

THE ULTIMATE MUSIC GUIDE

U2



THE COMPLETE STORY



RARE PHOTOS

CLASSIC INTERVIEWS

**IN-DEPTH REVIEWS
OF EVERY ALBUM**

FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**



WELCOME...

WAS IN DUBLIN one snowy winter on holidays, and I went to a party given by Charles O'Connor, the mandolin and fiddle player and concertina-squeezer of Horslips. This cat comes up to me, wire-framed glasses, Afghan hippy coat, curled Jimi Hendrix hair dyed blond, all serious and sincere.

And instead of the usual "What's Jimmy Page like?", he's pushing questions about the machinery of rock'n'roll, y'know, "How does publishing work?" and "How do you get tour support?", whatever. Intense, chipping into what's disguised as one's brain like a cerebral woodpecker, relentlessly... intense. English accent, protruding as posh. Airline pilot dad.

And then he gives me his demo tape, another fucking cassette unwittingly winding its way for use on my old answering machine. But because of his questions and his sense of intent, I listened to the bloody thing. Indeed, first thing when I got home on this floating snowflakes and new snowdrops dawn, in it goes into the cassette player. There was one track that stood out for me, "Shadows And Tall Trees". The band, they were... well, unformed. The guitar player was already happening, a sort of cross between Barry Melton with Country Joe & The Fish and Tom Verlaine from Television, although he'd never heard of Country Joe and his acid-fuelled partners-in-rhymes. The rhythm section was lumpy, the singer was learning the game. Very Euro whiteboy music, sort of clattery, produced at Eamonn Andrews Studios in Dublin by Barry Devlin, the bass player of Horslips.

The chap who'd given me the cassette was the bass player in his band, too, and was doing the hustle for the band. His name and number were on this tape. "Adam," it said, and the new name of the band in red marker - "U2"...

Welcome, anyway, to this undiluted and dilated fest of U2. Everything you wanted to know, but secretly felt too stupid to ask. Panic no more, vicar - Father Inne at your cervix! Every U2 album re-viewed by mainline cats, esteemed no-messing marquee names glowing and spelled Mueller, Cavanagh etc! Choice U2 chinwags from the *NME* and *Melody Maker* archives reprinted in full, some going back some 30 years [man]. Rare Ueee boogaloo! Under the skin of Bongo and Edge - Mick O'Teen as was - and Adam and Larry Mullen Jr!

Ha. They don't call it *Uncut* for nothing. Are they the world's greatest band? Are they shite? Pop your peepers in and unwax your earholes - there's nothing like the real thing, or they're nothing like the real thing. You choose. Welcome again to The Feast Of The Benign Beast that never ends.

Hello baby and Amen.

BP Fallon

★ BP Fallon, "Rock'n'roll Renaissance man", was publicist for Led Zeppelin and T.Rex, worked at Apple Records, managed Johnny Thunders, and currently fronts BP Fallon & The Bandits. He joined U2 on their Zoo TV tour, with the official title of 'Guru, Viber & DJ' and wrote the book of words and photography, *U2 Faraway So Close*. For more info, visit bpfallon.com

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Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 8th Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **UNCUT EDITOR** John Mulvey **ART EDITOR** Marc Jones
PRODUCTION EDITOR Mick Meikleham **SENIOR DESIGNER** Michael Chapman **DESIGNER** Miles Johnson **EDITORIAL/PICTURE RESEARCHER**
 Phil King **CONTRIBUTORS:** David Cavanagh, Stephen Dalton, Barney Hoskyns, John Lewis, Gavin Martin, Alastair McKay, Andrew Mueller, Sam
 Richards, Bud Scoppa, Adam Sweeting, Michael Bonner, Peter Watts, Mark Bentley **COVER PHOTO:** Colm Henry **THANKS TO:** Kevin Grant, Nick
 Mee (sub-editing), BP Fallon, Tom Pinnock, Michael Holder, Lida Aslanidou, Marine Candell, James Hanman, Lily Sharp, Ellen Peirson-Hagger,
 Georgie Bridges, Jędrzej Jędraszek, Hayley Sigrist, James Underdown, Mollie Mansfield **MARKETING** Charlotte Treadaway **SUBSCRIPTIONS**
 Sonja Zeven **PUBLISHING DIRECTOR** Ed Beale | **MANAGING DIRECTOR** Marcus Rich | **COVERS PRINTED BY** Polestar Wheatons
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BOY

And so it begins... The biggest band of the past 35 years emerges, intense and innocent, from the post-punk gloom. BY DAVID CAVANAGH

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- 2 **Twilight** ★★★
- 3 **An Cat Dubh** ★★★★★
- 4 **Into The Heart** ★★★
- 5 **Out Of Control** ★★★★★
- 6 **Stories For Boys** ★★★★★
- 7 **The Ocean** ★★★
- 8 **A Day Without Me** ★★★★★
- 9 **Another Time, Another Place** ★★★
- 10 **The Electric Co** ★★★★★
- 11 **Shadows And Tall Trees** ★★★

Released: October 20, 1980
Produced by: Steve Lillywhite
Recorded at: Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin
Chart position: UK: 52 US: 94

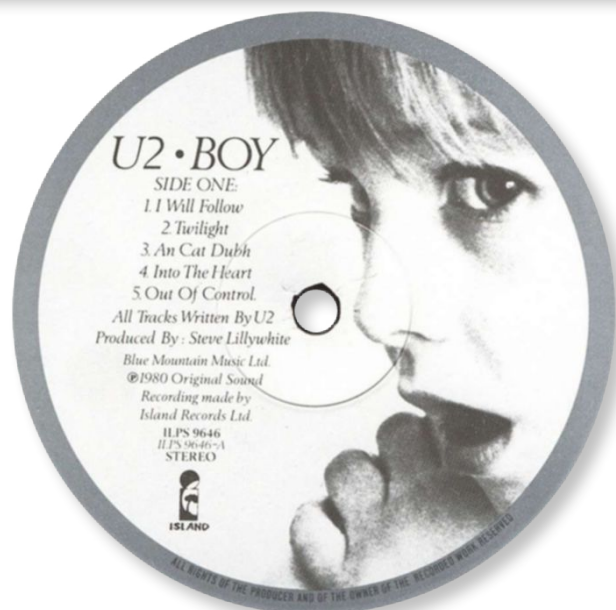
The great Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy used to play a game with his brothers when they were children. “Go and stand in the corner,” the eldest, Nikolai, would say to everyone, “and try not to think of a white bear.” The future author of *War And Peace* found the game fiendishly hard: how can the brain concentrate on *not* concentrating? Well, here is the modern-day equivalent. Go and listen to *Boy*, and try not to think of Live Aid, Zoo TV, Nelson Mandela, third-world debt relief, or a man in red-tinted sunglasses shaking hands with presidents, prime ministers and popes.

It’s getting more and more difficult, in other words, to judge U2’s early music on its own merits. Thirty-five years’ worth of baggage insists on coming along, too, like tin cans rattling behind a wedding car. Most retrospective reviews of *Boy* tend to assess it now in strategic terms – hark! the

unmistakeable sound of huge drums and chest-beating choruses being marshalled! – as though *Boy* were stage one in a world-domination plan, a blueprint for stadium rock. Which you can understand. As we know, U2 *did* develop into a stadium-rock band and *did* achieve world domination. So hindsight theories are inevitable. It’s just that *Boy* is the wrong album to apply them to.

As its title, cover and lyrics all indicate, *Boy* is the antithesis of the finished article. Title: *Boy*. Cover photo: a boy. Number of songs mentioning boys: five (of 11). *Boy* is an album that speaks abstractly – but communicates emotionally – about childhood and adolescence, and the concomitant feelings of self-consciousness, doubt, insecurity and fear. It’s an album without an artful thought in its head, let alone a game plan, and it can’t even pose a coherent question (“*What are the feelings to let me out?*”, “*Are the leaves on the trees just a living disguise?*”), never mind come up with an articulate answer. If there is one thing that *Boy* knows nothing about – nothing

CONTINUES OVER ►





The Edge and Bono backstage, Cork, Ireland, 1979

whatsoever – it's the future. The songs simply cannot be measured by the standards of U2's adult work. To hear them as they were meant to be heard, one almost needs to return to a state of innocence.

January 1981. At the McMordie Hall in Belfast, I'm squeezed up at the front, over to the right, where Adam Clayton is playing his bass about three feet away from my outstretched hands. TV cameras swivel around on the crowd's periphery, filming U2 for a local BBC arts programme. To my left, people are attempting to lean over and touch Bono who is crouched down at the lip of the stage, briefly motionless. It feels unreal to be stood in a hall watching U2 play songs from *Boy*. Normally at this time I'd be at home listening to U2 play songs from *Boy*.

It's becoming increasingly likely that U2 are going to be famous. People over the water have found out about them. At school, Boy has replaced Bowie's *Scary Monsters...* as the important LP of this era, and

everyone who hasn't bought it yet is pretending they have.

"The best thing about them is the guitarist," say some. "The best thing about them is the singer," say others, "especially when he acts the pop star." "The singer," says a classmate who saw U2 at the Ulster Hall last month, "is a shocking poser who loves himself something chronic." But she doesn't necessarily mean it as an insult.

The first side of *Boy* is unbelievably perfect. You can listen to it in the dark, and it takes you out of your body, your head, your nightmare, your city. When "Out Of Control" ends, somebody in the room can be heard breathing, and you're shocked

because it takes a few seconds to realise it's you.

So I've added *Boy* to that small list of albums in my collection that can induce an out-of-city experience. The Doors. *Hunky Dory*. *Stranded*. *Boy*. And this is one city I could do with escaping. I'm reminded of that great line: "What are the feelings to let me out?"

Says it all.

U2 REVELATIONS

■ The name "Bono Vox" is a contraction of "Bonavox Of O'Connell Street", inspired by a Dublin hearing-aid shop, as well as cod Latin for "good voice"

Looking at it chauvinistically, *Boy* was a sensational crystallisation of everything that U2 had been trying to express (and sometimes succeeding) throughout 1979-'80, firstly on the three-track EP "U2 Three", and then on the singles "Another Day" and "11 O'Clock Tick Tock". Looking at it more realistically, however, *Boy* was merely the next step forward for a Dublin new-wave quartet who had been acclaimed in Ireland, but had yet to make any headway in Britain. John Peel never played them, for instance. A bad sign.

Boy came out in the autumn of 1980, a season when, by chance, several bands working in similar new-wave/post-punk territory were releasing their debut albums. *Boy* was compared to two of them in particular: *Waiting For A Miracle* by The Comsat Angels (from Sheffield) and *Jeopardy* by The Sound (south London). The three bands were often linked and cross-referenced in the music papers, and opinions varied as to which one had the best prospects of success. They all wrote songs about anxiety, loss of control, panic. They all had an atmospheric sound. They all featured



a guitar prominently in their music (there were a lot of synths around at the time) and they all sang and played with intense concentration.

Where U2 had a clear advantage was in the idiosyncratic, echoes-and-chimes technique of The Edge, their oddly monikered guitarist. The Edge could push down a foot pedal and suddenly sound like the bells of St Clements ("I Will Follow"), or he could stroke one well-chosen

Boys"). He got even worse on the subsequent single "Another Day" (lipping urchin from *Oliver!*) and it took the brilliant follow-up, "11 O'Clock Tick Tock", to calm him down. Despite a typically unusual mix, producer Martin Hannett managed to capture a good percentage of the emotive, whooping, outwards-and-upwards-reaching vocal style that Bono would use on *Boy*.

Hannett (Joy Division, Magazine) was U2's original choice to produce the album. On the evidence of "11 O'Clock Tick Tock", the result might have been a dark, experimental classic. Perhaps U2 would have lingered longer in that grey-black world of post-punk expressionism to which they seemed briefly to belong in 1980 – a world where Kafka and Dostoyevsky were read assiduously, and excessive displays of emotion were regarded suspiciously. Or perhaps U2's flirtation with the dark side had gone as far as it could. For Bono, after all, there could never be too much emotion.

Hannett, in the event, was unavailable to produce *Boy*, for the suicide of Joy Division's singer Ian Curtis (May 18) had plunged him into despair. Steve Lillywhite, XTC's producer, took on the project instead. A murky, Hannett-style iconoclast he was not. But Lillywhite had a genius of his own. Close watchers of his recent activities would have noticed that he had made the drummer in The Psychedelic Furs sound absolutely, wall-shakingly colossal.

Can I never get anything right? I go to a U2 concert with a U2 button badge stuck on my plastic jacket – which will identify me as someone who's been listening to them since the beginning – and I contrive to get it nicked. Probably by someone who's been listening to them since three weeks ago. Now I'll have to buy another one, and the guy in the shop will think: "Ah, here comes the latest U2 fan."

The first side of *Boy* is unbelievably perfect. You can listen to it in the dark, and it takes you out of your body, your head, your nightmare, your city

note and make it ring out across the kingdom ("An Cat Dubh"/"Into The Heart"), or he could hit a harmonic and cause the song to go *boi-oi-oimnnng* like a tuning fork. He also had an impressive voice, and his harmonies and counterpoints on *Boy* ("Twilight", "The Electric Co") were sometimes as marvellous as anything he did on guitar.

While The Edge had already found his stride prior to *Boy*, it must be admitted that Bono was still a chameleon and a magpie on a learning curve. His vocal persona had been ludicrously mannered on the "U2 Three" EP, where he'd veered from effeminate English art-school student ("Out Of Control") to the rude-girl breathlessness of Ari Up ("Boy/Girl") to the look-at-me lunacy of Lene Lovich ("Stories For

There were a few people saying back at the venue that U2 are very religious. I don't know where they heard that from. I would be surprised if it was true. If anything, Boy seems to be saying the exact opposite. It's saying: I want to question Everything and take Nothing at face value. That's why it's so brave. That's why there's a boy on the album sleeve; it's to point out how much we've all learned since our childhoods. We've lost the trust in Jesus we once had, and now we're on our own.

Boy is a world where nobody is safe. The black cat is on her own at night ("An Cat Dubh"). Bono walks down "cold restless streets" that have "walls of white protest" ("Shadows And Tall Trees") – which I assume is an IRA reference. In "Twilight", there are lines about "boy" meeting "man" in the shadows. It's existentialism. It's not religion. They must be wrong.

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "Touching, precocious, full of archaic touches and modernist conviction, genuinely strange... It's not radical, in many ways it's traditionalist, but it's honest, direct and with not a sign of complacency or foolish certainty" **Paul Morley, NME, October 25 1980**

■ "Like all great rock, you feel you must have heard these songs somewhere else – and yet they're unlike any other that you can think of. Welcome to the new '80s" **Lynden Barber, Melody Maker, October 4, 1980**

Boy is an album with a very dramatic start. Several different elements combine and overlap. We hear someone say "1-2-3-4", then The Edge comes in, sounding like he's at the far end of the room, then there's a tinkling instrument like a glockenspiel (which they use on other songs, too), then Larry Mullen starts pelting bell out of his drums, then Bono cries out the title ("I will follow!"), then The Edge gets louder and the song shakes off a limp and starts running. That's the moment I usually switch the light off. Does everyone else do that?

"Twilight", the second song, is where it becomes obvious how much U2 have improved since... that single, "Another Day"... it was round about the start of last year. "Twilight" was the b-side, but I think they must have recorded it in their bedrooms. U2 in those days were a bit rough and punky-sounding. They can all really play now. They're probably as good as The Strangers. This new version of "Twilight" proves it.

"An Cat Dubh" and "Into The Heart" merge together in one of Boy's most mysterious passages. Bono disappears from view for a long time, and The Edge assumes control. When this happened at the concert, it was mesmerising. It was like a symbolic handover from one to the other. I've said my part, now you take over. And the ominous way The Edge's guitar

reverberated around the McMordie Hall made a nearby TV camera look like the swivelling head of a dinosaur in The Land That Time Forgot.

"Out Of Control" was the song that listeners voted to be the A-side of "U2 Three" on Dave Fanning's RTÉ 2 programme all those months and years ago. I didn't vote in the competition (although I may soon start claiming that I did), because it was an absolute formality that "Out Of Control" would win. The new version of this classic song sounds faster, louder and larger. Is it because my record-player is bigger than my radio? Or is it true what the reviews said – that the producer, Steve Lillywhite, has had a major influence? It's bizarre to imagine this music being made in a studio! With red lights and no talking please!

I could describe Side 2, but that click tells me Side 1 is going to repeat, which it will do for some hours to come. Besides, the NME and Hot Press are the places we look if we want descriptions.

For me, it's more a case of an experience – a passing shadow of uncertainty, fear and relief – when I listen to the album. Uncertainty of where I'm going, fear that I might not arrive, and relief to see that others are uncertain and fearful, too.



“If people come along from U2, then they’re

NME, FEBRUARY 14, 1981 In a Glasgow hotel bar, a youthful U2 outline their vision to GAVIN of Chairman Bono – on chess, “Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep”, the failure of punk and why

Bono Vox, aka Paul Hewson, the frontman and driving force behind U2, is huddled in the back of a small van, wrapped in a fur coat and speaking in low, husky tones. He’s complaining about the cynicism and elitism of new rock bands, which is threatening to become just as stupid and stupefying as the

industry it claims to be a barrier against – the record business.

“It’s the easiest thing in the world to be cynical. I can see it coming in myself sometimes and I have to stamp it out. You see it all the time.”

Bono writes fluent, prosaic lyrics and sings them in a strong, resounding voice. You can hear this combination in great songs like “11 O’Clock Tick Tock” and “I Will Follow”, two of the most gallant and genuinely subversive new pop singles released last year. The latter is

a whirl of reverberating guitars and a tale of determination through sorrow taken from *Boy*, U2’s debut album, one of the finest debuts ever released.

During the past year, Bono Vox has come out of Dublin and led U2 on an exhausting and exhaustive assault on the British concert circuit. The abandon and enthusiasm with which they thrust themselves into the attack was a logical extension of the ‘growing ethic’ that surrounded the band with the imagery of



expecting the world gonna get it!”

MARTIN. A first chance, for many, to hear the nascent thoughts
cynicism must be stamped out

the *Boy* album and has been fundamental to its members since they originally got together some four years ago.

Bono cares for the band passionately, and will talk long into the night about its beginnings, first experiences and how all of this is going to affect their aims and plans.

“I distrust anything that’s obvious, like someone saying, ‘Let’s be original.’ So they hang bananas out of their ears or start using a xylophone. There’s a million bands being

original and playing concerts in caves. I think that’s great, but change can come from something far more subtle.

“It’s hard to explain but, well, we’re all human beings and we all look different – you look different from me, but you don’t have to have a nose out to here to look different. Y’know what I mean?”

Bono draws his hand back from a point in mid-air and waits for my nod before continuing. He has a habit of

illustrating his sentences in this way and his conversation is similarly animated with lively metaphors.

“So U2 play with bass, drums and guitars on stages and on records which go on radios, like anyone else involved in the music business. I see no real reason to say we’re something else, so we’re going to play on a chandelier tonight and that makes us different. It doesn’t mean you’re different; it means you’re trying to be different.”

CONTINUES OVER »



We're travelling from Glasgow's Strathclyde University to a small, ancient hotel in the city centre. U2 have just played one of those rare performances where the audience moves in empathy with the performer, gradually becoming infatuated with the sways and currents running through the music. The songs are like a series of emotional landslides – shifting from doubt to hope and from loss to discovery, rising to a peak with “11 O'Clock Tick Tock” – a dazzling if, by that stage, draining realisation.

Inside, the audience proves to be young and demanding, creating the sort of atmosphere that the group revel in. Enjoyment and acceptance come as a natural rather than a ritualistic process and, somewhere near the end, Bono thanks them for coming to see U2, not the image created by the music press. As he explains later, this wasn't a jibe, but merely an acknowledgement of the honesty created between the audience and the performer.

“I don't feel we've been hyped by the music press, because I agree with the good things they say about U2. The music press' relationship with U2 has meant that people have come along expecting a lot and they've got a lot, sometimes maybe too much. It is a pressure.

“But if people come along expecting the world from U2 then they're gonna get it. I'm not scared we won't be able to give it to them.”

We're seated in a tacky lounge bar, myself, Bono and guitarist The Edge. As Bono reels off the details of his early youth I have some trouble equating the brash extrovert and charismatic performer beside me with the maverick youth who grew up alienated and confused in Dublin during the '70s.

“The Virgin Prunes [Bono's mate Gavin Friday's band] and U2 both came out of a place called Lipton Village. It's an imaginary place, something we developed in our imaginations to give us an alternative lifestyle as kids.

“We grew up studying people on street corners, we laughed at the way they talked and

be able to do that because I have a very competitive instinct. But I was going through a very problematic time, my mother had just died and I couldn't stand an educational system where IQ tests and value were based on being good at a very limited number of subjects.

