco, where Lars had installed a little eight-track demo studio to the property cut into the side of one of the city's famous hills.

The first riff on The Riff Tape was one that Hammett had come up with. "I tried to write the heaviest thing I could think of," Hammett said later. "I was all fired up." He certainly was. The riff in question would become the basis of what remains the band's most famous song, *Enter Sandman*.

Lars and James worked until they had seven songs in rough demo form. Some, like Hammett's riff, had neither lyrics nor a title, some had titles, some had titles and the odd lyric. Hetfield would improvise vocal melodies by mixing snatches of song titles and ideas with 'Ooooh's and 'Wooaaah's.

"The way it works," Lars explained, "is James and I sit with a big list of song titles and throw them at each other. We might pick one that will work with a specific guitar part. Others that don't catch straight away we just leave on the list."

With the songs on the tape demoed, things were about to change more radically.

"They had to make an out-of-the-box decision on how to make the next record," said Cliff Bernstein, reiterating Q Prime's belief that Metallica simply had to go big with this one. "They had been used to doing things a certain way."

"We'd never really liked the mixing on ...Justice... *Master Of Puppets* or *Ride The Lightning*," Ulrich said at the time. "So we were thinking: 'Who can we get in to do the mixing?' We felt it was time to make a record with a huge, big, fat low end. And the best-sounding record like that in the last couple of years was [Mötley Crüe's] *Dr. Feelgood*. So we told our manager: 'Call this guy and see if he wants to mix the record.'"

**T**his guy' was Bob Rock, a former small-time musician who had since hit it big as a producer. His speciality was rambunctious pop-rock which sounded fantastic pumping from a car radio. He'd turned the trick for Bon Jovi and Aerosmith, and had made Mötley Crüe sound like the world's greatest bar band. Rock was a fastidious perfectionist whose ear for music was a lot more finely tuned than some of his work suggested.

He was close friends with Bon Jovi guitarist Richie Sambora. While Bon Jovi were on a sabbatical, Sambora had approached him with a view to producing a solo album he had written. Rock was loathe to let a friend down, but he was intrigued by the Metallica proposal.

He'd booked a vacation with his family, and took off on a driving tour of the Grand Canyon still torn between the two projects. As he drove along he came across a Native American kid by the side of the road, miles from anywhere. Rock was

**"WE'RE METALLICA. NO ONE PRODUCES US; NO ONE FUCKS WITH OUR SHIT AND TELLS US WHAT TO DO."**

LARS ULRICH



ROCK/HALFINXZ

amazed to see that he was wearing a Metallica T-shirt. Later he pulled into a desert filling station; a Metallica tune was on the radio. "Metallica were never on the radio," he recalled. "These were like signs I couldn't ignore."

Rock got back to Q Prime and said that he wasn't interested in mixing the Metallica album. He wanted to produce it.

"Of course, we said: 'We're Metallica. No one produces us; no one fucks with our shit and tells us what to do,'" noted Lars. "But slowly, over the next few days, we thought maybe we should let our guard down and at least talk to the guy. Like, if his name really is Bob Rock, how bad can he be?"

James and Lars flew to Canada to meet with Bob Rock at his home in Vancouver. Lars: "We're sitting there saying: 'Well, Bob, we think that we've made some good albums, but this is three years later and we want to make a record that is really bouncy, really lively, just has a lot of groove to it.'"

"We told him that live we have this great vibe, and that's what we wanted to do in the studio. He was brutally honest with us. He said he'd seen us play a bunch of times and, 'You guys have not captured what's live on record yet.' We're like: 'Excuse me? Who the fuck are you?'"

"But he basically said the same thing as we had," Ulrich rationalised, "and we thought that maybe we shouldn't be so stubborn, and maybe we see where the fuck this would bring us."

Hetfield and Ulrich's reactions to Rock pretty much reflected how the big wide world saw their union, too. "Some people thought Bob would make us sound too commercial," said Hetfield. "You know: 'Oh, Bob works with Bon Jovi, Bob works with Mötley Crüe.' But if Flemming Rasmussen [Metallica's producer to that point] worked on a Bon Jovi record, would Bon Jovi all of a sudden sound like Metallica? We chose Bob because we were impressed with his crisp, full-sounding production on The Cult's *Sonic Temple* album and on Mötley Crüe's *Dr. Feelgood*.

"We wanted to create a different record and offer something new to our audience," Kirk Hammett agreed, once the decision was announced. "A lot of bands put out the same record three or four times, and we didn't want to fall into that rut. "The truth is, in the past we may have been guilty of putting out the same running order – you know, start out with ➤"

**Above: Lars, Bob Rock and James in a rare moment of joviality during their months of "hell" holed up together in the studio.**

**Below: Kirk Hammett, the man who wrote the riff that was the basis of *Enter Sandman*.**



PHOTO: SHOT

# "I DON'T THINK WE NEED TO JUSTIFY OURSELVES AT ALL. WE'RE DOING OUR SHIT OUR WAY."

JAMES HETFIELD

fast song, then the title track, then a ballad. Other than that, though, we've really tried to create something different every time. And on Metallica we definitely made a conscious effort to alter and expand the band's basic elements."

Bob Rock liked to work in his native Vancouver. In fact he had never worked anywhere else. When you're Bob Rock, they come to you. Metallica didn't. "We really didn't want to do it in Vancouver," said Ulrich, "and he'd never made a record outside of Vancouver; everyone comes to him. For a while I didn't think it was going to work out."

They compromised on One On One studios, a fine, unflashy complex in North Hollywood, West Hollywood's ugly cousin. Settling in for the duration, Metallica and Rock tried to make it home, sprucing it up with all the usual timekilling junk: pool tables, girlie mags, basketball hoops, pinball, punchbags – "for fucking tension," said Ulrich.

He needed it, too. For Bob Rock and Metallica, One On One was a torture chamber, pure and simple. Like a golf coach rebuilding a pupil's swing, Rock set to work on Metallica. He began by having the band play the songs through together, creating a groove and a feel. The method ran directly opposite to Metallica's usual working practices. "The whole first three months of pre-production were very difficult. They were suspicious," noted Rock.

Lars suffered the most. The new groove and feel had to originate from him. As a drummer, he had built his technique around complex fills and flourishes, embellishing already long and involved tunes. "I used to be concerned with the timing and lengths of a song when we were writing them. But this time I didn't even want to think about it. Before, it was always about not fucking up; it was never about letting the music carry you someplace. We spent a lot of years trying to prove to ourselves and to everyone out there that we can play our instruments – you know, listen to this big drum fill I'm doing." Rock and Ulrich each wanted simplicity. Not for its own sake, but to highlight the purity and power of the songs that they were refining. Ulrich, though, had trained for years to produce the exact opposite.

The band shot some home-video footage of the early months in pre-production. Some of it features Lars, fingers up, sweat sticking his hair to his face, losing his rag as pushes him through innumerable rehearsals, countless Lars had to re-learn a lot of technique as he adapted his style the requirements of the sessions. Even when he had nailed essential purity that he and Rock were searching perfectionist producer was still insisting of upwards of takes for every song.

At the same time, Rock was fighting the band's reluctance relinquish all their past habits – and also their natural tendencies to bait him, to test his worth.

In interviews for the *Classic Album DVD* series, Lars noted: "In retrospect, the nine months we spent in this room were pure hell. We were just really reluctant. The door was open just enough for Bob to open it more and pull us through. It became about a vibe and a moment."

The die was cast, though. There would be no turning back. The alternative, as Lars knew, was not worth considering. Metallica must grow, or wither on the vine.



ROSE WALTON

The men in Black, Metallica Mk.III:  
(l to r) Jason Newsted, Lars Ulrich,  
James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett.

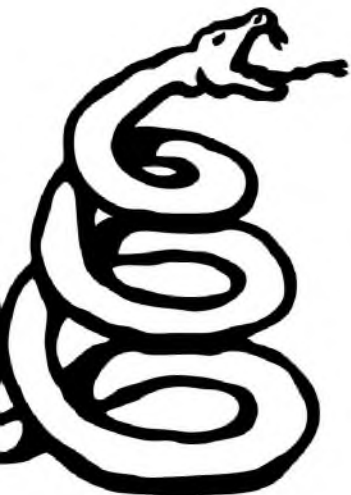




The sky's the limit: after the *Black Album*, Metallica were huge, and free to do whatever they liked.



Hetfield, Ulrich, Hammett and Newsted merge inconspicuously with the crowd in Japan.



**R**ock began by making suggestions. Hundreds of them, some good, some mad. At first the band were inclined to blow them off, but slowly he began to make an impression on them. The first shift was really a mental leap, especially for Lars and James.

"Our reaction to his proposal was initially negative," confessed Lars. "But when the first few songs started to develop we realised that the shit we were doing was a little more open-

minded. In the past our stubbornness had been one of our shortcomings, as well as one of the reasons for our success."

Lars also took heart from the songs they had written. Rock wasn't trying to impose anything that the band felt wholly alienated by, he was concerned more with showing them the boundaries of possibility.

"All 12 songs are ours," said Lars. "They were written before we went into pre-production, but Bob was great at helping us build up the whole sound. Everybody put their ideas more on the table. Last time it was: 'This is my drum sound and fuck you!' Bob's forté was that he was able to drag good performances out of us, especially the vocals.

"In the past, certain things were sacred. We had the almighty Metallica guitar riff and nothing could mess with it. Bob would say: 'You've already played that riff 92 times. I think people have it in their heads now.' So he'd put shit on top of it to give it texture. And that's been foreign to us. The main idea was to keep an open mind. A lot of great things on the record came from not saying no."

Hetfield, too, was unequivocal: "I don't think we need to justify ourselves at all. We're doing our shit our way. The integrity is there and we still get to see all our shit from start to finish. We've got the best people working for us now, people who respect our integrity, and if outside people supply us with good ideas for Metallica then why not listen to them?"

Along with the external pressures, the contradictory forces of wanting change but rejecting its methods, and all of the quirky personality clashes and coded alliances within the band, Bob Rock was dealing with some other weird stuff, too. Lars liked to work at night. James Hetfield preferred the daytime so that he could go outside, "take a few breaks, feel

some sun." So Rock ended up there at all hours. "24-7, burning the midnight oil," says James.

The *Black Album* was, above all, to be Hetfield's album. "It just got a little too easy to keep writing lyrics like the... *Justice* shit," he said. "It's too easy to watch the news and write a fucking tune about what you saw. Writing shit from within is a lot harder than writing the political shit, but once it's out it feels a lot easier to put your weight behind it, especially live."

"When the song is great and you add a lyric that takes it to another level, there's no better feeling. There's a big satisfaction in that. But I don't know, it's a proud kind of feel: 'Here's my baby; look at my kid.'"

"I'm not the kind of guy who'll sit down and read novels or poetry and I don't write nice little poems. The only way is to go inward and to be a little bit more universal, things that touch everyone."

James did, especially with songs like *Nothing Else Matters* and *Wherever I May Roam*, which were concerned with the brotherhood of the band on the road, and *The God That Failed*, a particularly personal song about his childhood. The soundscapes that the band and Rock were creating, though lush and broad, had the new simplicity that they'd been aiming for. "The simplicity of the songs left it wide open for the vocals to take over," said James. "For me that was a first."

Ten years later, Hetfield said of Rock: "I wouldn't be where I am today without his willingness to open my mind and push me further into different singing styles and moods."

Rock in turn appreciates the breakthroughs Hetfield made: "There's a real human quality to the album. James took a huge leap. The album stands as a very personal album."

**W**ith Rock getting the performances he wanted from Metallica, they were beginning to grasp what was possible. It was becoming apparent that the *Black Album* would be something special. There was one more major breakthrough to come: Metallica would cut a ballad. Their first. It would be a big one. With a symphony orchestra.

James was on the phone to a friend one evening, and was messing around on his acoustic guitar at the same time. He hit on a little melody picked out on the bass strings, and hung up quickly when he realised what he was doing. "I had no intentions of it being a Metallica song, it was a personal song for me," he said. "I didn't even think they'd like it. It was just me writing for me."

The tune was called *Nothing Else Matters*. Lars Ulrich: "It was a song you couldn't put borders around. So when Bob suggested the orchestra, I was open to it."

With *Nothing Else Matters*, Metallica had transgressed every boundary they'd set for themselves, and every one set by the media and public expectation. They had proven that heavy, powerful music could come through more than one medium. They'd added a new dynamic to their music and opened their appeal beyond genre. They'd cracked it. It wasn't until they'd fleshed out the 12 tunes that they realised how far from their thrash roots they had progressed.

"I'm sure we're gonna get a lot of people saying we're selling out," said Lars, "but I've heard that shit from *Ride The Lightning* on. People were already going: 'Boo, sell out' back then. One side of me wants to sit there and defend it—just cos they're short songs doesn't mean they're any more accessible

**"I RESENTED BOB ROCK. WE DIDN'T SPEAK FOR A YEAR AFTER THAT RECORD WAS MADE. IT WAS UGLY, NASTY."**

LARS ULRICH

— and the other side says I don't give a fuck.”

Hetfield, for his part, never even considered the style of the music he was making: “I never had the big picture of this album that Lars did. To me it was just a bunch of good songs.”

What weighed on Hetfield, and on the rest of the band and Bob Rock, was the weight of time. They had been in the studio for nine months. Their skin was turning grey. They had cabin fever. “We’ve seen four other bands come through and do their albums,” said Hetfield, “and some of those guys have already gone on tour.”

Rock remained utterly fastidious as the album neared completion. Everything was “big and weighty”. He would spend five hours patching a perfectly pitched note into a Hammett solo. He would push Ulrich through 40 takes for “the magical verses and choruses”, then cut them together “into one magical track.”

“Seven months in the studio with Metallica tends to change a man. And Bob’s been changed,” laughed James. “He’s got a few more grey hairs, a few more wrinkles, he grew a tumour, and has some sore knuckles from hitting the studio walls.”

Final mixes were done in New York. *Enter Sandman* took 10 days. As time ground Rock, Ulrich and Hetfield down, *Holier Than Thou* was mixed in one last, desperate session. That was ironic. Lars and James had felt that *Holier Than Thou* would probably be the first single to be released from the record when they had completed the initial demos at Lars’s eight-track home studio. By contrast, *Enter Sandman* didn’t even have a name at that stage.

It was an example of the record’s natural evolution. Rock had first described *Sad But True* as a “Kashmir for the 90s”, yet it would be the grandeur of *Nothing Else Matters* and *The Unforgiven* that filled that role. In dispelling the public’s preconceptions of what Metallica might achieve, they had dispelled their own as well.

Ten years later, Lars Ulrich spoke with a wonderful candour about the sessions that changed his life. “I resented Bob Rock,” he said. “Me and Bob Rock didn’t speak for, like, the first year after that record was made. It was ugly, nasty. I’d never made a record that took that long to make. Then something strange happened a year or two after that and we became friends. Now I can’t imagine making an album without him.”

The rest of the band understood, too. As did Bob Rock: “You just can’t argue with the songs,” he said.

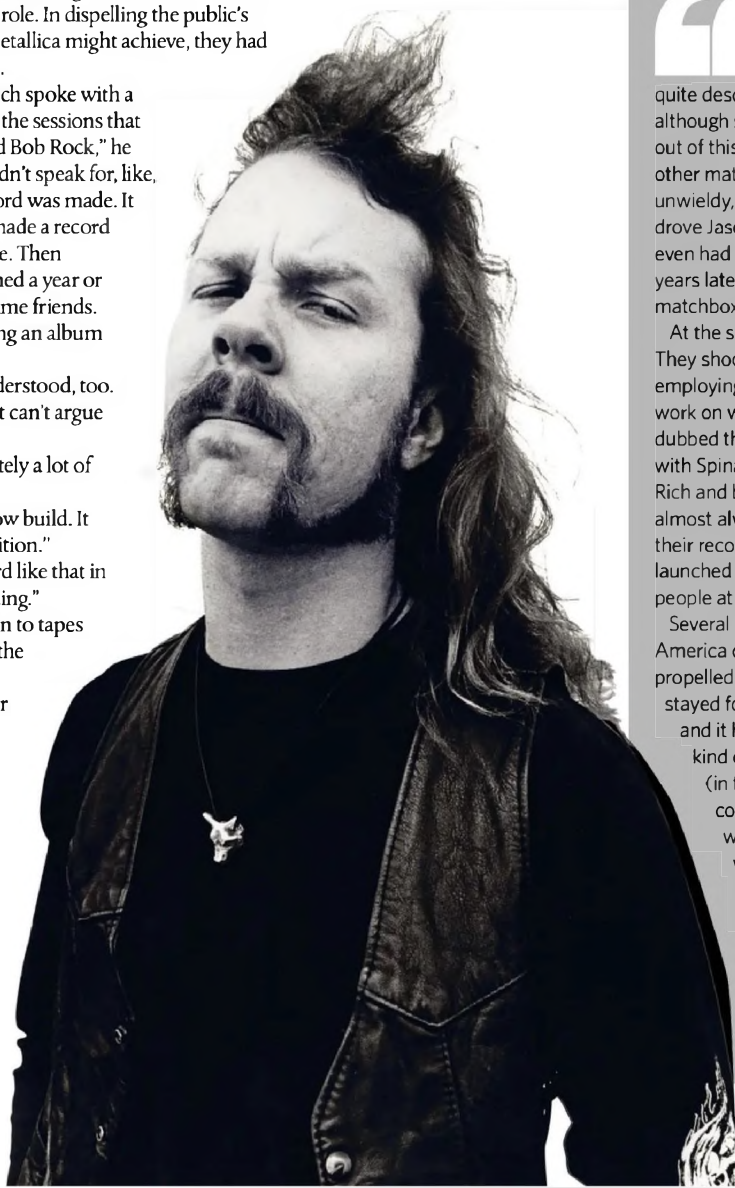
Lars: “There were definitely a lot of planets aligning.”

James: “It was a long, slow build. It felt good to get the recognition.”

Lars: “To have one record like that in your career, it’s truly amazing.”

Bob Rock: “When I listen to tapes now, I hear the hours and the time and the conflict.”

Metallica had made their ‘out-of-the-box’ decision, and it paid off. They became the clichéd rock juggernaut, touring endlessly. When they did call a halt a couple of years later, they were made — commercially, artistically, financially. Because of the Black Album, life for Metallica would never be the same again. **1**



The Black Album was very much James Hetfield’s album.

## METALLICA

### METALLICA

Making it nearly destroyed them, but it turned them into global superstars.

WORDS: PHILIP WILDING



“By the time of 1988’s ...*And Justice For All*, Metallica had taken their expansive, heavily arranged sound to an almost unnatural conclusion; ‘convoluted’ doesn’t quite describe the way the band were now sounding. And although songs like *One* and *Harvester Of Sorrow* grew out of this increasingly sophisticated and creative regime, other material broke up on impact. It was dense and unwieldy, and not helped by a bone-dry production that drove Jason Newsted’s bass all but out of the mix and even had Lars Ulrich wondering out loud some years later: “Why did we want a drum sound like matchboxes being hit?”

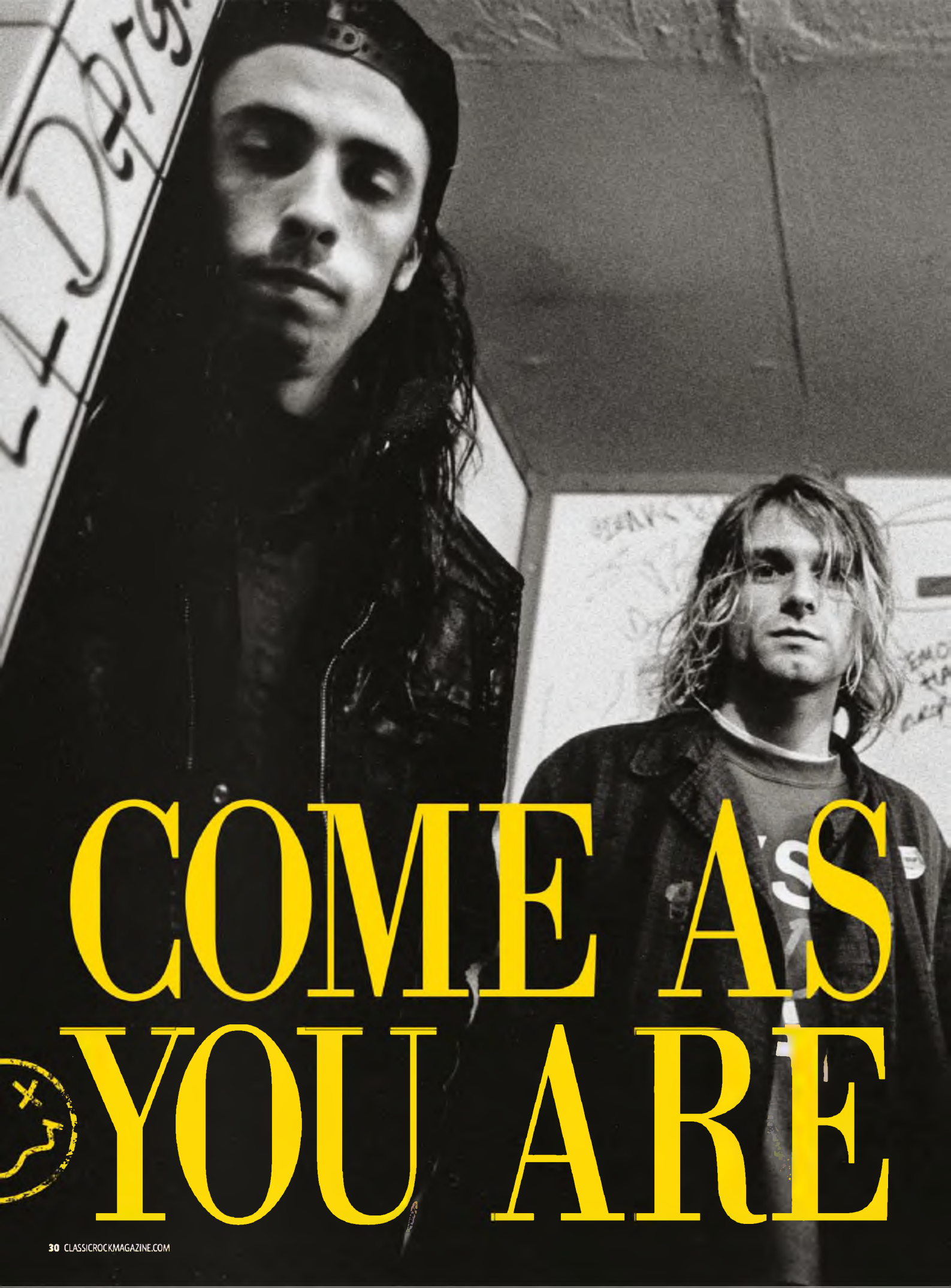
At the start of the 90s, Metallica went back to basics. They shocked fans (easily shocked fans, admittedly) by employing former Mötley Crüe producer Bob Rock to work on what would be their fifth album. Self titled, but dubbed the ‘Black’ album, its artwork drew comparisons with Spinal Tap. That, of course, was until people heard it. Rich and brooding and dark it might have been, but it was almost always about the songs first. Even someone at their record company must have noticed as the band launched the album with a listening party for 10,000 people at Madison Square Garden.

Several days later, at midnight, record stores across America opened their doors to an eager audience who propelled the album to the top of the US chart where it stayed for a month. A three-year long world tour later, and it had sold in excess of 15 million copies. It had the kind of shelf life that managed to sustain five singles (in the US), and in *Nothing Else Matters* a song you could dance to with your girlfriend. The album was so dazzling that no one even felt betrayed when James Hetfield started crooning at them. It became a high point of a live set usually designed to bludgeon an audience.

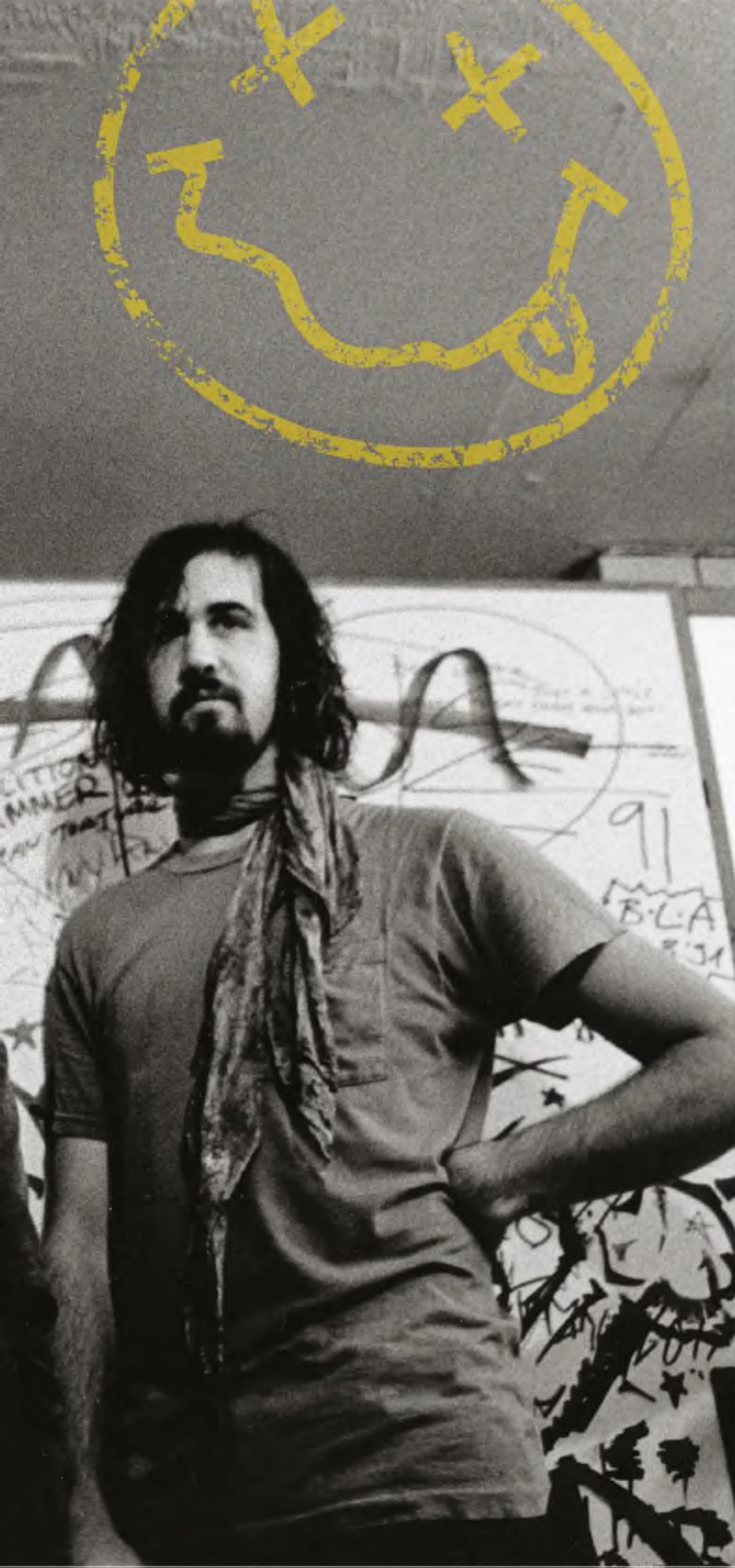
Every great band takes the true artistic high ground once, and the Black Album was the moment when Metallica found their footing.



GETTY VZ



# COME AS YOU ARE



**Nirvana's** *Nevermind* album toppled Guns N' Roses' *Use Your Illusion II* from the top of the US chart. We look back at the album that simultaneously introduced 90s grunge and sounded the death knell for 80s 'hair metal'.

WORDS: JON HOTTEN

**B**ack in 2002, not long after the 10th anniversary of the release of *Nevermind*, Dave Grohl and Krist Novoselic, the surviving members of Nirvana, were interviewed by *Rolling Stone*. As they spoke, the era of Guns N' Roses, Sunset Strip and style-over-content had become a faded holiday snapshot; now the industry love-buzz was all about rock'n'roll again: the Strokes, White Stripes and the rest of the new wave of trashy, disposable good-time music. Hedonism was back on top, and the rain and doom of Kurt's day seemed like a long, long time ago.

*Rolling Stone* writer David Fricke, who had conducted some of the best-known interviews with Nirvana in the early 90s (despite Kurt's view that "*Rolling Stone* sucks, has always sucked, and still sucks. Having us on the cover isn't going to make *Rolling Stone* any cooler") asked Dave Grohl whether he felt that *Nevermind* had an impact on the music he was hearing today.

"That would be far too egotistical," Grohl said. "I'm proud that I was a part of that band, that I had an opportunity to mean so much to so many people. When the Foo Fighters play shows, kids will walk up – kids from new bands who are huge, who are 22, the same age I was when we did *Nevermind* – and they tell me that I was a great influence on them. And all it does is make me feel old, like Neil Young or something."

Charles R Cross, Cobain's biographer and the former editor of Seattle music paper *The Rocket*, concurs: "I feel Kurt's songs will be remembered long past the celebrity of his fame and his brief place on the pop charts. I think the songs he wrote were so full of emotion and risk, that they will mean something to future generations. I've been surprised by how many young readers this book has had, and I think we are already seeing a new generation discover Kurt and Nirvana."

More has been written about Kurt Cobain's suicide than about his greatest record. We know far more about the last years of his life than we do about almost every other star of similar stature. We've read his suicide note, seen his dead body, watched his wife grieve, heard about his drug addiction. We've read the many books, seen the documentaries. We know where he bought the gun, where he bought his last hit, and we've retraced his last steps. We know pretty much all we're ever going to know about his death. Only now, with the desire for information having been sated, are thoughts turning back to his musical legacy, and what it will mean over the next 10 years. Kurt tried hard to escape from the impact of *Nevermind*, tried hard to play it down, to deny its greatness and even to disparage it, but it remains the centrepiece of his career.

PAUL BRINKMANN

It's hard to believe it's such a revolutionary record – for people in the band, around the band, in the world," Krist Novoselic told David Fricke. "There's a lot of power in the record, but it wasn't a Sgt. Pepper with symphony orchestras, it was just a rock'n'roll record. It could have come out in the 1970s or 1980s. Maybe that's part of its big success. You can chase after this idea or that concept, but this was stripped down, with a lot of feeling. That's the magic right there. There was no pretension."

*Nevermind* was such an unlikely hit that even as the band were making it – aware that they were signed to a major label in Geffen, and that they had some quite spectacular songs – they found it impossible to conceive that it could be such a thing. "It didn't seem possible," Grohl contended. "The charts were filled with fucking Mariah Carey and Michael Bolton. It seemed like we were about to make another pass through the underground."

Before the band began the sessions with Butch Vig in April 1990 for what was planned as the band's second full album for Seattle's Sub Pop label, there was nothing in Nirvana's recent history that suggested superstardom. Their first record, *Bleach*, cost precisely \$606.15 (less than £400) to make. It was nothing more than a minor hit for a hip little label. And if Cobain had any of the glorious pop sensibilities of *Nevermind* in his early writing, he was quick to bury them under the feedback and angst.

The band went through a two-year period of upheaval. They undertook their first domestic and international tours. Kurt dated and then broke up with Tobi Vail of the band Bikini Kill. Nirvana brought in a second guitarist, Jason Everman, who quickly left and joined Soundgarden. Nirvana's drummer, Chad Channing, also left, and Kurt and Krist found it very hard to replace him. Their original drummer, Dale Crover, helped out on a seven-date tour of the West Coast; Mudhoney's Dan Peters played on the *Sliver* single.

Sub Pop were going broke. Cheques for \$100 were bouncing. "We decided to cut out the middle man," said Kurt, as Sub Pop looked into distribution details with a couple of major labels. "I felt guilty because I wanted to be on their label still, because they're people who share similar thoughts. I kind of felt like the enemy at the time. But there was nothing that they could do to change my mind. It was just too risky."

Butch Vig was an all-around nice guy who was



About a boy: Kurt Cobain during the *Nevermind* sessions.

**“I was trying to write the ultimate pop song. I was basically trying to rip off the Pixies. I have to admit it.”**

## KURT COBAIN ON SMELLS LIKE TEEN SPIRIT

something of a veteran of the US underground punk scene. He'd worked with Killdozer, Tad and a pre-fame Smashing Pumpkins. Sub Pop's Jonathan Poneman sent Nirvana to him to record demos, saying: "These guys are going to be bigger than the Beatles."

When they went into Smart Studios in Madison, Wisconsin, Vig quickly picked up on the tensions between Kurt and Krist and Chad Channing. Krist told Vig he wanted the band to sound heavy. Kurt told him: "We want to sound slower and heavier than Black Sabbath. Turn off the treble."

Vig could do that, but he was also a self-confessed "pop geek". When he heard the seven

songs Kurt brought along he quickly saw that Kurt had finally absorbed his love of Cheap Trick and The Beatles into his punk rock agenda.

"I think of them as pop songs," Kurt said. "There aren't songs as wild and heavy as *Paper Cuts* or *Sifting* [from Nirvana's *Bleach*]. That's just too boring. I'd rather have a good hook."

Of the seven songs they recorded, five ended up on *Nevermind*. The version of *Polly* they cut went on after a remix, others changed slightly: *Breed* was then titled *Imodium*, *Stay Away* was called *Pay To Play*; *In Bloom* and *Lithium* were quoted over.

The sessions were bootlegged quite extensively, and by late May 1990 Nirvana had come to the attention of most of the major labels. *Sliver* was released as a stop-gap, and they parted company with Chad Channing.

Krist phoned Butch Vig and asked him if he'd be interested in producing an album for a major label. Vig said sure. By September they'd hooked up with Dave Grohl. Kurt called Butch Vig and told him: "I've found the greatest drummer in the world."

"Kurt was kind of a drummer himself," Dave Grohl told *Rolling Stone*. "When he would play guitar or write songs, if you ever looked at his jaw he would be moving his jaw back and forth, like he was playing the drums with his teeth. He heard in his head what he wanted from a rhythm, and that's a hard thing to articulate. I think one of the reasons they wanted me was that I sang back-up vocals."

Nirvana signed to Geffen on April 30, 1991, with Krist Novoselic taking the major role as the band member representing Nirvana's interests.

"We weren't even paying attention," he told David Fricke. "I'd be the one who'd talk to the attorney: 'How's the deal going?' Then one day we signed all the papers – and ordered sandwiches. We ate sandwiches and signed papers, and that



Dave Grohl: new kid on the block.

ALL GETTY



was it. We didn't know what we were getting into. We got all this money for an advance, and we spent it all on studios, videos and taxes. But I remember we were adamant about creative control. We got that."

"It was unbelievable," Grohl says. "We went from selling amp heads and *Love Buzz* singles for food to having millions of dollars. I remember the first time we got a 1,000-dollar check. We were so excited. I went out and bought a BB gun and a Nintendo – the things that I always wanted as a kid."

Nirvana kept a strong work ethic, though. They drove 60 miles daily to rehearse in place in Tacoma. Kurt worked and worked on the songs. Krist remembers *In Bloom* starting out "sounding like a Bad Brains song", but then becoming more and more refined by Kurt's persistence. On the day that Kurt turned up with the opening riff to *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, he made the band play it solidly for an hour and half.

"I was trying to write the ultimate pop song," Kurt confessed. "I was basically trying to rip off The Pixies. I have to admit it. When I heard The Pixies for the first time, I connected with that band so heavily I should have been in that band."

"We used their sense of dynamics, being soft and quiet and then loud and hard. ... *Teen Spirit* was such a clichéd riff. When I came up with the guitar part, Krist looked at me and said: 'That is so ridiculous.'"

The band travelled to LA for the *Nevermind* sessions, with Krist and his wife Shelley driving down in their VW camper with all the band's gear in the back.

They stayed in an apartment block called the Oakwood, where Kurt was soon receiving visits from Courtney Love, singer with Hole. "I thought she looked like Nancy Spungen [Sid Vicious's girlfriend]," he said, wickedly.



Up and over: Kurt at Belgium's Pukkelpop Festival in August 1991.

"I thought he'd got Dave Pirner damage, but way cuter," Courtney retorted, referring to the pin-up singer of alt-rockers Soul Asylum.

The band recorded through May and June at Sound City studios in Van Nuys, an unlovely suburb. "It was really nice to find yourself in a totally warm, tropical climate," Kurt said. "I don't think it would have turned out nearly as well if we did it in Washington."

They worked 10-hour days, breaking the

monotony by playing goofy covers of Alice Cooper, Black Sabbath and Aerosmith. Kurt's vocals were so well-worked out that his takes were incredibly consistent. Butch Vig was able to mix and match to achieve the perfect result. The only song that proved at all problematic was *Something In The Way*, the melancholic album outro that Kurt wrote just a week before recording. Vig solved the problem by recording Cobain not in the booth but on the studio sofa, with his nylon-string acoustic guitar.

"It's so strong," Novoselic said of the finished album, 10 years on. "There are no weak moments in it. I don't ever skip over a song. Each song has something to say. We were well-rehearsed, we went in and just knocked it out. It wasn't self-conscious. It poured out."

Dave Grohl has his own favourite memory of the sessions: "The only demos we'd done were on a boom box – we were used to hearing it sound like a shitty bootleg. All of a sudden you have Butch Vig making it sound like *Led Zeppelin IV*. And as we were mixing the album, Krist and Kurt and I would take a tape of the songs and just drive around the Hollywood Hills, listening to it. That was something else."

*Nevermind* was released on September 24, 1991. Throughout 1992 it was the most talked about and most imitated record in the world. Grohl says that he wishes they'd delayed six months before putting the album out, and allowed it to grow more organically. "From the time *Nevermind* came out to the time that Kurt died is not even three years," Grohl said in *Rolling Stone*. "That's not enough time to get used to something that life-altering."

Soon Kurt was resentful of the ubiquity of *Nevermind*, and feeling almost cheated by its success. He responded by decrying its sound and denying its brilliance.

"There was that punk rock guilt," says Grohl. "Kurt felt, in some way, guilty that he had done something that so many people had latched onto."

Butch Vig told David Fricke: "There are moments when I think about what that record did to him. Maybe if he hadn't had that success, he'd still be around. It's hard to know." 🍌



Krist Novoselic: "There are no weak moments on *Nevermind*!"

**"It's hard to believe it's such a revolutionary record – for people in the band, around the band, in the world."**

**KRIST NOVOSELIC ON NEVERMIND**



# “WHAT WE’VE GOT HERE IS A FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE...”

Drugs, rifts, hirings, firings, general chaos and the sound of a band falling apart. **Slash, Duff McKagan, Steven Adler** and more tell the story of GN'R's *Use Your Illusion*.

Words: **Jon Hotten** • Picture: **George Chin**

**W**e got these gigs supporting the Rolling Stones. We're massive Stones fans, so that's great for us. We get down there and the Stones each have their own limo, their own trailer, their own lawyer – you know, Mick has one, Keith has one, Charlie has one... I remember turning around to Izzy and saying: 'Man, we'll never be like that.' Of course, six months later, that was us."

Duff McKagan leans forward in his chair and uses both hands to push his hair back from his forehead. Two decades on, and he's still somewhat bewildered by the speed with which things unravelled for the five original members of Guns N' Roses. The last to leave, hanging on heroically until August 1997, he tries hard to reconcile the memories of those early years with the train wreck that was to come.

"You know," he says, "I'm still not sure that I can tell you exactly what happened, and I was there."

For a few brief, bright months in 1991 – beginning on the 17th of September at midnight, to be precise – Guns N' Roses achieved that rare state: they were the biggest band in the world. At that moment, Donald Trump was in a limousine with five models, heading for Tower Records in Manhattan, on his way to buy *Use Your Illusion I* and *II*, the new albums that were, in a music industry first, being released simultaneously. Stores in every major city were opening at 12 in order to sell them. Slash, who was burned out by their creation and about to take a holiday in Tanzania, interrupted his journey to the airport to stop off at Tower on Sunset Boulevard to watch the records go on sale from behind the two-way mirror in the back of the shop, the very same mirror from which store detectives had arrested him for stealing cassettes ten years earlier.

"It was," he says ruefully, "a magic little moment. Then I took off and went to Africa and got away from it. I went out to the Maasi Mara

for a couple of weeks, and that's about as far removed from 'rock star' as you can get."

When he returned, *Use Your Illusion II* had sold 770,000 copies and was at No.1 on the US Billboard chart, while *Use Your Illusion I* had sold another 685,000 and stood at number two.

"Yeah, we had overnight success," says Alan Niven, the man who managed Guns N' Roses almost to that point. "It took us three years. The momentum you try and create then creates its own momentum.

If you're Sisyphus and you're rolling the rock up the side of the mountain it's hard freaking work. Then you get the rock to the peak of the mountain and suddenly the damn thing rolls away from you. Your labour turns into lost control."

His control was gone already. He had been fired by Guns N' Roses months before the albums were released. Just as it would with Slash, Duff, Izzy, Steven and Axl, success was about to extract its price from Alan Niven.

"It put me in a real black pit at one point," he admits. "It did all of us. Look at what happened. They never made another meaningful record. Izzy was gone three months after I was. It just devolved from that point, because from then on, the shift was

between a young up-and-coming band to something that is more recognisable today, which is basically, it's Axl's band, and you can be sidemen for as long as I pay you."

**"A whirlwind of shit happened, but I think the *Use Your Illusion* records, if you know the back-story, were very victorious."**

Slash

**G**uns N' Roses had always been fuck-ups, it was part of their appeal. Tom Zutaut, the young A&R man who'd signed the band to Geffen, was fighting not to have them dropped before they'd even released an album. He'd almost had to beg Alan Niven to take them on as they drifted towards self-immolation. Niven had agreed, in part because "the situation was so fucked up I couldn't make it worse".

Niven's managerial strategy was based on the one that Peter Mensch and Cliff Burnstein had used with Metallica, another

"We did 36 songs in 36 days," recalls Slash of the *UYI* sessions.



GETTY IMAGES

uncompromising, hard-sell of a band; underground at first, and then maybe gold with album number two and if they got really lucky, platinum after that. "Nobody knew it would explode as it did," says Niven.

"Anyone who says they did is certifiable." He planned to build a profile in the UK to gain credibility in America. When the band appeared at Donington in 1987, they had sold 7,000 records. A week later, it was 75,000. By the Spring of 1988, *Appetite For Destruction* had irresistible momentum behind it, and all bets and strategies were off. The results of selling millions and millions of records were disorientating, terrifying even.

"I don't want to speak on the other guys' behalf," says Slash, "but I went from a gypsy troubadour-type kid without anything, through touring with Guns and all those experiences just basically living on the road and never really living anywhere else, and then just sort of thrown into superstardom and not knowing how to handle that. Not having any domestic skills for living at home. Just not knowing which way to turn and not knowing whether I was happy or not. And then pulling into a major drug depression and having to get it all back together to go in and make the second record and being completely disjointed."

"We all bought our houses and we all had our friends, and our friends would be saying: 'You're the glue that holds the band together,'" nods Duff McKagan. "And we're all getting that. You don't know what to think. It's never happened to you before. The record finally broke in the States a year after everywhere else. All of a sudden we came



back to LA, and everyone in the clubs, they're all dressed like us. Imagine coming back and you're a cultural phenomenon. People are dressing like you. Your music is being played on the radio all the time. You walk into a grocery store and you're on the cover of *Rolling Stone*, and people see that magazine cover and they see you and they're freaking out. This is in the grocery store I've always gone in..."

Alan Niven didn't need to be a student of rock'n'roll history to understand what would happen next. He fought fires, and while he did, he bought time with a mini-album, *GN'R: Lies*.

"One of the things I'm

proud of is that at least none of the band members died on my watch," he says, his voice slower now. "That took a lot of effort. The bottom line is, you have to help them fight the battle, but only they can win the war. Slash went cold turkey in my home one time. I cleaned the vomit from his mouth, made sure he got clean. Then as soon as he's clean, he calls a car and goes straight to his dealer. That was the sort of thing you were dealing with. You'd call Slash, say: 'Come into the office, you've got an interview with *Guitar Player* magazine'. There was no interview. He'd come in and you'd stick him in a car, fly him off to Hawaii and put him on a golf course where he couldn't score. We'd do that sort of thing.

