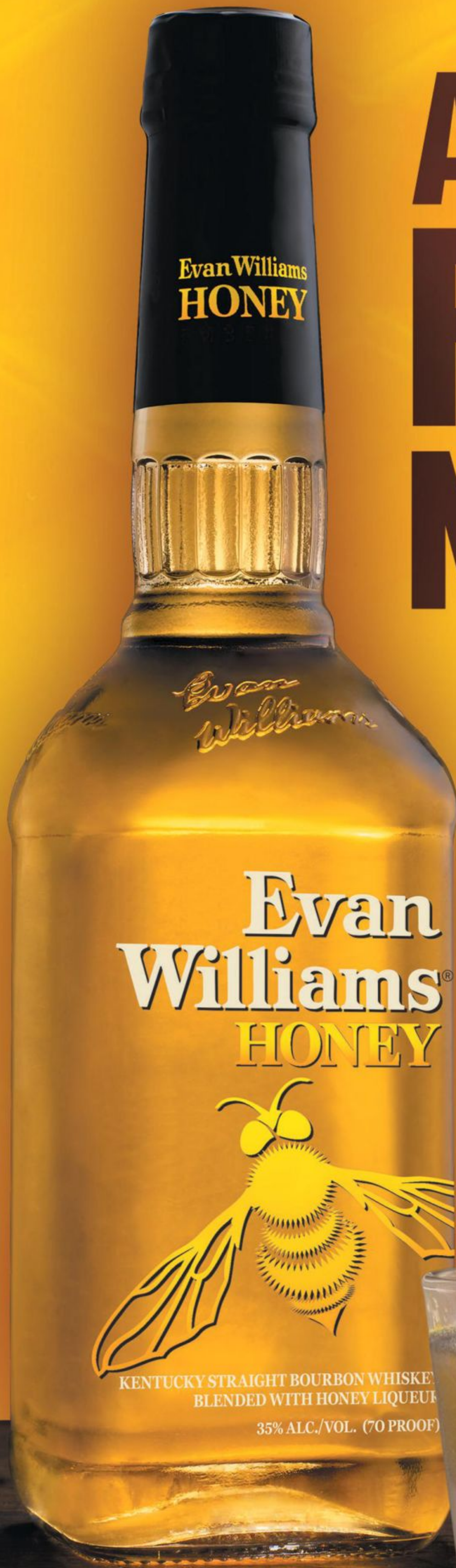


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Rolling Stone

David
Bowie
1947-2016

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RS1254 “All the News That Fits”

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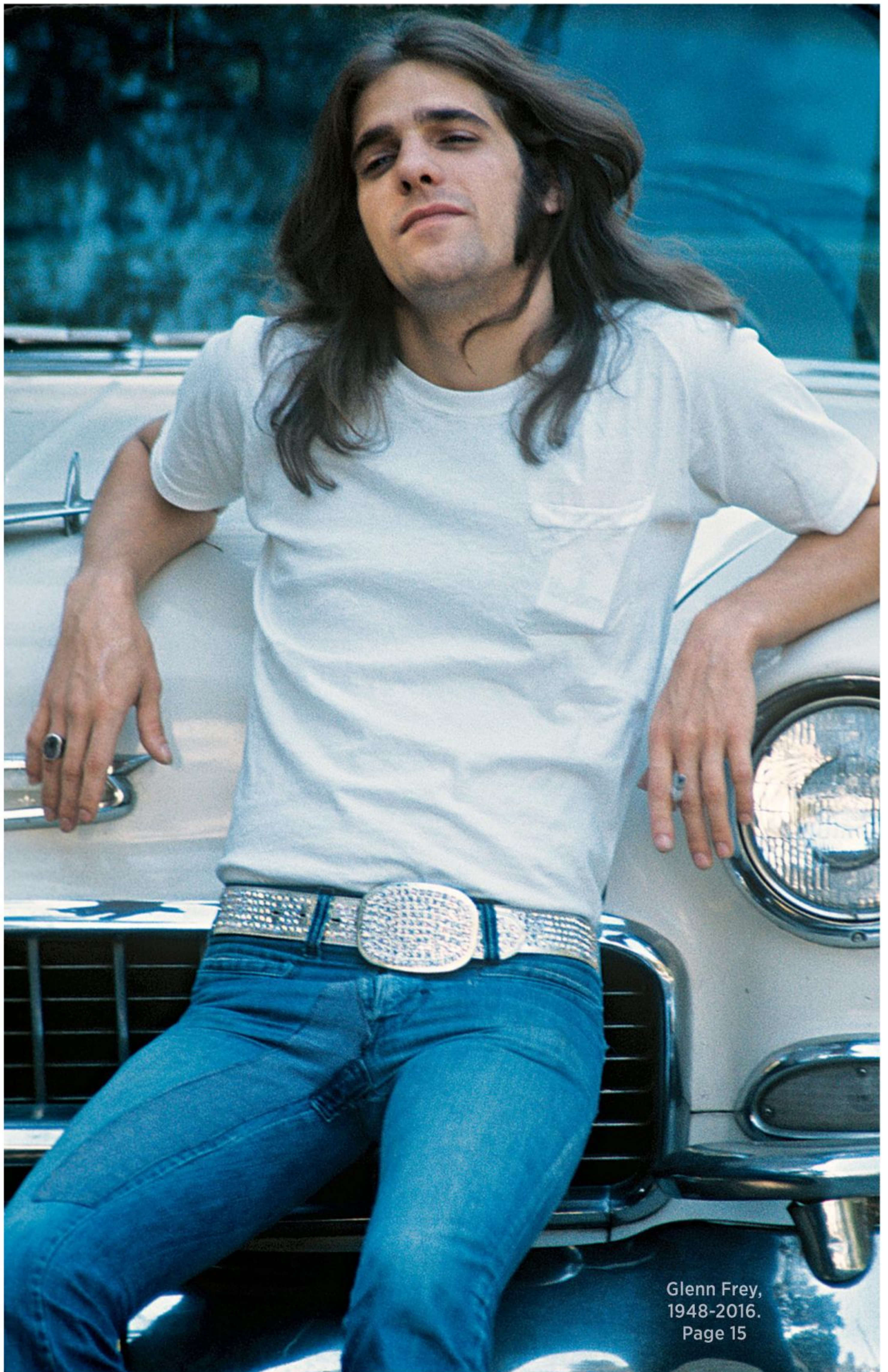
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ON THE COVER David Bowie photographed in London on March 21st, 1983. Photograph by **Anton Corbijn**/Contour by Getty Images.



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FILM

MICHAEL JACKSON IN THE '70S

Spike Lee talks about his new documentary, *Michael Jackson's Journey From Motown to Off the Wall*, which includes rare archival footage and new interviews.



Jackson in 1979



Osbourne

TOUR

SABBATH'S FINAL RIDE

The metal pioneers have kicked off their final tour, and we spoke to Ozzy Osbourne about hanging it up after nearly 50 years. "I don't want to drag it into dirt," he says.



PREVIEW

TEDESCHI TRUCKS BAND

Husband-and-wife team Derek Trucks and Susan Tedeschi talk about being in a 12-person band, their insane tour schedule and their new blues-rock album, *Let Me Get By*.



MUSIC

SAVAGES FIND LOVE AND NOISE

The art punks discuss how they combined aggression and heartbreak on their new LP. "It was very loud," says bassist Ayse Hassan. "It had this hyper-real feeling."

360 DEGREES OF COUNTRY!

Come to Rolling Stone Country for daily news, video and reviews on Nashville and beyond. In our regular series "The Ram Report," we talk to Aubrie Sellers about her debut album, *New City Blues*, the brand of music she calls "garage country," and her country-royalty pedigree: Her mom is Lee Ann Womack. Powered by Ram.

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Sellers



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Correspondence

Love Letters
& Advice



5SOS Delivers

AFTER PATRICK DOYLE'S laugh-out-loud Five Seconds of Summer cover story ["From Boys to Punks," RS 1252], I hope 5SOS can finally stop feeling they have to prove they're a real band: Millions of devoted fans know how great they are.

Sheila Dowd, via the Internet

5SOS FANS ARE BEYOND INFURIATED by Doyle's piece, which paints the boys as wild partyers. That isn't who they are. Why couldn't you have focused on their music, their interests and their influences? That's what we who love them want to know about.

*Courtney Adams
Via the Internet*

AS A HUGE 5SOS FAN, I'M surprised at the uproar over the story. I don't know why people think the band should be living in a cave or a monastery. They spoke openly with a reporter, and Doyle's excellent story was the result.

Nicole Estrada, via the Internet

WHAT PLANET ARE PEOPLE living on? The boys of 5SOS are young, rich, famous and have fans everywhere who buy records and tickets. They took their clothes off on the cover of an iconic magazine, and their fans are complaining?

*Meghan Davidson
Via the Internet*

Bay Does Benghazi

In RS 1252, contributing editor Josh Eells wrote about Michael Bay and the making of *13 Hours*, his film about the 2012 attack on the American diplomatic compound in Libya ["Michael Bay Goes to War"]. ROLLING STONE readers responded.

A BANG-UP JOB BY JOSH Eells profiling the master of explosions and his Benghazi film. Eells was respectful of Bay's body of work, but also delightfully skeptical.

*Steve Rollins
Via the Internet*

JUST FINISHED THE BAY piece. No "stand-down" order was given; Bay is attempting to influence the national politics of this country. You guys took down Gen. Stanley McChrystal. Why are you playing patty-cake with some Hollywood a-hole about something this important?

*Mark Clark
University Place, WA*

I'D GO SEE A MOVIE BASED on what actually happened

in Benghazi. Reality is dramatic enough for most people. Even if they were kidding, given our history in the region, it was crude that the CIA contractors threatened to waterboard Bay if he got their story wrong.

*Edward McGowan
Via the Internet*



I WOULD LIKE TO TELL you what I thought of the piece on Michael Bay, but it's classified.

*Bob Campbell
Chippewa Lake, OH*

American Gulag

WHILE READING JANET Reitman's Guantanamo story ["Inside Gitmo: America's Shame," RS 1252], I was torn between gratitude for the masterful reporting and rage about our government's unwillingness to shut this place down. The nearly 50 detainees in "indefinite detention" can't define American values.

Lauren Jackson, via the Internet

THE PRISONER WHO BECAME a *Little House on the Prairie* fan – how completely surreal. However he does it, Obama must fulfill his famous campaign promise and close Guantanamo.

William Walsh, via the Internet

I CAN'T UNDERSTAND THE persistent concern over these terrorists. If released, they go back to terrorism. These people hate the U.S. and will do all they can to destroy us. Gitmo is too good for them.

Marc Logan, Brooklyn

I HAD MY EYES OPENED BY the Gitmo story. Reitman is right: It is our shame. The annual cost to American taxpayers was \$3.4 million per detainee? What's the real reason for keeping the camp open?

*Robbi Stapleton Viveiros
Manteo, NC*

Weiland, R.I.P.

WHILE SAD, IT WAS HONESTLY not shocking to hear the

news of Scott Weiland's passing [Tribute, RS 1252]. David Fricke's remembrance reminds us what a tormented talent Weiland was.

Carrie Wilson, Rochester, NY

Southern Comfort

I'VE LOVED CAGE THE Elephant since "Ain't No Rest for the Wicked" came out in 2008 ["Brothers Gonna Work It Out," RS 1252]. The band cites T. Rex and the Smiths among its influences – how cool.

*Gary Riley
Via the Internet*

WHILE 5SOS REEKED OF punk posing, the Shultz brothers came off as sincere and true to their roots. If 5SOS believes "75 percent of our lives is proving we're a real band," they could take a lesson from Cage the Elephant.

Gavin Ehringer, Denver

Gomez Shines

JOE LEVY'S INTERVIEW with Selena Gomez was startling [Q&A, RS 1252]. I've been loving her new sound, but quite frankly I had no idea she was so thoughtful. Nice to get a clearer picture of her.

Wendy Wilson, via the Internet

Jamaican Star

ALEX MORRIS WROTE A FASCINATING profile of Marlon James ["Jamaica's Rebel Son," RS 1252]. James' stunning novel deserved the Man Booker Prize by a huge margin.

*Ted Graham
Via the Internet*

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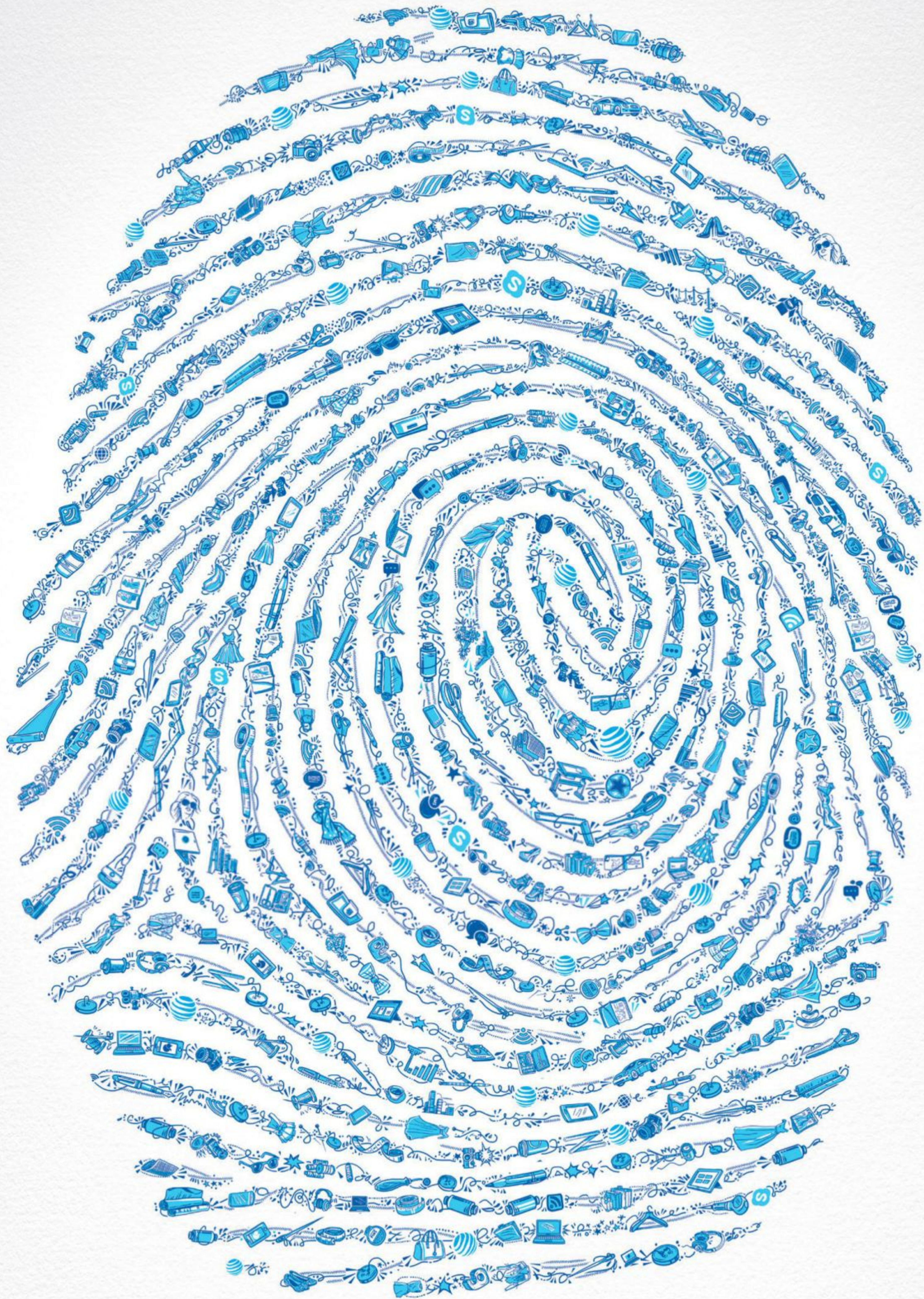
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Zac Posen, Fashion Designer

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The Playlist

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW



1. Kanye West feat. Kendrick Lamar "No More Parties in L.A."

Kanye trades witty verses with K. Dot over a blunted Madlib co-production, sounding like a throwback to the smart-aleck Ye we loved circa 2005. Ditching the party has never sounded so cool. Consider us officially stoked for *Swish*.

2. PJ Harvey "The Wheel"

Five years ago, Harvey blew our minds with *Let England Shake*, her spell-binding take on British folk. The lead single from her follow-up picks up where that left off, as she chants unsettling lyrics about destruction over roiling guitar chords and skronking sax.

3. Sia "Unstoppable"

Sia has a special gift for writing monumental hooks that feel like they're coming from a genuine place – like she does on this sledgehammer of a pop anthem.

4. Margaret Glaspy "You and I"

"I don't wanna see you cry, but it feels like a matter of time," the rising singer-songwriter warns on this sharp, sour breakup song, underscoring her point with hot barbs of electric guitar.



5. Jeff Buckley "Just Like a Woman"

Almost 20 years after the tragic romantic's death, we're still discovering new sides to his work. On this outtake from the Nineties, he stretches out a Dylan classic like a piece of psychedelic taffy.



6. Chairlift "Moth to the Flame"

The catchiest groove on *Moth* – the new LP from this Brooklyn synth-pop duo (and onetime Beyoncé collaborators) – feels as light and dizzy as falling in love. Listen a few times and we bet you will too.

7. Sad13 and Lizzo "Basement Queens"

Speedy Ortiz singer-guitarist Sadie Dupuis (a.k.a. Sad13) and Minneapolis rapper-singer Lizzo team up for a wicked-fun tune about the timeless art of rocking out below ground level.



MY LIST



Noel Gallagher

Five Greatest Bowie Songs

"Let's celebrate his life more than mourn his passing," says former Oasis guitarist (and Bowie mega-fan) Noel Gallagher, who's touring here this summer.

"In the Heat of the Morning"

It's little-known that Bowie started off as a Scott Walker-type dude. This song is very mid-Sixties Brit pop. Great organ sound.

"Fashion"

The guitars on this song are great – I love the discordant-ness of it all. It's got a great stomp to it. Not blues, not jazz, not rock. It's something else.

"The Jean Genie"

This is maybe the most un-British-sounding song he ever did. He was taking a lead from Lou Reed.

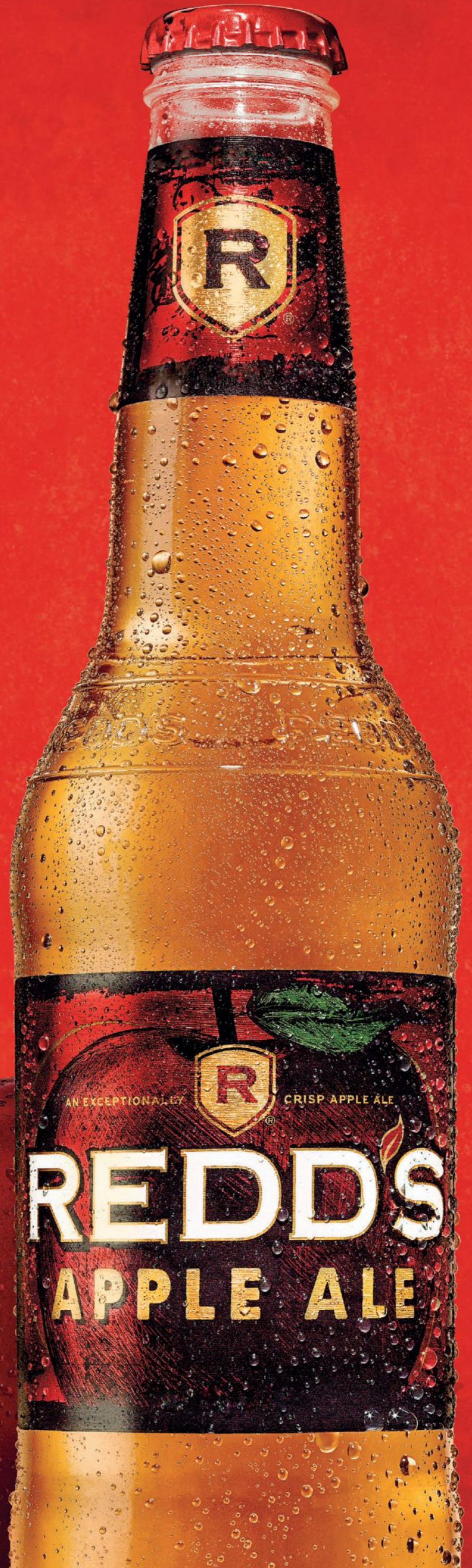
"Let's Dance"

A few years ago, I worked out the chords. What a fucking great song to play on guitar! And I like that it's got Nile Rodgers and Stevie Ray Vaughan – who else would have them on the same record?

"Heroes"

It's a straightforward song – the sentiment is amazing. I saw it on British television around 1981, and I went down to my local secondhand-record shop and never looked back.

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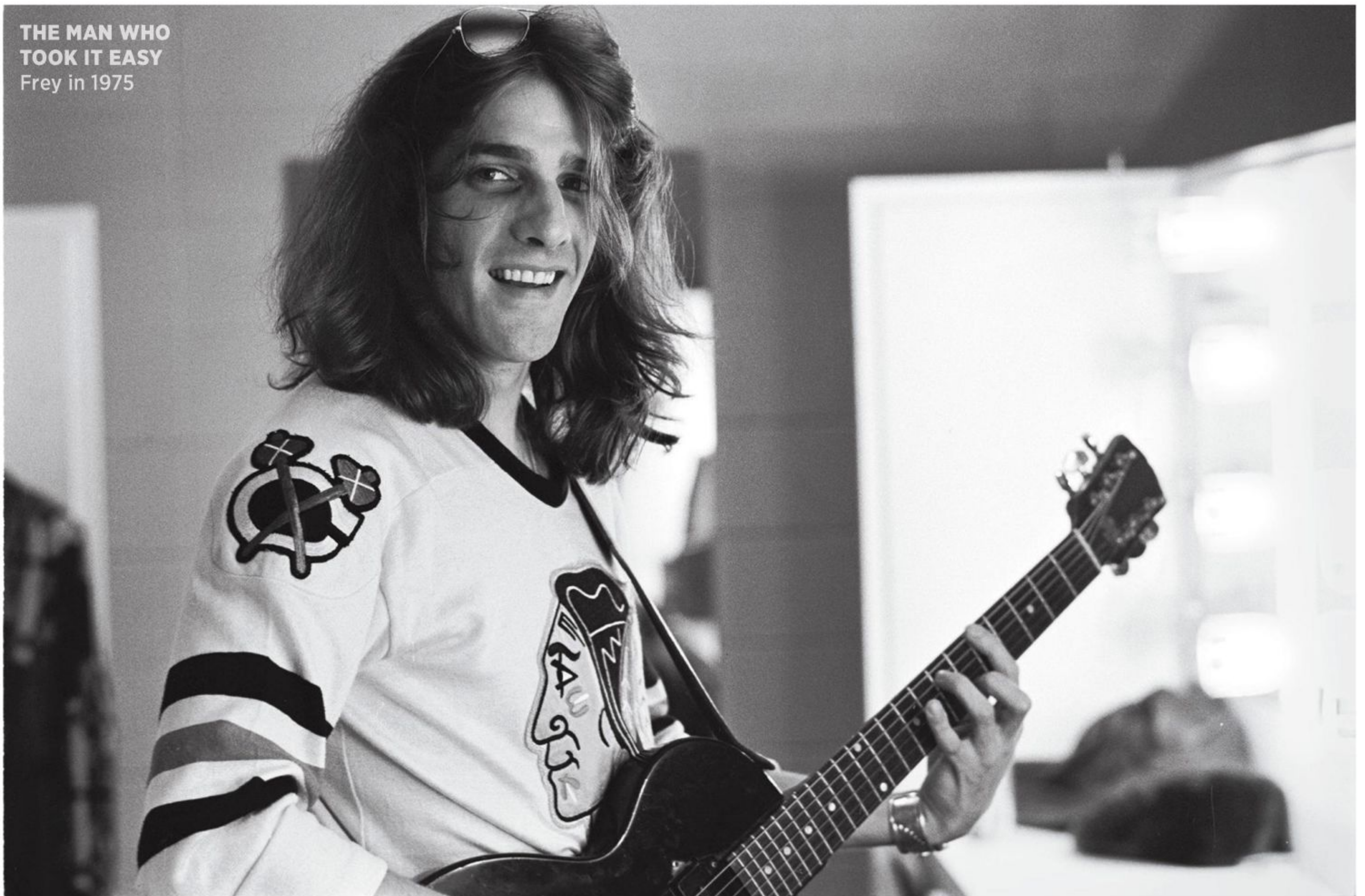


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Rock & Roll

THE MAN WHO
TOOK IT EASY
Frey in 1975



GLENN FREY 1948-2016

The Heart of an Eagle

IT WAS 1972, AND "TAKE IT EASY" was on the charts. The Eagles came to San Diego, where I was working for a local underground paper. I grabbed my photographer buddy Gary from school and made a plan. We were going to sneak backstage and grab an interview with this new group. I loved their harmonies, and the confident style that charged their first hit.

Glenn Frey introduced the band: "We're the Eagles, from Southern California." They were explosive, right off the

To one Rolling Stone writer, Glenn Frey was more than just a rock star – he was a good friend

BY CAMERON CROWE

top, opening with their a cappella rendition of "Seven Bridges Road." Then, this new band, filled with piss and vinegar, launched immediately into their hit. There was nothing "laid-back" about them. No "saving the hit for last." They were a lean-and-mean American group, strong on vocals and stronger on attitude.

Gary and I talked our way backstage with ease and found the band's road manager, who threw us all into a small dressing room where drummer-singer Don Henley, bassist Randy Meisner and guitarist Ber-



nie Leadon took us through the story of the band. Every other sentence began with “And then Glenn...” Glenn Frey was the only guy not in the room.

After about a half hour, the door whipped open and Frey walked in. He had a Detroit swagger, a memorable drawl and patter like a baseball player who’d just been called up to the majors. He was part musician, part tactician and part stand-up comic.

It was immediately obvious that Glenn had his eye on the big picture. He’d studied other bands, how they broke up or went creatively dry. He had a plan laid out. He even used that first interview to promote his friends – Jackson Browne, John David Souther and songwriter Jack Tempchin. His laugh and demeanor were infectious. Immediately, you wanted to be in his club.

At the end of the interview, I asked the band to pose together. The photo is one of my favorites. It captures one of their earliest, happiest, freest moments. A band that would later brawl memorably was giddy and happy that night, arms wrapped around each other. The look on



THE TEEN KING

Frey (top, third from left) with the Eagles in 1979. Above: Frey and Henley, 1975. The pair co-wrote most classic Eagles songs, often spending hours trying to figure out a single word in a lyric.

Glenn’s face is priceless: *This is my band, and we’re on our way.*

Glenn and I exchanged phone numbers, and he stayed in touch. He brought me in early on the making of the Eagles’ second album, *Desperado*. As I’d begun to do more and more work as a correspondent for *ROLLING STONE*, he began to complain to me about the magazine calling the band “soft” or “laid-back,” along with much of the East Coast literati. The Eagles, in my time around them, were many

things, but “laid-back” was not one of them.

Glenn’s jocular street wisdom was pretty addictive to a guy who’d never had a brother. It was easy to share your personal stuff with Glenn. He’d help you plot out the answers to your problems like a seasoned coach. He once laid out the psychology of getting and maintaining a buzz at a party. (“Two beers back to back, then one every hour and 15 minutes.... You’ll be loquacious, and all the girls will talk with you.”)

I found that I went to him often for gender-specific advice that would have stumped or even horrified my sister.

When I once told him about a girl I was in love with from afar, a girl I was sure I needed to impress with a better “act,” Frey reacted hugely. “No!” he said with a pirate’s smile. “You don’t need an act – all you need is to be you.” He leaned in close. “If she can’t smell your qualifications, move on.”

Frey was a big character, and as I began to write fiction, I often plucked liberally from things he’d told me. The above quote I gave to Mike Damone in *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*.

Glenn valued camaraderie, which was apparent whenever he was around crew and friends or in a recording session. Glenn and Don would coach the vocal takes like seasoned pros, giving sharp directions, as well as nicknames and athletic truisms worthy of John Wooden. Along with longtime friend and manager Irving Azoff, Glenn was also careful about keeping his band above financial water. He'd read too many biographies about genius musicians who were now broke. Early in the band's history, he took me aside. "I don't want to be super-rich, I don't need the big money," he once said. "I just want 1 million to spend on a house and a life, and 1 million to put in the bank and live off the interest. And then I got a life."

Six months later, before playing a sold-out show in Oakland, he casually told me the good news. "Cameron, remember what I told you about the \$2 million?" I nodded. "Got it. Now all I gotta do is make a buncha records that I would buy myself!"

The sound of those records made for scores of hits, changed the way concerts and the music business would be conducted in modern times, and also redefined what we now know as country music. None of this was by accident. Glenn was the playmaker. His and Henley's deep knowledge of sounds, of R&B and soul, country and pure rock, warmed up three different generations. Their success never even flagged during the decade-plus hiatus they took starting in 1980.