“I couldn't put in the work because I was too erratic as a persona and so I found a game like chess suited me because I was able to put everything from my mind and work with something abstract.”

When Bono found himself back in school after being chucked out of university for not having his native Gaelic language, he became very close friends with Adam Clayton, Larry and Dave (The Edge) Evans. They formed U2 and so Bono discovered a way in which he could express his methods and thoughts.

“Our first concert was one of the greatest we ever played and it was two years before we played another one like it. I believe we built U2 around a spark... you've got to remember at that stage there was still the tradition of the musician, there was still the tradition of Ritchie Blackmore.

“We couldn't compete on that level and yet in 1978 we played this Guinness and Harp Talent Contest with all these professional bands and heavy rock bands. We came down and played after doing this thing called Paddy's Punk Party and I'd lost my voice. We were a shambles. But after that gig we had record contracts offered to us.

“I knew we had something. I knew the effect we had over the audience compared to the other bands with their tight music and their pompous playing. We made use of the fact that we were slightly fragile and when we recorded our early demos in a four-track studio, we couldn't get a big sound out of it so we had to work on the fragile sound. Now that we are in bigger studios and we've got more experience we're plumping for the bigger

U2 formed at the same time as The Radiators From Space and The Boomtown Rats. Unrecognised and ignored in those early days, there is something satisfactory and inevitable about them having reached a position where they can now produce music much more original, imaginative, and durable than those other two.

The irony is that U2 knew nothing about rock, rock culture or what was looming round the corner.

“I remember thinking the first day we went into rehearsal that a movement was going to emerge that would be a breakdown between the flower power and the boot boy. I didn't really know what I was saying, because it turned out to be punk rock.”

We're joined at our rickety little table by Adam Clayton, the group's bespectacled bass player with a seemingly misplaced shock of curly blonde thatch hanging down on to his forehead. He's the cigar-smoking, brandy-drinking sophisticate of the group, with a certain Englishness to his manner and voice. He articulates what is perhaps the main motivation that drives U2.

“It's very much a complete thing. It wasn't sort of, ‘Let's form a band and let's write great songs.’ It was more to enjoy the whole experience of being a band of four people with the one cause; a cause you could develop and become emotionally involved in. It was much more the whole experience and it still is. It's like an extension of a school gang.”

They struggled through the cloistered Dublin scene as best they could, without becoming bogged down in the inevitable bitchiness and petty-mindedness which surfaces in closely knit, inadequate provincial scenes. U2 left Ireland after a one-off deal with CBS enabled them to release the Irish chart topper, “Out Of Control” (an alternative version was later to surface on *Boy*).

Their movement into the music industry wasn't naively hopeful. On a small scale

in Dublin they'd already experienced the strain that business and financial matters can put on a band. On the evening they left Ireland, their publisher withdrew half the advance that had been promised to them. So U2 arrived in England, unsure if they'd be able to last the whole tour

and tempted to accept the first record contract that came their way.

But they held out and finally got the deal they wanted with Island. *Boy* – a collection of the best songs in the group's 40-song repertoire – was released seven months later. Immediately they were accused of whimsicality, and pandering to adolescent sexuality (the *Boy* sleeve is a photo of a young boy with naked shoulders!).

Such criticism undermines and misinterprets the LP's value: it's a voyage from adolescence (which, after all, is the stage when Larry, Adam, Dave and Bono formed U2), into manhood, and the rich imagery presents a tussle between wonder, awareness, strength and acceptance. *Boy* is the group's personality, produced by the chemical interaction between their characters and their musical styles.

CONTINUES OVER ►

“Our biggest problem getting to a bigger audience is that we don't look a certain way, we don't fit into a little box” – Bono

at the expressions they made. We mocked the adult world and agreed we'd never grow up because all we saw was silliness.

“I remember watching *Top Of The Pops* and seeing this group called Middle Of The Road singing ‘Chirpy Chirpy Cheep Cheep’. I must have been about 11 at the time, and I thought, ‘Wow! This is what pop music is all about. You just sing like that and you get paid for it.’”

Drifting through his teenage years, Bono shunned the pubs frequented by his friends, remained largely unaffected by music and became, of all things, a keen, expert chess player.

“I found I was being pressured into organising my thoughts and I wanted to

sound, but the important thing is we always worked around the spark.

“Whatever we were good at, we worked around, not trying to be like anyone else, just looking for what was best in ourselves.

“Adam used to pretend he could play bass. He came round and started using words like action and fret and he had us baffled. He had the only amplifier so we never argued with him. We thought this guy must be a musician, he knows what he's talking about and then one day we discovered he wasn't playing the right notes, that's what's wrong, y'know?”

“We were stumbling in the dark, but with the spark and fanning it, finding that the emotion we were generating was affecting people. I can cry when I'm singing, literally. I can get very, very into it.”

U2: ARCHIVE 1981

"A band should have a personality of its own," says Bono, "and if a band's personality is dominated too much by one person then it's bad for the band. On another level, a band like Spandau Ballet is totally direct and pointed. That's so boring because you see it all in one go – clothes, fashion, hair and that's it. There's nothing to discover, no mystique, no charm and no personality."

The difference between U2's personality and that of most other rock bands is that it is natural. They reflect on and revise orthodox rock techniques and presentation, but totally relinquish its hopeless, heartless mythology. Their own motives and desires always shine through, purposeful and resilient. As Bono explains, this isn't always to their advantage.

"Our biggest problem getting to a bigger audience is that we don't look a certain way, we don't fit into a little box. We're not a ska group or something easy to digest. But the fact that we're not easy to digest means we're a lump in the throat, and a lump in the throat has far more guts to it. I believe ultimately... I don't know what I believe ultimately, but I know it's good that we're not easily digested."

I catch U2 at a very interesting stage in their development, certainly the peak of their career so far. It's a crucial period for them as they have to grow up now and present the new face of U2 as it's developed over the past 18 months. Bono describes how he sees this taking shape.

"We're a long-term project, we're only getting used to our tools, working with people and the learning we've undergone. I see the next album as being about battle, because I don't see life as being an easy road. I think it's a battle on many different levels, to express yourself, to keep

your head above the waves when problems and trouble come. I think it's a battle not to conform to the music business when you're 19.

"*Boy* was a retrospective of U2 over two years – the end of our adolescence. But now we've been to the ends of the earth, we've been throughout Europe and America and we've seen that all cities are the same when you eventually get down to their heart and soul.

"We've seen and learned a lot; it could either leave us cynical or with a determination and spirit not to fall or go under."

The pitfall that U2 must avoid – and something that they've been guilty of in the past – is to mistake pure musical clout for substance and vigour. Bono will admit that previously they have tried too hard, trying to throw themselves right into the audience's heart, but succeeding only in flying off the handle. Now they seem to have found the right balance, although one can't help but be concerned when Bono wears leather trousers and The Edge engages in guitar talk with The Skids' Stuart Adamson in Edinburgh the following night.

U2's music has taken shape, coaxed, though not inspired by, the Pistols, mingling the sense of space and drama brought to rock structures by Joy Division crystallising its essence – a determined sense of soul-searching – alongside Dexys Midnight Runners. Unlike the rest of those bands, U2 have lasted and remain hungry, vigilant and ebullient. They're raring to go, to tackle the idiocy and dogma that makes rock a routine more than a means of expression.

"I wouldn't say that we're bitter about rock'n'roll; we didn't enter this in a naïve way. There are a lot of untruths in rock'n'roll, the word itself conjures up certain standards to conform to and certain morals. But it's all superfluous imagery, it doesn't actually exist.



EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SPIDER-MAN: *Turn Off The Dark* – the \$75m Bono & Edge Broadway musical that ran for three years until January 2014, was perhaps the most ambitious project U2 members have undertaken away from the group. Here's a selective run-down of other side projects, contributions and collaborations...

1 SHE'S A MYSTERY TO ME – ROY ORBISON
(from *Mystery Girl*, 1989)
Written by Bono and The Edge, the latter also contributing guitar

2 IN A LIFETIME – CLANNAD
(from *Macalla*, 1985)
Duet vocal by Bono

3 PURPLE HEART – T-BONE BURNETT
(from *The Talking Animals*, 1987)
Co-written by Burnett and Bono

4 GIVE ME BACK MY JOB – CARL PERKINS
(from *Go Cat Go*, 1996)
Vocals by Bono, alongside

Johnny Cash, Willie Nelson and Tom Petty

5 PUT 'EM UNDER PRESSURE – IRISH WORLD CUP FOOTBALL SQUAD (1990)
Rave-like anthem, written and produced by Larry Mullen

6 HALLELUJAH
(from *Tower Of Song*, 1995)
Bono's solo cover for a Leonard Cohen tribute album

7 SNAKE CHARMER – JAH WOBBLE (1983)
Slide guitar by The Edge

8 GOLDENEYE – TINA TURNER (1995)
Bond-movie theme written by Bono and The Edge

9 THE LONG BLACK VEIL – THE CHIEFTAINS (from the album of the same name, 1995)
Lead vocal by Mick Jagger, with Bono on uncredited harmonies

10 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE (1996)
The opening and closing credits

themes were written and performed by Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen

11 SLIDE ON THIS – RON WOOD (1992)
The Edge contributes guitar to four tracks

12 LET THE GOOD TIMES ROLL – QUINCY JONES
(from *Q's Jook Joint*, 1995)
Sung by Bono with Ray Charles and Stevie Wonder

13 CONVERSATIONS ON A BAR STOOL – ANNIE ROSS
(from *Short Cuts* soundtrack, 1993)
Jazz piece written by Bono and The Edge for the Robert Altman film, later covered by Marianne Faithfull

14 SLIDE AWAY – MICHAEL HUTCHENCE
(from *The Michael Hutchence Album*, 1999)
Co-written by Hutchence and Bono, who also contributes a guest vocal

15 ROYAL STATION 4/16 – MELISSA ETHERIDGE

(from *Brave And Crazy*, 1989)
Harmonica by Bono

16 YOU MADE ME THE THIEF OF YOUR HEART – SINÉAD O'CONNOR
(from the *In The Name Of The Father* soundtrack, 1993)
Co-written by Gavin Friday and Bono

17 BORN AGAIN SAVAGE – LITTLE STEVEN (1999)
Adam Clayton plays bass

18 JAH LOVE – THE NEVILLE BROTHERS
(from *Brother's Keeper*, 1990)
Co-written by Cyril Neville and Bono

19 FLYER – NANCY GRIFFITH (1994)
Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen appear on four tracks

20 I WANNA BE AROUND – TONY BENNETT
(from *Duets: An American Classic*, 2006)
Having duetted with Sinatra in '93, Bono doubles up with another king of croon



“The emotion we were generating was affecting people. I can cry when I’m singing, literally. I can get very, very into it” – Bono

Girls don’t run around trying to rape people, you can’t get drunk every night and do loads of drugs.”

Bono rightly believes that the flimsy situation which McLaren used to try to break open rock music with the Pistols has turned sour, but it can now be transformed into something much more real and positive.

“There’s a lot of Johnny Rotten’s bastard children running in the streets. They’ve been sold into bondage and it frightens me to see them because they’ve been sold an image of violence and they’ve turned it into the reality of violence.”

The Edge, who is usually happy to let Bono do the explaining, is so exasperated that he interrupts.

“It’s incredible to see the followers of a band like Discharge are mostly 13 or 14. They’ve obviously never questioned the idea behind what they celebrate, but just look on it as an image. Like you would support Chelsea or wear a Bay City Rollers scarf.

“The basic feel I got from ’76 was of loud electric guitars, of singers with a song who sung with everything they had and sweated a lot and the audience also sweated a lot. The two became very close because you got a buzz in your spine – you felt that whatever he was singing about, he meant it. I believe in what I sing and we play our hardest onstage. I think it’s quite a simple thing, but I believe that in itself is an embodiment of what ’76 was about.”

It’s already been reported that U2 are all good Catholic Irish boys who don’t smoke, drink or swear. Untrue! Two of them are Protestants and all (except Larry) imbibe alcohol during my stay, and profanities are muttered. Bono is nonetheless a deeply committed Christian, although he doesn’t go to church – “I think the church is a big problem” – and feels that Christianity is grossly misinterpreted.

“It’s not all of our beliefs and not everyone in the band believes in the same way. There are

things I just don’t want to talk about. I’ll talk about them in music, the way I feel about things come out onstage. There are things that don’t go well coming indirectly from other people.”

It seemed relevant to ask what effect U2 wanted to have on the audience.

“Washed, I think, is a good word. It’s like you go along to a film where you go through the emotions, you’re brought up, you’re brought down, and you feel a sort of relief afterwards.

“If you look at what Adam And The Ants are trying to express, by using escapology rather than realism, it’s dignity. He’s using the imagery of a warrior to achieve it, but you might as well go to a drive-in movie.

“People should have dignity in themselves. They’re not numbers, but they’re bombarded by the TV and they feel very insecure in themselves and in looking in the mirror. If our music means anything on that level, it’s a celebration of just being me, of just being you.”

U2 have in their stride a new way of looking at the ideals of rock music and a different way of using it. They’re surging forward with one of the most strong-minded and radical sounds I’ve ever heard.

Wherever Bono Vox has chosen to put his heart and soul, there can be no doubt that, for the time being, it couldn’t be in a better place. **02**

OCTOBER

***Gloria exultate!* A declaration of faith – or a spiritual crisis? Certainly not the ‘big’ album that was expected... BY DAVID CAVANAGH**

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **Gloria** ★★★★★
- 2 **I Fall Down** ★★
- 3 **I Threw A Brick Through A Window** ★★★★★
- 4 **Rejoice** ★★★★★
- 5 **Fire** ★★
- 6 **Tomorrow** ★★★★★
- 7 **October** ★★★★★
- 8 **With A Shout** ★★★★★
- 9 **Stranger In A Strange Land** ★★
- 10 **Scarlet** ★★
- 11 **Is That All?** ★★★★★

Released: October 20, 1981
Produced by: Steve Lillywhite
Recorded at: Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin
Additional musicians: Uilleann pipes/bodhran – Vincent Kilduff
Chart position: UK: 11 US: 104

The *Boy* tour stretched to 12 countries and lasted for nine months. After touring Europe (twice) and North America (twice), U2 finished at the Hammersmith Palais in London on June 9, 1981, where it was apparent from some of the names on the guestlist – Bruce Springsteen, Pete Townshend – how much distance the young band had travelled in a short time. Exactly a year before, they’d struggled to fill the Half Moon in Putney, a 250-capacity back room of a pub.

Unlike many groups who take to the road for long periods, U2 had not been unveiling much new material as they went. During 157 concerts on the five legs of the *Boy* tour, only two songs (“Fire”, “I Fall Down”) from the next album, *October*, were ever performed. Compounding the lack of road-tested material was an incident in Portland, Oregon (March 22, 1981), where a briefcase containing Bono’s notebook of lyrics

was stolen by female fans backstage. Although the theft has become slightly exaggerated by U2 historians over the years – the missing notebook is usually cited in defence of any perceived weakness in *October* – it was hardly a fillip to a writing process that was already behind the clock.

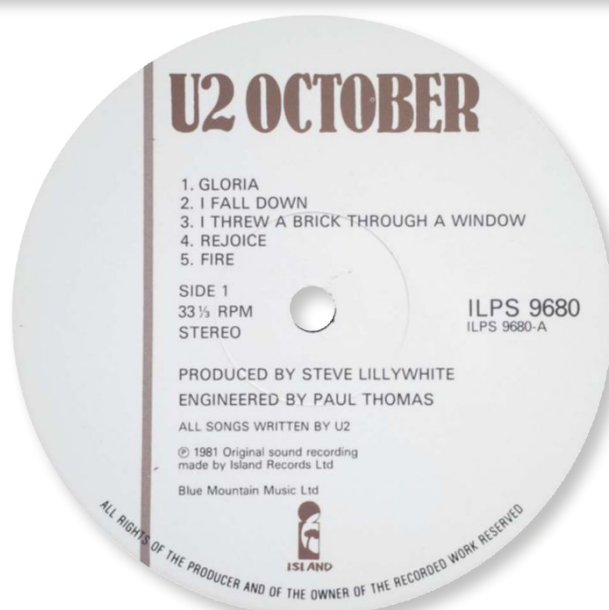
While U2 had been promoting *Boy* in Europe and the States, a vacuum had been created in Britain and Ireland, where their original fans were obsessive to hear something new, and where others, yet to make a definitive judgment, wanted proof that U2 amounted to more than a skilful guitarist and some passionate stagecraft. “Fire”, a single in July 1981, would not have convinced the doubters. U2’s poorest release to date, it offered a showcase of Steve Lillywhite studio effects instead of a satisfactory song (including a fashionable ‘boomerang’ echo on Bono’s vocals), while its tempo was reminiscent of the Eurodisco beat that ELO had used on “Turn To Stone”. U2 now had their first Top 40 hit, but it was embarrassing to think **CONTINUES OVER ►**

U2 OCTOBER



GLORIA
I FALL DOWN
I THREW A BRICK
THROUGH A WINDOW
REJOICE
FIRE

TOMORROW
OCTOBER
WITH A SHOUT
STRANGER IN
A STRANGE LAND
SCARLET
IS THAT ALL?



U2: THE ALBUMS

that “Fire” was the song for which they were nationally renowned. Meanwhile, the band worked under stressful conditions in Windmill Lane (July–August), where deadlines loomed like pylons and lyrics were composed literally at the microphone.

In October – the same month as its title – the album appeared in the shops. On first sight and listen, nearly everything about it was either a puzzle or a let-down. “Fire” was on it, which seemed pointless. It had a front cover photo dominated by Adam Clayton’s billowing sheep-fleece hair, with Bono behind him looking startled by something we couldn’t see. The atmosphere of the album was strange – tentative, a bit schizophrenic and not altogether welcoming. “Rejoice!” it kept shouting at us, but there were ghosts and haunting pianos all over side two. Most of all, *October* made a nonsense of the popular rumour that it would be a *big* album, just as Echo And The Bunnymen’s *Heaven Up Here* had been ‘big’. Big title. Big voice. Big ambitions. Big thematic leap forward. *October* arrived – a familiar friend looking older, gaunter and different, standing in a quiet space at the far corner of an empty room – and suddenly it was clear that we were all going to need to be reintroduced.

After a fade-in, *October* started promisingly (“Gloria”), but almost at once lost momentum (“I Fall Down”). “Gloria” – one of the few tracks on the album that required no effort to enjoy from beginning to end – was a terrific way to announce U2’s return, with carillons of guitar and a real sense of “We’re back!” The song twisted, shadow-boxed and ducked imaginary punches, and Bono sounded as excited by The Edge’s clever, string-bending riff as someone hearing it for the first time.

“I Fall Down”, however, had all sorts of limitations, such as no tune. The Edge was mysteriously underused on guitar (he was actually playing piano), while Bono’s lyrics, about a couple named John and Julie, were hampered by his inability to reveal a single detail of any consequence – except that one of them writes a letter. When track three,



Keepers of the faith: the born-again U2 were in spiritual crisis while making *October*

Edge guitar chords, and it also had a key line (“*I can’t change the world, but I can change the world in me*”) that would have resonated with any fans who’d adopted *Boy* as a sort of all-purpose message of support. On the other hand, the enthusiasm quickly evaporated with “Fire”, ending Side One on a backwards step.

Side Two was generally sparser, seemed even less confident, and was easily superior. If U2 had transposed the two sides, it’s possible that *October* would have produced a more ethereal effect than it did. Certainly, a tenuous state of

slowly, almost agonisingly. The musical arrangement, with hindsight, can be said to anticipate the suite on Kate Bush’s *Hounds Of Love*; it barely made use of U2 as a band, appearing to be a Bono solo LP condensed into four-and-a-half minutes. His stark images of bereavement (“*There’s a black car parked at the side of the road*”) related to the death of his mother, from a cerebral aneurysm, when he was 14.

Alas, these songs arrived too late to rescue an album that was palpably falling short. Much of the remainder of Side Two – “With A Shout” and “Stranger In A Strange Land”, particularly – either re-trod old ground from *Boy* or omitted the crucial ingredients that lead to magic. As for the down-right impertinent “Scarlet”, Mullen and Clayton

blatantly lifted their drums and bass parts from Joy Division’s “Atmosphere” – a homage that might have been interpreted as a sincere tribute to the late Ian Curtis, had not Bono tactlessly started wailing “*Rejoice!*” over the top. How to shatter a mood.

This, then, was the widespread reaction to *October* in 1981. It acquired a reputation as a hit-and-miss album, a disappointment, and was pushed into the past – and virtual irrelevance – when U2 released *War* in February 1983.

