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SCOTT SCHINDER
AND ANDY SCHWARTZ

ICONS OF ROCK

AN ENCYCLOPEDIA
OF THE LEGENDS
WHO CHANGED MUSIC
FOREVER

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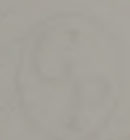
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ICONS OF ROCK

An Encyclopedia of the
Legends Who Changed
Music Forever

VOLUME 2

Scott Seider and
Andy Schwartz



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Legends Who Changed
Music Forever

VOLUME 2

Scott Schinder and
Andy Schwartz

Greenwood Icons



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Preface

It's now been more than half a century since rock and roll's official birth, although the music's roots stretch back much further. In that time, the genre has produced a rogues' gallery of memorable performers who've made essential contributions to rock's development as a major American art form, while emerging as fascinating, bigger-than-life figures in their own right.

It's common for historians to point to July 5, 1954—the evening that Elvis Presley recorded his debut single, “That’s All Right, Mama” at Sun Records’ Memphis studio—as the Night That Rock and Roll Was Born. But rock’s birth cycle was messier and more complicated. The mongrel synthesis of black and white musical forms—blues, jazz, gospel, country—was the product of the convergence of an unruly mass of musical, cultural, and social forces that had been percolating for longer than anyone could remember. Presley’s significance lies largely in the fact that in addition to being a brilliant and riveting performer, he was a charismatic young white man whose music could be marketed to Caucasian audiences at a time when musical tastes were as racially segregated as the rest of American society.

Those musical divisions began to break apart in the years following World War II. Postwar posterity created the first generation of American teenagers with sufficient disposable income to make them a potent economic force. Not coincidentally, that generation became the first to forge its own musical tastes; prior to the rock and roll era, kids more or less listened to the same music as their parents.

Beginning in the early 1950s, substantial numbers of white kids, who found little to relate to in the white-bread pop hits of the day, had begun to embrace the energy and immediacy of black rhythm and blues. While legal, social, and economic boundaries could prevent the races from mixing in public, they couldn’t keep white teens from listening to the black R&B discs that could be heard on the radio in most cities, spun by hipster disc jockeys of both races.

One of the most prominent was Alan Freed, whose combination of patter and platters captivated teens in Cleveland and New York, and who's generally credited as the man who popularized the term "rock and roll."

Almost immediately, rock and roll became the subject of outrage and derision from various moral guardians, authority figures, and bigots, who decried the music as an inducement to sexual abandon and race mixing. The critics, of course, were correct, and the music would play an integral, if gradual, role in breaking down racial barriers. In rock's early days, though, it was standard practice for hits by African American artists to be covered, in watered-down form, by white artists in order to make them palatable to white listeners. Thus, Little Richard's raucous, sexually charged "Tutti Frutti" became a jaunty, nonthreatening nonsense ditty in the hands of clean-cut Pat Boone, while the Penguins' passionate doo-wop anthem "Earth Angel" was whitewashed by the Crew-Cuts' version. But teenagers were too savvy to be fooled for long; most of the neutered cover versions, even the popular ones, were soon forgotten, while the originals were permanently enshrined in listeners' hearts.

But the view of rock and roll as a matter of whites co-opting and diluting black music is simplistic and inaccurate. For example, the multitude of rockabilly artists who followed in Elvis's wake, most of them Southerners of humble means, brought their own personalities and experiences to the mix, as evidenced by the dynamic work of Elvis's Sun Records labelmates Jerry Lee Lewis, Carl Perkins, and Johnny Cash, and that of such lesser-known iconoclasts as Charlie Feathers, Sonny Burgess, and Billy Lee Riley.

The first flowering of rock and roll in the 1950s produced a rich and diverse array of black and white performers. Many of the latter—like Bill Haley, the Everly Brothers, Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochran, and Gene Vincent—were steeped in country and rockabilly yet equally enamored of rhythm and blues. New Orleans, the city that had given birth to jazz, spawned jazz-rooted hits by Fats Domino, Huey "Piano" Smith, Lloyd Price, Lee Dorsey, Ernie K-Doe, and Clarence "Frogman" Henry. In Chicago, the seminal blues label Chess entered the rock and roll market by introducing two of rock's preeminent auteurs, refined wordsmith Chuck Berry and primitive genius Bo Diddley. Various urban centers spawned a biracial wave of doo-wop vocal groups. And innovative, forward-thinking African American artists Ray Charles, Sam Cooke, Jackie Wilson, and James Brown worked to lay the foundations of modern soul music.

It's a widely accepted truism that the years between the 1959 plane crash that killed Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and the Big Bopper and the arrival of the Beatles in early 1964 were fallow ones for rock and roll. But that notion is refuted by the sheer volume of magnificent music that was made during that period—by such one-of-a-kind voices as Roy Orbison and Del Shannon, by a wave of urban girl groups, by visionary producer Phil Spector, by surf-music overachievers the Beach Boys, and in the early stirrings of Motown, Stax and numerous other R&B labels.

For an America whose idealism had just been shattered by the assassination of its youthful president John F. Kennedy, the Beatles' arrival was welcomed as a desperately needed dose of optimism. The Beatles' influence was so pervasive that their success opened the doors for a massive influx of British acts, who dominated the American charts until the social and cultural upheavals of 1967's Summer of Love. Although the idealism of the Woodstock era didn't last, that period's musical changes did, pushing rock in a heavier, more self-consciously serious direction, and shifting the music industry's emphasis from hit singles to long-playing albums.

The 1970s saw rock diversify and fragment into diverse subgenres, which enriched and deepened the music's stylistic range, even if it limited its potential to spawn mass movements as it had in the 1950s and 1960s. As mainstream rock grew increasingly bloated and impersonal, blowback arrived in the form of the do-it-yourself rebellion of punk rock. Punk was both a mass movement and an influential commercial phenomenon in Britain, but it remained a cult item in America, where it spawned a vibrant independent underground that would eventually inspire the commercial alternative-rock boom of the 1990s.

In America, mainstream rock grew moribund in the 1980s, with the rise of style-obsessed MTV seeming to signal the death of the music's potential for provocation and transcendence. But the stasis of mainstream rock helped to fuel an increasingly vibrant underground circuit of left-of-center bands, scrappy independent labels, and small regional clubs. The built-in limitations of airplay, distribution, and media exposure conspired to keep American indie-rock underground for years, until the long-simmering groundswell exploded in the major-label success of Nirvana in the early 1990s.

As of this writing, the massive influence of the Internet, downloading, and affordable home recording has democratized music making and redrawn the parameters of the music industry. The long-term effects of these changes are still in the process of revealing themselves, but the music itself remains as integral to American life as ever.

In *Icons of Rock*, we examine the lives, music, and long-term influence of two dozen of rock's most prominent and influential bands and solo artists. Although each left an indelible mark on rock's development, we chose this combination of acts in effort to provide a representative cross-section of rock's rich panoply of sounds, styles, and stances. Indeed, rock's history is so broad and varied that we could just as easily have chosen twenty-four other acts and provided an equally representative selection. While history is written by the winners, it's worth noting that the rock's foundation owes as much to obscure visionaries, forgotten geniuses, and one-hit wonders as it does to superstars. But the twenty-four artist profiles featured in *Icons of Rock*—accompanied here by a variety of related features—offers a useful introduction for new listeners while providing additional insight for committed fans.

—Scott Schinder

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The Velvet Underground

Scott Schinder

OUTCASTS TO CLASS ACT

Today, the Velvet Underground's influence is widely acknowledged, and even casual rock fans maintain some awareness of their musical and cultural significance. But for most of its actual existence, the band barely registered on mainstream radar. Misunderstood by many, ignored by most, and treasured by a small coterie of broad-minded followers, the Velvet Underground introduced a multitude of innovations whose reverberations are still being felt decades later.

Even in the context of the social upheavals of the 1960s, the Velvet Underground was genuinely revolutionary, combining an uncompromising musical vision with songs whose lyrical content had no precedent in popular music. At a time when mainstream America was straining to come to terms with the hippie movement, the New York-based Velvets were presenting a darker, more confrontational vision of the world. In comparison with the

relatively upbeat peace-and-love vibes of the Summer of Love (which their first album preceded by a few months), the Velvet Underground was genuinely threatening.

Indeed, the seamy urban milieu and casual decadence of such confrontational masterpieces as “Heroin,” “I’m Waiting for the Man,” and “Venus in Furs” had never before been documented in popular music. Leader Lou Reed’s edgy scenarios were matched by music that was both primal and sophisticated, driven by Reed and Sterling Morrison’s alternately wrenching and nuanced guitar interplay, John Cale’s squalling viola runs, and drummer Maureen Tucker’s eloquently unadorned beats. Reed’s sung/spoken vocals maintained an oddly appropriate balance of involvement and detachment.

The Velvet Underground’s raw, often dissonant musical approach and gritty, boundary-pushing subject matter weren’t just transgressive by mainstream pop standards. They were also anathema to the emerging, self-consciously hip album-rock constituency, implicitly rejecting the hippie dream in favor of untidy, unflinching realism. Singer/guitarist/main songwriter Reed’s gripping portrayals of drug use, kinky sex, and casual violence were so shocking to many listeners that it was easy for them to overlook his lyrics’ consistent humanity and compassion, not to mention the affecting craftsmanship of his compositions.

Beyond the songwriting, the Velvet Underground’s most lasting influence was in its often-abrasive soundscapes, whose imaginative use of guitar feedback, distortion, dissonance, drones, white noise, and extended improvisations drew from a wide assortment of rock and roll and avant-garde elements. Their sonic extremes laid much of the groundwork for punk rock and its various offshoots. Indeed, it has been said that while few bought the Velvet Underground’s records when they were originally released, nearly everyone who did went out and started a band.

Iggy Pop and the Stooges: Gimme Danger

Producer Brian Eno famously noted that although the Velvet Underground didn’t sell many records in its lifetime, everyone who bought one went out and started his or her own band. The Velvets exerted a profound influence on rock performers seeking to carve out their own musical aesthetic without regard to established commercial trends. For the Stooges and their lead singer Iggy Pop, the Velvets’ approach validated a non-virtuosic instrumental style and the expressive potential of a three-chord (or even one-chord) song.

As working-class teenagers growing up in Michigan, the Stooges were far removed from the sophisticated New York milieu where rock and roll met pop art. But like the Velvet Underground, the Stooges weren’t afraid to explore the realm of pure noise whether through the groans and screams of front man Iggy Pop (born James Osterberg in 1947); Ron Asheton’s squalling, feedback-laden guitar; or the discarded fifty-five-gallon oil drums around which Iggy

built drummer Scott Asheton's first kit. Formed in 1967, the early Stooges played *sound* rather than *songs*—what Iggy later described as “thunderous, racy music, which would drone on and on. . . . The earth shook, then cracked, and swallowed all misery whole.”

In 1969, Elektra Records released *The Stooges*, produced by ex-Velvet John Cale. The group was now a recognizable rock quartet playing actual songs, but with a primal wall of sound perfectly suited to Iggy's no-holds-barred style of live performance. Songs like “No Fun” and “I Wanna Be Your Dog” later became punk-era standards when performed by the Sex Pistols, Joan Jett, the Damned, and Richard Hell.

For 1970's *Funhouse*, the Stooges added Steve McKay's caterwauling saxophone and recorded each song up to twenty times in consecutive complete takes (including live vocals) until they hit on a satisfactory performance. Iggy regrouped the Stooges in 1972 for *Raw Power*, produced by David Bowie and featuring new guitarist James Williamson (Ron Asheton switched to bass). Depending on one's point of view, Bowie's weirdly tinny mix either sabotaged the Stooges' music or lent it a certain mystery, as though heard through the cracked mirror that reflects Iggy's face on the album's back cover. The Stooges collapsed within a year and *Raw Power* passed into legend: the Dead Boys, Dictators, and Red Hot Chili Peppers all covered the track “Search and Destroy” in later years.

Iggy Pop went on to release many solo albums beginning in 1977 with two Bowie-produced efforts, *The Idiot* and the more compelling *Lust for Life*. These records lacked the Stooges' ferocity but revealed his expanded range as a singer and lyricist. In 2003, a few new studio tracks followed by a remarkable series of shows reunited Iggy with the Asheton brothers (plus ex-Minuteman Mike Watt on bass) and introduced the atavistic magic of the live Stooges to a new generation of fans.

Andy Schwartz

Although they were near-pariahs in their time, history has vindicated the Velvet Underground's artistic and cultural contributions. One measure of their late-blooming prestige was their 1996 induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, an honor for which they were elected over any number of their better-selling contemporaries. Where the band's LPs had once been allowed to fall out of print in the United States, their recorded legacy is now honored with expanded editions of the original albums, a career-spanning box set, archival collections of outtakes and rarities, and multiple releases of the handful of vintage live performances that happened to make it to tape.

Born in Brooklyn and raised in suburban Freeport, Long Island, Lou Reed spent much of his early life pursuing dual obsessions with rock and roll and literature. The first-born son of affluent tax accountant parents, he developed an early affinity for R&B and doo-wop. While in high school, he began playing

in local rock and roll combos, much to his parents' consternation. He even released a single with his teen vocal group the Jades, which was little noticed apart from one airing on popular New York disc jockey Murray the K's radio program. As a teenager, Reed suffered from depression, alarming his parents enough to have him treated with electroshock therapy (a traumatic experience that would inform his subsequent songwriting, most literally in the stirring "Kill Your Sons").

While attending Syracuse University in the early 1960s, Reed studied creative writing under noted poet Delmore Schwartz. Reed was also active in publishing a short-lived poetry magazine with some fellow students, briefly getting into hot water with the dean for writing an impassioned diatribe criticizing the student head of the Young Americans for Freedom. He hosted a jazz/R&B show on the college radio station, from which he was fired after making fun of a public service announcement on muscular dystrophy. He also experimented with sex and drugs, incurring the wrath of bullying local cops.

Syracuse had an active music scene, and Reed formed L.A. and the Eldorados, sometimes slipping some of his original compositions in between covers of familiar rock and R&B tunes. By then, Reed had written early versions of the future Velvet Underground standards "Heroin" and "Waiting for the Man." With Bob Dylan having recently expanded perceptions of what constituted appropriate subject matter for rock and roll songs, Reed was excited by the prospect of combining his musical and literary passions.

While at Syracuse, Reed found a kindred spirit in fellow English major and fellow Long Island native Sterling Morrison. They met after Morrison heard Reed cranking up his guitar, in order to annoy the ROTC troop that drilled on the football field behind the dormitory (Reed had earlier been kicked out of the ROTC for insubordination). Morrison also shared Reed's rebellious-intellectual stance, and was receptive to Reed's ideas about applying the sensibility of Dostoyevsky, Raymond Chandler, Hubert Selby, and Edgar Allan Poe to rock and roll.

GOING DOWNTOWN

By 1964, Reed had, despite his disciplinary problems, graduated from college with honors. Thanks to a recommendation from the Eldorados' old manager, he soon won a \$25/week job writing and recording quickie novelty tunes for the infamous Queens, New York, low-budget label Pickwick. In late 1964, the company decided to promote Reed's unlikely dance number "The Ostrich," which he'd recorded under the name the Primitives, and a live band was needed to impersonate his fictitious studio entity.

One musician tapped for the unlikely makeshift act was John Cale, a classically trained Welsh viola prodigy who had already established some impressive musical credits. The short-lived Primitives performing lineup also included

noted underground composer/filmmaker Tony Conrad and sculptor Walter DiMaria. Cale, Conrad, and DiMaria had been recruited by Pickwick exec Terry Philips, not for their artistic credentials, but because their longish hair convinced Philips that they looked like rock musicians.

The son of a coal miner and a schoolteacher, Cale had been a childhood classical prodigy who'd performed an original composition on the BBC before he'd even entered his teens. He later studied composition at London University's Goldsmiths College and at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music. He eventually gravitated toward the freedom of the underground and, with the patronage of Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein, won a scholarship to study music in the United States. After moving to New York in 1963, Cale participated in an eighteen-hour piano recital with avant-garde giant John Cage (photos of Cale performing at the event made the *New York Times*) and worked with renowned experimental composer LaMonte Young, whose use of extended electronic drones would be a key influence on the Velvet Underground.

Although Cale had been largely oblivious to the British rock and roll explosion that had been taking place while he was studying in London, his new acquaintance with Reed sparked an interest in fusing rock and art. Cale was fascinated by the literary aspect of the songs that Reed was writing, and by Reed's street-wise stance, which contrasted Cale's relatively sheltered upbringing.

Reed and Cale began writing songs together, and Reed was drawn into the Lower East Side creative community of which Cale was a part. The combination of Reed's rock and roll sensibility and Cale's grounding in classical and experimental disciplines—along with both men's drive to transcend the restrictions of their respective backgrounds—yielded a rich and rewarding partnership, with Cale helping to shape a compelling and original sonic vision to complement Reed's ambitious lyrics.

The duo's first known collaboration was "Why Don't You Smile Now," which was recorded as a single in 1965 by the All Night Workers, a band that included some old Syracuse friends of Reed's. The song also found its way to English R&B rockers the Downliners Sect, who covered it later that year.

A month after Reed and Cale began writing together, Reed ran into old friend Sterling Morrison, who was inducted into the band that the two new partners had decided to put together. With Reed playing guitar and doing most of the singing, Morrison on guitar and occasional bass, and Cale handling bass, viola (specially outfitted with guitar strings), and keyboards, the trio began rehearsing and recording embryonic demos of their compositions. Some copies of those tapes were circulated in the hope of generating record company interest. Cale even circulated some in London when he returned there for a visit; he reportedly gave one copy to Marianne Faithfull in the hope that she'd pass it on to Mick Jagger.

The new collaboration evolved quickly in unique and unexpected directions. Having never played in a rock band before, Cale was not bound by

rock's musical conventions—a distinction that was reflected in his unusual bass lines, which completely bypassed rock's rhythmic clichés.

Not surprisingly, the partnership of disparate, complex individuals Reed and Cale was fraught with tension from the start, thanks in large part to Reed's mercurial temperament. Depending upon the circumstances, Reed could be magnetically charming or cuttngly vicious.

One early sign of the band's internal fractiousness was Reed's insistence on taking individual songwriting credits on most of the ensemble's collectively constructed songs, a situation that would become a major bone of contention among the members in years to come.

The fledgling act found its first drummer in Angus MacLise, a free-spirited Scottish-born actor, artist, composer, and world traveler who lived next door to the squalid \$30/month Ludlow Street apartment that Reed and Cale shared. MacLise, who had worked with Cale in LaMonte Young's group, had picked up all manner of exotic rhythmic ideas in his travels through India, Nepal, and the Middle East. And his apartment, unlike Reed and Cale's, had heat and electricity.

The group had toyed with various names including the Warlocks and the Falling Spikes, before MacLise suggested the Velvet Underground, borrowing the phrase from the title of an erotic paperback novel that Tony Conrad had found lying on the sidewalk in the Bowery. The book's sensationalistic cover promised to expose "the sexual corruption of our age."

In July 1965, the newly christened Velvet Underground began performing (often hidden behind movie screens) as part of multi-media presentations staged by filmmaker Piero Heliczer. Those events were featured in a CBS TV news special on the New York underground film scene, narrated by no less an all-American authority figure than Walter Cronkite.

New York Post writer Al Aronowitz—one of the first journalists to write seriously about rock music, and a well-connected figure in the city's music scene—took an interest and became the Velvet Underground's first manager. Aronowitz offered the group their first paying job, opening for local combo the Myddle Class (whom he managed) in a high-school gym in Summit, New Jersey, on December 11, 1965, for which they would be paid \$75.

But Angus MacLise, who had exercised a substantial influence in shaping the band's early rhythmic sensibility, bailed out, horrified at the thought of the band playing formal shows and accepting payment for playing music. Needing a drummer for the Summit gig, the Velvet Underground tapped Maureen Tucker, known to her friends as Moe.

The sister of Reed's and Morrison's college pal Jim Tucker, the self-taught Moe adopted an eloquently minimalist percussive style that contrasted MacLise's complex rhythmic approach. Tucker played standing up, using a stripped-down kit consisting of tom toms, a snare, and an upturned bass drum, which she played with mallets rather than drumsticks. Tucker's simple-yet-exotic beats would prove an ideal foundation for the Velvets' raw instrumental flights.

As the Velvet Underground's most grounded member, Tucker would become a stabilizing force within the band. She didn't share her bandmates' drug-fueled Bohemian lifestyle, continuing to live on Long Island with her parents for most of her time in the group. In the years to come, Tucker would also be the only VU member to maintain consistently harmonious relationships with all of the others.

The Velvet Underground's Summit performance consisted of three songs, "There She Goes Again," "Venus in Furs," and "Heroin." Morrison later described the audience response as "a murmur of surprise" that grew into "a mighty howl of outrage and bewilderment" by the end of the set.

Feeling that the band needed to gain performing experience, Al Aronowitz helped them to get a residency at Greenwich Village's Cafe Bizarre. But despite Tucker being relegated to tambourine rather than drum kit, the quartet's volume levels soon invoked the ire of the club's manager, who threatened to fire them if they played "Black Angel's Death Song" again. Eager to be freed from the ill-conceived gig, the band obliged.

Multimedia artist and pop-culture provocateur Andy Warhol, who was at the peak of his notoriety at the time, had seen the Velvet Underground play at Cafe Bizarre two days before they got the ax, and was impressed enough to sign on as their new manager. In addition to providing rehearsal space and new musical gear, Warhol conferred the automatic notoriety that came along with his high-profile seal of approval. Perhaps most important, Warhol's patronage allowed the Velvets' music to continue to develop independently of commercial considerations.

WORKING AT THE FACTORY

It was Warhol's idea to augment the Velvet Underground with Nico, née Christa Päffgen. A striking, enigmatic, icy-voiced German model and jet-setter, Nico had already appeared in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*, given birth to French film star Alain Delon's son, and recorded (with help from Brian Jones and Jimmy Page) a solo single for Rolling Stones manager Andrew Loog Oldham's Immediate label.

The musicians resented having the blonde chanteuse foisted upon them, and never considered her to be a genuine member of the band. But Nico's dour glamour and oddly alluring deadpan vocals added an additional dimension to the Velvets' otherness, and she would help to inspire some of Lou Reed's most memorable songs.

The Velvet Underground became the house band of Warhol's studio/headquarters the Factory, whose eccentric cast of characters would provide a fertile source of lyrical inspiration for Reed. Warhol filmed a rehearsal that ended with the police responding to a noise complaint, and edited the footage into *The Velvet Underground and Nico: A Symphony of Sound*, which was then projected behind the band during live performances.

The music-and-film concept was subsequently expanded to include more films, a light show, and dancers. Dubbed the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, the multi-sensory happening debuted in April 1966, with a month-long run at an old Polish community hall on St. Mark's Place. The show then went on tour across the country, lending a substantial boost to the Velvet's profile in the process.

The Warhol connection helped to win the VU a deal with MGM's Verve imprint. Warhol was credited as producer of their first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, the bulk of which had been recorded quickly in April 1966, while the band was still unsigned. Although he was present for much of the recording, Warhol had little hands-on involvement in the sessions, which he co-financed (at a cost of \$2,500) with Norman Dolph, a former Columbia Records sales executive. Dolph oversaw the recording despite having little studio experience. The sessions took place over three nights in April of 1966 at New York's once-mighty, now-crumbling Scepter studios.

Reed later asserted that Warhol's biggest contribution to the album was his notoriety, which afforded the Velvet's the leverage to evolve on their own terms and the financial clout to have free reign in the studio, cutting the bulk of their first album without record company input.

When the Velvet's recordings were shopped around to record companies, the band encountered widespread resistance, even from such hip labels as Elektra and Atlantic. They received a more enthusiastic response from Columbia Records producer/A&R man Tom Wilson. Wilson was a former jazz specialist who'd become one of the era's foremost rock producers, having recently played a key role in Bob Dylan's transition from acoustic folkie to electric rocker. Wilson had also helped to salvage Simon and Garfunkel's floundering career by overdubbing electric instruments onto the acoustic "Sound of Silence" to create a folk-rock smash.

Wilson saw the Velvet Underground as having the potential for greatness, and advised the band that he was about to leave Columbia for MGM/Verve, who had engaged his services to shore up the company's rock roster. Once settled in his new job, Wilson signed the Velvet Underground.

To augment the tracks recorded with Norman Dolph, Wilson and the group recorded five more songs for *The Velvet Underground and Nico* in Los Angeles and New York. The L.A. sessions were booked on short notice in May 1966, when the band was in town for a month-long run at the Trip club with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable, and found themselves stranded with time of their hands after the sheriff's department closed down the venue after the second night.

The Velvet's had received a cool public reception during their truncated L.A. debut. But the gap between the Velvet's gritty, amphetamine-fueled urban attitude and the laid-back, acid-inspired vibe of the West Coast rock scene truly became clear when the band accepted an offer from concert impresario Bill Graham to bring the Exploding Plastic Inevitable to Graham's Fillmore

Ballroom in San Francisco. Sharing a two-night stand with Jefferson Airplane and Frank Zappa's Mothers of Invention, the Velvet Underground was greeted with outright hostility.

Although he'd been eager to have the Velvet Underground perform at the Fillmore, the prickly Graham was put off by the faux glamour of the Warhol entourage, whose outright rejection of hippie values didn't play well in the capitol of the emerging movement. Graham reportedly screamed, "I hope you motherfuckers bomb!" before the company took the stage. On the second night of the engagement, Graham pulled the plug after the Velvets left their axes leaning against their amps to create a squall of electronic noise.

The antipathy between the Velvet Underground and the hippie counterculture was further demonstrated by influential critic Ralph J. Gleason's *San Francisco Chronicle* dismissive review of one of the Fillmore shows. The hippie-hating Velvets, who felt that the San Francisco bands didn't know how to play rock and roll, reciprocated the ill will.

The VU's most formidable musical nemesis was Frank Zappa, iconoclastic leader of their Verve labelmates the Mothers of Invention, who had been the Exploding Plastic Inevitable's opening act at the Trip. Zappa—who, ironically, was also skeptical of the hippie movement—derided the Velvets as unmusical and sensationalistic, leading Reed to brand Zappa a pretentious academic. Ironically, Reed would deliver an admiring induction speech on the occasion of Zappa's posthumous induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995.

The conflict between the VU and their era's arbiters of hipness may go a long way toward explaining the general incomprehension that greeted the release of *The Velvet Underground and Nico*. Beyond the Warhol-designed peelable banana sticker that graced its front cover, it remains one of the most audacious and accomplished debut albums in rock history.

The album immediately showcased the band's complementary contrasts with the opening one-two punch of the dreamy melancholy of "Sunday Morning" and the brutal street scene of "I'm Waiting for the Man." Although Reed had written "Sunday Morning" as a conscious attempt to come up with a commercial pop tune, the song's undercurrent of paranoia and regret gave it a bittersweet depth that was probably a bit too heady for the Top Forty. The adrenaline-fueled dope-scoring vignette of "Waiting for the Man" was trumped by "Heroin," a harrowing epic whose violent peaks and blissed-out valleys draw the listener into its narrator's distorted perception.

Equally intense was the sadomasochistic imagery and disquieting viola drones of "Venus in Furs" and "The Black Angel's Death Song." "Run Run Run" and "There She Goes Again," by comparison, were catchy, relatively straightforward pop-rock tunes distinguished by terse, astringent playing and Reed's blunt imagery.

Although Reed was lead singer on most of the album, Nico's vocals were featured on three memorable songs. "All Tomorrow's Parties" had already

been part of the band's repertoire before she joined, but Nico's dusky presence enhanced the disturbing majesty of Reed's lyrics. "I'll Be Your Mirror" and "Femme Fatale" were written by Reed specifically for Nico to sing, and both were ideal vehicles for her frosty yet evocative voice. Both of those numbers underlined the empathy and sensitivity that were sometimes overshadowed by the more sensationalistic aspects of Reed's writing.

While waiting for the album to be released, the Velvet Underground continued to perform with the Exploding Plastic Inevitable. During one six-night stand at Poor Richard's in Chicago, Reed was hospitalized with hepatitis and Nico was vacationing in Spain, so the band performed with a reshuffled lineup, with Angus MacLise returning to play drums, Tucker moving to bass, and Cale and Morrison sharing lead vocal duties. The temporary personnel change irritated Reed, who made it a point to remind MacLise that his return was only temporary.

The Velvet Underground and Nico sat on the shelf for nearly a year before Verve released it in March 1967. The cause of the delay remains unclear, although some have speculated that it was due to Frank Zappa pushing to have the Mothers of Invention's debut LP come out first. Whatever the reason, by the time *The Velvet Underground and Nico* arrived, the media buzz generated by the Exploding Plastic Inevitable shows had dissipated.

Too weird for the AM radio and too dark for the progressive, album-oriented FM stations that were emerging at the time, *The Velvet Underground and Nico* received minimal radio exposure. MGM did make a token attempt at gaining mainstream airplay by releasing two singles, one pairing "Sunday Morning" with "Femme Fatale" and another combining the Nico-fronted tracks "All Tomorrow's Parties" and "I'll Be Your Mirror," but neither charted. Meanwhile, many publications refused to accept ads for the album, and the few reviews it received were largely negative.

It also didn't help that when the album did begin to attract some attention, Warhol cohort Eric Emerson sued MGM over the unauthorized use of a photo of him on the back cover, causing the company to pull the album from the market for six weeks so the cover could be reprinted. *The Velvet Underground and Nico* peaked at a less-than-stellar number 171 on the *Billboard* charts.

By the time *The Velvet Underground and Nico* was released, the group was no longer working with Andy Warhol, who by then was focusing his energies on making films.

Meanwhile, Nico had ceased performing with the Velvet Underground, following various internal machinations regarding her desire to sing more songs. While the circumstances of her departure had not been completely amicable, Reed, Cale, and Morrison contributed to Nico's Tom Wilson-produced 1967 solo debut *Chelsea Girl*. Cale and Reed co-wrote three songs, while Reed and Morrison provided "Chelsea Girls," a stirring extended work that's on a par with the VU's most affecting recordings. Cale would continue to work extensively with Nico, producing her next three LPs, *The Marble Index*, *Desertshore*, and *The End*.

TURNING UP THE HEAT

The second Velvet Underground release, *White Light/White Heat*, recorded quickly with Tom Wilson and engineer Gary Kellgren in the fall of 1967 and released in January 1968, suggested that the mainstream's rejection of *The Velvet Underground and Nico* had had a liberating effect on the group.

White Light/White Heat reflected the louder, harsher direction that the Velvet Underground's live performances had been taking. Dispensing with the first album's ballads, pop hooks, and baroque touches, the foursome carried their improvisational explorations to new extremes, with distorted instrumental sounds and turbulent ensemble performances that manifested the anger and alienation of Reed's lyrics. And, thanks to a new endorsement deal with Vox guitars, the band had access to an array of new electronic gadgets to further indulge their sonic experiments.

White Light/White Heat's clattery title track offers a fearsome ode to amphetamines, while the frantic "I Heard Her Call My Name" bristles with free-jazz chaos. Even the album's lone melodic ballad, "Here She Comes Now," carried an uneasy undercurrent. "The Gift" has Cale narrating a black-humored short story written by Reed, as the band jams menacingly beneath him. Cale also sings lead on "Lady Godiva's Operation," whose melodic reverie is shaken when Reed grabs the mike to deliver random snatches of lyrics; the track's vocal tug-of-war seemed an apt metaphor for the pair's competitive relationship.

But *White Light/White Heat*'s centerpiece, musically and conceptually, is the churning epic "Sister Ray," a sonically and emotionally unsparing mini-opera that explored several of Reed's pet themes amidst seventeen and a half disquieting minutes of churning cacophony. Like most of the album, the track was recorded live in the studio, with no edits or overdubs, and its noisy climactic jam reflected Reed's interest in the free jazz of Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor.

Impressive as it was, it was no surprise that *White Light/White Heat*'s slap in the face of musical propriety sold even more poorly than the first album, rising no higher than number 199 on the *Billboard* chart.

It didn't help that MGM seemed to have little idea of how to promote the band, since the Velvets' opportunities for mainstream exposure were decidedly limited, and the prospect of the album spawning a hit single was pretty much out of the question. The group's principal method of winning over new fans was touring, since few observers could remain neutral after witnessing a Velvet Underground set.

With Nico and Warhol now both out of the picture, *White Light/White Heat* represented a startlingly pure distillation of the original Velvet Underground's assortment of talents and personalities. But the volatile nature of Reed and Cale's personal and creative chemistry virtually guaranteed that their partnership would have a limited lifespan.

By August 1968, friction between Reed and Cale had escalated to the breaking point. Reed called a meeting to inform Morrison and Tucker that he was kicking Cale out of the band, but left it to Morrison to inform Cale that he'd been fired. Although the band still had some significant music to make, Cale's departure meant that the innate tension and conflict that had been so crucial to the band's creative process was largely gone, and that the Velvet Underground was now Lou Reed's band.

Cale played his final shows with the Velvet Underground at the Boston Tea Party on September 27 and 28, 1968. The following month saw the arrival of new bassist Doug Yule, an acquaintance who'd been in the Boston group the Grass Menagerie. Yule had been a VU member for just a few weeks when the band began recording its next LP in Los Angeles.

Released in March 1969, the group's third album, simply titled *The Velvet Underground*, was, in its own way, as radical a departure as its predecessor. Where *White Light/White Heat* pushed the band's sound to its most abrasive extremes, the third album (whose production was credited to the band) took an unexpected detour into subtlety and restraint.

While "What Goes On" and "Beginning to See the Light" rocked out forcefully, *The Velvet Underground* (issued on MGM proper rather than on the company's Verve imprint) largely focused on such reflective, melodic numbers as "Pale Blue Eyes," "Some Kinda Love," "Jesus," "I'm Set Free," and "That's the Story of My Life," all of which muse eloquently on various forms of love. Yule made his lead-vocal debut on Reed's "Candy Says," on which the bassist's tentative, vulnerable vocal was perfectly suited to Reed's humane lyrics and the song's striking, languid melody.

Minus Cale's experimental sensibility, Reed and Morrison's twin-guitar dynamics became the Velvets' most prominent feature, and the third album's spare, distortion-free arrangements—some featuring the pair's newly purchased matching Fender twelve-strings—made it easier to appreciate the nuances of the guitarists' interaction. The album's sole nod to the band's left-field origins is the dizzying nine-minute "The Murder Mystery," which merges a raga beat, burbling organ, overlapping spoken-word passages, and lilting counterpoint vocals by all four members. The eponymous album closes in atypically light-hearted fashion with the impish "After Hours," featuring a plaintive lead vocal by Tucker.

Although it has been claimed that *The Velvet Underground's* relatively restrained sound was the result of the band's Vox amplifiers and effects pedals being stolen at the airport prior to the sessions, witnesses have dismissed this claim as a myth. A more plausible explanation might be that the album's calmer mood was a reflection of Reed's state of mind once his conflicts with Cale were no longer part of the equation process.

Indeed, all concerned remember the sessions for the third album being relatively harmonious and stress-free. Although Yule lacked his predecessor's genius for experimentation, his solid bass playing, capable keyboard work,

and supportive backing vocals helped to bring some temporary stability to the lineup.

Despite its relative accessibility, *The Velvet Underground* failed to achieve the commercial breakthrough that many had hoped for at the time, making no more mainstream impact than the band's prior releases.

The Velvet Underground has been issued at various times in two different mixes. The more familiar version is the one overseen by engineer Val Valentin, but some releases have used an alternate mix by Reed, which Morrison nicknamed the "closet mix" for its relatively cramped, claustrophobic sound.

The Velvets stayed on the road for much of 1969. Between tours, they recorded several new tracks for a projected fourth album. But those recordings were shelved when manager Steve Sesnick, who had come on board after Warhol's departure, negotiated the band's release from the company. The quartet then signed with Atlantic Records, a label far more in tune with the album-rock market, and whose president Ahmet Ertegun was a longtime VU admirer. Ertegun reportedly urged Reed to stop writing about sex and drugs and deliver an album "loaded with hits."

The result was 1970's *Loaded*, featuring the catchiest material and most polished production of the Velvet Underground's career. The album, released on Atlantic's Cotillion subsidiary, even spawned a pair of actual FM airplay favorites in the uncharacteristically upbeat anthems "Sweet Jane" and "Rock and Roll," which were both refreshing in their catchy choruses and their unironic embrace of rock and roll as a healing force.

Elsewhere on the album, "New Age" harkens back to the Warhol days with its images of decaying showbiz grandeur, while "Oh! Sweet Nuthin'," "I Found a Reason," and the Yule-sung "Who Loves the Sun" add to Reed's potent body of haunting ballads. The band ventures into marginally more mainstream musical territory on "Head Held High," which convincingly adopts a gospel/R&B style; "Train Round the Bend," the closest they ever came to a straight blues-rock track; and "Lonesome Cowboy Bill," a jaunty rocker which pays sly tribute to beat icon William Burroughs.

The quality of its material aside, *Loaded*—which Reed later disowned as a severely bastardized version of his intentions, insisting that several songs had been edited, mixed, and resequenced without his consent—is sometimes criticized by Velvets purists for its relatively conventional veneer. That was due in part to Cale's absence, as well as the diminished participation of Morrison, who was juggling the sessions with his classes at City College, where he was working to finish his bachelor of arts degree. The most dramatic difference was the absence of Tucker, whose pregnancy forced her to sit out the sessions entirely (she was replaced in the studio by Yule's sixteen-year-old brother Billy, as well as engineer Adrian Barber and session player Tommy Castanaro).

(In 1997, Rhino Records reissued *Loaded* in an expanded two-CD "Fully Loaded Edition" that restored the unedited versions of the songs that Reed claimed had been butchered, along with various outtakes and alternate versions.)

That *Loaded* smoothed some of the material's rough edges is confirmed by the fiercely inspired live renditions that later surfaced on the 1974 release 1969: *Velvet Underground Live*. Culled from performances in Dallas and San Francisco, the album is a riveting document, documenting a ferocious side of the Reed/Morrison/Yule/Tucker lineup that was never captured in the studio. The album includes a majestic take of the then-new "Sweet Jane" that seemingly reflects Reed's original intention more accurately than the truncated version on *Loaded*.

The *Loaded* sessions, which took place between April and July 1969 at New York's Atlantic Studios, overlapped with a nine-week residency at Max's Kansas City, with the band recording by day and performing at night (with Billy Yule on drums). The demands of that arrangement took a toll on Reed's voice (hence Yule's presence as lead singer on three *Loaded* tracks) and contributed to tensions in the studio. At the end of a show late in the Max's engagement, a physically and emotionally fragile Reed abruptly announced that he was quitting. Reed's final Velvets performance happened to be captured on a portable cassette recorder by Warhol associate Brigid Polk, and was released by Atlantic in 1972 as *Live at Max's Kansas City*.

Ironically, upon its release in September 1970, *Loaded* would be the Velvet Underground's best-selling release, with "Rock and Roll" and "Sweet Jane" becoming the first Velvet Underground tracks to gain substantial radio play. In Reed's absence, manager Sesnick attempted to promote the more compliant Yule as the Velvets' new public face. Yule's name is listed above Reed's in *Loaded*'s credits, and he's the only member pictured on the album cover. The issue was further blurred by the album attributing the songwriting to the entire band (Reed later sued to regain individual credit). Despite those manipulations, Reed's departure limited *Loaded*'s marketplace potential.

When one considers how many of the Velvet Underground's innovations would be integrated into the rock mainstream in the coming decade, it's not hard to imagine that the band might well have been able to sustain a viable 1970s career if it hadn't splintered. Reed's protests aside, *Loaded* demonstrated that the Velvets could make commercially viable records without sacrificing their essence.

In Reed's absence, the remnants of the Velvet Underground attempted to continue, with Doug Yule moving to guitar and assuming lead vocal duties. But Morrison and Tucker bailed out the following year, after touring to support *Loaded*. Yule and manager Sesnick held onto the band's moniker long enough to take an in-name-only Velvet Underground on tour in Britain and to record 1973's now-forgotten *Squeeze*, which wasn't even released in America. Yule's ersatz Velvets sometimes included bassist Walter Powers and keyboardist Willie Alexander, both of whom had played with Yule in the Grass Menagerie. Despite the extended death throes, *Loaded* can be viewed as the Velvet Underground's real swan song, and it's a poignant and powerful one.

RECLAMATION AND RESURRECTION

In the years since the Velvet Underground's dissolution, its members have pursued divergent paths as their former band's status has continued to grow. Morrison hung up his guitar for decades, working as a tugboat captain before settling into an academic career as professor of medieval literature at the University of Texas at Austin for several years. Doug Yule recorded a pair of albums as part of the country-rock semi-supergroup American Flyer, before retiring from music to work as a cabinetmaker.

Reed, Cale, and Nico, meanwhile, launched long-running and artistically rewarding solo careers that have extended the Velvets' creative legacy. Following his abrupt exit from the group, an exhausted Reed initially retreated from music, moving back into his parents' house in Freeport and taking a job as typist at his father's accounting firm. After a period of "realigning" himself, he signed a solo deal with RCA Records and released 1972's *Lou Reed* (recorded in London with an odd assortment of players including Steve Howe and Rick Wakeman of British prog-rock kings Yes), a tentative, lackluster return whose best tracks—"I Can't Stand It," "Lisa Says," "Ride into the Sun," and "Ocean"—were inferior reworkings of tunes that had first been cut for the Velvet Underground's unreleased pre-*Loaded* album.

Although *Lou Reed* met with a muted public response, the artist would soon hit his solo stride, and achieve the commercial success that had long eluded his former band. By then, the rise of glam rock, whose embrace of decadent imagery and sexual ambiguity owed much to the Velvet Underground's pioneering example, helped to win Reed a receptive new audience on both sides of the Atlantic. It didn't hurt that David Bowie, glam's reigning superstar, offered to produce Reed's next album, 1972's *Transformer*, just as Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*-era cachet was at its highest.

Bowie and guitarist Mick Ronson helped to craft a flashy, commercially astute sound that had little in common with the Velvet Underground's free-form approach, but which provided a compelling framework for such tunes as "Vicious," "Perfect Day," and "Walk on the Wild Side." The latter, a slinky ode to the heady days of the Warhol Factory featuring references to some of Warhol's most colorful cohorts, became a Top Twenty single—a development that would have been unimaginable a year or two before.

The commercially savvy *Transformer* was followed by the downbeat *Berlin*, one of Reed's most ambitious and fully realized works, a moving, partially orchestrated song cycle built around the doomed romance of two chemically dependent Bohemians. While *Transformer* had established Reed as a viable commercial act, *Berlin* reclaimed his credentials as a serious artist.

In the decades to come, Reed would continue to record prolifically, reinventing his music and his image numerous times. Along the way, he's built a worldwide audience considerably larger than the cult that sustained the Velvet

Underground during its lifespan. While his output has been mixed, Reed's best solo work—for example, 1974's live *Rock 'n' Roll Animal*, 1976's warmly humane *Coney Island Baby*, 1978's ominous, minimalistic *Street Hassle*, 1982's soul-baring *The Blue Mask*, and 1989's vividly observational *New York*—is stunning in its musical and emotional clarity. And his worst releases—like 1975's *Metal Machine Music*, two unlistenable LPs' worth of dense guitar noise, and 1978's *Take No Prisoners*, a double live album consisting largely of bitter, profane between-song diatribes—exercise a perverse fascination all their own.

John Cale has had an equally prolific and varied solo career that at various times, has drawn upon his raw Velvets background and his roots in classical and avant-garde composition. Beginning with 1970's misleadingly titled *Vintage Violence*, Cale has produced a steady stream of memorable albums that have achieved an artful balance of the accessible and the experimental, cementing his status as both a punk icon and a legitimate composer. As a producer, Cale's extensive résumé includes a trio of debut albums—the Stooges' self-titled 1969 effort, Patti Smith's 1975 classic *Horses*, and the Modern Lovers' eponymous 1976 release—whose influence on the birth of punk rock was as significant as the Velvet Underground's catalog.

Patti Smith: Radio Ethiopia

Primitivism as the launching pad for musical exploration was one element of the Velvet Underground's legacy that most clearly imprinted itself upon the Stooges. But Lou Reed's songs also captured a unique poetic voice that fused the cutting-edge literary techniques of William Burroughs (*Naked Lunch*) and Hubert Selby Jr. (*Last Exit to Brooklyn*) with the streetwise panache of the best rock and roll lyrics.

Few artists were more influenced by this side of the Velvet Underground's output than Patti Smith. Born in 1946 and raised in suburban New Jersey, Patti moved to New York City in 1967. As one who'd lived through the rock and roll upheaval of the 1960s, Smith felt a calling to re-inject the music with the visceral excitement that had been drained out of it: "something new is coming down and we got to be alert to feel it happening. something new and totally ecstatic. the politics of ecstasy move all around me. I refuse to believe Hendrix had the last possessed hand that Joplin had the last drunken throat that Morrison had the last enlightened mind" (p. 129).¹

Patti's reputation spread with the publication of her poetry books *Seventh Heaven* and *Witt*, and with the swagger, charisma, and self-deprecating humor of her public recitals. In 1973, she began working with guitarist Lenny Kaye; over the next two years, they were joined by Ivan Kral (guitar, bass), Richard Sohl (piano), and Jay Dee Daugherty (drums).

Patti Smith's Arista debut, *Horses*, appeared in December 1975. It was the product of years of experimentation in underground rock clubs like C.B.G.B.

and Max's Kansas City, and months of fractious but ultimately rewarding sessions with producer John Cale. "Using Rimbaud, Morrison, and Hendrix as central figures in her explorations, the album relates a series of cathartic moments in her life. . . . Without a hit single, but with considerable pre-release hype, *Horses* cracked the *Billboard* Top 50, something not achieved by any of Smith's precursors—the Velvets, the MC5, the Stooges, or the New York Dolls" (pp. 192–93). Ibid. (Heylin)

Less than a year later, the Patti Smith Group released their second album *Radio Ethiopia*. The title track was a ten-minute-long improvisation that became the centerpiece of the band's live sets. In January 1977, Patti was seriously injured when she fell twelve feet from a stage in Tampa, Florida. After she recovered, the PSG released *Easter*—a more melodic album that reached the Top Twenty and spun off the Top Ten single "Because the Night," co-written by Smith and Bruce Springsteen.

Wave followed in 1979 before Patti left the music business for life in the Detroit suburbs with her husband, former MC5 guitarist Fred "Sonic" Smith, and their two children. Fred Smith died in 1994, as did Patti's brother, Todd. About a year later she re-formed the PSG for limited touring with Lenny Kaye and Jay Dee Daugherty. Subsequent Patti Smith albums have ranged from the inward-looking *Peace and Noise* (1997), with its piano-based compositions, to the strident, socially conscious *Gung Ho* (2000).

A. S.

1. Patti Smith in *Cream* magazine, 1973; quoted by Clinton Heylin, *From The Velvets to The Voldoids* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 129.

Following her initial trio of Cale-aided albums, *Chelsea Girl*, *The Marble Index*, and *Desertshore*, Nico gradually retreated to rock's cultish margins, nursing a long-standing heroin addiction but maintaining enough notoriety and mystique to enable her to continue to record and tour until her death of a cerebral hemorrhage on July 18, 1988, in Ibiza, Spain. Although she'd been more of a vocal prop than a collaborator during her VU tenure, Nico's bleakly fascinating solo work saw her emerge as a distinctive songwriter—and as something of a spiritual godmother to the goth movement.

Reed, Cale, and Nico unexpectedly reunited in early 1972 to play a pair of concerts in London and Paris. The latter show was widely bootlegged, and in 2003 received an official release as *La Bataclan '72*.

Perhaps the most unlikely, and inspiring, Velvets-related solo career is the dark-horse reemergence of Moe Tucker. The drummer initially left music for motherhood, living quietly in Georgia and working a minimum wage job at a Wal-Mart. In the 1980s, she reemerged as an iconoclastic, guitar-playing singer/songwriter, recording a series of acclaimed indie releases that reflected her post-VU experiences, often painting stark, wry portraits of life on the economic margins of American society. Tucker's late-blooming solo work saw

her collaborating with a new generation of Velvets-influenced alternative rockers, including members of Half Japanese and Sonic Youth, as well as outsider troubadour Daniel Johnston.

The fact that Reed, Cale, Nico, and Tucker were able to find sizable audiences for their solo work was indicative of how much the Velvet Underground's stock had risen in the group's absence. By 1985, the band's posthumous fan base was substantial enough to inspire the release of *VU*, a collection of previously unreleased vintage studio tracks, most of them recorded for the unfinished fourth MGM/Verve LP. The collection was welcomed by fans and critics as a major addition to the Velvets canon, and was successful enough to merit a second outtakes collection, *Another View*, the following year.

In 1990, Reed and Cale defied expectations by renewing their working relationship to write and record *Songs for Drella*, a heartfelt song cycle that paid tribute to their old mentor Andy Warhol, who'd passed away three years earlier. The following year, the classic Velvet Underground lineup of Reed, Cale, Morrison, and Tucker reunited for an informal onstage performance at a reception for a Warhol retrospective in Paris. That appearance led to a full-blown European tour in the summer of 1993, climaxing with a three-night run at Paris's Olympia theater, which yielded the album *Live MCMXCIII*.

The reunion tour drew enthusiastic crowds and generated positive notices, leading to discussions about a U.S. tour, an MTV *Unplugged* broadcast, and even a possible new studio album. But old tensions soon arose again, and Reed's efforts to seize control of the once-democratic quartet helped to doom the resurgent quartet to break apart before it had a chance to play any U.S. dates.

Any speculation about further reunions became moot when Sterling Morrison died of non-Hodgkins lymphoma on August 30, 1995. Sadly, the guitarist's passing came a few weeks before the release of the career-spanning VU box set *Peel Slowly and See*, and just a few months before the band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. At the induction ceremony, Reed, Cale, and Tucker performed a newly written song, "Last Night I Said Goodbye to My Friend," in tribute to their departed comrade.

Those landmarks made it clear how much the band's stature had increased in the nearly three decades since *The Velvet Underground and Nico* was unleashed upon a largely uncomprehending world. Today, the group looms larger than ever, and their precedent-setting vintage work retains its original power and beauty.

TIMELINE

July 12, 1965

Lou Reed, John Cale, and Sterling Morrison record the first Velvet Underground demos at Cale's Manhattan apartment.

December 11, 1965

The Velvet Underground play their first paying gig, in a high school gym in Summit, New Jersey. The performance features the band's new drummer Moe Tucker.

December 1965

Andy Warhol becomes the Velvet Underground's manager and patron. He also suggests that they add German singer/model Nico to their performances.

April 1966

The Exploding Plastic Inevitable, a Warhol-sponsored multi-media happening featuring the Velvet Underground, debuts in New York.

March 12, 1967

The band's first album, *The Velvet Underground and Nico*, is released.

January 30, 1968

The second Velvet Underground album, *White Light/White Heat*, is released.

September 28, 1968

John Cale plays his final show with the Velvet Underground at the Boston Tea Party.

March 1969

The Velvet Underground's self-titled third album is released.

October 15, 1969

The Velvet Underground perform a series of shows at a Dallas club called End of Cole Ave. Tapes from these shows will later appear on the live album *1969: Velvet Underground Live*, released five years later.

August 23, 1970

During an extended run of shows at Max's Kansas City in New York, Reed abruptly quits the band. A fan makes a cassette recording of the set, which will later be released as the album *Live at Max's Kansas City*.

September 19, 1970

Loaded, the fourth Velvet Underground album, is released. Although Reed has already departed and Morrison and Tucker will soon follow, *Loaded* proves to be the band's most commercially successful album.

June 1, 1993

Lou Reed, John Cale, Sterling Morrison, and Moe Tucker launch the Velvet Underground's twenty-fifth anniversary reunion tour in Edinburgh, Scotland. The band will break up again before they can play any American dates, but U.S. fans will get the live album *Live MCMXCIII*.

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The Velvet Underground, 1969

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Courtesy of Photofest.

The Grateful Dead

Jesse Jarnow and Andy Schwartz

AMERICAN INSTITUTION

For decades, the scene repeats nearly every night. In the distance, on the arena stage, the band performs with intense concentration on their instruments while all around them, in all directions, joyful chaos reigns.

Hundreds of balloons in a rainbow of colors bounce above the audience. No one sits in an assigned seat—in fact, no one sits at all. As puffs of fragrant smoke billow, rise, and dissipate overhead, the fans dance and spin wildly in

the aisles, in the hallways, or standing on their seats. When they sing along, as they do on nearly every number, they are louder than the band. Everyone, it seems, is smiling.

Behind the sound mixer, a jungle of microphone stands rises thirty feet into the air while audience members operate tape decks below, capturing every note coming from the speakers. Nobody tries to stop them.

Onstage, the band stops singing as a guitar solo emerges from the mix. The guitar solo morphs into a group jam and the musicians keep their heads down, each contributing to the improvisation. The drummers pick up the tempo as the bassist changes keys. Suddenly, without ever having stopped playing, the band is performing an entirely different song. The crowd erupts, singing louder and dancing harder.

When the show ends, the roadies pack up the equipment and the band heads for the next city. The audience follows them.

There was *nothing* like a Grateful Dead concert.

For thirty years, the Grateful Dead reigned as an American musical institution embodying the unfettered spirit of the psychedelic 1960s. The iconic and articulate lead guitarist Jerry Garcia was the group's most popular figure, but the Dead proudly declared that they had no leader. First and foremost, they were a performing band: Their material was designed to be extended in improvisations employing the techniques of free jazz, electronic music, and Indian classical music. These real-time experiments sometimes failed badly, as the musicians cheerfully conceded. But their willingness to take chances enabled the Grateful Dead to amass a loyal following, known as the Deadheads, who supported the band's creative whims for three decades. The novelist Ken Kesey once tried to explain the appeal of the Grateful Dead: "When you see a magic trick, there's a crack in your mind," he said. "And kids will watch five hours of mediocre music to have that one click happen, because that puts them in touch with the invisible."¹

JERRY GARCIA: BOHEMIAN RHAPSODY

The Grateful Dead arose in the early 1960s from the Bohemian scene of the San Francisco Bay area. The music they made was rooted in their respective backgrounds and interests.

Jerome John Garcia was born August 1, 1942, in San Francisco. Garcia was named for Jerome Kern, his mother Ruth's favorite songwriter. Jerry's father Joe led and played clarinet in a swing band. When Garcia was five, a pair of traumas marred his childhood. First, while chopping wood with his older brother Tiff, Jerry severed most of the middle finger of his right hand. Months later, on a family vacation near Arcata, Joe Garcia drowned in a river while fishing.

As a teenager, “I was a fuckup,” Jerry later admitted. “A juvenile delinquent. My mom even moved me out of the city to get me out of trouble. It didn’t work. I was always getting caught for fighting and drinking. I failed school as a matter of defiance.”² Jerry absorbed rhythm and blues music from a local radio station; on his fifteenth birthday, he received an electric guitar as a gift from his mother. He played along with jukebox at Joe Garcia’s, the bar his mother owned, between stints of washing dishes and stocking cases of beer.

Garcia enrolled at the California School of the Fine Arts where he encountered a sympathetic mentor in the painter Wally Hedrick, who introduced him to Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. This book, among others, steered Jerry toward the emergent beat culture of the Bay Area.

“I owe a lot of who I am and what I’ve been and what I’ve done to the beatniks from the fifties and to the poetry and art and music that I’ve come in contact with,” Garcia said in 1991. “I feel like I’m part of a continuous line of a certain thing in American culture, of a root.”³

Despite his aesthetic pursuits, Garcia continued to get into trouble and at age eighteen, he stole his mother’s car. Forced to choose between jail and military service, Jerry chose the army and was stationed at the Presidio army base in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park. He began to frequent the folk clubs of North Beach and was discharged in January 1961 in the wake of a half-dozen AWOL incidents.

PHIL LESH AND RON “PIGPEN” MCKERNAN: PLAYING IN THE BAND

Born March 15, 1940, in Berkeley, future Grateful Dead bassist Phil Lesh was very young when his grandmother Bobbie discovered him with his ear pressed to the wall, listening to a broadcast of the New York Philharmonic. She invited him in to hear the next piece—Brahms’s powerful First Symphony—and Lesh was enthralled.

In his teens, Phil played violin in the Young People’s Symphony Orchestra and at sixteen took up the trumpet. His parents relocated back to Berkeley so that their son could attend Berkeley High School. While playing in the school’s jazz band, Phil discovered the phrase “ad lib” on a chart and realized that it meant to make something up. “I fumbled my way through the section on a wing and a prayer,” he later wrote, “but my life and my idea of music had changed forever: Play something that’s not written! Something that’s never been played before! Yow!”⁴

Like his future bandmates, Phil Lesh possessed an anti-authoritarian streak that propelled him through a series of schools. As a student at San Mateo Junior College, he got a job auditioning newly released albums for the school library and soon discovered new musical heroes in jazz saxophonist John Coltrane and experimental composer Charles Ives.

Phil transferred to the University of California at Berkeley but promptly dropped out; he spent the next several months reading James Joyce. In 1962, along with his roommate Tom Constanten, Lesh enrolled in a graduate-level composition course at Mills College taught by Luciano Berio, a pioneering Italian electronic composer. Along with classmates like Steve Reich (later a key figure in minimalist music), Lesh absorbed the latest experiments in electronic sound. He participated in a performance of “Gesang der Junglinge,” a five-channel tape composition by German composer Karlheinz Stockhausen.

Meanwhile, Jerry Garcia—a casual acquaintance of Lesh’s—was playing coffeehouse gigs with his friend Robert Hunter and other musicians. When he heard Jerry play at a party in Palo Alto, Phil was struck by the guitarist’s technical skill and his relaxed command of various folk idioms. He immediately asked to record Garcia for a folk music program on listener-sponsored radio station KPFA, where Lesh had taken an engineering job. During the drive to Berkeley to retrieve Tom Constanten’s tape recorder, Phil Lesh and Jerry Garcia forged a lifelong bond.

A stocky teenager named Ron McKernan was another regular on the Bay Area folk scene. Born September 8, 1945, McKernan was the son of Phil McKernan, a blues and R&B DJ on a radio station in Berkeley who went by the name “Cool Breeze.” Expelled from Palo Alto High School at fourteen, Ron took up piano and harmonica; he became a fixture at black clubs in the area, where he honed a gruff baritone. Garcia’s friends christened him “Pigpen,” after the grimy character from the *Peanuts* comic strip, and McKernan joined their ever-widening circle of musicians.

Garcia had taken up the banjo and quickly absorbed the lightning-fast bluegrass style created by Earl Scruggs. While teaching banjo and guitar at Dana Morgan’s Music Shop in downtown Palo Alto, Jerry played in a succession of ramshackle jug bands and bluegrass groups as well as a gigging rock ensemble. In the course of events, he also met the two musicians who complete the first lineup of the Grateful Dead.

BILL KREUTZMANN AND BOB WEIR: DRUMS AND GUITAR

The first was Bill Kreutzmann (born May 7, 1946 in Palo Alto), already married with one child when he met Jerry Garcia and Phil Lesh. Bill taught drums at Morgan’s and played in the Zodiacs, an occasional group that featured Garcia on bass and Pigpen on harmonica.

The fifth and youngest member of the nascent band, Bob Weir was born October 16, 1947 and adopted by Frederick and Eleanor Weir; he grew up in the affluent San Francisco suburb of Atherton. Highly intelligent but severely dyslexic (at a time when dyslexia was not yet a recognized disorder), Bob was considered a troublemaker. In 1962, his parents enrolled him in Fountain Valley, a Colorado boarding school for boys with behavioral problems. Weir quickly found a cohort in John Perry Barlow, the son of a Wyoming state senator.

Before the school year ended, their antics caused Fountain Valley administrators to decree that one but not both teenagers could return to class in the fall.

Weir spent the summer on the Barlow family ranch where he rode horses, herded cattle, and crashed several slow-rolling tractors in the bargain. Under the influence of Johnny Cash, he also wrote his first songs in an effort to impress the local girls. While John Perry Barlow returned to Fountain Valley, Weir went back to California and gravitated toward the folk music scene where he was enthralled by the music of Joan Baez, Reverend Gary Davis, and others.

On New Year's Eve 1963, Bob was wandering Palo Alto with some friends when he heard a banjo playing from inside Morgan's Music. There he found Jerry Garcia. "He was absolutely unmindful of the fact that it was New Year's Eve," Weir recalled, "so we acquainted him with that information."⁵ A jam session ensued, and Weir soon became a fixture at the music shop.

THE WARLOCKS MEET THE MERRY PRANKSTERS

Garcia, Pigpen, and Weir formed Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions, a shambolic acoustic band that earned a small following (including Bill Kreutzmann) and even a slot on "Live from the Top of the Tangent," a live radio show broadcast on KZSU. Garcia became increasingly absorbed in bluegrass and in the summer of 1964, while Weir subbed for him at Morgan's, Jerry drove cross-country in his 1961 Corvair to attend a number of music festivals in the Deep South and witness firsthand the performances of bluegrass legends like Bill Monroe and Jim and Jesse McReynolds. Back in Berkeley, Pigpen was working as a janitor at Morgan's Music and listening listened obsessively to the Rolling Stones. When Garcia returned to San Francisco, McKernan convinced him to form an electric band.

With Dana Morgan Jr. on bass, the new group practiced in the back of the music shop, working up a repertoire of songs by Buddy Holly, Willie Dixon, and Slim Harpo. Pigpen became the natural front man while Garcia took up the challenge of adapting his impressive banjo chops to the electric guitar. The result was an instantly clear, bell-like tone that would define Jerry's sound for the rest of his life.

They called themselves the Warlocks and made their debut on May 5, 1965, at Magoo's Pizza in Menlo Park. Phil Lesh showed up the following week after a prolonged absence from the scene. In 1963, he'd composed a piece titled "Foci" to be played simultaneously by four orchestras. He'd also worked briefly with Steve Reich as a sound designer for a radical theater company, the San Francisco Mime Troupe, and discovered the music of the Beatles and Bob Dylan. But by 1965 Lesh had largely given up composing and performing; he worked as a U.S. mail carrier until he was fired for having long hair.

Jerry Garcia became dissatisfied with Dana Morgan Jr.'s stiff bass playing and lack of commitment, and persuaded Lesh to replace him despite the fact

that Phil had never touched a bass. But he could play the violin, an instrument strung like a bass in reverse, and he seemed a natural creative partner. Phil began to develop a contrapuntal bass style that interacted with Jerry's guitar like a lead instrument.

The Warlocks continued to rehearse intently wherever they could. At the In Room in Belmont, they played five fifty-minute sets per night, with ten-minute breaks, six nights per week. The band's sound began to expand after Lesh and Garcia introduced Weir and Kreutzmann to the music of John Coltrane. Kreutzmann, in particular, fell under the spell of drummer Elvin Jones's sheets of shimmering cymbals.

"Cleo's Back," an instrumental by Motown saxophonist Junior Walker, became an object of intense study. "There was something about the way the instruments entered into it in a kind of free-for-all way," Garcia explained, "and there were little holes and these neat details in it. . . . We might have even played it for a while, but that wasn't the point—it was the conversational approach, the way the band worked, that really influenced us."⁶ The Warlocks were clicking but were still an ambitious bar band driven primarily by Pigpen's bouncy Farfisa organ.

Outside the confines of the In Room, the musicians were experimenting in other ways. Phil Lesh had first tried the then-legal drug LSD several years earlier. "At one point I found myself outside in the front yard on a beautiful starry night, conducting, with extravagant gestures, Mahler's great Tragic Symphony, which was blasting from the house,"⁷ he wrote. Jerry Garcia and the others had discovered acid too, via Robert Hunter. The future Grateful Dead lyricist had volunteered for a government-funded research program at the Menlo Park Veterans Hospital studying the effects of psychotropic drugs on human subjects.

Another participant in this program was a graduate student in creative writing at Stanford University named Ken Kesey, who was subsequently hired as a psychiatric aide at the Menlo Park hospital. Kesey's psychedelic capers on the job seemed to pass without adverse consequences. The writer recalled "mopping fervently whenever the nurse arrived so she wouldn't see my twelve-gauge pupils."⁸ Oddly, Kesey was also allowed to bring in his own typewriter—which he put to good use.

Ken Kesey's debut novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* was published in 1962. It was set in a psychiatric ward and shaped by the author's experiences at Menlo Park. The book became immensely popular; meanwhile, Kesey began to stage group experiments with LSD. A clique of enthusiasts began to congregate around his Stanford home; among them was Neal Cassady, the real-life inspiration for the fictional character Dean Moriarty—the larger-than-life hero of Kerouac's *On the Road*. Relocating to La Honda in the Santa Cruz Mountains, the group named itself the Merry Pranksters.

The Pranksters retrofitted a 1939 International Harvester school bus with observation turrets, sleeping quarters, sound systems, and a psychedelic paint

job and named the bus “Furthur.” They set out on a madcap cross-country trip to the 1964 World’s Fair in New York City. After returning to California, the group continued its collective LSD experiments—now dubbed the Acid Tests—at Kesey’s compound and at a series of parties. In the fall of 1965, the Pranksters met the Warlocks—but they weren’t the Warlocks anymore.

BORN AGAIN

While browsing at a record shop, Phil Lesh had discovered a single released by another band called the Warlocks. During a band meeting to discuss a new name, Garcia threw open a Funk and Wagnalls dictionary and found what they were looking for. “Everything else on the page went blank,” he said, “diffuse, just sorta *oozed* away, and there was GRATEFUL DEAD, *big* black letters *edged* all around in gold, man, blasting out at me, such a stunning combination.”⁹

Throughout late 1965 and early 1966, the Grateful Dead regularly played the Acid Tests under the influence of psychedelics (although Pigpen stuck to alcohol). Admission to these multimedia spectacles was \$1; everyone paid, including the band members, because everyone was an equal participant.

“Nothing was expected of us,” Garcia once laughed. “We weren’t *required* to perform. People came to Acid Tests for the Acid Test, not for us. . . . We could play whatever we wanted. So it was a chance to be completely freeform on every level. As a way to break out from an intensely formal kind of experience, it was just what we needed, because we were looking to break out.”¹⁰

For the rest of his life, Jerry Garcia remained outspoken about his experiences with LSD. “Psychedelics were probably the single most significant experience in my life,” he said in 1993. “Otherwise, I think I would be going along believing that this visible reality here is all that there is. Psychedelics didn’t give me any answers. What I have are a lot of questions.”¹¹

Through the Merry Pranksters, the band met Augustus Owsley Stanley III. Known as “Owsley” or “Bear,” he was the independently wealthy grandson of a former Kentucky senator and governor. He was also the manufacturer of the LSD that fueled the Acid Tests and flooded the Haight in 1965–66. Bear quickly became the benefactor of the Grateful Dead and, over the next decade, its leading technical mastermind in the design of sound systems and equipment. The band played their last Acid Test on March 12, 1966, in Los Angeles, but remained lifelong friends with Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, one of whom—Carolyn Adams, known as “Mountain Girl”—became Jerry Garcia’s lover and companion.

With Bear’s help, the musicians and their ever-expanding family moved into Olompali, an idyllic historic estate in Novato, and then to a former Girl Scout camp down the road. The psychedelic experiments continued as the Dead gigged relentlessly on the emerging San Francisco ballroom circuit. Eventually the band moved back to the city and into a former boarding house at 710 Ashbury Street, just

south of the Panhandle section of Golden Gate Park and across the way from the communal home of the Jefferson Airplane.

Jefferson Airplane: Somebody to Love

San Francisco was a site of cultural experimentation years before the media-hyped Summer of Love swept the city in 1967. From the mid-1950s onward, the Bay Area supported a beat literary movement, fringe theater groups, and active jazz and folk music scenes. It was also home to a small but steadily growing group of inner-space explorers who used marijuana, peyote, and later LSD in pursuit of higher consciousness and spiritual alternatives to the perceived repression and materialism of cold war America.

The Grateful Dead were one pillar of the psychedelic music scene that arose in 1965, soon followed by Jefferson Airplane—the most commercially successful *and* the most radical of the first wave of San Francisco rock bands. Founded by singer/songwriter Marty Balin in the spring of 1965, the Airplane's personnel stabilized in the fall of 1966 to include Balin (vocals), Grace Slick (vocals), Paul Kantner (vocals, guitar), Jack Casady (bass), Jorma Kaukonen (lead guitar), and Spencer Dryden (drums). The intertwining voices of Kantner and Balin with Slick's keening wail became the group's aural trademark.

Jefferson Airplane was the first San Francisco psychedelic band to release a major label debut (*Jefferson Airplane Takes Off* on RCA in September 1966) and to score Top Ten singles ("White Rabbit" and "Somebody to Love," both 1967). They appeared on national television, on the cover of *Life* magazine, and at the historic festivals of Monterey, Woodstock, and Altamont.

The Airplane were unapologetic about their use of marijuana and psychedelics. They spoke out against the Vietnam War and in support of the Black Panther Party and played numerous rallies and benefit concerts. The unmarried Grace Slick and Paul Kantner had a daughter in 1971, well before such non-traditional families became an accepted part of American society.

In the turbulent years 1966–72, all but one of Jefferson Airplane's nine albums reached the Top Twenty and five of these were certified gold or platinum. But the band began to splinter within a year after the release of the politically charged *Volunteers* in October 1969. Spencer Dryden departed, followed by Marty Balin; Jack Casady and Jorma Kaukonen remained but also formed their own electric folk-blues band, Hot Tuna.

Paul Kantner and Grace Slick continued to front the Airplane until 1974, when they formed Jefferson Starship. Marty Balin returned to write and sing on "Miracles," a Top Five single that propelled the Starship's *Red Octopus* album to double platinum sales and the top of the charts in 1975. In an unlikely second act for these former avatars of the American underground, Jefferson Starship released seven more best-selling albums of polished mainstream rock.

Andy Schwartz

At this stage, the Grateful Dead were still almost exclusively a cover band. Many electrified jug band tunes remained in the group's repertoire for the rest of its career including Jesse Fuller's "Beat it on Down the Line" and traditional folk songs like "Cold Rain and Snow," "Don't Ease Me In," and "I Know You Rider." In the spring of 1966, the Dead released a locally distributed single of "Stealin'" (backed with "Don't Ease Me In"); in the fall, the band signed with Warner Bros. Records.

LSD was criminalized in January 1967, and in that same month the Grateful Dead flew to Los Angeles to record their self-titled debut. Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, and Bill Kreutzmann were popping Ritalin as the band crammed an album's worth of recording into four days. The result was a hyperactive run through the Grateful Dead songbook differentiated by a pair of originals, "The Golden Road (To Unlimited Devotion)" and "Cream Puff War," and a long jam on Noah Lewis's "Viola Lee Blues." Released in March 1967, the album never made it higher than number seventy-three but remained on the *Billboard* chart for over six months and went gold by 1971.

Back in San Francisco, the scene in the band's Haight-Ashbury neighborhood was approaching a tipping point. After a *Time* cover story titled "Hippies: Philosophy of a Subculture" declared 1967 to be the Summer of Love, young people flocked to San Francisco. This influx gave rise to a wave of violent crime and the increasing use of hard drugs like heroin, PCP, and methamphetamine. These trends were deeply disturbing to Haight pioneers like the Dead; on Easter Sunday 1967, the band played a free show in Golden Gate Park to help avert a riot between police and hippies. But mostly, they were too busy to worry.

Janis Joplin: Get It While You Can

If Grace Slick represented the cool and even elegant side of the San Francisco rock scene, then Janis Joplin (1943–70) embodied its unfettered do-your-thing spirit of funky liberation. Often accused of mimicking the black singers whom she adored, Janis had her own kind of soul. Behind the colorful outfits and outrageous public behavior was a sensitive young woman whom the stage transformed into an electrifying performer with energy to burn.

Born in conservative Port Arthur, Texas, Janis began singing blues and folk songs as a University of Texas undergraduate in 1962. She dropped out after six months and hitchhiked to San Francisco in January 1963. After two years, she was addicted to methamphetamine and returned to Texas to regain her health. When Janis once again began performing around the state, she specialized in the classic blues songs of Bessie Smith.

In the spring of 1966, Joplin returned to San Francisco to audition for Big Brother and the Holding Company: Sam Andrew (guitar), James Gurley (guitar), Peter Albin (bass), and David Getz (drums). Loud, fast, and chemically fueled, Big Brother was an archetypal "freak-rock" band with "no musical knowledge

whatsoever," Sam Andrew cheerfully admitted. Janis's arrival reined in some but not all of the band's noisier, more free-form tendencies.

Big Brother's Columbia debut album *Cheap Thrills* was a studio recording to which producer John Simon added audience and room effects, giving it the live atmosphere of a rock ballroom. Released in August 1968, *Cheap Thrills* was number one for eight consecutive weeks and the single "Piece of My Heart" reached number twelve. Janis began to believe her own critics, some of whom hailed her as a brilliant performer who'd be better off without Big Brother. She quit the group and formed a new soul-style band complete with horn section but it broke up after releasing one album, the Top Five entry *I Got Dem Ol' Kozmic Blues Again Mama!*, in October 1969.

In the summer of 1970, Janis began work on a new album with her new Full Tilt Boogie Band. She recorded tough, exciting new versions of obscure soul songs like Howard Tate's "Get It While You Can" and expanded into country-rock with the Kris Kristofferson tune "Me and Bobby McGee." Toward the end of these sessions, she died on October 3, 1970, from an accidental overdose of too-pure heroin. Her posthumous album, *Pearl*, topped the chart for nine weeks, and "Me and Bobby McGee" became a number one single.

In 1999, Joplin biographer Alice Echols wrote that "Janis moved to San Francisco and decided to sing rock and roll. Risking ridicule, she took one gamble after another. Was she the girl who helped throw open the doors of rock and roll, or the girl who longed for the white picket fence?"

A. S.

READY FOR A BRAND NEW BEAT

Between gigs—which included the Dead's first national tour—Jerry Garcia became reacquainted with his old friend Robert Hunter, then living in New Mexico. Out of the blue, Hunter mailed Garcia the lyrics to three songs he'd been performing at parties: "Saint Stephen," "Alligator," and "China Cat Sunflower." In reply, Hunter received an invitation to join the band.

Hunter hitchhiked to San Francisco and was immediately assimilated into the band's creative orbit. Although he never appeared onstage with the Grateful Dead, Hunter was credited as a band member on subsequent albums. The first song Hunter wrote with the band was "Dark Star," a two-chord springboard that quickly became the Dead's signature number. Instead of having to play through a standard blues song just to get to a long jam, they could now go directly to it. Dozens of new songs followed.

A second new collaborator also arrived in September 1967. Mickey Hart was born September 11, 1943, the son of a world-class rudimental drummer named Lenny Hart. "From the age of ten until forty, all I did was drum,"¹² Mickey wrote in 1990. Following a stint in an air force band, Hart reunited with his father at Drum City, Lenny's Bay Area music store. There, Mickey

was introduced to Bill Kreutzmann and the two spent a night drinking and drumming on cars.

On September 29, 1967, Mickey Hart joined the band at the Straight Theater in San Francisco and the band jammed for two hours on two songs including Robert Hunter's "Alligator." "I remember the feeling of being whipped into a jetstream," Hart said. "Garcia told me that everyone had felt it when I finally synched up. Suddenly, with two drummers pounding away in the back, they had glimpsed the possibility of a groove so monstrous it would eat the audience."¹³ Mickey moved into a room under the stairs at 710 Ashbury.

In October, the house at 710 was busted and several band members and friends were detained on marijuana possession charges (later dropped). The Grateful Dead family began to disperse across the Golden Gate Bridge to Marin County while the band continued to rehearse at a former synagogue next door to the Fillmore Auditorium. There they practiced for upwards of six hours a day, mastering tricky time signatures and bringing forth what Hart called "a new rhythmic language." In the course of these epic jams, the musicians would allow themselves to lose "the one," the first beat of a rhythmic pattern and the central pulse of a song.

"Instead of struggling with the one, we would establish a new one,"¹⁴ Hart explained. It became a game, and a source of excitement within the improvisation. When Bob Weir's "The Other One" was fused to Jerry Garcia's "Cryptical Envelopment," the band created its first song suite. With these conceptual suites at the center of the live shows, the Dead continued to tour and to prepare for their second album.

During a trip to New York, at Phil Lesh's urging, the band took in a Carnegie Hall performance of Charles Ives's Fourth Symphony, in which "invisible bands march[ed] across the soundstage in two different directions at different speeds [and] a solo viola mutter[ed] an occult hymn-tune as the rest of the orchestra spray[ed] fireworks in all directions." Inspired, Lesh and Hart "right then and there . . . began trying to figure a way to do something similar with our music."¹⁵

In addition to extensive touring, the band spent much of 1968 in various studios recording their second and third albums, *Anthem of the Sun* and *Aoxomoxoa*. The musicians attempted to re-create the psychedelic madness of their live performances by using the studio itself as an improvisational instrument. To create "The Other One," the first track on *Anthem of the Sun*, the band phased multiple live recordings of the song on top of one another. Phil Lesh called upon his old roommate Tom Constanten, and together they gleefully added prepared piano to "New Potato Caboose" (Constanten even let a toy gyroscope loose on the piano's strings). On Weir's song "Born Cross-Eyed," Lesh played trumpet for the first time in almost a decade.

On *Anthem of the Sun*, Lesh wanted to re-create "the sound of a thousand-petal lotus, unfolding in constant renewal."¹⁶ *Aoxomoxoa* unfolded similarly even if most of its eight songs were less than five minutes long. "The mixdown

became a performance in its own right, with three or more pairs of hands on the soundboard, minding their cues," Constanten wrote. "It was a good day when as many as three tunes got done."¹⁷ As the compositions grew denser, Constanten joined the band on the road to help replicate the arrangements, playing keyboards alongside Pigpen.

Neither album sold very well. Released in July 1968, *Anthem of the Sun* peaked at number eighty-seven on the *Billboard* chart while *Aoxomoxoa*, which followed in June 1969, made it to number seventy-three. By the end of 1968, the Grateful Dead were deeply in debt to Warner Bros. Using new sound and recording equipment cobbled together by Bear, the band recorded a series of shows in San Francisco in January and February 1969. The centerpiece of what would become their fourth Warner album, *Live/Dead*, was a song suite that the Dead had played in various permutations over the past year but not yet attempted in the studio. "Dark Star," "St. Stephen," and "The Eleven" flowed into one another before Pigpen delivered his own extended showstopper, a high-powered version of Bobby "Blue" Bland's "Turn on Your Lovelight." A wave of feedback and an a cappella rendition of the gospel song "We Bid You Goodnight" closed out the double LP.

Released in November 1969, *Live/Dead* reached only number sixty-four on *Billboard* but was far less expensive to make than the Grateful Dead's previous albums. Nonetheless, the Dead's business troubles weren't over. Mickey Hart's father Lenny had come on board to manage the band but soon was caught embezzling group funds; in January 1970, he fled to Mexico. Bear was busted on LSD-related charges and sent to jail for two years.

In a musical reaction to these events and the widespread turbulence of the decade's end, the Dead returned to pre-rock styles: blues, bluegrass, and early country music. The band had always played around with this sort of Americana; now the musicians began to assimilate the sounds more deeply into their original material.

Crosby, Stills, and Nash had spent time hanging out on Mickey Hart's ranch, and under their influence the Dead's front line (Jerry, Phil, and Bob) began to harmonize with more care. Garcia returned to the favor, adding pedal steel to CSN's Top Twenty hit "Teach Your Children." Tom Constanten, now a practicing Scientologist, moved on and the band began to add acoustic sets to their performances. A country-rock band called the New Riders of the Purple Sage emerged from the extended Grateful Dead family. The repertoire of the New Riders—whose personnel often included Phil Lesh, Mickey Hart, and/or aspiring pedal steel guitarist Jerry Garcia—included contemporary country classics like Dave Dudley's "Six Days on the Road" and Merle Haggard's "Mama Tried."

In seeking the calm after the psychedelic storm, Garcia and Hunter blossomed as songwriting partners on a pair of 1970 albums released in close succession: *Workingman's Dead* in May and *American Beauty* in November. "Uncle John's Band," the opening track on *Workingman's Dead*, hailed from

“a peculiar place where Appalachia met immigrant Scottish, English, Welsh, and Irish folk traditions,” Robert Hunter remembered, “to my mind the mythic territory of Fennario, where Sweet William courted ‘Pretty Peggy-O’ with such romantically disastrous consequences.”¹⁸

This move to simpler music proved to make good economic sense. Both *Workingman’s Dead* and *American Beauty* breached the *Billboard* Top Thirty; by 1974, both would be certified gold. “Uncle John’s Band” even made it to number sixty-nine on the Hot 100, although the song was relegated largely to FM radio for using the word “goddamn.” Two other potential singles, “Truckin’” and “Casey Jones,” were stricken from radio playlists for mentioning cocaine. But as a live attraction, the Grateful Dead began to draw more fans in more areas of the country. In San Francisco and New York, the band had played multi-night stands for the past three years; now they were able to do the same in other cities as a growing mass of “Deadheads” began to follow the band’s concert itinerary.

Santana: Everybody’s Everything

Carlos Santana, a fan of the Dead and the Airplane, soon became the leader of the most enduring and globally popular band to emerge from the “second wave” of San Francisco rock.

Born in Autlan, Mexico, in 1947, Carlos was already playing guitar when he moved to San Francisco in 1960, inspired by B.B. King and Chuck Berry. The first version of the group that bore his name combined Chicago blues with a conga sound still heard in parts of San Francisco, specifically from conga and flute players in Aquatic Park.

When the band’s lineup coalesced in the spring of 1969, it included seventeen-year-old drummer Michael Shrieve, bassist David Brown, and Latin percussionists Coke Escovedo, José “Chepito” Areas, and Mike Carabello. As the rhythm section churned beneath Carlos’s searing solos and crunching power chords, Santana created a sound that was as funky and danceable as the best Latin salsa but with the force and electricity of great rock and roll. Their explosive set was the surprise hit of the 1969 Woodstock festival and a highlight of the 1970 *Woodstock* documentary. The group’s self-titled Columbia debut, released in September, hung on the charts for over two years, peaking at number four. *Abraxas* (1970) and *Santana III* (1971) both topped the *Billboard* chart for weeks, with combined sales of over six million units.

By the end of 1972, some members of Santana were battling drug problems while others pushed for a more mainstream rock approach rather than the adventurous jazz-rock-Latin fusion of their leader’s dreams. Ultimately, the guitarist won this struggle for creative control. Over the next decade, he sought to balance commercial albums like *Moonflower* (1977, featuring the radio hit “She’s Not There”) with more personal projects like the roots-rocking *Havana Moon* (1983).

But by the late 1980s, Carlos Santana's commercial profile was in steep decline, and in 1991 his devoted manager Bill Graham died in a helicopter accident. In 1999, former Columbia Records president Clive Davis signed the guitarist to Arista Records and became the executive producer of his comeback album *Supernatural*.

With appearances by everyone from Eric Clapton to Lauryn Hill and Santana only co-writing five of thirteen tracks, there was a disconcerting sense that the guitarist had been reduced to playing genial guest host on his own album. Nonetheless, *Supernatural* sold over 15 million copies in the United States alone and spun off a pair of number one singles, "Smooth" and "Maria Maria." *Supernatural* went on to win nine Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year and Record of the Year (for "Smooth"). As the all-time best-selling album of Carlos Santana's thirty-year recording career, *Supernatural* more than lived up to its title.

A. S.

A LEANER BEAST

Following the first night of a six-night run at the Capitol Theater in Port Chester, New York, in February 1971, Mickey Hart left the Grateful Dead. Still tormented by his father's fiscal betrayal, Hart returned to California although the band kept him on its payroll and left the door open for his return. The Dead continued as a quintet that was nearly reduced to a foursome when Pigpen's heavy drinking began to undermine his performance. In September, the emaciated musician was hospitalized, diagnosed with hepatitis and a perforated ulcer.

Around this time, a woman approached Jerry Garcia at one of his solo gigs at a Berkeley bar called the Keystone Korner. "[My husband] is your new piano player," she announced, "so I'm gonna need your home phone number so we can keep in touch."¹⁹ Few knew that Pigpen was sick and a surprised Garcia gave his number to the woman, Donna Jean Godchaux (née Donna Thatcher). A few rehearsal jams later, her husband Keith Godchaux had joined the Grateful Dead.

Born July 19, 1948, Keith Godchaux was a Bay Area keyboardist of little previous renown. Donna Jean, on the other hand, had been a session singer at the famed Muscle Shoals recording studio in Alabama. In the 1960s, she'd recorded with Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, and Sam Cooke, and sung on Percy Sledge's 1966 Number One hit "When a Man Loves a Woman." While Keith's jazz-trained style pushed the Dead to new improvisational heights, Donna Jean's Southern-tinged harmonies perfectly complemented Garcia and Hunter's new songs. There were nearly a dozen of them in the repertoire by the time she joined the band for a spring 1972 tour of Europe.

"Sometimes I think, 'Yeah, this is kind of like a record I once heard somewhere,' but I never find 'em," Garcia laughed about the new tunes, including "Tennessee Jed," "Sugaree," and "Bertha." "The rhythms come from my background in rhythm and blues music more than anything else. But they also come from a kind of rhythmically hip country and western style—like Jerry Reed and people like that. Memphis more than Nashville. Some of the old California country and western stuff—old Buck Owens—had some nifty rhythmic ideas in it, as opposed to the old 4/4 stuff."²⁰

Bob Weir, too, had found a new songwriting partner in his old boarding school chum, John Perry Barlow. Barlow was an aspiring novelist but had never penned any song lyrics. Nonetheless, he and Weir established an immediate creative rapport during snowed-in work sessions at the Barlow family ranch, which John had taken over from his ailing father.

Most of these new Garcia and Weir songs never made it onto Grateful Dead studio albums. Some were relegated to the pair's respective solo projects, but mostly they became part of the Dead's live repertoire. Many were included on *Europe '72*, a two-record live set recorded during a six-week, twenty-two-show trek across the continent. Pigpen came, too, for what would prove to be his last tour.

The band massaged the album into shape, adding crystalline overdubs in anticipation of a November 1972 release. *Europe '72* became the Dead's highest charting release to date, peaking at number twenty-four, but the musicians were sick of the studio. "Making a record is like building a ship in a bottle," Garcia said. "Playing live is like being in a rowboat on the ocean."²¹ Over the next three years, the Dead recorded another pair of studio albums: *Wake of the Flood*, released in November 1973, and *From the Mars Hotel*, released in June 1974. Though the albums sold well, rising to number eighteen and number sixteen, respectively, the Dead's creative energies were elsewhere.

Ron "Pigpen" McKernan died from a gastrointestinal hemorrhage on March 8, 1973, at his home in Corte Madera, California.

With the launch of a new U.S. tour in the spring of 1973, the Grateful Dead moved from theaters to sports arenas. The jams grew longer and jazzier, more fusion than rock, with Godchaux providing connective tissue between Garcia and Lesh and Kreutzmann as the sole drummer. With each passing year, the music sounded more and more natural, the songs taking on both complexity and elegance. Garcia's "Eyes of the World" was a mellifluous and harmonically tense jam that ended with an intricate 7/4 break while Weir's three-part "Weather Report Suite" was his most mature work yet.