"I put Steven on a plane one night to go to Hawaii, and he's sitting in first class yelling: 'We're all going to fucking die... the plane's going to fucking crash...' Of course, they invite Mr Adler to exit the plane at that point, and so he's back into LA and he can get to his dealer and his dealer can get to him and we're fucked all over again."

Bands exist as delicate ecosystems. Change in one part can affect others in unexpected and unpredictable ways. As Steven Adler has argued long and hard in recent years, GN'R and *Appetite For Destruction* had something unique, a rough magic that rose up from its constituent parts. "The five of us, we're brothers," he says, even now. "And what do brothers do? They fight."

Guns N' Roses were fuck-ups, and the biggest fuck-up in Guns N' Roses was Steven. "He was suffering the worst and couldn't pull it back," says Duff, who remains in contact with the drummer. "We had this unwritten sort of code – pull it back when it's sensible, when it's time to record or time to play a show. Pull it back. Check yourself. There had been a few times where we'd check each other. You know: 'hey dude...' And that's all you'd have to say. It was a sort of honour amongst thieves. But Steven wasn't able to pull it back time and time again. The irony wasn't lost, even then. Slash and I told him quite a few times: 'Dude, it's us talking to you. If we're telling you you're getting too fucked up, you're getting too fucked up. Look who's talking to you. We're the guys that everyone else is worried about, and we're worried about you.' It was really heartbreaking. We warned him too many times."

"It was totally regrettable," says Slash. "But the band finally got to the place where we wanted to make a record, which was a hard enough place to get to... We're talking about the span of about a year, which to us was like a lifetime, and Steven... we could not get him back to front. We were resigned to the fact that he wasn't going to be able to do it in the time frame that we needed to get going, because we might miss the bus. We might fall apart again and take another year to get it together."

In the summer of 1990, the window seemed to be open. But every time Adler went to the studio, he blew it – too drunk, too stoned to function. The band had a lawyer draw up a legal document informing him that he would be fired. They thought it would scare him but it had little effect. "All the way up to getting Matt Sorum to play on the record,



**Tower Records in Manhattan, midnight, September 17, 1991.**

jack shit as far as drugs go, and he shoots her up with a mixture of heroin and cocaine?"

In a 2006 interview with the Metal Sludge website, Adler denied giving Everly drugs, claiming that he was jamming in his house with Hanoi Rocks guitarist Andy McCoy when McCoy's wife turned up with an already intoxicated Everly: "I called the ambulance and saved her," claimed Adler, "[and] this bitch [McCoy's wife] tells Axl I gave her heroin. He calls me up and says he's coming over with a shotgun to kill me..."

"I kept myself from doing anything to him," Axl told Del James in '92. "I kept the man from being killed by members of her family. I saved him from having to go to court, because her mother wanted him held responsible for his actions."

"Axl was fucking convinced that Erin had been overdosed," says Niven today. "Well that's going to go down well, isn't it? That really helped everybody. Is it any surprise we got to the point that we had to seriously consider getting someone else?"

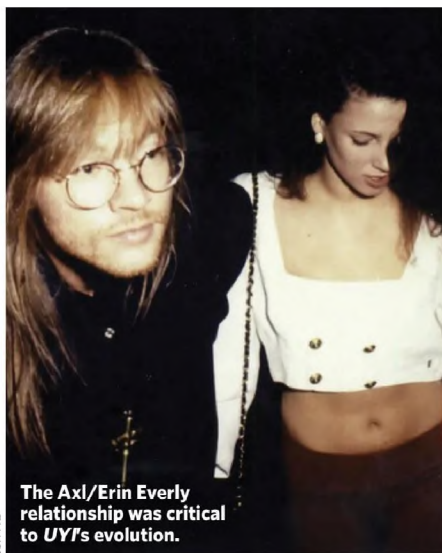
With Steven Adler went that ecosystem. Other drummers could drum, but they couldn't drum like Steven. "Let me say this," adds Niven. "Steven is not the world's best drummer by any stretch. Duff even had to show him what to play sometimes. But he had a quality that he brought to the band that anybody would accept as being part of the magic. He had such an enthusiasm for what he was doing. Matt is a competent drummer but he can't replicate that. He has a great consistency but he also has a heavy hand. He cannot match the feel that Steven had. So did we want Steven to go? Fuck no."

Izzy Stradlin, whose gloriously offhand guitar playing itself lent such groove to the music of Guns N' Roses, also felt Adler's absence diminished the band: "[It was] a big musical difference," he told *Musician* in 1992. "The first time I realized what Steve did for the band was when he broke his hand in Michigan [in 1987]. Tried to punch through a wall and busted his hand. So we had Fred Coury come in from Cinderella for the Houston show. Fred played technically good and steady, but the songs sounded just awful. They were written with Steve playing the drums and his sense of swing was the push and pull that give the songs their feel. When that was gone, it was just... unbelievable, weird. Nothing worked..."

Adler's replacement, Matt Sorum, was no stranger to a little chemical enhancement himself, as he told Mick Wall: "Here I was replacing the drug addict drummer, right? But he did heroin and I had cocaine." Nonetheless, Sorum had control of his lifestyle. It is only in the last two years that Steven Adler has been able to acknowledge that he did not, and that his failings had played a role in his dismissal. It's a process that began with an appearance on an American reality TV show, *Celebrity Rehab With Dr Drew*, in 2008.

"I blamed Slash and Duff and Izzy and Axl for my downfall for a lot of years, but when I started working with Dr Drew Pinsky, I learned that I got to talk about these things and get them out of my system," Adler says. "I needed to apologise to Slash for blaming him for everything that happened to me. Once I did that, it was like this huge weight lifted off my body... Now I can move on."

"Looking back," says Slash. "I think that losing Steven was one of the major components in the disintegration of the original band, but I think that was more Axl anyway. Steven was just the tip of the iceberg."



**The Axl/Erin Everly relationship was critical to UYI's evolution.**



**GN'R's new rhythm nation: Matt Sorum & Duff McKagan.**

we thought that would get Steven back," says Duff. "Then we realised, it's just not going to happen. It's just not. I wouldn't be being honest if I told you I knew exactly the point."

"In no way was it minor," says Alan Niven. "Firing a member of a band is a pain in the ass. It was incredibly painful and frustrating. I've got to confess I'm still capable of a flash of red hot anger with Steven at that."

Adler's own recollections of the moment are fractured, perhaps understandably given the state he was in. "Man, I was fucked up, and I have never denied that, I couldn't really deny it because it was pretty fuckin' obvious..." he says. "But I wasn't the only one. I remember one day Slash called me to go to the studio and play *Civil War*, I think it was. I'd been given an opiate blocker by a doctor. I still had opiates in my system and it made me so sick. I must have tried, like, 20 times to play it, but I couldn't. I was very weak and I didn't have my timing. Slash and Duff were shouting at me and telling me I was fucked up."

"I got a call a few weeks after that and I had to go to the office and there was all these stacks of papers, contracts, for me to sign, and I realised that I was being fired. It ended up with me having to go to court to get my royalties and my writing credits."

[In 1993, Adler was awarded a reported \$2.25m in an out-of-court settlement for his contribution to the band prior to *Use Your Illusion*. He does not have any writing credits on UYI]. Adler was sacked by Guns N' Roses on July 11, 1990 ostensibly for being unable, through drink and drugs, to fulfil his duties. Yet for many years, a rumour has circulated that it was an incident in which Axl Rose's wife, Erin Everly, OD-ed at Adler's house that soured his relationship with Axl. In a 1992 interview, Rose claimed that Everly had been found 'naked', and was taken to the emergency room. "I had to spend a night with her in an intensive care unit because her heart had stopped, thanks to Steven," he said. "She was hysterical and he shot her up with a speedball. She had never done

**"All the way up to getting Matt Sorum to play on the record we thought we would get Steven back."**  
Duff McKagan

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One thing that Guns N' Roses always had was music. They may have been stoned, but they were not standing still. Unlike many second records, material was not a problem. *November Rain*, perhaps the pivotal song on *Use Your Illusion*, pre-dated Axl joining the band. A 20-minute acoustic demo of the tune was recorded very early on at Sound City in Los Angeles. *Don't Cry* was, Axl remembered, the first song the band ever wrote together, a song about a girlfriend of Izzy's: "I was really attracted to her. They split and I was sitting outside the Roxy, and you know, I was like really in love with this person, and she was realizing this wasn't going to work, she was telling me goodbye. We wrote it in about five minutes."

Alan Niven had insisted that some material from the *Appetite For Destruction* sessions be held over: included in that was *You Could Be Mine*, *Back Off Bitch*, *Bad Obsession* and *The Garden*. In addition, Slash, Izzy and Duff were all prolific, and fast, writers.

"It was so splintered and such a struggle but I remember we finally got together after just a major rollercoaster ride of ups and downs," says Slash. "It was at my house on Walnut Drive in the Laurel Canyon hills. We compiled 30 fucking songs, more than 30 songs, in one evening. That was the one time in all of it that I remember that the band felt like itself. Just the guys like I was always used to — Izzy, Duff and Axl. We managed to put a focus on 36 songs. That was the only group writing session we had where we were all together in one room. That was a very poignant moment. And the next thing you know we were looking for drummers. I remembered seeing Matt with The Cult and thinking that he was the only good drummer I'd seen, and calling him and having him come down. We started rehearsing this material and next thing you know we're in the studio. Getting the basic tracks together so that we could play them front to back actually happened really quickly. But that's a hell of a lot of material and it was an epic journey."

Slash had an 18-minute song, *Coma*, that he had written: "while I was completely stoned". Duff had *So Fine* and Izzy had his usual raft of drop-dead cool rock'n'roll songs: *Pretty Tied Up*, *Double Talkin' Jive*, *You Ain't The First*, *14 Years* and *Dust N' Bones*.

"And," Slash remembers, "there were other songs that Axl had, that I had never heard before. Songs that he had written with West Arkeen, back in the day." Arkeen, a wild character of the sort you only seemed to get back in the 1980s who died of an overdose in 1997, had a co-credit on *The Garden*, *Bad Obsession* and *Yesterdays*, as well as *It's So Easy* from *Appetite For Destruction*. Axl's friend Del James also received a credit on *Yesterdays* and *The Garden*.

"I was good friends with West, but I never wrote with him," says Slash. "We hung out and jammed a couple of times but there was only a couple of songs I was ever around where I was there with Axl and we were all playing together. West and Axl and Del and Duff, that was more what that was like. I didn't mind. As long as the song was good and I could do something with it. I remember *It's So Easy* being one of those songs that when I first heard in its original form I was like, 'whatever', but then I got to it and changed it to what it sounds more like now. I remember *The Garden* being really good. But no, I didn't mind too much. I was usually too preoccupied doing whatever debauched shit I was doing. If everybody was busy doing that, nobody was looking over my shoulder while I was doing what I was doing."

Although the band's existence was precarious, their situation remained extraordinary. *Appetite...* continued to sell in its millions, and the non-appearance of its follow-up gave Alan Niven leverage to do things that had never been done before. Success in the music business, like success in most businesses, is built on having something that someone else wants.

"I'm getting a lot of pressure from an individual called David Geffen, saying: 'When am I going to get my fucking record?'" says Niven. "His agenda was that he wanted to release the record before selling DGC so that he could benefit from the sale of the record and then sell his company. Then when you estimate that we were figuring *Use Your Illusion* would probably do about a hundred million dollars in worldwide commerce in the first week gross, you can imagine there's a certain amount of pressure. David does have his reputation."

Regardless of that, Niven decided that he wanted to renegotiate the band's contract with Geffen. He'd been told that the managements of both Whitesnake and Aerosmith had tried their luck after selling five million records each, and had been turned down flat. David Geffen was notoriously hard-nosed, but then so was Niven. The undelivered *Use Your Illusion* was his weapon, his nuclear option. At a dinner with Geffen's label president Eddie Rosenblatt, he pressed the button.

"After I'd made sure that Eddie had had at least half a dozen glasses of wine, I leaned over to him and said: 'I hate to spoil the evening and don't freak out on me now, but you need to take a message to David, and that is until you renegotiate there will be no record.'" Niven got his deal. In return, he

delivered an elegant and lucrative solution to the abundance of material that Guns N' Roses had written. Instead of being a double album, the kind of bloated artistic and commercial proposition that had stalled and even sunk careers, *Use Your Illusion* would come as two single, standalone records, released on the same day. It was a classic music business masterstroke that allowed the band to claim it as an altruistic gesture to their fans, while providing not one but two revenue streams for everyone involved.

"We had a huge cloud to get out from under and that was the incredible sales of *Appetite*," Niven says. "I was very nervous of a situation where we might sell two million double albums, having sold at that point something like 12 million on *Appetite*. I had a meeting with Rosenblatt, and he pushed a pencil and a piece of paper at me and said, 'Write down what you think we're going to do'. Believe it or not, I wrote down that I thought we'd do four million of each single album, which meant we could say we'd sold eight million albums. That, I thought, would have a sense of continuity as opposed to drop-off."

What Niven and the band also gained was a sense of scale, an idea that *Use Your Illusion* was more than just a record (or rather two), it was an event, a statement. It set an already singular band further apart. Along with the changing line-up and the new scope of the music, the band's aesthetic was shifting too. Out were late 80s stylings like skulls and bones and guns and crucifixes, a visual language that anchored the band to a certain time and place. In came something far more worthy of them: art.

Axl Rose had become enthused by Mark Kostabi, a controversial New Yorker who'd taken Andy

Axl: in the shadow of the Mark Kostabi image that adorned the cover of *Use Your Illusion I*.



"There was a lot of alcohol around, but the heroin thing had subsided. It was never cool to do a lot of drugs in front of Axl."

Matt Sorum



"When I said I wanted to meet some porn stars, this wasn't what I had in mind..." Axl and Ron Jeremy.



Former GN'R manager Alan Niven.

Warhol's idea of an art factory to a new level, opening a studio called Kostabi World and having teams of

'assistants' turn out thousands of paintings.

"Axl really fell in love with his work," says Niven. "But the thing about Mark Kostabi was that he was playing the art bullshit game. He had other people paint basic backgrounds and then he stole images from classic paintings and stuck them on the backgrounds. Axl loved his conceit, loved what he was doing and bought these paintings that he wanted to use for the covers. And paid a fortune for them."

The *Use Your Illusion* sleeves were based on a detail from Raphael's painting *The School Of Athens*, a priceless Renaissance masterpiece that hangs in the Vatican. It was completed in 1511, which, as Niven swiftly realised, meant that it was out of copyright by several centuries. "I'm looking at it and thinking, 'Great - when it comes to the merchandising, we don't have to pay Kostabi or anybody else a dime: these things are in the public domain,'" says Niven. "Those images that Axl paid a huge fortune for, he could have basically had for free. It always made me smile to think of Axl writing a huge cheque to this guy Kostabi when he could have had Del James paint similar backgrounds, cut out the same image, stick it on and give Del a six pack."

Although the final album credits acknowledge a span of two years and seven recording studios, one of the most remarkable elements of the *Use Your Illusion* set is the speed at which they were recorded in their basic form.

"I was really happy with a lot of the material and I think we went in to do basic tracks and with a new drummer we did 36 songs in 36 days, so we weren't fucking around," says Slash. "After the basic tracks were done, I'd spend three weeks doing guitars, which for 30 songs was actually pretty fast. I was sometimes doing two songs in one day. But everything hit a brick wall when it came to doing the synthesizer stuff, and I never agreed with doing the synthesizer stuff anyway. Although I think some of it is brilliant, it was part of the new way, which was the beginning of the end. That was the

beginning of the whole process taking forever. It was like a lot of days were not working, some days it was working, and most of the record was finished. It didn't really need all the rest of it. That was the biggest disagreement for me."

Izzy Stradlin was also exiling himself, distanced by the scale of the recording. "I did the basic tracks, then he [Slash] did his tracks, like a month or two by himself," he said. "Then came Axl's vocal parts. I went back to Indiana. ..."

"Well Axl's a... perfectionist," says Duff slowly. "That's what makes him great. The end product's great, but it gets maddening to work with that person. There's no hashing out with them. *November Rain* in particular, the song was torturing him. He was happy he was finally finished with it. It wasn't really characteristic of the band."

"Axl had this vision he was going to create," Matt Sorum told Mick Wall. "We'd start at noon, the work ethic was cool. There was a lot of alcohol around, but the heroin thing had definitely subsided at that point - Slash had quit, Izzy had quit. We were dabbling in cocaine and partying rituals... But it was never really cool to do a lot of drugs in front of Axl."

But as the sessions became more drawn out and splintered, "It was later nights," says Sorum. "We'd start at six or seven. Axl would want to do *November Rain* and *Don't Cry*, his songs."

Hindsight is a beautiful thing. It is tempting to look back at the records through the prism of the band's impending devolution and see Axl Rose taking control and exacting his revenge on the world, living out all of the rock star fantasies he had as a boy in Indiana. The truth was more complex.

"When he was younger, he played piano and composed on piano," says Alan Niven. "I'd lay a bet that a record like Elton John's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* and songs like *Funeral For A Friend* had a huge impact on him. He aspired to that level, and anybody who has a hero and aspires to match a hero also in their heart hopes to exceed their hero and validate their presence."

So *Use Your Illusion* had *November Rain* and *Estranged*; big, ambitious pieces with themes that hinted at Rose's obsessive nature: *November Rain* is a song about "having to deal with unrequited love", he said. "*Estranged* is acknowledging it and being there. And having to figure out what to fucking do, it's like being catapulted out into the universe and having no choice about it and having to figure out what the fuck are you gonna do because the

## BE MY GUEST

Use *Your Illusion*'s high-profile guests on joining GN'R



### MICHAEL MONROE

HARMONICA & SAX, *BAD OBSESSION*

"The guys sent a rough mix of *Bad Obsession* to me," recalls Monroe. "I thought it was cool. It had a guide vocal, and it already had Slash's guitar riff there - an unusual kinda riff - and he was very specific; he wanted that exact riff on the harp. The first day I came in, Axl played me the song with Alice Cooper [*The Garden*] and *Live And Let Die*, blasting them in the studio. I was blown away. And *Coma*: that was fucking amazing. First time I heard that, I was, like, 'holy hell!'"

"It was very cool: there was a grand piano and candles all around us. Slash was pretty much the musical director on *Bad Obsession*, it seemed to me. He was in control and he had a very clear idea what he wanted. The harp riff, you had to bend the note like Slash did on guitar, and that was a bit out of the ordinary, and I had to work on that before I got it down. I remember thinking it was good enough and Slash saying, 'please do it one more time'. He was pushing me, which was cool. I respect that. It wasn't like pulling teeth."

"The vocal was just so Axl: the attitude. 'I called my mother, she's just a cunt now'... I thought that lyric was so funny. Pretty blatant, pretty ballsy - you can be sure they won't play that on the radio, right?"



### ALICE COOPER

VOCALS, *THE GARDEN*

"Axl, Slash and I had gotten to know each other really well when I did the *Constrictor* album," says Alice. "So, when Axl called me one night at 2am and asked me to come in right then and do a vocal, I wasn't at all surprised."

"At the time, I was on rock 'n' roll time myself, so I went straight down to the studio - I only lived round the corner - listened to the song a couple of times and just did two takes on the vocal part Axl wanted me to do. It was as simple as that. All I did was ask Axl and the producer Mike Clink what sort of Alice they wanted on the vocals: sensitive or threatening, and it went from there."

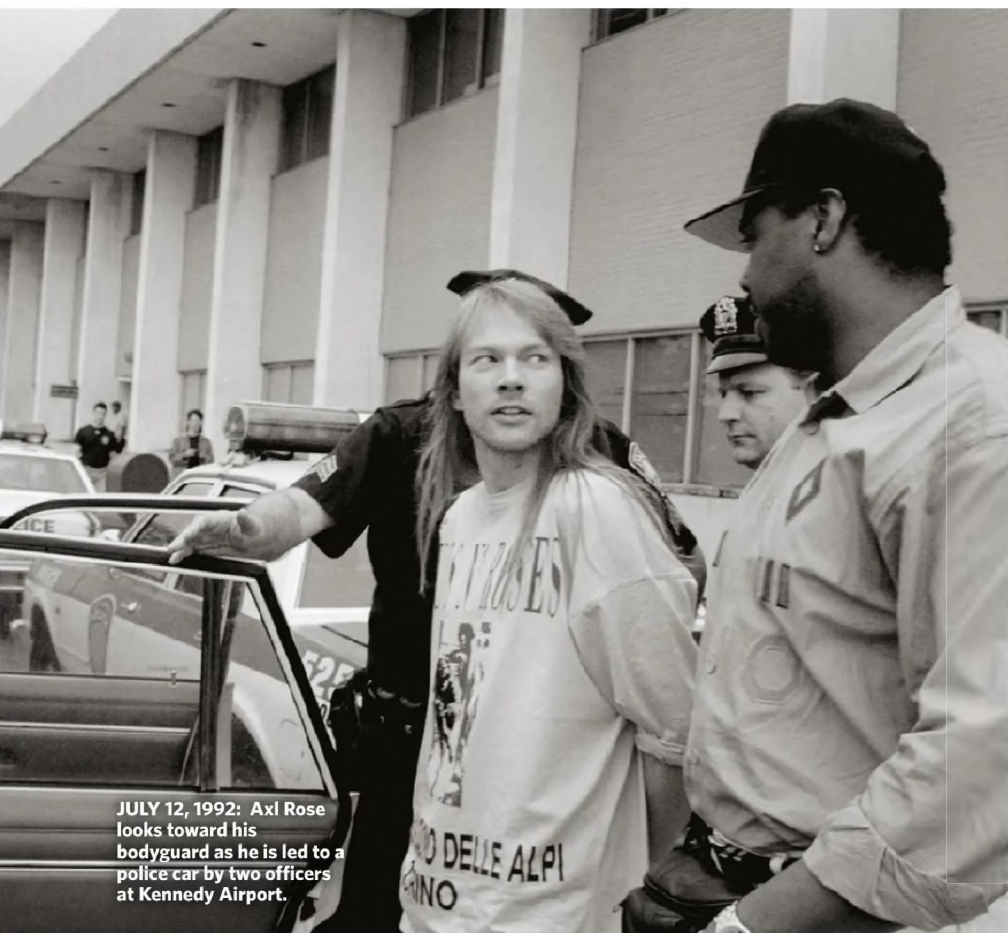
"I knew it was a really good song, and GN'R were on such a high right then that everything they did was of a very high quality. The one thing I have to admit, though, is that I didn't know what the song was about at the time, and I still don't. But I love the mystery that brings!"



### SHANNON HOON

VOCALS, *YOU AIN'T THE FIRST & MORE*

"Shannon was great," Mike Clink recalled in Greg Prato's *Blind Melon* book. *A Devil On One Shoulder And An Angel On The Other*. "He was this shy little kid. At that time, Blind Melon didn't exist. When he did the vocals, he had a really great, smooth, pretty voice. It added a nice little texture to the songs. My first impression was of him being this shy little kid from Indiana, who was a friend of Axl's. He was very respectful of everybody's space - he never got belligerent."



JULY 12, 1992: Axl Rose looks toward his bodyguard as he is led to a police car by two officers at Kennedy Airport.

things you wanted and worked for just cannot happen."

Yet their grandeur was counterpointed by shorter, more violent tunes like *Get In The Ring*, *Right Next Door To Hell* and *Back Off Bitch*, songs that sought to settle explicit scores and that made no secret of the depths of rage that fuelled their writer. It was an area in which he already had form.

"I thought they were tiresome, small-minded and mean," says Alan Niven. "I'd already been through *One In A Million* with him. But with the meanness and the vitriol – if you're going to apply it, apply it to something big. He'd make his attacks on his next-door neighbour or journalists, and I'm thinking, 'Axl, this is the scope of your world?'"

Rose addressed such accusations directly in 1992: "*Back Off Bitch* is a 10-year-old song," he said. "I've been doing a lot of work and found out I've had a lot of hatred for women. Basically, I've been rejected by my mother since I was a baby. She's picked my stepfather over me ever since he was around and watched me get beaten by him. She stood back most of the time. Unless it got too bad, and then she'd come and hold you afterward. She wasn't there for me. My grandmother had a problem with men. I've gone back and done the work and found out I overheard my grandma going off on men when I was four. And I've had problems with my own masculinity because of that. So I wrote about my feelings in the songs."

Use *Your Illusion I* and *II* became records that said plenty about their time: they are indulgent, bloated and created by men who weren't hearing the word 'no' too often. And yet they are also unafraid and unapologetic, and contain some of the best work GN'R ever produced. Interestingly, too, they lend

perspective to the band's two other major releases: a clear line can be drawn through them from *Appetite For Destruction* to *Chinese Democracy*.

Bitter, raunchy little rockers appear alongside romantic ballads. Izzy Stradlin's loose and groovy riffs sit with Slash's heroic piledrivers, Axl's bleeding heart is on his sleeve one minute and being rammed down your throat the next.

"We knew we had to bury *Appetite* in some way," Rose told *Hit Parader*, soon after their release. "There was no way to out-do that album, and if we didn't out-do *Appetite* in one way or another it was going to take away from our success and the amount of power we had gained to do what we wanted. I've never really looked at it as two separate albums. I've always looked at it as an entire package. For me it fits together perfectly for the 30 songs in a row. Everything that we decided to record for the album made it."

The records ran over one more bump in the road before they were done. Bob Clearmountain was hired to mix the tracks that Mike Clink had engineered. "Basically Axl moves into the studio with him, and God knows what that was like for Bob," says Niven. "Mr control freak breathing down the back of your neck. Bob Clearmountain was one of my heroes, but the mixes had no life and vitality."

Tom Zutaut suggested that Bill Price, who had almost produced *Appetite For Destruction* when the band had planned to record it in London, should try out for the job. Price delivered a "loud, in-your-face, heavily compressed" mix of *Right Next Door To Hell* as an audition piece, and got the gig.

"It was a very long process," Price recalled. "The last half a dozen songs were recorded, overdubbed, vocal'ed and guitar'ed, what have you'ed, in random

## JUST AN ILLUSION

We polled our critics to deem the perfect tracklist had *UYI* been a single record.

### CIVIL WAR

What's so civil about war anyway? Not much on this belter – at first haunting, hectic to close.

### YOU COULD BE MINE

Up GN'R's sleeve since *Appetite*, the *Terminator 2* song is the closest link to the leer of 'old' Guns.

### NOVEMBER RAIN

*November Rain* is the kind of epic you suspect Axl has been shooting for ever since.

### ESTRANGED

Old-school synergy wrapped around Axl's poignant piano and Slash's serpentine guitar.

### DON'T CRY

Axl reins in the shriek in favour of a heart-wrung vocal over Izzy's lovesick riff.

### GET IN THE RING

The one where all music journos secretly wish they'd been on the end of Axl's media-baiting shitstorm.

### LIVE AND LET DIE

Macca never quite had the right malice, but GN'R's venomous cover now feels definitive.

### DUST N' BONES

The key really turned in I/s ignition with Izzy's ode to lost minds and loose women.

### PRETTY TIED UP

Stradlin turned an encounter with an LA dominatrix into one of his best compositions.

### SO FINE

McKagan's finest moment on *II* was a heart-on-leather-jacket ode to Johnny Thunders.

### BREAKDOWN

Staggering stuff – from the cowboy lilt of the intro to the full-bore thrill-ride of the chorus.

### COMA

Written by Slash in his "heroin delirium", *Coma*'s key-changing chord cycle is immense.

recording studios dotted about America when they had a day off between gigs because the tour had already started. My mixing mode then switched into flying around America with pocketfuls of DATs, playing it to the band backstage."

"I never sit down and listen to records once they're finished, so it's been so long since I heard them," says Slash. "In hindsight I can look back and think about things I disagreed with and this that and the other, but at the time, I was just so gung-ho to finally be productive and to have the whole band in some sort of state of harmony. But to this day I have always thought that, for me as a guitar player, it was a fun canvas to play on and I felt I played really well on those records. I was enjoying myself. Three weeks with Mike Clink playing guitars, that was a fucking blast."

Alan Niven can still remember the long, lost weekend with Slash when he understood that things had changed. That delicate ecosystem



that Steven Adler somehow had a part in maintaining was gone. When a butterfly flaps its wings on one side of the world...

"We make choices every day. With *Use Your Illusion*, Slash made a choice and I totally understood it, and to this day I don't agree with it. One night, he and I were sitting alone in his house up in Laurel Canyon and he was really bemoaning what he thought Axl was doing to the band, and he was doing it in the context of the material he was writing. He felt it wasn't Guns N' Roses, he felt that he was being compromised by having to apply himself to it. He felt that one song of that kind of epic style might be appropriate, but so many? I looked at him and said: 'You've got to express this'. And Slash looked at me and he said: 'Listen, my father [an artist who designed album sleeves] has got a cupboard full of gold records, and he hasn't got a pot to piss in.' And that's where he folded. From then on, Axl was in charge."

Slash's response is measured, guarded: "Well..." he says slowly, "I think that Axl's always been difficult, but we managed. Because of the five individuals, and Alan, and Tom Zutaut, we managed to make it work. So you lose Steven, and then the Alan thing... I backed Alan all the way up to a certain point and then he did actually do something that set me off and I said: 'I can't fight for you any more'. But that was a volatile situation that was going to explode at some point. Alan wasn't going to take Axl's shit and Axl could not stand that, so it was a battle."

"I think in hindsight, although it wouldn't have been any fun, but all we could have done differently was just to refuse Axl everything that he ever wanted. I don't think it would have been very productive, but all things considered, what we ended up doing was going along with a lot of stuff just in order to be able to continue on, which built a monster. All I can see happening is that nothing would have happened, because it would have been at a standstill. I think we probably would have broken up a lot sooner. But

I can't support hiring Doug Goldstein as a manager. I knew that he was a creep from day one."

As the records were being mixed by Bill Price, Rose called Niven and told him that he could no longer work with him. "It's pretty plain when the first thing that's done after I'm fired is that the name is taken away from the rest of the band members [Rose demanded and gained legal ownership in the early 90s]," says Niven. "That tells you an awful lot right there. It was basically people taking control. Axl had an enabler and off they went. Doug Goldstein was a security guy when I took him on. Well credit where credit is due, one of the things that Doug was golden at was clean-up."

"Three months after I'm gone, Izzy quietly packs his bags, because it's not the band any more, it's not the band that he could feel any more. The feel of Izzy is something I profoundly connected to. For me he was the heart – and let me choose my words carefully – because he was not the heart and soul of the band, but he was the heart of the soul."

"Alan was somebody that I trusted, whereas I knew Doug was somebody that played both sides against the middle," says Slash. "In other words, he's telling me one thing, telling Axl another and appeasing Axl all the time. And I was aware of it, but at the same time, as long as shit was getting done I was okay. As long as we kept booking tours and I was sort of kept in the mix as far as the mechanics, that's how we managed to get from

1990 to 1990-whatever. We had the world record for touring. Even when we lost Izzy because we had all those shows booked, I was just like, 'Let's keep going'. But when the tour was finally over and it was time to get back to work, it was impossible, because Izzy wasn't there, Steven wasn't there, and it really dawned on me – the harsh reality that Axl and I had grown so far apart and we weren't really all that close to begin with."

"We'd grown so far apart, and to this day, there's no putting that back together."

Rose, of course, saw things differently. In one of his rare utterances on the subject, he told *Rolling Stone*: "It was a king-of-the-mountain thing. It's an old saying: 'Don't buy a car with your friends'. The old band all wanted to hold the wheel and ended up nearly driving the car over a cliff."

Duff McKagan was making one of his periodic trips to London. It was October 2010, and he was in a hurry. He came in on the red-eye and went straight to his usual hotel, where the manager had booked out a meeting room for him. He had three in a row, all sober business planning stuff, the boring meetings that he'd learned he had to take if he wanted life to run smoothly. The *Use Your Illusion* experience had taught him that, and more. Before he'd even put down his bags, the hotel manager said to him, 'So you're playing tonight?'

"Am I?" he'd replied absentmindedly, thinking to himself: 'Man, you know why I'm here, you booked the meeting room for me,' and then he'd picked up his key, taken the lift to his suite and put some music on, loud enough to shake the jetlag. Next thing he knew, there was an angry guy from the next suite along at his door complaining and when he looked up he realised that the angry guy at the door was Axl Rose. They hadn't played together for 13 years.

"For me as a grown up man who looks at life the way I do, it was meant to be," says Duff. "We had a grand old time. We went down to the gig together. I was tired by that point. I was drinking Red Bull so I was half out of my mind. Next thing I know I was playing. It was odd when I looked out in the crowd. I'm like: 'Oh, I'm going to have to explain this in every interview I do now...'"

"Axl's way of rationalising things is sometimes the most genius thing ever and I've always liked that about him. Other things were maddening, and I'm sure I maddened him. On the *Illusions* tour I could have not gotten so fucked up all the time. Did I blame it on him for being late all the time? Yeah, for the longest time. But you gotta start taking responsibility for yourself and that's what I didn't do. I knew there were times I could have pulled up and been a real voice of reason, because I think I was looked at as a voice of reason I that band. I didn't know how to and I didn't do it, but at least in my lifetime I have come to terms with it. I think the path of that band happened the only way it could have happened. It was fucked up from the beginning, it was beautiful and fucked up."

Duff McKagan remains the link between the original five members of the band. Although he

doesn't want to discuss his relationship with Axl, such as it is ["that's personal"], he enjoyed spending time with him in London. A few months later, he jammed with Steven Adler at the Borderline, an event that, it's safe to say, flew a little more under the radar than the appearance with Guns N' Roses. And he is close to Izzy, too.

"He has a cool fuckin' life man," Duff says. "I remember when he got sober, I was watching him. Early 90s, while we were still on the road. And the moment that he became at peace with himself, was the moment I also recognised he's not going to be here very much longer. He's a great guy and a very positive influence in my other life."

The sales of *Use Your Illusion I* and *II* stand today at more than 15 million copies, almost double the estimate that Alan Niven made to Eddie Rosenblatt.

The subsequent tour, which stretched on for years, grossed millions of dollars more. The price was less easy to quantify. Alan Niven moved to

Arizona and withdrew from the music business until very recently. Izzy Stradlin remains to all intents and purposes, retired. It took W Axl Rose 17 years and 11 band members to produce another Guns N' Roses record. And Guns N' Roses is still the name most readily attached to the careers of Slash and Duff.

"I've wasted 20 years doing drugs," says Steven Adler, "but I have a new start now and I'm taking it for all it's worth. My book showed all my warts and scars. It's something for me to make amends to everybody, for all the bullshit in my life."

"Most people go through life saying: 'I wonder what it's like to get to the apex of your occupation?'" says Alan Niven. "A lot of people spend their lives worrying about anonymity. But when you get to the apex, you find out it's a fucking illusion, it doesn't exist. And when your anonymity is compromised, you find out its value. The toll came later and when it did come it hit hard. I went through the severest depression you can go into."

"You know," says Slash, "when I look back on it, it was a monumental achievement. The first thing I think of when I think of those albums is that it was such a whirlwind of shit was happening at that particular time, but it was a huge accomplishment. I think the *Use Your Illusion* records, if you know the backstory, were very victorious." He pauses, while he thinks of one more thing he wants to say. "After all of it, we came through. Don't put too much of a negative spin on it, man..."

"That record polarized people. I've come to understand that, and I've come to be at peace with the whole thing," says Duff as he prepares to catch yet another plane, this time back home to Seattle. "I only figured this out a year ago. 'When are you guys gonna get back together?' Well, none of us guys have said we're going to. I wonder if some people – not all – if some people think if we got back together, they'd get their teenage years back? Are they asking us to get back together so that they can get their youth back, even for a minute? The title of the record, it's fuckin' appropriate when you think about it..."

"The harsh reality dawned on me that Axl and I had grown so far apart. To this day, there's no putting that back together."

Slash



# 1992

The oily rag had been lit and the Molotov Cocktails thrown – this was the year when rock truly found its revolutionary spirit.



In 1992, it felt like America was about to go up in flames. A year earlier, a black motorist named Rodney King had been severely beaten by four Los Angeles Police Department officers, prompting widespread condemnation and outrage. When, on April 29, 1992, all four cops were acquitted by a jury, that outrage turned into fury and LA exploded. The riot that followed lasted six days, left 63 dead and caused more than \$1 billion worth of damage. For a moment, it looked like the rest of the US was about to follow.

No band provided a better soundtrack to the chaos and fury sweeping the nation than Rage Against The Machine. These radical rap-metal revolutionaries had finished recording their debut album just before the LA Riots erupted, but it could easily have been written while the flames were burning outside the studio doors. Nor was its impact diluted when it was eventually released that November – four years of stifling conservative rule under Republican President George HW Bush ensured they still had plenty of paraffin for the Molotov Cocktails they were intent on lobbing at polite society. A brand new force had introduced itself, and then some.

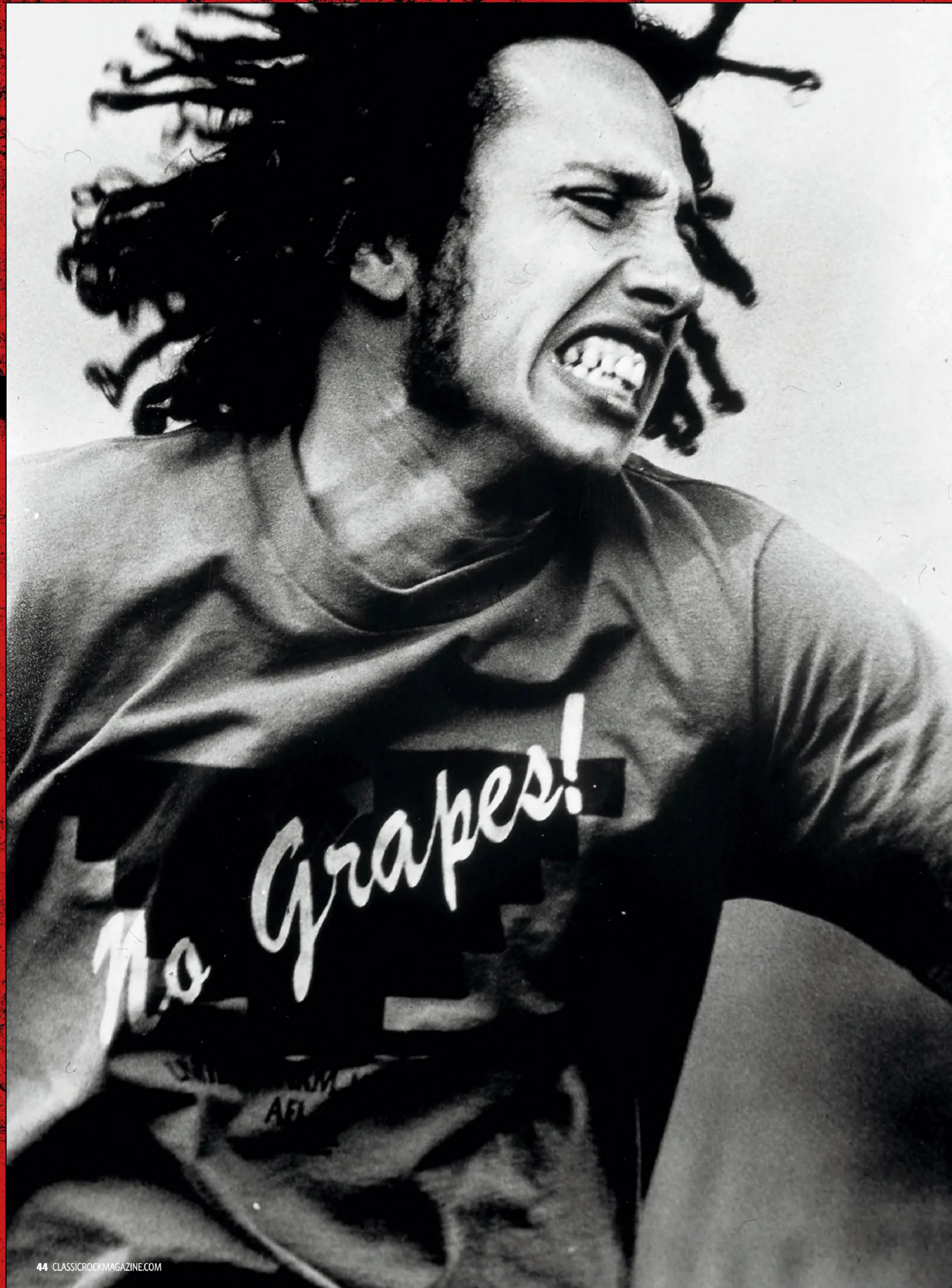
A year after Jane's Addiction frontman Perry Farrell's groundbreaking travelling festival-come-musical circus Lollapalooza made its debut, the Alternative Nation had beaten down the doors of the mainstream. The phenomenal success of Nirvana's *Nevermind* blindsided pretty much everybody, up to and including the members of Nirvana themselves, but it provided the spark for an entire generation of bands to completely remodel the musical landscape. Suddenly, an army of like-minded bands with loud guitars and angst to spare were following them to the top of the charts: Pearl Jam, Alice In Chains, Stone Temple Pilots, Blind Melon, Soul Asylum (who actually predated Nirvana by a few years, proving that good things come to those who wait).

The UK even had its own anti-heroes in shape of an unknown Oxford band named Radiohead, who notched up a surprise worldwide hit with *Creep*, allowing everyone from bedroom-dwelling misanthropes to sun-kissed Californian kids to wallow in a pit of self-loathing. That song soon became an albatross that Thom Yorke and co spent the rest of the decade trying shrug from around their neck.

This sense of change was infectious. Faith No More (pictured left), the band who had helped instigate this shift three years earlier with their era-defining *The Real Thing* album, lived up to their reputation as dyed-in-the-wool contrarians and released *Angel Dust* – a record that was as cantankerously challenging as it was brilliant. The likes of industrial godfathers Ministry, B-movie-obsessed metallers White Zombie and fearsomely funny alt-rock heroines L7 suddenly found themselves plastered across MTV, radio and magazine covers – something that would have been unthinkable just a couple of years earlier. Grunge even made it onto the big screen, courtesy of former *Rolling Stone* writer Cameron Crowe's Seattle-soundtracked rom-com *Singles*.

The old guard weren't going quietly, of course. Stadium rock behemoths Def Leppard partied like it was 1989 with the hyper-polished *Adrenalize* album while trad metal warhorses Iron Maiden unleashed *Fear Of The Dark* to a rabid response from their fanbase. Yet neither lived up to past glories. The writing was on the wall, at least temporarily – both knew it, and so did many of their contemporaries. The seeds that had been sewn over the past couple of years had bloomed.

This year of change ended with George Bush voted out of the White House. His replacement was a Bill Clinton, a sax-toting 40-something swiftly nicknamed 'The Rock N'Roll President'. He might not have owned any Nirvana or Pearl Jam records, but he sure as hell knew who they were. The revolution was in full swing. 🎸



“we  
were a  
f\*\*king  
livewire”

LEAD: ICONICPIX

## IN 1992, FOUR RAP-METAL REVOLUTIONARIES RELEASED AN ALBUM THAT WOULD CHANGE HEAVY MUSIC FOREVER. WE TALK TO RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE ABOUT THE DEBUT THAT SPARKED A REVOLUTION

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY

**I**t was early evening on Sunday, February 21, 1993 when the balloon went up. To the majority of people listening to Radio 1's weekly chart rundown, the name Rage Against The Machine meant nothing. Why would it? A brand new band mixing metal and hip hop like no one had done before, they'd yet to make an impact outside of the nation's rock clubs or the stereos of the more clued-in metal fan.