It was an open secret in Dublin’s music community in 1981 that three members of U2 (Bono, Edge and Mullen) were born-again Christians. They had spoken at a seminar in

They seem to be speaking with painful directness... it’s the sound of a band saying ‘help’

“I Threw A Brick Through A Window”, got under way with Larry Mullen bashing out a circular pattern on his kit as though practising alone in a garage, the black cloud of deflation began to wend its way across one’s emotional sky. The song itself was feeble, not even half-finished. An anticlimax. This was not the U2 of *Boy*.

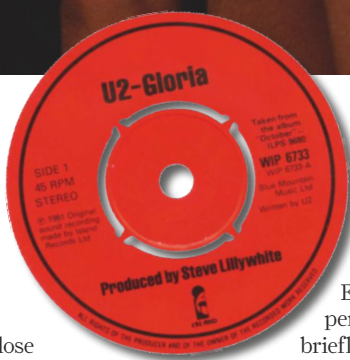
“Rejoice”, the next song, was suspiciously similar to “I Will Follow” – only faster – but it did at least revive the spirits with some crashing

mind hung like a shroud around the two songs (“Tomorrow” and “October”) that started the

second side. Both of them portrayed worlds that U2 had never previously considered going to. Satie-esque piano chords echoed through “October”, a little oasis of solitude and poignancy that became many listeners’ favourite track. “Tomorrow”, using Uilleann pipes from the Irish folk-music tradition, was a pin-drop intake of breath that released itself

U2 REVELATIONS

■ U2 were once the subject of a question on a Microsoft job application, which involved potential employees calculating how long it would take all four members to cross a bridge, two at a time, with one of the group at all times holding the only flashlight they possessed.



Worcester, England in front of an audience of fellow Christians (in which Bono and Edge quoted passages from the Old Testament), and they were affiliated to a hardline Christian sect in Ireland called the Shalom Fellowship. Outside their close circle, however, U2 were reluctant to discuss their faith at any length, with the result that stray items of gossip (“They pray before gigs!”) circulated in lieu of hard facts. Essentially, you knew they were religious. You just didn’t know how much.

This meant it was just about feasible to listen to “Gloria” and imagine that Bono was singing about his love for a girl named Gloria, using a few Latin expressions and Biblical allusions to drive home his point. It also meant that *October*’s recurring word “rejoice” could be taken as an outburst of hope and optimism, without it going any further than that. The LP sounded *spiritual*; it didn’t automatically sound *saved*.

In the years since 1981, however, it has become clear exactly how religious U2, and *October*, were. The text of “Gloria” was literal, not allusive, and “rejoice” had one meaning only. Remarkable new information was later made public – first in Eamon Dunphy’s biography *Unforgettable Fire* (1988), and then in the band’s autobiography, *U2 By U2* (2006) – which revealed the full extent of their involvement with Shalom in the early ’80s. While *October* was being written and recorded, Bono, Edge

and Mullen were all undergoing severe crises of guilt and indecision – a faith-versus-music conflict of interests, exacerbated by Shalom’s insistence on total commitment – and Bono and Edge both left the band for a short period. They have admitted that, briefly, midway through sessions for their vital second album, U2 ceased to exist. Talk about the book of revelations.

Having rejected *October* for its musical shortcomings as a 16-year-old in 1981, this new background information, I must say, put an entirely new slant on things. I found myself drawn towards the remastered CD in 2008. Not such a dull collection as I thought, perhaps! An LP made by a band that broke up and reformed in the middle of it! Maybe some of the anguish would seep through, and the songs would be recast in a new context. While I’m capable, like any atheist, of running at high speed from anyone preaching Christianity at me, I’m there like a shot if I believe I’m listening to the authentic sound of musicians creating desperate art out of profound turmoil. Could *October* be reassessed, and brought in from the cold, under those terms?

And once you start looking, it’s amazing how quickly you find it. “Gloria”, as a song and as a premise, becomes more complicated – and less of a platitude – when you know that its 21-year-old singer is a mess inside, fluctuating between his Pentecostal

zeal and his creative urge, with a craving to satisfy both. The chorale on the fade (“*Gloria in te domine...*”) sounds more flushed and heated than I remember it – Bono and Edge almost screaming the harmonies – and I don’t think it’s a trick of the remastering.

Rather than undermine *October*’s flow, as they did in ’81 when we were on the lookout for an emotional deliverance that the album couldn’t provide, “I Fall Down” and “I Threw A Brick Through A Window” now share responsibility for the great vulnerable black hole that *October* will occupy for most of its duration. “I Fall Down” is clearly trying its best to entertain us – it can’t help being rush-written and unfinished – and there’s something sweetly defiant about the way Edge, Clayton and Mullen unite together behind Bono, all for one and one for all, as he sings his truly terrible lyrics. Mullen, indeed, is *October*’s hero: the unflappable boy whose steady beat stops these dysfunctional semi-songs from getting into even more trouble. On “I Threw A Brick...”, he sounds like one of those drummers who keeps playing onstage, for dear life, after the power supply has died on his colleagues.

October is not miraculously going to become a *meisterwerk*, I should stress, even under the most generous conditions of revisionism. “Scarlet” will always make the teeth grind miserably, and “Fire” will forever be rubbish. But elsewhere, songs like “With A Shout” and “Is That All?”, where it’s not absolutely certain whether they were conceived in a fever or dashed off in Windmill Lane’s loo, seem to be speaking to us with painful directness: “*Where do we go from here?*”, “*Is that all you want from me?*” It’s funny how truthful you can be when you only have minutes to spare.

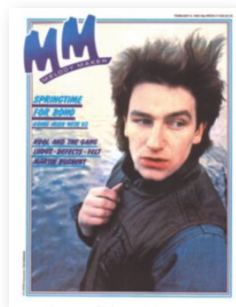
Having either not noticed, or not cared about, the evangelical rapture that pervades *October* in the months when I first owned it, it’s odd to stand face-to-face with this album that places high on many Christian Rock Album surveys in the 21st century. Odder still for me to reduce its Christianity to a secondary, if not tertiary, issue. What I’m hearing now (and learning to appreciate) is the very flaw that once condemned it. The sound of a band saying “help”. ☹☹

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ “It’s not a fashionable record because it needs time to work its way into your heart. And if U2’s emotionalism is at times threatening in its nakedness, their detractors will just have to lump it – because they’re here to stay”
Adam Sweeting, *Melody Maker*, October 10, 1981

■ “What is it that the excessive plaintiveness of Bono’s voice and the forced power of U2’s sound is trying to hide? [Yet] their music does soar – in fact it wings its way pretty serenely over danger zones like *The Fall* or *The Birthday Party*”
Barney Hoskyns, *NME*, October 10, 1981

“There’s too many people hiding behind their haircuts”



MELODY MAKER, FEBRUARY 6, 1982 | LYNDEN BARBER

watches U2’s passion kindling fervour on their home territory, and hears Bono talk *October*, faith, fashion, music, and... everything else. “The whole gloss thing is so strong now,” he says. “In ’76 we had the belief that music is more than that.”

Down the Liffey from the sea and up past the stately grey of Trinity College the wind whistles down the ear. “Hey, Bono, how’re yer doin’?” Robbie and Donal greet U2’s singer with a flash of teeth. They’ve spent £20 each on getting the train down from Belfast for tonight’s concert at the Royal Dublin Society hall and have been wandering around the centre of the city looking for members of the group.

The three of them chat like old friends, though Robbie has only met Bono once before – backstage at a gig, when he swapped shirts with Adam, U2’s bass player. He’s wearing the prize paisley trophy ready for tonight’s big event.

Just five hours later, Robbie’s priceless shirt is soaked in perspiration, caught in the tangle of grins, hair, flesh, smiles and limbs that erupt as the first reverberated shivers of The Edge’s guitar arch across the ceiling and splinter. There’s some *very* special magic in the air tonight...

The concert is a symbolic homecoming for U2, the local heroes returning to their city of

birth after a year spent seducing hearts in foreign parts, but that doesn’t even begin to explain what’s going on in here. The way U2 transform this massive cattle hall of several thousand people into an uninhibited expression of mass joy has to be experienced to be believed.

It’s impossible to talk solely in terms of the group’s “performance” or the electrifying atmosphere, as if the two can be taken separately and analysed; U2 and their audience are realising an intimate, two-way celebration.

“Your knees go weak, your adrenalin starts to go crazy, your bones just seem to rattle and blood *shoots* up your veins.” Bono is trying to describe what it feels like when the group trigger that kind of reaction. “You think ‘Right, there *is* something about this band!’”

“You see, we built this band around a spark – we could only play three chords when we started, but we knew there was an excitement within just the four people, and even when playing to just 10 people we seemed to communicate that. We put our lives on the line and just kind of went for it... and when you see the reaction you just feel... phew! It’s very hard to talk about it, really.”

Bono continues, almost at a loss for words, scarcely able to believe that he’s a part of all this.

“One thing I’m into is the type of people who are into us. They’re prepared to give, they’re a reaction-orientated audience. It’s everything that we wanted when we were a garage band. We just wanted that *total* thing, people just *up*.”

A few years ago, when U2 were just beginning to build up a following in Dublin, they found their fans weren’t getting in to see them when they played pubs because they were all underage. “They were the same age as us!” says Bono, incredulously.

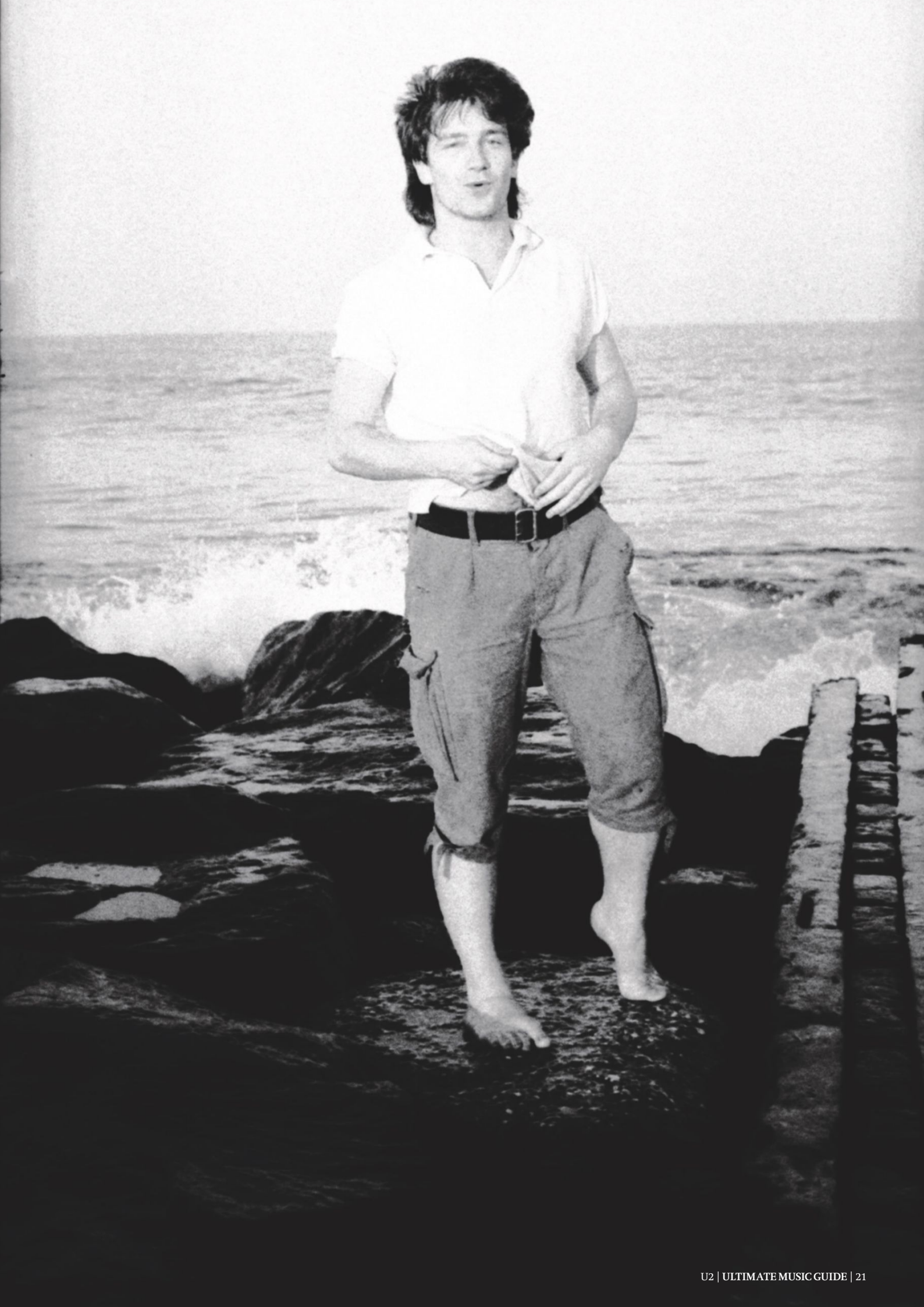
The group obliged by playing a gig in the local car-park, and at the RDS Bono dedicates a song to everyone who was there.

The strangest thing is that despite the forbidding size of this cold hall it still seems as if they could be playing in that car-park – the communication is that close, the excitement that feverish, the message that direct. The following day, the Irish Government falls.

U2 are currently the biggest group in Ireland – possibly the biggest ever – and hot property in Britain and America. U2 are also all between 20 and 22 years old and live at home with their parents in Dublin.

The group’s comparative youth is essential to their character; theirs is a

CONTINUES OVER »





Rock On The Tyne: U2 support The Police at the International Stadium, Gateshead, July 31, 1982

natural enthusiasm, a deep belief in the positive side of human nature. U2 play music that is richly rewarding, spiritually uplifting, so lacking in cynicism that it borders on naivety.

The defences are down, everything is offered, every inner emotion bared – and that's some big risk; it makes them vulnerable to doubters (and there are plenty). It also pays rich dividends to those prepared to invest their trust.

And how have these four coped with the pressure of being acclaimed as Ireland's finest? Has fame gone to their heads?

Mercurial guitarist The Edge (they really do call him that in everyday conversation; his real name is Dave) seems so unaffected that it's almost uncanny. When Pete Townshend hung around with the group last year, he said he felt like giving up guitar when he heard his playing... yet watch The Edge onstage; there's none of the usual strutting antics and immodest manoeuvres associated with guitar "heroes", just a slight shuffle of the hips and a cascade of sound that can send sparks.

The Edge meets the fans after the shows (and looks exhausted afterwards), talks quietly and

exudes unforced, natural charm and good humour. The story is that he only takes his guitar out on formal occasions... never practises, never rehearses, never thinks about the instrument too much, but just lets it flow.

"I tried to do the sound check for his guitar once," says a popular Irish vocalist. "I plugged the guitar in the way he does, set up the machines the way he does and got the same spectrum and played the same chords he does. And after I was making this pitiful noise one of the engineers came up and said: 'You know something? I've been watching him for a year now, and I do it every day, and I can't figure out, I don't know what he does or how he does it!'"

How about Larry, U2's thunderous drummer? Does he go around throwing TVs into the hotel swimming pool or crashing Cadillacs through plate glass?

Larry is, in fact, the group's quiet guy. Blessed with boyish good looks, a disarming smile and an apparent fear of the camera – he tries to hide behind the others – he's shy, rarely saying a word. Larry spends a lot of time with his girlfriend.

In the three days I spend with U2, Adam, the

oldest member, is the only one who goes out for the traditional post-gig wind down; out to a disco after a concert at Cork City Hall. The manager – also the gig promoter – is a middle-aged man who fusses around, taking souvenir photos and advising the DJ to play an endless stream of U2 records (which are totally undanceable, it would seem). Adam sits and signs for the inevitable autograph hunters – no chance of anonymity here.

Adam has an air of refinement and maturity, a man who savours good Guinness and oysters.

But where does all this leave the singer, the one who addresses the audience as if he knows each member personally?

Vox means "voice". Bono Vox talks... and some. But he's not a gab-merchant or idle attention seeker... it's just that he's got so much bubbling away inside him that he's got to get it out somehow. As a fully-paid-up over-the-top person, Bono has few rivals.

"Pete Wylie is the only person I know that can out-talk me," he says about his Wah!-mate. "He fills in the gaps where I have to take breaths!"

If the other members are the special



took six places out of the 50 top classic tracks of all time, capturing first place with "11 O'Clock Tick Tock".

Travelling between Cork and Dublin the group use two modest estate cars (not Rolls-Royces) and Bono spends most of his time engaged in conversation. He's not very excited by much contemporary music, he says, though he goes wild when played a tape of the Associates and loves Elvis Costello – and is more interested in people like Lennon, Dylan, classic punk (The Clash, Stiff Little Fingers) and early Who ("Live At Leeds was a very important record in my life"). It's not that Bono doesn't want to keep up with the current trends... it's more that he hates what they imply.

"There's too many people hiding behind their haircuts," he opines, and his eyes light up when the phrase "cocktail mentality" is mentioned.

"The cocktail mentality," he repeats, savouring the phrase. "Yes, I like that... the cocktail mentality!"

"The star-trip is more in vogue now, with the kind of wallpaper bands, than it was with ELO and Zeppo and all those," he complains. "It seems the whole gloss thing is so strong now, and in '76 we maybe naively at 16 had the belief that music is more than that. We wanted a gut-level reaction, an aggression, a heartbeat."

"U2 is not about fashion. We don't want to be in fashion, because being in fashion is going out of fashion, you know?"

Bono gets excited, stresses his words, becomes animated and agitated. I get the feeling he's been waiting to say this to somebody from the press for a long time, anxious to put across his ideas and reassure some sanity.

"If people like that sort of atmosphere in music, fine, but what I'd like to see is people burning the rulebooks... the rulebooks that say they have to like this type of music and nothing else. I think people should broaden their vision... there's some great music happening on ethnic fronts, like African music, and

and that's when you start talking about great music, as distinct from nice music.

"Like the word 'nice' is a horrible word... music for lifts, music for supermarkets. I think that's fine if you're into shopping or going up and down, but I want more than that. Is that wrong? Is it wrong to want more out of music?"

"I'm not suggesting U2 are Wagner; but when it comes to it, we're just four people playing music the way we see it."

U2 don't just ignore the conventions of a 25-year-old rock'n'roll tradition, they deliberately push them aside and breathe their own new life into the body. It's nothing weird or radical – just voice, bass, guitar, drums – but it's the belief and imagination that counts. And U2's music can't help being influenced by the Irish tradition – it's laced with a lyricism and melodic sense that's missing from so much English rock.

"The Irish aren't into much bullshit, really," says Bono. "They're not into designer jeans, you know? They're a more down-to-earth race, and I think they see through the fashion angle pretty quick. The Irish are also a very aggressive race, which makes for good rock'n'roll."

The audiences at Cork and Dublin are aged predominantly between 14 and 20, but it's not age – at least in the literal sense – that's the defining characteristic, it's the attitude. U2 fans are open, accepting, enthusiastic, emotional – they've not yet given themselves up to the cause of cynicism or world-weariness. You can be 40 years old and be young enough for U2... or 15 and too old.

Cynicism is "the city sickness", thinks Bono, a protective veneer developed as a reaction to life in small spaces on top of people.

But how can you have rock'n'roll without an accompanying sneer? Tradition states that rock is rebellious, common practice assumes it's implacably a threat. Grease back your hair, bare your teeth and thrust out your groin and the captains of industry will be quaking in fear on the top floor of Harrods... or is it often just an excuse for *not* rebelling, for not doing anything that genuinely threatens the structure of society? Who is more subversive... a Barry Manilow fan who's a militant shop steward, or a member of The Fall?

"That old cliché of rock'n'roll rebellion is a joke at this stage," says Bono. "It's so conservative you could actually write a rulebook, you know, on how to behave as a rock'n'roll rebel... and I think rebellion starts within your own heart. I think going out and getting pissed and shouting and dyeing your hair red is not necessarily any indication of a menace at all."

Unquestioning conformity doesn't seem quite the angle either. "When I was 16 and couldn't cope with the idea of getting a job, getting married up, growing up and dying – I wanted more and almost *fought* to break out of that rut."

"In the '60s you had this love and peace movement where people were rebelling against the standards and hypocrisy of their parents' lives, and they broke out of that. And I think they were right. I'm into that rebellion... it's just that the rebellion was diluted by escapism, through drugs."

CONTINUES OVER ►

"U2 is not about fashion. We don't want to be in fashion, because being in fashion is going out of fashion, you know?" – Bono

ingredients of U2, I suspect Bono is the catalyst, the match that lights the fuse. "Life is the permanent possibility of sensation," is one of his favourite quotations (though he can't remember who said it), and he seems to spend all of his time putting the dictum into practice.