The Dead expanded in other areas, too, in an effort to develop and run their own affiliated businesses. In 1968, in cooperation with the Jefferson Airplane and the Quicksilver Messenger Service, the band had taken on co-ownership of the Carousel Ballroom in San Francisco. The failure of this venture didn't deter them from other endeavors. Grateful Dead Records, run by a friend of Jerry Garcia named Ron Rakow, was founded in 1973 in

order to afford the band better quality control over the manufacture of their records.

For years, the Dead had used their own customized equipment. In 1968, Bear and others founded Alembic, a company dedicated to improving the quality of rock instruments and amplification. The luthier Doug Irwin was a key Alembic craftsman who built several of Garcia's guitars. "Our basses were great," Irwin recalled. "Before us, when you went to hear a band, you could feel the bass, but you couldn't hear it."²²

After Bear returned from prison in 1972, he and the Alembic crew set to work designing a brand new sound system suitable for larger venues; by 1974, it was ready. The "Wall of Sound," as it was known, stood three stories high with each instrument assigned its own enormous speaker stack. Instead of monitors, the band played directly in front of the Wall with each musician controlling his own voice and instrument in the mix. One result was incredible volume without distortion; another was incredible cost. In the band's newsletter, Robert Hunter compared the Grateful Dead's existence to Oroboros, the snake that eats its own tail.

By the summer of 1974, all parties were exhausted. "The most rewarding experience for me these days is to play in bars and not be Jerry Garcia of the Grateful Dead," Garcia said at the time. "I enjoy playing to fifty people. The bigger the audience gets, the harder it is to be light and spontaneous."²³ Cocaine was a problem as well, among band and crew members alike. Both factions had used it for years, but now Bob Weir complained that the latter were over-indulging.

From October 16 to 20, 1974, the Grateful Dead played five shows at Winterland Arena, a San Francisco ice skating rink that had become their home venue. With the Wall of Sound looming behind them and the phrase "The Last One" printed in red letters on tickets to the final night, a film crew recorded the band. On October 20, Mickey Hart returned for the Dead's final set. Although the band did not announce its breakup, there would be no shows for some time to come. The Wall of Sound was broken into components that were then sold off to several other bands.

HIATUS AND OSSIFICATION

The hiatus did not mean the end of the Grateful Dead. By February 1975, the musicians were playing daily at Ace's, Bob Weir's new home studio. Mickey Hart rejoined Bill Kreutzmann on dual drums as the band leisurely built new songs out of rambling jams. Some, like the instrumental "Slipknot," grew from themes that Jerry Garcia had been playing live for several years. Others were more ambitious, including a piece Garcia referred to as "the desert jam."

"We could either play a single note or an interval of a fifth," Garcia explained. "You could play them for as long as you wanted to, but any time

you heard a four-note chord vertically—see, the bass would be playing one note, Weir would be playing one note, then me and Keith—you could move your note so you'd change the harmonic structure of that chord. Nobody could hold a note more than two bars, or less than a whole tone, so that would guarantee the harmonic shifting. . . . It was almost a successful way to introduce the concept of almost no rules."²⁴

In a surprise appearance at a March 23 benefit show at San Francisco's Kezar Stadium, the Grateful Dead played nothing but this new music. "Blues for Allah," with lyrics by Robert Hunter, was the centerpiece of their album-in-progress, and soon became its title track. The band played only three more shows in 1975 but when *Blues for Allah* was released in September, it rose to number twelve. The Dead took some actual time off while Jerry Garcia recorded a solo album.

"As I was to discover, an idle mind is the devil's workshop," Lesh wrote in his autobiography. "I found myself spending more and more time propping up the bar at our local downtown Fairfax watering hole, a place called Nave's. I would drive down the hill to Nave's every night for dinner and a couple of beers. I had never been much of a drinker, scorning it as unworthy of my attention, but I rapidly settled into a routine of drinking all day, eating dinner and drinking until the bar closed. . . . Thus began my descent into alcoholism."²⁵ It wasn't long before Lesh "added cocaine to the mix."²⁶ From this time on, Lesh would be less of a musical force within the band.

Jerry Garcia was having troubles of his own. He had become the de facto director of the *Grateful Dead Movie* shot at Winterland prior to the hiatus. Jerry spent several months in the studio, helping to edit 125 hours of footage into a form he hoped would capture the Grateful Dead experience; he also commissioned a long animated sequence to open the movie. Expenses on the project mounted and the Grateful Dead were running out of money.

Grateful Dead Records closed in the fall of 1975 after label president Ron Rakow absconded with \$225,000 in company funds. A stressed-out Jerry Garcia turned to a new drug known as "Persian opium," actually a smokable form of heroin. "He had started using cocaine, which allowed him to keep burning the candle at both ends," Phil Lesh wrote, "but found Persian to be a tool that allowed him to check out whenever he wanted to."²⁷ Though the deleterious effects of the drug were not immediate, they proved decisive and Garcia's role in the group began to diminish.

The Grateful Dead were a radically different band when, in order to make ends meet, they returned to the road in 1976. With Mickey Hart rejoining Bill Kreutzmann at the drums, the band's music became more rhythmic and less inclined to fly off spontaneously in new directions. They jettisoned much of their experimental material, including old staples like "Dark Star" and even the recent "Blues for Allah." The band slowed down considerably while Mickey learned his way through the repertoire that had been created during his absence.

Bob Weir, a barely competent rhythm guitarist when the Dead began, now assumed a more active role. In 1968, Lesh and Garcia had even tried to oust Weir from the band because they didn't feel he was growing as a musician. But by the mid-1970s, as his mastery of strange chords expanded, Bob had found a musical space between Phil's contrapuntal bass leads and Jerry's guitar. His writing partnership with John Perry Barlow brought forth accomplished new songs like "Estimated Prophet," with its tricky reggae groove.

Jerry Garcia was not yet out of the picture. In "a single sitting in an unfurnished house with a picture window overlooking San Francisco Bay during a flamboyant lightning storm," Hunter wrote a new lyric. "I typed the first thing that came into my mind at the top of the page, the title: *Terrapin Station* . . . On the same day, driving to the city, Garcia was struck by a singular inspiration. He turned his car around and hurried home to set down some music that popped into his head, demanding immediate attention."²⁸ The sixteen-minute title song suite took up the second side of the Dead's new album. The band's first recording for Arista Records, *Terrapin Station* also included versions of Rev. Gary Davis's "Samson and Delilah" and of the Motown standard "Dancin' in the Streets" by Martha and the Vandellas. The album reached number twenty-eight on the *Billboard* chart soon after its release in August 1977.

Hampered by drug problems of their own, Keith and Donna Jean Godchaux left the Grateful Dead in 1979. They were replaced by Brent Mydland (born October 21, 1952), who'd previously played with Bill Kreutzmann in a Bay Area band called Go Ahead and now brought his spacey synthesizers and gruff yowl to the sound of the Grateful Dead.

The Dead continued to experiment albeit in less musically ambitious ways. In 1978, they traveled to Egypt to perform three shows at the foot of the Giza pyramids. The band jammed onstage with Egyptian master musicians including Hamza El-Din, but overall the shows were below par and plans for a live album were scrapped. In 1980, the Dead played acoustic sets for the first time since 1970 during fifteen shows at San Francisco's Warfield Theater, eight at Radio City Music Hall in New York, and two at the Saenger Theater in New Orleans.

In support of an organization of nearly thirty full-time employees, the Grateful Dead continued to tour year in and year out—trapped in the same wearying cycle that had caused the band to cease performing in 1974. Only Bob Weir and Brent Mydland consistently contributed new material, and the band's live shows began to (in Phil Lesh's word) "ossify." With few exceptions, such as the acoustic/electric shows of 1980 and their annual New Year's Eve performances, the Dead had followed a standard two-set format since their return to the road. Although they still played without song lists, a very specific pattern soon emerged.

The first set usually lasted for an hour. It alternated between numbers sung by Garcia and Weir and focused on shorter songs, including some old standbys (cf. "Beat It on Down the Line") dating back to the jug band days. Typically, the set would break into a brief jam and end with an upbeat closer. After an

intermission, the band played a longer second set that sometimes ran for as much as two hours. In this half, the songs stretched into long improvisations with lead vocals still alternating between Garcia and Weir.

Halfway through the second set, the other musicians left the stage while Mickey Hart and Bill Kreutzmann became what they called “the Rhythm Devils,” employing a variety of drums from Hart’s collection to create percussive landscapes. As the drummers finished and left the stage, the rest of the band returned to play the section known as “space,” an invocation of the free-form psychedelic jamming of earlier years. The show would conclude with several more songs, usually including a ballad by Garcia, a rocker led by Weir, and an encore cover such as the Rolling Stones’ “Satisfaction” or Van Morrison’s “Gloria.”

A TRAVELING CIRCUS

Dedicated Deadheads had been bootlegging concerts since the 1960s: “Once we’re done with it, it’s theirs,”²⁹ Jerry Garcia once said in defining the band’s laissez-faire taping policy. By 1984, Dead soundman Dan Healy could barely see the stage through the tall microphone stands erected nightly by the tapers. With a concert at the Berkeley Community Theater on October 27, the Grateful Dead began selling tickets for a special tapers’ section located behind the soundboard.

John Perry Barlow called this innovation “one of the most enlightened, practical, smart things that anybody ever did. I think it is probably the single most important reason that we have the popularity that we have. . . . [Tapes are the] article of currency for this economy, our psychic economy to say the least. . . . And by the proliferation of tapes, that formed the basis of a culture and something weirdly like a religion. . . . A lot of what we are selling is community. That is our main product, it’s not music.”³⁰

Deadheads followed the band wherever they went, setting up makeshift tent cities in the venue parking lots. Late in his life, famed anthropologist Joseph Campbell called the Deadheads “the most recently developed tribe on the planet.”³¹ The fans sang along with every lyric, cheering loudly when the band reached lines that seemed to reflect the Grateful Dead experience. Following a Grateful Dead tour became a summer rite of passage for many college students; for other fans, it was a year-round vocation. Magazines such as *The Golden Road* and *Relix* were founded to cover the band’s activities. Several religious cults including the Spinners and the Twelve Tribes were a consistent presence on the road with the Dead.

Although Jerry Garcia joked that “I’ll put up with it until they come to me with the cross and nails,”³² he continued to struggle with the pressures of fame. His heroin use grew worse, as did his performances. Between 1978 and 1982, Jerry’s hair turned gray and his weight ballooned. Meanwhile, Phil Lesh got sober; the bassist and his bandmates urged Jerry to do the same but

their concerns went unheeded. In January 1985, Garcia was arrested in his car in Golden Gate Park and charged with possession of heroin and cocaine. The guitarist began to clean up, but his health took a turn for the worse in July 1986 when he fell into a diabetic coma and nearly died.

Jerry survived, but then had to relearn to play guitar. "It was as though in my whole library of information, all the books had fallen off the shelves and all the pages had fallen out of the books,"³³ he explained. Miraculously, by October 1986, he was back on stage with the Jerry Garcia Band. On December 15, the Dead themselves returned to Oakland Coliseum. They opened the show with "Touch of Grey," one of the few new songs written by Garcia and Robert Hunter during the 1980s. With a chorus that affirmed "I will survive," it became the band's new anthem.

"Touch of Grey" also became a hit single as the lead track on 1987's *In the Dark*. Propelled by a video populated with singing skeletons, "Touch of Grey" reached number nine on the *Billboard* Hot 100 while *In the Dark* reached number six on the album chart. Suddenly, the Grateful Dead were more popular than ever as they spent part of 1987 on tour as the backing band for Bob Dylan. Although the concerts and the resultant live album, *Dylan and the Dead* (released January 1989), were far from either's best work, Dylan credited the Dead with rejuvenating him creatively. "I realized that they understood [my] songs better than I did at the time,"³⁴ he said.

Jerry Garcia was on the mend: writing new songs, forging new collaborations, and reestablishing old musical partnerships. In 1988, he co-produced *Virgin Beauty*, an album by free jazz saxophonist Ornette Coleman. The following year, Jerry reunited with mandolinist David Grisman, whom he'd first met at a bluegrass festival in North Carolina in 1964; the two had played together in Old and in the Way, Garcia's short-lived bluegrass band in 1973. In the half-decade that followed, the pair recorded often at Grisman's Dawg Studios.

Garcia began making visual art again, as well, both on canvas and on a computer. Some of his digital images were featured on the cover of *Infrared Roses*, a November 1991 collection of "space" segments including jams with jazz saxophonist Branford Marsalis. In 1989, the Dead had begun incorporating MIDI instruments that allowed Garcia to make his guitar sound like a flute, a trumpet, or almost anything else he desired. The MIDI technology encouraged musical experimentation. In October 1989, appearing at Hampton Coliseum in Virginia under the name Formerly the Warlocks, the band revived "Dark Star," a song they'd played just five times since 1974.

TROUBLE AHEAD, TROUBLE BEHIND

Outside each Grateful Dead show, the scene was getting out of hand. In 1988 and again in 1990, the band's representatives distributed flyers in and around

the venues asking fans not to sell drugs in the parking lot. "We're not the police," they wrote, "but if you care about this scene, you'll end this type of behavior so the authorities will have no reason to shut us down. We're in this together—so thanks."³⁵

As Jerry Garcia's health improved, Brent Mydland's condition worsened. The band had played many of Mydland's original compositions and even included four on 1989's *Built to Last* (released in November 1989) yet the keyboardist still felt like a junior member. Fighting a violent temper and a lack of self-confidence, he was arrested several times on various charges including driving while intoxicated. On July 26, 1990, Brent Mydland overdosed on a "speedball"—a combination of cocaine and morphine—and died at home in California.

The Grateful Dead chose to replace him with not one but two additional musicians. Bruce Hornsby, already a pop star in his own right, had played in a Dead cover band at the University of Virginia and happily agreed to join the real thing for a limited time. (He remained with the Dead through March 1992.) Vince Welnick, formerly of Bay Area theatrical rockers the Tubes, joined on a more permanent basis and quickly forged a creative alliance with Bob Bralove, the Dead's MIDI technician. In 1993, Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter turned out a batch of new songs—including "Lazy River Road" and "The Days Between"—that comprised the pair's strongest material since the 1970s. But the guitarist was quietly slipping back into old bad habits that precipitated his rapid decline.

A disastrous 1995 summer tour was marred by gate-crashing fans and a death threat to Garcia. The band issued a statement to the Deadheads: "Want to end the touring life of the Grateful Dead? Allow bottle-throwing gate-crashers to keep on thinking they're cool anarchists instead of the creeps they are."³⁶ On July 9, 1995, at Solider Field in Chicago, the Grateful Dead played their last show.

One week later, Garcia checked into the Betty Ford Clinic in California but left after a brief stay. On August 8 the guitarist tried again, this time at Serenity Knolls. (The facility was located a half-mile down the road from Camp Lagunitas, where the Dead had lived during the summer of 1966.) That night, one week after his fifty-third birthday, Jerry Garcia died in his sleep of heart failure.

"He is the very spirit personified of whatever is muddy river country at its core and screams up into the spheres," Bob Dylan wrote. "He really had no equals. . . . There are a lot of spaces and advances between the Carter Family, Buddy Holly, and, say, Ornette Coleman, a lot of universes, but he filled them all without being a member of any school. His playing was moody, awesome, sophisticated, hypnotic, and subtle."³⁷

On December 8, the band issued a statement: "The 'long strange trip' of the uniquely wonderful beast known as the Grateful Dead is over."³⁸

LEGACY

The music of the Grateful Dead reflects a kaleidoscopic range of influences, from Appalachian bluegrass to Chicago blues, from Western swing to the European avant garde. In particular, the songs of Jerry Garcia and Robert Hunter are rife with symbols and images of a mythical pre-modern America. A creatively democratic attitude pervaded every aspect of the band's singular career. The Grateful Dead organization was a sprawling collective of friends and hangers on, all salaried and provided for, with even the band's equipment roadies getting full votes in business decisions. The Dead and their off-stage partners designed and built instruments, amplifiers, and entire sound systems. Although they enjoyed success on two different major labels, the Dead also founded and ran their own record company.

The Grateful Dead were reluctant symbols of the 1960s, suspicious of the traveling party that followed them on tour and unwilling to speak out politically. But the musicians were open about their individual use of psychedelics as a tool of artistic and personal liberation. The Dead also played countless benefits for anti-war groups and community organizations, especially during their first decade.

From an office in San Rafael, California, the group published a Deadhead newsletter and opened a mail order business, selling its own concert tickets and merchandise. They allowed fans to freely record and exchange performances of their concerts. The Deadheads formed an informal national network of fans linked by fanzines and word of mouth. Wherever the Dead went, the Deadheads followed, guaranteeing sold-out shows in the most remote corners of the country. By the early 1990s, according to an estimate by *Forbes*, the Grateful Dead were earning more than \$12.5 million annually. The band's popularity never diminished and was never dependent upon mainstream media exposure.

The Deadheads and their descendents created a vibrant subculture that continues to the present day. The band's musical legacy, meanwhile, has been preserved and extended on a continuing series of live releases from its extensive tape archive, not to mention a massive free database of fan-made recordings available on the Internet. With their unique musical vocabulary and way of interaction, the Dead's music was tantamount to a thirty-year-long conversation—one that has become entwined with the dialogue of American music.

In the years since the dissolution of the Grateful Dead, several of its surviving members have continued to make music both together and separately. Bob Weir has toured constantly with his band Ratdog. After a brief retirement and a liver transplant, Phil Lesh returned to the road with his rotating cast of Phil Lesh and Friends, a group that regularly channeled the experimental Dead sound of the early 1970s. Mickey Hart founded his own label to release a series of field recordings by traditional musicians from around the world; his 1991 album *Planet Drum* won the Grammy Award for Best World Music Album.

A new generation of jam bands arose in the wake of the Dead. Both Phish and Widespread Panic began in the 1980s as Grateful Dead cover acts before developing their own styles and becoming arena headliners in their own right. The Dead's influence runs throughout modern music, from experimental art rockers like Sonic Youth (whose guitarist Lee Ranaldo had followed the Dead on tour in the late 1970s) and Wilco (who covered "Ripple" in concert). The Dark Star Orchestra performs song-by-song renditions of vintage Dead shows to ecstatic audiences. Acoustic acts such as Yonder Mountain String Band draw inspiration from Jerry Garcia's short-lived band Old and in the Way—whose lone self-titled album, released in 1975, was for the next twenty-five years the best-selling bluegrass album of all time.

It is as Bob Weir and John Perry Barlow wrote in 1975: The music never stopped.

TIMELINE

December 31, 1963

Bob Weir hears Jerry Garcia playing banjo at the back of Dana Morgan's music store in Palo Alto, California, and introduces himself.

May 5, 1965

The Warlocks make their live debut at Magoo's Pizza in Menlo Park, California.

November 1965

The Warlocks change their name to the Grateful Dead after Phil Lesh discovers a single by another band called the Warlocks.

December 11, 1965

The Grateful Dead play their first Acid Test with novelist Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters at the Big Beat in Palo Alto.

March 1967

Warner Brothers Records releases *The Grateful Dead*.

September 29, 1967

Mickey Hart joins the band on stage at San Francisco's Straight Theater, and immediately becomes a permanent member.

January 1969

The Grateful Dead begin recording *Live/Dead* at San Francisco's Avalon Ballroom.

January 31, 1970

New Orleans police bust the band after a show at the Warehouse in New Orleans.

February 19, 1971

Mickey Hart leaves the Grateful Dead after his father, Lenny, is caught embezzling money from the band.

October 19, 1971

Pianist Keith Godchaux plays his first show with the Grateful Dead at Northrop Auditorium in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

March 8, 1973

Pigpen dies of gastrointestinal hemorrhage in Corte Madera, California.

October 20, 1974

After a performance at San Francisco's Winterland Arena, during which Mickey Hart joins them on drums, the Grateful Dead begin a year-and-a-half hiatus from touring.

June 3, 1976

The Grateful Dead return from their "retirement" at the Paramount in Portland, Oregon, with Mickey Hart reinstated as a member.

June 1, 1977

The Grateful Dead Movie, co-directed by Jerry Garcia, is released.

October 1978

The Dead travel to Egypt to perform at the foot of the pyramids at Giza.

April 22, 1979

Brent Mydland replaces Keith Godchaux on keyboards at Spartan Stadium in San Jose, California.

October 1980

The Dead take up extended residences at Manhattan's Radio City Music Hall and San Francisco's Warfield Theater.

July 1986

Jerry Garcia falls into a diabetic coma and nearly dies.

July 6, 1987

In the Dark reaches number six on the *Billboard* chart, while "Touch of Grey" reaches number nine Pop.

July 1987

The Grateful Dead tour as Bob Dylan's backing band.

July 26, 1990

Brent Mydland dies from an overdose of cocaine and morphine.

August 9, 1995

Jerry Garcia dies of heart failure at a drug rehabilitation clinic in California.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Anthem of the Sun, 1968

Live/Dead, 1969

American Beauty, 1970

Europe '72, 1972

Grateful Dead Movie Soundtrack, 1974

One From the Vault, 1975

Reckoning, 1980

Infrared Roses, 1991

So Many Roads, 1999 (five-CD box set of live recordings and studio outtakes spanning the Grateful Dead's career)

NOTES

1. David Gans, "Everybody's Playing in the Heart of Gold Band," *So Many Roads* (Grateful Dead Records, 1999), p. 43.
2. David Shenk and Steve Silberman, *Skeleton Key* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), p. 100.
3. James Henke, "Alive and Well," in *Garcia* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1995), p. 184.
4. Phil Lesh, *Searching for the Sound* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2005), p. 6.
5. Shenk and Silberman, p. 196.
6. Dennis McNally, *A Long Strange Trip* (New York: Broadway Books, 2002), p. 92.
7. Lesh, p. 45.
8. Martin Torgoff, *Can't Find My Way Home: America in the Great Stoned Age, 1945–2000* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), p. 91.
9. McNally, p. 100.
10. David Jay Brown and Rebecca McClen Novick, *Voices from the Edge* (Freedom: Crossing Press, 1995), p. 57.
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13. Ibid., p. 138.
14. McNally, p. 229.
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17. Shenk and Silberman, p. 12.
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26. Ibid., p. 226.
27. Ibid., p. 230.
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29. Shenk and Silberman, p. 211.

30. McNally, p. 386.
31. Shenk and Silberman, p. ix.
32. Brown and Novick, p. 74.
33. Ibid., p. 69.
34. McNally, p. 566.
35. Brad E. Lucas, "Bakhtinian Carnival, Corporate Capital, and the Last Decade of the Dead," in *Perspectives on the Grateful Dead* (Westport: Greenwood Press), p. 80.
36. Lucas, p. 81.
37. McNally, p. 614.
38. Associated Press, "Grateful Dead Ends Its 'Long, Strange Trip.'" Available online at www.cnn.com/SHOWBIZ/Music/9512/grateful_dead/index.html.

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Frank Zappa

Chris Crocker

AMERICAN ICONOCLAST

Of all the rock stars that emerged during the pop music revolution of the 1960s, Frank Zappa may be the most confusing and contradictory.

His long, unkempt hair and oddball outfits made him look like an archetypal hippie. Yet he mocked the flower-power generation as savagely as he lampooned the corporate conformity of its parents. His sexualized, scatological

songwriting turned some of his albums and stage shows into bawdy rock burlesque. Yet he also composed serious orchestral works that would be performed in concert halls throughout the world. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Zappa's sardonic, surrealistic storytelling and intense, harmonically inventive music were viewed as the trippiest of the trippy. Yet he shunned drugs and spoke out strongly against them. He lampooned politicians of every stripe. Yet he also encouraged his fans to get involved in their democracy by exhorting them to vote and conducting registration drives at his concerts.

Frank Zappa took full advantage of the creative freedom of the late 1960s rock scene to carve out a singular niche combining social satire and challenging instrumental music, and he did so with idiosyncratic verve. Steeped in rock and roll's early R&B roots, he had an innate feel for the rhythms that make people move. But upon that foundation, he blended elements of modern jazz, twentieth-century classical music and electronic cacophony. He grew up in the thrall of such blues guitar pioneers as Howlin' Wolf, Guitar Slim, and T-Bone Walker, but his improvisations only began as blues-based solos. When Zappa turned his imagination to an electric guitar, he drew from a wild tangle of harmonic ideas to create unique sound sculptures, from a sonic boom to an Indian raga to a crash-landing spaceship.

Zappa generally refused to write love songs, and those he did write tended to depict love as a desperate commercial transaction, with cheap sex its currency. Like many singer-songwriters of his era, he focused his acerbic wit on the hypocrisies of our society, taking aim at government, the educational system, and the family unit. But he also ridiculed the youth culture in which his own fans were immersed. He frequently took a break from his savage critiques to revel in sheer absurdism, creating a loony alternate universe where one might encounter a Godzilla-sized poodle, a Montana dental-floss farmer, or a mountain that gets drafted into military service.

Zappa's interweaving of musical and social themes spawned a large and varied body of work—a lifelong tapestry of artfully wrought musical motifs, surrealist imagery, and anarchic jokes. Although he never achieved massive sales figures, Zappa gained his own peculiar sort of rock stardom while maintaining a persona that suggested the illegitimate child of John Coltrane and Lenny Bruce, with Spike Jones and Big Mama Thornton standing by as midwives.

His mastery of recording technology gave Zappa's music an impressive sonic sheen, and his sidemen were distinguished by their top-notch musicianship. Zappa's bands were notoriously tight and well rehearsed, as they had to be in order to perform music that might turn on a dime from hard-rock wailing to free-jazz riffing to street-corner doo-wop harmonizing. His technically challenging compositions brought established jazzmen like George Duke and Jean-Luc Ponty into his band, which was also a proving ground for lengthy list of notable rock musicians, including Lowell George, Adrian Belew, and Steve Vai.

Despite his initial fame in the rock world, Zappa was eventually recognized widely as a serious American composer. While many rock artists have tried their hands at symphonic writing or “rock operas,” Zappa was one of the few who possessed the chops and the discipline to successfully execute such endeavors. His interest in, and knowledge of, modern classical music was nearly as deep-rooted as his love of doo-wop and blues. His youthful enthusiasm for the French modernist composer Edgard Varèse opened the door for an appreciation of Webern, Stravinsky, and others.

The fact that Zappa was a largely self-taught musician who attended no music schools—and educated himself only in the basics of musical structure—didn’t stop him from creating modern compositions of sweeping beauty and dizzying intricacy. Bedeviled by the logistics and expense of working with symphony orchestras, Zappa eventually found he could compose and perform simultaneously on the Synclavier, a massive computer synthesizer. Still, he never abandoned flesh-and-blood musicians. Late in his life, Zappa took delight in the German new music group Ensemble Modern, who could realize his most elaborate and offbeat musical ideas.

Unlike those rock artists who self-indulgently emphasized their artistic temperaments, Zappa always considered himself a businessman, if a reluctant one. First, he was the boss of his band, hiring, firing, and paying salaries. Second, his frustrations at working within the structures of the mainstream music business led him to form his own labels. An unapologetic capitalist, Zappa toured Eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and sought to forge business ventures with peoples newly freed from the constraints of socialism. He was even offered a diplomatic post by the fledgling post-communist government of the Czech Republic—an offer that was rescinded at the request of a chagrined U.S. government.

The reason for that chagrin may have been what many considered Zappa’s most unusual performance, his testimony before Congress in 1985 in opposition to proposed laws to label record albums for their lyrical content. The musician who began as a flamboyant social critic emerged in the mid-1980s as a buttoned-down, but no less opinionated, public citizen.

By the time he died of prostate cancer in 1993 at the age of fifty-two, Zappa left a recorded legacy of over seventy albums, as well as various films, videos, and other media. Yet despite the wealth of his work that remains available to consumers, Frank Zappa is often as misunderstood today as he was in his heyday.

Frank Vincent Zappa was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on December 21, 1940, the child of the Sicilian-born Francis Vincent Zappa Jr. and American-born Rose Marie Colimore. He was the eldest child in what would become a family of six. His father worked as a meteorologist at Baltimore’s Edgewood Arsenal, where deadly mustard gas was manufactured. The staff’s families lived nearby, so in case of an accident, a gas mask was provided for each member of the family. A curious young Frank once took his gas mask apart,

breaking it. As a child, Frank suffered from asthma and sinus problems. He also developed an early enthusiasm for art.

By the time Frank was ten, his family had moved west, where his father worked in California's burgeoning defense industry. Although they first resided in northern California, the Zappas eventually moved south to the San Diego area. There, Frank continued his interest in art, and became fascinated by the beauty of the as-yet-unreadable notes on a sheet of music.

The young Zappa was intrigued by an article he read in *Look* magazine about *The Complete Works Of Edgard Varèse Volume 1*, an album by the contemporary French composer, who lived in New York at the time. Although he'd never heard any of its music, Frank became obsessed with the album and with Varèse. When he finally managed to find a copy of the LP, he realized that he didn't have enough money.

"I had searched for that album for over a year, and now . . . disaster," he later recounted. "I told the guy I only had \$3.80. He scratched his neck. 'We use that record to demonstrate the hi-fi with, but nobody ever buys one when we use it. . . . You can have it for \$3.80 if you want it that bad.'" ¹

Zappa listened to the album on a primitive old Decca phonograph, although its dissonance caused his elders to restrict its playing to his bedroom. For his fifteenth birthday, his mother promised him \$5 to spend as he chose. He chose a long-distance phone call to Edgard Varèse. Incredibly, Varèse's phone number was found, and the great composer spoke to his enthralled young admirer, telling him of his new composition "Déserts."

Simultaneously with his discovery of Varèse, Zappa cultivated an interest in R&B and doo-wop, beginning with his first exposure to "Gee" by the Crows and "I" by the Velvets. By the age of fourteen, he was taking drum lessons and had joined a teenaged rhythm and blues combo called the Ramblers.

When the Zappa family moved to Lancaster, California, Frank attended Antelope Valley Joint Union High School and formed a band of his own, called the Black-Outs. Although based in a culturally conservative area, the band crossed several color lines, as it included Zappa and one other young man of Italian descent, plus two members of Mexican extraction and three African Americans. Some of the local townsfolk disliked the group's racial makeup as much as they disliked their music. Zappa initially played drums, but later switched to guitar, playing a cracked model his brother Carl had purchased for \$1.50.

One day, Zappa was hitchhiking around Lancaster and got a lift from a schoolmate, Don Van Vliet. The two weren't well acquainted, but soon discovered a mutual mania for music. Don had to drop out of school and take over his father's Helms Bread truck route after his father had a heart attack, but he and Zappa bonded over their shared musical interests.

Zappa always claimed that he was not particularly popular with his high school administration, an assertion seemingly borne out by the fact that he was allowed to graduate with fewer credits than were required. With ambitions of

becoming a composer like his hero Varèse, Zappa took a harmony course at Antelope Valley Junior College. When his family moved again, from Lancaster to Claremont, California, Frank didn't go with them. He later enrolled at Chaffee Junior College in Ontario, California, where he took another harmony course, and also sat in on a composition course at Pomona College. These would prove to be Frank Zappa's last efforts at formal education.

At Chaffee, Zappa met Kay Sherman, whom he soon married, and put his artistic talents to work in the silkscreen department at the Nile Running Greeting Card company. Around this time, he was approached by Don Ceveris, a supportive former high school English teacher who'd written a screenplay for a western called *Run Home Slow* and wanted Zappa to compose the film's score. He wrote and recorded the soundtrack music, but the film's producers were forced to temporarily shelve the project for lack of funding.

His continuing efforts to find work in the music business led Zappa became the guitarist for a lounge act called Joe Perrino and the Mellotones. After one too many nights of playing tired versions of "Green Dolphin Street" and "Anniversary Waltz" while clad in a white dinner jacket and bow tie, Zappa quit music altogether. He closed his guitar in its case and stowed it away behind a sofa, where it stayed for eight months.

FRAME UP, FREAK OUT

Zappa was then asked to compose the score for another low-budget film, this time for *The World's Greatest Sinner*, a bizarre religious/political/rock and roll satire shot on a shoestring by eccentric Hollywood character actor Timothy Carey, who directed and starred in it. The film featured some of Zappa's earliest recorded music, and includes themes and motifs that would re-emerge later in his career.

In another attempt to hear his orchestral music, Zappa paid \$300 in 1962 for musicians to perform his compositions at a concert at the nearby Mount St. Mary's College. In addition to the orchestral instruments, Zappa used electronic music on tape and simultaneously projected home movies, offering an early manifestation of the multi-media experimentation that would become more common later in the decade.

Ronnie Williams, a guitar-playing friend, introduced Zappa to Paul Buff, the owner and operator of the Pal Recording Studio in the southern California town of Cucamonga. Buff was an innovative recording engineer, and his studio boasted remarkably advanced equipment for a small-town operation, including a five-track recording apparatus. Zappa soon began working with Buff in the three-room studio, with the pair cutting a series of rock and roll tunes and licensing their recordings to such independent labels as Original Sound and Del-Fi, in hopes of scoring a hit record.

Billing themselves under various pseudonyms, Buff and Zappa recorded in a variety of styles. As the Masters, they cut a vigorous instrumental number called “Break Time,” backed with an instrumental cover of the Tennessee Ernie Ford hit “Sixteen Tons.” When Zappa and Buff turned themselves into the Hollywood Persuaders to cut the chugging, horn-driven boogie tune “Grunion Run,” the distinctive Zappa guitar sound was already evident in the track’s wiry, stinging riffs.

During this period, Zappa also wrote and produced tunes for other performers. Taking the opportunity to write for one of the doo-wop groups he loved as a teenager, Zappa, with vocalist friend Ray Collins, penned “Memories of El Monte” for the Penguins. The group was nearly a decade past its classic hit “Earth Angel,” and Zappa’s soulful melody seems to acknowledge the fact, offering a nostalgic pastiche of old vocal-group classics. The poignant R&B plaint “Everytime I See You,” by the teenage singing duo the Heartbreakers, features a splendidly sputtering, unquestionably Zappa-styled solo.

With fame still a few years away, the future underground icon made an unlikely national television appearance on *The Steve Allen Show*, hosted by the comedian/writer/musician whose cerebral sense of humor Zappa appreciated. Dressed in a suit and tie, the seemingly straight-laced guest tickled Allen’s love of the absurd when he brought along a pair of modified, overturned bicycles and demonstrated the different ways one could make music with them, dubiously dubbing the process “cyclophony.” After demonstrating the curious noises one could derive from a bicycle, Zappa coaxed Allen into “playing” it as well, prompting atonal counterpoint from Allen’s studio band, with taped electronic sounds switched on from the control room. Zappa puckishly titled the piece *Improvised Concerto for Two Bicycles, Prerecorded Tape and the Musicians in the Back*. The dissonant free-fire zone they produced became mainstream America’s first moment of Zappafied weirdness, with the young composer impudently turning a national TV variety show into a festival of noise.

Zappa’s next band was the Soots, whose lead singer was his old Lancaster buddy Don Van Vliet—now known by the name under which he would soon become an underground musical legend, Captain Beefheart. Yet the Soots’ recordings failed to generate any interest from record companies. Still seeking a suitable live unit, Zappa then formed a blistering electric trio, the Mothers, with bassist Paul Woods and drummer Les Papp. The band played mainly—and mostly unnoticed—at the Saints and Sinners, a go-go bar in Ontario, where the waitresses would dance onstage and where the band’s audience consisted mainly of Mexican laborers.

Back in Cucamonga, a debt-plagued Buff sold his studio to Zappa, who financed the purchase with his long-delayed payment for his *Run Home Slow* score. Zappa renamed the facility Studio Z and, with his marriage falling apart, moved into the studio. He was later joined there by old friend Jim

“Motorhead” Sherwood and various others needing a short-term place to stay.

Expanding his creative horizons, Zappa paid \$50 for some background sets from the F. K. Rockett Studios in Hollywood, and announced that he planned to make a film called *Captain Beefheart Meets the Grunt People* with his old friend Don Van Vliet. The local paper, the *Ontario Daily Report*, anointed Zappa “The Movie King of Cucamonga,” despite the fact that he’d made no movies yet.

Studio Z began to develop a reputation, mainly as a hangout for local weirdos. One day, Zappa was approached by a man claiming to be a used car salesman, and wondering if the Movie King of Cucamonga might want to produce a pornographic film for him. Although he needed the money, Zappa instead recorded a raunchy audio tape with Lorraine Belcher, one of the women living at the studio.

When Zappa met up with his client, the supposed used car salesman said he didn’t have the money to pay for the titillating tape. As Frank turned to walk away, he was arrested for conspiracy to commit pornography, as was his female cohort. Studio Z was raided and its tapes confiscated; the headline in the *Ontario Daily Report* screamed “2 a Go-Go to Jail.” Zappa’s father took out a bank loan to pay his son’s bail, and Frank in turn used some of his royalties from “Memories of El Monte” to bail out Belcher. The trial ended with Zappa being forced to serve ten days in Tank C of the San Bernardino County Jail—a bleak, overcrowded, insect-infested lockup that left a horrible, indelible impression on the young musician. Now officially a convicted felon, Zappa was put on probation for three years. (The song “San Ber’dino,” from 1975 album *One Size Fits All*, makes reference to that shattering sojourn.)

By 1964, Zappa had fallen behind in his rent and moved out of Studio Z, which itself was soon demolished to make way for a wider street. Ray Collins had been singing in a band called the Soul Giants, which had lost its guitar player after Collins reportedly slugged him. The Soul Giants also included bassist Roy Estrada, drummer Jimmy Carl Black, and saxophonist Dave Coronado. Zappa stepped in as guitarist, and would soon take over as the group’s leader.

Zappa soon grew tired of the band’s repertoire of cover tunes and suggested that they add some of his compositions to their set. He also convinced the group to rename themselves Captain Glasspack and His Magic Mufflers. The name change did little for the group, and Coronado quit. One day in the spring of 1964, Zappa decided to revert to a previous band name, with one vowel changed, and dubbed the group the Mothers.

The Mothers eventually moved to Los Angeles, which had become home to a burgeoning “freak” scene where the band seemed to fit right in. “The origins of hippies—as per San Francisco/flower power/Haight Ashbury—is quite a different evolution from the Los Angeles freak movement, of which I was a part,” Zappa later explained. “There was just a difference in the concept of it. I was never a hippie. I never bought the flower power ethic.”²

Local scene maker and counterculture guru Vito Paulekas originally brought his Freaks—a loose assemblage of dancers and assorted hangers on—to the Byrds' earliest shows. But the entourage soon attached themselves to the Mothers. As "Mother Superior," the lanky, wisecracking Zappa cut a striking figure. He now sported long, stringy hair and a distinctive mustache-and-beard configuration that he copied from R&B bandleader Johnny Otis.

Los Angeles was not the peace-and-love utopia that San Francisco was being portrayed as. In L.A., there was a simmering tension between the freaks and the police—just another flashpoint in a town of jostling white, black, and Latino populations. When the freaks gathered at the rock clubs of the Sunset Strip, local business leaders saw them as a cultural eyesore, and leaned on the police to make things hot for them. The result was police harassment, with the cops periodically rounding up groups of young nonconformists with little legal justification.

Despite static from the cops, the Mothers became the rock and roll face of the L.A. freak scene, and as such were invited to perform at a party that was to be filmed for an exploitation flick called *Mondo Hollywood*. At the party, they met Herb Cohen, who had managed such folk artists as Theodore Bikel, Judy Henske, and the Modern Folk Quartet. Cohen saw potential in this loud, odd band and soon became their manager. No stranger to controversy himself, Cohen was once arrested for booking boundary-busting comedian Lenny Bruce into a San Francisco nightclub. (Zappa himself had had a passing acquaintance with Bruce, whose convention-challenging humor was a strong influence on him. Zappa was in New York when Bruce died in L.A. in 1966, but flew back west for the funeral.)

Under Herb Cohen's guidance, the Mothers began gigging at such L.A. hotspots as the Action, the Whisky A Go-Go and the Trip. During one Whisky show, Cohen convinced Tom Wilson, a respected producer and A&R man who'd recently been hired by Verve Records to shore up the label's rock roster, to take a look at the Mothers. Wilson walked in while the band was playing "Trouble Comin' Every Day," a blues number that dissected the Watts race riots that had torn L.A. apart that year. Assuming the Mothers to be a white blues band that sang protest songs, he offered to sign the group to Verve.

The Mothers—Zappa, Ray Collins, Roy Estrada, and Jimmy Carl Black, plus temporary member Elliott Ingber on rhythm guitar—recorded their debut album *Freak Out!* in late 1965 and early 1966. In the engineer's booth, Tom Wilson was charmed by the sardonic pop hooks of "Any Way the Wind Blows," but his mood changed when the band launched into the ominous, bovine moans and otherworldly vocals of "Who Are the Brain Police?" Wilson picked up the phone and warned Verve's New York headquarters that the Mothers may not be exactly what he thought they were.

Freak Out!—one of rock's first double albums—was an explosion of Zappa's pent-up creative energy, from angry rockers like "Hungry Freaks, Daddy" and "Trouble Comin' Every Day" to the 1950s doo-wop parody "Go Cry on

Somebody Else's Shoulder" to the avant-garde a cappella opus "It Can't Happen Here" to "The Chrome Plated Megaphone of Destiny," a grand finale of tape manipulation combined with, as the album notes explain, "what freaks sound like when you turn them loose in a recording studio at one o'clock in the morning on \$500 worth of percussion equipment."

The album also featured Zappa's artfully crafted orchestral arrangements, and its elaborate cover design included a massive list of influences, musical and otherwise, including Slim Harpo, Igor Stravinsky, Salvador Dalí, and Bram Stoker. The project cost Verve the then-unprecedented sum of nearly \$30,000.

Although it's now recognized as an innovative, visionary classic, *Freak Out!* sold poorly by the commercial standards of the day. Verve also had a bit of a problem with the group's name, insisting that they lengthen it by adding "Of Invention," since the word "Mothers" bore too much similarity to the abbreviation of a popular Oedipal epithet.

At the Whisky A Go-Go, a pretty blonde secretary named Adelaide Gail Sloatman had caught Frank's eye. The two were soon living together.

In the final weeks of 1966, the Mothers recorded their second album, *Absolutely Free*. Keen to head off another *Freak Out!*-sized expenditure, Verve imposed an \$11,000 spending cap on the album. By then, the group had expanded to include keyboardist Don Preston, reeds player Bunk Gardner, second drummer Billy Mundi, and Zappa's old friend Motorhead Sherwood on baritone saxophone.

With *Absolutely Free*, Zappa's social satire became far more cutting. The album featured pungent assaults on social conformity ("Plastic People," "Statue Back Baby"), unfettered flights of dadaist humor ("The Duke of Prunes," "Call Any Vegetable") and a satirical rock oratorio ("Brown Shoes Don't Make It"). The album concluded with the alcohol-fueled mayhem of "America Drinks and Goes Home," an anarchic caricature of his lounge-band days with Joe Perrino.

Pere Ubu: The Modern Dance

Frank Zappa's complex music and corrosive satirical humor demonstrated that given time and effort, an "outsider" style of rock music might find its own audience. When Cleveland natives David Thomas and Peter Laughner founded Pere Ubu in 1975, Midwest rock was represented nationally by the power-pop of Cheap Trick and the Raspberries, the blue-collar balladry of Bob Seger, and the heavy metal guitar histrionics of Ted Nugent. But Thomas and Laughner were not inclined to pursue any of these styles, which neither reflected their diverse influences (from the early Kinks and the Velvet Underground to obscure British bands like Van Der Graaf Generator) nor captured the atmosphere of life in a declining industrial center. Pere Ubu wasn't going to spend years playing Top Forty covers in northeast Ohio bar rooms. Pere Ubu was going to be *different*.

The group made its intentions clear in 1976 with "Final Solution," one of its three self-released singles. The song had rock-solid rhythmic drive, Peter Laughner's snaking guitar riffs, and a memorable chorus. But Allen Ravenstine's synthesizer sputtered and gurgled like a steam locomotive with engine trouble while David Thomas (aka Crocus Behemoth) sang in multiple voices: an affectless monotone, a high-pitched yelp, an angry shout.

Released in 1977, the year of Peter Laughner's death from acute pancreatitis, Pere Ubu's debut album, *The Modern Dance*, sold only about 15,000 copies in the United States. But it put the band on the punk/new wave live circuit, where the rotund and conservatively dressed Thomas cut a singular figure. Ubu's second album in a year, *Dub Housing*, was a dark near-masterpiece of unnerving sonic atmospheres and half-absurd, half-foreboding lyrics (cf. "Caligari's Mirror").

When *New Picnic Time* (1979) saw no improvement in sales, Pere Ubu briefly disbanded but soon regrouped for a new album, *The Art of Walking*. Thomas took control of the band as other musicians came and went, some rejoining after long absences. Ubu's output was consistently inventive and true to its own legacy. At this writing, Pere Ubu has released twenty-plus albums on at least eight labels, including the raucous live anthology *390° of Simulated Stereo* (1981), the pop-oriented *Cloudland* (1989), and the latest "comeback" *Why I Hate Women* (2006). There's no end in sight for the band that David Thomas once described as "the longest-lasting, most disastrous commercial outfit to ever appear in rock and roll."

Andy Schwartz

Although the independent Zappa chafed against record company politics, he appreciated the continued support of producer Tom Wilson, who served as a crucial buffer between band and label, and whose patronage was crucial in the Mothers' ability to continue making records.

Although the Mothers of Invention were the new stars of the L.A. scene, the scene itself was imploding under the pressure of increased hostility from the authorities. The group temporarily relocated to New York, where they were to perform an extended nightly engagement—an elaborately staged presentation alternately titled *Pigs and Repugnant* or *Absolutely Free*—at the Garrick Theater in Greenwich Village.

Frank and Gail rented an apartment in the West Village, near the one where Edgard Varèse's widow Louise still lived, and prepared themselves for the birth of their first child, Moon Unit. One such preparation was to get married, which they did at New York's City Hall. The clerk asked Zappa if he had a wedding ring for his bride, but all Zappa had was the vending machine pen (bearing the inscription "Congratulations from Mayor Lindsay") with which he'd filled out the marriage license. "When we got married, I pinned a ball-point pen on her dress," Zappa recalled, adding, "It was a maternity dress because she was nine months pregnant."³

While living in New York, Zappa's smarter-than-your-average-rock-star reputation earned him an opportunity to record a symphonic album. Titled *Lumpy Gravy* and credited to "Frank Zappa/Abnuceals Emuukha Electric Symphony Orchestra and Chorus," the project was a unique sonic collage of orchestral music, rock band snippets, electronic weirdness, and seemingly random voices engaged in surreal dialogues.

Although *Lumpy Gravy* was released later, it was recorded almost simultaneously with the Mothers of Invention's third release, *We're Only in It for the Money*. A masterful equal-opportunity takedown of both the establishment and the counterculture, the album attacked right-wing politics with "Concentration Moon," skewered hippie politics with "Who Needs the Peace Corps?," savaged sexual politics with "Harry You're a Beast," and eerily presaged the 1970 shootings of Vietnam War protesters at Kent State University with the stark ballad "Mom and Dad." Ending with an extended audio fever-dream haunted by electronic tape-manipulation, *We're Only in It for the Money* was more a continuous concept record than even the Beatles' landmark *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—whose distinctive cover collage was cleverly parodied on *Money* by art director Cal Schenkel. Zappa reportedly phoned Paul McCartney for permission to spoof the Beatles artwork, but no conclusion was reached. Wary of legal action, Verve packaged *Money* with the outside cover on the inside and a less problematic photo of the band on the front.

We're Only in It for the Money's cover wasn't the only element to arouse concern from Verve. The company's list of complaints included a plea that one verse of "Mother People" be excised; Zappa cut the verse, but recorded it backward and inserted it at the end of side one under the title "Hot Poop."

By this point, Zappa had become the Mothers' principal producer, as Tom Wilson's increasing drug use was becoming an impediment. The prevalence of drugs in the rock world caused the sober, hard-working Zappa no small irritation, and many were shocked that such an outlandish-looking nonconformist could disdain them.

"People would do frightening things and think it was fantastic. Then they would discuss it endlessly with the next guy, who had taken the same drug," said Zappa. "I tried marijuana and waited for something to happen. I got a sore throat and it made me sleepy."⁴

By now, the ever-expanding Mothers lineup had been augmented by two new, classically trained members, reeds player Ian Underwood and vibraphonist/percussionist Art Tripp. But just as the decade was reaching its psychedelic apex, Zappa jabbed a finger in the eye of the Love Generation with *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets*, a left-field project that simultaneously honored and subverted the R&B songs he'd loved as a teenager. With elaborate, albeit slightly twisted, doo-wop arrangements, he reworked *Freak Out!*'s "Anyway the Wind Blows" and debuted "Love of My Life," a tune dating back to his Studio Z days.

Even by his own audience's broad-minded standards, *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets* was a deeply unconventional move. Some of Zappa's bandmates felt the same way. "Ray Collins and Roy Estrada knew about that kind of music and Jimmy Carl Black too," Zappa noted. "But it was not up Ian Underwood's alley, or Art Tripp's or Bunk Gardner's. They thought it was moron music."⁵

GUJAR HERO, BIZARRE HERO

With newborn Moon Unit in tow, Frank and Gail moved back to California, first to a log cabin-styled house in Laurel Canyon, then to their longtime residence in North Hollywood. As opposed to his Studio Z days, where he'd made his home in a recording studio, Zappa now had the luxury of putting a professional-quality recording studio in his home. With the Mothers' Verve contract reaching its bitter end, Herb Cohen cut a distribution deal with Warner Bros. Records that allowed Zappa to take charge of his own label, Bizarre Records.

Bizarre's debut release was the Mothers of Invention double album *Uncle Meat*. A dazzling, sprawling declaration of independence, *Uncle Meat* showcased Zappa's many facets, from the demented doo-wop of "Electric Aunt Jemima" and "The Air" to the sizzling instrumental "Ian Underwood Whips It Out" to the avant-garde meditation "Project X." The album also featured several instrumental themes that would become Zappa standards, including the enchantingly intricate "A Pound for a Brown on the Bus" and the masterfully jazzy "King Kong."

In addition to studio recordings, *Uncle Meat* included several live tracks, including a recasting of the garage-rock anthem "Louie Louie" using the grand pipe organ of London's Royal Albert Hall. That same London concert, on October 28, 1968, saw the Mothers joined on stage by fourteen members of the BBC Symphony for a groundbreaking rock-and-classical concert that would see release twenty-five years later as *Ahead of Their Time*. Ever the multi-media provocateur, Zappa also began shooting an *Uncle Meat* movie in late 1969, although it would remain unfinished for around twenty years.

Zappa was poised to create a Bizarre empire, with the record label at its core. He formed a sister imprint, Straight Records, which was launched with the 1969 release of the seminal Zappa-produced Captain Beefheart album *Trout Mask Replica*. Subsequent Bizarre and Straight releases came from future shock-rock star Alice Cooper, eccentric street singer Wild Man Fischer, former Mothers bassist Jeff Simmons, and the GTOs. The latter group was comprised of several prominent L.A. rock groupies, including Christine Frka, a babysitter for the Zappa kids, and Pamela Miller, later known as groupie memoirist Pamela Des Barres. Bizarre/Straight also released albums by esteemed

cult singer/songwriter Tim Buckley and a cappella group the Persuasions, as well as archival material from rebel comics Lenny Bruce and Lord Buckley. Cal Schenkel's Nifty, Tough and Bitchen art department gave all of Bizarre/Straight's releases a distinctive, slightly demented visual stamp.

Captain Beefheart and the Magic Band: My Human Gets Me Blues

Much rock music that once was considered harsh and "difficult" has become familiar and even broadly viable in the marketplace. Iggy and the Stooges' 1973 recording "Search and Destroy" has been transformed from a desperate cry at hard rock's outer limits into the soundtrack of a TV commercial for Nike. But the music of Captain Beefheart seems nearly as problematic for today's mass audience as it was in 1969 despite years of critical exegesis, CD reissues, and concert re-creations.

Born in 1941 in Glendale, California, Don Van Vliet was a promising art student who shared a passion for blues and R&B with his adolescent friend, Frank Zappa. With Zappa's encouragement, Don taught himself to play harmonica, guitar, piano, soprano saxophone, and bass clarinet in a rough but expressive style. He took the stage name Captain Beefheart and formed the first version of the Magic Band. Such early albums as *Safe as Milk* (1967) sounded like the work of an above-average Sunset Strip blues-rock band with a hooting, gravel-voiced lead singer, as Beefheart freely explored his four-and-a-half-octave vocal range.

Trout Mask Replica was something else entirely. Produced by Zappa and released on his Bizarre label in 1969, the sprawling two-disc set was recorded in just two days after eight months of tortuous Magic Band rehearsals. Beefheart often taught his songs to the group by whistling, drawing diagrams, or playing all the instrumental parts on the piano, then leaving it to percussionist John "Drumbo" French to translate his ideas for guitars, bass, and drums.

Nothing about the album seemed to have a clear precedent in rock music: the lurching, unpredictable shifts in time signatures, the squalling saxophone outbursts, the physically challenging but perfectly synchronized guitar parts of Zoot Horn Rollo (Bill Harkleroad) and Antennae Jimmy Semens (Jeff Cotton). Through twenty-eight songs, Beefheart groaned, shouted, and chortled his Dadaist lyrics.

A core of amazed listeners did indeed "get him." *Trout Mask Replica*, critic Lester Bangs later wrote, "was not even 'ahead' of its time in 1969. Then and now, it stands outside time, trends, fads, hypes . . . constituting a genre unto itself: truly, a musical Monolith if ever there was one" (pp. 188–89).¹

Captain Beefheart's later albums like *The Spotlight Kid* (1971), *Clear Spot* (1972), and *Doc at the Radar Station* (1980) were often inspired but proved scarcely more commercially viable than their illustrious predecessor. Not counting *Bongo Fury*, a one-off collaboration with Frank Zappa in 1975, he never placed an album in the *Billboard* Top 100. But Devo, Talking Heads, the

B-52s, and John Lydon of the Sex Pistols and Public Image Ltd. all have acknowledged the influence and impact of Beefheart's singular artistry.

In 1982 Captain Beefheart released his final album, *Ice Cream for Crow*, and then retired to the Mojave Desert to pursue painting. "Not many people seem to have things in common with me," he told Lester Bangs. "I guess what intrigues me the most is something like seeing somebody wash my windows—that's like a symphony" (p. 192).

A. S.

1. Lester Bangs, "Captain Beefheart Is Alive," reprinted in *Main Lines, Blood Feasts, and Bad Taste: A Lester Bangs Reader*, edit. John Morthland (New York: Anchor Press, 2003), 188–189.

Like Zappa's business, the Mothers were also growing—into a ten-piece band, with the addition of guitarist/vocalist Lowell George (who would later found Little Feat) and Bunk Gardner's trumpet-playing brother, Buzz. But only one Mother, Ian Underwood, played on Zappa's next project, *Hot Rats*. Beyond its arresting cover photograph of a mystical-looking Christine Frka rising out of an abandoned swimming pool, the album was ambitious tour de force that raucously cross-bred acid rock and electric jazz.

In place of the Mothers, Zappa tapped the talents of an assortment of notable jazz and R&B players, including bassists Max Bennett and Shuggie Otis (son of Johnny), drummer John Guerin. Zappa also tapped a pair of electric violinists, French jazzman Jean-Luc Ponty on one track and Don "Sugarcane" Harris (previously half of the 1950s R&B vocal duo Don and Dewey) on two others. A state-of-the-art sixteen-track recording board allowed Zappa to do massive amounts of overdubbing, resulting in the best-sounding album he'd ever made. *Hot Rats* was a primarily instrumental effort, with Captain Beefheart's rendition of "Willie the Pimp" as its sole vocal.

Hot Rats begins with "Peaches En Regalia," a majestic, ebullient theme with which Zappa would open his concerts for years thereafter. Zappa's guitar improvisations dominated the album on such tracks as "Willie the Pimp," "The Gumbo Variations," and "Son of Mr. Green Genes," his extended solos soared and screamed, beckoning listeners down harmonic pathways unimagined in psychedelia's wildest flights. If he hadn't been recognized as such before, *Hot Rats* marked Zappa's emergence as a bona fide guitar idol.

At a 1969 concert in Boston, legendary jazz saxophonist Rahsaan Roland Kirk joined the Mothers onstage for a wild jam session, which gave the show's promoter, veteran jazz impresario George Wein, an idea. Wein came up with the concept of a package tour matching the Mothers of Invention with Kirk, jazz vibraphonist Gary Burton, and the Duke Ellington Orchestra.

During the tour, Zappa saw Ellington, a bona fide living legend of American music, begging a promoter's aide for \$10. Worrying that his career future would be similarly bleak, he disbanded the Mothers of Invention (although he would retain the name for future lineups). "The jobs didn't pay well," Zappa

complained. "An average tour, like the 1969 tour, I had to take \$400 out of my bank account just to go on the tour. And at the end of the tour I was \$10,000 in debt. Everybody else had been paid—I had to guarantee them their salaries, they had their food paid, their hotel paid, their salary paid—they got a weekly check, whether they worked or not. It was the only way I could keep the band together."⁶

Such financial considerations were no small thing for Zappa, who already had another mouth to feed when his son Dweezil was born in September 1969. (Another son, Ahmet, would arrive in 1974, followed by another daughter, Diva, in 1979.)

Although he'd broken up the group, Zappa still had hours of Mothers material in the can, and planned to release it in a giant, multi-album set. When such a magnum opus proved impractical, some of the material was packaged on individual albums, beginning with the 1970 LPs *Burnt Weeny Sandwich* and *Weasels Ripped My Flesh*. *Weasels* featured the fanciful teen-angst rocker "My Guitar Wants to Kill Your Mama," a reworking of his old Ramblers tune "Directly from My Heart to You" featuring Sugarcane Harris, and a song whose title blended Claude Debussy with an image from his youth in Baltimore, "Prelude to the Afternoon of a Sexually Aroused Gas Mask."

As the 1960s drew to a close, Zappa's music was beginning to gain widespread respect. For instance, Jean-Luc Ponty's *King Kong: Jean-Luc Ponty Plays the Music of Frank Zappa* was released in 1969. In addition to Zappa—who arranged all of the tracks, as well as playing guitar on one number and contributing a new twenty-minute orchestral composition—the album featured a host of West Coast jazzmen as well as Mothers Underwood and Tripp, plus versatile jazz pianist George Duke, who would soon become a Mother himself.

Zappa had continued his orchestral writing during various Mothers tours, and ultimately assembled it into "200 Motels," an ambitious, Kafka-esque saga of a rock band on the road. He put together a new set of musicians equal to the task of performing his demanding compositions. The original Mothers lineup had grown out of a rock and roll/rhythm and blues bar band, and was comprised largely of musicians unfamiliar with the complex time signatures and demanding arrangements that Zappa favored. In contrast, he recruited his new musical cohorts—players who were up to the demands of their boss's ambitious compositions—from the top ranks of jazz and rock.

On May 15, 1970, Zappa presented "200 Motels" in concert at Los Angeles's Pauley Pavilion as an ambitious blend of rock and "serious" music, with Zappa and his new sidemen—including keyboardist George Duke and drummer Aynsley Dunbar—playing the rock portions, while conductor Zubin Mehta led the Los Angeles Philharmonic on the rest.

After the show, Zappa ran into singers Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan, whose band the Turtles had been reliable 1960s hit makers but had recently dissolved amidst some nasty business disputes with their record company. The pair soon joined up with Zappa's new Mothers lineup (which also included ex-Turtles bassist Jim Pons) as lead singers. Because they were still embroiled

in Turtles-related litigation that prevented them from working under their own names, Volman and Kaylan were cryptically rechristened the Phlorescent Leech (later shortened to Flo) and Eddie. When Zappa took “200 Motels” on the road, Flo and Eddie became an invaluable addition to the show, with their manic energy and comic sensibility enhancing his sardonic scenarios.

In early 1971, Zappa and the new Mothers joined with director Tony Palmer in London to create a motion picture version of *200 Motels*, which featured the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra as well as Theodore Bikel, Ringo Starr, and the Who’s drummer Keith Moon, plus old friends Motorhead Sherwood and Jimmy Carl Black, and members of the GTOs. To mark the end of the movie shoot, the Royal Philharmonic was scheduled to perform the orchestral “200 Motels” at London’s Royal Albert Hall on February 8. Instead, about 4,000 Zappa fans were turned away when the concert was canceled when the Royal Albert Hall’s management deemed the piece’s text to be unsuitable. A furious Zappa later initiated legal proceedings against the prestigious venue.

The *200 Motels* selection titled “Touring Can Make You Crazy” found no better expression than on Zappa’s 1971 European tour. During a December 4 concert at the Casino de Montreux in Geneva, a fire broke out, caused by either faulty wiring or a concertgoer setting off fireworks. The fire started during Don Preston’s “King Kong” synthesizer solo, and Zappa directed the audience to calmly leave. That proved difficult, as the hall’s management had chained shut some doors that were needed for evacuation. Although no lives were lost, the Mothers’ equipment was destroyed in the inferno, which burned the entire building down. (The incident became the subject of the classic hard rock hit “Smoke on the Water” by Deep Purple, whose members were present at the show.)

Zappa and the band decided to cancel most of the ten dates remaining on the tour, but wanted to end the tour at London’s Rainbow Theatre as originally planned. With rented gear, they played a pair of two-show nights at the Rainbow. During the encore of the first night’s early show, a concert attendee named Trevor Charles Howell ran up from the audience and pushed Zappa off the stage and onto the concrete floor of the orchestra pit fifteen feet below, leaving him seriously injured. Outside the concert hall, rumors spread that Zappa had been killed.

TOURING, TAUNTING, TESTIFYING

In his plunge from the Rainbow stage, Zappa suffered a multiple-fractured ankle, a broken rib, a hole in the back of his head, and a crushed larynx. The injury to his larynx resulted in his voice dropping in pitch by a third. His leg never healed correctly; doctors suggested the ankle be re-broken and re-set, but Zappa declined the offer. Thereafter, one of his legs was shorter than the other, causing him chronic back pain.

After a year-long recuperation, Zappa was finally able to tour again, but in the future he would make sure that there was always a bodyguard nearby. Fans would become familiar with bodyguard John Smothers, a bald, stocky African American man who stood on stage for the duration of every show, and who would come to figure extensively in Zappa lore.

While recuperating from his injuries, Zappa created two of his most bracing jazz-rock albums, *Waka/Jawaka* and *The Grand Wazoo*. Both were characterized by lavishly arranged horns and the electrifying keyboards of George Duke. At around the same time, Herb Cohen let the Bizarre label fade away, and launched DiscReet Records in its place.

Zappa's growing reputation as a master guitarist helped him to reach more of a mainstream audience with the rock-oriented early 1970s albums *Over-Nite Sensation* and *Apostrophe (')*. The former featured good-humored surrealism with the dental floss-farming scenario of "Montana," alongside the openly sexual narratives of "Dirty Love" and "Dinah-Moe Humm."

Zappa's often-adolescent attraction to sexual themes earned him scorn from music critics, and cost him many of his original fans. But the artist enjoyed nothing so much as sticking a sharp thumb in the eye of political correctness, even as political correctness was just becoming an American cultural trait.

Beyond what many saw as a puerile attachment to X-rated humor, Zappa was still reacting to his obscenity arrest ten years earlier. Ever since a harmlessly prurient audiotape had turned him into a convicted felon, Zappa insisted on continually testing the limits of free speech. He waved his dirty lyrics like a red flag before a bull, taunting American sensibilities to ensure that he would never again be submitted to the humiliation he endured at the hands of the San Bernardino County Sheriff's Office.

As he put it himself, "A person can only be offended by smuttiness if they believe in smut as a concept and believe in the concept of dirty words—which I don't. It's always seemed to be something that bothered rock writers more than anybody else."⁷

Apostrophe (') included the gospel-grounded George Duke collaboration "Uncle Remus," as well as power trio improvisations with ex-Cream bassist Jack Bruce and Derek and the Dominos drummer Jim Gordon. But the album's best-known song was "Don't Eat the Yellow Snow," based on an old winter-time joke. The song became an unexpected airplay hit after a Pittsburgh radio station cut the ten-minute track down to a more airplay-friendly three minutes. Zappa, on tour in Europe at the time, phoned L.A. and instructed his engineer to edit the track to conform to the Pittsburgh version, and the result became one of his most popular tunes.

Zappa maintained a frantic composing and performing pace between 1973 and 1977, and he collected the fruits of his labors into a projected four-LP boxed set called *Läther*. As complete a picture of Zappa's multifarious interests as one could imagine, *Läther* offered, among other things, orchestral

works large and small; more scatological storytelling; red-hot jazz-rock; paint-peeling guitar licks; and even an anthropomorphic mini-opera called “The Adventures of Gregory Peccary.”

In light of the cost and scale of *Läther*, Warner Bros. declined to release the massive package in its intended form. In December 1977, an irate Zappa brought a test pressing of the album to L.A. radio station KROQ and played it in its entirety, offering it for free to any listener who wanted to tape it. The *Läther* flap was later settled when Zappa re-packaged its tracks into four single LPs, *Zappa in New York*, *Studio Tan*, *Sleep Dirt*, and *Orchestral Favorites*. (The complete *Läther* would finally be issued as a three-CD set in 1996.)

Free of what he termed the “contractual bondage” of his Warner Bros. deal, Zappa launched a new label, Zappa Records, distributed by Phonogram. The label’s first release was 1979’s *Sheik Yerbouti*. Much like *Uncle Meat* before it, *Sheik Yerbouti* was a broad-ranging expression of creative freedom, with guitar instrumentals (the saber-toothed “Rat Tomago”), clever spoofs of disco and punk (the bouncy “Dancin’ Fool” and the shrieking “I’m So Cute,” respectively), as well sexually themed tunes as “Jones Crusher,” “Bobby Brown Goes Down,” and “Jewish Princess.” The latter raised an outcry from the Anti-Defamation League of the B’nai B’rith, but Zappa never apologized for his use of exaggerated stereotypes.

Sheik Yerbouti was followed by the epic concept effort *Joe’s Garage*, originally contained on three LPs divided between two separately released albums. *Joe’s Garage* consisted of a series of songs strung based around a narrative set in a dystopian world where music is outlawed. Zappa felt that his concept was no fantasy, as the newly minted Iranian theocracy had already declared rock and roll illegal within its borders, and subsequent developments in the United States bore out the concept’s prescience. While uneven, *Joe’s Garage*’s highlights included one of Zappa’s most heartbreaking guitar ballads, “Watermelon in Easter Hay”; a memorable remake of “Lucille Has Messed My Mind Up,” an R&B gem he originally wrote for Jeff Simmons; and “Catholic Girls,” a kind of carnal companion piece to “Jewish Princess.”

After another instance of what he saw as uncalled-for corporate interference, Zappa Records came to an end. This time, rather than anyone crying foul over a dirty joke, the flap was political. Phonogram balked at distributing his single “I Don’t Want to Get Drafted,” a visceral yet tuneful reaction to President Jimmy Carter’s reintroduction of the military draft. Thereafter, Zappa would release his music on a new label, Barking Pumpkin, which was initially distributed through CBS.

Nineteen eighty-one saw the first batch of Barking Pumpkin releases, including a three-LP set comprised entirely of guitar solos, with the self-deprecating title *Shut Up ’N Play Yer Guitar*. Offered to fans exclusively via mail order under the assumption that it would have limited commercial appeal, the package far outsold expectations, and remains a fan favorite.

Zappa's 1982 release *Ship Arriving Too Late to Save a Drowning Witch* spawned a surprise hit in "Valley Girl," a novelty tune built around daughter Moon's parody of the lingo-laden ramblings of spoiled southern Californian teens. When Moon played "Valley Girl" during an interview on Los Angeles's KROQ, the station's phones lit up. The combination of Frank's ravenous beat and Moon's self-involved twittering subsequently caught on at stations across the United States, making "Valley Girl" the only Zappa single to reach the Top Forty.

Despite his frequently voiced distaste for the pop music world, Zappa always seemed to harbor a yearning for a mainstream hit, dating back to his earliest recordings at Studio Z. So there was more than a little irony attached to the fact that his sole top hit single would be driven by a comic monologue from his daughter, who had only elbowed her way into the studio as a ploy to spend some extra time with her busy dad.

Nineteen eighty-three saw the release of the two-volume *London Symphony Orchestra*, consisting of several orchestral Zappa pieces conducted by noted classical musician Kent Nagano. The following year brought *Boulez Conducts Zappa: The Perfect Stranger*, a collaboration with the French modernist composer and conductor Pierre Boulez, whose name had been included on *Freak Out!*'s roster of influences.

Although he still made rock albums, Zappa continued to accumulate respect in the classical world. He even conducted some Edgard Varèse works at a concert honoring the composer's 100th birthday, and saw far wider interest in his own compositions than ever before.

A unique episode that brought the eighteenth and twentieth centuries into sync occurred after Gail Zappa heard about a baroque composer named, of all things, Francesco Zappa. The older Zappa's only surviving music was a set of string trios, which the younger Zappa arranged and recorded using his newest musical tool, the Synclavier.

For his own compositions, the Synclavier's computerized functions allowed Frank to create music of speed and intricacy well beyond human technical abilities. The instrument opened a new world of musical possibilities for Zappa. His intense Synclavier-realized 1986 effort *Jazz from Hell* won him his first Grammy Award, for Best Rock Instrumental Performance.

While Zappa continued to create adventurous, distinctive new music at a steady pace through the 1980s, he also found himself in a new, high-profile role as a media personality. In the mid-1980s, popular culture went through one of its periodic periods of consternation over the supposed ill effects of rock and pop lyrics dealing with sex, violence, drugs, and other hot-button topics. A group known as the Parents Resource Music Center—comprised largely of well-connected Washington, D.C., women, most of them wives of government officials and prominent businessmen—advocated a labeling system for music, much as had been created for movies twenty years before. Two principals in the group were Tipper Gore, wife of then-Senator and future

Vice President Al Gore; and Susan Baker, wife of Reagan Treasury Secretary James Baker.

The issues raised by the PMRC resulted in Capitol Hill hearings of the Senate Commerce, Technology and Transportation Committee on September 19, 1985. Various conservative critics of pop music testified to the corrosive effects of naughty song lyrics, but they were countered by testimony from Zappa, as well as Dee Snider, frontman of the pop-metal band Twisted Sister, and middle-of-the-road icon John Denver.

The PMRC proposed record labeling as a method for parents to exercise control over their children's musical choices. But Zappa viewed labeling as an artistic scarlet letter that set up a system of condemnatory classifications that would provide an excuse for radio stations not to play, and retailers not to sell, certain releases. Zappa saw the music business heading down a slippery slope toward censorship, and his testimony assailing the PMRC was front-page news across the country. His appearance on Capitol Hill shocked many who were unaccustomed to his caustic wit, while others were surprised that the scraggly wiseacre they remembered from the 1960s had metamorphosed into a serious, articulate spokesman in short hair and a business suit. Although the PMRC ultimately retreated and the record industry compromised by adopting the now-familiar black-and-white Parental Advisory label, Zappa had emerged as a passionate public advocate for free speech. In a sense, he was teaching a new generation what he'd learned back in San Bernardino County about the fragility of First Amendment rights.

Capitalizing on the issue, Zappa's next album was the pointedly titled *Frank Zappa vs. The Mothers of Prevention*. Its centerpiece was the extended track "Porn Wars," a nightmarish audio epic that combined Synclavier music with manipulated tapes of the hearings that featured the voices of Senators Al Gore, Fritz Hollings, Paula Hawkins, and Slade Gorton (plus never-before-heard snippets of dialogue from *Lumpy Gravy*).

The Fall: Prole Art Threat

Founded in 1976 by lead singer and lyricist Mark E. Smith (born 1957 in Manchester, England), the Fall are the longest-running band to emerge from the U.K. punk rock scene. By 2005, the group had released *seventy-eight* official albums, although only a handful of these have ever reached the U.K. chart (and no Fall album has ever reached the *Billboard* Top 200). Smith has often expressed his contempt for musicians as professional craftsmen—one reason why more than fifty players have passed through the Fall during the past three decades. Smith is a keen and eclectic listener, however, whose influences include 1960s garage rock, the early Velvet Underground, reggae, disco, and rockabilly. In addition to their hundreds of original compositions, the Fall have covered songs by the Kinks, Sister Sledge, Captain Beefheart, and Frank Zappa.

Fall lyrics, all penned by Smith, weave together rhymes, slogans, critical observations, and details of daily life in the north of England. He sings, mutters, chants, and shouts his words in a continuous verbal flow over instrumental backing that ranges from guitar-powered neo-rockabilly to synth-flavored dance-pop, all propelled by a powerful backbeat. In this mix, Smith's voice and lyrics are the most consistently abrasive and confrontational elements. They are also what make the Fall's best music so mysterious, gripping, and timeless.

Smith, declared one writer, "is the sort of artist whose lyrical content is, at times, closer in detail and delivery to writers like James Joyce and Philip Larkin: witty, bilious wordplay set amongst a backdrop of decaying brick and haunted corners. . . . [He] slices a rusty scalpel through life's sores, picking apart woolly liberalism, self-pity and corrupt hypocrisy, to name but a few of his pet hates."

A. S

AN AMERICAN COMPOSER

Having made two feature films (*200 Motels* and the 1979 concert movie *Baby Snakes*), Zappa entered the nascent home video market with the 1984 release *Does Humor Belong in Music?* Not surprisingly, its distributor Sony Video Software felt it deserved a warning sticker due to foul language and a brief moment of female toplessness. Faced with this attempt to slap a label on his work, Zappa changed distributors to MPI Home Video. Finding an ally in MPI, he signed a distribution deal with the company for his Honker Home Video label, which released a series of new and old Zappa titles, including *Baby Snakes*, *Uncle Meat*, *Video from Hell*, *The True Story of 200 Motels*, and *The Amazing Mr. Bickford*, the last of which was a showcase for the creations of clay animator Bruce Bickford. In other business ventures, Zappa achieved cottage-industry successes with his mail-order merchandise arm Barfko-Swill and the Los Angeles rehearsal space Joe's Garage.

After many years of often frustrating touring, Zappa resolved to return to the road in 1988 with a ten-piece band that had learned more than 100 of his songs. He even managed to bring along the monstrous Synclavier. Dubbed "Broadway the Hard Way," the tour ran from February through June 1988, although it was not originally intended to terminate that early. Zappa reportedly disbanded the enterprise prematurely due to tension between most of his band members and his bassist/musical lieutenant Scott Thunes.

Zappa claimed to have lost \$400,000 on the tour, and vowed never to go on the road again. Fortunately for his fans, the 1988 tour yielded the live albums *Broadway the Hard Way*, *The Best Band You Never Heard in Your Life*, and *Make a Jazz Noise Here*. Various performances from the tour also

appeared in the *You Can't Do That on Stage Anymore* series, six double CDs of previously unreleased live material dating back to 1965.

In 1989, Zappa published his autobiography *The Real Frank Zappa Book*. The volume debunked various Zappa-related myths and included personal anecdotes and touring stories, as well as discussions of his take on politics.

When the Soviet Union fell after generations of cold war tensions, Zappa was eager to release his long-banned recordings throughout the former Soviet bloc. After visiting Russia in 1989, he returned in 1990 under the aegis of cable TV channel the Financial News Network, to promote media coverage of business opportunities in the Eastern Europe.

On his way home, he stopped off in the newly formed Czech Republic, where he met with that country's new president, Vaclav Havel, a playwright and longtime Zappa fan. Havel proposed that Zappa take on a more formal role with the Czechs, representing them in matters of trade, tourism, and culture. But after hearing that Zappa made some unflattering comments to Havel about then-Vice President Dan Quayle, the U.S. government reportedly suggested that the Czechs disassociate themselves from Zappa. Zappa's role was downgraded to that of unofficial cultural emissary. Coincidentally or not, the U.S. Secretary of State at the time was James Baker, husband of PMRC founder Susan Baker.

In the former Czechoslovakia, one of the most popular underground bands was the Plastic People of the Universe, named after a Mothers song from *Absolutely Free*. While visiting there, Zappa was moved by the risks taken by his fans. He explained, "In a club in Prague, there were two guys who said that they had been grabbed by the secret police, and before they were beaten, the guy said, 'We are now going to beat the Zappa music out of you.' And nobody in the audience seemed too surprised about it."

In the spring of 1990, Zappa fell ill and was rushed to a hospital emergency room. There, doctors detected prostate cancer, which had been spreading for as long as ten years and had grown to inoperable levels. He attempted radiation treatments, with limited success. He kept his condition a secret until the fall of 1991, when he backed out of appearing at Zappa's Universe, a series of tribute concerts featuring various ex-Mothers, the Persuasions, the Orchestra of Our Time, and other Zappa-related performers. Aware that news organizations were poised to report Zappa's illness to the public, Moon and Dweezil Zappa held a press conference to explain their father's absence.

Despite the debilitating effects of his disease and the ravages of the drugs used to treat it, Zappa became involved with the German new music outfit the Ensemble Modern. The group decamped to Los Angeles, where they rehearsed Zappa material for a series of concerts in September 1992 in Berlin, Frankfurt, and Vienna. These concerts were the source of the 1993 album *The Yellow Shark*, which featured the simmering "Outrage at Valdez" and the breathless "None

of the Above,” as well as new arrangements of the Zappa classics “Uncle Meat,” “Pound for a Brown,” and “Dog Breath Variations.”

Zappa’s ill health made it impossible for him to attend the entire series of shows. One of his last efforts with the Ensemble Modern was to record new versions of the complete works of Edgard Varèse. Frank Zappa passed away at home, surrounded by his wife and children, just before 6 P.M. on December 4, 1993.

The first Frank Zappa album to be released after his death was *Civilization Phase III*, in which some listeners heard the artist composing his own elegy. The album was a two-disc odyssey that combined Zappa’s Synclavier work, the Ensemble Modern, and theater-of-the-absurd voices retrieved from the *Lumpy Gravy* sessions and augmented by new utterances from Moon, Dweezil, and others. Some of Zappa’s most intricate, delicate music can be heard on it, alongside passages of unrelenting darkness—as though Zappa stared into the void of the eternal, and captured what he saw and heard there.

In 1995, Frank Zappa was posthumously inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, with a short speech delivered by Lou Reed. Fans couldn’t help but notice the irony, since Zappa and Reed had famously disliked each other ever since 1966, when the Mothers and Reed’s Velvet Underground were Verve labelmates/rivals.

As the rivalries and hostilities of the past faded in the wake of Zappa’s death, his music was finding new life, in concert halls and on record. The Ensemble Modern released two more albums of Zappa compositions, and discs comprised of Zappa material were released by the Persuasions, big-band leader Ed Palermo, and others.

In the years since, the Zappa Family Trust has released numerous albums of archival Zappa material, with an unknown number of potential releases still in the pipeline as of this writing. Zappa’s industrious work ethic insured that left behind an extensive backlog of unreleased music.

Frank Zappa was a composer, a musician, an activist, a satirist, a cynic, and an idealist. His life and his work were constantly evolving and endlessly intertwined. In a process he called “conceptual continuity,” a melody written in the early 1960s could metamorphose into an orchestral composition in the 1990s, or absurd jokes about prunes or ponchos or mudsharks could resurface where they were least expected. Every minute aspect of his art became part of a career-long jigsaw puzzle in which the pieces fit together, but which in its enormity, could never be completed. Even after his death, the universe Zappa created is still being explored.

“I hate to be a guy sitting around saying, ‘I’m misunderstood,’” Zappa once reflected. “But it’s not even a matter of being misunderstood. It’s a matter of being uncomprehended. I have a lot of different musical questions, and I’m looking for a lot of different musical answers, and if the audience is similarly disposed, then they can take the course with me.”⁸

TIMELINE

May 22, 1963

Frank Zappa opens Studio Z in Cucamonga, California.

June 30, 1964

Frank Zappa joins the Mothers.

February 26, 1965

Freak Out!, the debut LP by the renamed Mothers of Invention, is released.

June 26, 1967

The Mothers celebrate the Summer of Love by releasing the savagely satirical *Absolutely Free*.

March 4, 1968

Zappa and the Mothers release *We're Only in It for the Money*.

June 30, 1968

Zappa's symphonic album *Lumpy Gravy* is released.

June 16, 1969

Trout Mask Replica, the Zappa-produced avant-garde classic by Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band, is released on Zappa's Straight label.

March 30, 1970

Zappa's largely instrumental album *Hot Rats* reaches the British Top Ten.

May 15, 1970

The Mothers of Invention perform Zappa's *200 Motels* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Zubin Mehta.

June 5–6, 1971

The Mothers perform a two-night stand at New York's Fillmore East. The shows are recorded for the album *Fillmore East, June 1971*. On the second night, the Mothers jam with John Lennon and Yoko Ono; recordings from that show will be released on the Lennon album *Sometime in New York City*.

September 7, 1973

Zappa and the Mothers release *Over-nite Sensation*, one of Zappa's most popular albums.

March 22, 1974

Apostrophe (') is released. It will reach Number Ten in the United States, making it Zappa's highest-charting album, as well as his second consecutive gold album.

April 11, 1975

Zappa and the Mothers begin a six-week tour in support of the album *Bongo Fury*, with the band joined by Captain Beefheart on vocals.

August 9, 1976

Grand Funk Railroad's album *Good Singin', Good Playin'*, produced by Frank Zappa, is released.

October 21, 1978

Frank Zappa hosts *Saturday Night Live*.

March 3, 1979

Zappa releases *Sheik Yerbouti*, a double LP that contains the popular disco parody "Dancin' Fool."

September 3, 1979

Zappa releases *Joe's Garage Act I*, which will be followed in two months by *Joe's Garage, Acts II and III*.

September 4, 1982

"Valley Girl," a collaboration between Zappa and daughter Moon Unit, enters the Top Forty, where it will peak at number two.

September 18, 1985

Frank Zappa testifies before the State Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation, rebutting efforts by the Parents Music Resource Center to place warning labels on rock albums containing controversial language.

March 2, 1988

Zappa wins a Grammy for Best Rock Instrumental for his album *Jazz from Hell*.

June 9, 1988

Zappa performs his final concert at the Palasport in Genoa, Italy.

December 4, 1993

Frank Zappa passes away.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Freak Out!, 1966

Absolutely Free, 1967

We're Only in It for the Money, 1968

Uncle Meat, 1969

Hot Rats, 1969

Weasels Ripped My Flesh, 1970

Frank Zappa's 200 Motels, 1971

The Grand Wazoo, 1972

One Size Fits All, 1975

Bongo Fury, 1975

Sheik Yerbouti, 1979

Shut Up 'N Play Yer Guitar, 1981

Jazz from Hell, 1986

The Yellow Shark, 1993

Läther, 1996

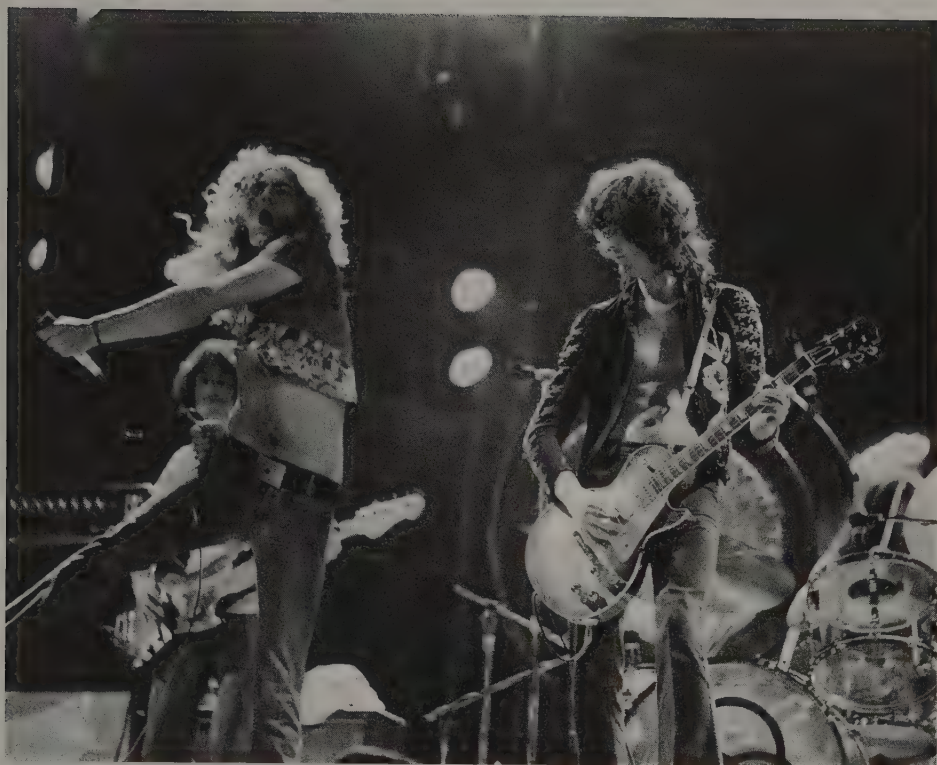
NOTES

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2. Patrick and Barbara Salvo, "Frank Zappa Interview," *Melody Maker* (January 4, 1974), available online at home.online.no/~corneliu/melodymaker.htm.
3. David Sheff, "Frank Zappa: The Playboy Interview," *Playboy* (May 2, 1993), p. 60.
4. Ibid, p. 62.
5. David Fricke, "Cruising Down Memory Lane with Frank Zappa," *Trouser Press* (April 1979), p. 20.
6. Andy Gill, "Frank's Wild Years," *Q Magazine*, December 1989, available online at home.online.no/~corneliu/q_interview.htm.
7. Kurt Loder, "Frank Zappa Interview," *Rolling Stone* (1988) available online at home.online.no/~corneliu/rs88.htm.
8. Robert L. Doerschuk and Jim Aikin, "Jazz from Hell," *Keyboard* (February 1987).

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Led Zeppelin

Andy Schwartz

BUILDING A STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

Guitarist Jimmy Page, singer Robert Plant, drummer John Bonham, and bassist John Paul Jones formed Led Zeppelin in August 1968. One year later, the group had broken through to audiences on both sides of the Atlantic and its self-titled debut album had reached the U.K. and U.S. Top Ten.

At its inception, Led Zeppelin was derided by some critics as an overbearing, overloud, and mindless “heavy metal” band. In fact, their music has little of the spiritual gloom and gothic atmosphere characteristic of metal bands like Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden. Zeppelin’s repertoire drew upon diverse influences and traditions including blues from Chicago and the Mississippi

Delta, folk songs of the British Isles, funk and soul, mid-1960s psychedelic rock, and strains of Indian and North African music.

Nonetheless, Led Zeppelin exponentially increased the sonic intensity and visual flash of rock music with dramatic results. The group was at the forefront of a “third wave” in British rock music following the breakthrough of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones in 1963–65 and a subsequent crop of blues-oriented bands like Cream and the early Fleetwood Mac in 1966–68. In the case of many English groups of the first wave, the musicians grew up in the same locale and the bands sometimes played out a good part of their careers within that region. But the musicians who formed Led Zeppelin hailed from two disparate regions (suburban London and the West Midlands) and came together as aspiring professionals rather than as friends who’d grown up playing together.