Their 2013 documentary, *History of the Eagles*, told the whole warts-and-all story. And in it, you see the Frey his friends knew. Funny. Tough. Cynical. A rules-keeper. Along the way, these scrappy carpetbaggers from Texas and Detroit wrote about Los Angeles with a clarity and wit that few have matched, in novels, music or movies. The East Coast critical intelligentsia continued to slight them, and sometimes even mock them.

Frey gave up trying to please them long ago. The Beach Boys had the far more media-attractive tale of Brian Wilson and a troubled young genius's mythology of pain. The Eagles had Glenn and Henley, an avalanche of public acceptance, fewer scandals, and a clear-eyed adult's view of the same California. They were, frankly, a winning team. Some never forgave them for their success. But that success, as Frey would explain to you, was always part of the plan. "You can be in the gutter talking about all your missed opportunities," he said, "or you can be successful, and pull the other guy out of the gutter."

Frey made success look like a ballgame anybody could suit up and play with him. Within a half hour, he'd have given you a nickname. Because I made him laugh with an imitation of James Brown's MC ("Ladies and gentlemen, it is star time to night..."), I was "Get Down Clown." And Glenn, who along with Henley made a regular habit of charming the ladies with gallant good manners, was "the Teen King." Because of his ability with charting Eagles harmonies, he was also "the Lone Ar-



"It was easy to share your personal stuff with Glenn. I went to him for gender-specific advice that would have horrified my sister."

ranger," and once, because he'd collected a small garbage bin filled with weed in his backyard, he was "Roach." Don Felder, his guitarist, was "Fingers." The other band members had a psychedelic ever-changing collection of nicknames that each had deep and swirling meanings. I forgot most of 'em, but Glenn never did.

When I later moved in with Glenn and Henley for a couple of weeks while they were writing the *One of These Nights* album, we talked about life and love and music for days on end. I watched as they incorporated their nighttime adventures into daytime classics. They worked meticulously on songs like "Lyin' Eyes" and "One of These Nights," often spending hours on a single word.

And at one point, Glenn took me aside. We had the very conversation that appears in *Almost Famous*, when William is guided to leave some stuff off the record. Frey eventually capitulated. "Everything's on the record," he said. And then the famous Glenn smile. "Just make us look cool."

In *Jerry Maguire*, Glenn played Dennis Wilburn, the general manager of the Arizona Cardinals. I had auditioned several other actors for the part. Somehow they all had a problem harassing and beating down Tom Cruise's character, who was then at his low point. Many were intimidated delivering soul-crushing lines to such a superstar. Glenn came in and had more fun harassing Cruise than a kid at summer camp. "It's just sports to me," he said.

His turnaround at the end of the film was far sweeter for the vigor he put into the performance. He was an excellent actor with generous people skills, friends with the entire crew. For all those who worked with him, from the beginning to the end, he was the team captain who you could call late at night. Glenn was also never far from the Teen King, awash with the enthusiasm and wickedly fun humor of his youth.

After the enormous critical and commercial victory of the band's masterpiece, *Hotel California*, Glenn also became a family man. He approached that role with the same verve of the kid who got in a car and drove from Michigan to Laurel Canyon, spotted David Crosby on his first day and never looked back.

For fans of Frey feeling the pain now, I have a simple suggestion: Enjoy a long-neck Budweiser, and put on some soul music. Something with great vocals, like Johnnie Taylor's "I've Been Born Again." Or a song that Glenn was so intent on playing for me that he drove back and forth on Sunset Boulevard, again and again, just to listen and study: Eddie Hinton's "Get Off in It."

A last image. Working on our show *Roadies*, I was set on hiring Glenn to play the band's skilled but flighty manager, Preston. The word that came back was upsetting. Frey was in tough shape, hospitalized but fighting. I tried not to worry too much. Glenn Frey is, and always was, built for the fourth-quarter win. I last saw him over the summer, and I told him I wanted him to act again. He was enthusiastic. "I got an idea for a TV show," he said. "*Kauai Five-O*. I'm Hawaii's toughest cop, and I live in Kauai. And in the off-season..." There was that pirate smile again. "...I get to be in the Eagles. It's a good life, right?"

RS

The Long Run

Glenn Frey was a dedicated family man who fought through years of illness to keep the Eagles flying

BY DAVID BROWNE

IN LOUISIANA ON JULY 29TH, 2015, Glenn Frey was about to go onstage for the last encore of the final show of their History of the Eagles Tour. He seemed in a good mood – and he had reason to be. Bernie Leadon, a founding member of the Eagles who'd left in 1975, had re-joined the band for the shows. On the way to the stage, Frey gave Leadon a hug and told him how glad he was to play together again – then he added, “This isn't the end.”

Sadly, though, it was: The show turned out to be Frey's last public gig. On January 18th, Frey, who had been coping with rheumatoid arthritis for more than 15 years, succumbed to the disease, in combination with colitis and pneumonia he may have developed from his arthritis medications. He was 67. “It's a complex medical history, and in the end, all those things ganged up on him,” says longtime friend and collaborator JD Souther.

Outside of his illnesses, life was good to Frey. The Eagles toured regularly since reuniting in 1994 and sounded as strong as ever in recent years. A 2013 documentary, *History of the Eagles*, generated further interest in the band, which earned \$100 million in 2014. “I saw them less than a year ago, and they were damn good,” says Randy Newman. “Sedate crowd – maybe it's L.A. – but it was tremendous. Hit after hit. And put together.”

With his wife, Cindy, a choreographer he met on one of his video shoots, Frey had three children (Deacon, Taylor and Otis). “I have a nine-year-old son,” he told *ROLLING STONE* in 2012. “I have two kids that have just now gone off to college. So those are big responsibilities. Obviously, there's more to life than making records.”

Frey had homes in L.A. and Hawaii, and in recent years, he and his family had moved to New York, where he picked up his son after school and even took the subway to one of the Eagles' shows there last year.

Fitting the Eagles into that life could be tricky. “Don [Henley] lives in Dallas, and I live in L.A., but I really want to live in Hawaii, and Timothy [Schmit] and Joe [Walsh] are kind of spread out here,” he told *ROLLING STONE*. “It's not so much about tension as much as geography.”



Frey and Henley in 2015

“[My kids] are big responsibilities,” Frey told *Rolling Stone* in 2012. “Obviously, there's more to life than making records.”

Frey battled health issues for decades. In the Nineties, he'd had two bouts of diverticulitis (inflammation of the digestive tract) that required surgery, including one in 1994 that forced him off the road. “We actually postponed a tour and flew back to L.A., and he had surgery,” recalls former Eagle Don Felder.

Frey remained active outside the Eagles. In 2012, he released *After Hours*, a collection of pop-standard covers. The set came about after he delivered impromptu versions of some of the songs at a golf tournament (Frey, an avid golfer, had been invited to perform by Clint Eastwood). When he died, he was writing songs for what would have been his first album of original material since 1992's *Strange Weather*. Plans for an Eagles-

themed musical have been in the works for years, and Frey recently took in *Beautiful*, the Carole King Broadway show, for inspiration. Asked if the Eagles production would include the band's infamous fights, he called them “conversations – give and take.”

But Frey's health was a constant problem. He would sometimes play with a bandage on his wrist to dull his arthritis pain. Last summer, his treatment led to intestinal issues, and while preparing for a third surgery, he developed pneumonia and was hospitalized in New York in October. The Eagles were forced to postpone their participation in December's Kennedy Center Honors. Frey never left the hospital.

At press time, plans for a memorial were still in the works, and the future of the Eagles is unclear. “Glenn is the first one of the Gentlemen Boys to go – that's what Glenn, Jackson [Browne], Don and I called each other when we sang on other people's records,” Souther says. “Linda Ronstadt called me last night and said, ‘It's a different world, isn't it?’ I said, ‘Yes, it is.’ It will not be the same without the big laugh and big, gregarious approach to life that Glenn had.”

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Hinds: Late Nights, Loud Guitars

How the best band in Madrid went from covering Bob Dylan on the beach to selling out clubs in America

ONE SECOND – I’M GOING TO grab a beer so I’ll feel relaxed and tell you our secrets,” Ana García Perrote says with a laugh. The 21-year-old singer-guitarist is backstage at a theater in Lille, France, killing time before she hits the stage with the Madrid-based quartet Hinds. Their shows are ridiculously fun garage-rock rave-ups – much like their debut LP, *Leave Me Alone* – and lately the crowds have been wilder than ever, which is just how Hinds like it. “Our audiences used to be more shy,” Perrote says after finding a drink. “But now people know that if you go to a Hinds show, you can dance as much as you want and feel free for an hour.”

Hinds began in the summer of 2011, when Perrote and singer-guitarist Carlotta Cosials, who met through an ex-boyfriend, brought a couple of acoustic guitars along on a vacation to Spain’s Mediterranean coast. “I didn’t know how to play,” says Cosials, 24, “but Ana taught me the three chords that she knew.” They ended up sitting on the beach, strumming Bob Dylan’s “It Ain’t Me, Babe,” and trying to memorize the knotty lyrics. “We got really obsessed,” Perrote says. “We had tan lines from where the guitars cast shadows on our bodies.” Next, they tried busking their Dylan cover and a few other songs by the shore; it was good enough to bring in 30 euros. “We were so happy that we could pay for the gas to Madrid and back!” says Perrote.

The duo’s musical career quieted down shortly after that, only to roar



SPANISH BOMBS
Martin, Cosials,
Grimbergen and
Perrote (from
left) in Brooklyn,
October

back in 2014, when they rounded out their lineup with bassist Ade Martin, 23, and drummer Amber Grimbergen, 19. A few buzzy singles later (and a name change from Deers to Hinds after the threat of legal action from another band), they were selling out club shows in the U.K. and Germany.

Hinds’ members are especially fond of playing the States, where they just finished a monthlong tour and will return in

March. “The wildness of Americans really turns us on,” Cosials says. “People really give themselves to the music. In Europe, people don’t go that crazy.” They’re still talking about the house party they played in one Kansas City fan’s basement after rocking a local theater in October. “It was exactly how Europeans imagine American parties,” Perrote says. “Everyone was making out with each other. This is the best work ever, seriously.” **SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON**



Nashville
royalty:
Sellers

Aubrie Sellers Brings Garage Country to Nashville

Singer breaks out with tough-sounding debut

Aubrie Sellers is the daughter of veteran Nashville hitmaker Lee Ann Womack. But she grew up listening to Led Zeppelin right along with Ralph Stanley, and that comes through in what she calls the “garage country” sound of her debut album, *New City Blues*. “My mom loved traditional country music, and she wasn’t exposed to all the

music that I was growing up,” says Sellers. “I never thought I was going to make a record like my mom.”

Sellers, 24, was raised in Nashville and East Texas (“I’m a dual citizen”). Her family borders on country royalty – along with her mom, her stepfather, producer Frank Liddell, helmed her debut. “I was on the road singing with my mom when I was 14, 15, 16,” Sellers says. “There’s been

a lot of pressure because my parents are really successful.” Last year, she landed a slot opening for Chris Stapleton – fitting, since her tough sounds may make her part of the same game-changing wave in Nashville. “Chris, Sturgill [Simpson] and even artists like Kacey Musgraves and Miranda Lambert have been helping to unlock people’s minds,” she says. “People want to hear stuff that’s different.” **JOSEPH HUDAK**

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Who Will Win a Grammy?

Will Taylor rule the night? Can Kendrick take Album of the Year? Who's James Bay, again? Our experts preview the 2016 awards

RECORD OF THE YEAR

Uptown Funk

Mark Ronson feat. Bruno Mars

EXPERTS SAY "It was Number One for 14 weeks, and it was on pop, R&B and hip-hop radio," says Jack Isquith, Slacker Radio SVP of content licensing and programming. "That's insane dominance."

VEGAS ODDS: 4-5

Blank Space

Taylor Swift ▶

EXPERTS SAY "It was one hit among many [on 1989], which may hurt its case," says Isquith.

VEGAS ODDS: 5-2

Thinking Out Loud

Ed Sheeran

EXPERTS SAY "It would have to jump over Swift and Ronson," says oddsmaker Johnny Avello. "I don't see it."

VEGAS ODDS: 6-1

Really Love

D'Angelo and the Vanguard

EXPERTS SAY "No chance," says Carl Mello, senior buyer at Newbury Comics. "He's more of an album artist than singles artist."

VEGAS ODDS: 10-1

Can't Feel My Face

▶ The Weeknd

EXPERTS SAY "If voters want to be seen as less than 80 years old, it has a chance," Mello says.

VEGAS ODDS: 25-1



ALBUM OF THE YEAR

1989

Taylor Swift

EXPERTS SAY "People love this album, but it feels like it's been out for 100 years," Mello says. "She might be disappointed going up against Kendrick."

VEGAS ODDS: 1-2

Traveller

Chris Stapleton

EXPERTS SAY "He did tremendously at the Country Music Awards," says Isquith, "but he's not known enough with Grammy voters."

VEGAS ODDS: 5-1



To Pimp a Butterfly

Kendrick Lamar ▲

EXPERTS SAY "This is the category where critical acclaim counts," says Isquith, "and this is the most critically acclaimed album."

VEGAS ODDS: 7-1

Beauty Behind the Madness

The Weeknd

EXPERTS SAY "Voters will [choose him] in the singles category," says Mello. "They probably haven't listened to the album."

VEGAS ODDS: 15-1

Sound & Color

Alabama Shakes

EXPERTS SAY "You could almost see them sneaking in like Arcade Fire or Beck did," says Isquith, "but not with Kendrick here."

VEGAS ODDS: 20-1

BEST NEW ARTIST

Meghan Trainor ▼

EXPERTS SAY "She had four legitimately big hits and has an Everywoman persona," says Isquith. "And gets a bump because she's seen as a really good writer, too."

VEGAS ODDS: 2-1



Sam Hunt

EXPERTS SAY "He won [Best New Artist] at the AMAs and did well at the CMAs," says Avello. "But I still give Trainor a slight edge."

VEGAS ODDS: 5-2

James Bay

EXPERTS SAY "He's a very good artist, but he's kind of the Martin O'Malley of this category," says Isquith.

VEGAS ODDS: 7-2

Courtney Barnett ▶

EXPERTS SAY "She's an excellent lyricist and has a really strong persona musically," says Isquith. "I suspect people think bigger things are going to come for her, and because she didn't make a dent at all in the mainstream, I don't know if she's going to get the nod in this category."

VEGAS ODDS: 6-1



Tori Kelly

EXPERTS SAY "She's a great singer, but this category has a couple of heavyweights," says Isquith.

VEGAS ODDS: 10-1

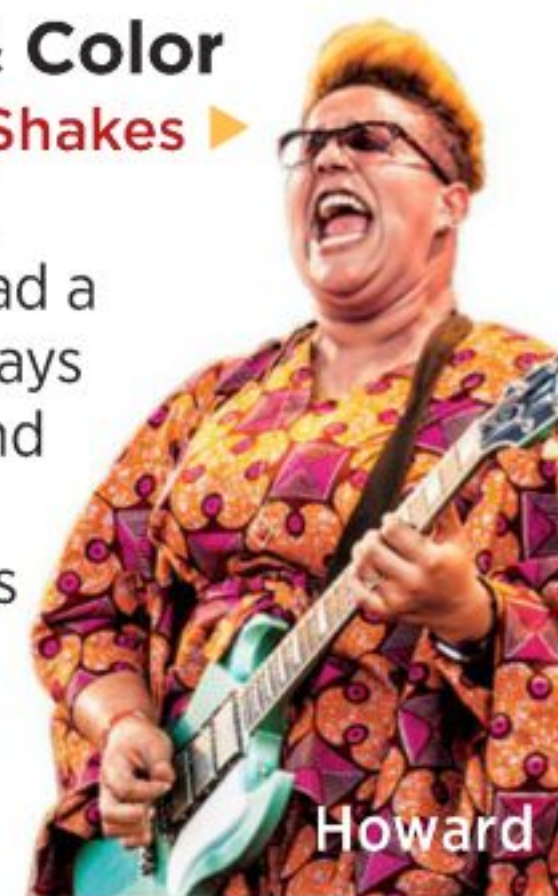
BEST ALTERNATIVE ALBUM

Sound & Color

Alabama Shakes ▶

EXPERTS SAY "They've had a big year," says Isquith. "And Brittany Howard has a unique persona."

VEGAS ODDS: 9-5



Star Wars

Wilco

EXPERTS SAY "It's a good album, but a Grammy would feel as much like a lifetime-achievement award as a recognition of this record," says Isquith.

VEGAS ODDS: 5-2

Vulnicura

Björk

EXPERTS SAY "Does anybody know that record even came out?" asks Mello. "I don't think the world is engaged with her current music whatsoever."

VEGAS ODDS: 7-2

The Waterfall

My Morning Jacket ▶

EXPERTS SAY "Another very solid album," says Isquith, "but not a career-defining album for them."

VEGAS ODDS: 6-1



Currents

Tame Impala

EXPERTS SAY "It's an excellent album, but the band still feels more underground than the other artists here," Isquith says.

VEGAS ODDS: 8-1

WHO SHOULD WIN



"Uptown Funk." Ronson and Mars came up with a retro-soul classic that incorporates decades of party-starting history while still seeming utterly of the moment.



Kendrick. 2015's most innovative hip-hop album was also a powerful indictment of American hypocrisy told with wit, wisdom and searing honesty.



Barnett's full-length debut established her as one of the sharpest songwriters in rock – a sly observational lyricist with killer melodies to spare.



Alabama Shakes stretched their sound with psychedelia and deeper grooves on their second LP, and Howard is a powerhouse whose confidence keeps growing.

FROM TOP LEFT: DIMITRIOS KAMBOURIS/LPS/GETTY IMAGES; SMALLZ & RASKIND/GETTY IMAGES FOR THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE AWARDS; © AMY HARRIS/CORBIS; CHRISTIAN SAN JOSE; RYAN PIERSE/GETTY IMAGES; CASEY CURRY/INVISION/AP IMAGES; JAMIE MCCARTHY/GETTY IMAGES

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BACK TO WORK
Lofgren, Springsteen,
Clemons and Van
Zandt kick off the
River Tour 2016.

How Springsteen Got Back to 'The River'

Behind the scenes as the E Streeters launch their first tour in nearly two years. Plus: His plans for his next album

BY DAVID FRICKE

'MOOD LIGHTING – WE NEED mood lighting," Bruce Springsteen says from the stage at the Consol Energy Center in Pittsburgh. Then he turns to his left and shouts, "Professor!" – the singer's nickname for E Street Band pianist Roy Bittan, who begins his long signature introduction to the ballad "Point Blank" from Springsteen's 1980 double album, *The River*. As the rest of the E Street Band takes up the song's walking-wounded rhythm, Springsteen is aptly lit at his mic, half in shadow, like a New Jersey-boardwalk Sinatra in a T-shirt, jeans and loosely laced work boots.

It is the start of Springsteen's final rehearsal before he and the E Street Band

open a 24-date tour here the following night. The concerts, their first in almost two years, will feature complete performances of *The River* with what Springsteen calls a "set after the set" of hits. The January 16th show in Pittsburgh will place a high bar for the gigs to follow: 34 songs over nearly three and a half hours, including a memorial cover of David Bowie's "Rebel Rebel."

But at this practice session – which is a show in itself, running for close to three hours – Springsteen is drilling his band through sides three and four of *The River*, yelling cues and calling out missteps. "By myself," he orders during a jubilant "Cadillac Ranch," reminding guitarists Steven Van Zandt and Nils Lofgren, violin-

ist Soozie Tyrell and singer Patti Scialfa, Springsteen's wife, to hold their backing vocals in one chorus. After a moving finale of "Drive All Night" and "Wreck on the Highway," Springsteen calls the four to a huddle next to Max Weinberg's drum riser to refine the harmonies in "The Price You Pay," their voices quietly ringing in the empty arena, without a mic, like private prayer.

"We spent everything we had, literally, to make that record," Springsteen says of *The River*, his fifth studio release and first Number One album, in his backstage dressing room after rehearsal. Released in October 1980, *The River* was the product of nearly two years of writing, recording sessions and last-minute changes, includ-

ing the retraction of an early single-disc sequence. "When the record came out, we were down to peanuts," Springsteen goes on. "But I wanted it to have scope, to appeal to the different parts of what we did. I wanted it to be fun. I wanted it to be crushing." He and the E Street Band accumulated enough material for four albums: the 20 songs on *The River*, and more than two dozen outtakes included in the new, lavish audio-visual box set, *The Ties That Bind: The River Collection*.

Springsteen characterizes his earlier albums as "outsider records. I was part of a marginal community at the Shore. The records were an imagined version of that outsider's scene." *The River*, he contends, "was the first insider record, where the character is meditating on those elements – marriage, work, love, faith, death – that you have in common with everyone else."

"You're asking people to retrace some miles with you from 35 summers ago," Springsteen says of the current tour, noting that he's played *The River* in its entirety only once before, at New York's Madison Square Garden in November 2009. He warns that the album is "not gonna say the same things now that it said at the time. It's gonna say that – and something else. I have an idea what it's gonna be, but" – he leans forward for emphasis, grinning – "I'm anxious to feel it."

It is a recent hunger. Until November, Springsteen had no plans to tour with the E Street Band in 2016. Last summer, the singer completed a new solo album that he had started almost four years ago, prior to 2012's *Wrecking Ball*. "I was probably gonna go out and perform it on my own," Springsteen says. But in November, as he and manager Jon Landau discussed promotion for *The Ties That Bind*, Landau suggested that Springsteen and the E Street Band perform *The River* at a couple of small-hall shows in New York and Los Angeles.

"Bruce said, 'It takes as much time to rehearse for two shows as it does for 20. Why don't we do 20?'" Landau recalls. "I fell out of my chair." Weinberg says he got the call about the tour after Thanksgiving. Concert dates were announced the next week.

Weinberg says he was "absolutely delighted" to hit the road. "In all of my professional engagements, I have what I call the Springsteen Clause. It's inviolate. It's my own version of *force majeure*. It's an act

of God or Bruce Springsteen. And it works all the time."

Springsteen dropped the horn section and vocal choir that illuminated his 2013-14 concerts with the E Street Band. "I knew the basis of the show was going to be *The River*, and that was a small rock group," he says. The tighter lineup "feels much more like the old days." Indeed, of the 10 musicians who take the stage in Pittsburgh, five – Springsteen, Van Zandt, Weinberg, Bittan and bassist Garry Tallent – were on *The River*, while keyboard

Edge of Town. Several songs cut for *The River* – including "Point Blank," the party grenade "Sherry Darling" and the poignant father-son conversation "Independence Day" – were written for the previous album. "I've always read that Bruce is a perfectionist," Weinberg says over a cocktail at the band's hotel after rehearsal. "But it was more like, 'You keep writing until you get what makes sense.'"

The drummer remembers getting a call from Springsteen at 9 a.m. one day, asking him to come to the singer's house to

work on a song that he had written overnight. Later that day, Weinberg says, the entire band was in the studio cutting that tune, "Roulette." It was the first song the band recorded for *The River* – and it was eventually left off the album, along with other deep-fan favorites such as "Loose Ends" and "Be True."

Van Zandt, who co-produced *The River*, estimates that Springsteen wrote 100 songs circa *Darkness* and *The River*. "He was getting 10, 12 songs very quickly," the guitarist says over lunch the day of the Pittsburgh

show, "and I'd be like, 'OK, let's put that out. You want to do 12 more? That's the next album.'"

"But he thinks about this stuff so deeply, so comprehensively," Van Zandt continues. "He just had a thing: 'I'm doing it my way, the way I feel.' That continues to this day. He's his own genre."

"I don't know," Springsteen says cautiously when asked if he will extend *The River* Tour 2016 beyond the closing dates so far, March 15th and 17th in Los Angeles. "We'll have to see how everybody feels, how the show feels." Springsteen also declines to reveal details about the new solo album. Van Zandt, who has heard it, says it's "very good" with "real nice things on it, nice orchestrations." And Landau confirms that "it will be the next thing we release. It's something Bruce wants to stand behind."

For now, Springsteen is on what he calls "writing hiatus," concentrating on the live resurrection of his turning-point songs on *The River*. "If you wrote them well, they sustain," he says. "Not only do they sustain, they grow and find their current context. That's what I'm hoping for on this tour, that the music finds its life in the here and now. That would be wonderful," Springsteen adds with a hopeful smile. "I'd go home a happy player." **TS**



"We stand toe-to-toe with any version of our band that's been out there. The shared history you have with people makes the night beautiful."

player Charlie Giordano and saxophonist Jake Clemons fire up the parts originally played by late E Street members Danny Federici and Clarence Clemons, Jake's uncle.

"You're competing with people's memories of what we've done," Springsteen admits, acknowledging the legendary status of the 1980-'81 shows he played behind *The River* – two-set marathons with the E Street Band that often ran up to four hours a night. "I don't have a problem with that. We stand toe-to-toe with any version of our band that's been out there. And that shared history you have with people makes the night very full, very beautiful."

Springsteen was on the verge of turning 30 when he began recording *The River* at the Power Station in New York in March 1979. He was also in the middle of a furious, searching torrent of songwriting that had spilled over from *Darkness on the*



Seeing is believing:
Anderson and
Duchovny.

'The X-Files': Paranoia Ain't What It Used to Be

The show is back after 14 years. Can it resonate in a new, more terrifying America?

BY ROB SHEFFIELD

THE TRUTH IS OUT THERE," AS *The X-Files* used to promise. Chris Carter's alien-chasing Sunday-night thriller basically invented the 21st-century geek, demanding you pay attention to the most obsessive details as two trench-coated FBI spooks, David Duchovny's Mulder and Gillian Anderson's Scully, probed the outer limits of government conspiracy and paranormal freakosity. It was the first modern show where fans made a point of learning the titles of episodes, whether you were a "Jose Chung's From Outer Space" fan or a "Musings of a Cigarette Smoking Man" die-hard. It's also where the word "shipper" came into parlance, as fans divided over whether or not they rooted for a Mulder-Scully relationship. All different kinds of fandom culture are rooted in our obsession with *The X-Files*.

So it makes sense that the world has been fiending for *The X-Files* to return, even if it's just for a six-episode miniseries sprint. The new season definitely gets off to a wobbly start, overloaded with back-story exposition, but the prime pleasure is seeing Mulder

and Scully back in action – they still disagree about almost everything, yet they still know deep down they can only trust each other. Duchovny's as committed as ever to the art of non-acting, with his laid-back squint-and-frown game on point, while Anderson's Scully reliably scoffs at her partner's theories about space invaders. The agents have a new case to investigate, with *The Americans'* Annet Mahendru as an alien-abduction victim. (Or *is* she?) The cast has other new additions, like *Community's* Joel McHale, along with old faithfuls like Mitch Pileggi as their skeptical Vietnam-vet supervisor.

The world is a hugely different place from the one Mulder and Scully left behind in 2002. Once the 1990s crashed into the 2000s and the country's problems got a lot more terrifying, it was hard to imagine a time when aliens were anybody's biggest nightmare. So this is a chance for *The X-Files* to do something bold with this story, updating it for a more dangerous world – the only question is whether it can be done in a mere six-episode revival. But like so many other *X-Files* fans, I want to believe. **TS**

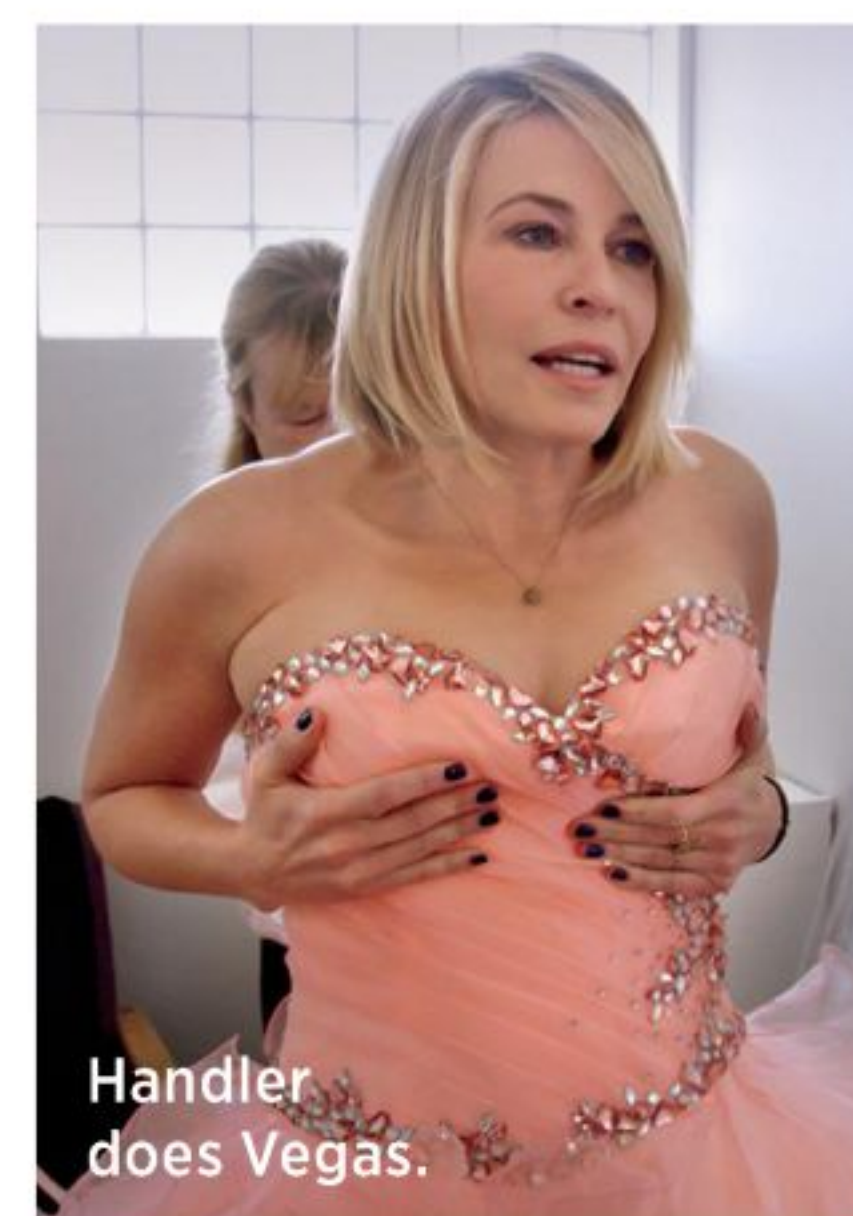
TV's Queen of Mean Gets Serious

Chelsea Handler takes on a surprising new role: Documentarian

A couple of years ago, Chelsea Handler decided she was done being TV's funniest mean girl. So in 2014, she quit *Chelsea Lately*, the show that had made her a biting late-night fixture. "I wasn't challenging myself," she says. "I was coasting."