And so, when presenter Bruno Brookes cheerfully announced that their new single, *Killing In The Name*, had entered the charts at No. 27 and cued the song up, neither he nor several million listeners knew what was about to happen.

The song started with a coiled guitar and tense bassline, as some guy rapped about the American police force's inherent racism with palpable vitriol in his voice: *'Some of those who work forces are the same who burn crosses.'* Then – boom! – the whole thing suddenly erupted. Over guitars that sounded like a thousand police sirens wailing all at once, the line *'Fuck you I won't do what you tell me!'* blasted out of radio speakers everywhere,

not just once, not twice, but 16 times. And then, suddenly, it reached its gloriously profane crescendo with one word hurled out with all the anger and pain that could possibly be mustered: *'MOTHERFUCKER!'*

Understandably, the snafu prompted a deluge of complaints to the BBC from offended listeners. Bruno Brookes, who was unaware that an unedited version of the song had accidentally been aired, was suspended for a week and almost lost his job. In just three and a half minutes, a group of political agitators from Los Angeles had detonated a bomb live on the airwaves.

“We knew the band's politics were radical,” says guitarist Tom Morello today. “And that the band's music was a radical combination of styles. But we didn't think it was going to matter, 'cos no one was ever going to hear it.”

But people did hear it, in their millions. Rage Against The Machine were about to start a four-man revolution.

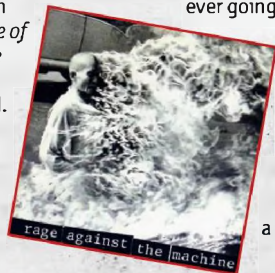
**T**his year marks the 25th anniversary of Rage Against The Machine's debut album. Even now, a quarter of a century after it exploded

like a car bomb under the hood of mainstream culture, that record has lost none of its power, impact or provocative fervour. It was the sound of Public Enemy yoked to Black Flag, of Dr Martin Luther King and Malcolm X set to a soundtrack of cutting-edge metal.

Rage arrived as the gloriously shallow, MTV-driven rock scene of the 1980s was flat on the canvas with bluebirds fluttering around its head, laid out by the emergent grunge movement. In America, a new generation of hip hop bands was providing a vital social commentary, marrying the gritty reality of the streets with the violent glamour of a Hollywood crime blockbuster. All this was happening against a backdrop of global turmoil, racial tension and the threat of war in the Middle East. In hindsight, their timing was perfect.

In reality, it was purely accidental. Vocalist Zack de la Rocha, guitarist Tom Morello, bassist Timmy C (aka Tim Commerford) and drummer Brad Wilk had been in various low-level LA bands, including hardcore firebrands Inside Out (Zack) and Lock Up (Tom, who played on their sole album, the unfortunately titled *Something Bitchin' This Way Comes*).

“I had been in a band that had a record deal, I ▶



had already had my grab at the brass ring," says Tom. "The band got dropped and I was 26 years old, and I thought that was it. I thought, 'If I'm not going to be a rock star, or make albums, I'm at least going to play music that I believe in 100%.' And I was fortunate to meet three people who felt very similarly."

The four were brought together by various mutual friends, though Zack and Tim had known each other since childhood. Zack and Tom came from similarly radical backgrounds – Zack was the son of Mexican-American political artist Robert de la Rocha, Tom was the son of a white American activist mother and a Kenyan diplomat father. Growing up, both had experienced racism first hand, and bonded over their hard-left political views – views that would shape Rage from the off.

"I wanted to ensure the protection of this band's integrity," said Zack in 1999. "Our words had to be backed up by actions, because we're dealing with this huge, monstrous pop culture that has a tendency to suck everything that is culturally resistant to it into it in order to pacify it and make it non-threatening."

Ironically, for a band who would go on to become one of the most successful of the 1990s, Rage Against The Machine saw their very existence as limiting what they could achieve.

"We began with zero commercial ambition," says Tom. "I didn't think we'd be able to book a gig in a club, let alone get a record deal. There was no market for multi-racial, neo-Marxist rap-metal punk rock bands. That didn't exist. So we made this music that was just 100% authentic, it was 100% what we felt like playing. We had no expectations."

Still, it was clear to the members of Rage from the start that they were onto something unique. Brad Wilk can vividly recollect the band's very first rehearsal.

"More than anything, I remember this connection and movement and momentum that was happening in the room," he says.



Tom Morello: visionary, revolutionary, bloody loves a baseball cap

GETTY IMAGES: ROSS HAZEN

## "WE DIDN'T THINK ANYONE WOULD HEAR US"

TOM MORELLO DIDN'T FORESEE RAGE EXPLODING

"Something clicked. I played so well with Tim and Tom, and then we had Zack, who was a bolt of lightning, flying off my kick drum and was in it for real. There was something really special about what we were doing. We weren't analysing it or putting our fingers on it yet. It was just an intense moment for us all. We saw the very beginning of the potential we could have."

Like so many Californian bands before them, Rage's first gig took place not at a club but at a party, in Huntington Beach, in the sprawling suburb of Orange County, south of Los Angeles.

"It was a party in a house, and the place felt electric," says Tim Commerford. "A lot of our songs didn't even have vocals at that time. In fact, we played a version of *Killing In The Name* that was just the music – he hadn't got the vocals done. You could feel the electricity. It felt like holding on to a fucking live wire. That's what it was: a live wire. And it kept getting more and more live."

Collectively, Rage were fans of hip hop, and Tom recalls the band's early days being sound-tracked by the likes of Public Enemy and Cypress Hill. But while hip hop provided a big steer for the band, it wasn't their sole influence. All four had grown up on guitar music ranging from 70s rock and 80s metal to punk (see *Guerilla Radio*, page 42).

"Our histories run deep, that's why we were the band we were," says Brad. "We didn't just listen to hip hop, we listened to all kinds of things, from Black Sabbath to Led Zeppelin to Minor Threat and the Sex Pistols. When we were getting together, we agreed that we wanted our record to sound somewhere between Ice Cube's *AmeriKKA's Most Wanted* and Led Zeppelin's *Houses Of The Holy*."

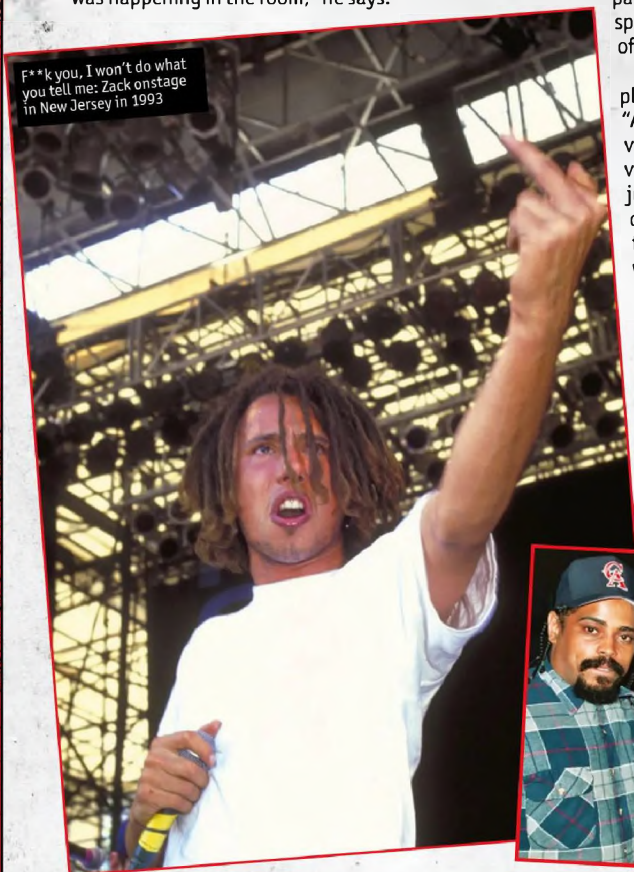
In March, Rage embarked on their first proper tour as openers for Public Enemy. Thanks to the controversies whipped up by the US media around 'gangsta rap' acts such as NWA and Ice-T, mainstream America had a poisonous – read: virulently racist – relationship with hip hop, and trouble was never far away. It was the perfect environment for Rage Against The Machine.

"The tour was a needlessly controversial one," says Tom. "At the time, rap was considered a dangerous endeavour, and the police sometimes outnumbered the audience at these shows. They tried to shut several down, filed injunctions – none of which were successful, I might add. We were playing these colleges, and the audience would be 100% white fraternity boys and sorority girls, passing through five levels of metal detectors and pat-downs. I think the cops were afraid that we were going to be bussing in Bloods and Crips to the show. There was an air of hysteria."

Today, the guitarist still expresses bafflement that anyone at all would want to take a chance on Rage Against Their Machine and their political message, let alone a corporate record company. But their 12-track demo tape found its way into the hands of Michael Goldstone, the Epic Records A&R hotshot who'd previously signed Pearl Jam.

"Our only goal was to make music for ourselves and to make our own record – a cassette tape, an elaborate demo tape of the 12 songs we had written," says Tom. "That was our entire goal. We never thought we'd play a show. We never thought we'd make a record."

Garth Richardson was a young Canadian



F\*\*k you. I won't do what you tell me: Zack onstage in New Jersey in 1993



Zack with heroes Cypress Hill in 1994

Rage Against The Machine (left to right): Tom Morello, Zack de la Rocha, Tim Commerford, Brad Wilk





The livewires onstage during Rock For Choice at The Palladium, Hollywood in 1993

GETTY

## "COPS WERE AFRAID. THERE WAS HYSTERIA"

POLICE WERE DAUNTED BY RAGE'S HIP HOP CONNECTIONS

studio engineer whose biggest credit came on an album by hair metal B-listers White Lion. But he was young and hungry, and when Epic asked his boss, producer Michael Wagener, who should work on the debut album by this hot new rap-metal band they had signed, he was an obvious choice.

"I got the demo tape and went, 'Holy shit.' There was nothing else like it," he recalls. "I went over to see them play in their jam space. I think they played me four songs, and I was blown away, to the point where I couldn't talk afterwards, because my stutter was so bad. I was like, 'Are you fucking kidding me - I'm going to be doing this band?' It was their power, and also what Zack was saying. It was so fresh and so new."

Rage began recording their debut album with Garth in March 1992. Seven of the 12 tracks from the demo tape, including *Killing In The Name*, *Bomb Track* and *Bullet In The Head*, would appear on the album.

"The songs were probably about 85 to 90% there," remembers Garth. "We made a few changes, mostly lyrically. Literally, somebody just had to capture them."

To achieve this, the producer brought in a full concert PA system to get the full impact of the band's live firepower. This was undiluted Rage - though sometimes it created unforeseen problems.

"The problem is that sometimes Zack's voice went," says Garth. "He was working it so hard. The end of *Freedom*, where he's screaming, 'Freedom!', that's just one take. Every time he sang, he gave it his

all. Anybody that wanted him to hold back, he was, like, 'No, fuck off, leave me alone.'"

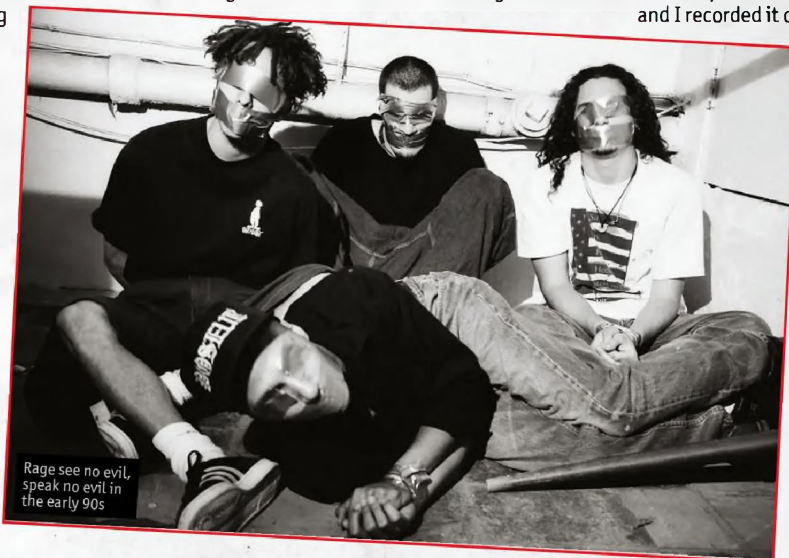
Given the incendiary lyrical subject matter, there was surprisingly little input from Epic. They seemed to learn their lesson after suggesting the band remove the line 'Now you're under control' from *Killing In The Name*. "There was a big conversation about that," remembers Garth. "And the band just said, 'Fuck you, that part stays.'"

*Killing In The Name* would be the song that broke

the band in the UK. For six months, it soundtracked every rock club in the country, its impassioned call-to-arms galvanising dancefloors of people out to party. Yet, like so many of the great songs, it came about by accident.

"I remember coming up with that riff," says Tom. "I was giving guitar lessons at the time, and I was teaching some Hollywood rock musician how to do drop-D tuning. In the midst of showing him, I came up with that riff. I said, 'Hold on a second', and I recorded it on my little cassette recorder to

bring into the rehearsal the next day, never realising that it would be the genesis of a song that would have that lasting impact."



Rage see no evil, speak no evil in the early 90s

In April 1992, a series of riots erupted in Los Angeles when four white policemen were acquitted of beating African-American motorist Rodney King, despite the assault being filmed by a witness standing on his balcony. For America, it was a moment of chaos. For Rage Against The Machine, who had already recorded their debut album and would release it in November, the timing



# "I HEARD THE DEMO AND WENT, 'HOLY SHIT!'"

PRODUCER GARTH RICHARDSON WAS OVER THE MOON WITH WHAT HE HEARD

was unfortunately convenient.

"All of those songs were written prior to the Rodney King riots," says Tom. "In some ways the record was prescient, in that it saw this maelstrom of racial strife and imperialist war on the horizon. When the record hit, it was a fertile field for us to have the ear of audiences around the world."

Rage were proudly revolutionary – too revolutionary for America, who were slow to catch on. Britain was a different matter, as Bruno Brookes' unfortunate Radio 1 mishap proved.

"The UK was the first place people lost their minds over this music," says Tom. "One of the principal reasons was that there were more lax lyrical censorship laws on your MTV and radio. We never edited the curse words out of songs, so people in the United States couldn't even hear them on MTV, they couldn't hear them on radio. And secondly, people over there were surprised to hear an American band that had a view of America that was similar to Europe's view of America."

From that small spark, a conflagration began to spread, as word about Rage Against The Machine grew. Their snowballing success had the desired effect, as a generation – or at least sections of it – began to wake up to the messages they were delivering through the bullhorn of their songs. Musically, too, they dragged the dormant rap-metal movement that had briefly flared up in the late 1980s back out of its stupor (in Bakersfield, California, the members of a brand new band named Korn were certainly paying attention to what Rage were doing).

Plus, society was changing fast in the early 90s. While sexism, racism and homophobia were still unfortunately prevalent, there was growing opposition to such outdated outlooks. Rage Against The Machine took it several steps further, crediting Black Panthers founder Huey Newton and Provisional IRA hunger striker Bobby Sands on the credits list to their album – a contentious move on both sides of the Atlantic. The sleeve itself featured a 1963 picture of Vietnamese monk Thich Quang Duc setting himself on fire in protest of his government's oppression of Buddhism. It was the ultimate visual representation of protest.

"My heroes were not guys in rock bands," says Tom. "They were revolutionaries who were fighting to change the world. It looked like we were going to have an opportunity to get in that arena. This was an incredible opportunity to engage the planet – not just with our music, but with our ideas."

The success of *Rage Against The Machine* took everyone by surprise, not least Rage Against The Machine. They rapidly went from being the outcasts of the Hollywood scene to a lightning rod for the alt-rock movement. Rather than blunting their political edge, success only sharpened it – most famously in 1993, when they took to the stage at a Lollapalooza festival show in Philadelphia naked, apart from gaffa tape over their mouths, as a protest against censorship.



"Our words had to be backed up by actions": Zack de la Rocha fights the power.

But the pressure-cooker environment that comes with being in a revolutionary left-wing band eventually took its toll. Tensions between the band members grew, and Rage split up in 2000 after just three studio albums. They have sporadically reformed since – most famously for a one-off gig in London's Finsbury Park, after a fan-led campaign saw a reissued *Killing In The Name* trounce the Simon Cowell-backed *X-Factor* winner Joe McElderry to the 2009 Christmas No.1. The members also embarked on their separate careers, with Morello forming supergroup

Prophets Of Rage with members of Cypress Hill and Public Enemy (there's still no sign of Zack de la Rocha's long-mooted solo album, though).

Nearly 30 years after it was released, however, Rage's debut remains a landmark – the point where rap and metal truly came together to deliver a body-blow to the status quo.

"Human strife has not changed. Racism has not changed. Things have actually gone backwards," says Garth Richardson. "Rage Against The Machine wrote an incredible record that was current – and it will be time and time and time again." ✦



# WHIPPING BOYS

From the release of their debut album, *Core*, onwards, **Stone Temple Pilots** were pilloried like no other band before or since. Even though they became one of the great groups of the 90s, the wounds from those attacks never fully healed.

Words: **Dave Everley**

In an episode of one of the most popular TV shows of the early 90s, there's an exchange that sums up the prevailing critical view of Stone Temple Pilots when they first came along. In it, those two unlikely arbiters of cool, Beavis and Butt-head stare blank-eyed out of the screen as the video to STP's hit single *Plush* plays. "Is this Pearl Jam?" cackles Beavis.

"Yeah, Eddie Vedder dyed his hair red," snorts Butt-head.

Beavis: "Wait a minute. This isn't Pearl Jam."

Butt-head: "They both suck."

Beavis: "Pearl Jam doesn't suck. They're from Seattle."

In that brief conversation, those animated sofa-dwellers with the single-digit IQs neatly summed up the reception the Los Angeles band had received from sections of the mainstream music press: they were copyists, opportunists, bandwagon jumpers. They had the temerity to sign to a major label without putting in the hours on some godforsaken indie label than no one but the hippest hipster knew about. Jesus, they weren't even from the right city.

The vitriol heaped upon Stone Temple Pilots was vastly out of proportion to their supposed crimes against cool. The band's debut album, *Core*, was simultaneously confident and pained, anthemic and intimate. Sure, it slotted neatly into prevailing trends, and yes, singer Scott Weiland's chameleonic baritone evoked both Eddie Vedder and Kurt Cobain. But Stone Temple Pilots were their own men – and men of the people at that, as the eight million people who bought *Core* can testify.

If there's a band that Stone Temple Pilots should be compared to, it's Led Zeppelin. Not musically – the surviving members of STP aren't foolish enough to draw a parallel there. But certainly both bands were forced to endure an inordinate amount of shit being undeservedly dumped on them early in their careers, and both eventually rose above it with dignity and pride intact.

"We grew up listening to bands like Led Zeppelin, who got heavy criticism," says bassist Robert DeLeo, a man with the slicked-back hair, deep-set eyes and warm vocal tones of a 1920s stage hypnotist. "When you model yourself on someone you admire, and you see they got the slings and arrows too, it gives you a kind of

strength. The whole mentality of STP at all times was: 'Let's write the best songs.' That's what it was all about. It was honouring the craft of the song."

This year *Core* turns 25, and the craft DeLeo talks about hasn't just stood the test of time, it has aged better than many of its contemporaries. While the journey since taken by the band that made it has been marked by breathless highs and heartbreaking lows, the album that started it off stands as a validation of everything Stone Temple Pilots set out to achieve.

Robert DeLeo moved to Los Angeles in 1984 with \$1,200 in his pocket and ambition in his head. He and his elder brother Dean had grown up on the other side of America in small-town New Jersey, where they spent their early years listening and playing along to Led Zeppelin, T.Rex and Cheap Trick.

It was in LA that Robert met a skinny suburban kid named Scott Weiland. Cleveland-born but raised in Orange County, Weiland was an all-American quarterback type with a wild streak a mile wide. As a teen he'd dabbled with marijuana and cocaine and been sent to rehab by his mum and stepdad for his troubles.

"He was a completely different person back then," says Robert. "He was fresh out of college, kind of on a fratboy, jock kind of trip. He was very energetic, very alpha male. But he definitely had the gift of singing."

Weiland and his best friend, guitarist Corey Hickok, had a band called *Soi Distant*, whose pretentious, would-be European-sounding name was matched by their pretentious, would-be European-sounding music.

A chance encounter with Robert DeLeo prompted them to ditch the Duran Duran and Ultravox influences and form a new band, *Swing*. Soon the trio were joined by drummer Eric Kretz.

"We were into the more funky, James Brown-meets-rock type of thing," Kretz recalls. "The stuff Robert and I were really trying to do was in that Zeppelin, James Brown, Grand Funk Railroad vein, with funky backbeats underneath the rock music. The songs were a lot more silly."

But every chain has a weak link, and *Swing's* was Corey Hickok. In 1989, Robert suggested the

band bring in his brother Dean as a replacement. Dean was approaching 30 and living in San Diego, where he ran a construction firm. But he'd never given up the guitar, or the dream of becoming a musician.

"I was asked to play some solos early on, and it was pretty evident that they needed to make a change," says Dean. "I was just getting on with my life, and they said: 'Hey, man, why don't you join the band?' Corey was Scott's best friend, and I think it was hard for him. But he knew that the band had to grow and expand."

Dean insisted the band change their name to mark a fresh start, and *Swing* became *Mighty Joe Young*, after the black-and-white 1949 *King Kong* knock-off. It wasn't the only thing that was different. "When Dean joined the band, the dynamics changed and the songwriting changed," says Kretz. "We got a much more hard rock type of sound. As far as the lyrics Scott was coming up with, a lot of the joking and silliness went. And his vocal approach got a lot heavier. He started channelling Jim Morrison and David Bowie."

Life in a struggling band in LA was tough. Robert DeLeo earned a paltry wage working in a guitar shop amid the hookers, drug dealers and dreaming musicians on Sunset Strip. "Working

**"WHEN YOU MODEL YOURSELF ON SOMEONE YOU ADMIRE, AND YOU SEE THEY GOT THE SLINGS AND ARROWS TOO, IT GIVES YOU A KIND OF STRENGTH."**

ROBERT DELEO

at the guitar shop and seeing some of these hair-band guys come in was an education," says Robert. "Every one of those could play really great, but it was a blueprint of how not to treat people."

His job put Robert on the front line of the LA music scene, watching the changing of the guard as it happened. The glam-metal groups still ruled the streets, but there was a new breed of bands waiting in the wings, including *Jane's Addiction* and the *Red Hot Chili Peppers*. "It felt like something was happening," he says now. "And it felt like we could be part of it."

# STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

While Robert was selling axes to soon-to-be-has-beens, Weiland was working across the street at a model agency, chauffeuring beautiful women to assignments around town.

"It was great because I would have an idea and run over there real quick, or he'd have an idea and run over to me," says Robert. "Scott was very focused; he was like a lion. He was very ambitious, very passionate about all aspects of being in a band. Lyrics and music and success – he wanted it just as much, if not more, as the three of us."

Weiland was undergoing a change. When he and Kretz moved into a loft apartment in downtown Los Angeles, the drummer watched his bandmate transforming before his eyes. "I saw him delving a lot more into the arts – poetry, strange novels, watching really avant-garde movies," says Kretz. "You gotta develop this 'tortured artist' intellect, and you have to be able to express it in your own form. And that's what he did."

**H**ollywood in the early 90s wasn't a million miles away from Hollywood throughout the 80s. Money ruled everything. The Sunset Strip clubs had a pay-to-play policy, which meant a band had to bring in a few hundred people just to cover the outlay. For Mighty Joe Young, that was easier said than done.

"We were always on the outside," says Kretz. "You hear about these unsigned bands that have this huge crowd base and have a thousand people at their shows. We were never that band."

They managed to bag shows at venues with names like Club Lingerie and The Coconut Teaser, and 100 miles down the Pacific coast in San Diego, where Dean DeLeo lived.

It was at a long-forgotten East Hollywood dive called Shamrocks where the future suddenly opened up for them. They had recorded a demo comprising a handful of songs that eventually ended up on *Core*. The demo tape came to the attention of Atlantic Records A&R man Tom Carolan, who saw the band at Shamrock and offered them a deal. He also suggested they find a new name, as Mighty Joe Young was already taken by an aging bluesman.

As a kid, Weiland had been weirdly fascinated by STP Oil Treatment, a lubricant used in motor engines. He suggested they fit a name around the initials. One early suggestion, Shirley Temple's Pussy, was rejected for being too fratboyish. But the next one stuck: Stone Temple Pilots were born.

Over the course of a few months at the end of 1991 and into '92, STP recorded their debut album with producer Brendan O'Brien at Rumbo Recorders in the San Fernando Valley. Some of the songs that appeared on their demo were retooled for the album. Newer tunes were added, among them the stuttering *Sex Type Thing*, an anti-rape song that found Weiland assuming the character of the protagonist with barely concealed distaste (something which the band's critics later seized upon with misguided glee), and *Plush*, a vivid if abstract dissection of obsessive relationships partly inspired by the story of a murdered woman in San Diego. According to the DeLeos and Kretz, the sessions were a breeze.

"We all had the same vision at the time," says Robert DeLeo. "As you can see from the history of the band, that didn't always last. But back then there was a strong camaraderie



Early promo shot: (l-r) Scott Weiland, Robert DeLeo, Eric Kretz, Dean DeLeo.

and vision for what we were trying to achieve with that record."

Released in September 1992, *Core* was a confident debut. While it nodded to the prevailing alternative rock trends that had been shoved front and centre by the success of Nirvana and Pearl Jam, it also had a flavour of its own, not least in Dean DeLeo's complex, textured guitar work. Stone Temple Pilots knew they had a good record, one that did justice to their illustrious forebears on Atlantic.

"Since we'd signed to Atlantic Records, which was one of the greatest labels in the world, I was like: 'If we fail and get dropped, there was no coming back from getting dropped from the top,'" says Eric Kretz. "That was my biggest fear."

His concerns proved unfounded. Thanks to help from MTV, who pushed the videos for *Sex Type Thing* and *Plush*, the album started to sell steadily. It helped that they had a magnetic frontman who embraced the limelight while so many of his peers pushed it away. Unlike Kurt Cobain or Eddie Vedder, Scott Weiland was a natural-born rock star.

"I've got to tell you that term, 'rock star', I don't care much for it," says Dean DeLeo. "But I never really looked at Scott like that."

**"WE ALL WANTED THE SAME THING - TO MAKE AN INDELIBLE MARK ON THE FACE OF MUSIC."**

**DEAN DELEO**

I looked at him like my brother. He was my brother, and we were in this thing together. We all wanted the same thing – to make an indelible mark on the face of music."

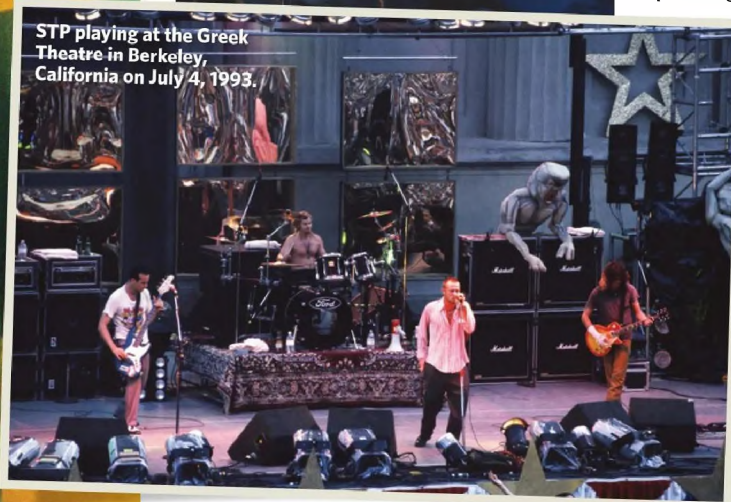
**I**n November 1992, STP embarked on their first national tour. Holed up in an RV with an equipment truck trailing them, they criss-crossed America, stopping off at such sweatboxes as Washington DC's 9.30 Club, the Phantasy Nightclub in Lakewood, Ohio, and Club Downunder in Tallahassee, Florida. Not every show was a ringing success. At one gig in Buffalo, New York, the band counted seven people in the venue, as well as themselves – including the bartender and the bouncer. The next night, in Toronto, the club they played was sold out.

Their mettle was tested early the following year when they opened for thrash linchpins Megadeth. Every night they would face down a front row who would flip them the bird or simply turn their backs.

"Scott really had to start working the audience," says Kretz. "They hated him, they hated us, they



Feeling the heat in the early 90s: Scott Weiland (left) and Eric Kretz.



STP playing at the Greek Theatre in Berkeley, California on July 4, 1993.

If the criticism hurt the band, it certainly didn't hurt them commercially. By the end of 1993, *Core* had topped three million sales. But there were darker clouds gathering on the horizon – ones that would irrevocably change the band.

On June 12, 1993, Stone Temple Pilots kicked off their Bar-B-Q-Mitvah Tour, a kind of mini-Lollapalooza package tour also featuring Texan loons Butthole Surfers, Oklahoma weird-beards the Flaming Lips, funk pioneers Basehead and cult punk heroes FIREHOSE.

"We told the promoters we want to do shows where shows haven't been done – like fishing ponds and golf courses," says Kretz. "Lollapalooza was out at the time, and they were trying to do something different. We thought: 'How do we do something different? Well, fuck it, let's try to make something all our own.' And it was quite a big party."

For Scott Weiland, that party was about to spiral out of control. In his autobiography, 2011's *Not Dead And Not For Sale*, the singer recalled his fascination with heroin – or at least its then-distant allure. "I associated heroin with romance, glamour, danger and rock'n'roll excess," he wrote. "More than that, I was curious about the connection between heroin and creativity. At that point, I couldn't imagine my life without at least dabbling with the King Of Drugs."

When the tour hit New York, Weiland decided to take the plunge. When other, unnamed musicians clubbed together to buy some China White heroin, he added his name to the order. For that night's show,

Stone Temple Pilots decided to dress up as Kiss. Before he hit the stage in his Paul Stanley drag, Weiland snorted heroin for the first time. "I was undisturbed and unafraid," he recalled. "A free-floating man in a space without demons and doubts. The show was beautiful. The high was beautiful."

No matter how he gussied it up in poetry, a line had been crossed – one that the singer would never truly come back across.

"The start of his heavy drug intake definitely came towards the end of that tour," says Kretz. "Before that we were all heavy drinkers. I'd watch him drink until he passed out. He didn't do it all the time, but it happened. But that tour changed things. He learned some bad habits, and unfortunately they stayed with him."

**B**y the time the campaign for *Core* was over, the album was well on its way to selling eight million copies. Success provided scant armour against the brickbats of the press. Instead, STP doubled down and channelled their anger, frustration and songwriting craft into a glorious follow-up, *Purple*. Like its predecessor, it sold in the multimillions – and it silenced their critics.

But for Scott Weiland, success – and curiosity – came at a cost. His on-off-on-again drug habit would define his life over the next 20 years as much as his music did. He fell into a tragically predictable cycle of arrests, rehab and relapses, while his relationship with his STP bandmates ebbed and flowed, with singer and band

hated anybody who was opening for Megadeth. We definitely earned our stripes on that tour."

While Stone Temple Pilots were out on the road, *Core* began to cook with gas. The success of the Seattle bands had spawned a public appetite for anything that sounded grungey, edgy, anthemic and preferably all three, and STP fitted the bill.

"I don't know if you could ever be prepared for that rocket ride," says Robert. "Our A&R guy, Tom Carolan, said something I'll always remember: 'You gotta fasten your seat belts.' He was right. We were on the road for fourteen months. Not a lot of people can do that. But it's the mental and emotional side of what occurs that plays with your soul."

If anyone was playing with Stone Temple Pilots' soul, it was the media. While the band had their champions in the rock press on both sides of the Atlantic, the mainstream media piled in on them. The *New York Times* compared them unfavourably

to Pearl Jam and Nirvana; *Rolling Stone* voted them the Worst New Band Of The Year.

From being a cool little outfit doing their own thing in the LA clubs, STP suddenly became the press's whipping boys. They were accused of everything from cynical plagiarism to the corporatization of grunge. The criticism snowballed – it became a weird form of schoolyard bullying. Eric Kretz and Robert DeLeo look back on it all with the grace that only a quarter of a century's distance can bring. "Sometimes you just take the punishment," says Kretz. "You just say: 'You know what? I can turn it around to my benefit.' And critics aren't always right."

"We weren't making records for them," says Robert DeLeo. "Most of those people didn't even listen to our records. They just kind of copycat wrote what everyone else was writing."

Dean DeLeo is a different matter. The critical kickings meted out to the band still rankle after all this time. When the subject is brought up, there's a pause, and the conversational temperature drops by several degrees.

"I've been making records for twenty-five years," he says eventually. "So I've earned where I don't need to entertain a question like that. If I was asking you questions, and you had a decade and a half under your belt, I wouldn't ask that kind of question. You're asking me about something that happened twenty-five years ago. I wouldn't even know how to answer that."

**"WE WERE ON THE CUSP OF AN EXCITING MOVEMENT IN ROCK'N'ROLL, AND WE WERE PART OF IT. NO ONE CAN TAKE THAT AWAY FROM US."**

ERIC KRETZ

## STONE TEMPLE PILOTS



**"I DON'T MUCH CARE FOR THE TERM 'ROCK STAR'. I NEVER LOOKED AT SCOTT LIKE THAT. I LOOKED AT HIM LIKE MY BROTHER."**

**DEAN DELEO**

splitting and reuniting multiple times over the years, like a married couple who couldn't live with each other but couldn't live without each other too.

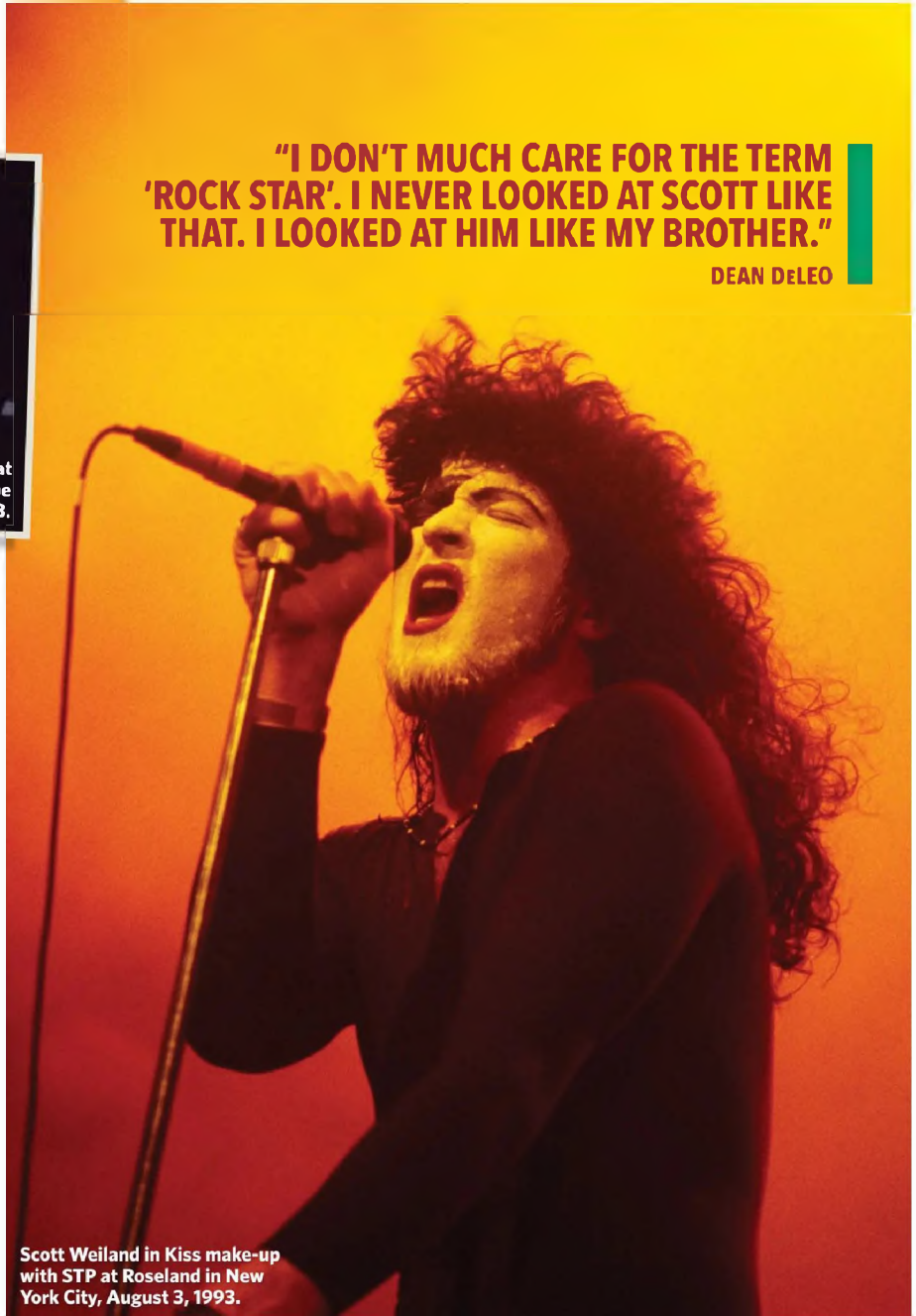
In December 2015, the inevitable happened. Weiland was found dead in the bunk of his tour bus before a gig in Minnesota with his new band The Wildabouts. A combination of drugs was found in his system. The cause of death was determined to have been an accidental overdose of cocaine, MDA and alcohol. His former bandmates in Stone Temple Pilots released a statement paying tribute to their fallen colleague: "You were gifted beyond words. Part of that gift was part of your curse."

"I think about Scott a lot," Robert DeLeo says now. "Every single day. Every aspect of his character, from the beginning of the band to the day he passed. We went through a hell of a lot together."

More than 25 years on, *Core* stands in part as a tribute to Weiland, but also as a marker of Stone Temple Pilots' tenacity. Other bands would have crumbled in the face of opprobrium, but STP didn't just transcend it, they turned the tables on their critics. Today, they should finally get the respect they deserve.

"Man, we were just so young and hungry back then," says Eric Kretz. "We were fired up to make a difference, we truly were. We were on the cusp of an exciting movement in rock'n'roll, and we were part of it. No one can take that away from us." 📌

**Scott Weiland in Kiss make-up with STP at Roseland in New York City, August 3, 1993.**



GORDON MUMFORD/CONIC PIX/GETTY IMAGES

## "PEOPLE STILL WANT TO HEAR THESE SONGS"

How Stone Temple Pilots rose from the ashes of tragedy once more.

On July 20, news broke that Chester Bennington had been found dead in his Los Angeles home. Although he was best known for fronting Linkin Park, Bennington had also stood in for Scott Weiland in Stone Temple Pilots between 2013 and 2015, and he sang on their acclaimed *High Rise* EP.

"I remember we were rehearsing for one of the last couple of shows we were doing with Chester in 2015," says STP's Robert DeLeo. "We were in a rehearsal room, and Chris Cornell walked in -

he was rehearsing next door. We all said hi and hugged. I look back at that moment now and think: 'I would have never, ever had the thought that those two guys would no longer be with us.'"

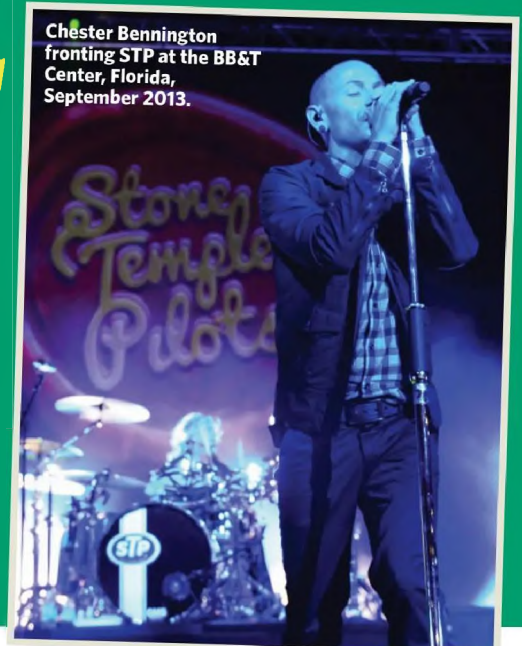
Bennington's death came a year and a half after that of Scott Weiland. But despite having lost both their singers, the surviving Pilots were unwilling to let go of the band's legacy. "People still want to hear these songs," says Robert.

In 2016, STP announced they had recruited vocalist

Jeff Gutt, formerly singer with Dry Cell and onetime *American Idol* contestant. The new line-up has made two albums, 2017's *Stone Temple Pilots* and 2020's largely acoustic *Perdida*.

"It was like I already knew them," Gutt told *Classic Rock* in 2017. "And I knew that I had what it took to do the gig. Because I'm here first for the band members, second for Scott and Chester, and third for me."

**Chester Bennington fronting STP at the BB&T Center, Florida, September 2013.**





# ★ CLASSIC ★ ROCK

HIGH VOLTAGE ⚡ ROCK'N'ROLL



# 1993

Grunge's new superstars were already becoming jaded with fame, but a legion of bands were waiting to take their place.



**F**ifty years from now, rock'n'roll historians will look back on 1993 and think, 'What the hell happened there?' The speeding juggernaut of the Alternative Nation T-boned mainstream culture at maximum speed, leaving a trail of carnage and insanity. If that wasn't weird enough, a running commentary was provided by pair of cackling cartoon sofa-dwellers named Beavis and Butt-head, who made their bow on MTV that March.

In the real world, things seemed as normal as they ever were. The year's big single was Whitney Houston's wedding dance favourite *I Will Always Love You*, *Jurassic Park* revolutionised the big screen and weird-headed sci-fi series *The X-Files* debuted on TV. So far, so predictable.

Yet a parallel set of events were taking place at the same time. Guns N' Roses mammoth *Use Your Illusion* tour came to a lumbering close two-and-a-half years after it started. It felt like curtain coming down on an ancient, Aquanet-fugged era – even GN'R themselves would pretty much disappear from the limelight for the rest of the decade, and when they did return only Axl Rose was left standing.

Plenty of other bands were ready to fill the breach. Inevitably, chief among them were Nirvana, whose third album, *In Utero* – released that September – was the sound of a band violently pushing back against the fame which had been thrust upon them. A couple of months later, they played a set for MTV's *Unplugged* show, with the resultant album being released in the wake of Kurt Cobain's death the following year. Jadedness was in the air – Pearl Jam's blockbusting second album, *Vs*, was almost as intent at dismantling the band's own legend as *In Utero* was for Nirvana.