Zeppelin largely avoided face-to-face contact with the music press and eschewed certain standard industry practices. The band rarely performed on television and maintained a policy (at least in the United Kingdom) of not releasing singles from its albums. Rather than limiting its popularity, the band’s stance lent it an aura of principled musical artistry and a reputation for not giving in to pop trends or commercial pressures.

Led Zeppelin was an enormously popular “people’s band” that also personified the wealth, privilege, and arrogance of international rock stardom at its 1970s apex. Particularly in the United States, their music appealed to teenagers for whom the Beatles and Stones, even Cream and Jimi Hendrix, represented the musical tastes of older siblings. This new generation of rock fans embraced Zeppelin and flocked to its concerts in increasingly larger venues, from 400-capacity clubs to open-air sports stadiums. When its career came to a sudden and tragic end in 1980, Led Zeppelin was one of the most popular and influential rock bands of all time.

JIMMY PAGE (GUITAR)

Led Zeppelin was a collective musical effort from its inception but guitarist Jimmy Page was its instigator, record producer, and driving force. Born January 9, 1944, James Patrick Page grew up in the London suburbs of Heston and Epsom. He was largely self-taught on his instrument that he picked up at age twelve when he fell under the spell of guitarist Scotty Moore’s licks on Elvis Presley’s Sun recording of “Baby, Let’s Play House.” From the 1950s rock and roll of Elvis and Gene Vincent, Jimmy worked his way back to electric blues guitarists like B.B. King and Otis Rush and such pre–World War II country blues artists as Robert Johnson and Skip James. He was also a fan of British folk music and in particular the acoustic guitar players Davy Graham and Bert Jansch.

Page's formal education ended at age fifteen and he joined a beat group called Neil Christian and the Crusaders with whom he made his earliest studio recordings including the 1962 single, "The Road to Love," and a cover of Big Joe Turner's R&B standard, "Honey Hush." When a bout of glandular fever curtailed his touring career, Jimmy enrolled in art school to study painting while continuing to sit in on jam sessions at the Marquee club in London. Mike Leander, a staff producer for Decca Records, was impressed with Page's talent and began to employ him on numerous recording sessions beginning in early 1963 with "Diamonds" by Jet Harris and Tony Meehan, which became a number one hit in the United Kingdom.

Accompanying performers both celebrated (Donovan, Brenda Lee) and obscure (the Lancastrians, Gregory Phillips), Jimmy Page is estimated to have played on 50–60 percent of the hit records recorded in London in the years 1963–66. Studio life, although often tedious and mechanical, afforded Page the chance to play different styles of pop music with a wide array of arrangements and instrumentation. Working with the producers Mike Leander and Shel Talmy, he absorbed the finer points of overdubbing, mixing, tape editing, microphone placement, and other technical aspects of recording. Page later applied this knowledge as a staff producer for Immediate Records where he worked with British blues singer John Mayall and former Velvet Underground vocalist Nico.

In May 1966, Jimmy joined guitarist Jeff Beck (a friend since primary school) for a "super-session" that also included Keith Moon and John Entwistle of the Who and another London sessioneer, John Paul Jones. Although their raucous instrumental, "Beck's Bolero," would not be released for another two years, the creative camaraderie of the session gave rise to talk of a new group with Beck, Page, and the Who rhythm team. When Keith Moon jokingly predicted that the band would "go over like a lead balloon," John Entwistle chimed in, "more like a lead zeppelin."

A few weeks later, Page joined Jeff Beck in a new configuration of Beck's group, the Yardbirds (guitarist Chris Dreja switched to bass). Among the lineup's few recordings was a careening version of the Johnny Burnette rockabilly classic "The Train Kept A-Rollin'," made for the soundtrack of Michelangelo Antonioni's 1966 film *Blowup*. This track ranks with the Yardbirds' greatest studio performances and was a signpost on the road to Led Zeppelin: Two years later, "The Train Kept A-Rollin'" would be the very first song ever played together by the four members of the new group.

In October 1966, when Jeff Beck exited in the midst of an American tour, the Yardbirds were poised to disintegrate. But Jimmy Page, at last extricated from the London studio scene, was thrilled to be on the road in the birthplace of blues, R&B, and rock and roll. The Yardbirds' 1966–67 gigs at Bill Graham's Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco were Jimmy's introduction to the nascent American rock ballroom scene and a far cry from the screaming teenyboppers that still made up a good part of the band's British audience.

The guitarist participated in the Yardbirds' final studio album, *Little Games*, but it failed to revive the band's fading fortunes and in July 1968 drummer Jim McCarty and lead singer Keith Relf called it quits. Jimmy Page and Yardbirds manager Peter Grant hastened to assemble a new band to fulfill the contractual obligation of a two-week tour of Scandinavia. When Chris Dreja left to pursue a career in photography, bassist John Paul Jones was the first to sign on.

JOHN PAUL JONES (BASS AND KEYBOARDS)

John Paul Jones was born John Baldwin to musician parents on January 3, 1946, in the London suburb of Sidcup, Kent. John went on to study music at boarding school where he was equally influenced by blues, modern jazz, and classical music. In 1960, while serving as the organist and choirmaster at a local church, he bought his first bass guitar; two years later he joined his first professional rock band, fronted by Jet Harris and Tony Meehan. On Meehan's recommendation, Jones began receiving regular offers of studio session work.

In the period from 1964–68, John played bass guitar and/or keyboards on hundreds of sessions. His credits include the Rolling Stones, Herman's Hermits, Cat Stevens, and Rod Stewart. Both Jones and Jimmy Page played on Donovan's "Sunshine Superman," a number one U.S./number two U.K. hit in 1966. It was not unusual for John to compose a score for horns and strings the night before, pass out the music at the next day's session, and then conduct the ensemble for the recording.

By 1968, Jones was burnt out from the grinding routine. "I was making a fortune but I wasn't enjoying it anymore," he told Dave Lewis in a 1997 interview. "It was my wife Mo who noticed an item in [English music paper] *Disc* saying that Jimmy was forming a new band out of the old Yardbirds. She prompted me to phone him up. It was the chance to do something different at last."

"I knew [Page] well from the session scene, of course, he was a very respected name. So I rang him up. He was just about to go up to Birmingham to see Robert."¹

ROBERT PLANT (VOCALS, HARMONICA)

Robert Plant was born August 20, 1948, in West Bromwich and grew up in Halesowen. Both towns are in the West Midlands region of Britain, near the city of Birmingham and close to the rural area known as "the Black Country." This name may have derived from the above-ground seams of coal that ran through the landscape or from the black smoke that poured from its factories

and mines in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the forbidding region of Mordor is said to be based on the historic ambience of the Black Country. Despite its history of environmental degradation, the area also contains swaths of beautiful countryside that, along with Tolkien's trilogy, would later inspire some of Plant's pastoral fantasies as a songwriter.

Beginning in his mid-teens, Robert eschewed a career in accounting to sing with a succession of Birmingham-based bands whose styles reflected his eclectic musical states. The Crawling Kingsnakes played blues in emulation of Muddy Waters and Howlin' Wolf; Listen was a white-soul outfit that released a cover version of the Young Rascals' U.S. hit "You Better Run." Band of Joy, with John Bonham on drums, mixed original material with circa-1967 covers of psychedelic rock songs by Buffalo Springfield ("For What It's Worth") and the Jimi Hendrix Experience ("Hey Joe"). None of these groups achieved notable success beyond the Midlands but they gave Robert the chance to strengthen his naturally powerful voice and gain invaluable stage experience.

Plant was working with yet another Midlands band, Hobbstweedle, when Jimmy Page traveled to Birmingham to hear him. The guitarist's first thought was that Plant must have some fatal personality defect: Why else would a vocalist of his caliber still be toiling away in provincial obscurity? As it turned out, the two musicians got on famously from their first record listening session. "Babe I'm Gonna Leave You" by Joan Baez and "You Shook Me" by Muddy Waters were among the tracks that Jimmy played for Robert as examples of the kind of material he aspired to perform with his new band.

Jimmy Page remembers discussing with Plant "what the band's driving force should be, the acoustic and electric. Then I saw John Bonham playing with [American singer-songwriter] Tim Rose at a London club and I knew I didn't have to look any further."²

JOHN BONHAM (DRUMS)

John Henry Bonham was born May 31, 1948, in Redditch, Worcestershire, in the heart of the Black Country. By the age of five, he was banging incessantly on tin cans and empty boxes using forks and knives for drumsticks. His exasperated mother, Joan, bought the boy a snare drum when he was ten; at fifteen, Jack Bonham gave his son the gift of a cheap, badly rusted drum kit which was soon replaced by a professional-quality Premier set. John had been expected to follow his father into the building trades but now there was no turning back: "I was determined to be a drummer as soon as I left school. I was so keen [that] I would have played for nothing. In fact I did for a long time."³

Bonham was only seventeen when he married Patricia Phillips; when their first child, Jason, was born in 1966, the impoverished couple was living in a cramped fifteen-foot house trailer. But the power and precision of his drumming

with regional bands like the Blue Star Trio, the Senators, and Way of Life made “Bonzo” into a local legend in the West Midlands.

Bonham played so loudly that at least one club owner refused to hire any band that included him. But in tandem with his brute power there was a propulsive sense of swing. As in the big-band drumming of Buddy Rich and Gene Krupa, two of his percussive idols, this element of John’s playing *lifted* Led Zeppelin’s music rather than simply nailing it to the floor—and he could swing whether playing with sticks or brushes or even his bare hands. Bonham was one of the first “name” drummers in rock to utilize a smaller kit with very large diameter shells (including his trademark oversized twenty-six-inch bass drum) but many observers agreed that he could produce his huge sound on almost any drum set.

“The Band of Joy had been the real schooling for Bonzo and myself for taking material and stretching it, breaking down the general order of the pop song,” Plant later recalled. “So meeting Jimmy and Jonesy was like a gathering of souls, because Jimmy had been doing that with the Yardbirds in a different form.”⁴

On August 19, 1968, the four musicians gathered for the first time in a small rehearsal room at 22 Gerrard Street in London. Since no one had any original material at hand, they ended up playing the Yardbirds’ arrangement of “The Train Kept A-Rollin’” along with some other blues and rockabilly numbers. John Paul Jones later described this inaugural jam as “quite a stunning experience—wonderful, very exhilarating.”⁵

As “The Yardbirds featuring Jimmy Page,” the quartet commenced a two-week tour of Scandinavia that began with their first public performance on September 7 in Copenhagen. On October 15, they made their live debut as Led Zeppelin at Surrey University. With an eye already cast in the direction of the United States, Jimmy Page and band manager Peter Grant had decided to drop the “a” from “lead” in the belief that Americans would mistakenly pronounce it “leed.”

Peter Grant (born November 1, 1935) had worked around the edges of British show business in the 1950s as a talent booker, bouncer, semi-professional wrestler, and film actor. In 1963, he went to work for pop music promoter Don Arden as a tour manager accompanying visiting American rockers including Gene Vincent, Bo Diddley, and the Everly Brothers. Grant took over management of the Yardbirds in late 1966 after Jimmy Page had joined the band and later hired Richard Cole as the band’s road manager for its final American tour in 1968. Both men would play key roles in the Led Zeppelin story.

Standing approximately six feet, six inches and weighing more than 300 pounds, Peter Grant was an imposing figure—and an extremely intimidating one whenever he chose to be. He was completely and unceasingly devoted to Led Zeppelin: Its four members placed their careers, their fortunes, and sometimes their very lives in his meaty hands. It is emblematic of the faith and trust they shared that no written contract ever existed between Peter Grant and Led Zeppelin.

LED ZEPPELIN (DEBUT)

On September 27, 1968, Led Zeppelin entered Olympic Studios in London. Less than two weeks later, in roughly thirty-five hours of actual studio time, the self-titled debut album, *Led Zeppelin*, was completed. Financed by Peter Grant and Jimmy Page, *Led Zeppelin* was safely “in the can” when Atlantic Records executive Jerry Wexler—acting on a tip from British pop singer Dusty Springfield—signed the group to a one-year contract with four one-year options for an advance of £110,000 (at the time, about U.S. \$210,000). Although the next generation of superstars would command multi-million-dollar advances, in 1968 this was an unprecedented amount of money for a record company to pay for a rock band. Most important, Led Zeppelin was guaranteed creative control over the content and packaging of its recordings.

Olympic Studios possessed only a four-track recorder but it had a superior “room sound.” Combining this natural ambience with the judicious use of echo and careful microphone placement, album producer Page and engineer Glyn Johns created a recording of unusual depth and spaciousness—a sort of supercharged version of the atmospheric Sun Records sound that had captivated Page in his adolescence. Even on the heaviest tracks, each instrument was clearly distinguishable and carefully balanced within the mix.

As a guitarist, Page was more strident than Eric Clapton and less exploratory than Jimi Hendrix. But with his keen ear for recorded sound, he carefully positioned each chord or single-note line within a particular arrangement. Robert Plant, still a work in progress, made up for his lack of subtlety with a palpable air of excitement and enough lung power to match Page blow for blow. John Paul Jones added sturdy bass lines, occasional keyboard touches, and practiced arranging skills; John Bonham was John Bonham, with his huge sound and unerring “in the pocket” time.

The material was assembled hastily but captured the band’s range and eclecticism. The album included two Chicago blues standards (“I Can’t Quit You Baby” and “You Shook Me”), a rearranged holdover from the Yardbirds’ stage show (the intense, doomy “Dazed and Confused”), a pair of folk-based tracks (“Babe I’m Gonna Leave You” and Page’s acoustic showpiece “Black Mountain Side”), and some furious hard rock riffs hitched to catchy pop choruses (“Good Times, Bad Times,” “Communication Breakdown”).

Led Zeppelin set another pattern for the band’s future output in that several songs had been “borrowed” from their original sources without proper credit. “Dazed and Confused” was credited to Jimmy Page when in fact it had been composed by the American singer-songwriter Jake Holmes and released on his 1967 album *The Above-Ground Sound of Jake Holmes*. “Babe, I’m Gonna Leave You,” the Joan Baez recording that Jimmy had played for Robert in their first meeting, somehow became a Page/Plant composition when it appeared on *Led Zeppelin*. (The name of Anne Bredon was added to the credits on later pressings.)

Critical response in Britain was largely favorable. Writing in the counter-culture magazine *Oz*, Felix Dennis likened the disc's impact to that of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper* and the Byrds' *Younger Than Yesterday*: "Very occasionally a long-playing record is released that defies immediate classification or description, simply because it's so obviously a turning point in rock music that only time proves capable of shifting it into eventual perspective. . . . This Led Zeppelin album is like that."⁶ Chris Welch of the U.K. music weekly *Melody Maker* was another influential journalist who championed the band from the beginning.

But so far as Peter Grant was concerned, the United States was *the* key market for his band—and there press reaction was decidedly cool, even caustic. In *Rolling Stone*—by far the most influential American rock magazine—reviewer John Mendelsohn dismissed Jimmy Page as "a very limited producer and a writer of weak, unimaginative songs" and derided Robert Plant for his "strained and unconvincing shouting."⁷ The group was deeply wounded by this harsh critique and for years thereafter Led Zeppelin declined any and all interview requests from *Rolling Stone*. Page, especially, became suspicious and cynical in his attitude toward the press.

When Atlantic released *Led Zeppelin* on January 12, 1969, the band was already two weeks into its first U.S. tour, which began December 26, 1968, in Denver, Colorado. On most dates, Led Zeppelin supported the American band Vanilla Fudge but in January 1969 they headlined the Whisky A Go Go in Los Angeles for a reputation-making multi-night stand. At Bill Graham's Fillmore West in San Francisco, appearing on the bottom of the bill, Led Zeppelin blew away both blues singer Taj Mahal and hometown favorites Country Joe and the Fish. To close out a four-night stand (January 23–26) at the Boston Tea Party in Boston, Massachusetts, the band played for more than four hours—performing the Zeppelin set list twice before joyfully improvising on songs by the Who, the Beatles, and the Rolling Stones.

At a time when much live rock music was performed in the rambling jam style of the Grateful Dead and Jefferson Airplane, Led Zeppelin played with almost overwhelming intensity and expertly controlled dynamics. Their set lists were plotted for maximum impact while allowing for extensive improvisation as the group ranged through intense electric songs and gentle acoustic numbers. Zeppelin had a matched pair of charismatic front men in Jimmy Page and Robert Plant, the guitarist's dark, somewhat forbidding charisma and dancing attack contrasting with the singer's blonde sensuality and statuesque physique.

As author and academic Susan Fast later noted:

The "theatricality" of the performances, their physicality (including the intense depth and volume of the sound), their enormous length, the sometimes meandering improvisations, and even Page's "sloppy" playing—moments during which he is clearly more interested in creating a particular emotional landscape

than in getting all the notes right—were all pressed into the service of celebrating an ecstatic loss of control. . . . [Led Zeppelin] represents spirit of carnivalesque laughter, with its “vulgar, ‘earthy’ quality” and its ability to revive.⁸

In the summer of 1969, Led Zeppelin appeared at several major American rock festivals including the Atlanta International Pop Festival (July 5), the Seattle Pop Festival (July 27), and the Texas International Pop Festival (August 31); in October the band sold out Carnegie Hall in New York. *Led Zeppelin* sold nearly 500,000 copies in its first six months of U.S. release; in July it was certified gold by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA). The album spent a total of ninety-five weeks on the *Billboard* chart, peaking at number ten in the United States and at number six in the United Kingdom. The band achieved these feats largely through the feverish word of mouth created by its live performances, supplemented by increasing if sometimes grudging exposure on FM rock radio (a format then barely three years old).

In Great Britain, album sales were more closely tied to pop radio airplay—which was rarely given to songs of more than three minutes’ duration. That the band refused to allow Atlantic’s U.K. affiliate to edit or release any tracks as singles made the Top Ten breakthrough of *Led Zeppelin* all the more remarkable.

LED ZEPPELIN II

Today it would be unthinkable for a band of Zeppelin’s stature to release two full albums within a single year. *Led Zeppelin II*, however, was released in November 1969—the product of sessions in New York, Los Angeles, and Memphis booked whenever the tour schedule permitted. Many rock performers have created stellar debut albums only to fall short on their sophomore outings. *Led Zeppelin II* maintained the overall quality level of its predecessor while taking the band’s sound in some new directions.

“Thank You,” a majestic mid-tempo song, featured John Paul Jones’s churchy organ, a neat Jimmy Page break on acoustic twelve-string, and a surprisingly tender vocal by Robert Plant (who’d written the lyric for his wife, Maureen). “Heartbreaker” was a cavernous stomper with a furious extended solo by Page. Howlin’ Wolf’s “Killing Floor” provided both the main lyric and guitar riff of “The Lemon Song” before Zeppelin turned it into a jazzy blues jam powered by Jones’s fluid bass lines and some adept rhythmic shifts. “Moby Dick” showcased an abbreviated five-minute version of the John Bonham drum feature that would run for fifteen minutes or more in live performance.

The album’s opening track would become one of Led Zeppelin’s signature songs. “You Need Love” was an obscure Muddy Waters blues number later covered by a British band, the Small Faces. Zeppelin powered up the Faces’ main riff, inserted a noisy, almost avant-garde “freak out” in mid-song, and

created the orgasmic “Whole Lotta Love”—credited to Page/Plant/Jones/Bonham. (Blues songwriter Willie Dixon, the composer of “You Need Love,” won a substantial out-of-court settlement years later.)

Led Zeppelin II shot to number one in Great Britain and—despite another sarcastic thumbs-down from John Mendelsohn in *Rolling Stone*—topped the *Billboard* album chart for seven straight weeks. (The album was certified by the RIAA in November 1999 for sales of over 12 million copies.) Contrary to the group’s stated wishes, Atlantic executives edited and released a U.S. single of “Whole Lotta Love.” It reached number four on the Hot 100, sold over one million copies, and likely sparked sales of several hundred thousand albums. Nevertheless, Peter Grant was livid.

On January 9, 1970—Jimmy Page’s twenty-sixth birthday—Led Zeppelin gave a triumphant performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Filmed for the BBC and later issued as disc one of a double DVD set, it captures the band in a peak early performance. Without the laser light shows and pyrotechnic displays of its later years, Led Zeppelin projects enough sound, energy, and bravado to fill a stadium while maintaining a close-knit, even intimate collective stage presence.

From December 28, 1968, through April 18, 1970, Led Zeppelin played over 150 shows. It was a fast-paced and sometimes grueling regimen with peaks of frenzied excitement dropping off sharply into boredom, restlessness, and longing for home and family. (Plant, Jones, and Bonham all had wives and young children back in England.) Richard Cole’s best-selling tell-all, *Stairway to Heaven: Led Zeppelin Uncensored*, goes into extensive detail about his charges’ notorious exploits: the wholesale destruction of hotel rooms, practical “jokes” both revolting and frightening, and some truly Olympian drinking bouts usually led by John Bonham. (In hindsight, the drummer seems to have suffered chronic, debilitating anxiety caused by the fear of flying and the lengthy separations from his family.) At one post-concert celebration in Frankfurt, Germany, the four musicians along with Cole and Peter Grant “ordered and consumed . . . a total of 280 drinks among the six of us” in four hours.⁹

LED ZEPPELIN III

During a much-needed break in May 1970, Robert Plant and Jimmy Page retreated to a rented cottage in rural Wales called Bron-Yr-Aur (pronounced “Bron-raar”). Without the distraction of friends and family (or even running water), they began to compose new acoustic-based material for a third album. In June, the band commenced recording at Headley Grange—a large, drafty country estate built in 1795—using the Rolling Stones’ mobile unit. “Immigrant Song” and “Out on the Tiles” were potent heavy rock numbers but acoustic songs like “That’s the Way” and “Bron-Yr-Aur Stomp” predominated. Page came

up with a fresh arrangement of the traditional folk ballad “Gallows Pole” while “Hats off to (Roy) Harper” was an extended slide guitar workout built upon Bukka White’s classic Delta blues “Shake ‘Em on Down.”

June 28 found Led Zeppelin back in Britain to headline the Bath Festival of Blues and Progressive Music before an audience of over 200,000. A watershed night in the band’s history, it began at sunset with the opening blast of “Immigrant Song,” one of several numbers performed from the as-yet-unreleased *Led Zeppelin III*, progressed through a newly developed acoustic mini-set, and ended with five encores—the last a frenetic medley of rock and roll classics by Little Richard, Chuck Berry, and Elvis Presley. The Bath Festival cemented Zeppelin’s reputation in Britain as a superstar band on a par with the Who and the Stones.

Led Zeppelin would not perform again in the United Kingdom for nearly nine months. Instead, the band went back to the recording studio to complete basic tracks for the album and then returned to North America in mid-August. On September 19, 1970, nearly eighteen months of touring ended with sold-out early and late shows at New York’s Madison Square Garden for a total box office take in excess of \$200,000.

Led Zeppelin III promptly topped the American and British charts when it was released in October. Yet the album was considered a commercial disappointment when it remained on the *Billboard* list for a mere forty-two weeks, less than half as long as its predecessors. Critical response to the acoustic songs was lukewarm; Led Zeppelin was even accused of copying Crosby, Stills, and Nash. *Rolling Stone* reviewer Lester Bangs wrote that “my main impression was the consistent anonymity of most of the songs” while singling out “That’s the Way” as “the first song they’ve done that has truly moved me. Son of a gun, it’s beautiful.”¹⁰

Robert Plant’s lyrics to “That’s the Way” depict two boyhood friends and the feelings of loss and regret as they grow apart. Some fans and critics have interpreted the song as a metaphor for the band’s relationship with America. The country that had rushed to embrace Led Zeppelin’s music and made the band’s fortune was also teeming with racial tension, police brutality, and gun violence. (Neither Plant nor John Bonham had ever seen an armed policeman until they came to the United States.) In *Stairway to Heaven*, Richard Cole writes of a biker who tried to stab him in a Greenwich Village bar and an irate Memphis concert promoter who pulled a pistol on Peter Grant.

UNTITLED (LED ZEPPELIN IV)

In September 1970, the band returned home to England where Jimmy Page and Robert Plant spent another week working together at Bron-Yr-Aur. Recording sessions began at Island Studios in London but by the New Year, the band was back at Headley Grange where chief engineer Andy Johns once

again manned the Rolling Stones mobile unit. With its gardens and fireplaces, the relaxed atmosphere of the rambling old house encouraged spontaneous sonic experimentation: Bonham setting up his drums in a hallway, Page placing guitar amps in cupboards and closets.

Here the band created the untitled album sometimes known as *Zoso* (for one of the four runic symbols that appear on the disc label) or *Four Symbols* but more often as simply *Led Zeppelin IV*. Regardless, it is *the* all-time classic Zeppelin album: a pinnacle of recorded rock music that flows like one long song, a seamless blend of electric and acoustic music with all of the “light and shade” that Jimmy Page had envisioned in the sound of his dream band.

John Paul Jones brought in a long, complicated blues line that took many hours for the musicians to master. In one section, the instrumentalists are playing entirely different time signatures: Page (guitar) and Jones (bass) in 9/8 and then 5/4, Bonham (drums) in straight 4/4. This challenging riff evolved into “Black Dog,” which Barney Hoskyns calls “one of the most fiendishly intricate songs in all of rock and roll” as well as “one of most diabolically powerful tracks in the Led Zeppelin catalog.”¹¹ On another day, the band had made numerous attempts to record another song (the Indian-influenced “Four Sticks”) when suddenly a frustrated John Bonham hammered out the drum intro to Little Richard’s “Keep A-Knockin’” and Page burst into an infectious Chuck Berry-inspired riff. Simply titled “Rock and Roll,” the new tune was quickly completed and then recorded in just three takes with Rolling Stones road manager Ian Stewart on boogie-woogie piano.

The drumless “Battle of Evermore,” with John Paul Jones on mandolin, is one of several songs in the Zeppelin catalog in which Robert Plant makes oblique or explicit lyrical references to characters from the works of Tolkien (in this case, *The Return of the King*). Robert performed the song as a soaring duet with Sandy Denny—the golden voice of British folk-rock and the only non-member ever to sing on a Led Zeppelin recording. The album’s closing track, “When the Levee Breaks,” was a mournful, droning blues masterpiece propelled by the rolling thunder of Bonham’s drums and Page’s shimmering slide guitar. The members of Zeppelin shared composer credits with country blues singer Memphis Minnie (Minnie Lawler), who wrote and recorded the song two years after the 1927 Mississippi River flood that displaced close to one million people.

In April 1970, Jimmy Page had begun working on a long multi-part song that finally came together at Headley Grange. There, Page and Jones painstakingly worked out the instrumental sections, from the delicate, almost medieval opening (with Jimmy’s acoustic guitar and three recorder parts played by JP) to the majestic, fully electric finish. During the first full rehearsal of the track, Plant dashed off most of the lyrics including the title phrase: “Stairway to Heaven.” The eight-minute track was recorded in February 1971 in London, made its live debut on March 5 at a show in Belfast, and soon became a cornerstone of the band’s live show.

"Stairway to Heaven" seemed to resonate with its listeners as no other Zeppelin song before or after: as a lyrical fable of false materialism and spiritual transcendence, a dramatic showcase for Page's towering guitar architecture, a very catchy tune, or some combination of all these and more. Decades of saturation radio airplay have turned "Stairway to Heaven" into a cliché of progressive rock and 1970s pop culture. In 1988, the Texas post-punk band Butthole Surfers released an album titled *Hairway to Steven*; in January 1990, a Florida radio station played "Stairway to Heaven" for twenty-four hours to introduce its short-lived all-Led Zeppelin format. In 1993, the Australian singer Rolf Harris had a number seven hit in the United Kingdom with a cover of the song; country superstar Dolly Parton recorded a bluegrass "Stairway" on her 2002 album *Halos & Horns*.

Led Zeppelin IV was released in the United States on November 8, 1971, and in the United Kingdom on November 19; after one week, it was certified gold by the RIAA for U.S. sales of over 500,000 copies. The album shot to number one in Britain; it peaked at number two in the United States, locked out of the top spot by Carole King's *Tapestry* (a number one album for fifteen weeks). The band's continual touring sustained the disc's chart performance: *Led Zeppelin IV* remained in the Top Sixty for three and half years and ultimately logged 259 weeks on the *Billboard* chart.

Even *Rolling Stone* seemed to grasp that the band had reached a new creative peak. In his review, Lenny Kaye hailed *Led Zeppelin IV* as "an album which is remarkable for its low-keyed and tasteful subtlety. . . . What's been saved is the pumping adrenaline drive that held the key to such classics as 'Communication Breakdown' and 'Whole Lotta Love,' the incredibly sharp and precise vocal dynamism of Robert Plant, and some of the tightest arranging and producing Jimmy Page has yet seen his way toward doing."¹² Robert Christgau of *The Village Voice* called the disc "the definitive Led Zeppelin and hence heavy metal album" and singled out "When the Levee Breaks" as a "triumph."¹³

Black Sabbath: Electric Funeral

The high-volume performances of Jimi Hendrix and Cream in the late 1960s raised the ante for rock music in terms of power, amplification, and instrumental virtuosity. Beginning with the Rolling Stones' North American tour of 1969, the most popular rock performers began to migrate from the Fillmore-type ballrooms to sports arenas with a capacity of 10,000 and more.

These conditions set the stage for the rise of heavy metal. The phrase first appeared in William Burroughs's 1962 novel *The Soft Machine* ("the Heavy Metal Kid") and was used by Steppenwolf in the 1968 hit "Born to be Wild." The term "heavy metal" became a catchall name applied across the board to image-conscious L.A. bands like Mötley Crüe and Poison, the high-powered

Texas boogie-blues of ZZ Top, and the complex futurist epics of Canadian power trio Rush.

Black Sabbath was one of the most influential heavy metal bands of all time. John "Ozzy" Osbourne (lead vocals), Tony Iommi (guitar), Terence "Geezer" Butler (bass), and Bill Ward (drums) all came from working-class families in the northern English city of Birmingham. This once-thriving industrial region was already in decline by 1970 when the band released its self-titled debut album, which may partly explain the dank, despairing atmosphere of Black Sabbath songs like "Paranoid" and "Children of the Grave."

Sabbath was never a critical or industry favorite and never had a U.S. Top Forty single. But the group's lumbering power trio sound and lyrical themes of despair, madness, and the occult resonated with white working-class listeners on both sides of the Atlantic, while countless aspiring rock guitarists absorbed Tony Iommi's simple but indelible riffs. Each of Black Sabbath's first five LPs reached the U.S. Top Thirty and quickly sold in excess of one million copies.

In 1979, Ozzy Osbourne left the group to establish a thriving solo career. His 1979 album *Diary of a Madman*, a heavy metal classic featuring the late guitarist Randy Rhoads, was certified triple platinum and reached the U.S. Top Ten. In 1996, Ozzy and his wife/manager Sharon Osbourne created Ozzfest, a touring festival of hard rock and metal bands. It became a hugely successful (and profitable) annual event for which the original Black Sabbath united on several occasions. Ozzy himself gradually metamorphosed from a widely denounced parental nightmare in the tradition of the early Rolling Stones or Alice Cooper into the damaged but loving and witty father figure of his MTV reality show, *The Osbournes*, one of the most successful series in the network's history.

Andy Schwartz

Led Zeppelin IV hit the street as the band began a sixteen-date tour of the United Kingdom. (In September the group had made its first foray to the Far East with five hugely successful shows in Japan; Page and Plant aspired to perform in every country in the world.) Although most shows on this and subsequent tours went off without major incident, there was always the chance that a Led Zeppelin concert could get dangerously out of control. A melee could be touched off by ticket-less fans seeking entry to the show, by the actions of overly aggressive police and security, or by the sheer pandemonium-inducing power of the band's performance.

On July 5, 1971, a show at the Vigorelli Velodromo in Milan, Italy, had ended after just forty minutes when police fired teargas inside the overcrowded stadium. The band members barricaded themselves in a small room backstage while their equipment was trashed; several Zeppelin roadies were among the dozens injured and the group never again appeared in Italy. On August 19, 1971—Robert Plant's twenty-third birthday—at the Pacific Coliseum in Vancouver, British Columbia, some 3,000 fans showed up without tickets.

In the ensuing fracas with police, thirty-five people were injured; damage to the venue led Vancouver city officials, the following year, to deny the band a performing license for an already sold-out show (which then was moved to the Seattle Coliseum in Washington State).

AC/DC: Highway to Hell

If Black Sabbath represented the gloom-and-doom side of heavy metal, AC/DC was pure party music—that is, if the party involved superhuman alcohol consumption, cartoonishly exaggerated sexual activity, and a general atmosphere of non-stop “rocking out” to songs like “Highway to Hell” and “You Shook Me All Night Long.”

Like Sabbath, AC/DC evolved as a “people’s band” that never had a U.S. Top Twenty single and was largely overlooked by the rock press. The group’s lasting popularity may be attributed in large part to the single-minded consistency of its sound, with its histrionic vocals, thunderous 4/4 drumming, and manic Chuck Berry-inspired guitar solos. Fans also delight in certain unchanging aspects of AC/DC’s legendary live shows, such as the short-pants schoolboy’s outfit still worn by guitarist Angus Young (who turned fifty in 2005).

Brothers Malcolm Young (rhythm guitar) and Angus Young (lead guitar) founded AC/DC in 1973 in Sydney, Australia. Their older brother, George Young, and his partner, Harry Vanda, have co-produced the majority of AC/DC’s twenty-plus albums. The brothers Young later recruited Bon Scott as lead singer and eventually settled on the rhythm section of Mark Evans (bass) and Phil Rudd (drums). Evans departed in 1977 and was replaced by Cliff Williams; Rudd left in 1982 but returned—twelve years later—after overcoming drug and alcohol problems.

Highway to Hell, a U.S. Top Twenty hit in 1979, was the product of five years of relentless touring and increasing support from rock radio programmers. Bon Scott died February 20, 1980, after an all-night drinking binge and was soon replaced by Brian Johnson. Angus, Malcolm, and their new vocalist quickly composed ten songs for a new album that was released in July 1980.

That album was *Back in Black*, which today is widely believed to be the second best-selling album of all time after *Thriller* by Michael Jackson. *Back in Black* is RIAA-certified for U.S. sales of over 21 million with estimated worldwide sales of more than 40 million. After a decline in album (though not concert ticket) sales in the latter half of the 1980s, the group made a strong comeback in the 1990s with three albums that reached the U.S. Top Ten: *The Razor’s Edge* (1990), *Ballbreaker* (1995), and *Stiff Upper Lip* (2000).

AC/DC has done one thing longer and better than anyone else, and that is to blithely span the musical distance between heavy metal and the original rock and roll of the 1950s. For this singular achievement, it is a legitimate contender for the title of “the world’s greatest rock and roll band.”

A. S.

HOUSES OF THE HOLY

Recording sessions for a fifth studio album began in earnest in the early spring of 1972 after the band's return to England from a February tour of Australia and New Zealand. *Led Zeppelin IV* would have been a difficult act for anyone to follow and by comparison *Houses of the Holy* was a scattershot collection. "No Quarter" and "The Ocean" were new classics that ranked with the band's best; another strong track, "Over the Hills and Far Away," dated back three years to the first Page/Plant writing session at Bron-Yr-Aur. But neither an odd-metered James Brown parody called "The Crunge" nor the heavy-handed reggae-*cum*-doo-wop song "D'Yer Maker" represented Led Zeppelin at its best. The American rock critic Metal Mike Saunders called the album "awful," a set of "nondescript" songs and arrangements "nowhere near dynamic enough to rescue the material."¹⁴

Predictably, the fans paid no mind and elevated *Houses of the Holy* to number one soon after its release on March 28, 1973. The album spent ninety-nine weeks on the chart; in November 1999, *Houses* was certified for sales of 11 million units by the RIAA.

Beginning in early May and continuing through late July, Led Zeppelin's 1973 U.S. tour was an arduous trek of nearly four months—and an unprecedented harvest of wealth. Most rock acts of the period worked for a guaranteed fee versus 60 percent of gross ticket sales but now Peter Grant was in a position to demand a straight 90 percent of the gross from local promoters. A night's work by his client could bring in \$80–90,000 after expenses with the manager and the musicians sharing equally in the proceeds. Led Zeppelin had started in clubs, moved to theaters, and then to indoor arenas; now the band was headlining some of the largest sports stadiums in America. A May 5 performance at Tampa Stadium in Florida drew 56,800 fans and broke an attendance record set by the Beatles at Shea Stadium in 1965.

Metallica: Ride the Lightning

By 1983, Black Sabbath was a spent force, AC/DC was coming down from the career high of *Back in Black*, and the L.A. glam-metal wave was just approaching the California coastline. Into this temporary gap marched Metallica, whose 1983 debut album *Kill 'Em All* introduced listeners to what would become the most popular and influential American metal band of the next two decades.

There was some of hard-core punk's aggression and venom in Metallica's "thrash metal" music. But the music closest to the hearts of founding members James Hetfield (vocals, guitar) and Lars Ulrich (drums) was the so-called New Wave of British Heavy Metal such as Judas Priest, Diamond Head, and the deeply obscure Vardis. On *Kill 'Em All*, Metallica—now including lead guitarist Kirk Hammett and bassist Cliff Burton—matched their high-volume, rapid-fire riffs with impressive songwriting skills. *Ride the Lightning* (1984) was a virtual

concept album about death: by suicide ("Fade to Black"), in warfare ("For Whom the Bell Tolls"), and by execution ("Ride the Lightning").

In 1986, *Master of Puppets* marked the creative pinnacle of this first phase of Metallica's development, and their final outing as a support band was that year's tour with Ozzy Osbourne. The former Black Sabbath front man shuffled around the stage wearing a frosted bouffant and a silver lamé suit. By contrast, Metallica played with unrestrained ferocity: clad in jeans and T-shirts, the four musicians looked as though they'd climbed out of the fourth row to commandeer the show. Tragically, Cliff Burton was killed in September 1986 when Metallica's bus went off the road during a Scandinavian tour. He was replaced by Jason Newsted, who remained with the group until 2003 when he left and was replaced in turn by ex-Suicidal Tendencies and Ozzy Osbourne bassist Robert Trujillo.

Combining genuine talent with canny marketing strategies, Metallica have attained a dual status that is almost unique in rock and roll history. In the years since their number one album *Metallica* (1991), with its shorter and more radio-friendly songs, they have become one of the world's most popular rock bands with total career sales of more than 57 million albums in the United States alone. At the same time, the group has retained the respect of the rock press and, more important, that of their core metal fandom. On the front of a T-shirt or the back of a leather jacket, the name "Metallica" still connotes something of the anti-social anger and musical raw power that gave rise to a rock and roll legend.

A. S.

By the end of the tour, Grant and Richard Cole had leased a customized forty-seat Boeing 720B jet dubbed "The Starship" for the exclusive use of Led Zeppelin. The band hired an independent publicist, a savvy New Yorker named Danny Goldberg, and relations with the press began to improve. Journalists began to notice that—on the charts and on tour—Led Zeppelin were outselling those longtime critical favorites, the Rolling Stones.

The 1973 tour closed with three sold-out nights at Madison Square Garden; as it turned out, these would be the band's last live shows for many months. English director Joe Massot was hired to film the performances as the basis for a concert documentary titled *The Song Remains the Same*. Most of the live footage used in the film was from the first concert; it was, Jimmy Page admitted, "not one of the magic nights"¹⁵ for the road-weary foursome.

The gaps between stage numbers were filled with footage of the individual musicians in various real and imagined settings—John Bonham driving a tractor on his Black Country farm, for example, or Page in an eerie sequence inspired by his passionate interest in the occult. The guitarist had become a devoted acolyte of the occult author and "black arts" experimenter Aleister Crowley, who had died in 1947. Page amassed one of the world's largest

collections of Crowley manuscripts and memorabilia, purchased Crowley's former home on Loch Ness in Scotland, and in 1975 opened a London bookshop called Equinox that specialized in occult works.

Jimmy later described the completion of *The Song Remains the Same* as "an incredible uphill struggle. . . . The director was very stubborn and it would have been a lot easier had he just done what he'd been asked to do."¹⁶ (Massot was replaced by Peter Clifton before the film's completion.)

"It was a massive compromise," John Paul Jones recalled. "We never knew what was happening. When we first had the idea, it was a relatively simple one—to film some shows and then release it as a film. Little did we know how difficult it would all become."¹⁷ Three years would pass before *The Song Remains the Same* was finally released to theaters.

During the Madison Square Garden run, the band took up residence at the Drake Hotel in Manhattan where Richard Cole rented a hotel safe deposit box to secure credit cards, passports, and money. Hours before the third and final show on July 29, the road manager opened the safe and found it emptied of \$203,000 in cash—an amount equal to about half the gross income from the New York concerts. Cole, who was supposed to have the only key, swore he hadn't taken the money and had no idea who did. The theft made the front pages of the New York tabloids but police made no arrests; later the band filed suit against the hotel and collected a substantial settlement.

PHYSICAL GRAFFITI

In January 1974, Peter Grant and Led Zeppelin hosted a series of gala receptions in London, New York, and Los Angeles to announce the release of a new Led Zeppelin double album, *Physical Graffiti*, on the band's own Swan Song Records and the installation of Danny Goldberg as president of the label. (Zeppelin's original Atlantic contract had expired but Atlantic would distribute the new imprint worldwide.) Swan Song's first signing, the British hard rock band Bad Company, topped the *Billboard* chart with its self-titled Swan Song debut (five million sold) and released three more platinum or multi-platinum albums on the label. Other Swan Song artists—including 1960s survivors the Pretty Things, Scottish rock-soul singer Maggie Bell, and roots-rocker Dave Edmunds—never approached Bad Company's level of commercial success but enjoyed artistic control of their output as well as substantial promotion budgets.

Physical Graffiti was a fifteen-track set comprised of eight new tracks recorded at Headley Grange and seven songs culled from sessions for earlier albums. The first disc was much the stronger of the two, beginning with "Custard Pie"—a harmonica-laced electric blues based on Sleepy John Estes's "Drop Down Mama" from 1935. Page's shivering slide guitar and Bonham's furious drumming propelled the intense eleven-minute gospel-blues "In My

Time of Dying” while “Houses of the Holy” and “Trampled Under Foot” were tightly constructed, even danceable hard rock tunes. The closing track, “Kashmir,” was a dramatic 8:30 opus built on a series of orchestral crescendos, its lyrics and musical ambience inspired by Robert Plant’s travels in Morocco—not, as the title implies, on the Indian subcontinent. Plant later said that he considered “Kashmir” rather than “Stairway to Heaven” to be the definitive Led Zeppelin song.

On the uneven second disc, Zeppelin meandered from country-rock flavor of “Down by the Seaside” to the 1960s soul ambience of “Night Flight.” There was also two-minute Jimmy Page acoustic instrumental (“Bron-Y-Aur”), a pair of good-natured but lightweight blues jams (“Boogie with Stu” and “Black Country Woman”), and the sub-par rock tune “Sick Again” that closed the album.

The release of *Physical Graffiti* on February 24, 1975, ignited a new wave of Zep mania. The album held the U.S. number one position for six weeks (it was a U.K. number one as well) while *all* of Led Zeppelin’s previous releases re-entered the *Billboard* Top 200 chart. Meanwhile the band had played its first live gig in eighteen months on January 11 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands; one week later, Zeppelin’s next North American tour began in Minneapolis, Minnesota—a state-of-the-art production bolstered by a 70,000-watt sound system and a massive custom-built lighting rig.

Approximately 700,000 tickets were sold for these thirty-nine dates and yet the demand seemed infinite. In Greensboro, North Carolina, on January 29, some 500 fans were excluded from the sold-out show. They attempted to storm the rear entrance of the arena and badly damaged three of the band’s five rented limos with a cascade of bottles, stones, and pieces of scaffolding. A February 4 concert at Boston Garden in Massachusetts was canceled by city officials when the restive crowd that gathered hours before show time caused \$30,000 worth of damage to the facility. Much to the band’s relief, the U.S. tour concluded with three ecstatically received performances at the Forum in Los Angeles.

Back in London, tickets for three concerts in May at the 19,000-capacity Earl’s Court Exhibition Centre sold out in five hours; two added dates also sold out instantly for a total attendance of 85,000. The band mounted its full U.S. stage production and projected the action throughout the hall via a 20-foot by 30-foot video screen—one of the earliest uses of video projection in an indoor rock concert. The Earl’s Court performances became legendary as among the finest shows of Led Zeppelin’s career—as well as some of the longest, featuring electric and acoustic songs from every phase of the band’s history.

DARKENING SKIES

Following this triumphant homecoming, the band members took a break before the start of a relatively short U.S. tour set to begin in late August. Robert Plant,

his wife Maureen, and their two young children took an extended trip through North Africa and were joined on the Greek island of Rhodes by Jimmy Page, his paramour Charlotte Martin, and their daughter Scarlet. On August 4, while Jimmy was on a side trip to Sicily, Maureen Plant was driving her husband and the three children (with Charlotte and Scarlet following in a second car) when suddenly she lost control and the vehicle struck a tree. Robert shattered his right ankle and right elbow and his right leg was broken in several places; his son Karac and daughter Carmen also suffered broken limbs. Maureen was the most seriously injured with a broken leg and fractures of the skull and pelvis; her face was badly cut and she lost a dangerously large amount of blood. (Scarlet Martin escaped the crash with only minor injuries.)

Richard Cole chartered a private jet and flew to Rhodes to bring the family home. Robert's leg was placed in a cast from hip to toe; initially doctors thought he might never again walk unaided. The singer made slow progress while residing as a tax exile on Jersey in the Channel Islands. Led Zeppelin's U.S. tour was canceled and American concert promoters suffered sizable losses. Bill Graham, who'd sold \$1 million worth of tickets for two shows at Kezar Stadium, lost the funds he'd laid out for facility deposits, promotion, and advertising along with \$130,000 in ticket service charges.

In early September, still confined to a wheelchair, Robert Plant was flown to Los Angeles while Maureen and the children stayed behind. Fighting depression and disillusionment, he joined Jimmy Page in a rented house in Malibu for several weeks of intensive songwriting before John Bonham and John Paul Jones arrived for the first rehearsals. These new songs were imbued with deep blues feeling and a sense of barely controlled desperation.

PRESENCE

The band moved from L.A. to Munich where Led Zeppelin's seventh album, *Presence*, was recorded in just eighteen days in November. Plant sang of his Third World travels (and, obliquely, of his accident) in the storming "Achilles Last Stand" and poignantly expressed his longing for home and family in "Tea for One." A version of Blind Willie Johnson's "Nobody's Fault But Mine" played like a heavy-metal confessional, all mournful wails and sinuous slide guitar. On the lighter side, there was the amped-up rockabilly of "Candy Store Rock" with its rollicking band track and Robert's vocal homage to the Elvis sound-alike singer Ral Donner.

Dispensing with organs, mellotrons, and recorders, Zeppelin was once again the world's greatest instrumental power trio: Jimmy Page laid down all of his guitar solos and overdubs in one marathon fourteen-hour session. "All our pent-up energy and passion went into making it," he explained. "That's why there was no acoustic material there. The mechanism was perfectly oiled. We started screaming in rehearsals and never stopped."¹⁸

In a 2006 retrospective for *Rolling Stone*, Mikal Gilmore called *Presence* “the forgotten album; its feelings are too hard, too intense, and probably too insular to stay close to for very long.” Although the album became Zeppelin’s fifth U.S. number one, *Presence* spent less time (thirty weeks) on the *Billboard* chart than any of its predecessors. But for its potent emotion and the resurgent brilliance of Jimmy Page’s guitar work, and for capturing a do-or-die moment in Zeppelin’s history, Gilmore avers that *Presence* is “likely the best album the band ever made.”¹⁹

While *Presence* was in progress, the long-delayed film *The Song Remains the Same* had its world premier on October 20, 1976, in New York. The theater’s sound system shortchanged the band’s live sound (a problem that would undermine many future screenings) and critical response was muted at best. The *New York Daily News*, for example, gave the movie no stars out of a possible five. Still, even a second-rate Led Zeppelin performance was guaranteed to capture some stunning music such as the film’s twenty-six-minute version of “Dazed and Confused” with its Jimmy Page violin-bow guitar solo. A double-disc soundtrack, rushed out in time for the holiday shopping season, quickly sold two million copies while ascending to number two in the United States and number one in the United Kingdom. In November, Led Zeppelin made its first appearance on American television, performing “Black Dog” on the ABC series *Don Kirshner’s Rock Concert*.

A U.S. tour scheduled to begin in February 1977 was canceled when Robert Plant contracted tonsillitis. The singer was still in recurring pain from his leg injuries on April 1, 1977, when Led Zeppelin played its first concert in nearly a year at Memorial Auditorium in Dallas, Texas. On April 30, the band set a new world attendance record for a solo indoor attraction when 76,229 fans filled the Pontiac Silverdome in suburban Detroit.

Most gigs passed without serious incident including multi-night runs at Madison Square Garden; The Forum in Inglewood, California; and the Capitol Center in Landover, Maryland. But on April 19 in Cincinnati, Ohio, police made 100 arrests when an estimated 1,000 fans tried to crash the first of two shows at the Riverfront Coliseum. A fan rampage following Zeppelin’s May 21 show at the Summit in Houston, Texas, damaged the facility and resulted in forty arrests, mostly for drug possession and disorderly conduct. When rain forced the band to cancel a June 3 show at Tampa Stadium in Florida, “the concert turned into a full-fledged riot . . . Sixty fans ended up in the hospital. So did a dozen cops.”²⁰

An atmosphere of unchecked power and physical intimidation had grown up around Led Zeppelin. It was fueled by alcohol and hard drug use, and by Richard Cole’s hiring of John Bindon, a notorious London gangster, as the band’s security coordinator. On July 23, following the first of two day-long festival shows promoted by Bill Graham Productions (BGP), this seething undercurrent erupted backstage at the Oakland-Alameda County Coliseum in Oakland, California.

A BGP stagehand named Jim Matzorkis noticed a boy in the backstage area removing the wooden artist nameplates from the doors of the trailers that served as dressing rooms. Matzorkis remonstrated with him and calmly but firmly took back the signs. The boy turned out to be Peter Grant's son and John Bonham had witnessed the incident. He and Grant confronted Matzorkis and Bonham kicked the stagehand, who then fled to another trailer nearby. Bill Graham arrived on the scene and accompanied Peter Grant to the trailer, ostensibly so the manager could speak with Jim Matzorkis.

"I opened the trailer and went in first," Graham later wrote. "Jim was sitting in the cubbyhole. Peter Grant went in . . . [and] in one move, I was behind Grant. He just grabbed Jim's hand, pulled him toward him . . . and smashed Jim in the face, knocking him back into his seat. I lunged at Grant. He picked me up like I was a fly and handed me to the guy by the door. That guy shoved me out. He threw me down the steps and shut the door . . . I heard Jim saying, '*Bill! Help me! Bill!*' And a lot of noise."²¹

As John Bindon held the stagehand from behind, Peter Grant "just started working me all over, punching me in the face with his fist and kicking me in the balls. He knocked a tooth out . . . It was really horrifying because there was no way out and here was this 300-pound guy just having his way with me."²² Outside the trailer, meanwhile, Richard Cole was swinging an aluminum pole at BGP employee Bob Barsotti. Finally Jim Matzorkis managed to escape and was driven to a hospital.

Bill Graham states that in a phone conversation a few hours later, an attorney for Led Zeppelin implied to him that the band "would find it difficult to play"²³ the second show unless Bill Graham signed a waiver indemnifying Led Zeppelin, along with Peter Grant and his employees, against any and all legal action that might arise from Jim Matzorkis's beating. The promoter reluctantly agreed: He was certain that this document, signed under duress, would have no standing and he feared that a last-minute cancellation might cause a riot. The Sunday concert went on amid high tension backstage but without incident; when Robert Plant attempted to reconcile, Graham refused to speak to him. Jimmy Page, angry and disheartened by the violence, played sitting down for most of the show.

Robert Plant later stated: "Instead of it being the two big wheels [Grant and Graham] moving away and talking about it quietly . . . it was just a slugging match. I had to sing [*"Stairway to Heaven"*] in the shadow of the fact that the artillery we carried with us was prowling around backstage with a *hell* of an attitude. I mean, it was this coming together of these two dark forces which had nothing to do with the songs that Page and I were trying to churn out."²⁴

On the morning of July 25, Oakland police arrested Peter Grant, John Bindon, John Bonham, and Richard Cole, who were charged with assault and released on bail. The defendants later pleaded no contest to the charges; they received suspended sentences and were placed on probation. "They cut a deal with the judge," Jim Matzorkis recalled bitterly. He filed a \$2 million civil suit which

“went for a year and a half. They settled for fifty thousand or something like that.”²⁵

Bill Graham admired Led Zeppelin as musicians and performers; he disdained what he felt they stood for in popular culture. “I didn’t like their influence on society or their power. . . . They surrounded themselves with physical might. The element around them was oppressive. They were ready to kill at the slightest provocation.”²⁶ In one case, at least, the promoter proved a prescient judge of character: In 1978, John Bindon stabbed one John Darke nine times in a fight outside a club in Fulham, London. Indicted for murder, Bindon was acquitted in a jury trial in November 1979. He died in 1993 of AIDS-related illness.

For Plant, the worst was yet to come. On July 26, 1977, the Zeppelin entourage flew to New Orleans, which served as the band’s home base for the tour. During check-in at the hotel, the singer received a phone call from his wife Maureen in England informing him that their six-year-old son Karac was seriously ill with a respiratory infection. Two hours later, she called again: Karac was dead.

IN THROUGH THE OUT DOOR

Robert Plant retreated to home and family for the next year. Rumors flew of a Led Zeppelin breakup as the singer pondered the risks and rewards of being in the world’s biggest rock and roll band: “After losing my son, I found that the excesses that surrounded Led Zeppelin were such that nobody knew where the actual axis of all this stuff was. Everybody was insular, developing their own world. The band had gone through two or three really big—huge—changes: changes that actually wrecked it before it was born again. The whole beauty and lightness of 1970 had turned into a sort of neurosis.”²⁷

In July 1978 the singer tentatively re-emerged for some unannounced club gigs, singing blues and rock and roll covers with a local band called the Turd Burglars. He still harbored strong doubts about rejoining Led Zeppelin and at one point applied for a teaching position at a Rudolph Steiner school in Sussex. Plant’s wariness was only partially dispelled by a band meeting that John Bonham persuaded the singer to attend in September. By mid-November, the band had begun work on its eighth studio album at Polar Studios in Stockholm. In the making of *In Through the Out Door*, much of the workload fell to Robert Plant and John Paul Jones—the two members not deeply involved with either heroin and/or alcohol.

“There were two distinct camps by then and we were in the relatively clean one,” Jones later admitted. “We’d turn up first, Bonzo would turn up later, and Page might turn up a couple of days later. . . . When that situation occurs you either sit around waiting or get down to some playing. So that’s what we did in the studio.”²⁸

In Through the Out Door is not an album held in high esteem even by many diehard fans. Jones's keyboard motifs predominated and were not balanced out by any classic Led Zeppelin blues grooves; Plant's lyrics were below par save for "All My Love," his moving elegy for Karac. The soaring, over-reaching spirit that had characterized Jimmy Page's best guitar work was almost entirely absent.

In the summer of 1979, Led Zeppelin returned to live action a few weeks prior to the album's release. After two warm-up shows in Copenhagen, the band headlined the Knebworth Festival in Hertfordshire, England, on August 4 and August 11. The performances were a commercial and critical triumph with over 250,000 tickets sold in just two days. In film footage later released on the *Led Zeppelin* DVD, Robert Plant's performance betrays none of his inner tension while a jubilant Jimmy Page plays with the flair and fury that made him a rock guitar legend.

"Robert didn't want to do it," John Paul Jones later recalled, "and I could understand why. But *we* really did, and we thought he would enjoy it if we could just get him back out there. And I think he *did* enjoy Knebworth. On the DVD he *looks* like he's enjoying it!"²⁹

Plant himself "knew how good we had been, and we were so nervous. And yet within it all, my old pal Bonzo was right down in a pocket. . . . After it was over, I don't know if I was breathing a sigh of relief because we'd got to the end of the show in one piece or whether we'd actually bought some more time to keep going."³⁰

In September 1979, the new LP was issued in six different sleeves using alternate angles from the same photo session. It became the first album by a rock band to debut at number one on the *Billboard* album chart and also topped the U.K. list. *In Through the Out Door* stayed at number one in the United States for seven weeks—the band's best chart performance since *Led Zeppelin II*—and sold over five million copies. The single "Fool in the Rain" reached number twenty-one on the Hot 100 despite its lurching rhythm track and Plant's off-key vocal. *In Through the Out Door* spent forty-one weeks on the *Billboard* chart, during which time Zeppelin played not a single public performance.

Maureen Plant gave birth to a son, Logan Romero Plant, in January 1979 and Robert balked at the prospect of another months-long American tour. In a compromise with Peter Grant and the other band members, he agreed to three weeks of European concerts. With little advance publicity, the tour kicked off on June 17 in Dortmund, Germany—the first song of the night was "The Train Kept A-Rollin'."

Ten days later in Nuremberg, during the third number of Zeppelin's set, John Bonham collapsed on stage. He was hospitalized briefly and released, and the band moved on to shows in Zurich, Frankfurt, Mannheim, and Munich. After the last concert, on July 7 in Berlin, Bonzo told Dave Lewis: "Overall everyone was dead chuffed [pleased] with the way the tour went.

There were so many things that could have gone wrong. We want to keep working and of course we want to do England.”³¹

On September 24, Led Zeppelin gathered at Jimmy Page’s home in Windsor to begin rehearsals for a North American tour set to begin in Montreal on October 17. John Bonham drank vodka steadily throughout the day and evening until the rehearsal ground to a halt. The drummer may have consumed as many as forty vodka drinks before midnight, when he passed out and was moved to a spare bedroom by a crew member.

When John Paul Jones and Zeppelin road manager Benji LeFevre (who’d replaced Richard Cole) went to look in on him the next morning, John Bonham was dead. A coroner’s inquest held on October 8 ruled his death an accident attributable to consumption of alcohol: Bonzo had died in his sleep from the inhalation of vomit. He was thirty-two years old.

Although the formal announcement of Led Zeppelin’s dissolution would not be made for several months, the decision was nearly instantaneous. “It was impossible to continue, really,” Jimmy Page later explained to Cameron Crowe. “Especially in light of what we’d done live, stretching and moving the songs this way and that. At that point in time especially, in the early eighties, there was no way one wanted to even consider taking on another drummer. For someone to ‘learn’ the things Bonham had done . . . it just wouldn’t have been honest. We had a great respect for each other, and that needed to continue . . . in life or death.”³²

On December 4, 1980, the surviving members and Peter Grant informed the media: “We wish it to be known that the loss of our dear friend and the deep sense of undivided harmony felt by ourselves and our manager have led us to decide that we could not continue as we were.”

One more “new” Led Zeppelin album was issued in late 1982. *Coda* included several outtakes from the 1978 Stockholm sessions as well as as 1970 soundcheck recording of “I Can’t Quit You Baby” and an extended drum feature titled “Bonzo’s Montreux.” To many fans and critics, *Coda* seemed like a cash-in release unworthy of the band’s catalog. The album spent a mere sixteen weeks on the *Billboard* chart (peaking at number six) and sales tapered off rapidly after the first million copies.

Since John Bonham’s death, Plant, Page, and Jones have performed together on only a handful of occasions. With drummers Tony Thompson and Phil Collins, they played an under-rehearsed three-song set at the Live Aid concert at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia on July 13, 1985. In May 1988, the trio—this time with Bonham’s son Jason on drums—closed the Atlantic Records Fortieth Anniversary celebration at Madison Square Garden. In 1989 the three musicians played together at the twenty-first birthday party of Robert Plant’s daughter Carmen and in 1990 they performed at Jason Bonham’s wedding (he played drums on both occasions).

Jimmy Page took charge of the Led Zeppelin catalog with input and approval from Jones and Plant. In 1990, the guitarist compiled a four-CD box

set titled simply *Led Zeppelin* that included numerous photos plus essays by Cameron Crowe and Robert Palmer. Although it contained only four tracks not previously issued on album, this expensive package cracked the *Billboard* Top Twenty and sold over one million copies.

Page and Plant reunited in 1994 for an MTV *Unplugged* performance filmed in Wales, London, and Morocco. Much to his annoyance and dismay, John Paul Jones was not asked to participate even though the resulting live album, *No Quarter*, took its title from a song largely composed by him (ten of the thirteen tracks were Led Zeppelin songs). *No Quarter* sold over one million copies and reached number four on the *Billboard* chart. Its success led to a world tour on which Page and Plant were backed by the unusual combination of a standard rock band and a North African orchestra. They later wrote and recorded a new album of original material, *Walking into Clarksdale*, released in 1998.

As a solo artist, Robert Plant released six albums between 1982 and 1993, each one certified gold (for 500,000 sales) and/or platinum (for 1,000,000 sales). John Paul Jones composed music for several films and produced albums for Foo Fighters and Butthole Surfers. In 1994 he collaborated with avant-garde vocalist Diamanda Galas on an album *This Sporting Life*, and a subsequent tour.

On January 12, 1995, Led Zeppelin was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame by award presenters Steven Tyler and Joe Perry of Aerosmith. In November 1997, Atlantic released a two-disc set, *BBC Sessions*, containing Led Zeppelin performances from three different sessions for the BBC in 1969 as well as most of an April 1971 concert at the Paris Theater in London. Six years later, the band enjoyed another unexpected resurgence in popularity with two more archival releases.

Released in May 2003, the two-disc *Led Zeppelin* DVD had a running time of nearly five and a half hours. It included an entire Royal Albert Hall concert from January 1970 as well as footage from Madison Square Garden (1973), Earl's Court (1975), and Knebworth (1979)—all brought up to a remarkable standard of visual and sonic clarity through the application of digital technology. The set sold more than 500,000 copies and was among the year's top-selling DVD titles. *How the West Was Won* was a double live album plus DVD that captured June 1972 performances at the Forum in Los Angeles and the Long Beach Arena. This set entered the *Billboard* Top 200 at number one—the first Led Zeppelin album to top the chart since *In Through the Out Door* in 1979.

In 2005, the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences (NARAS) presented Led Zeppelin with a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award—the band's first official recognition by the Recording Academy, twenty-five years after its dissolution. In July 2006, the RIAA credited Led Zeppelin with U.S. sales of over 109.5 million albums and ranked the band at number four on its all-time best-seller list after the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and Garth Brooks. International sales may be roughly equivalent to the U.S. figure, meaning that

over 200 million Led Zeppelin albums have been sold worldwide. *Led Zeppelin IV* has sold over 23 million units in the United States alone.

Led Zeppelin has influenced virtually every hard rock and metal band that followed in its wake including Mötley Crüe, Def Leppard, Guns N' Roses, and Rage Against the Machine. Pearl Jam bassist Jeff Ament told *Rolling Stone* that Led Zeppelin was “the band we always looked toward.”³³ Even hip-hop fans have been exposed to Zeppelin’s music through sampling: John Bonham’s drum track on “When the Levee Breaks” has been sampled for songs by the Beastie Boys, Ice-T, and Dr. Dre.

The best of Led Zeppelin’s recorded work still sounds clear, expansive, and hugely powerful. The same four musicians created virtually all the sounds on each album, with a bare minimum of guest performers, and the band made no overt effort to embrace new trends such as punk or electronic music. For these reasons, Led Zeppelin’s album catalog projects a sense of creative cohesion, growth, and integrity almost unmatched in rock music. Despite the overwhelming familiarity of such key songs as “Whole Lotta Love” and “Stairway to Heaven,” Led Zeppelin’s music is still capable of not just blowing away new generations of listeners but of enchanting them.

In his essay for the *Led Zeppelin* box set, the late Robert Palmer appraised the group’s singular contribution to popular music. “Perhaps Zeppelin’s greatest legacy,” he wrote,

is a quality that is now in short supply: they showed that four individuals, from varied backgrounds and with diverse personalities and imaginations, could chart their own adventurous musical course, make their own records just the way they wanted to without intrusion from corporate execs hoping for a hit single, innovate with every album, and *keep on doing it*, long after many another band would have grown creatively slack from the excesses that come with fame and fortune. Luckily for us, they persevered.³⁴

TIMELINE

January 9, 1944

James Patrick (Jimmy) Page born in Heston, Middlesex, England.

June 3, 1946

John Baldwin aka John Paul Jones born in Sidcup, Kent, England.

May 31, 1948

John Henry Bonham (“Bonzo”) born in Bromwich, England.

August 20, 1948

Robert Plant born in West Bromwich, England.

July 7, 1968

The Yardbirds featuring guitarist Jimmy Page disband after playing their final show in Luton, Bedfordshire, England. To fulfill outstanding contractual commitments, Page recruits a new lineup with Jones, Bonham, and Plant.

August 19, 1968

First rehearsal of the new quartet at 22 Gerrard Street in London.

September 7, 1968

The band makes its live debut in Copenhagen, billed as “New Yardbirds” or “Yardbirds featuring Jimmy Page.”

September 27, 1968

The band begins recording its debut album at Olympic Studios in London, produced by Jimmy Page and engineered by Glyn Johns.

October 15, 1968

By the time of its first U.K. performance, at Surrey University, the band has taken the name Led Zeppelin.

November 13, 1968

Atlantic executive Jerry Wexler signs Led Zeppelin to Atlantic Records for an advance of £110,000 (approximately U.S. \$210,000).

December 26, 1968

Led Zeppelin begins its inaugural U.S. tour, supporting Vanilla Fudge in Denver.

January 12, 1969

The self-titled debut album, *Led Zeppelin*, is released on Atlantic.

February 15, 1969

Led Zeppelin enters the *Billboard* Top Pop Albums chart, ultimately reaching number ten in the United States and number six in the United Kingdom.

April 24, 1969

The band begins a five-week headlining U.S. tour at Fillmore West in San Francisco.

July 5, 1969

Led Zeppelin performs at the Atlanta International Pop Festival in Atlanta, Georgia.

October 17, 1969

The band plays the first rock concert at New York’s Carnegie Hall since the Rolling Stones’ appearance in 1965.

December 6, 1969

Led Zeppelin enters the Top Forty with “Whole Lotta Love.” It peaks at number four, the highest-charting U.S. single of the band’s career.

December 27, 1969

Led Zeppelin II tops the *Billboard* chart and stays at number one for seven weeks. In February 1970, the album hits number one in the United Kingdom.

June 1970

At Headley Grange, the band begins work on its third album using the Rolling Stones’ mobile studio.

June 28, 1970

Led Zeppelin headline the Bath Festival of Blues and Progressive Music in England before a crowd of over 200,000.

October 31, 1970

Led Zeppelin III becomes the band’s second U.S. number one album.

January 30, 1971

“Immigrant Song,” a single from *Led Zeppelin III*, reaches number fifteen on the Hot 100.

March 5, 1971

During a show in Belfast, Led Zeppelin performs the classic “Stairway to Heaven” for the first time in public.

November 8, 1971

Led Zeppelin’s untitled fourth album (commonly referred to as *Led Zeppelin IV*) is released in the United States and after one week is certified gold. The album remains on the chart for 259 weeks but never goes to number one.

February 12, 1972

Led Zeppelin hits number fifteen with “Black Dog,” a single from *Led Zeppelin IV*.

May 5, 1973

56,800 fans attend a Led Zeppelin concert at Tampa Stadium in Florida breaking the attendance record set by the Beatles at Shea Stadium in 1965.

May 12, 1973

Led Zeppelin’s fifth album, *Houses of the Holy* (released March 28), becomes their third U.S. LP to reach number one. The album remains on the chart for ninety-nine weeks and is later certified for sales of eleven million units.

December 29, 1973

Led Zeppelin hits number twenty with “D’yer Mak’er,” a single from *Houses of the Holy*.

January 1975

Led Zeppelin launches the Swan Song label and previews its forthcoming album at gala press parties in New York and Los Angeles. Distributed by Atlantic Records, Swan Song releases the band’s own albums and others by Bad Company, Dave Edmunds, and the Pretty Things.

January 11, 1975

Led Zeppelin plays its first live show in 18 months in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. A major U.S. tour begins January 18 in Minneapolis.

February 24, 1975

Led Zeppelin’s double album, *Physical Graffiti*, is released. It reaches number one in both the United States and United Kingdom and tops the *Billboard* chart for a total of six weeks.

March 29, 1975

Led Zeppelin becomes the first band in history to place six albums at once on the *Billboard* chart: *Physical Graffiti* (number one), *Led Zeppelin IV*, *Houses of the Holy*, *Led Zeppelin II*, *Led Zeppelin*, and *Led Zeppelin III*.

August 4, 1975

Robert Plant, his wife Maureen, and their children Karac and Carmen are seriously injured in a car crash while vacationing in Greece.

November, 1975

Led Zeppelin’s new album, *Presence*, is recorded in just eighteen days in Los Angeles.

March 31, 1976

Presence is released and quickly becomes the band's fifth U.S. number one album, spending thirty weeks on the *Billboard* chart.

October 20, 1976

Led Zeppelin's concert documentary, *The Song Remains the Same*, premieres in New York. A double-disc soundtrack reaches number two in the United States and number one in the United Kingdom.

April 1, 1977

The band begins a new U.S. tour at Memorial Auditorium in Dallas.

April 30, 1977

Led Zeppelin sets a new world attendance record for a solo indoor attraction with an appearance at the Pontiac Silverdome in Detroit attended by 76,229 fans.

August 1979

Led Zeppelin headlines the Knebworth Festival in Hertfordshire, England, with performances on 8/4 and 8/11.

August 15, 1979

Led Zeppelin's final studio album, *In Through the Out Door*, is released. Recorded in November–December 1978 at Polar Studios in Stockholm, Sweden, *In Through the Out Door* becomes the first album by a rock band to debut at number one on the *Billboard* chart and retains the top spot for seven weeks.

July 7, 1980

At the conclusion of a two-week European tour, Led Zeppelin plays its final live performance at Eissporthalle in Berlin.

September 25, 1980

After a day and night of heavy drinking, Led Zeppelin drummer John Bonham dies of asphyxiation in his sleep.

December 4, 1980

Led Zeppelin releases a statement announcing that it is disbanding in the wake of drummer John Bonham's death.

September 7, 1990

Led Zeppelin, a four-CD and six-LP box set, is released and reaches number eighteen on the *Billboard* chart. With sales of over one million units, it is the best-selling box set in rock history.

January 12, 1995

Steven Tyler and Joe Perry of Aerosmith induct Led Zeppelin into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame during a ceremony at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York.

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Presence, 1976

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Joni Mitchell

Scott Schinder

WOMAN OF HEART AND MIND

The archetype of the confessional female singer-songwriter is so deeply ingrained in the contemporary musical consciousness that modern listeners can be forgiven for not realizing that not long ago, the idea of an intelligent, independent woman documenting her inner life in song was a risky concept, one with no precedent in a popular music industry that limited female performers to a limited range of narrowly defined roles. No artist was more influential in altering that situation than Joni Mitchell.

When Mitchell rose to fame during the folk music boom of the 1960s, she was not the first female artist to write her own songs. But the poetic intimacy of her songs and the seamless honesty of her performances established the Canadian singer/guitarist as a role model for generations of artists who would follow in her footsteps.

Mitchell's consistent refusal to compromise her artistic integrity, her willingness to defy the expectations of her audience and the music industry, and

her drive to continually redefine her musical persona permanently altered expectations of what a female artist could achieve.

Early in her performing career, Mitchell diverged from the folk scene's emphasis on traditional material and sociopolitical commentary to write deeply personal songs drawn from her own experience. As the social and political upheavals of the 1960s gave way to soul-searching introspection in the early 1970s, Mitchell's example was followed by a massive wave of writer/performers of both genders, who turned inward for inspiration. Some, like Carole King and James Taylor, outsold Mitchell, but none bested her artistry or originality.

Mitchell achieved substantial commercial success of her own, but her restless creative instincts quickly took precedence over careerist concerns. Not long after scoring her first major hit single, she demonstrated her willingness to risk alienating her fans by embracing jazz as an outlet for her muse. In the decades since, she has continued to make music on her own terms, regardless of commercial consequences.

Roberta Joan Anderson was born on November 7, 1943, in Fort Macleod, in the Canadian prairie province of Alberta, and at the age of nine moved with her family to the larger city of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. She developed an affinity for classical music during early childhood, and prevailed upon her parents to pay for piano lessons when she was just seven years old. But her initial efforts at formal music training proved frustrating when her piano teacher discouraged her from attempting to play the melodies that she heard in her head. She also showed an early talent for drawing and painting, interests that she would continue to pursue as her musical career progressed.

When she was nine, Joni was stricken with polio. She recovered from the potentially fatal disease after an extended convalescence at a children's hospital. It was also during her hospital stay that she felt the urge to perform, singing Christmas carols to the other patients. She would later credit her experience with the illness for helping her to develop her artistic sensitivity. Soon after her recovery, she took up cigarette smoking, a lifelong activity which would be reflected in the evolution of her singing voice.

When Joni was in the seventh grade, a favorite English teacher, Mr. Kratzman, encouraged her to express herself through poetry, and to write from her own experiences. His influence would prove so significant that Mitchell would later thank him on the cover of her first album.

During her teenage years Joni's musical interests were energized by the rock and roll she'd hear on the radio and on local jukeboxes. Initially unable to afford a guitar, she bought herself a \$36 ukulele and taught herself to play. Once she'd acquired an actual guitar, she began performing informally at parties, and playing folk songs at coffeehouses in Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Calgary.

She made an effort to pursue a career as a painter, enrolling at the Alberta College of Art in Calgary, but her attendance there lasted only a year. Feeling stifled

by courses that she considered to be overly rigid, she found more fulfillment in music. As Joni Anderson, she began performing regularly on the regional folk scene that had developed around Alberta, initially playing traditional folk standards, many of them learned from the albums of Judy Collins. Joni wrote her first song, "Day by Day," while en route to the Mariposa Folk Festival in Toronto.

A few months after leaving college in June 1964, Joni moved to Toronto, which had become the home to a burgeoning folk scene. But she couldn't afford to join the local musicians' union, which initially limited her opportunities to perform professionally. Instead, she played for tips in coffeehouses and busked on the streets.

By now, Joni was writing her own songs, eschewing the standard folkie repertoire of traditional and topical numbers in favor of her own originals. She also demonstrated a highly individual vocal style, as well as a distinctive guitar technique that set her apart from her folk-scene contemporaries.

As Mitchell later noted, "I looked like a folksinger, even though the moment I began to write, my music was not folk music. It was something else that had elements of romantic classicism to it."¹

Mitchell's idiosyncratic approach was partially determined by circumstance and necessity. Early on, she began playing guitar in unconventional open tunings, to compensate for the fact her left hand had been left weakened by her battle with polio. That approach resulted in her chord structures often bearing a stronger resemblance to jazz than folk or rock. Her playing style would evolve from the intricate picking heard on her early albums to the more rhythmic, percussive style that she would employ as she explored more overt jazz influences. In 2003, *Rolling Stone* would rank Mitchell as the highest-placing female in its list of the greatest guitarists of all time.

Shortly before moving to Toronto, Joni learned that she was pregnant. On February 19, 1965, she gave birth to a baby girl, Kelly Dale Anderson. Single and broke in an unfamiliar town, she soon wed folk singer Chuck Mitchell, hoping that marriage would ease her transition into motherhood. But after a few weeks of marriage, she had a change of heart, and gave her daughter up for adoption.

Mitchell would keep the matter private for many years to come, although she would make reference to it in several songs, most notably "Little Green," on her 1971 album *Blue*. In adulthood, Mitchell's daughter, now named Kilauren Gibb, would search for her birth mother, and the two would be reunited in the late 1990s.

In the summer of 1965, Joni and Chuck Mitchell moved across the U.S. border to Detroit, where they performed as a duo in that city's folk clubs. The couple would eventually separate after a year and a half of marriage, but Joni would retain her ex-husband's surname in her solo career.

By summer 1966, Mitchell's growing reputation had won her an invitation to perform at the prestigious Newport Folk Festival, alongside many of the folk

world's biggest names. Although she was still a virtual unknown, her short set—which included such future Mitchell standards as “Michael from Mountains,” “Chelsea Morning,” and “The Circle Game”—won a rapturous response from a mesmerized audience.

Early in 1967, Mitchell moved to New York, where she met manager Elliot Roberts, who became an enthusiastic supporter and would continue to direct her career for decades to come. She performed locally and toured folk clubs up and down the East Coast, developing a reputation as a compelling live performer.

While playing in a club in Florida, Mitchell was seen by ex-Byrds member David Crosby, who was so taken with her talents that he brought her to Los Angeles. There, Mitchell moved in with Crosby and became a prominent presence on that city's musical community.

Crosby became a tireless champion on Mitchell's behalf, using his music business connections to spread word of her talents. The buzz resulted in a recording deal with Warner Bros. Records' Reprise label. Crosby signed on as producer of her first album, using his influence to get the company to allow her to record in a spare, acoustic style, without the ornate folk-rock arrangements that were common on singer/songwriters' albums at the time.

Meanwhile, Mitchell's songs had begun to attract substantial attention in the form of cover versions by more established artists. Noted folkie Tom Rush had met Mitchell in Toronto, and was impressed enough to bring her “Urge for Going”—a vivid evocation of changing seasons and life's passages—to the attention of Judy Collins. When Collins passed, Rush recorded the tune himself. It would appear on his 1968 album *The Circle Game*, whose title track was another Mitchell composition. After country star George Hamilton IV heard Rush's version of “Urge for Going,” he cut his own version and scored a country hit with it, marking the first chart appearance of a Joni Mitchell song.

Other prominent folk artists to record Mitchell material early on included Ian and Sylvia, Buffy Sainte Marie, and Dave Van Ronk, as well as seminal British folk-rockers Fairport Convention, who recorded two of her songs on their 1967 debut album and another on their second LP the following year.

COMING OF AGE IN CALIFORNIA

Mitchell had already become something of a cause celebre among other artists by the time her first LP was released in early 1968. With mentor Crosby producing, the album—officially titled *Joni Mitchell*, but commonly referred to as *Song to a Seagull*, in recognition of the message spelled out by a flock of airborne birds in its front cover painting—was a remarkably accomplished debut.

With its sides subtitled "I Came to the City" and "Out of the City and Down to the Seaside," the debut disc was informally divided between songs featuring urban imagery and others suggesting a more pastoral atmosphere. Whatever their settings, there was no mistaking the poetic insights and subtle melodic sophistication of her artfully detailed love songs ("Michael from Mountains," "Marcie") and pensive character studies ("I Had a King," "Nathan la Freneer").

While *Joni Mitchell's* visionary songcraft was celebrated by an in-the-know core of musicians, critics, and hipsters, the album's sales were relatively modest. The artist toured widely, making high-profile appearances at the Miami Pop Festival and London's Royal Festival Hall. Mitchell's commercial stock received a substantial boost when her early idol Judy Collins scored a Top Ten single with Mitchell's "Both Sides, Now" in late 1968.

The Collins hit helped to build anticipation for the April 1969 release of Mitchell's second LP, *Clouds*, which contained her own version of the "Both Sides, Now." In addition to raising her commercial profile, the sophomore effort marked a substantial artistic leap. Beyond her confident, expressive performances, *Clouds* benefited from spare arrangements based around Mitchell's distinctive guitar work; the only other musician on the album was Stephen Stills of Buffalo Springfield/Crosby, Stills, and Nash fame, who contributed understated guitar and bass.

In addition to Mitchell's own vibrant versions of "Both Sides, Now," "Chelsea Morning," and "Tin Angel," all of which had already been heard in other artists' cover versions, *Clouds* boasted several remarkable new songs that further established Mitchell as a prominent new voice. She affectingly addressed the insecurities of new love ("I Don't Know Where I Stand"), young adulthood's loss of innocence ("Songs to Aging Children Come," which would be featured prominently in the 1970 film version of Arlo Guthrie's *Alice's Restaurant*) and the dehumanizing effects of war (the a cappella "The Fiddle and the Drum"). *Clouds* also won Mitchell her first Grammy award, in the Best Folk Performance category.

As Mitchell toured in support of *Clouds*, Warner Bros. recorded a concert at New York's Carnegie Hall and another in Berkeley, California, with an eye toward releasing the results as a live album. Instead, her third LP, 1970's *Ladies of the Canyon*, would be another collection of new studio recordings. It would further broaden Mitchell's public appeal, thanks in large part to "Big Yellow Taxi," a playful environmental anthem that became her first Top Forty single.

Ladies of the Canyon's title referred to Laurel Canyon, the L.A. hipster enclave where Mitchell now resided with David Crosby's musical partner Graham Nash, in a home that Nash would immortalize in the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young hit "Our House." The album found her moving in unexpected new directions, introducing new thematic and stylistic elements that

would manifest themselves more prominently on future releases, such as the emotional desolation of “The Arrangement,” the imaginative use of piano, cello, saxophone, clarinet, and flute throughout, and the extended instrumental passages that graced several tracks.

Both in sound and substance, *Ladies of the Canyon* was infused with the sunny, free-spirited vibe of late 1960s California life, with “Conversation,” “Willy,” and the title song offering a near-mythical evocation of the Golden State. Other highlights included the bucolic small-town vignette “Morning Morgantown” and the poignant “For Free,” on which the artist contrasted her own vocation with that of a humble street performer. “For Free” was the first of several songs on which Mitchell would examine the benefits and drawbacks of stardom.

Ladies of the Canyon also included “Woodstock,” a starry-eyed ode to the historic 1969 rock festival, which celebrated the event as a mystical milestone in the awakening of human consciousness. Although many listeners assumed that Mitchell was present at Woodstock, she was actually inspired to write the song while in New York City and watching news reports about the event. She had been scheduled to perform on the festival’s final day, but was advised by her management to cancel when the clogged highways caused by attendees threatened her chances of getting back to Manhattan in time for a scheduled appearance on Dick Cavett’s TV talk show.

“Woodstock” became a major U.S. hit when it was covered by Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, who did perform at the festival. In Britain, it hit the pop charts in a version by Matthews’s Southern Comfort, a band led by former Fairport Convention singer Ian Matthews. While the better-known Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young version of “Woodstock” emphasized the song’s anthemic elements, Mitchell’s reading is thoughtful and meditative, with a haunting electric piano arrangement that accentuated the song’s spiritual elements.

Ladies of the Canyon received substantial airplay on FM radio, resulting in higher sales that earned Mitchell her first gold album award. Her new fans took pleasure speculating about the real people and relationships who had inspired Mitchell’s lyrics.

While *Ladies of the Canyon* raised her profile substantially, her growing fame became a source of some discomfort for Mitchell. Rather than working to capitalize upon her expanding audience, she decided to take a year off from touring in order to concentrate on writing, painting, and travel. On an extended trip through Europe, she spent time in France, Spain, and Greece. During an extended retreat to the Greek island of Crete, she learned to play dulcimer and wrote a series of starkly reflective new songs inspired by her travels.

During this period, Mitchell limited her live appearances to a few festival dates during the summer of 1970, including a performance at the massive Isle of Wight festival in August. Although one of the best-known and most star-studded of the era’s rock extravaganzas, the 1970 Isle of Wight fest—the third

and last in a series of annual events—turned out to be a financial and logistical debacle, as well as a somewhat traumatic event for Mitchell.

At one point during her Isle of Wight set, an acquaintance of Mitchell's jumped on stage, grabbed her microphone, and launched into a less-than-coherent diatribe criticizing the festival, before being dragged off the stage by security personnel. When audience members protested the interloper's removal, a shaken Mitchell responded by urging that the crowd treat the performers with more respect.

The songs that Mitchell wrote during her European sojourn formed the core of her next album, *Blue*, released in June 1971. *Blue* was a major creative watershed for Mitchell, stripping away whatever had been flowery or twee in her previous work and focusing on raw emotional insight. While its lyrics delivered unflinching emotional truths, *Blue* replaced the relatively conventional acoustic folk stylings of her prior releases with more intricate arrangements that prominently featured dulcimer and piano (a reflection of Mitchell's admiration for the piano-based work of Laura Nyro).

Blue offered a sublimely expressive song cycle that explored romantic loss and disillusionment with such disarming honesty that it came to be widely regarded as the quintessential 1970s singer-songwriter album. "This Flight Tonight," "A Case of You," "Little Green," and the title track (reportedly inspired by fellow troubadour James Taylor) exemplified the album's raw resonance, while even the more upbeat material, such as "Carey," "All I Want," and "My Old Man," carried an unmistakable undercurrent of sadness. The desolate, bittersweetly beautiful "River" would, ironically, become a staple of Christmas-season radio programming, as well as one of Mitchell's most-covered compositions.

Although *Blue* would become so deeply ingrained in the public consciousness that it's now hard to imagine it any different, the album actually underwent some revisions just prior to its release. The LP had already been sequenced and mastered, before being altered at the last minute by Mitchell, who deleted the much-covered "Urge for Going" and the little-known "Hunter (The Good Samaritan)," replacing those with "All I Want" and "The Last Time I Saw Richard," both of which would emerge among *Blue*'s best-loved songs.

Blue was a nearly instant critical and commercial hit, sealing Mitchell's status as one of the new decade's cultural icons. That perception was supported by her concurrent guest appearances on albums by two of her most prominent peers, James Taylor's *Mud Slide Slim and the Blue Horizon* and Carole King's massively popular *Tapestry*.

In the wake of *Blue*'s success, Mitchell returned to touring. Her live performances during that period—including some benefit concerts for anti-war Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern—introduced many of the new songs that would appear on her next album, *For the Roses*. The 1972 release marked her move to Asylum Records, a new imprint run by influential young rock mogul David Geffen, who would continue to play a

prominent role in Mitchell's career. Asylum, which had been acquired by Warner Communications and merged with the hip rock label Elektra, would quickly emerge as a key outlet for many of the major exponents of 1970s West Coast rock, including Jackson Browne and the Eagles.

Jackson Browne: For Everyman

Born October 9, 1948, in Heidelberg, Germany (where his father was stationed with the U.S. military), Jackson Browne grew up in Orange County, California. He moved to New York City at age nineteen, shortly after two of his original songs ("Melissa" and "Holding") were included on the debut album by the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band, but later returned west to Los Angeles. Other early Browne compositions such as "These Days" gained critical attention when covered by folksinger Tom Rush and ex-Velvet Underground chanteuse Nico.

Browne was not yet twenty-one when he wrote "These Days," in which the narrator expresses a mournful hindsight and the sense that he's already seen too much of life and its disappointments. The boyishly handsome Browne's gift for memorable melodies complemented his poetic talents in other early songs such as "Rock Me on the Water" and "Jamaica, Say You Will." His best songs depict a young American searching for love, security, and a purposeful life within the materialism, superficiality, and shifting emotional landscapes of contemporary society. Beyond his own success, Browne's sound and style exerted a profound influence on the southern California rock scene of the 1970s. Linda Ronstadt recorded several of his compositions and other L.A.-based singer/songwriters such as J.D. Souther and Warren Zevon followed in the wake of his career.