Now, Handler is back – and getting out of her comfort zone – with a new Netflix documentary series, *Chelsea Does*, in which she takes on marriage, race, technology and drugs. ("We did drugs last," she says. "In case I died.") Handler interviewed a huge range of people – former Israeli President Shimon Peres about racism, Khloé Kardashian and Leah Remini about selfies, even her own father about his sexual appetite. While in Silicon Valley, she successfully pitches an app called Gotta Go, which sends fake emergency texts to help ditch bad dates.

Handler is also preparing a new show that she describes



Handler
does Vegas.

as "a younger, cooler 60 *Minutes*." Does she miss her old late-night gig? "I succeeded," she says. "I walked away on my terms. I think it's important for women to know that. You don't have to stay in a job just because it's secure."

ELISABETH GARBNER-PAUL

FROM TOP: ED ARAQUEL/FOX; SAEED ADYANI/NETFLIX

LIFE
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LATELY, IT SEEMS LIKE PRETTY much every day is a good day for Ice Cube. In the past five months, he's seen his old group, N.W.A, elected to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame; watched *Straight Outta Compton*, the movie he co-produced about the groundbreaking gangsta-rap act's late-Eighties rise, rake in a \$200 million payday worldwide; and booked his first-ever spot at Coachella – which will take place just a week after the Hall of Fame induction ceremony in April. “Of all those, making the Hall of Fame has to be the tip-top,” says the rapper-actor. “That’s a big accomplishment for me, but it’s also a big accomplishment for the Hall of Fame to let the world know they’re about more than just rock & roll.” In the meantime, he’s focused on promoting *Ride Along 2*, a sequel to the 2014 buddy comedy with Kevin Hart in which Cube plays an Atlanta detective. “The Oscar-movie phase is over – time to get back to some real fun,” he says. “Me and Kevin are the best duo out there.”

Which would have seemed more unlikely to you back in 1988: That one day you’d be in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, or that you’d play a cop in the movies?

That I’d be playing a cop. I never even thought about doing movies back then. In ’88, I was just trying to be the best rapper in the world. Music was a hobby that became a full-time job. I didn’t know if we were going to be a blip on the radar, or where my life was going to go from there.

You were a powerful voice against police brutality back then with songs like “Fuck tha Police.” How does it make you feel to see so many stories about cops killing unarmed black people in the news all these years later?

Makes me feel like a black man. That’s what it makes me feel like – same as always. As a black person, it’s always seemed like it’s a war on us. It’s just terrible. They wonder what I’ve got to complain about at this point in my life. I’ll tell you: People are only nice to me because they know who I am and they like my work. It shouldn’t have to be like that to get people to respect you.

What’s your take on the presidential race? Are there any candidates you like?

Not really. You can elect, but you can never select. That’s the dilemma. It’s the difference between bad and worse.

What do you think of Donald Trump?

Q&A



Ice Cube

The actor and MC on joining the Hall of Fame with N.W.A, police brutality then and now, and rapping for David Bowie

BY SIMON VOZICK-LEVINSON

I think he’s a rich white man. He can’t possibly know the pain of poor people.

You’re playing Coachella the same night as Guns n’ Roses. Are you planning to stick around for their set?

Yeah, I’m interested to see how that goes. Just to see them together again will be cool. I thought they were the cream of the crop back then – I always liked Slash’s style. And then, like a lot of good bands, they broke up too soon. **Speaking of reunions, there were some rumors last year about the surviving members of N.W.A getting together for a new tour. What’s the status on that? Is it happening?**

Well, I don’t really know the status. Making the movie was a monster, and we had to really concentrate on that. Some things are easier said than done. I hope people will see us out on that stage together soon, but it’s really up to Dre and Ren and Yella.

You worked on a remix of David Bowie’s “I’m Afraid of Americans” in 1997. Was that a big deal for you?

It was. He was such an innovator, and his songs were phenomenal. I remember when I first heard “Fame” on the radio, I thought he was black. It was so funky!

What was your favorite movie last year that you weren’t involved in?

I love *Spotlight* – the story about Boston politics was well-told, and it had that *All the President’s Men* feel, just investigating what’s going on. It felt real. I liked *The Revenant*, too, but it felt real long to me.

***Straight Outta Compton* got people talking again about the 1991 incident in which Dr. Dre assaulted journalist Dee Barnes over an interview she did with you after you quit N.W.A. What did you think about that situation at the time?**

I felt sorry for Dee. And I was mad at Dre at the time – I didn’t have too much sympathy for him.

Then why didn’t that incident make it into the movie? Many people were disappointed to see it left out.

Go make your own movie about N.W.A. Then you can put in anything you want to.

Your son gave a great performance in the film as your younger self. What was it like watching him in that role?

It was wonderful to see my son do his thing and get busy. I knew he could do it. As a father, that’s what I get off on.

He looked pretty cool in your old Jheri curl. Did it make you think about bringing that look back?

Uh, no [laughs]. I’ll let you bring back the Jheri curl.

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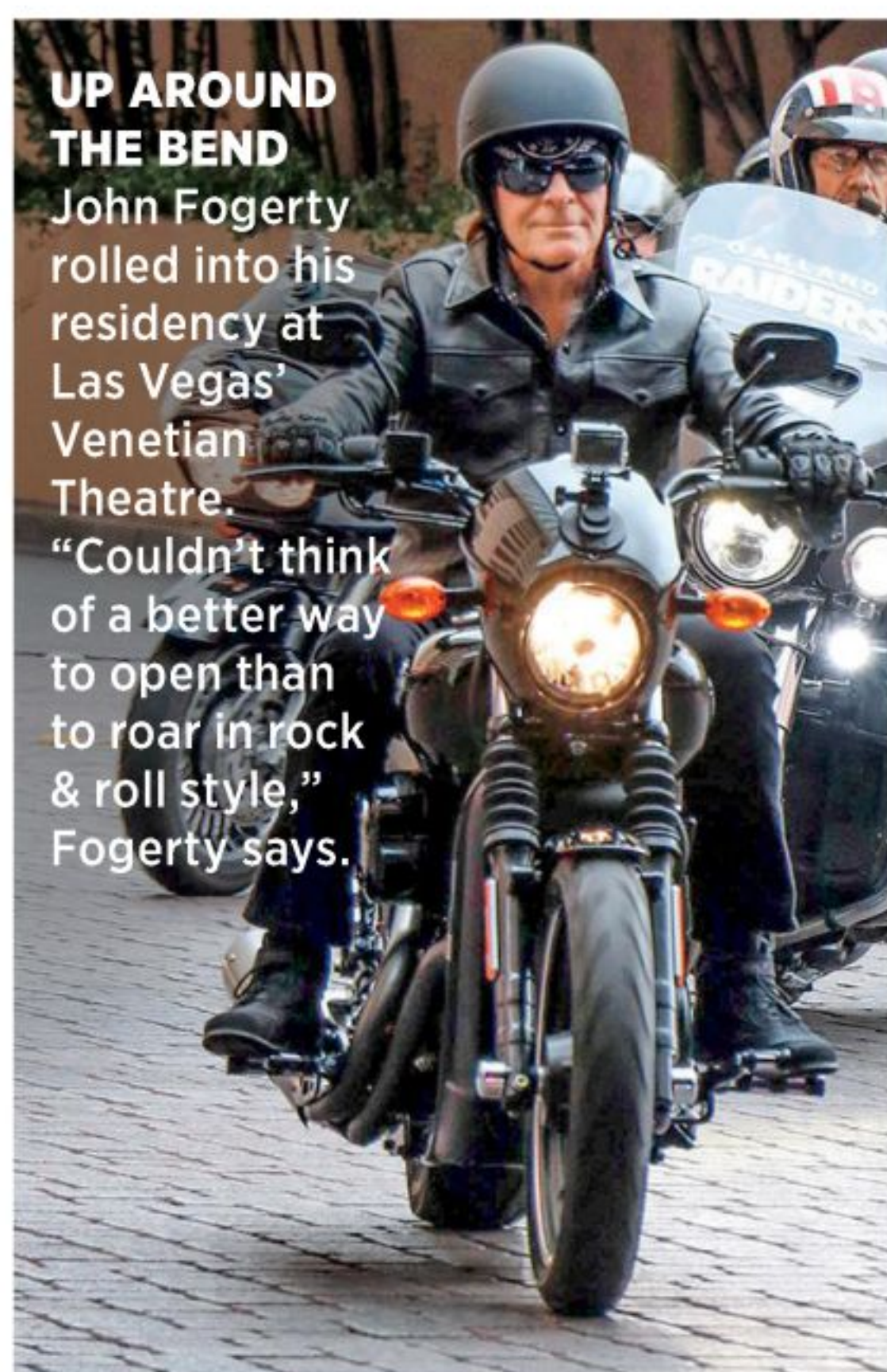
RandomNotes



Beck (with Alison Mosshart and Dave Grohl) was supposed to play at Amoeba, "but I lost my voice!" he says.

Stella's Rock & Roll Circus

L.A.'s classic Amoeba Records doesn't shut down for private events often. "I think my dad is the only person that's closed down the store, really," said Stella McCartney. But she kept up the family tradition by throwing a bash for her new fashion line, drawing friends like Leonardo DiCaprio, Dave Grohl and Katy Perry. They were treated to sets by Marilyn Manson and Johnny Depp (who howled "Beautiful People," left) and headliner Brian Wilson. "It was so intimate - he came out and did 'God Only Knows,' 'Surfin' U.S.A.,' 'Good Vibrations,'" says Beck. "Everyone there appreciated it so much, dancing and singing. It was great."



UP AROUND THE BEND

John Fogerty rolled into his residency at Las Vegas' Venetian Theatre. "Couldn't think of a better way to open than to roar in rock & roll style," Fogerty says.

Sean and Madonna: The Force Awakens

Sean Penn arrived at his Help Haiti Home charity gala in L.A. with a surprise date: ex-wife Madonna! "I'm going to do something for the second time," joked Penn. "I'm going to say to an Italian chick from Michigan, 'Will ya?'"



Tom Petty played a surprise set.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: JOHN SALANGSANG/BFA/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; DAVID X. PRUTTING/BFA/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; BUCKNER/VARIETY/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; STEPHEN LOVEKIN/VARIETY/REX SHUTTERSTOCK; FPA/FAMEFLYNET PICTURES



ON THE BEACH
Neil Young, who recently sold his Hawaiian compound for \$20 million, went for a stroll with girlfriend Daryl Hannah in Malibu. Young just announced he'll play the New Orleans Jazz Fest in May.



Second Line for Bowie

David Bowie was a big Arcade Fire fan, attending some of their earliest gigs in New York. To honor him, Arcade Fire and Preservation Hall Jazz Band staged a traditional second-line parade through New Orleans' French Quarter, leading thousands in singalongs of "Heroes" and more. "It felt kind of like a planet exploded," said Win Butler of Bowie's death. "This is a way for us to express the gratitude we have that he existed."



Ride the Lightning

St. Vincent, a.k.a. Annie Clark, unwound from a hard-touring year by hitting the waves in Barbados with girlfriend Cara Delevingne. Clark is just getting used to the attention that comes with dating a supermodel: "I have a rich life that has nothing to do with the flimflam," she said recently.



GOODFELLAS

Mick Jagger and Martin Scorsese held court after the New York premiere of their new HBO drama, *Vinyl*, about the seedy 1970s music scene. "It was something I knew a little bit about!" Jagger joked.



VIVA LA LAKERS

Chris Martin and son Moses watched the Golden State Warriors beat the Lakers in L.A. Martin's next sporting event: playing the Super Bowl with Coldplay. "We're excited to do it," he said. "It's one of those days where the world connects."



TO PIMP A BASKETBALL

Kendrick Lamar caught up with Kobe Bryant courtside – which is a long way from Lamar's first Lakers game: "My cousin and I sold Tootsie Rolls outside, and an usher let us in," he's said.

The Rise and Fall of a Fox News Fraud

Wayne Simmons used CIA credentials to get on TV and work with the Pentagon. One problem: Prosecutors say it was all a lie

BY REEVES WIEDEMAN

BY THE TIME WAYNE SIMMONS WENT ON FOX NEWS last March for what would end up being his final appearance, viewers knew what to expect. “This president clearly has absolutely no idea what he is talking about,” Simmons said of President Obama’s handling of ISIS. Simmons had made guest appearances on Fox more than a hundred times as a “former CIA operative,” and certainly looked the part: white mustache, neck bulging out of his dress shirt, a handshake “so hard, he can crush you with it,” as one Fox host put it. Beyond offering his expertise as an intelligence officer, he had become particularly adept at serving up hawkish red meat to the network’s audience. “We could end this in a week,” he went on, suggesting that the United States

run “thousands of sorties” against ISIS. “They would all be dead.”

Simmons was largely anonymous when he first appeared on Fox, in 2002, but he soon became a regular face on the network, alongside a cast of retired military officers who, like Simmons, had been recruited into the Pentagon’s “military-analysts program.” The initiative invited retired officers who had made names for themselves as television-news commentators to attend regular briefings from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and to make trips to Iraq and Guantanamo Bay. In 2009, *The New York Times* won a Pulitzer Prize for its report on how the Pentagon used the analysts to build public support for the war in Iraq. The program disbanded, and many of those involved tried to distance themselves from it. But Simmons boasted of his connection as a way to bolster his bona fides, even mentioning it in his Amazon author biography. In 2012, Simmons co-wrote *The Natanz Directive*, a novel about

a retired CIA agent called back for one last op. When the book was published, Rumsfeld contributed a blurb: “Wayne Simmons doesn’t just write it. He’s lived it.”

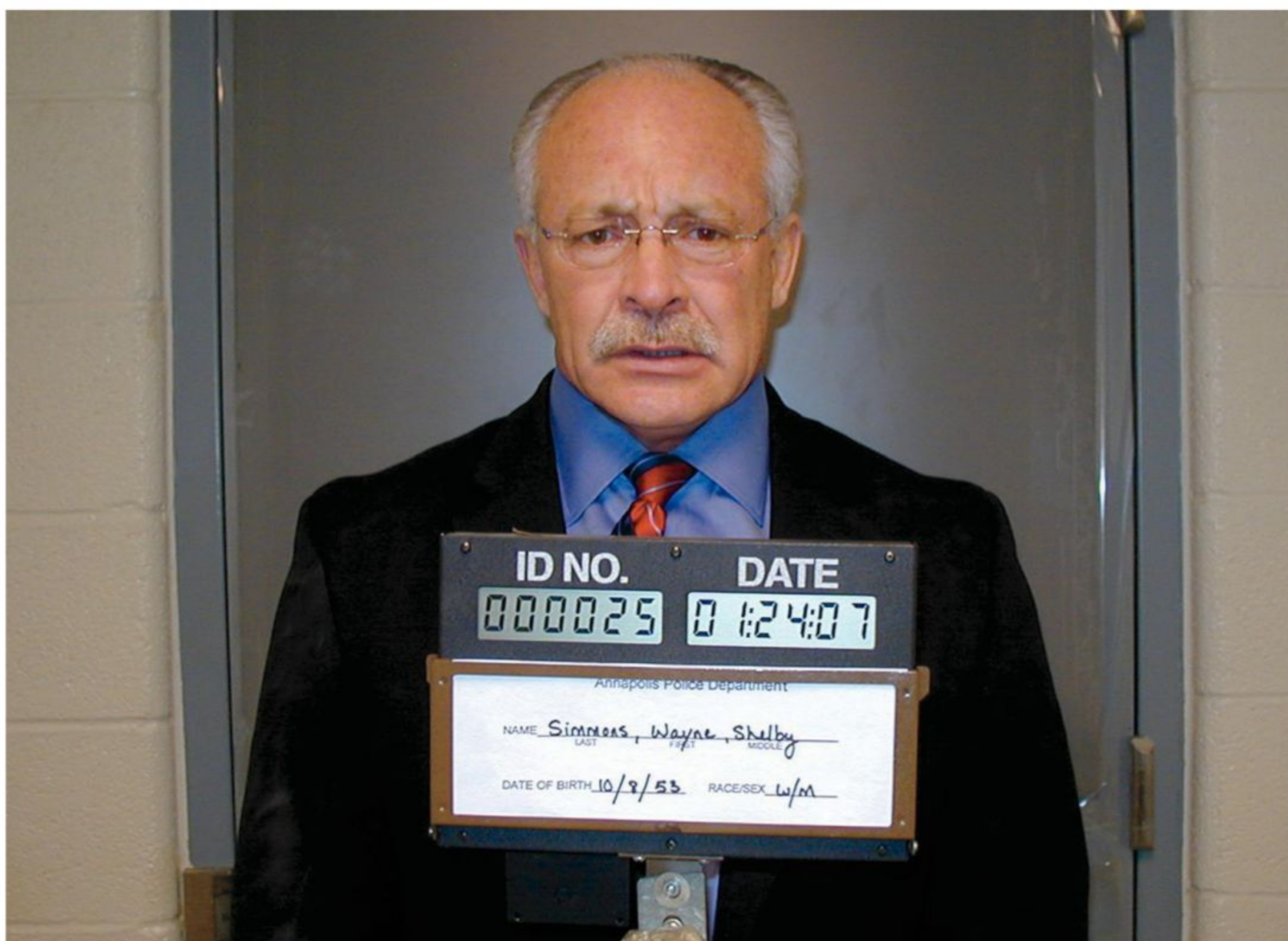
But according to prosecutors, Simmons was living a lie. Last October, the government charged him with multiple counts of fraud, saying he had never worked for the CIA at all. Prosecutors alleged that Simmons used his supposed intelligence experience not only to secure time on Fox and an audience with Rumsfeld, but also to obtain work with defense contractors, including deployment to a military base in Afghanistan. He was also charged with bilking \$125,000 from a woman, with whom prosecutors say he was romantically involved, in a real-estate investment that did not exist. He has pleaded not guilty to the charges, and his trial is scheduled to begin February 23rd. If convicted, he will likely face several years in prison.

Simmons claimed to have spent 27 years with the CIA, but Paul Nathanson, the

assistant U.S. attorney prosecuting the case, said in a court filing that Simmons “never had any association whatsoever with the CIA.” (The CIA declined to comment – as a rule, it never confirms or denies agents – but said it is “working closely with the Justice Department on this matter.”) Instead, prosecutors say Simmons spent those 27 years doing just about everything else: He ran a limousine service, a gambling operation and an AIDS-testing clinic; worked for a hot-tub business, a carpeting company and a nightclub; and briefly played defensive back for the New Orleans Saints. Along the way, he accrued criminal convictions, including multiple DUIs, plus charges for weapons possession and assault, and an arrest for attacking a cabdriver in Annapolis, Maryland, in 2007. “Fuck you, you can’t do shit to me – do you know who I am?” Simmons told a cop, according to a police report, before insisting that he was CIA, and that the cabbie, who was Pakistani, had a bomb. A police dog found no explosives, and a CIA representative told the cops to take whatever actions they deemed necessary.

All the while, Simmons continued to get himself guest slots on Fox. The Pentagon’s military-analysts program had helped boost his profile, along with that of others who made extreme proclamations on air: Last year, retired Adm. James Lyons said the Muslim Brotherhood had “carte blanche entry into the White House,” and retired Lt. Gen. Thomas McInerney supported Donald Trump’s freeze on Muslim immigrants. All three men helped push right-wing theories about Benghazi into the mainstream. “If you have two generals and a former CIA officer saying these things, they give legitimacy and heft to what would have been a partisan attack,” says Angelo Carusone of Media Matters for America, a progressive media watchdog. “It has an effect on the way voters behave.”

And yet, for years, Simmons’ radical positions, his allegedly fabricated credentials



The Talented Mr. Simmons

Above: Simmons' mug shot for his arrest in Annapolis in 2007. Left: He appeared on Fox News more than a hundred times over 13 years. In various TV appearances, he was often a partisan advocate: He called President Obama a "boy king" and Nancy Pelosi a "pathological liar."

cartels and arms smugglers" before he retired in 2000.

After 9/11, Fox, like every news outlet, was desperate for analysts capable of talking knowledgeably about the War on Terror, so the chance to put a former CIA officer on the air would have been alluring. (Fox declined to participate for this article.) The network has not explained how Simmons first appeared on the channel, or how he passed their vetting process, but one possible explanation lies in the fact that his early appearances were almost all on Saturday nights. "With weekends, the vetting goes away, and the pre-interview goes away, and just general thought of any kind goes away, other than 'Who can I get in front of a camera?'" claims a former Fox producer. Once a guest proves capable, bookers for prominent time slots often snap them up when breaking news hits, and have little reason to question their credentials. "If you want to play Talented Mr. Ripley, once you get inside, nobody's going to think twice about whether you should be there," the ex-Fox producer says.

By 2004, Simmons was appearing on a sometimes-weekly basis, often in prime time, which caught the eye of the Pentagon's public-affairs office. Two years earlier, in October 2002, it had created the military-an-

and his off-camera behavior never got him thrown off the air. Just a week after the incident with the cabbie, Simmons received a note of congratulations from the Pentagon ("Saw you on Fox yesterday. Impressive, as always") and was invited to join a conference call with Gen. David Petraeus. "He's always using this supposed CIA affiliation as a trump card," Nathanson said. "Frankly, it often works."

WAYNE SIMMONS HAS lived almost his entire life in Maryland, where he and his wife, who passed away in 2012, raised two children. Around Annapolis, he was known as both a good neighbor and someone prone to the occasional bar-room dispute over politics. "He was always a gentleman, even if he seemed a little in-

tense or on edge," says William Cooke, an Annapolis attorney. "I took the guy at his word." (Simmons declined to comment on the record for this story.)

Simmons was certainly a likely candidate for service. His mother worked as an FBI fingerprint specialist, and his father served in the Navy with enough distinction that in 1996 his death was marked with a tribute on the Senate floor. Simmons' sister became a senior official in the Defense Department during the second Bush administration, and his son is in the Secret Service.

Simmons claims that his own service began in 1973, when he briefly enlisted in the Navy, before spending nearly three decades with the CIA. He has said he "spearheaded deep-cover intel ops against some of the world's most dangerous drug

analysts program to help build support for the War in Iraq. "It was really about giving people with on-the-ground experience a chance to get more information," says Allison Barber, who oversaw the program as deputy assistant secretary of Defense. Critics, however, saw it as a way to disperse talking points to ostensibly neutral officers with a national television audience. Many also had undisclosed ties to defense contractors.

When Simmons began talking with the Pentagon, in 2004, the war was going poorly. An Iraqi insurgency had led to brutal fighting, and the Abu Ghraib scandal had corroded support. The Pentagon was in need of advocates, and the military analysts, which the Pentagon referred to as "surrogates," had nearly tripled to more than 50. Both former and current Penta-

ROLLING STONE REPORTS

gon officials said there was little vetting of potential analysts, on the presumption that the networks had done their due diligence. Barber cited the fact that Simmons “was pretty prolific on television” as his primary qualification, and said credentials were less important than the ability to reach a large audience. Simmons’ response to a Pentagon official’s inquiry about the program didn’t suggest he expected a stringent process: “There is quite a bit of info under ‘Wayne Simmons and CIA’ on a Google search.”

Simmons jumped at the chance to join the program and was soon invited on a trip to Guantanamo Bay after a 2005 Fox appearance in which he defended the treatment of detainees there. “Doesn’t giving them a Koran simply add fuel to an ideological fire already burning out of control?” Simmons asked a Guantanamo officer at one point, according to a written report from a retired Army officer on the trip.

Simmons became a regular at the program’s roundtables and conference calls, and he often e-mailed the group with his views on the latest political news. “Wayne is one that we can turn to and engage fully,” a Pentagon official told his colleagues, after Simmons e-mailed to say he “would love to backhand” some retired generals who had criticized Secretary Rumsfeld. In 2006, Simmons was present when President Bush signed the Military Commissions Act, which gave the executive branch powers to detain prisoners indefinitely, and the Pentagon listed him as one of its “most prolific retired military analysts.” One official e-mailed a colleague to say, “Let’s make sure we get Wayne Simmons to Iraq.”

IF THERE WAS A REASON TO RAISE an eyebrow at Simmons’ claims, it may have been the fact that a low-level CIA operator wanted to go on television at all. “Most operators don’t want to go on TV,” one former Navy Seal tells me. “They want to get paid \$200,000 as a security contractor.” While some members of the military-analysts program had contracts that offered as much as \$1,000 per appearance, Simmons was never paid by Fox, and he supported himself through a variety of businesses, including launching Simmons Air, a commuter airline in Maryland. (Simmons got a \$20,000 rookie contract with the New Orleans Saints in the summer of 1978, when he was supposedly five years into his CIA career, but was cut that September.) Eventually, Simmons tried to capitalize on his public profile, becoming a regular on the local Republican speakers’ circuit and landing a book deal.

He also tried to work for the government, according to prosecutors. In 2008, after his airline collapsed, Simmons secured work with BAE Systems, a government contractor that sent him to Fort Leavenworth for training as a “Human Terrain System Team leader,” until he was forced to resign due to “performance problems.” A year later, he was rejected from another contracting job after the State Department found his claims about working for the CIA were false. In 2010, a third contractor sent Simmons to Afghanistan as a “senior intelligence adviser,” but he was sent home after his interim security clearance was revoked. (None of the contractors responded to requests for comment.)

Yet even though the government was now aware of Simmons’ fabricated creden-

tials, nobody told Fox, where he continued to appear, often as a partisan advocate: In various appearances, he called Barack Obama a “boy king” and Nancy Pelosi a “pathological liar.” Simmons’ comments – along with those made by other fringe military-analysts members who remained on air – seeped into the mainstream; in 2013, he became a member of the Citizens’ Commission on Benghazi, which led the charge to keep the attacks in the news. “A lot of his segments didn’t just contain misinformation about Benghazi – he repeated already-debunked falsehoods,” says Carusone of Media Matters.

But as Simmons’ profile rose, some around him began to have doubts. In 2010, he was introduced to Kent Clizbe, a former CIA case officer. When they met, Clizbe said that Simmons bragged about his work busting drug cartels, but he was short on details. “Within a couple of minutes, I knew he was a fraud,” Clizbe says. “You can’t bullshit a bullshitter.”

Clizbe says he relayed his concern to a number of people who knew Simmons, and word made its way to a *Washington Times* reporter who asked Simmons about the charges. “Some of my colleagues are convinced that it is related to my outspoken membership on the Citizens’ Commission on Benghazi,” Simmons wrote to the reporter in late 2013, suggesting a smear campaign. “It is angering and pathetic.” (The *Times* decided against publishing the story after being told that Simmons had been granted security clearances and sent to Afghanistan.)

But as the FBI began looking into Simmons, he made little effort to lower his profile. (The government declined to say

BOTTOM: FROM LEFT: NO CREDIT; ARIS MESSINIS/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES; NEW YORK “DAILY NEWS”; ALONES/SHUTTERSTOCK; GERIG/JULLSTEIN BILD/GETTY IMAGES; BOB D’AMICO/ABC/GETTY IMAGES; DIGITALLY ALTERED BY “ROLLING STONE”

THREAT ASSESSMENT THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE SCARY



WITH US

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Spike Lee, Jada Pinkett Smith call for boycott of **too-white** Oscars.

what prompted its investigation.) Last February, the same month in which Simmons' lawyer says he and Simmons met with government attorneys to discuss his client's alleged CIA past, Simmons appeared on Fox three times. In one segment, he repeated a spurious claim that there were "at least 19 paramilitary Muslim training facilities in the United States."