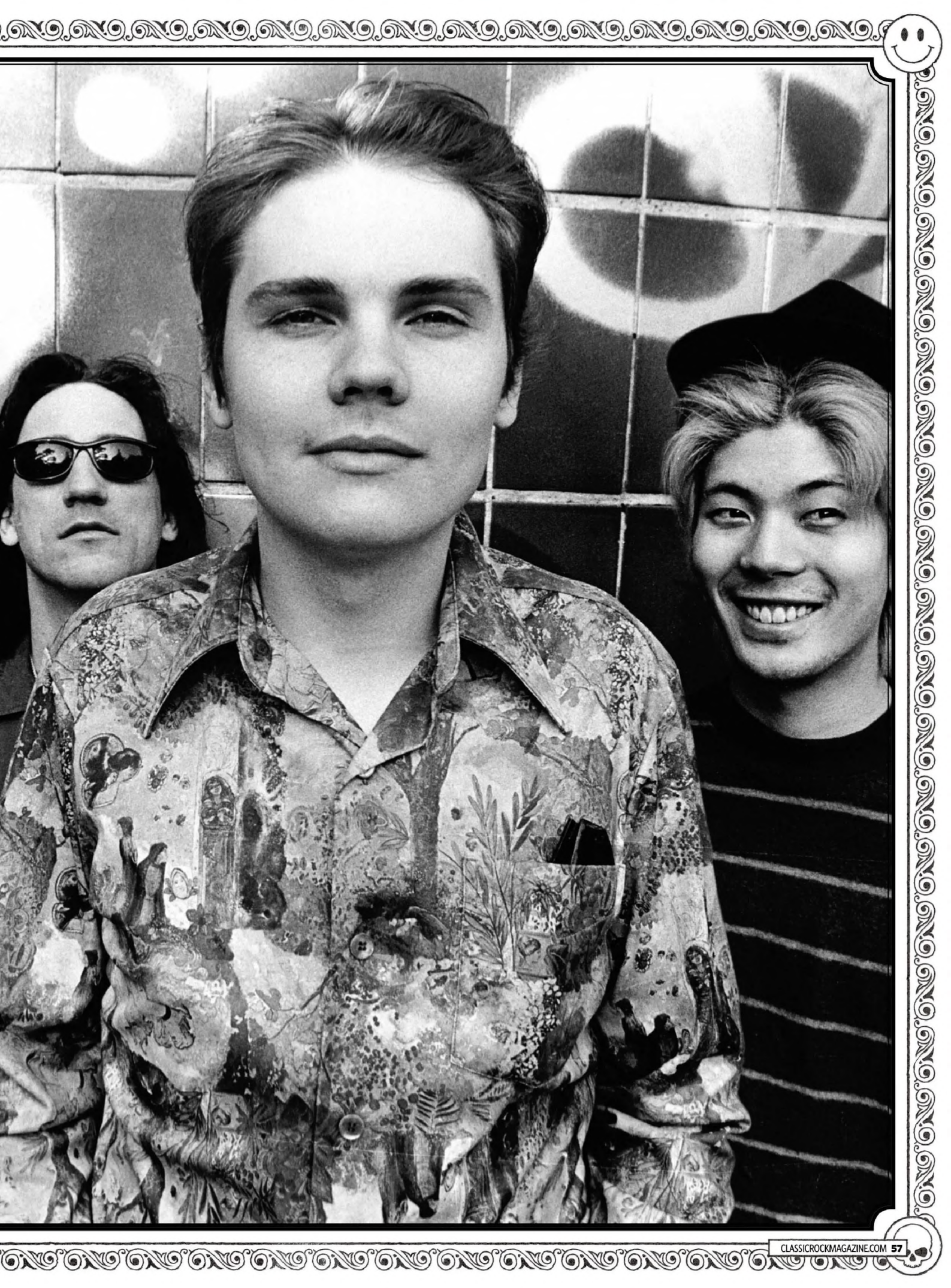
But for a legion of bands, this was an opportunity waiting to be seized. Billy Corgan (pictured right) – always an outsider even among outsiders – served up his first true masterpiece with The Smashing Pumpkins' second album, *Siamese Dream*. LA alt-metallers Tool dropped their debut full-length album, *Undertow*, taking a huge step on a path that would see them becoming arguably the biggest cult band of the decade. Their onetime touring buddies Rage Against The Machine cause a rumpus during a stop-off in Philadelphia on that year's Lollapalooza tour by standing silently onstage for 15 minutes, stark naked apart from duct tape across their mouths, as a protest against censorship group the PMRC.

In the UK, a bunch of disgruntled indie rockers were reacting badly to the perceived domination of American culture. The opening volleys of what would come to be called Britpop were fired by Blur and Suede via *Modern Life Is Rubbish* and their eponymous, Bowie-indebted debut respectively. But the best British rock album of the year came from a bunch of scraggly, drug-fuelled fuck-ups called The Wildhearts, whose *Earth Vs The Wildhearts* remains one the decade's greatest under-the-radar albums and a bona fide cult classic today.

This paint-splattered canvas of a year was chaotic and hard to follow, but that was the brilliant thing about it. Suddenly it seemed like anything was possible. And so it proved. ●









# THE BIRTH OF TOOL

When Tool formed and descended onto an unsuspecting Hollywood in 1993, alternative music was about to be dragged into a whole new world of possibilities.

WORDS: JON WIEDERHORN • ADDITIONAL REPORTING: ELEANOR GOODMAN

**T**he origins of Tool are as unusual as the band's music, and were strangely dependent on the comedy band Green Jello formed by Hollywood resident Bill Manspeaker in 1981. In the late 1980s, future Tool drummer Danny Carey had moved from Kansas to LA and joined the band Karmageddon, which included Green Jello

guitarist Steven Shenar. At the time, Green Jello had a pool of 50 members, and Steven asked Bill if he could bring his other bandmates to jam. Nine musicians met up at Danny's Hollywood rehearsal space. In no time, Danny was playing with Green Jello, and tipped Bill off about a 6,600 square-foot artist's loft space nearby, which became the band's home base.

"I had a whole scene going there," Bill said. "At three o'clock in the morning there would be 80 people at my house jamming, creating costumes [for Green Jello] and being creative. Anybody that needed a place to stay could stay, so there were always 10 or 20 people living in the house, and we just fed off each other and played. I didn't care if I had 20 guitar players, 14 bass players and seven drummers all



Tool at the Green Jello loft in Hollywood, December 1991

GETTY X2

jamming. "Yeah, sure! Come along. Play!"

Soon after, Bill met future Tool guitarist Adam Jones, who had a good career working in Hollywood on movie special effects, for films including *Predator 2*, *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* and *Jurassic Park*, and had no intention of joining a band full-time. Adam, who was born in Park Ridge, Illinois, started playing guitar after he found an old acoustic lying around his house, and in his teens he played in a couple of no-name bands with his brother before forming The Electric Sheep with future Rage Against The Machine guitarist Tom Morello.

According to Bill, Adam's girlfriend at



Maynard James Keenan at the Jello loft in Hollywood with a pet salamander, November 1991.

## “OUR MUSIC WAS ALL ABOUT RELEASING THAT PRIMAL SCREAM.”

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

the time worked in an office with his girlfriend. It wasn't long before they were talking about Green Jello, who wore numerous goofy costumes on stage, including a cow, a pumpkin and a lump of shit (known for obvious reasons as Shitman). Intrigued, Adam's girlfriend told her co-worker that Adam worked on costume effects. At their girlfriends' suggestion, Adam and Bill met to talk shop.

Around the same time, the guitarist met Maynard James Keenan through a friend the singer was dating. The two musicians bonded about art, movies and music and soon became good friends.

"One day, Maynard played me a tape of a joke band that he was in. I went, 'Maynard, you can sing. You sing good.' So I kept bugging him to start a band on the side with me, just for fun," Adam said in a 2008 interview. "At the time, I just wanted to play music as an outlet. I thought, 'Here's my job working on special effects for movies, and there's my hobby playing guitar.'"

The songs Maynard played Adam were by the band Children Of The Anachronistic Dynasty, which he had formed in Michigan in the mid-80s before he moved to LA. One of the tracks was an early version of *Sober*, unrecognisable from the version that helped break Tool. Hoping to convince Maynard to jam with them, Adam brought him to Bill's loft, where he was introduced to the Green Jello team. Although Adam and Maynard didn't start playing together right away,

Maynard, who was engaged by Green Jello's scatological humour, joined the band as their second singer.

"I was very welcoming to everybody," Bill said. "Somebody needs help, you give them food, you give them a place to live, you help them out creatively and you become friends. So Jim moves in, and he joins Green Jello and our little group of artists and musicians. But Jim's a little grumpy. When someone would come to the house, I had to tell them first, 'My roommate Jim is a little grumpy. He doesn't mean any harm, he's a good guy. If he says something rude or weird just ignore it. He's a good person.' So, Jim joins us and is creative. Then Jim cut his hair, and decided his name was going to be Maynard."

**M**aynard had a blast being a part of Manspeaker's crazy art collective, but at first he was reluctant to do something more serious, which is why he hadn't yet jammed with Adam. As time went by, however, he got tired of working on music video sets all day for less than \$50, so he decided that his creativity might be better applied in a professional band. And being new to the city gave him a different insight than that of many local musicians.

"I had just moved to LA in December '89 and it was strange for me. It felt different," Maynard explained. "It seems like kids that grew up there are kind of jaded because they've seen lots of people come and go and

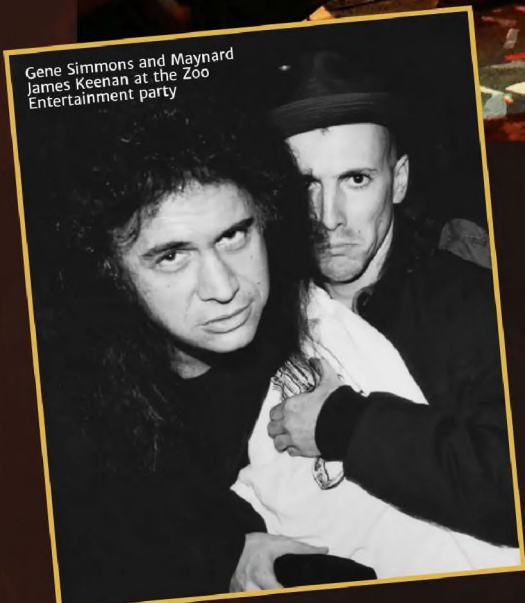
Tool performing at the Zoo Entertainment party to celebrate their signing. Club Lingerie, Hollywood.

# “I LISTENED TO THEIR DEMO NON-STOP AND HAD MY MIND BLOWN.”

MATT MARSHALL, A&R



Gene Simmons and Maynard James Keenan at the Zoo Entertainment party



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people fail and people succeed. They can't really be excited and let that excitement push them into some kind of success. Going around with friends to clubs, I started noticing that most of the people that were playing music clearly were taking cues from A&R guys or marketing people. I'm an opinionated guy, so I kept expressing that opinion, and a bunch of people said to me, 'Well, if you think you can do better, go for it.'"

When Maynard agreed to start jamming with Adam, they recruited Maynard's friend Paul D'Amour, who had recently moved from Seattle to LA, to play bass with them. Since Maynard was already playing in Green Jello, and recognised Danny's acrobatic abilities, he

tried to get him to join them in Tool. Danny, who was already playing with numerous bands at the time, declined the invitation, so they flagged down a former drummer of Autograph to join them on drums.

"The guy didn't show up, and Danny filled in because he felt sorry for us," Adam recalled. "We were laughing our asses off about it afterward, because Danny said, 'Well, I'll sit in on the session, but that's it.' He sat in, and then he went, 'Wow, we should jam again!' Then he said we should jam a couple of times a week. From that point on he was in."

It wasn't long before Tool had a handful of solid songs, which they eventually split between 1992's *Opiate* and 1993's *Undertow*. While Tool became more psychedelic and lyrically profound in the late 90s, they were initially motivated by being broke, living in a smoggy, overcrowded city, hating their neighbours and other pet peeves.

"My musical approach came from a lot of the frustration of living in LA," Maynard said. "I was busting ass trying to survive. Rent was high, and there was a lot of weird hypocrisy in this dog and pony show that happens within the film and music industries, which I found very awkward. A lot of the original pieces were inspired by that kind of energy. The music was emotionally driven. It was all about emoting and releasing that primal scream."

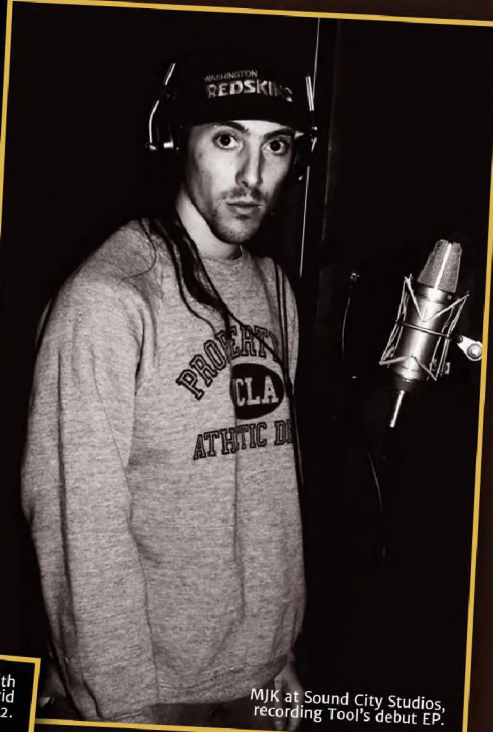
When they had enough songs written, Tool started booking shows. Their first was at Bill's loft. His friend Kevin Coogan, who worked at Green Jello's label, Zoo Records, was there that night, and went to work raving about Tool. So his colleague, A&R man Matt Marshall, agreed to catch one of their shows a couple weeks later, at a venue called Club Lingerie.

"It was one of their first gigs, so they went on at one in the morning," Matt recalled. "I was so tired I almost didn't stay. But luckily I stuck around and saw them playing to about 10 people. And yeah, I was sort of shocked and wondering, 'Was I just tired, or were they as good as they appeared to be?' I asked Kevin if he could get a demo for me from Bill. A day or two later he showed up with *that* tape, of a demo they'd made, and I spent a few days listening to it non-stop and having my mind blown."

Tool were signed by Zoo Entertainment after only their seventh gig. Clearly, there was some luck involved, having met the right people at the right time. But the band's approach to music was refreshing compared to all the other groups that were trying to get record deals by tapping into the alt-rock/grunge market and the success of Nirvana. Tool had a different kind of aesthetic; each member had a distinct personality that helped

Adam Jones recording Tool's debut EP, at Sound City Studios in Van Nuys, LA, December 22, 1991.

Paul D'Amour at the Jello loft in Hollywood, November 24, 1991.



MJM at Sound City Studios, recording Tool's debut EP.

Danny Carey with Tool at English Acid in LA, January 1, 1992.



propel the band. Maynard was heavily influenced by songwriters like Joni Mitchell and Swans' Michael Gira, both of whom injected a lot of emotion and heart-on-sleeve vulnerability into their music. Danny was a highly skilled drummer heavily influenced by proggy players such as Rush's Neil Peart. Paul, who came from the Midwest grunge scene, took a guitarist's approach to bass, giving the songs a melodic anchor. Adam wasn't just a power-chord riffer; he was also like a Surrealist painter who created dizzying pictures with sound, and didn't pander to conventional ideas of song structure.

"There was just no passion in the majority of the bands that were playing around town in Los Angeles," Maynard said. "There was this A&R feeding frenzy out there, and no one was really delivering live. Then there we were, these four pretty pissed-off, relatively talented – comparatively – musicians. And I'd say we owed a lot to Nirvana. Nirvana opened the door for most music guys around town who were chasing their tails trying to find the next big thing. They hear us, and we don't

sound like most of the other stuff going on. So they don't really get it, but they knew that it was different."

Matt Marshall played the band's demo for the president of the label, Lou Maglia, who was impressed. Soon after, the two of them were on a night out together to watch LA hopefuls Dumpster. When that band finished early, Lou agreed to go to see Tool at LA dive bar Coconut Teaszer.

"The guys knew that there was a chance he'd show up," Matt said, "and they put on to this day one of the most ridiculously incredible sets I'd ever see them play. Maynard was super-intense, maniacal and all over the stage, and the rest of the band were just as phenomenal as they always were. Lou was

like, 'Get them to my office tomorrow!'"

Zoo Entertainment hired producer Sylvia Massy to work with the band on the *Opiate* EP. Before they were scheduled to enter Sound City studios in Van Nuys, California, the band planned to play a New Year's show at Bill's loft. Knowing it would be a wild gig, they decided to set up professional recording equipment.

"I rented a remote truck with an API console in it and had it in the parking lot of the loft building," Sylvia recalled. "We ran cabling up through the upstairs window to get into the main venue up there, and there was a huge party. Green Jello headlined, but Tool opened. It was a mob scene there, and Maynard was on fire. He really engaged the audience. His stature was like a troll, and he would lean over and spit into the mic, and his shrieks, his screams, were blood-curdling and really exciting. Yet he had kind of a soft, feminine dynamic too, because his voice could be very soft and he had a lot of control over that. So two of the songs we recorded at the show [*Jerk-Off* and *Cold And Ugly*] were used on *Opiate*."

While Tool had written most of the songs on *Undertow* by the time they recorded *Opiate*, they decided to enter the international music scene with a bang, not a whine. So they put their loudest, most abrasive songs on *Opiate* and saved the rest for later. "For some reason, we felt like no one would take us seriously unless we recorded only our most killer, aggressive, in-your-face songs and put them

**“HE WOULD SPIT IN THE MIC AND HAD A BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM.”**

SYLVIA MASSY, PRODUCER



Tool, 1993 (left to right): Adam Jones, Maynard James Keenan, Paul D'Amour, Danny Carey.

## “WE SMASHED OUR GUITARS AND TORE THEM APART WITH CHAINSAWS.”

MAYNARD JAMES KEENAN

out there at one time,” Adam said. “And I think that got us typecast as a metal band right off the bat. It’s kind of funny, because the song I thought was the least aggressive, *Opiate*, was the more popular one on the record.”

Armed with *Opiate*, Tool headed out on their first proper tour, and later opened some shows for Henry Rollins. “We’d find ourselves in some place like Akron, Ohio, playing a venue that looks like it holds about 500 people, but there are only five people there and those are the guys that are gonna play after us,” Maynard recalled. “It was very awkward, but it didn’t really matter to us, because we were still getting to know each other. So being on a stage like that, hearing what things sound like in different venues, getting used to travelling, I think that was a very important step in our growth.”

Realising that they needed to release a full album soon, to headline clubs and possibly receive more mainstream attention, Tool headed back into the studio with Sylvia Massy, this time splitting their time between Sound City and the dirtier, grimmer Grandmaster Studios.

“That was a bit of a rugged place,” Sylvia recalled. “When we were recording at Grandmaster it was raining, and the water was pouring into the tracking room so badly that we had to stop recording because the sound was bleeding into the microphone. It was mouldy and there were mice living in the walls. At one point our monitors stopped working, and it turned out mice had chewed through the wire in the walls.”

*Undertow* may have been written mostly at the same time as *Opiate*, but sonically there’s a

world of difference between the two. *Opiate* was gritty and heavy, balancing crunch with a atmosphere. On songs like *Sober* and *Prison Sex*, *Undertow* did the opposite, allowing Maynard to emote in a way that revealed sensitivity along with pain. The rest of the band found individual spaces to play to their strengths, instead of tumbling over one another.

“We developed a lot in between those two albums, just as songwriters,” Danny said. “Before, I had a tendency to play everything and anything I could think of at any given moment. With *Undertow*, I started definitely playing more for the song and maturing as a musician and listening a lot more to my bandmates. And they were doing the same.”

Tool spent approximately three weeks in the studio recording *Undertow*. Once they had recorded the main tracks, they decided to experiment and create something rooted in pure chaos and destruction. The result was the album closer, *Disgustipated*. The dissonant, jarring track was inspired by an acoustic anti-vivisection benefit show Tool took part in at the Hollywood Palladium.

“We bought a stack of five-dollar acoustic guitars in Tijuana, Mexico and we came out

Maynard James Keenan with Tool at Lollapalooza at Shoreline Amphitheatre, June 23, 1993.



GETTY X2



Maynard with Rage Against The Machine at Lollapalooza, 1993.

FRANK WHITE

and started playing Maynard's Dick [found on 2000's *Salival* box set] for this sold-out crowd that wasn't at all there to see us," Maynard said. "Right in the middle of the song, we all grabbed these guitars and we just started smashing them and pulled out chainsaws and tore the hell out of these things. I had a shotgun with blanks in it, and I was shooting it inside the Palladium. Flames were leaping out of the barrel towards the curtain. I'm saying into the mic, 'This is necessary! Life feeds on life [the repeating lyric that would end up on *Disgustipated*]' and here are all these horrified people there to save the bunnies. They thought we were assholes. Of course, we were amused with ourselves, and that's all that really mattered."

"When we first got approached by this girl to play that show, she was wearing leather Docs and talking about how killing animals was wrong," Adam recalled. "We were like, 'Umm, you're wearing leather Docs,' So we said, 'OK, we'll do it,' but we went the other way with it. Life feeding on life is very natural. So, after we did this big thing, the same girl wearing leather Docs went, 'Oh, that was sooo great.' She totally missed the point!"

For *Disgustipated*, the band bought two pianos for \$100 each. With the permission of the studio owner, they set up the pianos in the huge indoor parking lot, smashed the instruments and shot them full of holes.

## “THE STUDIO WAS MOULDY AND THERE WERE MICE LIVING IN THE WALLS.”

SYLVIA MASSY, PRODUCER

Then, with the help of Sylvia Massy and programmer Eric Anest, they scrambled the sounds of demolition to create a haunting industrial track. It ends with a nine-minute recording of crickets, and a snippet of spoken-word poetry that was left on Maynard's answering machine.

For Tool's record release party, Maynard somehow got the Hollywood Church of Scientology to agree to allow the band to play a special concert on their grounds.

"I kept getting calls from the Center wanting to hear the music, and it was like, 'Oh, I don't want to send them the music,'" said the band's former publicist, Leah Horwitz. "And then they came over and met with us, and they did the concert there, and it went well. It was just an interesting place to play."

"It was all a huge sarcastic thing," Bill said. "Scientology is a huge religion here in Hollywood. So Tool played the Celebrity Center in this gothic-looking castle, and only the super-important Scientologists get to go there and party. Maynard just wanted to sing these disruptive songs in this place of Scientology. He wanted to be annoying."

For all the buzz Tool had created, *Undertow* got off to a slow start. The EP shifted about 2,500 units in its first week. With strong connections from the band's label and management team, Tool were given a slot on the second stage of the 1993 Lollapalooza festival, which also featured Primus, Alice In Chains and their LA buddies Rage Against The

Machine among others. Halfway through the tour, Tool were moved from the second stage to the main stage, where they were one of the highlights.

"At that time, that was the only tour of that sort in the world, which was just mindblowing for us," Danny said. "All of a sudden we were playing to 20,000 people a night. I had so much adrenaline, I'd count off the first song and then it would seem like I'd blink my eyes and it was over. But we got a lot of attention for that, so MTV played our video for *Sober* one time and they got bombarded with requests. We watched our record go from nowhere up to Number 50 on the charts, and it stayed there for two years."

As Tool continued to attract more mainstream listeners - *Undertow* would eventually go double platinum - the band started questioning why its subversive messages were winning over commercial audiences, and whether they had turned the wrong corner somewhere. In addition, personality conflicts erupted, and being in a crowded bus for months at a time exacerbated tensions within the band. By the end of the tour, the four musicians that had been best friends needed some space, and parted ways with Paul D'Amour due to creative and personal differences.

"Some of the growing pains really started to set in when we were on the road for *Undertow*, where you're starting to figure each other out and figure out what the nuances were and hang-ups and emotional and mental obstacles," Maynard recalled.

"We started to really see that the business is a tough one to fucking navigate and get away from. I think we went from zero to jaded in under 30 seconds. The honeymoon was definitely over."

But the band's creative and commercial success had only just begun.

# Greetings From S#\*tsville!

It was 1993 and grunge was running rampant across the world. But in the UK a bunch of dysfunctional no-hopers were staging a one-band fightback. This is how **The Wildhearts** made their masterpiece debut...

Words: Paul Rees

In the summer of 1993 the prevailing sound was of down-tuned guitars and recycled Black Sabbath riffs. Alienation and ennui were lyrical staples and plaid shirts and Doc Martens de rigueur as uniform. Two years after Nirvana released *Nevermind*, grunge was at its all-pervasive zenith and American alt.rock in the ascendancy.

Already that year, Smashing Pumpkins and Tool had each brought out their second album, respectively *Siamese Dream* and *Undertow*. The biggest guns were looming, too. Nirvana's *In Utero* was being readied for a September release, Pearl Jam's *Vs* a month later. Three weeks ahead of *In Utero*, another now-classic album was released. And it came from an unlikely source.

The Wildhearts had evolved out of such inglorious other bands as the Quireboys, Dogs D'Amour, Tattooed Love Boys and hardly recalled NWOBHM-ers Tobruk. Forming as Wild Hearts, they at first comported themselves as faintly ridiculous Guns N'Roses clones with their teased hair and cowboy boots. Such was the chaotic nature of almost everything they did, it took them four years to get around to making their first album. Even then, *Earth Vs The Wildhearts* was spewed out on to tape that was so worn it was almost transparent, and with the four members of the band in a state guitarist CJ now describes succinctly as "fucked".

Yet the result sounded not only entirely at odds with the musical mood of the time, but also almost stupidly exciting. All at once, *Earth Vs The Wildhearts* shot a restorative cocktail into the veins of a then-moribund British rock scene, made the idea of grafting



bittersweet harmonies on to Metallica riffs seem entirely cogent, and marked the flowering of a rare and genuine maverick talent in the misbegotten form of singer/songwriter/guitarist Ginger. The Wildhearts were to prove incapable of sustaining any semblance of *Earth Vs* dead-ahead focus, but nonetheless the sheer potency of the record has been amplified over time.

"That was the first album I ever recorded, and for whatever reason it's the one I'm still talking about to this day," Ginger reflects. "I guess there's just a sense of honesty to *Earth Vs* that people like. We weren't trying to be glamorous, and it must have worked for us.

"I haven't listened to it for twenty years. People are very, very fond of it and for that I'm grateful, but I've no real connection with those songs now. As a whole it's like a snapshot of your first shag. When the reviews came out and it was: 'The sound of British rock finally waking up,' we were like: 'Are these fuckers talking about our album?' It didn't make sense then and it still doesn't now." >

**The men who fell to Earth: (l-r) Stidi, Ginger, Danny McCormack and CJ, 1993.**



CARINA REES / STEVE DOUGLE





*“There’s a sense of honesty to Earth to the Wildhearts that people like.”*

*Ginger*



At the dawn of 1989, no success of any kind seemed within reach of the man born David Walls in South Shields, Tyneside. Ginger, as he would become known, had just then been thrown out of Faces-fixated bar-room rockers the Quireboys for being too heavy a guitar player and an even heavier drinker and general party animal.

During the fleeting time he was in the Quireboys he had given no indication that he could write songs, much less that he was able to bring together such disparate styles as thrash metal, glam rock, punk rock and alt.country. Not that to begin with he even knew how to translate this gumbo of influences into real flesh-and-blood sound.

With Wild Hearts, Ginger started off by hitching on to the last knockings of the hair-metal bandwagon. A couple of early line-ups included one of two vocalists, former Tobruk frontman Stuart 'Snake' Neale and one Dunken F Mullet from another band of also-rans, Mournblade, neither of whom would last the course.

The fledgling group recorded a grand total of nine demo tapes with this pair, which combined did at least land them a development deal with Warner Brothers subsidiary EastWest Records, but no distinction. After Ginger was eventually persuaded to take on lead vocals, they settled on a line-up comprised of founders Ginger and guitarist CJ, late of the Tattooed Love Boys, plus former Dogs D'Amour drummer Bam, and on bass Danny McCormack.

It was Ginger becoming their lead singer, abetted by the discovery that CJ was naturally inclined towards vocal harmonies and, what's more, that their two voices fitted like the proverbial hand in glove, that gave the now Wildhearts their wings.

"Up to that point we'd wanted a cross

between Joe Strummer, Robin Zander, Steven Tyler and Paul Stanley," a laughing CJ recalls of their vocalist search. "Of course, that person doesn't exist. And now all of a sudden we had these really lovely Beatles, Beach Boys-style harmonies."

"I hated singing," adds Ginger. "I'm only comfortable now when I sing in a Geordie accent. Over the years, I've wished that I'd held out and found a proper singer, but I doubt we'd be having this conversation now if that'd happened."

In the two years that followed after he stepped up to the mic, songs flowed out from Ginger and on to an EP, *Mondo Akimbo A-Go-Go*, and a mini-album, *Don't Be Happy... Just Worry*. Bam jumped back into Dogs D'Amour, Andrew Stidi' Stidolph took over the drum stool, and from touring with everyone from NWOBHM icons Diamond Head to Alice In Chains and the Manic Street Preachers, The Wildhearts' sound hardened and crystallised.

"All along I was kind of cherry-picking the songs I liked best for the first album, because that's what bands used to do when I was young," says Ginger. "I wanted it to have the best chance possible of being accepted. But right up until it got released I figured there was a strong chance people would just turn around and go: 'No, you can't do that.' That mixing heavy with pop wouldn't work, because otherwise someone else would have already done it."

"It was going totally against the grain. Which for me was the more reason to do it. Plus I had the confidence of youth. I hated grunge, couldn't understand why anyone would like it. The music I was listening to was played by the sort of

**"Okay, whose turn is it to tidy up?" CJ, Ginger, Danny and Bam, 1992.**

*"The Wildhearts was dysfunctional as a group and as individuals. We weren't very nice people."*

CJ

people you would want to invite to a party. This was years before any of us had even tried heroin. We were all about speed, which was just as well because it was all we could afford. I always thought heroin was the least rock-and-roll drug in the world, because it put people to sleep."

Charged with shepherding that first album into being was Dante Bonutto, recently added to the A&R department at EastWest. A former rock writer, Bonutto had seen Ginger out and about at gigs and they shared a passion for Kiss, but it wasn't until the sessions for *Don't Be Happy* that they were formally introduced. Or to be more accurate, this was occasioned as Bonutto watched Ginger drive a tractor into the recording studio's swimming pool.

"I stood there thinking: 'He's not going into the pool, surely?' And he did," Bonutto remembers. "That sort of set the tone for our relationship from then on. There was always a drama going on."

"How brattish and belligerent the band were put people off as much as it attracted them," CJ qualifies. "It wasn't an act. The Wildhearts was dysfunctional as a group and as individuals. We just weren't very nice people."

In early 1993, EastWest put the Wildhearts into Wessex studios in north London for an intended short, sharp demo session. Wessex was where the Sex Pistols had put down *Never Mind The Bollocks* and the Clash *London Calling*. There was no fanfare or import attending the Wildhearts' date. Working with the in-house engineer, they had to use so-called 'gash tape', a cheap quarter-inch reel onto which countless other wannabes had previously recorded tracks. The budget was

so restrictive that Bonutto practically had to beg his paymasters for a hand-out so that the band could finish up an additional song, *Loveshit*, that Ginger knocked out at the last minute.

His motivation for *Loveshit* was unconventional. One day, he reminisced with Bonutto about a TV advert of the 1980s for the body spray

Limara. The ad was popular among teenage boys of the time for showing a pneumatic blonde bathing naked in a waterfall.

Ginger's specific point of interest was the ad's theme song, *Remember My Name*, a strident rocker that Bonutto informed him was sung, in a full-throated roar, by Stevie Lange, then-wife of producer 'Mutt' Lange. And soon enough, Stevie was brought to Wessex to sing backing vocals on Ginger's newest song.

"My puberty loved that advert and her voice," Ginger says. "I can remember running away and writing that song just for Stevie to sing. I didn't want her to have



to sing any of the others that had all these swear words, but I called it *Loveshit* by accident. Not the smartest bolt in the box."

Like the other 10 songs that would make up the Wildhearts' debut album, *Loveshit* was recorded live in one or two takes. Most of the rest were drawn from more direct personal experience: Ginger wrote *Miles Away Girl* about his girlfriend of the time, a nurse, and *Greetings From Shitsville* about his flat in London's Belsize Park. Although he wasn't above indulging in a spot of self-mythology on the latter: as CJ recalls: "NW3 is one of the richest postcodes in the world and Ginger's place was actually alright."

Musically, the tracks were like fun-fair rides, a roller-coaster cascade of ideas and reference points, veering off at wild tangents and as if none could be made epic enough to contain all the ideas rampaging around in Ginger's head. *Everlong*, for example, ran to six and a half minutes, accommodated at least four different, mighty riffs, and still gave the impression it could go for many minutes more.

"I just wanted to make a kind of music that I wasn't hearing at the time," says Ginger. "And I had nothing to write about other than what was going on in my life. That's been my practice ever since. It means that whenever I go on stage, no matter how I'm feeling, at least I'm not a fraud."

"I still think today that Ginger is hugely underrated," offers Bonutto. "I would put him up alongside Elvis Costello and Paul Weller as one of our great British songwriters, and he's probably been more consistent than either of them. I've never heard a bad song he's written."

A kind of reckless abandon was another of Ginger's signature traits. It was this that surely led him to title three of *Earth Vs*' most accessible songs: *Greetings From Shitsville*, *Loveshit* and *My Baby Is A Headfuck*. Bonutto had the often onerous task of explaining away this self-destructive bent

to his bosses at EastWest. Today he considers The Wildhearts the very last band that should have been signed to a major record company.

"That whole corporate set-up was anathema to Ginger as an artist and he didn't want to toe the line," he says. "If I said something was black, he would automatically go white because he felt it was the right thing to do artistically. I actually had great empathy with his point of view, because I love that rebellious rock'n'roll spirit and people who live the lifestyle and mean it."

"I played *Greetings From Shitsville* to the head of A&R at the company and he said: 'That's an amazing song. Why on earth would they call it *Shitsville*?' Well, welcome to The Wildhearts."

"Thing is, we never had any aspirations towards commercial success," reasons Ginger. "We didn't have those smarts about sustaining a career. Swear words are fantastic, too, if you're trying to be loud and snotty. That was our logic."

**R**ight from the outset, the band had wanted to have Mick Ronson produce their debut album. They had been impressed by the venerable former Spiders From Mars guitarist's work with Morrissey on the latter's 1992

**Above left: Danny and CJ on the town; right: Ginger lets fly.**

album *Your Arsenal*. But Ronson's health was ailing and he was unable to commit to such a labour. However, he did drive himself down to the studio to add a characteristic solo to *My Baby Is A Headfuck*, an event that CJ recalls "kind of freaked us out". It would be the last time Ronson was recorded, cancer claiming him on April 29, 1993.

After that, they turned to producer Mark Dodson re-recording with him a brace of the demo tracks. One, *Suckerpunch*, made it onto the finished album. The other, ...*Headfuck*, didn't because the band had needed to match exactly the tempo of the original in order for Ronson's contribution to be preserved, and the result was stilted.

Neither Ginger nor Bonutto can quite agree on whose actual idea it was, but both men finally determined that the demos should be released as the finished album, with the exception of *Suckerpunch*. Bonutto's one concession to radio-friendliness was to have the basic tracks remixed by Pet Shop Boys/Human League producer Mike 'Spike' Drake. By Bonutto's own admission, the band immediately took against Drake, but he succeeded in accentuating the sugar pill of Ginger's melodies without dampening the Wildhearts' raw fire. ➤

## 'Earth Vs shot a restorative cocktail into the veins of a then-moribund British rock scene.'



**E**arth Vs *The Wildhearts* was released on August 30, 1993, by which time Stidi had been replaced on drums by Rich Battersby. The album's front cover adequately reflected the distinctive, uncompromising nature of the music: a portrait of Ginger, his face submerged in oil and bound with barbed wire, a cockroach crawling from his mouth. This, Bonutto points out, was in the days before Photoshop technology, "so for real he had to lie in a bath of oil with a cockroach on his face. Altogether it was a magnificent statement."

Another Wildhearts sleeve from that period was to gain a notoriety of its own. EastWest pressed ahead with *Shitsville* as the launch single. Ginger had a very particular idea for the artwork that should accompany it. Which is to say he imagined a photograph of someone shitting into a pitta bread that the four members of the band would hold open. At the time, they were laying down their first batch of tracks with Battersby, and Simon Efemey producing. Ginger happened to mention the pitta bread idea to the voluble Efemey, who instantly volunteered his services.

"A week later, the five of us were in a photo studio and me with my kecks off," Efemey recalls. "A Japanese girl took the picture, and it was all set up with deadly seriousness. The night before, I'd even drunk a load of Guinness to help ease my movement. But as soon as I heard the camera shutter going I started to piss myself laughing. She got the shot of it appearing to drop into the pitta, but I was shaking so much that I actually shat all over Danny's hand."

This was a transgression too far for EastWest, who released the single in a plain brown sleeve instead, but it didn't matter. The Wildhearts had got real momentum by then anyway. *Earth Vs The Wildhearts* received rave reviews, Radio 1 daytime playlisted another of the album's standout tracks, *TV Tan*, and the band undertook a crowning UK tour with The Almighty.

By the next summer, the *Caffeine Bomb* single had got The Wildhearts on British TV institution *Top Of The Pops* and they headlined the second stage at the Donington Monsters Of Rock festival on a bill that also included Therapy? and Terrorvision, heirs apparent to lead a Brit-rock renaissance. Ginger certainly had grand ambitions for The Wildhearts' next move, plotting a defining double album.

It wasn't to be. EastWest balked at that concept too, and when the band's second album, *P.H.U.Q.* subsequently came out in May 1995 it was as a single disc. In Ginger's opinion it was a substandard one at that, the more ranging and esoteric tracks having been put out on the *Fishing For Luckies* EP instead.

*P.H.U.Q.* entered the UK chart at No.6 but, fatally, Ginger had ousted CJ from the band before it was even finished, robbing both himself and the Wildhearts of their essential foil. His timing couldn't have been more ruinous, and after that it was all downhill.

Intent on waging war with EastWest, Ginger next delivered them a third album of splenetic industrial metal, *Endless*,

*Nameless*, that, depending on one's point of view, was either a bold artistic statement or unlistenable. EastWest duly passed on it. It was eventually released by indie label Mushroom Records in 1997, but by then Ginger had split the band, citing musical differences and drug problems.

"Two things derailed the band completely," Ginger offers. "The first was cocaine. That was how CJ and I fell out. Soon as cocaine came into the picture, the egos started to get affected and we were having these huge arguments about what I can't even remember. And when EastWest refused to go with the double album, the band was over for me at that point. If we were going to succeed at this I had wanted to make a statement."

**T**he Wildhearts' story ever since has been typically chequered. Starting in 2001 there have been serial reunions, just as many bust-ups and the odd album. In 2018, Ginger and CJ, the latter now living in the Yorkshire Dales, together played a handful of acoustic dates around the UK. The upshot of which, reasons CJ, was as likely to have been that they "wound up killing each other as to have come back feeling like brothers again".

Rich Battersby got to be so disillusioned with the whole messy business that at one point he stopped playing altogether, but he's now back in the fold. So too is Danny McCormack. Years of heroin addiction led in 2015 to him having to have his right leg amputated below the knee. "For a one-legged bloke that should be dead, he's doing really well," says Ginger. "I've no idea what makes that bloke tick, but tick he does."

Ginger too has not been without his demons. He was hospitalised in the late 2010s in an apparent suicidal state. Today he claims to be fit, well and happier for being busy. Despite stating in that he would never again record with The Wildhearts, the Ginger/CJ/Danny/Rich line-up returned with 2019's appropriately-titled *Renaissance Men* – a record that crackles with the same energy and intent as their debut. A new album, 2021's *21st Century Stars*, proves that was no fluke.

*Earth Vs The Wildhearts* itself stands now as a monument to its time, to the pig-headed brilliance of the man who conceived it, and to The Wildhearts themselves, who spectacularly and wilfully snatched defeat from the jaws of certain victory.

"I really wouldn't want to go back and change anything," Ginger concludes. "Back then we were having the time of our lives. I would suggest to any band going in to make their first album that they live exactly as they want to and get smart later on. If you're going to be stupid, then for fuck's sake do it when you're young. And we were stupider than most." 🍌

*"If you're going to be stupid, then do it when you're young. And we were stupider than most."*

*Ginger*

**Don't be happy, just look worried: Danny, Rich Battersby, Ginger and CJ, circa 1994.**

# THE FULL UNCENSORED STORY OF METAL'S MOST ICONIC BAND

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# 1994

It was the shot that was heard around the world – and Kurt Cobain's death proved a tipping point for 90s rock.



**O**n April 8, 1994, Kurt Cobain's body was discovered by an electrician in a greenhouse above the garage of his house in Seattle. A 20-gauge shotgun lay on his chest, and a suicide note was found in a flowerpot nearby. The death of Nirvana's troubled singer at the age of 27 wasn't just the defining moment of 1994, it was one of the defining moments of the entire decade. The man who was the figurehead for a generation was gone, leaving a legacy that would last to this day.

His passing didn't instantly mark the end of grunge. Two of Nirvana's most celebrated contemporaries, Soundgarden and Pearl Jam, both released albums either side of Cobain's death, albeit very different ones. The former's blockbusting *Superunknown* was bold and ambitious, a statement of intent from a band who had been forced to wait in line while the bands they inspired were garlanded with praise and success ahead of them. The latter's *Vitalogy* was knotty and angry, serving notice that Pearl Jam wanted out of the toxic celebrity arms race they'd found themselves locked into. And if grunge was becoming passé, no one told Bush, a bunch of British interlopers who became one of the biggest success stories of the year with their Nirvana-soundalike debut *Sixteen Stone*.

Yet the most remarkable release of 1994 was *Live Through This*, the second album from Hole, the band fronted by Cobain's wife and all-round force-of-nature Courtney Love (pictured left). In an unhappy coincidence, it was released just four days after Cobain's body had been found, casting this brilliant, furious, sarcastic record in an entirely different light. It was a measure of both the record's greatness and Love's fortitude that it landed with defiance rather than sorrow.

Yet something did shift with Kurt Cobain's death. The biggest band of the year wasn't a bunch of flannel-clad misery merchants from the Pacific Northwest but a trio of punk rock kids with multi-coloured hair from San Francisco's Bay Area named Green Day. Their third album, *Dookie*, was an explosion of pop-punk tuneage and jittery street rat attitude that provided the perfect antidote to the increasingly gloomy intensity of the previous four years. It connected with the public to the tune of 10 million sales.

Green Day were swiftly followed out of the traps by fellow punk rock footsoldiers The Offspring, whose own 1994 album, *Smash*, matched *Dookie* unit-for-unit. Between them, they opened the gates for a wave of pop-punk bands to come flooding out - misery was out, pogoing was in.

By that point, alternative rock had become the new mainstream anyway. Bands as diverse as Weezer, Beastie Boys and Live provided the soundtrack to the year, while lesser-known acts such as Pavement and Jeff Buckley served up instant-classic albums. Even the Woodstock festival – the original bastion of 60s alternative culture – got a modern do-over to mark its 25th anniversary, with mud-splattered sets from heroes-of-the-hour Green Day and Nine Inch Nails, who released their own landmark second album, *The Downward Spiral*, that March.

It wasn't just America where things were accelerating at a rapid pace. In the UK, Oasis' electrifying debut album *Definitely Maybe* turned them into charismatic superstars, The Prodigy's *Music For The Jilted Generation* mashed up dance, hip hop and rock like no one else had done before, and the Manic Street Preachers served up a harrowing masterpiece with their third album *The Holy Bible*.

Kurt Cobain's death cast a long shadow over 1994, yet amid the tragedy, rock proved that it still had plenty of life left in it. 🎸

Green Day in 1994: (l-r) Tré Cool,  
Billie Joe Armstrong, Mike Dirnt.

# THE YEAR PUNK BROKE

In 1994, with their major-label debut *Dookie*, Green Day pointed the way forward for punk rock for the rest of the decade - and well into the next millennium. We chart the rise of the band from the underground to the mainstream.

Words: **Darren James**





**B**y 1993, Green Day were already a successful band by anyone's standards, with the compilation *1,039/Smoothed Out Slappy Hours* and the album *Kerplunk* having sold more than 30,000 copies each and gained the band a rapidly expanding live following.

In truth, they had probably achieved as much as any band in the punk arena could reasonably have expected to. Fortunately, Nirvana had just rewritten the rules, and turned the music world on its head with their globe-straddling album *Nevermind*. Like Green Day, Nirvana started out on a modest indie label – in their case Sub Pop – and caused howls of indignation among fans when they signed to a major (Geffen). Yet the success of *Nevermind* and its subversively catchy single *Smells Like Teen Spirit* not only propelled Nirvana into the big time, but also opened the floodgates for any potentially chart-friendly chancers with a snappy tune and a punk sensibility.