"Without sounding a total idiot, I can't remember being bored over the last 10 years," he lolls in soft Gaelic tones. "An hour on my own is just special to me; I just don't get bored; there's too much happening."

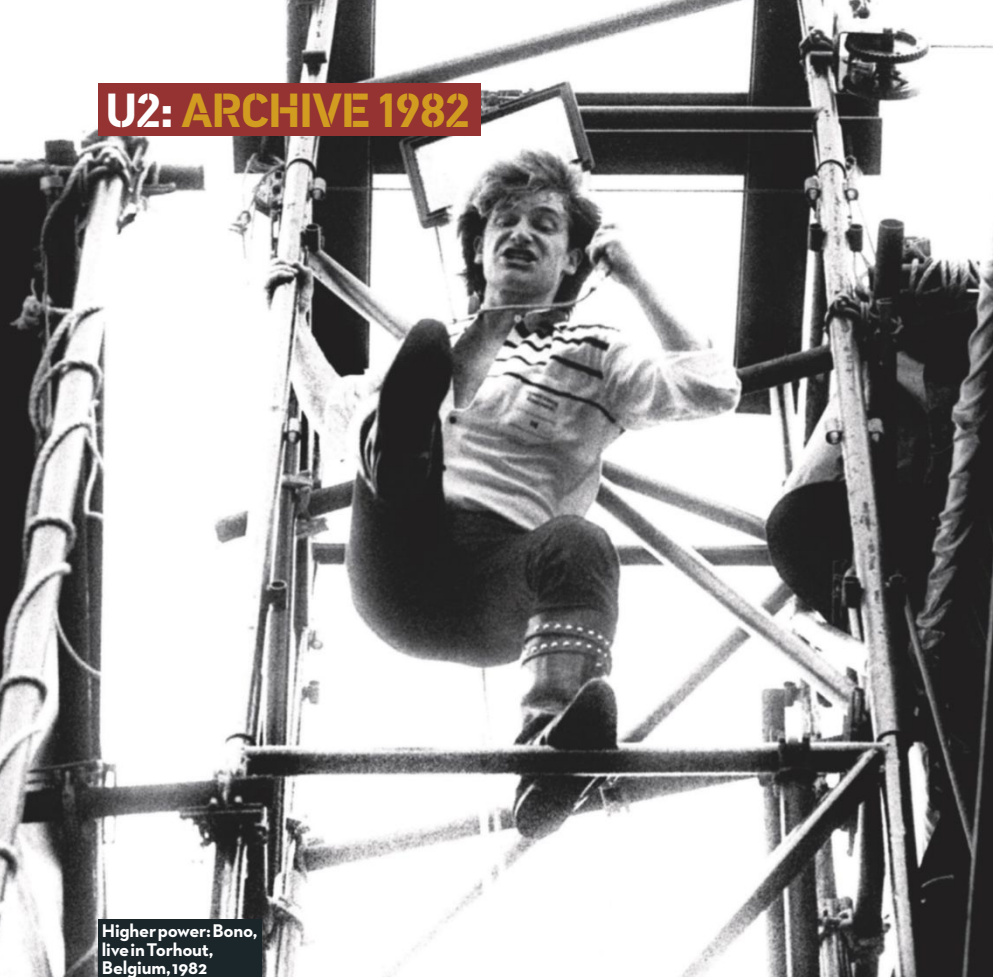
U2's tour of Ireland is actually only three dates, Galway, Cork and Dublin (Belfast has been cancelled due to floor collapse at the hall); they can only play the largest venues. In a listeners' poll run by Dave Fanning's late-night rock show on RTE, Ireland's national radio, U2

I'm particularly interested in traditional Irish music.

"At the same time, I'm sure there are some great pop songs, but I want more out of music than just that. I want music with the X factor, music with that heart and soul."

"I don't want to sound pretentious, but to me truth is like a two-edged sword, it cuts deep. I can tell when a singer is singing what's in his heart, or if he isn't. There's a big difference, and there's a lot of glossy pop songs that can maybe make us cry, but it's a bit like watching *Lassie*, or *The Little House On The Prairie*, you know, it's not *real* emotion."

"The truth is when that singer is saying something that comes from right down within him, and it affects you right down within you..."



Higher power: Bono, live in Torhout, Belgium, 1982

"That's how, if you like, the world dealt with it, it calmed it down. And with punk it's the same thing, but what does it turn into? Tribalism, another form of escapism. I like to think of our music as a celebration, just breaking down those barriers.

"This country has been cut in two for too long, you can see the scars on people's lives, and now with mass unemployment in Britain you can see the scars there, too. Great music should be able to break through barriers, class barriers or whatever."

Can music change people's lives?

"Well, in 'Rejoice' I said, *'I can't change the world, but I can change a world in me'*. Music can possibly direct you and change you as a person. I think the ultimate revolution is the one that goes on in a man. I'm not saying 'Join the revolution, be like us'... where you go is your decision."

But U2's desire to communicate seems so extreme it's almost a kind of crusade, isn't it?

Bono seems a little defensive.

"It's not a plan. We don't say, 'Let's be aggressive, let's really communicate and be passionate.' Sometimes to think about it is to destroy it. U2 is natural, we're really just four people – within ourselves we have a very strong relationship, like a love between the band, which spreads into the crew, our sound engineer, the management, even to the record company, and then spreads into the audience."

And what about Bono's religious beliefs, I venture tentatively? It's a subject that's so easy to latch on to and blow up out of all proportion. Do people have a stereotyped idea of his views? "I think people understand now that I'm not religious, they understand that I'm nearly anti-religion... when I talk of religion I'm talking about the force that's cut this country in two. I'm not religious at all, but

I do believe in God very strongly, and I don't believe that we just kind of exploded out of thin air, I can't believe it.

"I think it's the spiritual strength that's essential to the band. People have got to find their own way, I'm not into standing up and saying, 'Hey, you should be into God!' My own life is exhilarating through an experience I feel, and I feel there's no point in talking about something which should be there in your life anyway. You don't have to preach about it."

Has he always felt the same way?

"I'm not religious at all, but I do believe in God very strongly..."

– Bono

"No, when I was 16 I had a hunger, I wasn't going to accept... I'm quite violent, actually. 'I Threw A Brick' is an attempt to use that kind of violent image. It's like seeing a reflection of yourself in the window and seeing who you are just for a split second, and you realising you don't like what you see."

Has U2 changed him?

"I've changed as it's gone through. When it started I was very drunk on being in a band, very confident, it was everything. I couldn't see the wood for the trees. You get bitter, you knock other bands... I had a lot of hate.

"That's changed in my life, U2 has broadened my experience and allowed me to realise that

wherever you go in the world, people are still flesh and blood, and if they would only realise and stop hitting each other over the head."

But wishing or singing about it isn't going to make it stop, is it?

"No, you can only make it stop in your own life. U2 has helped me realise that wherever you go people are being cheated."

And what about views in the rest of the group? Is there a high degree of concurrence, or the usual tensions?

"There is a natural friction, a wonderful friction," says Bono. "I don't think our egos are self-egos; we've a band ego. I can say to The Edge, 'I don't like that thing you've just played,' and he doesn't go, 'And I don't like what you've just done,' he goes, 'You must be right, otherwise you wouldn't have said it.'"

Bono is keen to talk about *October*, the group's second album. When it was released last autumn they deliberately kept clear of the press. Bono says he didn't fully understand it at the time.

"I'm much happier talking to you now, because *October* now is clearer in my head. I listened to it last week for the first time in ages and I couldn't believe I was part of it. It's a *huge* record, I couldn't cope with it! I remember the pressure it was made under, and writing lyrics on the mic and at £50 an hour that's quite a pressure. Steve Lillywhite was pacing up and down the studio... he coped really well. And the ironic thing about *October* is that there's a sort of peace about the album, even though it was recorded under that pressure."

Like Bono, it's taken me several months to fully come to grips with the record. Initially I found that some of its spiritual side grated; the word "rejoice" used repeatedly in two songs, for instance... "A lot of people found *October* hard to accept at first," says Bono. "I mean, I used the word 'rejoice' precisely because I knew that people have a mental block against it. It's a powerful word, it's lovely to say. It's implying more than 'get up and dance, baby'."

"*October* goes into areas most rock'n'roll bands ignore. When I listen to something like 'Tomorrow', it actually moves me."

And next? They've already completed a new single, as yet untitled, and have tried out controversial Blue Öyster Cult producer Sandy Pearlman in the studio. Bono says they want less of a "cinematic sound" and he denies that their interest in Pearlman contradicts this aim.

"He produced the second Clash album, and it's raw and I like that aggressive sound. And also he puts himself out... in America he was flying around to every city we played just as a fan. I like him."

The only result of the studio trial is "a sort of psychobilly" track which they couldn't complete because "we need 48 tracks for it". One possibility is that they'll use three different producers for the next album.

In the meantime I'll stay at home and play the records; bathe in their lush romanticism, revel in their blunt aggression, dream of another time, another place... like that special night at Dublin RDS. Anybody can fall in love with U2 if they want to. You, too... **U2**

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WAR

Raise the white flag: the mission begins in earnest, with big music, big issues – and, curiously, a sly touch of funk. BY ADAM SWEETING

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **Sunday Bloody Sunday** ★★★★★
- 2 **Seconds** ★★★★★
- 3 **New Year's Day** ★★★★★
- 4 **Like A Song** ★★★★★
- 5 **Drowning Man** ★★★
- 6 **The Refugee** ★★★★★
- 7 **Two Hearts Beat As One** ★★★★★
- 8 **Red Light** ★★
- 9 **Surrender** ★★★★★
- 10 **40** ★★★★★

Released: February 28, 1983
Produced by: Steve Lillywhite, except "The Refugee", produced by Bill Whelan
Recorded at: Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin
Additional musicians: Steve Wickham (electric violin), Kenny Fradley (trumpet), Cheryl Poirier (b. vocals with Adriana Kaegi, Taryn Hagey, Jessica Felton)
Chart position: UK:1 US:12



Following the mixed responses and modest sales (particularly in America) that greeted *October*, U2 knew that they needed to raise their game for the follow-up. In June 1982, the quartet returned to the familiar surroundings of Dublin's Windmill Lane studios to begin several months of work on their third album, which would eventually be released in February of the following year.

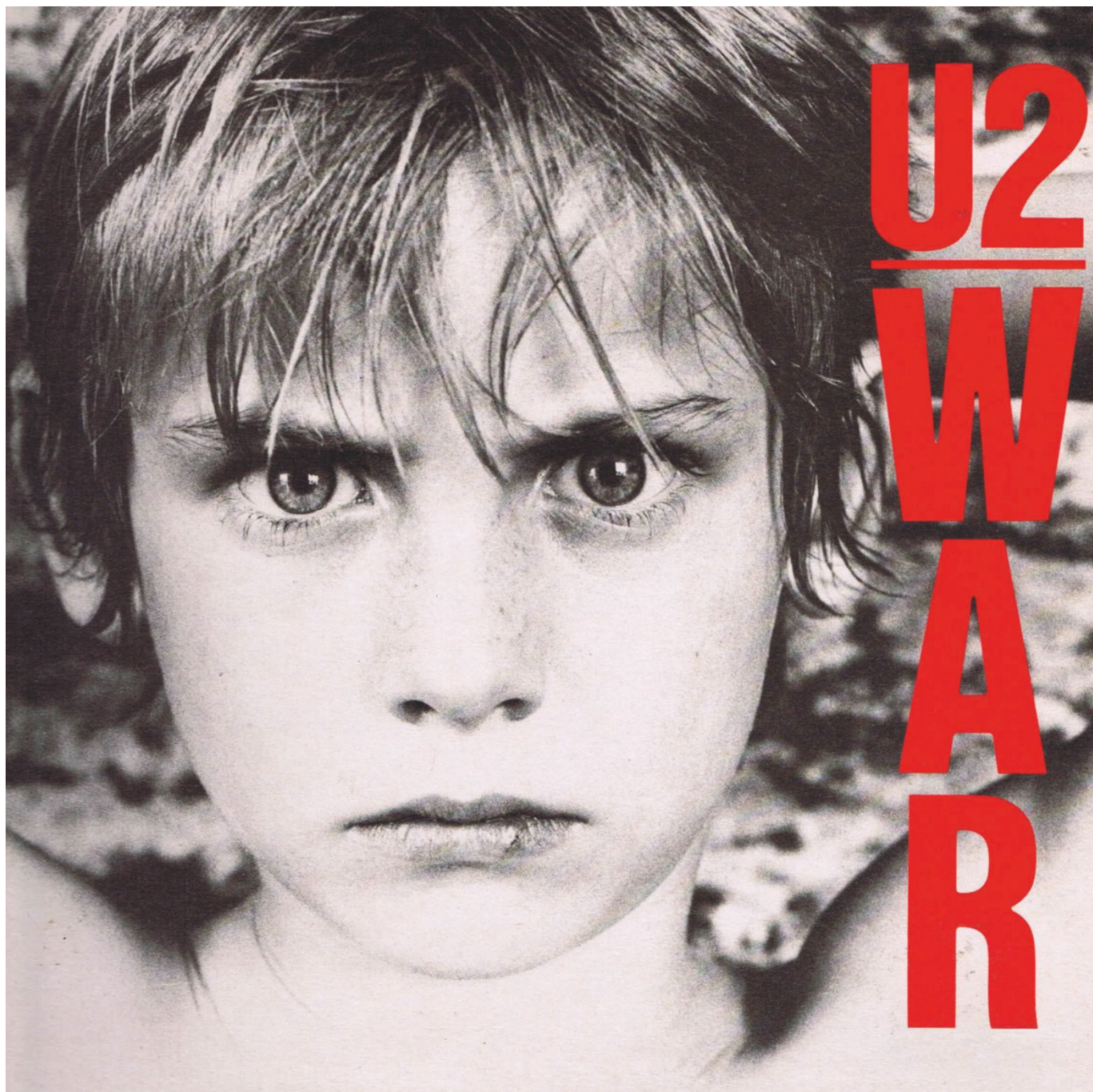
Some things had stayed the same – the studio, and producer Steve Lillywhite – but the mood within the band had undergone an important transformation. There had been problems during the recording of *October*, stemming largely from a temporary crisis of faith within the ranks, when all of the band except the devoutly hedonistic Adam Clayton joined the Shalom Fellowship.

By the time they reconvened for the *War* sessions, the band had convinced themselves

that it was OK with God for them to continue to pursue the U2 path. Steve Stockman, a Presbyterian minister in Ireland, wrote that, "The God that they met and have pilgrimaged with down the amazing road is a God who is bigger than church or religious boundaries." (*Walk On: The Spiritual Journey Of U2*.) The way Bono expressed it was that, "Everywhere I look, I see evidence of a Creator. But I don't see it as religion, which has cut my people in two."

Thus, the fiery, strident U2 which came storming out of the traps on *War* was a group pumped up with a renewed sense of mission. If Bono's latest batch of lyrics often suggested doubt, dread and a need for answers, there could be no denying the intensity and conviction with which he delivered them. By the time of their studio follow-up to *War*, *The Unforgettable Fire*, U2 would have discovered the joys of ambience and aural impressionism, so *War* stands now as the fullest flowering of the passionate, widescreen sound that was the hallmark of their early years.

CONTINUES OVER ►



U2: THE ALBUMS

U2 REVELATIONS

■ The boy whose face adorns *Boy* and *War* is Peter Rowen, brother of Virgin Prunes vocalist Derek 'Guggi' Rowen. Peter became a photographer, and the lensman for the *War* shoot, Ian Findlay, became a judge.

■ The Edge shelled out £15,000 for a *Spitting Image* puppet of Jarvis Cocker at a 2008 charity auction.

Audiences experienced their first taste of the band's renewed vigour with the single "New Year's Day", released in advance of the album at the start of 1983. It was an urgent, powerful rocker driven by a locked-tight rhythm section and a scalding display from The Edge, including one of his most dramatic solos.

Bono's vocal, meanwhile, was cranked up to such an emotional pitch that he sounded as if his head might be blown off his shoulders.

The accompanying video was shot in Sweden and depicted the band as a group of Cossack-like horsemen trekking through snow and fir trees, as well as "performing" the song, though obviously rigid with cold, under a white flag. In fact temperatures dropped so low that some Swedish girls had to be recruited, and disguised under layers of winterproof clothing, to replace the band for the horse-riding sequences.

Some say the song's lyrics allude to the Solidarity movement in Poland, while the video's intercut battlefield sequences from the Russian front in WWII suggested that the group's Christianity must be of the militant ilk. However, as its director Meiert Avis pointed out, Bono's lyric-writing technique, "often involves stripping out all the specifics of the original inspiration. What's left is poetic, universal and wide open to subjective projection. That's why everyone can relate U2 songs to their own lives." It's a shrewd observation about the way Bono and the band have been able to persuade listeners towards a presumed "meaning" of a song, without leaving a trail of evidence that would convict them in court.

The video's white-flag motif became a familiar stage prop for Bono during this period, sometimes earning him ridicule from sceptics for its "Onward Christian Soldiers" connotations. But it proved a potent and enduring symbol. Footage of him performing "Sunday Bloody Sunday" with the



Substance over style: with *War*, the band tackled the Troubles, global terrorism and conflicting general

War now stands as the fullest flowering of the passionate, widescreen sound of the early years

white flag in 1984's *Under a Blood Red Sky* film moved *Rolling Stone* to describe it as "the defining image of U2's warrior-rock spirit", and to include it in the magazine's 50 Moments That Changed The History Of Rock'n'Roll.

"Sunday..." was also the opening track on *War*, introduced by Larry Mullen's martial drumbeat before gathering pace with vocals, Edge's



guitar arpeggios, and some jagged punctuation from guest fiddler Steve Wickham (later to become a critical member of The Waterboys). On this occasion, as it happens, Bono had contributed one of his most specific lyrics. The title alone was enough to evoke the Irish Troubles and the notorious 1972 massacre of civilians in Derry, and Bono had added his own images of bodies in the streets, but he

intended the piece to deliver a healing message: *"How long must we sing this song?... we can be as one."* And to lift it beyond the plane of mundane realism altogether, he introduced a specific spiritual note by evoking the risen Christ: *"The real battle just begun/To claim the victory Jesus won."*

For an Irish band at that moment in history, these could have been dangerous waters indeed, and at least one Republican leader had a "Sunday Bloody Sunday" poster in his office. But U2 have always managed to hold the line between humanism and partisan political allegiance. Bono adopted the precaution of announcing that "This is not a rebel song" onstage, though the glaring exception was their performance of it in Denver preserved in the *Rattle And Hum* movie, the day after the atrocious Enniskillen bombing. "Fuck the revolution," he roared, sickened by Irish-Americans infatuated with rebel mythology.

Sandwiched between "Sunday..." and "New Year's Day" on the album was "Seconds", completing an opening trilogy of "statement" songs. The mood here was less frenetic but more tense, with Mullen laying down a measured beat over Clayton's almost-funk bassline as the focus shifted to the shadow-world of global terrorism. The depth of Bono's expertise on this topic was hard to gauge, but his depiction of nukes being assembled "in an apartment on Times Square" despatching us to oblivion in "a second" was chilling enough, the effect enhanced by some eerie, ethereal vocal overdubs. Any connection with The Human League's assassination song, also called "Seconds", might not have been entirely coincidental.

This first glimpse of a funkified U2 on "Seconds" turned out to be one of the disc's recurring subplots, and, in hindsight, quite a strange one. Though U2 had arrived on the comet-tail of post-punk, they'd seemed to owe little obvious allegiance to the movement, though of course their early supporters in Dublin had watched them taking their baby steps and working through their influences. Yet on *War*, there are several instances of U2 stepping sideways from their usual surging surround-sound into the angular funk of Gang Of Four or Shriekback, suggesting an allegiance to art-rock wholly at odds with their status as the ultimate major-label megaband.

Odder still, they didn't make a bad job of it. In "Two Hearts Beat As One", whose lyric might

have been a coded attack on New Romantic nightclub-pop, Clayton does his simple but effective funk thing on bass, even chucking in a few nifty thumb-slaps, while Edge sustains a frantic, razor-sharp jitter on rhythm guitar. Mullen, as ever, is as solid as St Paul's Cathedral on the traps. This was the first album on which he used a click-track in his headphones to ensure tighter time-keeping, and while he apologised afterwards for the way this had forced him to stick to simpler drum patterns than usual, it paid dividends in terms of the sheer uncluttered thwack he brought to the songs.