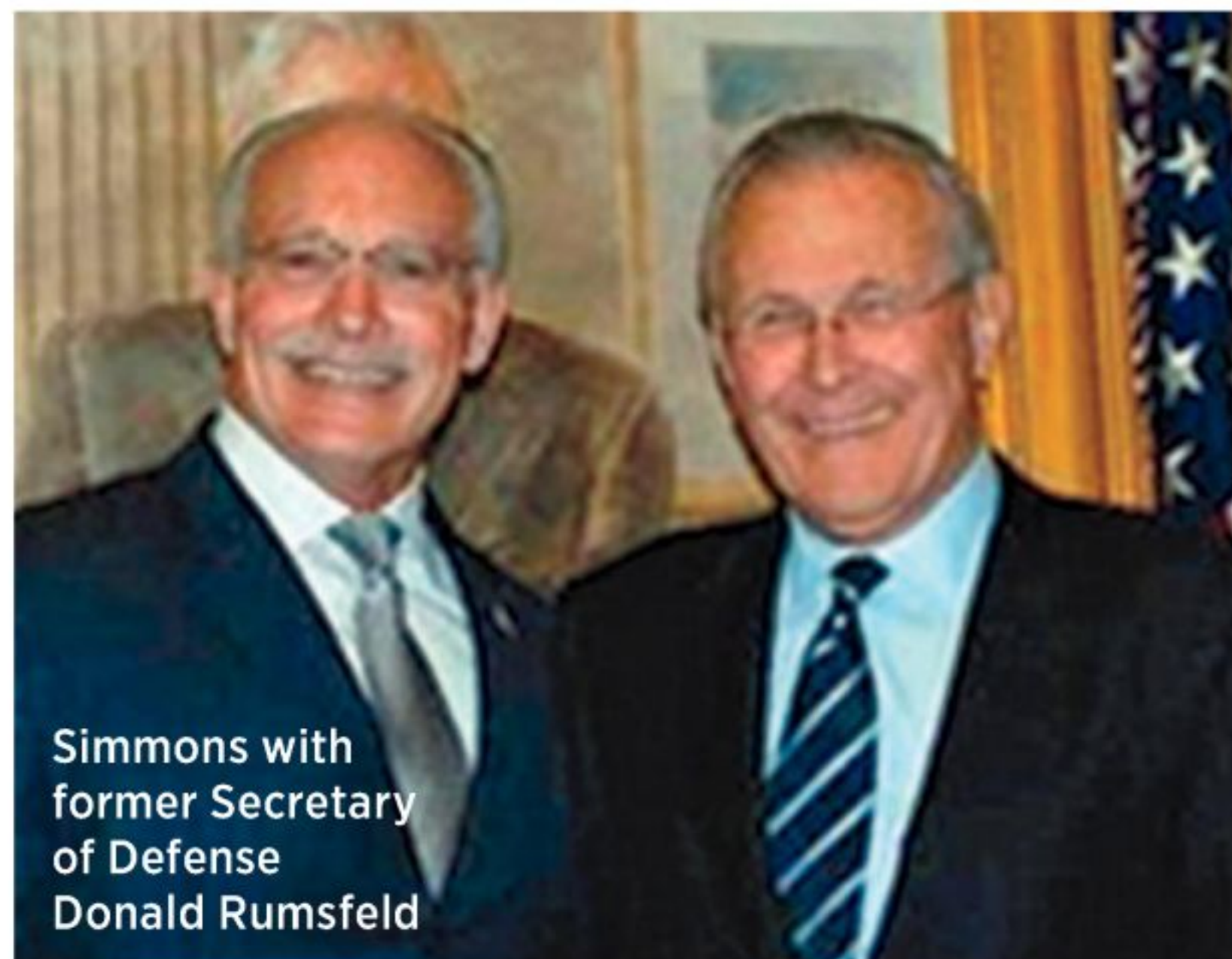
"Wow," replied the host Neil Cavuto, without challenging Simmons.

"They're using paramilitary exercises to plan and execute these types of operations all over the United States," Simmons said. "And when it happens, it will just be you and I saying, 'We told you so.'"

FOR NOW, SIMMONS LIVES in a large home, which is just another facade shielding a murkier reality. None of his business ventures panned out. Prosecutors say that he hasn't made a mortgage payment since 2010, and that his car was recently repossessed – not that it would do him much good anyway. According to the terms of his bail, he is allowed to leave his house to care for his horses and visit the doctor or his attorney, but he is otherwise required to stay at home under the supervision of his adult daughter. His request to join his family at several Christmas gatherings was denied.

If Simmons is shown to have fabricated his CIA experience, he won't be the first – in 2013, a former EPA official admitted to stealing \$900,000 from the government by pretending to work for the agen-

cy – but he will be one of the most prominent. "Why didn't someone at the CIA, or some retired CIA person, go to Fox?" says Robert Baer, a former CIA case officer and journalist. "There's plenty of fakes out there. But most of them don't get on



"Why didn't the CIA go to Fox? There's plenty of fakes, but most of them don't get on TV."

TV." The simplest answer might be that no one had much incentive to probe Simmons' past. Once he started appearing on Fox and had an audience, he became useful to the government; once he was useful to the government and was granted an audience with Rumsfeld, he became even more useful to Fox.

But while Simmons may have been the most egregious charlatan, he wasn't

the only fringe member of the shuttered military-analysts program who stayed on the air. "The difference between Simmons and the more legitimate people probably isn't all that great," says Robert Entman, a professor of media and public affairs at George Washington University. "He may have said more outlandish things, but totally legitimate spokespeople said many misleading things too." Just last year, retired Maj. Gen. Paul Vallely, who participated in the military-analysts program, said that President Obama was "intentionally weakening our military," which sounded almost reasonable next to comments from Tom McInerney, who insisted on Fox News that terrorists had flown the disappeared Malaysia Airlines 370 to Pakistan.

Not every conspiracy theory takes, of course, but as the Benghazi controversy shows, a few people with impressive-sounding titles can go a dangerously long way. Simmons rose from obscurity to prime time on Fox News, which burnished his credentials in the eyes of the government, which raised his profile on Fox and with the public at large even further. If only someone had listened to Simmons in 2007, when he went on Fox to criticize the hiring of a CIA agent who had entered the United States illegally. "Without knowing who we're hiring and who we are employing to protect our nation, we are in big, big trouble," Simmons said. "Somewhere along the line... whoever was responsible for the background check at the FBI really fell down."

AGAINST US

- Ted Cruz: "JFK would be a **Republican** today."
- Rupert Murdoch engaged to **Jerry Hall**.
- Whitesboro, NY, votes to keep **racist** town seal.
- Goldman fined just **\$5 billion** for role in 2008 economic meltdown.
- Ebola** re-emerges in West Africa hours after outbreak declared over.
- NRA rewrites fairy tales – e.g., "Little Red Riding Hood (**Has a Gun**)."
- Report: **62 billionaires** now as rich as half of global population.

David Bowie

1947 - 2016

How rock's greatest outsider
continually re-created himself, and
changed the world along the way

By Mikal Gilmore

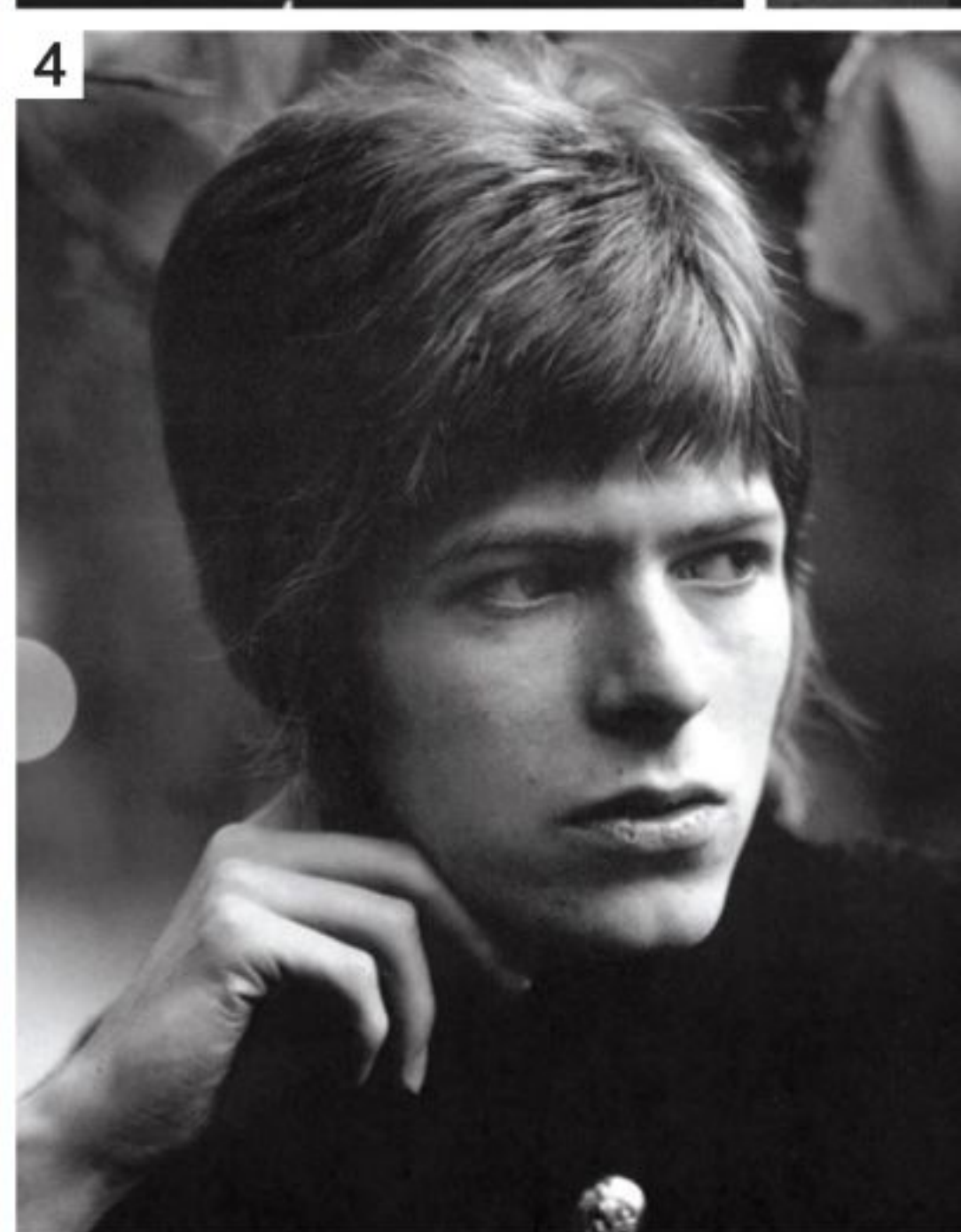
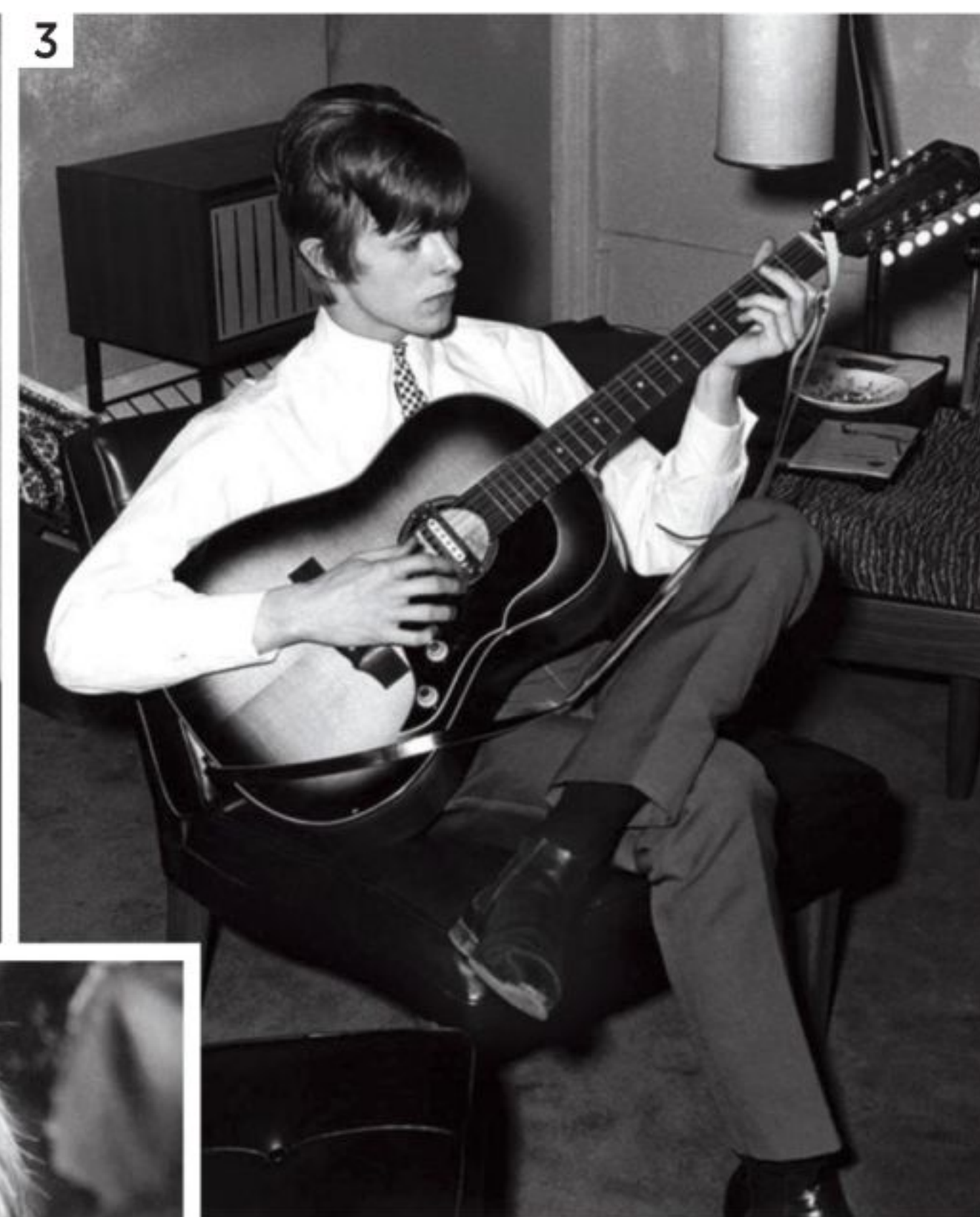
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EATH HAD BEEN ON DAVID Bowie's mind in recent years. In "The Stars (Are Out Tonight)," from his surprise 2013 release, *The Next Day*, he could see it above and below: "Stars are never sleeping/Dead ones

and the living/We live closer to the Earth/Never to the heavens." Most memorably, he spoke about it in lyrics from his new album, *Blackstar*, released just two days before his end. In the spellbinding "Lazarus," Bowie sang, "Look up here, I'm in heaven/I've got scars that can't be seen/I've got drama, can't be stolen/Everybody knows me now/Look up here, man, I'm in danger/I've got nothing left to lose." It was the least fanciful verse he'd ever written.



Bowie in
Los Angeles,
1987



ABSOLUTE BEGINNER

(1) A 16-year-old David Jones, saxophonist with R&B group the Kon-rads, 1963. (2) Age seven, circa 1954. (3) and (4) He spent the mid-Sixties in and out of mod and R&B bands. (5) *Hunky Dory*-era Bowie in front of his Haddon Hall home, 1971.

For us, though, death didn't seem to become David Bowie. At age 69, he was, to be sure, no longer a young man. For years he had been largely out of our scrutiny; once voluble in interviews, he had quit them entirely. In early 2015, he underwent chemotherapy for what was reported to be liver cancer. Some friends thought he had beat the worst part. At the time of his death, on January 10th, Bowie was already working on a follow-up to *Blackstar*.

He had been a vital presence since the world saw him standing there, outfitted as Ziggy Stardust, in a glittery and tight fishnet top, wearing a perfect swept-up shock of bright, artificial red hair, sparkling earrings and an impossibly beautiful and confident face. He was unlike anything rock & roll beheld before, and he proved its greatest liberator since Elvis Presley. Like Presley, he coalesced an audience of outsiders – young people held in disregard. Bowie gave his following the nerve to assert a sexuality that pop culture saw as marginal and abject. “We were giving permission to ourselves,” Bowie wrote, “to reinvent culture the way we wanted it. With great big shoes.” Sometimes Bowie seemed to recoil from what he'd done, as if it defined his image and possibilities too fast. He would spend years trying to distance

himself from it; he'd drive himself to near madness, to confusion and to new greatness along the way, always a nomad, roaming from one future to another. By the end, in the video for “Lazarus,” he writhed in a sarcophagus, trying to wrestle either to or from death.

The public reaction to that death – in the hours and days that followed – was genuine and massive: There was an immediate and immense outpouring through social media; his influence on everything from fashion to underground culture was hailed in the media; the Vatican even offered a blessing. David Bowie was one of those people the world couldn't imagine living without. But since death was at his disposal, Bowie apparently decided to face it and make it an element in his work, a collaborative partner. This was what he'd always done: He transformed himself, and then moved on.

CHANGEABILITY WAS, AT least early on, David Bowie's most consistent trait. He restyled his appearance and sounds, he explored new places and perspectives, and was regularly described as a chameleon. Some observers wondered if this amounted to something more than a change in image or persona – something closer to a genu-

inely shifting personality or even psychology. Why so many variances? Why a space alien at one point, a sexualized prophet a couple of years later, a “plastic soul” singer a year after that?

The answer, of course, was that all of these characters were outsiders. “All I knew,” Bowie once said, was that there was “this otherness, this other world, an alternative reality, one that I really want to embrace. I wanted anything but the place I came from.”

He came from a place where madness threatened. His mother, Margaret Burns (known as Peggy), had three sisters who suffered from schizophrenia or other mental illness. In 1947, Burns – who already had a 10-year-old son, Terry, from an affair with a French bar porter – married Haywood Stenton Jones, a public-relations man who left his wife and daughter to be with her. The couple's only child, David Robert Jones, was born in Brixton.

Bowie's older half brother was his first influence: Terry introduced him to Nietzsche and the writings of the Beats, as well as to Eric Dolphy and Charles Mingus. But Terry also suffered from mental illness, and would eventually be diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. Bowie remembered taking Terry to see Cream at a 1966 concert in Bromley. “I had to take him out of the club because it was really starting to affect him – he was swaying,” Bowie recalled. “We got out into the street and he collapsed

Contributing editor MIKAL GILMORE wrote about Freddie Mercury and Queen in July 2014.



on the ground, and he said there was fire and stuff pouring out the pavement.”

Bowie became concerned that his family’s madness might be communicable. He started to form emotional distances from his parents, who had trouble handling Terry and eventually turned him out of the house. In 1976, Bowie told *Playboy*, “My brother Terry’s in an asylum right now. Everybody says, ‘Oh, yes, my family is quite mad.’ Mine really is. No fucking about, boy. Most of them are nutty – in, just out of, or going into an institution. Or dead.”

One thing the family shared, though, was music. His mother, in particular, was a fine singer. Bowie later said, “All our family could sing,’ she’d inform my father and me. We couldn’t do much else, but we all loved music.”

In 1956, Bowie first heard rock & roll, in the music of Little Richard and Elvis Presley. The music was already transforming American culture and society – it was, in a sense, about disturbance, race, sex and a new youthful power. For Bowie, this was the obsession that saved him. He wanted, like Presley, to become somebody who could transform himself before the world, who invented his own prospects,

who could stand in defiance and never be unremembered.

By 1963, British rock & roll aspirants – including the Beatles and the Rolling Stones – were developing their own R&B-informed versions of the music: rough, insolent, inventive and overpowering.

Bowie joined several R&B and mod groups, but he didn’t have a band disposition; he wanted to stand apart. By the time he was 19, he’d met a manager who secured him a record contract with a subsidiary of Decca. Ken Pitt – who believed he’d found the next Frank Sinatra when he first heard Bowie sing Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “You’ll Never Walk Alone” at London’s Marquee Club in 1966 – let the young man share his home, as relief from

the hell of the Jones household. Pitt convinced him that he could no longer use the last name Jones, after the rise of *Oliver!* child actor Davy Jones (later a member of the Monkees). The singer selected Bowie, after American knife-wielding pioneer Jim Bowie; the new last name, he decided, signified a way of cutting deeper. Pitt also turned Bowie on to the grotesque art of Egon Schiele and Aubrey Beardsley, and the writings of 19th-centu-

ry decadents such as Oscar Wilde. But the manager’s most lasting gift was introducing Bowie to the music of the Velvet Underground: The group, and the songwriting of its leader, Lou Reed, showed Bowie how to write about a mean world, in terms and sounds that were both beautiful and cacophonous.

Bowie was casting about musically, singing cabaret at times, working in collectives and sometimes playing solo folk music. He was a fan of Bob Dylan, and he admired friend and rival Marc Bolan’s abstruse work in Tyrannosaurus Rex, before Bolan metamorphosed into T. Rex. Bowie’s debut album, *David Bowie* – released in June 1967 – displayed wide-ranging and unconventional sources: British music hall, French *chanson* and show-tune-style balladry – none of which connected with much of an audience.

Some who knew Bowie thought that his mutability in adapting new musical styles and looks carried over to his erratic treatment of others. He could be charming, attentive and enticing, but he could turn indifferent, even seemingly unfeeling. Bowie would describe himself at times as disconnected. In 1972, he told *Rolling Stone*, “I’m a...very cold person. I can’t feel strongly. I get so numb. I find I’m walking around numb. I’m a bit of an iceman.” Bowie’s inconstant aspect wasn’t helped by his libertine marriage to the flamboyant, eccentric Angela Barnett; Bowie once said

“All I knew was this other world I wanted to embrace – anything but the place I came from.”



that being married to her was “like living with a blowtorch.” As one story goes, Angela once threw herself down a staircase, thinking Bowie was going out to meet another lover; Bowie purportedly stepped over her and said, “Well, when you feel like it, and if you’re not dead, call me.” Producer Ken Scott told author David Buckley, “When [Angie] walked into a room, you knew it. I think David saw the effect she had on people and started to emulate it. I think it was part of him taking from everything around him and making it part of him. Because, in the early stages, he was much more quiet and subdued. And he became more flamboyant as time went on.”

Bowie landed his first major hit, “Space Oddity,” from the album of the same name. Timed to be released close to the first manned moon landing, in July 1969, it was an affecting reflection of a man lost in space – a representation of Bowie’s own disconnection. In that same season, Bowie, Angela and some friends and band members settled into Haddon Hall, a Victorian house with Gothic windows in Kent that would become the birthplace of David Bowie’s legend. It was there – amid a lot of clubgoing and promiscuity – that Bowie developed the songs and ideas that would turn into his next three, breakthrough albums (*The Man Who Sold the World*, *Hunky Dory* and *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars*).

The first salvo, 1970’s *The Man Who Sold the World*, was a strange, paranoid and philosophical album. Bowie was now working largely in electric rock & roll – hard and dissonant, and not quite like anybody else’s. He was also playing with musicians who could carry out his increasing sense of risk: bassist Tony Visconti (who would become Bowie’s longtime friend and producer), drummer Woody Woodmansey and, in particular, guitarist Mick Ronson, who gave Bowie’s songs a crucial majesty. “You believed every note had been wrenched from his soul,” Bowie once said.

Hunky Dory, from 1971, is one of rock’s perfect works. On the mellifluous opening track, “Changes,” he stood up for the audience he wanted and identified with: “And these children that you spit on/As they try to change their worlds/Are immune to your consultations/They’re quite aware what they’re going through.” His new pop skills first became evident in “Oh! You Pretty Things,” a hit single he’d written for Peter Noone, formerly the lead singer in Herman’s Hermits. Noone would call Bowie the best songwriter since the team of John Lennon and Paul McCartney. Yet behind

the sweetness of “Oh! You Pretty Things,” there was also a complex mind at work, willing to turn dark: “I look out my window, what do I see?/A crack in the sky and a hand reaching down to me/All the nightmares came today/And it looks as though they’re here to stay.”

“The only way to remain a vibrant part of what is happening is to keep working anew.”

Hunky Dory was also unexpectedly seedy at moments: particularly “Queen Bitch” (a tribute to the Velvet Underground’s Reed), about a man who is desirous, mistrustful, finally raging, over another man’s sexual attentions. When Bowie performed the song on U.K. television in 1972, the moment made him. Nobody had seen anybody like this before: an utterly confident young man, facing the camera in a commando suit and tall red boots, singing un-

ashamedly about proscribed matters and people in degraded conditions in both their lives and the culture around them.

By this time, Bowie had invented a famous and outrageous character who would define him: Ziggy Stardust, an otherworldly messiah who fell to Earth – therefore to corruption – and who lost everything but a legacy. *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* (1972) was Bowie’s breakthrough, and a complicated one.

2



STARMAN

(1) In the Netherlands, with then-wife Angela and son Duncan Jones, February 1974. (2) With Mick Ronson, 1973. (3) Bowie said Ziggy Stardust was a fiction, but that “I play it right down the line.” (4) At the Grammys with friend John Lennon, 1975.

4



3



Not unlike the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, the album and its title formed an alter ego for a creative mind. In the Beatles' case, though, they were already famous and their second self was clearly a stand-in or fiction. In Ziggy's case, the alter ego seemed to define the creative mind – Bowie – rather than the other way around. That's because an audience hadn't really known Bowie before. This is how he made his imprint: as a vain and charismatic being, suddenly making the best music on the planet and attracting an audience that became a following, and who recognized a liberator when it saw one.

‘Z

IGGY STARDUST AND the Spiders From Mars” was a dividing line for popular music, as surely as punk or disco would prove in a few years. “I was incredibly excited by it at the time,” Bowie later said. “It just felt so radical – completely against everything that was happening at the time with the denims and the whole laid-back atmosphere.”

Musically, *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars* was often exuberant, with undertones that were even darker than *Hunky Dory*'s. The new album opened with “Five Years,” about the im-

mediate reaction people have when they learn the Earth's days are numbered: “Five years, that's all we've got.” The revelation brings out the worst and the best: “A girl my age went off her head, hit some tiny children/If the black hadn't a-pulled her off, I think she would have killed them.../A cop knelt and kissed the feet of a priest/And a queer threw up at the sight of that.” It is among Bowie's most remarkable songs: Everybody, it says, is equal and bewildered and precious standing before the knowledge of death. At the album's end, Bowie sang the equally enthralling “Rock & Roll Suicide,” from the view of a man trying to save a person who is confused, hurting and in peril of self-destruction. But if we've been following the album's loose story, it's implicit that the person singing, trying to rescue another, doesn't have long to live himself.

Perhaps most important, *Ziggy Stardust*, even more than *Hunky Dory*, delineated sexual themes – bisexuality and homosexuality among them – that popular culture hadn't depicted on this scale before. Bowie's outrageous appearance alone was enough to do the job, but he took it much further than that, miming oral sex on Ronson's guitar at shows. It was the sort of image of libido that had never been allowed before in the public arena.

He claimed he intended Ziggy Stardust as a fictional character, “but I play that character right down the line.” Ziggy

Stardust was assumed by many – especially fans – to represent David Bowie's true values and lifestyle. Bowie knew this. “It's very hard to convince people that you can be quite different offstage in rock & roll than you are onstage. One of the principles in rock is that it's the person himself expressing what he really and truly feels.”

In an eventful 1972 *Melody Maker* interview, Bowie spontaneously announced, “I'm gay – and always have been, even when I was David Jones.” He didn't appear to be exclusively gay; after all, he was married to a woman, now with a child – Angela had given birth to Duncan Jones, born Zowie Bowie, in 1971 – and was purported to have had sex with many women. In 1983, he would tell Kurt Loder, in *ROLLING STONE*, that claiming to be bisexual “was the biggest mistake I ever made.” Later, he clarified: “I think I was always a closet heterosexual. I didn't ever feel that I was a real bisexual. It was like I was making all the moves, down to the situation of actually trying it out with some guys. But for me, I was more magnetized by the whole gay scene, which was underground. Remember, in the early 1970s it was still virtually taboo. There might have been free love, but it was heterosexual love. I like this twilight world. I like the idea of these clubs and these people and everything about it being something that nobody knew anything about. So it attracted me like crazy.”

Critic John Gill and others thought that Bowie had used and betrayed gay culture, but also admitted that he had emboldened many people to be more open about their sexuality. Singer Tom Robinson said, “For gay musicians, Bowie was seismic. To hell with whether he disowned us later.”

Bowie said later, “I couldn’t decide whether I was writing the characters or whether the characters were writing me, or whether we were all one and the same.” He toured with the Spiders From Mars – bassist Trevor Bolder, drummer Woodmansey and guitarist Ronson – in the U.K. and America for much of 1972 and 1973. Then, on July 3rd, 1973, at a show at London’s Hammersmith Odeon, Bowie did away with Ziggy Stardust in one sure and shocking move. Before the evening’s final song, “Rock & Roll Suicide,” Bowie spoke to his audience. “Not only is this the last show of the tour,” he said, “but it is the last show we’ll ever do. Thank you. Bye-bye. We love you.”