In March 1972, Jackson Browne released his debut album, *Saturate Before Using*, which spun off the Top Ten Pop hit "Doctor My Eyes." That same year, the Eagles scored a breakthrough hit with his composition "Take It Easy," which reached number twelve. Browne's second album, *For Everyman*, was issued in November 1973. Like its predecessor, the disc was only a mid-chart success but earned strongly favorable reviews and sold steadily over time. *For Everyman* became the first of Browne's five successive million-sellers including the ambitious *Late for the Sky* (1974, number fourteen) and *The Pretender* (1976, number five). During the making of the latter album, the singer's wife Phyllis Major committed suicide. This tragedy seems to have moved Browne toward an even more unflinching introspection with such songs as "Here Come Those Tears Again" and "Sleep's Dark and Silent Gate."

Running on Empty (1978, number three) and the number one album *Hold Out* (1980) became Jackson Browne's best-selling recordings. He reached his Hot 100 peak in 1982 with "Somebody's Baby" (number seven), which was popularized by its inclusion on the soundtrack of the movie *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Albums from the Reagan years like *Lawyers in Love* (1983)

found the singer turning from the personal to the broadly political, and throughout the 1980s Browne sharpened his leftist-humanist critique. *Lives in the Balance* (1986) remained on the *Billboard* chart for nearly eight months and was certified gold.

While his profile as a recording artist gradually diminished over the next decade, the singer's tours were always well received. In 2004, Jackson Browne was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and in 2005 he revisited his impressive song catalog on the independently released album *Solo Acoustic Vol. I*.

Andy Schwartz

For the Roses was a transitional effort that found Mitchell continuing to expand her sound. While some tracks stuck to the spare, folk-based approach of her earlier releases, others marked the initial stirrings of the overt jazz influences and extended instrumental passages that would soon become prominent in her work. Along with old friends Graham Nash and Stephen Stills and legendary rockabilly guitarist James Burton, the album's supporting cast included noted jazz-fusion bassist Wilton Felder and saxophone/reeds player Tom Scott, who would emerge as a key Mitchell collaborator.

The album also featured some of Mitchell's most artful and eloquent writing yet, continuing in the unsparingly insightful vein of *Blue*. Her talent for documenting the dynamics of troubled relationships is featured on "Woman of Heart and Mind," "Lesson in Survival," and "See You Sometime," while "Barangrill" and "Cold Blue Steel and Sweet Fire" demonstrated her knack for lyrical scene-setting.

For the Roses continued Mitchell's upward sales trend, spawning her biggest single to date in the buoyant pop gem "You Turn Me On (I'm a Radio)." The song's central double entendre proved irresistible to disc jockeys, sending it to number twenty-five on the *Billboard* pop chart in early 1973.

Having attained sufficient commercial success to wield control over her artistic direction, Mitchell next followed her muse into new territory. Ironically, her explorations produced 1974's *Court and Spark*, the most commercially successful album of her career. Her efforts to find musicians sympathetic to her songs' quirky chord patterns and unconventional rhythms led her to forge a productive working relationship with saxist Tom Scott's jazz-fusion outfit, the L.A. Express—whose membership included such stellar players as guitarist Larry Carlton, bassist Max Bennett, keyboardist Joe Sample, and drummer John Guerin, who was also Mitchell's boyfriend at the time—who provided most of the backup on the album. A few months earlier, Mitchell had contributed a guest vocal to "Love Poem" on the L.A. Express album *Tom Cat*.

Court and Spark's seamlessly accessible pop/folk/jazz blend struck a responsive chord with fans, spending four weeks in the number two slot on *Billboard*'s

album chart. It also produced a trio of successful singles in the breezy “Help Me,” Mitchell’s first and only Top Ten single; the witty “Free Man in Paris,” a character portrait whose stressed-out protagonist was reportedly inspired by David Geffen; and the sly-humored singles-bar scenario “Raised on Robbery.”

Court and Spark has been described as a concept album examining the need for honesty and trust in relationships, and Mitchell’s customary level of lyrical insight was prominent on “Down to You,” “People’s Parties,” and “The Same Situation,” which wrestled with insecurity and self-doubt—feelings which were somehow complemented by the music’s smooth, effortless swing.

In addition to the members of L.A. Express, *Court and Spark* featured guest appearances by David Crosby, Graham Nash, Latin-pop hit maker Jose Feliciano, The Band’s Robbie Robertson, and even popular stoner comedy duo Cheech and Chong, who added their patented patter to Mitchell’s lighthearted reading of “Twisted,” a satirical jazz tune originated by the noted vocal trio of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross.

Although *Court and Spark* would mark her commercial apex, Mitchell continued to balance musical experimentation with mass appeal on her next few albums, maintaining her dual positions as an influential artist and popular star.

Mitchell’s high profile was demonstrated when *Court and Spark* was nominated for four Grammy awards. But the mainstream triumphed when she was beaten in the Best Female Pop Vocal and Record of the Year categories by Olivia Newton-John’s drippy “I Honestly Love You.” Mitchell and Tom Scott did win one Grammy, for Best Arrangement Accompanying Vocals.

To support *Court and Spark*, Mitchell mounted a lengthy tour, with the L.A. Express as her backup band. That trek saw her rise to the occasion while playing in some massive venues, including a series of summer stadium shows with Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young.

The tour spawned the two-LP *Miles of Aisles*, most of which was recorded during a trio of August shows at L.A.’s Universal Amphitheater. The live album found Mitchell and company reinterpreting songs from her first five albums, along with the new compositions “Love or Money” and “Jericho.” In addition to giving her the opportunity to rework familiar material, the live collection also served as a handy introduction for the new fans that she’d won in the wake of *Court and Spark*’s crossover success.

Mitchell continued to challenge her new listeners with 1975’s *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*. Recorded with many of the same musicians as *Court and Spark*, the album marked her bravest artistic leap yet. Her new songs radically redefined the boundaries of her style, trading the conventional song forms of her prior work for a mix of pop and jazz elements that had no precedent in mainstream popular music, along with exotic rhythms that presaged the multicultural consciousness that would take another decade to become commonplace in rock.

Her new lyrics were equally adventurous, largely abandoning the relentless self-examination of her prior work. Instead, she turned her observational

skills upon the outside world, resulting in richly cinematic vignettes that offered colorful tales of mobsters (“Edith and the Kingpin”) and the idle wealthy (the title track).

The album’s most striking departure was “The Jungle Line,” an insistently rhythmic epic that incorporated wailing synthesizer, unconventional vocal harmonies, and the forceful tribal drumming style of the Royal Drummers of the African nation of Burundi. Mitchell is generally regarded as the first Western musician to incorporate Burundi rhythms; they would later be utilized by many other white acts, including 1980s British new-wavers Adam and the Ants and Bow Wow Wow.

The Hissing of Summer Lawns is now widely considered to be a visionary classic, revered by fans, critics and a broad array of musicians. But the album received less than glowing reviews at the time, with many critics expressing discomfort with Mitchell’s ostensible abandonment of her confessional focus. One particularly scathing review appeared in *Rolling Stone*, which would maintain a volatile love/hate relationship with Mitchell over the years.

Whatever the reservations of critics, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* was a solid seller, peaking at number four in *Billboard*. But it would be Mitchell’s last Top Ten album, and the first of a string of uncompromising releases that would alienate a substantial chunk of her audience while sealing her status as one of rock’s most influential innovators.

In the fall of 1975, Mitchell joined up with Bob Dylan’s all-star touring ensemble the Rolling Thunder Revue, for the last four shows of the now-legendary road show’s first leg, before starting 1976 to tour with the L.A. Express in support of *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*.

During America’s bicentennial summer of 1976, Mitchell, who had recently broken up with John Guerin, accompanied two friends on a cross-country drive from California to Maine, before driving home to California on her own, via Florida and the Southwestern states. During the trip, Mitchell’s observations of American landscape inspired her to write six songs for her next album, *Hejira*.

The spacious, moody album, whose title is an Arabic word signifying a break from one’s past, was Mitchell’s most overtly jazz-based effort to date, largely maintaining a subdued, reflective mood, with relatively spare arrangements built around Mitchell’s and Larry Carlton’s guitars. *Hejira*’s songs featured evocative, metaphorical lyrics and sweeping melodic lines that often provided a complementary contrast to the tracks’ fluid jazz rhythms.

Rather than concentrate on first-person soul-searching, many of *Hejira*’s road-inspired material—rife with images of highways and small towns—delivered their insights via incisive character portraits. “Song to Sharon” finds its title character wrestling with conflicting desires for marriage and independence, while “Furry Sings the Blues” (with Neil Young on harmonica) was inspired by an encounter with elderly Delta bluesman Furry Lewis). “Amelia,” ostensibly an ode to doomed aviatrix Amelia Earhart, carried a haunting

personal resonance. While the languid late-night vibe of “Blue Motel Room” reflected *Hejira*’s overall mood, “Coyote” and “Black Crow” offered upbeat songcraft that indicated that Mitchell hadn’t lost her playful streak.

Much of *Hejira* was already in the can when Mitchell decided that the recordings lacked a certain quality that she’d been looking for. At around the same time, she heard about a fretless bassist, Jaco Pastorius, whose melodic, inventive playing had begun to cause a stir in the jazz world. Mitchell went to see the twenty-three-year-old prodigy play, and immediately connected with his distinctive style, in which she recognized elements of her own unconventional approach to guitar. She decided that Pastorius was the element that her new music had been missing, and brought him in to overdub new bass parts on four *Hejira* tracks.

Mitchell and Pastorius first performed together publicly on November 20, 1976, two days before *Hejira*’s release, at a Save the Whales benefit concert in Sacramento, California. Three days later, she was part of a star-studded roster of guest performers, including Bob Dylan, Eric Clapton, Van Morrison, and Neil Young, appearing at The Band’s farewell extravaganza at San Francisco’s Winterland ballroom. The show was filmed by director Martin Scorsese and released in 1978 as the acclaimed concert film *The Last Waltz*, which featured Mitchell and The Band’s memorable performance of “Coyote,” one of three songs she’d played at the show.

Unlike *The Hissing of Summer Lawns*, *Hejira* was praised by most critics, who embraced Mitchell’s return to more personal songwriting. The album sold well enough to attain gold sales status three weeks after its release. But it received limited airplay on FM rock stations, which undoubtedly put a dent into its sales.

URGE FOR GROWING

In the summer of 1977, Mitchell began working on *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter*, a double LP of loose, abstract pieces that would be her most unconventional effort to date. The album found Mitchell embracing the freedom of the jazz aesthetic more strongly than ever, with much of the music constructed through spontaneous improvisation with a supporting cast that included Carlton, Guerin, percussionist Don Alias, and seminal saxophonist Wayne Shorter, as well as an assortment of Latin percussionists. Also participating in the sessions were guest vocalists Chaka Khan, J.D. Souther, and Eagles member Glenn Frey.

The opening “Overture” featured six simultaneous guitars playing together in multiple tunings. The satirical fantasia “Dreamland” was comprised entirely of percussion and vocals. The seven-minute instrumental “The Tenth World” emphasized Latin percussion. The album’s centerpiece was the sixteen-minute,

side-long “Paprika Plains,” which featured a full orchestra and Mitchell’s improvised piano passages.

Released in December 1977, *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* met with mixed reviews, with some critics hailing it as a brave masterpiece and others dismissing it as overwrought and unfocused. Although it sold well enough to go gold and reach number twenty-five on the *Billboard* chart, the album’s obscure lyrics and general lack of memorable melodies alienated a sizable portion of the longtime fans who’d stuck with Mitchell through *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* and *Hejira*. The package also raised eyebrows with its fanciful cover photographs, which featured Mitchell in male drag as a black pimp character she named Art Nouveau.

One of those who did admire *Don Juan’s Reckless Daughter* was pioneering bebop bassist and composer Charles Mingus, who was so impressed that he invited Mitchell to collaborate with him on a planned musical interpretation of poet T.S. Eliot’s “Four Quartets.”

Mingus had proposed that he write a score for bass, guitar, and orchestra around the Eliot pieces, with Mitchell editing Eliot’s verses into lyrics and singing the results. Although Mitchell was intrigued by the prospect of working with the revered jazz giant, she found the prospect of condensing Eliot’s work to be daunting. A few weeks after Mitchell declined, Mingus called to tell her that he’d written six original pieces for her to write lyrics to.

Judging this to be a more practical assignment, Mitchell accepted, and in the spring of 1978 spent several weeks with Mingus in New York, working on the material for their collaboration. During that period, they cut some preliminary studio sessions that included contributions from such stellar jazz instrumentalists as bassist Stanley Clarke, keyboardist Jan Hammer, guitarist John McLaughlin, saxophonist Gerry Mulligan, and drummer Tony Williams. These recordings would not be released to the general public, although some would eventually surface in underground collectors’ circles.

At the time, Mingus was battling Lou Gehrig’s disease, and Mitchell accompanied Mingus and his wife Sue to Mexico, where the musician sought alternative treatments for his illness. After Mingus died on January 5, 1979, Mitchell refashioned the project as a tribute to the late jazz giant. As completed by Mitchell and an all-star electric band that included Pastorius, Shorter and keyboardist Herbie Hancock, drummer Peter Erskine, and percussionist Emil Richards, the album was released that June as *Mingus*, and combined recordings of three Mitchell/Mingus collaborations, along with some new Mingus-inspired Mitchell compositions and a heartfelt interpretation of the Mingus classic “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat,” with the tracks linked by bits of Mingus conversation that made the late musician a palpable presence on the album.

Mingus was released in July 1979 to a less than enthusiastic response from critics. Although it managed to place in the *Billboard* Top Twenty, it received little airplay and was the first Joni Mitchell album to fall short of gold sales

status since her 1968 debut. Although it was widely regarded as a failure at the time of its release, the album's prestige has grown considerably over the years, and many supporters now regard it as a visionary work.

By this point, Mitchell had lost much of her mainstream pop audience, leaving her with a relatively small but devoted core of followers. Those loyalists would stick with her in the years to come, as she continued to heed the call of her unpredictable muse while ignoring the demands of the mainstream marketplace.

Meanwhile, Mitchell's increasing esteem within the jazz community was confirmed by several high-profile appearances. A week before *Mingus's* release, she unveiled the new material at the U.C. Jazz Festival in Berkeley, California, with a band that included Alias, Hancock, Pastorius, and Williams. She also headlined the prestigious Playboy Jazz Festival at the Hollywood Bowl in June.

During this period, Mitchell began to devote increased attention to her passion for painting. One of her canvases graced the front cover of *Mingus*, whose release coincided with the publication of *StarArt*, a coffee-table book collecting artwork by Joni and fellow musicians Cat Stevens, John Mayall, Commander Cody, Klaus Voorman, and Rolling Stone Ron Wood.

Nineteen eighty saw the release of *Shadows and Light*, Mitchell's second live double album, which was accompanied by a concert video of the same name. Unlike *Miles of Aisles*, *Shadows and Light* concentrated on songs from her recent jazz-inspired recordings, offering vibrant new readings featuring such star sidemen as Jaco Pastorius, guitarist Pat Metheny, saxophonist Michael Brecker and keyboardist Lyle Mays, all of whom were given abundant room to stretch out and interact. The collection offered a handy summation of Mitchell's boundary-breaking late 1970s work.

In late 1980, Mitchell went to Toronto to work on *Love*, an offbeat multi-part feature film written by various prominent female artists. Mitchell scripted a segment, as well as assembling the soundtrack and starring onscreen in the same male role she'd introduced on the cover of *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter*. Rather than use her own music, she scored her portion of the film using jazz recordings, most of them by Miles Davis, during which she did write and perform the film's title theme. Intriguing as the project may have been, *Love* was apparently never completed.

Mitchell was still in Toronto when she was inducted into the Juno Awards' Canadian Music Hall of Fame by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. She then made an extended trip to the Caribbean to work on new songs, during which she also found time to paint a mural on a wall in the home of Jamaican filmmaker Perry Henzell (director of the reggae-themed cult hit *The Harder They Come*). During her visit to the islands, Mitchell soaked up the beat of Jamaican reggae, as well as the exotic rhythms of such new-wave rock acts as the Police and Talking Heads. At one point, Mitchell even asked the Police to record with her.

CHALK MARK IN THE 1980s

Although a Mitchell/Police collaboration did not come to pass, Joni's new polyrhythmic influences would manifest themselves on her next album, *Wild Things Run Fast*. More significantly, though, the album found Mitchell returning to melodic pop songwriting and emotionally direct lyrics, while retaining an unmistakable jazz sensibility that informed the album's musical palette.

Wild Things Run Fast was originally recorded for Asylum Records, to whom Mitchell owed one more album. But it was ultimately released in October 1982 on old friend David Geffen's much-touted new label, which bore his surname. The high-profile move, combined with the fact that the album featured her most commercially accessible music since *Court and Spark*, helped to put Mitchell back in the mainstream public eye. She even briefly returned to the pop charts when her tongue-in-cheek reworking of the old Elvis Presley number "(You're So Square) Baby I Don't Care" narrowly scraped into the Top Fifty to become her first chart single in eight years.

Wild Things Run Fast yielded such catchy, upbeat originals as "Solid Love," "You Dream Flat Tires," and "Underneath the Streetlights," while "Chinese Cafe" demonstrated left-field pop savvy by incorporating elements of the beloved pop standard "Unchained Melody." The album's accessible orientation was further reflected in the presence of guest vocalists James Taylor, Kenny Rankin, and Lionel Richie, the ex-Commodores member who at the time was riding high as a solo star.

Much of Mitchell's new material was inspired by her relationship with bassist Larry Klein, whom she wed on November 21, 1982, in a ceremony at the home of manager Elliot Roberts. Klein quickly emerged as the artist's chief musical collaborator, playing on and helping to mix *Wild Things Run Fast*.

Wild Things Run Fast won back some of the old fans that Mitchell had lost with *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* and *Mingus*. But she had the misfortune of releasing her potential commercial comeback just as the pop mainstream had begun to emphasize the slick, gimmicky acts that were being promoted through the new music-video cable channel MTV, limiting Mitchell's ability to reach new listeners.

If *Wild Things Run Fast* didn't quite restore Mitchell to her former level of popularity, it wasn't for lack of trying. To support the album, she embarked on the most extensive concert tour of her career, running five months and encompassing Japan, Australia, Britain, Europe, and the United States. Mitchell and Klein later put together *Refuge of the Roads*, a documentary that mixed live performances from the tour with home-movie footage.

Mitchell would continue to release challenging new music through the 1980s and 1990s, albeit with less frequency than in her 1970s heyday. By the end of 1984, she and Klein had taken an active interest in electronics, and had

begun working with the Fairlight synthesizer, a state-of-the-art instrument capable of reproducing a vast array of sounds.

When they indicated their intention to integrate their electronic experiments into Mitchell's next recording project, Geffen brought up the possibility of working with an outside collaborator with more synthesizer experience. Geffen suggested Thomas Dolby, one of the most accomplished of the then-current crop of new British synth-pop stars. Although he'd scored an international hit in 1983 with his wacky techno-pop anthem "She Blinded Me with Science," Dolby was also a longtime Mitchell fan who'd recorded a memorable cover of "The Jungle Line."

With Dolby acting as player, programmer, and co-producer, 1985's *Dog Eat Dog* combined an assortment of modern sounds with some of the most uncompromisingly political songwriting of Mitchell's career. "Dog Eat Dog," "Fiction," and "The Three Great Stimulants" were sharp indictments of the callousness and materialism of Reagan-era America, even if their lyrics were occasionally so abstract as to partially obscure their messages.

Dog Eat Dog's social consciousness was further reflected in "Ethiopia," which poignantly contrasts the gravity of third-world poverty with the emptiness of show-business glitz. The song was partially Mitchell's skeptical response to the all-star charity recordings that proliferated at the time (although she did participate in one such project, Northern Lights, a one-off assemblage of Canadian musicians, including such contemporaries as Neil Young, Gordon Lightfoot, and Anne Murray, who recorded the song "Tears Are Not Enough" to raise funds for Ethiopian famine relief).

Dog Eat Dog's Los Angeles release party was held at the James Corcoran Gallery, in conjunction with an exhibition of Mitchell's recent abstract expressionist collage paintings. She also made an effort to join the music-video explosion by putting together a visually inventive promo clip for the album track "Good Friends." The video premiered on MTV with a fair amount of fanfare, but received limited exposure on the channel thereafter.

Dog Eat Dog's extensive use of advanced recording technology made it Mitchell's most expensive recording project to date, but the album's lackluster sales hardly justified the expense. The songs' angry stance divided and confused many critics, and the album stalled at number sixty-three—Joni's poorest chart showing since her debut album.

Like many of Mitchell's more "difficult" releases, *Dog Eat Dog* has gained resonance with the passage of time, and its harsher visions have largely been vindicated by subsequent world events. At the time, though, its commercial performance was so disappointing that Mitchell cancelled a planned six-month tour to support the album, choosing to use the time to paint instead.

During the summer of 1985, Mitchell and Klein survived a serious automobile accident on the Pacific Coast Highway, when their car was hit by a drunk driver. In September, Joni, who owned a home in a remote section of British Columbia, became embroiled in controversy when she and her rural neighbors

campaigned against a salmon-fishing company whose nearby processing plant they believed to be threatening the area's ecology. The situation became particularly uncomfortable after local newspapers sided with the fishing company.

Over the next two years, Mitchell limited her public appearances to a handful of benefit shows. For example, on June 15, 1986, Mitchell was a last-minute addition to the all-star Amnesty International Conspiracy of Hope benefit concert at New Jersey's Giants Stadium.

Mitchell continued to pursue electronic influences on 1988's *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*. On paper, the album might have seemed like a commercial move, since it teamed Mitchell with a diverse assortment of famous guest vocalists, including Peter Gabriel, Don Henley, Willie Nelson, Tom Petty, cartoon pop-punk Billy Idol, the Cars' Benjamin Orr, former Prince sidekicks Wendy Melvoin and Lisa Coleman, and even Iron Eyes Cody, the Native American actor who'd played Tonto in the old Lone Ranger film series. Despite its roster of big-name singers, though, the album was as idiosyncratic—and as out-of-step with the 1980s mainstream—as its predecessor.

Beyond its resourceful use of multiple voices and its emphasis on spare, percussion-heavy instrumental tracks, *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm* continued to explore many of the topical themes that Mitchell had explored on *Dog Eat Dog*. The songs encompassed the environment ("Lakota" and a rewrite of the old cowboy song "Cool Water"), war ("The Tea Leaf Prophecy," "The Beat of Black Wings"), and the soullessness of contemporary American culture ("Number One," "The Reoccurring Dream").

The album led off with Mitchell's duet with Gabriel, the tender love song "My Secret Place"; it was recorded at Gabriel's studio in England, where Klein was playing on the sessions for Gabriel's album *So*. Elsewhere, Nelson brought his trademark twang to "Cool Water," while Henley was featured on "Lakota" and "Snakes and Ladders," and Petty and Idol assumed colorful character roles on "Dancin' Clown." The album-closing "A Bird That Whistles" was a rewrite of the blues standard "Corrina, Corrina," featuring Wayne Shorter on sax.

Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm generally received more favorable reviews than *Dog Eat Dog*, and its sales were slightly better—although not sufficiently so to prevent the cancellation of yet another planned concert tour. It did, however, bring Mitchell her first Grammy nomination in over a decade, in the Best Female Pop Vocal Performance category. She ended up losing to newcomer Tracy Chapman. Ironically, Chapman was managed by Joni's longtime manager Elliot Roberts, whom Mitchell had fired only a few months before.

Although Mitchell didn't tour behind *Chalk Mark in a Rainstorm*, she did make a guest appearance at a performance of *The Joni Mitchell Project*, a stage revue built around her songs that ran for three months at the L.A. Theater Center. She debuted the new "Cherokee Louise," which would appear on her 1991 album *Night Ride Home*.

TURBULENCE AND GRACE

Mitchell's final Geffen release *Night Ride Home* represented a strong return to the artist's roots, dispensing with the technological frills and celebrity duets of her recent work in favor of spare, mostly acoustic arrangements built around her voice and guitar. "Night Ride Home," "Passion Play (When All the Slaves Are Free)," and "Come in from the Cold" echoed the reflective intimacy of her early work, while tackling more mature subject matter in a manner that reflected the viewpoint of a fiercely independent woman closing in on her fifties.

Night Ride Home won Mitchell the most enthusiastic reviews she'd received in years. Unfortunately, Geffen's artist roster was now dominated by young hard-rock and heavy metal bands, and the soon-to-be-departing Mitchell was no longer much of a promotional priority for the label. The result was that the album failed to win the mass audience it might have reached had it been released a few years earlier.

Although *Night Ride Home* didn't quite reestablish Joni Mitchell as a cultural icon, she did receive some unexpected notoriety the following year, when Bill Clinton became the Democratic Party candidate for president. The press was quick to note that Clinton's teenage daughter Chelsea had been named after Mitchell's "Chelsea Morning"—although it had actually been Judy Collins's cover version that Clinton and wife Hilary had heard at the time.

Mitchell and Larry Klein separated in 1994, but continued to work together on that year's *Turbulent Indigo*, which marked Mitchell's return to Warner Bros./Reprise. Her return to her original label carried some symbolic value, since the album largely continued to embrace the sound and spirit of her beloved earlier work.

Turbulent Indigo's melodically accessible, lyrically direct songs seamlessly meshed the personal and the topical, looking outward at a troubled world while exploring the rocky terrain of the human heart. The resulting album offered an incisive and sometimes disturbing panorama of contemporary life, all the more effective for its spare, understated sound.

While "Last Chance Lost" and the disquieting domestic-abuse tale "Not to Blame" observed relationships gone awry, other tracks maintained the sociopolitical perspective that had been so prominent on *Dog Eat Dog* and *Chalk Mark in a Rain Storm*. For example, "Sunny Sunday" presented an eloquent metaphor in its protagonist's nightly attempt to shoot out a streetlight, while "Sex Kills" offered a dark assessment of the state of civilization, encompassing a litany of ills from AIDS to the degradation of the environment.

Although its sales were again underwhelming, *Turbulent Indigo*—whose front cover featured a Van Gogh-inspired Mitchell self-portrait—was widely acclaimed as a return to form for Mitchell. Its release coincided with a growing sense of public acknowledgment of her importance and influence, an

awareness that was affirmed when *Turbulent Indigo* won a Grammy award as the year's Best Pop Album.

Mitchell's rising public profile was underlined by the simultaneous 1996 release of a pair of retrospective compilations, *Hits* and *Misses*, which collected her successful singles and lesser-known gems, respectively. The latter disc was the idea of Mitchell, who had refused to give her blessing to the proposed best-of collection unless she was allowed to assemble a companion volume of more esoteric material.

Hits included such early favorites as "Urge for Going," "Woodstock," "The Circle Game," and "Big Yellow Taxi," as well as her trio of *Court and Spark*-era hit singles. *Misses*, meanwhile, concentrated on more challenging and esoteric material, offering a handy primer to show Mitchell's pop fans what they'd been missing during the artist's years in the music-industry wilderness. That period was represented here by the *Mingus* highlight "The Wolf That Lives in Lindsey," the title songs of *For the Roses* and *Hejira*, and various favorites from each of her 1980s and 1990s releases.

In January 1996, in an article headlined "Too Feminine for Rock? Or Is Rock Too Macho?," *New York Times* critic Stephen Holden took the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—an institution that had been widely accused of conservatism and elitism, and which had yet to honor any female performers—to task for not having inducted Mitchell, who had become eligible in 1993. Coincidentally or not, Mitchell would finally be voted into the Hall of Fame on May 15, 1997, becoming the first woman artist to receive the honor.

Also in January 1996, Reprise released a CD single containing six diverse remixes of "Big Yellow Taxi." Mitchell's original recording had been featured on a soundtrack album for the TV sitcom *Friends*, released the previous September. The remix EP briefly got Mitchell onto the dance charts; she would venture into R&B the following year, guesting with rapper Q-Tip on the Janet Jackson song "Got 'Til It's Gone," from Jackson's platinum album *The Velvet Rope*.

Mitchell played a more active role in another soundtrack project, director Allison Anders's 1996 film *Grace of My Heart*, a drama set in the pop-music scene of the 1960s. Larry Klein, who served as the project's music supervisor, asked Mitchell to write a song to in the vein of her *For the Roses* period, to be performed by the film's lead character. Although she initially balked at the idea, she reconsidered after viewing scenes from the film, and wrote the bittersweet "Man from Mars" for the occasion.

"Man from Mars" was performed in the film by singer Kristen Vigard, who did all the singing for actress Ileana Douglas's character. Anders had planned to use Mitchell's vocal on the soundtrack album, but when Mitchell objected, Vigard's voice was substituted—but not before the initial batch of CDs reached stores with the Mitchell version included by mistake. MCA Records recalled most of the faulty pressings, but a handful of copies containing Mitchell's voice reached the hands of fans and collectors.

Mitchell revived “Man from Mars” for 1998’s *Taming the Tiger*. The album continued the personally charged songwriting of her recent efforts, while recalling some of the fluid jazz textures of her *Hejira* era. The album’s title track and “Stay in Touch” seemingly referred to the artist’s recent reconnection with her long-lost daughter—and her concurrent discovery that she was a grandmother—and family-related themes ran through the songs. Mitchell promoted *Taming the Tiger* with a long-awaited concert tour, playing numerous co-headlining shows with Bob Dylan and Van Morrison.

In 2000, Mitchell released *Both Sides Now*, a stylistic departure consisting largely of covers of jazz and pop standards of the 1930s and 1940s, with the singer backed by a seventy-one-piece orchestra and/or a 1940s-style big band. As co-producer Klein explained in his liner notes, the album was intended as a song cycle illustrating the trajectory of a modern relationship—despite most of the songs being more than half a century old, and most of them having an unmistakably melancholy mood.

In addition to such familiar numbers as “Stormy Weather” and “Answer Me, My Love,” *Both Sides Now* featured a pair of reworked Mitchell classics, the title song and the *Blue*-era favorite “A Case of You.” Both provided a compelling contrast between the middle-aged artist’s wise, dusky tone and the bright, eager voice of her earlier work. Beyond its conceptual ambitions, the project offered persuasive evidence of Joni’s growth into a masterful, evocative vocalist capable of immense subtlety.

The release of *Both Sides Now* was accompanied by an all-star tribute concert, which was broadcast as a special on the TNT cable network. The broad array of artists who turned out to pay musical tribute to Mitchell—including Bryan Adams, Shawn Colvin, Elton John, Wynonna Judd, Diana Krall, k.d. lang, Cyndi Lauper, James Taylor, and Richard Thompson—attested to the broad swath of her influence.

In 2002, Mitchell abruptly announced that she was finished with the music industry. She stated in interviews that her forthcoming release *Travelogue* would be her last album, and that she had no intention of signing another record deal, or of recording or touring at any time in the foreseeable future. By the time the album was released, she had apparently reconsidered her decision, stating that her retirement plans may have been premature.

If she’d made good on her threat to quit, *Travelogue* would certainly have been an uncommonly graceful swan song. The two-CD set featured new readings of twenty-two classic Mitchell classics, with lush orchestral accompaniment as well as an assortment of jazz players including Larry Klein, Herbie Hancock, Wayne Shorter, organist Billy Preston, and trumpeter Kenny Wheeler.

Travelogue transcended its ostensible status as an instant greatest-hits collection to craft a dynamic and deeply personal statement that attests to the musical and emotional richness of Mitchell’s remarkable body of work. The package—which also reproduced an extensive selection of Mitchell’s paintings—revisited material from various points of her career, largely avoiding her

best known songs (except for “The Circle Game” and “Woodstock”) in favor of more challenging selections. She often recast the songs drastically, placing the songs in new musical contexts that, more often than not, enhanced their insights.

At a time when many of her peers and contemporaries were revisiting their songbooks with easily digestible *Unplugged*-style quasi-retrospectives, *Travelogue* offered a far more complex and rewarding experience.

In 2003 *The Complete Geffen Recordings* was released, which combined remastered editions of her four albums for the label, along with some bonus rarities and Mitchell’s own liner notes observations. The release of the collection coincided with a growing level of appreciation for the artist’s Geffen-era output.

The Complete Geffen Recordings was followed by a trio of themed compilations drawn from Mitchell’s catalog. *The Beginning of Survival* was a collection of topically themed Geffen-era material. *Dreamland* focused on her jazz-based compositions. *Songs of a Prairie Girl* consisted of songs inspired by her upbringing in Canada. The latter collection coincided with Mitchell’s appearance at a concert as part of Saskatchewan’s Centennial celebration, at which Mitchell performed before Queen Elizabeth II.

While her fans had to be satisfied with the flood of retrospective product, Mitchell focused on her visual art, which she rarely sold or exhibited in public. February 2007 saw the debut, in Mitchell’s old stomping grounds of Calgary, of *Dancing Joni*, a ballet built around Mitchell’s songs.

A few months earlier, in an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, Mitchell revealed that she’d been working on her first set of new songs in nearly a decade. The news came as a relief to fans who’d worried that she’d never record again. But regardless of her future musical ventures, Mitchell’s discography is already one of the most remarkable bodies of work in contemporary music, and its influence remains incalculable.

TIMELINE

November 5, 1962

Joni Anderson makes her first paid performance, at the folk club the Louis Riel in Saskatoon, Canada.

August 1963

Joni makes her first television appearance, singing several songs and playing ukulele on a late-night TV show in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.

January 21, 1967

Country singer George Hamilton IV’s version of “Urge for Going,” enters the Country singles chart, the first recording of a Joni Mitchell composition to become a hit.

March 9, 1968

Joni Mitchell’s eponymous debut album is released.

December 1, 1968

Joni Mitchell and Graham Nash move into a home on Lookout Mountain Road in Los Angeles's Laurel Canyon, which will later be immortalized in the Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young hit "Our House."

August 18, 1969

Mitchell is scheduled to perform at the Woodstock festival, but cancels in order to honor a commitment to appear on Dick Cavett's TV talk show. Although she doesn't appear at Woodstock, she's inspired to write the song of the same name while watching TV news reports about the event.

April 1970

Mitchell's third album *Ladies of the Canyon*, including her first Top Forty single "Big Yellow Taxi," is released.

June 1971

Mitchell's fourth album, *Blue*, is released.

December 14, 1972

For the Roses, Mitchell's first album for David Geffen's new Asylum label, is released.

January 1974

Mitchell's album *Court and Spark* is released. It will go on to become her biggest-selling album.

Summer 1976

Mitchell and two friends drive cross-country from California to Maine, after which Mitchell drives back to California on her own. Her travels inspire most of the songs for her next album, *Hejira*.

November 20, 1976

Mitchell performs for the first time with bassist Jaco Pastorius, at a Save the Whales benefit concert in Sacramento, California. Her new album *Hejira*, featuring Pastorius on several tracks, will be released two days later. The day after that, Mitchell is one of several guest performers at The Band's farewell concert at the Winterland ballroom in San Francisco's Winterland ballroom.

July 14, 1979

Mingus, Mitchell's collaboration with jazz giant Charles Mingus, is released six months after his death.

November 14, 1982

Joni Mitchell moves to David Geffen's new label, Geffen Records with *Wild Things Run Fast*.

February 28, 1996

Mitchell's seventeenth album, *Turbulent Indigo*, wins a Grammy award for Best Pop Album.

February 8, 2000

Mitchell releases *Both Sides Now*, a collection of 1930s and 1940s jazz and pop standards with orchestral and big-band arrangements. The album's release coincides with an all-star Mitchell tribute show on the TNT cable network.

November 19, 2002

Mitchell releases *Travelogue*, a retrospective collection featuring new versions of twenty-two Mitchell classics. In interviews promoting the album, the artist announces

that she's done with the music business, stating that she has no intention of recording or touring again.

October 8, 2006

In an interview with the *Ottawa Citizen*, Mitchell reveals that she's been working on her first set of new compositions in nearly a decade.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Joni Mitchell (aka Song to a Seagull), 1968

Clouds, 1969

Ladies of the Canyon, 1970

Blue, 1971

For the Roses, 1972

Court and Spark, 1974

The Hissing of Summer Lawns, 1975

Hejira, 1976

Don Juan's Reckless Daughter, 1977

Mingus, 1979

Night Ride Home, 1991

Turbulent Indigo, 1994

NOTE

1. Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Induction Essay, available online at www.rockhall.com/inductee/joni-mitchell.

FURTHER READING

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Pink Floyd

Scott Schinder

THE BAND WHO ATE ASTEROIDS FOR BREAKFAST

Pink Floyd bridged the free-spirited experimentalism of 1960s psychedelia and the stadium-filling excess of 1970s progressive rock. The English foursome began as esoteric psychedelic avatars and ended up as one of the world's most successful and influential recording acts, having sold, by one recent estimate, approximately 175–200 million records worldwide.

Pink Floyd was born of the first generation of rock bands to consciously break away from the standard format of the three-minute verse/chorus song. Although its members had all begun their careers playing conventional R&B-based rock and roll in other bands, Pink Floyd would play a crucial role in expanding rock's formal structures. The quartet made rock safe for extended compositions, constructing futuristic sonic vistas that incorporated hypnotic

rhythms, majestic keyboard flights, soaring guitar figures, and an imaginative array of high-tech gadgets and sound effects. Those elements would eventually become commonplace among the Floyd's prog-rock contemporaries, but few bands employed them as effectively—or with as much commercial success—as Pink Floyd.

In the 1970s, Pink Floyd's technically complex, thematically provocative concept albums raised the stakes on the rock LP as a creative medium. Their elaborate cover designs helped to revolutionize album cover art. And the band's elaborately staged live extravaganzas set a standard for epic concert spectacle that's rarely been matched.

Pink Floyd's massive popularity and ubiquitous presence on album-rock radio were all the more impressive in light of the band members' long-standing insistence on maintaining a near-faceless media profile, avoiding interviews and other media activities for much of their career.

The first of the three distinct periods of Pink Floyd's career was the band's years under the leadership of singer/guitarist/songwriter Syd Barrett. Barrett was a uniquely charismatic figure whose impish persona and playfully eccentric songwriting made him an ideal Aquarian-age icon. As Pink Floyd's founder, frontman, and original guiding force, he shone brightly but briefly, before his descent into acid-fueled mental illness turned him into one of rock's most mythologized cult heroes.

It was in 1965 that Barrett, then a promising painter attending London's Camberwell Art School, joined a jazz/R&B combo that had been known, at various times, as Sigma 6, the T-Set, the Megadeaths, and the Architectural Abdabs. Barrett joined at the behest of bassist Roger Waters, an old friend from Barrett's hometown of Cambridge. The band also included keyboardist Richard Wright and drummer Nick Mason, whom Waters had met while all three were studying architecture at London's Regent Street Polytechnic. Rounding out the lineup was Bob Close, a talented jazz guitarist whose musical sensibilities immediately clashed with Barrett's. When Close quit in 1966 to pursue a career in photography, it left Barrett as the group's *de facto* leader.

Waters, Wright, and Mason were initially more concerned with their studies than with music, which they apparently regarded as a casual diversion rather than a serious career option. But Barrett instilled a sense of focus and direction, bringing a distinctive sonic vision to the band's repertoire of familiar R&B covers by adding layers of guitar feedback and distortion. Before long, Syd's unconventional songwriting would open up a new set of possibilities, as would Wright's classically trained keyboard work.

Barrett rechristened the group the Pink Floyd Sound, borrowing the names of American bluesmen Pink Anderson and Floyd Council. The "Sound" was soon dropped from the band's billing, but "The" would remain for a few more years.

Their retooled approach represented the group's interpretation of the new brand of psychedelic rock that was being made by a new wave of long-hair bands from America's West Coast. Actually, since most of those U.S. acts had yet to release records, their U.K. contemporaries were largely basing their version of psychedelia on what they'd heard and read about them. That helped to ensure that the Pink Floyd and their contemporaries on the nascent British psychedelic scene would develop a style and attitude distinct from their stateside inspiration.

Barrett's idiosyncratic tunes suggested a sort of lysergic Lewis Carroll, with whimsical, fantasy-filled lyrics populated by gnomes, unicorns, and scarecrows. On stage, the band was prone to stretch the tunes out with improvisational freakouts incorporating feedback and electronic noise. Their live shows were elevated with the addition of Britain's first quadraphonic PA and first liquid light show—the perfect hallucinatory experience for an audience looking for something headier and more mind-expanding than mere pop music.

The Pink Floyd soon found itself at the center of the psychedelic counterculture that was beginning to take root in London. With England belatedly emerging from post-World War II austerity, an air of optimism and possibility had taken hold in the city, inspiring a generation of young artists, filmmakers, and writers—and a new breed of rock musicians.

The band made its public debut at London's Countdown Club in late 1965, and subsequently became a fixture at a series of popular Sunday-afternoon multi-media happenings at London's Marquee Club, and a regular attraction at such fabled venues as the UFO Club and the Roundhouse, providing a perfect soundtrack to the heady counterculture of what America's *Time* magazine had officially dubbed "swinging London."

London scenesters were taken with the quartet's flamboyantly experimental live sets, which incorporated psychedelic light shows and lengthy instrumental improvisations to create a multi-sensory experience that was a perfect manifestation of the scene's iconoclastic spirit.

By early 1967, when the Pink Floyd won a recording deal with the powerful EMI, such Barrett originals as "The Gnome," "Matilda Mother," and the epic instrumental "Astronomy Domine" had largely pushed the R&B covers out of the band's set lists. They soon proved adept at channeling the energy, mischief, and experimentalism of its live shows into disciplined, smartly crafted recordings.

In March 1967, the band released its auspicious debut single "Arnold Layne," a vivid vignette about a transvestite kleptomaniac. The session was produced by Joe Boyd, an American who'd co-founded the UFO Club and who would soon emerge as an important figure on the U.K. music scene. The song boasted a powerful hook and a mind-bending sound, and instantly established the Pink Floyd at the forefront of the burgeoning U.K. rock underground.

Symphony in Rock: Procol Harum, Moody Blues, Deep Purple

There wasn't any particular name for the music of the Left Banke in 1966 when the New York-based group scored a U.S. Top Five hit with "Walk Away Renee." But with its sweeping strings and delicate choirboy vocals over an understated rock rhythm track, "Walk Away Renee" was a harbinger of things to come from the movement known first as "art rock" and later as "prog" ("progressive rock").

Classical music was a crucial influence on prog and English groups were the leading exponents of the style from 1967 onward. From primary school classes to BBC national broadcasts, classical music is a long-standing and deep-rooted cultural tradition in Great Britain—far more so than in the United States. English rock musicians were more likely to relate to the music, whether as a source of creative inspiration or as an upper-class realm to be parodied or subverted.

It wasn't until the release of the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* in June 1967 that the art-rock trend really got under way. *Sgt. Pepper* represented a giant step forward in studio experimentation, and its release served notice to a previously dismissive adult world that rock and roll had reached a new level of seriousness and maturity. Most early British art-rock aggregations had begun life as beat groups or R&B bands and developed on a track parallel to that of the Beatles.

In 1965, the Paramounts' repertoire drew heavily on American R&B songs by such artists as the Coasters and Johnny "Guitar" Watson. By early 1967, the Paramounts had become Procol Harum and were playing original songs co-written by singer/pianist Gary Brooker and lyricist Keith Reid. The group's first single, "A Whiter Shade of Pale," was a stately ballad with a melody borrowed from a Bach cantata and the cathedral-like organ playing of Matthew Fisher. In the same week that *Sgt. Pepper* entered the *Billboard* album chart, "A Whiter Shade of Pale" debuted on the U.S. Hot 100, where it rose rapidly to number 5 (and reached number 1 in the United Kingdom). Procol Harum delivered on this initial promise with a half-dozen well-crafted LPs including a 1972 live set recorded with the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra that became the band's only gold album.

Like Procol Harum, the Moody Blues started out as an R&B band from Birmingham, England. Their first Top Ten hit, in 1965, was a version of the American soul ballad "Go Now." Three years later, a revamped lineup featuring new lead singer Justin Hayward released *Days of Future Past*, a lush *Sgt. Pepper*-inspired song cycle recorded with the London Festival Orchestra that spun off the U.S. number two single "Nights in White Satin." It was the first in a long series of best-selling releases by the increasingly middle-of-the-road Moodies, including the number one albums *Seventh Sojourn* (1972) and *Long Distance Voyager* (1981).

Art rock met heavy metal in the sound of Deep Purple, formed in 1968 by organist Jon Lord and guitarist Ritchie Blackmore and later joined by drummer

Ian Paice. The English quintet first scored with its dramatic revamps of American pop tunes (cf. "Hush" by Joe South) but took a heavier direction (i.e., playing longer solos at higher volumes) after the arrival of singer Ian Gillan and bassist Roger Glover in 1969.

In 1970, this lineup joined forces with the London Philharmonic Orchestra to record Jon Lord's *Concerto for Group and Orchestra* in concert at the Royal Albert Hall. The overblown album that resulted was a commercial failure and eventually Deep Purple returned to playing organ/guitar power rock. In this vein, the band scored five U.S. Top Twenty albums during the next five years including the platinum double-disc live set, *Made in Japan* (1973). The crushing Ritchie Blackmore guitar riff that kicks off "Smoke on the Water" is a sonic landmark of the pre-punk 1970s: the song broke out of FM rock radio to become Deep Purple's only U.S. Top Five single after "Hush" in 1968.

Andy Schwartz

Despite its controversial subject matter, "Arnold Layne" made the pop Top Twenty in Britain. The group ran into some censorship problems with the song's B-side, which had originally been titled "Let's Roll Another One" before the band was prevailed upon to change the title to "Candy and a Currant Bun."

June saw the release of the Pink Floyd's second single, "See Emily Play," an infectious slice of kaleidoscopic pop that Barrett claimed he'd literally dreamed up after dozing off in the woods. The song became a smash, rising to number six in Britain, and appearing on the pop charts alongside the likes of the Beatles' "All You Need Is Love" and Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale." "See Emily Play" solidified the Pink Floyd's position as standard bearers of the British arm of flower power. That status was also aided by the band's appearance performing "Interstellar Overdrive" in the documentary film *Tonite Let's All Make Love in London*.

Their success on the mainstream pop charts put the Pink Floyd on the English touring circuit, but they found audiences outside of London to be far less receptive than their usual London crowds. The band didn't do much to endear themselves to their new listeners, refusing to perform their current hit during their set.

The Pink Floyd's debut LP, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*—the title was borrowed from a chapter of the classic British children's book *The Wind in the Willows*—was recorded at EMI's Abbey Road studios at the same time that the Beatles were cutting *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*. At one point, Paul McCartney, George Harrison, and Ringo Starr stopped by to say hello and lend support to their new labelmates.

Released in August 1967, *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* was dominated by Barrett's, unconventional guitar work and visionary songwriting. His surrealist ditties (e.g., "Bike," "Matilda Mother") and free-form instrumentals

("Astronomy Domine," "Interstellar Overdrive") suggested the pleasures and terrors of the psychedelic experience.

The album also featured an array of innovative recording techniques. Norman Smith, the EMI staff engineer who produced the sessions (and who'd previously worked with the Beatles) found that Barrett's tendency to never perform a song the same way twice—and to rework material between takes—made it tricky to employ multiple takes. The album's version of "Interstellar Overdrive" avoided that issue simply by taking two complete band performances of the song and dubbing one on top of the other.

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn's intoxicating yet vaguely uneasy atmosphere was enhanced by a variety of advanced production techniques that helped the album to sound unlike anything else in rock at the time.

The album was a hit in Britain, reaching number six on the charts. By then, however, Syd Barrett's behavior was growing increasingly erratic, a situation that many of his friends attributed to his prodigious intake of LSD and other mind-altering substances. Although he'd apparently shown no prior signs of mental illness, the frontman would often become transfixed on stage, refusing to play the same song as the rest of the band—or simply staring into space and not playing at all.

The Pink Floyd's first U.S. tour in the autumn of 1967 included dates at the Fillmore and the Winterland in San Francisco, and L.A.'s Cheetah Club. At a time in which America's homegrown hippie acts were beginning to make mainstream commercial headway, the trip had the potential to put the band and "See Emily Play" across in the States.

But the visit had to be cut short after just eight days, following an uncomfortable performance on TV's *American Bandstand* in which Barrett was unwilling or unable to lip-sync his vocal, and an appearance on Pat Boone's variety show in which he greeted the host's genial questions with a blank stare. The U.S. edition of *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (released by Capitol's Tower imprint in a butchered, truncated version that deleted "Astronomy Domine," "Bike," and "Flaming" from the running order) ended up stalling at a modest number 131 on the charts.

The ill-fated American adventure was followed by a November tour of England, on which the Pink Floyd supported the Jimi Hendrix Experience. Barrett's distressing mental state continued to manifest itself, both on and off stage. The guitarist was prone to spend the entire set playing a single chord on his mirrored Telecaster, or not playing anything. On some nights he refused to even emerge from the tour bus, leaving the group to draft Davy O'List of opening act the Nice to fill in for him. As frustrating as Barrett's decreasing participation was, it also showed his less flashy bandmates—who, despite Pink Floyd's acid-drenched reputation, didn't share Syd's passion for hallucinogenics—that they were capable of functioning without the input of their unreliable leader.

Prog-Rock Supergroup: Emerson, Lake, and Palmer

Emerson, Lake, and Palmer were prog-rock's first supergroup. The flamboyant Emerson's former outfit, the Nice, had released an album titled *Ars Longa Vita Brevis* in 1968. One full side of *Ars Longa* was devoted to a suite for rock band and orchestra that quoted liberally from J.S. Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos*.

In late 1969, bassist Greg Lake left another leading prog band, King Crimson, to join forces with organist Keith Emerson and drummer Carl Palmer. The trio's second public performance took place in August 1970 at the massive Isle of Wight Festival. ELP were launched on a career trajectory of arena concerts and nine consecutive U.S. gold albums including *Tarkus* (1971) and *Pictures at an Exhibition* (1972). The level of sheer bombast in ELP's music rose with each new recording, reaching its apex in 1974 with *Welcome back, my friends, to the show that never ends—Ladies and Gentlemen . . .* Even the title ran on far longer than necessary, yet this lavishly packaged three-disc set became (at number four) the group's highest-charting U.S. album.

In May 1977, Emerson, Lake, and Palmer embarked on a U.S. tour accompanied by a seventy-piece orchestra, sixty-three roadies, two accountants, a doctor, a hairdresser, and Carl Palmer's personal karate instructor. Sound equipment and stage sets filled eight semi trucks; production costs were estimated at \$2 million. This colossal extravaganza threatened to bankrupt the group. The orchestra was jettisoned after three weeks (save for concerts in New York and Montreal) and ELP were forced to tour as a trio for three additional months simply to recoup their earlier outlay. After one further album and a "farewell" tour, they disbanded on December 30, 1978.

A. S.

A third Pink Floyd single, "Apples and Oranges," was released in November 1967. While the song featured some typically endearing Barrett lyrical flights, it replaced the melodic infectiousness of its predecessors with a ramshackle looseness that hinted at the band's internal instability. The song was a chart failure, endangering the commercial status that had been achieved with "See Emily Play."

In January 1968, following much internal hand-wringing over how to deal with Barrett, Pink Floyd brought in a fifth member, David Gilmour, another Cambridge native and a longtime friend of Barrett's. Gilmour and Barrett had been classmates at the Cambridgeshire College of Arts and Technology and had often traded guitar licks in their spare time, but had not played in a band together previously. In 1965, Gilmour had tasted some minor success and done a bit of recording with the Cambridge beat combo Jokers Wild. While Pink Floyd had been taking Swinging London by storm, Gilmour had spent

much of 1966 and 1967 touring the European continent with an outfit known initially as Flowers and later as Bullitt.

According to an official announcement, the addition of Gilmour was a reflection of the band's desire "to explore new instruments and add further experimental dimensions to its sound." The initial plan was for Pink Floyd to continue as a quintet, with Gilmour picking up the slack on stage and Barrett continuing to write songs and contribute in the studio.

But Syd grew increasingly unpredictable, which did little to ease the talented Gilmour's entry into the lineup. After a handful of shambolic gigs as a five-piece, Barrett was unceremoniously dumped from the lineup. Driving to a gig in Southampton in February, his exasperated cohorts simply didn't bother to pick him up. That didn't stop the deposed leader from turning up in the audience at his band's gigs, turning his piercing gaze upon his replacement.

SOPHOMORE SAUCER

The post-Barrett Pink Floyd debuted with the Wright-penned single "It Would Be So Nice," a buoyantly upbeat ditty that wasn't a major departure from the band's Barrett-led singles. Its B-side, the Waters-penned "Julia Dream," saw the bassist engaging in a brief flirtation with flower-power fairy-tale pop. Regardless of its resemblance to their prior successes, the disc, like "Apples and Oranges," came and went without making much of a dent on the charts.

Although Barrett was credited on Pink Floyd's second LP *A Saucerful of Secrets*, he appeared on only one track, "Jugband Blues," whose poignant lyrics seemed to document its author's descent into madness. The song also featured a guest appearance by a Salvation Army brass band, which Barrett had brought into the studio and instructed to play whatever they wanted.

Elsewhere, the uneven yet sporadically vibrant *Saucerful* retained some of the Barrett-era band's sound while previewing the more sprawling, expansive approach that they would continue to pursue for the next few years. Waters contributed the album-opening freakout "Let There Be More Light," as well as the supremely spacey "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun" and the ironically bouncy "Corporal Clegg." The latter track's portrayal of a shell-shocked war veteran previews some of the military themes that Waters would explore in the future.

Wright's pastoral, warmly nostalgic "Remember a Day" was more appealing than his stolid "See Saw," but both songs represented the airy flower-power sensibility that the band would soon be leaving far behind.

A Saucerful of Secrets' screechy, feedback-laden twelve-minute title track, constructed from scratch in the studio, was both a sonic and compositional landmark for Pink Floyd. It signaled the most substantial shift in the band's creative approach, trading Barrett's improvisational attitude for a more formal

sense of structure that was appropriate for a group containing three former architecture students.

That perfectionist streak would be a hallmark of their subsequent work. Still, the band hadn't lost its taste for sonic experimentation, as evidenced by the mass of distorted tones that launched the title piece—another section of which finds Gilmour fretting his guitar with a microphone stand while soloing over a repetitive drum loop.

A Saucerful of Secrets found Gilmour establishing himself as a crucial element of Pink Floyd's sound, demonstrating an imaginative, blues-rooted guitar style as well as a smooth singing voice that would soon become one of the band's most attractive features.

On the day of the album's release, Pink Floyd staged the first-ever free concert in London's Hyde Park, setting the stage for legendary subsequent Hyde Park performances by the Rolling Stones and Blind Faith.

Although the group remained largely unknown in America, *A Saucerful of Secrets* made the British Top Ten. Meanwhile, Pink Floyd's futuristic sound resulted in the band's music being featured in televised coverage of the *Apollo 11* moon landing in England, Germany, and Holland.

While Pink Floyd surprised many of their early admirers by rebounding in his absence, Syd Barrett continued to struggle with his deteriorating mental state. Gilmour, Waters, and Wright attempted to aid his dwindling recording career, helping to piece together a pair of scattershot 1970 solo albums, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett*. Gilmour and Waters volunteered to salvage the former after Barrett's unsteady condition caused the sessions to run over budget and EMI threatened to pull the plug. Gilmour and Wright played on, and co-produced, the follow-up *Barrett*.

Despite Syd's declining lucidity, *The Madcap Laughs* and *Barrett* maintained a daffy charm, and featured enough worthy material and engaging performances to instill hope among the wayward visionary's admirers that he might carve out a productive solo career. *Madcap*'s "Terrapin," "Dark Globe," and "Octopus" and *Barrett*'s "Baby Lemonade," "Gigolo Aunt," and "Effer-vescing Elephant" maintained the playful imagery and artful songcraft of his best work with his former band. But the two albums would be the last new material that Barrett would release.

In 1972, Barrett would make a brief stab at launching a new band, Stars, with ex-Pretty Things/Pink Fairies drummer Twink Alder and bassist Jack Monck, but that project would fall apart after a handful of low-key gigs. Two years later, Syd returned to EMI's Abbey Road studios for another abortive solo session, before withdrawing completely from the music industry and returning to Cambridge, where he continued to lead a quiet life away from public scrutiny until his death in 2006. In the decades since, the absent icon has remained the subject of much ongoing fascination, while his unique songs and persona have continued to provide inspiration for multiple generations of left-of-center artists.

Pink Floyd, meanwhile, took another unsuccessful stab at the singles charts with Waters's "Point Me at the Sky," an undistinguished bit of paisley pop that failed to chart, but whose one-chord-jam B-side "Careful with That Axe, Eugene" would become a popular live number. Over the next decade, the band would take the unheard of step of almost entirely ignoring the singles market.

The group had considerably more success staking out new territory on its albums, while developing an elaborate state-of-the-art live show whose audiovisual presentation matched the music's complexity, incorporating films projections, a light show, and a prodigious amount of audio gear. The latter included the Azimuth Coordinator, a quadraphonic sound system that projected three-dimensional sound throughout the venue.

With their colorful frontman gone, the four remaining musicians cultivated an impassive, workmanlike stage demeanor that kept the focus on the music—and on the visual fireworks.

The band structured its live show into a pair of thematic song cycles, which they titled "The Man" and "The Journey." "The Man" carried the listener through a day in the life of an English everyman, from sunrise through the working day through a dream-filled sleep. That segment also included the on-stage construction of the table at which the musicians took a tea break. "The Journey" offered more of a stream-of-consciousness experience, stringing together several of the band's more atmospheric pieces.

Although still a little-known cult act in America, Pink Floyd took its elaborate live setup on the road in the United States. Their assault on the States was typically ambitious, with the band assuming considerable additional expense by playing only headlining shows with no other acts on the bill. They even paid to rent out the Fillmore ballroom, rather than appear on one of that venue's standard multi-act gigs.

Their stateside strategy would ultimately pay off. Pink Floyd made its first appearance on the U.S. Top 100 with 1969's *Ummagumma*, a two-LP set (on EMI's new progressive imprint Harvest) combining live and studio material. The live disc included extended readings of the previously released "Careful with That Axe, Eugene," "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," "A Saucerful of Secrets," and the Barrett-era "Astronomy Domine," all of them superior to their studio incarnations and demonstrating the Waters/Mason rhythm section's knack for injecting an aggressive, propulsive edge into the Floyd's spiciest pieces. The live tracks gained substantial U.S. airplay on FM album-rock stations, an emerging radio format that would play a key role in establishing Pink Floyd as a commercial force in America.

Ummagumma's less impressive studio half comprised eclectic individual solo experiments spotlighting each member of the band. The format was an outgrowth of Wright's frustration with the limitations of writing for a four-piece rock lineup and his desire to compose "real music." Wright's four-part keyboard epic "Sysyphus" demonstrated his facility on an array of pianos, organs, and synthesizers. Gilmour's "The Narrow Way" was a three-part

instrumental showcasing his facility for balancing acoustic and electric textures. Mason's "The Grand Vizier's Garden Party" was a nine-minute drum piece utilizing an array of percussive devices.

The only member who really distinguished himself in the solo context was Waters. His pastoral, acoustic "Grantchester Meadows" utilized the recorded sounds of birds and a buzzing fly, while his "Several Species of Small Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict," showed the bassist in uncharacteristically wacky mood, whipping up a dizzying mass of distorted, sped-up voices approximating the title creatures.

1971's *Atom Heart Mother*—notable for its decidedly non-cosmic front-cover shot of a cow in a pasture—was a tad more focused than *Ummagumma*, but similarly uneven. The album's first side was occupied by a grandiose multi-part twenty-three-minute collaboration with avant-garde composer Ron Geesin, who oversaw the track's orchestral and choir arrangements. Side two featured accessible songs by Gilmour, Waters, and Wright, before reaching a perplexing climax with the twelve-minute "Alan's Psychedelic Breakfast," which mixed an extended sound collage with a meandering jam.

Despite containing some of Pink Floyd's most outré music to date, *Atom Heart Mother* became the group's first number one album in the United Kingdom and continued their commercial progress in the United States. They launched the album with a series of elaborate concerts including another free show in Hyde Park, in which the band performed the title piece accompanied by a raft of classical musicians (whose instruments were reportedly out of tune due to the soggy weather). Pink Floyd also performed "Atom Heart Mother" at the Montreaux Classical Music Festival, the first rock act to perform at that prestigious event.

At around the same time, the band was briefly involved in another classically influenced project, a prospective ballet adaptation of Marcel Proust's literary classic *Remembrance of Things Past* by French choreographer Roland Petit's, which was to feature ballet star Rudolf Nureyev and be filmed by director Roman Polanski. The production was to be scored with Pink Floyd music, performed by the band and a massive orchestra, but the project never got off the ground. The quartet would eventually collaborate with Petit on a smaller scale, providing live accompaniment for Marseilles and Paris performances of a ballet Petit had built around several Floyd numbers.

Considering Pink Floyd's visual sensibility and affinity for mixed media, it was only natural that they would gravitate toward film. They provided the music for a pair of features by European auteur Barbet Schroeder, the 1969 heroin-addiction drama *More* and the 1972 hippie fantasy *La Vallee*. The soundtrack pieces were released on a pair of appropriately atmospheric albums, the moody electro-acoustic *Music from the Film More* and the droning, dreamy *Obscured by Clouds*.

Pink Floyd also provided music for the 1967 British feature *The Committee*, and wrote and recorded a full-length score for Michelangelo Antonioni's

1970 underground hit *Zabriskie Point* (although Antonioni only used three of the group's pieces). Waters had also stepped outside of the band to collaborate with electronic innovator Geesin to produce an offbeat score (incorporating organic noises in place of instruments) for the 1970 documentary *The Body*. Waters and Geesin reworked the pieces extensively for the album *Music from the Body*, which had Gilmour, Mason, and Wright guesting on one track.

1971's *Meddle* is regarded by many as the first appearance of the Pink Floyd that fans around the world would make one of the decade's biggest rock acts. It was certainly the album on which the disparate strains of the band's post-Barrett work finally settled into a cohesive direction, forming a blueprint for the textured widescreen sound of the group's most artistically and commercially successful work.

Meddle's centerpiece was another side-long epic, "Echoes," the best example to date of how well the group had mastered long-form composition—and one which they didn't need an orchestra to put across. The multi-part piece moved seamlessly between multiple build-ups and climaxes, veering off into various unexpected directions but maintaining its momentum for its entire twenty-three-and-a-half-minute length.

Elsewhere on *Meddle*, the ominous "One of These Days" was one of Pink Floyd's most satisfying instrumentals, crystallizing the science-fiction ambience that had long been hinted at on prior releases, while maintaining recognizable pop and rock elements that balanced the band's more eclectic leanings.

Meddle also reflected the increased influence of Gilmour, whose musicianship and sense of melody had helped to establish him as a forceful presence within Pink Floyd. If Waters's lyrical and conceptual sensibilities would come to dominate the band's attitude, Gilmour's imaginative yet concise guitar work and expressive singing voice would become the most identifiable features of its sound.

THE DARK SIDE

While *Meddle* had established much of the blueprint for Pink Floyd's 1970s sound, their real artistic breakthrough would be its next studio album. The suite of songs initially known as "Eclipse" became the centerpiece of the band's concerts in February 1972. It would take another year for them to polish and record the song cycle as the basis for their next album.

By then, they had completed filming on *Pink Floyd at Pompeii*, a feature-length documentary built around the band's performance in an empty 2,000-year-old amphitheater in the fabled Roman city, which provided a suitably spooky backdrop for their confident renditions of "Set the Controls for the Heart of the Sun," "Careful with That Axe, Eugene," "A Saucerful of Secrets," and the *Meddle* standouts "Echoes" and "One of These Days." The film also

included footage of the band working in the studio on its next album, which would be released in March 1973 as *The Dark Side of the Moon*.

The painstakingly constructed sonic extravaganza was the project on which the post-Syd Barrett Pink Floyd truly came into its own as a creative unit, mastering the medium of the long-playing LP as a complete and cohesive artistic statement. *Dark Side of the Moon* featured state-of-the-art production, with an artfully layered sonic palette that incorporated inventive sound effects, spoken-word snippets, Clare Torry's wailing backup vocals, and Dick Parry's uplifting saxophone work. Engineer Alan Parsons's precise recording methods set new standards for the rock genre, while making imaginative use of stereo effects.

Beyond its meticulously assembled soundscapes (recorded on Abbey Road's newly outfitted twenty-four-track deck), much of *Dark Side of the Moon*'s appeal was in its focused, accessible songcraft and its compelling lyrical themes. Although all four members contributed to writing the music, Waters provided all of the album's lyrics, which addressed the fears and anxieties of contemporary life, and touched upon many lyrical themes that he would explore more extensively in the future.

Waters's lyrics on *Dark Side of the Moon* embodied the combination of biting cynicism and passionate humanism would define his songwriting persona for decades to come. Throughout the album, Waters persuasively decries dehumanization, alienation and aggression.

"Us and Them" (which, in an earlier incarnation, had been rejected by Antonioni for the *Zabriskie Point* soundtrack) assessed the futility of war, "Breathe" embraced ecology, "Time" and "The Great Gig in the Sky" muse on mortality, while "Brain Damage" confronts the specter of mental breakdown in a manner that's especially resonant in light of Syd Barrett's decline. Those songs all became familiar album-rock radio fixtures, while the Waters-penned, Gilmour-sung "Money" (which incorporated the sound of clanging cash registers and clinking coins into its rhythm) became the band's first American hit single.

Dark Side of the Moon became a runaway commercial smash, rising to number one in the United States, spending a record-setting fourteen-year run on *Billboard*'s sales charts and selling an estimated 40 million copies as of 2004. After years of solid popularity at home and cult status in America, Pink Floyd were suddenly worldwide superstars.

The new commercial clout conferred by *Dark Side of the Moon*'s success allowed Pink Floyd, more than ever, to operate on its own uncompromising terms. The musicians were now in a position to spend unprecedented amounts of studio time perfecting their recordings.

The band would also continue to stage increasingly elaborate stage shows, in which they risked being upstaged by outsized props and over-the-top light shows. They supported *Dark Side of the Moon* with its most extravagant concert production yet, for which musicians and crew traveled with thirty tons of gear.

Pink Floyd's mystique would be further enhanced by the members' increasing avoidance of media interviews, and their practice of not including photos of themselves on their album covers.

In the wake of *Dark Side of the Moon*'s success, Columbia Records head Clive Davis lured the band away from EMI/Capitol to sign a megabucks deal with Columbia in the United States (they remained with EMI/Harvest elsewhere). Despite the daunting prospect of following such a huge hit, Pink Floyd produced a worthy follow-up with 1975's *Wish You Were Here*.

Depending on how one listened, *Wish You Were Here*—encompassing three shorter songs plus the multi-part, twenty-six-minute “Shine on You Crazy Diamond”—could be seen as deeply negative or fiercely humanistic. Waters's lyrics confronted the pain of loss and lamented the dehumanization of modern society. “Welcome to the Machine” presented a bleak assessment of the individual's place in modern society, while the bitterly humorous “Have a Cigar” (with a lead vocal provided by band friend and Harvest Records label-mate Roy Harper, who was drafted for the occasion when Waters's voice gave out) posited the music industry as a soul-crushing microcosm of societal oppression.

The spirit of Syd Barrett (whose long shadow the band had finally escaped with *Dark Side of the Moon*) seemed to loom over much of *Wish You Were Here*, both in the album's title track and in Waters's heartfelt paean “Shine on You Crazy Diamond,” which invokes the exhilaration of Barrett's early highs and confronts the tragedy of his decline.

Barrett's presence was more than just thematic. At one point during the sessions, a barely recognizable Syd (who'd put on a great deal of weight and had shaved his hair and eyebrows) showed up unannounced in the studio. Indeed, it took a while for his former colleagues to realize who he was. According to some reports, his unexpected visit had a jarring effect on his ex-bandmates, who played some of their new material to an unimpressed Barrett.

Wish You Were Here also featured one of the most audacious of the band's always impressive cover-art concepts. Designed by artist/photographer Storm Thorgerson (a childhood friend of Waters, Gilmour, and Barrett) and his graphic studio Hipgnosis (who would provide the cover designs for almost every Pink Floyd album), the album's front cover pictured two lookalike business-suited men—one of whom happens to be consumed by flames—shaking hands. In its original vinyl release, the provocative image was hidden behind opaque black shrink wrap.

It was later revealed that the period between *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here* was accompanied by internal doubts and tensions that nearly split up the band. The creative malaise ran so deep that they briefly planned to follow up their commercial blockbuster with an album to be titled *Household Objects*, which was to consist of tracks recorded using everyday items in lieu of conventional instruments. Pink Floyd completed three tracks

using this method in the autumn of 1973, before abandoning the project and moving on to make *Wish You Were Here*.

The years 1976 and 1977 saw the rise of punk rock in Britain. While the movement was a relative blip on mainstream cultural radar in America, it was a major social and cultural force in the United Kingdom. Punk's angry primitivism was a direct reaction against the bloated pretensions of such 1970s "dinosaur" acts as Pink Floyd. In fact, Sex Pistols frontman Johnny Rotten had been recruited after manager Malcolm McLaren spotted him wearing a Pink Floyd T-shirt that he'd defaced with the words "I hate" above the band's name.

At least one Pink Floyd member took the punk explosion in stride. Nick Mason, who regarded punk as a healthy development, signed on to produce *Music for Pleasure*, the second LP by punk pioneers the Damned. The album, recorded at Pink Floyd's new Britannia Row studios, was regarded as something of a disappointment by the Damned (who'd initially hoped to coax Syd Barrett out of retirement to produce it) and critics.

It's not much of a stretch to read the relatively stark, astringent sound of Pink Floyd's next album, 1977's *Animals*, as the band's response to punk. If Waters's cynical lyrical insights had seemed harsh on *Dark Side of the Moon* and *Wish You Were Here*, they blossomed into outright misanthropy on *Animals*. Inspired partially by George Orwell's classic political allegory *Animal Farm*, Waters's new lyrics decried capitalism's greed and hypocrisy, dividing society into self-righteous, hypocritical "Pigs," ruthlessly ambitious "Dogs," and compliant, unquestioning "Sheep." By now, Waters was exerting near-complete control over Pink Floyd's creative direction and, while some critics were struck by the music's intensity, others opined that *Animals* suffered for the other members' relative lack of input.

One area in which *Animals* stood out was its characteristically iconoclastic cover art, which depicted a giant flying pig floating past London's Battersea Power Station. Although a photo shoot had originally been staged with an inflatable prop pig, the wind made the balloon difficult to control, so a photo image of the pig was superimposed for the actual cover. The flying pig would become an enduring icon, putting in appearances in all of Pink Floyd's subsequent touring productions.

The spring of 1978 saw the release of David Gilmour's eponymous first solo album and Rick Wright's solo debut *Wet Dream*. Those albums' appearance was indicative of their creators' decreased involvement in their more famous parent band.

BUILDING THE WALL

Waters's control of Pink Floyd's musical, lyrical, and conceptual direction was almost total by the time the band recorded the two-LP, twenty-six-song rock

opera *The Wall*, an emotionally charged magnum opus with unmistakable, if highly stylized, autobiographical elements. Indeed, Waters had briefly considered recording it as a solo project.

The initial impetus for the project was Waters's increasing discomfort with his position as rock idol. For him, the situation came to a head on July 6, 1977, during a Pink Floyd concert at Montreal's Olympic Stadium.

As Waters wrote for an exhibit devoted to *The Wall* at Cleveland's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum,

I found myself increasingly alienated in that atmosphere of avarice and ego until one night . . . the boil of my frustration burst. Some crazed teenage fan was clawing his way up the storm netting that separated us from the human cattle pen in front of the stage, screaming his devotion to the demi-gods beyond his reach. Incensed by his misunderstanding and my connivance, I spat my frustration in his face. Later that night, back at the hotel, shocked at my behavior, I was faced with a choice. To deny my addiction and embrace that comfortably numb but magic-less existence or accept the burden of insight, take the road less traveled and embark on the often-painful journey to discover who I was and where I fit. *The Wall* was the picture that I drew for myself to help me make that choice.¹

Fortunately, Waters used *The Wall* to tackle a varied set of themes and emotions that extended beyond rock star dissatisfaction. The narrative chronicles the emotional breakdown of its tortured rock star protagonist, Pink. Pink loses his father in World War II (as did Waters when he was only a few months old), and is smothered by a domineering, overprotective mother and bullied by a cruel, repressive education system. His alienation—from his wife, his audience, and his own conscience—is symbolized by the metaphorical wall that grows higher as his isolation increases. He eventually becomes the defendant in a flamboyant imaginary trial, and is ultimately sentenced to tear down the wall and re-engage with the outside world.

While some critics would accuse *The Wall* of being pretentious or overblown, there's no denying the humanism of its message, belying Pink Floyd's persistent image as heartless technocrats. And despite its conceptual and thematic ambitiousness, *The Wall* actually featured some of the shortest and catchiest songs of the band's career.

With Waters firmly at the helm of the project, the other three band members were largely reduced to glorified sidemen, although Gilmour co-wrote the popular tunes "Run Like Hell," "Young Lust," and "Comfortably Numb" and sang lead on the latter, as well as having a fair amount of input into the arrangements.

Waters's dominance continued to stoke growing resentment within the band. Richard Wright was actually fired from the group late in the recording of *The Wall*, although that fact was not announced to the public at the time. Wright was brought back as a hired musician for the *Wall* concerts.

Although *The Wall* was lyrically Pink Floyd's bleakest work to date, the quality of the songwriting, playing, and production helped to make Pink's plight accessible to audiences beyond the band's established fan base. The album became a best-selling blockbuster, even spawning a highly unlikely smash single in "Another Brick in the Wall (Part 2)." That song's menacing but infectious chorus—featuring a group of children recruited from a local elementary school by Britannia Row engineer Nick Griffiths—and its pointed indictment of organized education, struck a responsive chord with teenagers, who helped to make it a number one pop hit on both sides of the Atlantic. *The Wall* spent fifteen weeks at the top of the American album charts. At the time of its release, it was the third-highest selling album in U.S. history.

To promote *The Wall*, Waters devised Pink Floyd's most elaborate concert spectacle to date, a production so complex—and expensive—that the band, rather than taking it on a full-fledged tour, performed the show in five cities in the United States, England, and Germany. Incorporating an estimated \$1.8 million worth of equipment, the *Wall* concerts featured giant prop versions of the grotesque characters that artist Gerald Scarfe had designed for the album's cover, along with a life-sized model airplane that flew over the audience before crashing in flames, and, most imposingly, the construction of a forty-foot-high on-stage wall during the performance. The wall gradually grew higher until the musicians were completely hidden from the audience's view, before being demolished in the show's cathartic climax.

The Wall was popular enough to spawn a 1982 feature film version, directed by Alan Parker and starring Bob Geldof (at the time the leader of new wave band the Boomtown Rats) as Pink. The film added two new songs, as well as reworking versions of several album tracks.

The film version of *The Wall* indirectly spawned the next Pink Floyd album, 1983's *The Final Cut*. That project had begun life as the movie's soundtrack disc but evolved into an independent Waters song cycle tackling several of the same themes addressed in *The Wall*; militarism, social injustice and the callousness of global politics.

The Final Cut—subtitled "A requiem for the post war dream," and haunted by the memory of Roger's father Eric Fletcher Waters, killed in World War II at the age of thirty, as well as by Britain's recent Falkland Islands war—boasted some of Waters's most impassioned songwriting to date. But the album, even more so than *The Wall*, was a virtual Waters solo project, with Gilmour (who sang lead on only one track) and Mason relegated to low-key supporting roles. By Pink Floyd's lofty sales standards, *The Final Cut* was a flop, but Waters claimed not to care.

During the first half of 1984, Gilmour and Waters released solo albums—*About Face* and *The Pros and Cons of Hitchhiking*, respectively—two months apart. Both were commercial disappointments, as were the respective tours mounted to promote them (despite the presence of superstar Eric Clapton playing guitar in Waters's backup band).

SPLITTING HEADACHES

The ignominious fate of his solo venture didn't stop Waters from informing Gilmour and Mason, in the summer of 1985, that he was leaving Pink Floyd. The news was kept quiet at the time. But on October 31, 1986, Waters made the situation public, filing suit to officially dissolve the partnership and declaring the group to be "a spent force creatively." Gilmour and Mason, however, had other ideas, and made it known that *they* had no intention of disbanding Pink Floyd.

The previously press-shy Waters used the media as a forum to bash his former bandmates, deriding their instrumental and songwriting abilities, and dismissing their efforts to continue under the valuable brand name as dishonest and cynical. Gilmour countered in his own interviews, asserting that after all the hard work he'd done to establish the Pink Floyd name, he had no desire to start over.

The public airing of Pink Floyd's internal disputes was distinctly out of character for a band that had maintained such a low public profile for so much of its existence. After a bitter court battle, Waters would fail in his legal effort to retire the Pink Floyd name.

Gilmour and Mason released *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* under the Pink Floyd banner in 1987. The album was cut at Gilmour's Astoria studio, located in a houseboat docked on the Thames, with producer Bob Ezrin (who'd collaborated closely with Waters on *The Wall*) and a passel of sidemen, including a returning Richard Wright on keyboards. The lush, smoothly crafted effort recaptured some of the band's 1970s sound, but was noticeably lacking in the lyrical bite that Waters had previously brought to the table.

A Momentary Lapse of Reason was beaten to the marketplace by Roger Waters's second post-Floyd effort, *Radio K.A.O.S.*, a concept album that offered a cautionary anti-corporate message as well as a hopeful meditation on the potential of mass communication. But the Gilmour/Mason effort was the clear commercial winner, outselling the Waters album by a wide margin and making it clear how much commercial value the Pink Floyd name held. While many longtime fans regarded *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* as a Pink Floyd album in name only, that didn't stop it from going platinum and becoming a Top Five hit.

Both albums were accompanied by elaborately mounted stage shows. The Gilmour-led ensemble offered a retrospective of familiar Floyd favorites. The band's long-standing habit of downplaying individual personalities meant that many casual fans probably didn't notice Waters's absence, particularly when many of the stage frills that fans associated with Pink Floyd remained intact.

The *Momentary Lapse of Reason* tour ran for nearly two years and did boffo business around the world, grossing an estimated \$135 million, making it the most financially successful music tour of all time. When the financial

magazine *Forbes* cited 1989's highest-paid entertainers, Pink Floyd was listed seventh—behind Michael Jackson, Steven Spielberg, Bill Cosby, Mike Tyson, Charles Schultz, and Eddie Murphy, and ahead of the Rolling Stones.

The situation clearly infuriated Roger Waters, who pointed out that he was essentially touring in competition with his own repertoire—and that he was losing. Despite his characterization of his former partners' actions as “despicable,” he officially withdrew his legal challenge to Pink Floyd's continued existence in December 1987. As part of the settlement, Waters retained the rights to the concept of *The Wall* (which he would restage for an all-star 1990 benefit performance in Berlin, commemorating the reunification of East and West Germany) and a per-show fee for the use of the trademark flying pig (which Gilmour would circumvent by adding testicles to the previously female animal).

Despite the success of *A Momentary Lapse of Reason* and the live *Delicate Sound of Thunder*, the Waters-less Pink Floyd didn't release another studio album until the multi-platinum *The Division Bell* in 1994, by which time Wright had returned as a full member. Wright also co-wrote “Wearing the Inside Out,” which featured his first lead vocal on a Pink Floyd record since *Dark Side of the Moon*. *The Division Bell* continued in a vein similar to *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*, delivering solid, well-crafted songs but adding little to the band's enduring canon. The same could be said of the subsequent live disc *Pulse*.

The Division Bell and *Pulse* seemingly closed the door on the latter-day Pink Floyd. Through the 1990s and early 2000s, Waters continued to release new solo projects, including an all-star live version of *The Wall* recorded live in Berlin. Gilmour kept a relatively low profile, guesting on projects by other artists including Paul McCartney, Pete Townshend, Bryan Ferry, Robert Wyatt, Elton John, and Tom Jones, as well as contributing to a variety of charity recording projects. In 2004, Nick Mason published his memoir *Inside Out: A Personal History of Pink Floyd*, and it was reported that Waters was working on a Broadway stage adaptation of *The Wall*.

Despite the band's long absence from the marketplace, further evidence of the public's ongoing fascination with Pink Floyd was provided by a widely circulated rumor that *Dark Side of the Moon* revealed new levels of meaning when listened to while viewing the movie *The Wizard of Oz*. Although the album's creators denied any intentional correlation between the record and the film, fans around the world scrambled to experience the multi-media sensation and ponder its possible significance.

IN THE FLESH

In 2001, Gilmour, Mason, Waters, and Wright had managed a low-key reunion of sorts, collaborating on the editing, sequencing, and song selection of

the greatest hits collection *Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd*. But even the most optimistic fans were pleasantly shocked when Waters and his long-estranged ex-bandmates put aside their twenty-year feud to play a one-off set at London's Hyde Park on July 2, 2005, as part of the multi-city Live 8 benefit concert simulcast.

The reunion came at the urging of Bob Geldof, who since starring in the film version of *The Wall* had become a widely admired philanthropist through his spearheading of the 1986 Live Aid concerts. Gilmour initially resisted the idea, but reconsidered after receiving a call from Waters. Both agreed that the cause—the raising of public awareness of third world debt in conjunction with that year's G8 summit—trumped the internal squabbles that had torn Pink Floyd apart.

The quartet played a surprisingly upbeat set of some of their best-known songs, with none of the visual frills that have routinely accompanied Pink Floyd live performances. The performance was ecstatically received by fans, igniting widespread speculation about a longer-term reconciliation. Despite a reported \$250 million offer for a world tour, Gilmour made it clear that he regarded the Live 8 performance as an opportunity to lay Pink Floyd to rest on a positive note and in the service of a worthy cause. He quietly made it official with an announcement in January 2006, stating that Pink Floyd had no plans to tour or release new material.

Prog Perennials: Genesis and Yes

Genesis and Yes were two leading British prog-rock bands that proved highly adaptable to changing times. As early as 1969, Genesis was well known in England for theatrical live shows, elaborate costumes, and its complex multi-part compositions. The group's record sales eventually caught up to its creative élan in 1974 with *The Lamb Lies Down on Broadway*, an ambitious musical drama stretched over two LPs. When lead singer Peter Gabriel suddenly departed for a solo career in May 1975, drummer Phil Collins took over on lead vocals. Soon, the costumed epics of earlier years were replaced by airy, soft-pop love songs accompanied by high-tech laser light shows. Beginning with *Abacab* in 1981, the group placed five albums in the Top Ten: *Invisible Touch* (1986), with its U.S. number one title single, sold over six million copies in the United States alone. After Phil Collins left following *We Can't Dance* (1991), Genesis went into terminal decline.

Yes started out in 1968 as a sort of psychedelic beat group known for its extended arrangements of Beatles and Byrds songs. Jon Anderson (lead vocals), Steve Howe (guitar), Tony Kaye (keyboards), Chris Squire (bass), and Bill Bruford (drums) created Yes's signature high-register vocal harmonies and suite-like song structures. In 1972, the flamboyant Rick Wakeman replaced Kaye on keyboards and Alan White took over the drum seat from Bruford. In the same year, Yes released two albums that both reached the U.S. Top Five.

Fragile featured the hit single “Roundabout” and was the first Yes release to feature Roger Dean’s mythical, Tolkein-inspired cover art. *Close to the Edge*, at number three, was the highest-charting album of the band’s career.

Not content with coming “close to the edge,” Yes stampeded right over it with *Yessongs*, an endless three-disc live album. The next studio album, *Tales from Topographic Oceans*, contained only four tracks: each ran for approximately twenty minutes and occupied a full side of the two-LP set. One was titled “The Revealing Science of God (Dance of the Dawn).”

Individual ambition and frequent personnel shifts led to the breakup of Yes in 1981. Two years later, the group was reconstituted with Jon Anderson, Chris Squire, Tony Kaye, Alan White, and guitarist/vocalist Trevor Rabin. In November 1983, this lineup released *90125*, a collection of tightly constructed pop-rock songs laced with dance beats and electronic effects. Produced by Trevor Horn, *90125* was the first Yes album to reach the U.S. Top Five since *Relayer* in 1974. Its lead track, the danceable “Owner of a Lonely Heart,” became the band’s only U.S. number one single.

After *Big Generator* (1987), Yes once again splintered into competing factions performing under various names. But in 2002 a “classic” version of the band (with Anderson, Howe, Squire, Wakeman, and White) regrouped for a world tour, including a rapturously received appearance at New York’s Madison Square Garden. Yes was now the last band standing—the longest-running show in the history of prog-rock.

A. S.

Mason later speculated that the band might be persuaded to reform again for a charitable purpose, but not for profit. Meanwhile, when Gilmour released his 2006 solo album *On an Island*—his first collection of new material since *The Division Bell* a dozen years before and his first solo effort since 1984’s *About Face*—he called upon Richard Wright to contribute some keyboard work, and to play in Gilmour’s touring band when he took his new material on the road.

Pink Floyd’s albums have always remained solid sellers, even during the band’s lengthy absence from the public eye. But sales of the band’s catalog experienced an unexpected surge in the wake of their Live 8 set. England’s HMV chain reported that sales of *Echoes: The Best of Pink Floyd* had increased by 1,343 percent in the week following Live 8, while Amazon.co.uk announced that *The Wall*’s sales had ballooned by a whopping 3,600 percent. Gilmour announced that he would donate his profits from this sales windfall to charity, and urged that other Live 8 artists and their record companies do the same.

The fact that their vintage work can still have such an impact decades after its creation—and the fact that fans continue to pine for a reunion—says much about Pink Floyd’s generation-spanning appeal.

TIMELINE

October 12, 1965

The Pink Floyd plays its first live show at the Countdown Club in London.

February 12, 1966

The band performs at a series of Sunday afternoon multimedia happenings at London's Marquee Club.

October 11, 1966

The Pink Floyd performs at the launch party for Britain's first underground paper, the *International Times*.

December 23, 1966

Pink Floyd perform for the first time at London's UFO Club, epicenter of the city's burgeoning Underground scene.

February 27, 1967

Pink Floyd record their first single, "Arnold Layne," at Sound Techniques Studio in London.

April 5, 1967

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, the debut album by Pink Floyd—and its only LP with Syd Barrett as bandleader—is released in Britain.

May 23, 1967

The band's second single, "See Emily Play," is recorded. It will reach number six on the British pop chart.

January 7, 1968

David Gilmour joins Pink Floyd.

April 6, 1968

Syd Barrett's departure from Pink Floyd is announced to the public.

October 24, 1970

Atom Heart Mother reaches number one on the British album chart.

February 17, 1972

Pink Floyd debuts a new extended piece titled "Eclipse" at London's Rainbow Theatre. "Eclipse" will soon evolve into the album *Dark Side of the Moon*.

March 13, 1973

Pink Floyd releases *Dark Side of the Moon*.

April 28, 1973

Dark Side of the Moon hits the number one spot on the *Billboard* album chart, where it will spend a record-setting 741 weeks.

June 23, 1973

Pink Floyd scores their first-ever Top Forty single in America with "Money," from *Dark Side of the Moon*. The song will peak at number thirteen.

September 12, 1975

Wish You Were Here, the band's long-awaited follow-up to *Dark Side of the Moon*, is released.