Better still was "Refugee", where they achieved a more successful fusion between a funk undercarriage and the melodic superstructure on top. The lyric, with its tale of a young woman abandoned because of some unspecified war and hoping to find sanctuary in America, was perhaps a portent of Bono's later escapades as international peace ambassador. Musically, the band successfully bound their headstrong vocalist to a tough, pulsing beat in which Edge's licks sliced across Clayton's floating bassline and some Afro-style cross-rhythms from Larry. The tribal chant of "wa-waaar" sprinkled on some additional

globalist flavour.

On the other hand, this experimental spirit could occasionally wander too far, as it did in the bizarre "Red Light". Evidently influenced as much by their experiences at New York's Danceteria as at the Hammersmith Palais, they'd imported a job lot of backup musicians from Kid Creole's Coconuts, including a squad of wailing female singers and trumpeter Kenny Fradley. Fradley's squealing Latino soloing was technically impressive, but wheeling out Mrs Mills to play piano would have been no more incongruous. Elsewhere, the band wisely stuck to their strengths. "Drowning Man", while not a major achievement, made atmospheric use of its simple drifting structure,

enhancing the mood with some more of Wickham's fiddle and some pingy harmonics from Edge, while Mullen tiptoed around his kit with brushes. "Like A Song" opened with what sounded like Mullen boarding up the windows with a hammer and nails, then promptly burst forth into the kind of euphoric rush that they'd trademarked on *Boy*. The Edge, in particular, hurtled through the song as though snowboarding down a vertical ski-run.

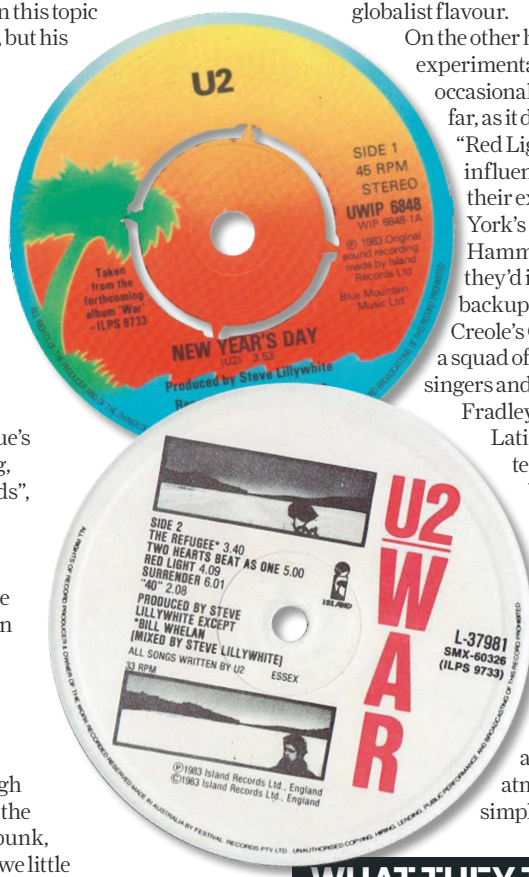
They saved a couple of choice morsels until last. "Surrender" told the story of a certain Sadie, who "tried to be a good girl and a good wife", but inexplicably found she could only explore the meaning of her life by living on the 48th floor. The band squeezed much more from this material than it possibly deserved, constructing an attractively loose groove over which Edge assembled a steeping edifice of squeaks, shimmers, slides and echoey clangs, while the backing girls traded vocal chants with Bono as the track strolled unhurriedly to the fade. Its open-ended structure was surely designed to make a perfect vehicle for the singer's lengthy walkabouts and crowd excursions during the live shows.

And finally came "40", as hymnlike a song as you'd expect, given that Bono had adapted the lyrics from the Bible's 40th Psalm. Its cyclical structure and aura of spiritual calm were just the job for its message of gratitude for God's forgiveness, and brought the album's various traumas and torments to a soothing close.

Although Gavin Martin wrote in *NME* that, "*War* is another example of rock music's impotence and decay," this was not the prevailing critical view of the album. "Sunday Bloody Sunday" and "New Year's Day" were hailed as instant classics, and the power and scope of the group's sound earned favourable comparisons to everybody from The Who to The Clash. It rocketed straight to No 1 in the UK, and while it didn't quite pierce the US Top 10, it successfully restored the band's Stateside lustre after *October*'s failure to crack the Top 100.

Perhaps above all, *War* proved that U2 were capable of making stirring, emotional music that addressed big issues of faith, conflict, love and terror at a time when substance seemed woefully lacking in pop. Bono often felt irked by the superficiality of the British record business, where fashion sense and how many yachts and supermodels you had in your videos often outweighed musical considerations.

"*War* is meant to be a slap in the face," he declared. "A slap in the glossy, made-up-to-be-pretty face which is the music of most of our contemporaries..." **BB**



WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "Too often, this seems like *October Part II*. 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' is a catalogue of horrors... How should we react to Bono's question, 'How long must we sing this song?' The cynical will reply: 'You've accrued enough royalties already to retire comfortably' **Steve Lake, Melody Maker, February 12, 1983**

■ "*War* overreaches itself... Rock music as a naïve, communal 'we-can-change-the-world' pursuit went rigor mortis when The Rolling Stones played Altamont, and Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and Jim Morrison topped themselves..." **Gavin Martin, NME, February 26, 1983**

“People are grow
with pap...”



ing disillusioned



NME FEBRUARY 26, 1983 Just when the synthpop junta proclaims guitars are obsolete, U2 storm into the mainstream. **ADRIAN THRILLS** joins the quartet for a heated debate on *War*, peace, the state of music and the state of the world. Too earnest? “I think part of the fun,” says Bono, “is seeing us fall flat on our feet and then get back up again.”



S

ome will claim it was an epitaph for the New Pop. Some will even herald the start of a rock revival, although the rockers' revenge seems more appropriate. But whatever it signalled,

something strange happened to the nation's singles chart last month.

First came Wah!'s "The Story Of The Blues"; next it was Echo And The Bunnymen's "The Cutter"; then the haunting hues of "New Year's Day" took their place in the Top 10, and suddenly the singles charts was beginning to resemble an *NME* Readers' Poll. The Class Of '79 were suddenly coming good commercially.

Bono Vox, the lyrical lead voice of U2, wisely refuses to be drawn into any sweeping generalisations, but permits himself a wry smile at this slightly unlikely turn of the tide.

"It would be stupid to start drawing up battle lines, but I think the fact that 'New Year's Day' made the Top 10 indicated a disillusionment among record buyers. I don't think 'New Year's Day' was a pop single, certainly not in the way that Mickie Most might define a pop single as something that lasts three minutes and three weeks in the chart. I don't think we could have written that kind of song.

"People are growing disillusioned with pop, with the wallpaper music and the gloss. It's as if someone has eaten too many Smarties over the last couple of years, and they're beginning to feel ill as they look at all the wrapping paper strewn around the room."

Distanced from the bustle of British pop by the Irish Sea and by their own purity of purpose, U2 have just released their third album, *War*. Produced, like the last two, by Steve Lillywhite and recorded in the isolation of

a song about the bomb ("Seconds"), which features fragmented excerpts from last year's chilling television documentary, *Soldier Girls*. Even the love songs on *War* are fierce and direct, largely shunning the more delicate lyricism of the earlier albums.

Just as the words have become more incisive, so the music is now much more robust. U2 are a rock rarity – a band who have actually become tougher with maturity rather than blanding out as most of their contemporaries have done. *War* is the group at their most rhythmic. Their sound is rooted in drummer Larry Mullen's shuddering tub-thumping and bassist Adam Clayton's bewildering percussive patterns. Guitarist The Edge is less dominant than before, the traditional solos of the axe hero superseded by intuitive excursions in tonality and harmonics that put an eerie veneer over the rock-solid foundations.

The new material is not always successful, the band occasionally tripping over their own blustery intensity, but one or two songs are quite devastating in their ferocity. The bittersweet "Like A Song", for example, is probably the finest realisation of the thrash ethic since Wah!'s epic "Seven Minutes To Midnight" single.

Another significant departure on *War* is the manner in which U2 have extended their musical base to include some outside assistance in the shape of electric violinist Steve Wickham [subsequently of *The Waterboys*], Coconut Cheryl Poirier, Adriana Kaegi and Taryn Hagey, and Kid Creole trumpet player Kenny Fradley on a couple of tracks. There are plans, too, to have the entire album remixed by New York studio whiz François Kevorkian, the man behind the console on the D Train singles and the successful US remix of Yazoo's "Situation".

Further proof of U2's emergence from their



U2 live on *The Tube* television show, Newcastle, March 1983

"We are winning. We are beating the businessmen at their own game by conquering the USA on our own terms..." – Bono

Windmill Lane studios in their native Dublin, the album is a vital watershed in their growth. Bono describes it as "a slap in the face", and regards it as the most important move they have ever made. The songs on their two previous albums, *Boy* and *October*, showed a young band coming to terms with themselves – with the journey from adolescence to a fragile manhood.

The new LP is different in that U2 are now facing out rather than inwards; they are now coming to terms with the outside world, and that means coming to terms with the horror of the Falklands, Beirut, Central America, the nuclear threat and the strife of their own battle-torn backyard in Ulster – coming to terms with war. Not all the songs are directly about war, but those that are rank among the most powerful the band have yet recorded. There is a plaintive scream for compassion in Ulster ("Sunday Bloody Sunday"), an acknowledgement of the struggle of Solidarity ("New Year's Day") and the black humour of

cocoon will come later in the year when they begin work on a ballet score for a Dublin theatre. For now, though, the spotlight is on U2 as one of the country's top live bands – they start a UK tour shortly – and on the near-vocational passion of their new LP.

U2 have always been romantics. They are one of the few bands to retain the idealism of 1976, looking on rock music as a great quest rather than a career. Bono's punk-inspired ideals might appear quaint in the colder musical climate of 1983, but they remain essential to any understanding of U2.

"People see us as four guys who are uprooted from their city of Dublin and thrown across the world," he says. "And we are winning. We are beating the businessmen at their own game by conquering the USA on our own terms. We might not be this week's thing, but that will never bother us."

The following interview took place at various locations one Sunday afternoon in Dublin.

Bono – the aggressive pacifist – practically jumps out of his skin when he talks, his spirit and fire a sharp contrast with the softer approach of The Edge, the suave assurance of Adam and the watchful demeanour of Larry. Bono will talk of "credibility" and "commitment" and make it ring true, his confidence never crossing over into conceit – his belief in the U2 way is total, but it doesn't deny the value of some of the other options. Being among the last of the rock idealists sometimes seems a good place to be.

Why *War*?

BONO: War seemed to be the motif for 1982. Everywhere you looked, from the Falklands to the Middle East and South Africa, there was war. By calling the LP *War* we're giving people a slap in the face and getting away from the cosy image that a lot of people have of U2.

EDGE: It's a heavy title. It's blunt. It's not something that's safe, so it could backfire. It's



the sort of subject matter that people can really take a dislike to. But we wanted to take a more dangerous course, fly a bit closer to the wind, so I think the title is appropriate. *October* and *Boy* both had a key to the songs in the title and this one is no different. Not all the songs are about war, but it's a good general heading.

The images conjured up by the songs are a far cry from what people might expect from U2. On *Boy* and *October*, the imagery possessed an almost spiritual purity, whereas the songs on *War* seem far more gruesome and horrific.

BONO: A lot of the songs on our last album were quite abstract, but *War* is intentionally more direct, more specific. But you can still take the title on a lot of different levels. We're not only interested in the physical aspects of war. The emotional effects are just as important, "*the trenches dug within our hearts*".

People have become numb to violence. Watching the television, it's hard to tell the difference between fact and fiction. One minute you see something being shot on *The Professionals*, and the next you see someone falling through a window after being shot on the news. One is fiction and one is real life, but we're becoming so used to the fiction that we become numb to the real thing. *War* could be the

story of a broken home, a family at war. Instead of putting tanks and guns on the cover, we've put a child's face. War can also be a mental thing, an emotional thing between loves. It doesn't have to be a physical thing.

The most obvious context is the nuclear threat. You deal with it on "Seconds", but you'd also touched on it before on last year's "A Celebration" single: "I believe in the Third World War/I believe in the atomic bomb." Was that a pointer to some of the songs on the album?

BONO: All I was saying was that the realities of the bomb must be faced: "*I believe in the powers that be/But they won't overpower me.*"

EDGE: People are starting to ask more questions about the bomb. In the past, people have been more apathetic. They have become so caught up with their own lives that they haven't looked outside. Now they are asking what the hell is going on.

ADAM: I think people are ready to take a more militant

stance to protect their future as the rise of the CND movement shows.

BONO: Before we can overcome these things we have to face them. There is a line in "Seconds" about a fanatic assembling a nuclear device in an apartment in Times Square, New York, but it could be anywhere. We are now entering the age of nuclear terrorism where a group of fanatics could have the capabilities of bringing a bomb into a city and holding millions of people to ransom.

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Live in America, circa '83: a fan throws a US flag on stage... Bono cuts it up and throws it back



Live at Hammersmith Odeon, March 1983

“Sunday Bloody Sunday” – the obvious assumption is that it’s about the troubles in Ulster....

ADAM: It isn’t so much about the Troubles in the physical sense, but about the human carnage of families being wrecked.

EDGE: We all had a hand in that song, because it’s probably the heaviest thing we’ve ever done, lyrically. It’s hard for us to justify a title like “Sunday Bloody Sunday”, and we are aware of that. We realise the potential for division in a song like that, so all we can say is that we’re trying to confront the subject rather than sweep it under the carpet.

We thought a lot about the song before we played it in Belfast and Bono told the audience that if they didn’t like it then we’d never play it again. Out of the 3,000 people in the hall about three walked out. I think that says a lot about the audience’s trust in us.

ADAM: Being based in Dublin, we decided that it was morally wrong that we weren’t coming to terms with *[the subject]* ourselves. Before “Sunday Bloody Sunday” it was something that we ourselves had been sweeping under the carpet.

It’s the same dilemma that The Undertones had to face before they wrote songs like

time we wrote the song, we didn’t know that martial law was going to be lifted on New Year’s Day. We were just saying that no matter how much people try to change the situation, things are always more or less the same at the start of every new year.

A lot of people have grown tired of rock bands wearing their social conscience on their sleeve. Isn’t it all a bit self-righteous?

EDGE: The position of any band talking about the topics of their day is always a very delicate one. The only justification I can give is that we are expressing our convictions. I can see how it can appear patronising, but it depends on one’s motivations. There are a lot of things we could get pulled up on. If people don’t like it, then that is understandable, but we will be standing by what we’ve done.

A lot of the songs on *War* are inter-related. Are we witnessing the return of the dreaded concept album?

EDGE: No, definitely not. That would imply that every song on the album is part of a jigsaw, which isn’t the case. The title is a key to some of the songs, but not all of them are about war: “Surrender” is inspired by New York; “Two

to offer something positive then it can be very uplifting. If you use your songs to convey bitterness and hate, a blackness seems to descend over everything. I don’t like music unless it has a healing effect. I don’t like it when people leave concerts still feeling edgy. I want people to leave our concerts feeling positive, a bit more free.

Things might look very gloomy, but there is always hope. I think there is a need to develop a new political language to get over what is happening. Unemployment will not decrease. The new computer technology will eventually wipe out the clerical classes, and office workers will be a thing of the past. Millions of people are already on the dole with a lot of leisure time. They are going to have to be re-educated in order to make better use of that

time. A lot of people can’t handle these times and they are turning to things like heavy drug use. In the area of Dublin where I live there are 15-year-old kids using heroin. They can buy little ten-packs for £10. A lot of people just can’t handle this age.

Are you afraid?

BONO: I’m frightened, yes, but I’m not cynical or pessimistic about the future and a lot of that must come down to my beliefs. It is my belief in God that enables me to get up in the morning and face the world. I believe that there is a reason and a logic to everything. If I didn’t believe that and thought that everything was simply down to chance, then I’d be really afraid. I wouldn’t cross the road for fear of being run over.

You say you are sustained by your Christian beliefs. What about human nature? Do you have any faith in that?

BONO: I don’t know. It’s fine to think that everyone is nice, man, and people are really swell, but there is still this capacity in man for terrible violence. I see that aggression in myself sometimes, and I see it in other people. The secret is to come to terms with it. The century that we are living in is the most barbaric ever. In the past men committed atrocities without being fully aware of what they were doing. Now man has been educated, but the atrocities are still going on. But I still have my beliefs, not so much in people, but in what lies behind people. That comes across in the music.

War is not a negative LP. I mean, I’m in love and there is a lot of love on the album. A song like “New Year’s Day” might be about war and struggle, but it is also about love. It is about having the faith to break through and survive against all odds. Love is a very powerful thing. There’s nothing more radical than two people loving each other.

When I talk about love I’m thinking of an unselfish love. Emotions can be

CONTINUES OVER ►

“Maybe we’ll get sick of guitars, but for now they convey our emotions best” – The Edge

“Crisis Of Mind” and “It’s Gonna Happen” – coming to terms with something that was occurring on your own doorstep. But what about “New Year’s Day”, which is about Poland? What do you think qualified U2 to make pronouncements about something like that?

ADAM: It’s not a comment on the situation, more an acknowledgement of Solidarity. At the

Hearts” is a love song; and “Drowning Man” is a very restful, peaceful song.

Considering the seriousness of some of its subject matter, *War* could have been a very grim and pessimistic album, but you also hold out a certain amount of hope.

BONO: You have to have hope. Rock music can be a very powerful medium and if you use that



U2: ARCHIVE 1983

bought and sold just like anything else, but I think real love is about giving and not expecting anything in return.

So the album could just as easily have been called *Love* – love as a weapon against repression? You seem to be saying that one can't appreciate the true value of love until it is set against the hatred and lunacy of the outside world...

BONO: I think that love stands out when set against struggle. That's probably the power of the record in a nutshell. The album is about the struggle for love, not about war in the negative sense. I would be failing in this interview if I made *War* sound like a gloomy album, because it's not. I hope it's an uplifting record. Some love songs devalue the meaning of the word. Disco bands turn it into a cliché by tearing it down until it means nothing. The power of love is always more striking when set against realism than when set against escapism.

There are those who will seize on the fact that U2, Wah! and the Bunnymen were all in the Top 10 a few weeks ago as a signal that "rock" is back; worthy old rock as 1983's

alternative to the disposable pop trash that dominated the singles chart in '82. Do you see U2 as a "rock" group?

ADAM: If you were to file us under anything in a record shop, I suppose it would have to be under 'rock'. But I think it is a very false divide. 'Rock' and 'pop' cross over in so many places that I don't think you can start putting bands in neat little boxes like that. Look at a group like The Doors in the '60s: they were very much a rock group, but they were also having pop hits like "Light My Fire".

U2 exist within a traditional rock format in that your sound is basically guitar, bass and drums. How would you counter the currently fashionable claims that the format is redundant after 25 years or so? There was a letter in [NME letters page] Gasbag a fortnight ago alleging that U2 were no more than a "chugging" progressive rock band with their hearts back in the early '70s.

EDGE: Anyone who can react in such a superficial, instinctive way would miss the point of what we're doing anyway, even if they liked it. They're the sort of people who base their taste on fashion and whim. I don't think

people who go to our concerts are particularly interested in what is trendy. They appreciate us on a far more gut level. They're not bothered that we're just playing guitar, bass and drums.

BONO: We've chosen to work within that format, even though a lot of people threw it out the window a couple of years ago. It suits what we want to do. We want a joust. The guitar, bass and drum setup is good for giving people a good slap in the face.

Your instruments are only lumps of wood anyway. They're hardly the best criteria to judge the worth of a band.

BONO: We believe that passion is more important than technique. 1975 was all about style and technique. Herbie Hancock and jazz-rock, and 1982 was pretty much the same with groups like Level 42. I believe we need that slap in the face once more. The sort of thing that we got in 1976. The elitist thing has got to be smashed down again. It's like Orwell's *Animal Farm*: the pigs have all become farmers! The bands that were our contemporaries, the garage bands of 1976, are back on the big star trip. They're playing the part of the people they pulled down. It's either intellectual crap or patronising gloss.

EBET ROBERTS/REDFERNS



Live at the San Bernardino festival, California, May 1983

ADAM: To be candid, I would have liked to have been part of the fashion scene that was going on in London two years ago. It would have been nice to dress up and go to Club For Heroes. Being the weakest member of the band emotionally, I wanted to do that, but I couldn't. It was the forbidden fruit. In retrospect, there's a strength through having turned it all down. If I'd gone to London, it would have trivialised what I was doing in U2. At the time, though, there was a certain conflict because what was happening in London did look exciting.

But it was exciting. There was excitement in the way that London clubs were confronting the drabness of rock. What they offered as an alternative might have lacked substance, but that conflict did produce a certain tension...

ADAM: There was nothing in it in retrospect, but at the time it did seem exciting. Watching from the sidelines, I felt that I wanted to be a part of it, but somehow I just couldn't.