Green Day's rise to stardom began when, after years of looking after their own affairs, they were picked up by managers Elliot Cahn and Jeff Saltzman (who already had Mudhoney, Melvins and Primus on their books). It's not clear whether a firm decision had been made to sign the band to a major at this stage, as Epitaph were among the labels they approached with a new demo – and were apparently keen to work with them – but as the other contenders included Geffen and Sony it seems likely.

What is certain is that by this time, the members of Green Day (singer/guitarist Billie Joe Armstrong, bassist Mike Dirnt and drummer Tre Cool), for all their working-class backgrounds, had developed a canny business sense, and a firm

Make our day, punks:  
Billie Joe and Tré  
onstage in 1994.



belief in their own abilities. They insisted that whatever label they went with, the band have total artistic control – something promised to many artists down the years, but rarely delivered.

Naturally, Green Day took their time, holding out for the best offer. The turning point came when Rob Cavallo, an A&R man and producer for major label Reprise/Warner's, received a copy of the demo and then headed out to Berkeley in 1993 to meet the band.

Cavallo later recalled: "I'll never forget when Green Day said to me – it was so cool when they said: 'We're going to be a great band.' And they knew it. 'We're going to be a great band no matter what Reprise does for us.' They could already draw 1,000 kids in a good 10 or 12 cities across this country, and they'd already played in Europe. These kids in Green Day were 21 years old. They knew what it took to be successful in the music business. They never had jobs, they made their living by being a band by the time they were age 16 or 17."

As Cavallo said, in addition to the quality of their early releases, the band's status by this stage was built on gruelling tours of the underground punk circuit, covering both the US and Europe thanks to budget-priced flights. Green Day had played small clubs in such glamorous UK spots as Wigan and Newport, and squats in Germany, all off their own backs.

In the States, like several of their contemporaries they

Master of puppets: Billie Joe and stuffed friend.



**“We didn't start  
this band to  
to cash in on  
a lot of money.”**

Billie Joe Armstrong

played many shows at the legendary 924 Gilman Street club in the Bay Area of San Francisco. Seeing the way the club was operated also showed them something that listening to records back home couldn't: the ideas and principles by which the US underground scene was run. These could sometimes be strict, as many transgressors found to their cost, but the sense of empowerment and belonging was potent and far-reaching, and the club thrives to this day.

Given all that experience, once Green Day had taken the decision to sign with a major label, you might think they would have anticipated a little flak to come at them from some quarters. But, like others before them, it seems they were a little taken aback by the ferocity of the resultant backlash. If not exactly hurt by the reaction from their friends in the punk underground to the news that they'd signed with

Reprise, the band were still a little mystified. The band have told about when they visited Gilman Street after the release of the debut Reprise album and were met with a frosty reception, with one former pal asking: "What the hell are you guys doing here?"

Green Day's Mike Dirnt said at the time, "You know, every band who sold records is getting branded with the sell-out label, especially from fans who liked them in their early, unsuccessful days. They think they've found something, they identify with you because you're underdogs, and then you make it and they hate you. They feel you've betrayed them because now others like you too. We didn't start the band to cash in a lot of money. When we started out, punk was probably the most unpopular music around."

True. Although it seemed that Billie Joe Armstrong felt the Gilman Street rejection, at least a little: "We've played in front of 2,000 and 3,000 people, and I still haven't felt the same thing that I felt playing that place. There are bad shows I've had there that I'll remember for the rest of my life, and there's the greatest shows I've ever played."

He continued, more defensively: "Punk is not just the sound, the music, punk is a lifestyle. There are a lot of bands around that claim to be punk and they only play the music, they have no clue what it's all about. It's a lifestyle I choose for myself. It's not about popularity and all that crap. When we started out, we played punk rock, the music. Then we developed, we changed our sound – but we didn't change. We're just as punk as we used to be. We got a lot of crap, and we're still getting it, for being signed with a major label. So what?"

Even with a major-label budget at their disposal, the band's now deeply ingrained work ethic meant that the 17 tracks that were laid down at Fantasy Studio in Berkeley for the *Dookie* session were recorded in just 19 days, working 12 hours a day. The title is US slang for turd, and was slimmed down from the original concept of *Liquid Dookie* on the grounds that it was "too gross".

Released on February 1, 1994, *Dookie* entered the US *Billboard* chart at a modest No.141, but soon picked up momentum with the success of *Longview*, the first single taken from it. That was aided in no small part by its chaotic accompanying video, which was shot in the basement of Billie Joe and Tre's apartment on Ashby and Telegraph Avenue in Berkeley. It gained plenty of airplay on MTV, and *Longview* was soon heading up the chart,



The three stooges: Green Day backstage at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1994.



and went on to reach No.3 on *Billboard's* end-of-year Modern Rock listing.

The album's second single, *Basket Case*, went to No.1 in August of that year, beginning a five-week residency in the US chart. It was also the first Green Day single to hit the UK chart, peaking at No.55 in the same month and No.7 on reissue. The video for *Basket Case* was another belter, and was nominated for MTV's Best Video Of The Year award. The third single was live favourite *Welcome To Paradise*, and was Green Day's most successful in the UK at the time, hitting No.20. This was followed in early 1995 by *When I Come Around*, which spent seven weeks at the top of the chart.

*Dookie* was a bona fide phenomenon. US sales reached 10 million, with worldwide sales of an amazing 20 million, and the album picked up a Grammy for Best Alternative Music Performance. In February 1995, after a year in the chart, it was still at No.2.

With its great songs, and the backing of a major label and MTV, it was perhaps inevitable that *Dookie* would be huge. But there was one other important

factor in its elevation (and that of Green Day) to such dizzy heights, and that was the ill-fated Woodstock '94 festival. To many people it seemed a pretty ludicrous idea from the start: resurrecting a festival that, despite the mythology surrounding the original one in 1969 (and some amazing performances from the likes of Jimi Hendrix and The Who), was an organisational disaster, and building the new version on long-outmoded ideals. As it turned out, Woodstock '94 was nothing like the Woodstock in 1969 – it was much, much worse.

At least the intentions of the first Woodstock were good: to put on a festival with all the finest acts available to hippydom. Held over the weekend of 12-14 August 1994 at Winston Farm in upstate New York, Woodstock '94 was strictly a money-making deal, with punters paying \$135 (£84) for entrance and appalling facilities. On top of all that, there was

the rain, which pelted down almost incessantly for the whole weekend, reducing the site to a quagmire – and the tolerance levels of the 250,000 punters to zero.

At the time of the festival, *Dookie* had just picked up a gold disc for sales of over 500,000, so naturally Green Day's spirits were high when they went on stage at 3pm. But opening with *Welcome To Paradise* was either taking the piss or just unwise (we know which our money is on). The crowd had been chanting for the band during the performances that preceded them, so it's not as if they weren't among friends. But when a few fans chucked mud at the stage, Armstrong and Dirnt began goading them to hurl more – which they were more than happy to do. With the stage by now almost as much of a mess as the rest of the site, Armstrong removed his trousers, although whether it was this that provoked fans to begin attempting to invade the stage is unclear. In the ensuing chaos, Dirnt lost some teeth when a member of the security crew knocked him into a monitor, believing him to be a member of the audience.

To say that the organisers were unimpressed would be a huge understatement. Their set cut short, Green Day were ushered from the stage and immediately spirited away by helicopter. The resulting publicity was all that was needed to give them the final push from being a big band to being the biggest punk band in the world. 1

Prince of the night: Trent Reznor in full on goth mode.



# HEART OF DARKNESS

As the mastermind behind **Nine Inch Nails**, Trent Reznor took nihilism into the mainstream. And *The Downward Spiral* was his crowning glory.

Words: **Tommy Udo**



In 1997, Trent Reznor was named one of *Time* magazine's 25 most influential people, sharing the honour with the cartoon character Dilbert and then US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. *Time* called Reznor 'the anti-Bon Jovi'. His "vulnerable vocals and accessible lyrics led an industrial revolution: he gave the gloomy genre a human heart. . . Reznor's music is filthy, brutish stuff, oozing with aberrant sex, suicidal melancholy and violent misanthropy.

But to the depressed, his music proffers pop's perpetual message of hope: there is worse pain in the world than yours. It is a lesson as old as Robert Johnson's blues."

Reznor was the latest in a long line of brooding, dark romantic figures that included David Bowie, Lou Reed, Jim Morrison, Mick Jagger and Keith Richards. He was also an overlooked recording genius; a studio nerd who pioneered a polished, aggressive hard rock sound that is still ubiquitous today.

He seemed an unlikely icon, yet throughout the 90s Reznor transcended genres and tribes: he appealed to goths because of his emaciated, pale demeanour; he appealed to fledgling nu-metalheads who loved the abrasive guitars and in-your-face beats; he appealed to 'cyberpunk' types who read *Wired* magazine because it seemed that he appeared to be orchestrating the bleak future world of frazzled tech depicted by William Gibson in *Neuromancer*. Before the rise of his protégé Marilyn Manson, he was the country's most popular nihilist. That reputation rested largely on his masterpiece, the sprawling black hole of despair that was Nine Inch Nails' *The Downward Spiral*.

Even today you can listen to *The Downward Spiral* and still discover things that you had never heard before. It's almost as if the album has kept on growing and changing, updating itself between plays.

Nine Inch Nails' debut album *Pretty Hate Machine*, recorded in 1988, was essentially an electronic work heavily influenced by Skinny Puppy, Ministry and Depeche Mode, with Reznor as one-man band, creating all the songs and sounds in the studio. The *Broken EP* introduced distorted guitars and a hard rock sensibility.

Those appealed largely to a cult market, the still-thriving industrial underground. But by the time he made *The Downward Spiral* in 1994, the 'mainstream' of hard rock – under the influence of everyone from Rage Against The Machine and Nirvana to post-Black album Metallica – was shifting towards the place where Trent Reznor had already staked out his territory.

Reznor had moved moved to Los Angeles in 1992, following the success of *Pretty Hate Machine*. A deal with Interscope gave him the artistic freedom he needed to work on his second album. He wanted a property where he could set up his own recording studio. Reznor wanted *The Downward Spiral* to be one of the first albums recorded entirely using state-of-the-art digital technology. Rather than putting the band in the studio, recording the instruments and mixing it together, sounds were recorded and stored on a hard drive, from which they could then be digitally altered.

One of the beauties of digital recording is that it can really be done anywhere. The location Reznor wanted had to be sufficiently isolated, and large enough to accommodate the gear and any collaborators, like producer Flood and his main collaborator/assistant, drummer Chris Vrenna, whose job was to sift through hundreds of videos for samples to be used on the album.

Reznor found a ranch-style bungalow to rent on Cielo Drive in the Hollywood Hills, a beautiful, picturesque location set in the super-rich part of Los Angeles populated by movie executives, actors and musicians. The house had had some famous tenants in the past, most notably maverick film director Roman Polanski his beautiful young actress wife Sharon Tate back in the 60s.

One sultry night in August 1969, while the heavily pregnant Sharon and her friends were turning in for the night, a group of hippies broke in. In the space of an hour Sharon watched as they slaughtered three of her friends in front of her. Then they killed Sharon, ripping the unborn baby boy from her womb. She was alive to see this. They wrote in her blood the words 'Pig' and 'Healer Skelter' (sic) on the walls and door. Reznor had moved into the house made famous by the Charles Manson murders.

"It's a coincidence," he told *Rolling Stone* at the time. "When I found out what it was, it was even cooler."

Life on Mars: Reznor with inspiration-turned-touring partner David Bowie.



GETTY X3

**"I HATE SENDING A NEW SONG OUT: 'I CUT MY SOUL OPEN - CHECK IT OUT'." TRENT REZNOR**

Later he admitted that he had in fact deliberately chosen the location for the bad vibes, but regretted this after a meeting with Sharon Tate's sister Doris. At the time they were recording in the house, Vrenna and Reznor nicknamed the studio 'le pig', alluding to the word 'pig' scrawled on the wall in Sharon Tate's blood. One of the strongest tracks on the album was *March Of The Pigs*, although Reznor denied that there was any connection between this and Manson.

Reznor had been listening to a lot of David Bowie, and the influence of *Hunky Dory*, Bowie's 1971 album on which he attempted to redefine the way pop songs were written – something that appealed to Reznor – had percolated through.

While *The Downward Spiral* was not planned as a concept album, there are undeniably linking themes and recurring motifs in the songs. Reznor had been keeping notes on his inner state since his chaotic booze- and chemical-fuelled stint on Lollapalooza. This provided the conceptual backbone for the songs.

"It is personal experiences, but it's wrapped up in the

highly pretentious idea of a record with some sort of theme or flow to 'em, and it was meant to be... it's become kind of a dated 70s concept. But some of the records that influenced me a lot on this album, like [David Bowie's] *Low* and even *The Wall* – I'm sure I'm ripping off Pink Floyd. In fact I know I am.

"There's records, although they may appear dated today, that try to do things that are more exciting to me than, 'Here's my video track and here's my dance song and here's my power ballad.' All that kind of disposability. It was just me, bored, trying to come up with something I kind of wanted to set the parameters to work within, to focus more."

**T**he expectations for *The Downward Spiral* were almost crippling. *Pretty Hate Machine* and *Broken* had, in a sense, both been produced in secret.

But the constant pressure from fans, the media, admirers and other bands asking how the new album was going, what it would be like, what the songs would be and when it was out started to take their toll.

It was certainly was more of a struggle to make than he expected. The original intention had been to make the album quickly. Reznor cited the example of Nirvana, who had gone into the studio and made *Nevermind* in two weeks. But the process was different for him, and soon the suits at his new record company, Interscope, were expressing 'concern' at the amount of time the album seemed to be taking to make.

Part of this was down to Reznor's extra-curricular activities. He signed Marilyn Manson to his Nothing imprint, and began the process of turning him into a star.

## "I WANTED TO KILL MYSELF. I HATED MUSIC."

TRENT REZTOR

He also immersed himself in a world of hedonism and debauchery – something that Reznor would admit came from a dark place within.

"I just wanted to kill myself. I hated music," he later said bitterly. "I was like, 'I just want to get back on the road because I hate sitting in a room trying to, trying to... just scraping my fucking soul.' Exploring areas of your brain that you don't want to go to, that's painful. You write something down and you go, 'Fuck. I can't say that. I don't want people to know that.' It's so naked and honest that you're scared to let it out. You're giving a part of your soul away, exposing part of yourself. I avoid that. I hate that feeling of sending a tape out to someone: 'Here's my new song. I just cut my soul open. Check it out. Criticise it.'"

Lost in the chaos, Reznor wanted to finish the album and get the hell out of LA and back on the road. Not everyone was onboard with the idea and told him so.

"That's the stupidest fucking reason for doing an album I've ever heard," American Recordings boss and all-round music guru Rick Rubin told Reznor when they ran into each other. "Don't do it until you make music that it's a crime not to let other people hear."

Shaken by Rubin's advice, Reznor knuckled down and finally delivered the finished album almost a year after he had started work on it. The flurry of writing and recording produced 16 songs, and some leftovers that would crop up on B-sides or would be reworked as material for remixes for Nine Inch Nails as well as other artists.

The songs were like frontline reports from the battlefield of Trent Reznor's psyche. That they were classic songs of negativity, angst, despair and hatred would come as no surprise. But Reznor's voice – previously heard only through a bank of distortion and effects, screaming – was transformed, seductive and even sweet. From the deceptively quiet intro of *Mr Self Destruct*, through grandiose almost-pop of *Closer*, to the tenderness in the hate-ballad *Piggy*, it was clear that *The Downward Spiral* was an album with light and shade, with blended colours rather than just blocks of bold primary hues.

There was enough of the cyber jack-beat on *Heresy* and the intense title track itself to connect Reznor to his earlier, work on *Pretty Hate Machine* and *Broken* and still have him strictly filed under an 'industrial' music category, but the truth of the matter is that he wasn't so much part of a different genre as an entirely new game altogether.

Reznor had made a great album that could only be listened to in small doses. *The Downward Spiral* was something magnificent that took you on a journey all the way to the heart of darkness. **X**



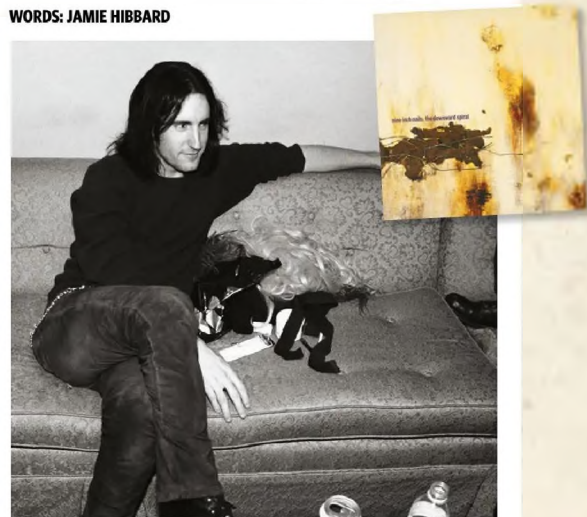
NIN guitarist Robin Finck.

## NINE INCH NAILS

### THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL

An industrial album so good that even Johnny Cash covered its closing song.

WORDS: JAMIE HIBBARD



No one ever expected an industrial artist to become as huge and as well-respected as Nine Inch Nails have now become, but off the back of their debut release *Pretty Hate Machine* in 1991 it was obvious that mainman Trent Reznor had a lot more strings to his bow than the majority of his contemporaries.

After *Pretty Hate Machine* came two EPs that delved deeper and deeper into Reznor's madness, crystallising his self-loathing not only lyrically but also within the very framework of the tracks' incendiary guitars, chaotic samples and pummelling, relentless drums. But, even taking that into consideration, no one was ready for the sumptuous soundscapes and wrist-slitting structures of his masterwork, 1994's *The Downward Spiral*.

From the very beginning, songs like *Mr Self Destruct*, *Piggy* and *Closer* summed up the bleakness of Reznor's soul, but he delivers his lines with such preening rock-star self-absorption that it's captivating even for the most jaded of listeners. Reznor knows how to pull a crowd into his twisted world, whether it's live on stage or coming at you through your headphones. This is a man who is prepared to strip himself bare and lay it all on the line for a wanton audience.

This is the album that made Reznor a deserved star – but in the midst of the recording, he happened across another maverick performer and fledgling rock star in Marilyn Manson, and promptly signed him to his own label imprint. The latter even managed to get the former behind the mixing desk for his 1996 hate-fuelled album *Antichrist Superstar*, yet even with all his attractive theatrics, media manipulation and fancy for the taboo, Manson couldn't topple Reznor from the top of the industrial rock god tree. And with Reznor having *Hurt*, the standout closing track from *The Downward Spiral*, under his wing, it's easy to see why.

As an aside, when country legend Johnny Cash eventually covered *Hurt* for his 2002 album *American IV: The Man Comes Around*, his version was even better than the original. Reznor wouldn't admit this, of course, but he has since said that he didn't realise how good a song *Hurt* was until he heard The Man In Black sing it.

# 1995

As grunge spiralled back down to earth in the wake of Kurt Cobain's death, pop punk took over as the soundtrack of the year. But nu metal was waiting in the wings.



**C**all it 'hump year'. After the musical revolution that blazed through the first half of the 1990s like a bush fire, 1995 was the point where the entire decade pivoted. In the wake of Kurt Cobain's death the previous April, things weren't necessarily brighter – but they were feeling marginally more upbeat.

If Cobain's demise signalled the start of grunge's descent back down to earth after half a decade of cultural domination, 1995 was when it touched down with a bump. With Nirvana defunct and Pearl Jam wrestling with their unwanted megastardom, it was left to Alice In Chains to represent Seattle's original superstars. Their self-titled third album was a grinding test of endurance that seemed to sum up the state of the scene that spawned them. It would be the last record frontman Layne Staley ever made – and a symbolic end point to grunge's first chapter.

But rock abhors a vacuum, and there were plenty of bands and artists waiting to step into the gap. The punk rock explosion which had been detonated by Green Day's *Dookie* and The Offspring's *Smash* in 1994 had set off a cultural earthquake that was only intensifying. Mohawked ska-punk attack dogs Rancid became the third part of this unholy trinity with the exhilarating ... *And Out Come The Wolves* album, while Green Day themselves swiftly followed *Dookie* with the darker, more scabrous *Insomniac*. Inspired by what was happening, a trio of fart joke-fixated San Diego kids named Blink-182 released their own debut album, *Cheshire Cat*, though it would be a few years before they joined pop-punk's new grandees at the top table.

At the same time, something else was stirring elsewhere in California. Towards the end of 1994, a bunch of misfits named Korn from the nowhere city of Bakersfield had dropped their angst-fuelled self-titled debut album, instantly birthing the scene that would eventually be dubbed "nu metal". By 1995, they had been joined by kindred spirits

Deftones (singer Chino Moreno, pictured right), whose own debut album, *Adrenaline*, offered a different spin on this nascent genre – one that owed as much to 80s alt-rock as it did hip hop and funk metal.

Naturally, the decade's emergent big guns weren't silent. Smashing Pumpkins frontman Billy Corgan proved himself alt-rock's great visionary with his band's sprawling, breath-taking third album, *Mellon Collie And The Infinite Sadness*. White Zombie completed their transformation from underground noiseniks to groove-metal kingpins with *Astro-Creep 2000* (an album that would prove to be their swansong). Oasis swept all before them with (*What's The Story*) *Morning Glory?*, briefly looking like they would conquer America in the same way as they'd conquered Britain. There were also some sad farewells, not least to Blind Melon singer Shannon Hoon, who died of a cocaine overdose that October at the all-too-young age of 28.

A steady parade of brand new bands jostled for position as rock's Next Big Thing. Some – Filter, Everclear, Presidents Of The USA – teetered on the brink of greatness before sinking back into relative obscurity. Others would go onto mould the sound and look of the decade and beyond, Anglo-American electro-rockers Garbage and ska-punk upstarts No Doubt among them. And then was former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl's unpromisingly-named new solo project, Foo Fighters. What happened to that guy anyway?

But 1995's biggest breakout star was neither a pop-punk upstart or a suburban white boy in baggy pants. Alanis Morissette had started out as a cookie-cutter singer who put out two big-in-Canada dance-pop albums in the early 90s. But with her third album, *Jagged Little Pill*, she toughened her sound up, enlisted the help of Red Hot Chili Peppers bassist Flea and former Jane's Addiction guitarist Dave Navarro, and made a record that filtered mid-90s angst through a female perspective. Thirty-three million sales later, it stands as one of the biggest albums of the decade. ●





# THIS IS A CALL

Dave Grohl didn't just survive the hurricane of Nirvana, he came out the other side and formed the **Foo Fighters**. He looks back on that band's first three albums, from their classic 1995 debut to 1999's *There Is Nothing Left To Lose*.

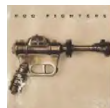
Words: **Kevin Murphy**

In the depths of 1990, two 20-something musicians sat in the bedroom of the house they shared in Seattle. They were bored and passed the time writing songs. One of them had come up with a melancholy-hooked lonely, longing pop tune inspired by the other. The first man was Dave Grohl, his buddy was Nirvana bandmate Kurt Cobain, and the tune he was writing was *Friend Of A Friend*, a song that would finally emerge in 2005 –14 years after *Nevermind* changed the fates of both the composer and his muse.

Dave Grohl survived the hurricane that was Nirvana, dusted himself off and formed Foo Fighters. What began as a modest, almost cathartic exercise has become a monstrously successful group with a string of hits like *Learn To Fly*, *Everlong* and *Times Like These*. Grohl simply wanted to liberate songs he'd kept locked away while his life was consumed drumming in what was then the world's most pivotal band. But Grohl has the Midas touch. Everything he handles turns to gold records. They line the walls of the vast studio complex Foo Fighters constructed in Northridge, a deeply unfashionable suburb of Los Angeles best known as the epicentre of the city's great 1994 earthquake.

Today, decked out in a sharp black suit, the ever-friendly Grohl gives the more casually attired but equally upbeat

drummer Taylor Hawkins a congratulatory hug. The pair have been bandmates and friends since Hawkins replaced original Foo's sticksman William Goldsmith in 1997. They're here to look back on the early years of a career that has been wilder and bigger than either could have imagined.



#### FOO FIGHTERS (1995)

"After Nirvana, I wasn't really sure what to do," says Grohl, who was 25 when Kurt

Cobain's death brought that group abruptly to an end. "I was asked to join a couple of other bands as the drummer, but I couldn't imagine doing that because it would just remind me of being in Nirvana; every time I sat down at a drum set, I would think of that. And other people would think of that as well. I thought, 'What do I do? Do I even play music any more? Maybe it's time to do something else. Maybe real life starts now. Because at that point I had been touring in bands since I was 18 and I'd seen the world and got to be in this huge band.'"

As Grohl contemplated his next move, he was well aware that anything he did was going to be overshadowed by his association with Nirvana whose influence only grows with the passing years.

"When I was young, someone played me the Klark Kent record that [Police drummer] Stewart Copeland had done. I



thought how cool that he could make a record and people can listen to it objectively because it wasn't Stewart Copeland from The Police, it was Klark Kent. That's kind of what I wanted to do. There were some songs I'd recorded in my friend's studio while Nirvana was still a band and an independent label in Detroit wanted to release something."

It wasn't the first time Grohl's compositions had been the subject of outside interest. In 1991 he'd released a 10-track cassette called *Late* on the Washington-based Simple Machines label. Initially contractual restrictions prevented him from releasing any more new material, but with the demise of Nirvana in April 1994, multi-instrumentalist Grohl was free to pursue a solo career.

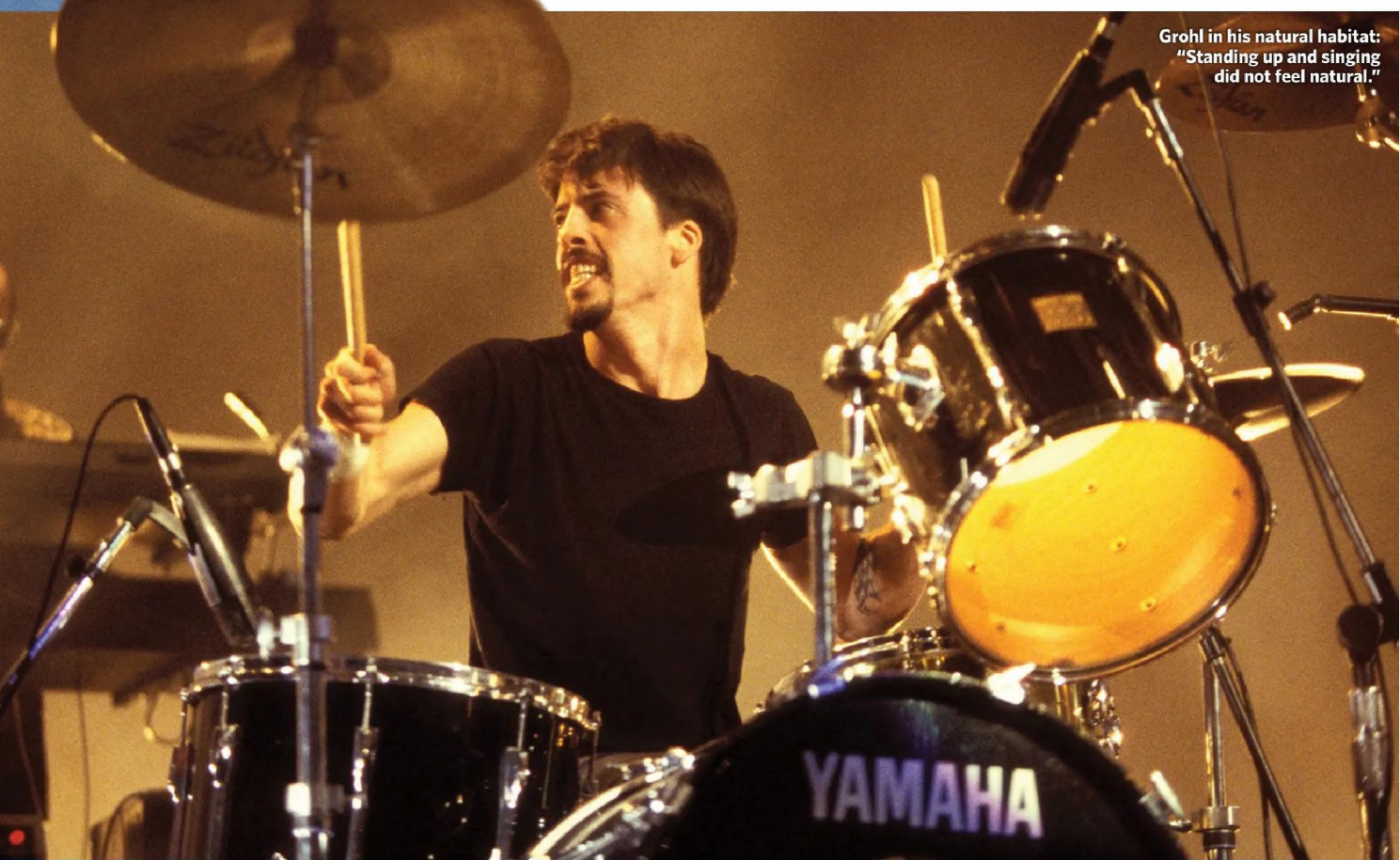
The reaction to the tape was swift. "I'd get calls from Virgin, RCA, MCA, Columbia or Capitol or whatever," he says. In the end Grohl signed with Capitol after ▶

Foo Fighters: (l-r) Taylor Hawkins, Pat Smear, Dave Grohl, Nate Mendel.



**“After Nirvana I wasn’t really sure what to do. I thought, ‘Do I even play music any more?’”**

Dave Grohl



Grohl in his natural habitat: "Standing up and singing did not feel natural."

GETTY IMAGES

being courted by President Gary Gersh who had signed Nirvana to Geffen.

Recording all the instruments in the studio was one thing, but even the talented Grohl couldn't play them all live. For that he would need a band. After securing bass player Nate Mendell and drummer William Goldsmith from the recently defunct Sunny Day Real Estate he gave a tape to guitarist Pat Smear, a man who had also played with Nirvana.

"He said, 'God, this stuff is really poppy!'" squeals Grohl in his best Smear impersonation. "I'm like: 'Really?' He goes: 'I love it.' 'Wow, thanks. We're looking for a guitar player.' He's like: 'I'll do it.' I'm like: 'You will?' No shit, because he's like the coolest fucking guy in the world. That guy was in The Germs. He was great in Nirvana, and I thought he's way out of this league; this is just a stupid demo."

With a band assembled they began rehearsing. But the role of frontman was a new and uncomfortable one for Grohl: "Standing up and singing a song with a guitar with shredding volume did not feel natural. It still doesn't."

He also found performing his own material in distinct contrast to that of playing with Nirvana: "It's a different feeling when you're singing words you've written and playing songs you've written. It's so much more personal."

When the Foo Fighters' self-titled debut arrived in July 1995, its cover depicted the band's name above a photograph of a gun.

Considering Grohl's former bandmate had shot himself to death only 15 months earlier, the choice of cover image might appear to some to be tactless.

"People kind of freaked out on that," admits Grohl, whose love of sci-fi led him to choose the picture of the Buck Rogers toy gun. "Honestly, that never came to mind once. Obviously it didn't, because if I thought people would associate that with that, I would never have done it."

The cover aside, reaction to the album was positive. It reached number 23 in the US chart. The Foo Fighters had arrived.



#### THE COLOUR AND THE SHAPE (1997)

It was almost as if Foo Fighters had evolved accidentally but now, as a fully fledged group with a hit record and tour behind them, it was clear the approach to the second album would be different.

"Going into making *The Colour And The Shape* I knew it had to be good," says Grohl. "It couldn't be a basement demo. It couldn't be that second raw album that most people were doing at the time."

Grohl, though, was still uncertain about exactly what it was he'd created. "The foundation of the band was that demo tape recorded by one person and at times it could feel flimsy. It would make you question: Are we a band? Or 'How does this work?' So we immediately started writing new songs like *My Hero, Enough*



*Space and My Poor Brain*. We hired Gil Norton to produce. He'd produced some of our favourite records: Pixies and Echo & The Bunnymen, stuff like that. Gil is awesome in that he fucking wrings you out. He wants every last drop of performance and song. It was intense. I learnt more from that guy than anyone."

But by the time they'd nearly completed the album, it had become obvious all was not well. "We'd finished like 12 songs," recalls Grohl. "We'd recorded *Monkey Wrench, Wind Up, Doll and My Poor Brain* and everyone knew it wasn't happening. William, our drummer, wasn't really gelling. It didn't sound powerful. It didn't sound how I'd imagined it to sound."

The group took a Christmas break, during which Grohl went into a friend's studio and started recording new material, playing drums himself. He played the songs to Norton: "He's like: 'Those are good. I like those'. So I started recording newer songs, playing the drums, playing the guitar and William was bumming out. That turned into a breakdown and then I

**"People come up to me and say, 'The Colour And The Shape helped me through my divorce. I'm, like, 'It caused mine!'"**

Dave Grohl



The Foes in 1997: and then there were three



"Meet Nirvana's new singer!": Grohl, Krist Novoselic, Pat Smear and crooner Tony Bennett.



London calling: Grohl onstage at Brixton Academy in 1995.

realised he wasn't coming back, so I recorded all the drums on the record myself. It was basically Pat, Nate and I for that album. We did it pretty quickly. We re-recorded the record in about four weeks. When we were done, I knew we had a fucking great album."

In addition to the problems within the group, Grohl was also in the midst of domestic upheaval. "Oh, I was getting a divorce too," he adds nonchalantly. "You know what's funny? People come up to me – it's usually men – and say: 'Man, that album, it helped me through my divorce'. I'm like: 'Really? It caused mine.'"

If contentment is artistic death, then at least Grohl's woes were having a positive influence on the music. "I was living out of my duffel bag on this cat piss-stained mattress in my friend's back room with 12 people in the house. It was fucking awful. Made for a good record though."



**THERE IS NOTHING LEFT TO LOSE** (1999)

For two whole weeks Foo Fighters were a quartet again.

Alanis Morissette's drummer Taylor

Hawkins had joined the group but, three days before they were to head out on tour, "Pat said: 'Guys I have to quit'," recalls Grohl, the sense of shock still palpable. "I'm like, what the fuck? What next?"

"That was a splintered fucking band at that point," Hawkins reflects of his first days with the group.

"It really was," concurs Grohl. "The band was just holding on by our fingertips this whole time."

Grohl convinced Smear to stay on until he found a replacement in Franz Stahl, guitarist with hardcore band Scream who Grohl had played with prior to Nirvana.

After the tour, Grohl was finding the Los Angeles lifestyle too distracting. "We had the bachelor pad in Laurel Canyon. We would just go drag the Sunset Strip and bring it back to the house."

Returning to his old stamping ground of Virginia, he built a studio in the basement of his house. They extricated themselves from their record contract with Capitol, and became a three-piece again. "It didn't work out with Franz," Grohl states succinctly. The Foes brought in producer Adam Kasper and set to work.

"It was so great," smiles Grohl. "We were in a basement in Virginia with sleeping bags nailed to the wall. There's no record company, there's no suits knocking on the door, there's no one telling you what's good or bad. It was four months of the most mellow recording."

The relaxed conditions were reflected in the music which was softer than anything they'd produced to that point. "It's easy to fucking stomp on a distortion pedal and make a chorus blow up," explains Grohl. "That's easy. It's easy to turn up to 10 and scream your balls off. What's not easy is to write a song that's a mid-level linear dynamic that moves from beginning to end with melody."

"So that was the idea with a lot of that record, whether it was *Learn To Fly*, *Ain't It The Life*, *Gimme Stitches* or *Next Year*. We were more focused on melody and songwriting, and it took a lot of people off guard. A lot of people thought Foo Fighters were selling out or going soft. It was more about getting into the music and writing. That album opened up doors for us to make anything possible."

For Dave Grohl, that was the kind of challenge they had no choice but to accept. Anything really was possible, and the Foo Fighters have spent more than 25 years proving it. ●



Only happy when it rains:  
(l-r) Steve Marker, Butch Vig,  
Shirley Manson, Duke Erikson.



**“I felt so plain and  
normal, and like such  
an incredible fraud.”**

— SHIRLEY MANSON —

# The World is not Enough

WORDS: PAUL REIS

Following the release of their self-titled debut album in 1995, **Garbage** had smash hits, a James Bond theme and global fame. But, with the world at their feet, Shirley Manson and co disintegrated in a maelstrom of paranoia and exhaustion.

**I**n December 1994, influential British DJs John Peel and Steve Lamacq began playing a pulsating and vaguely gothic-sounding song titled *Vow* on their respective Radio 1 shows. Sleek and somewhat sinister, it progressed via a biting guitar line to a propulsive chorus laced with a dose of menace as its female singer threatened to tear an errant lover's world apart. The work of a mysterious band called Garbage, it staked out a new musical genre: futuristic grunge-pop.

*Vow* prompted an initial buzz of interest that turned to a clamour when it became known that Garbage's drummer was Butch Vig. As producer of Nirvana's *Nevermind* and also *Gish* by the Smashing Pumpkins, Vig had set the template for the dominant alt-rock sound of the 90s. Much less was known about his other two American bandmates and fellow producers – Steve Marker and Duke Erikson – and next to nothing about the band's Scottish singer, Shirley Manson.

That all changed with the release of Garbage's self-titled debut album the next summer. Well-crafted but with a dark beating heart, it went on to sell more than four million copies, transforming the band, and especially Manson, into stars.

Urbane, introverted and frankly middle-aged, Erikson, Marker and also Vig soon took a back seat to their striking, potty-mouthed vocalist. The impulsive, extrovert Manson delighted journalists with such diverting tales as the one in which she settled an argument with her boyfriend by taking a dump on his Cornflakes. She also looked great, and progressed to being a sex symbol, role model and 'it' girl, all bundled up into one feisty, flame-haired package.

A second hit album, *Version 2.0*, followed in 1998, and for a while Garbage appeared to be blessed. They were feted in the media, headlined the Reading Festival and were invited to record a James Bond film theme. However, their relentless schedule was driving them into the ground, at a point when

the music business was going through one of its periodic shifts.

In short order, Garbage were undone by internal tensions, record company politics, divorce, depression, the White Stripes and a catastrophic attack on mainland USA. The combined effects split the band apart and left deep wounds that took years to heal. Manson sums up their career in one word: "Tumultuous".

Garbage regrouped in 2010, five years after they officially went on hiatus. Today, Vig describes the intervening period as having passed in the blink of an eye. Phoning from various ports in the US and Europe, the Garbage men have retained their relaxed, genial air. Sitting in a poky London office on a hot summer's afternoon, Shirley Manson is also unchanged, save for the fact that her red hair is now dyed electric pink. This is to say she's sharp, funny, unguarded, saucer-eyed and dressed in various shades of black. She also swears like a docker, and when she laughs, which is often, it arrives as a resounding eruption that sounds delighted and also filthy.

"It's such a cliché," she allows of Garbage's story, "but it's been a mental ride."

**I**t began in Madison, Wisconsin in the late 1970s. Madison, the state capital, is a compact, picturesque city built on the confluence of the Yahara River and encompassing four lakes. Madison's thriving music scene was centred on a club called Merlyn's, which hosted the passing American and British punk and new wave bands of the period. It was also a regular haunt of local new-wave heroes Spooner, formed in 1974 by singer/guitarist Erikson, who had moved to Madison intending to teach art. In summer 1978, Erikson talked Vig out of relocating to Colorado to work as a ski instructor, and into being Spooner's new drummer. Vig was completing a film studies degree, and brought with him another student on his course, Marker, to be the band's roadie.

Spooner went on to make a brace of albums and opened up regional gigs for The Police, Cheap Trick and Pat Benatar, among others, but their fame never extended out from their corner of the Midwest.

On the side, Marker invested in a four-track reel-to-reel tape recorder, and together with Vig, began producing other bands. This led to the pair of them establishing Smart Studios in 1983, in a two-storey red-brick building in downtown Madison.

From the mid-80s onwards, a procession of off-kilter American underground bands trooped through Smart, among them Urge Overkill, Tad, Killdozer and, in 1991, both Nirvana and the Smashing Pumpkins. Vig was at the same time making a name for himself remixing U2, Depeche Mode and Nine Inch Nails. More accurately, he was reinventing their songs, erasing all but the vocal tracks and adding entirely new music with the help of Marker and Erikson. It was this process of fashioning songs out of loops and samples, as well as organic instruments, that gave rise to Garbage.

"The original idea was for it to be a studio band," says Vig. "We were thinking of something like [US experimentalists] the Golden Palominos, where each song would have a different singer and stylistic approach."

In the first instance, and based on their shared love of Blondie and Patti Smith, they wanted to have a female singer. Vig and Marker saw Manson on MTV one night in 1994, performing a brooding song called *Suffocate Me* with her (short-lived) band Angelfish, Kohl-eyed and alluring. It was the one time the video was screened on the channel.

Shirley Ann Manson was born in the well-heeled Stockbridge area of Edinburgh on August 26, 1966. She grew up rebelling against her conventional upbringing, bunking off school. Her mother had sung in big bands and Shirley inherited her passion for music, latching on to such strong, indomitable characters as Siouxsie Sioux and Chrissie Hynde.

She left school at 16 and worked as a shop assistant for five years. In '84 she became a backing >



Have boa, will travel: Shirley Manson onstage in 1995.

singer with Goodbye Mr. Mackenzie, a band emerging from the city's post-punk scene. The crippling self-image that afflicted Manson was not helped by her falling into a ruinous relationship with their frontman, Martin Metcalfe.

"I felt so plain and normal, and like such an incredible fraud for not really doing much in the band," she says. "I was also involved with a man who lived a pretty wild and extreme existence, so there was a lot of madness and excess. I just longed for a bohemian lifestyle. I would go out to clubs every night and dance myself stupid. That felt like a freedom."

Goodbye Mr. Mackenzie peaked with their single *The Rattler*, which charted at No.37 in the UK for one week in March 1989. Manson, who had split from Metcalfe by then, moved on to Angelfish, who endured for one album and tour.

She was kicking her heels in Edinburgh when Vig and Marker tracked her down and invited her to a meeting with them and Erikson. It took place over afternoon tea at a smart London hotel. The three Americans struggled to comprehend Manson's accent. She was surprised at how much older than her they were. But plans were laid to fly her out to Madison for an audition. It proved to be a disaster.

"We couldn't get into Smart because it was full, so we had to set up a makeshift studio in the basement of Steve's house," Erikson recalls. "We ran a mic cable upstairs to the lounge, where Shirl sat all by herself. It was a bleak couple of days in winter. I'd go up and check on her now and again and she would just be staring out the window."

"It was a fiasco," says Manson. "They would

## "We were worn out and sick of each other."

BUTCH VIG

shout up things like: 'Okay, we're going to run a track. Put your headphones on and just make up something.' I had no idea what to do and acted like a complete freak."

Manson returned home crestfallen, but took with her a tape of the rough sketches of songs that Vig, Marker and Erikson had worked up. By the time they got back in touch and asked her to try out again, she had begun writing lyrics for *Vow* and a luminous pop track, *Only Happy When It Rains*. According to Erikson, Manson had "defined those songs, and all of a sudden we felt like there was a direction".

The notion of using a revolving cast of singers was gradually abandoned as their debut album took shape through 1994 with Manson. Her voice, which ranged from seductive to strident, was a perfect fit for the album's oozing melodies, shadowy corners and jagged edges. Vig, Marker and Erikson each pinpoint the creation of its centrepiece ballad, *Milk*, as the moment when Manson truly stamped herself on the band. A woozy, spooked lament, it was the first song she had written, based on the only two chords she had figured out on guitar, and recorded by candlelight in a single late-night session.

"I went back to my hotel room and listened to it over and again on a cassette all the rest of that night," Manson says. "I couldn't believe that something I had written sounded so beautiful."

The album, *Garbage*, was released in August 1995. To begin with it barely scraped into the UK Top 20 and entered the US chart at a lowly No.193. But as the band toured for the next 18 months it

picked up momentum, propelled by its intoxicating singles – *Stupid Girl* and *Only Happy When It Rains* – and the flowering of Manson into their glammed-up focal point.