December 15, 1979

Pink Floyd releases *The Wall*. It will spend fifteen weeks at number one in the United States, where it will sell over 23 million copies, making it history's third best-selling album.

March 22, 1980

"Another Brick in the Wall (Part II)," the controversial first single from *The Wall*, reaches number one on the U.S. charts, where it will remain for four weeks.

June 17, 1981

Pink Floyd performs *The Wall* for the twenty-fourth and final time, in Dortmund, Germany.

December 12, 1985

Roger Waters notifies Columbia and EMI Records that he is no longer a member of Pink Floyd.

October 31, 1986

Roger Waters files suit to formally dissolve Pink Floyd. The legal battle will drag on for years, but Waters's ex-bandmates David Gilmour, Nick Mason, and Richard Wright will continue to record and tour as Pink Floyd.

September 19, 1987

Pink Floyd, minus Roger Waters, releases *A Momentary Lapse of Reason*.

July 2, 2005

Gilmour, Mason, Waters, and Wright surprise fans by staging a one-off reunion of the classic Pink Floyd lineup in London's Hyde Park as part of the multi-city Live 8 benefit concert simulcast.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

The Piper at the Gates of Dawn, 1967

A Saucerful of Secrets, 1968

Ummagumma, 1969

Meddle, 1971

The Dark Side of the Moon, 1973

Wish You Were Here, 1975

Animals, 1977

The Wall, 1979

The Final Cut, 1983

NOTE

1. www.pinkfloyd-co.com/band/hof/pf_hof.html.

FURTHER READING

- Mason, Nick. *Inside Out: A Personal History of Pink Floyd*. San Francisco: Chronicle, 2005.
- Schaffner, Nicholas. *A Saucerful of Secrets*. New York: Harmony, 1991.
- Watkinson, Mike and Pete Anderson. *Crazy Diamond: Syd Barrett and the Dawn of Pink Floyd*. London: Omnibus Press, 1993.



Courtesy of Photofest.

Neil Young

Scott Schinder

THE LONER

It's hard to think of an artist who's taken greater advantage of rock's potential for self-reinvention than Neil Young. Of all of the major performers who rose to prominence during the rock explosion of the late 1960s, none have pursued a career course as stubbornly unpredictable as that of the Canadian-born singer/songwriter/guitarist.

Young's expansive body of recorded work is distinguished by countless abrupt stylistic shifts, ranging from sensitive acoustic singer-songwriter fare

to bleak, pensive introspection to the raucous, raw-nerved electric rock he's recorded with his recurring backup band Crazy Horse, with stops along the way for traditional country, rockabilly, electronica, and horn-driven R&B. The artist's propensity for musical shape-shifting would be less impressive if he wasn't so adept at making compelling, deeply personal music in all of the genres in which he's worked.

The durable Canadian iconoclast first came to prominence as guitarist in the seminal late 1960s L.A. country-folk-rock band Buffalo Springfield, and subsequently attained commercial superstardom as one-fourth of the soft-rock supergroup Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. When he achieved massive solo success in the early 1970s, Young seemed destined to take his place alongside such crowd-pleasing troubadours as James Taylor and Jackson Browne. But his unshakable fidelity to his restless muse caused Young to pursue his career on his own terms. While it may have cost him some of his original fans, it ultimately yielded far more rewarding artistic results.

As Young later observed, the mainstream success of his chart-topping 1972 breakthrough hit "Heart of Gold" "put me in the middle of the road. Traveling there soon became a bore, so I headed for the ditch. A rougher ride, but I saw more interesting people there."

While most of his 1960s and 1970s contemporaries were falling into careerism or becoming content to rest on their laurels, Young continued to test limits, spontaneously moving forward into new projects. With little regard for audience expectations, he's often followed his most commercially successful releases with his most challenging, difficult music. Meanwhile, his uncompromising work ethic has caused him to consistently reject music that doesn't meet his standards. Young's body of unreleased recordings, including several full albums, is impressive on its own, and has kept collectors and bootleggers busy for years.

While his unconventional methods have undoubtedly cost him record sales and alienated some of his less adventurous fans, they've also earned Young respect from his peers and reverence from multiple generations of younger bands. It's significant that, when punk rock arose in the late 1970s, Young was the only prominent American rocker of his generation to openly embrace the new movement, recognizing the same nonconformist spirit that's always been present in his own music.

It's worth noting that Young's most commercially successful album, 1972's *Harvest*, was a sterling example of the laid-back singer-songwriter genre that he helped to invent, while his second-biggest, 1979's *Rust Never Sleeps* mixed acoustic material with squalling, feedback-laden hard rock.

The son of noted Canadian sportswriter/novelist Scott Young and Rassy Ragland Young, Neil Percival Kenneth Robert Ragland Young was born in Toronto and spent his early childhood in Omemee, a small town that he would later memorialize in the song "Helpless." A bout with polio at the age of six left him with a limp and a weakened left side.

After his parents divorced in 1960, the teenaged Neil moved with his mother back to Winnipeg. While attending high school there, he played guitar in a series of instrumental garage bands. One of those combos, the Squires, developed a small following and scored a minor local hit with their surf-style single "The Sultan." When Young began writing lyrics and adding those songs to the Squires' sets, he took his first stabs at singing in public. In 1964, Young discovered Bob Dylan, and began playing his compositions solo in local folk clubs and coffeehouses, while continuing to play rock and roll with the Squires.

In the mid-1960s, Young returned to Toronto and became active on the city's burgeoning folk scene. By 1966, he'd joined the Mynah Birds, which also included future Buffalo Springfield bassist Bruce Palmer and American singer Ricky James Matthews, who would later gain fame as funk-soul star Rick James. The Mynah Birds recorded an album for Motown, the hugely successful R&B label located across the U.S. border in Detroit. But the band's Motown recordings were shelved when Matthews was arrested for being AWOL from the U.S. Navy.

Frustrated by his inability to make headway within the Canadian music scene, Young drove to Los Angeles in his 1948 Pontiac hearse, which he'd nicknamed Mort, with Bruce Palmer in tow. Shortly after their arrival, Young and Palmer got stuck in a traffic jam on Sunset Boulevard, and ran into Stephen Stills and Richie Furay, a pair of American singer/guitarists whom Young had met and befriended while they were touring in Canada. The chance meeting sparked the formation of the Buffalo Springfield, whose lineup was completed by drummer Dewey Martin.

In its two-year lifespan, Buffalo Springfield released three influential, if flawed, albums—1967's *Buffalo Springfield* and *Buffalo Springfield Again*, and the following year's *Last Time Around*—whose rootsy country/folk/rock hybrid picked up where the Byrds' similar experiments had left off.

Buffalo Springfield scored a Top Ten hit with the Stills-penned protest number "For What It's Worth," and gave lead guitarist Young a chance to flex his songwriting muscles with such memorable tunes as "Nowadays Clancy Can't Even Sing," "Mr. Soul," "On the Way Home," and "I Am a Child," and the mock-symphonic *Sgt. Pepper*-inspired art-rock experiments "Broken Arrow" and "Expecting to Fly." But it's generally agreed that the Buffalo Springfield failed to live up to its immense musical potential, and management problems and the band's volatile mix of personalities helped to hasten its premature demise. Young had already quit multiple times by the time the Springfield finally disbanded in mid-1968.

The Band: Across the Great Divide

Almost before 1967's fabled Summer of Love had ended, rock and roll was beginning to change once again. Just as many young people were leaving San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury for bucolic, sparsely populated areas of northern

California and the Pacific Northwest, so some rock musicians began to turn away from extended jamming and high-volume theatrics and toward country, blues, folk music, and R&B. Neil Young's 1970 album *After the Gold Rush* was a prime example of this more reflective approach. But it was predated by *Music from Big Pink*, the debut album of the mostly Canadian quintet called The Band: Rick Danko (bass, vocals), Levon Helm (drums, vocals), Garth Hudson (organ), Richard Manuel (piano, vocals), and Robbie Robertson (guitar).

As the Hawks, this group (minus Helm) had backed Bob Dylan on his groundbreaking world tour of 1965–66 and later recorded informally with him in Woodstock. Those sessions ultimately led to the release of *Music from Big Pink* in July 1968: "The Weight," "Chest Fever," and Dylan's "I Shall Be Released" were among its key tracks. The music was tight-knit and unflashy; the lyrics were redolent with mystery and quasi-mythical characters like "Crazy Chester" and "The Swede."

"The sense of teamwork and collaboration was incredible," Levon Helm recalled years later. "Robbie was writing stuff that evoked simple pictures of American life. . . . There was a whole movement toward country values in America in those days, as young people searched for different ways of surviving during the Vietnam era. That's in there too" (p.165).¹

The group's self-titled second album, *The Band* (released September 1969), was even more specific in its evocations of a bygone America. "The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down" is a lament for the destruction of the South in the Civil War, poignantly sung by Arkansas native Levon Helm. In "King Harvest Has Surely Come," Richard Manuel sings in the character of an impoverished farmworker who hopes for a better life through union membership. The Band augmented its rock instrumentation with the rustic strains of fiddle, mandolin, and accordion.

"The title we had for the record was *Harvest*, because we were reaping this music from seeds that had been planted many years before we'd even been born. But we could have called it *America* as well, because this music was right out of the air" (p.189).²

The Band made the Billboard Top Ten, sold over one million copies, and sent many rock musicians back to the music's American roots. The Band broke up in 1976; Richard Manuel took his own life in 1986 while on tour in Florida with Garth Hudson and Rick Danko. In 1994, The Band was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Andy Schwartz

1. Levon Helm with Stephen Davis, *This Wheel's On Fire* (New York: Wm. Morrow & Company, 1993), 165.

2. *Ibid.*, 189.

It was during his tenure with Buffalo Springfield that Young began experiencing seizures that were eventually diagnosed as epilepsy.

DON'T SPOOK THE HORSE

Determined to pursue a solo career, Young hired manager Elliot Roberts, who also managed Young's friend and fellow Canadian transplant Joni Mitchell; Roberts would continue to manage Young for the next four decades. Young signed a solo deal with Reprise Records (for which Mitchell also recorded), and in early 1969 he released *Neil Young*, a mixed bag of rock tunes, brooding ballads, and densely overdubbed studio experiments.

Creedence Clearwater Revival: Rollin' on the River

In July 1968, the same month in which The Band released *Music from Big Pink*, Creedence Clearwater Revival released its self-titled debut album and created its own brand of musical Americana. Creedence hailed from El Cerrito, a working-class suburb of San Francisco, and comprised John Fogerty (lead vocals, lead guitar), his older brother Tom Fogerty (guitar, vocals), Stu Cook (bass), and Doug Clifford (drums). They'd been playing together since 1959 (under other names) without coming close to a hit record. Now, the group's nearly nine-minute version of Dale Hawkins's 1957 hit, "Suzie Q," was becoming an underground FM rock radio favorite. When released as a two-part single, "Suzie Q" reached number eleven on the Hot 100.

"Suzie Q" was the first of the group's thirteen Top Forty hits and the only one not written by John Fogerty, who had a gift for writing three-chord songs with indelible melodic hooks and lyrics that often invoked images of the American South. Creedence's number two hit "Proud Mary" (1969) was the tale of a Mississippi River steamboat, while in "Born on the Bayou" he sang about New Orleans.

Elsewhere, Fogerty wrote from a distinctly blue-collar perspective: as the itinerant musician who narrates "Lodi" or the working man who aims his scornful anti-war protest at a "Fortunate Son" of privilege. Creedence also brought 1950s rock and roll and R&B back into the spotlight with their versions of songs first popularized by Bo Diddley, Elvis Presley, and Screamin' Jay Hawkins.

In 1969–70, Creedence Clearwater Revival was the best-selling American rock band in the country. The group scored five Top Ten albums including *Green River* (number one for four weeks in 1969) and *Cosmo's Factory* (number one for nine weeks in 1970). Both titles, along with *Willy and the Poor Boys* (also 1969), were later named to *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the 500 Greatest Albums of All Time.

Eventually, the other members began to chafe under John Fogerty's strong-willed control of their musical direction and business affairs. Tom Fogerty left in early 1971 (he died in 1990) and the group disbanded in the fall of 1972. Creedence Clearwater Revival was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1993.

A. S.

Although Young's artistic potential was demonstrated on such tracks as the turbulent rocker "The Loner," the enigmatic ballad "The Old Laughing Lady," and the uneasy surrealist narrative "The Last Trip to Tulsa," the debut LP suffered from murky sound caused by an experimental mastering process that was applied to the album without Young's knowledge.

By the time *Neil Young* was released, Young had already begun playing with a local outfit called the Rockets, which included guitarist Danny Whitten, bassist Billy Talbot, and drummer Ralph Molina. Young renamed the band Crazy Horse and enlisted them to back him on his second album, *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*.

Recorded in just two weeks, the sophomore effort traded its predecessor's stylistic meanderings for a musically and emotionally raw sound that helped to make such songs as "Cinnamon Girl," "Down by the River," and "Cowgirl in the Sand" into beloved classic rock standards. The latter two tracks, which ran nine and ten minutes respectively, demonstrated the lineup's knack for spare, seething instrumental jams. Both were reportedly written while Young was delirious with a 103-degree fever. Crazy Horse's primitive crunch proved inspirational to Young, who would continue to work with the band off and on for decades to come.

Shortly after the album's release, Young was invited by his old bandmate Stephen Stills to join Crosby, Stills, and Nash, who had already achieved substantial success with their self-titled 1969 debut LP. Although the trio had initially attempted to recruit Young as a guitar sideman, Elliot Roberts's fierce negotiating skills won Young equal membership, allowing him to walk into an established hit act as a full partner. The move instantly raised Young's public profile, and would prove invaluable in promoting his concurrent solo career.

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young performed their second show as a quartet at the landmark Woodstock festival. The following year, they released the massively successful studio album *Déjà Vu*, which was followed by a single of Young's "Ohio," a seething protest song inspired by the recent fatal shooting of four student protesters by National Guardsmen at Kent State University. The tougher sound and darker mood of "Ohio" and much of *Déjà Vu* demonstrated the extent to which Young's influence had pushed the group away from the harmony-driven folk-pop that had dominated the first Crosby, Stills, and Nash album. The quartet's extensive touring also yielded the 1971 double live album *Four Way Street*.

Despite his CSNY commitments, Young found time to continue recording and performing on his own, releasing *After the Gold Rush* in late 1970. That album, which mixed such subtly uneasy acoustic numbers as "Only Love Can Break Your Heart" and "Don't Let It Bring You Down" with harder-edged material such as "Southern Man" and "When You Dance (I Can Really Love)," established Young as a solo star. The dreamlike title track was based on an idea that Young had for an apocalyptic science fiction concept, which Young and actor Dean Stockwell had hoped to turn into a movie.

In addition to marking an evolution in his songwriting, *After the Gold Rush* also marked the first instance of Young forsaking the formality of a conventional recording studio in favor of a more homespun recording approach. The tracks were cut in a tiny basement studio that Young had set up in his home in the Bohemian Los Angeles enclave of Topanga Canyon.

Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young soon went their separate ways, but Young forged ahead undaunted. He recorded 1972's *Harvest* largely in Nashville with a group of country session musicians, whose seasoned professionalism contrasted with Crazy Horse's inspired primitivism. The sessions began spontaneously, while Young was in Nashville to tape a guest appearance on Johnny Cash's TV variety show, and decided to try cutting some of his new songs while in town.

The largely laid-back *Harvest* was a massive hit, on the strength of such songs as "Heart of Gold," "Old Man," and the anti-heroin anthem "The Needle and the Damage Done." The album hit the top spot on the *Billboard* album charts and remained in the Top Forty for six months, while the lilting, poignant "Heart of Gold" became a number one pop single, making Young an instant household name. Ironically, "Heart of Gold" was pushed out of the number one chart spot by America's similar-sounding, but inferior "A Horse with No Name." Elliot Roberts soon signed America to a management contract, reportedly to Young's annoyance.

Harvest also included "Alabama," which, like "Southern Man," was Young's angry response to the poisonous race relations of the American Deep South. The songs were vitriolic enough to inspire a lyrical riposte from seminal Southern rockers Lynyrd Skynyrd, who dismissed Young in their 1974 hit "Sweet Home Alabama." Although the situation led many observers to assume that there was bad blood between the two acts, that wasn't the case. Young admired Skynyrd, whose singer/songwriter Ronnie Van Zant was a big Young fan (and is seen wearing a Young T-shirt on the cover of his band's album *Street Survivors*). Young would also offer several of his unrecorded compositions to Skynyrd, but the 1977 plane crash that killed Van Zant and two other band members kept a Young/Skynyrd collaboration from coming to pass. After the crash, Young would pay tribute to the band with a medley of "Alabama" and "Sweet Home Alabama" at a show in the band's home state of Florida.

The Allman Brothers Band: Midnight Riders

In the 1969 film *Easy Rider*, a motorcycle trip from southern California through the Deep South ends in the violent death of its two long-haired, pot-smoking protagonists. This scene was emblematic of the counterculture's fearful attitude toward the South, with its racism and political conservatism. But in that same year, the self-titled debut album by the Allman Brothers Band helped to offset these prejudices and gave rise to a new school of Southern rock.

Twenty-two year-old Duane Allman was a fiery and inventive guitarist, especially adept on slide guitar. (On *Rolling Stone* magazine's list of the greatest guitarists of all time, published in 2003, he is ranked number two—right behind Jimi Hendrix.) Duane founded the group in March 1969 with Dickey Betts (guitar), Berry Oakley (bass), and drummers Butch Trucks and Jaimoe, and then recruited younger brother Gregg Allman on lead vocals and Hammond B-3 organ. Rather than relocate to the music industry centers of New York or Los Angeles, the Brothers based themselves in Macon, Georgia.

The Allman Brothers Band (ABB) was inspired by 1960s rock groups like the Yardbirds, by jazzmen Miles Davis and John Coltrane, and by Southern soul music. (As a session musician, Duane Allman had played guitar with soul singers Wilson Pickett and Clarence Carter.) But the core of their sound was the blues, from Robert Johnson to B.B. King. The feeling and tonality of the blues was ever-present in the Brothers' music even when their heady improvisations stretched live performances of songs like "Whipping Post" beyond the twenty-minute mark.

By playing more than 200 live dates in the year following their debut album, the Brothers amassed the following that would propel their landmark double live set, *At Fillmore East*, to number thirteen and platinum status after its release in July 1971. Duane Allman died October 29 in a motorcycle accident in Macon; just over a year later, bassist Berry Oakley was killed in another Macon motorcycle crash. These tragic losses precipitated years of depression, addiction, and instability among the surviving members even as *Brothers and Sisters* (featuring the the Dickey Betts-penned Top Ten single "Ramblin' Man") topped the *Billboard* chart in 1973.

The Allman Brothers Band broke up in 1982. But in 1989, Gregg Allman, Dickey Betts, Butch Trucks, and Jaimoe re-formed for a twentieth anniversary tour, joined by lead/slide guitarist Warren Haynes and bassist Allen Woody. The Brothers signed a new recording contract and began touring annually; the original sextet was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1995 while the latter-day ABB won a 1996 Grammy Award for Best Rock Instrumental Performance. In the turbulent year 2000, Allen Woody died of a drug overdose (he was replaced by Oteil Burbridge) and Dickey Betts was replaced by Butch Trucks's twenty-one-year-old nephew Derek Trucks. But for the Allman Brothers Band, "the road goes on forever."

A. S.

The massive success of *Harvest* and "Heart of Gold" caught Young by surprise, and he reacted to his new commercial status by venturing into edgier, less accessible territory on his next several projects. He indulged his long-standing cinematic interests by directing *Journey Through the Past*, an incomprehensible but occasionally striking film memoir that included some interesting candid studio moments and some entertaining archival footage. The film also

produced an equally disjointed double-LP soundtrack album that combined stray Buffalo Springfield and CSNY tracks and a wealth of non-Young material with fascinating side-long studio outtakes of the *Harvest* songs “Alabama” and “Words.”

Journey Through the Past was followed by the muddy-sounding 1973 album *Time Fades Away*, largely recorded during a turbulent post-*Harvest* tour on which Young struggled with vocal problems and his distress over the recent death of Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten. Whitten had died of a heroin overdose in November 1972, shortly after his drug use had caused Young to fire him from his touring band.

The tour that produced *Time Fades Away* marked the first instance of Young rebelling against his own success. His ragged performances during that period, combined with set lists that emphasize unfamiliar new material, alienated fans who’d expected *Harvest*’s smooth country rock. The chaotic shows also angered several of the veteran session pros who comprised the Stray Gators. Young has called *Time Fades Away* his least favorite of his albums; more than three decades after its original release, it remains unissued on CD.

The dark period—during which Young abruptly walked away from the guaranteed payday of a proposed Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young project—continued with two of Young’s most compelling and confrontational works: 1974’s pensive, haunting *On the Beach* and 1975’s unhinged and unsettling *Tonight’s the Night*.

On the Beach was a brooding song cycle comprised of turbulent rockers and haunting, impossibly sad ballads. The apparently Charles Manson-inspired “Revolution Blues” was a disturbing account of brewing discontent and societal collapse, while “On the Beach” and “Ambulance Blues” evoked breakdown on a more personal level. Curiously, the consistently downbeat album opened with “Walk On,” one of Young’s most uplifting rockers.

Tonight’s the Night (which had actually been recorded before *On the Beach* but temporarily shelved by Young) was a ragged, harrowing mood piece haunted by the recent overdose deaths of Danny Whitten and Young’s guitar tech Bruce Berry, and recorded in a series of mind-altered stream-of-consciousness sessions. Although both albums sold poorly and received mixed reviews at the time of their release, both are now regarded as being among Young’s greatest works.

The band that recorded most of *Tonight’s the Night*—guitarists Ben Keith and Nils Lofgren, plus the Crazy Horse rhythm section of bassist Billy Talbot and drummer Ralph Molina—took the album’s grim songs and sleazy, dissipated late-night vibe on the road with a series of shows in late 1973. For those gigs, a wasted Young assumed the persona of a seedy nightclub MC, referring to Neil Young in the third person and opening the sets with the introduction, “Welcome to Miami Beach, ladies and gentlemen. Everything is cheaper than it looks.” Since the album had yet to be released and most listeners were unfamiliar with the circumstances that had inspired the material, audiences

who'd come to hear "Heart of Gold" were taken aback by the material and its presentation, and some crowds had violently negative reactions to the performances.

Oddly, Young's dark period was punctuated by an attempt in the summer of 1973, to regroup Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young. The quartet convened in Hawaii with the intention of recording a new album—tentatively titled *Human Highway*, after a Young composition that would eventually surface as part of *Rust Never Sleeps*—but internal disagreements kept the effort from getting off the ground.

Young did reunite with Crosby, Stills, and Nash in the summer of 1974, for an ostensibly lucrative series of outdoor stadium shows. But the tour—which David Crosby later dubbed "the Doom Tour"—was beset with bad feeling and bad music, and was widely excoriated for its sloppy, indulgent performances. While Young unveiled several new songs on the tour, his partners stuck with tried-and-true oldies. There was little doubt that money was the chief motivation for the reunion, and it became history's the highest-grossing rock tour up to that point. But rampant financial excess caused the foursome to make relatively little money from the enterprise. A plan to release a live album from the tour collapsed when Young withheld his approval. Following a disastrous finale at London's Wembley Stadium, another attempt to record a new CSNY album in December 1974 quickly fell to pieces, amidst reports of internal bad blood and Stills's bizarre, drug-fueled behavior.

Meanwhile, 1975's *Zuma* found Young back on solid, confident musical ground. Recorded with a regrouped Crazy Horse including new guitarist Frank Sampedro, *Zuma* was recorded in a rented house in Malibu, with Young and the band cutting tracks live and loud. *Zuma*'s inspired bashing produced such unsettling yet invigorating rockers as "Barstool Blues," "Danger Bird," and the hallucinatory time-travel epic "Cortez the Killer." At one point, Bob Dylan visited the sessions and joined in on piano and guitar, although none of his contributions made it to the finished album.

Zuma marked the beginning of Young's renewed collaboration with his retooled backing combo. Over the years, many of his musical peers would be appalled that an artist of his stature would work extensively with such primitive, sloppy players. Indeed, Crazy Horse's propensity for egregious technical errors would surely have tested the patience of any bandleader without Young's love for unmanicured spontaneity. Crazy Horse would continue to serve as a source of inspiration and aggravation for Young in the decades to come, and their contributions would be crucial in much of his most inspired and enduring music.

In 1976, Young reunited with Stephen Stills in the short-lived Stills-Young Band, whose only album *Long May You Run* was distinguished mainly by Young's title song, a nostalgic tribute to the much-mythologized hearse that had brought him to California. Young canceled a proposed major tour with Crazy Horse in order to go on the road with the Stills-Young Band. But he

quickly reversed his the decision and abruptly bailed out in mid-tour, leaving Stills to attempt to finish the remaining sold-out dates on his own.

In 1977, Reprise released *Decade*, a three-LP retrospective assembled by Young himself. The collection was distinguished by some worthy unreleased material drawn from Young's copious archives, and by the artist's pithy handwritten liner notes. While such elaborate archival collections would become commonplace in the CD era, they were rare at the time, and the fact that Young was the subject of such a package was a measure of his iconic status.

Nineteen seventy-seven also saw the release of *American Stars 'n Bars*, a mostly country-flavored hodgepodge of tracks, some of them originally intended for the unreleased 1975 Young album *Homegrown*. Although an inconsistent mixed bag, *American Stars 'n Bars* ended with a trio of tracks that were among Young's most powerful, "Star of Bethlehem," "Will to Love," and "Like a Hurricane."

Shortly after the release of *American Stars 'n Bars*, Young resurfaced unexpectedly as a member of the Ducks, a Santa Cruz combo that also included Moby Grape bassist/singer Bob Mosley and Springfield-era Young acquaintance Jeff Blackburn. The Ducks exclusively played low-key local club gigs, with Young taking a relatively low-key role and introducing several new songs.

Nineteen seventy-eight's *Comes a Time*, a mostly acoustic collection that featured some lush country politan orchestrations. Young had originally cut the album as a solo acoustic effort, but followed Warner/Reprise president Mo Ostin's suggestion that he try fleshing out the tracks with additional players. The resulting album was close in spirit to Young's most popular work, and became Young's best-selling release since *Harvest*. Young's reputation for rigorous quality control was confirmed when he purchased 200,000 LP copies of an early pressing of *Comes a Time* back from Warner Bros. in order to correct a technical problem.

Backup singer Nicolette Larson, who'd previously appeared on *American Stars 'n Bars* and whose sweet country harmonies were featured prominently on *Comes a Time*, subsequently scored a Top Ten solo hit the following year with disco-style reworking of the *Comes a Time* number "Lotta Love."

RUST IN PEACE

Typically, Young used the commercial clout he'd earned from the accessible *Comes a Time* to stage a more conceptually ambitious project. His next tour, which he titled "Rust Never Sleeps," was a theatrical tour de force, built around a set of new songs that offered vivid, melancholy observations about life, rock and roll, and America.

The shows were divided into an acoustic solo set and a set of fierce, ear-splitting rock with Crazy Horse, and made extensive use of oversized stage props and costumed "road-eyes," dressed in long robes and with glowing red eyes, recalling the Jawas of the then-recent *Star Wars*. The set was decorated

with giant props, amps, speaker cases, and microphones, and audience members were given cardboard "Rust-O-Vision" glasses that supposedly allowed them to watch the musicians rusting away on stage.

The "Rust Never Sleeps" shows were bookended by a song, alternately known as "My My, Hey Hey (Out of the Blue)" and "Hey Hey, My My (Into the Black)," which was performed in both acoustic and electric versions. The number was a meditation on rock and roll, taking note of the recent death of Elvis Presley and the recent demise of the Sex Pistols, whose lead singer Johnny Rotten was name-checked in the lyrics. The much-quoted contention that "It's better to burn out than to fade away" is certainly debatable, but the statement was an apt summation of many of his new songs' thematic concerns, as well as a manifestation of Young's long-standing willingness to embrace artistic risk.

Young's enthusiasm for punk was consistent with his preference for raw substance over slick artifice. At the time, it was common for Young's old-guard contemporaries, feeling threatened by the apparent changing of the musical guard, to decry punk as unmusical sacrilege. While most of his peers were resisting the new music, Young was channeling its influence into such frantic new songs as "Sedan Delivery" and "Welfare Mothers," on which Crazy Horse's sound ascended to a new stratosphere of sludgy distortion.

The tour yielded the 1979 album *Rust Never Sleeps*, consisting of the new songs that Young had assembled for the show. By dividing the material into acoustic and electric sides, the album juxtaposed Young's most accessible music with his most primitive and provocative. Although the tracks were recorded live on tour, the audience noise was largely edited out, giving the album a seamless spontaneity without the sonic distractions inherent in most live recordings. Beyond its meditations on rock and roll, such memorable numbers as "Pochahontas," "Thrasher," "Ride My Llama," and "Powderfinger" reflected the dual interests in frontier Americana and science fiction that had long been recurring motifs in Young's songwriting.

Rust Never Sleeps was followed by *Live Rust*, a more conventional double live album that mixed old and new songs. There was also a feature film documenting the shows, directed by Young under his cinematic pseudonym Bernard Shakey (Shakey being a childhood nickname the Young acquired after his bout with polio) and also titled *Rust Never Sleeps*.

The critical and commercial success of *Rust Never Sleeps* restored Young to rock's commercial forefront as well as its artistic cutting edge. Perhaps not surprisingly, he followed his high-profile comeback with a series of releases that largely perplexed his fans and tested his new audience's goodwill.

Nineteen eighty's *Hawks and Doves* was a patchy assortment of older unreleased tracks (some from *Homegrown*) and new country-rock numbers whose vaguely right-wing lyrics seemed odd coming from the author of such antiauthoritarian anthems as "Ohio" and "Southern Man." Nineteen eighty-one's *Re*ac*tor* comprised raw Crazy Horse workouts whose minimalist lyrics

were lambasted by critics. Young also wrote and recorded the soundtrack music for *Where the Buffalo Roam*, a quickly forgotten 1980 film inspired by the works of gonzo journalist Hunter S. Thompson.

*Re*ac*tor* marked the end of Young's dozen-year association with Reprise, and he signed a lucrative contract with the new Geffen label. But the artistic freedom conferred by the new deal would throw the artist's recording career into near-freefall for much of the 1980s. Nineteen eighty-two's *Trans* largely comprised electronic tracks, with Young's familiar voice rendered largely unrecognizable through the use of a computerized vocoder (although his electric guitar sound was largely intact). The project was recorded with a band composed of musicians from various stages of Young's history, including ex-Buffalo Springfield bassist Bruce Palmer, *After the Gold Rush*/*Tonight's the Night* guitarist Nils Lofgren, *Harvest*-era steel guitarist Ben Keith, and Crazy Horse drummer Ralph Molina.

The elaborate, surreal live presentation that Young had designed for *Trans* proved to be a financial debacle when Young took it to Europe, and was deemed too expensive to take on the road in America (a Berlin performance was captured for posterity and released as a cable TV special and home video). *Trans* initially sold respectably, reaching number seventeen, but it also severely confused many of Young's fans. Young would later explain that the album's sonic shape-shifting, and its themes of strained communication, were largely a reflection of his and his wife Pegi's extensive, emotionally exhausting involvement with a series of therapies for their new son Ben, who was born with cerebral palsy and was unable to converse verbally.

Nineteen eighty-three's rockabilly-flavored *Everybody's Rockin'*, credited to the fictitious Neil and the Shocking Pinks, fared no better commercially. Young took the Shocking Pinks, which included Stray Gators Ben Keith and Tim Drummond, on the road as part of his stripped-down U.S. *Trans* show, which concluded with a set by the made-up 1950s group.

A considerably more elaborate, outré project from the same period was Neil Young/Bernard Shakey's first narrative feature *Human Highway*, shot over the course of three years with an assortment of friends and cronies. Young co-directed the surrealist musical sci-fi satire with actor and longtime friend Dean Stockwell, with whom he'd planned the abortive *After the Gold Rush* film a decade earlier. Young starred as the largely improvised film's goofy auto-mechanic protagonist, heading a cast that included Stockwell and fellow Hollywood nonconformists Dennis Hopper, Russ Tamblyn, and Sally Kirkland, along with the satirical new wave band Devo, who portrayed workers from the local nuclear power plant. The film was, and remains, little seen.

Young was a staunch admirer of Devo, who also recorded for Warner Bros., and who'd originally been brought to his attention by Stockwell. The artsy Akron, Ohio, outfit's satirical multimedia presentation, built around the concept that the human race was devolving into stupidity and corruption, carried a tragicomic edge that appealed to Young. Young and Devo struck up an

acquaintance that eventually led to the band signing a management deal with Elliot Roberts.

Young's first attempt at recording "Hey Hey, My My" had been with Devo, during *Human Highway's* long birth cycle. That never-released version was a cacophonous mess featuring vocals by Devo leader Mark Mothersbaugh's infantile alter ego, Booji Boy. Mothersbaugh added the words "rust never sleeps," which he'd remembered from an old Rustoleum advertisement. The phrase struck a chord with Young, crystallizing his ideas about rock and roll and life in general.

UNCHARACTERISTIC

Young's genre experiments proved so disturbing to his new label that in November 1983, Geffen filed an unprecedented lawsuit against the artist, requesting damages of over \$3.3 million and charging him with making music that was "not 'commercial' and . . . musically uncharacteristic of Young's previous recordings." Young filed a countersuit, and the matter would drag on for the next year and a half. Artist and label eventually settled the matter. Ironically, the Geffen lawsuit gave Young the best publicity he'd had in years, positioning him as the idealistic underdog persecuted by heartless corporate bullies.

Less attractive to most press outlets was a series of bizarre interviews in which Young offered effusive praise for the bellicose foreign policy of then-president Ronald Reagan. Young's pro-Reagan rants proved so troubling to critics and fans that Elliot Roberts stopped him from doing interviews.

Young would return to more familiar sounds for the remainder of his Geffen years. But 1985's country-oriented *Old Ways*, which he had recorded, scrapped, and recorded again, failed to recapture the magic of *Harvest*. Young toured widely with various versions of the International Harvesters, the band of Nashville session veterans he'd assembled for *Old Ways*.

Nineteen eighty-six's *Landing on Water*, recorded with commercial sessionmen Danny Kortchmar and Steve Jordan, was an uneasy marriage of electric guitars and soulless electronics, and did little to restore Young's commercial status or artistic prestige. The album's cover art—an illustration from an airline crash manual—was indicative of Young's precarious position through the 1980s. *Landing on Water's* main point of musical interest was "Hippie Dream," disillusioned semi-sequel to "Tonight's the Night" that was inspired by Young's former bandmate David Crosby, who at the time was in the midst of a highly publicized drug-fueled decline.

More entertaining than *Landing on Water* was the tour that followed it. Billed as "Live from a Rusted-Out Garage," the shows rivaled the *Rust Never Sleeps* tour for flamboyant theatricality and technical overkill. Young and the reassembled Crazy Horse performed on a giant mock-garage set among giant

talking mice, motorized cockroaches, and various giant props. But the tour's attempts to have the rough-edged Crazy Horse duplicate *Landing on Water's* high-tech rhythms—with bassist Talbot doubling on keyboard bass and drummer Molina playing with prerecorded samples—were decidedly ill-conceived.

Also in 1986, the original members of Buffalo Springfield gathered informally at Stephen Stills's home. But nothing further arose from that meeting, despite various attempts to get the band to reform for a reunion album or tour.

Although his Geffen albums sold poorly, Young retained his iconic status and remained a reliably popular touring act through the 1980s continuing to pull arena-sized crowds, regardless of whatever alternate persona he was embracing at the moment.

In 1985, Young, John Mellencamp, and Willie Nelson co-founded the charity Farm Aid, which staged the first of its annual all-star benefit concerts that September. Since then, the organization has continued to work for the interest of American family farms. Young remains on Farm Aid's board of directors and continues to perform the organization's yearly concerts, often delivering impassioned speeches about the importance of environmental awareness.

In 1986, Young, the father of two sons with cerebral palsy, began hosting a long-running series of annual all-star benefit concerts for the Bridge School, a non-profit California facility that Pegi Young had co-founded to assist mentally and physically handicapped children.

Young regained some of his old fire when he reunited with Crazy Horse for 1987's *Life*. By that point, though, his relationship with Geffen had grown irretrievably contentious, with Young regularly bad-mouthing label head (and Elliot Roberts's former management partner) Geffen in print. At one point, Young announced that the cover of *Life* would show himself in a prison cell, with the number of albums he'd made for Geffen scratched out on the wall.

Young returned to Warner/Reprise in 1988 with *This Note's for You*, after the label bought the artist out of his remaining commitments to Geffen. The album, credited to Neil Young and the Bluenotes, was another stylistic detour, with Young, in sports jacket and shades, assuming the persona of sleazy hipster Shakey Deal and leading a horn-driven R&B band. Although *This Note's for You* was a well-executed genre exercise rather than a return to form, it was delivered with spirit and humor. When Harold Melvin, leader of the veteran soul group the Blue Notes, raised legal objections, Young changed the name of his band to Ten Men Workin', after one of the album's song titles.

This Note's for You's title track offered a tongue-in-cheek critique of pop-star product endorsements, and inspired a humorous promo video that tackled the same subject. The clip was initially banned by MTV, but eventually made its way into heavy rotation on the channel, and was ultimately named Best Video of the Year on MTV's annual video awards show.

Also in 1988, Young reunited with Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young for a slick, uninspired new album, *American Dream*, released the following year.

The foursome played a few benefit concerts, but Young declined to sign on for a long-term commitment, and it would be another decade before CSNY would do a full-blown reunion tour.

FREEDOM AND GLORY

While *American Dream* was greeted with overwhelmingly negative reviews, Young's 1989 release *Freedom* marked a major return to form. A mix of sensitive ballads and tough, largely urban-themed rockers—with an emphasis on the latter—*Freedom* once again rescued Young's reputation and reestablished him at the forefront of contemporary music. Much of the album was recorded in all-night sessions at the Hit Factory, located in Manhattan's Times Square, with the Bluenotes' rhythm section of bassist Rick Rosas and drummer Chad Cromwell. The gritty urban surroundings, and Young's unhappiness about his involvement in the misbegotten *American Dream*, manifested themselves in some of the toughest, angriest music of Young's career. Young launched *Freedom* with an electrifying performance on TV's *Saturday Night Live*, backed by a formidable one-off lineup of Frank Sampedro, Steve Jordan, and bassist Charley Drayton.

Freedom's most popular track was the topical "Rockin' in the Free World," which expressed Young's displeasure with the current Republican administration, and bookended the album in acoustic and electric renditions. The song also became a de facto anthem during the fall of the Berlin Wall, and would later figure prominently in Michael Moore's 2002 agit-prop documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11*.

Nineteen eighty-nine also saw the release of *The Bridge*, a Young tribute album comprised of interpretations of his songs by several young alternative-rock acts. The tribute disc demonstrated how Young had come to be revered as an inspiration and role model by a new generation of left-of-center music makers.

Young continued his resurgence with 1990s *Ragged Glory*, a belated reunion with Crazy Horse recorded in a converted barn on Young's ranch in northern California. The album's loose, feedback-drenched workouts were equally well received by fans and critics, and felt completely current in the context of a new generation of loud underground bands who were beginning to gain wider attention.

When he toured behind the album, Young signaled his support of the current generation of alt-rock bands by using seminal New York noise-rock band Sonic Youth as his opening act. It was Sonic Youth's suggestion that Young augment *Weld*, the 1991 live album recorded on that tour, with the EP *Arc*, a sound collage consisting entirely of feedback and guitar noise recorded on stage.

Having made a decisive return to rock, Young surprised many observers by making 1992's explicitly commercial *Harvest Moon*. The mature, largely acoustic collection was a sequel to the best-selling *Harvest*, recorded in Nashville

with a reunited Stray Gators and vocal appearances by original *Harvest* guests Linda Ronstadt and James Taylor. The new album featured warm, mature songs paying tribute to the enduring values of home, nature, and long-term romance.

Harvest Moon became a major hit, and its success led to an acoustic performance on MTV's popular *Unplugged* show, which was released as an album in 1993. *MTV Unplugged* featured some unexpected choices of material, including an acoustic version of the *Trans* track "Transformer Man." The same year, Geffen capitalized on Young's renewed popularity by issuing *Lucky Thirteen*, a scattershot collection of album tracks and rarities drawn from his years with that company.

Also in 1992, Young wrote and recorded "Philadelphia," for director Jonathan Demme's hit movie of the same name. The song was nominated for an Academy Award, but ironically lost out to Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia," from the same film. Young also guested with old friend Randy Bachman, of Bachman-Turner Overdrive fame, on "Prairie Town," a track on Bachman's album *Any Road* that recalled the pair's early days on the Winnipeg music scene.

Young also won substantial acclaim for his 1992 summer tour, which teamed him with a new backup combo, the legendary Stax Records house band Booker T. and the MGs, with whom he'd first performed at a 1992 Bob Dylan tribute concert at New York's Madison Square Garden.

Young's return to the middle of the road with *Harvest Moon* wasn't permanent. Nineteen ninety-four's *Sleeps with Angels*, recorded with Crazy Horse, was a much darker effort, and led some observers to describe it as a 1990s answer to *Tonight's the Night*. *Sleeps with Angels* reflected the influence of the then-current crop of noisy young grunge bands, whose sound owed a debt to Young's work with Crazy Horse. The title track of *Sleeps with Angels* was widely interpreted as a tribute to the late Nirvana leader Kurt Cobain, who had quoted Young's lyrics in his suicide note earlier that year. The album's highlights included the nearly fifteen-minute "Change Your Mind," which, in edited form, became a popular airplay track.

In the wake of *Sleeps with Angels*, Young began jamming with Seattle grunge stars Pearl Jam, and the association led to the extra-raw 1995 album *Mirror Ball*, on which the members of Pearl Jam (and producer Brendan O'Brien) served as Young's backup band. *Mirror Ball* was recorded in a whirlwind four-day session that also produced the companion EP *Merkin Ball*, which was released under Pearl Jam's name.

Young's longtime passion for model trains—a hobby that he shared with his wheelchair-bound son Ben—became a business venture in 1995, when he became a partner in the Lionel model-train company. Prior to his business involvement with Lionel, the elaborate train setup at Young's ranch had played a crucial therapeutic role for Ben, and Young called upon his technical skills to help pioneer several innovations that now allow handicapped users access to the trains' controls.

In 1996, Young inaugurated Vapor Records, a new label run by himself and manager Elliot Roberts. Vapor would eventually score some commercial success with releases by punk progenitor Jonathan Richman and sibling pop duo Tegan and Sara. But the company's first release was a CD containing Young's music score for Jim Jarmusch's film *Dead Man*, an abstract effort consisting mainly of feedback-driven instrumentals.

The same year, the death of Young's longtime producer David Briggs—whose edgy recording approach had been a key component in most of Young's 1970s albums—inspired him to reunite with Crazy Horse for a series of informal jams that eventually became the 1996 album *Broken Arrow*.

Broken Arrow was largely uninspired, but it was followed by extensive tours of North America and Europe that found Young and Crazy Horse firing on all cylinders again. Those tours produced the live album *Year of the Horse*, and were documented in the same-titled documentary by Jim Jarmusch, which focused on Young's long-running relationship with his on-again, off-again backup band.

Young closed out the century with *Looking Forward*, another Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young album, which was followed by a wildly successful reunion tour, the quartet's first in a quarter-century. Also in 2000, Young released *Silver & Gold*, a set of low-key country-pop songs that followed largely in the vein of *Harvest Moon*, and *Road Rock Vol. 1: Friends & Relatives*, a live album and DVD cut with many of the same musicians.

Young reunited with Booker T. and the MGs for 2002's R&B-tinged *Are You Passionate?* The album received a good deal of advance press for "Let's Roll," a heartfelt tribute to the victims of the September 11, 2001, terror attacks. But the album otherwise focused on love songs dedicated to Pegi Young, his wife and sometime backing vocalist.

In 2002 the publication of author Jimmy McDonough's meticulously researched Young biography *Shakey*, offered a fascinating and insightful portrait of Young's perfectionist work ethic and control-freak tendencies. The latter quality was demonstrated in the fact that the very private Young reluctantly cooperated with McDonough on the project, yet came close to scuttling the project by threatening to withdraw his approval at the last minute.

Young's 2003 project *Greendale* incorporated his multi-media interests, as well as his penchant for sociopolitical commentary. *Greendale* encompassed a studio album, a Young-directed feature film, and an elaborate concert production that combined a Young/Crazy Horse performance with a cast of live actors performing the show's narrative. *Greenville*'s plotline portrays the effect of larger world events upon a fictional small-town farm family, and served as a vehicle for Young's criticisms of the Bush administration's economic and environmental policies and the destructive effects of Bush's war in Iraq.

In early 2005, Young was diagnosed with a potentially fatal brain aneurysm. Prior to undergoing surgery, he wrote and recorded a set of introspective new songs, several of which seemed to reflect his brush with mortality (as well as

the recent death of his father), and explore his rural roots. After undergoing a minimally invasive neuroradiology procedure, Young went to Nashville and recorded his new material for the largely acoustic *Prairie Wind*, which achieved healthy sales and won widespread critical acclaim.

Young returned to the stage on July 2, 2005, performing in Toronto as part of the worldwide Live 8 simulcast. The following month, he performed a pair of concerts at Nashville's Ryman Auditorium with most of his *Prairie Wind* sidemen. Those shows were filmed by Jonathan Demme and formed the basis of the concert film *Heart of Gold*, a celebration of Young's body of work that premiered the following year at the Sundance Film Festival.

Having wasted little time in bouncing back from his life-threatening condition, Young made headlines again in 2006 with *Living with War*, an unapologetic set of noisy protest songs that harshly rebuked the Bush administration's Iraq war policy. The album, recorded with session players and a large vocal choir, was written quickly and recorded over a nine-day period in March and April 2006, initially made available on Young's Web site at the end of that month, and released to retail outlets scarcely six weeks after it was recorded. One place where *Living with War* was not available was the huge—and politically conservative—Wal-Mart chain of stores.

All of *Living with War*'s songs—including such titles as “Let's Impeach the President,” “Shock and Awe,” and “Looking for a Leader”—were performed live during Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's politically charged “Freedom of Speech Tour '06,” along with many of the group's classic topical material.

Meanwhile, recent years have seen Young beginning to make good on his long-standing promise to make some his voluminous backlog of unreleased material available to the public. The release of Young's massive rarities box set *The Neil Young Archives*, which has apparently been in the works since the late 1980s, has been announced and postponed numerous times, leading many fans to despair of ever getting to hear it. But in 2006 Young launched what's projected to be a lengthy series of archival releases, beginning with a pair of early 1970s live recordings, the Crazy Horse–fueled *Live at the Fillmore East* and the solo acoustic *Live at Massey Hall*.

Although he's revealed a late-blooming willingness to journey into his past, Neil Young shows no sign of losing interest in his musical present. More than four decades into his recording career, Young remains virtually the only rocker who's as vital in his sixties as he was in his twenties.

TIMELINE

January 23, 1969

Neil Young releases his self-titled debut solo album.

May 27, 1969

Young releases *Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere*, his first album with Crazy Horse.

March 17, 1970

Déjà Vu, Young's first album as a member of Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, is released. It will reach number one on the *Billboard* album chart, selling over seven million copies.

September 16, 1970

Neil Young's third solo album, *After the Gold Rush*, is released. It will become his first Top Ten album as a solo artist.

March 18, 1972

"Heart of Gold," from Young's fourth album *Harvest*, tops the U.S. pop singles chart.

October 14, 1973

Young releases *Time Fades Away*, whose raw electric sound represents a substantial break with the mellow sound of its best-selling predecessor *Harvest*.

August 15, 1974

Young releases the downbeat *On the Beach*, which *Rolling Stone* later calls "the most despairing album of the decade."

July 16, 1975

Young releases *Tonight's the Night*, inspired by the heroin-related deaths of Crazy Horse member Danny Whitten and guitar tech Bruce Berry.

November 25, 1976

Young performs "Helpless" at The Band's farewell concert at the Winterland Ballroom in San Francisco. The performance, will be featured in *The Last Waltz*, director Martin Scorsese's documentary of the event.

December 17, 1977

Decade, a triple-LP Neil Young retrospective, is released.

October 18, 1978

The gentle, acoustic-flavored *Comes a Time* is released. It will become his biggest-selling album since *Harvest*.

October 22, 1978

Young's concert at San Francisco's Cow Palace is shot for Young's concert film version of *Rust Never Sleeps*.

July 19, 1979

The album *Rust Never Sleeps* is released.

November 19, 1981

*Re*ac*tor* is released, ending Young's sixteen-album association with Reprise Records.

January 13, 1983

Neil Young kicks off his new association with his new label, Geffen, by releasing *Trans*.

April 21, 1988

Young returns to Reprise Records with *This Note's for You*.

September 6, 1989

Young's "This Note's For You" wins an MTV Video Music Award as Video of the Year.

September 22, 1989

Neil Young releases *Freedom*, which many critics acclaim as his best work since *Rust Never Sleeps*.

September 23, 1990

Ragged Glory, widely regarded as a return to form by Young and Crazy Horse, is released.

October 24, 1992

Young releases *Harvest Moon*, a sequel to his twenty-year-old *Harvest*. It will become his first platinum album since 1979's *Rust Never Sleeps*.

February 7, 1993

Young tapes an acoustic performance for MTV's *Unplugged*. The performance will be released as a fourteen-song CD and home video in July.

March 21, 1994

Neil Young's Academy Award-nominated "Philadelphia," from Jonathan Demme's film of the same name, loses to Bruce Springsteen's "Streets of Philadelphia," from the same film.

July 25, 1994

Young and Crazy Horse release *Sleeps with Angels*, whose title song pays tribute to the late Nirvana leader Kurt Cobain.

May 26, 1995

Young releases *Mirror Ball*, an album recorded with Seattle grunge stars Pearl Jam.

May 8, 2006

Young returns to the realm of political protest with the release of *Living with War*, a collection of songs harshly critical of the George W. Bush administration.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Neil Young, 1969

Everybody Knows This Is Nowhere, 1969

After the Gold Rush, 1970

Harvest, 1972

Time Fades Away, 1973

On the Beach, 1974

Tonight's the Night, 1975

Zuma, 1975

Comes a Time, 1978

Rust Never Sleeps, 1979

Live Rust, 1979

Trans, 1982

Freedom, 1989

Ragged Glory, 1990

Harvest Moon, 1992
Sleeps with Angels, 1994
Prairie Wind, 2005
Living with War, 2006

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Courtesy of Photofest.

David Bowie

Jesse Jarnow

INTELLECTUAL SHAPESHIFTER

David Bowie staked his claim in the pop world by creating and courting controversy. First charting with a hit called “A Space Oddity,” before taking on the persona of Martian bandleader Ziggy Stardust, and eventually portraying spaceman Thomas Jerome Newton in Nicholas Roeg’s 1976 film, *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Bowie cut an almost literally alien figure when he rose to stardom in the early 1970s. Like Bob Dylan before him and Prince afterward,

the British singer tapped into his era's mores. Bowie willfully positioned himself as a transgressive rock star.

"You can't go out on stage and live, it's all false that way," Bowie said in 1976, at the height of his fame. "I can't stand the premise of going out in jeans and a guitar and looking as real as you can in front of 18,000 people. I mean, it's not normal!"¹ In part, when Bowie forged glam-rock along with T. Rex singer Marc Bolan, it was in reaction to the earnestness of singer-songwriters like Neil Young and Bruce Springsteen. But his artistry was much more than that.

Musically, glam mixed theatrical camp with the power of loud guitars and anthemic choruses. Bowie dressed and played the part off stage as well. He streaked his natural blonde hair red and was bone skinny, due in part to massive cocaine consumption. Appearing like an alternate universe Elvis Presley, Bowie was an androgynous chameleon. He appeared bare-chested with a leather jacket, or dressed in skintight clothes, which ranged from paisley jumpsuits to dancer's leotards to immaculately tailored suits. Openly bisexual and vociferously intellectual, David Bowie in the late 1970s was the very definition of charisma.

Indeed, the look Bowie created as Ziggy Stardust was massively iconic. As one of the first pop stars to declare attraction to the same sex, Bowie became the figurehead of a subculture of disenfranchised youth of all genders, sexualities, and cultural differences. Even after Bowie himself moved on to new characters, Ziggy's influence resonated throughout popular culture, in movies like *Velvet Goldmine* and *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. He was a template of fashion, a shorthand adopted and adapted as an outrageous bridge between stadium pomp and the onset of punk in 1977.

But as market savvy as David Bowie was, he also came from an even firmer tradition: British music hall. In fact, Bowie began his career in the shadow of Anthony Newley, an unapologetically nostalgic British pop act. First and foremost, David Bowie—whose birth name was David Jones—was an entertainer. He was willing to do anything necessary to put on a show, either on stage or in the culture at large, from studying mime to deliberately spreading a reputation as a sexual provocateur.

On top of it all, Bowie was a vocalist of extraordinary technical ability, able to pitch his singing to particular effect. "I don't think people realize how finely he can tune his singing, in terms of picking a particular emotional pitch," producer Brian Eno once said. "It's really scientific the way he does it, very interesting. He'll say 'I think that's slightly too theatrical there, it should be more withdrawn and introspective'—and he'll go in and sing it again, and you'll hear this point-four of a degree shift which makes all the difference."²

After the global triumph of Ziggy Stardust, Bowie continued to reinvent himself. He had numerous personas, which informed both his exterior appearance and his method of making music. These characters included a gaunt

studio experimentalist with fascist leanings in Berlin in the late 1970s (known as “the Thin White Duke”), a normal dude pop star in a dinner jacket in the 1980s, and a jam-happy democratic bandmember with Tin Machine in the 1990s. Though he served as a producer and a collaborator for artists he felt were overlooked, Bowie’s primary extramusical work explored a number of alternate occupations, as an actor, an art dealer, and a businessman. When Bowie agreed to reissue his back catalog in 1997, he managed his profits by selling so-called Bowie bonds to fans, promises on future earnings.

Even as he changed, Bowie was always extraordinarily conscious of the way he was perceived, and what he could do to affect that. “It’s true—I am a bisexual,” he told *Playboy*. “But I can’t deny that I’ve used that fact very well. I suppose it’s the best thing that ever happened to me.”³ Ever self-reflective, Bowie was also a prolific reader and an inquisitive intellectual who befriended artists such as Damien Hirst and novelist Hanif Kureishi. As he reached a half-century, Bowie emerged as an elder statesman in the music world. As an arbiter of taste, Bowie performed and recorded with a number of high-profile bands who cited him as an influence, and curated music festivals that included both his musical spawn as well as more established avant-garde acts. Bowie remained present in the theater and fashion worlds, as well.

Though he has not remained as influential as he was in the 1970s and 1980s, Bowie has nonetheless remained an active part of the transatlantic cultural scene.

BIRTH OF A STARCHILD

David Robert Jones was born January 8, 1947, in London, England. His parents, Haywood (John) Jones and Margaret (Peggy) Burns were unmarried, each with children from previous relationships, though they wed seven months after David’s birth. They lived in south London, in working-class Brixton, where John was a promotions officer and Peggy an usher at a movie theater. David was a shy child, but grew close with his mother’s first son Terry, with whom he shared a bedroom. When David was six, the family moved nine miles southeast to suburban Bromley, in Kent. London was still only a half-hour train ride away.

On Sundays, the family listened to *Two Way Family Favorites*, a radio show that played nostalgic British pop music, such as Ernest Lough’s “On the Wings of a Dove,” one of Peggy’s favorites, with which she sang along. John was keen on the emerging popular culture. He bought a television long before many in the neighborhood, and a 78 RPM gramophone soon after. Three years later, John brought home a collection of 45 RPM singles. Having the wrong speed record played posed only a minor problem for David.

“I would crouch over the heavy-armed turntable, twirling the disc ever faster until it approached what I presumed would be its real speed,” Bowie wrote

many years later. "Although wobbly and wonky, these really great sounds came out of the horn." David made his way through singles by Fats Domino and Frankie Lymon, among others, before he found the song that would change his life: Little Richard's melodramatic "Tutti Frutti." "It filled the room with energy and color and outrageous defiance. I had heard God. Now I wanted to see him."⁴ In that moment, David Jones decided he wanted to be a musician.

David's older half-brother Terry was a jazz fan, and introduced his sibling to American jazz bassist and bandleader Charles Mingus, as well as the beat writings of novelist Jack Kerouac and poet Allen Ginsberg. David played occasionally in a skiffle duo with classmate George Underwood and performed the swing-influenced folk songs of Lonnie Donegan. He also took a part-time job at a record shop. Though he was fired for daydreaming, David used his earnings to purchase a white Bakelite acrylic alto saxophone and took lessons with respected jazzbo Ronnie Ross.

When David was fifteen, he got into a fistfight with Underwood over the affections of a girl. Underwood punched David in the eye and sent him to Farnborough Hospital. After two operations, David was diagnosed with anisocoria. The pupil of his left eye was paralyzed and permanently dilated. His vision was mostly unaffected, though under certain light, his left eye could turn from blue to green or brown. Many years later, tabloids would publish outlandish accounts of how the eye came to be as it was, part of Bowie's alien mythology.

At Bromley Technical High School, David studied art with Owen Frampton, whose son Peter would become a massive pop star in his own right. Though Frampton emphasized the liberal attitudes then popular in the country's art schools, which David absorbed, David's own work leaned toward commercial art. Except in graphic design, David was not a good student. At sixteen, David left school and worked as a low-level assistant at Nevin D. Hirst Advertising in London. He continued to gig with various groups, such as the R&B-influenced Konrads (where David called himself "David Jay"), and the blues-based groups the King Bees and the Manish Boys (both named for blues songs). Bowie quit his job and—on June 5, 1964—saw the release of his first single, the slave spiritual "Liza Jane," with the Manish Boys.

The band appeared on several television shows to promote the single, and opened for Gene Pitney and Gerry and the Pacemakers on a short tour. Still, David Jones continued to explore new sounds and ideas. On November 12, 1964, David appeared in a comic interview on Britain's *Tonight* show, pretending to be the president of "the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Long-Haired Men." His music wasn't mentioned, though his performance was firmly tongue-in-cheek.

Half-brother Terry, returned from the military, often joined David as he discovered new bands, though Terry was increasingly debilitated by a mental illness. When not living at home, crippled with depression and schizophrenic

visions, Terry spent much of the decade in various institutions; he committed suicide in 1982. David pressed on and joined the Who-influenced Lower Third. In September 1965, at the Marquee with the Lower Third, David Jones drew the attention of music industry veteran Ken Pitt.

Pitt had served as a publicist for Frank Sinatra, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and others before he became a manager. He took David under his wing, and exposed him to the work of outlandish literary gay humorist Oscar Wilde and the psychedelic erotic illustrator Aubrey Beardsley. Pitt also suggested that David pick a full-time stage name, as another Davy Jones had become popular as a singer for the Monkees. On September 16, 1965, David Jones began to use the surname Bowie, for the single-bladed hunting knife favored by American frontiersman Jim Bowie.

PREPPING THE LAUNCHPAD

Though the Lower Third remained nominally a rock act, the newly christened David Bowie grew more theatrical by the month. Influenced heavily by actor, songwriter, and Music Hall revivalist Anthony Newley, they even performed and recorded "Chim Chim Cher-ee," a bit of whimsy penned by the Sherman brothers for Disney's film musical *Mary Poppins*. "I'm determined to be an entertainer," Bowie said at the time. "Clubs, cabaret, concerts, the lot. . . . A lot is said and written about the musical snobbery with the fans, but I think the groups are just as bad. For some reason even the words 'entertainer' and 'cabaret' make them shudder."⁵

Throughout the next two years, Bowie performed with both the Buzz (his own band) and Riot Squad. In the latter, Bowie first wore makeup on stage and encouraged the band to cover Frank Zappa's "It Can't Happen Here." As a solo artist, Bowie signed to Deram, an experimental subsidiary of major label Decca. There, he released a number of singles throughout 1966, which included the semi-orchestral arrangement of "Rubber Band." With collaborator Dek Fernley, Bowie scored parts for the London Symphony Orchestra. Some songs, like "Gravedigger," were nearly pure theater. Others contained campy one-liners, such as "The Laughing Gnome." Another, "She's Got Medals," was about a cross-dressing female soldier. On June 1, 1967—the same day Decca released the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*—Deram issued *David Bowie*. The underpromoted album sold poorly.

Bowie's time at Deram was far from wasted. At one session, he met Tony Visconti, a twenty-two-year-old American-born producer who had recently joined Decca's London staff. The two hit it off famously. They shared an affinity for taboo-breaching American acts such as the Velvet Underground, Frank Zappa, and the Fugs. With a few exceptions, Visconti became Bowie's de

facto producer. Bowie continued to draw from theater, too, and in 1967 he attended Lindsay Kemp's mime classes at the flamboyantly gay dancer's Mime Company. Beginning on December 28, 1967, and through the spring of 1968, Bowie appeared in Kemp's *Pierrot in Turquoise*, where he sang several songs. Though he was never a gifted practitioner of mime, Bowie took the skills with him to his other endeavors.

In 1968, Bowie worked on an unfinished rock musical (*Ernie Johnson*), submitted an original play to the Beatles' newly formed Apple Corps (*The Champion Flower Grower*, rejected), failed auditions for several television plays, and appeared in Kemp's choreography for Alexander Pushkin's *The Pistol Shot* on the BBC. He rehearsed (though did not perform) a cabaret routine that had him singing Beatles songs and acted in several television commercials as well as a silent movie. Dropped by Deram and signed to Mercury Records, musically Bowie moved in a folkier direction. He formed the short-lived Feathers with then-girlfriend Hermione Farmingdale, a dancer he met while working on *The Pistol Shot*, and co-founded a weekly folk society in the Beckenham neighborhood where he lived. By 1969, though, the club had evolved into Growth, an anything-goes arts lab where people could showcase their creative talents of any variety.

In February 1969, with the July moon landing on the horizon, Bowie wrote the timely "Space Oddity." A haunting, chorusless narrative about a never-to-return astronaut named Major Tom, the Gus Dudgeon-produced single was released in July 1969. The BBC banned it until the *Apollo 11* astronauts returned safely to earth. In September, the song reached number five in the United Kingdom and became Bowie's first hit. Though now a minor success, Bowie's flamboyance was still not always tolerated. In the fall of 1969, when he toured solo acoustic opening for Humble Pie, Bowie was frequently booed. His full-length album, *A Space Oddity*, released in November, reached number seventeen in the United Kingdom, and number sixteen in the United States. The follow-up single, "The Prettiest Star," which featured T. Rex's Marc Bolan on guitar, did not chart.

During 1969, Bowie met Angie Barnett when the two discovered they were both sleeping with the same man, Mercury Records' Calvin Mark Lee. Like Bowie, Barnett was bisexual, and her extravagance complemented his. She encouraged Bowie to try wilder fashions and acted as an informal manager after Bowie parted ways with Kenneth Pitt. The two married on March 20, 1970, at the Beckenham Registry Office and moved into Haddon Hall, a large Victorian home that became something of a salon of sex, fashion, and music. While musicians, like new guitarist Mick Ronson, slept on mattresses on the floor, the Bowies spent time at the Sombrero, a gay disco.

All of this, in fact, was a type of research for David Bowie. During 1970 and 1971, though his singles and albums did not sell well, Bowie's music transformed into what became known as glam-rock. Both Bowie and T. Rex's Marc Bolan (a sometimes friend, sometimes rival) were both credited as being

the genre's progenitors, though the style was a perfectly natural outgrowth of the London rock scene. Piece by piece, Bowie implemented new facets into his act, though little showed on *The Man Who Sold the World*, released in November 1970 in the United States (number 105), and April 1971 in the United Kingdom (number 26). On May 30, 1971, Angie gave birth to Duncan Zowie Haywood Jones, Bowie's first son. Until the late 1970s, to his later regret, Bowie was mostly an absentee father.

The New York Dolls: Looking for a Kiss

From inauspicious beginnings in the decaying Mercer Arts Center in downtown Manhattan, the New York Dolls created some of the most exciting and passionate music of the glam era. The Dolls never reaped any financial reward in their own time. But they exerted a profound influence on far more successful bands, from KISS to Guns N' Roses, and paved the way for punk and new wave.

When the New York Dolls formed in 1971, the American music scene was dominated by singer/songwriters (James Taylor, Carole King) and by 1960s survivors like the Grateful Dead. The Dolls brought back flash and excitement with their outrageous, streetwise image: on the cover of their 1973 self-titled debut album, the five musicians appeared in full drag, complete with makeup and teased coiffures. The Dolls' punchy three-chord songs like "Personality Crisis" and "Looking for a Kiss" invoked the spirit of 1950s and early 1960s rock and roll refracted through the witty lyrics of lead singer David Johansen and the careening two-guitar attack of Johnny Thunders and Sylvain Sylvain.

Internal problems plagued the band almost from its inception. During their first tour of Britain, in the fall of 1972, drummer Billy Murcia died from an accidental drug overdose. His replacement, the dynamic Jerry Nolan, soon developed his own drug dependency, as did Johnny Thunders. Radio programmers shied away from the Dolls' androgynous look and raw sound; neither of their two albums reached the *Billboard* Top 100 and the original quintet broke up in 1975.

By 2004, only Johansen, Sylvain, and bassist Arthur Kane were still alive. But they reconstituted the New York Dolls with several new members to play the London Meltdown Festival in June 2004 at the personal request of former Smiths lead singer and festival curator Morrissey. The show was a resounding success but a few weeks later, Arthur Kane entered a Los Angeles hospital, suffering from flu-like symptoms. Diagnosed with leukemia, he died July 13, 2004, at age fifty-five.

With new bassist Sam Jaffa (formerly of the Dolls-influenced Hanoi Rocks), Johansen and Sylvain soldiered on. In July 2006, the New York Dolls released *One Day It Will Please Us to Remember Even This*—their first new album in thirty-two years.

Andy Schwartz

In addition to appearing on numerous BBC radio programs, Bowie also masterminded the group Arnold Corns, who released a terrible selling single of two songs that would later appear on Bowie's *Ziggy Stardust*, "Moonage Daydream" and "Hang on to Yourself." Likewise, ex-Herman's Hermit Peter Noone scored a number twelve U.K. hit with Bowie's "Oh You Pretty Things." Most important, though, Bowie found the perfect backing band: guitarist Mick Ronson, drummer Woody Woodmansey, and bassist Trevor Bolder. Tony Visconti, meanwhile, had jumped to the Marc Bolan camp. In his place, Bowie employed Ken Scott, a former engineer for the Beatles, to record *Hunky Dory* throughout the summer of 1971.

Released in December, it rose to number three on the U.K. charts after Bowie made a deliberately shocking announcement in a *Melody Maker* cover story published on January 22, 1972. "I'm gay and I always have been, even when I was David Jones,"⁶ Bowie told journalist Michael Watts. The quote caused an immediate stir, sending *Hunky Dory* rocketing up the chart. Bowie did nothing to clarify why he was also married with a child. Even as an admission of bisexuality, it was a risky move in what was still a predominantly homophobic society. If Bowie's post-hippie fashion hadn't put him on the pop culture radar, his declaration that he wasn't straight surely did.

If Bowie exploited his sexuality for publicity, it was merely a part of a more studied campaign. On his first tours of the United States in 1971, Bowie grew fascinated with conceptual artist Andy Warhol, the Velvet Underground's early patron, who believed that fame was a carefully manufactured construction. Bowie used all of the skills he had thus accumulated—songwriting, provocation, theater, fashion, the conveyance of a deep Otherness—to create Ziggy Stardust, the character he would inhabit nominally for the next few years and, in the eye of the public, well beyond.

ZIGGY STARDUST AND THE THIN WHITE DUKE

By the time of *Hunky Dory*'s release in December 1971 (number three U.K., number ninety-three U.S.), Bowie was already well through the recording sessions for Ziggy's unveiling. In guitarist Mick Ronson, Bowie found a perfect musical foil. "I would . . . literally draw out on paper with a crayon or felt-tip pen the shape of a solo," Bowie explained. "The one in 'Moonage Daydream,' for instance, started as a flat line that became a fat megaphone type shape and ended in sprays of disassociated and broken lines. . . . Mick could take something like that and actually bloody play it, being it to life."⁷

Bowie based Ziggy Stardust on two outsider musicians: the Legendary Stardust Cowboy, an American country-and-western musician who claimed to have traveled into space, and Vince Taylor, the so-called French Elvis Presley, who spiraled into truly epic drug abuse and subsequent mental health issues. Visually, Bowie drew from Stanley Kubrick's recently released adaptation of Anthony Burgess's

violent novel, *A Clockwork Orange*, as well as Japanese kabuki theater. Japanese designer Kansai Yamamoto created a hairstyle for Ziggy, as well as a series of outlandish costumes for Bowie's tours. His shows now involved numerous costume changes, face makeup, and the uniquely reverbed guitars of Mick Ronson. The result was a character unlike anything seen before in pop music.

With the band in costume and dubbed the Spiders from Mars, Ziggy made his stage debut on January 28, 1972, at Friars Aylesbury, a small club, before the start of a theater tour. They would continue to tour, more or less continuously, for the next year and a half, playing over 170 shows. The performances grew to include mime routines, mimicked fellatio on Ronson's guitar neck, and a costume that exposed Bowie's ass to the crowd. Whenever there was media present, Bowie was in character as Ziggy Stardust.

"It was so much easier for me to live within the character, along with the help of some of the chemical substances at the time," Bowie said in 1993. "It became easier and easier for me to blur the lines between reality and the blessed creature that I'd created—my doppelgänger. I wasn't getting rid of him at all; in fact, I was joining forces with him. The doppelgänger and myself were starting to become one and the same person. Then you start on this trail of psychological destruction and you become what's called a drug casualty at the end of it."⁸ Though Bowie was by now a regular cocaine user, it did not begin to take its toll until later.

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars, released by RCA on June 6, 1972, reached number five in the United Kingdom, though only number seventy-five in the United States. As "Starman" reached the U.K. Top Ten, Bowie took Ziggy to the airwaves to perform on *Top of the Pops* and *Lift Off*—performances cited as highly important by future generations of musicians who saw the show as children. Throughout the year, Bowie continued his influence on then-current musicians, as well. He contributed "All The Young Dudes" to Mott the Hoople, who scored a number three hit with what many consider to be the singular anthem of glam-rock. He also befriended two radical 1960s icons who had hit hard times: ex-Velvet Underground leader Lou Reed, who joined the Spiders on stage in July 1972, and former Iggy and the Stooges frontman Iggy Pop, who became a lifelong friend. Bowie produced *Transformer* for Reed, which yielded Reed's "Walk on the Wild Side" (number ten U.K., number sixteen U.S.), a song that relaunched Reed's career as an American glam-rocker. Bowie had not had as much luck in Reed's native country.

Mott the Hoople: All the Young Dudes

After several unsuccessful albums and tours, Mott the Hoople were on the verge of disbanding when David Bowie came to their rescue—and turned Mott into a "glam rock" band by unavoidable association. In truth, the group's original sound had little in common with T. Rex, Roxy Music, or early 1970s

Bowie. Rather, it was unashamedly derivative of the influential Bob Dylan albums *Highway 61 Revisited* and *Blonde on Blonde*, from the Dylan-esque drawl of lead singer Ian Hunter to the characteristic instrumental combination of Verden Allen's organ and Hunter's piano. Although Mott never recorded any Dylan songs, their versions of songs by Dylan emulators like Sonny Bono ("Laugh at Me") and Doug Sahm ("At the Crossroads") were highlights of such uneven early albums as *Mott the Hoople* (1970).

The group struggled for three years until David Bowie offered them a new song. Written and produced by Bowie, "All the Young Dudes" was a mid-tempo ballad with an irresistible sing-along chorus—and a perfect fit for Mott's sound and Ian Hunter's wry delivery. The lyrics held up a mirror to the post-1960s teenage rock audience.

A number three U.K. hit that also made the U.S. Top Forty, "All the Young Dudes" and the album of the same name gave Mott a new lease on life. The band reached its creative peak with the self-produced *Mott* (1973), on which Ian Hunter truly came into his own as a rock songwriter with the compassionate love song, "I Wish I Was Your Mother," and "The Ballad of Mott the Hoople," which examined the performer/audience relationship in a way that seemed to chronicle not just one band's unsteady rise but that of glam rock itself.

A. S.

In the next two years, Bowie fell in love with the United States. He toured, recorded, and lived there. "Here was this alternative world that I'd been talking about," Bowie remembered, "and it had all the violence, and all the strangeness and bizarreness, and it was really happening. It was real life and it wasn't just in my songs. Suddenly my songs didn't seem so out of place."⁹ Between promotional work and tours in the United States, Bowie recorded a new album in January 1973. Named for another character he'd developed during his shows, *Aladdin Sane* (number one U.K., number seventeen U.S.) added a harder edge to the sound the Spiders developed on *Ziggy Stardust*, especially with the contributions of new keyboardist Mike Garson. After the April release of the album, throughout the remainder of the year, Bowie had four singles in the Top Ten, and another during the first months of 1974, including "Drive-In Saturday" (number three), an unauthorized re-release of 1967's "The Laughing Gnome" by Deram (number six), *Hunky Dory*'s "Life on Mars?" (number three), and "Rebel Rebel" (number five). Over the summer, all but one of his six albums hovered in the Top Forty.

Despite the massive success he'd worked so long to achieve, Bowie was fed up with *Ziggy Stardust* and *Aladdin Sane*. On May 12, 1973, during the tour's closing performance at Earls Court in London, Bowie announced his retirement. In truth, he only disbanded the Spiders (who toured briefly without him) and reevaluated his own career. In October, Bowie released *Pin-Ups* (number one U.K., number twenty-three U.S.), an album of cover songs by

contemporary artists like Pink Floyd, the Who, the Kinks, and Bruce Springsteen. By the end of 1973, he had sold over a million albums and a million singles in the United Kingdom. As Bowie prepared for the next phase of his career, the image of Ziggy Stardust continued to circulate throughout England. So-called Bowie boys and Bowie girls perpetuated it as a fashion craze and a hairstyle of short-cropped orange hair.

By the first months of 1974, he had composed much of *Diamond Dogs*, the first album he produced by himself. Originally conceived as a musical adaptation of George Orwell's dystopian novel *1984*, Bowie worked with a new band on his dense new songs; only keyboardist Mike Garson remained from the Spiders. An important element for Bowie's new direction came into place when he reconnected with Tony Visconti, who had parted ways with Marc Bolan. In Visconti's new home studio, the two pared down the sound of *Diamond Dogs*. Back in the fold, Visconti would remain an important part of Bowie's music over the next decade. Released on April 24, 1974, *Diamond Dogs* hit number one in the United Kingdom, and became Bowie's first Top Ten album in the United States, where it reached number five, despite the fact that "Rebel Rebel" had petered out at number sixty-four on the singles charts there.

Still unsatisfied, Bowie moved to New York. Though he grew more reliant on cocaine, he was no less ambitious in his art. In Manhattan, he befriended Carlos Alomar, a guitarist he met while producing a session for faded British pop star Lulu. The former house guitarist at the famed Apollo Theater had never heard of Bowie before. Alomar, born in Puerto Rico, was Bowie's guide to the local music scenes. Bowie asked Alomar to join the Diamond Dog Revue, the expensive American tour Bowie was about to begin. Alomar turned him down.

The Diamond Dogs Revue featured Bowie alone on stage, the band hidden behind backdrops. He interacted with a number of sets and props, which included a bridge and a giant hand. The stage cost \$400,000 and required thirty men to build. The tour ran for over a month with very few gigless days. During a six-week break in the tour, Bowie recorded at Sigma Sound in Philadelphia. Carlos Alomar came down from New York, and brought a band with him, including a young vocalist named Luther Vandross. Bowie brought in former Sly and the Family Stone drummer Andy Newmark, among others. With Visconti in charge, Bowie sang live with the band.

Sessions for *Young Americans* ran throughout the rest of the year, in various combinations. Meanwhile, *David Live*, a concert album, was released in October (number two U.K., number eight U.S.), and kept Bowie's visibility high. In January 1975, Bowie collaborated with ex-Beatle John Lennon on "Fame" (number one U.S., number seventeen U.K.). Far from glam, Bowie's new music hinted at the disco that had infiltrated the U.S. pop charts. Bowie changed his appearance, too, sweeping his hair to the side in the guise of a new persona, The Thin White Duke. Despite the simpler clothes, the Thin White Duke was just as alien as Ziggy Stardust. In large part, this is

because Bowie had shrunk to just over eighty pounds, the result of his cocaine addiction.

The Thin White Duke took on a more definite persona when Bowie joined the cast of Nicholas Roeg's *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, based on Walter Tevis's science fiction novel. Bowie played Thomas Newton, an alien sent to earth to save his own planet, but corrupted into total detachment by the materialistic popular culture, especially television. "I find it very sad," said Bowie twenty-five years later, "because I look at a younger me and I feel almost protective because I can see an incredible amount of pain and isolation that I was putting myself through with my drug abuse and I just feel quite sad for that person."¹⁰

After he finished work on the film in New Mexico, Bowie moved to Los Angeles, where he bottomed out, sinking deep into paranoid delusions during the nocturnal hours he kept and living on milk and cigarettes. These fantasies, in part, were stoked by his burgeoning interest in the occult, notably mysterious British poet Aleister Crowley. In interviews, Bowie alternated between acute hallucinations, such as claiming to see a body fall past the outside window, and outlandish statements. "As I see it I am the only alternative for the premier of England. I believe England could benefit from a fascist leader."¹¹

"Around late 1975, everything was starting to break up," Bowie said later. "I would work at songs for hours and hours and days and days and then realize after a few days that I had done absolutely nothing. I thought I'd been working and working, but I'd only be rewriting the first four bars or something."¹²

Bowie worked on two projects throughout the fall, an unused soundtrack for *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, and a new album of original songs, titled *Station to Station*. The cover featured a still photograph from *The Man Who Fell to Earth*. By contrast with the tight pop songwriting of his previous albums, *Station to Station* (number five U.K., number three U.S.) heralded a newly experimental Bowie. With a title track that lasted over ten minutes, Bowie still managed a Top Ten single in "Golden Years" (number eight U.K., number ten U.S.). Two shows into Bowie's American tour, Iggy Pop—whom Bowie had visited in a Los Angeles mental hospital the year before—joined up as a backing vocalist. The two were inseparable for the next year and a half.

In April, Bowie returned to Europe, determined to continue his musical experimentation. The shows featured little obvious grandeur. Instead, they were centered on the harsh lights that revealed Bowie's features like in an expressionist film. In Berlin, he toured former Gestapo landmarks. When he visited England for the first time in two years on May 2, he immediately caused controversy. When he arrived at London's Victoria Station, a photographer claimed to have shot a picture of Bowie giving a Nazi salute. The *New Music Express* ran it with the caption, "Heil and Farewell." Bowie countered that he was merely caught mid-wave.

As he traveled throughout Europe, Bowie absorbed as much culture as he could. When the tour ended in May, he moved to the Swiss Alps with Angela

and his son Zowie, where he painted and read from the library of 5,000 books he'd accumulated. The Bowies' marriage, which had been open for some years, was nearly over, however. After the arrival of Iggy Pop in Switzerland, the two singers traveled to the Château d'Hérouville in July 1976, northwest of Paris, an expensive live-in recording studio. There, with Bowie as producer, they recorded Pop's new album, *The Idiot*. Bowie used the sessions to experiment. Influenced by the new wave of German experimental acts, such as Kraftwerk and Neu, he tried out tape loops to alter the basic sound of the instruments.

Bowie took August off, and returned to the Château on September 1 with producer Tony Visconti and another new collaborator: Brian Eno. Once a member of Roxy Music, one of Bowie's glam contemporaries, Eno had quit the band to experiment with his own brand of pop, as well as with what he called ambient music. The author of an essay titled "The Recording Studio as a Compositional Tool," Eno championed unorthodox methods of music making, such as the Oblique Strategies cards he created with artist Peter Schmidt, in which abstract statements were used to jump-start creativity. Eno also introduced an EMS synthesizer to Bowie's palette, which complemented the sounds Visconti wrung from the instruments with an Eventide Harmonizer. *Low* took shape. The first side of *Low* was filled with more traditional songs. The second featured long, instrumental pieces influenced by Eno's theories of ambient music.

T. Rex and Roxy Music: Top of the Pops

During David Bowie's original reign as the "godfather of glam" in the 1970s, his principal rivals for the loyalty of fans and domination of the British charts were T. Rex and Roxy Music.

At age fifteen, Marc Bolan (1948–77) already was a much-publicized face on the style-conscious Mod movement in London. His first group, John's Children, played hopped-up R&B in the style of the early Who. In 1967, Marc broke up this band to form Tyrannosaurus Rex with Steve Peregrine Took. Their fey, pseudo-mystical debut LP is a minor classic of British "flower power" music bearing the title *My People Were Fair and Wore Sky in Their Hair But Now They're Content to Wear Stars on Their Brows*.

Bolan soon segued into the more earthy and upbeat sound of T. Rex's 1970 single, "Ride a White Swan," which reached number two in the United Kingdom. Marc was not a virtuoso guitarist, and his breathy voice was limited in range and power. But on this and subsequent hits he deployed melodic hooks and bouncing back beats with the carefree insouciance of (and frequent direct quotations from) original 1950s rockers like Chuck Berry and Eddie Cochran.

These qualities, together with Bolan's flair for fashion and the sparkling sonic details supplied by producer Tony Visconti, combined to make T. Rex the biggest pop group in Britain from 1971 to 1973. The group scored eleven consecutive U.K. Top Ten singles, including the number one hits "Bang a Gong (Get It On)"

and "Telegram Sam," and created a frenzied, largely female fan base. (T. Rex didn't fare as well in the United States, where they had just one Top Ten single and a lone Top Twenty album.) Marc Bolan died in a car crash in 1977, a twist of fate that tragically echoed the death of Eddie Cochran in England in 1960.

Bolan's chart decline after 1974 made room for Roxy Music. Where T. Rex was virtually a one-man show, Roxy Music was a real band: the key founding members were lead singer and principal songwriter Bryan Ferry, Phil Manzanera (guitar), Brian Eno (keyboards and "treatments"), Andy McKay (saxophone), and Paul Thompson (drums). The group's influences ranged from the pop art of Andy Warhol to obscure 1950s saxophone instrumentals, and their retro-futurist look and eccentric but catchy songs seemed to fit in with the glam-rock style.

Roxy Music was an immediate success in Great Britain. The group placed ten singles in the Top Ten including "Virginia Plain," "Street Life," "Love Is the Drug," and the 1981 John Lennon tribute "Jealous Guy" (which reached number one). Beyond his persona of soulful, world-weary elegance, Bryan Ferry was an exceptional lyricist and vocalist whose skills were perfectly matched by those of his musicians. *Roxy Music* (1972) and *For Your Pleasure* (1973) had a manic, experimental edge often attributed to the influence of Brian Eno, who left the group in July 1973. Eno released a series of extraordinary solo discs (cf. *Another Green World*, 1975), and later produced U2's number one albums *The Joshua Tree* (1987) and *Achtung Baby* (1991).

Ferry was now firmly in control of the band, and its sound became progressively smoother and more commercial. The American mass audience never quite "got" Roxy Music, however: its first and only U.S. million-seller, *Avalon*, was the last album of new material released prior to the group's breakup in 1982. Bryan Ferry carried on with the solo career he'd maintained in tandem with that of the band. In 2001 Roxy Music reunited for a well-received, fifty-date world tour, but no new recordings were forthcoming.

A. S.

Though Bowie was not completely free of his demons—several times he went to the local hospital, convinced he was being poisoned—he was on the mend. Bowie and Iggy Pop decamped to West Berlin, where each tried to get sober—Bowie from cocaine, Pop from heroin. The two drank a great deal as Bowie mixed *Low* and began on Iggy's next endeavor. Titled *Lust For Life*, Bowie contributed the title track, which he wrote on a ukulele. Bowie spent the next two years in Germany. He cropped his hair short and grew a moustache. "Every day I get up more nerve, and try to be more normal, and less insulated against real people."¹³

"I just can't express the feeling of freedom I felt there," Bowie said in 2001. "Some days, the three of us would jump into a car and drive like crazy through East Germany and head down to the Black Forest, stopping off at any small village that caught our eye. Just go for days at a time. Or we'd take long, all-afternoon lunches at the Wannsee on winter days. The place had a glass roof

and was surrounded by trees and still exuded an atmosphere of the long gone Berlin of the twenties.”¹⁴

Released in January 1977, with another *Man Who Fell to Earth* photograph on the cover, *Low* (number two U.K., number eleven U.S.) was fronted by “Sound and Vision” (number three U.K., number sixty-nine U.S.). Bowie thrived in Berlin. In the summer, with Brian Eno and Tony Visconti, he reconvened the *Low* band at what he called “the hall by the Wall.” Hansa Studios had a Nazi-era stage big enough to accommodate 120 musicians. From the control room one could see the armed guards positioned at the top of the Berlin Wall. The album contained tributes to both Neu (“Heroes”) and Kraftwerk (“V-2 Schneider,” after Kraftwerk member Florian Schneider), as well as the spiraling guitar work of Robert Fripp, a longtime Eno collaborator.

The triumphant title song only reached number twenty-four on the U.K. charts, but along with the album (number three U.K., number thirty-five U.S.) was received with rapture by the press when it was released on October 14, 1977. Over the Christmas holiday, David and Angela Bowie split permanently. They divorced finally in March 1980, ten years to the month of their wedding. Early the next year, Bowie shot *Just a Gigolo* in Berlin with director David Hemmings in which Bowie played a soldier forced into prostitution after World War I.

When he finished his acting work, Bowie went on the road with *Heroes*. Carlos Alomar led the band, which also featured experimental guitarist Adrian Belew, whom Bowie had veritably stolen from Frank Zappa backstage at one of the latter’s shows. Like the tour for *Station to Station*, Bowie stripped the staging down even further. He was still a performer, but the emphasis was on the music. The shows began with “Warszawa,” one of the abstract instrumentals from *Low*. Alomar conducted the band with a baton. Bowie only included a few of his hit singles in the tour’s set list. His influence as a cultural figure was undiminished, however, with even Andy Warhol in attendance when the tour arrived at New York City’s Madison Square Garden. The tour continued through the rest of 1978 and finished in Japan, where Bowie spent Christmas and attended the premiere of *Just a Gigolo*. Despite including Marlene Dietrich’s last film appearance, the film bombed.

In the new year, Bowie traveled to Switzerland to create the final album in his trilogy with Brian Eno. With the addition of Adrian Belew, the experimentation continued, such as when Bowie played “All the Young Dudes” backward to create the chord changes for “Move On,” or when the band switched instruments to record “Boys Keep Swinging.” In general, though, the *Lodger* sessions were not as wide-ranging as the previous two discs. Neither Bowie nor Eno was thrilled with the final product, though it reached number four in the United Kingdom, number twenty in the United States upon its May 1979 release, with “Boys Keep Swinging” making the Top Ten in England.