BONO: We see London as outsiders and probably have more objectivity through that. It's good to be able to go to London and then escape from it, never letting it become a trap.

we're branching out into new areas it's because we need to. We're not pandering to any outside demands. We are always aware of what is happening musically, but we're not prepared to let it dictate our style.

Is being on Island an advantage? They seem to be a label who will always allow a band to develop rather than expect some immediate commercial return.

EDGE: The criterion with Island is quality, whereas with other labels it is purely sales. Island always hang on to a good act, even if that act is not selling records. Sometimes they have shied away from signing an act that would have made them money simply because Chris Blackwell wants a label that he can be proud of, perhaps more than he wants the money. Island is more or less an extension of his own musical taste, so he is always keen to prolong the longevity of all his acts. Perhaps he would have liked us to have a hit earlier on, but he must be happy now that we're having hits without losing our dignity.

How did the liaison with François Kevorkian come about?

BONO: It came about through Chris Blackwell. Kevorkian's biggest ambition is to remix Jimi Hendrix, so Chris Blackwell gave him what he considered the next best thing, The Edge! The good thing about Kevorkian is that he won't just do the usual dance mix cliché. He just takes the master tapes and plays around with the sounds already on them. Kevorkian is Martin Hannett part two. He's got the same Dr Who features and he leads you into his garden of weeds in the same way that Hannett does.

Another direction in which you are extending your interests is the forthcoming ballet soundtrack. What inspired that?

EDGE: It originally came from the proprietor of the Royal Dublin Ballet. He had this idea of

Do you ever worry about appearing too earnest? Sometimes, particularly onstage, you almost fall over your own two feet in the rush to project your own passion.

BONO: Sometimes we fail and I'll be the first to admit that. Sometimes we go over the top and miss the point altogether, but I know that our music means a hell of a lot to our audience from the letters that we receive; not the fan letters, but letters that actually go into the music and take it seriously. I think part of the fun of being a U2 fan is seeing us fall flat on our feet and then get back up again.

Have you ever got to the stage of not wanting to go on?

BONO: Yeah, about once a week! When we were making *War* we went practically to the brink of breaking the band. When we go into the studio we draw totally on our deepest resources and stretch them to the limit. If the band is going to be honest, they've got to bring out everything, even the things that might frighten them.

EDGE: I want U2 to be a band that takes risks. I hate this idea of U2 as a nice safe band. Maybe it's because we don't play the rock'n'roll game. We don't do drugs or get arrested in America or smash up hotels or get our willies out on stage. All that is just conforming to rock tradition. The rock rebel thing is very phoney.

ADAM: I don't think it's very likely that we'll give in now. The longer we go on, the more interesting things become. I can see us going through an awful lot of changes that I would never have imagined when we first got going. At first it was just a simple case of playing for fun. Now it's very different. Perhaps it's maturity, perhaps it's down to Bono getting married last year and The Edge getting married this year, but as we mature the frantic teenage issues that we were concerned with early on are changing into something else, something more complex.

And so the quest goes on...

BONO: Yeah, and I feel that we're winning at the moment. In some ways, U2 are only really being born

now. Right now, it feels good. I think there is a certain insight in this group, a certain ability to see human emotions and expose them honestly. There are a lot of clichéd songs around in the charts. The fiction factory loves churning out superficial songs about the same old subjects. That's just something we refuse to do. This might sound egotistical, but I think we'll always retain our honesty.

ADAM: Basically, I think we're all nutters, but somehow it works. It always comes out in the wash. ☺☺

Come on, it's not that bad! You can't write off a city like that.

BONO: No, I'm not saying that. I love London, but the fact that we are based in Dublin, away from all the activity, does give us our own perspective.

Prior to *War*, U2 grew up in almost total isolation, oblivious to outside trends and influences. Now you seem to be broadening your

“François Kevorkian's biggest ambition is to remix Jimi Hendrix, but instead he's got the next best thing: The Edge!” – Bono

scope, enlisting the likes of the Coconuts, Kenny Fradley and François Kevorkian to embellish your sound. There's even a 12in dance mix of “Two Hearts” due for single release!

EDGE: Up to now, we've defined our own terms, and if

using contemporary music with his company. He got in touch with us and also with Arlene Phillips, who is the kind of choreographer who has an understanding of working with rock music.

Things are at an early stage at the moment, but we have done some stuff for it, using synthesisers and drum machines. We're not scared to broaden our musical base. Maybe at one stage we'll get sick of guitars, but at the moment they are the best vehicle for what we want to say with U2. They convey our emotions best.



UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY

How do you make North America fall in love with you? By playing a drizzly, half-full arena in Colorado, obviously. BY JOHN LEWIS

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **Gloria** ★★★★★
- 2 **11 O'Clock Tick Tock** ★★★★★
- 3 **I Will Follow** ★★★★★
- 4 **Party Girl** ★★
- 5 **Sunday Bloody Sunday** ★★★★★
- 6 **The Electric Co** ★★★★★
- 7 **New Year's Day** ★★★★★
- 8 **40** ★★★★★

Released: November 7, 1983
Produced by: Jimmy Iovine
Recorded live at: Denver, Colorado, Boston, Massachusetts (on the Effanel Music Mobile Facility) and St Goarshausen, West Germany
Chart position: UK: 1 US: 28

“We always wanted to separate ourselves from the groups that play ‘little music’ which has no heart or soul, no grandness of vision to it, and which all sounds very small,” said

Bono, talking to *Trouser Press* in 1982. “We want to achieve a cinematic, big screen, Panavision sound.”

While producer Steve Lillywhite had facilitated that on record, U2 were having trouble translating the sound to a live environment. Even Paul Morley, one of the group’s few champions in the weekly music press in those early years, felt that U2’s live shows veered into heavy metal indulgence. “Live, U2 have been appallingly erratic,” he wrote. “Nervous, over-eager, musically unsure.” Chris Salewicz, in a 1980 *NME* live review where U2 were supporting Echo And The Bunnymen, had been harsher still, witheringly describing Bono as a clownish

fusion of Rod Stewart and Bob Geldof.

Clearly, U2 had problems keeping their sound within the confines of the modestly sized venues that they were playing. Those flarey drums, widescreen guitars and howling vocals needed space to breathe. “If we stay in small clubs we develop small minds,” said Bono in 1982, “and then we’ll start making small music.” U2, then, needed *lebensraum*.

Prior to the 1983 summer tour from which this album was culled, U2 had become big news in much of Europe, with *War* topping the UK charts in March 1983. But in the States they seemed to have hit the glass ceiling faced by every other “college rock” outfit. Their manager, Paul McGuinness, came up with an elaborate wheeze to really break them over the Atlantic – to film them playing a huge outdoor American arena, and get the result screened on MTV. If you made U2 look like a top-grossing live act, reasoned McGuinness, people would believe that they really were, and they would become one. All **CONTINUES OVER ►**

The album cover for U2's 'Live Under a Blood Red Sky' features a monochromatic, high-contrast image. The background is a deep, textured red. In the lower-left foreground, a dark silhouette of a person is shown in a crouched or crawling position, facing right. A thin, vertical white line runs down the center of the image, passing behind the silhouette. In the upper right corner, the text 'U2' is printed in a large, bold, white sans-serif font. Directly beneath 'U2', the word 'LIVE' is written in a smaller, white sans-serif font, with each letter separated by a small gap. Below 'LIVE', the phrase '“UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY”' is written in a white sans-serif font, with the first and last words enclosed in quotation marks. A thin white horizontal line is positioned at the bottom of the text block.

U2
L I V E
“UNDER A
BLOOD RED
SKY”





you needed to do was project the aura of success, and that success would become a self-fulfilling prophecy.

McGuinness eventually chose the suitably epic environment of the Red Rocks amphitheatre in Denver, Colorado, and used a small crew from Channel 4's music weekly *The Tube* to film the concert. After investing nearly all of his and the band's capital in the project, though, McGuinness looked on in horror as the whole plan seemed to lurch into disaster. Instead of the sweltering heat that they expected for early June, the band arrived to find a venue drenched in perpetual drizzle, as the temperatures plummeted to late-winter levels. Electrical cables were soaked, support bands had to be cancelled for safety reasons, and only 4,400 punters turned up in a spectacular outdoor amphitheatre that held nearly 11,000.

As it happened, all these drawbacks worked in U2's favour. The rain turned to dramatic mist, the gig took on the aura of a paganistic tribal gathering, and the audience, having struggled to the venue in dismal weather, took on the mantle of pilgrims. Bono, shrouded in

steam and shot from below, looked suitably messianic. The spectacular setting – cut into a red-rock cliff face – looked like the set of a Cecil B DeMille movie, and the film of the concert finally broke them into the big league in America.

Under *A Blood Red Sky* was billed as the soundtrack to *Live At Red Rocks*, but actually, only two tracks from the album – “Gloria” and “Party Girl” – were recorded in Denver. The others were recorded at the Loreley Amphitheater in St Goarshausen in (what was then West) Germany for WDR Television's *Rockpalast 83*. “11 O’Clock Tick Tock”, meanwhile, came from a show at the Orpheum Theater in Boston. It leaves the package slightly disjointed – lacking the narrative quality of the *Live At Red Rocks* audio track – but it still serves as an example of arena rock at its best.

On record, the reverb-drenched drum sound pioneered by producer Steve Lillywhite seemed to disappear into the void. Live, given the correct ambient space, those drums are effectively soaked up by an adoring crowd. What’s especially thrilling about *Under A Blood Red Sky* is hearing the whole band master the

dynamics of playing a big venue. On the album’s opening track, “Gloria”, for instance, Larry Mullen’s echo-laden, “Ticket To Ride” drums utterly occupy the amphitheatre, while The Edge has learned the less-is-more truism of playing large venues. On “Gloria” he only needs to play a minimal series of harmonics on his instrument – he knows that the audience’s offbeat chants will perform

the function of a rhythm guitar.

It’s followed by “I Will Follow” which, more than any other U2 track, sounds like Joy Division retooled for the stadium circuit.

U2 REVELATIONS

■ U2 were fourth on the bill for the Loreley Festival on August 20, 1983, a performance captured by West German TV show *Rockpalast 83* and then used for six tracks on...*Blood Red Sky*. The band were billed ahead of Dave Edmunds, but behind Stray Cats, Joe Cocker and Steve Miller, who was the headline act.



U2's tribal gathering: rain turned to dramatic mist at the Red Rocks amphitheatre in Denver, Colorado

Among their early '80s peers, U2 were commonly regarded as a Joy Division for thickoes. "They made music for plumbers and bricklayers," sneered Ian McCulloch from Echo And The Bunnymen, who went on to describe them as "flag-waving born agains... who appealed to the lowest-common-denominator emotions."

A calling card for their live shows, this remains a fascinating and thrilling example of U2's mastery of arena rock craft

These objections kind of missed the point. Bono had no truck with the doom-laden post-punk introspection that Joy Division had inspired; he was more interested in the messianic intensity that Ian Curtis commanded. To this end, the live version of "I Will Follow" takes the brutal bassline from "Transmission" and tops it with Bono's evangelical fervour to absolutely thrilling

a military fanfare. No wonder they dropped the song from their live sets for the best part of a decade.

"New Year's Day", their best-known song at the time, here sounds anthemic, majestic and better than ever, while even the dull filler tracks from *Boy* are transformed into thrilling, stadium-sized monsters. Whereas the album version of "The Electric Co" is

effect, while "40" (which closes this album) sounds a little like Joy Division pulling off a joyful singalong. Unlike their moody, greycoated post-punk peers, U2 wanted to make music that was consciously expansive, inclusive and uplifting. Bono, like

Springsteen, rejected the notion of pop as being divisive and rebellious. Rock'n'roll wasn't to be wasted on petty punk wars or generation gaps. It was part of the social glue that held society together. "Ultimately, the group is totally rebellious," said Bono, "because of our stance against what people accept as rebellious."

Using pop music as a vehicle for hope and redemption was an uplifting ethos that would eventually turn U2 into something of an NGO, preaching unity in Sarajevo, marking the end of dictatorships in Latin America and calling popes and presidents on speed-dial. Bono's quasi-political positive punk is most obvious in this live version of "Sunday Bloody Sunday", here taken from the German gig. "There's been a lot of talk about this song," announces Bono in the intro. "Maybe too much talk. This song is not a rebel song. This is 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'."

The quote is clearly a dig at the Provos and their American sympathisers, who had started to use the song as a rallying cry for militant republicanism. Because they hadn't listened to the line, "*I won't heed the battle call/It puts my back up/Puts my back up against the wall*", Bono felt the need to hammer home his anti-sectarian, anti-violence, anti-paramilitary sentiments. To this end he started to brandish his huge white flag when he sang the song at concerts, the resulting image appearing on the album cover and becoming a key point in the *Live At Red Rocks* film. But if Bono is preaching against the futility of war and terrorism ("*The trench is dug within our hearts/And mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart*"), he's undermined by the rest of the band, as Mullen thumps out a rigid, martial tattoo on the snare drum and The Edge's arpeggios sound like

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "Anyone who has caught the full blast of the band live has to admit it's a rare old shiver... At their best, U2 achieve a kind of grace through simplicity. One can only hope we've not already heard the best of this band"

Adam Sweeting, *Melody Maker*, November 26, 1983

■ "I can't believe in U2, but I can get quite a charge from their soaring soda-fountain of passion... Pity this isn't the wall-of-heroinics document it could and should've been" Barney Hoskyns, *NME*, November 26, 1983

almost eaten away from the inside by The Edge's swarm-of-wasps guitar, the live version gives the whole band sufficient room to breathe, with Bono given space to extemporise along with the guitar freakout. Hold on to your old vinyl versions, by the way: the full 5'18 version of "The Electric Co" sees Bono's vocal improvisations culminate in a half-minute quote from "Send In The Clowns" – after Stephen Sondheim's lawyers objected, Bono's meanderings were edited out of all subsequent releases, leaving us with a version that lasts 4'50.

The one track that's at odds with the rest of the album is their 1982 b-side, "Party Girl". It sounds like a strange indie-pop vestige from an earlier age, with The Edge, never the best rhythm-guitar player, sounding stiff and awkward as he tries to play a jangly accompaniment. A couple of minutes in – when he starts to play a weedy, mostly out-of-tune solo – Bono unironically declares, "Yeah! Guitar hero!"

Running at 35 minutes, the album was released as a budget-priced "mini-LP" (retailing at £3.49 in the UK where other albums would have set you back at least £4.49). It reached No 2 in the UK charts and, astonishingly, spent nearly four years in the Top 75; sales picked up again after U2's stadium-conquering appearance at Live Aid in 1985. In the States it reached No 28, and laid the groundwork for the success of *The Unforgettable Fire* the following year.

Although the album served as a calling card for U2's live shows – inspiring later records such as *Rattle And Hum* and the "Wide Awake In America" EP – it didn't quell the growing industry for live U2 bootleg tapes. It also led to the band getting suspicious of the rapturous reception that they were starting to get at their live shows.

"When the energy of the crowd is so brutal," Bono told *People* magazine, "the spirit of the music flees and all you're left with is crashing drums and clanging guitars."

Brian Eno would later help them resolve this dilemma. But *Under A Blood Red Sky* remains a fascinating and thrilling example of U2's mastery of arena rock craft. **BB**

THE UNFORGETTABLE FIRE

Ambience. Majesty. Brian Eno. Phase Two brings atmosphere to the anthems...

BY BARNEY HOSKYNS

TRACKMARKS

- 1 A Sort Of Homecoming ★★★
- 2 Pride ★★★★★
- 3 Wire ★★★★★
- 4 The Unforgettable Fire ★★★★★
- 5 Promenade ★★★
- 6 4th Of July ★★★
- 7 Bad ★★★★★
- 8 Indian Summer Sky ★★★
- 9 Elvis Presley And America ★★★
- 10 MLK ★★★

Released: October 1, 1984
Produced by: Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois
Recorded at: Slane Castle, Co Meath and Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin
Additional vocals, instruments and treatments: Eno/Lanois;
String arrangement: Noel Kelehan
Fairlight: Paul Barrett
Chart position: UK:1 US:12



My only real brush with U2 was at the time of *The Unforgettable Fire*, a time when they were at their first major crossroads, uncertain of which direction to turn. As a band, they were a mere eight years old, desperately striving to out-grow the callow anthemics of their first four albums.

I was there and I did witness first-hand the power and the glory, the angelic majesty of U2 as the canny Paul McGuinness plotted their charm-offensive assault on the USA. I remember the band playing Hartford, Connecticut, and Philly's vast Spectrum: Bono in total control, an overgrown Boy playing the part of Rock Star so ardently you wanted to believe he was the real thing. How badly did America want to love Bono? How badly did Bono want to love the country he hymned in "Elvis Presley And America"?

"I think I'm a kind of part-time rock'n'roll star," Bono told me. "We're probably the worst

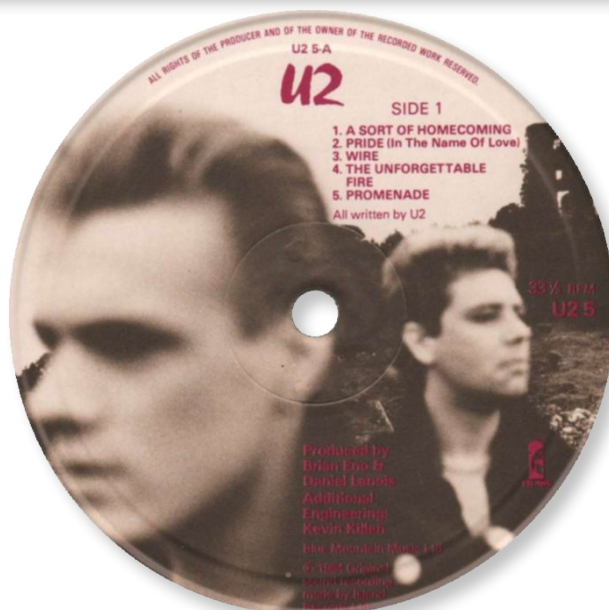
rock stars ever. Part of it with us is the falling over and picking ourselves up off the ground, part of it is sitting up late at night in Philadelphia and saying something that will put a noose around my neck. I met Elvis Costello a few months ago and he said to me, 'I'm ambivalent about U2, I love it and I hate it.' He said, 'You walk this tightrope that none of your contemporaries will walk – they're afraid to walk it – and when you stay on it I bow my head. But you fall off it so many times.'"

For a moment there, U2 afforded a genuine guilty pleasure, earning me the considerable scorn of *NME* colleagues. Yes, Bono charmed even me, pushed me into a Philadelphia taxi and asked its driver to take us to the nearest decent diner – surely knowing the waitresses would drop their plates in disbelief at the sight of him – for our interview. I couldn't help liking him, and I still believe he's a good man. I've just never been sure rock'n'roll is about good men.

Following 1983's strident *War* and *Under A Blood Red Sky*, U2 knew the world's stadiums were theirs for the taking. But

CONTINUES OVER ►

A black and white photograph of a large, ivy-covered stone ruin, likely a castle or fortress, under a dramatic, cloudy sky. Two people are standing in the foreground on a grassy field, providing a sense of scale. The structure features several tall, narrow towers and large arched openings.





Unforgettable
U2, 1984: "band
of the decade"

With *The Unforgettable Fire*, U2 broke through to the true mass audience they've retained to the present day...

they didn't want to be crass about it. They wanted at least a smidgeon of the cred their *NME*-fêted peers, from Joy Division to Echo And The Bunnymen, had been accorded. They'd made their first three albums with the orthodox Steve Lillywhite, and even he allegedly suggested they try someone new next time.

Where could a band of trusty young arena-fillers turn to subvert their own breastbeating Red Rocks power? They turned to Brian Eno, whose work with Talking Heads – on *Fear Of Music* and *Remain In Light*, in particular – suggested he could “treat” U2's three-chords-and-the-truth evangelism in

ways that might give their sound richer, artier dimensions.

Eno initially demurred – said he wasn't really interested in producing rock bands any more.

U2 REVELATIONS

■ The castle pictured on the front cover of *The Unforgettable Fire* is called Moydrum, and is just outside Athlone in County Westmeath. The castle on the back cover is Carrickgogunnell in County Tipperary.

Nor did Island boss Chris Blackwell want the former Roxy boffin getting his knob-tiddling hands on the label's prize rock asset. “It was hard to persuade Eno,” remembered The Edge. “I think he was intimidated by the lack of irony in what we were doing. He'd come from Talking

Heads, the Rhode Island School Of Design, living in New York, and here was this Irish band hitting everything full on, completely

earnest, hearts on sleeves, no irony at all.” Bono wouldn't take no for an answer, though, cajoling Eno and engineer Daniel Lanois into visiting Dublin. By the end of their first lunch together, the duo had agreed to produce the band.