Three years later, follow-up *Version 2.0* added gloss, more pop and robotic noises to the mix, and bagged a brace of Grammy nominations for the band for their troubles. At the end of 1999, *Garbage* recorded the title track to the new James Bond film *The World Is Not Enough*, rubber-stamping their place in rock's A-list. By then they had been swept up and carried off in a whirlwind.

"We didn't realise how crazy it all was," says Marker. "Mad shit like us flying into Europe from America on a private plane for one night to play at the MTV Awards, and having Mick Jagger walk into our dressing room to say hi. It was all going so fast. And that, mixed with our bizarre self-esteem issues, always thinking we had fucked everything up, didn't allow us to see the big picture."

"I was thrilled by our success but embarrassed about it too," Manson admits. "It was as if it meant that in some way we must suck. I also felt like I had to be something I wasn't. I would freak out if I hadn't had a manicure, like I wasn't being a good pop star. I felt as though everybody was disappointed when they met me in real life, because I was aware I was working with incredible image makers and that I didn't look like that. Mad, twisted, sick thinking. And it made me ill in the end."



Their third album, *Beautiful Garbage*, was

meant to be released on September 17, 2001. Six days before that, two hijacked planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. The record was postponed for two weeks. It was lush, euphoric and had a veneer of artifice, entirely at odds with the new mood of fear and uncertainty. The prevailing winds of the music business were also starting to blow in a different direction, occasioned by two breaking bands stripping rock back to its core elements: the White Stripes and The Strokes. As her own band was falling out of step, Shirley Manson's eight-year marriage to Scottish sculptor Eddie Farrell was also disintegrating.

"At that point I was a basket case," she says. "It was an incredibly painful divorce and it sent me off the rails. I just felt very scared and panicked in the world, not able to trust anyone. So nobody, not even the band, knew what I was going through. Plus we got sold on to Interscope Records

in America and they inherited a band that was struggling on radio. It was a fucking nightmare."

For 2005's *Bleed Like Me*, Manson hacked off her hair and went peroxide blonde. It was meant as a protest at Interscope's expectation of moulding her into a homogenised pop pin-up. The record sounded disengaged and sank. Relations between the band members had soured, and Garbage cancelled their tour that October, announcing they were taking an indefinite hiatus.

"I remember feeling an unbelievable sense of exhilaration when we finally decided to quit the tour," says Vig. "It had been ten years and we were worn out and sick of each other."

"We were barely even speaking," Manson adds. "We didn't want to talk to anyone outside of the band about the problems we were having with our career, so of course it turned into this whole passive-aggressive thing between us. I just wanted to get the fuck out of there and go home."



**"I would freak out if I hadn't had a manicure, like I wasn't being a good pop star."**

— STEVE MARKER —

During the next five years the four of them had just fleeting contact. Vig returned to producing full-time and worked with Foo Fighters, Green Day and Muse. Marker and Erikson also recorded other artists, but operated under the radar. Manson moved to LA and began to develop a solo album, co-writing with Weezer's Rivers Cuomo and Paul Buchanan of stately Scots band the Blue Nile. The resulting songs were downbeat and reflective, and her record label rejected them.

A chance meeting with a Hollywood television

executive led to her being offered a role as a ruthless cyborg in the US network TV series *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, which ran for two seasons up to 2008. She based her character on Margaret Thatcher and revelled in the experience, but adds that it was "not a good time in my life".

Ultimately it was a succession of personal devastations that brought Garbage back together. In May 2008, Manson lost her mum to dementia. The following year the six-year-old son of mutual friends of Manson and Vig was struck down with cancer and died. Days after attending his funeral, the pair of them got on the phone to Marker and Erikson and arranged an impromptu recording session in LA, Manson having resolved that time was being wasted and they were meant to be together.

They finally reconvened in February 2010 over two bottles of wine in the studio, and proceeded at a leisurely pace to make the *Not Your Kind Of People*

album, Manson breaking off to marry Billy Bush, their long-serving sound engineer. The record was self-released in 2012. It was more abrasive-sounding than its predecessors but it settled them back into their own niche. Since then they've released another two albums, 2016's *Strange Little Birds* and 2021's *No Gods No Masters*. Whatever time they lost, they've more than made up for it.

"It's been glorious," Manson says of their comeback. "My mum dying was the most sobering moment of my life, obviously, but I feel like her final gift to me was that she took me and shook me up. My equilibrium was restored and I became sane again."

"I feel really grateful. I've come from a position of lack my entire life. That's just how it's been – I was the middle child. To suddenly believe in your forties that you got the long straw, it changes the way you look at the world and your whole story. Does that mean I'm at peace? Fuck no." 🗣️



# 1996

The second half of the decade was underway, and change was in the air. Out came the hair clippers, skanking anthems and digital singles.



**O**n the surface, 1996 was a year of megastar splits and multi-million dollar reunions. Punk pioneers Ramones counted out their last "1, 2, 3, 4", while Phil Collins and Sammy Hagar said goodbye to prog-pop titans Genesis and everlasting hard rock icons Van Halen respectively. Elsewhere, the nostalgia machine went into overdrive, with the likes of the Sex Pistols and the original Kiss line-up coining it in on megabucks comeback tours.

All that felt like it was happening on some distant planet. The real action in 1996 was going on a long way from vast arenas and the offices of smart-suited tour accountants. In the vast suburban grid of Orange County, a bunch of like-minded bands were smashing together punk rock and ska with all the verve of youth. The figureheads of this new movement were a trio of wayward beach bums named Sublime, who were pulling along a flotilla of like-minded souls in their wake, and No Doubt, whose third album, *Tragic Kingdom*, had caused ripples when it was released the previous year. By the end of 1996, it was No Doubt who had launched ska punk globally thanks to crossover hit *Don't Speak*, while Sublime had dissolved following the tragic death of frontman Bradley Nowell just weeks before the release of their self-titled third album, another senseless victim of a drug overdose.

As the unexpected global success of ska punk proved, 1996 was a year where the rules went out of the window. While Rage Against The Machine doubled down on the street-rioting radicalism with their

second album *Evil Empire*, their friends and former tourmates Tool plunged head-first into stranger waters with their second album, the prog metal-adjacent *Aenima*.

Seattle superstars Pearl Jam stripped away the grunge and most of their audience on the determinedly back-to-basics *No Code*, which was precisely what the band wanted. Geek rock superheroes Weezer ditched the sunny power-pop of their self-titled debut for agonised introspection on follow-up *Pinkerton*, a record that was reviled at the time but has subsequently become a 1990s classic. Even Stone Temple Pilots, perceived by many as perpetual bandwagon jumpers, took a turn for the oddball with the psychedelic pop-grunge of *Tiny Music... Songs From The Vatican Gift Shop*, whose songs were as surprising as its title was weird.

The award for the year's most unlikely transformation went to Metallica, whose self-titled 1991 album – aka the Black Album – was on its way to becoming one of the decade's most successful records. The former thrash overlords chopped off their hair, hit the eyeliner and, with the brilliant but divisive *Load*, served up a record designed to confound anyone who thought they could begin to get a handle on them.

Ironically, for all the changes that were happening, it would be one of music's most enduring figures who truly pointed the way to the future. David Bowie may have been in one of his periodic career lulls, but his song *Telling Lies* would be the first ever digital single released by a major label. Then, as always, he was at the forefront of everything, waiting for the rest of the world to catch up. 🎧

No Doubt: the band that turned ska punk into a global phenomenon.



# GWE STEFANI! BEYOND!

Punk ruled the mid-90s – but thanks to **Rancid**, **Sublime**, **No Doubt** and more, it was about to slip on its checkerboard sneakers and hit the dancefloor. This is how the world went ska punk crazy:

Words: **Mike Rampton**

**R**

ecord launches aren't meant to also be farewell shows, but Operation Ivy didn't do what other bands did. And so, on May 29, 1989 at famed Berkeley punk mecca 924 Gilman Street, the

forefathers of modern ska punk released their debut album, *Energy*, and split up that same evening.

In a late 1980s scene dominated by thrash and hair metal, Op Ivy had shown up playing a pissed-off mixture of punk and ska. It was a gamble - they were regularly heckled by crowds early on - but Gilman Street was the perfect hothouse for this unlikely fusion of sounds.

"It was a great climate to be creative and do some cool shit," Operation Ivy guitarist and future Rancid frontman Tim 'Lint' Armstrong recalled. "Gilman was a climate where you could play punk rock and ska and not get moshed on."

It was indeed, and something about what they were doing struck a chord with people. Early 80s British 2-Tone filtered through contemporary California punk had ended up turning Op Ivy into California punk's most exciting underground band - and one of its hardest working. They played show after show after show, touring in a beaten-up 1969 Chrysler Newport, surviving on cheese sandwiches and sleeping on floors.

But recording *Energy* was too much, and they went out in a blaze of glory at their home-from-home, two years to the month since they got together. That night, the 300-capacity Gilman Street was sold out four times over as the Bay Area punk crowd gathered to say farewell to their heroes. There would be one more private show in a friend's garden, but that was it. Operation Ivy had come and gone, and the world hadn't noticed. But, without meaning to, they'd started a revolution.

**S**ka has had three separate phases. It started in Jamaica in the late 1950s, mixing elements of Caribbean and American music together. Exported to the UK by Caribbean emigrés, by the late 70s it morphed into 2 Tone, taking on elements of punk and directly addressing the politics of the time - racial inequality, civil unrest and general downtroddenness. Then in the 90s, across the Atlantic in the US, came the third wave: ska punk.

Dicky Barrett, frontman with ska punk lynchpins Mighty Mighty Bosstones, has a theory that ska pops up in troubled times. "I think ska is some sort of a



Check it out: **Mighty Mighty Bosstones** in 1993.

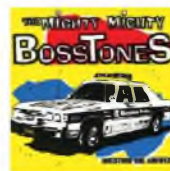
IMAGE CREDIT: BOB GEORGE/CONTOUR

musical super hero," he told *Punk News*. "When people need to feel good, it seems to show up at just the right time. I think that whatever was going on in Jamaica in the 50s, with all the turmoil, it needed ska then. And it needed it in Margaret Thatcher's England and we need it now. Do the math - when people are feeling down, they want to feel good. Ska is the thinking man's way of enjoying himself."

When Operation Ivy's Tim Armstrong formed Rancid in 1991, one of their founding principles was: "We don't play ska." They stuck to it on 1992's self-titled, straight-up-punk debut, but ska was very much present on 1994 follow-up *Let's Go*. Punk had replaced grunge as the next big thing thanks to Green Day and The Offspring, and Rancid found themselves being courted by Madonna's label, Maverick. Instead, they stayed where they were, on punk label Epitaph.

"Ultimately, we decided it would dumb not to stay with [Epitaph owner and Bad Religion guitarist] Brett Gurewitz, a real record guy, a punk rock record guy," Armstrong later recalled. "Madonna's cool, but she's an international superstar. She's not a punk rock record guy."

Rancid's decision was borne out when their third album, 1995's *...And Out Come The Wolves*, sold more than a million copies. More than half a decade after Operation Ivy's demise, there was money to be made in ska punk.



**W**hile Operation Ivy were burning themselves out, 400 miles down the coast, ska was being reinvented in a different way. Formed in Long Beach in 1988, Sublime were a band that brought a party with them wherever they went. Where the Berkeley scene was filled with angry men in leather jackets, Sublime were sun-soaked beach bums in wraparound shades who filtered the sound of Jamaican ska through the Californian sunshine.

The trio of singer and guitarist Bradley Nowell, drummer Bud Gaugh and bassist Eric Wilson - plus their constant companion, Nowell's dalmatian Lou Dog - had a good thing going, partying up and down the Southern California coast and getting paid for it. They played raucous shows at house parties with hundreds of people that inevitably got out of control, resulting in the police showing up pretty much every time.

Despite the popularity of a surfy, summery, stoned sound that combined ska with punk and hip-hop influences, Sublime couldn't convince record labels to sign them - so they began their own, Skunk Records. Their 1992 debut album, *40oz. To Freedom*, was partly recorded by breaking into the studio at night and using the equipment for free.

When the bluntly-titled anti-abuse song *Date Rape* belatedly became a radio hit a full three years later after being picked up by tastemaking LA radio station KROQ, MCA signed Sublime (in the interim, they had released the messily experimental *Robbin' The Hood*, featuring guest vocals on one track from Gwen Stefani, singer with then unknown Orange County ska punks No Doubt).

Signing to a major label and booking a co-headlining slot on the first Warped

**"When people need to feel good, ska seems to show up at just the right time. It's the thinking man's way of enjoying himself."**

**Mighty Mighty Bosstones' Dickey Barrett**





Last of the mohicans: Rancid in 1994.

assured by an executive from LA's KROQ that it would take "an act of God" for No Doubt to be played on the radio. While the world was embracing grunge, they were making cartoony ska-pop. Their follow-up, *The Beacon Street Collection*, was named after the location of the house the band shared. However, as the process of creating a third album began, the band started to fall apart. Keyboardist Eric Stefani, Gwen's older brother, had always been the leading creative force in the band, but had a crisis of confidence when asked to collaborate with others, and left to pursue a career in animation. Meanwhile, the relationship between Gwen Stefani and bassist Tony Kanal was coming to an end.

Gwen began writing lyrics, something she had never done before, and looked to her own life for inspiration – the way her parents treated her differently to Eric due to her gender, her former relationship with Kanal, and more. The resulting songs – including *Just A Girl*, *Spiderwebs*, *Sunday Morning* and *Don't Speak* – led to *Tragic Kingdom*, the title a pun on the shadow of Disneyland the band had grown up in. It was one of the most successful albums of the decade, leading to a stratospheric rise to global fame.

In August 1995, on the first ever Warped Tour – the same one Sublime's dog was biting skaters at – No Doubt were billed tenth, their name printed smaller than the proclamation that the festival would feature a "huge climbing wall". One month later, *Just A Girl* came out, equal parts poppy and angry, impossibly catchy and unapologetically livid.

Stefani began bombarding radio stations with phone calls, calling KROQ a hundred times a day, but it soon became clear that doing so wasn't necessary as the song was an immediate hit. A month after that, the album dropped, going on to sell a staggering 16 million units.



Goldfinger: beneficiaries of Tony Hawk's Pro Skater game.

Tour did nothing to calm Sublime down. Bud Gaugh later told *Time* magazine they got booted from the tour: "Basically, our daily regimen was wake up, drink, drink more, play, and then drink a lot more. We'd call people names. Nobody got our sense of humour. Then we brought the dog out and he bit a few skaters, and that was the last straw."

But it was Bradley Nowell's drug use that was really out of hand – what started as a dabble with heroin, a drug he perceived as having a kind of rock'n'roll romanticism to it, had spiralled into a full-on addiction. Recording their self-titled major-label debut, the singer's partying was getting out of control. Butthole Surfers' Paul Leary, who produced the album, told *Rolling Stone*: "There were times where someone had to go into the bathroom to see if Brad was still alive."

"He got this elitist attitude because he was a junkie," Bradley's wife, Troy, later told *Spin*. "He always used to say, 'You guys don't understand because you don't do heroin.' A lot of junkies are like that. They think they're doing the most hardcore thing, sticking needles in their arm. We could say anything – 'We understand what you're going through' – but we really don't, and they know that. They like that."

Nowell tried to quit after the birth of his son Jakob, but relapsed every time. He died of an overdose on May 25, 1996, his body found by his hungover bandmates. He was 28. He'd got married just one week earlier, and Sublime's self-titled album was still two months away from release.

On the back of singles such as *What I*

*Got, Doin' Time*, *Santeria* and *Wrong*, the album became a massive hit, shifting six million copies but leaving behind countless unanswered questions about what might have been. Where would Nowell be today if he'd beaten his demons? Still hanging out in a van with his dog? Or would he be a huge star? That's what happened to one of his friends, after all.

No Doubt formed in Anaheim, California in 1986, setting out to treat their sun-soaked Californian surroundings how their beloved Madness treated Camden Town. "When I discovered ska music in the late 70s, it was all about unity and anti-racism, good skinheads and bad skinheads," Gwen Stefani told *Stereogum* in 2018. "We were trying to imitate this other generation and they were so vocal about their message. We heard that."

After their 1992 self-titled debut album came out, the band were

Sublime: late frontman Bradley Nowell, centre.



The tour promoting *Tragic Kingdom* ended up circling the globe three times, playing larger and larger venues as the band's fame grew. They were meant to be on tour for two months, but it ended up lasting two and a half years. *Don't Speak*, which detailed Stefani and Kanal's breakup, became the most-played song of 1996 on US radio and a crossover hit, its catchy anguish appealing to every demographic. While not in itself a ska song, its runaway success sparked massive interest in the scene the band had come out of. No Doubt were certified megastars, and surely there were more in the making.

**N**o Doubt's explosion led to a gold rush, with labels clamouring to sign ska punk bands, confident the hits would come. Save Ferris told *Billboard* their signing was a direct result of Stefani and co's success, with guitarist Brian Mashburn saying, "I'd be kidding myself to think we got here all by ourselves."

And the hits did come. Reel Big Fish, fronted by bequiffed, sharp-sideburned Aaron Barrett, enjoyed a bona-fide chart hit with the 1996 single *Sell Out*. "When *Sell Out* came out, that was like in the movies," Barrett recalled in a documentary about the ska punk scene, *Pick It Up! Ska Punk In The '90s*. "They do a montage of playing a small show and then they get bigger and bigger and then they pan up the charts, going to Number One."

Reel Big Fish did make an appearance in *South Park* creators Matt Stone and Trey Parker's cult 1998 comedy *BASEketball*, performing a cover of A-Ha's *Take On Me* and their best song, the phenomenally good *Beer*. Nonetheless, their brush with chart success cast quite a shadow over their subsequent career, sometimes dealt with jokingly (as with the compilation album *Greatest Hit... And More*) and sometimes with a feeling of real bitterness. On their fifth album, a cover of Morrissey's *We Hate It When Our Friends Become Successful* has an extra line inserted: "Especially if you're No Doubt – that makes it so much worse".

The other properly giant hit was *Mighty Bosstones' The Impression That I Get*, which hit the Number One spot on the *Billboard* Modern Rock chart in 1997, 14 years into the Bostonian nine-piece's career. That same year, some bands started questioning how sustainable the ska punk explosion was. Less Than Jake drummer/lyricist Vinnie Fiorello told *Billboard*: "Labels start signing copycat bands, and fans say, 'Not another girl that sounds like



**Ska'd for life: Less Than Jake with the legendary Skullman in 1998.**

Gwen. Not another guy with green hair and a suit. Not more guys jumping on crowds during horn solos."

[L] themselves were frequently accompanied on stage by Skullman, a tuxedoed dancer in a rubber mask. According to guitarist Chris Demakes, retiring Skullman was a practical decision after he gained some weight – struggling to get into the tuxedo was one thing, but then on a particularly hot Warped Tour day the less-bony-than-before Skullman "passed out and nearly died".

Ska punk was an integral part of the mammoth touring festival, and Less Than Jake played the Warped Tour a record 13 times. Reel Big Fish managed 11. Bands like Mad Caddies, Dance Hall Crashers, Voodoo Glow Skulls, Suicide Machines, Save Ferris and the Aquabats – the latter a superhero-themed family-friendly eight-piece who counted a pre-fame Travis Barker in their number – were mainstays. The idea a lot of people have of what a ska punk band is – a too-large group playing fairly samey, trombone-heavy songs and ironic cover versions to a parking lot of fans in identical checkerboard Vans – came out of Warped Tours featuring, well, bands exactly like that.

Beyond the juggernaut that was Warped, one of the biggest platforms in making ska punk huge ended up being video games. Skate legend Tony Hawk inadvertently gave the genre a huge leg-up via the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* video game series. The games' soundtracks were more diverse in terms of genre than the collective memory has decided, featuring hip-hop, metal and classic punk but their ska punk tunes are the ones that have become most associated with the franchise. Goldfinger's singalong anthem

*Superman* is the unofficial theme tune to the whole series.

"It would never be the song it is today without Tony Hawk's help," Goldfinger frontman John Feldmann told *Loudwire* in 2020. "I don't know if it was a marketing person who suggested that Goldfinger was having success and you should put them in your game or if he just really gravitated toward the song. I've never met Tony, but I'm really grateful that he chose us to put in his game."

**B**y the first few years few years of this century, the ska punk bubble had burst. There was never a point when touring in a nine-piece band was economically viable, and the novelty value of a ska cover of a pop classic just wore off over time, as pretty much every signed ska punk band jumped on that bandwagon – Save Ferris doing *Come On Eileen*, Goldfinger doing *99 Luftballons*, Less Than Jake covering the *Grease* soundtrack... Everyone got the joke.

At the same time, the music on the Warped Tour diversified, with hip-hop and metalcore featuring heavily. Nu-metal and pop-punk bands sold in the millions. The big ska punk names continued to tour almost constantly, but no new bands seemed able to break into that small group – or maybe the bands ambitious enough to do so were ambitious enough to play something other than ska punk.

Either way, the glory days of ska punk were over. Dust gathered on trombones and moths feasted on checkered Vans. But ska punk's lifers play on. "We love our songs," says Less Than Jake's Lima. "We love playing our songs, we love what we do and it's cool that there are people out there still dancing around." 📍

## "Labels signed copycat bands: 'Not another girl that sounds like Gwen Stefani.'"

Less Than Jake's Vinnie Fiorello



# 1997

Grunge was finally dead - and in its place came pre-millennial tension, ear-shattering electronica and an army of freaks waiting to take on the world.



**W**as it better to burn out than fade away? By 1997 grunge's biggest stars had largely imploded. Soundgarden officially disbanded on April 9, while Alice in Chains vocalist Layne Staley had become a recluse, effectively putting a end to that band as a creative force. As grunge's empire crumbled, its brand of anti-commerce similarly faltered.

But there were plenty of hands ready to step into the break. Just like Frankenstein's Monster, rock was waiting for an infusion of electricity to give it new life. The wild-eyed theatrics of Keith Flint had turned The Prodigy's *Firestarter* into a best-selling single in 1996, but it was 1997's *The Fat of the Land* that truly tipped the scales for the band, topping the charts both sides of the Atlantic.

No less significant, though sitting firmly at the other end of the musical spectrum, were Radiohead (pictured right). The Oxford band had served notice of their ambition with 1995's *The Bends*, but epochal follow-up *OK Computer* channelled pre-millennial paranoia, claustrophobia and alienation into a rubber-stamped pre-millennial masterpiece.

Meanwhile, the US was embracing a nu breed of its own. Limp Bizkit's *Three Dollar Bill, Y'all*, Coal Chamber's self-titled debut and Deftones' *Around the Fur* laid the groundwork for nu metal's ascendant star. Nu metal forebears Faith No More didn't survive the advent of the scene they'd inadvertently influenced however, sticking around just long enough to

release one last album, *Album of the Year*, and reluctantly seeding their own replacements as they took Limp Bizkit out on what turned out to be the final tour of their initial run.

But then, the changing of the guard seemed to be a recurring motif throughout the year. Dave Grohl had already laid the groundwork for his musical rebirth in 1995, but *The Colour and The Shape* firmly established Foo Fighters as a fully-fledged band rather than just a rebound project for the ex-Nirvana drummer.

The face of rock was changing and massive package tours helped pave the path. In its second iteration Ozzfest became a fully-touring entity, setting itself up to help break bands like Slipknot and System of a Down over subsequent years. Meanwhile, Warped Tour went international for the first time, exposing the likes of Blink-182 and Limp Bizkit to European audiences. Bizkit weren't the only nu metal bands making in-roads in Europe, however - both Korn and Deftones would embark on their first headline tours of the continent, further spreading nu metal's influence.

But the most unexpected breakthrough of all went to Rammstein, the German industrial-metal troupe cracking America with the power of sheer determination (and a metric fuck-tonne of pyrotechnics). While industrial metal had existed independently of nu metal for almost two decades, Rammstein's arrival in America proved to be the final spark needed to turn nu metal's embers into a blaze of glory that would shape rock for the rest of the decade. 🍷







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# HOW RAMMSTEIN BROKE AMERIKA

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When Rammstein released their second album, 1997's *Sehnsucht*, it turned them into one of the biggest bands in Europe. What no one expected was that the rest of the world would embrace them.

WORDS: EMMA JOHNSTON



**A**merica's love affair with Rammstein is an old-fashioned tale of opposites attracting. After all, when this close-knit gang who grew up in the former Communist East Germany arrived armed with uniquely aggressive songs sung entirely in their native tongue and a reputation for spectacular, explicit shows that literally set the stage – and their frontman – on fire, there was little to suggest the largely English-speaking, socially conservative population would welcome them. And yet their rise in the US was meteoric.

Less than a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in September 1997, the band landed in New York for showcases at the CMJ music industry conference. Already successful in their homeland and across Europe, and having released second album *Sehnsucht* a month earlier, here they were starting again from scratch. The shows were attended by Wayne Pighini of London Records, who would later release *Sehnsucht* as their US debut, but his first experience of the full production would have to wait until a concert in Las Vegas that December, when they were touring in support of German industrial band KMFDM.

"I remember walking out of the venue that night and thinking, 'Wow, this is really something special,'" he says. "Till took out the flamethrower and started blowing flame 20 feet over the crowd's heads, and the crowd was going crazy. I'd never seen anything like this, and I just remember getting on the plane home and thinking, 'I don't know what is going to happen here, but this band has really got something unique going.'"

Respected US publicist Steve Martin first became aware of Rammstein when acts on his roster including Dave Grohl and the Beastie Boys returned from European festivals raving about them, so he flew to Vienna to see them, and was bowled over by their dangerous take on performance art.

"I was utterly dumbfounded," he recalls. "Kiss was the very first concert that I saw when I was a kid, but this was something beyond that. Kiss was cartoonish, Rammstein is more on the scary side. Seeing them that first night, everything threw me off

balance. The theatrics just seemed more serious and authentic. I walked out of there saying, 'This may take a while but it's going to translate to America.' I knew it would work."

**W**ith *Sehnsucht* imminently due out in the US, Wayne contacted his friend Michael Arfin, a New York-based booking agent he'd met in college. On the excellent documentary *Rammstein In Amerika*, Michael admitted to having reservations about the band ("My initial instinct was this would never, ever work in America"), but Wayne convinced the label bosses to fly him to the west coast to see their LA date at the Palladium.

"That show was pretty crazy," Wayne says. "Halfway through he turned to me and said, 'Dude, I'm in.'"

The live extravaganza, he says, was key to their appeal to the US market. In the land of supersizing, a band willing to go so far over the top every night had a head start.

"With them it's the whole package," he says. "The fire's just part of it. It's the costumes, the lighting, and they are so tight musically. It all works perfectly. Everybody sees flames shooting up to the sky and you can feel the heat on your face, and it's crazy, but it wouldn't work if the music and the lights and everything didn't fit with the fire. And they also have Till, who's this massive, hulking man. He's strong and imposing, and he commands the stage. He's maybe the best frontman I've ever seen. They suck you in with the antics and the pyro, but once you start to really look at it, you realise there's a lot more going on."

Frontman Till Lindemann is indeed a beast of a figure, his massive frame and booming, militaristic vocal style contrasting with some of the more camp elements of the stage show (usually involving some kind of staged abuse of keyboardist Christian 'Flake' Lorenz) in a manner that makes him seem all the more imposing. Offstage, though, Wayne's first impression of the band was one of thoughtful professionalism.

"They were very soft spoken," he remembers. "Till has always been incredibly respectful, pleasant to deal with. He certainly likes to have a good time but if you're talking to him, he will always be super-polite and cool. Every one of them was always that way with me. They've never been disrespectful or difficult."

"They were really a close-knit group, like a family," adds Steve. "I noticed it was all about the bond between the six of them. They were all on the same wavelength, and meeting them that first night helped me understand, this is why they made this work, this improbable musical style and really dangerous live show. But they had a really warm family vibe, just mature adult guys. I just could tell when I first met them that these guys had come from nothing and they don't take anything for granted."

**A**fter the release of *Sehnsucht* the band toured like demons, first with KMFDM, then as headliners, and eventually as part of Korn's multi-band Family Values tour. But they scored another ace, soon after the album came out, when MTV ran with the video for *Du hast*.

"That was pretty huge," says Steve. "When I'd go to get a cup of coffee with one of them, people in cars would be sticking their head out the window going 'Rammstein! *Du hast!*' They didn't fit with anything that was on MTV at the time and I think that was to their advantage. Sticking out like a sore thumb between a No Doubt video and a TLC video, that's going to pique anyone's interest. I just imagine if I had seen that when I was 15 years old there's no way I would be able to look away from that screen."

With nu metal on the rise, opening doors for heavy bands of all stripes, and the reputation of Rammstein's colossal



Vorsprung durch technik: Rammstein onstage in Munich in 1997.

live show spreading like, well, wildfire, America was hooked. *Sehnsucht* eventually went platinum on the Billboard chart, unheard of for a German-language act.

"It's theatre, it's opera, you can go and watch it and not understand a word of it and yet you can still figure out what's going on," says Wayne. "When we started working with the band in the States, that was always the question: how is this going to translate in America? How would this connect with someone emotionally when you can't understand what's being said? We actually did cut *Du hast* and one other song in English, and it just doesn't work. It sounded so weird and out of place, so we scrapped it. It's amazing how that language barrier can be broken down."

"The translation was too literal and it lost all the emotional impact of the original lyrics," adds Steve. "In the same way that when I watch a foreign film, I want to watch it with subtitles, I don't want to watch it dubbed."

In October 1998, guitarist Richard Z. Kruspe told *Hammer* scribe Ian Fortnum of his own satisfaction that American audiences took the band so firmly to their bosom. "It was an absolute smashing surprise for us," he said. "Because you go to another country and you're singing in a foreign language and they still like what you

do, that's amazing. Before we came here everybody back in Germany told us: 'You won't make it, because that's a thing that nobody can do.' But we always believed we could achieve it because we strongly believe in what we do and that we can get our message across."

**T**he band weren't a completely unknown quantity on their arrival in the US, having been personally picked by director David Lynch to soundtrack a scene in his 1997 neo-noir film *Lost Highway*. "If a director like that gives the band a seal of approval, that lends a lot of credibility to it for people," says Wayne.


But it was only after touring that the wider population started to notice them, and inevitably, the moralists started to get twitchy. Aside from local fire marshalls forbidding them to use their pyro in Chicago, they faced a small but vocal group of critics for whom Rammstein's onstage persona was too much.

"A couple of times in the States, in Denver and in the Mormon states, in Chicago, a couple of cities, there were like little demonstrations," Till Lindemann told *Rolling Stone* in 2015. "Church people. A demonstration with big signs in the air and, 'Go home, Nazis' and stuff like this. It was Christian and religion groups, but they're always there. For Slipknot and Manson, they're always there. It's like a weekend procedure for them. People go to picnic and they go to make a demonstration [laughs]. It's like, 'Some rude guy is playing here tonight.'"

"I remember we had to put out a statement when they found some of their music in the collection of the kids

## "WE CUT *DU HAST* IN ENGLISH. IT SOUNDED SO WEIRD THAT WE SCRAPPED IT"

WAYNE PIGHINI, FORMERLY OF LONDON RECORDS



Flame on: Till Lindemann lights up the Family Values tour.

who perpetrated the Columbine shooting,” adds Steve. “We just had to put out a statement saying that the band did not condone violence, and they were shattered to hear that people had been killed. But I don’t think they have a public enemy number one standing. I don’t think they’re seen as anything negative.”

Things came to a head – if you’ll pardon the expression – in Worcester, Massachusetts, on September 23, 1998. They were on the Family Values tour when Till and Flake were hauled off to jail for the night, charged with lewd and lascivious behaviour after simulating sex during *Bück dich*, using a prosthetic penis that squirted liquid over the crowd.

“If I have an artistic interpretation of something, it’s my interpretation of that thing, which I don’t find bad at all,” Till said in *Rammstein In Amerika*. “I mean, if I get out a plastic dildo and squirt some milk around, I don’t expect to be locked up because of it. That this actually happens, that such a thing exists, such narrow-mindedness, you have to get your head around that first.”

“I admire that they were going to do their show the way they were going to do it, and let the consequences be what they were,” says Steve. “They wouldn’t compromise. One of my first impressions of them was how sincere and intense they were. They were focused and passionate, and I can see how people of that level of belief in their own art would say, ‘I’d rather go to jail than tone down my show.’”

This uncompromising stance was part of the reason Rammstein were so

successful in conquering the nu metal crowd on the Family Values tour, despite having very little in common with the scene. Conceived by Korn, the tour also featured fellow nu metallers Limp Bizkit and hip hop icon Ice Cube.

“I don’t think the audience knew what hit them over the head,” Korn guitarist Munky said of the response to the German band.

Orgy were the opening band on this traveling nu metal circus, and frontman Jay Gordon remembers Rammstein taking them under their wing. “I can’t say enough good things about Till, he’s amazing,” says Jay. “Every guy in the band was a really good dude, and they taught me how to say bad words in German. We made 20 bucks a week and we had, like, a Happy Meal on our rider. But Rammstein had cooks, and they would make us food, European cuisine we had never eaten. They also taught me how to party like a rock star. I would walk in their dressing room, and a Heineken bottle would go at 120mph past my head. One time it cost us \$27,000. We were at the Philadelphia 76ers Arena, and the dressing room they had was the visiting team’s locker room, so we pushed over all the lockers over, put axes in the ceiling, fire extinguishers everywhere, and we created some havoc. And I don’t mean just once or twice, we did the whole place.”

Steve Martin takes a more business-like view of the tour. “That was when I first noticed that this thing was a juggernaut,” he says. “People were actually showing up wearing Rammstein T-shirts. I’m not sure the

role it played in taking them to any next level but seeing them perform in that situation reaffirmed that they were going to be headlining these places.”

America had been well and truly broken. And then, just as suddenly as they’d arrived, they disappeared. The follow-up to *Sehnsucht, Mutter*, was released in 2001 to critical acclaim and commercial success, but they soon stopped playing the States. Almost a decade later, they elected to return in spectacular fashion at a sold-out Madison Square Garden in Manhattan on December 11, 2010, with a tour to follow. “That,” says Steve, “was a real ‘told-you-so’ moment.”

For most bands, abandoning the US to concentrate on Europe would have ended them in North America. But Rammstein aren’t most bands, and while they were gone, YouTube arrived. A whole new generation was able to witness the videos and incomparable live shows, and they longed to experience it themselves.

“Rammstein are one of those bands that have managed to get bigger and more successful by not being in the public eye,” says Wayne. “Some bands, if they don’t stay in the public eye they are forgotten about, but then there are some bands, the longer they are gone the more demand is created. That’s what is amazing about Rammstein, the mystique that they’ve created for themselves.”

The late, great Keith Flint: a twisted firestarter to strike fear into the hearts of MPs.



# RAVE NEW WORLD



**By taking dance music into heavy new territories, The Prodigy lit a fire under metal that burned so brightly, it couldn't be ignored**

WORDS: MÖRAT

**W**hen The Prodigy began appearing in metal and rock magazines in the mid-90s, not everyone was happy. Letters pages were flooded with complaints. Subscriptions were cancelled. More than one death threat was issued by a disgruntled metal fan.

In hindsight, this reaction – while OTT – was perhaps understandable. In the early 90s, the band and the rave scene they emerged from was seen as the enemy. The antithesis of heavy music, it was the preserve of white-gloved button-pushers who would happily dance around a car alarm. The bottom line was simple: rock and dance did not mix.

All that began to change in 1994 with the release of The Prodigy's second album, *Music For The Jilted Generation*, which included a couple of rock-orientated tunes – *Their Law* and *Voodoo People*. But it wasn't until a truly incendiary Glastonbury performance in '95 that it became obvious that The Prodigy were morphing into something very special and utterly unique; a mad hybrid of rock and punk, hip hop and dance music, that had the ability to bring all these disparate tribes together. Even then, most fans discovered them more by luck than judgement.

And then, in March 1996, The Prodigy released their new single. Its incendiary title told you all you needed to know: *Firestarter*. Helped along by video featuring vocalist/ringmaster of chaos Keith Flint bugging out in an underground tunnel, the single went straight to Number One, prompting questions in Parliament about the two-mohawked lunatic advocating arson. The Prodigy were too big to ignore – and rock fans started to get it.

"That's what you want, innit!" grins Prodigy founder/leader/genius Liam Howlett today, remembering the controversy. "But at the same time I thought, was there nothing else more important going on that they had to talk about my record? Get on with running the country, you cunts!"

**D**espite the success of *Firestarter*, and its equally provocative follow-up singles *Breathe* and *Smack My Bitch Up*, there was still resistance from the more diehard quarters of the metal community. Some remained vehemently opposed to these upstarts imposing dance beats on 'their' music. For Liam himself, it was



Liam Howlett backstage at Glastonbury festival, scaring the hippies



GETTY IMAGES

Funny-looking guitars... it was all too much for some metallers

**"WE DIDN'T GIVE A F\*\*K ABOUT ACCEPTANCE"**  
LIAM HOWLETT

never quite as simple as The Prodigy becoming a rock band.

"I was into hip hop before The Prodigy started," he says, "and at that time it was quite noisy in its sound. If you listen to Public Enemy, it was loud, chaotic, a real 'fuck you' sound. Then when the east London breakbeat sound started happening, I heard that chaos and noise in those records, so I got drawn in."

Growing bored with hip hop, Liam started going to raves, but that, too, became stale, eventually feeling safe and repetitive. The Prodigy were in LA when Rage Against The Machine's debut was released, and had also been playing festivals alongside the likes of Suicidal Tendencies and Biohazard. Tired of playing to undiscerning ravers, The Prodigy wanted the rock crowd.

"But it was never like we were moving into rock music," argues Liam. "We just

expanded our sound and brought back the edge I wanted. I will say, though, that the fundamental underpinning sound of the beats and bass never changed; that attack has always stayed the same from our first record to now."

By 1997, The Prodigy had proved their mettle – and indeed their metal – on the festival circuit, blowing away the opposition at the likes of Reading, Phoenix Festival, and T In The Park, something Liam says was very important in winning over a new audience. "We bent people towards what we were doing, rather than trying to fit into the rock scene," he says.

**I**f *Firestarter* had laid the groundwork, then The Prodigy's third album, *The Fat Of The Land*, sealed it for them. Released in June 1997, anticipation had reached fever pitch – the world was gagging for it. Matters were helped along by another burst of controversy, this time surrounding the single *Smack My Bitch Up* and its no-holds-barred drug-taking 'n' nudity video. After complaints from feminist groups about the track, the album was pulled from the shelves of certain record stores, but that didn't stop it going to Number One in more than 20 countries including the US and UK.



Serial thrillers: Keith and Maxim Reality in 2007.

## "THERE'S FIVE KILLER TUNES ON THE FAT OF THE LAND"

LIAM HOWLETT

GITTY

"It's alright," says Liam, modestly reflecting on the album some 20 years later. "I mean, there's five killer tunes on there. *Smack My Bitch Up* is still our live anthem, and the sound still hits hard and fresh today, so I got that mix right, which I'm proud of. I don't think it's our best album, as a whole, but it has two or three of our best tunes, and it signifies a good moment in time when barriers had been broken down."

He's understating the impact of the record and its enormous influence on the rock scene. Everyone from Biohazard and Sepultura to Gene Simmons (no, really) have covered songs from *Fat Of The Land*, and the big beats that were then so unusual in rock are now almost commonplace. The Prodigy became Download fixtures, finally headlining the main stage in 2012, even if they

still weren't totally accepted by sections of the metal crowd. For anyone else, that would have been frustrating. Not for Liam Howlett.

"Nah, man, never," he laughs. "We loved it. We weren't trying get accepted, we didn't give a fuck. We were simply telling people there's another heavy attacking sound here and a new angle. I think once people had seen us live, it was easier to understand."

Even after the huge worldwide success of their best-known album, *The Prodigy* never eased up on their confrontational approach. "None of my influences have changed," says Liam. "I think your influences

when you first start writing music always stay with you and never leave. From the attack and groove of the Rage sound, to the chaos and beats of Public Enemy and [their production team] The Bomb Squad... System Of A Down always inspire me, and they're a band who do shit their own way. They don't sound like anybody else... and we don't wanna sound like anybody else!"

Tragedy struck The Prodigy with the sudden and shocking death of Keith Flint in 2019. But Howlett has continued the band, partly in his honour. Ask him now to sum up the impact and influence of *The Fat Of The Land* and Liam simply shrugs. "Fuck knows, and I don't wanna know." That type of thing, he says, is for other people to analyse and write about. "We're just doing our thing and pushing forward."

He does confess that it's a little strange for *The Fat Of The Land* to be considered a classic 'metal' album, given the band's history with the genre.

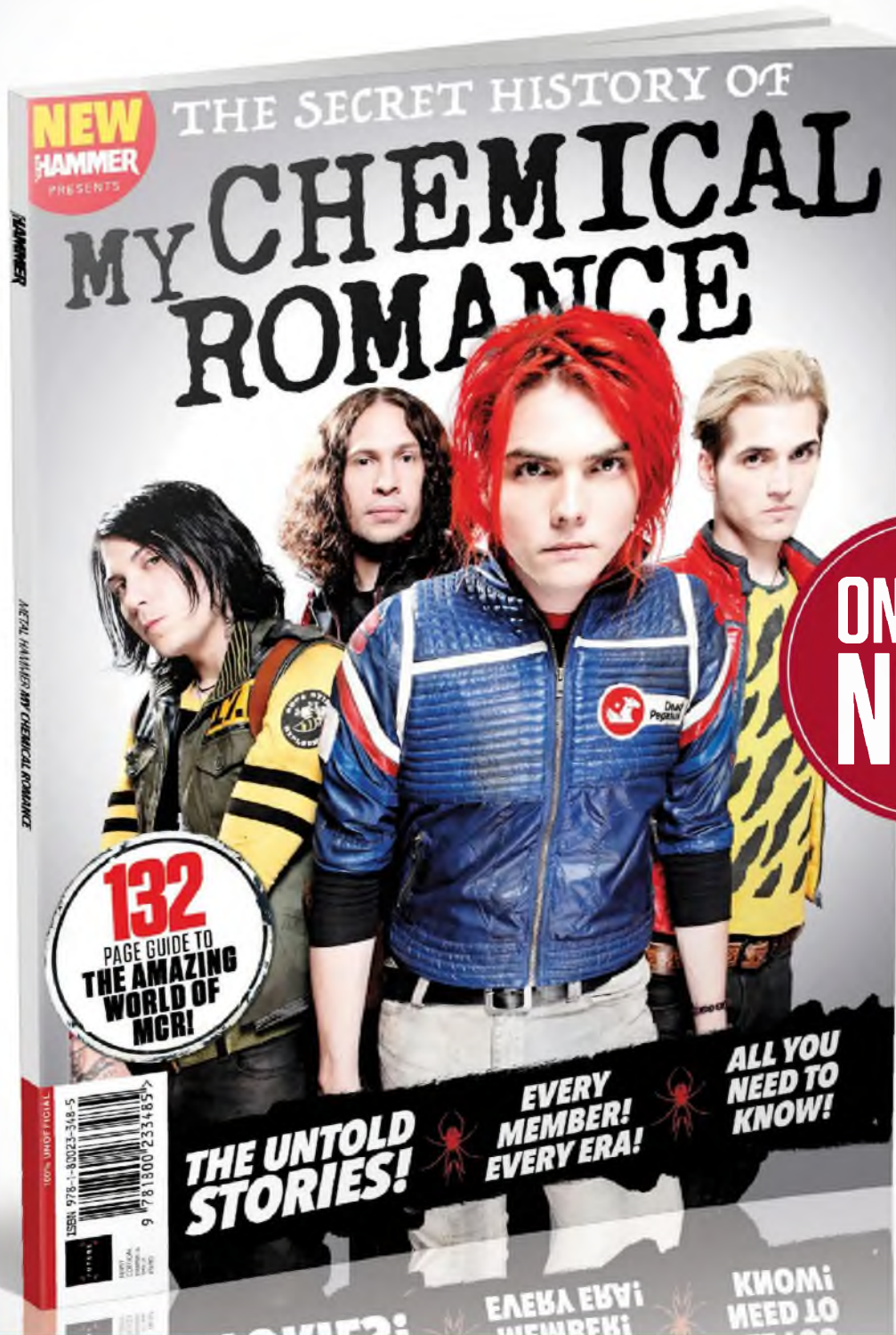
"But when I look back, there's never been any one thing that's been normal about this band. I'm used to strangeness in my world!" ✚





# THE UNDILUTED STORY OF ONE OF ROCK'S MOST ICONIC BANDS

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# 1998

It was the year nu metal truly crossed over – but new champions were being crowned right across the musical spectrum.