David Bowie was at the end of one creative path, though his previous direction was already well represented in the music world. Just as his visual style had overtaken the youth of England, his albums had a profound impact on a

new generation of musicians, which included both arty experimentalists like Devo and Talking Heads (both would go on to work with Brian Eno), flamboyant singers who borrowed a bit of Bowie's androgynous sex appeal (such as the Eurythmics' Annie Lennox and Culture Club's Boy George). Some performed covers (such as Bauhaus, who had a Top Twenty U.K. hit with their version of "Ziggy Stardust" in 1980), and others were veritable imitators, like pop star Gary Numan. "To be honest, I never meant for cloning to be part of the eighties," Bowie said. "He's not only copied me, he's clever and he's got all my influences in too. I guess it's best of luck to him."¹⁵ To naturally disenfranchised young fans, Bowie himself was no longer the icon he once was.

THE MOONLIGHT FROM EARTH

Recorded at the Power Station in Manhattan in the spring of 1980, *Scary Monsters (and Sugar Creeps)* was, according to Tony Visconti, an effort to move in a more overtly commercial direction. The first single, "Ashes to Ashes," was a sequel to "A Space Oddity." Released in August 1980, it reached number one in the United Kingdom, Bowie's first U.K. number one, save for the 1975 reissue of "Space Oddity." With MTV's launch less than a year away, David Bowie had long ago embraced the video age, shooting promotional clips for many of his singles. In the early 1980s especially, he threw an increasing amount of creative energy into the fledgling medium. Bowie took an active hand in his videos, storyboarding "Ashes to Ashes" and playing multiple roles in "Fashion" (number five U.K., number seventy U.S.).

While Bowie's public character became increasingly normal, he returned to the theater to play a role that was anything but. In New York, Bowie rehearsed as the titular character in Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*, published in 1979, about disfigured man and sometimes circus oddity John Merrick. Notably, Bowie played the role without makeup. After a brief run in Denver, Colorado, in July, the show moved to Manhattan for the autumn season. On December 8, tragedy occurred when Mark David Chapman, an insane fan, murdered Bowie's friend, former Beatle John Lennon, outside Lennon's Manhattan apartment. It soon came out that just days before, Chapman had seen Bowie perform as John Merrick. Within weeks, Bowie left the cast of *The Elephant Man*. He has not acted in a play since.

Bowie did not record his own music or tour again during 1981, though he still managed to end up on the top of the charts, via a one-off collaboration with over-the-top British rockers Queen on "Under Pressure," released in October (number one U.K., number twenty-nine U.S.). Over the summer, he took to the television stage, acting in a BBC production of Bertolt Brecht's *Baal*. Bowie had included Brecht's songs in his live set before, and recorded a soundtrack EP with Tony Visconti and an orchestra during a one-day session back at

Hamsa Studios in Berlin. The following spring, he acted in two more films: as a vampire in Tony Scott's *The Hunger*, and as a prisoner of war in Nagisa Oshima's *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence*. Finally, in December, he announced his first tour in five years, and entered the Power Station in New York City with producer Nile Rodgers for his first original session in nearly three.

The result, released in April 1983, was *Let's Dance* (number one U.K., number four U.S.). Issued on MCA-America, to which Bowie had signed in January for a reported \$17 million, it was unquestionably his biggest hit yet. Rodgers, who led the dance-funk outfit Chic, gave Bowie's songs a glittering sheen. Another addition was blues guitarist Stevie Ray Vaughan, who gave Bowie's music a directness never present in the work of previous collaborators. With a new jacket-and-tie look, Bowie was at a peak, even appearing on the cover of *Time* magazine in the United States. The album's title song reached number one in both the United Kingdom and United States, while ten of his albums charted on the U.K. Top 100. There were even two more charting singles, "Modern Love" (number two U.K., number fourteen U.S.), and "China Girl" (number two U.K., number ten U.S.).

On his Serious Moonlight Tour, Bowie sold out stadiums across England, including three shows at the 65,000-seat Keynes Bowl in Milton Keynes, and performed for 250,000 fans at the U.S. Festival in San Bernardino, California, in May 1983. The stage set was as bold as ever, and included the giant hand as well as the release of tiny balloons at the show's peak. Instead of playing only his newest material, as on past tours, Bowie performed his hits. During the show, Bowie removed his jacket, rolled up his sleeves, and loosened his tie with the studied charm of a cabaret singer. Despite his vast creative success as a pop star experimenting with form and sound, Bowie revealed in Serious Moonlight that he was still the same entertainer he always was. It was here that Bowie's commercial success began to separate from his critical popularity. It was at this time, as well, that Bowie fell out with Tony Visconti, who had not worked on *Let's Dance*. The pair would not work together again for over a decade and a half.

Five months after the Serious Moonlight tour, Bowie traveled to Morion Heights, north of Montreal, to record *Tonight*. Though Iggy Pop joined him for a pair of songs, Bowie's work with producer Derek Bramble was erratic, and Bramble left the album midway through. The album yielded one Top Ten hit in "Blue Jean" (number six U.K., number eight U.S.), though the title track duet with Tina Turner did not break the Top Fifty in either England or the United States, and Bowie himself admitted that the album was below his own artistic expectations. "I feel, on the whole, fairly happy about my state of mind and my physical being," he said when the album was released in September 1984. "I guess I wanted to put my musical being in a similar staid and healthy area, but I'm not sure that that was a very wise thing to do."¹⁶

Bowie continued to keep a jet-set profile, performing "Heroes" at Live Aid at Wembley Stadium on July 13, 1985, and recording a one-take duet with the

Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger that same month on Martha and the Vandellas' "Dancin' in the Street." The two shot a video, played heavily by MTV, and the single reached number one in the United Kingdom, number seven in the United States. He played large roles in two more films, Julien Temple's musical *Absolute Beginners*, for which Bowie recorded the title single (number two U.K., number fifty-three U.S.), and Jim Henson's *Labyrinth*, where Bowie played Jareth, the goblin king at the center of Henson's dark, puppet-infested maze. In interviews, he still sounded discouraged about the state of his own creativity. "I don't have the riveting desire now to persuade people that what I have to say is right,"¹⁷ he said.

In the fall of 1986, Bowie regrouped with Iggy Pop at Mountain Studios in Switzerland, producing and co-writing much of *Blah Blah Blah*. As soon as they'd finished, he immediately recorded his next album at the same studio. Though he recorded once again with longtime guitarist Carlos Alomar, the album was almost wholly devoid of experiments. Once again, Bowie came to the studio almost fully prepared and left little room for spontaneity. *Never Let Me Down* (number six U.K., number thirty-nine U.S.) was a critical disappointment. None of its singles made the Top Ten, on either side of the Atlantic, though Bowie accompanied the album was a lavish tour. Dubbed Glass Spider, eleven dancers and musicians worked inside a giant set, while Bowie ran about the stage with wireless microphones, speaking cryptically with the dancers.

Like the album, the Glass Spider tour received harsh reviews. When the six months of shows were over, Bowie needed another change. He got something more, entering a period of his career where every album constituted a potential new direction. Some would be considered failures, some would be considered successes, but none redefined the way the public perceived David Bowie, nor did they offer much in the way of lasting musical directions for Bowie himself. During these years, many of Bowie's projects involved old collaborators brought back into the fold for another round of creative dialogue.

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

The catalyst for his immediate evolution, though, was someone Bowie had never worked with before: Reeves Gabrels, a guitarist whose wife Sarah was a publicist on the Glass Spider tour. Bowie and Gabrels hit it off backstage, talking about art and making up new dialogue for cartoons. When the tour was over, Sarah gave Bowie a tape of Gabrels's guitar playing. In May 1988, Bowie invited Gabrels to spend the weekend in Switzerland. Gabrels stayed for the duration of a month. Bowie aimed to return to the experimental music on which he once thrived. That same summer, on July 1, he also appeared at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London, where he performed a drum-machine rework of *Lodger's* "Look Back in Anger" and joined La La La Human Steps, a Canadian dance ensemble.

In the studio, the Sales brothers, drummer Hunt and bassist Tony, joined Bowie and Gabrels. The pair—the sons of comedian Soupy Sales—had worked with Bowie on Iggy Pop's *Lust for Life* in 1977, and gave a powerful rock rhythm section to the arty experiments Bowie and Gabrels had worked up. In Switzerland, the Bahamas, and New York studios, the quartet became Tin Machine. Influenced by American indie rock bands like Sonic Youth and the Pixies, Tin Machine released their self-titled debut in May 1989 (number three U.K., number twenty-eight U.S.). As he did on the Serious Moonlight tour, Bowie made a conscious effort to appear as “normal,” as he smoked cigarettes on stage and engaged in long jams with the band.

Bowie spent 1990 locked in his own past. To promote the *Sound + Vision* box set of his old songs, Bowie staged a greatest hits tour. It would “probably be the last time I will be doing these songs,” he announced. “And generally I stick by what I say.”¹⁸ The goal, he said, was to separate himself from his past so that he could concentrate full time on Tin Machine in the future. Adrian Belew used samplers to trigger orchestras and previous versions of the Bowie sound. Like the Diamond Dogs Revue, the band (except Belew) performed behind a screen, Bowie performed synthesized re-creations of songs from throughout his career. He sold out three nights at the 12,000-seat London Arena, while a new greatest hits collection, *ChangesBowie* reached number one in the United Kingdom.

That fall, Bowie began a relationship with thirty-five-year old Somalian supermodel Iman Abdulmajid. True to his word, Bowie reentered the studio with Tin Machine as well. *Tin Machine II*, however, sold poorly (number 23 U.K., number 126 U.S.)—his first album not to crack the British Top Ten in over twenty years. Quietly, the band disbanded. “Once I had done, nobody could see me anymore,” Bowie said. “[It] was the best thing that ever happened, because I was back using all the artistic pieces that I needed to survive.”¹⁹

On June 6, 1992, Bowie and Iman married, and he recorded a tribute to their recent nuptials. Titled *Black Tie White Noise* (number one U.K., number thirty-nine U.S.), Bowie worked with *Let's Dance* producer Nile Rodgers. Though the album spawned Bowie's last Top Ten single, “Jump They Say,” Rodgers now felt constrained by Bowie and wanted to make a more pop-oriented album than Bowie had in mind. Keyboardist Mike Garson returned, too, adding keyboards to “Looking for Lester.” The next year, Garson thrived when Bowie recorded a soundtrack to the BBC adaptation of Hanif Kureishi's *Buddha of Suburbia* (number seven U.K.), a novel in part about growing up in Bowie's hometown of Bromley in the early 1970s. Kureishi and Bowie met in February 1996, when the former interviewed the pop star.

Following his association with Kureishi, Bowie reestablished himself in the British creative world. He associated with controversial artists like conceptualist Damien Hirst and painter Peter Howson. Throughout 1994 and 1995, Bowie worked once again with intellectual producer Brian Eno and guitarist Reeves Gabrels. 1. *Outside* (number eight U.K., number twenty-one U.S.) was

intended to be the first installment of a massive collaboration that would encompass everything from “interactive” material to an opera. Only the album, comprised of long improvisations guided by Eno’s chance-oriented methods, was finished. In the fall of 1995, he toured with American shock-goth Nine Inch Nails, singing a half-dozen songs with frontman Trent Reznor each night. Bowie frequently paired himself with younger artists, including former Smiths’ frontman Morrissey (who opened a leg of the *Outside* tour) and the Pet Shop Boys (who appeared on a rerecorded version of 1. *Outside*’s “Hallo Spaceboy” that reached number twelve U.K.).

Like “Hallo Spaceboy,” 1997’s *Earthling* (number six U.K., number thirty-nine U.S.) once again played on Bowie’s alien persona. With Gabrels and Garson, Bowie embraced samples. Many of the songs featured club-oriented jungle beats behind them. And though Bowie worked with his longtime collaborators, he also sought to make himself visible to younger fans. To celebrate his fiftieth birthday in 1997, he performed at New York City’s Madison Square Garden with Sonic Youth and the Foo Fighters, as well as old friend Lou Reed. He became involved in a number of extramusical projects. With his Bowie bonds, he sold bonds against the future earnings of his EMI back catalog. Though it caused a good deal of stir, perhaps more prescient was Bowie’s involvement in the Internet. His company, Ultrastar, managed and ran a number of high-profile Web sites unrelated to music. On September 1, 1998, he launched BowieNet.

“If I was 19 again, I’d bypass music and go straight to the internet,” he said. “When I was 19, music was still the dangerous communicative future force, and that was what drew me into it, but it doesn’t have that cachet any more. It has been replaced by the internet, which has the same sound of revolution to it.”²⁰ The Web site became one of Bowie’s foremost outlets around the turn of the century. He posted long journal entries, previewed new songs, and even collaborated with a fan on one number. Though his albums, such as *hours. . .* (number five U.K., number forty-seven U.S.) did not sell well in the two primary markets, many found greater acceptance elsewhere in Europe and Japan. In 1998, Bowie rekindled his collaboration with producer Tony Visconti, yielding 2002’s *Heathen* (number five U.K., number fourteen U.S.) and 2003’s *Reality* (number three U.K., number twenty-nine U.S.).

Living in New York City with Iman, the two raised their child Alexandria Zahra Jones, born August 15, 2000. Growing into his role as an elder musician, Bowie curated festivals (including the Meltdown Festival in London in 2002, where he also performed *Low* in its entirety, and the Highline Festival in Manhattan in 2007), and continued to perform with bands that had grown from his influence, including the Arcade Fire and TV on the Radio. In June 2004, he underwent an angioplasty only days after leaving a performance in Prague with a pinched nerve in his shoulder.

“There are no yearning ambitions anymore,” he said. “There are things I’d like to do, but none are crucial. I sense that I’ve become the person I always should’ve been.”²¹ Like *The Man Who Fell to Earth*’s Thomas Newton, David Bowie has become fully assimilated into contemporary culture, but his music can still sound otherworldly.

INFLUENCE

Because of David Bowie’s standing as an agent of provocation, he has—besides hip-hop—influenced many of the major rock and pop movements that have emerged since his rise. In many cases, the artists influenced ended up sounding nothing like Bowie himself, and just as often borrowed a bit of his look or presence as they did elements of his sound. The British punk scene of the late 1970s, for example, often professed their hatred for the artificial pomposity post-1960s rock absorbed, with Bowie himself being a main offender. Still, though, even singers like the Sex Pistols’ Johnny Rotten mimicked Bowie in some ways (such as through his cropped haircut), while claiming to hate him.

Others were more effusive in their praise. Eighties pop idol Madonna once claimed that she wanted to become a pop star after seeing Bowie perform as Ziggy Stardust. Certainly, Bowie was a model for her, as well as other pop auteurs that followed, including Prince. When grunge arrived in the early 1990s, the debt to Bowie was subtle, if firm, with Nirvana covering “The Man Who Sold the World” on their legendary MTV *Unplugged* appearance just five months before singer Kurt Cobain’s suicide. The shock-rockers that followed grunge, which included both Nine Inch Nails (whom Bowie toured with) and Marilyn Manson (who took Bowie’s penchant for gender-bending pop culture reinterpretation) were unmistakable Bowie-ites.

In Bowie’s own country, his influence was both more obvious, and perhaps more superficial, especially with the late 1990s rise of the so-called Britpopers, which included bands Oasis and Blur. The latter especially took Bowie to heart, even giving Bowie and Brian Eno a songwriting credit on their homage “M.O.R.” With Bowie as the model for the pop star-as-autodidactic, Blur frontman Damon Albarn has expanded his musical interests into areas such as opera (*Monkey: Journey to the West*) and multimedia spectacles, like Gorillaz, a cartoon “band” projected on the stage while the real musicians play behind a scrim, à la the Diamond Dogs Revue.

“When it came out, I thought *Low* was the sound of the future,”²² Joy Division/New Order drummer Stephen Morris said. Like many, Morris wasn’t seduced so much by Bowie’s sound but by the *reach* of the sound and the experimentalism it implied. That is what Bowie has provided for so many others, from imitators like Gary Numan to recent upstarts such as the Arcade

Fire: not so much showing them a roadmap to the future, but that the future is there at all.

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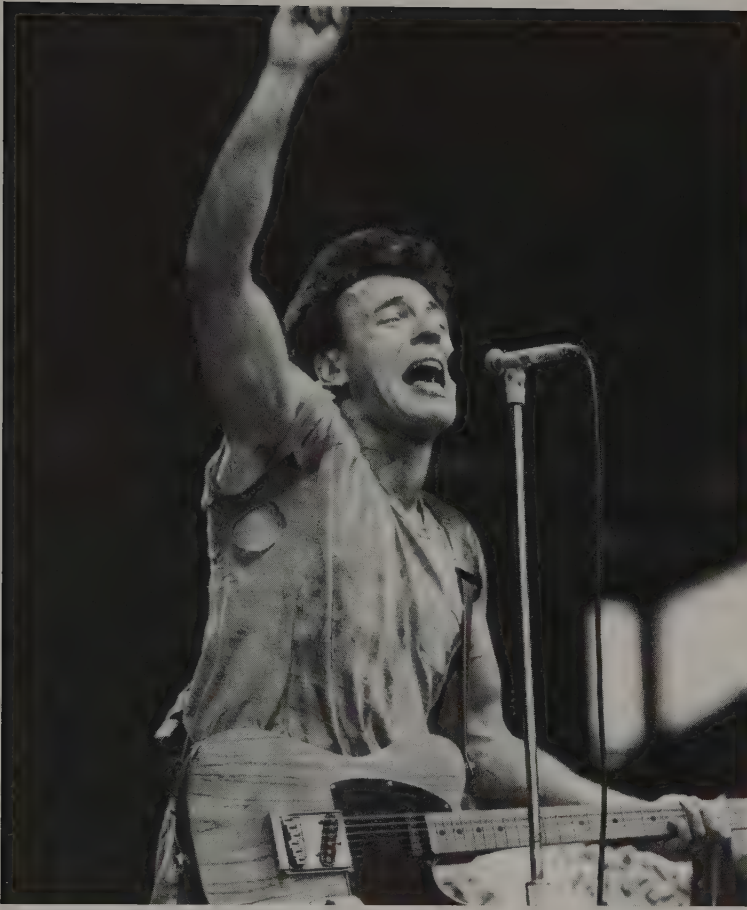
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Courtesy of Photofest.

Bruce Springsteen

Susan Godwin

HE'S THE BOSS

Bruce Springsteen first won fame in the 1970s as rock's blue-collar bard, a guitar-slinging true believer possessing an uncanny ability to articulate the drama, dignity, and heroism in the struggles of everyday life. Beyond his knack for articulating the dreams and disappointments of working-class people, Springsteen earned a reputation as one of rock's most transcendent live

performers, delivering marathon live shows that were both physically exhilarating and emotionally cathartic.

Springsteen's deeply felt songs and sweat-soaked concerts helped to forge an extraordinarily durable relationship with his rabidly devoted fan base. The strength of that bond was established early in his career, and has remained strong as he's progressed from cult status to worldwide superstardom.

Emerging during the musical doldrums of the early 1970s, long after the euphoria of the 1960s had worn off, Springsteen combined a distinctive stage persona and an original songwriting voice with a much-needed sense of musical history. At a time when disco, glam, and heavy metal offered listeners fantasy and escape, Springsteen injected an unmistakable dose of reality to rock and roll.

Although dismissed early on by skeptics as the latest in a long line of "new Dylans," Springsteen would soon create something worthy of imitation in its own right. His work has drawn from the rich histories of rock, pop, R&B, folk, and country to forge a powerful musical vehicle for a lyrical vision that is wholly Springsteen's own.

GROWING UP

Bruce Frederick Springsteen was born in Long Branch, New Jersey, on September 23, 1949, and raised in Freehold, a working-class town near the state's southern shoreline. Two younger sisters were subsequently added to the family. Bruce enjoyed a loving and mutually supportive relationship with his mother Adele, who sometimes worked as a secretary. But his interaction with his father Douglas was considerably more strained; it would later provide lyrical inspiration as well as fodder for his between-song on-stage monologues.

His father held a series of odd jobs, including stints as a factory worker, bus driver, and prison guard, and the family often struggled to make ends meet. Douglas Springsteen's limited choices, along with the desire to escape and the rage instilled by financial impotence, would have a profound effect upon his son's character and songwriting.

As a child, Bruce was constantly in trouble in parochial school, where he clashed with religious authority figures. He later recalled a nun stuffing him into a garbage can when he was in third grade, and, as an altar boy, being knocked down by a priest during Mass. His Catholic background would later appear as a recurring motif in his songwriting.

The young Springsteen was far more responsive to music than to religion. His first exposure to rock and roll came with Elvis Presley's 1957 appearance on *The Ed Sullivan Show*, after which his indulgent mother bought him his first guitar and arranged for lessons. But Bruce's hands were too small to fit around the frets at the time, so music took a backseat until the Beatles' U.S. arrival in 1964, when it took hold of him for good. Going to sleep with his transistor

radio under his pillow, he eagerly absorbed the racially and stylistically integrated sounds of early 1960s Top Forty.

In his early teens, Bruce purchased his first grown-up guitar for \$18 at the local pawnshop. When he was sixteen, Adele took out a loan to buy him a \$60 Kent guitar, an event he would later memorialize in the song "The Wish."

In 1965, after a brief tenure in a local outfit known as the Rogues, the teen-aged Springsteen joined the Castiles, a high school combo that played at local events and teen dances, including Bruce's own class of '67 dance. In May 1966, the Castiles recorded a self-produced, little-noticed 1966 single, both of whose tracks, "Baby I" and "That's What You Get," were co-written by Springsteen and bandmate George Theiss on the way to the studio.

The closest the Castiles came to the big time was a handful of well-received gigs at the Cafe Wha? in Greenwich Village in late 1967 and early 1968, shortly before the band broke up. Meanwhile, Bruce's long hair and scruffy attire made him an easy target for local bullies, and increased friction with his conservative father.

After the Castiles' demise, Springsteen played in a power trio called Earth. He joined Earth during his brief tenure at Ocean County Community College; he dropped out of school after some fellow students began an active drive to have him dismissed for his rough appearance. Dropping out of school during the Vietnam War was serious business, since college students were exempt from the draft. The draft was no abstract threat; the Castiles' drummer, Bart Haynes, had been killed in action.

Bruce's next band, Child, was launched in 1969 and included organist Danny Federici and drummer Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez. When the members of Child learned of a Long Island outfit with the same name, the group was rechristened Steel Mill. A later addition was "Miami" Steve Van Zandt, a guitarist who'd learned to play bass in order to join the lineup.

Steel Mill's heavy blues-rock attracted an enthusiastic live audience along the Eastern seaboard, and won the band an especially strong following in the Virginia area. The group even ventured west in early 1970, playing several gigs in the San Francisco area, including an appearance at the legendary Fillmore ballroom. During that trip, at Fillmore impresario Bill Graham's invitation, Steel Mill recorded demo versions of some of Springsteen's songs in Graham's studio. Like the Castiles tracks, those recordings were quietly pressed up as a single and quickly forgotten, although they'd turn up years later on bootleg releases.

Bill Graham's short-lived interest aside, Steel Mill's regional popularity never threatened to translate into a recording career. Although the Jersey Shore was about an hour's drive from the music-industry center of New York City, it might as well have been on the other side of the world. The fact that Springsteen and Steel Mill were playing to hundreds, and sometimes thousands, of fans per night didn't make a difference.

Steel Mill wound down in early 1971, while the Jersey Shore scene was still reeling from the traumatic effects of the race riots that had taken place in

Asbury Park the previous summer. Springsteen then formed the short-lived Dr. Zoom and the Sonic Boom, a sprawling, anarchic fifteen-piece ensemble that included Van Zandt, Lopez, bassist Garry Tallent, organist David Sancious, and harmonica player/master of ceremonies Southside Johnny (whose later recording career with Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes would be midwived by Van Zandt and Springsteen).

Springsteen then tapped Van Zandt, Tallent, Sancious, and Lopez to launch the Bruce Springsteen Band. Consciously designed as a showcase for the more ambitious songs that Bruce was now writing, the lineup initially included a horn section and three female backup singers, before slimming down to more manageable quintet. The Bruce Springsteen Band played steadily on the Jersey Shore for a few months, but its leader put the group to rest in early 1972, instead embracing the lower overhead of solo acoustic shows.

The solo Springsteen signed a management and music-publishing contract with Mike Appel and his partner, Jim Cretecos. Appel and Cretecos were veteran New York songwriter/producer/music biz hustlers who'd had some success writing songs for the Partridge Family. According to legend, this momentous signing took place in a dark parking lot; it was a decision Springsteen would soon come to regret.

Appel was an aggressive manager, which was probably exactly what the shy Springsteen needed at the time. But Appel's bluntness almost cost his client his big break. On May 2, 1972, after bullying his way into the office of legendary Columbia Records A&R man John Hammond (whose previous signings included Billie Holiday, Bessie Smith, Aretha Franklin, and Bob Dylan), Appel reportedly blustered that he had an artist better than Dylan and wanted to see if Hammond was savvy enough to figure that out. The gentlemanly Hammond was appalled at the insult, but allowed Springsteen to play several songs for him anyway.

Despite Appel's lack of couth, Hammond was mightily impressed by Springsteen, and arranged for him to play a live audition that night at the Greenwich Village club the Gaslight, so that other Columbia executives could check him out. Hammond then took Springsteen into the studio to record some rough solo demos of his compositions. Hammond recalled being so excited that he later recalled writing "greatest talent of the decade" in the session log sheets.

In June 1972, Bruce Springsteen signed to Columbia Records. Hammond, who had read Springsteen's management and publishing contracts, grew concerned over provisions that gave Appel enormous control over the artist's career and copyrights. He had an attorney friend check it out, and suggested to Bruce that the deal be rewritten, lest it create trouble for him in the future. While Springsteen respected Hammond, he chose to ignore the red flag.

GREETINGS FROM BRUCE

Although Columbia had intended to market him as a folkish solo singer/songwriter, Springsteen was intent on being a rock and roller, and that meant

having a real band. For that purpose, he tapped the talents of his old Jersey Shore cohorts Garry Tallent, Vini Lopez, David Sancious, and saxophonist Clarence Clemons. Besides being an accomplished player and a worthy on-stage foil for Springsteen, the physically imposing Clemons (aka the Big Man) had proven his worth in the past for his ability to apply pressure when club owners were reluctant to pay up at the end of the evening.

Columbia fought Springsteen over his choice for his debut effort's cover design, which replicated a 1940s-style tourist postcard bearing the album's title, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* The artist's Jersey Shore roots were a crucial element in his early work. Asbury Park—a faded, economically depressed seaside resort town at the time—was where Bruce had honed his craft and formed many of his most enduring friendships. In the future, long after his music made him wealthy, he would still keep a home in his native state and raise his children there.

In his 1998 book of lyrics *Songs*, Springsteen revealed that he wrote most of the debut album “in the back of a closed beauty salon on the floor beneath my apartment in Asbury Park” and added that *Greetings* “was the only album where I wrote the lyrics first, setting them to music later.”¹

Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J. was released on January 5, 1973. Such standout tunes as “Blinded by the Light,” “Growin’ Up,” “Lost in the Flood,” and “Spirit in the Night” featured bigger-than-life characters and surrealistic, stream-of-consciousness lyrics, delivered in rapid-fire vocal bursts. That approach would contrast the more direct, observational songwriting style that Springsteen would employ in the future.

Meanwhile, Columbia didn't quite seem to know what to do with their newcomer, employing a promotional campaign that played up to the “new Dylan” hype, much to Springsteen's irritation. When the company helped to win him a slot as the opening act on a summer tour with Chicago—the label's biggest act at the time—he was regularly greeted by hostile crowds.

In its initial release, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.* was largely ignored in the marketplace. The album's first single, “Blinded by the Light,” flopped; the song would become a hit three years later in a bombastic cover version by Manfred Mann's Earth Band. In its first year of release, *Greetings* sold fewer than 12,000 copies, offering little to suggest that Springsteen was destined for big things.

After launching the album with a four-night stand at the Philadelphia club the Main Point, Springsteen toured extensively to support it, working to win new fans in small clubs and colleges along the East Coast. But a performance at a Columbia Records convention in Los Angeles went badly, creating an impression within the company that the previously golden-eared John Hammond (who had suffered a heart attack while at a Springsteen performance earlier that year) had stumbled in signing this second-rate Dylan wannabe.

Springsteen shifted songwriting gears for his second LP, *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, recorded over July and August 1973 and released on November 5. The album was a notable leap forward from *Greetings*, with

such compositions as “4th of July, Asbury Park (Sandy),” “Kitty’s Back,” and the suite-like uber-bar-band rave-up “Rosalita (Come Out Tonight)” paring down the first album’s nervous rush of lyrics into concise yet detailed dramas. “Incident on 57th Street” and “New York City Serenade” offered a gritty urban milieu that brought out Springsteen’s sense of drama and knack for character development.

The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle also expanded upon its predecessor’s sound, with the addition of Danny Federici on organ, as well as an influx of jazz and soul influences that lent the album a funky multicultural sensibility that was also reflected in several of the album’s lyrics—and which contrasts the lean rock and roll approach that would soon make Springsteen famous.

The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle received a fair amount of high-profile press notices, including a glowing review in the January 31, 1974, issue of *Rolling Stone*. Meanwhile, relentless gigging up and down the Eastern Seaboard helped Springsteen to expand his already rabid fan base, and win radio airplay in scattered markets including Cleveland and Philadelphia. *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle* moved about 80,000 copies during 1974—a significant step up from his debut, but not enough to break Springsteen out of cult status.

In February 1974, drummer Vini Lopez was fired amid criticism of his drumming style and fiery temper. As his replacement, Springsteen brought in Ernest “Boom” Carter, a friend of Sancious and a veteran of the Asbury Park scene.

The relatively lukewarm public response to the first two albums left Springsteen at a crossroads. If he failed to score a solid hit with his next album, it might spell the end of his recording career. It would take him two years—and a lifetime’s worth of creative anguish—to deliver his third album, but the wait would be worthwhile.

“ROCK ‘N’ ROLL FUTURE”

A May 1974 show at the Harvard Square Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts—ostensibly just another college-town gig—would alter the course of Springsteen’s career. In the audience was rock critic Jon Landau, who at twenty-six was already the editor of *Rolling Stone*’s review section, as well as a columnist for Boston’s *Real Paper*. What Landau saw and heard that night sent him into a rhapsody in print for the latter outlet, which included the now-famous line: “I saw rock ‘n’ roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen.”²

Landau, who’d had some prior recording experience producing albums by the MC5, the J. Geils Band, and Livingston Taylor, became so enamored of Springsteen’s music that he offered himself as a sounding board during the recording of the artist’s make-or-break third album. Appel, who had overseen

the production of the first two albums, reluctantly acceded to Springsteen's desire to involve Landau as co-producer of his next LP.

Springsteen and his sidemen (now known as the E Street Band) entered the studio in suburban Blauvelt, New York, to begin work on Bruce's third album in August 1974. But the sessions soon broke down, due to a combination of technical problems and Bruce's own temporary lack of focus, with only one track, "Born to Run," in the can.

Meanwhile, manager Appel sought to generate interest by leaking cassette copies of an early mix of "Born to Run" to radio stations that had been supportive of Bruce in the past. The action angered Springsteen and Columbia Records, but the unreleased song gained considerable airplay, ramping up public demand for the yet-to-be-recorded album.

Sancious and Carter decided to leave the band to launch the jazz-fusion group Tone; they played their final Springsteen date on August 14, 1974. One of the last gigs that Sancious and Carter played with Springsteen was the now infamous August 3 show on which Bruce was mismatched with Canadian songbird Anne Murray on a bill at the Schaefer Music Festival in New York's Central Park. Although Bruce was the opening act, most of the audience had come to see the local hero anyway, and filed out before headliner Murray took the stage. After that night, Springsteen vowed that he would never again be anyone's warm-up act—an audacious stance for a commercially unproven artist.

To fill the vacancies in his band, Springsteen took out an ad in New York's *Village Voice* and recruited pianist Roy Bittan and drummer Max Weinberg, whose most recent gig had been playing in the pit band of the Broadway musical *Godspell*. Bruce took his retooled lineup back to the studio in or around 1975 to resume work on the album, this time at the state-of-the-art Manhattan studio the Record Plant.

The painstaking recording of the album that would become *Born to Run* continued through July. Realizing that Columbia was finally behind him, Springsteen took advantage of the larger recording budget to indulge his perfectionist tendencies. The sessions became grueling marathons, with Springsteen painstakingly reworking and reconfiguring the material. One of the most labored-over songs was "Born to Run," before Springsteen decided to use the version they'd recorded previously.

It was during these exhausting sessions that longtime pal Steve Van Zandt officially joined the E Street Band as second guitarist. "As a producer, Bruce knew exactly what he wanted and he wasn't going to stop until he got it," Van Zandt later recalled. "He had this brilliant vision of marrying the past with the future and he had this song which summed up the entire rock 'n' roll experience. But the first two albums had been done more live, more spontaneous, and hadn't satisfied him, so maybe he thought he should try more modern methods."³

The protracted birth cycle and grueling studio sessions proved to be worth the extra trouble. Indeed, it was immediately apparent that *Born to Run*

represented a substantial leap forward on every conceivable level. For one thing, the album's majestically layered arrangements offered an updated variation on Phil Spector's grandiose Wall of Sound. For another, Springsteen's new compositions were leaner and less wordy than those on the first two albums.

The songs' mythic evocations of teenaged life lent themselves to the wide-screen sonic approach. While the material on his first two albums had celebrated those adolescent experiences, new songs like "Born to Run," "Thunder Road," "Backstreets," "Meeting Across the River," and the near-operatic "Jungleland" carried an air of parting, as if their writer understood, consciously or not, that he was bidding farewell to these themes. Springsteen and his retooled band delivered performances that were as dramatic as the songs.

"I'd written the lyrics sitting on the edge of my bed in this shack in Long Branch, New Jersey, thinking 'Here I come, world!,'" Springsteen later explained. "They're filled with that tension of trying to get to some other place."⁴

Springsteen launched *Born to Run* in mid-August with a five-night, ten-show residency at the 400-seat Greenwich Village club the Bottom Line. Columbia bought a quarter of the available tickets and packed the house with various taste makers, and arranged for a live broadcast on the popular album-rock station WNEW FM. Bruce and the band rose to the occasion, delivering a series of shows that remain a milestone in Springsteen lore. By now, his concerts were prone to run for upward of three hours, with set lists that would vary widely from night to night.

"Blowing minds was routine for us," Van Zandt later told *Rolling Stone*. "We had been doing it for ten years, and Bruce used all ten years of it in those shows."⁵

"It was our coming-out party," Springsteen observed. "Some sort of transformation occurred over those five nights. We walked out of that place in a different place."⁶

Dave Marsh, writing in *Rolling Stone*, proclaimed, "Springsteen is everything that has been claimed for him—a magical guitarist, singer, writer, rock 'n' roll rejuvenator . . . Like only the greatest rock singers and writers and musicians, he has created a world of his own. . . . His show is thematically organized but it's hard to pin down the theme: American *Quadrophenia*, perhaps. But Springsteen doesn't write rock opera; he lives it."⁷

Columbia Records' carefully orchestrated publicity campaign exceeded all expectations in late October, when both *Time* and *Newsweek*—America's two biggest weekly news magazines at the time—ran cover stories on Springsteen in the same week. The media coup ignited an instantaneous backlash, with the apparent hype turning off potential fans and longtime acolytes.

The air of hype followed Springsteen to his first-ever overseas performances. He arrived at the Hammersmith Odeon to find banners proclaiming, "Finally, London is ready for Bruce Springsteen." The mortified artist, still stinging from Columbia's new-Dylan campaign of a few years earlier, tore down the

offending banners, and he and his jet-lagged band went on to play a highly charged set that was finally released on DVD in 2006.

Backlash or not, *Born to Run*, released on August 25, 1975, was a smash. The album sold would sell a million units domestically by the end of 1975, and its title track made the Top Twenty of *Billboard*'s singles chart. It also received near-unanimous raves from the major critics.

Greil Marcus, writing in *Rolling Stone*, wrote that "the guitar figure that runs through the title song [is] the finest compression of rock 'n' roll thrill since the opening riffs of 'Layla'" and rhapsodized that

Born to Run is a magnificent album that pays off on every bet ever placed on Bruce Springsteen—a '57 Chevy running on melted-down Crystals records. . . . We know the story: one thousand and one American nights, one long night of fear and love. What is new is the majesty Springsteen and his band have brought to this story. Springsteen's singing, his words and the band's music have turned the dreams and failures two generations have dropped along the road into an epic. . . . You may find yourself shaking your head in wonder, smiling through tears at the beauty of it all.⁸

Reviewing the album for *Creem*, seminal critic Lester Bangs wrote,

There's absolutely nothing in his music that's null, detached, or perverse, and even his occasional world-weariness carries a redemptive sense of lost battles passionately fought. Boredom appears to be a foreign concept to him—he reminds us what it's like to love rock 'n' roll like you just discovered it, and then seize it and make it your own with certainty and precision. If I seem to OD on superlatives, it's only because *Born to Run* demands them; the music races in a flurry of Dylan and Morrison and Phil Spector and a little of both Lou Reed and Roy Orbison, luxuriating in them and an American moment caught at last, again, and bursting with pride.⁹

DARKNESS

Born to Run had paid off magnificently on Bruce Springsteen's long-standing promise, both musically and commercially. But trouble had been brewing behind the scenes, and the legal disputes that resulted threatened to derail Springsteen's musical and career momentum.

As a power struggle between Mike Appel and Jon Landau intensified, Springsteen had increasingly come to rely on the latter for creative counsel. Landau's input proved helpful in allowing Springsteen to achieve the epic sound that he envisioned, and the resulting boost to the artist's confidence made him more willing to question his business relationship with Appel.

Although *Born to Run*'s production was jointly credited to Springsteen, Landau, and Appel, Landau had become Bruce's main confidant and his

principal studio collaborator, and was interested in becoming his manager as well. But Springsteen was initially hesitant to jettison Appel, the man who, as he saw it, had stuck by and fought for him when he had nothing.

Matters came to a head after journalist Dave Marsh, a longtime Landau associate who would later become Springsteen's official biographer, asked for permission to quote some of Bruce's lyrics in a book he was writing about Springsteen, and Appel refused. Springsteen was mortified to realize that he didn't actually control the rights to his own songs.

On July 27, 1976, Springsteen sued Appel for fraud, undue influence, breach of trust, breach of contract, and misappropriation of funds, seeking damages of a million dollars. When Appel countersued, the judge issued an injunction that prevented Springsteen from recording until the case was resolved. The conflict would be settled out of court ten months later—a lifetime in rock and roll terms, particularly for an artist working to capitalize on a major breakthrough.

When the legal dust finally cleared, Springsteen had won his freedom from Appel and signed a personal management contract with Jon Landau. Five days after reaching a settlement with Appel, Springsteen was back in the studio to start work on his long-delayed fourth album. But the next Bruce Springsteen LP, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, wouldn't reach the public until June 1978, nearly three years after *Born to Run*'s release.

By then, the state of popular music had changed considerably. Rock had been temporarily overtaken in the marketplace by the slick decadence of disco. While Springsteen remained an artist of considerable prestige and commercial appeal, it would take several years for him to completely recover the career momentum that he'd lost in the crucial gap between albums.

On an artistic level, though, the highly anticipated *Darkness on the Edge of Town* didn't disappoint. In many ways, it was an even more ambitious effort, maintaining much of *Born to Run*'s grandiose sound but delving into deeper and darker lyrical territory. Where many of *Born to Run*'s adolescent characters grasped at moments of transcendence and escape, the older inhabitants of such *Darkness* numbers as "Badlands," "The Promised Land," "Racing in the Streets," and the heartbreaking title track wrestled with failure, disappointment, and regret while struggling to cling to what little they had. Springsteen still cared enough about his characters to lend a sense of nobility to their plight. The album's only source of uplift was in the pummeling energy of its performances, with Springsteen delivering his most impassioned singing to date and the road-tempered E Street Band clicking seamlessly into overdrive.

Some observers interpreted the album's bitter, angry undercurrent—manifested most clearly on the fiery "Adam Raised a Cain," which seemingly addressed Springsteen's fractious relationship with his father—as a reflection of the artist's recent career travails. Even the cover shot of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* showed a wary, circumspect Bruce, offering a marked contrast

to the playful urchin depicted on *Born to Run*'s sleeve. And, just in case there was still any doubt, in "The Promised Land" he flat-out declared that he was no longer a boy, but a man.

An emotionally complex effort that offered no easy answers but rewarded extended exposure, *Darkness on the Edge of Town* was no joyride down the New Jersey Turnpike. Although many fans still name it as their favorite Springsteen album, the less anthemic, more demanding collection didn't receive the immediate across-the-board critical acclaim that *Born to Run* had.

During the period that produced *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, the prolific Springsteen wrote and/or recorded many memorable songs that weren't included on the finished album because they didn't fit thematically. That he was more concerned with art than commerce is underlined by the fact that several of these compositions became hits for other performers. These included Patti Smith's reading of "Because the Night," the Pointer Sisters' version of "Fire," and 1950s rocker Gary U.S. Bonds's comeback hit "This Little Girl." Other outtakes from this period would be covered by Greg Kihn and Southside Johnny and the Asbury Jukes.

On September 23, 1979—his thirtieth birthday—Springsteen and the E Street Band were part of the all-star musical cast for one of a series of Madison Square Garden concerts to benefit the anti-nuke activist group Musicians United for Safe Energy. His performance, which was preserved for posterity in the documentary *No Nukes*, marked the first time that Springsteen had publicly embraced a high-profile political cause.

Rock for Humanitarian Relief: The Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid

The benefit concert has been an important feature of the rock landscape since the mid-1960s. The first show ever presented by the legendary concert promoter Bill Graham was a 1965 benefit starring Jefferson Airplane that raised \$4,200 for the legal defense of the San Francisco Mime Troupe.

In 1971, famine struck the South Asian nation of Bangladesh in the aftermath of its struggle for independence from Pakistan. At the behest of India sitar master Ravi Shankar, George Harrison organized and headlined the Concert for Bangladesh on August 1, 1971, at New York's Madison Square Garden. More than 40,000 fans attended the two performances, which also featured Shankar, Eric Clapton, Ringo Starr, and Bob Dylan. In 1972, a triple LP of concert performances reached number one in the United Kingdom and number two in the United States followed by a feature-length documentary. At that time, bureaucratic obstacles raised by several governments prevented much of the money from being distributed to international aid organizations. In recent years, the CD reissue of the album and the DVD release of the film have kept a stream of artist royalties flowing to UNICEF, possibly amounting to \$15 million or more.

Live Aid was conceived by the Irish rock singer Bob Geldof as a vehicle for aid to famine victims in war-torn Ethiopia. It began in 1984 with a London recording session that produced the all-star benefit song "Do They Know It's Christmas?" The single went to number one in Great Britain (and many other countries) and raised millions for the campaign. It was followed by "We Are the World," an even bigger benefit hit recorded by a cast of forty-two American artists that topped the U.S. Hot 100 for four weeks. Geldof organized two massive concerts held simultaneously on July 13, 1985. U2, Queen, David Bowie, the Who, and Paul McCartney were the featured artists at Wembley Stadium in London while Bob Dylan, Madonna, Black Sabbath, and Lionel Richie performed at a Bill Graham-produced show at JFK Stadium in Philadelphia. More than a billion viewers in over 100 countries saw the Live Aid concerts and fundraising telethon via satellite technology. Early press reports estimated proceeds from Live Aid at \$60–70 million, which was channeled through such organizations as the Christian Relief & Development Association and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees.

Andy Schwartz

Springsteen's performance of the new song "The River" would prove to be one of the highlights of the *No Nukes* film. One on-stage moment that didn't make the final cut was when an annoyed Springsteen dragged noted rock photographer and former girlfriend Lynn Goldsmith out of the crowd and flung her into the wings.

"The River" would be the title track of Springsteen's next album, a twenty-track, two-LP set released in October 1980. While some of the songs had originally been written for *Darkness on the Edge of Town*, others pointed the artist in unprecedented new directions. The family drama and working-class milieu of "Point Blank" and "Independence Day" wouldn't have been out of place on the earlier album, nor would the haunting title track, whose poignant portrayal of hopes dashed by circumstance offered a faint but crucial glimmer of redemption.

The River's most popular number was "Hungry Heart," a buoyant pop anthem that Springsteen had initially intended to offer to the Ramones. Instead, the tune gave its author his first Top Ten single, with the victory all the more sweeter for the contrast between the song's rousing chorus and its lyrics of restlessness and longing.

But *The River's* most stirring tracks, and the ones that pointed to Springsteen's future development as a songwriter, are the moody, dread-filled ballads "Stolen Car" and "Wreck on the Highway," which preview the dark introspection which would be the focus of his next record. The darker lyrical themes didn't keep *The River* from reaching the top slot of the *Billboard* chart.

In the spring and summer of 1981, Springsteen and band toured the United Kingdom and Europe, in their first overseas trip since the over-hyped

Hammersmith Odeon shows almost six years earlier. He was greeted by adoring audiences that were as receptive as those in the States.

By now, Springsteen had begun to take an active interest in political issues, devouring books on American history and covering Woody Guthrie's "This Land Is Your Land" onstage. During a road trip from Arizona to Los Angeles, Springsteen picked up a copy of wheelchair-bound Vietnam vet turned anti-war activist Ron Kovic's autobiography, *Born on the Fourth of July*. Coincidentally, a few days later, he ran into Kovic at the motel where they were both staying. That chance encounter, and Kovic's story, inspired Springsteen to turn the first night at a multi-night stand at the Los Angeles Memorial Sports Arena into a benefit for the Vietnam Vets of America.

Rock for Political Change: "No Nukes" and Farm Aid

The organizers of the Concert for Bangladesh and Live Aid were careful to avoid addressing the political conflicts that had created humanitarian crises in Bangladesh and East Africa. But some benefit concerts responding to local crises in the United States were implicitly critical of government policies.

In 1979, rock musicians Bonnie Raitt, Jackson Browne, Graham Nash, and John Hall organized MUSE (Musicians United for Safe Energy) to oppose the further spread of nuclear power plants following the near-disaster at Three Mile Island. In September, MUSE put together a series of five No Nukes concerts at Madison Square Garden with Bruce Springsteen, Tom Petty, James Taylor, and Gil Scott-Heron, among others. The shows also spun off the now-mandatory multi-disc live album and concert film, both called *No Nukes*. In 1982, a No Nukes rally drew over 600,000 protestors to the Great Lawn of New York's Central Park.

During the 1980s, many American family-owned farms were staggering under the combined pressures of high interest rates, increased foreign competition, and domestic overproduction. Independent farmers were selling out to large agricultural conglomerates or losing their land in bank foreclosures. Just weeks after Live Aid, Willie Nelson, Neil Young, and John Mellencamp joined forces with rural activists to create Farm Aid. The first show, assembled in just six weeks, was held on September 22, 1985, in Champaign, Illinois, before a crowd of 80,000 people and raised over \$7 million.

Farm Aid concerts have been held in a variety of locales and venues, mostly in the South and Midwest. Bob Dylan, Sheryl Crow, Waylon Jennings, B.B. King, Alan Jackson, Wilco, Phish, and the Dave Matthews Band are among the hundreds of artists who have performed at Farm Aid. In its first two decades, the organization distributed more than \$23 million to its own programs and to affiliated groups like the Nebraska Farmers Union and the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture.

A. S.

ALONE IN NEBRASKA

Assembling songs for his next album, Springsteen laid down spare solo demos in the modest four-track studio he'd set up in his New Jersey home. But when he attempted to translate the material into a band context, the results failed to capture the naked, haunted quality that his stark demo recordings had conveyed so effortlessly. Springsteen eventually decided simply to release his demos in their raw original form.

The resulting album, *Nebraska*—mastered from the cassette that Springsteen had been carrying around in his pocket—was released in September 1982, and was quickly recognized by critics as one of the artist's bravest and most powerful works. Its stark performances, with Springsteen's lonely, aching voice usually accompanied by just guitar and harmonica, were perfectly suited to the songs' wrenching lyrics.

Nebraska—whose mood was signaled by its grim front-cover view of a desolate stretch of highway seen through a windshield—took Springsteen further down the uneasy road that he'd begun to explore with "Stolen Car" and "Wreck on the Highway." The songs were populated by emotionally and economically vulnerable Americans alienated by class prejudice and institutional injustice, as well as the consequences of their own misguided choices. The material reflected the influence of Springsteen's explorations into the work of such American authors as Flannery O'Connor and John Steinbeck, as well as his affinity for such rootsy musical iconoclasts as Hank Williams and Woody Guthrie.

The upbeat rock and roll numbers that had provided relief from some of the darker themes of *Darkness on the Edge of Town* and *The River* were gone on *Nebraska*. The songs' protagonists—the small-time hood of "Atlantic City," the unemployed auto worker turned reluctant killer of "Johnny 99," the guilt-stricken cop of "Highway Patrolman," the haunted driver of "State Trooper"—are largely powerless in the face of forces far beyond their control and/or comprehension.

Nebraska's chilling title track was narrated in first person from the point of view of a soon-to-be-executed multiple murderer who can't even articulate a reason for his crimes. The song was inspired by 1950s thrill-killer Charles Starkweather; the same case spawned director Terrence Malick's 1973 film *Badlands*, which coincidentally shared its title with an earlier Springsteen song.

Nebraska ends on a tentative note of hope with the melodically simple yet philosophically complex "Reason to Believe," a moving ode to the persistence of faith in the face of daunting odds.

As Springsteen later explained to Kurt Loder in a 1984 *Rolling Stone* interview, "*Nebraska* was about that American isolation: what happens to people when they're alienated from their friends and their community and their government and their job. Because those are the things that keep you sane . . . and

if they slip away . . . then life becomes kind of a joke. And anything can happen.”¹⁰

Following up the sales breakthrough of *The River* with a project as challenging as *Nebraska* was a risky career move. But it quickly paid off for Springsteen, demonstrating that his integrity trumped his commercial instincts and reinforcing his identity as a serious artist.

Nebraska also made it clear that Springsteen’s audience appeal wasn’t dependent upon mainstream exposure. Despite producing no hit singles and gaining relatively little radio play, the album sold surprisingly well, peaking at number three on *Billboard*’s album chart.

Nebraska was the first example of a pattern that Springsteen would repeat in the future, that of following his most popular releases with less commercial, more personal projects. The album also presaged the lo-fi explosion that would soon become a major force in the indie rock underground, as home recording gear became more affordable and commonplace.

While radio programmers were hesitant to embrace *Nebraska*, critics had no such reservations. “*Nebraska* comes as a shock, a violent, acid-etched portrait of a wounded America that fuels its machinery by consuming its people’s dreams,” Steve Pond wrote in *Rolling Stone*. “The style is steadfastly, defiantly out-of-date, the singing flat and honest, the music stark, deliberate and unadorned.”¹¹

SOLD AMERICAN

Springsteen was back rocking again on his next album, *Born in the U.S.A.*, released in June 1984. In contrast to the stripped-down *Nebraska*, *Born in the U.S.A.* boasted a state-of-the-art sound that lent a radio-ready sheen to such catchy tunes as “Glory Days,” “Cover Me,” and the synth-drenched “Dancing in the Dark.” But the album’s upbeat vibe wasn’t limited to its production. While “I’m on Fire” channeled some of *Nebraska*’s brooding lyrical intensity, “Bobby Jean,” “No Surrender,” and even the mournful “My Hometown” carried a guarded optimism, with bruised-but-not-beaten protagonists who felt like they still had something to fight for.

Born in the U.S.A.’s much-misinterpreted title track—partially inspired by attending a screening of *The Deer Hunter* with Ron Kovic—was the first-person story a Vietnam vet who returns home to shattered dreams and broken promises, including those of his government. Despite the song’s potently angry message, some less sophisticated listeners couldn’t hear past its fist-pumping chorus and misinterpreted it as a flag-waving nationalist anthem.

In September, syndicated right-wing columnist George Will wrote a column praising Springsteen, and apparently suggested to members of President Ronald Reagan’s staff that they seek Springsteen’s endorsement for Reagan’s reelection campaign. Reagan campaign staffers were politely rebuffed by Springsteen representatives when they invited Bruce to appear with Reagan at

a September 19, 1984, campaign stop in Hammonton, New Jersey. But that didn't stop Reagan from amending his standard stump speech by stating, "America's future rests in a thousand dreams inside your hearts; it rests in the message of hope in songs so many young Americans admire: New Jersey's own Bruce Springsteen. And helping you make those dreams come true is what this job of mine is all about."¹²

Springsteen had previously resisted commenting publicly on matters of electoral politics. But the Reagan campaign's brazen misappropriation of his message and reputation—particularly since the Reagan administration's policies embodied just the sort of institutional callousness that songs like "Born in the U.S.A." implicitly condemned—motivated him to speak up.

During a September 22 concert in Pittsburgh, Springsteen introduced "Johnny 99" by commenting, "The president was mentioning my name the other day and I kinda got to wondering what his favorite album musta been. I don't think it was the *Nebraska* album. I don't think he's been listening to this one." Later in the show, he spoke of visiting the Lincoln Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., and stated, "It's a long walk from a government that's supposed to represent all of the people to where we are today."¹³

In a subsequent interview with *Rolling Stone*'s Kurt Loder, Springsteen elaborated, "You see the Reagan re-election ads on TV—you know: 'It's morning in America.' And you say, well, it's not morning in Pittsburgh. It's not morning above 125th Street in New York. It's midnight, and, like, there's a bad moon risin'."¹⁴

At around the same time, Springsteen reportedly spurned an offer of several million dollars for the use of "Born in the U.S.A." in a Chrysler car commercial.

Beyond the political shenanigans, *Born in the U.S.A.* became the commercial blockbuster that had long been predicted for Springsteen. It sold over 15 million copies in the United States alone, and spawned no fewer than seven Top Ten singles, the biggest being "Dancing in the Dark." The hugely successful tour that followed saw Springsteen finally playing the huge outdoor stadium gigs that he'd previously avoided. The massive venues tested Bruce's much-vaunted ability to bring an intimate atmosphere to large-scale shows, and most observers agreed that he passed the test.

The *Born in the U.S.A.* tour also marked the on-stage addition of backup singer Patti Scialfa and guitarist Nils Lofgren. While Scialfa was a veteran of the Asbury Park music scene, Lofgren possessed an extensive résumé that included an acclaimed, prolific solo career and some notable backup work with Neil Young. Lofgren had stepped in to replace Van Zandt, who had launched a new career leading Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul. Van Zandt was also the motivating force behind the all-star benefit project Artists United Against Apartheid, whose 1985 release "Sun City" (in which Springsteen was one of the featured vocalists) was the most musically compelling of the period's many charity recording projects.

It was also on the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour that Springsteen began using his expanded clout to lend support to causes he believed in. In addition to his friends in the veterans movement, he also met with labor, environmental, and civil rights activists at almost every tour stop, endorsing their organizations from the stage and allowing the groups to set up information booths on the premises.

The following year saw the release of Springsteen's first official concert recordings, *Live 1975–1985*, an epic five-LP collection that became the first box set to debut at number one on the *Billboard* album chart. Although the artist had long resisted efforts to get him to make a live album, the package's length and historical breadth was sufficient to do justice to his expansive live shows, and to convey the uplifting rush of the live Springsteen experience as well as its subtler nuances.

Just as Springsteen had followed the crowd-pleasing *The River* with the subdued *Nebraska*, the multi-platinum *Born in the U.S.A.* gave way to 1987's pensive, scaled-down *Tunnel of Love*. A set of reflective songs surveying the dramas, doubts, and insecurities of romantic love, the album was widely interpreted by listeners as commenting on his recent marriage to model/actress Julianne Phillips—a union that had raised the eyebrows of some fans, who worried that their working-class hero had gone Hollywood.

Tunnel of Love found Springsteen working on a more intimate scale than ever before, with such numbers as “Cautious Man,” “One Step Up,” and “Two Faces” portraying lovers who seemed as tortured and desperate as *Nebraska*'s criminal characters. *Tunnel of Love* sold three million copies at the time—a respectable showing, but only a fraction of *Born in the U.S.A.*'s sales. Apparently, most fans preferred their Bruce bigger than life. With the perspective of history, though, *Tunnel of Love* is now regarded by many as Bruce's most underrated album.

The tour that followed *Tunnel of Love* defied fan expectations almost as much as the album did. Beyond the retooled E Street Band lineup, Springsteen altered song arrangements and deleted several popular numbers from the set entirely.

Tunnel of Love's contemplative direction strongly suggested that Springsteen had reached a crossroads, both in his musical and personal lives. That observation would be confirmed by the five-year gap that would precede his next release of new material. During that time, Springsteen would end his two-and-a-half-year marriage to Phillips and marry Patti Scialfa, with whom he would relocate to California. Springsteen and Scialfa would start a family with the arrival of the first of their three children in 1990.

For fans, though, a much bigger family-related shakeup was Springsteen's dismissal, in the fall of 1989, of the E Street Band. For an artist planning to take an extended break from touring and recording, not keeping his large band on the payroll was a sensible business move. But many fans took the split personally.

Springsteen broke his extended silence in March 1992, simultaneously releasing two new studio albums, *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*. Both were recorded in L.A. with session players rather than his beloved band, with Scialfa and Roy Bittan the only holdovers from the E Street Band. His new material reflected the influence of Bruce's new family life, largely maintaining a sunny disposition that represented a substantial shift from the internal struggles documented on *Tunnel of Love*.

Springsteen's new embrace of a happy, stable family life met with mixed reviews. Several critics suggested that he might have done better to judiciously edit the material into a more focused single album. The fans seemed to agree, with both discs meeting with disappointing sales figures.

A similar sense of anticlimax accompanied Bruce's return to the road, with a new, unnamed backup band that included Bittan and some lesser-known West Coast musicians. Springsteen's willingness to forsake the tried-and-true comfort zone of his longtime lineup may have been admirable, and the shows were consistently solid and energetic, but the E Street Band was a hard act to follow, and the general consensus was that his new sidemen's professionalism was no substitute for their predecessors' time-tested rapport.

Although the new band would prove short-lived, it was recorded for posterity on the live disc *Plugged*, recorded in September 1992 and released the following year. The album was the soundtrack from Springsteen's installment of MTV's *Unplugged* series; the amended title refers to Springsteen breaking the show's usual format by performing with an electric band. The set focused on songs from *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, adding the previously unreleased "Red Headed Woman" (the album's only acoustic performance) and a spirited take of "Light of Day," which Springsteen had provided for Joan Jett to perform in the 1987 film of the same name, but which he hadn't previously released himself.

If Springsteen was stung by the relatively cool reception that accompanied his return to active duty, he didn't show it. He continued moving forward into new projects, albeit without the obsessiveness that he had applied to his prior endeavors, balancing his roles as artist and family man.

If the dual release of *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town* had proved to be a somewhat underwhelming return, Springsteen soon managed to make a stronger impact with a single song. "Streets of Philadelphia," his contribution to the soundtrack of Jonathan Demme's 1993 drama *Philadelphia*, movingly captured the plight of the film's main character—a gay lawyer dying of AIDS—without resorting to melodrama or sentimentality.

GHOST HUNTING

In March 1995, Columbia released *Greatest Hits*, a haphazard best-of collection that was notable mainly for the fact that it gave Springsteen an excuse to reassemble the E Street Band to record some new tracks.

Far more satisfying was *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, released eight months later. A sequel of sorts to *Nebraska*, the album—whose title name-checked the hero of John Steinbeck's classic Depression-era novel *The Grapes of Wrath*—found Springsteen alternating between solo acoustic tracks and band arrangements while maintaining the earlier disc's stark, haunted atmosphere.

The Ghost of Tom Joad also revisited several of *Nebraska*'s lyrical themes, with such songs as "The Line," "Balboa Park," and the title number painting an even bleaker picture of an America oblivious to its poor and working-class citizens and openly hostile toward immigrants. The escape that Springsteen sang of early in his career is simply not an option for the people in these songs.

Springsteen supported *The Ghost of Tom Joad* with a tour of solo performances in theater-sized venues, where he faced the formidable challenge of keeping his notoriously demonstrative crowds quiet enough that his voice could be heard. The album won Springsteen his seventh Grammy, this time for Best Contemporary Folk Album.

Tracks was released in 1998, a four-CD, sixty-six-song collection of rare and previously unreleased material that Springsteen called "a sort of an alternate version of my life."¹⁵ The set included numerous songs that have become fan favorites via their inclusion in live shows and/or bootleg releases over the years. *Tracks* was a testament to Bruce's notoriously stringent quality control, since even his least remarkable castoffs had something to recommend them. It also helped to set the stage for Springsteen's imminent artistic rebirth.

In March 1999, Springsteen was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Bruce dedicated his award to his parents, and thanked his recently deceased father, wryly noting that he might not have had anything to write about if it hadn't been for their strained relationship. Springsteen's fence-mending extended to bringing his long-estranged former manager Mike Appel to the Hall of Fame ceremony as one of his guests.

A month after his Hall of Fame induction, Springsteen launched a long-awaited reunion tour with the E Street Band (now including both Van Zandt and Lofgren) in Barcelona, Spain, where the group played for three hours without a break. The U.S. portion of the tour began with fifteen exuberant sold-out shows at New Jersey's Continental Airlines Arena and ended with a triumphant ten-night engagement at New York City's Madison Square Garden.

The Madison Square Garden shows were recorded and broadcast as an HBO TV special, and released on CD and DVD as *Live in New York City*. All three included the new song "American Skin," Springsteen's response to the then-recent shooting death of Amadou Diallo, an unarmed African immigrant, at the hands of New York City police officers.

Despite the song's humane, thoroughly nonjudgmental stance, "American Skin" aroused the ire of Big Apple cops, some of whom reportedly refused to work security at the Garden shows. The head of New York's Fraternal Order of Police even denounced Springsteen as a "f-ing dirtbag,"¹⁶ conveniently

ignoring the benefit shows that he'd played for the families of officers killed in the line of duty.

A similar sense of raw-nerved topicality pervaded Springsteen's 2002 release *The Rising*, his first studio album with the E Street Band in eighteen years. Released less than ten months after the September 11, 2001, attacks, the project was a moving meditation on loss, faith, and healing, with such songs as "Lonesome Day," "Empty Sky," "You're Missing," and "My City of Ruins" emphasizing the preciousness of life rather than lingering on the sadness and tragedy inherent in their subject matter. The reconstituted E Street Band rose to the occasion, playing with as much fire as ever, and new producer Brendan O'Brien's raw, loose production lent added urgency to the performances.

Many fans and critics regarded *The Rising* as Springsteen's most consistently inspired album since *Nebraska* two decades earlier. It also became his biggest-selling album of new material in a decade and a half, and would earn three Grammys including Best Rock Album.

The *Rising* tour included a record-setting ten-night stand at New Jersey's Giants Stadium, an unprecedented ticket sales milestone even by Springsteen standards. That was followed by a three-night run at New York's Shea Stadium. Bob Dylan was a surprise guest on the final night, with the two generational icons trading vocals on Dylan's "Highway 61 Revisited."

Springsteen had long been generous in lending support to social and political causes, playing benefit shows to support Vietnam veterans groups, anti-nuclear organizations, Amnesty International, and the Christic Institute. Yet he had always avoided endorsing candidates for political office, as he had when Democratic presidential candidate Walter Mondale had sought his support in the wake of the Reagan "Born in the U.S.A." fiasco.

Controversial Concerts: Live 8

Twenty years after the first Live Aid concert, on July 2, 2005, Sir Bob Geldof (who'd been knighted by the Queen of England for his pivotal role in Live Aid) mounted another series of international concerts called Live 8: a day of huge outdoor concerts in the capital cities of each of the world's eight wealthiest nations, whose heads of state would be gathered in Scotland on July 6 for the G8 (Group of Eight) economic summit.

Live 8 was intended not as a fundraiser for humanitarian relief efforts but as a kind of mass lobbying effort that would pressure the assembled leaders to place Africa-related issues—including debt relief, increasing foreign aid, and lowering trade barriers—at the top of the G8 agenda. In Great Britain, activists in the "Make Poverty History" campaign had been agitating around some of these issues for years. Many of them saw Geldof as a late arrival to their cause who was unwilling to bluntly criticize the policies of the G8 governments and whose concerts would deflect attendance and attention from a massive march and rally planned for July 2 in Edinburgh.

The rally drew a crowd of 225,000 even as the Live 8 concerts took place in cities including London (with Elton John, U2, Coldplay, and Madonna), Rome (with Duran Duran and Faith Hill), Berlin (with Green Day and Crosby, Stills, and Nash), and Philadelphia (with the Dave Matthews Band, Bon Jovi, and Stevie Wonder). The day's most historic set was played by Pink Floyd, whose four members performed together for the first time since 1981.

Some activists criticized Bob Geldof for not including more artists from Africa and of African descent on these shows, and for his welcoming stance toward corporate and political leaders like Microsoft's Bill Gates (who addressed the London concert), British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and U.S. President George W. Bush. In the weeks after Live 8, the G8 agreed to 100 percent debt relief for poor states from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the African Development Bank; a rise in aid to \$50 billion a year by 2010, and a pledge to protect 85 percent of vulnerable Africans against malaria.

These pledges "will not make poverty history," said Charles Abugre of Christian Aid. "It is vastly disappointing." He and other critics pointed out that the increased aid would be spread throughout numerous countries, that debt payments were due to rise sharply, and that debt relief was conditional upon cuts in social spending by the recipient governments.

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But the first term of the George W. Bush administration was enough to force Springsteen to reconsider his long-standing policy. In 2004, he and the E Street Band joined a star-studded lineup including John Fogerty, John Mellencamp, R.E.M., Pearl Jam, the Dave Matthews Band, and the Dixie Chicks on the Vote for Change tour, in support of John Kerry's unsuccessful bid to unseat Bush. Springsteen even granted permission for the Kerry campaign to use the *Born in the U.S.A.* anthem "No Surrender." Springsteen also appeared at some Kerry rallies, performing acoustic renditions of the song.

In the spring of 2005, Springsteen released the low-key, mostly acoustic *Devils & Dust*. Like *Nebraska* and *The Ghost of Tom Joad* before it, the album featured a set of brooding, personal compositions whose emotional content and character detail gave them a literary resonance. "The Hitter," "Long Time Comin'," and "Maria's Bed" wrestled compellingly with hope and despair, while the title track tackled the Iraq war from the perspective of a confused soldier. Beyond its vivid songwriting, *Devils & Dust* differed from its spare precursors in its varied and expressive musical palette.

The album's political content and sexual imagery apparently put the kibosh on a proposed tie-in deal with the ostensibly hip coffee shop chain Starbucks. Even without that timely marketing gimmick, *Devils & Dust* entered the album charts at number one in ten different countries, including the United States and Britain.

Springsteen supported *Devils & Dust* with a solo tour. In contrast to the minimalist one-man shows that had accompanied *The Ghost of Tom Joad*, he

accompanied himself on electric guitar, piano, pump organ, autoharp, ukulele, and banjo, as well as acoustic guitar and harmonica. The sets included some startling reworkings of some of Bruce's best-loved tunes, as well as some surprising cover choices, for example, a heartfelt take on "Dream Baby Dream" by 1970s synth-punk pioneers Suicide.

Devils & Dust was clearly the work of a still restless artist more concerned with expanding the musical and thematic boundaries of his work than with maintaining his position as a superstar. That distinction was demonstrated once again by the April 2006 release of *We Shall Overcome: The Seeger Sessions*, a collection of traditional folk songs associated with activist folk-music icon Pete Seeger. The project's tone was simultaneously serious and celebratory, with expansive arrangements utilizing an eclectic eighteen-person band incorporating fiddle (from recent E Street Band addition Soozie Tyrell), horns, accordion, banjo, and pedal steel guitar. The album, and the tour that followed, embodied Springsteen's abiding respect for his musical roots as well as his long-standing streak of humanist politics—qualities that he shared with Seeger.

Three decades into his recording career, Bruce Springsteen was still conquering new territory and embracing new challenges. As Peter Evans observed in the *Rolling Stone Album Guide*, "With Springsteen growing older we see a chance that we missed with Elvis—that of a great American rocker confronting age with grace."¹⁷

Or, as Springsteen told *Rolling Stone*'s DeCurtis in 1998, "I've created a long body of work that fundamentally expresses who I am. That's what I go out to present. That's the only way I know how to do it, and the way I approach it now isn't any different to when I started. . . . I try to do my best job, and think as hard as I can about the things that interest me, and write and perform as well as I can and then try to find the audience that's out there for it.

"Basically," Springsteen concluded, "I've been pretty consistent with my approach since I started. . . . You have faith in what you do. And then you do it."¹⁸

TIMELINE

May 16, 1966

Seventeen-year-old Bruce Springsteen makes his first studio recordings, cutting two original songs with his band the Castiles at Bricktown Studio in New Jersey.

January 23, 1971

Springsteen breaks up his band Steel Mill at the height of its popularity, following a farewell show at the Upstage Club in Asbury Park.

May 2, 1972

New manager Mike Appel brings Springsteen to meet with legendary Columbia Records talent scout John Hammond, who is so impressed that he arranges for Springsteen to perform that night at the Gaslight Club for other Columbia executives.

The next day, Springsteen and Hammond record a set of solo demos of Springsteen's compositions at CBS Studios in New York.

June 9, 1972

Bruce Springsteen signs with Columbia Records.

January 5, 1973

Columbia releases Bruce Springsteen's first album, *Greetings from Asbury Park, N.J.*

November 5, 1973

The second Bruce Springsteen album, *The Wild, the Innocent and the E Street Shuffle*, is released.

February 12, 1974

Springsteen fires the E Street Band's original drummer, Vini "Mad Dog" Lopez, replacing him with Ernest "Boom" Carter.

May 9, 1974

A Springsteen show at Harvard Square Theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts, inspires *Real Paper* critic Jon Landau, to write "I saw rock 'n' roll future and its name is Bruce Springsteen." Landau will later become Springsteen's manager.

September 19, 1974

Keyboardist Roy Bittan and drummer Max Weinberg join the E Street Band, replacing David Sancious and Ernest Carter, respectively.

March–July 1975

Springsteen records his third album *Born to Run* at the Record Plant in New York. The sessions include new E Street Band guitarist Steve Van Zandt and new co-producer Jon Landau.

August 13–17, 1975

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band play a now-legendary sold-out five-night stand at the Bottom Line in New York City. One show is broadcast live on local station WNEW FM. The shows mark a turning point in Springsteen's transition from cult hero to mainstream star.

September 6, 1975

Springsteen's third album, *Born to Run*, is released.

October 27, 1975

Springsteen is featured simultaneously on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. The unprecedented media exposure demonstrates Springsteen's growing prominence, but it will also engender accusations of hype.

April 29, 1976

Following a show in Memphis, Springsteen and Steve Van Zandt visit Graceland in an attempt to meet Elvis Presley. But after Bruce jumps the fence, he's ejected from the grounds by a security guard.

July 27, 1976

Springsteen files suit against manager Mike Appel. Appel countersues two days later, resulting in an injunction that will keep Springsteen out of the recording studio for the next ten months.

May 28, 1977

Springsteen and Mike Appel arrive at an out-of-court settlement, with Springsteen winning the right to return to the studio and sign a management contract with Jon Landau.

June 1, 1977

Springsteen begins recording his fourth album, *Darkness on the Edge of Town*.

May 23, 1978

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band kick off their first tour of arena-sized venues in Buffalo, New York.

June 6, 1978

The long-awaited *Darkness on the Edge of Town* is released.

August 24, 1978

Springsteen appears on the cover of *Rolling Stone* for the first time.

September 23, 1979

On Springsteen's thirtieth birthday, he and the E Street Band perform at New York's Madison Square Garden as part of the all-star No Nukes benefit concerts. Springsteen introduces his new song "The River."

October 3, 1980

Springsteen begins a tour in support of the still-unreleased *The River*. The tour will find Springsteen and band playing their longest shows to date, with most performances running between three and four hours.

October 17, 1980

Springsteen releases the double LP *The River*, drawn from the over sixty songs recorded during the album sessions.

November 8, 1980

The River becomes Springsteen's first number one entry on *Billboard*'s album chart.

November 15, 1980

The River's first single, "Hungry Heart," becomes Springsteen's first Top Ten hit, reaching number five.

December 31, 1980

Springsteen ends a three-night stand at New York's Nassau Coliseum with his longest concert to date, running over four hours and containing thirty-eight songs.

April 7, 1981

Springsteen's first extended European tour, encompassing thirty-three shows in ten countries, kicks off in Hamburg, Germany.

July 2, 1981

Bruce Springsteen and the E Street band inaugurate New Jersey's new Meadowlands Arena with a six-night stand. Springsteen's ability to fill the arena six times is one example of his increased audience draw.

August 20, 1981

Springsteen plays a memorable benefit concert for the Vietnam Veterans of America at the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

September 14, 1981

The final show of the *River* tour in Cincinnati also marks Steve Van Zandt's last show with the band, prior to his departure for a solo career.

January 3, 1982

In his bedroom at his home in Holmdel, New Jersey, Springsteen records several new songs on a four-track tape recorder. Although the spare solo recordings are intended as demos, they will ultimately form the basis of his next album, *Nebraska*.

June 4, 1984

Born in the U.S.A., for which Springsteen recorded over approximately 100 songs, is released.

June 29, 1984

The *Born in the U.S.A.* tour begins in St. Paul, Minnesota. The E Street Band now includes two new members, guitarist Nils Lofgren and backup singer Patti Scialfa.

July 7, 1984

Born in the U.S.A. reaches number one on the *Billboard* chart. It will remain at the top of the chart for seven weeks and in the Top Ten for eighty-five weeks, and produce seven Top Ten singles.

August 5, 1984

Springsteen and band play the first of ten sold-out shows at the Meadowlands in New Jersey.

September 19, 1984

President Ronald Reagan invokes Springsteen's name during a campaign speech in Hammonton, New Jersey. Three days later, Springsteen will respond during a concert in Pittsburgh.

January 28, 1985

Springsteen wins his first Grammy award when "Dancing in the Dark" is named best pop/rock single.

March 21, 1985

Springsteen kicks off a massively successful world tour with his first Australian shows, including an outdoor concert in Brisbane that marks his first stadium show.

April 4, 1985

Springsteen and band play their first dates in Japan.

August–September, 1985

Bruce plays eight sold-out shows at Giants Stadium in New Jersey's Meadowlands, which holds an audience of 80,000.

August 30, 1985

Bruce rejoins Steve Van Zandt to perform on Van Zandt's all-star anti-apartheid benefit single "Sun City."

October 2, 1985

Bruce Springsteen's globe-trotting *Born in the U.S.A.* Tour draws to a close at the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum. The fifteen-month, 150-date outing found him performing at mammoth outdoor stadiums and indoor arenas.

February 1986

Bruce turns down a \$12 million offer from Chrysler president Lee Iacocca to use "Born in the U.S.A." in a TV commercial.

November 29, 1986

Bruce Springsteen's box set *Live 1975–85* enters the *Billboard* album chart at number one.

July 19, 1988

Touring in support of his new album *Tunnel of Love*, Springsteen performs for the first time behind the Iron Curtain, with a concert in East Berlin in front of a crowd of 180,000, his largest audience yet. The show is broadcast live on East German television.

July 23, 1988

Bruce plays three songs with a street musician on the streets of Copenhagen. The event is recorded on camcorder by a passerby.

September 2, 1988

Springsteen and the E Street Band launch Amnesty international's Human Rights Now! tour out at Wembley Stadium in London, along with Sting, Peter Gabriel, Yousou N'Dour, and Tracy Chapman. The tour will continue through Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, and South America over the next two months.

October 10, 1988

The Human Rights Now! tour ends with a show in Buenos Aires, Argentina, portions of which are later broadcast on TV worldwide.

September 23, 1989

Bruce celebrates his fortieth birthday at the Stone Pony in Asbury Park, where performs with most of the E Street Band.

October 18, 1989

Springsteen informs the members of the E Street Band that he plans to work with new musicians on his next album, effectively breaking up his longtime band.

November 16–17, 1990

Springsteen performs a pair of solo acoustic sets to benefit the Christic Institute, sharing the bill with Jackson Browne and Bonnie Raitt.

March 31, 1992

Two new Springsteen albums, *Human Touch* and *Lucky Town*, are released simultaneously.

May 6, 1992

Springsteen's new live band plays its first gig, a private show for Sony Music staffers at the Bottom Line in New York.

May 9, 1992

The new lineup makes its public debut, backing Springsteen on *Saturday Night Live*, which also marks Springsteen's first live U.S. TV appearance.

June 15, 1992

Springsteen's first tour with his new band kicks off in Stockholm, Sweden.

June 23, 1992

Springsteen plays the first of eleven shows at the Meadowlands in New Jersey.

September 22, 1992

Springsteen records a performance for MTV. Although the show, which will premiere on November 18, is part of the cable music channel's *Unplugged* series, Springsteen performs electric with his full band lineup.

June 25, 1993

Springsteen makes his first appearance on David Letterman's late-night talk show, performing "Glory Days" with the show's house band.

March 21, 1994

Bruce wins an Academy Award for his song "Streets of Philadelphia," which he performs live on the Oscar awards show.

January 9, 1995

Springsteen reunites the E Street Band to record some new tracks for his upcoming *Greatest Hits* compilation.

February 21, 1995

Bruce and the reunited band takes the stage at Tramps in New York to film a video for the new song "Murder Incorporated" in front of an invited audience. The video shoot turns into a impromptu two-hour live set that includes much classic material.

September 2, 1995

The E Street Band reunites once again for the opening concert of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame museum in Cleveland.

October 10, 1995

Springsteen begins a low-key six-show stint as guitarist in old friend Joe Grushecky's band the Houserockers.

November 21, 1995

Springsteen's spare, folk-inspired album *The Ghost of Tom Joad* is released. On the same day, he begins a solo acoustic tour of small theaters in New Brunswick, New Jersey.

March 25, 1996

Bruce interrupts a European solo tour to perform "Dead Man Walkin'," which he wrote and recorded for Tim Robbins's film *Dead Man Walking*, at the Academy Awards show. Although nominated for Best Song, it does not win.

February 26, 1997

The Ghost of Tom Joad wins a Grammy for Best Contemporary Folk Album. Bruce performs the title song at the Grammy awards show.

November 10, 1998

The four-CD box set *Tracks*, assembled from Springsteen's massive archive of unreleased songs, is released.

December 8, 1998

A press release announces Springsteen's first tour with the E Street Band in nearly a decade.

December 10, 1998

Springsteen celebrates the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Human Rights with a solo set at an Amnesty International show in Paris.

April 9, 1999

Bruce Springsteen's reunion tour with the E Street Band, which now includes both Steve Van Zandt and Nils Lofgren, commences with a three-hour show Barcelona, Spain.

July 15, 1999

The U.S. leg of the reunion tour begins with the first of fifteen sold-out shows at New Jersey's Continental Airlines Arena. By the end of the run, Springsteen will have performed for over one million fans in that venue since its opening in 1981.

June 4, 2000

During a show at Philips Arena in Atlanta, Springsteen debuts the new song “American Skin,” inspired by the recent killing of an unarmed African immigrant by New York City police officers. Condemnations follow from NYPD members, who, despite having never heard the song, call for a boycott of Springsteen’s upcoming Madison Square Garden shows.

June 12, 2000

Having remained silent during the “American Skin” controversy, Springsteen performs the song at Madison Square Garden, as he will at all of the tour’s remaining shows.

April 7, 2001

Live in New York City, recorded at Madison Square Garden, premieres on HBO.

September 21, 2001

Ten days after the September 11 terror attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., Springsteen performs as part of a television special honoring the victims, debuting the new song “My City of Ruins.”

July 30, 2002

Springsteen’s 9/11-inspired album *The Rising* is released, with a promotional blitz that includes numerous TV appearances including a live performance on *The Today Show*.

August 7, 2002

The *Rising* tour officially begins at the Continental Airlines Arena.

October 1, 2003

The *Rising* tour concludes with three shows at New York’s Shea Stadium.

October 1, 2004

Springsteen and the E Street Band join the Vote for Change tour, an all-star effort in support of Sen. John Kerry’s presidential campaign. Springsteen will also perform acoustically at Kerry campaign rallies in Wisconsin, Ohio, and Florida.

April 21, 2005

Springsteen begins a solo tour in support of his album *Devils & Dust*. Unlike his acoustic tour a decade before, Springsteen plays a variety of instruments, including electric guitar.

November 15, 2005

The *Born to Run 30th Anniversary Edition*, including a remastered version of the album and a DVD of a 1975 London concert, is released.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Greeting from Asbury Park, N.J., 1973

The Wild, The Innocent and the E Street Shuffle, 1973

Born to Run, 1975

Darkness on the Edge of Town, 1978

The River, 1980

Nebraska, 1982

Born in the U.S.A., 1982

Live 1975–1985, 1986

Tunnel of Love, 1987

The Ghost of Tom Joad, 1995

The Rising, 2002

Devils & Dust, 2005

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3. Phil Sutcliffe, "You Talkin' to Me?," *Mojo*, January 2006, p. 84.
4. *Ibid.*
5. "50 Moments that Changed the History of Rock & Roll: Springsteen Breaks Out in 1975," *Rolling Stone*, June 24, 2004, available online at www.rollingstone.com/news/story/6085500/springsteen_breaks_out_in_1975.
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Courtesy of Photofest.

Ramones

Scott Schinder

THE KINGS FROM QUEENS

The Ramones are generally acknowledged as the band that launched the punk movement. The New York quartet's self-titled 1976 debut album ignited an international musical revolution that drastically altered rock's direction, even if it took a decade and a half for that revolution to penetrate the American commercial mainstream.

Bursting onto a rock scene that had grown bloated, complacent, and self-important, the Ramones broke all of the rules of 1970s rock. Armed with three chords and four leather jackets, they played short, loud, manic-tempoed tunes, hammered home with brute, primitive force by guitarist Johnny Ramone's buzzsaw power-chord drone, bassist Dee Dee Ramone's throbbing bass pulse, and drummer Tommy Ramone's relentless pummeling.

Devoid of artifice and pretension, the Ramones stripped down to their most basic elements and often kicked into gear by Dee Dee's raw-throated drill-sergeant "one-too-free-faw" count-offs, the Ramones' songs nonetheless maintained a hook-filled sensibility rooted in the band members' love for the

vintage bubblegum and British Invasion pop they'd grown up with. The four-some's grounding in vintage Top Forty was further manifested in gangly front-man Joey Ramone's vaguely faux-British-accented vocals.

The band's sonic stance was matched with a unique sense of street-level surrealism that was manifested in the absurdist imagery and junk-culture aesthetic of their early lyrics and record sleeves. The Ramones wrote aggressively melodic ditties about pinheads and cretins, which they sometimes punctuated with unironic romantic tunes that revealed the tender heart beneath the band's rough exterior.

No band prior to the Ramones had done so much with so little. The musicians made an artistic virtue of their rudimentary chops, and Joey didn't allow his technical limitations to keep him from becoming a distinctive and supremely expressive vocalist. Despite his lack of conventional vocal chops, the gawky singer was adept at nailing the sincere sentiment that lurked beneath the twisted humor of his and Dee Dee's lyrics, which invoked existential confusion, mental illness, and romantic travail.

Just as their sound railed against all that had grown stale and stodgy in popular music in the mid-1970s, the Ramones' image was an equally radical jab at rock's status quo. The band members' original uniform of leather jackets, T-shirts, and torn jeans reclaimed rock's unpretentious roots at a time when many of the genre's major performers had become mired in excess and pretension.

The Ramones' anti-star stance, and the anybody-can-do-this message implicit in their music, helped to change rock from an arena-bound spectator sport into a participatory activity, opening the door for the countless punk, new wave, hard-core, and indie-rock combos that would follow.

The band's early notoriety turned these four misfits into unlikely leaders—first of the fertile and diverse downtown New York scene that they helped to jump-start, then for a transatlantic punk explosion, and ultimately as icons of a worldwide movement.

In their home country, the Ramones soldiered on for more than two decades, in pursuit of a commercial breakthrough that never quite arrived. In Britain and Europe, though, the Ramones' impact was immediate and apparent. The band's first London show became a pivotal event in sparking the British punk boom.

That the Ramones were able to sustain a two-decade career as a recording and touring act was particularly impressive in light of the various forces that threatened to doom the band to a limited shelf life. The less-is-more simplicity of their musical approach led many early observers to dismiss them as a one-trick pony, and their relative lack of commercial success didn't seem to augur well for a long-term future. Even less encouraging was the lengthy series of internal traumas that bedeviled the group, and the volatile chemistry that resulted in extended feuds between certain members.

Indeed, the four unrelated young men who shared a surname and a musical mission had little else in common, and the Ramones' interpersonal tensions

became the stuff of legend. Despite the bandmates' often strained relations, the Ramones managed to release fourteen studio albums and tour almost constantly between 1976 and 1996.

Their recorded output could be inconsistent, and their liaisons with big-name producers often yielded spotty results. But the four studio LPs with which the Ramones launched their career—*Ramones* (1976), *Leave Home* (1977), *Rocket to Russia* (1977), *Road to Ruin* (1978)—ensured the group's iconic status. Those albums constitute a body of work as original and influential as anything in rock and roll, rewriting the music's rules and creating a template that countless bands would follow thereafter.

The Ramones' seminal early work can safely be regarded as ground zero of the punk explosion, but it wasn't without precedent and it didn't come out of nowhere. In the late 1960s, the Velvet Underground explored sonic extremes and taboo lyrical subject matter, while the Stooges and the MC5 shattered notions of hippie-era peace and love with confrontational aggression. In the early 1970s, the New York Dolls courted mainstream outrage with garage raucousness, cartoon decadence, and transvestite chic, while a variety of iconoclastic cult combos in various regions—the Modern Lovers in Boston, Rocket from the Tombs in Cleveland, the Runaways in L.A.—pushed at other musical and thematic boundaries. And New York's own Dictators had pioneered some of the irreverent junk-culture aesthetic that the Ramones would help to popularize, and even managed to release a major-label debut LP a year before the Ramones did.

Regardless of who came first, it was the Ramones who crystallized punk's unruly attitude and musical aesthetic into an identifiable, accessible style that others could emulate and expand upon. While their British counterparts/acolytes the Sex Pistols may have been far more effective as media manipulators and social provocateurs, the Ramones' influence was longer-lasting and more far-reaching.

The four highly incompatible young men who became the Ramones came together in early 1974 in the middle-class Forest Hills section of Queens. All four were troubled misfits who'd found a measure of salvation and solace in music.

Tommy Erdelyi was born in Budapest, Hungary, and emigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of four. In 1964, under the spell of the Beatles, he began playing guitar and formed a teen combo, the Tiger 5, to play Fab Four tunes at parties and junior high school dances. Two years later, he befriended fellow Forest Hills High School student John Cummings, a quick-tempered bassist who'd served a two-year stint in military school, and whose tastes ran toward the harder sounds of the Rolling Stones, the Who, and the Yardbirds. The two joined up to form a new garage outfit, the Tangerine Puppets, named after a Donovan song of the same name.