The crowd erupted in a shriek. Bowie’s band was just as surprised. Nobody knew that he had planned this. “I really did want it all to come to an end,” Bowie wrote in his memoir, *Moonage Daydream*. “I was now writing for a different kind of project and exhausted and completely bored with the whole Ziggy concept...couldn’t keep my attention on the performance. I was wasted and miserable.”

Bowie never worked again with the Spiders From Mars – perhaps the best band in the world at the moment. He no longer wanted musicians with a reputation as good as his own, or who shared his identity. “I honestly can’t remember Mick that well nowadays,” he said in 1976 of Ronson. “It’s a long time ago. He’s just like any other band member.” Ronson went on to play with Ian Hunter and in Bob Dylan’s Rolling Thunder Revue. He and Bowie later reconciled, and Bowie was more forthcoming with his respect: “Mick was the perfect foil for the Ziggy character,” he said. “He was very much a salt-of-the-earth type, the blunt northerner with a defiantly masculine personality, so that what you got was the old-fashioned yin and yang thing. As a rock duo, I thought we were every bit as good as Mick and Keith....Ziggy and Mick were the personification of that rock & roll dualism.” The guitarist died of liver cancer in April 1993.

Bowie fully intended to leave Ziggy Stardust behind at the Odeon that night. He did something at the end of that concert, though, that made the likelihood impossible, in that performance of “Rock & Roll Suicide.” Bowie wasn’t just addressing a single soul in this instance, but he was also – crucially – talking to his audience, and to every marginalized person in that crowd: “You’re not alone....,” he sang with empathy that felt real; it was a trait he might have learned from one of his he-

roes, Judy Garland: “Gimme your hands ‘cause you’re wonderful.” Bowie didn’t realize that this assurance, real or fictional, was the most important thing he ever did. He had provided a model of courage to the Ziggy audiences – and in turn, over the years that followed, to millions of others – who had never been embraced by a popular-culture hero before. He helped set others free in unexpected ways. He promised to be there for them. He could never annul that moment.

IN THE SEASONS THAT IMMEDIATELY followed, Bowie found himself in a quandary: He still emitted the Ziggy Stardust vibe – so did his growing audience. He hadn’t yet redefined himself in any clear way, and he never broke his pace of working and touring – it only intensified, though fueled increasingly by drug use.

In *Aladdin Sane* (1973), the album’s eponymous lead character was an extension of Ziggy Stardust – though a more disconnected observer of others’ excesses and creeping ruin. Bowie had thought of the album as an interim effort (he had theatrical hopes for the one that would follow) but later changed his mind: “Funnily enough, in retrospect, for me, it’s the more successful album, because it’s more informed about rock & roll than *Ziggy* was.” The next album, 1974’s *Diamond Dogs*, was more foreboding: It began with howls, and though there were beautiful (“Rock & Roll With Me”) and insolent moments (“Rebel Rebel”), Bowie’s soundscape was strewn with waste, bad faith and intimations of death; he was talking about a world that might not survive and might not deserve to. Yet even if the song structures on *Aladdin Sane* and *Diamond Dogs* had grown more complex, the man making the music still resembled Ziggy Stardust. His audience of outsiders knew what it wanted from Bowie – more of the same, in sounds and looks, and he was giving it to them.

Bowie put together an evolving touring ensemble for North America that included, at various times, guitarists Earl Slick and Carlos Alomar, saxophonist David Sanborn, bassist Willie Weeks, drummer Tony Newman and pianist Mike Garson. (Garson brought a new stretch to Bowie’s music. Garson’s complex, atonal solo in “Aladdin Sane” remains the single best instrumental break in all of Bowie’s music.) Bowie, though, wasn’t happy with what was developing.

Bowie resolved to make a soul – or as he termed it, “plastic soul,” album. He appreciated the funk and R&B of the time, and in America he could expose himself to it. This time he decisively changed his look, fashioning his hair up into a suave pompadour. The album that resulted, 1975’s *Young Americans*, proved to be Bowie’s breakthrough in the U.S. – in part because of the taut and unusual “Fame” that he wrote and recorded with his friend John Lennon.

Young Americans wasn’t purely an emulation of black pop. Some songs, such as a cover of the Beatles’ “Across the Universe,” didn’t fit the purported scheme at all – and that diversity made the album stronger and more singular. In the end, though, the album didn’t solve anything for Bowie. “*Young Americans* was damn depressing,” he said. Bowie had developed a horrific cocaine habit. “It was a terribly traumatic time. I was in a terrible state. I was absolutely infuriated that I was still in rock & roll. And not only in it, but had been sucked right into the center of it.”

Bowie later implied he was driving himself crazy. In 1993, he told England’s Radio 1, “One puts oneself through such psychological damage in trying to avoid the threat of insanity. You start to approach the very thing that you’re scared of.” He

moved to Los Angeles, lived with little sleep on a diet of cocaine, milk, and red and green peppers. He investigated the occult, and according to one rumor, stored his urine in a refrigerator so no wizard could harm him with his own bodily fluids. In a 1976 ROLLING STONE profile, Cameron Crowe related an incident during an interview: “Suddenly – always suddenly – David is on his feet and rushing to a nearby picture window. He thinks he’s seen a body fall from the sky. ‘I’ve got to do this,’ he says, pulling a shade down on the window. A ball-

point-penned star has been crudely drawn on the inside. Below it is the word ‘Aum.’ Bowie lights a black candle on his dresser and immediately blows it out to leave a thin trail of smoke floating upward. ‘Don’t let me scare the pants off you. It’s only protective. I’ve been getting a little trouble from...the neighbors.’”

“David was never insane,” Angela later wrote. “The really crazy stuff...coincided precisely with his ingestion of enormous amounts of [drugs]. His madness simply didn’t happen unless he was stoned out of his mind.”

Perhaps as proof that he hadn’t lost it, Bowie’s magnificent 1976 album, *Station to Station*, took his soul and funk inter-

“I couldn’t decide whether I was writing the characters, or if they were writing me, or whether we were all the same.”



CRACKED ACTOR

Onstage during the *Station to Station* tour, Wembley Arena, London, May 1976

ests into new directions, incorporating both art-rock structures (the title song) and some of the artist's most beautiful ballad vocals ("Word on a Wing," "Stay" and a cover of Dimitri Tiomkin's "Wild Is the Wind," originally recorded by Johnny Mathis in 1957). It ended up being recognized as one of Bowie's freshest and finest works. "The only way to remain a vibrant part of what is happening," he said, "is to keep working anew all the time. For me, it always will be change. I can't envisage any period of creative stability and resting on any laurels. I think for what I do and what I'm known for, it would be disastrous."

At the same time, little by little, something changed for the better in Bowie's personal life – at least in a short run. "It was time to get out of this terrible lifestyle

I'd put myself into and get healthy," he later said. "It was time to pull myself together."

IN LATE 1976, BOWIE RELOCATED TO West Berlin, where he caroused with his friend Iggy Pop, of the Stooges. Bowie was intent on putting his drug habits behind him, but ended up just trading them in and became a heavy drinker. His efforts at self-imposed rehabilitation hadn't taken hold. "I was in a serious decline, emotionally and socially," he said in 1996. "I think I was very much on course to be just another rock casualty – in fact, I'm quite certain I wouldn't have survived the Seventies if I'd carried on doing what I was doing. But I was lucky enough to know

somewhere within me that I really was killing myself, and I had to do something drastic to pull myself out of that. I had to stop, which I did."

In 1977, Bowie divorced the erratic Angela, winning custody of Duncan, who largely avoided communication with his mother in the years after. Bowie also vindicated himself in other ways and found some relief from his excesses by making new groundbreaking music. With former Roxy Music keyboardist and music experimentalist Brian Eno, Bowie took the abject state that he'd been in and converted it into new, shattered art-rock textures, writing fragmentary and impressionistic lyrics that fit the new forms. Eno "got me off narration, which I was so intolerably bored with," said Bowie. "Narrating stories, or doing little vignettes of what I thought was happening in America and putting it on my albums in convoluted fashion... Brian really opened my eyes to the idea of processing, to the abstract of communication."

The resulting album, 1977's *Low*, was unconventional pop by any standard: Entire tracks consisted of odd instrumental fragments; others – "Breaking Glass," "Speed of Life" and "Sound and Vision" – lastingly redefined modern art-song; and the extraordinarily beautiful "Warszawa" invented a new language (Visconti described it as "quasi-Balkan") to contain its hypnotic mysteries. When Bowie sang on *Low*, it was often in a horizontal, undisturbed voice, as if from a dissociated place.

At first his label, RCA, did not want to release *Low*. "I remember getting angry about RCA's reaction," Bowie said. "I went into incredible anger first and then depression for months. I mean, it was really awful, the treatment they gave to that album. It was hideous, because I knew how wrong they were about it."

The subsequent collaboration with Eno, *Heroes*, produced one of Bowie's most popular anthems in its title song, about lovers meeting under the threat of the Berlin Wall. *Low* and *Heroes* went on to inspire a generation – or more – of new artists, from Joy Division, Cabaret Voltaire, the Human League and Orchestral Manoeuvres in the Dark to Trent Reznor, and proved to be Bowie's most sonically influential work.

THE MAKING OF THE MUSIC AND THE time in Berlin itself helped Bowie's health and psychology. Bowie and Eno wound down their collaboration with 1979's *Lodger* – a less-experimental effort that in some instances ("D.J.," "Look Back in Anger" and "Boys Keep Swinging") returned to the pop forms that Bowie had eschewed. In 1980, Bowie returned to New York, where he recorded what was



LET'S DANCE

On tour in the U.K., 1983.

generally considered to be his last great work for more than a decade, *Scary Monsters*. In some ways, it was a summation of what Bowie had done since the early 1970s: music that recalled both the boldness of the Ziggy period and the Berlin avant-garde albums. *Scary Monsters* yielded “Ashes to Ashes,” an evocation of “Space Oddity” that met and surpassed the original.

In September 1980, Bowie took a three-month role on Broadway, playing John Merrick, the title character in *The Elephant Man*. It was a physically tiring role, and Bowie received praising reviews. On the night of December 8th, he received news that his friend John Lennon had been shot to death in front of the Dakota apartment building in Manhattan. It was reported that Lennon’s killer, Mark David Chapman, had attended a performance of *The Elephant Man* just days before the killing, and had Bowie on a list of potential targets. Bowie soon left the role.

IN 1983, AFTER A THREE-YEAR ABSENCE from recording popular music, Bowie moved to a new label, EMI – reportedly for \$17 million – and made the biggest album of his career, *Let’s Dance*, produced by Nile Rodgers of Chic. Bowie had remade himself once again: He was a

global superstar now, on the same plane as Prince, Michael Jackson, Madonna and Bruce Springsteen (whom Bowie had championed years before). His image and movements were elegant, the music was an enjoyable foray into huge, synth-powered R&B, Stan Kenton-inspired big-band swing and suggestions of 1950s pop. But Bowie now had to face new questions: When you lose your excesses, do you also lose your brilliance? What does it mean for an artist to forswear the cutting edge for mere success, even if it is immense? “I don’t really have the urge to continue as a songwriter and performer in terms of experimentation – at this moment,” Bowie told *NME*. “I feel that at the moment I’m of an age – and age has an awful lot to do with it – I’m just starting to enjoy growing up. I’m enjoying being my age, 36, and what comes with it.”

Around this time, Bowie mentioned his half brother, Terry, during an interview. “It is my fault we grew apart,” he said, “and it is painful.” On January 16th, 1985, Terry left a psychiatric hospital, walked to a nearby train station and laid his head on the tracks. Bowie sent roses to his brother’s funeral and a card that read, “You’ve seen more things than we can imagine, but all these moments will be lost, like tears washed away by the rain. God bless

you – David.” Bowie later said he was “never quite sure of what real position Terry had in my life, whether Terry was a real person or whether I was actually referring to another part of me. I wonder if I imbued my stepbrother with more attributes than he really had.”

After *Let’s Dance*, Bowie wandered a confusing creative trail, making two indifferent-sounding albums – *Tonight* (1984), *Never Let Me Down* (1987) – that met with little esteem. In 1984, Bowie said, “I think because I was starting to feel sure of myself in terms of my life, my state of health and my being...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.”

He was right: He had become a successful mainstream artist. He had wealth, homes, legend, and if the albums didn’t succeed, he could mount profitable stadium-size tours. “The main problem with success,” Brian Eno said of Bowie, “is that it has a huge momentum. It’s like you’ve got this big train behind you, and it wants you to carry on going the same way. Nobody wants you to step off the tracks.”

Eventually, Bowie was ready to step off. As he had once wanted to abandon Ziggy Stardust, he now wanted to relinquish his superstar standing. In 1989, he formed a

supposedly democratic quartet, Tin Machine, with guitarist Reeves Gabrels, bassist Tony Sales and drummer Hunt Sales. It started with a promising idea. “We realized when we first talked,” Gabrels later said, “that we were both listening to the same thing – John Coltrane, Miles Davis, Cream, the Pixies, Hendrix, Glen Branca, Sonic Youth, Strauss, Stravinsky. These were all things we wanted this band to be.” In the end, it was a metallic band, blaring with feedback, and its sheer force leveled both the concept and the music the band played. “The consensus,” Bowie said, “was that...it was a huge hype, because I was saying I was ‘part of the band.’” At the same time, Tin Machine provided Bowie a respite from his mainstream persona and may have even helped him regain a gradual new ambition – one that, by his life’s end, found him at an almost unparalleled artistic pinnacle.

THERE WAS AN EVEN MORE important source of renewal when he met Somali fashion model Iman Abdulmajid in 1990. (According to one story, Bowie saw a picture of her in a magazine and said, “I want to have a date with her.”) “I’d never been out with a model before,” he said, “so I hadn’t even bargained on the cliché of the rock star and the model as being part of my life. So I was well surprised to meet one who was devastatingly wonderful and not the usual sort of bubblehead that I’d met in the past. I make no bones about it. I was naming the children the night we met.” Bowie said that their romance “was conducted in a very gentlemanly fashion, I hope, for quite some time. Lots of being led to doorways and polite kisses on the cheek. Flowers and chocolates and the whole thing. I knew it was precious from the first night, and I just didn’t want anything to spoil it.”

Bowie proposed to Iman in Paris, and the couple married in secret in Lausanne, Switzerland, in April 1992. “I had to learn how to evaluate what sharing one’s life meant,” Bowie later said. “Strange new things like learning to listen, knowing when a reply was not necessary but just being a receptive human being....Most importantly, though, turning one’s asocial, possessive and inevitably destructive characteristics around.”

Bowie wrote and recorded a new work in 1993, *Black Tie White Noise* – his first solo effort in six years – in part to commemorate the wedding. Both the album and the marriage proved turning points for him. The album (like *Let’s Dance*) still had one foot in an overtly commercial sound, but it also looked at the real world and real pain with new understanding.

The title song was Bowie’s response to the 1992 L.A. riots that erupted after the acquittal of police officers in the beating of Rodney King (“I’m lookin’ through African eyes/Lit by the glare of an L.A. fire/I’ve got a face, not just my race”). In another track, “Jump They Say,” Bowie addressed the suicide of his half brother, Terry.

Black Tie White Noise loosened Bowie up. He went on to record a series of ambitious, occasionally brilliant, albums – *Outside* (1995), *The Buddha of Suburbia* (1995), *Earthling* (1997), *Hours* (1999), *Heathen* (2002), *Reality* (2003) – that were always musically bold and that sometimes examined vulnerable psychology, an elusive spirituality and a world in trouble. “If you can make the spiritual connection with some kind of clarity, then everything else would fall into place,” Bowie told journalist and author Paul Du Noyer in 2003. “A morality would seem to be offered, a plan would seem to be offered, some sense would be there. But it evades me. Yet I can’t help writing about it.”

Heathen was one of the most successful of the sequence – an album that was about the rising anxiety of the times, but which also had a pop and rock & roll sure-handedness that matched the dexterity of Bowie’s early-Seventies music. There was both devastation and pop to be had here, and like much of Bowie’s best music, each had the effect of deepening the other. Also, his new fatherhood – he and Iman’s daughter, Alexandria, was born in 2000 – was affecting his thoughts. “Since my daughter’s been born, I am changing as a writer,” he said. “There has been a shift in the weight of my responsibilities, relinquishing my own concerns about myself and Iman as a couple, and instead thinking about Lexi and what her world is going to be like.” On another occasion, Bowie said, “I desperately want to live forever. You know what I want [is] to still be around in another 40 or 50 years....I just want to be there for Alexandria. She’s so exciting and lovely, so I want to be around when she grows up.”

In 2004, he suffered a heart attack on a European tour, collapsing after a show in Germany. He never toured again, though he performed in New York with Arcade Fire in 2005; with Pink Floyd’s David Gilmour in London in 2006; and with Alicia Keys at a Manhattan charity con-

cert that year. When he was seen on New York’s streets in the spring of 2005, he looked recuperated and fit. The year before, Bowie had said he was preparing for a new record. “I’m heading for another period of experimentation. [I’m at] a time when I’m collecting myself before I break all my own rules.” That following album, *The Next Day*, wouldn’t arrive until 2013, though it was worth the wait. It was a work of beauty and craft – like *Heathen*, an encapsulation of Bowie’s prime early strengths. However, the long-awaited masterpiece, *Blackstar*, didn’t come until January 8th, 2016 – David Bowie’s 69th birthday. It took hold like nothing since *Low* or *Heroes*.

Two days later, he was dead. “I really don’t have too many regrets,” Bowie said in 2003. “I have personal regrets about myself and my own behavior and people I let down considerably during those years. But that’s how life was for me.”

In his last decade, Bowie lived a private life in downtown Manhattan and his home in Woodstock, New York, with his wife and daughter. He made music from time to time, but he gave no interviews. In his final months, as he fought to restore his health with cancer treatment, he also strived to live as creatively as ever – and he did so, in unexpected and resounding ways. *Blackstar* walks us right up to death, about as far as we can go without somebody holding our hand. We don’t know what happens past that point, short of the rumored miraculous.

But miracles can happen. In Bowie’s case, they came both early and late. The times when he performed “Rock & Roll Suicide” to the Ziggy

Stardust audiences were miraculous moments, as he extended himself to his new-found audience – his hands stretching to theirs, theirs reaching back, his fingers touching theirs – and sang: “Oh, no, love! You’re not alone/You’re watching yourself but you’re too unfair/You got your head all tangled up but if I could only make you care/Oh, no, love! You’re not alone.” He would end with the refrain: “Gimme your hands ‘cause you’re wonderful/Oh, gimme your hands.”

We are not alone. In telling his audience that, David Bowie sealed his meaning, and he offered to them a promise of deliverance. You are not alone. David Bowie showed us that even past death, you can still reach out.



MODERN LOVE

In 2002, with Iman: “I had to learn what sharing one’s life meant,” he said after they were married in 1992.

The Final Years

How Bowie stepped away – and came roaring back

By Brian Hiatt

W

HEN THE PAIN HIT, DAVID BOWIE WAS singing a song called “Reality.” It was just another concert on a tour that had stretched on a little too long, bringing him to a stiflingly hot arena stage in Prague, on a late-June evening in 2004. “Reality,” the title track to his album of the previous year, was

about facing mortality and putting illusions aside, and at age 57, he had been busy doing just that. He was sober, and had finally quit smoking. He was taking medication to lower his cholesterol, working out with a trainer. That night, as usual, he looked agelessly, extraterrestrially great: lean, with longish blond hair spilling onto his

unlined forehead, a fluorescent scarf around his neck. But as he stood in the spotlight, yowling lines like “Now my death is more than just a sad song” – a reference to his doomy Ziggy-era renditions of Jacques Brel’s “My Death” – he found himself struggling for breath. Bowie clutched at his shoulder and chest, leaving the song’s final words unsung.

“He looked over his shoulder at me,” recalls bassist Gail Ann Dorsey, “and he was pale, translucent almost. His shirt was drenched. And he was just standing there, not singing. I could see the audience’s expressions in the front row change – from joy to kind of looking concerned.” A bodyguard rushed onstage and helped Bowie off.

He somehow managed to return for a few more songs that night, before seeing a doctor who misdiagnosed him with a pinched nerve in his shoulder, prescribing muscle relaxants. Bowie pushed through one more shaky show at a German festival two days later, ending with the last version of “Ziggy Stardust” he’d ever sing in concert. He hit every note, made it down the stairs leading off the stage, and promptly collapsed. At a local hospital, doctors realized that he had a blocked artery in his heart, and performed emergency surgery.

That night essentially marked the end of David Bowie as a public figure. He never toured again, never gave another in-depth interview. He grew so secretive that he chided one of his closest collaborators, Tony Visconti, for revealing that they watched British comedy during studio

breaks. By the time he made his surprise re-emergence in 2013 with his first album in a decade, *The Next Day*, he had pulled off a feat that no other rock star has quite managed, regaining all of the heady mystique of his breakthrough years, and then some. He was a legend, a living ghost, hiding in plain sight, walking his daughter to school, taking cabs, exercising alongside ordinary humans in workaday gyms in Manhattan and upstate in Woodstock. With his family, he said, he was David Jones, the person he had been before he assumed his stage name. He had, at last, truly fallen to Earth, and he liked what he found there.

His final three years, though, were an extraordinarily fertile period of creativity. In 2014, he began work on another, even better, album, *Blackstar*, while also helping bring to life an ambitious off-Broadway show, *Lazarus*, based around his old and new songs. But he had kept one more secret: Bowie maintained focus on these last creations while battling cancer (of the liver, according to one friend). He died on January 10th, two days after the release of *Blackstar*, and a month after the opening of *Lazarus*. His passing occasioned the kind of worldwide grief not seen since the deaths of Elvis Presley and Michael Jackson.

Visconti, who knew of Bowie’s illness, noticed the tone of some of the *Blackstar* lyrics early on. “You canny bastard,” Visconti told him. “You’re writing a farewell album.” Bowie simply laughed. “It’s so inspirational how he lived his last year,” says Visconti, pointing out that Bowie wrote some of his most amusing lyrics (“Man, she punched me like a dude,” “Where the fuck did Monday go?”) while terribly ill. “He kept his sense of humor.”

In the worst moments, Visconti would try to reassure him. “Sometimes he would phone me when he just finished treatment,” he recalls. “He couldn’t talk very loud. He was really pretty messed up, and I would say, ‘Don’t worry about it. You’re going to live.’”

“One hopes,” Bowie would shoot back. “Don’t get too excited about that.”

THE LAST WEEKS OF THE “REALITY” tour had been dark ones. Seven weeks before Bowie’s heart attack, a stagehand suffered a fatal fall from a lighting rig; weeks later, a fan threw a lollipop at the stage, hitting Bowie in his already damaged left eye – an incident he found deeply unsettling. Even before his health issues ended the tour, Bowie told his longtime keyboardist, Mike Garson (the man behind the bonkers “Aladdin Sane” piano solo), that he planned to step back to spend more time with his family: his wife, the supermodel Iman, and daughter Alexandria, born in 2000. (Bowie had raised his other child, Duncan Jones, born in 1971 and now a successful film director, amid the tours, albums, debauchery and persona-switching of the Seventies.) Bowie

adored Iman: Touring Japan with his short-lived band Tin Machine in 1992, the year they married, Bowie got what his bandmate Tony Sales describes as “a tattoo of Iman riding on a dolphin on his calf with the serenity prayer underneath it. It was based on a drawing he made.” (Bowie had also begun attending

“You canny bastard,” longtime producer Tony Visconti told Bowie. “You’re writing a farewell album.”



THE DUKE

Bowie, seen here in the final year of his life, showed extraordinary poise and creative focus as he battled cancer.

alcohol-abuse recovery meetings with Sales around then.)

"Three-quarters through the *Reality* tour," recalls Garson, "he said, 'You know, Mike, after this tour, I'm just going to be a father and live a normal life. And I'm going to be there for Lexi while she grows up. I missed it the first time.'"

Before the tour, Bowie had told Visconti, his friend and frequent producer, of ambitious plans to follow 2003's *Reality*. "We had plans to make three more albums, at least," says Visconti, who had just renewed his creative partnership with Bowie, beginning with 2002's *Heathen*. "We were talking about an electronica album, for instance. And he'd make up a group name. He wanted to have more fun and not have the pressure of releasing another David Bowie album for a

while. He said, 'When I get off tour, we'll do that.'"

The two men were renting a studio in Philip Glass' New York complex, and Visconti kept it going for a couple of years after Bowie's heart attack. Eventually, though, Bowie told him, "I'm going to give up my share. I don't think I'm going to be using it for a while. I'm gonna take some time off." He meant it: Bowie wouldn't begin work on *The Next Day* until 2010.

In 2005, Bowie briefly re-emerged, playing two short sets over a single week with what was then his favorite new band, Arcade Fire. "I feel great," he told a reporter during rehearsals. But he would perform only two more times, both in the following year. In May 2006, he paid tribute to a formative influence, Syd Barrett, by joining David Gilmour onstage in

London for the Barrett-penned "Arnold Layne" (and, for good measure, "Comfortably Numb"). Six months later, Bowie delivered a three-song performance at a charity gala, backed by Garson, closing his set by dueting with Alicia Keys on "Changes." It was the last song he ever sang onstage.

Also in '06, he joined another young band he admired, Brooklyn's TV on the Radio, in the studio, singing harmonies on their song "Province." His persistent advice to that adventurous group was, according to band member Dave Sitek, "Don't bend. Stay strange."

Around that time, Bowie told a reporter who approached him at a party that he was "fed up" with the music industry. "I go for a walk every morning," he said, "and I watch a ton of movies. One day, I watched three Woody Allen movies in a row. I like going out to [downtown movie theater] the Angelika: If the first one's only OK, I'll sneak into one after the other. It's so easy." In another brief interview, he said, "I love seeing new theater, I love seeing new bands, art shows, everything. I get everywhere – very quietly and never above 14th

Street." He told a friend that an ingenious trick rendered him invisible in Manhattan: He'd carry a Greek-language newspaper around, aiming to convince any curious onlookers that he was a Greek guy who happened to resemble David Bowie. When he wasn't surreptitiously taking in culture or hanging out with his family in his modern-art-filled apartment, he was making visual art of his own: painting, sketching with charcoal.

Bowie, Iman and Lexi split their time between the city and Woodstock. He had fallen in love with the "spirituality" of the Catskill Mountains while recording an album at Visconti's studio there, and ended up purchasing a 64-acre plot of land, intending to build a house. In the meantime, he'd rent a local bed-and-breakfast over the summers, and eventually bought another house nearby, renovating it to add a huge library, according to local lore. "I love mountains," he said in 2003. "I'm a Capricorn. I was born to be gallivanting on a peak somewhere.... I was never a Woodstock-y kind of person, at all, ever. But when I got up there, I flipped at how beautiful it is. There's a barrenness and sturdiness in the rugged terrain that draws me."

In 2007, Bowie helped curate New York's Highline Music Festival, which announced that he would play a "large outdoor concert" as part of the event. When he quietly pulled out, rumors swirled that he was experiencing renewed health problems. But Visconti, for one, says he saw no evidence of that.

"When I met up with David in 2008 or 2009," he says, "he actually had some weight on him. He was robust. His cheeks were rosy red. He wasn't sick. He *was* on medicine for his heart. But it was normal, like a lot of people in their fifties or sixties are on heart medication, and live very long lives. So he was coping with it very, very well."

Bowie was never a recluse, either. He accompanied Iman to society events, becoming a cheerful, nattily dressed but silent red-carpet presence. He popped up at the 2009 premiere of Duncan Jones' sci-fi film *Moon*, standing proudly alongside his son for photos. He made quirky choices for extramusical exploits, including an uproarious 2006 appearance on Ricky Gervais' *Extras*, a voice-over for Lexi's favorite cartoon, *SpongeBob SquarePants*, and roles in Christopher Nolan's *The Prestige* (as inventor Nikola Tesla), in 2006, and in the 2008 indie film *August* (as a fearsome corporate executive). Though Nolan had to implore him to take the former role, Bowie actually sought out the latter—he had a movie agent actively reading scripts for him. But his offer to act in *August* came with unusual preconditions. "He would show up, he'd know his lines, he'd do the role," recalls the film's director, Austin Chick. "But under no circumstances was I allowed to direct him." Chick more or less agreed, but Bowie ended up accepting some direction anyway for the tiny part.

BY JANUARY 2013, BOWIE had lulled the world into thinking he had long since retired from music. So when he celebrated his 66th birthday with the out-of-nowhere announcement of his first album in a decade, *The Next Day*, the response was close to ecstatic. "People were so delighted," says U2's Bono, who traded e-mails with Bowie around that time, "and *he* was so delighted that there was so much interest in it." For once, Bowie joked to Bono, he wasn't overshadowed on his birthday by Elvis Presley, also born on January 8th.

The project began with a casual question to Visconti: "How would you like to make some demos?" Bowie wrote 30 or so songs for the album, in wildly different styles, recording at Soho's Magic Shop studio, around the corner from his apartment building. They'd lay down the basic tracks live, with Bowie even playing some guitar.