**W**hile nu metal had steadily built a head of steam throughout the middle of the decade, 1998 saw the breakthrough of some of the biggest names in the game as it became a commercial powerhouse. Korn's third album *Follow The Leader* topped the charts in the US, as well as breaking the top 10 in other countries including the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Jonathan Davis and co further built upon this success with the inaugural Family Value tour, a US-wide trek that bridged the worlds of hip-hop and rock with a line-up that included Korn alongside Limp Bizkit, Rammstein, funk rockers Incubus and ex-NWA rapper Ice Cube.

The tour helped put Limp Bizkit on the map, thanks in part to a stage set that saw singer, Fred Durst emerging onto the stage via a giant toilet bowl (pictured left). The success of the tour helped cement nu metal's legacy, ultimately grossing more than \$6.4 million. It also pushed Rammstein towards platinum sales on their second record *Sehnsucht*, albeit while also adding to their legend when the band were arrested for 'indecent exposure' after a show in Massachusetts – remarkable for an industrial metal band who sang entirely in German.

It wasn't entirely free of controversy. Limp Bizkit themselves were struggling to gain a airplay in Portland, Oregon when their managers stumbled onto a plan to ensure airtime – they'd just pay for it. Thus kicked off a 'payola' controversy that highlighted a shady underbelly in dubious practices within the music industry. Not that Bizkit cared too much – the gambit ultimately paid off when they became ascendant stars in nu metal's new regime.

Even old-school metal bands weren't able to resist nu metal's pull –

thrashers Slayer released one of their most divisive records of their career, *Diabolus in Musica* inspired by the new craze, while ex-Sepultura frontman Max Cavalera barely let the dust settle on his departure from the Brazilian thrashers before unveiling his new project Soulfly. Amidst it all, new stars were emerging. System of a Down's self-titled debut didn't quite take the world by storm in 1998, but moderate radio success for *Sugar* and *Spiders* and popularity at the third Ozzfest (for the first time) helped plant the seeds for their own explosion into the mainstream three years later.

Ironically, while Ozzfest continued to thrive and adapt with the times, alternative festival Lollapalooza declared it was 'unable to secure a headliner' and was unable to go ahead for the first year since it had been established. But even with nu metal rapidly taking over, alternative rock still flourished. Smashing Pumpkins achieved a Number 2 spot on the Billboard 200 with the divisive *Adore* and Hole enjoyed their most commercially successful release to date in *Celebrity Skin*, while The Offspring achieved a smash hit with the release of *Americana*, selling over 175,000 copies in the first week.

The dour tones that had defined the start of the 90s finally began to break as the decade reached its close. Monster Magnet's *Powertrip* reintroduced a sense of hedonism to the rock lexicon, while ex-Kyuss guitarist Josh Homme emerged after a brief period experimenting in the desert, debuting his new band Queens of the Stone Age with a self-titled release packed with fuzz-soaked 70s riffs. 1998 may have been the year nu metal broke into the mainstream, but the sheer diversity of commercially and critically successful releases that year ensured the genre had a foothold for decades to come. ●

Korn: the band who  
invented nu metal.



# THE LAST REVOLUTION

In 1998, **Korn** released their multi-platinum third album, *Follow The Leader*, and nu metal became the biggest sound around. This is the epic story of the scene that defined the end of the 1990s...

Words: **Jon Wiederhorn**

**K**urt Cobain was dead. Eddie Vedder had no interest in being a public figure and Soundgarden had become a polished hard rock band that lacked the blazing guitar tones that made 1989's *Louder Than Love* and 1991's *Badmotorfinger* so undeniable. With traditional metal bands like Judas Priest and Iron Maiden enduring line-up shifts and suffering seismic culture shock, there were no rock stars left to deify.

It was 1993. A time when grunge and alt.rock had made celebration a dirty word. Rage Against The Machine were bombastic, but they were as political as The Clash. Nine Inch Nails were aggressive and theatrical, but their music was strongly rooted in keyboard pop and their lyrics were introspective. Tool were cryptic and brooding, creating great songs that offered no easy climax or release. Twenty years ago, audiences were craving something heavier and dirtier, and a new breed of bands were waiting around the corner to give them what they wanted.

"Alternative music was a depressing time in rock," says Korn frontman Jonathan Davis. "It was boring. I'd go to those shows and just fall asleep. I wanted to wake people the fuck up and make music that was exciting and vibed me up."

"At that time, Los Angeles was a musical dead zone; there was no scene whatsoever," adds Coal Chamber and DevilDriver vocalist Dez Fafara. "Labels weren't signing bands from LA anymore because

Poison, Warrant and the hair bands had killed the Sunset Strip. In the early 90s it was just us and a few other bands who came along and fought like hell to bring the scene back to life."

Equally captivated by hip-hop and metal, Korn, Coal Chamber, Deftones, Limp Bizkit and others injected a new level of fury, fun and freewheeling recklessness back into rock. The scene started in and around California, but quickly spread around the world. Audiences were attracted to the inherent volatility and explosive performance value of nu metal and critics, eager to champion a new scene, scrambled for the right words to describe these new bands that eschewed guitar solos and palm-muted metal riffing, but embraced the eclecticism of Faith No More, the bombast of Sepultura and the rock-rap hybrid of Rage Against The Machine.

"Unfortunately, I'd say I played a large part in the evolution of nu metal," laments RATM guitarist Tom Morello. "There was a wave of bands, that sort of first Lollapalooza nation: Tool, Nine Inch Nails, Rage Against The Machine, Nirvana, that were artistically forward-looking, combining elements of arena rock with artistry and punk. But they all had qualms about playing the same arenas that Poison was playing. It took Rage, Tool, NIN four or five years to make a record because we were all kvetching over the situation we were in. And I'm confident that at the same time, record company executives in board rooms across the nation were saying, 'If only we can find a Rage Against The Machine that would make five videos per record and have songs about chicks and show off and shit.' And nu metal was born.

Since Los Angeles was a wasteland for metal in the early 90s, most new metal groups formed in the suburbs. Bakersfield, California, 110 miles south of LA turned out to be the prime breeding ground for the nascent scene. In 1989 vocalists Richard Morrill and Pete Capra formed L.A.P.D. with guitarist James 'Munky' Schaffer, bassist Reginald 'Fieldy' Arvizu and drummer David Silveria. The band moved to LA and released one full-length album before Capra left, allegedly due to excessive amphetamine abuse. It would be the first drug-related ejection in a scene that teemed with excess and indulgence, just like their Sunset Strip predecessors.

L.A.P.D. hired new guitarist Brian 'Head' Welch and changed their name to Creep when they connected with producer Ross Robinson – a man often cited, quite correctly, as the 'Godfather of Nu Metal' – whose 80s thrash band Détente they had once shared the stage with.

Robinson happened upon them playing the tiny club Coconut Teaser. "They did three songs and Reggie

music really dark and different sounding and lower than other bands," says James 'Munky' Schaffer. "[A Korn guitar tone has] gotta be heavy, but with clarity. Then we use lots of sound effects to make it sound even weirder."

But for all the strange noises and unusual guitar tones, at the heart of the new sound there were still songs with identifiable choruses – melodies that audiences would latch on to. Korn wrote and refined their songs with Robinson for a year before they started recording. For Robinson, the goal was to capture both Davis' vulnerability and the band's aggression. He saw himself as much the musician's psychologist as he was their engineer. "I wanted to capture their fire and make sure it stayed completely lit," he says. "I worked with each person to make sure they understood why they were doing what they were doing and my inquiry was very deep and we discovered a lot of unhealed wounds. I'm not afraid to go there and I craved it. But everything was based on a foundation of love and support."

## **"L.A. WAS A MUSICAL DEAD ZONE. IN THE EARLY 90S, IT WAS JUST US AND A FEW OTHER BANDS WHO FOUGHT LIKE HELL TO BRING THE SCENE BACK TO LIFE."**

**Korn's Jonathan Davis**

broke a bass string and took 10 minutes to change it," Robinson recalls. "The singer was talking shit about the band to his friends on the side of the stage. And there were only about five people there. I was like, 'Oh my God! This is good! I could feel it. It was one of those life-altering moments.'"

In need of a new singer, Schaffer and Welch went to Bakersfield to check out a show by Sex Art, featuring Arvizu's childhood friend Jonathan Davis. The guitarists weren't impressed by the band's first song and were getting ready to leave. "They thought we sucked," laughs Davis. "Then they heard my voice and flipped out. Then Fieldy called and asked me to try out. I went to their studio and from the first note, when I heard their sound, I was like, 'Oh my God, this is insane!'"

Creep gave Davis some demos and asked him to write lyrics for the songs and then come back for a formal audition. Although they played so loudly during the rehearsal that no one could tell what Davis sounded like, the singer threw himself into his performance and impressed everyone in the room.

"He was flailing his arms and wiggling out," says Robinson. "I got chills all over my body just watching him and I knew he was it."

He was. Davis shortly became ensconced in Creep, and in turn Creep became Korn. The band's strength came from the combination of Davis' twisted, tormented vocals – which addressed such subjects as death, child abuse, loneliness and teenage angst – and the band's blend of funk and hip-hop rhythms, skewed, seven-string riffs and haunting guitar effects. "I started using a seven string guitar to make the

**W**hile Korn were honing their craft with Robinson, about 400 miles to the north, the similarly-minded band, Deftones, were cultivating their own influential sound in Sacramento, California. Following a life-changing accident – he was hit by a drunk driver, thrown off his skateboard and nearly died – guitarist Stephen Carpenter jammed with two of his fellow high school students, vocalist Chino Moreno and drummer Abe Cunningham. He

knew instantly that Cunningham's flailing beats would work well with his alt. metal riffs and Moreno's half sung, half screamed vocals so he asked the two to join him in Deftones.

"The first Deftones show was in someone's backyard and it was hilarious," Carpenter recalls. "Our bass player showed up late. He was in cut-offs and a W.A.S.P. shirt. When we were playing, his strap would come off and he didn't have enough sense to take the cord up through the strap and plug it in, so he'd step on the cord and unplug himself." Realising their bassist was a liability, Deftones found a replacement in the form of Chi Cheng. "Chi fitted the image we wanted to have," Carpenter says. "He just had long hair and some fresh-ass equipment, and we're like, 'You're in the band, dude.' And with time he turned into a great bass player."

In no time, Deftones were playing local clubs and recording demos, and early on they were already inspiring others. "I saw their name on a flyer, and someone in the local scene said, 'You got to check out this band,'" Papa Roach vocalist Jacoby Shaddix says. "I started going to Deftones shows before they were signed and I was blown away by the raw emotion. They were fuckin' rock stars, for sure. I dressed like them. I walked like them. They were my idols. And I was like, 'I found it. This is what I want to do.'"

Before Korn's self-titled debut exploded, Deftones played a concert in Bakersfield. Ross Robinson was in the audience and liked what he saw. After the show, the producer gushed to the Deftones about how much he enjoyed the gig and the band gave him a demo, which Robinson played for Korn. ➔

Coal Chamber:  
freaks unleashed.



## "WE RECREATED THE 80S IN THE 90S. THE DRUGS, ALCOHOL AND GIRLS WERE OUT OF CONTROL."

Coal Chamber's Meegs Rascon

DAVID ALLEN

"A couple days later, the Korn guys called and said, 'Dude, we like your stuff. We want to play shows with you guys,'" recalls Moreno. "We went to LA and did a show together. That was right when they were starting to get a buzz. We had never even heard each other's bands before that and that's why I tripped out. What they played was kind of like what we were doing, except a little darker."

"It was so weird," says Arvizu. "Jon and Chino were making almost the same moves and wearing Adidas jumpsuits. But we didn't give a fuck. We liked them 'cause they were good and we all became friends."

That the Deftones and Korn looked and sounded similar is understandable. Both Davis and Moreno grew up listening to new wave and loved Depeche Mode and The Cure. And the two groups formed in an alternative era that shunned conventional metal and downplayed technical expertise in favour of agonised emotion. Audiences identified not just with the fierce grooves, but also the confessional lyrics. By the time Korn and Deftones were on their second albums, 1996's *Life Is Peachy* and 1997's *Around the Fur* respectively, nu metal was on the verge of going stratospheric. Korn had already gone platinum, Deftones would soon go gold.

By then, LA's Coal Chamber, featuring vocalist Dez Fafara, guitarist Meegs Rascon, drummer Mike Cox and bassist Rayna Foss were making a name for themselves. After seeing them play, Robinson talked to them about producing their first album and introduced them to the A&R team at Roadrunner. But after Coal Chamber heard too many people comparing them to Korn, they became skittish and asked Jay Baumgartner (Ugly Kid Joe) and Orgy's Jay Gordon to produce their self-titled 1997 album. "There was a lot of nepotism in the scene, which I was wary of," Fafara explains. "We loved Korn and before they

made it they used to come to our studio and watch us play. We were stoked for them when they got famous. But things quickly spun out of control so quickly and it got to the point where we didn't want to be mentioned in the same breath with them all the time."

It wasn't just seven-string guitars, hip-hop rhythms and youthful anger that unified the nu metal bands. From Korn to Snot, nearly every group eschewed guitar solos and concentrated instead on creating harrowing and haunting tones and propulsive grooves. Maybe they were taking cue from the wave of alternative bands that had removed solos from their lexicon years ago, but Robinson is happy to accept credit for the trend.

"I wanted to tailor the sound of the bands I worked with around those heart-opening, dark feelings of sorrow and angst. In *Détente*, I played guitar and I saw how ego-driven solos were. It just didn't feel right in this new form of music. The solo is an egotistical, terrible device. Maybe it was my hatred of my own playing that made me feel that way. But I thought it was better for a band to have continuous movement rather than breaking that momentum to show off."

The band that would forever change and eventually fragment the nu metal scene didn't come from anywhere near California, and were far more rooted in hip-hop than their peers. Jacksonville, Florida-based Limp Bizkit was fronted by backwards baseball cap-wearing rapper Fred Durst, who played in the rock bands Malachai Sage, Split 26 and 10 Foot Shindig before convincing Malachai Sage bassist Sam Rivers to form a new rap-rock band with him in 1994. Rivers recruited his cousin Sam Otto, who was studying jazz drumming, then art-metal guitarist Wes Borland came into the fold.

"Fred had this idea for a mega-band, where he'd have musicians who could cross over into as many different styles of music as possible and mix them all together," Borland says. "We were all adopted one by one."

Limp Bizkit created a local buzz almost immediately, but their big break came when Korn opened for hardcore band Sick Of It All in Jacksonville and Durst got together with Korn after the show. Many drinks later, he said he was a tattoo artist and volunteered to tattoo the band back at his house. Welch took him up on the offer.

"The tattoo's supposed to say 'Korn,' but it looked more like 'Nor,'" laughs Arvizu. "We started talking and Fred gave us some of their demos, which we liked. I called up Ross and said, 'You should produce these guys.' So I pretty much hooked them up. Then we took them under our wing and brought them on tour with us because we liked them. If we like a band and we get along with them, they're gonna go on tour with us and we're all gonna get crazy. We paid Fred [Durst] \$500 to go onstage naked and play *Faith* by George Michael and he went out and did it. The stage was about three feet off the ground, so people's faces were right up against his dick. We just sat back and giggled our asses off."

Limp Bizkit recorded their first album, *Three Dollar Bill Yall\$* with Robinson in 1997. It included their cover of George Michael's *Faith* along with 12 other songs, including their first radio single, *Counterfeit*. Robinson recalls the recording sessions were upbeat and filled with juvenile humour and killer jams. "There was so much humor and pure *Beavis & Butt-head* fun," the producer says. "They're a great, great band. The swing of those drums and the talent of the bass player was undeniable. And then you had Wes, who was a different animal altogether and could play

DAVID ALLEN

anything. The music was pure and raw and I knew it was magical after I listened to a cassette of the mixes while I was driving."

By the time Korn began to write their third album, *Follow The Leader*, the musicians had become consumed by their popularity. Along with Coal Chamber, Orgy and Snot, Korn were doing cocaine, meth and drinking as heavily as many of the bands whose whole aesthetic they had originally strived to escape, like Mötley Crüe, Ratt and Poison.

"They had people involved with the band who were giving them blow and at that point I was no longer interested," Robinson says. "I wasn't involved with the drug scene or the party scene with those guys. I was the straight-edge dude and the one they trusted the most. But basically they hired people to party with. As soon as the scene turned completely into Mötley Crüe, I was out of the picture."

By the time Robinson abandoned the music style he helped pioneer, most of the artists he helped mould were too fucked up to notice or care.

"We were drinking mass quantities of everything, and when I got really fucked up I'd bite people," Davis admits. "When I walked into the bus everything stopped because nobody wanted to get bit. I bit everyone in the band hard. I bit a whole bunch of people when I was still drinking. I didn't know what I was doing. I would party and get drunk and do cocaine or crank or whatever was around. Then I'd get all horny and wanna be tied up and fuck some chick, but I've got a wife. So I'm fighting inside, and I'd drink more to deal with the pain."

Sex, drugs and rock'n'roll may be a long-established cliché but "that's what we lived," Fafara says. "We did every kind of drug – coke, sniffing ketamine. We had four bottles of whiskey a day on our rider and after that was gone we would go out to the bar. I was doing anything that could take me down. So I would take handfuls of Somas, mixed with Xanax, mixed with red wine and whisky. And then at two in the morning I'd decide to eat an eighth of mushrooms. I once did two weeks straight on the road on mushrooms."

"We kind of recreated the 80s but in the 90s," Rascon says. "The music was darker, heavier and angrier, but the amounts of drugs, alcohol and girls was out of control. I was doing a lot of what we would call drug salads. It was just every type of drugs at once – coke, speed, weed, Special K, GHB, ecstasy..."

The popularity and profits of nu metal made partying a breeze. And since nu metal appealed to young women almost as much as men, concerts turned into Romanesque bacchanalias. Even though the population was still concerned about AIDS, attitudes about sex were looser than they had been in years. Nu metal bands gloated about their relationships with porn stars and their hedonistic exploits in a way that was verboten in the grunge era.

"There is definitely a connection between the porn and metal worlds," Rascon says. "It's all about

rhythm and it correlates with sex because sex is all about pulsing rhythms. It's hard for a rocker guy to date a normal nine-to-five banker. They'll look at us like we're out of control. While someone in the sex industry, they look at us as normal because they have the same kind of crazy lifestyles."

When the challenge to having commitment-free sex was gone, some nu metal musicians turned their sex lives into a callous game, seeing how many girls they could score in a night, how badly they could treat women on tour or how crazy their sex lives could become. "One time, I was in the shower backstage, and these three girls brought a bag full of dildos and whips and they went at it," Davis says. "I got tied up and got the shit beaten out of me with Judas Priest belts and about 50 people watched. Then some other people took beer bottles and used them in both of their orifices. It was pretty intense. It's not like I look for it. I usually just walk into my dressing room and, hello, there it is. It's insane."

When they were at their commercial peak, Korn were raging so hard that they were often at odds with one another and eventually the members had to travel in different buses. But their management had the wherewithal to take advantage of the band's status and the ability to deliver despite their offstage instability. Korn launched the label Elementree, on which they signed Orgy, Videodrone and Deadsy. Then in 1998, they created their own tour, Family Values, which featured Korn, Limp Bizkit, Ice Cube, Incubus, Orgy and Rammstein.

"It was the perfect tour at the time," said Ice Cube. "These bands pumped a lot of hip-hop into their music and they were big fans of the stuff I was doing. So you had this really powerful mixture of hardcore and metal mixed with hip-hop. It set a whole new vibe and the world took notice."

Deftones were invited to be a part of the first Family Values, but turned down the offer because

they grew wary of being lumped in with nu metal scene; once they had further established themselves and the music was on the decline, they went out on Family Values 2006. But in 1998, Deftones were most interested in proving themselves on their own.

"We had already been together for 10 years when that [scene] started happening, and we and never tried to be lumped in with that or anything else," Carpenter says. "Before that was happening, we used to get compared to Rage Against The Machine. That was flattering, but we've always just wanted to be Deftones."

"The minute the angst-ridden, heavy music goes out of style, I don't think we're gonna go out with it," Moreno said in 1998. "There are a lot more elements to our music that separates us from that scene. As far as the other bands, I respect them and I dig them, but the minute we get pigeonholed in a scene, the minute everyone decides that scene is not cool, basically everything we've worked 10 years for is out the window. Suddenly you're reliant on all these other bands, when you should just rely on yourself and what you're doing."

In 1999, Deftones proved themselves on Ozzfest with Rob Zombie, Slayer, Primus, Godsmack and System Of A Down. Interestingly, the second stage that year included Slipknot, a band whose iconoclastic style would eventually replace most nu metal acts as the next musically extreme and insanely popular voice of metal. "It was a weird time because we immediately got lumped in to the nu metal side of things even though we were way more violent than all of that stuff," says vocalist Corey Taylor. "But it didn't bother us. We said, 'Look, you can label us whatever you want. We're just trying different things.

We'll use hip-hop if we want, and we'll play grindcore if we want.' I think because of that, we were able to set a standard that we weren't a type of genre, we were our own genre."

That same year, nu ➔



Slipknot: the masked marauders.

metal went supernova thanks to Limp Bizkit's second album, *Significant Other*, which featured the lowest common denominator smash hit *Nookie*, with the chorus, 'I did it all for the nookie, c'mon/The nookie, c'mon/ So you can take that nookie/ And stick it up your yeah!/ Stick it up your yeah!/ Stick it up your yeah!' In no time, backwards baseball caps were the rage and *Significant Other* rocketed up the charts, selling seven million copies in the US and 12 million worldwide. For Durst, the album wasn't about "nookie", as much as being in unfaithful relationships.

"A lot of my lyrics come from betrayal and the way I've been treated by certain ex-girlfriends because those scars don't go away," he said in 1999. Despite his alleged sensitivity, Durst's post-*Nookie* behavior didn't curry much sympathy from his detractors. He became a hustler and an opportunist, and strived to build his career like a hip-hop mogul, becoming an A&R man (signing Staind and Puddle Of Mudd), and was contracted to direct several Hollywood films. But following the debacle at Woodstock, in which Durst urged the audience to follow the advice of the first track on *Significant Other* and *Break Stuff*, the rapper became the whipping boy of the nu metal nation.

It wasn't entirely fair. Durst didn't instruct anyone to commit the rapes that took place in the pit and the bonfires in the audience didn't start until the Chili Peppers' set the next day. But Durst became a convenient scapegoat, especially five years after the fact. By then, Borland had left the band, come back and then quit again and Durst had written songs for Britney Spears and boasted about their alleged romantic relationship. He also dated Carmen Electra and reportedly Halle Berry, who shot a romantic scene with him for the video of Bizkit's cover of The Who's *Behind Blue Eyes*, which was featured on 2003's *Results May Vary*, with Mike Smith on guitar.

"Fred really wanted to embrace celebrity

and stardom just as I was hoping to become the character of this weird Mike Patton-y guy in these crazy costumes," Borland says. "I le and I saw two completely different visions of the band. I was out of control in many ways that were similar to the ways that he was out of control. I went, 'We have the opportunity to do the weirdest fuckin' record right now,' and he was like, 'No, we have the opportunity to write a smash record!' And I said, 'No, you don't understand! We can throw everybody a curveball and be really artful.' And he's like, 'Nope, we gotta get everybody up for a home run.' And I was like, 'That will be a home run!' We had these major creative differences. But looking back, my attitude of wanting to do something really weird was just as much a mistake as him saying, 'Let's write a bunch of hits.' But it led to us falling apart because it really bothered me that a lot of the people I had looked up to my entire music career were bashing Limp Bizkit and hating our music. It took a while for me to get over that."

It's hard to pinpoint what the death knell was for nu metal. Some point to Woodstock 1999, others blame labels for watering down the genre and embracing less confrontational rap-rock groups including Kid Rock and Linkin Park. Still others put the blame on new musical genres that emerged.

"Four car garage rock killed rap metal," says Shaddix. "Bands like The Strokes, The Vines, The 'The' bands. They killed it. They stole the audience and the industry turned its back instantly."

"Money grabbers started to think they know the schematic of why it was a success and they started interfering with the process, interfering with the songwriting," Robinson adds. "You can hear the sound of people's voices changing. They weren't as raw. The songs were getting overproduced. It

started turning into an obvious money machine and people started going, 'Fuck you! I'm not buying your sales pitch!'"

Even after the masses turned their backs on nu metal, bands that had switched up their style to become more mainstream, including Incubus and Papa Roach, were able to persevere at rock radio. Meanwhile, industry founders, Korn and Deftones maintained as well. Korn were able to continue in part thanks to Davis, who had been sober at that point for years, but refused to be judgmental of Schaffer and Arvizu's persistent partying.

"I had stopped drinking because I realised I was gonna die if I kept going," Davis says. "One day, when my baby was about three, I came home drunk one night and he saw me and gave me this fucking look that I'll never forget. I felt like the biggest piece of shit. I was like, 'I'm not gonna do this to my son. I gotta be there for him.' So I sobered up. I still party like a motherfucker with all my friends, I just don't partake. I don't even drink caffeine."

Unlike many bands, Korn's fan base remained strong through the lowest points for nu metal and continued to support the band when Welch bailed in 2005 after he found religion and got clean. "The alcohol and drug use just kept escalating," he said. "Now there were times when I tried to clean my life up, but I just couldn't do it on my own. I really [needed] God to take away my addiction to drugs."

Not long after, Arvizu wised up and followed suit thanks to a death-bed plea from his father. With most of the band sober, Korn took extra time to analyse and dissect their music, determine what their greatest strengths were and experiment around those strengths to remain viable in a changing market. The band's 2005 industrial-tinged, dance beat-inflected *See You On The Other Side* went platinum and 2007's atmospheric, experimental self-titled disc went gold. Korn tried to recapture the mindset of *Life Is Peachy* by reconnecting with Robinson for the heavier, more primal 2010 album *Korn III: Remember Who You Are*, but it was 2011's *The Path Of Totality*, with dubstep percussion and collaborations with Skrillex and other cutting edge producers that brought Korn to new, younger audiences.

Deftones, meanwhile retained their fan base by circumnavigated boundaries, writing pained but, unpredictable and sometimes sprawling songs on 2003's *Deftones* and 2006's *Saturday Night Wrist*. The musicians' camaraderie and chemistry kept them together through circumstances that would have destroyed lesser bands. In November 2008,

Deftones were wrapping up their sixth album, *Eros*, which they had been working on for 18 months with their longtime producer Terry Date. Then disaster struck.

Bassist Chi Cheng's sister Mae was driving away from a wake for their brother, who died a year earlier, when her car struck another vehicle traveling at high speed and flipped three times.

Cheng wasn't wearing a seat belt and was thrown from the vehicle and suffered severe head trauma and lapsed into a coma. For four months after the accident, Deftones were on the



**"FRED DURST REALLY WANTED TO EMBRACE STARDOM. HE AND I HAD DIFFERENT VISIONS."**

Limp Bizkit's Wes Borland





Deftones: fierce grooves and confessional lyrics.

GETTY

verge of collapse. They visited Cheng in the hospital, but spent most of their time apart from each other trying to escape what had happened. Finally, they decided to meet in their rehearsal space in Sacramento to decide if they wanted to stay together. "We considered breaking up the band," Moreno admits. "We thought, 'Maybe this is too hard now and this thing has run its course.'"

"I never considered breaking up," Carpenter says. "But I told everybody that I was perfectly comfortable with starting a whole new band — coming up with a new name and starting again from scratch."

In the end, Deftones kept their name, but they shelved *Eros*, which reminded them too much of Cheng (it remains unreleased). They brought in bassist Sergio Vega, who had filled in for Deftones in 1999 when Cheng broke his foot and was unable to tour. After playing some shows with Vega, they felt revitalized, so they re-entered their practice space in June 2009 with producer Nick Raskulinecz.

At first, Deftones were hesitant, but as soon as they plugged in and started jamming they clicked into gear, and before long they were coming up with ideas at a previously unprecedented pace. Writing was therapeutic and recording an album became a good way to deal with a horrible situation. "In a lot of ways, we didn't have a choice but to get together and be productive," Carpenter says. "Us moving forward and doing this was our way of not sitting around being bummed out. We did that for months, and it's tough."

The resultant album, *Diamond Eyes*, was cohesive, cathartic and simmered with equal parts textural creativity and raw brutality. The band applied

**"WE'D BEEN TOGETHER 10 YEARS WHEN THAT SCENE STARTED HAPPENING. WE NEVER TRIED TO BE LUMPED IN WITH IT OR ANYTHING ELSE."**

Deftones' Stephen Carpenter

the same formula to their latest album 2012's universally acclaimed *Koi No Yokan*, also produced by Raskulinecz. On April 13, 2013, almost exactly five months after the album was released, Cheng, who had been in a semi-conscious state for almost four and a half years, died in the emergency room as his mother cradled his head and sang his favorite childhood songs into his ear.

It's a shame Cheng's not still around to enjoy the resurrection of nu metal. Even though the genre was ridiculed for years, it is currently undergoing a renaissance thanks to the passion and determination of its pioneers and the blandness of much of today's radio rock, which is leading new audiences to seek out more visceral and emotional bands. Korn are currently working on their first album with Welch since 2003 — and are playing high up on the bill at this month's Download: the same festival where Slipknot are headlining for the second time in five years. Limp Bizkit have signed to Lil Wayne's label Cash Money and are recording the follow-up to 2011's *Gold Cobra*, which failed to generate enough interest in the US for a full-scale tour, so the band focused their efforts in Europe, where they blew up larger than ever, resulting

in them securing a Download berth too. "We're going in two different directions, right now," reveals Borland. "I've gotten really intense about writing snappy, complicated riffs that have a lot of dive-bomb-type whammy bar push-and-pull suction sound in them and are heavier than ever. It's heavy groove stuff with rap, so it sounds like what you'd expect from Limp Bizkit."

In addition to Limp Bizkit's Big Cash developments, Coal Chamber have reunited over the past year, Jay Gordon has re-formed Orgy with an entirely new lineup and entered the studio to record the band's first album since 2004's *Punk Statik Paranoia*. For Robinson, the renewed interest in metal was inevitable.

"Right now I'm looking out my window and I can see across the Santa Monica Bay, right where we recorded the first Korn album," he says. "I can always look there and it feels so good. And that means it was a real thing. As long as something's real, there's the potential for it to be great." **1**

*Some source material for this feature is taken from Louder Than Hell: The 'Definitive Oral History Of Metal' by Jon Wiederhorn and Katherine Turman*

# 1999

Controversy, tragedy, knob jokes and nine men in masks – this is how music’s greatest decade came to a close.



**T**he 90s belonged to the freaks. After all, in a decade where bands like the Butthole Surfers or Primus could sign major label deals and become mainstream successes, who else *could* it belong to? But on April 20, 1999 the same sense of otherness that had defined the alternative movement since the late 80s was scapegoated for something darker and more sinister. The Columbine school shooting was a tragedy that made global headlines, but devolved into a circus as media blame questioned alternative culture as a potential factor in the event.

Columbine wasn't the only dark event rock weathered in 1999, as the Woodstock 1999 event in July devolved into rioting and violence, as well as reports of sexual violence during some band's sets. Once again, the music was blamed – the likes of Limp Bizkit, Korn and Red Hot Chili Peppers all put under scrutiny.

No better outlet for all of the darkness of rock and metal could be found than in Des Moines' Slipknot. An 18-legged whirlwind of bile and vitriol, Slipknot distilled the angst of nu metal and took it to its logical, extreme conclusion. Nu metal had found its newest stars just in time for the millennium hit. Before that though, some late additions from the scene's established heroes proved to further demonstrate nu metal's grip on rock culture. Limp Bizkit's second record *Significant Other* topped the charts in June 1999, while Korn managed to nip at the heels of their wildly successful *Follow The Leader* with follow-up *Issues* again hitting Number One on the Billboard 200.

Yet rock and metal didn't have the monopoly on public enemies.

Detroit rapper Eminem was a new kind of rock star – albeit one not formed in the bounds of rock or metal itself. The Slim Shady character he had developed allowed him to explore topics like drug abuse, violence and murder, but also attracted the same level of criticism that rock acts who covered similar topics would receive. Naturally, such controversy also translated into enormous album sales.

For all the hate rock was getting in the press, it didn't seem to hurt its commercial prospects any. Blink-182 (pictured right) hit big with their third album, *Enema of the State*, a mix of goofy pop-punk stylings and knob jokes. Similarly, Red Hot Chili Peppers' *Californication* saw the return of prodigal son guitarist John Frusciante, his comeback helping the band shift away from the cartoon funk-rock of their early releases. Even Metallica, one-time kings of thrash, were soothing things down with the baroque metal-meets-orchestra live album *S&M*.

The end of the 90s was supposed to be a party – the biggest party, in fact. And why not – it was the end of the world after all. At least so far as the music industry was concerned at least. Within 12 months of the launch of groundbreaking file-sharing service Napster on June 1, 1999, the website was being sued by Metallica. Over two decades on, streaming and downloading remains a contentious point for artists and has caused irrevocable changes in how the music industry itself operates.

1999 was more than just the year that separated the 90s from the 2000s – it was the crucible that forged and consolidated some of our biggest names including Slipknot, Blink-182, Korn and Limp Bizkit, as well as the line between how things were and how things are now. 🍌



# CALIFORNIA

## Dreaming

From the highs of *BloodSugarSexMagik* to the lows of guitarist John Frusciante's near-fatal drug addiction, the **Red Hot Chili Peppers** had a turbulent decade. But with 1999's *Californication* they delivered an album that would usher in the funk rock icons' stellar third act.

Words: **Dave Everley**

**O**n June 14, 1998, the prodigal son came home. When the Red Hot Chili Peppers walked out onstage at the Tibetan Freedom Concert at Washington DC's RFK Stadium, it was with guitarist John Frusciante, the man who had deserted them mid-tour six years earlier and spent the ensuing period in a full-blown drug hell.

It was Frusciante's highest-profile appearance since reconnecting with his estranged bandmates earlier that year. But this was more than a reunion: it signified the return of man who had journeyed to the brink of death.

It nearly didn't happen. Storms caused the show to run over and the Chili Peppers, who were last minute additions to the bill, looked like they wouldn't be able to play. But headliners Pearl Jam – who had supported the Chilis in their very early days – threatened to pull out unless organisers cut their set short by 15 minutes so their old friends could take the stage.

The band played just three songs that night: *Give It Away*, *Under The Bridge* and *The Power Of Equality*. But the truncated setlist didn't matter. What mattered was that the band and Frusciante had emerged from a decade of drama intact. The Red Hot Chili Peppers were whole again.

John Frusciante was 18 years old when he played his first gig with the Chili Peppers, in November 1988. His new bandmates were barely a decade older but it felt like they'd lived many more lives than he had.

Singer Anthony Kiedis and bassist Flea had formed the Red Hot Chili Peppers with guitarist

Hillel Slovak and drummer Jack Irons in 1983. They were the ultimate good-time party band, the exuberance of their songs mirrored by the chaos of their lifestyle. Kiedis and Slovak especially were ardent drug users, with heroin their favoured means of getting wasted. But the good times screeched to a halt in June 1988, when Slovak died of an overdose at the age of 26.

Frusciante was the natural replacement. He had discovered the Chili Peppers when he was 15 and was a regular at their LA club gigs. He already knew their songs inside out, and aced his audition. "I realized that I wanted to be a rock star, do drugs and get girls," Frusciante told *Guitar Player*.

**"I had no image to present to anyone. I was as close to dying as a person could be."**

**John Frusciante**

He joined a band who were still grieving – and in Kiedis' case, still wrestling with his demons. Despite his own hedonistic ambitions, the teenage Frusciante barely even smoked pot, prompting his new bandmates to nickname him "Greenie".

The Chilis' first album with Frusciante, 1989's *Mother's Milk*, was their most successful yet, selling 500,000 copies in the US. But it was 1991's Rick Rubin-produced *BloodSugarSexMagik*, that turned them into superstars. It was a measure of their success that both Nirvana and Pearl Jam opened for them in late 1991.

Yet as the record sales rose and the shows got bigger, Frusciante found himself struggling with the scale of the band's fame. The omens were there even before he'd joined the band. Hillel Slovak once asked the younger man if he thought the Chili Peppers would still be popular if they played

the 20,000-capacity LA Forum. No, Frusciante had replied, it would ruin the whole thing.

Now the guitarist was watching his prophecy come true. "John would say, 'We're too popular, I don't need to be at this level of success, I would just be proud to be playing this music in clubs like you guys were doing two years ago,'" wrote Kiedis in his book, *Scar Tissue*, adding that the pair would get into heated arguments backstage.

The relationship between the alpha male singer and the sensitive guitarist had broken down. "Of all personal understandings in the band, the one between Anthony and I was the worst," Frusciante told Dutch magazine *Oor*. "Our relationship had

reached an all-time low before *BloodSugarSexMagik*."

Frusciante's fragile state of mind wasn't helped by his chemical intake. The kid whose bandmates had nicknamed him "Greenie" due to his lack of experience with

drugs had shot heroin for the first time shortly after finishing *BloodSugarSexMagik*, and now his dabblings were getting serious – something that both concerned and angered Anthony Kiedis, who was trying to maintain his own sobriety.

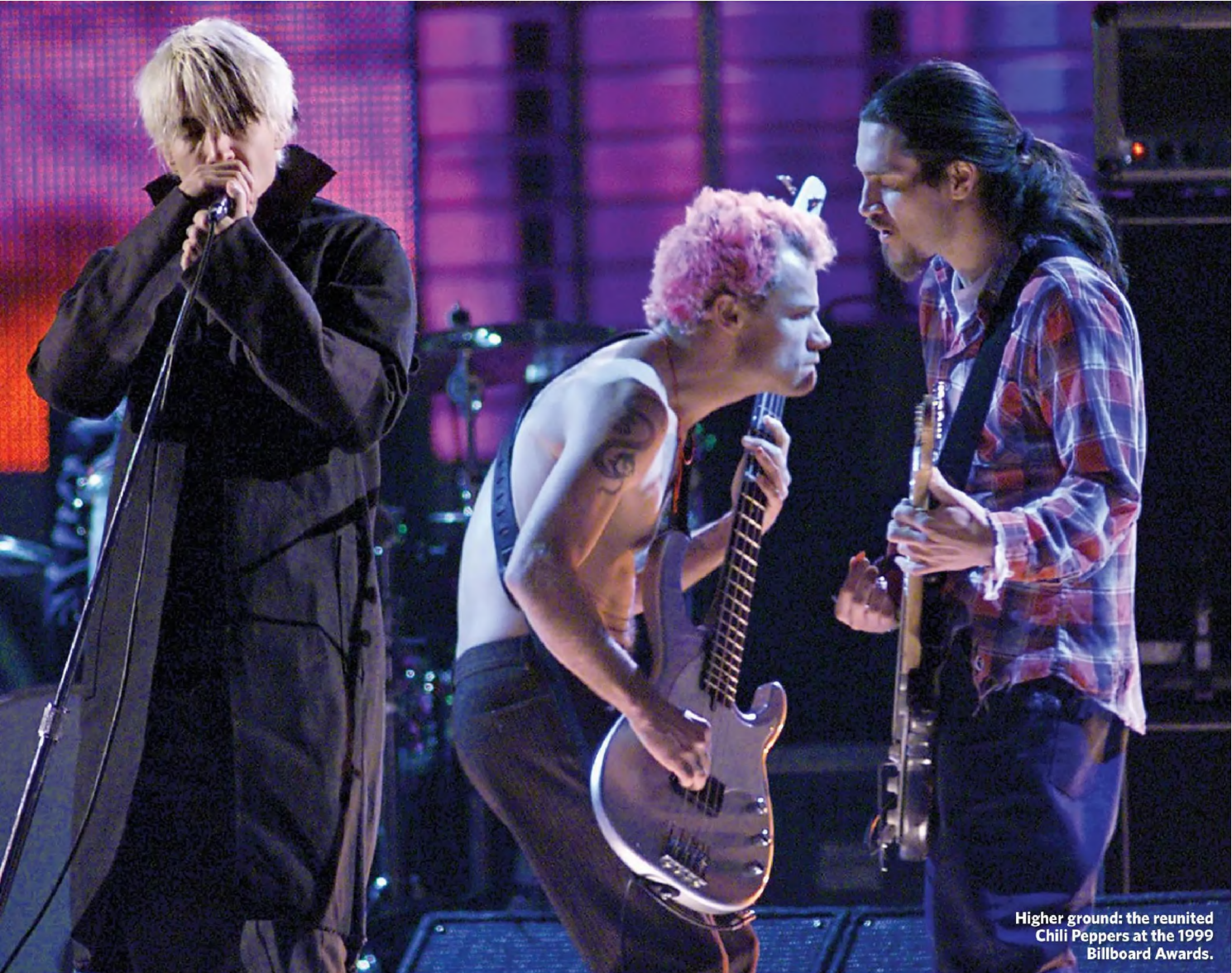
The toxic combination of drugs, fracturing interpersonal relationships and the pressure of being in a hugely successful band was impacting on Frusciante's mental health. The snapping point came in the summer of 1992. As the band flew to Japan for a series of shows, the guitarist started to hear voices in his head: "You won't make it during the tour, you have to go now."

That's precisely what he did. On May 7, 1992, just after playing a show in the city of Saitama, John Frusciante walked out on the Red Hot Chili Peppers mid-tour, flew back to America and disappeared into a black hole of his own creation. ➤

**Red Hot Chili Peppers (l-r):  
Anthony Kiedis, Chad Smith,  
Flea, John Frusciante.**



TERRY O'NEILL/GETTY IMAGES



Higher ground: the reunited Chili Peppers at the 1999 Billboard Awards.

GETTY IMAGES

**B**etween the summer of 1992 and his eventual return to the Red Hot Chili Peppers six years later, John Frusciante hovered between life and death. Following the aborted Japanese tour, he figured his life as a professional musician was over. The fog of depression prompted a freefall into full-blown addiction: heroin, cocaine, crack, anything he could get his hands on.

The role of drug addict with a death wish was one Frusciante embraced. He holed up in a house in the Hollywood Hills, walling himself off from his former life. His waking hours were divided between snorting, smoking or shooting up and dazed artistic endeavours – painting, writing short stories, making lo-fi four-track recordings.

As Frusciante's addictions worsened, his friends began to drift away, their concern at his well-being giving way to helpless fatalism: no one thought he was going to make it out alive. One of the people who had stayed close was River Phoenix. The *My Own Private Idaho* star moved in with Frusciante in October 1993, and the two of them would spend days at a time getting high and not sleeping. Frusciante was reportedly with the actor on the night he collapsed and died of a drug overdose

on the pavement outside LA club The Viper Room on October 31, 1993.

In 1994, Frusciante released his debut solo album, *Niandra Lades And Usually Just A T-Shirt*. Its skeletal, half-there song-sketches were a world away from the Chili Peppers' taut funk-rock gymnastics and a reflection of the guitarist's precarious physical and mental state. It sold just 15,000 copies. But then that was exactly what John Frusciante wanted.