The result was an album of bursting widescreen beauty that groped towards the more realised Americanophilia of *The Joshua Tree* without quite getting there. The group still haven't found what they're looking for on those streets with no names, but it's engrossing to watch them reach for the next record's panoramic grandeur – to hear the Edge's busily glistening guitar shapes, to hear post-'70s rock draped in such succulent, shimmering textures. Without *The Unforgettable Fire*, let's be honest, there would be no *OK Computer* – even though Radiohead



arbitrarily – and to the band’s bemusement – deemed done. “Promenade” was low-key and drifting, a dreamy sketch of a song. The instrumental “4th Of July” recalled the Eno of *Before And After Science*, an Edge favourite. “The more conventional the song, the less interested Brian was,” Edge said. “He didn’t take a huge interest in ‘Pride’ or ‘The Unforgettable Fire’. But Danny was there to cover for him, so they balanced each other out well.”

Bono would later admit that not even “Pride” was properly completed.

Which didn’t stop it ascending to No 3 on the UK singles chart.

“Because of the situation in our country, non-violent struggle was such an inspiring concept,” The Edge said of the song. “Even so, when Bono told me he wanted to write about King, at first I said, ‘Woah, that’s not what we’re about, what we understand.’ Then he came in and sang the song and it felt right, it was great. When that happens there’s no argument. It just was.”

Crucial to the album’s sound was the greater freedom given to Larry Mullen, whose echoey, Manu Katché-style tom fills reflected the taste for funk and African percussion that had been so clear on *Remain In Light*: note, incidentally, the distinct echo of that album’s “Listening Wind” in *The Unforgettable Fire*’s “Indian Summer Sky”. “There was a lot offocus on the drums and we worked on developing my playing,” Mullen remembered. “I am not

technically proficient, so Danny encouraged me to find new approaches and gave me the time I needed.”

It was Mullen who motored the album’s centrepiece, “Bad”, the desperate monologue of a pal lost to the heroin epidemic that gripped Dublin in the early ’80s.

“Bono knew the family, he’d talked to the brothers about it,” The Edge remembered. “It was new for him as a lyricist, writing in the first person from someone else’s point of view. I don’t think there’s ever been a song about addiction that captures the feeling so vividly.”

A live highlight on the tours of the subsequent months, the six-minute track was another song Bono hadn’t finished – and yet another that Eno insisted on leaving as was. It was almost certainly more moving for its open-endedness: you can’t help but surrender to the incantatory quality of Bono’s vocal, with its imploring “*Let it go... and so fade away.*”

It’s true that by the time we reach the penultimate “Elvis Presley And America”, the album’s essential two-chord trance-mode is getting a bit tired. It’s also true that the hymnal lullaby “MLK” – the album’s closer – is little more than a variation on the Stones’ spectral “Moonlight Mile”, not to mention a blueprint for the bogus emotion that’s fuelled a generation of U2 wannabes like Coldplay and Snow Patrol. But the peak moments on *The Unforgettable Fire* – the gunning propulsion of “Wire”, the gleaming beauty of the title track, with its swirling keyboards and Noel Kelehan strings – do absolutely what they’re meant to: reinvent U2 in the same way that *Achtung Baby* reinvented/Germanised them seven years later. In the process they enabled the group to leave rivals Simple Minds, Big Country and the Bunnymen trailing in their stadium-busting dust. By the end of 1985 – a year in which Bono sang on “We Are The World” and danced with the audience at Live Aid – *Rolling Stone* were proclaiming them “the band of the decade”.

“When Eno came to us for *The Unforgettable Fire*, he talked about ‘rock’n’roll with a wink’ – how rock had become a parody of itself,” Bono told me that night in Philly. “It’s white music that’s the problem, white music that is the straitjacket. White people in their suits and ties are afraid to take their trousers off in public. And somebody’s got to burst the bubble, not for us because we’ve burst it ourselves and set ourselves free, but for all the people who aren’t making the music they could be making ‘cause somebody winked and their eyes got stuck.”

Rock snobs protested that popular music must be more than mere epic affirmation, but U2 shone on regardless. The charge that they benefited from punk’s flushing-out and then returned unapologetically to the bombast of the ’70s did not faze them. “Why can people not just see our music as part of something else?” they wondered – rather than simply in the context of rock’s endless cycles. The only answer was that thousands did. Where Echo And The Bunnymen remained tied to the hip in-crowd of the weekly music press, U2 broke through to the true mass audience they’ve retained to the present day. **BB**

were, in a sense, the anti-U2... or at least the post-Cobain U2.

Recorded for the most part in the gothic ballroom of a country pile belonging to Paul McGuinness’ mate, Lord Henry Mountcharles, *The Unforgettable Fire* took the driving intensity of *Boy*, *October* and *War*, deconstructed it, and then draped it with keyboards and ambient effects that bathed the band’s fist-punching sound in something vaporously majestic. “[Eno] catalysed our songwriting,” Bono reflected years later, “allowed us to get away from the primary colours of rock into another world where we could really describe ourselves in what was going on around us.”

If the group hedged its bets with “Pride (In The Name Of Love)”, the yelping homage to Martin Luther King that’s easily the anthemic equal of “I Will Follow” and co, other tracks on *The Unforgettable Fire* were more diffuse and poetic – more, in fact, unfinished. Born of a lyric improvisation of Bono’s, “Elvis Presley And America” was a work-in-progress that Eno, somewhat

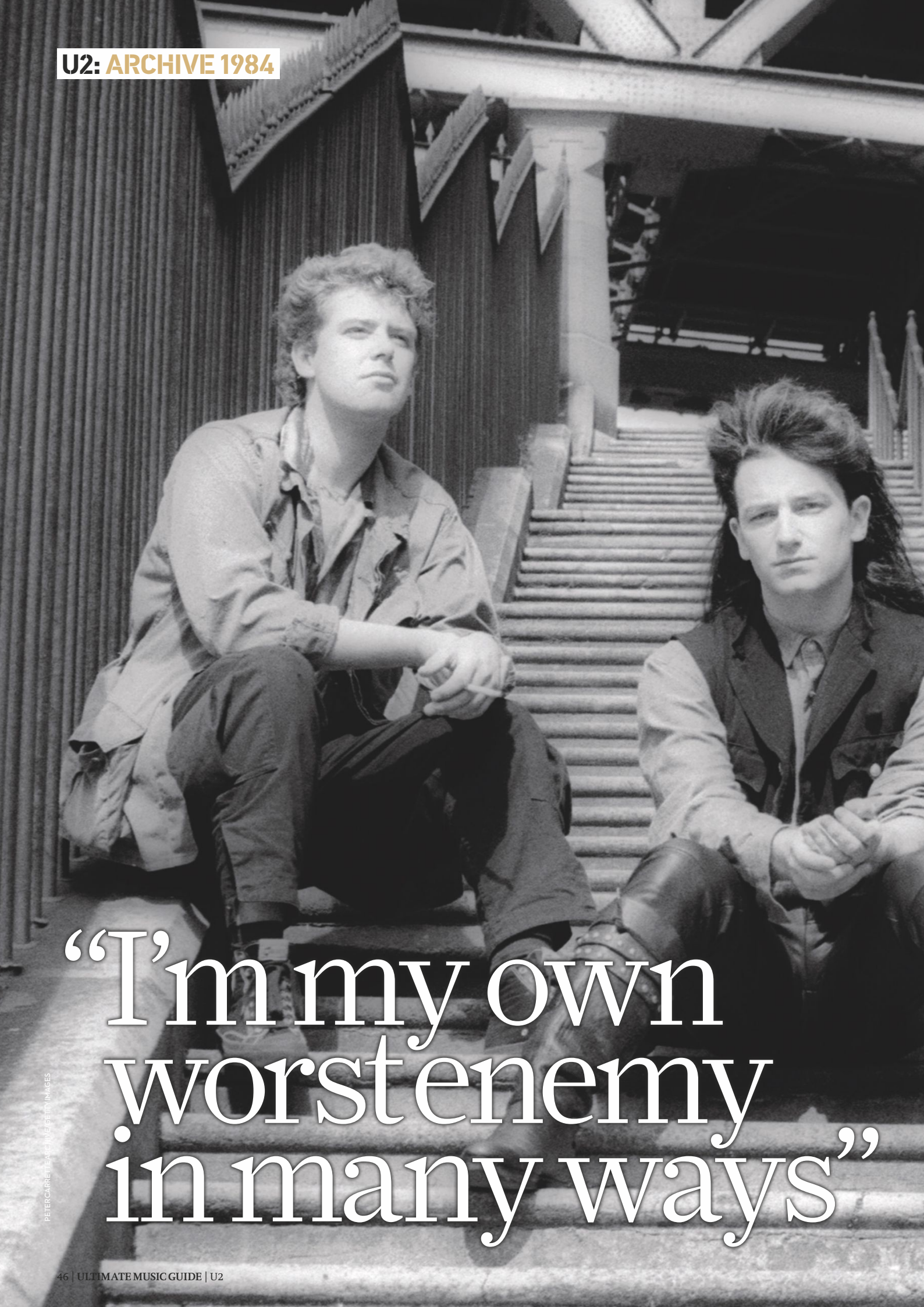
WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ “If you bring your established conception of U2 to this record you’ll be disappointed. If there are hints of the suggestive ambience of *Boy*, there’s little of the raw thrill of that album... U2 could have stuck with their hard rock, of course, with lucrative results, and this new tack is brave and welcome. The new U2 is only partially realised here”

Adam Sweeting, *Melody Maker*, October 6, 1984

■ “Just in time, U2 have swerved off to one side. Here, they’ve made the record they needed to make. The old four-square rock unit has been deconstructed. In its place there’s a panoramic soundscape, multiple textures... I don’t say it’s their best album yet, but it’s music worth spending some months getting to know”

Paul Du Noyer, *NME*, October 6, 1984



“I’m my own
worst enemy
in many ways”



MELODY MAKER, NOVEMBER 10, 1984 Bono has waved white flags, disrupted Dylan gigs, raged at politicians and piloted his band to becoming one of the world's biggest. Now, as the Eno-enhanced *The Unforgettable Fire* looks set to make them even bigger, **ADAM SWEETING** corners U2 in a selection of big tents and roadside urinals across France and discovers that Bono might just turn out to be a decent politician himself...



And so it came to pass that I finally met U2 for the very first time in a huge tent near Nantes. Backstage, the band was wandering about the debris of wiring,

moveable screens and Portakabins stacked up on bricks. I wasn't sure what to expect. After all, I'd heard all the rumours, too, about pre-match prayer meetings and the somewhat Old Testament attitude to things like women, drugs and alcohol. Would Bono carry loaves and fishes?

Bono sauntered up, a stocky, pixyish figure with his long hair bundled up under a grey Crimean War-style cap. He was swigging on a bottle of Heineken. In a flash, an anecdote was upon him.

"I really hadn't realised how bad this band can be," he began. "In Sydney we came out and started playing 'Gloria' in two different keys. Adam comes out onstage" – he swiftly dropped into bassist Adam Clayton's familiar groin-thrusting stage posture – "and because he's tone deaf he didn't notice," Bono cackled.

"Thing is," he continued, "when we're bad I go right over the top and become the complete rock'n'roll idiot. Paul Morley from the *NME* came to see us in Dublin, and the band were awful that night. After I'd invited the entire crowd up onstage and then pulled the PA down around our ears, I went backstage and just put a paper bag over my head in despair. Morley came into the dressing room with his head in his hands and he goes, 'Bono! Metaphysical peaks! Metaphysical peaks! Joy Division at the Lyceum!' He hasn't liked one of our gigs since..."

Bono is: polite, courteous, much sharper than Ian McCulloch gives him credit for and disturbingly funny. I also have a strong suspicion that he's been doing his homework on your correspondent. This is both flattering and unnerving – exactly the reaction, I daresay, which Bono intended to create. Bono knows what he wants and gets it.

Guitarist The Edge, once known as David Evans, stepped out of the bathroom, drying his hair. He dressed himself hurriedly, then switched off the small Sony tape recorder which had been pumping out The Art Of Noise. There was a knock on the door as room service arrived with tea and coffee.

There's a gentlemanly quality about Edge which insists that protocol can and will be observed under the most improbable conditions. In a foul, stuffy tent, he will ensure that visitors have a drink in their hands. In a plush Parisian hotel, refreshments are a must, silver teapots on a tray this time. Edge seems to have remained innocent, somehow.

"The first time I came to London from Dublin, I was really... not shocked, but the biggest impression that I had was that of the sexuality of the city," Edge recalled. "Dublin and Ireland generally are obviously very influenced by the Catholic church, it's very conservative sexually in terms of dress, generally in every way. When I first went to London, it was a real buzz, a real rush, because it was such an exciting place."

"I don't know what it is about cities. I think it's because you're depersonalised, you can display

your sexuality anonymously. If you went around in a mini-skirt somewhere like Kilkenny, a small town in Ireland, you might well find yourself in trouble. But a city has that kind of anonymous quality and you can get away with it." He tinkled his spoon around in his china cup.

"Wow! That's a kind of heavy topic for this time in the morning."

Your band seem very family-orientated, Edge, feet on the ground and all that. A lot of groups at your level (or even earlier) start shedding old girlfriends and mates from home. They go mad.

"I can fully understand that," said Edge, "because when Grand Madness starts taking over, y'know... this lifestyle is so weird, this is no way for a normal human being to live. When that really starts taking its toll, you start to question everything about yourself. Everything that smacks of normality suddenly becomes kind of alien to what's happening around you."

"The thing about this band is that we were friends before we were in a group, and we've never lost that, and that's a really important thing. A lot of groups actually start to move apart and start to worry about solo careers within the band and their own personal profile, and suddenly you have divisions and what have you. A real band, I think, is a family in a way, it's a unit, not just a working unit but something that works socially. I think my closest friends are the members of the group, and that's risky because when you're working with your friends the kind of friction that can happen can be really serious."

Have there been memorable ego battles within U2, then?

"I think so," riposted Edge a trifle dubiously, "but I also think we were honest enough to realise that that side of the human being is very unsavoury and in a sense futile, and we just rationalise it and... if someone had to give in they had to give in. There have been times when we've been less inclined to call round to one another, but it's never got to the stage when anyone's not been speaking or... you see some bands, like The Who, the classic example, beating each other up onstage. It never got as bad as that."

"Within the band we've got some pretty obnoxious sides to our personalities as well, y'know – Lawrence can be so stubborn, Bono can be very ugly, as well."

"Every one of us has some very ugly sides. I suppose everyone does, but when you're living so close to one another you really find out about it. Again, I suppose we've known each other for so long we've managed to iron out all those kind of problems before the band actually took off, which is a real advantage."

In Paris, U2 played in another giant tent, in the middle of a rusting jungle of girders and mud, busted concrete and shattered factory buildings alive with derelict grandeur. They filmed a part of [*Jean-Jacques Beineix's 1981 film*]

Diva here, according to Larry Mullen.

The rain thundered down all night. At the mixing desk, the harassed soundmen flung cellophane over their machines to try to keep out the wet. Onstage, Edge's keyboards wouldn't work in "The Unforgettable Fire" and his guitars were out of tune. Afterwards, Edge just sighed and shook his head, smiling weakly.

But U2 got through the set, somehow. So many things went wrong that Bono had no choice but to junk the maps and fly by the seat of his leather trousers. "I just wanna say," he spluttered at one point, "that this band and this audience deserve better than this place." It was too packed to move, and so hot that your flesh felt like it was trying to escape down your trouser legs. At one point, as Edge played a guitar break, Bono crouched at the front of the stage handing out glasses of water to the suffocating punters.

The new album, *The Unforgettable Fire*, is, of course, quite a departure for our boys. It veers hectically away from the hard – or harsh – dynamics and polemics of *War*. Produced by Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, *Fire* finds the Dubliners in shifting, swirling mood. No doubt I should lecture you at this juncture about Rock, Religion and Politics, but frankly I can't be bothered. I like *The Unforgettable Fire* for its clean break with the past and its multiple possibilities, but I find some of the material on it unfinished and well short of inspirational. Bono describes the LP as "out of focus".

The Edge sees it this way. "We were determined to make an LP of contrasts, not just the one-dimensional feel, something that had something for everyone. Our audience now is a huge cross-section. It's not just fans of *War* – there are people who hated

War and loved *Boy*, people who hated

Boy and probably love "Pride..." or something. It's beginning to widen, and I didn't feel that *War* really showed off the full breadth of our abilities as songwriters or musicians, so that was one of the things that was in the forefront of my mind as we were writing the songs and getting the production together.

"Every side of the band should be showcased, and I think it's been done



"Because of the belief I have in God and in music, some people see this as naivety, some as stupidity" – Bono

successfully. With a song like "Pride..." you can see there is a certain craft to the songwriting. It's the only successful pop song we've ever written, and I use that word 'pop' in the best possible sense. Pop for me is an easily understandable thing, you listen to it and you comprehend it almost immediately. You relate to it instinctively.

CONTINUES OVER ►

U2: ARCHIVE 1984

"A lot of the rest of the LP isn't like that at all. You listen to it once and it probably sounds a bit confusing. As you get to know it better, it draws you in and you personalise it, it becomes something personal to you. The lyrics as well, I think you can personalise the lyrics because there is an openness to them which is open to interpretation, which I was excited by."

It was no great surprise, then, to find U2 struggling a bit with some of these songs in front of a live audience baying for more. Bono himself, at the Nantes gig, pointed out to the crowd that the band were still learning how to tackle these elusive, multi-layered pieces onstage. This seemed a rare instant of vulnerability from the man famous for flagwaving, breast-beating and PA-climbing, and I liked him the more for it.

And anyway, despite the multiple malfunctions, "Wire" jabbered like a hot electrode thrust into raw nerve-endings, "Bad" spanned tighter and more gripping extremes than the recorded version, and "Pride..." struck home with poignant nobility. If "Indian Summer Sky" and "A Sort Of Homecoming" veered off the beaten track, well... there are quite a few gigs left to go yet.

Adam Clayton, bassman, is faintly anomalous in the U2 setup. It is Adam we may encounter pottering about backstage after the show in his personally monogrammed white towelling dressing gown. It is Adam we might well find ourselves propping up a bar with in the middle of the night while the other U-boys are dozing peacefully. It was Adam who only recently took Bono to task *vis-à-vis* the attitude of the band.

It was Bono himself who told the story. "Adam really gave me a hard time," he said, aghast. "He says, 'My dear Bono, you are responsible for the morale of this unit and frankly you're falling down on the job. I think you'd better get a grip on the situation.' So... fair play to him." Bono's eyes widened ruefully. "He's the man to thank."

Clayton, with his curly fair hair, specs and vaguely supercilious public school accent, maintains an air of moneyed independence. He lacks Bono's missionary zeal and one somehow can't credit him with Edge's tireless, scholarly application. However, Adam is the social lubricant of U2, a laconic commentator on the group's comings and goings, the wry observer of the scenery through which they move.

When we arrived in Nantes, Mick Jones' new band [*Big Audio Dynamite*] were just finishing their supporting set. We could hear it quite clearly from outside the tent. Clayton ambled up and lit a Silk Cut.

"Yeeees," he murmured, "did you hear much of their set?"

No, we were too late.

"Hmmm. Yes. Perfectly acceptable Ladbroke Grove rock." Clayton smiled and sniffed the night air. "Well, better get ready. See you later." And with that he was gone.

Is it something of a challenge playing this new material, I enquired later?

"Yeah, I think towards the end of the *War* tour we were definitely getting itchy feet to move on, and that's a bad stage of touring because you really can't do anything about it – when you feel you've played the songs enough and you just

want to get away from it. But there's an awful lot of people all around the world that want to see us, and why should we just end up playing for London and New York who see everyone who comes through? I like to be able to tour in other places. It's not always fun, it's not always together, but you have to accept that as part of the problems of going to these places."

It was touring, according to Adam, which kept U2 in business up until *War* came along and broke the band Stateside. Had they not kept up the hectic touring routine, he reckons they might have gone under. Then came *War* and the cashflow slipped decisively into the black. So...

"With this new record we knew we had a very strong, firm base and we could afford to take a few risks. Hence Eno coming in – it defined the spirit in which we were gonna make that record. The spirit of it was very much, 'OK, we'll rehearse the numbers as much as possible, but we're also totally open to basically seeing what happens,' and this in itself became a problem, as we ended up with roughly 25 pieces of music."

"We thought that might be a freeing thing, but in essence it wasn't, because you have so many different choices – which songs do you decide to go for? Really, only half of the prepared material

got on the record, and the rest of the material was the stuff that we'd created under the influence of Eno, so to speak."