It was the beginning of what turned into a final flood of productivity. "I can't stop it," he wrote in an e-mail to Floria Sigismondi, who directed clever music videos for two *Next Day* tracks. "It's com-

ing full force and I'm just creating and creating and creating."

In March 2013, Bowie visited London, where he brought Iman and Lexi along for an off-hours visit to "David Bowie Is," a well-received, career-spanning exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum that included everything from his sketches for stage setups to famous costumes to an old coke spoon, all drawn from the Bowie organization's own extensive, carefully maintained, 75,000-item archives. "We arranged it as a private, self-led family visit," says exhibit co-curator Victoria Broackes. "They spent a good amount of time there. I think to see it all on show must have been a very unusual experience for him, and quite overwhelming, in a sense."

During that same London trip, Bowie told an old friend, theater producer Robert Fox, that he was thinking about a musical based on the 1963 book *The Man Who Fell to Earth*—he had starred in a movie adaptation of it in 1976, and had long been haunted by (and identified with) its main character, stranded alien Thomas Newton: Even the eerie instrumentals on 1977's *Low* were in part an attempt to capture Newton's mentality. Fox hooked Bowie up with Irish playwright Enda Walsh, who wrote the book for the Tony Award-winning adaptation of *Once*. First draft in hand, they recruited avant-garde theater director Ivo van Hove around April 2014. Van Hove was a Bowie fanatic, but he had scheduling issues. "I felt with David, from day one, a huge urgency to do it," van Hove says. "I wanted to postpone it, and he said, 'No, no, we have to make it now, it has to happen.'"

By November that year, they were workshoping the show, known as *Lazarus*. In the show, an older Newton was isolated in his apartment, guzzling gin, heartbroken, calling himself "a dying man who can't die." His only salvation comes in the apparition of a 13-year-old girl who helps him believe that he might somehow find a way to some version of home. The little girl revives the jaded, alienated Newton, playing Jesus to his Lazarus. Van Hove acknowledges that "of course it's not a coincidence" that the character is the same age as Bowie's daughter was when he wrote it.

As they cast the show, Bowie had the novel experience of hearing his songs sung back to him. When he heard co-star Cristin Milioti, of *How I Met Your Mother* and *Fargo*, perform a dark, anguished version of "Changes," he smiled.

"I'm so glad I wrote that song," he said. As a teenager, Bowie had imagined writing musicals, and he took particular pleasure in seeing *Lazarus* take shape. "What I always saw in him was the face of a delighted and amazed child," says James Nicola, artistic director of the New York Theatre Workshop, which produced the show, "who was seeing something come to life that was unexpected and joyful."

Bowie was also writing new songs—some of them destined for *Lazarus*, some for his next album, some for both. In the summer of 2014, Bowie and Visconti had recorded a single song, "Sue (Or in a Season of Crime)," with the Maria Schneider Orchestra, which he released on the greatest-hits comp *Nothing Has Changed*. It was a jazzy, orchestral epic unlike anything he'd recorded before, and among the featured musicians was jazz

saxophonist Donny McCaslin, whose eclectic, jazz-schooled band would form the musical core of Bowie's next album.

When Bowie showed up for *Blackstar* recording sessions in New York last January, he had no eyebrows, and no hair on his head. He had begun to tell a handful of friends and collaborators that he had cancer and was undergoing chemotherapy. "He just came fresh from a chemo session," says Visconti. "And there was no way he could keep it a secret from the band. He told me privately, and I really got

choked up when we sat face to face talking about it." Bowie informed the band members that he was ill and asked them to keep it a secret. It was never discussed again.

"He was so brave and courageous," says Visconti. "And his energy was still incredible for a man who had cancer. He never showed any fear. He was just all business about making the album."

The *Blackstar* sessions were loose and experimental, with Bowie and Visconti taking some inspiration from D'Angelo's *Black Messiah* and Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly*, which came out after sessions were well underway. Bowie would eat lunch in the studio lounge with the band each day, ordering in from a local sandwich spot called Olive's. "It was a vibe-y, cozy environment," says keyboardist Jason Lindner, whose array of vintage sounds helped define *Blackstar*'s ambience. On his 68th birthday, Iman stopped by with sushi from Nobu, and the band members made him a surprise recording of their outré take on "Happy Birthday." Muffin, his assistant's dog, was around a lot, and "always made him smile," adds Lindner.

"I can't stop it," Bowie told a friend during his final burst of productivity. "I'm just creating and creating and creating."



GOLDEN YEARS

Above: Bowie in 2004 at the second-to-last concert of his career, in Prague, where he experienced symptoms of a heart attack. Right: In the studio recording his 2013 album, *The Next Day*.

In addition to the seven songs on *Blackstar* and the three extras used in *Lazarus*, Visconti says there are five strong outtakes, including a *Hunky Dory*-ish track called “When Things Go Bad.” Visconti expects them to come out soon on a deluxe edition.

All the while, Bowie was undergoing chemo, and at one time, his prognosis seemed bright. “He was optimistic because he was doing the chemo and it was working,” says Visconti, “and at one point in the middle of last year, he was in remission. I was thrilled. And he was a bit apprehensive. He said, ‘Well, don’t celebrate too quickly. For now, I’m in remission, and we’ll see how it goes.’ And he continued the chemotherapy. So I thought he was going to make it.”

But Bowie still embedded enough intimations of mortality into his lyrics – and majesty in the music – that *Blackstar* seemed very much like a fitting goodbye. “I think he thought if he was going to die, this would be a great way to go,” says Visconti. “This would be a great statement to make.”

Bowie was well aware that *Lazarus*, too, served that purpose, with its existential themes and its summational use of his entire catalog. But even as he engineered twin artistic departures for David Bowie, he was doing everything he could to stick around as David Jones. “I deeply



felt that he really didn’t want to die,” says van Hove. “It was a fight not against death but a fight to live. And living, for him, was being a real family man. He loved to go home, to be at home with his daughter, with his wife, his family.”

Bowie was also working on yet another project: two extraordinary music videos, directed by Johan Renck. The clip for the otherworldly 10-minute-long title track of *Blackstar* is a complex, cryptic valedictory statement with nods to Aleister Crowley and old Bowie iconography – most blatantly, a long-dead astronaut who may well be Major Tom. The song has distinct sections, and in the video they’re sung by brand-new Bowie personae: the eerie Buttoneyes (Bowie with buttons placed over bandaged eyes); a preacher; and the

charismatic, sassy trickster who sings the song’s swaggering middle section: “You’re a flash in the pan/I’m the Great I Am.” Almost all of it began with drawings Bowie sent to Renck.

It was Renck’s idea to film the Buttoneyes character lying in bed for the “Lazarus” video – a setting that now evokes a deathbed. In November, about a month after he shot that video, Bowie’s cancer came back, according to Visconti. This time, doctors told him it was terminal. “It had spread all over his body,” says Visconti, “so there’s no recovering from that.”

Bowie wasn’t feeling well enough to attend previews of *Lazarus*, but he made it to opening night, enduring a gauntlet of press photographers on his way in, one last time. He had about a month to live, but he told van Hove that it was time to start working on a second musical. At the end of the show, he collapsed backstage, for the second time in a decade.

In those final weeks, he still somehow found time and energy to record demos for five entirely new songs. A week before his death, just before *Blackstar*’s release, he FaceTimed Visconti and told him he wanted to make one more album, a follow-up to *Blackstar*.

“I was thrilled,” Visconti says, “and I thought, and he must have thought, that he’d have a few months, at least. So the end must’ve been very rapid. I’m not privy to it. I don’t know exactly, but he must’ve taken ill very quickly after that phone call.”

The news of Bowie’s death surprised even the collaborators who knew of his illness. Others, like the actors in *Lazarus*, had no idea he was sick. In the first show after Bowie’s death, Michael C. Hall, who plays Newton, was so conscious of his lines’ new resonance that he could barely get them out.

Renck knew that Bowie was ill, but he was unaware that he had taken a turn for the worse. Like other viewers, he’s newly focused on the end of the “Lazarus” video. Bowie, dressed in a *Man Who Fell to Earth*/*Station to Station*-era costume – black with diagonal stripes – backs into a wooden wardrobe that resembles a coffin. As the song’s final guitar chord fades, he pulls the door shut behind him and disappears into darkness.

The exit wasn’t Bowie’s idea, but he embraced it. “Somebody on set said, ‘You should end the video by disappearing into the closet,’” says Renck. “And I saw David sort of think about that for a second. Then a big smile came up on his face. And he said something like, ‘Yeah, that will keep them all guessing, won’t it?’”

Additional reporting by
DAVID BROWNE, PATRICK DOYLE,
ANDY GREENE and SIMON
VOZICK-LEVINSON

TRIBUTES

Mick Jagger

I CAN'T REMEMBER HOW I MET David – which is weird – but we used to hang out in London a lot in the early days of the Seventies; we were at a lot of parties together. He would come around my house and play me all his music – I remember him playing me different mixes of “Jean Genie,” which was really kind of Stones-y, in a way. That’s what I enjoyed: watching him develop as an artist.

There was always an exchange of information within our friendship. And I suppose there was always an element of competition between us, but it never felt overwhelming. When he’d come over, we’d talk about our work – a new guitarist, a new way of writing, style and photographers. We had a lot in common in wanting to do new things onstage – using interesting designs, narratives, personalities.

He’d always look at my clothes labels. When he would see me, he’d give me a hug, and I could feel him going up behind the collar of my shirt to see what I was wearing. He used to copy me sometimes, but he’d be very honest about it. If he took one of your moves, he’d say, “That’s one of yours – I just tried it.” I didn’t mind shar-

“There was competition between us, but it never felt overwhelming.”



Bowie and Jagger in London, 1987

ing things with him, because he would share so much with me – it was a two-way street.

We were very close in the Eighties in New York. We’d hang out a lot and go out to dance clubs. We were very influenced by the New York downtown scene back then. That’s why “Let’s Dance” is my favorite

song of his – it reminds me of those times, and it has such a great groove.

My favorite memory was the time we did “Dancing in the Street” together. We had to record the song and film the video all in one day. We enjoyed camping it up. The video is hilarious to watch. It was the only time we really collaborated on anything, which is really stupid when you think about it.

Later on, he bought a house in Mustique, where I have a place, and we used to hang out in the West Indies. David was so relaxed there, and so kind to everyone. He did a lot of work making health care better for local people; I was doing school charity work, and he would come with me there and do story time with the local kids.

I know David stopped touring around 2004 after having some health problems. After that, he kind of vanished, both from my life and the stage, so to speak, until he came back with an album that was a very interesting piece. It’s really sad when somebody leaves and you haven’t spoken to them for a long while. You wish you’d done this, you wish you’d done that. But that’s what happens. Strange things happen in life.

Bono

I’VE PLAYED AT BEING A ROCK & roll star, but I’m really not one. David Bowie is my idea of a rock star. Right now, I’m in Myanmar, a little cut off from the reaction to David’s passing, but I can assure you the sky is a lot darker here without the Starman.

The first time I saw him perform was on *Top of the Pops* in 1972, singing “Starman.” He was so vivid. So luminous. So fluorescent. We had one of the first color TVs on our street, and David Bowie was the reason to have a color TV. I’ve said he was our Elvis Presley. There are so many similarities: the masculine-feminine duality, the mastery of being onstage. They created original silhouettes, shapes now seen as obvious, that did not exist before.

I’d like to consider myself David’s friend, but I’m more of a fan. He came and visit-

“He was so vivid, so luminous. The sky is darker without him.”



Bowie and Bono

ed us when we were mixing *Achtung Baby* – and, of course, he had introduced us to Berlin and to Hansa Studios. We had a playful sort of banter – he would really go

there in conversations, and we would even occasionally hurt each other’s feelings. He took his daughter to a matinee to see *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, and he sent me the reasons he didn’t like it. And everything he said was really helpful, because it was in the early days.

Ultimately, as a songwriter and as a performer, your currencies are thoughts and feelings. Some people may have original thoughts, but the musical landscape is not that unique. You have to be able to close your eyes and just feel the songs and say, “What part of me is being played by those notes?” Or, “Who else plays them?”

And in Bowie’s case, the answer is nobody. His musical landscape affects you in a way that is completely different from all other music. That part of me is only played by David Bowie.



Bowie, Iggy and
Lou Reed in
London, 1972

Iggy Pop

MORE THAN ALL OF THE other rock musicians, David Bowie was interested in people – *really* interested, especially other people in the arts. He was always like, “OK, who are you and what are you thinking about? How do you do what you do?” And he appreciated oddballs – people who looked different and spoke in a certain way. He had a very strong curiosity and had very absolute aesthetic values.

I met David in New York in 1971. I was staying at [publicist] Danny Fields’ little funky-ass loft. It was late one night, and Danny went to Max’s Kansas City. I didn’t want to go. I was watching TV – *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. Danny rang me: “There’s a guy down here. You remember him.” And I did. David had said something in *Melody Maker* about his favorite songs, and he said he liked the Stooges, which is something not a lot of people would admit at the time. Danny said, “You really gotta get down here.”

David was there with his manager, Tony DeFries, and all these other people around him. My impression was that he was very poised and very friendly, but not as friendly in that setting as when I got to know him in smaller groups. I could see that he had some ideas for me.

I learned a lot from him. I first heard the Ramones, Kraftwerk and Tom Waits from him. He also had a certain rigor. If he saw something in another artist he ad-

mired, if they didn’t pick up that ball and run with it, he didn’t have any problem saying, “Well, if you’re not going to do it, I will. I’ll do this thing you should have done.” And that was very valid.

David had an important effect on the third Stooges album, *Raw Power*. We did some sessions at Olympic Studios in London – songs like “Tight Pants,” “I’m Sick of You,” “I Got a Right” – and sent the tapes to David. He came back to me: “You can do better than that.” So we did. We wrote more and came up with more sophisticated work. If we were going to be in his stable, he wanted us to do work of the very best quality.

You can see what I learned from David as a performer if you look at footage from the solo tour I did last year. I’m standing my ground – David knew how to do that. Keep your arms away from your torso. Put one foot forward. Sometimes a little bit of movement is better than a lot – a little bit left, a little bit right.

David was not a person to waste a piece of music: Never waste an idea. I first heard his 1980 song “Scary Monsters (And Super Creeps)” when we were in a house on Sunset Boulevard in 1974. It was called “Running Scared” at the time. He was playing it on the guitar and wanted to know if I could do something with it. I couldn’t. He kept it and worked it up.

That was another big thing I learned: Don’t throw stuff away.

“David had a certain rigor: Never waste a piece of music, or an idea.”

Trent Reznor

“He said, ‘I’m not going to play what they want me to.’”

IN THE NINETIES, BOWIE reached out to me and said, “Let’s collaborate and do a tour together.” It’s hard to express how validating and surreal that whole experience was – to find out, to my delight, that he surpassed any expectations I had. He was this graceful, charming, happy, fearless character.

At one of our first meetings, we were talking about how the tour was going to go. I was faced with a strange predicament: At that moment in time, we’d sold more tickets than he did in North America. And there was no way on Earth that David Bowie was going to open for me. On top of that, he said, “You know, I’m not going to play what anybody wants me to play. We’re going to play a lot of *Low*-era-type things, and the new album. That’s not what people are



Reznor and
Bowie in New
York, 1997

going to want to see, but that’s what I need to do. And you guys are going to blow us away every night.”

There was a subdued reaction to him, for the most part. In an outdoor-amphitheater rock concert in the summer, people with 32-ounce beers probably would have preferred to hear “Changes,” rather than an art installation onstage. He did what he wanted to do. That made an impression: In a world where the bar keeps seeming to be lower, where stupidity has got a foothold – there is still room for uncompromising vision. **RS**



WHO POISONED F

MOM MOVED MY TWO SISTERS and me to the appropriately named town of Flushing on the outskirts of Flint, Michigan, in 1980. My dad had just been killed in a plane crash, and she reasoned my Flint uncle would serve as a surrogate father. That didn't happen; he was a good man, but he had two boys of his own. We arrived just in time to watch a city die, as the auto industry disintegrated like a Chevette hitting a wall. This was only good for Michael Moore.

It did give me unfettered access to the Flint River. My uncle was a dentist, and his mansion was built on the proceeds of Gen-

A writer returns home to find a toxic disaster, giant government failure and countless children exposed to lead

BY STEPHEN RODRICK

eral Motors' generous medical plan. His house was adjacent to the Flushing Valley Golf Club, which bordered the river. The three months we stayed with him provided hours of creepy pleasure for a maladjusted teen. In pre-EPA days, factories had been dumping sludge and crud into the river for decades. Every day, my anti-nature walks brought new treasures: a dog carcass; the front grille of a K-car; and long, green bubbles of water that appeared to be living, malevolent, aquatic creatures with free will. Whenever I stuck my hand into the water to retrieve an abandoned tire or a shard of chain-link fence, my skin would come out a mottled crimson.

I moved away after graduating from Flint's Catholic high school, where I was

FROM LEFT: SAM OWENS/"FLINT JOURNAL"/MLIVE.COM/AP IMAGES; BRITTANY GREESON/"THE NEW YORK TIMES"/REDUX



After Flint switched its water source to the polluted Flint River, residents took to the streets.

FLINT, MICHIGAN?

mugged at a neighboring 7-Eleven when my teacher sent me to buy him some cigarettes. The jobs kept moving away too. To me, Flint became a self-deprecating anecdote. It was the city that tried to rescue itself with an auto-themed amusement park (hilarious!), had one of the highest per-capita violent-crime rates in the country (scary!), frequently finished near the top of worst-cities-in-America lists (true!), and so on.

Some 30 years later, I can't say I was surprised when my high school best friend, Gordon Young, a chronicler of Flint's slide in his book *Teardown: Memoir of a Vanishing City*, texted me that Flint, now in receivership and run by an apparatchik appointed by the austerity-mad GOP gov-

ernor, was switching over from the Great Lakes to the Flint River for its drinking water. All to save some bucks. I thought this was preposterous. Only in Flint – a city that makes Youngstown, Ohio, look like Miami – could this be a viable solution.

I texted back: "Man, that seems like a bad idea."

I had no clue.

By the fall of 2015, news began coming out of Flint about undrinkable water, kids getting sick and a stonewalling state government. I headed back to Flint for a week. I saw orange water running from a hydrant. I read FOIA'd e-mails that prove the city and state decided not to chemically treat Flint's water, something required in every town, village and city in Amer-

ica. There was the woman whose water tested for lead at a toxic-waste level. This was after officials told her she was nuts, even though her daughter lost chunks of her hair in the shower, while her four-year-old son remained dangerously underweight and his skin became covered in red splotches any time it was exposed to the water. And I met a pediatrician who discovered that the lead levels of kids under five in Flint were dangerously elevated. She became physically ill when a state official called her deluded. I was told that the few million dollars saved by the city on Flint water would now cost hundreds of millions to repair ruined pipes.

The human damage is incalculable. Think of a mother waking in the middle

of the night to make formula for her baby girl and unwittingly using liquid death as a mixer. Lead poisoning stunts IQs in children, many of whom in Flint are already traumatized by poverty, arson and rampant gunfire outside their doors. And for what? I hate to get all MSNBC-y, but this man-made disaster can be traced to one fact: Republicans not giving a shit about poor kids as much as they give a shit about the green of the bottom line.

Recently, Michigan was forced to declare a state of emergency in Flint. Some of the public servants involved have resigned. Now, the feds and the state are investigating what one water expert calls one of the greatest American drinking-water disasters he's ever seen. In the coming months, we'll know if those to blame were criminals or merely incompetent jackasses.

Flint doesn't make me laugh anymore. It makes me want to punch someone in the face.

IT SEEMED SO PROMISING BACK then. On April 25th, 2014 – coincidentally, the 34th anniversary of my family's move to Flint – town leaders gathered at the cavernous Flint Water Treatment Plant for a celebration. After a countdown, then-Mayor Dayne Walling pushed a black button, and Flint's water supply switched from a Detroit-based system to the Flint River.

There were some from the very beginning who thought this was a terrible idea, notably Flint's congressman Rep. Dan Kildee. "My first thought was, 'Are you kidding me?'" Kildee told me one morning in his office. He threw his palms up in the universal sign of exasperation. "We go from the freshest, deepest, coldest source of fresh water in North America, the Great Lakes, and we switch to the Flint River, which, historically, was an industrial sewer."

Walling pushed the button, and the civic fathers of Vehicle City toasted with water from the Flint River. This would turn out to be the worst B-roll in political history when Walling unsuccessfully sought re-election in 2015.

"I was never briefed on the whole treatment plan, with someone explaining what had and hadn't been done," Walling told me at an inexplicably successful crepe restaurant (with a sign reading "unleaded" below its water station) in downtown Flint. He'd championed the downtown revitalization, and there was now a wine bar and some other amenities, but neighborhoods still had shattered streetlights. Walling is a Rhodes scholar, but insists he was bamboozled about Flint's water and didn't get enough information from the state over-

lords. "It's time for people to stop treating Flint like shit," Walling said.

The reason Walling didn't get all the information is simple: He was only sort of mayor. Elected in 2009, Walling took over a city that had hemorrhaged half its population over the past 50 years, and once contemplated taking a part of the city off the grid to save on infrastructure costs. There was a \$20 million budget deficit, as Flint was having difficulties meeting the pension requirements of union retirees who had worked in a more prosperous time and with a much larger tax base.

In 2011, Gov. Rick Snyder, a white-haired accountant who ran on the slogan "one tough nerd," took office. He quickly ordered the state to take over the management of cities like Detroit, which had become economically insolvent. Part of the state's reasoning for the takeovers was that it needed to step in to provide for the safety and welfare of citizens. Walling and the city council were stripped of their power, and their salaries were cut. Not surprisingly, the powerless city council attracted less than stellar talent. In 2013, Flint elected two convicted felons and two others who had declared bankruptcy.

But who benefited? It seemed austerity and budget balancing meant more than citizen welfare as state-appointed managers slashed union benefits. The city cut 36 police officers from a force already stretched so thin that if a handful of officers were processing criminals, there were literally no cops on patrol.

"It's like what's going on in Greece," says state Sen. Jim Ananich, who represents Flint and has a newborn he takes to his in-laws' house in nearby Grand Blanc for baths. "How did we get to a place where we've cut everything? There's nothing left but the books balancing. What the city looks like after that doesn't matter. As long as there's less red and more black, we're in good shape."

The transfer from Detroit to Flint water was just another bottom-line move. Flint was switching over in 2017 to a new pipeline that would serve the middle of the state with water from Lake Huron. (The city council cast a symbolic 7-1 vote in favor of the new pipeline. The state would later try to use this as a protective fig leaf to claim the city had approved drinking river water.) Detroit's emergency manager asked the state to intervene in the switch, and when that failed, the utility told the city of Flint that its contract would be terminated in one year. The problem then was what to

do between 2014 and 2017. Snyder's Flint emergency managers – four cycled in and out like scrubs in an AAU hoops game – chose the Flint River rather than renegotiating with the petulant Detroit water utility. The initial results were not promising. One resident described her water to me as "the color of morning pee." When an aide to Ananich complained to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, she says she was told, "It's called the Clean Drinking Water Act, not the Tasty Drinking Water Act. We're doing our job."

Acceptable water standards had become a fungible term in Flint.

ON THE SOUTH SIDE OF FLINT IN the summer of 2014, LeeAnne Walters had filled the above-ground pool that sat in the yard of her two-story home, with scraggly maple trees out front. She'd lived there for three years with her naval-reservist husband and their four kids, and they loved it. There were block parties and friendly neighbors; the children spent hours in the pool with their pals.

That summer was different. Her son Gavin would emerge from the water covered in red splotches. Doctors dismissed it as dermatitis and, briefly, scabies. But when the Walters hosted a pool party and everyone emerged red and inflamed, she knew it wasn't just her son. On another day, she heard her 18-year-old daughter, Kaylie, screaming from the shower: "My hair is falling out in clumps!"

It made Walters think about her own thinning auburn hair. She did a survey of her brood – everyone was losing hair. Her water stank and was rust-colored. It was around that time that the city had to issue an E. coli warning, urging all residents to boil their water.

I met Walters in November. She wasn't at her house the first time I stopped by, so I drove around the block and watched a Flint Water

Department truck let a hydrant pump out gallons of orange water. "We're just cleaning the pipes," said the worker cheerfully. When I met Walters, she wore a hoodie and faded jeans. She'd been a medical assistant before becoming a full-time mom. She was struggling to understand why the government would do this to her and her family. She wasn't an activist before, but circumstances had changed.

"I didn't know what the hell I was doing, but I started calling the EPA, looking up water on the Internet," Walters told me as

WHILE THE STATE WAS SAYING FLINT'S WATER WAS SAFE TO DRINK, GENERAL MOTORS WAS SAYING IT WASN'T SAFE TO BE USED ON CAR PISTONS.

Additional reporting by Flint-based journalist SCOTT ATKINSON.

she fumbled with an unlit cigarette. “I had no idea how my life was going to change.”

THIS IS WHERE IT GETS COMPLICATED in a profoundly stupid way. To fight off concerning levels of fecal coliform and *E. coli*, the city kicked up the amount of chlorine pumped into the water system

ommendations was that residents should allow their water to run for 20 minutes to flush out the TTHM. This was met with much grumbling, but consent, in a city where water bills can be higher than mortgage payments.

In January 2015, Walters and a few dozen other citizens attended a hearing

year-old Gavin, who already suffered with autoimmune issues and was 10 pounds lighter than his twin brother, Garrett. His skin turned a fiery red every time it came into contact with Flint water. By this time, she forbade her kids from drinking the water. She started buying dozens of gallons of bottled water for cooking and instituted a five-minute-shower rule.

Walters called the city. After some hemming and hawing, they sent over a crew to test the water. The inspector left her an urgent voicemail one night telling her not to use the water until they talked. She called the next morning, and the inspector told her that her water came back with 104 parts per billion of lead. This was nearly seven times above the federal-action level of 15 ppb. The inspector recommended running the water for nearly a half-hour before using it, and he came back two weeks later. This time, Walters’ water tested at 397. Panicked, she got Gavin and the rest of her family tested for lead poisoning. No level of lead is considered safe, but anything more than 5 micrograms per deciliter in the blood is considered highly damaging. Gavin’s came back at 6.5.

Walters told me the story with her hands clasped together so tightly I could see her knuckles whitening. We went out on the porch so she could smoke. The city offered to fix her pipes and in return asked her to sign a no-harm agreement. Appalled by the horse trading over her kid’s health, she fired back.

“I said, ‘What the hell are you talking about?’” Walters told me with a sneer. “How do you put a price tag on your son? Your child being poisoned?”

Later, when we said goodbye, there was guilt in her eyes.

“You wonder what, as a mom, you could have done differently,” Walters said, wiping away tears.

BETWEEN INTERVIEWS, I PILOTED my rental car through broken neighborhoods where my friends and I would buy beer at 16 from hypercompetitive liquor stores – the number of liquor licenses available lingers from the days when Flint had 50,000 more residents. I took a wrong turn and found myself down by the river, where some middle-aged men were fishing. I met two black men in overalls and with few teeth. They didn’t want to give me their names because they were fishing without licenses. The older one said, “I’ve been fishing here for years, but I ain’t ever eaten anything I’ve caught. There’s something not right with the water.” He showed me a giant pike he had caught that was flapping around in a white bucket without much enthusiasm. Its eyes were oversize and bulging, looking like Blinky, the radioac-



1

SOMETHING IN THE WATER

(1) Walters with her son Gavin, who suffers from lead poisoning. (2) Even the hospitals’ taps were unsafe. (3) A child whose skin is inflamed from Flint’s water.



2

in the fall of 2014. This resulted in Flint water testing for an unacceptable level of total trihalomethanes (TTHM), a contaminant composed of four chemicals that come together when heavily treated water mingles with debris and garbage in a water system. Flint citizens went from orange water to complaining that their skin was on fire after showers. Still, the city said the water was safe, as long as you were not very young, elderly or had a severely compromised immune system.

An old friend disagreed, but for a different reason. General Motors announced it was discontinuing use of Flint water in one of its plants, because the high level of chlorides found in the polluted Flint River could corrode engine parts. So while the state was saying the water was still safe to drink, GM was saying it wasn’t safe to be used on car pistons.

Walters and the rest of Flint were told it was all going to be OK. One of the rec-

with Flint Emergency Manager Jerry Ambrose. She showed Ambrose plastic bottles with her orange water. He just shook his head and said there was no way the water came from Flint.

Walters was livid. Her daughter whispered to Melissa Mays, another concerned Flint mother, “I think she’s gonna hit him!” Mays, a feisty tattooed woman, told me, “They called her a liar and an idiot.” The two soon partnered on a crusade to figure out what the hell was in their water.

The whole Walters family had been ill since December 2014, but LeeAnne was particularly concerned about her four-



3

tive fish caught outside the nuclear reactor on *The Simpsons*. But his friend was less concerned. "If you're hungry, you'll eat anything." He smiled through his twisted teeth. "I mean, we're drinking out of it, might as well eat out of it."