Cummings's aggressive nature surfaced early on, for example, the live show during which he put down his bass in mid-song to beat up the group's singer

on stage. On another occasion, he interrupted a set to toss Tommy into the drum kit. Another night, while the band were headlining a talent show at Forest Hills High School, he hit the class president in the crotch with his bass.

The Tangerine Puppets got as far as recording a couple of demos and playing at the legendary Palisades Amusement Park, before breaking up in the summer of 1967.

A few years later, while working a construction job on an office building in midtown Manhattan, Cummings ran into his Forest Hills neighbor Douglas Colvin, who worked in the same building. The two got into the habit of meeting during their lunch hour, and bonded over their shared enthusiasm for the Stooges and the New York Dolls. They began talking about starting a new band, which they did after Cummings was laid off from the construction gig.

The Virginia-born Colvin was the son of a career army officer, and grew up largely in West Berlin, then still in the midst of post-World War II reconstruction. There, he observed the lingering shadow of Nazism, which would subsequently manifest itself in some of his more fanciful lyrics. During his childhood, Colvin learned the escape his turbulent home life by retreating into his imagination—and, eventually, into drugs. He also found inspiration in music, first picking up guitar at the age of twelve. A few years later, he moved to Queens with his divorced mother.

When he and Colvin decided to launch their combo, Cummings switched from bass to guitar. Unable to afford a Fender or Gibson ax, he purchased a cheap Mosrite—a considerably less prestigious brand—for \$50. Although the choice was initially a result of financial necessity, Mosrite guitars would become a cornerstone of the Ramones' sound, and Johnny's continuing use of the brand would create a new wave of sales for the company.

Joining Cummings and Colvin's new outfit on drums was another Forest Hills neighbor, Jeff Hyman, an awkward loner whose brother Mitch (later leader of the Rattlers and a member of rock critic Lester Bangs's combo Birdland) had once played in a band with Cummings. After his parents divorced during his childhood, Jeff found emotional sustenance in the bubblegum, girl-group pop and British Invasion rock that he heard on New York's vibrant Top Forty airwaves.

Hyman's early experiments with hallucinogens had earned him a stint in a hospital psych ward—an experience that would inspire more than one Ramones lyric—and had once spent a day in the notorious Manhattan jail the Tombs after being busted for peddling without a license. Jeff had taken up drumming in his early teens, and had made his first attempts at singing and songwriting in the Queens glitter band Sniper about a year before hooking up with Cummings and Colvin.

The new outfit's short-lived original lineup was Johnny on lead guitar, Dee Dee on rhythm guitar and lead vocals, and Joey on drums, plus a long-forgotten bassist named Richie Stern, who was kicked out after two days when he proved unable to keep up with the frantic tempos. The new combo got its

name after Colvin began calling himself Dee Dee Ramone, emulating Paul McCartney's use of the stage moniker Paul Ramon in the Beatles' early days. The others eventually followed suit, and the band became known as the Ramones.

Their shared stage name allowed these disaffected nobodies to build a collective identity. That image of solidarity was reinforced by the members' leather-and-jeans dress code, and by their early method of crediting their songwriting to the entire band rather than issuing individual writing credits. Johnny later claimed that the band's original motivation for writing their own songs was that they couldn't figure out how to play other people's.

The Ramones' first original composition was "I Don't Wanna Get Involved with You," followed by "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," which the band later confessed was more or less the same song. After coming up with "I Don't Wanna Be Learned, I Don't Wanna Be Tamed" and "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement," the band broke its streak of song titles beginning with "I Don't Wanna" by penning "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue."

Beyond their goofy titles and cartoonish imagery, the Ramones' early songs reflected the band members' own early experiences with alienation, family dysfunction, substance abuse, and petty crime, filtered through a juvenile affinity for horror and war movies.

According to Joey, "Our early songs came out of our real feelings of alienation, isolation, frustration."¹

As Johnny explained, "We couldn't write about girls or cars, so we wrote songs about things we knew."²

"We were all kind of loners and outcasts—and that's our audience," said Joey. "We also shared this dark, black sense of humor that only a few people understood."³

By the time Joey, Johnny, and Dee launched the Ramones, Tommy Erdelyi had begun to build a successful career as a recording engineer, working at Manhattan's famed Record Plant on albums by the likes of Jimi Hendrix, Mountain, Herbie Hancock, and John McLaughlin. By 1974, Erdelyi and fellow Forest Hills High School alumnus Monte Melnick—who would later serve for most of the Ramones' career as the band's road manager and right-hand man—had opened a small rehearsal studio, Performance, in Manhattan, which became the embryonic Ramones' practice space.

Even then, Erdelyi recognized a unique quality in the inexperienced trio's hyperactive clatter, and informally signed on as their manager. "They were terrible, but they were *great*," he later recalled. "I could tell right away that they were exciting, interesting and funny. They kept coming back week after week and rehearsing and got better and better."⁴

The Ramones played their first official gig, a showcase at Performance, on March 30, 1974, with the band playing seven songs in front of about thirty friends who's paid \$2 each to get in. Dee Dee was so nervous that he accidentally stepped on, and broke, his bass.

Two months later, Dee Dee, who had trouble singing and playing bass simultaneously, surrendered frontman duties to Joey. When six months' worth of auditions failed to recruit an appropriate replacement drummer, the band drafted Erdelyi to man the skins. Although he'd never played drums in a band before, Tommy felt strongly enough about the Ramones' potential that he agreed to take the job.

Tommy soon developed an unschooled, propulsive drumming style that was perfectly suited to the explosive racket that his new bandmates were making. Beyond his percussive approach, Tommy also played a pivotal role in crafting the Ramones' attitude and personalities into an actual image, and building a mystique around these unlikely rock stars.

While the players had previously been frustrated in their attempts to emulate their favorite records, they developed their unique minimalist style once they learned to work within their technical limitations. Johnny built his style on furiously downstroked barre chords, playing with so much force that his fingers sometimes bled on stage, while Dee Dee's bass work stuck to the beat, with few melodic embellishments.

A key element in the development of the Ramones' sound was Johnny's disdain for guitar solos, which would lead to him playing only a handful of them over the next twenty-odd years. His simple but eloquent style would prove to be a touchstone for future generations of aspiring guitarists. But the fact that Johnny's style was simple didn't mean that it was easy, and it's worth noting that few if any of his acolytes ever matched his primitive genius. For the remainder of the band's existence, Johnny would pride himself on never improving his technique and maintaining the same inspired-amateur status that he had the band formed.

BOWERY BLITZKRIEG

At the time that the Ramones began, there were few venues in which an unconventional, uncommercial band could perform live. But the quartet soon found a home at CBGB, a grungy biker bar on the Bowery, a thoroughfare that was then known as the skid row of Manhattan's Lower East Side. Owner Hilly Kristal had opened the establishment in late 1973, dubbing it CBGB OMFUG, an unwieldy acronym for Country, Bluegrass and Blues and Other Music for Uplifting Gourmandizers. The club's early fare consisted mainly of country music and poetry readings. But Kristal would reassess his booking policy after the then-unknown Television asked for a gig in the spring of 1974, and Kristal gave them a regular Sunday night slot.

Punk: New York

The CBGB scene that brought forth the Ramones also incubated a host of other groups and solo artists exploring diverse styles of rock and roll under the catch-all

rubric of “punk rock.” Predating the Ramones, Television was the first of these new bands to appear at CBGB after founding members Tom Verlaine (guitar, vocals) and Richard Hell (bass, vocals) convinced owner Hilly Kristal to let the nascent group play there. In songs like “Friction” and “Marquee Moon,” Verlaine and Richard Lloyd created extended dual-guitar improvisations in a style that melded Stones-style 1960s rock with avant-garde jazz. Hell left and was replaced by Fred Smith prior to the recording of *Marquee Moon* (1977) and *Adventure* (1978), neither of which made the *Billboard* album chart. Nonetheless, Television dramatically expanded the range of possibilities for guitar-based rock music and exerted a palpable influence on bands ranging from U2 to the Strokes.

Founded by charismatic lead singer Debbie Harry and her longtime partner, guitarist Chris Stein, Blondie was the most commercially successful group to emerge from the CBGB scene. Harry and Stein recruited drummer Clem Burke, keyboards player Jimmy Destri, and bassist Gary Valentine, the latter an important contributing songwriter (later replaced by Nigel Harrison). Blondie was influenced by surf music and girl-group pop: their early songs—including “In the Sun,” “Sex Offender,” and Gary Valentine’s “(I’m Always Touched by Your) Presence, Dear”—injected these forms with post-modern irony and a playful spirit. In 1979, Blondie scored an international number one hit with “Heart of Glass,” and this disco-flavored track propelled the *Parallel Lines* album into the U.S. Top Ten. The band broke up in 1983, but Harry, Stein, Burke, and Destri reformed in 1998 and released two further studio albums. In 2006, Blondie was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Talking Heads were led by singer/guitarist David Byrne, whose preppy look and anxious demeanor quickly endeared his band to the art-student segment of the CBGB audience. Byrne’s songs like “Psycho Killer” and “The Book I Read” combined suppressed emotions and literate lyrics with tunes of near-bubblegum catchiness. Drummer Chris Frantz and bassist Tina Weymouth formed the sparse but solid rhythm section, later bolstered by the arrival of Jerry Harrison on keyboards. The group released two albums of minimalist rock, *Talking Heads 77* (1977) and *More Songs About Buildings and Food* (1978), before gradually expanding its tonal palette with tribal rhythms and added funk instrumentation for *Remain in Light* (1980). “Burning Down the House” became Talking Heads’ first U.S. Top Ten hit in 1983, and the soundtrack of their concert documentary, *Stop Making Sense*, sold over 2 million copies during its 118-week run on the *Billboard* chart. Talking Heads disbanded in 1991 but were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2002.

Andy Schwartz

In the summer of 1974, the Ramones ran across a *Village Voice* ad for one of Television’s Sunday night shows at CBGB. They contacted Kristal who, not having much to lose, agreed to give them a shot. His decision to take a chance on the Ramones would turn CBGB from a little-noticed hole in the wall into a cultural landmark.

The Ramones played their first CBGB gig on August 16, 1974—just two weeks after Tommy picked up the sticks for the first time—and returned for another show the following night. Kristal, who maintained that he couldn't imagine anyone actually liking the Ramones, offered them a weekly slot anyway. By the end of the year, the band would have seventy-four CBGB performances under their belt.

The Ramones' combustible early live sets rarely ran longer than twenty minutes, into which time they'd cram fifteen or more tunes, with no between-song patter to interrupt the aural barrage. The only interruptions occurred when band members occasionally broke into heated on-stage arguments.

Joey often described the Ramones' first CBGB audience as consisting of the venue's bartender and his dog. But word of the band's assaultive performances spread, and soon their shows began attracting an enthusiastic assortment of downtown hipsters and artists, as well as a growing contingent of outsiders curious enough to brave the Bowery's unsavory reputation.

Soon, the Ramones were at the center of a vibrant, creative scene that encompassed cutting-edge acts as diverse as post-psychedelic guitar improvisers Television, provocative poetess Patti Smith, tightly wound art-rockers Talking Heads, ironic popsters Blondie, literate punk brats Richard Hell and the Voidoids, pioneering synth duo Suicide, raucous Cleveland transplants the Dead Boys, ex-New York Doll Johnny Thunders's elegantly wasted Heartbreakers, and countless less well-remembered bands. The scene was quickly dubbed punk rock, but the term was less a genre distinction than a convenient catch-all.

Although they were gigless losers just a few months before, the Ramones were soon a local sensation. Among the new friends that they made at CBGB was Arturo Vega, a Mexican-born artist who designed the band's logo—an irreverent variation on the U.S. presidential seal—and their merchandise. In addition to providing a crucial early source of income for the impoverished musicians, T-shirts bearing the now-famous eagle logo would play a significant role in spreading the Ramones' name—an invaluable asset for a band that couldn't get radio play in most of the country. Vega would become a valuable addition to the band's team, and would provide physical shelter when Joey and Dee Dee moved into Vega's loft around the corner from CBGB.

Early on, the CBGB scene stirred up enough word of mouth to merit a fair amount of media attention, including a feature in *Rolling Stone* and prominent pieces in the influential British music weeklies *Melody Maker* and *New Musical Express*.

The Ramones acquired their first manager in veteran journalist, record-company executive, and rock scenester Danny Fields. Fields's cutting-edge tastes allowed him to recognize the Ramones' uniqueness, and his music business connections offered the potential of the band actually getting a record deal.

In late 1974, Fields and the Ramones scraped up \$1,000 to record a modestly produced fifteen-song demo that contained most of the songs that would be comprised by the Ramones' first album. The demo was sent to every label that Fields and the band could think of; it was rejected or ignored by all of them.

But the media buzz surrounding the Ramones, and the CBGB scene in general, eventually became too loud for the music industry to ignore, and in June 1975, the band played auditions for the Sire, Arista and Blue Sky labels. It was Blue Sky Records head Steve Paul who was responsible for setting up an unannounced opening slot for blues-rock guitar hero Johnny Winter at the Palace Theater in Waterbury, Connecticut. Playing in front of audience who had no advance warning that they were on the bill, the Ramones were pelted with bottles and firecrackers, but refused to surrender the stage until their set was done.

The Johnny Winter incident was the first of a series of disastrous out-of-town gigs that demonstrated the width of the cultural gap that still separated the Ramones' hometown audience and the rest of America. Those shows found the band performing for audiences that ranged from mildly unfriendly to openly hostile, on oddly matched bills beneath such headliners as Peter Frampton, Blue Oyster Cult, and Toto.

By autumn, the Ramones had won a deal with Sire Records, a label that had been launched in 1966 by record company vet Seymour Stein and songwriter/producer Richard Gottehrer. For the first few years of its existence, Sire had concentrated mainly on licensing recordings from overseas. But Stein was now eager for the company to develop acts of its own, and was particularly enthusiastic about the burgeoning downtown rock scene.

The debut album, simply titled *Ramones*, was recorded early in 1976 for a minuscule \$6,400 and mixed in one ten-hour session. The sessions took place at Plaza Sound, a venerable facility located in Manhattan's grandiose art deco landmark Radio City Music Hall, with Sire A&R man Craig Leon producing and Tommy Ramone (credited as T. Erdelyi) as associate producer.

By then, the Ramones had so many original tunes that they simply chose the first thirteen they'd written. They recorded the tracks quickly, rarely doing more than two takes, and at one point cutting seven songs in a single day. The production was raw and largely unadorned, while nodding to some of the band members' favorite 1960s discs in the discreet separation of Johnny's guitar and Dee Dee's bass in separate stereo channels. Producer Leon did do some layering of instruments to fatten the sound, and also borrowed Radio City's gigantic Wurlitzer pipe organ to beef up a reading of Chris Montez's 1962 hit "Let's Dance," while adding glockenspiel, tubular bells, and jangly twelve-string guitar on the uncharacteristically swoony original "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend." The tracks were recorded at such a high volume that when the album was mastered, the loudness actually damaged some of the mastering equipment.

Released in April 1976, *Ramones* was a brilliant distillation of the four-some's essence, an unyielding assault that was as catchy as it was aggressive. Its fourteen songs clocked in at just under twenty-nine minutes, with the mini-horror movie "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement" the album's longest track at an epic 2:35.

From the bracing opening salvo of "Blitzkrieg Bop," with its rousing "Hey Ho! Let's Go!" chant, to the closing blast of "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World," *Ramones* never lets up. The set introduced such essential Ramones anthems as "Beat on the Brat," "Judy Is a Punk," and "Loudmouth," while introducing the band's trademark bleakly humorous view of urban lowlife on "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "Chain Saw," and "53rd and 3rd." "Havana Affair" and "Today Your Love, Tomorrow the World" revealed a strain of tongue-in-cheek military and Nazi imagery that troubled some listeners, but which reflected Dee Dee's experiences growing up in post-World War II Germany. Meanwhile, "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend" and "Listen to My Heart" revealed an unexpected romantic streak. Whether intentional or not, the decision to print the songs' minimalist lyrics on the album's inner sleeve was a brilliant conceptual stroke.

Although the songwriting was collectively credited to the entire band, as it would be on their next six albums, Joey and Dee Dee were responsible for most of the material. Joey wrote "Beat on the Brat," "Judy Is a Punk," and "Chain Saw," while Dee Dee provided "Now I Wanna Sniff Some Glue," "I Don't Wanna Walk Around with You," and "53rd and 3rd." The latter song was written, apparently from the bassist's own experience, about the male prostitution which took place at the Manhattan intersection of the title. Dee Dee also co-wrote "Blitzkrieg Bop" with Tommy, and "I Don't Wanna Go Down to the Basement" and "Loudmouth" with Johnny, while Tommy was responsible for "I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend."

Ramones—featuring an iconic black-and-white cover photo by photographer and CBGB door person Roberta Bayley, who was paid \$125 for the session—was met with enthusiasm from fans and rapturous praise from a handful of open-minded critics, and with derision or indifference from the rest of the world. Those who didn't immediately recognize the band's revolutionary vision generally vilified the album as a bunch of horrible noise that barely qualified as music.

Radio airplay for the album was virtually nonexistent, apart from a few adventurous stations in New York and on the West Coast. But the positive press and underground word of mouth was enough to push *Ramones* into the lower reaches of the *Billboard* Top 200.

Touring to promote the release outside of the New York area proved problematic for the Ramones, since at the time there were few venues—or booking agencies—sympathetic to this kind of music. The band worked with a series of agents, with little success, often leaving Danny Fields to scrape up out-of-town

engagements himself. The situation resulted in an endless string of dispiriting road gigs, with the group routinely facing uncomprehending audiences and irate club owners, but also gradually winning new converts in the process.

It was a very different story when the Ramones made their first visit to Britain, where their album had already sparked the imaginations of a generation of kids who would soon form the first wave of the British punk movement. The short tour kicked off with a two-night stand at London's Roundhouse on July 4 and 5, 1976. Although they were second-billed to influential proto-power-popsters (and Sire labelmates) the Flamin' Groovies, the Ramones' sets are widely credited for igniting the first sparks of British punk, which would catch fire that summer.

The Roundhouse shows found the Ramones playing in front of crowds that included members of nearly every major U.K. punk act, including the Sex Pistols, the Clash, the Damned, and Generation X, as well as future Pretender Chrissie Hynde.

Punk: London

In the United States, punk was a cultural and musical rebellion in which only a minority of performers directly addressed the issues of the day. But in the United Kingdom—where the national economy was in severe recession and unemployment was running high—punk assumed a greater social and political significance from the start. The Sex Pistols and the Clash were the two founding bands of British punk rock.

In their songs and their stance, the Sex Pistols challenged the accepted rules and habits of British society, with its hidebound class distinctions and residual monarchy. Guitarist Steve Jones, drummer Paul Cook, and bassist Glen Matlock (later replaced by the doomed punk icon Sid Vicious) comprised a basic but effective hard rock band influenced by the early Who, the Stooges, and the New York Dolls. But singer Johnny Rotten (né John Lydon) set the Pistols apart from all their contemporaries. He was a fearless front man whose glaring stage demeanor and open mockery of convention incited both adoration and outrage.

Promoters and club owners frequently barred the Sex Pistols from performing; their singles like "God Save the Queen" ("she ain't no human being") were banned from the radio but became Top Ten hits nonetheless. In October 1977, the group released its only official studio album, *Never Mind the Bollocks Here's the Sex Pistols*, followed in January 1978 by a memorably chaotic two-week U.S. tour that ended with the Pistols' breakup after their final show in San Francisco. In a tumultuous career that lasted little more than two years, the Sex Pistols left a deep and divisive mark on popular culture. They set off heated debates in the British mass media, even in the halls of Parliament, and inspired young people around the world to form their own punk bands. In-

ducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2006, the Sex Pistols refused to attend the organization's formal ceremonial dinner in New York.

The Clash was a more explicitly left-wing band than the anarchic Sex Pistols. Singer/guitarist Joe Strummer and bassist Paul Simonon founded the group, later completed by guitarist Mick Jones and drummer Topper Headon. Their first public performance, on a July 4, 1976, bill with the Sex Pistols, coincided with the Ramones' first U.K. appearance on the same date. Strummer and Jones quickly formed the composing core of the Clash. They created such furious early punk anthems like "White Riot" and "I'm So Bored with the USA," then gradually expanded the band's sound to incorporate reggae ("Lover's Rock"), rockabilly ("Brand New Cadillac"), and dance music ("Train in Vain," one of the most popular Clash songs). The Clash played benefits for Rock Against Racism and other activist groups, and their 1981 album *Sandinista!* took its title from the Nicaraguan socialist political movement.

The group struggled for U.S. airplay and acceptance before breaking into the Top Thirty in 1980 with the ambitious double album, *London Calling*. In 1982, *Combat Rock* reached number seven in the United States with sales of over two million copies, but Topper Headon's departure (due to heroin addiction) was followed by that of Mick Jones and the Clash finally disbanded in 1986. A reunion tour was under discussion in December 2002, when Joe Strummer died suddenly of a heart attack at age fifty. The 2000 documentary film *Westway to the World* recounted the turbulent, pathbreaking history of the Clash, whose members were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2003.

A. S.

In August, the Ramones played their first West Coast dates, including two nights at the Roxy in Los Angeles, again with the Flamin' Groovies. The Roxy shows would become touchstones for the emerging L.A. punk scene.

Six months after recording their debut, the Ramones were back in the studio to record their sophomore LP, *Leave Home*, which would be released in January 1977. Tommy co-produced with studio vet Tony Bongiovi, who had originally been his mentor in his Record Plant days.

With upgraded sound quality and marginally more sophisticated songwriting, *Leave Home* represented a subtle progression from its predecessor, with a somewhat more pronounced pop sensibility and even some understated production touches. Its fourteen songs included several that would become Ramones standards, notably the insistent sing-along mental-illness odes "Gimme Gimme Shock Treatment" and "Pinhead." The latter tune, inspired by the infamous 1932 cult horror film *Freaks*, introduced the durable "Gabba Gabba" chant and would spawn the band's durable "pinhead" mascot.

Elsewhere on *Leave Home*, "Now I Wanna Be a Good Boy" presented a convincing portrayal of adolescent existential confusion, while "Suzy Is a

Headbanger” offered another colorful punk-scene vignette, “You Should Never Have Opened That Door” maintained the band’s horror-movie fixation, while a manic cover of the Rivieras’ 1960s hit “California Sun” nodded to vintage surf rock.

Leave Home—whose title referred to the band breaking out of the CBGB scene—initially also included “Carbona Not Glue,” an ode to the illicit pleasures of huffing the household cleaning fluid of the title. The song was included on the initial pressing, but was deleted from subsequent editions out of fear that the Carbona company would sue over the use of its brand name in such a tawdry context. The song would be restored when the album was reissued on CD.

While *Leave Home* again grazed the lower reaches of the American charts, it was a genuine hit in England, then in the thrall of a rising wave of home-grown punk bands, many of which were using the Ramones’ inspiration as a jumping-off point to more explicitly confrontational and/or political music.

The Ramones’ overseas popularity was further demonstrated in the spring of 1977, when the infectious new single “Sheena Is a Punk Rocker” peaking at number twenty-two.

Punk: Los Angeles

In southern California, musicians were working in directions roughly parallel to those of the New York bands. In Los Angeles, X was the premier name on the scene that coalesced around a bare-bones Hollywood punk club called the Masque. The intertwining lead vocals of bassist John Doe and singer Exene Cervenka were reminiscent of earlier West Coast bands like the Jefferson Airplane, but propelled through short, sharp songs by the supercharged rockabilly guitar of Billy Zoom and DJ Bonebrake’s furious drumming. On the critically acclaimed albums *Wild Gift* and *More Fun in the New World*, X gave voice to southern California punk culture’s disenchantment with conspicuous consumption, Hollywood image-mongering, and a right-leaning American political order.

The Germs represented LA punk at its most musically untutored and socially alienated. Lead singer Darby Crash brought many of their live performances to the brink of disaster, but he was also a gifted writer of tortured, surreal lyrics. The Germs created a few classic independent singles and one remarkable studio album, 1980’s *(GI)*, before they fell apart. On December 7, 1980, four days after a Germs reunion show that is reputed to have been one of the band’s best-ever live gigs, Darby Crash died of a heroin overdose at age twenty-one.

The Blasters, led by brothers Phil and Dave Alvin (on lead vocals and lead guitar), injected punk-rock energy into a repertoire of obscure 1950s rock and roll numbers and such evocative Dave Alvin songs as “American Music” and “Long White Cadillac.” Musicians from X, the Blasters, and other L.A. bands

passed through the ranks of the Flesheaters. Lead singer/lyricist Chris Desjardin yowled his way through dark tales of passion and betrayal that often took their titles from film noir and other B movies (cf. "A Minute to Pray, a Second to Die").

The L.A. scene produced two of the most influential all-female bands in rock and roll history. First came the Runaways, who emerged from the pre-punk glam rock scene under the guidance of an older male producer and songwriter, Kim Fowley. The group could never dispel the air of cynical manipulation that came with Fowley's involvement and neither of their two albums—*The Runaways* (1976) and *Queens of Noise* (1977)—made the *Billboard* Top 100, although guitarist/vocalists Joan Jett and Lita Ford went on to establish successful solo careers. The Go-Go's, on the other hand, was a self-made female quintet with authentic L.A. punk roots. The band's 1981 debut album, *Beauty and the Beat*, smoothed out their rougher edges and topped the *Billboard* chart for six weeks. It sold over two million copies and spun off "We Got the Beat," at number two the highest-charting of the group's four Top Twenty singles. Two more albums, *Vacation* and *Talk Show*, both reached the Top Twenty. The Go-Go's broke up in 1985 but have reformed periodically for recordings and concert tours.

A. S.

LEAVING HOME

"Sheena Is a Punk Rocker" (an alternate mix of which was added to *Leave Home* when "Carbona Not Glue" was deleted) was featured on *Rocket to Russia*, released in November 1977. Considered by many to be the quintessential Ramones album, *Rocket to Russia*—co-produced by Tommy and Ed Stasium—was the strongest and most focused distillation yet of the band's sound and sensibility, featuring their strongest, most hook-filled set of songs yet, and performances to match. The album also demonstrated some subtle progressions in the band's song structures, as well as various percussive frills and some more complicated guitar parts, provided by Ed Stasium.

Rocket to Russia opened with the gleeful "Cretin Hop" and continued with the winsome "Rockaway Beach," which made the band's fondness for the Beach Boys explicit. Along with gleeful excursions into extreme psychiatry ("Teenage Lobotomy") and unstable home life ("We're a Happy Family"), the band successfully ventured into melancholy balladry with "Here Today, Gone Tomorrow" and "I Wanna Be Well." Topping off the set are a pair of inspired cover versions, "Do You Wanna Dance," previously a hit for Bobby Freeman and the Beach Boys, and the Trashmen's immortal stupid-rock masterpiece "Surfin' Bird."

Almost as memorable as the songs was the loopy back-cover illustration by John Holmstrom, editor of New York's *Punk* magazine and a longtime

Ramones supporter. The illustration was a perfect summation of the band's world-view, depicting their pinhead mascot riding the title missile, presumably toward the Soviet Union, with the world below populated by a plethora of flamboyant cartoon characters.

Rocket to Russia received the band's strongest reviews yet, along with some high-profile media exposure, including a major feature in *Rolling Stone*. By this time, most of the critics who'd initially been skeptical about the Ramones had been won over, as evidenced by *Rocket to Russia*'s sixth-place showing in the *Village Voice*'s annual critics' poll, behind the Sex Pistols' *Never Mind the Bollocks*, *Here's the Sex Pistols*, Elvis Costello's *My Aim Is True*, Television's *Marquee Moon*, Fleetwood Mac's *Rumours*, and Steely Dan's *Aja*.

Still, the Ramones' idiot-savant image persisted in the minds of many—a perception that rankled the band members. "People thought everything was an accident," Tommy grouched to England's *New Musical Express*. "These four morons are really cute and they're doing something really neat, but obviously it's all an accident. First of all, it wasn't four morons. Second of all, none of it was an accident. And third of all, it's four talented people who know what they like and who know what they're doing."⁵

Rocket to Russia also made some modest commercial strides in America, with the album reaching the *Billboard* Top Fifty and three singles—"Sheena Is a Punk Rocker," "Rockaway Beach," and "Do You Wanna Dance"—entering the U.S. Top 100. But the upswing would be short-lived. The Ramones would never again appear in the American singles chart, and the upward trend of the band's domestic record sales would soon be broken.

Rocket to Russia benefited from Sire's new distribution deal with Warner Bros. Records, a company far more sympathetic to Seymour Stein's left-of-center tastes than Sire's prior distributor, ABC. But the album's commercial progress still fell short of expectations, leading many to consider the possibility that the Ramones—and punk rock in general—might be doomed to cult status.

The Ramones welcomed 1978 with a New Year's Eve show at London's Rainbow Theatre; that show would later be released as the in-concert album *It's Alive*. A week later, they played a landmark show at New York's Palladium, with the Runaways (including future solo star Joan Jett) and Suicide as opening acts. It was the Ramones' first New York show in a theater-sized venue, and confirmed the band's increasing drawing power.

Although they were getting more prestigious bookings, the band members were still living hand to mouth, subsisting on a \$125 weekly salary. The situation was particularly hard on Dee Dee, who by then was contending with a \$100-a-day heroin habit.

Rocket to Russia marked the studio swan song of the Ramones' original lineup. Tommy Ramone, weary of the grueling tour regimen and wanting to focus on his production career, quit the band in the spring of 1978, but would stay on as co-producer of their next album, *Road to Ruin*. In later years, he

would produce albums for the Ramones-influenced likes of the Replacements and Redd Kross.

The Ramones considered several candidates as Tommy's replacement, including ex-New York Doll Jerry Nolan, Dead Boys member Johnny Blitz, Paul Cook of the now-defunct Sex Pistols, and Clem Burke of the not-yet-famous Blondie. But the job went to Marc Bell of Sire labelmates Richard Hell and the Voidoids. Bell had previously played with the early 1970s proto-heavy metal trio Dust and transsexual punk icon Wayne County.

Bell was rechristened Marky Ramone, and given three weeks to learn the band's new songs in time to begin work on their fourth LP *Road to Ruin* on May 31. He made his live debut as a Ramone less than a month later.

The change in drummers wasn't the only new development on *Road to Ruin*. The album, co-produced by Tommy and Ed Stasium, and released in October 1978, introduced some notable variations into the band's established formula, including such unexpected stylistic flourishes as guitar solos (most of them provided by Stasium), acoustic rhythm guitars, an honest-to-goodness ballad, and—perhaps most shockingly—two songs that ran longer than three minutes.

Such alterations may not seem earth-shaking in retrospect. But at the time they were debated at length by fans and critics, who agonized over whether the band was expanding its range or merely sacrificing its original edge. But despite its stronger emphasis on the band's pop elements, *Road to Ruin*—the first Ramones album to run longer than thirty minutes—was neither a gratuitous sellout nor a drastic reinvention.

Road to Ruin opened with the uncharacteristically midtempo "I Just Want to Have Something to Do," a tuneful meditation on anomie and ambivalence in which Joey manages to rhyme "Second Avenue" with "chicken vindaloo." Despite the presence of such credible punk raveups as "I Wanted Everything," "Bad Brain," and "I'm Against It," *Road to Ruin*'s most memorable tracks were the ones that diverged farthest from the band's early sound, including the heartbreaking ballad "Questioningly," the twangy, countryish "Don't Come Close," the cranky ballad "I Don't Want You," and a heartfelt reading of the Searchers' British Invasion-era jangle-pop classic "Needles and Pins."

But *Road to Ruin*'s most enduring track was the hyper-catchy "I Wanna Be Sedated," which invoked the physical and mental stresses of the band's hard-touring lifestyle. Its lyrics were inspired by a now-legendary mishap prior to a show at Passaic, New Jersey's Capitol Theater, when a makeshift humidifier exploded backstage, scalding Joey's face and throat. The singer valiantly went through with the show, before being rushed to a hospital emergency room.

Beyond its sound, *Road to Ruin* also sported some noticeably bitter lyrics that seemed to betray the band's commercial frustrations. That harder edge, as opposed to the playful spirit that dominated previous efforts, was noticeable on such tunes as Joey's "I Just Want to Have Something to Do" and Dee Dee's "I Wanted Everything."

Whether or not *Road to Ruin*'s sonic alterations had been a blatant bid for mainstream acceptance, the album failed to expand the Ramones' U.S. audience. The band would soldier on, but *Road to Ruin*'s disappointing commercial showing had a negative effect on morale, and that sense of frustration would fester for years to come. The Ramones would spend much of the next two decades attempting, with varying degrees of success, to recapture their original inspiration on record.

The Ramones' commercial status in America was such that the double concert LP *It's Alive*, which appeared overseas in April 1979, didn't even receive a Stateside release at the time (it would finally be issued in the United States in 1995).

Despite being a challenge for American fans to obtain, *It's Alive* was a definitive document, capturing the band at its peak as both a live act and a cultural phenomenon. The breakneck twenty-eight-song set offered an accurate representation of the band's exhausting live shows. *It's Alive* recapitulated most of the highlights from the first three albums, delivering a head-spinning summation of the Ramones' golden age in under an hour.

By now, the Ramones were working with a high-powered booking agency, Premier, which instituted a more strategic touring strategy that would save the band the indignity of opening for arena-rock dinosaurs in front of hostile crowds.

Military-school alumnus Johnny emerged as a prime motivator in the Ramones' transformation into a focused touring machine. If Joey and Dee Dee were the band's main creative forces, Johnny demonstrated an ability to instill discipline—including strict rules forbidding alcohol and drug use prior to shows—that proved invaluable to the Ramones' long-term viability as a live act.

The Ramones' next move was an unlikely stab at big-screen stardom in *Rock 'n' Roll High School*, a low-budget flick produced by veteran B-movie mogul Roger Corman (a fact that was a particular selling point for exploitation-film maven Johnny) and directed by up-and-coming auteur Allan Arkush.

The irreverent comedy had first been envisioned by Corman a few years earlier as *Disco High*, in an effort to exploit the then-current dance craze. The script subsequently went through a series of rewrites, including a heavy-metal variation and versions that would have featured Todd Rundgren or Cheap Trick. But director Arkush was a Ramones fan.

Rock 'n' Roll High School wisely used the Ramones as a quirky plot device, rather than trusting the first-time thespians with substantial amounts of dialogue. The script treated the musicians as iconic anti-heroes, while giving the musicians various bits of comic business that wrung laughs out of their established mythology. The plot, such as it was, involved teenaged Ramones freak and aspiring songwriter Riff Randell (played by perky B-movie icon P.J. Soles), who dreams of meeting the band while doing battle with wrathful, rock-hating

Miss Togar (cult-film veteran Mary Woronov), the new principal of Vince Lombardi High School.

For Ramones fans, though, *Rock 'n' Roll High School's* high point was its climactic concert sequence. Shot at the Roxy in Hollywood, the footage provides a valuable document of the group in its headbanging heyday.

Rock 'n' Roll High School spawned a soundtrack album that included two new Ramones studio tracks, the rousing title number, and the dreamy "I Want You Around" (which appears as part of a comic dream sequence featuring P.J. Soles and the band), plus a medley of five live tunes drawn from the concert scene, and a version of Ritchie Valens's 1950s classic "Come On, Let's Go" on which the Ramones back up their Sire Records labelmates the Paley Brothers.

While *Rock 'n' Roll High School* would eventually become a beloved cult item, it wasn't a box office hit in its original release, and did little to push the Ramones toward household-name status.

UP AGAINST THE WALL OF SOUND

Rock 'n' Roll High School's title song would reappear in a new version on the next Ramones album, *End of the Century*. If *Road to Ruin* had been an attempt to translate the Ramones' appeal in a manner that would be understandable to a mass audience, *End of the Century* was a high-concept project that must have seemed brilliant on paper yet proved problematic in practice.

Matching the Ramones with legendary producer Phil Spector certainly sounded like a good idea, at first anyway. An eccentric, unpredictable visionary whose legendary Wall of Sound production method had made him rock and roll's preeminent visionary during the early 1960s, Spector produced many of the timeless girl-group classics that the Ramones revered. And Spector had already proclaimed the Ramones to be his favorite new band, so the match seemed like a natural one.

But the collaboration wasn't the musical landmark that fans of the Ramones and Spector had hoped. For one thing, the producer was used to working with singers and studio session players, rather than self-contained groups. For another, his meticulous working methods, which involved the layering of multiple layers of instruments and voices, were the antithesis of the Ramones' stripped-down recording approach. Spector's painstaking approach proved frustrating for a band that was used to working fast.

Beyond those fundamental differences Spector, once one of America's most innovative and prolific hit makers, had long ceased to be a major commercial or artistic force. Worse, the always eccentric "tycoon of teen" had become a volatile recluse with a retinue of bodyguards and a fondness for alcohol and firearms.

Although Spector initially expressed enthusiasm about working with the Ramones, the project soon ran into trouble. The recording sessions, by all

accounts, were rocky and fraught with tension, and band members later described feeling as if they were being held prisoner in Spector's L.A. mansion. The producer reportedly pulled a gun on Dee Dee at one point, and forced Johnny to play and replay the opening chord to "Rock 'n' Roll High School" for eight straight hours.

Furthermore, Spector's cluttered arrangements often conflicted with the band's spare sound. And his focus on Joey's vocals—on such tracks as a gloppy, string-drenched remake of Spector's 1964 Ronettes classic "Baby I Love You"—stirred resentment from other members. Spector's obsessive perfectionism assured that the project would be considerably more costly than any of the Ramones' prior releases, which had all been recorded efficiently and inexpensively.

Despite its troubled birth cycle, *End of the Century* boasted several instances in which Spector's sonic vision meshed comfortably with the Ramones' sound. The majestic opener "Do You Remember Rock 'n' Roll Radio?" was a heartfelt ode to vintage Top Forty radio that struck a winsome balance between the band's raucous drive and Spector's thick production, which augments the foursome with surging organ and saxophones.

Elsewhere on *End of the Century*, the band's efforts to break out of its familiar style yielded some worthy results, including "Danny Says," a poignant ballad about the loneliness of life on the road. Less successful were the rock tunes, whose energy was generally diluted by the gauzy production. Those included the Spectorized "Rock 'n' Roll High School," which paled in comparison to the soundtrack album incarnation; "Chinese Rocks," a Dee Dee-penned heroin anthem that sounded watered down in comparison to the version that Johnny Thunders and the Heartbreakers had recorded earlier; and "The Return of Jackie and Judy," a somewhat redundant sequel to "Judy Is a Punk."

Whether due to Spector's reputation, the Ramones' higher media profile or the advance expectations attached the project, *End of the Century* ended up becoming the highest-charting album of the Ramones' career, peaking at number forty-four in the United States. In England, where the band already had an established commercial track record, they achieved their highest-charting single when "Baby I Love You" reached the Top Ten.

But the apparent commercial momentum failed to pan out, and the band would spend much of the 1980s attempting to recapture their essence, while struggling to compete in a music scene dominated by slick, MTV-friendly pop.

While their record sales would remain unremarkable, the Ramones would continue to be in demand as a live act and maintain a busy international touring schedule for the remainder of their career.

But the Ramones' ongoing failure to gain commercial airplay or score a hit single in their home country—a career necessity in the years before college/alternative radio became a significant force—took a heavy toll on the group's already fragile morale. The situation helped to stir dissension, within the band,

whose fractiousness belied the Ramones' carefully maintained collective facade.

Beyond disagreements over musical direction, the band was plagued by the long-running feud between staunch liberal Joey and Republican control freak Johnny, who reportedly still resented the early decision to have Joey take over lead vocals from Dee Dee. Joey and Johnny's antagonism was amplified when Johnny "stole" Joey's girlfriend Linda, whom Johnny later married. Although they would continue to record and tour together, Joey and Johnny would not speak to each other for extended periods, and their estrangement would never be resolved.

Dee Dee Ramone, meanwhile, had his own issues to contend with. A long-time heroin user, he would struggle with addiction for the rest of his life, with multiple stints in rehab and various drug-related scrapes with the law.

After their unhappy experience with Phil Spector, the Ramones continued to work with outside producers, in the hope of scoring a commercial hit. For 1981's *Pleasant Dreams*, the band recorded with Graham Gouldman, a British Invasion vet who'd written "For Your Love" for the Yardbirds and "Bus Stop" for the Hollies, and subsequently scored hits of his own as a member of quirky 1970s popsters 10cc. Despite Gouldman's power-pop pedigree, and notwithstanding some appealing use of background harmonies, his production pushed *Pleasant Dreams* toward a sterile hard-rock sound. The resulting album was competent but lacking in spark. Its most memorable track was "The KKK Took My Baby Away," which Joey reportedly wrote in response to his disputes with Johnny.

The band would next tap pop veterans Ritchie Cordell and Glen Kolotkin to produce 1983's *Subterranean Jungle*. That album went a long way toward recapturing the heavier elements of the Ramones' sound (with Walter Lure of the Heartbreakers augmenting Johnny on guitar), while steering the band back towards their 1960s pop and bubblegum roots, with some of their catchiest originals in years and appealing covers of the Music Explosion's "Little Bit o' Soul" and the Chambers Brothers' "Time Has Come Today." Other highlights included "Psycho Therapy," which was accompanied by a promo video that MTV refused to play it until some of its more extreme imagery was removed.

Subterranean Jungle also saw another change in the Ramones' drum seat. Marky Ramone was fired near the end of recording due to his alcoholism, and was replaced on the remaining sessions by Heartbreakers drummer Billy Rogers. After the album's completion, the band hired a longer-term replacement in Richard Reinhardt, formerly of New York's Velvetene, who was initially credited as Richie Beau before graduating to billing as Richie Ramone.

In August 1983, the band received some unwanted headlines after Johnny was either attacked by or got into a fight with punk musician Seth Macklin. The incident left him critically injured with a fractured skull, forcing him to undergo emergency brain surgery. Despite the seriousness of his injuries,

Johnny was back in action within a few months, and his resilience would be referenced in the title of the Ramones' 1984 album *Too Tough to Die*.

While *Subterranean Jungle* had been an encouraging step in the right direction, it was *Too Tough to Die* that restored the Ramones to something resembling their original glory. With Tommy Ramone/Erdelyi and Ed Stasium returning as producers, the album was, to some degree, the Ramones' response to America's burgeoning hard-core punk scene, and did much to restore the band's musical credibility.

With *Subterranean Jungle*'s booming guitar riffs pared down to punk size and the beat ratcheted back up to supersonic speed, *Too Tough to Die* reclaimed the Ramones' original values of energy, catchiness, and brevity without resorting to retro pandering. It also featured the band's strongest set of songs since *Rocket to Russia*, with Dee Dee (who wrote or co-wrote nine of the album's thirteen songs) demonstrating a thoughtful, introspective edge on "I'm Not Afraid of Life" and an apocalyptic social conscience on "Planet Earth 1988." In a nod to the Ramones-influenced hard-core movement that had gained momentum in the 1980s, Dee Dee stepped up to the mic to lend his raw vocal stylings to "Endless Vacation" and "Wart Hog"; Sire chose not to include the latter song's drug-inspired lyrics on the album's lyric sheet.

"Howling at the Moon," produced by Dave Stewart of British hit makers Eurythmics, was a surprisingly effective one-off foray into slick synth-pop, with an unshakable sha-la-la chorus and urban Robin Hood lyrics.

Too Tough to Die found the Ramones reasserting their relevance and reclaiming their legacy. But the artistic resurgence would be short-lived, and the long-term renaissance that *Too Tough to Die* seemed to signal would never materialize.

The topical direction that had surfaced on *Too Tough to Die* continued with "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg," released overseas as a free-standing single in 1985. Recorded by Joey, Dee Dee, and ex-Plasmatics member Jean Beauvoir, the song was Joey's outraged response to President Ronald Reagan's controversial visit to a Nazi cemetery in Germany. Beyond its lyrical message, "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg" was a near-perfect Ramones single, with a big, soaring chorus buoyed by Spectroresque backing vocals.

Steven Van Zandt, former Bruce Springsteen guitarist and Beauvoir's sometime boss in Little Steven and the Disciples of Soul, was impressed enough by "Bonzo" to invite Joey to participate in Van Zandt's all-star anti-apartheid single "Sun City," released under the Artists United Against Apartheid. Fittingly, Joey's vocal contribution was a line that once again took Ronald Reagan's policies to task.

By the time "Bonzo Goes to Bitburg" turned up on the Ramones' 1986 release *Animal Boy*, it had been innocuously retitled "My Brain Is Hanging Upside Down," presumably in deference to Reagan admirer Johnny's political leanings. That compromise was indicative of the album's indecisive atmosphere. Rather than continue with *Too Tough to Die*'s punchy sound or

“Bonzo Goes to Bitburg”’s anthemic approach, *Animal Boy* (produced by Beauvoir) unwisely attempted to commercialize the band’s sound with synthesizers and 1980s production frills.

Like all of the Ramones’ lesser albums, *Animal Boy* had its moments, including the opening track “Somebody Put Something in My Drink,” Richie’s second Ramones composition. The song was inspired by an incident in which a stranger slipped LSD into the drummer’s gin and tonic, which resulted in Reinhardt being dragged away in a straitjacket. Other standouts were “She Belongs to Me,” a surprisingly sweet, sincere ballad co-written by Dee Dee and Beauvoir, and the surging, yearning anthem “Something to Believe In,” which spawned a clever video spoofing telethons and featuring an assortment of guest celebrities.

Nineteen eighty-seven’s *Halfway to Sanity* boasted a tougher sound and a more confident overall vibe, thanks in part to new producer (and guest guitarist) Daniel Rey, who’d been a member of the CBGB punk combo Shrapnel. Dee Dee once again provided some strong songwriting, including “I Wanna Live” and “Garden of Serenity,” on which the bassist channeled his personal dilemmas into compellingly crafted songs.

After completing work on *Halfway to Sanity*, Richie Ramone (who contributed two compositions to the album) abruptly quit following a salary dispute. Blondie’s Clem Burke, temporarily renamed Elvis Ramone, stepped in for a couple of shows, before Marky Ramone, now clean and sober, returned to the Ramones’ drum seat, where he would remain for the remainder of the band’s existence.

While the Ramones’ U.S. record sales remained unspectacular, the 1988 release of the career retrospective *Ramones Mania* gave some indication of a growing public awareness of the band’s historical importance. The compilation became the first Ramones album to be certified gold in the United States during the group’s lifetime.

Meanwhile, Dee Dee, having been introduced to hip-hop during a recent stay in rehab, took the unexpected step of attempting to launch a solo career as a rapper. After releasing the half-baked solo rap-punk single “Funky Man,” he renamed himself Dee Dee King and released the full-length *Standing in the Spotlight*. Despite occasional flashes of the artist’s customary lyrical wit, the album was dominated by weak rhymes, perfunctory music tracks and Dee Dee’s gravelly, awkward delivery. In a marketplace in which white teenagers had yet to embrace hip-hop in large numbers, *Standing in the Spotlight* barely registered, and now stands mainly as a souvenir of one of rock’s least rewarding identity crises.

Another boost in the Ramones’ notoriety came through their contribution of the Dee Dee/Daniel Rey–penned title song to the 1989 horror film *Pet Semetary*, based on the best-selling novel by avowed Ramones fan Stephen King. The track won a fair amount of airplay, but the increasingly unstable band wasn’t in much a position to capitalize on the attention.

Although disliked by some of the band's longtime fans, "Pet Semetary" was one of the brighter spots on 1989's patchy *Brain Drain*. Aside from the unironically idealistic "I Believe in Miracles" and the bittersweet holiday tune "Merry Christmas (I Don't Want to Fight Tonight)," the album, produced by punk/funk/jazz innovator Bill Laswell, was weighed down by uninspired material and rote performances.

MANIA AND RESPECT

In addition to being the Ramones' final studio album for Sire Records, *Brain Drain* was also their last to feature Dee Dee Ramone, the band's most prolific songwriter (he'd written or co-written half of *Brain Drain*'s twelve songs). Dee Dee—who at the time had been having substantial success in keeping his drug demons at bay—quit in July 1989, just two months after *Brain Drain*'s release.

Dee Dee was replaced by C.J. Ramone, aka Christopher John Ward, a Long Islander who'd recorded two albums as a member of the heavy metal band Axe Attack before embracing punk. At the time he got the Ramones gig, he was AWOL from the marines, and when he attempted to resolve his discharge status so he could join the band on tour, he found himself tossed into a military brig in Quantico, Virginia. He was released in time to play his first Ramones gig in September—at 8 in the morning—on the Jerry Lewis muscular dystrophy telethon.

C.J. made his Ramones recording debut with the 1991 concert disc *Loco Live*. In contrast to the essential *It's Alive*, the thirty-two-song *Loco Live* (featuring amusing liner notes by old friend Debbie Harry of Blondie) was more workmanlike than inspired. But it offered an accurate reflection of the solid international touring machine that the Ramones had become in the years since.

Loco Live also demonstrated how smoothly C.J. had stepped into the lineup, and how the young bassist—who'd yet to hit puberty when the Ramones released their debut album—had given the band a new shot of enthusiasm and adrenaline. Not only was his playing as solid as his predecessor's; he also proved himself adept at taking over Dee Dee's trademark count-offs.

Dee Dee would continue to battle addiction in his post-Ramones life, while recording and performing with a series of short-lived bands, including the Rmainz, which also included C.J. and Marky and specialized in performing the songs Dee Dee had written for the Ramones. In 1990, he made the news again when he was busted, along with twenty-five others, in a police drug raid in Manhattan's Washington Square Park—for buying a small amount of marijuana, of all things.

Dee Dee later wrote a pair of autobiographies, *Poison Heart: Surviving the Ramones* (aka *Lobotomy*) and *Legend of a Rock Star*, which featured

disarmingly forthright accounts of his experiences with addiction and mental illness, as well as the Ramones' turbulent inner workings. He also wrote a novel, *Chelsea Horror Hotel*, a fanciful punk ghost story featuring guest appearances by the ghosts of his departed pals Sid Vicious, Johnny Thunders, and Stiv Bators.

The Ramones continued to maintain an active touring schedule into the 1990s, while continuing to release new product on Radioactive, a new label run by Gary Kurfirst, who also managed Talking Heads and replaced Danny Fields as the Ramones' manager in the early 1980s.

When the Ramones weren't on the road, Joey was making the most of his status as beloved elder statesman of Manhattan's downtown rock and roll scene, promoting live shows and championing various young bands. The singer—who achieved sobriety in 1990—also became active in a variety of progressive causes, speaking out and playing benefit shows on behalf of environmental, AIDS, homelessness, and animal rights groups, and campaigning against censorship of rock lyrics.

The Ramones didn't release another new album until 1992's *Mondo Bizarro*, by which time some major changes had occurred in the rock landscape. Nirvana's massive commercial success—exactly the sort of breakthrough that had eluded the Ramones for their entire career—had established the prospect of crossing over from the hip underground to mass commercial success as a realistic possibility. In this atmosphere, the Ramones were acknowledged as respected innovators, building a renewed sense of excitement around their next release.

Although he was no longer performing with the Ramones, Dee Dee's presence was felt strongly on *Mondo Bizarro*, to which he contributed three new songs. The project once again reunited the band with producer Ed Stasium, who didn't attempt to recapture their original punk style or pander to the emerging alt-rock aesthetic. Instead, he gave the album a big, spacious sound that was well suited to the drama of the songs and the band's performances, as well as Joey's reinvigorated singing.

Although relatively slick-sounding by Ramones standards, *Mondo Bizarro* recaptured the trademark blend of riffs, hooks, and humor that first endeared the band to fans. While longtime admirers may have been put off by guest guitarist Vernon Reid's flashy pyrotechnics on "Cabbies on Crack," one couldn't help but embrace the song's nightmarish energy. Dee Dee's songs, "Strength to Endure," "Main Man," and especially "Poison Heart," demonstrated his ability to wring affecting songcraft out of his own harsh personal experience. "Strength to Endure" featured C.J. on lead vocal, giving the track a certain passing-of-the-baton momentousness.

Despite the changes in the alt-rock marketplace, *Mondo Bizarro* once again failed to change the band's commercial fortunes in the U.S., although it was highly successful internationally. But by the early 1990s, it was clear that the Ramones had achieved a level of public recognition that transcended their

record sales. One measure was the band's appearance, in animated form, on *The Simpsons*, performing a punk rendition of "Happy Birthday" to Homer Simpsons villainous boss Mr. Burns.

Mondo Bizarro's persuasive reading of the Doors' "Take It as It Comes" set the stage for 1993's all-covers *Acid Eaters*. An unmistakable retreat, but a reasonably enjoyable one, the album found the Ramones interpreting a dozen garage-rock and psychedelic nuggets, with a playful looseness that the band hadn't shown on record in quite a while. While most of the song choices—from such sources as the Rolling Stones, the Who, the Animals, the Troggs, Love, Jefferson Airplane, the Seeds, and Jan and Dean—weren't particularly adventurous, the band brought some unexpected twists to some of the more unexpected material, including a touching interpretation of Creedence Clearwater Revival's "Have You Ever Seen the Rain" and a punked-out take on Bob Dylan's "My Back Pages."

By the mid-1990s, America's mainstream rock audience was finally beginning to embrace punk rock in large numbers—or least a watered-down, commercialized variation of punk, as practiced by such younger acts as Green Day, the Offspring, and Rancid. Although those bands were pale echoes of the first-generation punk acts that they revered, their success in popularizing punk with younger listeners brought a new wave of recognition and acknowledgment for the Ramones' pioneering contributions.

"The '80s were a lonely time for us," said Johnny. "We were out there by ourselves. When the '90s came, you had this movement of punk bands again."⁶

So there was some cruel irony in the fact that this new outpouring of high-profile respect coincided with the Ramones' decision to call it quits. In 1995, they released the pointedly titled *¡Adios Amigos!*, announcing that they'd break up if the album didn't sell in massive quantities.

¡Adios Amigos! was an inconsistent but respectable effort, combining some memorable tracks with some blatantly derivative material recycling elements from their back catalog. More notable was the quality of the band's performances, which carried a level of intensity that suited the occasion. Much of the standout songwriting was provided by the not-quite-departed Dee Dee, who contributed "Makin' Monsters for My Friends" and "It's Not for Me to Know," plus "The Crusher," which had previously appeared in radically different form on the ill-fated Dee Dee King album. Joey's "She Talks to Rainbows" was a haunting ballad that showcased the singer's underappreciated skills as a pop craftsman, while the band turned Tom Waits's "I Don't Want to Grow Up" into a joyous, defiant statement.

When *¡Adios Amigos!* ended up spending an anticlimactic two weeks on the charts, the Ramones spent most of the second half of 1995 on what was billed as their official farewell tour. Although they'd planned to split up for good when that tour ended, an offer from the trend-setting traveling alt-rock festival Lollapalooza resulted in the Ramones performing on the sixth Lollapalooza tour in the summer of 1996.

The Ramones played their final show—number 2,263, by the band's count—at the Palace in Los Angeles on August 6, 1996. The group was joined on stage by various guests, including Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder, Lemmy Kilmister of Motorhead, Chris Cornell of Soundgarden, and Rancid members Tim Armstrong and Lars Frederikson, as well as Dee Dee Ramone, who turned up to sing (and miss two verses of) his own "Love Kills."

Nineteen ninety-six saw the release *Greatest Hits Live*, a solid but somewhat redundant live disc recorded that February at a New York show, augmented by a pair of studio outtakes including the band's own version of Motorhead's tribute tune "R.A.M.O.N.E.S." The Ramones' extended goodbye continued the following year with the release of another live set, *We're Outta Here!*, recorded at their final show in L.A.

On July 20, 1999, Joey, Johnny, Dee Dee, Tommy, Marky, and C.J. convened at Manhattan's Virgin Megastore for an autograph signing to promote Rhino Records' two-CD Ramones anthology *Hey! Ho! Let's Go*. It would be the last time Joey would appear in public with any of his ex-bandmates. Having been diagnosed with lymphoma in 1995, he succumbed to the illness on April 15, 2001, at the age of forty-nine.

Joey Ramone's long-in-the-works solo effort, *Don't Worry About Me*, was released the following February. Recorded with, and completed by, frequent Ramones producer Daniel Rey, the album spotlighted Joey's skill at writing simple but effective pop tunes, while demonstrating how expressive his trademark whine could be. "Maria Bartiromo," named after the cable-news financial reporter, was inspired by Joey's late-blooming interest in the stock market, while "I Got Knocked Down" makes poignant reference to the singer's illness. *Don't Worry About Me* also showcased Joey's ear for outside material with amped-up reworkings of the bucolic Louis Armstrong pop standard "What a Wonderful World" and the Stooges' "1969."

It's a cruel irony that Joey, who'd always longed to see his band win recognition and respect, wasn't around to enjoy the honor when the Ramones were inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in March 2002.

On June 5, less than three months after the band's induction, Dee Dee Ramone was found dead of a heroin overdose in his Hollywood home. He'd wrestled with drug addiction for most of his adult life, but never stopped making music.

A little more than two years after that, on September 15, 2004, Johnny Ramone died of prostate cancer, also in his adopted hometown of Los Angeles. Unlike his longtime bandmates, Johnny had pledged to retire from music after the Ramones' dissolution, reasoning that nothing he could ever do would be better.

Johnny's death came just as the Ramones were receiving another wave of recognition, thanks to the documentary *End of the Century: The Story of the Ramones*. The film was powerful testament to the band's spirit and influence, as well as a warts-and-all account of their troubled interpersonal relations.

Johnny, for instance, admits that he never called Joey during the singer's illness, but adds that he was depressed for weeks after the singer's death. (Actually, the guitarist kept tabs on the singer's condition through regular calls to Arturo Vega, who had remained on good terms with both.)

Also released at around the same time was *Hey Is Dee Dee Home*, an hour-long tribute by low-budget documentarian Lech Kowalski. Consisting almost entirely of interview footage that Kowalski shot with Dee Dee in 1992 for Kowalski's Johnny Thunders documentary *Born to Lose*, the film was a virtual monologue that provided a fascinating insight into Dee Dee's troubled life and times.

That three of the Ramones' four founding members passed away at a time when the band was finally receiving large-scale recognition is all too consistent with the bad timing that plagued the group during its existence. At the time of this writing, the Ramones' level of fame is, arguably, higher than it was at any time during the band's existence. Their vintage songs have appeared in TV ads for cars, soft drinks, cell phones, and athletic wear. Sales of Ramones merchandise—including the famous “presidential seal” T-shirt, which has been spotted on countless celebrities in the years since the band's demise—grow annually.

The Ramones' recorded legacy continues to be discovered by new generations of fans, thanks to a series of reissues and compilations on the Rhino label, the most recent being the lavish 2005 box set *Weird Tales of the Ramones*, packaged, appropriately enough, in a giant mock comic book. And their musical influence lives on in multiple generations of punk combos, several of whom have released song-for-song remakes of classic Ramones albums.

Once reviled by many mainstream critics, the Ramones are now routinely honored whenever rock magazines print surveys of rock's greatest songs and/or albums. In 2002 and 2004, respectively, *Spin* and *Rolling Stone* both voted the Ramones the second greatest rock and roll band of all time, behind the Beatles.

Although three of the founding members are no longer around to enjoy the honor, history has caught up with the Ramones and vindicated their musical crusade. The band that fought so long and hard to win respect and find an audience is now heard and loved by fans around the world. And the changes that the Ramones wrought upon rock and roll are now deeply woven into rock and roll's fabric.

It's been said that the Ramones saved rock and roll by making it fun again, and that's as good an epitaph as any.

TIMELINE

March 30, 1974

The Ramones make their public debut in front of a crowd of friends at Performance Studio in Manhattan.

August 16, 1974

The Ramones perform the first of numerous shows at the Bowery club CBGB.

April 16, 1976

The Ramones' self-titled first album, recorded at a cost of \$6,000, is released.

July 4, 1976

The Ramones celebrate the U.S. Bicentennial with the first show of their first British tour, at London's Roundhouse. The show, and the tour, will prove to be significant events in launching the U.K. punk movement.

November 26, 1977

The Ramones' third album *Rocket to Russia*, enters the *Billboard* album chart, where it will peak at number forty-nine. The album also spawns three Top 100 singles: "Sheena Is a Punk Rocker," "Rockaway Beach," and "Do You Wanna Dance."

December 31, 1977

The Ramones perform on at London's Rainbow Theatre. The show will be captured for posterity on the double album *It's Alive*.

April 25, 1979

Rock 'n' Roll High School, the Ramones' movie debut, premieres in Los Angeles.

May 1, 1979

The Ramones begin recording *End of the Century* with legendary producer Phil Spector.

January 26, 1980

The Ramones' Spector-produced remake of the Ronettes' "Baby I Love You" enters the British singles chart, where it will eventually reach number eight, becoming the biggest single of the band's career.

November 3, 1984

Too Tough to Die, which reunites the Ramones with co-producers Tommy Erdelyi and Ed Stasium, is released and widely acclaimed as the band's best work in years.

July 22, 1995

The Ramones release their final studio album *¡Adios Amigos!*.

August 6, 1996

The Ramones perform their final concert in Los Angeles.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Ramones, 1976

Leave Home, 1977

Rocket to Russia, 1977

Road to Ruin, 1978

End of the Century, 1980

Too Tough to Die, 1984

Hey! Ho! Let's Go! Anthology, 1999

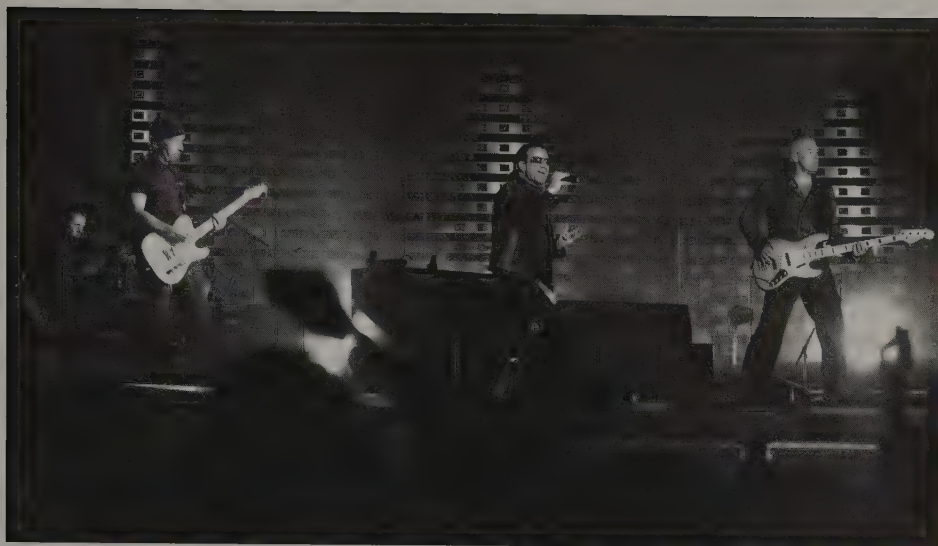
Weird Tales of the Ramones, 2005

NOTES

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2. Dr. Donna Gaines, Rock and Roll Hall Of Fame 2002 Induction Essay for the Ramones; available online at www.kauhajoki.fi/~jplaitio/halloffame.html.
3. Bessman, p. 5.
4. Ibid., p. 10.
5. Ibid., p. 96.
6. Bill Werde, "Punks in the Hall: The Ramones and Talking Heads Battle Their Way from CBGB to Cleveland," *Village Voice*, March 13–19, 2002; available online at www.villagevoice.com/issues/0211/werde.php.

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U2

Susan Godwin

BOYS TO MEN

When they first appeared on the international musical landscape at the dawn of the 1980s, Ireland's U2 quickly established themselves as standing apart from the flood of eager young bands from the British Isles. Even when they were little-known newcomers, it was always clear that the Dublin quartet had big goals—not so much a desire for success and stardom as a deep-rooted need to express themselves and communicate with listeners on a grand scale. From the start, U2 was determined to be an *important* band.

Beginning as a scrappy do-it-yourself combo with a messianic streak, U2—frontman Bono, guitarist the Edge, bassist Adam Clayton, and drummer Larry Mullen Jr.—managed to maintain their grassroots appeal even after becoming one of the world's biggest rock acts, avoiding the standard rock trappings of drugs, sex, and scandal in the process.

The band's missionary zeal was initially manifested in a sweeping signature sound that merged punk's electric energy with an epic sense of drama, along with an idealistic lyrical sensibility that translated personal and spiritual journeys into compelling songcraft. The Edge built complex webs of sound over the muscular drive of the Clayton/Mullen rhythm section. In lead singer/lyricist

Bono, U2 possessed a frontman with a knack for grand gestures that played better in arenas than small clubs, and whose questing, idealistic nature was matched by a fiery sense of oratory.

While their fundamental earnestness opened U2 up to skepticism and ridicule, it also allowed them to forge a durable bond with fans, who maintained a deep emotional investment in the group even after it achieved superstar status. U2 believed deeply in rock's potential for internal and external revolution, and believed so deeply that they didn't care if doing so made them appear foolish.

Beyond their stature as a musical institution, U2 gained an unprecedented level of influence beyond the entertainment industry, thanks to the band's activism on behalf of a variety of causes championing social and economic justice. The loquacious Bono, in particular, emerged as a figure of genuine clout on the international political stage, using his public profile and personal powers of persuasion to gain access to the corridors of political power and exercise a benign influence upon world events.

In the 1980s, U2 built a dedicated audience through constant touring and a string of acclaimed releases. Unlike many of their contemporaries, the band was able to sustain their popularity in the decades to come, reinventing themselves as postmodern, self-consciously ironic state-of-the-art pop experimentalists.

All the while, U2 has seemingly reveled in its own contradictions, being openly religious in the secular world of rock, leavening their potential for pomposity via a self-deprecating sense of humor, and contributing their time and energy to numerous charitable causes while remaining unapologetically commercial.

U2's four members first came together in the autumn of 1976, while punk rock was still experiencing its birth pangs in New York and London, and the unruly new sound was beginning to filter into Dublin. Larry Mullen Jr., looking for others to form a band, posted a notice on a bulletin board at Dublin's Mount Temple comprehensive school, which had opened four years earlier as Dublin's first co-educational, non-denominational school. The respondents to Mullen's posting included Paul Hewson, David Evans, and Adam Clayton.

Although Clayton had briefly played in a band before coming to Mount Temple and Mullen had racked up some early touring experience drumming in a brass band comprised of local postal workers, the teenagers shared a general lack of musical experience. Despite their limited technical skills, the new bandmates possessed prodigious amounts of energy, enthusiasm, and drive—qualities that were arguably more essential in the punk-fueled atmosphere of the time.

Initially naming themselves Feedback and playing cover versions of Rolling Stones and David Bowie tunes, they soon changed their moniker to the Hype and began performing original compositions. The group initially included a fifth member, Evans's younger brother Dick, on guitar.

The musicians were also part of a larger social circle of independent-thinking, musically inclined local nonconformists. The self-styled community dubbed itself the Village, and its members were assigned offbeat nicknames based on their individual characteristics. Paul Hewson acquired his eventual stage name Bono Vox—pidgin Latin for “good voice”—after the phrase was spotted in a local advertisement for hearing aids. The quietly intense Dave Evans, meanwhile, was renamed the Edge, in recognition of his sharp mind and facial features.

The Village would soon spawn another band, the confrontational art-goth ensemble the Virgin Prunes, fronted by Villager Gavin Friday and featuring Dick Evans on guitar, along with the Edge, Clayton, and Mullen, who moonlighted with the Virgin Prunes on their early live performances.

Early on, Bono, the Edge, and Mullen, along with several other Village and Virgin Prunes members, became members of Shalom, a sect of Charismatic Christianity. Although the association with Shalom would eventually fracture when the sect’s leaders expressed disapproval of the musicians’ rock lifestyles, their embrace of Christianity would exercise a pivotal influence upon U2’s attitude and songwriting. U2’s members, however, would resist discussing their faith in public until they had two albums under their belts.

In 1978, Clayton, who’d graduated from school a year earlier than his bandmates, became the Hype’s de facto manager, and took on the task of forging contacts with various players in the insular Irish rock scene, in order to solicit career advice. Among those with whom the bassist finagled contact were such local luminaries as Boomtown Rats guitarist Gerry Cott, influential Dublin radio DJ Dave Fanning, and Thin Lizzy leader and Irish rock legend Phil Lynott.

One of those whom Clayton contacted was Steve Averill, aka Steve Rapid, lead singer of noted Irish punk combo the Radiators. Averill, who held down a day job with one of Dublin’s leading advertising agencies, suggested that the Hype’s name lacked subtlety and that the quartet should find a name that wouldn’t pin them down to a specific idea or image. A few days later, Averill suggested U2 as a possible new handle.

In addition to referring to the infamous American spy plane that had set off a Cold War crisis after it was shot down over the Soviet Union in 1960, the group’s new name was both a subtle double entendre and a snappy two-letter, two-syllable word that looked good in print and rolled off the tongue.

The fledgling combo achieved its first significant career break in early 1978, when they won a talent contest co-sponsored by Harp Lager and the *Evening Press* newspaper. In addition to a £500 cash prize, U2 won the opportunity to cut some demo tracks in CBS Records’ Dublin studios. But the session, the quartet’s first attempt at studio recording, was a disappointment, with the underprepared neophytes only managing to lay down rough versions of three of their original tunes before time ran out.

Another player in the local rock community who received a call from Adam Clayton was Paul McGuinness. The artist manager and sometime filmmaker

had been around the long enough to develop some definite ideas about how a homegrown baby band could sidestep the limitations of the small-time Dublin scene to achieve international success, and he was keen to find a young Combo to which he could apply those strategies. After seeing U2 play, he was intrigued enough to offer to work with them.

In November 1978, U2 recorded its first proper demo, with production help from McGuinness's friend Barry Devlin, a member of the revered Irish folk-rock band Horslips. The sessions produced demo versions of three early U2 originals, "Street Mission," "Shadows and Tall Trees," and "The Fool." Devlin also offered a useful bit of advice—that the band should avoid future tensions by sharing their songwriting credits and song publishing collectively.

Despite their expanding musical arsenal and their new manager's music-industry clout, the fledgling foursome initially had little success getting their career off the ground. With no interest from any of the English labels that McGuinness had approached with the demo tape, the band struck a deal with the Irish arm of CBS Records. That arrangement applied to Ireland only, allowing McGuinness to continue to seek an international deal with another company.

In October 1979, CBS released the three-song single *U2Three*, encompassing the A-side "Out of Control," along with "Boy-Girl" and "Stories for Boys" on the flip. Prior to its release, the band members had appeared on influential local DJ Dave Fanning's show and invited listeners to vote to choose the disc's A-side—a clever promotional gimmick that was an early indication of the marketing savvy that the band and McGuinness would employ to facilitate U2's rise.

The debut single was originally released in a numbered limited edition of 1,000—just enough copies to create a hit on the Irish charts, the better to boost McGuinness's sales pitch to labels in London. The single—which offered a sonic snapshot of the band at a formative yet compelling stage—quickly sold out and established the quartet as local heroes. Their status was further demonstrated in January 1980, when U2 finished in first place in five categories of the Irish music paper *Hot Press*'s annual readers' poll. Early in 1980, U2 scored another Irish hit with their second CBS single, "Another Day."

But the group's success at home was slow to develop into wider career momentum. Their initial forays to London for live performances gained little public or media attention. A frustrated Paul McGuinness took the risky step of setting up a high-profile concert at Dublin's 2,000-capacity National Boxing Stadium. That brash move ultimately paid off when the band, playing in front of a crowd comprised largely of friends and invited guests, rose to the occasion and played an inspired set that led Bill Stewart, a visiting A&R man from Island Records' London office, to offer a recording deal on the spot.

English/Jamaican entrepreneur Chris Blackwell had founded Island as an independent imprint in the 1960s, and in the years since, the company had earned a reputation as one of England's most innovative, artist-friendly labels.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the company maintained a niche on rock's cutting edge by signing such iconoclastic acts as Traffic, Cat Stevens, Fairport Convention, Nick Drake, and Mott the Hoople. In the 1970s, Island had been instrumental in introducing reggae to British and American audiences, and in engineering Bob Marley's rise to international stardom.

IN LOVE AND WAR

May 1980 saw the release of U2's first Island single, "11 O'Clock Tick Tock," produced by Martin Hannett, best known for his innovative work with Joy Division and the roster of the iconoclastic Factory label. The single set the stage for the November release of U2's debut LP, *Boy*.

Hannett had originally been slated to produce *Boy*, but dropped out of the project after Joy Division's lead singer Ian Curtis committed suicide. Instead, U2 recorded the album with Steve Lillywhite, a young studio veteran whose résumé included significant releases by such British new wave acts as XTC, Ultravox, and Siouxsie and the Banshees. Lillywhite proved to be an ideal collaborator, possessing both the technical skills to focus the band's budding sound and the psychological insight to coax confident, swaggering performances out of the ambitious yet inexperienced players.

Musically, *Boy* combined infectious energy and atmospheric textures with a sweeping, epic sound that incorporated most of the elements that would soon make U2 one of the world's most popular rock acts. Bono's yearning voice soared forcefully over the Edge's ringing, effects-laden guitars, anchored by Clayton's propulsive bass and Mullen's spare, driving drumming.

Beyond its dynamic sound, *Boy* was notable for Bono's evocative, impressionistic lyrics—many of which were still being written and reworked during the recording sessions. The album's title gave some hint of the songs' thematic concerns, reflecting the wonder, dread, and confusion of adolescence and young adulthood. Appropriately, *Boy*'s most appealing quality was its consistent sense of youthful energy and optimism, along with an open-hearted idealism that distinguished U2 from their prematurely jaded contemporaries.

U2's fresh-faced appeal was encapsulated neatly on *Boy*'s lead-off track and first single, the rousing, insistent "I Will Follow." The song quickly put the band on the map in America, where it gained substantial album-rock radio exposure as well as play in the rock dance clubs that had begun to sprout up in various U.S. cities.

Boy's original cover art, designed by old friend Steve Averill, featured a stark portrait of six-year-old Peter Rowan. Rowan, whose face had previously been featured the sleeve of the U2 *Three* single, was the brother of Virgin Prunes members Derek "Guggi" Rowan and Trevor "Strongman" Rowan, whose family lived across the street from Bono. Peter's innocent features were an apt personification of the band's meditations on the challenges of youth.

It was a daring move for U2 to package its debut album with a front cover that neither mentioned the band's name nor showed the faces of the band members. Beyond that, *Boy's* packaging received some unexpected criticism when some observers expressed concern that the image of the shirtless, vulnerable-looking Rowan promoted pedophilia. While those charges may not have had much merit, they may have had some influence on the decision of Warner Bros. Records, which distributed Island Records in the United States, to issue *Boy's* American edition with different cover art.

Boy instantly drew raves in the English music press, winning laudatory comparisons with such seminal acts as the Velvet Underground, Patti Smith, and Roxy Music. Meanwhile, U2 made some crucial early inroads in the United States. In the days before MTV and college radio emerged as promotional vehicles, the eager quartet—with the support of the prestigious booking agency Premier Talent—tirelessly toured the Stateside club circuit, playing all manner of thankless gigs, at one point sharing the bill with a wet T-shirt contest.

DIY: Rock from the American Eighties Underground

While MTV was becoming a dominant force in the mainstream of popular music, a new scene was coalescing in basements, practice rooms, and small clubs around the country. DIY (Do It Yourself) became the short hand appellation for a thriving underground scene of self-produced recordings, independent distribution, fanzines, and venues.

West Coast "hard-core" punk rock was one important segment of this scene, and Black Flag was its leading exponent. The group came together not in Hollywood but in such suburban towns as Hermosa Beach, south of Los Angeles. L.A. bands like X and the Blasters had roots in earlier styles of music, but the essence of Black Flag was a fury born of frustration and male aggression. Under the iron-willed leadership of guitarist Greg Ginn, the band's sound incorporated elements of heavy metal, prog-rock, and avant-garde jazz while its muscular lead singer, Henry Rollins, became a hard-core icon.

The anarchic ferocity of the music found its real-life equivalent in the riotous, stage-diving behavior of Black Flag's fans, which led in turn to the group being harassed by police and banned from many venues. Until Greg Ginn broke up the band in 1986, Black Flag toured relentlessly, even playing fan-promoted gigs in private homes, and issued their recordings through Ginn's own SST Records.

The Replacements were another leading light of the American 1980s underground. The Minneapolis-based quartet, fronted by singer/guitarist Paul Westerberg, started out in 1979 as a thrashing quasi-hard-core band. They gradually evolved into a more melodic but still forceful unit as Westerberg's songwriting drew on pop, rockabilly, and Stones-style hard rock. More accessible and less fearsome than Black Flag, the Replacements became a critics' favorite. After several releases on the independent Twin/Tone imprint, the group released its

major label debut, *Tim*, in 1985. The “Mats,” as they were affectionately known, came close to having an actual hit record in 1989 with “I’ll Be You” (from the album *Don’t Tell a Soul*) but disbanded two years later.

Independent labels thrived on the success of Black Flag, the Replacements, and other not-ready-for-MTV bands. SST, perhaps the most important American indie of the 1980s, released vital early recordings by the Minutemen, Meat Puppets, Sonic Youth, and Hüsker Dü. Slash Records, founded in 1978 as an offshoot of the leading L.A. punk fanzine (also called *Slash*), boasted an eclectic roster that included the Violent Femmes (punk-folk), the Gun Club (punk-blues), and Los Lobos (Chicano folk-rock). Some nominally “indie” imprints functioned as a kind of farm system for major labels, operating on lower budgets and with canny campaigns of artist development. Miles Copeland’s IRS Records partnered first with A&M and later MCA to sign and market the Go-Go’s, the Fleshtones, and Camper Van Beethoven. In 1987, IRS struck gold with the Top Ten album *Document* by R.E.M.—and this Athens, Georgia, quartet went on to become the most popular and long-lived band to emerge from the American DIY underground.

Andy Schwartz

U2 made its New York debut on December 5, 1980—three days before John Lennon’s murder—playing at the East Village club the Ritz. That show found the band, stuck in an ignominious opening slot, winning over an indifferent weeknight crowd and making a strong impression upon the handful of music-industry pros in attendance.

The group’s diligent roadwork and high-energy performances helped to build the beginnings of an enthusiastic American fan base. The grassroots buzz helped to push *Boy* into the lower reaches of the U.S. Top 100 early in 1981.

Although they’d won some acclaim and made some career headway with *Boy*, U2’s relatively modest success contrasted Bono’s somewhat immodest comments to *Rolling Stone* at the time. “Even at this stage, I do feel that we are meant to be one of the great bands,” the singer insisted. “There’s a certain spark, a certain chemistry, that was special about the Stones, the Who and the Beatles, and I think it’s also special about U2.”¹

While such grandiose pronouncements may have seemed presumptuous at the time, history would soon validate the singer’s cockiness.

U2 achieved its first British chart success with “Fire,” a non-album single released in the United Kingdom in June 1981. The song’s mix of personal insights and apocalyptic imagery underlined the Christian references that had begun to attract the notice of some critics. Although the band had yet to publicly address the issue, the fact that three of the four members were Christians was too tempting an angle for the press to ignore.

U2’s spiritual orientation—and the accompanying internal crises that led Bono, the Edge, and Larry to briefly consider retiring from music—was strongly

reflected in the group's sophomore album *October*, produced by Lillywhite and released in November 1981. Indeed, the album's opening track and first single "Gloria" found Bono singing in Latin and offering everything he has, apparently, to God. Meanwhile, "Tomorrow" seems to hint that the Second Coming is imminent.

October largely found the band working in the same musical vein as *Boy*, while introducing some of the atmospheric textures that would soon play a more prominent role in their sound. The album's lyrics had a stream-of-consciousness feel that was partially the result of Bono writing on the run—and, often, in the studio—due to the theft of a notebook containing all of the lyrics he'd been working on, while the band was on tour in America.

Despite the rushed circumstances of its creation, *October* was a slightly larger seller than *Boy* in the United Kingdom, where it reached number eleven on the album chart. It also expanded the band's audience in America, where a tour as opening act for the J. Geils Band—which U2 had reluctantly accepted—turned out to be an unexpected triumph, with the band rising to the occasion and regularly winning over the headliner's audiences. Those modest career strides aside, *October* was more of a holding pattern than a leap forward.

In 1982, the fledgling cable music video channel MTV began to emerge as an influential new force for promoting new artists. U2's promo videos for "I Will Follow" and "Gloria" found their way into MTV's rotation, and this new source of exposure helped to heighten public anticipation for the quartet's third album, *War*, which would become U2's breakthrough on both sides of the Atlantic.

MTV: Music on Television

In August 1981, the arrival of MTV (Music Television) on the American airwaves created a profound change in popular music. A division of Warner Communications, which also owned the Warner Bros., Atlantic, and Elektra record labels, MTV was a cable television network devoted to playing music videos.

Unlike any other TV network or most cable channels, MTV didn't have to pay the cost of producing the bulk of its programming. Instead, nearly all music videos were produced and paid for by record companies and functioned as advertisements for the album from which the song was taken.

Style-conscious English groups were among the earliest and most adept exploiters of MTV. The androgynous look and campy attitude of Culture Club lead singer Boy George, combined with his warm, mellifluous voice, made him a media sensation. In 1982, the reggae-tinged pop song "Do You Really Want to Hurt Me?" became the first of Culture Club's six consecutive U.S. Top Ten singles, each one accompanied by a much-played video. Duran Duran's bland but catchy dance-rock songs worked best as soundtracks to such extravagant clips as "Rio," which set the quintet in a world of luxurious

international travel and unabashed wealth decorated by beautiful women. Beginning in 1983 with their self-titled debut, Duran Duran scored six U.S. platinum or multi-platinum albums and two U.S. number one singles, "The Reflex" and "A View to Kill."

MTV proved indispensable to the career of Madonna, the biggest female pop star of her generation. Beginning in 1984 with her first U.S. number one hit, "Like a Virgin," Madonna enacted a decade-long series of poses, provocations, and image makeovers in the MTV spotlight. Madonna appropriated and personalized images from (among other sources) gay culture and classic Hollywood films in dazzling new small-screen creations that kept the singer one step ahead of her pop-music competitors.

MTV brought forth new behind-the-scenes talent to match the new wave of hit performers. The team of Lol Creme and Kevin Godley directed more than fifty music videos including classic clips by the Police ("Every Breath You Take") and Frankie Goes to Hollywood ("Two Tribes"). Major Hollywood directors were drawn to the music video form. John Landis directed Michael Jackson's fourteen-minute "Thriller" in 1983, a cross between a horror film and a *West Side Story*-style dance production number. In 1987, Martin Scorsese manned the cameras for Jackson's seventeen-minute "Bad," about a high school student who returns to his old neighborhood and falls prey to anti-social influences before all concerned break into another elaborately choreographed dance sequence.

Music video introduced new artists and reinvented familiar ones. Veteran jazz pianist Herbie Hancock had an MTV hit with his award-winning animated video "Rockit," directed by Godley and Creme. The self-mocking iconography of "Sharp Dressed Man" transformed Texas blues-rock trio ZZ Top with the aid of designer sunglasses, customized cars, leggy women, and the band's own impossibly long beards. Painters and sculptors also tried their hand at the new form. Pop Art legend Andy Warhol directed "Hello There" for the Cars; Robert Longo made "The One I Love" with R.E.M. and "Bizarre Love Triangle" with New Order.

Open for business around the clock, MTV became an indispensable tool of music marketing. "On the surface, [videos] advertise a song from a new album we're meant to purchase. But in a deeper and more pervasive sense, the clips are pitching us the personas of the performers. Music videos are crafted to hawk an image, an identity for the artist, which we then 'purchase' by relating to it."¹

A. S.

1. Jim Farber, "MTV: The Revolution Will Be Televised," *Rolling Stone Illustrated History of Rock & Roll* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 647.

Released in early 1983, *War*, was both an artistic leap forward and a commercial one. The album featured an updated cover portrait of *Boy's* cover

model Peter Rowan, whose grave expression gave some hint of the new album's darker lyrical contents.

War's most noticeable difference was the strongly political direction of its lyrics, including the album's most popular tracks "New Year's Day" and "Sunday Bloody Sunday." The former was inspired by the Polish Solidarity Movement, while the latter addressed the long-standing sectarian strife in the band's homeland, but their topical bluntness didn't keep them from becoming hit singles and MTV favorites. Elsewhere, *War* confronted the specter of nuclear war on "Seconds," which featured a rare lead vocal by the Edge, and wrestled with weighty spiritual issues on "Surrender."

Beyond its provocative lyrical themes, *War* boasted a majestic, expansive sound that showed the band playing with more force and focus than ever. The arrangements were expanded by the addition of such outside instruments as electric violin and trumpet, as well as backing vocals by Kid Creole's female vocal trio the Coconuts.

War entered the U.K. charts at number one on St. Patrick's Day 1983, and became the first U2 album to sell over a million copies in America. Its sales success allowed the band to graduate from playing clubs to performing in theater-sized American venues. The move to larger-scale shows was a timely one, since, even at this early stage, U2 had already evolved into a bigger-than-life live act. The band's sound was powerful enough to fill a large venue, while Bono had blossomed into a commanding sense of rock theater, as reflected in such trademark moves as his iconic brandishing of a white flag while performing "Sunday Bloody Sunday"—a bold move that could easily have been awkward and pretentious in other hands.

Bono's penchant for athletic stage antics almost resulted in disaster when, at the massive U.S. festival in California in May 1983, he climbed out on a canopy stretched across the scaffolding six stories above the stage, and the structure came close to giving way under his weight. The incident drew protests from the band's stage crew, resulting in the singer promising to curb his tendency to risk life and limb during shows.

On June 5, 1983, U2 filmed a concert at Colorado's Red Rocks Amphitheater, which spawned a full-length home video and an audio EP, both titled *Under a Blood Red Sky*. Due to the less-than-ideal recording conditions, the live disc actually featured only two tracks from the Red Rocks show, along with material from gigs in Boston and West Germany.

Under a Blood Red Sky entered in the British charts at number two, becoming the biggest selling live recording in U.K. history up until that point. In America, a clip of the band performing "Sunday Bloody Sunday" at Red Rocks—complete with Bono's white-flag march—received heavy MTV airplay and played a key role in establishing U2's public image.

In 1984, U2 launched a record label, Mother Records, distributed by Island. Mother's aim was to give young Irish bands a head start by releasing their first

singles, and then allowing them to move on to sign deals with other companies. The company's discoveries included such soon-to-be-successful bands as Hot-house Flowers and Cactus World News. But the challenges of motivating Island to promote records by artists in which it had no future stake, and the difficulty of getting the busy band members to sign off on Mother's business decisions proved impractical, and the label quietly shut down after a handful of releases.

PRIDE, FIRE, AND LIVE AID

Rather than following *War* with a similar set of socially conscious anthems, U2 took an unexpected, and somewhat riskier, turn on their next studio album. Splitting with original producer Lillywhite, they recorded with the production duo of Brian Eno, the former Roxy Music keyboardist who'd become both an influential solo artist as well as a producer for the likes of David Bowie and Talking Heads; and Canadian engineer/musician Daniel Lanois.