As the 1990s progressed, his life got even darker. His arms became covered with scars, the result of abscesses from shooting heroin and cocaine, and he began to lose his teeth. At one point, he nearly died from a blood infection. He tried half-heartedly to get clean, but it never stuck.

In a 1996 piece on the guitarist for the *LA New Times*, journalist Robert Wilonsky described him as "a skeleton covered in thin skin."

"[Heroin] helps you do anything better you want to do," Frusciante told Wilonsky. "At least for me, not for other people. A lot of people... they know that when I'm clean I lose the sparkle in my eye, I lose my personality, I'm not happy, I'm kinda empty."

Frusciante seemed to exist in a vortex of darkness. In 1996, his house in the Hollywood Hills burnt down, destroying several

guitars and tapes of the music he was working on. He moved into the Chateau Marmont, the hotel where comedian John Belushi died of a speedball overdose nearly 25 years before. When he was kicked out of there, he moved to another hotel, and then onto another.

In 1997, he released a second solo album, *Smile From The Streets You Hold*, a record that was even more untethered to reality than its predecessor. Frusciante later claimed that he made the album for "drug money", and it sounds like it. This was the work of someone who had lost interest in the world and in themselves.

"I had no image to care about or present to anyone," he told *Alt Press*. "I wasn't ashamed... I was as close to dying as a person could be."

Except John Frusciante didn't die. Against the odds, he cleaned up and rediscovered the part of him that wanted to live again. And then he rejoined the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

**F**rusciante's sudden departure had left a hole that his former bandmates struggled to fill.

The first guitarist they recruited, Arik Marshall, lasted less than a year. The second, Jesse Tobias, barely notched up a month. "We were looking for very specific, cosmic characteristics, and they weren't presenting themselves," Kiedis told *Rolling Stone*.

A seemingly permanent solution was under their noses. Dave Navarro was the guitarist with Jane's Addiction, a band whose rise to fame





The Chilis with guitarist Dave Navarro (right) in 1995.



The funk brothers: the Chili Peppers in 1989.

paralleled the Chili Peppers' own, right down to their drugs habits. Jane's fell apart at the end of 1991, and the Chilis saw Navarro as the perfect replacement for Frusciante. He rebuffed their first request, but the band persevered and he said yes at the second time of asking.

The union didn't quite deliver on its promise. Their sole album together, 1995's *One Hot Minute*, was solid rather than spectacular. Navarro's psychedelic heavy rock style wasn't a great fit for the Chili Peppers' groove-centred approach. It didn't help that both Navarro and Kiedis were falling back into bad old ways. "We both had a loose grip on reality," the guitarist later admitted.

Whether the reasons were musical or chemical, the partnership between the Chilis and their latest guitarist officially dissolved in 1998. "We did not fire him; he did not quit," Flea told *Alternative Press* the following year. "It was like, this is not working. Basically, the intangible things that make magic happen were not happening."

And so the Red Hot Chili Peppers found themselves without a guitarist for the second time in six years. But bringing the magic back this time would prove to be a lot easier.

When John Frusciante and Anthony Kiedis met at a gig by the reunited Jane's Addiction near the end of 1997, it was the first time they had spoken in five years. Flea had stayed sporadically in touch with Frusciante, but Kiedis, angered by his mid-tour departure, had not.

"He wasn't on drugs, but I was and he wasn't judgemental," Frusciante told *Rock Sound* of their encounter. "He used to give you a bad vibe about pot and drinking, but he was just cool."

It was Flea who suggested they call Frusciante after Navarro's departure. The guitarist had begun hearing voices again, except this time they told him he would die if he didn't quit drugs. Frusciante listened to them, checking himself into rehab that January to clean up and save himself.

Kiedis was sceptical about getting his former bandmate back, but Flea dug in. The bassist told him that he would quit the band if they didn't at least call Frusciante.

"When Dave left, Flea called me up and asked me what I thought about playing with John," the singer told *Kerrang!* "I told him it would be a dream, but that it was a very far-fetched concept. Then a week later we were playing together."

Things moved fast. With three months of a "bombastic" - Kiedis' words - rehearsal, the Red Hot Chili Peppers were onstage at the Tibetan Freedom Concert in Washington DC with Frusciante. Soon, they were working on songs for their first album with the guitarist since *BloodSugarSexMagik*.

The original plan was to make an electronica album. "I feel the most exciting music happening is electronica, without a doubt," said Flea. They considered Brian Eno, William Orbit, U2 associate Flood and even David Bowie as producers, none of whom were available.

Instead, they went back to Rick Rubin, who had produced *BloodSugar...* and *One Hot Minute*. Rubin allayed any doubts as to Frusciante's physical and mental wellbeing. "He's brimming with ideas, and he lives and breathes music more than anyone I've ever seen in my life," the producer told *Spin* of the guitarist, who would go spend tens of thousands of dollars on surgery to clear up the scars on his arms and replace his ruined teeth.

Frusciante's renewed vigour reinvigorated the Chili Peppers. Their seventh album, *Californication*, felt less like the work of a band picking up where they'd left off almost a decade earlier, and more like the start of an entirely new chapter. It didn't ditch the funk rock of the past so much as hone it into something mature and intelligent. *Around The World and Parallel Universe* ramped up the energy, but the slower songs - *Scar Tissue*, *Otherside* and the title track,

with its acute dissection of the California state of mind - showed a more thoughtful, measured side to the band. But Flea batted away suggestions that it signified the Red Hot Chili Peppers' rebirth.

"I just feel that we always exist," the bassist told *Rock Sound*. "John, Chad, Anthony and me. It's like we're still around, we always have been."

"Not me," added Frusciante. "Everybody thought I was dead. But as you can see, I'm very much alive."

**"We're all co-dependent and we know it, but we also trust each other."**

John Frusciante

**C**alifornication was released on June 8, 1999. It reached No. 3 in the US, and would go on to sell more than 15 million copies worldwide - more, even, than *BloodSugarSexMagik*.

But the album's real triumph wasn't its commercial success. Kiedis acknowledged that *Californication* effectively saved the Chili Peppers

("Until John rejoined, Flea was at the end of his Chili Peppers rope," said the singer). More importantly, as Frusciante acknowledged, it signified his own return from a journey that was almost destined to end in tragedy.

"It's a second chance for all of us," he told *NYRock*. "In a way, we're all co-dependent and we know it, but we also trust each other."

The momentum from *Californication* carried the Chili Peppers and Frusciante through 2002's *By Your Side* and on to 2006's sprawling and vastly under-rated *Stadium Arcadium*. Yet there was always a sense that old ghosts - if not demons - could return, and the guitarist bailed on the band for a second time in 2009 to pursue his solo career. It was more amicable this time - Frusciante even recommended his own understudy, Josh Klinghoffer, as his replacement.

Yet even that wasn't the end of the story. In 2019, Frusciante returned to the band, displacing Klinghoffer. "It's just returning to family," he said in 2021. "I'm extremely comfortable with those people. It was as if no time at all had gone by." 🍌



Red Alert: Slipknot in 1999.



# SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES

Released in 1999, Slipknot's snarling self-titled debut album was one of the defining debuts of the decade. This is how nine outcasts from the Mid-West changed the game virtually overnight...

WORDS: TOMMY UDO

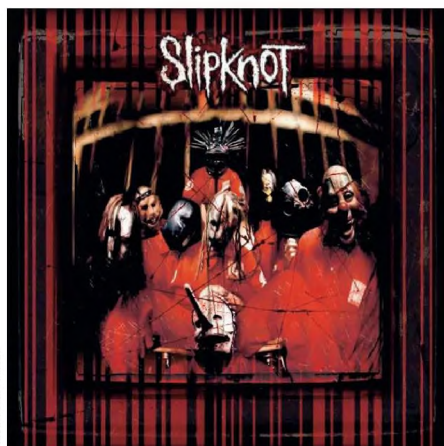
**"IF TRUTH BE TOLD IT WAS** really my wife who persuaded me to sign Slipknot," recalls Roadrunner Records A&R supremo Monte Conner, the man who signed Slipknot. "I really wasn't sure. I liked them but I was prevaricating. That and a character that they had in the band at that time – called, I think, The Baby [actually the mentalist Cuddles] – swung me."

Welcome to the mid 90s, a period that seems almost as remote as the Dark Ages in terms of the phenomenal changes that we have seen in heavy music and in the lives of nine [or so] crazy kids from the Mid-Western USA who had an idealistic dream to scare the living piss out of the whole motherfucking planet.

"Slipknot is still the heaviest album ever to make it onto the Billboard Top 3," says Corey Taylor. "There's no doubt that the album opened the door to a lot more very extreme bands crossing into the mainstream," says Monte Connor.

"It set the bar," agrees Joey Jordison.

In retrospect, Slipknot's 1999 self-titled album was a major change in metal. Until then, bands were still caught up in the fallout from grunge, and while the lightweight



ALL IMAGES: PRESS

pop-metal of bands such as Korn, Limp Bizkit and others were keeping hard rock alive and on permanent rotation on MTV, there was nothing outside of the underground to challenge the old guard of Slayer, Metallica and Megadeth, nothing with any real substance.

Slipknot had no idea what they were going to sound like when they formed: stuck in dead-end bands and dead-end day jobs, they

wanted to do something – anything – to get the fuck right out of that life. "Back at the time, there was no metal going on in Des Moines, there was no hardcore, nothing. We had all been in bands that had opened up for each other, and the scene had become just terrible. No one really gave a fuck about music, so we formed Slipknot," says Corey Taylor.

Shawn Crahan used to frequent a club in Des Moines called The Runway where cover bands and tribute bands would try to outshine each other in their slavish imitation of other bands. When the only two original metal bands in Des Moines that he liked broke up, he knew it was time for him to do it himself. Along with vocalist Anders Colsefni and Paul Gray, he formed a band called Meld. Local drummer Joey Jordison was persuaded to come and watch them rehearse: one song they played that night was called Slipknot. He knew there and then that he had to be in.

Joey Jordison worked as a night manager at a gas station. He'd leave band practice at 10pm, take a radio and TV to the gas station and crank metal out all night. Shawn Crahan would come down and they'd start plotting things out. When he left at 5am, they had worked out the blueprint for the band that Slipknot would eventually become. Then he got fired because he was scaring the customers away. "We literally had people pull up, see me and Shawn sitting in the window, floor it out of there and go to the Amoco station across the street."

Slipknot's live shows around the period between 1995 and 1998 were occasionally shambolic affairs, played out in bars in the bad ▶

**"IT WAS VIOLENT. THINGS  
WERE GETTING BROKEN. IT GOT  
CRAZY REALLY QUICKLY."**

ROSS ROBINSON

Boiler suited and booted: Slipknot go to work.



part of town to at best indifferent and at worst hostile crowds. Line-ups changed: original guitarists Donnie Steele and Josh Brainard left, the former after he “found Christ”, the latter lost interest. Anders Colsefni left in 1997 and was replaced by Corey Taylor who the band had met when they faced off against Stone Sour in a Battle Of The Bands contest. Craig Jones was

tapped to replace Donnie, but he was moved to samples and Mick Thomson joined as lead guitarist. When Josh bolted, Corey suggested a replacement, James Root, from his old band Stone Sour. The band found DJ Sid Wilson later on, and the incarnation of Slipknot that we all love to hate was formed.

There were a few labels interested in Slipknot, particularly in the wake of their debut release *Mate. Feed. Kill. Repeat.*, essentially a collection of demo-quality tracks that gives us a snapshot of a band not quite fully formed.

“There were a few tracks on that record that were good that ended up being redone on the first Roadrunner album”, says Roadrunner’s Monte Connor.

As well as Connor, producer Ross Robinson – then riding high on the success of his work with Korn and Limp Bizkit – had heard the album and went to Des Moines to see the band himself, intending to sign them to his IAM imprint. After seeing them and hanging out with them in strip bars – “Des Moines’ main form of entertainment”, says Corey Taylor a tad

warily – Robinson was impressed by their dedication and by their vision. It was the alchemical reaction that would turn base metal to gold.

Thanks in part to Robinson and Monte Connor’s wife, Slipknot were signed and travelled out to Robinson’s Indigo Ranch studio in California to start work on the album. For a time, Robinson seemed to be the only person who was totally convinced by Slipknot. As far as the band were concerned, they’d written the album for themselves and had no idea that anyone else outside of their friends and family would buy it.

“We hadn’t recorded the album yet; we hadn’t gone out and toured; we didn’t know how people were going to take us. So we’d just written the songs for us. There was no audience until then”, says Corey.

The band travelled economy class in those days and slept where they fell, on couches and on armchairs if they were lucky, on hard floors if not. Robinson has a reputation as a producer who lays down challenges to bands to get the best work out of them; with Slipknot it was a two-way street.

“I was working out every day just to stay on top of that record”, Robinson, a man who seems



ALL IMAGES: PRESS

to hyperventilate with enthusiasm in everyday conversations, told *Hammer*. "It was spontaneous, it was violent. Things were getting broken. We were out there away from anyone else, nobody dropping by or hanging out, it got crazy really quickly."

"Ross had me pounding that kit so hard that my hands were bleeding, and that was when we were just setting up the drum levels. My

hands were covered in these bloody bandages," says Joey.

"Ross pushed us and we pushed back," says Corey. "It was a fight. Ross was throwing punches at us. He was so into it. You can hear that on the record."

"It's a piece of magic," says Robinson. "We made it for us."

It was a brutal, desensitised catalogue of rage and despair. It was like a fusion of the most extreme hip-hop with the most extreme metal. In the raw blast of *Eyeless*, Corey Taylor screams: "*Insane – Am I the only muthafucker with a brain?/I'm hearing voices but all they do is complain/How many times have you wanted to kill/Everything and everyone – Say you'll do it but never will/You can't see California without Marlon Brando's eyes/I am my Father's son/He's a phantom, a mystery and that leaves me/Nothing!/How many times have you wanted to die?/It's too late for me/All you have to do is get rid of me!*"

The song was inspired by the schizophrenic ravings of a street dweller that the band met in New York when they were visiting the offices of Roadrunner Records to sign their contract.

According to Mick Thomson: "He was running around, screaming it at everyone. Though I think his choice of actor was pretty cool. He was off his shit."

In the more defiant *Surfacing* Corey sings: "*Fuck it all/Fuck this world/Fuck everything that you stand for/Don't belong/Don't exist/Don't give a shit/Don't ever judge me.*"

But the truly terrifying *Scissors*, an unconnected, rambling stream of consciousness evocative of a deranged killer, was the album's 'money shot,' the equivalent of Linda Blair's 360 degree headspin in *The Exorcist* or the chest-burster in *Alien*: "*I play doctor for five minutes flat/Before I cut my heart open and let the air out/Three bugs, a pound of dust/Some wind spilled before me In the strangest manner that had/Broke away my tear spout.*"

It may have sounded like horror comic stuff to some critics, but there was a basis in the very real human pain that some of the band's members had suffered. Rumours of child abuse, suicide attempts and a mania for self-slashing added to the band's mystique.

In an interview with *Metal Hammer* at the time, Joey Jordison said: "You stick nine guys together who have had no outlet for their whole lives, and you live in Iowa and you come out on a fucking stage, then you have some shit to portray. We were walking around like ghosts, slitting our wrists open saying, 'Please take a look at this, look at what we are trying to do'. When we put it together and came to doing a live show all the elements of being downgraded, not appreciated, being given nothing because we live in such a shithole, all

that came out. There is no way you can go through life thinking everything is great because it's not. Look at all the fucked-up shit that goes on. The world is a sick fucking place. The fact is you can come to our show and get all your aggressions out and go away feeling relieved. I want everyone to get a rush of emotion from it."

The band's self-titled debut album was the most successful record Roadrunner ever had, with only Coal Chamber coming close. The rapid success of the album owed a lot to the rather shrewd decision to buy Slipknot onto the opening slot of the 1999 Ozzfest tour.

The band struck up a good relationship with Jack Osbourne, who had a hand in booking subsequent tours. Without the benefit of support from press, radio or MTV, the album became a cult item that went platinum within three months of release. This allowed them to obviously shock the shit out of the mainstream; the music and the image guaranteed fodder for the ban-it brigade in the wake of the Columbine shootings.

But the first people to turn their noses up were not concerned Conservative Christians, it was the metal underground, who wrote them off as another addition to the nu-metal canon – something the band bristled against

Joey: "If you listen to a song like *Get This* from the digipack, or *Surfacing* or [*sic*] or even like fucking *Scissors*, the roots are death metal, thrash, speed metal, and I could go on and on about all those bands. I know all the songs, and I know every fucking label... the underground metal kids should also be happy because the current success of Slipknot, on songs like *Surfacing* and [*sic*] that have super-fast 16th-note double-bass – none of those fuckers in the other bands they lump us with could contend with that." **H**



**“ROSS HAD ME POUNDING THAT KIT SO HARD THAT MY HANDS WERE BLEEDING. THEY WERE COVERED IN THESE BLOODY BANDAGES.”**

JOEY JORDISON

# THE 50 GREATEST ALBUMS OF THE 1990s

Grunge blockbusters, pop-punk monsters, stadium metal behemoths, alt-rock game-changers – these are the albums that defined an entire decade.

## MOTHER LOVE BONE

APPLE (1990)



50

Apple is proof that grunge had its glammier side. From the swagger of *This Is Shangri-La* to the wind-down simplicity of the piano-led *Crown Of*

*Thorns*, the music has so much more impact knowing it would be the only album Mother Love Bone would ever make – singer Andrew Wood died of an overdose before *Apple* was even released

## THERAPY?

TROUBLEGUM (1994)



49

Therapy's second album bore traces of the antisocial noise that they'd made their name with, but this was primarily an album dominated by

enormous sing-along anthems such as *Screamager* and *Nowhere*. A record custom-built to unite the rock tribes – a job it did brilliantly.

## PRIMUS

SAILING THE SEAS OF CHEESE (1991)



48

With its barking-mad worldview and wonky hooks, Primus' second studio album was perfect for the uncertain but curious early 90s. *Tommy The*

*Cat* and *Jerry Was A Racecar Driver* were so full of so much energy that the genuinely bizarre nature of Primus' approach to rock'n'roll barely registers.

## SUBLIME

SUBLIME (1996)



47

Long Beach's Sublime were set to become the leading lights of the So-Cal punk scene, until frontman Bradley Nowell died of a heroin overdose on May 25,

1996, two months before their self-titled third album was released. Yet despite the backstory, songs such as *What I Got* and *Doin' Time* remain as euphoric and beach-boy cool as anything that came out of the movement they helped popularise.

## WHITE ZOMBIE

ASTRO-CREEP 2000 (1994)



46

*Astro-Creep* was White Zombie's fourth and final album, and they really did save the best till last. Here the New Yorkers pulled no punches, just stripped

flesh from haunches. Across 52 minutes, it rattled through enough sample-heavy grooves, B-movie gabbling and gut-twisting heaviness to rival any metal band in the 90s.

## KORN

KORN (1994)



45

Korn drew on the influence of Faith No More, Rage Against The Machine and hip-hop, but turned it into something brand new. Their debut album

seethed with pain, rage and self-loathing in a way

that metal bands had never expressed before, single-handedly ushering in nu metal. It remains as integral to modern metal as the first Black Sabbath album or Metallica's *Master Of Puppets*.

## RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

EVIL EMPIRE (1996)



44

Occasionally overshadowed by RATM's shock-and-awe debut, this follow-up is still a phenomenal record. *Bulls On Parade* and *People Of The Sun*

were the hits, but the deeper cuts are no less impactful: the psychedelic punk of *Revolver* and the scattergun jazz of *Down Rodeo* are as good and as experimental as anything Rage have ever written.

## SYSTEM OF A DOWN

SYSTEM OF A DOWN (1998)



43

System Of A Down's debut is an absurdly brilliant record and the leader in a field of one. Spawning the anthemic likes of *Sugar*, *Suite Pee* and *War*, it

stands as one of metal's finest opening statements, mixing demented punk energy with fragile beauty and setting them up to become one of the era's biggest and most unique bands.

## RAMMSTEIN

SEHNSUCHT (1997)



42

Building on *Herzeleid*'s muscular sound, Rammstein's second album delivers dollops of gothic noir alongside the usual industrial-metal punishment.

Confrontational, provocative, utterly Teutonic, *Sehnsucht* proved there was way more to German metal than the Scorpions.

## STONE TEMPLE PILOTS

PURPLE (1994)



41

The accusations of bandwagon-jumping clearly stung STP. Their second album found them demonstrating their growing ambition on the country-tinged

*Interstate Love Song* and the muscular pop-metal of *Silvergun Superman*, both of which deviated from the grunge blueprint – although *Meat Plow* and *Vaseline* kept a boot in that camp.

## THE OFFSPRING

SMASH (1994)



40

Released in April 1994 – the darkest month of the decade – The Offspring's third album rocketed these Orange County punk veterans to global fame. Compared to grunge's self-lacerating angst, *Gotta Get Away*, *Self Esteem* and massive hit single *Come Out And Play* were a blast of fresh air.

## FOO FIGHTERS

- FOO FIGHTERS (1995)



39

Six months after the death of Kurt Cobain, Dave Grohl laid down 15 songs at Robert Lang Studios in Seattle, playing virtually every note himself. The result was the most uplifting album of 1995, with *I'll Stick Around*, *Big Me* and *This Is A Call* bursting with energy and positivity. A new dawn rising.

## HELMET

MEANTIME (1992)



38

New Yorkers Helmet's staccato riffs cemented them as one of the most influential bands of the 90s. Yet their second album proved that they didn't just create massive concrete blocks of sound, they also dealt in arty, avant-garde passages of noise. Often imitated, never bettered.

## RADIOHEAD

THE BENDS (1995)



37

Somewhere between their debut *Pablo Honey* and *The Bends*, Radiohead must have entered into a pact with the forces of darkness, so profound is the leap in quality between those two albums. *The Bends* is a masterpiece: beautifully written, played and recorded, startling in its ambition and depth.

## FUGAZI

REPEATER (1990)



36

The ultimate DIY band, Fugazi's debut album, stunned with its articulate anger at the capitalism that so enveloped society. Yet, you could also hum the tunes in the shower. Steadfastly refusing to

compromise by chucking in their lot with a major label, Fugazi led by example.

## OASIS

DEFINITELY MAYBE (1994)

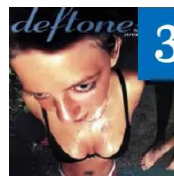


35

One of the defining documents of the 90s, the Manchester quintet's debut was a thrilling snapshot of what it means to be young, fearless and fiercely convinced of one's own capacity to transcend the mundane and mediocre. More than 25 years on, its swagger remains undiminished.

## DEFTONES

AROUND THE FUR (1997)



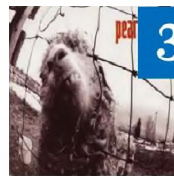
34

If their 1995 debut *Adrenaline* suggested Deftones were riding in Korn's slipstream, this follow-up proved they were nobody's shadow. A dense record, where

de-tuned, nervy metal dallies with starkly bare tunes, *Around the Fur* remains arguably the definitive Deftones album.

## PEARL JAM

VS (1993)



33

Vs. was the sound of band kicking against fame. On their second album Pearl Jam dialed down the grand emoting of debut *Ten*: *Go* and *Blood* were blasts of petulant fury. Yet they couldn't quite

throw the baby out with the bath water.

*Rearviewmirror* and the plaintive *Elderly Woman Behind the Counter In A Small Town* backed up the notion that Eddie Vedder and co were an arena rock band, and a classy one at that.

## SLIPKNOT

SLIPKNOT (1999)



32

The start of a genuine phenomenon and the point where nu metal almost swallowed the world whole. The frustration and alienation captured by Slipknot on their debut album struck a resounding chord with those hungry for the next shot of extreme sonic outrage. And outrage was exactly what they got: squealing, scratching volleys ricocheted off grinding, bullet-proof thrash riffs while a rhythm section hammered away in titanic triplicate. Nasty, brutish, overwhelmingly nihilistic but utterly mesmerising.

## RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

CALIFORNICATION (1999)



31

After a rocky few years, *Californication* came along at a time when the Chilis had their backs to the wall. They didn't so much ditch the funk rock of the past as hone it into something mature and intelligent. *Around the World* and *Parallel Universe* ramp up the energy, but it's the slower songs – *Scar Tissue*, *Otherside* and the title track – that show a more thoughtful side. The resurrection of the Red Hot Chili Peppers was complete.

System Of A Down:  
one of the era's most  
unique bands.





L7: anything but square.

## R.E.M.

**AUTOMATIC FOR THE PEOPLE** (1992)



30

R.E.M.'s eighth album was a lesson in how to go stratospheric without selling out. It married Michael Stipe's poetic lyrics to some of the band's most

irresistible hooks, resulting in a record that made you tap the wheel and contemplate your own mortality at the same time.

## THE BLACK CROWES

**THE SOUTHERN HARMONY AND MUSICAL COMPANION** (1992)



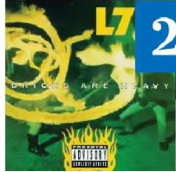
29

The Black Crowes' second album – and only US Number One – remains their finest work. The band were on a roll, cutting the whole album in just

eight days. Its heavy, funky, soulful rock'n'roll – best illustrated by the snaking *Remedy* and the stoned jam *Thorn In My Pride* – was classic yet timeless, repackaged for an entirely new decade.

## L7

**BRICKS ARE HEAVY** (1992)



28

Named after 1950s slang for 'square', L7 were anything but dull. The LA band hooked up with Nirvana producer Butch Vig of *Nevermind*

fame for their third album, *Bricks Are Heavy*, a union which turned them into unlikely stars. *Pretend We're Dead* might be the album's best-known and stand-out track, but *Shitlist*, *Everglade* and *Wargasm* are no slouches either.

## NIRVANA

**UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK** (1994)



27

Even without the baggage of Kurt Cobain's death, the posthumously released *Unplugged In New York* was stirring and poignant. Highlights

include the squeezebox-bolstered *Jesus Doesn't Want Me For A Sunbeam* and the magical *All Apologies*, but the best comes last, when Cobain's drawl breaks into a ravaged howl at the three-minute mark of *Where Did You Sleep Last Night*. Nirvana didn't need the noise to do their thing.

## JEFF BUCKLEY

**GRACE** (1994)



26

Buckley copycats might mimic the angelic voice, but they're missing the point: the late Californian had eclectic tastes and his sole

album mixed moments of drowsy beauty with bombastic rock and reworked Middle English hymns, while his cover of Leonard Cohen's *Hallelujah* gained an unlikely afterlife that no one saw coming. "I know I can do better," said Buckley at the time. Sadly he never got the chance.

## SLAYER

**SEASONS IN THE ABYSS** (1990)



25

Some believed that thrash icons' fifth album was the sound of a band stuck in a rut. But this was actually a band in a groove, knowing precisely

what they should be doing, and how to deliver it.

The last studio to feature talismanic drummer Dave Lombardo until 2006, while it offered no discernible change in direction from what had gone before, the band's strength of vision was clear on *Dead Skin Mask* and *War Ensemble*. Thrash metal might have been on the ropes, but Slayer weren't.

## ALANIS MORISSETTE

**JAGGED LITTLE PILL** (1995)



24

*Jagged Little Pill* seemingly appeared overnight. What was remarkable about its unimaginable success was its relaxed and humble genesis. Alanis

Morissette, a 21-year-old Canadian dance-pop singer, hooked up with Glen Ballard, fresh from producing/writing with Michael Jackson and Paula Abdul, and 13 days later, a multimillion-selling, Grammy-grabbing album was written.

Like a 90s version of Carole King's *Tapestry* – a highly charged emotional unburdening of youthful heartbreak set to crack songcraft – the intensely personal nature of the naked and angry lyrics resonated with an entire generation, and not just young women.

## SMASHING PUMPKINS

**SIAMESE DREAM** (1993)



23

By the time of the Smashing Pumpkins' second album, Billy Corgan was both writing the songs and playing all the instruments except the

drums, with his perfectionist tendencies finding his bandmates – particularly guitarist James Iha and bassist D'Arcy Wretzky – relegated to the role of 'the help'. Not fitting the grunge, metal or indie brackets, Corgan instead magpied from every genre to make an album to appeal to all tribes. The result was came on like a grunge Queen, with all the fearlessness and foolishness that suggested. It sold by the bucketload, and for a while they were one of the most-talked about bands around.

## OASIS

**(WHAT'S THE STORY) MORNING GLORY?** (1995)



22

The point where Oasis went from being the most exciting new band of the mid-90s to one of the biggest. Their second album evokes a moment in

time, all Cool Britannia optimism, laddish bonhomie and, tellingly, a point when the Gallaghers were famous for music rather than for their tabloid antics. An unstoppable juggernaut, it went on to sell in excess of 10 million copies.

## THE WILDHEARTS

EARTH VS THE WILDHEARTS

(1993)



21

An intoxicating mash-up of pop melodies, metal aggression and punk swagger. The Wildhearts' brilliant debut is a perfect encapsulation of what

it meant to be young, skint and lairy in mid-90s Britain. Bursting with dazzling riffs and memorable melodies, songs like *Greetings From Shitsville* and *Everlong* sounded like all your favourite rock'n'roll bands playing at once. The work band in love with music, life and lots and lots of drugs.

## MANIC STREET PREACHERS

THE HOLY BIBLE (1994)



20

In a musical landscape in which grunge was reaching the end of its glory days and Britpop was on the rise, the Manic Street Preachers' third album was an

anomaly, a reading list, a warning from history. This was the last album they recorded with now disappeared guitarist Richey James, whose personal turmoil stains this vivid record like a tattoo. A relative flop at the time, today it's viewed with a reverence that borders on the cultish.

## FOO FIGHTERS

THE COLOUR AND THE SHAPE (1997)



19

*The Colour And The Shape* was not an easy album to make. By the time it was completed, both guitarist Pat Smear and drummer William Goldsmith

had tendered their resignations, and Dave Grohl had been served divorce papers by his first wife. As ever, music would be his guide out of the darkness. *Everlong*, *Monkey Wrench* and *My Hero* are the big hitters here, but this is the Foo Fighters' most cohesive artistic statement, and their finest hour.

## SMASHING PUMPKINS

MELON COLLIE AND THE INFINITE SADNESS (1995)



18

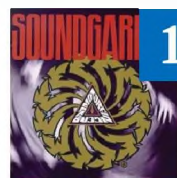
Set aside an afternoon for this pair of discretely titled but interlinked song cycles. It's a languid sprawl at two hours, with more than 28 songs, and it

shows Smashing Pumpkins in bold and

adventurous form. Alongside the band's signature undulating rock, you'll also find them trying their hands at practically every musical style under the sun, many unexpected, and all of them beautiful.

## SOUNDGARDEN

BADMOTORFINGER (1991)



17

By the time of their third album, original grunge architects Soundgarden were long overdue the success of their peers. Their third full-length

album finally delivered it for them. But *Badmotorfinger* was more than just a standard-issue grunge album: prog-esque song structures abounded, and there was blaring saxophone on several songs. But it was MTV hit *Outshined* that propelled the album up the charts and gave Soundgarden the place at grunge's top table that they so richly deserved.

## HOLE

LIVE THROUGH THIS (1994)



16

There's never been a rock star like Courtney Love, and all of the wit, venom and irony inside her was poured into Hole's second album. *Live Through This*

cut through the grunge boys' club like a buzzsaw – killer singles *Miss World* and *Bruise Violet* were funny and fearsome. Released the week after the death of Love's husband Kurt Cobain, the album's title became a mix of prophecy and defiance.

## ALICE IN CHAINS

DIRT (1990)



15

Alice In Chains' debut album, *Facelift*, was grunge's first mainstream hit, opening the door commercially for Nirvana's *Nevermind*,

Pearl Jam's *Ten* and Soundgarden's *Badmotorfinger* to step through. But everything was just about to get darker – a whole lot darker – with AIC's follow-up record, *Dirt*. Heavy, bleak and brutally self-lacerating, *Dirt* was AIC's epic junkie confessional. Sadly, it'd prove all too prophetic for Layne Staley.

## FAITH NO MORE

ANGEL DUST (1992)



14

Following on from their success with *The Real Thing* in '89, FNM delivered another slab of innovative rock – and we'd not heard anything quite like it.

Despite publicly giving the impression that he was just killing time in FNM until his 'other band' Mr Bungle hit the big time, frontman Mike Patton excelled himself here. The singer's idiosyncratic character is smeared all over *Angel Dust*. Many of the lyrics were even cooked up in a sleep-deprivation experiment he put himself through – see the self-help psychosis of *Land Of Sunshine* or the gale-force paranoia of *Caffeine*. Faith No More made a lot of great albums, but with *Angel Dust* they made one hell of a masterpiece.

## NIRVANA

IN UTERO (1993)



13

How are a cult band meant to react to levels of success they had barely dreamed of and didn't ask for? Nirvana opted to stay true to their outsider

values, and brought in hardcore legend Steve Albini to give them a harsher, more abrasive sound designed to satisfy old fans and alienate new ones. Nirvana belonged on the margins and *In Utero* is a brutal, visceral fuck-you to success.

## JANE'S ADDICTION

RITUAL DE LO HABITUAL (1990)



12

The art rock of Jane's Addiction's 1988 debut album, *Nothing's Shocking*, had been an exercise in musical graffiti. This time, Perry Farrell and co painted

on a wider canvas. *Ritual de lo Habitual* was designed to appeal to a more mainstream audience while turning rock'n'roll on its head by throwing elements of funk, goth and punk into the mix with complex and catchy-as-hell songwriting. The subversive perversity that drove the band's psyche was always bubbling beneath the surface of songs like *Been Caught Stealing*, while mystic epic *Three Days* were their *Stairway To Heaven*.

## RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS

BLOODSUGARSEXMAGIK (1991)



11

Enter producer/guru/star-maker Rick Rubin, whose work on the Red Hot Chili Peppers' fifth album helped turn them into the megastars they'd

always been in their heads. Recorded in a supposedly haunted mansion once owned by Harry Houdini, *Blood Sugar Sex Magik* exists where the spiritual meets the carnal. *Give It Away*, *Suck My Kiss* and *Sir Psycho Sexy* take their livewire funk rock to its logical conclusion, but it's Kiedis's tender junkie's mea culpa *Under The Bridge* that stands as the album's outstanding moment.



Soundgarden: swaggering grooves and nightmare lullabies.

doomy, slow-moving sludge-rock, sometimes pulling into a layby between the two.

Like all great albums, *Superunknown* is a record of many shades and characters. At its centre were two ballads, *Fell On Black Days* and *Black Hole Sun*, radio hits that resembled lullabies you'd sing to your children if you wanted them to have nightmares. Elsewhere, there was a silly swaggering groove about a Spoonman that became one of their biggest hits.

It's hard to imagine another rock band at the time who could go from the minor-chord waltz of *Limo Wreck* to the theatrical lurch of *The Day I Tried To Live* in one track, never mind over the course of a whole record. They were a band of multitudes, unafraid to explore every aspect of their personality. By removing the shackles, Soundgarden made their career peak.

## RADIOHEAD

OK COMPUTER (1997)



6

Few modern albums have been as showered with accolades as *OK Computer*. Fewer still have deserved them. Radiohead's third album didn't just

redefine the Oxford five-piece, it redefined what it meant to be a rock band in the 1990s.

Where 1995's *The Bends* was a comparatively straightforward, if intelligent alt-rock album, this found Thom Yorke and his not-so-merry-men processing the effects of fame, loneliness and the weight of modern life. And they didn't like what they saw. But a great concept is nothing without great tunes to back it up, and *OK Computer* had them: *Lucky*, *Karma Police* and the utterly unique *Paranoid Android* were arena rock songs written by people to whom arena rock was a disgusting concept. A 90s landmark in sound and spirit.

## NINE INCH NAILS

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL (1994)



5

While Nine Inch Nails' debut album *Pretty Hate Machine* put them on the map, and 2000's *The Fragile* is the greatest statement in a sense of scope, *The*

*Downward Spiral* remains Trent Reznor's definitive moment. Recorded in the Tate House (where the Manson Family murdered actress Sharon Tate and four others) while Reznor was depressed, anxious and suffering from crippling addiction, the band's second album is one of the grimmest depictions of the human condition ever.

Yes, *Hurt* is still incredible, but this album is infinitely more powerful than just one song. Loops of live drums and anaemic, wiry guitars take the *Broken* sound and starve it of any hope, love or nutrients. *March Of The Pigs'* quiet/loud dynamic delivers the most beautiful of beatings, *Closer* will remain is an apocalyptic strip club anthem. *The Downward Spiral* is a bleak, barren view through Reznor's eyes circa 1994 – look if you dare.

## RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE (1992)



10

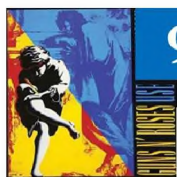
Rage Against The Machine's debut album was a Molotov cocktail exploding in the face of popular culture. It arrived as MTV metal was flat on the canvas

with bluebirds fluttering around its head, sucker-punched by both alternative rock and a new generation of politically-charged hip hop acts.

Rage channelled the vitality of the former with the fury of the latter, dropping this rap-metal A-bomb against a backdrop of riots, racial tension and global turmoil – timely back then but all too timeless now. Nearly 30 years on, its flames still burn brightly, having lost none of their power or provocative fervour.

## GUNS N' ROSES

USE YOUR ILLUSION VOLUMES I & II (1991)



9

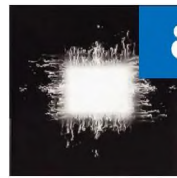
Received wisdom says that if these two sprawling double albums were condensed into one single record it would rival *Appetite For*

*Destruction*. But the beauty of the *UYI* twins was their scope: these 30 tracks played like a history of rock'n'roll's past, present and future, from the gimlet-eyed snarl of *Right Next Door To Hell* and the epic balladry of *Estranged* to *November Rain's*

showstopping blow-out and *Coma's* all-out weirdness. Overblown? No, this is the point where Axl Rose fully realised his vision for what Guns N' Roses could be.

## TOOL

AENIMA (1996)



8

Weird, esoteric, sarcastic, unsettling... Tool's second album was the point where they separated themselves from the alt-metal pack.

They could still land a direct punch when they wanted, as the perfect build-and-release of rock club favourite *Stinkfist* proved. But *Aenima* was the point where these King Crimson fans' progressive underbelly began to show itself – the nine-minute *Eulogy* built from two notes to a wall of furious noise, while the psychedelic nightmare trip of the climactic *Third Eye* properly showed the world the real Tool for the first time. At a time when rock had gone back to basics, *Aenima* was out there on its own.

## SOUNDGARDEN

SUPERUNKNOWN (1994)



7

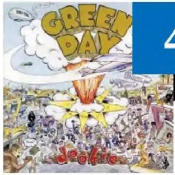
Soundgarden's fourth album is the quartet's definitive statement, a perfect blend of jolting rock riffs, rhythmical bursts and powerhouse vocals. It veers from surging songs you had to race to keep up with to

GETTY X2



## GREEN DAY

DOOKIE (1994)



4

By 1994, Green Day were already a successful band by punk rock standards. The trio's second album *Kerplunk* sold more than 30,000 copies and gained the band an impressive live following.

But *Dookie* - named after a baby's shit - was something else. Released two months before Kurt Cobain's death, it offered sweet relief from grunge's cycle of musical and human misery. There was angst here, too, on the self-lacerating *Basket Case* and irony-bomb *Welcome To Paradise*, but its bubblegum energy was more Banana Splits than Nirvana. By the end of the decade it had sold more than 10 million copies and turned Green Day into the superstars they never expected to be.

## PEARL JAM

TEN (1991)



3

The debut from the band who emerged from the ashes of Mother Love Bone is one of the great grunge albums.

Where their peers wielded irony like a weapon, *Ten* wore its earnestness as a badge, yoking Eddie Vedder's intensity to songs that were anthemic (*Even Flow*), empathetic (*Jeremy*) and brooding (*Black*).

Their debt to the unfashionable rock bands of the past provided ammo for their detractors - *Alive* was snidely pegged 'the grunge *Free Bird*', disregarding the personal heartbreak at its core. But *Ten* sold in the millions and Pearl Jam had the last laugh - even if would ultimately prove to be a bitter one.

## METALLICA

METALLICA (1991)



2

It was a bold move - a shift from thrash metal to mainstream rock, with shorter, slower, more direct songs, and most controversially, a slick production from Bob Rock, whose previous clients were hair metal kingpins Mötley Crüe.

But Metallica's fifth album found them shifting gears without compromising their core values. Where *Enter Sandman* and *Sad But True* were unsurpassed stadium metal anthems, the more measured *The Unforgiven* and *Nothing Else Matters* had genuine emotional weight and a lyrical duality that hinted at troubled times past and ahead. More than anything else, that's why the *Black Album* retains its fascination three decades later. The gamble paid off.

Nirvana: impossibly brilliant, totally iconic.



## NIRVANA

NEVERMIND (1991)



1

Is it possible to really quantify how much of an immense impact this, Nirvana's second album has had on the

world of rock music? Probably not.

Nirvana were significant because their musical influences were rooted in 70s metal - Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin et al - but their attitude was most assuredly punk rock, and their success united both sides of that divide and crossed over to the mainstream in a way that not only took the music business by surprise, but has had a lasting impact on rock music ever since.

Nirvana had already made one great record, *Bleach*, recorded for Seattle label Sub Pop on an eight-track. Cobain's band found itself at the vanguard of the Seattle 'grunge' movement that also included Soundgarden and soon Pearl Jam. American alternative music was rapidly becoming big business with the Pixies flying high and Sonic Youth now signed to a major label, Geffen. And this positioned Nirvana perfectly to take indie rock to the masses.

The rest is history. Suffice to say that the musical landscape of the world would probably be a lot different today had Kurt not shared with us the glory of *Smells Like Teen Spirit*, *Come As You Are* and the rest. Impossibly brilliant, utterly game-changing, totally iconic.

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*James Addiction* METALLICA NIRVANA GUNS N' ROSES NIN **tool** *Foo Fighters* *Stone Temple Pilots* Rammstein garbage Slipknot **Green Day** nu-metal \*RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS SKA-PUNK **rage against the machine** *THE PRODIGY*

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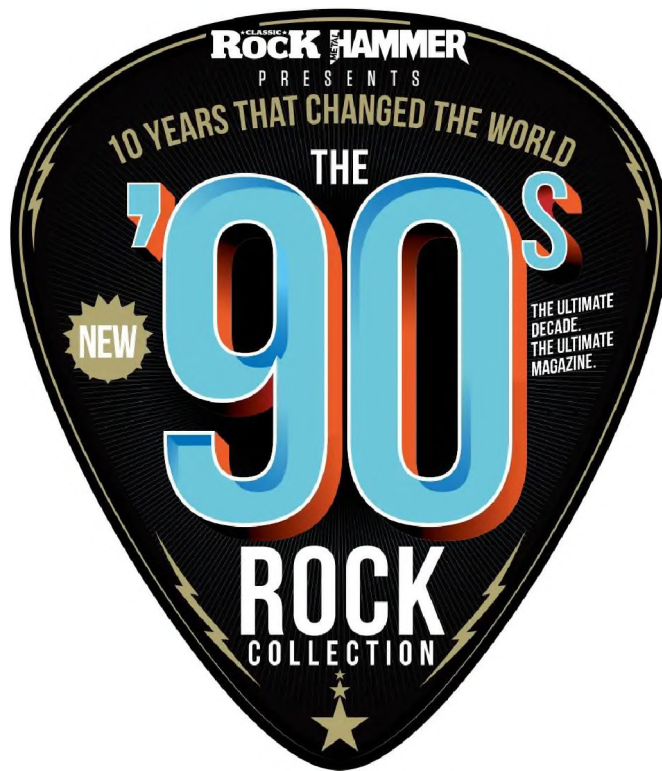
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*“Here we are now, entertain us...”*

**The Ultimate '90s Rock Collection** is a 132-page celebration of the decade that changed the world.

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