After the initial lead readings came back, Walters became desperate. She began calling everyone from activists to random people at the regional office of the EPA. She got the attention of an EPA water expert named Miguel Del Toral, who came to her house, ran more tests and came to a startling conclusion. The water Flint used to buy from Detroit contained orthophosphate, a chemical used to control lead and copper levels in the drinking water. Del Toral wrote that once Flint changed to river water, "the orthophosphate treatment for lead and copper control was not continued." Del Toral warned that there was no chemical barrier to keep lead and copper from infiltrating Flint residents' drinking water. In plain English, Flint lacked a corrosion-control plan, something every water system in America has been required to have for years. To make matters worse, the water from the Flint River contained eight times more chloride than Detroit water. Chloride is a corrosive compound that causes pipes to rust and leach. At a time when Flint water needed more corrosion control than ever, it was getting none.

Walters gave the Del Toral document to the Michigan ACLU, which released it to the press, but it only drew attention from Michigan Radio. There was a reason for this: All of official Michigan denied there was a problem. In February, the EPA asked the MDEQ directly if the state was practicing corrosion control. MDEQ staffer Stephen Busch wrote back: "[Flint] has an optimized Corrosion Control Program [and] conducts quarterly Water Quality Parameter monitoring at 25 sites and has not had any unusual results."

This wasn't true; there was no corrosion control. Still, the state of Michigan launched a counteroffensive essentially calling anyone with concerns about Flint water a crank. "Let me start here – anyone who is concerned about lead in the drinking water in Flint can relax," said Brad Wurfel, spokesman for MDEQ. (He later described Del Toral as a "rogue employee.")

Internally, the MDEQ seemed more annoyed than concerned. In July, the ACLU's Curt Guyette pushed for more details, and an MDEQ staffer e-mailed co-workers saying of the Flint situation, "Apparently it's going to be a thing now."

Eventually, the MDEQ admitted the city hadn't been doing any corrosion control with Flint's water, and no one seemed overly concerned. Wurfel essentially said they didn't have to address it for a year. "You know, if I handed you a bag of chocolate chips and a sack of flour and said, 'Make

chocolate-chip cookies,' we'd still need a recipe," Wurfel told Michigan Radio. "They need to get the results from that testing to understand how much of what to put in the water to address the water chemistry."

Apparently, Flint's citizens needed to keep drinking poisoned water for a year before the state could figure out how to unpoison their water.

I drove over to the Flint Water Plant with Scott Atkinson, a friend and, until recently, a reporter at *The Flint Journal*, the local paper that had heartily endorsed the switch to Flint River water two years ago. The plant was off Dort Highway, a desolate slice of Flint that I was warned to avoid as a teenager. The giant stone building seemed unmanned. We walked in on a weekday afternoon and could have pushed a series of buttons and knobs and created God knows what kind of ecological havoc. We found the main office, but it was empty. There was a cardboard box with plastic bottles, instructions on how to test your water at home and a number to call for more information. I grabbed a bottle and started to head out when I heard a radio playing behind a closed door.

Here in Flint, even the public employees seem to have gone into hiding.

FRUSTRATED BY THE lack of response from the state and city, Walters kept reaching out to anyone she thought could help her family. That April, she contacted Dr. Marc Edwards, a water-treatment expert who teaches at Virginia Tech and has received a MacArthur genius grant. She had heard of Edwards' work over the past decade on lead contamination in Washington, D.C.'s water and laid out what she was going through. That spring, he tested Walters' water repeatedly as a sort of ground zero for lead poisoning. The results were frightening. While the state downplayed the poison levels in Walters' house through an assortment of tricks, including taking a sample at a trickle rather than a steady flow, Edwards took 30 samples with steady water flow. The average came in at 2,300 ppb, and one came in at a nearly unbelievable 13,500, well above the EPA standard for toxic waste.

In August, Walters told Edwards that she and other activists had traveled to Lansing, the state capital, where MDEQ staffers had stonewalled them and dismissed their concerns. Edwards became so angry

that he and four research assistants drove from Blacksburg, Virginia, to Michigan. They began working with Walters and Flint citizens to collect samples of water for testing and acquired 280 samples.

Edwards' analysis determined that 40 percent of Flint homes had tested over acceptable levels. He joined a press conference on the lawn outside City Hall and begged Flint citizens not to drink their water. The MDEQ spokesman Wurfel uttered another gem, decrying the research and saying, "[Edwards] specializes in looking for high lead problems. They pull that rabbit out of that hat everywhere they go. Nobody should be surprised when the rabbit comes out of the hat."

The state and city did their own testing. They managed to come up with only 71 samples. Originally, the city came in above federally accepted levels, but then the MDEQ instructed Flint to eliminate two of the highest test scores on technicalities. One was LeeAnne Walters' house. The reason? She used a water filter.

"It's amazing how hard they had to work to leave people in harm's way and all the lies they told," Edwards said to me a few weeks later, after his research had been vindicated. He's taken Flint on as a cause, and much of the information that's come to light came from FOIA requests made by Edwards. "We will throw a landlord in jail in this country if they do not disclose a lead-paint hazard in an apartment. It's that simple." He sighed and tried to maintain an even tone, but was unsuccessful. "Here, these fuckers were working overtime to cover this up and to keep kids drinking."

In the end, it was the kids of Flint that finally made the state of Michigan crumble.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, an Iraqi-American, is the director of the pediatric residency program at Flint's Hurley Hospital. On a typical shit-cold Michigan winter afternoon, she took me for lunch at a new farmers' market that had opened below her equally new pediatric clinic. Its location wasn't a coincidence; many of Flint's residents can't afford cars, so Hanna-Attisha had pushed for the clinic to be next to the central bus station and other state offices that serve underprivileged children. "If they can make just one stop, it increases the chances they use all the services," she told me as she mussed with the hair of one of her clinic's patients.

Hanna-Attisha had more than enough work and didn't need to get involved in the

"IT'S AMAZING HOW HARD THEY HAD TO WORK TO LEAVE PEOPLE IN HARM'S WAY," SAYS A WATER-TREATMENT EXPERT, "AND COVER THIS UP."

water crisis. A majority of Flint's kids are considered to be at-risk because of abandonment, high crime and lack of food. "A favorite question that we like to ask in pediatrics is, 'What do you want to be when you grow up?'" Hanna-Attisha told me. "You have kids saying, 'Oh, I'm gonna be Superman,' 'I wanna be a ballerina.' And so many of our kids just stare at you because they just don't have hope. They have no hope."

Last August, Hanna-Attisha had a dinner party. She invited a former EPA staffer who briefed her on Edwards' findings. Soon, Hanna-Attisha was pulling recent blood tests at Hurley, Flint's main hospital, and comparing them to the previous year's.

"When pediatricians hear about lead, we freak out," Hanna-Attisha told me. "We absolutely freak out, because we know the kind of irreversible lifetime multi-generational impact." You can address the damage, she said, but it will always be there.

Prior to the switch-over, 2.1 percent of kids tested at elevated lead levels. In tests administered between January and September 2015, the number spiked to 4 percent and to more than 6 percent in Flint's worst-affected neighborhoods. She checked and re-checked the numbers before going public in September. The state's reaction was predictable. Wurfel said her research didn't match the state's and was "unfortunate" in a time of "near hysteria."

When Hanna-Attisha went home to her own two children, she felt physically ill and on the verge of tears. "I was trembling. As a scientist, you're always paranoid, so you check and double-check." She exhaled quietly. "But the numbers didn't lie."

Then something unexpected happened. After a few days, the state admitted that both Edwards' and Hanna-Attisha's findings had raised legitimate issues. It announced in October a million-dollar plan to provide filters for residents of Flint. Wurfel even privately apologized to Hanna-Attisha.

Not that the residents of Flint were done being abused. In an act of ballsiness, the state announced that Flint would switch back to its original Detroit water system at a cost of \$12 million, but Flint would have to pay \$2 million of that cost, demolishing its discretionary budget for the rest of the year.

In November, Dayne Walling lost his bid for re-election, largely because of the B-roll video of him pushing the button that set off the chain of events. It might be unfair, but Flint needed a scapegoat, and Walling's name was on the ballot.

Over the winter, e-mails obtained through FOIA requests by Edwards revealed that the problem with Flint's water could have been addressed months earlier if the state hadn't ignored red flags raised by administration officials. Before the new year, Snyder would accept the resignations of Wurfel and MDEQ head Dan Wyant. Wurfel, in hindsight, says he would have handled things very differently. "I regret



LEADING FROM BEHIND Gov. Snyder apologized and promised to fix the problem but critics call the effort "too little, too late."

this situation and my role in it," he said. "Deeply. I'm a father to a toddler, and I've had to look at him and imagine how I'd feel countless times. I'll carry that with me for the rest of my life." Edwards says corrosion control would have cost the state of Michigan \$80 to \$100 a day.

ON JANUARY 11TH, GOV. RICK Snyder arrived in Flint to face a furious city. He held a press conference at City Hall, in the same room where the powerless Flint City Council meets. The room looks like the auditorium of a high school you would never want your children to attend. It is dotted with broken chairs that, rather than having been repaired, are securely labeled with sheets of paper reading "broken chair." On more than one occasion, including on new Mayor Karen Weaver's inauguration day, I saw a bottled-water truck parked outside the building.

Outside the room, protesters, including Melissa Mays, shouted for the governor's resignation and waved gallon jugs of what looked like urine but was actually water that came from their kitchen taps. A television reporter asked the crucial question: "Some are calling for your arrest, others are calling you a potential murderer. How can you in good conscience not have done greater due diligence?"

Snyder gave a standard mea culpa: "I've apologized for what's going on with the state and I am responsible for state government." He went on to say he wished none of this had happened. Snyder noted that he didn't know the seriousness of the situation until October.

For that to be true, he'd have to have not read his e-mail. In July, his chief of staff, Dennis Muchmore, wrote: "I'm frustrated by the water issue in Flint.... These folks are scared and worried about health impacts, and they are basically getting blown off by us." (Not that Muchmore was a friend of Flint. In a September e-mail, he referred to water activists as the "anti-everything group.")

Snyder forged on, and speaking in a high, nasal voice, pledged all the state's resources to deal with the problem. (He had already asked President Obama to declare Flint a federal disaster area, something Weaver had been asking for since before her inaugural speech that I attended in November.) But there were signs that his administration was still in denial. First, a bureaucrat mentioned that only 43 Flint citizens had tested positive for lead poisoning. Then,

Eden Wells, the chief medical officer for the state, started talking about how lead comes from many sources and filibustered about soil and paint chips. (This led Weaver to move back to the microphone and correct the fantasy: "Today, it is about the lead in the water.") Finally, the governor's staff tried to shift some blame to old faucets at Flint schools. Standing in the second row behind Snyder, Hanna-Attisha just shook her head.

"They still really don't get it," she told me after the press conference. "They've only tested 43 because we've done outreach, and lead poisoning in the blood has a short half-life. There's no way of knowing how many people were affected before we started making noise." She fired off an e-mail to the governor's staff, telling them if they wanted to start rebuilding the trust of the people of Flint, this wasn't the way to do it.

That Friday, 150 protesters traveled to Lansing and stormed Snyder's office, calling for his resignation and criminal prosecution. (Snyder did not respond to requests for comment on this story.) The same afternoon, Michigan State Attorney General Bill Schuette, a Republican crony of Snyder's, announced he was launching an investigation into the water crisis. "The purpose of the investigation is to determine what, if any, Michigan laws were violated in the process that resulted in the contamination [Cont. on 63]

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Reviews

"Someday if you're asking
All about the key to love,
I'd say that wonderful night,
What a wonderful crazy night it was."
—ELTON JOHN, "Wonderful Crazy Night"



Elton Puts the Old Glitter Back On

John revisits the wild feeling of the early Seventies on a bright, uptempo album



Elton John

Wonderful Crazy Night Island

★★★★★

BY DAVID FRICKE

Elton John opens his 32nd studio album by looking back in delight. "Some things you don't forget/Some things just take a hold," he sings with relish in the title song, a jaunty recollection of lasting love at first sight. The music framing that glee – "Loose clothes and a cool, cool drink/A greasy breeze from the chicken stand," conjured by John's lifelong lyric partner, Bernie Taupin – is retrospective too. John's roller-coaster-piano figure and R&B solo evoke the glitter-gospel charge of "Honky Cat" and "Crocodile Rock." John, 68, has rarely strayed far from that template. But there is a striking vigor and engagement here, especially for an artist of his vintage. He animates Taupin's images as if they are his memories, with convincing, grateful zeal.

Wonderful Crazy Night is the latest stage in an extended return to form for John – his third straight album with co-

Reviews

producer T Bone Burnett after 2010's *The Union*, a sublime collaboration with Leon Russell, and 2013's *The Diving Board*. Where the latter LP was heavy on pensive balladry, this record is closer to the swing of moods and earthy hues that marked John's early classic LPs. "In the Name of You" moves in creeping time to a bluesy piano riff doubled by Davey Johnstone, John's longtime guitarist. Johnstone also chimes in, literally, on "Claw Hammer," brightening its swampy aura with Byrds-like 12-string guitar. In "A Good Heart," John and Burnett turn the pleading in Taupin's lyrics into a Beatlesque spin on Southern soul with a coat of horns that could have come from *Abbey Road*.

There is a loose, earnest theme running through most of these songs. The exception, "I've Got 2 Wings," is an effectively restrained country-church tribute to the real-life Louisiana preacher-guitarist Elder Utah Smith, written by Taupin as a first-person memoir from heaven (Smith, who died in 1965, notes the years he spent in an unmarked grave). Everything else – the jangling surrender in "Blue Wonderful"; the liberating certainty of "Looking Up," with its chopping-piano gait; the allusions to flirting and deliverance in "Tambourine" – examines the hard work of maintaining paradise on Earth: the confession, reassurance and unconditional giving. The songs routinely summon comparisons to John's greatest hits; it's easy to imagine "Tambourine" sliding onto 1973's *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road*.

But there is a matured pacing and weight to the music and John's vocal performances that make this record one of his finest in its own right. *Wonderful Crazy Night* is about what happens after those loose clothes and cool drinks. The final tally: It's all worth it. **TS**

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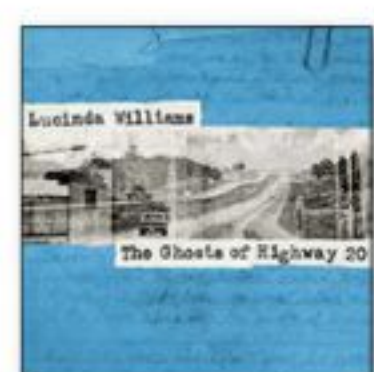
Crafty: Williams onstage last year

Lucinda Hears That Lonesome Whistle Blow

Williams grapples with mortality on a stark, emotionally raw alt-country masterpiece

Lucinda Williams *The Ghosts of Highway 20*

Highway 20/Thirty Tigers ★★★★★



With blowsy, parched vocals, languorous tempos, straggly melodies and flyaway guitar lines, Lucinda Williams' 12th album feels a little like an alt-country picture of Dorian Gray. It's literary, it's the polar opposite of cosmetically brushed-up pop – and as such, it's not for everyone. But its jazzy rawness represents a high point of emotional craft in a career defined by it.

Credit Williams' gorgeously ravaged phrasing – not that far, in its way, from Billie Holiday's 1958 swan song, *Lady in Satin* – and the lyrics, which seem colored by the passing last year of the singer's father, poet Miller Williams. Mortality's shadow is explicit in "Death Came" and "Doors of Heaven," implicit in a stark reading of "Factory" (Bruce Springsteen's tribute to his own dad) and the faintly biblical, breathtakingly carnal Woody Guthrie cover "House of Earth." Illuminating it all are the twinned guitars of Greg Leisz and Bill Frisell. The latter, who has evolved from an A-list jazz impressionist with country inflections to a journeyman Americana session dude capable of almost anything, here comes out as a straight-up jam swami on songs that regularly stretch past the five-minute mark. You may not hear a more satisfyingly generous display of guitar interplay this year. And that's just the gravy. **WILL HERMES**



Sunflower Bean

Human Ceremony Fat Possum

★★★★★

Brooklyn psych-pop kids bring the heat on a noisy, pretty debut

"What do you do when you're stuck between days?" Sunflower Bean singer-bassist Julia Cumming wonders on the Brooklyn trio's debut LP. The answer: You cut through the malaise with curt little psychedelic pop tunes that refuse to sit still. Sunflower Bean know their way around the canon of noise-guitar poetry – from the Velvet Underground to Seventies krautrock to Spacemen 3-style Eighties drug punk. "I Was Home" planes along gracefully, "Wall Watcher" is bruising bubblegum, and the surfy speed demon "2013" makes the recent past sound like a trippy tomorrow. Their 2016 is looking pretty hot too. **JON DOLAN**



Vince Gill

Down to My Last Bad Habit

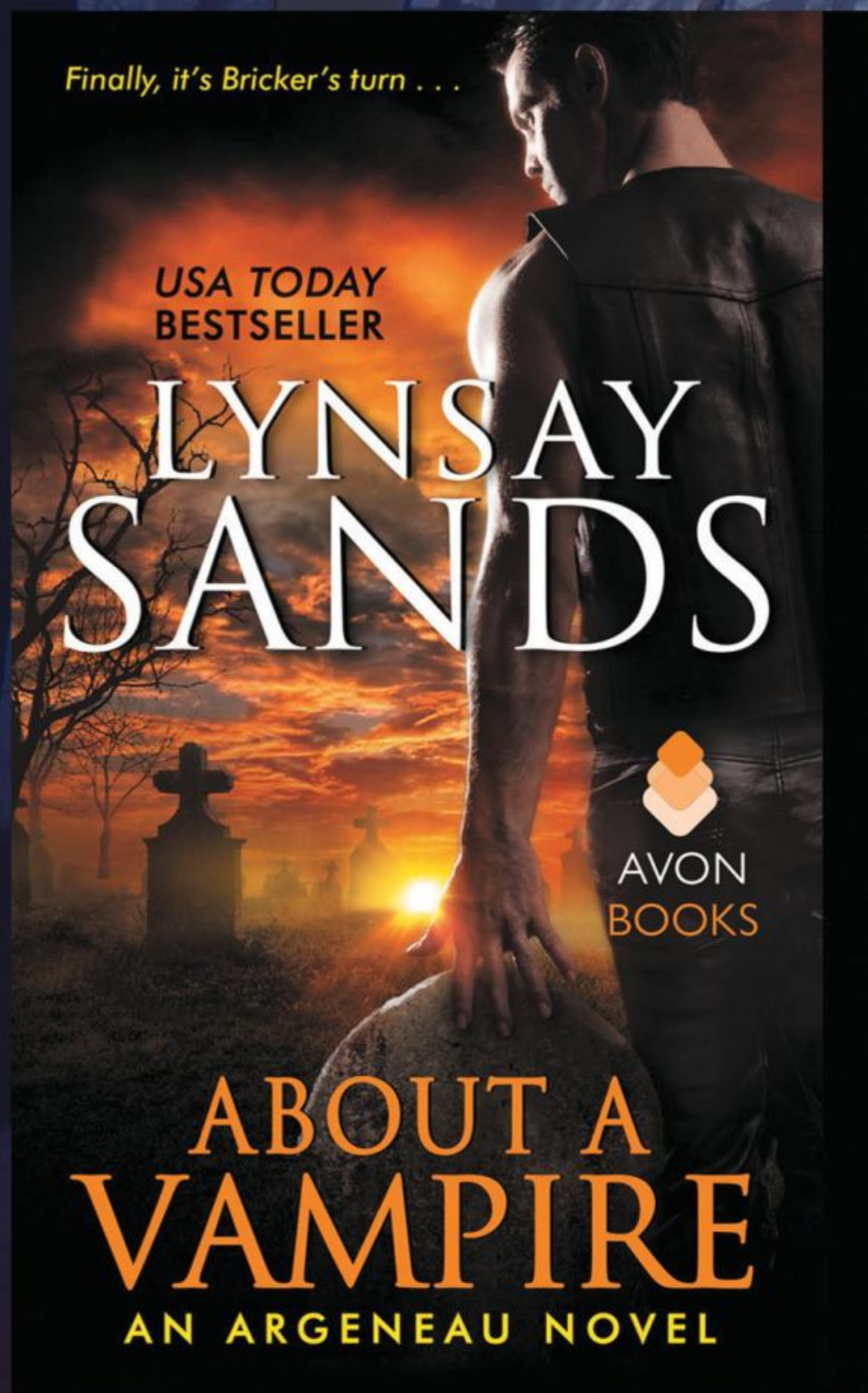
MCA Nashville ★★★★★

A country master nods to George Jones and the Eighties

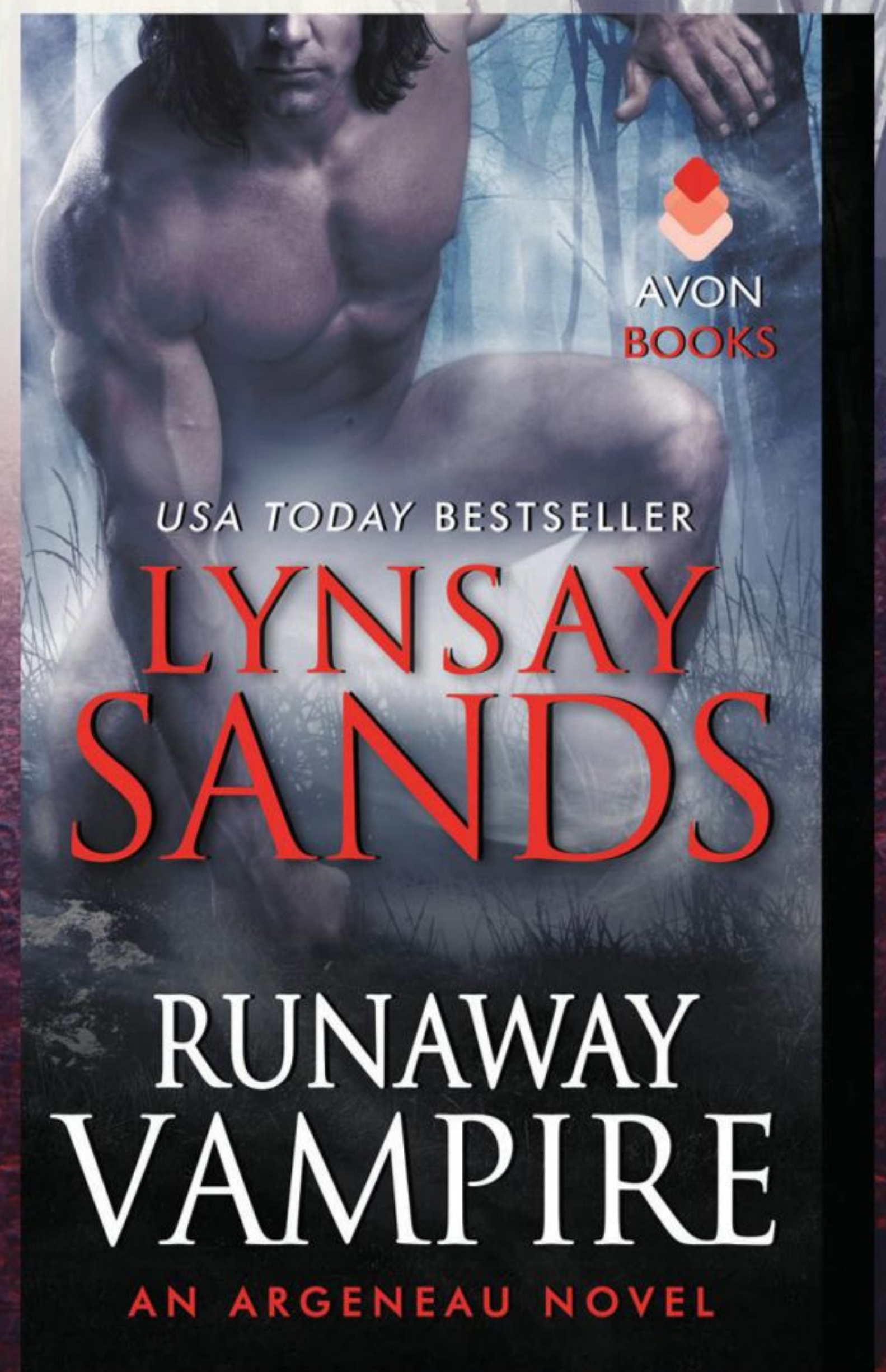
Vince Gill is an encyclopedia of country tradition, whether he's producing new standard-bearer Ashley Monroe or wrapping his high Oklahoma tenor around "Sad One Comin' On (A Song for George Jones)" – a note-perfect honky-tonk weeper about the king of honky-tonk weepers. The rest of this LP focuses on Eighties-style country-pop schmaltz, which after all is Nashville tradition too. The title track quiet-storms with wit; Richard Marx, the master of piano melodrama, co-wrote two songs. Gill vindicates it all with exquisite guitar work and soulful vulnerability. In a macho world, it's surprisingly refreshing. **WILL HERMES**

LYNSAY SANDS

NEW YORK TIMES AND USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR



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WHO POISONED FLINT?

[Cont. from 57] crisis," Schuette said in a press release.

His announcement was met with rolled eyes from Flint citizens. Schuette's response was likely a reaction to the announcement the previous week that the United States attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan was working with the EPA on a Flint investigation. (The feds provided no details of the scope of their probe.) Way back in September, state Rep. Sheldon Neeley had asked Schuette to get involved and start an investigation. Schuette didn't get back to him until shortly before Christmas, saying there were plenty of folks already looking into the Flint water crisis. Schuette only reversed course as pressure mounted and his political future came into question.

"Without fear or favor, I will carry out my responsibility to enforce the laws meant to protect Michigan families and represent the citizens of Flint," he said.

Did I mention Bill Schuette wants to be Michigan's next Republican governor?

OUT ON THE STREETS, FLINT NOW looks like a benevolently occupied city, which seems to have been Snyder's goal when he took over the town back in 2011. National Guardsmen working out of Flint firehouses handed out cases of water. Each firehouse was getting truckloads of water every day. They were also handing out filters, one per household, and were providing testing kits. On the news, there was video of soldiers distributing water in Flint's poorest neighborhoods, like the Marines did in Iraq after the fall of Saddam.

The government had finally mobilized. President Obama was sending \$5 million in federal aid. There were signs that Snyder was finally starting to get it, albeit a year too late. On January 19th, he gave his State of the State address, saying, "I am sorry, and I will fix it." He offered Flint \$28 million in relief. He released his e-mails on the water crisis, and all of Flint began reading, hoping to pinpoint exactly when his botching of the crisis began.

The EPA also fell on its sword, suggesting it should have pushed the state to more aggressively attack the poisoned water. "Our first priority is to make sure the water in Flint is safe, but we also must look at what the agency could have done differently," the EPA said in a statement. On the same day, Weaver met with President Obama, who appointed a "czar" to keep tabs on Flint.

Everyone was working together. It was beautiful until you thought about how long it had taken. We were now 600 days out from when Flint changed its water. While the water has been switched back to Detroit's system, no one knows when lead will stop leaching from the pipes, or

if it already has. One proposed solution is digging up the decrepit pipes across the city and repairing or replacing them. The cost could run from the millions to \$1.5 billion, according to Weaver. And that's if the city and state can find them. The listing of which homes get their water from modern pipes and which still use lead pipes is kept on 45,000 index cards at the Flint Department of Public Works.

What happens to Snyder and his underlings is an open question. In January, Flint residents filed multiple class-action suits against the governor and the state for exposing them to dangerous drinking water. Political blunders aside, the human costs are permanent and unforgivable. The damage to kids will be comprehensive and last a generation; the effect on learning rates, crime and other social ills is incalculable.

"You can't quantify the fear you see in the mothers' faces," says Hanna-Attisha. "They're just petrified what is going to happen to their kids in 10 years."

Flint has seen a spike in the number of cases of Legionnaires' disease, a severe type of pneumonia usually spread by bacteria in water vapor. The number of cases in Genesee County, Flint's home, has gone from six to 13 a year to 87 from June 2014 to November 2015, roughly the same time Flint began using water from the Flint River. There have been 10 deaths.

Earlier in the fall, Congressman Kildee traveled to New York to hear the pope speak before the United Nations' General Assembly. He heard the pontiff say that every human being should have access to clean drinking water. Kildee's heart sank.