The result of the new partnership was *The Unforgettable Fire*, whose title was borrowed from an exhibition of paintings created by survivors of the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the final days of World War II, which the band members viewed at Chicago's Peace Museum.

The Unforgettable Fire traded the punchy rock sound of its predecessors for a more experimental approach, emphasizing sustained atmospherics over rockist fireworks. The songs' arrangements emphasized the growing nuance and subtlety of the Edge's guitar work, whose distinctive textures enhanced the songs' cinematic qualities.

Lyrically, the album was largely inspired by the band's experiences traveling in America, surveying the gap between the country's idealized mythology and its reality. The collection produced U2's first U.S. Top Forty single in "(Pride) In the Name of Love," a stirring tribute to slain 1960s civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. whose anthemic chorus contrasted the subtle sound that dominated the album. *The Unforgettable Fire* also yielded a significant live showpiece in the six-minute "Bad," which poignantly addressed the issue of heroin addiction, a growing problem in the band's home country.

Despite its less overtly accessible direction, *The Unforgettable Fire* duplicated *War*'s sales success, entering the U.S. Top Ten after its release in October 1984. U2 supported *The Unforgettable Fire* with a massively successful world tour that spawned another live EP, *Wide Awake in America*.

In late 1984, Bob Geldof, the habitually outspoken lead singer of Ireland's Boomtown Rats, was moved by television news coverage of famine in Ethiopia to create a benefit project to help address the desperate situation. The result was Band Aid, whose seasonal single "Do They Know It's Christmas?" offered a historic assemblage of some of the British pop world's biggest names. Bono was prominent among the all-star supergroup, which also included Sting, Boy

George, Phil Collins, Paul McCartney, George Michael, Paul Weller, and Paul Young.

Rush-released in time for the 1984 Christmas season, “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” topped the pop charts on both sides of the Atlantic, selling over 50 million copies worldwide. Geldof then raised the stakes by staging Live Aid, an all-star transatlantic concert spectacle, on July 13, 1985, at London’s Wembley Stadium and JFK Stadium in Philadelphia, which was simulcast around the globe to raise even more funds for the cause.

Not surprisingly, U2 was one of the first acts to sign on for the concerts. Performing at Wembley—an outdoor venue far larger than those in which the band was used to performing—the band kicked off its abbreviated seventeen-minute set with a rousing “Sunday Bloody Sunday” and continued with an extended “Bad” that interspersed portions of the Rolling Stones’ “Ruby Tuesday” and “Sympathy for the Devil” and Lou Reed’s “Satellite of Love” and “Walk on the Wild Side.” During that medley, Bono took a spontaneous leap off the stage into the photographers’ pit in order to dance with a female fan. While the stunt cost the group the time to do its planned third number, “New Year’s Day,” it drove the Wembley crowd into a frenzy.

If there had been any doubt previously, their Live Aid performance officially served notice of U2’s new status as a world-class band. For a band that specialized in big gestures while maintaining an intimate connection with its fans, it was a perfect coming-out party.

In the autumn of 1985, U2 once again joined Bob Geldof and the Boomtown Rats, along with Elvis Costello, Van Morrison, and several Irish acts, for another high-profile benefit concert. The Dublin show, dubbed Self Aid For Ireland, was designed to raise awareness of that country’s dire unemployment situation.

Also in 1985, Bono became a part of Artists United Against Apartheid, a benefit project organized by E Street Band guitarist Steven Van Zandt to resist South Africa’s brutal system of racial segregation. Bono quickly wrote a new original song, “Silver and Gold,” for the album, and recorded it with help from Rolling Stones guitarists Keith Richards and Ron Wood.

In the summer of 1986, U2 joined the Conspiracy of Hope, a series of six stadium concerts across America to raise funds and awareness for Amnesty International, an esteemed organization that works to draw attention to the plight of political prisoners around the world. Others on the rotating Conspiracy of Hope bill included the Police, Peter Dinklage, Lou Reed, Joan Baez, and the Neville Brothers. For their Conspiracy of Hope performances, U2 did something they hadn’t done since their early Dublin days. They added cover material—namely, the Beatles’ “Help,” Bob Dylan’s “Maggie’s Farm,” and Eddie Cochran’s “C’mon Everybody”—to their set list.

The tour, which began on June 4, climaxed eleven days later with a live MTV broadcast from New Jersey’s Giants Stadium. The day before, the members of

U2 attended an anti-apartheid rally in New York's Central Park, where they joined Van Zandt onstage to perform "Sun City," the main song from the Artists United Against Apartheid album.

In March 1985, four months before U2's breakthrough performance at Live Aid, *Rolling Stone*—a reliable indicator of mainstream American tastes—featured U2 on its cover, accompanied by a headline anointing the group "Our Choice: Band of the '80s."

By 1987, U2 was poised for worldwide superstardom. The band's fifth album, *The Joshua Tree*, released in March of that year, proved to be another breakthrough, both commercially and artistically. The project, again co-produced by Eno and Lanois, offered rich soundscapes awash in emotion and craft. The album—named after a twisted tree that proliferates in the rocky deserts of the American Southwest—also found the band tapping into an array of American folk and blues influences.

Those qualities were manifested in a pair of yearning, dramatic singles, "With or Without You" and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For." Both signaled U2's new status by reaching number one on the U.S. singles chart. Elsewhere on *The Joshua Tree*, the band's passion for current events was featured in "Bullet the Blue Sky," which surveyed the human toll of American intervention in Central America.

In addition to winning uniformly enthusiastic reviews, *The Joshua Tree* became the first U2 album to top the U.S. charts, as well as the band's third in a row to enter the British charts at number one. In England, it set a record by going platinum within twenty-four hours. By 1988, when it won a Grammy award as Album of the Year, it had sold 14 million copies.

The Joshua Tree's more pronounced American orientation coincided with the group's decision to bring along a camera crew and director Phil Joanou to document their U.S. tour. The result was *Rattle and Hum*, a feature film that combined concert footage with material featuring the musicians' off-stage explorations of American music and culture. The latter included a recording session at Memphis' Sun studios, where Elvis Presley gave birth to rock and roll, a performance with a Harlem gospel choir, and a duet with blues great B.B. King.

The film was accompanied by a double album that mixed live tracks and new studio recordings. Both the album and the film received the first consistently negative reviews of U2's career, with many critics finding the band's take on American roots music to be naive and/or patronizing. While critics dismissed the film as a rock-star indulgence and the album as an unfocused grab-bag, both were popular with audiences, with the soundtrack disc selling seven and a half million copies.

During an emotional homecoming concert in Dublin on New Year's Eve 1989, Bono told the audience, "We won't see you for a while; we have to go away and dream it all up again."²

That statement was widely interpreted as a suggestion that U2 was disbanding. Indeed, it reflected the internal crises and soul-searching that some of the band members were experiencing at the time.

THIS IS "POP"

Despite the breakup rumors, in 1990 U2 reconvened with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois in East Berlin to begin work on what would become one of the band's best-selling and most critically acclaimed works, *Achtung Baby*. Released in November 1991, the album—which Bono had described as “the sound of four men trying to chop down *The Joshua Tree*”³—succeeded in its intention of reinventing U2 for the new decade.

Achtung Baby retreated from the group's obsession with America, instead drawing its principal inspiration from the dance, house, and electronica sounds that were then sweeping Europe. The record was densely textured, incorporating sequencers, bits of found sound, neo-psychedelia from the then-new English “rave” scene, and multiple layers of sound effects. The album's retooled postmodern sound was matched by lyrics whose personal, even sexual, content was startling in comparison to the band's prior work.

The reflective, understated ballad “One” diverged from *Achtung Baby*'s hyperactive mood, and its humanistic sentiment was widely embraced as a response to the growing AIDS crisis.

Achtung Baby's radical reworking of U2's established sound found favor with fans and critics. In addition to topping the *Billboard* album charts, the album spawned Top Ten hits in “One” and the surging “Mysterious Ways.”

If *Achtung Baby* had redrawn U2's sonic parameters, the band's transformation became complete when they took the album out on the road. At the start of 1992, U2 launched the wildly ambitious Zoo TV tour, a multi-media extravaganza that incorporated a video system priced at over \$3.5 million, with hundreds of screens flashing surreal clips by montage artists; an elaborate stage set featuring rebuilt Trabants, the infamous “People's Car” of East Germany; and live satellite TV links to such far-flung locales like war-torn Sarajevo. The sensory overkill was intended to mock the decadent excess of arena rock—although some skeptics suggested that the band came dangerously close to becoming what it parodied.

During the shows, Bono adopted various flamboyant personae, specifically “The Fly,” an over-the-top rock-star caricature in huge black bug-eye shades; demonic lounge lizard “Mister MacPhisto”; and “Mirrorball Man,” an over-the-top television evangelist.

Another unique feature of the shows was Bono's on-stage prank phone calls. The singer playfully tormented TV home shopping networks and sex-chat lines, requested delivery of thousands of pizzas to the concert venue, and attempted to get through the White House switchboard to contact

President Clinton. The show—which also featured a nightly electronic duet between Bono and a video image of Lou Reed on Reed’s “Satellite of Love”—made inventive use of the video clips compiled by the multi-media artists known as the Emergency Broadcast Network, including a video of *Naked Lunch* author William S. Burroughs reciting his poem “A Thanksgiving Prayer.”

For one show in Sydney, Australia, an indisposed Adam Clayton was too ill to perform, and was replaced at the last minute by his bass tech, Stuart Morgan.

The elaborate stage presentation required a dozen mobile trailers and a minimum of 200 crew members, and took over 40 hours to set up in each venue. Some of the band’s longtime fans were undoubtedly bewildered and/or disappointed, since irony was not what they had come to expect from the deeply sincere U2. But many more were dazzled by the unprecedented spectacle. When tickets went on sale in Los Angeles, Pacific Bell reported that 54 million phone call attempts were made in four hours as redial buttons were continually pressed. By the end of the tour, more than 5 million tickets had been sold.

The Zoo TV concept generated enough excitement to lead to serious discussions about launching Zoo TV as an actual cable television channel, in conjunction with MTV and PolyGram. But nothing came of those talks.

Prior to the European leg of the Zoo TV tour, U2 returned to the studio with the intention of recording a quickie EP as a companion piece to *Achtung Baby*. But the project quickly evolved into the full-length *Zooropa*, released in July 1993. Even more technologically obsessed than its predecessor, *Zooropa* relied heavily on sampling, expanding upon the tour’s themes of media overload. By layering the earthy vocals of guest star Johnny Cash over a synthesizer track on the bittersweet “The Wanderer,” U2 pointedly underlined the potential of technology, as well as its limits.

Zooropa apparently was a bit too demanding for many U2 fans. While it topped the *Billboard* charts for two weeks and won a Grammy as Best Alternative Music Album, it sold a relatively modest two million copies and failed to produce a hit single.

U2 mounted another ambitious tour to promote *Zooropa*, on which Bono’s alter ego the Fly metamorphosed into demonic lounge lizard MacPhisto. After finishing the tour in late 1993, the band took another extended break, reemerging in 1995, when they collaborated with R&B producer Nellee Hooper to record “Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kill Me,” a glam-style contribution to the soundtrack of the film *Batman Forever*. Bono and the Edge also wrote the theme song for the 1995 James Bond thriller *Goldeneye*, sung by Tina Turner, while their bandmates Clayton and Mullen reworked the iconic theme song of TV’s *Mission Impossible* for the soundtrack of the 1996 feature film adaptation of the show.

In 1995, U2 once again broke away from their successful format to collaborate with Brian Eno on the album *Original Soundtracks, Vol. 1*, with the

result credited to the Passengers. One of the disc's biggest surprises was "Miss Sarajevo," on which Bono sang a duet with opera star Luciano Pavarotti. The low-key departure received a muted response from critics and the public. Among those who expressed dissatisfaction with the Passengers project was drummer Mullen, and the band promised that the next official U2 release would be a full-fledged rock record.

Despite U2's pledge to return to a harder sound, their next studio effort, the pointedly titled *Pop*, turned out to be something else entirely. For the occasion, the band teamed with a new pair of producers: the electronically inclined Flood, né Mark Ellis, who'd engineered *The Joshua Tree* and produced Nine Inch Nails and Depeche Mode; and Scottish club DJ turned producer Howie B, who'd worked with such cutting-edge U.K. acts as Soul II Soul and Massive Attack.

Pop once again challenged the expectations of U2 fans, bearing a heavier electronic and dance-music influence than its two predecessors. Beyond its heavy use of sampling and tape loops, the album found U2 making a conscious effort to alter its own sound. Mullen's drums were damped down, Bono relied less on his trademark falsetto, Clayton's bass was heavily processed, and the Edge explored an array of adventurous new guitar effects.

The band—which launched *Pop* with a surprise press conference at a K-Mart in Manhattan's East Village—felt that the album was something of a rush job, since their already-booked tour forced them to wrap up work on it before they were completely satisfied with the results. Despite those reservations, *Pop* met with positive reviews and respectable sales.

For their Popmart tour, which began in April, U2 once again raised the bar for elaborate on-stage eye candy. For the occasion, the band and its 200-strong crew transported an estimated 1,200 tons of equipment, including a huge mirrored lemon (which, appropriately enough, sometimes failed to function), a similarly massive olive, a hundred-foot-high "golden arch," and a giant video screen.

The tour became the second-highest-grossing of the year, second only to the Rolling Stones. But the \$80 million that Popmart took in was \$20 million less than what the band had spent to mount the extravaganza.

Following the *Pop* album and tour, the members of U2 took another hiatus from group activity. Late 1998 saw the release of *Best of 1980–1990*, the first in a series of best-of collections released in the wake of the band's lucrative new contract with PolyGram, which by then had absorbed Island Records.

While the group was taking a break, various band members took advantage of the opportunity to pursue other creative interests. Bono indulged his long-time interest in film by writing, co-producing, and making a brief on-screen appearance in the feature film *The Million Dollar Hotel*, directed by esteemed German filmmaker Wim Wenders and starring Mel Gibson.

The project, a surrealistic film noir set in an L.A. hotel filled with bizarre characters, was a rare failure for both Bono and Wenders, and was roundly

reviled by critics and ignored by audiences. Even its soundtrack album sank without a trace, despite the presence of new recordings by U2 and Bono. Critics dismissed the film as a pretentious, confusing vanity project, with one titling his review "Where the Streets Have No Shame." Even star Gibson opined that the film made no sense.

Fortunately for Bono, he had plenty of other activities to distract himself from his celluloid misfire. In March 1999, he inducted Bruce Springsteen into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. It was Bono's third such speech, following his prior Hall of Fame inductions of the Who in 1990 and the late Bob Marley in 1994. His induction speeches would earn Bono status as an in-demand musical toastmaster. He performed similar duties when Island Records founder Chris Blackwell was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2001, and also delivered a memorable introduction of Frank Sinatra (on whose smash 1993 *Duets* album Bono had joined Sinatra to revisit his classic "I've Got You Under My Skin") and when the Chairman of the Board received a lifetime achievement award during the 1994 Grammy awards show.

The Edge also did his bit for the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, inducting the Yardbirds in 2002 and the Clash in 2003.

Bono's efforts at political activism would prove far more effective than his cinematic venture. He and his bandmates had previously shown their social conscience in their songwriting and by participating in Live Aid and other benefit projects. But in 1997 Bono began to throw himself headlong into taking a more hands-on role in campaigning on behalf of the world's poor and voiceless.

The frontman proved adept at using his notoriety to exercise a benign influence upon world events, gaining unprecedented access to the corridors of power. On behalf of a group called Jubilee 2000, which campaigns for the cancellation of third-world debt, the singer went to Washington, D.C., and lobbied Congress, resulting in President Clinton and Congress agreeing in principle to cancel \$435 million worth of debt. Later, Bono and other Jubilee 2000 supporters visited Pope John Paul II at his summer home outside Rome.

Bono traced his interest in the issue of third-world debt to some harsh lessons he'd learned in the wake of Live Aid. "It was \$200 million we raised for Africa there," he recalled. "And we were jumping around the place; we felt we'd cracked it."⁴ That was before he found out that \$200 million was roughly equivalent to what Africa pays every week for the interest on debts owed to wealthier countries, including the United States.

Bono's bandmates have at times expressed reservations about his political activities, and have admitted that his extracurricular activism has stirred tensions within the group. But they've also expressed admiration for the singer's drive and ingenuity.

"We've grown up being a political band," the Edge stated. "We never saw a need to separate religion and politics from everything we write about and

care about. We have always been well aware that steaming in on any issue was liable to get us into trouble, or just come off as uncool. My own real fear was that Bono was going to lead us into doing things that were desperately uncool and we would regret. But even though I have winced on his behalf, I've had more times when I've just been so proud of him and blown away with the success of what he's done."⁵

ANOTHER BEAUTIFUL DAY

U2 returned to band activity in time to greet the new millennium with *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, released in the autumn of 2000. Reteaming with Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, the band reclaimed much of its classic sound, with nary a trace of the postmodern irony and electronic experimentalism of their 1990s work.

Along with the album's back-to-basics sound, many of the band's new songs—including the euphoric hit “Beautiful Day”—offered messages of hope and perseverance in the face of adversity. Another standout track was “Stuck in a Moment You Can't Get Out Of,” which Bono revealed he'd written about the apparent suicide of his friend, INXS lead singer Michael Hutchence.

In contrast to the relatively lukewarm public response to the experimentally oriented efforts *Achtung Baby* and *Pop*, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* was an unquestioned smash, topping the charts in over thirty countries and reaching number three in the United States, where the album earned won seven Grammys, including Song of the Year for “Beautiful Day.”

In a four-star review, *Rolling Stone* called the album

U2's tenth studio album and third masterpiece. . . . Their first masterpiece, 1987's *The Joshua Tree*, imagined cathedrals of ecstasy; their second, 1991's *Achtung Baby*, banged around fleabag hotels of agony. . . . [*All That You Can't Leave Behind*] represents the most uninterrupted collection of strong melodies U2 have ever mounted. . . . When Bono sings, his grief and his grandiosity seem to come from the same place in his heart. It's a reminder that what makes U2 so big isn't really their clever ideas, or even their intelligence—it's the warmth that all too few rock stars have any idea how to turn into music.⁶

From March to November, U2 returned to the road for its Elevation 2001 tour. The tour maintained a relatively intimate atmosphere—if indoor arenas can be called intimate in comparison to the outdoor stadiums the band had been filling previously. The band considered canceling the final part of the tour following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but ultimately decided to let the show go on. By all accounts, the tour had a unifying effect on the band, reenergizing the members' relationships with each other and with their audience.

Beyond its positive effect on band morale, *Elevation 2001* also became the year's most commercially successful concert tour. But it also became something of a personal ordeal for Bono, whose father Bob Hewson was slowly dying of cancer. Unwilling to give up any moment he could share, Bono took on the physically and emotionally demanding task of flying to his dad's bedside after every European show.

"It was a very odd time," he later recalled. "I used to leave stage, immediately get on a plane home and get in to Dublin. I would have one glass of Bushmills to steady my nerves, then go in. I slept beside my father with the sound of the audience ringing in my ears during his dying days."⁷

In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, Bono participated in the recording of a multi-star remake of the Marvin Gaye classic "What's Going On?" Originally intended to raise funds for AIDS relief, the project was retooled to benefit both that cause and the United Way's September 11 Fund.

After the tour ended, U2 traveled to New Orleans for a high-profile appearance during the halftime show of Super Bowl XXXVI, playing a three-song set that reached an emotional climax with "Where the Streets Have No Name." The names of those killed in the September 11 attacks were projected onto two giant backdrops, which were released and fell to the ground at song's close.

In 2003, U2 garnered an Academy Award nomination for "The Hands That Built America," which they wrote and performed for Martin Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*. The band performed the song—which won a Golden Globe award in the same category—on the Seventy-Fifth Annual Academy Awards show, but the Oscar ultimately went to Eminem's "Lose Yourself."

U2 reunited with Steve Lillywhite for their next album, *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*, which also incorporated production contributions from previous collaborators Brian Eno, Daniel Lanois, Flood, and Nellee Hooper. Released in November 2004, the disc found the band largely dispensing with dance beats and electronic gimmickry in favor of a scrappy rock approach that harked back to the foursome's early sound. It also offered some deeply personal lyrics shaded by the loss of Bono's father.

The band had actually begun the project with veteran producer Chris Thomas, but switched gears when the sessions stalled. While *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* moved U2 back toward an organic rock sound, the band employed some digital methods to help promote the album.

In a move that alienated some fans, U2 teamed up with Apple computers, allowing the manufacturer to use *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb*'s infectious first single "Vertigo" in a television commercial for the company's iPod MP3 players. In conjunction with that promotion, Apple issued a special-edition iPod pre-loaded with the entire U2 catalog, with a color scheme that echoed that of the new album and with the band members' autographs embossed on the back. The campaign coincided with the release of *The Complete U2*, a

digital “box set” of 400 songs, including B-sides, rarities, and various live and unreleased material, available for download from Apple’s online music store.

How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb predictably hit the top of the *Billboard* charts and quickly achieved platinum status. The album garnered eight Grammy Awards, including Album of the Year, Rock Album of the Year, (“Sometimes You Can’t Make It on Your Own”), and Best Rock Song (“City of Blinding Lights”), bringing the band’s Grammy total to twenty-two.

At around the same time that *How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb* was restoring U2’s identity as a rock band, speculation began to arise about Bono receiving a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize, in recognition of his efforts fighting AIDS in Africa and working to eliminate third-world debt. As a vehicle for his charitable efforts, Bono formed a non-profit organization called DATA (Debt AIDS Trade Africa).

July 2, 2005, found U2 back on stage, performing as part of Live 8, an ambitious, star-studded concert event instigated by Bob Geldof. The international simulcast was timed to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Live Aid, and to coincide with the G8 summit—an annual political and economic meeting of the world’s largest industrialized nations—the following week. U2 played in London’s Hyde Park, one of ten venues around the world to host Live 8 performances.

Live 8’s aim was to focus public attention on the G8 summit, and to put pressure on the summit’s participants to address the economic plight of the world’s poorest nations. The effort led to the G8 leaders making a commitment to double aid to Africa by 2010, and to forgive the debts of eighteen of the continent’s poorest countries.

In December, Bono—who had thrown his support behind an expansive anti-poverty campaign named “One,” after the U2 song—was awarded a prestigious Person of the Year award by *Time* magazine, sharing the honor with Microsoft billionaire/philanthropist Bill Gates and his wife Melinda. The magazine cited Bono “for being shrewd about doing good, for rewiring politics and re-engineering justice, for making mercy smarter and hope strategic and then daring the rest of us to follow.” *Time* also noted that in the course of his efforts, the overachieving rock star had “charmed and bullied and morally blackmailed the leaders of the world’s richest countries into forgiving \$40 billion in debt owed by the poorest.”⁸

Early 2006 saw U2 visiting Latin America, although the band would have to cancel subsequent tour dates in Asia and Australia due to an illness in their extended family. In February 2006, while in Santiago, Chile, in February, the Chilean president-elect presented U2 with Amnesty International’s 2005 Ambassador of Conscience Award. At the end of 2006, Bono was awarded an honorary knighthood by England’s Queen Elizabeth, in acknowledgment of his philanthropic efforts.

After a quarter-century of providing their fans with musical and moral uplift, U2 retains its sense of mission. As Bono told *USA Today* in 2000,

“There is a transcendence that I want from rock. . . . I’m still drunk on the idea that rock and roll can be a force for change.”⁹

Or, as the rarely interviewed Larry Mullen put it,

We want to do things that nobody else has done before, and we will do whatever we have to do to achieve that. We’re never satisfied. We never feel like we’ve made our greatest record. We always feel we can do better, we can be better, and that’s constant. After every record, we sit down and go, “OK, what was wrong with that? What was right with it?” And next time around, we fix it. We constantly do that, and that’s why U2 survives. . . . Being big means shit to us. It’s being great that we want, and that’s what we strive for.”¹⁰

TIMELINE

May 6, 1960

A U-2 spy plane piloted by U.S. Air Force Captain Francis Gary Powers is shot down over the Soviet Union, setting off an international incident. Four days later, Paul Hewson, aka Bono, is born at Dublin’s Rotunda Hospital.

March 20, 1978

The recently formed Dublin combo the Hype change their name to U2.

April 28, 1978

U2’s first-ever press interview appears in Dublin’s *Hot Press*.

May 25, 1978

Paul McGuinness becomes U2’s manager.

September 1979

The first U2 release, the three-song single *U2Three*, is issued by CBS Records in Ireland.

October 5, 1979

U2 makes its television debut with a performance at the Cork Opera House, broadcast on the Irish RTE network.

January 1980

U2 finishes in first place in five categories of *Hot Press*’s annual readers’ poll.

March 23, 1980

U2 signs with Island Records.

October 20, 1980

U2’s debut album, *Boy*, is released in the United Kingdom.

December 6, 1980

U2 play their American debut at the Ritz in New York.

March 3, 1981

Boy is released in the United States.

February 28, 1983

U2’s third album, *War*, debuts at number one in the United Kingdom.

June 5, 1983

U2 performs at Denver's Red Rocks Ampitheater. The performance will become the band's first live home-video release.

December 1983

U2 is named Band of the Year in the *Rolling Stone* critics poll.

August 1, 1984

The U2-run label Mother Records opens for business.

July 13, 1985

U2 performs at the Live Aid charity concert at London's Wembley Stadium.

June 4, 1986

U2 performs on the opening date of Amnesty International's all-star Conspiracy of Hope benefit tour.

March 9, 1987

U2 releases *The Joshua Tree*, which will soon become a number one album around the world.

April 27, 1987

U2 appear on the cover of *Time* magazine, which touts them as "U2: Rock's Hottest Ticket." They are only the third band to be given a *Time* cover.

May 16, 1987

"With or Without You" becomes U2's first number one hit in the United States.

March 2, 1988

The Joshua Tree wins two Grammy Awards, for Album of the Year and Best Rock Performance.

October 27, 1988

The U2 documentary *Rattle and Hum* makes its world premiere.

October 30, 1989

Bono makes his first-ever live solo appearance at a benefit show at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.

December 31, 1989

U2 concludes a tour with a four-night stand at Dublin's Point Depot. The final show is broadcast on radio, reaching 500 million listeners, and includes comments from Bono that are interpreted by many fans as an announcement of the band's possible breakup.

June 20, 1990

Bono joins David Bowie on stage at a Bowie concert in Cleveland, Ohio.

February 29, 1992

U2's Zoo TV tour kicks off at the Lakeland Arena in Florida.

March 27, 1992

On stage during one of the band's Zoo TV shows in Detroit, Bono orders 10,000 pizzas for the audience, but the pizzeria he calls is only able to deliver 100 to the venue.

August 28, 1992

During a syndicated radio interview in New York, American presidential candidate Bill Clinton converses with U2 via phone.

January 20, 1993

In Washington, D.C., Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr. team up with R.E.M. singer Michael Stipe for a rendition of the U2 hit "One" at MTV's 1993 Rock and Roll Inaugural Ball for newly elected President Clinton.

April 25, 1997

U2 kick off their year-long PopMart tour, which features the most elaborate staging of the band's career.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Boy, 1981

October, 1982

War, 1983

The Unforgettable Fire, 1984

The Joshua Tree, 1987

Achtung Baby, 1991

All That You Can't Leave Behind, 2000

How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb, 2004

NOTES

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Courtesy of Photofest.

Nirvana

Susan Godwin

FROM THE MUDDY BANKS OF THE WISHKAH

Nirvana certainly wasn't the first band to graduate from the indie-rock underground to the major-label big leagues, nor was it the first punk act to win fans from the rock mainstream. But with the multi-platinum success of their 1991 album *Nevermind*, the Seattle trio single-handedly brought the punk and do-it-yourself ethos to millions of teenagers across the country and around the world.

The musical revolution that had been launched by the Ramones and the Sex Pistols in 1976 had expanded and evolved in the decade and a half that followed. But alternative rock remained largely a grassroots movement, sustained through a nationwide (and international) network of independent labels, college radio stations, small clubs, fanzines, independent record stores, and an ever-growing constituency of fans whose left-of-center tastes weren't being served by the corporate music industry. While major labels had successfully marketed numerous indie-bred bands, there was some doubt as to whether any of those acts possessed the potential to break through to multi-platinum superstardom.

By the dawn of the 1990s, mainstream rock was dominated by slick, content-free corporate rock and lightweight, soft-centered pop-metal. But that music had little personal significance for the youthful demographic often referred to as Generation X—kids who'd grown up in the shadow of AIDS, with the institutionalized callousness of the Reagan era, and with an awareness that they were part of the first generation of Americans unlikely to do better than their parents.

Nirvana was the right band at the right time. The angst and anxiety of their generation were reflected in Kurt Cobain's alienated lyrics and anguished vocal wail, and in the trio's grinding yet catchy sound. On their 1991 album *Nevermind* and its indelible hit anthem "Smells Like Teen Spirit," Nirvana married punk's primal energy with infectious pop songcraft to make music that seemingly embodied the era's tortuous contradictions.

Even before his self-inflicted death made him twentysomething forever, Cobain was a readymade icon—charismatic yet ambivalent, dynamic yet tortured by anger, hurt, and self-doubt. If he ultimately failed to come to terms with his role as anti-rock star, and was torn apart by his efforts to resolve the conflicts between art and commerce, Nirvana's musical legacy and cultural impact speaks for itself.

Kurt Donald Cobain (b. February 20, 1967)—the first of two children born to homemaker Wendy Cobain and her auto mechanic husband Don—grew up in Aberdeen, Washington, 100 miles southwest of Seattle. Although once a prosperous seaport, Aberdeen by then was an economically depressed, culturally deprived logging town whose main industry had been devastated by automation.

Although born into modest economic circumstances, Kurt's early childhood was, by all accounts, a happy and stable one. Those who knew him then describe him as a bright, creative child. He showed an aptitude for music early on, and loved the Beatles and the Monkees. Kurt's musical inclinations were encouraged by his mother, whose brother and sister played in local bands, and who allowed Kurt to take drumming lessons in the third grade. He also showed a definite talent for drawing and painting.

Kurt also experienced a variety of health problems early in life, including hyperactivity, persistent bronchitis, and even a minor case of scoliosis (curvature

of the spine). Like many children of his age group, Kurt was treated for hyperactivity with Ritalin, an amphetamine-like stimulant. Still, those who knew him generally portray Kurt as a sunny, upbeat child, at least until his parents divorced in 1975.

By all accounts, Kurt's personality changed drastically after the split. He became withdrawn and sullen, and his growing awareness of his artistic temperament made him feel increasingly alienated from other kids his age. He spent a year living with his mother and her new, mentally unstable boyfriend in Aberdeen, before landing with his father in nearby rural Montesano, Washington. Relations with Don and his new wife and stepchildren deteriorated, leaving Kurt to be shuttled among various friends and relatives during his teens.

Don Cobain did play a significant, if inadvertent, role in laying the groundwork for his son's musical future, via the influence of his collection of LPs by such hard-rock acts as Black Sabbath, Led Zeppelin, and Aerosmith.

For Kurt's fourteenth birthday, Wendy's brother Chuck bought him a secondhand electric guitar. He gave up the drums, and took enough guitar lessons to learn to play AC/DC's "Back in Black." He became fascinated with the punk and new wave groups that he read about in *Creem* magazine. But since he couldn't hear those bands on the radio and their records weren't available in Aberdeen, he often had to be content with making a cathartic racket on his guitar, conjuring up his own version of what he imagined the music sounded like.

A fortuitous friendship was formed after Kurt was pressured by his father into joining the town's Babe Ruth league baseball team. Although he spent most of his time on the bench and did whatever he could to avoid playing, Kurt connected with a rock-obsessed teammate named Matt Lukin, who was also a classmate of his at Montesano High. Lukin played bass with the Melvins, a local trio whose heavy, sludgy sound would later establish them as founding fathers of the grunge scene.

Cobain soon also befriended the Melvins' leader, Buzz Osborne, with whom he shared an art class. It was Osborne who would actively initiate Cobain to the world of punk rock. Buzz made some punk compilation cassettes for Kurt, the first song on which was "Damaged II" by California punk icons Black Flag. Cobain later counted the experience of hearing the song as a landmark moment. "It was like listening to something from a different planet," he said. "I sensed that it was speaking more clearly and more realistically than the average rock 'n' roll lyric."¹

In August 1984, Cobain, Lukin, and Osborne traveled to Seattle to attend a Black Flag show. The experience was so transformative for Kurt that he was moved to sell his entire record collection—which then included albums by Journey, Foreigner, and Pat Benatar—for \$12.

At Aberdeen High, Kurt found himself at a loss to establish lasting friendships or connect with a peer group. He settled in with the school's stoner

crowd, mainly because they were ostensibly into rock music. He eventually became the target of intense bullying, in particular due to a friendship with an openly gay student.

It wasn't a big surprise when Kurt Cobain quit high school in May 1985, just a few weeks before the end of his twelfth-grade year. Before dropping out, he'd begun to notice fellow student Chris (né Krist) Novoselic. Novoselic was the son of Croatian parents who'd emigrated to the United States two years before his birth. He was born in Compton, California, and spent most of his childhood in Gardena, before the family relocated to Aberdeen, where his new surroundings turned him into an instant outsider.

Although Kurt never actually met Chris during their school years, he couldn't help but take notice of Novoselic's six-foot, seven-inch height, his twisted sense of humor, and his propensity for bizarre and sometimes drunken behavior.

Two people with whom Novoselic connected at Aberdeen High were Matt Lukin and Buzz Osborne, who helped to convert him to punk, just as they did with Cobain. It was through their mutual Melvins connection that Kurt Cobain and Chris Novoselic eventually met and became friends.

After leaving high school, Kurt went through an extended period during which he was directionless and frequently homeless, spending time crashing at his mother's house, staying with friends' families, and sleeping on various couches, porches, cars, and in Novoselic's van—and, at one point, under the North Aberdeen Bridge. He worked various menial jobs, including a stint as a janitor at his own former high school. The only job that he enjoyed was teaching young children to swim at the local YMCA. With various friends, he also engaged in various acts of small-time vandalism, and specialized in painting graffiti calculated to antagonize or confuse Aberdeen's redneck townies.

By late 1985, punk and hardcore had come to dominate Cobain's musical interests, and he began taking steps to form a band to play the songs he had been writing. He began rehearsing his compositions with Melvins drummer Dale Crover playing bass and friend Greg Hokanson on drums; Kurt christened the trio Fecal Matter. The lineup made its live debut in December, opening for the Melvins at a nearby beach bar.

Cobain and Crover later traveled to Seattle to record demo versions of seven of Kurt's compositions (including the future Nirvana numbers "Downer" and "Spank Thru") on his aunt Mary's home four-track home recorder. The rough, relatively primitive recordings revealed some of the aggressive riffing and thrashy tempos that would figure in Nirvana's future sound, but little of the melodic sensibility. A subsequent lineup with Buzz Osborne on bass and ex-Melvins drummer Mike Dillard rehearsed briefly but never performed in public.

The following May, Kurt performed a set in Olympia, Washington, reciting his poetry over improvised music played by Osborne and Crover. The short-lived

trio was named Brown Towel, but the promoter misheard Osborne over the phone and billed the band as Brown Cow. It was at around this time that Cobain reportedly used heroin for the first time.

Cobain and Novoselic eventually forged a close friendship. They first played together in the Stiff Woodies, an informal Melvins side-project in which Chris sang and Kurt played drums, and the two briefly attempted to start a Creedence Clearwater Revival cover act called the Sellouts. In early 1987, they launched a more serious outfit to play Kurt's songs.

Completing the as-yet-unnamed combo was drummer Aaron Burckhard, who'd been part of the extended group of friends and hangers-on who surrounded the Melvins. Driven largely by Cobain's boundless enthusiasm, the trio began rehearsing and playing at local parties under various names, including Skid Row, Pen Cap Chew, Bliss, and Ted Ed Fred. At first, they mainly played songs from the Fecal Matter tape, but Kurt quickly began coming up with new tunes.

In April 1987, as Skid Row, the trio performed live on KAOS, the radio station of Olympia's Evergreen State College. Their set included several songs that would appear on the first Nirvana album, and turned out so well that the band would use it as their demo for several months. That fall, Kurt relocated to Olympia to move in with a girlfriend, and Chris moved to Tacoma, leaving Aaron Burckhard behind in Aberdeen.

In January 1988, Cobain and Novoselic joined Dale Crover and recording engineer Jack Endino to record and mix ten Cobain originals in six hours at Endino's Seattle studio Reciprocal Recording, whose affordability had made it a favorite of local bands. Endino was guitarist/leader of the influential Seattle band Skin Yard, and his studio skills had already established him as something of a godfather to an emerging generation of young, heavy Northwest bands; his recording credits included work with Green River, Mudhoney, Soundgarden, and Screaming Trees. The session was paid for with \$152.44 that Kurt had earned in his janitorial job.

By now, the Pacific Northwest had begun to emerge as a vibrant hotbed of indie-rock activity, with Seattle at the epicenter of a new wave of loud, long-haired combos whose attitude was informed by punk but whose music was equally influenced by heavy metal. Ground zero for grunge was Seattle's Sub Pop Records, a savvy indie label launched in 1986, and which had already begun to make an underground splash with such bands as Mudhoney, Soundgarden, and Tad.

Pearl Jam: Spin the Black Circle

In the summer of 1991, the two most important bands in what became known as "alternative rock," both based in Seattle, released new albums within a few weeks of each other. The first was *Ten*, the Epic/Sony debut album by Pearl Jam, and the second was *Nevermind* by Nirvana.

Pearl Jam's surging two-guitar sound was more classic rock (à la the Who and Led Zeppelin) than punk rock, and the expressive baritone of lead singer Eddie Vedder invested his sometimes obscure lyrics with genuine emotion. In contrast to the 1980s glam-rock bands like Mötley Crüe, the members of Pearl Jam dressed like surfers or mountain bikers, signifying their artistic sincerity and lack of pretense. *Ten* remained on the *Billboard* chart for nearly five years and eventually sold over 12 million copies in the United States alone, making Pearl Jam the biggest American rock band of the 1990s.

This sudden success caused conflicts within the group, which stuck together nonetheless through several more multi-million selling albums including *vs.* (1993) and *Vitalogy* (1994). Pearl Jam made adept use of the Internet to consolidate its fan base and to market a steady stream of "official bootlegs" of its live concerts. Eddie Vedder became an outspoken critic of the Bush administration, and the band played numerous benefits for causes ranging from the victims of Hurricane Katrina to the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America.

Pearl Jam outlived the Seattle grunge scene from which it had emerged to become a kind of twenty-first-century version of the Grateful Dead, with ever-changing set lists, left-liberal politics, and a legion of faithful fans who snapped up tickets for every tour. In the spring of 2006, the group made a resounding return to the commercial arena as the self-titled *Pearl Jam* became its eighth studio release to reach the *Billboard* Top Five.

Andy Schwartz

TOP OF THE SUB POP

Jack Endino played the band's new demos for Sub Pop co-founder Jonathan Poneman. Poneman loved the tape, although Bruce Pavitt, his partner in the label, was initially resistant. Cobain, meanwhile, sent copies of the demo to every independent label he knew, but received no response.

When Dale Crover moved to San Francisco with the Melvins in March 1988, he recommended Dave Foster, a friend from Aberdeen, as his replacement. Foster was capable enough, but his hot-tempered personality and mainstream musical tastes caused instant friction with his new bandmates. When Foster, after a few months in the band, spent two weeks in jail after assaulting a man his girlfriend was cheating with, Cobain and Novoselic began rehearsing with Aaron Burckhard again. But Burckhard was soon out once more, after getting busted for drunk driving.

Nirvana found a more reliable replacement in Chad Channing, an elfin drummer who shared Cobain's childhood experiences with hyperactivity and Ritalin, and who, like Kurt and Chris, came from a broken home. Channing, whose solid, straightforward drumming style would help to push the band in

a less cluttered, more melodic direction, made his debut with the group in May 1988.

Channing had only been a member for a month when Nirvana returned to Reciprocal Recording with Endino to record their first official release, a seven-inch single issued in November as the first installment of Sub Pop's new subscription-only series of limited-edition seven-inch vinyl releases. Although Kurt didn't know much about Sub Pop at the time, he figured that the label was cool because its roster included Soundgarden, whom he loved.

Oddly, Nirvana's debut A-side was not a Cobain composition, but an amped-up cover of "Love Buzz" by the Dutch band Shocking Blue, best known in the United States for their 1970 hit "Venus." Although some interpreted the choice as an expression of Kurt's affection for Melvins leader Osborne, the song was actually Novoselic's idea. The single version of "Love Buzz" kicked off with a truncated version of a sound collage that Cobain had assembled from various children's records.

Although "Love Buzz" wasn't an original, the track contained several sonic elements that would emerge as Nirvana trademarks, including the use of alternating quiet and loud passages, as well as Kurt's distinctive scream. The disc's B-side was the Cobain original "Big Cheese."

By this point, the Seattle indie-rock scene was beginning to gain significant national attention, thanks in large part to Sub Pop's low-budget promotional savvy. The Sub Pop singles club, which Nirvana inaugurated with "Love Buzz," would prove to be a key element in building mainstream interest in the label and its home city.

Cobain smashed his guitar on stage for the first of countless times at the end of a show on October 30, 1988, at Evergreen State College. He subsequently got into the habit of buying cheap guitars at pawnshops while on tour, specifically for the purpose of smashing them at that night's show.

In late 1988, Nirvana returned to Reciprocal to cut Nirvana's first album, *Bleach*, again with Jack Endino producing. Not released by Sub Pop until June 1989, *Bleach* caught Nirvana still in its formative stages, evolving some promising ideas but largely following the established grunge format rather than forging a distinctive musical or lyrical voice.

Thanks to some catchy guitar riffs and Cobain's already impressive ability to scream in tune, *Bleach* (which included three tracks rescued from the January demo session with Dale Crover on drums) was generally more impressive for its sound than its substance, although standout tracks like the dense "Blew" and the bittersweet mid-tempo "About a Girl" suggested the levels of insight and songcraft that Cobain would subsequently achieve.

Bleach's dense, claustrophobic sound was well suited to its lyrical contents. Cobain (who, for no particular reason, spelled his name Kurdt Kobain in the album's credits) maintained that the pared-down, minimalistic lyrics had no personal significance, but it's hard not to relate the images of suffocating

small-town life in “School,” “Swap Meet,” and even the cartoonishly vulgar “Floyd the Barber” to his own teenage experiences. Elsewhere, the harsh self-examinations of “Negative Creep” and “Scoff” were early manifestations of the unsparing introspection that he would pursue more intensively in the future.

Bleach was well received within the U.S. indie-rock community, gaining substantial college airplay and selling an impressive 35,000 copies. It also gained considerable attention in Britain, thanks in large part to Sub Pop’s canny courting of the influential U.K. music press. But Cobain and Novoselic were annoyed by some of Sub Pop’s promotion, which tended to paint the band members as unschooled backwoods hicks.

To a large degree, *Bleach* had conformed to the already-familiar parameters of the grunge sound. But the album did offer some early hints of the more personal and distinctive approach that Nirvana’s subsequent work would reveal. The track that pointed most clearly to Nirvana’s future direction, was “About a Girl.” With its subtly insistent hook, Cobain’s nuanced vocal, and his oblique but affecting lyrics, the song manifested a sense of vulnerability and longing that made it stand out from *Bleach*’s more aggressive workouts, previewing the more complex emotional territory that Cobain would soon be tackling on a regular basis.

Although he didn’t play on *Bleach*, second guitarist Jason Everman was included in the album’s credits and cover art. Although he didn’t join the band until after recording was completed, Everman contributed to the project via his loan of \$606.17 to finance the sessions. Everman was added to Nirvana early in 1989, when the prospect of touring to support the album caused Cobain some concerns about his ability to sing and play simultaneously.

Nirvana celebrated *Bleach*’s release with a June 9 show dubbed Lamefest ’89, as the opening act on a bill that also included Mudhoney and Tad. The show—at Seattle’s Moore Theater, the largest venue to host a grunge event up to that point—was a landmark event for the Seattle scene, and an early omen of the alt-rock explosion that was to come.

Nirvana then embarked on a low-budget twenty-six-date tour that forced the band to endure marathon drives while making no more (and frequently less) than \$100 per night. Despite the decidedly modest conditions, they found that having a full album out—and being on a label with growing underground cachet—instantly boosted their prestige, and suddenly the band was playing in packed clubs.

The punishing tour schedule also exposed the mismatch in personal temperament and musical orientation between metalhead Everman and the rest of the band. Although the presence of a second guitarist had helped Cobain to relax and thus improve his own guitar work, Everman’s presence became increasingly superfluous, and after six months, Nirvana was a trio again.

In October 1989, Nirvana made its first trip overseas, enduring a grueling forty-two-day, thirty-six-show tour of the United Kingdom and Europe with

Sub Pop labelmates Tad. The tour was as spartan as the band's Stateside treks, with all eleven musicians (including Tad's 300-pound-plus leader Tad Doyle) and crew shoehorned into a single van. While the traveling conditions were fairly miserable, Nirvana was greeted with full houses and rapturous fan responses. Among the tour's highlights were sold-out gigs in Berlin a few days after the Berlin Wall came down.

In December, the independent Tupelo label issued the four-song Nirvana EP *Blew*, which combined the *Bleach* tracks "Blew" and "Love Buzz" with a pair of new originals recorded with producer Steve Fisk at a relatively luxurious twenty-four-track Seattle studio. The new songs were the buoyant, riff-driven "Stain" and the melodic "Been a Son." The latter tune's lyrics, about a young girl's awareness that her parents had been hoping for a boy, again demonstrated Cobain's budding propensity for unflinching introspection.

When Nirvana went to Madison, Wisconsin, in April 1990 to record demos for their proposed second Sub Pop album with veteran producer Butch Vig at his Smart Studios, Cobain's growing dissatisfaction with Chad Channing bubbled to the surface. Kurt would later claim that his on-stage guitar-smashing habit began as a manifestation of his frustration with Channing's drumming. Channing played his final show with Nirvana in Boise, Idaho, the following month, at the end of a lengthy U.S. tour.

By now, growing major-label interest in Nirvana, combined with mounting frustrations caused by Sub Pop's promotional limitations and financial problems, had influenced Cobain and Novoselic to decide to leave the cash-strapped hometown indie for a larger company.

In August, Nirvana, with Dale Crover sitting in on drums, played eight West Coast dates opening for Sonic Youth. The tour coincided with the release of another Sub Pop single, whose A-side, "Sliver," had been recorded during a dinner break in a Tad session, with Jack Endino producing and Mudhoney's Dan Peters on drums. The song was written from the point of view of an unhappy young boy who's been left with his grandparents by his mom and dad. The B-side was "Dive," drawn from the band's demo sessions with Butch Vig but stylistically a throwback to the band's *Bleach*-era sound.

Beyond its affecting, vulnerable lyric, "Sliver" was also the catchiest song Nirvana had yet released. "I decided I wanted to write the most ridiculous pop song that I had ever written," explained Cobain, who said he'd been listening to a fair share of R.E.M. and the Smithereens, as well as the legendary Tacoma garage band the Sonics, at the time. "It was like a statement in a way . . . I wanted to write more songs like that."²

THE MISSING PIECE

On September 22, 1990, Nirvana performed before its largest audience to date—approximately 15,000—at Seattle's Motor Sports International Garage,

sharing the bill with the Melvins, the Dwarves, and the Derelicts. Mudhoney's Dan Peters sat in on drums, in his only public performance with the band.

In the audience that night was Dave Grohl, who'd flown out to Seattle to try out for Nirvana's vacant drum seat after mutual friend Buzz Osborne had put him in touch with Kurt and Chris. Grohl had his audition a few days after the Motor Sports gig, and was invited to join on the spot.

Prior to Nirvana, Grohl had toured and recorded as a member of the notable Washington, D.C. punk/hard-core band *Scream*. Grohl was born in Warren, Ohio, and had grown up primarily in Virginia, the son of a high school English teacher mother and a journalist father. His parents divorced when he was just six years old and, like Cobain, Dave did unhappy stints living with each parent, before being shuttled between a series of other relatives.

A rock convert from an early age, Grohl took guitar lessons at age twelve, and before long was playing in neighborhood combos. An early new wave enthusiast, he was turned on to punk rock in the summer of 1982 by a female cousin, who took him to see to see such acts as *Naked Raygun*, *Rights of the Accused*, and *Channel 3*. His affinity for punk didn't keep the personable Grohl from being voted vice president of his freshman class at high school in Alexandria, Virginia. The duties of his office included reading the morning announcements over the school's public-address system, during which he took the opportunity to expose the student body to the music of the *Circle Jerks* and *Bad Brains*.

Grohl had made his recording debut as drummer in the speed-riffing punk outfit *Mission Impossible*, which in 1985 occupied half of a six-song split single on the tiny *Sammich* label. When that group broke up, Grohl joined hard-core/postpunks *Dain Bramage*. When he was invited to join *Scream*, the sixteen-year-old quit high school and didn't look back.

The addition of Grohl instantly gave Nirvana the rhythmic discipline they'd previously lacked. Grohl's Bonham-strength pounding also added a new level of energy to the band, and his stylistic versatility opened up many new musical options.

"Dave added so much more diversity," said Cobain. "Not only did he have perfect metronome timing, he hit really hard. He was able to go in between all the dynamics that we wanted to experiment with. It was just perfect. Plus he sang backup vocals and I'd wanted that forever."³

After joining Nirvana, Grohl relocated to Seattle and moved into Cobain's squalid apartment, where the two new bandmates lived mainly on corndogs and macaroni and cheese. Their mutual poverty was briefly interrupted a few weeks later when Nirvana jetted off for a series of dates in the United Kingdom, where they were now playing to packed venues holding a thousand people.

The increasing music-industry buzz that surrounded Nirvana led to the band signing with Gold Mountain, the high-powered management firm that handled the careers of such above-ground stars as Bonnie Raitt and Belinda

Carlisle, but whose roster also included New York indie icons Sonic Youth, whose members were long-standing Nirvana supporters.

Sonic Youth had recently moved from the indie world to the corporate coffers of Geffen Records' new DGC imprint. It was widely assumed at the time that one of Geffen's motivations for signing the uncommercial but widely respected Sonic Youth was to shore up the company's hip credibility and establish it as an attractive destination for other underground acts with greater sales potential.

Although several majors had actively courted the trio, Nirvana eventually opted for Geffen/DGC, signing with the company in April 1991. At the time, they aspired to sell as many records as Sonic Youth.

As "Sliver" had suggested, Nirvana was moving in a more melodic, emotionally expansive direction. Cobain had long harbored a desire to make music that merged the propulsive heaviness of Black Sabbath with the pop melodicism of the Beatles. But instead he'd pushed Nirvana to work within the conventions of the Sub Pop sound. It wasn't until he heard the Pixies' 1988 album *Surfer Rosa*, with its blend of squalling guitars, screaming vocals, and melodic song structures, that Cobain felt confident enough to pursue his original instincts without worrying about how his scenemates might react.

Prior to beginning work on its first DGC album, Nirvana had met with such notable producers as David Briggs (best known for his work with Neil Young), Don Dixon (R.E.M., the Smithereens), and Scott Litt (R.E.M., the dB's). But Vig, with whom they had already collaborated successfully, was ideally suited to Cobain's vision of fusing infectious pop songcraft and savage punk noise. Although he'd built a reputation for his studio work with such aggressive indie acts as Tad, Killdozer, and Smashing Pumpkins, Vig had also maintained a career as a pop-rock musician, playing drums in such melodic pop-rock acts as Spooner and Fire Town (he would subsequently achieve pop stardom of his own as a member of Garbage).

With a recording budget of \$65,000—modest by major-label standards but far more lavish than anything the band had previously had access to—Nirvana traveled west to begin recording their first major-label album *Nevermind* with Vig at Los Angeles's Sound City studio in May and June 1991.

While Nirvana was engaged in pre-album rehearsal sessions, Cobain reconnected with Courtney Love, a much-traveled veteran of various indie scenes and more recently leader of the band Hole, which was about to release its debut album *Pretty on the Inside*. Kurt and Courtney had briefly met in 1989, but when they reconnected at a Butthole Surfers/Redd Kross/L7 show at L.A.'s Palladium just before recording on *Nevermind* began, sparks flew.

According to Michael Azerrad's 1993 Nirvana bio *Come as You Are*, Courtney expressed her interest in Kurt by punching him in the stomach, and Cobain responded by wrestling her to the ground. Aside from that confrontation, and Novoselic's sixteen-hour stint in jail after being pulled over for driving while intoxicated, the *Nevermind* recording sessions generally went smoothly.

The band found it stimulating to be away from their usual surroundings, and their rapport with the easygoing Vig made for a relatively easy transition to mainstream recording. Although the producer sometimes had trouble getting Cobain to do multiple takes, the band was so well prepared that this didn't become a major problem. The resulting collision of spontaneity and craft would make for a bracing hybrid that amplified Nirvana's best and most distinctive qualities.

Although Nirvana's prior recording efforts had emphasized live-in-the-studio performances, *Nevermind* subtly employed a considerable amount of state-of-the-art technical trickery to achieve more polished results without sacrificing the band's sense of raw energy. While Vig used such common tactics as editing and combining different live takes, commercially astute mixer Andy Wallace employed an arsenal of sonic frills in an effort to increase the album's commercial appeal. Wallace, whose involvement doubled the project's studio budget, ran the tracks through a variety of effects boxes to sweeten and enhance their sonic presence, and added digital reverb and samples to Grohl's drum tracks.

The band reluctantly went along with the audio trickery at the time, but the issue would come to be a source of guilt and embarrassment for Cobain in the future. But the fripperies would be far less apparent on the finished album than the quality of the songs and the raw commitment of the performances. Cobain's singing, in particular, had achieved a level of visceral intensity that had only been hinted at in the band's previous work.

THE YEAR PUNK BROKE

In the summer of 1991, after finishing work on *Nevermind*, Nirvana played a series of West Coast dates with Dinosaur Jr., who'd preceded them in moving from the indie-label world to the corporate major leagues. They then joined their mentors Sonic Youth on a soon-to-be-historic European tour, during which they shared festival stages across the continent with such indie stalwarts as Mudhoney, Babes in Toyland, Gumball, and Dinosaur Jr. They also found time to indulge a growing fondness for drunken backstage destruction.

The two-week trek was documented by indie filmmaker Dave Markey in the documentary *1991: The Year Punk Broke*. In addition to capturing a pivotal moment in rock history, when the indie sound and sensibility was just about to break into mainstream culture, it also captured Nirvana's playful side. In one humorous backstage scene, Cobain plays Kevin Costner to Sonic Youth bassist Kim Gordon's Madonna in a spoof of a scene from the Material Girl's then-recent tour documentary *Truth or Dare*.

1991: The Year Punk Broke also features footage from Nirvana's famed August 23 performance at the England's Reading Festival. The set included impassioned renditions of material from the still-unreleased *Nevermind*,

and ended abruptly when the leather-jacketed Cobain catapulted himself onto the unsuspecting Grohl's drum kit. That leap, which resulted in a dislocated shoulder for Cobain, would stand as an iconic moment in Nirvana's history.

For Nirvana, the sense of community and camaraderie they experienced during the European trek was exciting and empowering. "Every time I look back at the best times in this band, it was right before *Nevermind* came out," Cobain later said.⁴

Nevermind was released on September 24, 1991, and slipped into the nation's CD bins with moderate fanfare, with DGC initially manufacturing a relatively paltry 46,000 copies of the album.

The album's combination of nasty, distorted guitars and modern production sheen offered a sharp, vibrant contrast to *Bleach*'s monochrome blur. The production tinkering couldn't dilute the songs' insistent infectiousness or the trio's formidable instrumental chemistry, which had finally clicked into place with the addition of Grohl's potent pounding.

Cobain's lyrics were often composed of seemingly disconnected, haphazardly arranged fragments, as compelling in their form as in their substance, and their openness to interpretation seemed to broaden their resonance with his new audience. The songwriter's choked, screaming vocals added cathartic urgency to his expressions of anger, pain, and confusion.

"Every song doesn't have a specific theme," Cobain stated at the time. "It's all these ideas incorporated into every song. It's just that every song is about everything—everything that I like and love with as much passion as I can give it."⁵

Nevermind's opening salvo (and first single), "Smells Like Teen Spirit," quickly emerged as both the album's initial calling card and a bracing generational anthem. Boasting one of the most attention-grabbing intros in rock history, the track begins with a lone, strumming guitar before abruptly erupting into an infectiously turbulent barrage of noise and melody, punctuated by the band's trademark (and soon to be much-imitated) low-key passages. Those who heard it at the time couldn't help feeling that the song signified something bigger than just a new rock album.

Cobain had written "Smells Like Teen Spirit" just a few weeks before it was recorded, and hadn't considered the song to be particularly special, although he and Novoselic did worry that fans might dismiss it as a Pixies rip-off. As it turned out, more listeners noted the tune's melodic resemblance to Boston's 1976 hit "More Than a Feeling"—a similarity that Nirvana would acknowledge by occasionally adding the Boston number to their set lists.

Elsewhere on the album, Cobain's troubled consciousness found expression on such pummeling yet haunting tunes as "In Bloom," "Lithium," "Drain You," and "Territorial Pissings" (the latter pointedly begins with Novoselic singing a fragment of the Youngbloods' 1960s folk-rock hit "Get Together"). The mid-tempo "Come as You Are" balanced an inviting lyric with an undercurrent

of sonic menace, while the churning “Breed” recalled the band’s early Melvins influence.

Its reputation as a modern punk touchstone aside, *Nevermind* is also notable for its two quietest songs, “Polly” and “Something in the Way.” The former features evocative lyrical snippets that force the listener to share the perspective of the song’s sexual predator protagonist, while the latter employs space and quiet, brushed by the strains of cello, to bring the album to a beautifully nodding conclusion.

Nevermind’s first pressing accidentally omitted the album’s hidden closing track, the grinding seven-minute vamp “Endless, Nameless,” which the band had improvised in the studio when their early attempts to cut “Lithium” ran astray. The piece is preceded by an extended silence that follows the official album-closer “Something in the Way,” startling listeners who’d let the CD end and forgotten to take it off.

The contradiction-embracing spirit of *Nevermind*’s musical contents was echoed by its provocative cover image, a shot by underwater photographer Kirk Weddle of a baby swimming toward a dollar bill suspended on a fishhook. The image offered a powerful manifestation of the band’s awareness of the irony of its new major-label status, while indicating that they also possessed a sense of humor about their predicament.

Nevermind quickly took off commercially, largely on the strength of “Smells Like Teen Spirit,” and sold out its first pressing, briefly causing a shortage in retail stock of the album. The song was almost instantly proclaimed an anthem for the teen/young-adult age group that the media had become fond of referring to as Generation X.

“I’ve always felt that the song was an observation of a culture mired in boredom amidst relative luxury,” Novoselic opined in his 2004 book *Of Grunge and Government: Let’s Fix This Broken Democracy*. “In other words, many have the means to make their own way but choose not to do so. The lyrics don’t convey a literal message guiding people toward a sense of liberation. It’s simply a comment on a condition.”⁶

The literal meaning of “Smells Like Teen Spirit” was less important than its emotional urgency. With no lyric sheet included in the album package, listeners were hard-pressed to identify exactly what Cobain was singing, which only added to the song’s mythic allure.

The song’s iconic status was underlined by its promotional video, which became a heavy-rotation fixture on MTV. Directed by Sam Bayer but reedited by Cobain, the clip’s images of dry-ice fog, cheerleaders, and flannel-shirted teens moshing in a high-school gymnasium updated music-video clichés for the grunge era.

Nevermind crashed into the *Billboard* album chart’s Top Ten in late November, when it was simultaneously certified gold and platinum by the RIAA.

The band was forthright about its desire to make an impact beyond the indie world, claiming a willingness to play ball with the mainstream in order

to achieve their artistic goals. Cobain observed, “No one, especially people our own age, wants to address important issues. They’d rather say, ‘Nevermind, forget it.’ On one hand, we’re not a political band—we’re just some guys playing music—but we’re not just another mindless band asking people to forget it either.”⁷

Rage Against the Machine: Take the Power Back

In the 1990s, a time of relative political placidity in American society, the L.A.-based band Rage Against the Machine was determined to be a voice for revolutionary change. On their self-titled debut album, released in 1992, the instrumental power trio of Tom Morello (guitar), Tim Commerford (bass), and Brad Wilk (drums) combined with the exhortatory lyrics of vocalist Zack de la Rocha to create an exciting and hugely powerful fusion of hard rock and hip-hop. Rage’s explosive energy made them a difficult act for any other to follow, and the band became arena headliners as their album went on to sell over one million copies.

Rage made its political agenda clear from the start. The group played benefit concerts that raised significant sums for the campaigns to free imprisoned Native American activist Leonard Peltier and to save black revolutionary Mumia Abu-Jamal from the death penalty. Other performances benefited the causes of Tibetan cultural freedom and women’s reproductive rights (Rock for Choice). Rage’s second album, *Evil Empire*, shot to number one upon release in May 1996. It included the Grammy Award-winning song “Tire Me,” and a second track, “People of the Sun”—inspired by the Zapatista movement in southern Mexico—that became a memorable music video. The band’s last album of original material, *The Battle of Los Angeles*, was released in November 1999 and entered the *Billboard* chart at number one.

The three-year gap between albums was indicative of the persistent tension between the quiet, self-effacing Zack de la Rocha and the verbose Harvard honors graduate Tom Morello. De la Rocha left the group in October 2000 and his musical output since then has been sporadic. In 2003, Zack collaborated with producer DJ Shadow on “March of Death,” a fiery musical protest against the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Morello, Commerford, and Wilk joined forces with ex-Soundgarden lead singer Chris Cornell to form Audioslave—a more melodic and less politically oriented group whose second album, *Out of Exile*, topped the *Billboard* chart in 2005.

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Despite such confident statements, soon after *Nevermind*’s release, Cobain began to publicly question some of the production and mixing choices that had determined the album’s finished sound. “I’m constantly feeling guilty in ways,” he admitted in *New Route* magazine. “It’s not that I’m totally unsatisfied with

the production, but it still makes me feel like I've probably offended my own beliefs as a self-proclaimed punk rocker. A few years ago, I would have hated our band." It wouldn't be the last time he'd express ambivalence over Nirvana's career direction.⁸

It became clear early on that *Nevermind*'s sales breakthrough was more than just a career achievement for one band. Instead, it was a high-profile victory for a movement that had long been bubbling beneath the surface of popular culture. While hip college-age audiences had supported independent and left-of-center music, the fact that millions of ordinary teenagers across the nation were now listening to a punk band bred in the grassroots indie world signaled a seismic shift in mainstream musical tastes—and occasioned a substantial change in the signing practices of major-label A&R departments.

"It was just the right album at the right time," Cobain later observed. "People were tired of Warrant. It just got old."⁹

The start of 1992 found "Smells Like Teen Spirit" climbing into the Top Ten of the *Billboard* pop singles chart, and *Nevermind* knocking Michael Jackson's much-anticipated *Dangerous* album from the top position on the trade publication's album chart. For any observer of pop-music trends, it was hard to miss the symbolism of this event. Just as Jackson's sleek state-of-the-art R&B had defined the pop zeitgeist of the 1980s, Nirvana's explosive outbursts were the sound of the 1990s.

As Lorraine Ali observed in *Newsweek*, Nirvana "didn't just make Michael Jackson seem as over as the '80s, they made a mockery of Skid Row, Poison, the declining Guns N' Roses and the other rockers with more hair than your mall-rat sister."¹⁰

In an interview with *Spin* magazine, Cobain also revealed his misgivings about the way in which the demographics of Nirvana's fan base had changed since the band's commercial ascent. "I don't necessarily want to go back and play clubs, but I would like to get rid of the homophobes, sexists, and racists in our audience," he said. "I know they're out there and it really bothers me."¹¹

Nirvana's January 11 performance on NBC-TV's *Saturday Night Live*—for which fans began lining up that Friday afternoon in hopes of securing tickets—marked one significant mainstream milestone. The *SNL* performance was something of a punk-era equivalent to Elvis Presley's and the Beatles' historic appearances on *The Ed Sullivan Show*. In addition to playing explosive versions of "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and "Territorial Pissings," the band vigorously upended their equipment through a wail of Cobain's guitar feedback.

It was during the week of the *SNL* appearance that much of the Nirvana camp came to recognize the extent of Cobain's growing heroin habit, and the impact it was having on the band. Kurt would later claim that the original impetus for his heroin use was self-medication, to help him cope with the chronic and extreme stomach pain that he'd been experiencing for years.

It was at around this time that Courtney Love, who had also been using heroin, learned that she was pregnant. Following the *Saturday Night Live* broadcast, she and Cobain moved into an apartment in L.A. together.

On February 2, 1992, *Nevermind* was certified triple-platinum for U.S. sales of three million. The same month, the band played a well-received tour of Pacific Rim countries, concluding with a pair of concerts in Hawaii. During the Hawaiian stopover, Kurt Cobain and Courtney Love were married in a small ceremony on February 24.

In conjunction with the tour, the six-song Nirvana EP *Hormoaning* was released in Australia and Japan. Along with the “Smells Like Teen Spirit” B-sides “Aneurysm” and “Even in His Youth,” the disc also paid tribute to the band’s influences with a quartet of covers, encompassing “D-7” by seminal Northwest punks the Wipers, “Turnaround” by new-wave conceptualists Devo, and “Son of a Gun” and “Molly’s Lips,” a pair of tunes by Scottish indie-popsters the Vaselines. The latter three tracks were culled from a 1990 session the band had cut for broadcast on legendary English DJ John Peel’s BBC program.

As *Nevermind* continued to rack up stratospheric sales, Cobain’s personal life became subjected to increasingly intense scrutiny. Fans and journalists speculated about rumors surrounding his drug use, his emotional stability, and his marriage to the volatile, sharp-tongued Courtney Love. The talk only increased when Cobain was hospitalized after collapsing in a Belfast hotel in June 1992.

In early August, a feature about Cobain and Love appeared in *Vanity Fair* magazine, and implied that Love had used heroin during her pregnancy. Love and Cobain denied the allegations, and reportedly threatened and harassed the piece’s author, Lynn Hirschberg.

On August 18, 1992, Courtney gave birth to a healthy baby girl, Frances Bean Cobain, but the blessed event was followed by a *Los Angeles Times* article alleging that Love had been receiving methadone treatment two weeks before her daughter was born.

As the rumor mill continued to rage back home, the new father made a triumphant return to the Reading Festival, this time in a headlining slot. For Cobain, the high-profile event offered an opportunity to mount his own response to the current media frenzy.

Clad in a hospital gown and a blonde wig, a frail-looking Kurt was rolled onto the Reading stage in a wheelchair. The singer struggled to the mic to sing a snatch of the Bette Midler ballad “The Rose,” before collapsing backward in a sprawl. Cobain’s ability to parody his personal pain in such a high-profile forum belied his image as angry young mope-rocker. With Cobain’s Norma Desmond act out of the way, Nirvana tore through an energized set that included “All Apologies,” a bittersweet new tune slated for the band’s projected third album.

But the fallout from Kurt and Courtney's recent negative media coverage wasn't over. Los Angeles child-care authorities soon stepped in—as a result of the *Vanity Fair* article, Cobain believed—and briefly took custody of the newborn Frances.

As public interest in Nirvana—and in the newlyweds—continued to grow, the focus of much of the media coverage shifted from chronicling a new rock revolution to telling a more conventional story about drugs and the destructive personalities of the two unlikely celebrities. In December 1992, in one of several attempts at damage control, the Cobain family posed proudly on the cover of *Spin*, which trumpeted Artist of the Year honors for Nirvana.

The various dramas surrounding Nirvana helped to keep the band from mounting a high-profile U.S. tour to capitalize on *Nevermind*'s success, and delayed the making of a follow-up studio album. Instead, fans clamoring for more Nirvana music got the rarities compilation *Incesticide*, released in December 1992.

Although assembled from various B-sides, outtakes, demos, and BBC sessions, the collection nonetheless maintained a remarkably high level of quality. Despite the fact that Nirvana was still a new band with only two full-length albums under its belt, the amount of material available for *Incesticide* was striking. Beyond Cobain's mildly disturbing cover painting and his revealing, unsettling liner notes, the collection included the *Blew* EP track "Stain," much of the import-only *Hormoaning* EP and four previously unreleased tracks from the January 1988 demo session with Dale Crover.

ARGUING WITH SUCCESS

In early 1993, as Nirvana prepared to enter the studio to begin work on its third album, *In Utero*, Cobain revealed that he had music for a dozen new songs, but that his notebooks of new lyrics had been destroyed, along with some treasured guitars, in a plumbing accident in his apartment while the group was touring in Europe.

Disregarding the commercial pressures facing any band following up a blockbuster album—let alone one anointed the Voice of a Generation—the band chose to avoid *Nevermind*'s production polish to make a raw, honest punk album.

For the task, they chose indie recording icon Steve Albini. In addition to leading the esteemed noise outfits Big Black, Rapeman, and Shellac, Albini was an uncompromising lo-fi studio ace whose unadorned recording philosophy concentrated on conveying the dynamics of a rock band playing in a room. His no-frills approach had made him Albini an in-demand engineer (he generally refused to be credited as "producer") for such prominent alt-rock acts as Tad, Helmet, the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion, and the Pixies, whose beloved *Surfer Rosa* Albini recorded.

At the time, Nirvana's decision to work with Albini and eschew the stealthy studio gadgetry that had helped *Nevermind* to penetrate the mainstream consciousness caused considerable consternation at Geffen/DGC. Some observers theorized that the band was consciously trying to shed its mass audience, a charge that Cobain vigorously denied.

Nirvana's third album *In Utero* was recorded and mixed with Albini in two weeks during February 1993 at Pachyderm Studios in rural Cannon Falls, Minnesota, where the band was booked under the pseudonym the Simon Ritchie Bluegrass Ensemble (Simon Ritchie being Sid Vicious's real name). Despite the skimpy time frame, the sessions were finished ahead of schedule, thanks to the trio's intensive rehearsals and Albini's disciplined work ethic.

Although the band was reportedly initially happy with what they'd cut with Albini, their record company was apparently less impressed. *Chicago Tribune* critic Greg Kot reported that high-placed Geffen executives had claimed to him that the album was unreleasable; Cobain later confirmed that Nirvana's Geffen A&R rep, Gary Gersh, and the band's management were unhappy with the recordings. Albini later theorized that Gersh had tipped off Kot in attempt to exert pressure on Cobain to have the tracks remixed.

For whatever reason, Cobain and Novoselic subsequently revised their opinion of the recordings, and reportedly asked Albini to remix the tracks. When Albini demurred, R.E.M. producer Scott Litt was brought in to remix a pair of tracks, "All Apologies" and "Heart-Shaped Box," also the album's first two singles. (Litt also remixed a third track, "Pennyroyal Tea," although his version was released only on the single version of the song.) The remainder of the album used Albini's original mixes, but mastering engineer Bob Ludwig did substantial sonic tinkering to boost the presence of the vocals and bass, much to Albini's annoyance.

In retrospect, the pre-release hand-wringing over Albini's production seems less a reflection on the album's musical quality than an indication of how much money was riding on its success. Removed from the original controversy, *In Utero* is a bracingly powerful effort that presents Nirvana's salient qualities in an appropriately edgy sonic context. If its sound was alienating to some listeners, it wasn't outrageously inconsistent with the band's prior output.

In interviews, Cobain resisted the notion that Nirvana had, in effect, chosen to record an album with one creative hand tied behind their collective back simply to make a point.

Even if the band's intention had been to bolster their indie street cred, to atone for Cobain's guilt over *Nevermind*'s commercial compromises, or simply to alienate their more casual fans, *In Utero*'s most subversive element wasn't its production but the songs themselves. The material largely downplayed the previous album's anthemic choruses in favor of emotional and melodic subtlety, and the songs' emotionally naked lyrics are well served by the pared-down musical settings.

The lashing “Serve the Servants” opens the album. In light of subsequent events, it’s hard not to read the bleak, resigned lyrics of such songs as “Heart-Shaped Box,” “Rape Me,” and the heartbreaking closing track “All Apologies” as presaging Cobain’s self-inflicted death. But even if he had lived, *In Utero* would still carry an unmistakable air of farewell.

Upon its September release, *In Utero* sold in healthy quantities, but substantially less than its predecessor, which might well have been the case even if the band had made a carbon copy of *Nevermind*. A subsequent U.S. tour—the band’s first since *Nevermind* took off—was reasonably well attended overall, but met with some disappointing turnouts.

The accusations of Nirvana being deliberately uncommercial were seemingly refuted by the fact that the band acceded to Geffen’s request to ship an altered edition of *In Utero*, with its cover art toned down and “Rape Me” retitled “Waif Me,” to such conservative retail chains as Wal-Mart and K-Mart, so that fans in small towns would still be able to purchase the album.

In Utero’s troubled, turbulent vibe seemed to reflect the mood within the band. Cobain had suffered a heroin overdose on May 2, although that fact was not revealed to the public at the time. The following month, Love called police to the family’s Seattle home after Cobain threatened suicide. Cobain had a second overdose in July, just prior to a show to preview the *In Utero* songs at New York’s Roseland Ballroom.

When Nirvana began touring behind *In Utero* in the fall of 1993, the band was an on-stage quartet once again, with the addition of second guitarist Pat Smear to the lineup. Although a new face to most Nirvana fans, Smear was already a punk icon when Kurt Cobain was going through puberty. As a member of the seminal quartet the Germs, he’d been an important presence on the L.A. punk scene, before the band’s singer Darby Crash died of a heroin overdose in 1980.

Smear made his Nirvana debut when the band returned to *Saturday Night Live* in September. When a forty-five-date North American tour kicked off in October, the lineup was further augmented by classically trained cellist Lori Goldstone, whose textures meshed surprisingly well with the band’s harder edges.

As the band toured and rumors continued to circulate, fans and press continued to speculate about the state of Cobain’s health. In a cover story in the November of *Details*, Cobain claimed that he had been off heroin for a year.

During a pause in the tour in November, the band stopped off in New York for a one-off acoustic performance on MTV’s *Unplugged*. The show’s stripped-down format proved to be a fortuitous vehicle for Cobain’s songs and the band’s instrumental rapport, accentuating the introspective, melancholy elements of such tunes as “About a Girl,” “Come as You Are,” “Pennyroyal Tea,” and “All Apologies.”

In addition to revealing Novoselic’s capable accordion chops, the *Unplugged* set also featured a guest appearance by Curt and Cris Kirkwood of the beloved

Meat Puppets, who joined in to play three of their own tunes. The set also included memorable covers of the Vaselines' "Jesus Doesn't Want Me for a Sunbeam," David Bowie's "The Man Who Sold the World," and Leadbelly's "Where Did You Sleep Last Night."

Casual fans may have been surprised by the twentysomething combo's choice of the latter number, a decades-old blues standard. But Cobain was a committed Leadbelly fan, and had already recorded a version of the song with Screaming Trees frontman Mark Lanegan on Lanegan's 1990 solo album *The Winding Sheet*. So it's not surprising that Cobain's haunting, possessed reading of "Where Did You Sleep Last Night" was one of the *Unplugged* set's highlights.

November also saw Nirvana contribute to another, somewhat less demanding MTV-related project by contributing a track, "I Hate Myself and Want to Die," to the tie-in album *The Beavis and Butt-Head Experience*. Despite its worrisome title, the song was more self-deprecating than desperate.

In a January 1994 *Rolling Stone* cover story titled "Success Doesn't Suck," Cobain confirmed that the song was intended as a joke, which was one reason that the band left it off *In Utero*. Much of the *Rolling Stone* piece found Cobain working to dispel his image as a tortured, addicted, withdrawn contrarian.

Also in January, Nirvana entered Seattle's Robert Lang Studios to record "You Know You're Right," a new song that they'd been playing on tour. It was the band's first recording session since completing work on *In Utero* a year earlier. It would also prove to be their last.

R.I.P.

On March 1, Nirvana played what would be their last live show at Terminal Ein in Munich, Germany. After the performance, Kurt became ill and was diagnosed with bronchitis and laryngitis. Canceling several shows, he flew to Rome to receive medical treatment and spend time with his wife and daughter. On the morning of March 4, Cobain was rushed to the hospital after suffering an overdose of the tranquilizer Rohypnol combined with alcohol. After being hospitalized for five days, Cobain returned to Seattle.

Although management and the record company assured the press that the overdose had been accidental, many within the Nirvana camp confirmed that Cobain had attempted suicide. On March 18, Love called the police to their Seattle home after Kurt locked himself in a room, threatening to kill himself.

On March 26, Kurt was reported as "restored to full health and looking forward to touring the U.K." But by March 30, the British tour was off and Cobain was admitted to the Exodus Recovery Center in Marina Del Rey, California. After three days at Exodus, Cobain abruptly left the facility and returned to his home in Seattle.

Cobain then seemed to vanish from the radar of his family, bandmates, friends, and business associates, who were unable to contact him. His mother contacted police to file a missing persons report.

On the morning of April 8, 1994, the body of twenty-seven-year-old Kurt Cobain was discovered above the garage of his Seattle home by Gary Smith, an electrician who'd entered the house to install a new security system. Authorities later estimated his death to have occurred three days before his body was found, and ruled it to be the result of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Medical examiners discovered heroin and Valium in his bloodstream.

The news of Cobain's death was accompanied by a level of public grief and mourning that the music world had not witnessed since the murder of John Lennon fourteen years earlier. While radio stations blanketed the airwaves with Nirvana music, the media descended upon Seattle, ready to lionize Cobain as a tragic spokesman for his generation.

The first Nirvana release following Cobain's death arrived in November 1994. *MTV Unplugged in New York*, the fourteen-song album version of the band's television performance, avoided accusations of exploitation through the understated power of its musical contents. Indeed, the album's restrained, emotion-charged performances carried an appropriately bittersweet tone in light of the tragedy that followed its recording.

MTV Unplugged in New York debuted at number one on the *Billboard* album chart, selling more than 310,000 copies in the first week of release and later earning the band a Grammy Award in the Best Alternative Music Performance. The *Unplugged* version of "About a Girl" became a popular radio hit, and its stand-alone clip became an MTV favorite.

While Cobain's death is generally accepted to have been the result of suicide, various alternate theories regarding the cause of his death have arisen. Most of these have centered around the premise that the incident was actually a murder staged to look like a suicide. The most prominent manifestation of this was filmmaker Nick Broomfield's documentary *Kurt and Courtney*, which probed some of the darker aspects of the couple's relationship and raised the possibility that the death was a paid hit.

For Cobain's most devoted fans, though, the impulse is to remember what he and his band gave them, not the manner in which he was taken from them.

"I miss Kurt Cobain and Nirvana for the same reasons everybody else does," Kurt Loder wrote on MTV.com on the tenth anniversary of the artist's death.

Apart from their music, which I think will live as long as there are ears attuned to hear it, and their live shows, which were titanic, they exuded something rare: a near magical musical power that can unite people in ecstasy or anguish, but in any case unite them, and maybe, make their lives seem a little richer and more exciting, more filled with possibility, a little more worthy of living.¹²

AFTER THE END

In the years following Cobain's death, his bandmates have followed divergent career paths. Krist Novoselic (who had reverted to the original spelling of his given name following a 1993 trip to Croatia) formed Sweet 75, an eclectic musical venture pairing him with Venezuelan vocalist Yva Las Vegas, which released one grunge-free album for DGC in 1997. In 2002, he recorded an album as a member of Eyes Adrift, a supergroup power trio that also included Curt Kirkwood of the Meat Puppets and ex-Sublime drummer Bud Gaugh.

But Novoselic has focused much of his post-Nirvana energies upon social activism. He has been involved in regional politics in Washington state, worked on behalf of pro-choice and gay rights organizations, and worked to raise awareness about the plight of women and children in the conflict-torn former Yugoslavia. In 1995, Novoselic founded Joint Artists and Music Promotions Political Action Committee (JAMPAC), an advocacy organization for Washington state's music community.

Novoselic also combined his musical and political interests to team with Soundgarden's Kim Thayil and Dead Kennedys leader Jello Biafra to form the No WTO Combo, whose performance accompanied protests of during the World Trade Organization's 1999 conference in Seattle. In 2004, he authored the book *Of Grunge and Government: Let's Fix This Broken Democracy*, a combination memoir and practical guide to political activism.

Dave Grohl, meanwhile, quickly reinvented himself to carve out a durable and commercially successful post-Nirvana musical career. Having established his songwriting and singing credentials with "Marigold," released in the United Kingdom as a B-side on Nirvana's "Heart-Shaped Box" single, Grohl adopted the group identity of Foo Fighters. After recording the first Foo Fighters album by overdubbing all of the instruments himself, he expanded the act into a full-fledged quartet with Grohl singing and playing guitar.

Grohl has also found time to lend his drumming skills to a variety of acts ranging from classic-rock icon Tom Petty to prominent alt-rock outfits Killing Joke, Nine Inch Nails, Queens of the Stone Age, and ex-Minutemen bassist Mike Watt, on whose 1995 solo effort *Ball-Hog or Tugboat?* Grohl was briefly reunited with Kris Novoselic.

Meanwhile, Nirvana's posthumous legend continued to grow, fueled by the distance of history and a trickle of posthumous releases. In 1996, DGC released *From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah*, a sixteen-song live album spanning the band's career. Even without an active band to promote it, the live disc reached the top slot on the *Billboard* album charts.

2002's *Nirvana* was a single-CD compilation that distilled a selection of key tracks from the band's history. The disc's most anticipated selling point was the previously unheard "You Know You're Right," the new original that the band had recorded less than three months before Cobain's death.

A few years earlier, Novoselic had begun research for a proposed box set of rare and unreleased tracks covering Nirvana's entire existence. The archival project was originally intended for a 2001 release in conjunction with *Nevermind*'s tenth anniversary. But legal disputes between Love and the surviving Nirvana members delayed the collection's release. It was finally issued in 2004 as the lavishly packaged, lovingly annotated three-CD/one-DVD box set *With the Lights Out*. The package went platinum and reached number nineteen on the *Billboard* album chart—an impressive showing for a high-priced box set.

More than a decade after Kurt Cobain's passing, Nirvana's best work retains its musical and emotional resonance, while the changes that the band wrought remain deeply ingrained upon the face of popular music as well as the music industry. If the advent of "alternative rock"—a term that has grown so nebulous as to be almost meaningless—has opened the doors for much mediocre music, it has also greatly expanded the audience for adventurous and left-of-center rock. And, while Cobain was never able to enjoy the fruits of his success, the music that he made during his lifetime continues to enlighten and inspire.

TIMELINE

December 1987

Kurt Cobain, Krist Novoselic, and drummer Aaron Burckhard form the first lineup of Nirvana in their hometown of Aberdeen, Washington.

January 23, 1988

With Dale Crover of the Melvins filling in on drums, Nirvana records a ten-song demo with producer Jack Endino at Endino's Seattle studio Reciprocal Recordings. The demo will soon win the band a deal with Sub Pop Records.

October 30, 1988

Kurt smashes his guitar on stage for the first time.

November 1988

Nirvana's first Sub Pop single, "Love Buzz"/"Big Cheese," is released.

June 1989

Sub Pop releases Nirvana's first album *Bleach*, which the band supports with a month-long club tour.

October 23, 1989

Nirvana plays its first overseas show, in Newcastle, England.

September 25, 1990

Drummer Dave Grohl, formerly of Washington, D.C., band *Scream*, joins Nirvana.

April 17, 1991

Nirvana plays "Smells Like Teen Spirit" in public for the first time.

April 30, 1991

Nirvana signs with Geffen/DGC Records.

August 1991

Nirvana open for their heroes Sonic Youth on a European festival tour, documented in the film *1991: The Year Punk Broke*.

September 20, 1991

Nirvana launches their *Nevermind* tour in Toronto.

September 24, 1991

Nevermind is released by DGC.

October 12, 1991

Nevermind is certified gold.

January 11, 1992

Nevermind hits number one on *Billboard*'s album chart. The same day, Nirvana performs on *Saturday Night Live*.

February 24, 1992

Kurt Cobain marries Courtney Love in Waikiki, Hawaii.

April 1992

Nirvana appears on the cover of *Rolling Stone*.

August 18, 1992

Frances Bean Cobain is born.

September 21, 1993

In Utero is released.

November 19, 1993

Nirvana tapes an all-acoustic *MTV Unplugged* performance at Sony Studios in New York.

January 7, 1994

Nirvana plays its last U.S. show at the Seattle Arena.

February 6, 1994

Nirvana embarks on a tour of Europe.

March 1, 1994

Nirvana performs at Terminal Ein in Munich, Germany. It will be their final show.

March 4, 1994

Kurt is hospitalized in Rome, following a suicide attempt.

April 8, 1994

Kurt Cobain is found dead of a self-inflicted shotgun wound.

April 10, 1994

Thousands of fans turn out for a Cobain memorial service in Seattle.

SELECT DISCOGRAPHY

Bleach, 1989

Nevermind, 1991

Incesticide, 1992

In Utero, 1993

MTV Unplugged in New York, 1994

From the Muddy Banks of the Wishkah, 1996

Nirvana, 2002

NOTES

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2. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
3. "Kurt Speaks: An Exclusive 1994 Interview," VH-1, available online at www.vh1.com/artists/interview/1458484/11042002/nirvana.jhtml.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Mike Gitter, "Nirvana: A Steady Current of Mistrust and Contempt for the 'Average American,'" *East Coast Rocker*, October 9, 1991.
6. Krist Novoselic, *Of Grunge and Government: Let's Fix This Broken Democracy*, 2004, Chapter 1 available online at www.akashicbooks.com/of-grungeexcerpt.htm.
7. Nirvana promotional bio, 1991, DGC Records.
8. Michael Deeds, "Nirvana," *New Route*, December 1991.
9. "Kurt Speaks."
10. Lorraine Ali, "If You Read, You'll Judge," *Newsweek*, October 28, 2002; available online at www.nirvana-music.com/kurt-cobain-journals-news-week.html.
11. Jonathan Poneman, "Family Values," *Spin*, December 1992.
12. Kurt Loder, "Days of Thunder," MTV.com, April 2004; available online at www.mtv.com/bands/n/nirvana/news_feature_040325.

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About the Authors and Contributors

SCOTT SCHINDER is the author of several books about popular music and culture, including Rolling Stone's *Alt-Rock-A-Rama*. He has written for such publications as *Entertainment Weekly*, *Newsday*, and *Creem*.

ANDY SCHWARTZ is the former publisher and editor of punk/new wave music magazine *New York Rocker*. He also served as national director of editorial services for Epic Records (a division of Sony-BMG) and as a consulting researcher and archivist for the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

ALAN BISBORT has spent 25 years as a working journalist and writer. His writing has appeared in *Rolling Stone*, *Creem*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Vanity Fair*.

CHRIS COCKER is a freelance writer specializing in contemporary music.

SUSAN GODWIN is a freelance writer specializing in contemporary music.

JESSE JARNOW has written for the *London Times*, *Rolling Stone*, the Associated Press, and elsewhere. He blogs about books, b-sides, and baseball at jessejarnow.com.

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