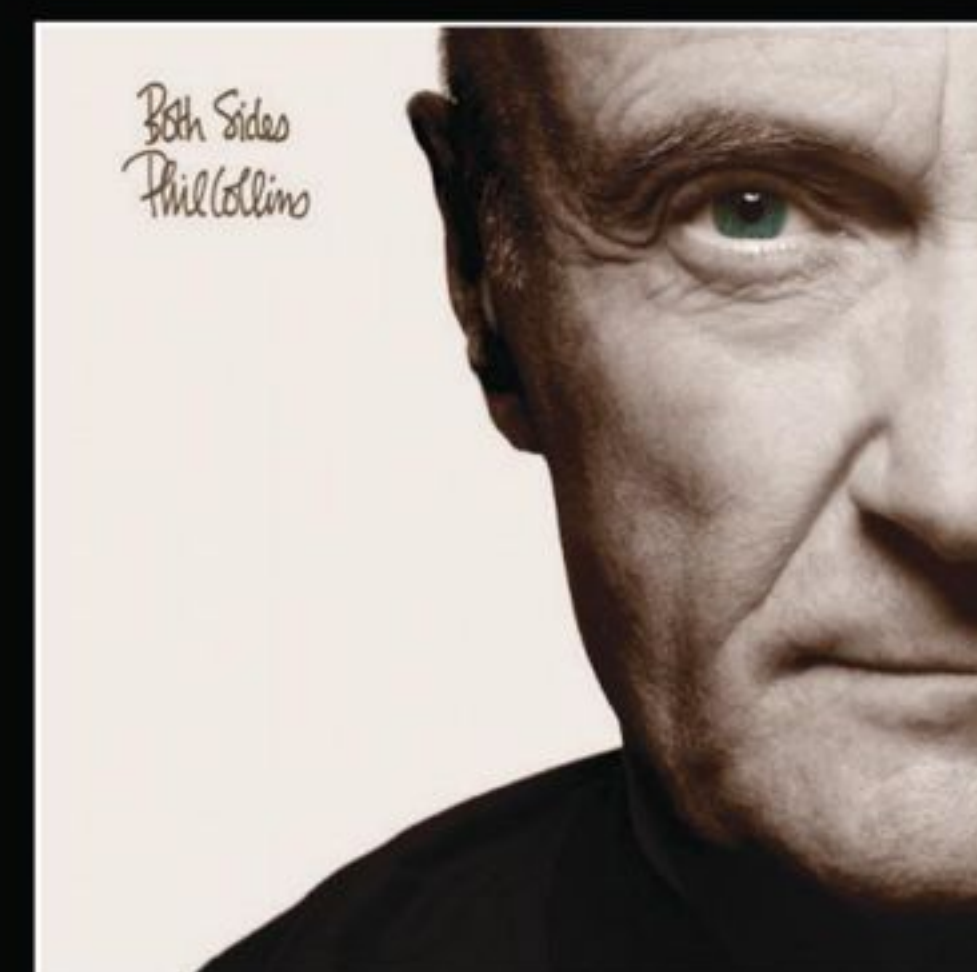
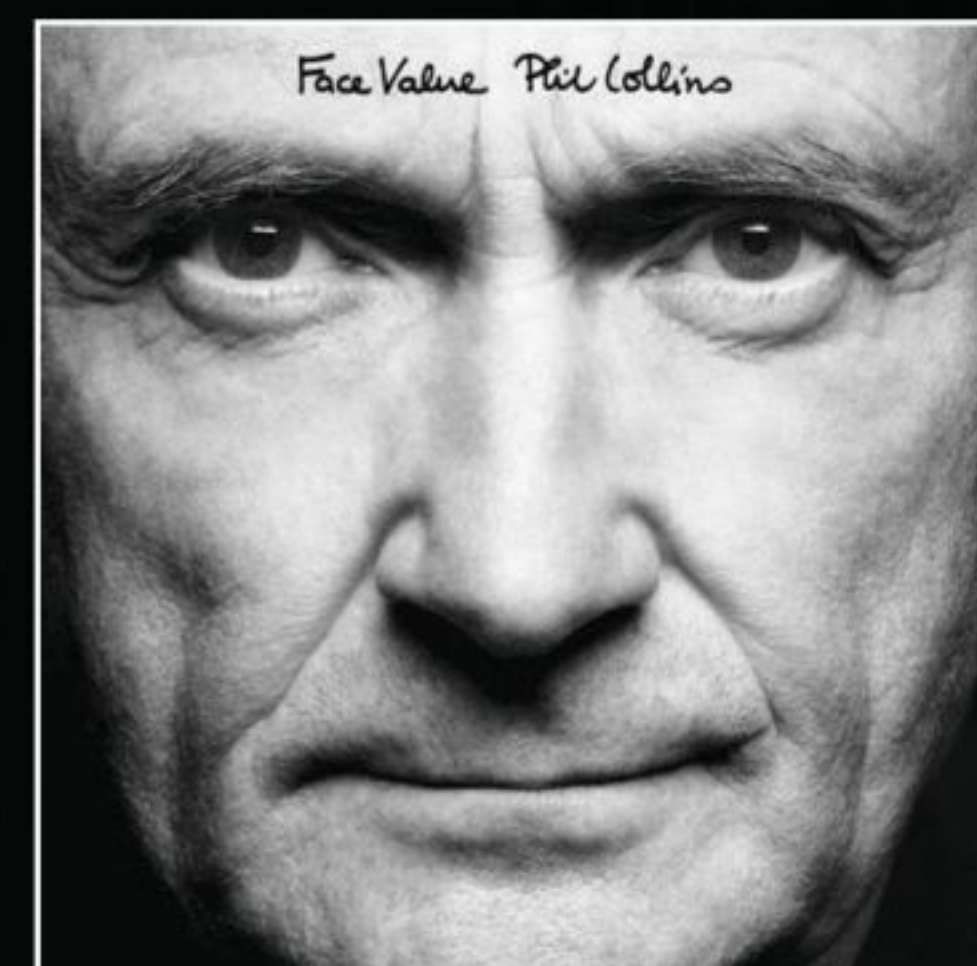
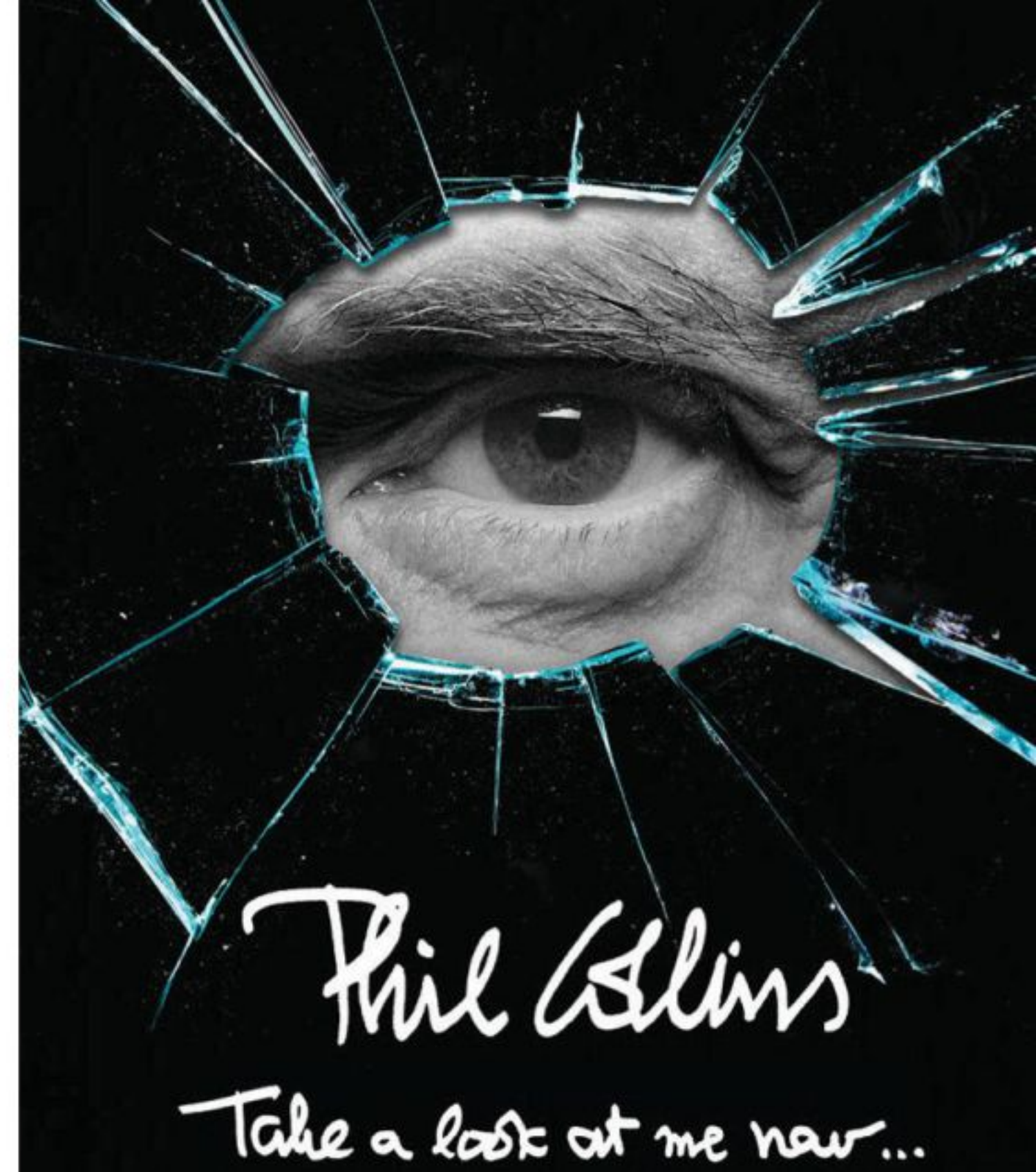
"I'm a citizen of the United States," he told me, "the richest country on the planet, at the richest moment in its history, and what the pope was referring to were poor children in Africa, not realizing that my kids in Flint don't have clean drinking water."

Meanwhile, Hanna-Attisha has been losing sleep for months. When she dreams, she dreams of lead, the facts and figures of her studies spinning around in her brain. She spends her days thinking of a decade from now, when more Flint kids have ADD and more are introduced to the wrong side of the juvenile-court system. "We have to do the best for them we can," says Hanna-Attisha. "It's just a nightmare."

For Walters, the governor's apology was too little, too late. "I'm always going to wonder, if there's a problem with my kids, if it's because I let them drink that water," she told me as she loaded some garbage bags of her belongings into her nephew's truck outside her home.

She wasn't at Snyder's press conference. You see, LeeAnne Walters was done. She moved her family to Virginia, putting Flint in the rearview mirror.

I couldn't blame her.



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By Peter Travers

Oscar 2016: Whites Only

A startling lack of diversity marks this guide to Oscar's potential winners and losers. Place your bets

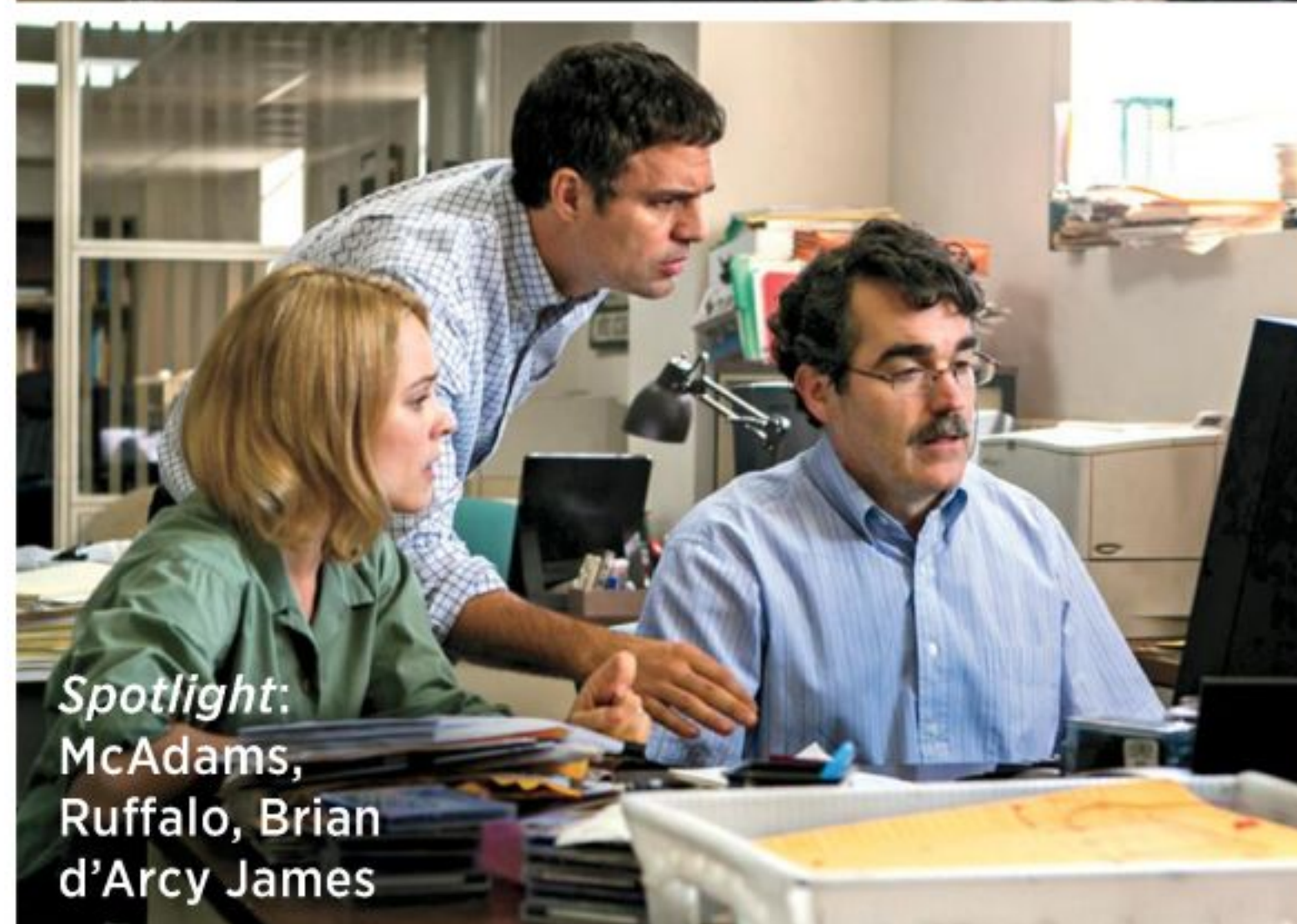
Best Picture

- The Big Short
- Bridge of Spies
- Brooklyn
- Mad Max: Fury Road
- The Martian
- The Revenant
- Room
- Spotlight

THE ACADEMY OF OLD FARTS and outdated sciences holds the option of nominating 10 movies for Best Picture, but it chose only eight, leaving out work crafted by people of color (*Straight Outta Compton*), directed by women (Marielle Heller's *The Diary of a Teenage Girl*), and starring transgender actors (*Tangerine*). OK, *Compton* did get nominated for best screenplay, but it's written by two white people. WTF! Spike Lee and Jada Pinkett Smith are calling for a boycott of the February 28th Oscar ceremony in protest against the nearly 6,000 Academy voting members (who are 94 percent white). Not one of the 20 acting nominees is a minority. The same thing happened last year when David Oyelowo, so brilliant as Martin Luther King Jr. in *Selma*, was among the snubbed, along with director Ava DuVernay. No disrespect to the new crop of nominees, but we should be looking for winners among the best of the best, not the best of the rest. **SHOULD WIN** *Spotlight*. Tom McCarthy's film took a hot topic (the *Boston Globe*'s Pulitzer-winning report on Catholic Church cover-ups of abuse by pedophile priests), executed it with precision and expelled all



The Revenant: Iñárritu directs DiCaprio.



Spotlight: McAdams, Ruffalo, Brian d'Arcy James



Mad Max: Fury Road: Hardy and Theron

Hollywood bullshit in the most iconic film about journalism since *All the President's Men*. **WILL WIN** *The Revenant*. The Oscar usually goes to the film with the most nominations. *The Revenant* has 12; *Mad Max: Fury Road* got 10. If *Spotlight* has to go down to any other film, *Max* would be my choice, though Adam McKay's all-star financial farce, *The Big Short*, is picking up speed as a spoiler. **ROBBED** Todd Haynes' *Carol* and Danny Boyle and Aaron Sorkin's *Steve Jobs* join F. Gary Gray's *Compton* and Ryan Coogler's *Creed* on my list of most egregious kiss-offs.

Best Actor

- Bryan Cranston *Trumbo*
- Matt Damon *The Martian*
- Leonardo DiCaprio *The Revenant*
- Michael Fassbender *Steve Jobs*
- Eddie Redmayne *The Danish Girl*

THE BIG JOKE THIS SEASON is that Johnny Depp didn't get a nod for playing gangster Whitey Bulger in *Black Mass* because "black" is in the title. Good one. But Depp wouldn't have taken the prize anyway.

SHOULD WIN Fassbender. This knockout performance and the audacious film that contains it were largely ignored at the box office. Fassbender's achievement as the Apple guru will only grow in luster over the years. **WILL WIN** DiCaprio. It's Leo's time. Four previous nominations and no win? What! Leo froze his ass off. Let's hope he thanks the bear. **ROBBED** Michael B. Jordan (*Creed*) put real muscle and artistry into a fight film that went beyond the call of sequel duty. But he went out with the black tide, along with a fully committed Will Smith (*Concussion*).

Best Actress

- **Cate Blanchett** *Carol*
- **Brie Larson** *Room*
- **Jennifer Lawrence** *Joy*
- **Charlotte Rampling**
45 Years
- **Saoirse Ronan**
Brooklyn

DID JENNIFER LAWRENCE really need a fourth nomination to make her the Meryl Streep of millennials? If Blanchett hadn't just won, for *Blue Jasmine*, she'd be out front. And first-time nominee Charlotte Rampling, 69, would soar if her film won the viewer support it deserved. It did not.

SHOULD WIN Ronan is just 21, but the miracles she works as an Irish immigrant bravely facing a scary new world define astonishing.

WILL WIN Larson. With nominations for film, directing and writing, *Room* is an Oscar-voter favorite. And the core of its success can be found in Larson's tour de force as a mother confined in all areas save the heart.

ROBBED It wasn't race that took a hit here, it was age. Lily Tomlin, 76, was ignored for *Grandma*; Blythe Danner, 72, for *I'll See You in My Dreams*; and Maggie Smith, 81, for *The Lady in the Van*. Damn you, Oscar.

Best Supporting Actor

- **Christian Bale** *The Big Short*
- **Tom Hardy** *The Revenant*
- **Mark Ruffalo** *Spotlight*
- **Mark Rylance**
Bridge of Spies
- **Sylvester Stallone** *Creed*

YO, ADRIAN. YOU CAN SEND the other nominees home — such is the heat generated by the resurgence of Rocky. Even Bale, Ruffalo and Hardy can't survive that comeback offensive.

SHOULD WIN Rylance. The one actor who could block the Rocky siege. As a Russian spy being traded for one of ours in Steven Spielberg's old-school

The Contenders

Best Actor



FAVORITE	SPOILER
<i>Leonardo DiCaprio</i>	<i>Michael Fassbender</i>
<i>The Revenant</i>	<i>Steve Jobs</i>

Best Actress



FAVORITE	SPOILER
<i>Brie Larson</i>	<i>Saoirse Ronan</i>
<i>Room</i>	<i>Brooklyn</i>

Best Supporting Actor



FAVORITE	SPOILER
<i>Sly Stallone</i>	<i>Mark Rylance</i>
<i>Creed</i>	<i>Bridge of Spies</i>

Best Supporting Actress



FAVORITE	SPOILER
<i>Rooney Mara</i>	<i>Jennifer Jason Leigh</i>
<i>Carol</i>	<i>The Hateful Eight</i>

Best Supporting Actress

- **Jennifer Jason Leigh**
The Hateful Eight
- **Rooney Mara** *Carol*
- **Rachel McAdams** *Spotlight*
- **Alicia Vikander**
The Danish Girl
- **Kate Winslet** *Steve Jobs*

HERE'S THE PROBLEM. Rooney Mara and Alicia Vikander are not giving supporting performances. Mara has as much screen time as her *Carol* co-star, Blanchett, who is nominated as Best Actress. Ditto Vikander and her *Danish Girl* co-star, Best Actor nominee Eddie Redmayne. Mara and Vikander are both stellar (I use the word advisedly), but this category scam puts other nominees at a disadvantage.

SHOULD WIN Leigh. As the only woman among Quentin Tarantino's despicable octet, Leigh

delivers a true supporting performance, one that serves the ensemble as she rebels against macho abuse.

WILL WIN Mara. She progresses from scared girl to independent woman by learning that she alone must decide who she loves. Mara won the Best Actress prize at Cannes, whose judges accurately understood the scale of her role.

ROBBED Charlize Theron (*Mad Max: Fury Road*). If the Academy is going to fudge the lines between lead and supporting, why not reward Theron for her stupendous job as Furiosa?

Best Director

- **Lenny Abrahamson** *Room*
- **Alejandro G. Iñárritu**
The Revenant
- **Tom McCarthy** *Spotlight*
- **Adam McKay**
The Big Short
- **George Miller**
Mad Max: Fury Road

JUST MIGHT BE THE MOST contentious category of Oscar 2016. The smart money says there'll be a split between Best Picture and Best Director.

SHOULD WIN Miller. At 70, the Aussie filmmaker reinvented his action franchise with a feminist twist and a poet's eye.

WILL WIN Iñárritu. Only twice in 88 years (the last in 1951) has a director won back-to-back Oscars. And no one has directed consecutive Best Pictures. By honoring the *Birdman* winner, the Academy can make history.

ROBBED Ridley Scott (*The Martian*). The legend behind *Alien*, *Blade Runner*, *Thelma & Louise*, *Gladiator* and *Black Hawk Down* had been touted to take home his first Oscar, at 78. Now he's not even nominated. See, white dudes get shafted too. Disturbing? Yup. But eclipsed by the Academy's growing exclusion of minorities. If he doesn't quit his Oscar hosting job, Chris Rock might kick racist ass. If not, #OscarsSoWhite is trending. Speak up. **RS**

Lucinda Williams

The singer-songwriter on her Southern roots, her poet father, meeting Dylan, and hunting for bargains

You live in Los Angeles, but you grew up in Louisiana and Mississippi. What's the most Southern thing about you?

I was raised to be proud of where I was from. When I first came to New York, I met a Southerner who got rid of her accent so she could be in radio or film. I said, "That's fucked up. Don't you want to have an identity?"

I have a certain Southern Gothic sensibility. I related to Flannery O'Connor at a young age. My mother's father was a fire-and-brimstone Methodist preacher. I saw a lot of that kind of thing growing up, and I read about it in O'Connor. Her writing was really dark but also ironic and humorous. It informs a lot of my songs.

Who are your heroes – musical, literary or otherwise?

I always looked up to my father [the poet Miller Williams]. He taught creative writing, and it was almost like an apprenticeship growing up with him. I got some of the lines for [the 2014 song] "Temporary Nature (Of Any Precious Thing)" from a conversation with him. A friend had died, and I was real sad about it, and he said, "Honey, the saddest joys are the richest ones," and I immediately wrote it down. He would just come out with these profound statements. He died last year – on January 1st, just like Hank Williams.

What advice would you give your younger self?

There are good people in the music business, but there are a lot of horrible, stupid people, too. In 1984, I had just moved to L.A. I had a meeting with this guy at, I think, Columbia Records. He said, "You have a lot of potential, but you need to work on your songs. None of them have bridges." After the meeting, I got out my Bob Dylan and Neil Young albums. I said, "These songs don't have bridges either. So fuck that guy."

What misperceptions did you have about the business?

I used to think talent was all it took. But now I think it's 50 percent talent and 50 percent drive. I've seen people who were brilliant but don't want to tour or do whatever it takes. How many times do you read about an artist who had a record deal in the Seventies, and now they're working as a carpenter somewhere? They're all bitter and cynical: "Nobody understands my music anymore." No, it's because you fucked up your career!

What's the most indulgent purchase you ever made?

I was in New York about 15 years ago and I went on this

shopping spree with a friend who was vicariously shopping through me. I think I ended up spending around \$12,000. I bought these Dolce and Gabbana shoes – white patent leather with silver metal studs. Now, though, I just shop online. That doesn't sound very rock & roll, but it's safer that way. I get really good bargains.

What do you wish you could do that you can't?

Sometimes I want to wear sunglasses when I go on TV and [husband-manager] Tom says, "You can't." I want to be like Dylan in *Don't Look Back*; when he did press, he would just be fucking with them all the time. Tom says I shouldn't try to be cool.

What music moves you the most?

My dad was into Coltrane and Chet Baker, so it's got to be Coltrane's *Ballads* and Baker's *Holiday*, where he does Billie Holiday songs. I never get tired of Nick Drake. I love the Gregg Allman album *Laid Back*. His version of Jackson Browne's "These Days" knocks me out.

Dylan made such an impression on me. In 1965, one of my dad's students came over to the house and walked in with a copy of *Highway 61 Revisited*. While he met with my dad, I put the album on, and it blew my 12-year-old mind. In the Seventies, Dylan came into [New York club] Folk City, and I got up to sing a few songs with the band that was playing. The owner of the club introduced me to Bob. He said, "Keep in touch – we're gonna go on the road soon." It was like somebody back in the day meeting James Dean. It was so riveting.

What are you reading right now?

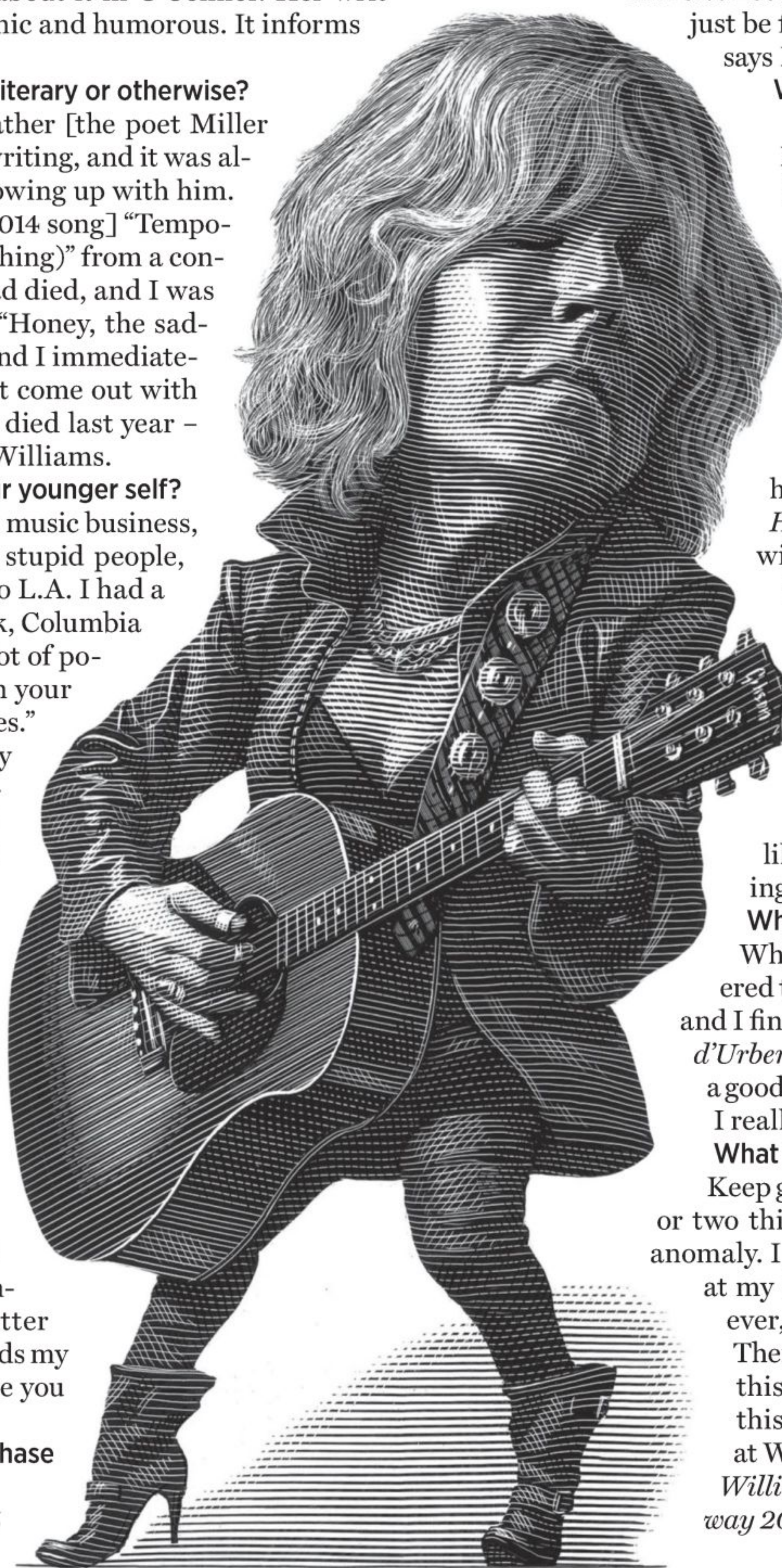
While I was touring Europe, I discovered the joy of reading a book on my iPad, and I finally read Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. I couldn't put it down. It does a good job of expressing that period of time. I really like [books] like that.

What rule do you live by?

Keep going and don't quit just because one or two things don't work out. I'm kind of an anomaly. I got discovered late. And here I am, at my age [62]. My writing is better than ever, and my voice is better than ever. There aren't many people doing this at this age, especially women. I *have* to do this. What else are you going to do, work at Walmart?

Williams' new record, "The Ghosts of Highway 20," is out February 5th.

INTERVIEW BY DAVID BROWNE





MICHAEL
JACKSON'S

JOURNEY FROM
MOTOWN TO

OFF
THE
WALL

An Optimum Productions Picture

A Spike Lee Joint

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