For *The Unforgettable Fire*, U2 experimented with new methods of creating music.

Adam: "The traditional way of U2 writing a song is well known now. We all get into a room, bash out ideas and then Bono sings over it. And we thought, well, this wasn't fully realising the potential of the songs, so Bono and Edge spent time together getting things to a point where the arrangements and chord changes were fairly set, and then the band came in and did their magic. But really that only worked for a couple of songs."

"The one in particular it worked best for was 'The Unforgettable Fire', and not really any of the others survived that treatment. This band cannot play other people's songs, and it was almost like that with Bono and The Edge saying, 'Here's the song, here's the demo, have a listen to it, see what you come up with.' And unfortunately, once I'd heard what they'd done, I found I already had a preconceived idea of how the bass would be, rather than if they'd just presented me with, say, the guitar line, when I would have had a bassline coming



On tour in Australia, 1984



“Grand Madness takes over. This lifestyle is so weird... it’s no way for a normal human being to live” – The Edge

through that was totally mine. So it was very limiting. It justifies itself if we got a song like ‘Unforgettable Fire’ out of it, but I don’t think we can write a whole LP that way. We still have to resort to the painful process of working it out note by note.”

It seems a far cry from the rock’n’roll madness which Clayton has allegedly succumbed to from time to time.

“Um...” he pondered, “I used to think I was into being a rock star, I’m not terribly interested in it now. I may have gone through a phase of being high on limos and pads and girls and stuff, but now that’s not what it’s all about for me at all. I like what we do, I like very much what our music is about, and that’s the satisfaction I get out of it. I really don’t need, any more, the approval of other people – I’m secure enough within that.”

But once upon a time?

“The worst periods are making records, as there’s a couple of months of intense activity where your ability as a musician is being constantly questioned. And that is very, very trying. *War* was less traumatic than *October*. *October* was very tough, and it probably did send me a bit batty for a year or so. The nice thing was that *Unforgettable Fire* was really just as difficult as *October*, but I’m relieved I’ve come through it relatively unscathed.”

“I don’t know much about politics but I know a little about people,” said Bono as the bus wheezed and clanked its way towards Paris, “and I responded to Dr Garret FitzGerald, who’s now the Prime Minister of the country, as a person more than a politician. See, I met him before he was Prime Minister, at Heathrow. I just walked through the security cordon, pushed them

aside, went up and had an argument with him. For about half an hour, y’know? The police were coming up to me, but he said, ‘No, no, it’s all right.’

“Then he said, ‘Well, look, let’s continue this conversation when we get to Dublin,’ so we went on the plane and ended up sitting beside each other and we had another row. It was not in an aggressive way. I was asking him why politicians don’t speak the language of the people, why they invented their own language that leaves the rest of the country out. I was saying that any leader had to throw away the political language they had and speak to people.

“Then he wrote to me and he came down while we were making *War*. Then, because I’d been mouthing off to him about unemployment, he said, ‘Well, we’re putting together this emergency committee on unemployment – I want you on

CONTINUES OVER »

U2: ARCHIVE 1984

it.' And I said, 'Well, what can I do?' So essentially I was a troublemaker. All I could do was arrive at these meetings and when people said, 'What young people feel like...' I'd say, 'Hey, I'm one of them.'

"But I realised that I wasn't unemployed. I realised I didn't want to speak at a committee meeting about unemployment without somebody unemployed with me. I realised that there was another language, Committee-Speak, and I didn't understand this either... So not only was there Polit-Speak, there was Committee-Speak, and I didn't really speak the language."

But Bono, isn't the language you sing in with U2 rhetorical, larger than life? A gesture, to some extent?

"Yeah," said Bono. "I often use words not just for what they mean but what they sound like, the way they bump up against another word. I'm more interested in impression than detail at the moment. I'd like to start using everyday speech – as I'm getting more and more interested in the folk tradition. As they said of Brendan Behan, 'If the English heard words like misers, the Irish spend them like...' What's the word?"

Edge: "Spendthrifts?"

Bono: "Like people who just spend on everything, they just throw words and see what happens. I think as I go on I am going to work towards a balance between the impression and the detail."

He thought for a while.

"I'm my own worst enemy in many ways."

Why? Because you talk too much?

Bono chortled. "Yeah, I do. I don't talk too much when I'm with people that I believe in and they believe in me, but that whole thing of brushing up against Irish politics, it was a bad thing for the group."

Could that have anything to do with why U2 get tarred with accusations of being pretentious, overblown and bombastic?

Bono winced faintly. "I think it's more a kind of pompous thing rather than pretentious. Usually it's because... coming from Ireland you're a bit like [makes aggressive nutting motion],

so people ask you a question and it's Bop! And it came across as being a little heavy at times. But I never pointed a finger at anyone other than myself. Sometimes the tone of my voice gives the impression of a warning, but I never point."

I told him that the previous night's gig had seemed low-key by his standards – he didn't wave any white flags and he didn't climb the PA, thank God. It was almost apologetic.

"The *War* thing, they were symbolic gestures, that's all. Y'know, the white flag... I was sick of the green, white and orange. I was sick of the Union Jack and the Stars And Stripes. I wished the colours could be drained from them and just leave the white flag. And I felt that a lot of people wanted that to be said – a lot of people who were in our audience. It was something very, very simple, and the anger that came out at that time... anger is a dangerous thing – in the hands of a man like myself! It can come across that I'm angry at the audience, angry at *them*. It's always *us* with U2. I never write songs about 'you' or 'they'. It's 'us'. It's 'we'. It's 'I'. Always. It's a big difference."

Maybe the problem with *War* was its military sound. While you were singing about the struggle for peace, the record actually sounded very militaristic.

"But," said Bono, "it was that thing I was getting into at the time, and I still believe in, which is militant pacifism. That's what Martin Luther King was, he wasn't a passive pacifist, he was a militant pacifist. It was the release of a lot of... 'Cos people out there, if you can articulate something for a mass of people as you're singing, it might just be something like 'no more, no war'. Everyone feels like that. They don't go through every day thinking about it, but yet it's in there."

"Everybody's aware right now of the fact that there's an alliance between Ronald Reagan and Mrs Thatcher, that there are missiles moving into Germany, but you're not aware of it on a conscious level, are you? You don't wake up and think, 'Oh, another day that might be our last.' You don't think like that."

I think some people do, actually...

"Well, this is it, it's there whether you like it or not. When you are an outlet for that, a great explosion takes place."

a shirk and a shrug. And of course, I am not into rock'n'roll for that, I'm just not, and I think that made people feel uncomfortable. In Ireland the two things you shouldn't talk about are religion and politics, and there they were."

Larry doesn't do interviews. He's currently going through a James Dean phase, with short blond hair, denims and biker boots. Larry drinks beer and likes to watch girls, sometimes. Larry likes to play the drums.

In the Gents at a roadside caff somewhere in France are all of U2, tour manager Denis Sheehan, U2's bus driver and a *Melody Maker* journalist. Adam Clayton stands at the urinal. "It's funny how having people watching can put one off one's stroke," said Clayton mockingly, shaking himself back into his trousers.

"I was at this gig once in Ireland," Bono recalled, "and I was in the Gents trying to have a pee, and there was this guy waitin' behind me and I just couldn't get it to happen. Anyway I finally did, so just as I'm leaving this guy turns to me and says, 'Stage fright, Bono?'"

"Since we started thinking about being a band we were always very aware of his [Eno's] work," said Edge, "not just his production work with Talking Heads and Bowie, but also his solo stuff. Not so much in the last couple of years – I must admit that his ambient work has passed me by – but stuff like *Before And After Science*. I bought that record and at first it confused me slightly, but as I got to know it, it impressed me more and more. His use of textures and different instrumentation I really enjoyed a lot. And we ripped off a few of the production ideas."

"There's one particular track on *Before And After Science* which impressed me a lot, he had some echoed drums on it, so when we were putting together "I Threw A Brick..." for *October* I brought down the record and we stayed up very late one night with Steve Lillywhite and got out some Rototoms and started working on that, and it worked out well. And when we were deciding on a producer for this record, his name kept coming up. I mean, within the band there's quite a variety of tastes in music and producers, but whenever Brian's name was brought up it seemed to meet with unanimous approval."

Edge moved on to the band's *Under A Blood Red Sky* video.

"We're still really just travelling musicians. But we have buses now, and computer mixing desks" – Bono

I think U2's similarities to a crusade earned you a few brickbats.

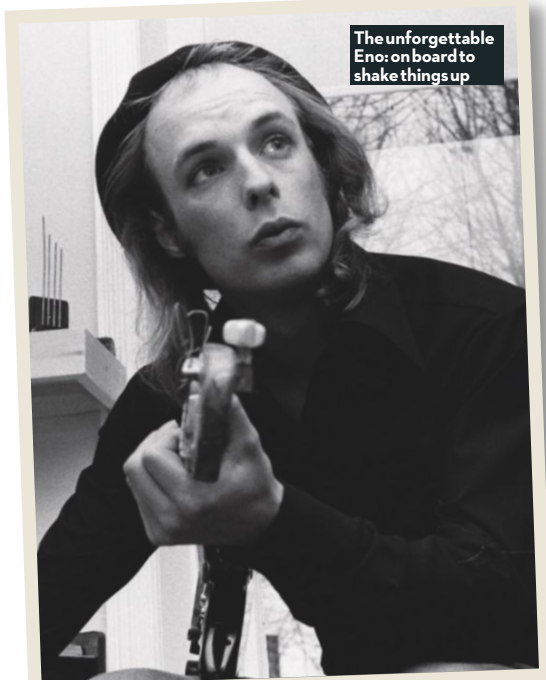
"Yeah, that was probably it. The real crime in the music press is... you can say what you want but you better not believe it. I think because of the spiritual side of the group that I was associated with, people thought, 'This is dangerous', y'know? That this guy believes in what he's saying, because rock'n'roll is all

"The visual side owes a lot to the weather being so bad," he admitted. "If the sun had been shining, I'm sure that video would be OK, but it certainly wouldn't suit the group in the way that it does. It's those accidents sometimes that... it's seizing the moment. That's another thing we learned in the making of this record, it's the accidents and knowing what to do with them that makes it good."

"Like a few times at soundchecks, there's one



ERICA LEBENBERG/REDFERNS



The unforgettable Eno: on board to shake things up



particular case of a song we've never recorded called 'Be There', which was a great illustration of that. I picked up a guitar and hit a chord, just a normal E barre chord, but the guitar roadie had tuned it totally wrong – all the strings were tuned to wrong notes, and the resulting chord, which was some weird sort of minor seventh, suddenly sparked Bono off. And Adam and Larry were messing about with something, and suddenly there was an entire song, melody and lyric. It just appeared on the end of Bono's tongue. It was really remarkable.

"Those moments, they're quite rare, actually, I think, and Brian and Danny Lanois were very quick to catch the fact that something was in the air, and make the appropriate move. '4th Of July' is another example of that. Myself and Adam were just in one of the rooms in Slane Castle where we recorded the backing tracks, messing around. Brian had some treatments set up for a vocal effect and he patched the guitar into them. Got a rough mix going, it sounded really good, so he just put on the quarter-inch tape machine. So '4th Of July' never went to 24-track, it just went straight on to stereo tape. So we've just taken a section of improvised live work, almost, and it just captured a lovely mood."

Bono (who says "we're still really travelling musicians, it's just that we have buses now and computer mixing desks") sees U2 as straddling traditions from Ireland to America, even as far as Australia. Edge talks about the "American Wakes" familiar from Irish literature of the famine years, when people would gather to send the emigrants to the States on their way, realising they'd never return. This, he says, is a reason why America holds a mythic place in Irish affections.

Bono puts it more simply. "The Irish built America," he says. He wanted to call the new LP *Bits And Pieces Of America* at one point. While Edge points to similarities between American and Irish folk musics, Bono speaks of the power and open spaces of the North American continent, characteristics dear to U2's conception of themselves.

"America is just a very powerful place," said Bono. "You fight with it, you wrestle with America. I always say there are two Americas, there's one that's spelt Amerika and that's, y'know, eight channels, that's Ronald Reagan, that's pistols and the Ku Klux Klan. But I'm interested in *America*, which is open space, which is a new-found land, the cities, the people

in the cities who come to see us play and who I feel are extraordinarily open to our music and have not got preconceived notions about the group or are not as inhibited sometimes as audiences in other parts of the world."

One of Bono's current preoccupations is the loss of roots in popular music, a fixation he shares with Van Morrison. Perhaps it's because the Irish are respecters of tradition that Bono and U2 have been able, more than their contemporaries, to try at least to forge a link back to rock's illustrious heritage. U2 and Springsteen share a mutual respect, while Bono got onstage with Bob Dylan in Dublin last summer and improvised his own version of "Blowin' In The Wind". This earned Bono a gale of flak in the Irish press ("How dare this pompous man rewrite Bob Dylan's songs!") but Dylan loved it. His kids are U2 fans.

It's perhaps due to this concern for a rich and shared past that Ireland's folk tradition has always been an unobtrusive but vital and potent presence in U2's music. Check "An Cat Dubh" from *Boy* or "Tomorrow" from *October*. These did not appear by accident. They're critical clues to U2's origins and their ultimate destination. If audiences around the world love the band, their status in

CONTINUES OVER ►



“We have got some pretty obnoxious sides to our personalities. Lawrence can be so stubborn, Bono can be very ugly, as well. Every one of us has some very ugly sides” – The Edge

Dublin could almost be described as “legendary” in the fullest sense.

In an effort to put something back into the homeland, U2 have started a record label called Mother, with distribution through Island. Soon, there will be a 12in single called “Take My Hand” from traditional Dublin group In Tua Nua, featuring violinist Steve Wickham (who played on *War*) and Uilleann pipe specialist Vincent Kilduff (he appeared on *October*).

“We’re not the big bad wolf that people make us out to be,” said Bono pensively. “We are fish out of water, and as I say, one of the reasons that I have sometimes been heavy-handed is because I have been aware that people see me as... because of the belief I have in God and in music, some people see this as naivety, some as stupidity. I read this and so I get tense and over-

react. And as I say, I’m my own worst enemy. I’ve dug a few holes for the band, to bury them.

“The criticism I get... Y’know, somebody said Ian McCulloch’s done more press about U2 than we have in the last two years – everywhere we go, Australia, Europe. I suppose I ought to send him a cheque. But I refuse to let it get in the way of my appreciation of what I believe is a good group. Echo And The Bunnymen are a very good group and they’re in danger of not being a good group because some things are poisonous and they get into the system.

“I’ve also been very hurt about it at times. Everyone goes through periods of self-doubt, and when there’s another voice saying, ‘You’re right to go through periods of self-doubt,’ it sorta hurts me.

“It’s made me rethink the music press, because I don’t want to get into the music press, I don’t want to be remembered for

negative things, I want to be remembered for positive things. I think there’s a lot of people in music who deserve applause, y’know. People you wouldn’t expect. For instance I’ve a lot of time for Tony Wilson of Factory Records, a person like that, and Elvis Costello and Paul Weller. There’s a lot of good music in England. Why is it a competition? Just because the charts go ten, nine, eight, people think it’s a competition.”

With *The Unforgettable Fire*, whether you think it flawed or not, U2 have avoided the heavy rock trap that was yawning beneath them and have suggested capabilities their detractors probably never suspected. I learned from meeting them that they have a very shrewd conception of their place in the great scheme, and are also well aware of how they’re viewed by press and public. This quartet can think, chew gum and make hit records all at the same time.



"People charge us with being traditional and it gets up my nose," complained Bono. "Why are people concerned about changing the face of music, when the face is really only the facade? Like there's Bruce Springsteen working within traditional American rock'n'roll, and he says more than so many other people. He says more with a scream than so many people do with pages and pages of words. Take Van Morrison. He makes soul music and some people have tried to write him off, but he certainly hasn't been. That man! He's a genius."

Bono has a gift for making contact with people, either singly or en masse. Maybe this makes him a politician after all. Shrewdly, he hands back the compliment to the people who made U2 famous. "People in the audience know more about the people in the band than everyone gives them credit for. People in the press sometimes want to capture a side of a personality, and sometimes I'm portrayed in a very one-dimensional way, but... the music is better than the musician and the audience is better than the journalist. I'm working on this thing that they know about these things... they know about music, as a mass, they know whether it's good or whether it's not good."

He sipped some tea to ease his croaking throat. "If there's a difference between the art and the artist there's something up. I really think that, and there's such a vast difference in a lot of cases." **👉**

PARODY (IN THE NAME OF LAUGHS)

■ **U2 have long been ripe for ribbing, though not always affectionately...**

NOBODY KNOWS WHAT I'M ON ABOUT - SPITTING IMAGE
"I've got a flag, I sing 'whoa-oh!'/I changed my name to Boh-oh-no-oh/There are no streets in the desert, I've heard/You can change the world, but you can't change the world..." Lyrics by *Uncut* contributor David Quantick. U2 were such fans that they'd sometimes screen this TV skit before their own gigs.

WHERE'S ME BLOODY HAT? - MITCH BENN

Inspired by Bono allegedly buying a first-class plane ticket for cherished head-gear left behind at the start of a tour, as heard on the Radio 2 topical comedy, *It's Been A Bad Week*. Benn's other U2 parodies include "Look At My Tower", about the group's plans to build Ireland's tallest skyscraper - "a vast phallic monument to their own fabulousness," as he puts it.



SOMEONE TELL SAM JACKSON HE'S MY BRO - DC LUIGI

The entire plot of *Snakes On A Plane* distilled into a three-minute contemplative ballad by frat-boy Bono impersonator Luigi, also responsible for the "Get On Your Boots" parody "Check Out My Pubes".

YouTube keywords: Sam Jackson bro / pubes U2



LUCKY CLOVERS - BEN STILLER

As seen on Stiller's TV sketch show, with Ben as Bono extolling the virtues of his favourite breakfast cereal.

YouTube keywords: U2 clovers

NOTHING COMPARES 2 U2 - THE JOSHUA TRIO

Ireland's foremost U2 parodists of the 1990s, who included *Father Ted* co-creator Arthur Matthews in their line-up. Special mention also for "The Edge Has Got His Hat On".



ISTILL CAN'T ACCEPT WHAT A KNOB I AM - THE CHASER

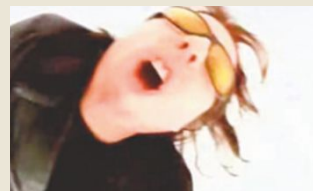
From the Australian TV sketch show *The Chaser's War On Everything*, whose own take on Bono bemoans that, despite breaking bread with world leaders, he's perhaps blind to his own shortcomings.

YouTube keywords: U2 Chaser parody

"CAVITY SEARCH" - WEIRD AL YANKOVIC

The veteran spoofer recounts a visit to the dentist to the tune of U2's hit from the *Batman Forever* soundtrack: "Numb me, drill me, floss me, bill me".

YouTube keywords: Weird Al cavity



SAVE THE WORLD (IN THE NAME OF ME) - BONONO AKA FRENCH & SAUNDERS...

A celebration of Bono! **YouTube keywords:** Saunders U2

ONE - DAVID CROSS WITH JOHNNY MARR

Arrested Development star Cross' straight-faced cover of the notorious rewrite of the U2 hit by two Bank Of America employees sucking up to bosses at a conference.

YouTube keywords: Cross U2

AS U2 LIKE IT - TROUBADOUR THEATRE COMPANY

LA comedy players' condensed works of Shakespeare to the accompaniment of rewrites of U2's best-known songs.

YouTube keywords: as U2 like it

THE JOSHUA TREE

The record that took over the world... 25 million sales later, a fresh look at U2's inescapable fifth studio album. BY ANDREW MUELLER

TRACKMARKS

- 1 Where The Streets Have No Name ★★★★★
- 2 I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For ★★★★★
- 3 With Or Without You ★★★★★
- 4 Bullet The Blue Sky ★★★★★
- 5 Running To Stand Still ★★★★★
- 6 Red Hill Mining Town ★★★★★
- 7 In God's Country ★★★★★
- 8 Trip Through Your Wires ★★★
- 9 One Tree Hill ★★★
- 10 Exit ★★★
- 11 Mothers Of The Disappeared ★★★

Released: March 9, 1987

Produced by: Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois

Recorded at: Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin

Additional musicians/personnel:

Backing vocals: The Edge, Eno, Lanois. **DX7 programmes and keyboards:** Eno. **Tambourine/omnichord/additional rhythm guitar:** Lanois. **Harmonica:** Bono. **Chart position:** UK:1 US:1

Worse things can happen to a band than selling 25 million (and counting) copies of an album. However, not many worse things can happen to the LP itself. Popular music is unique among the arts in that most of our consumption of it is involuntary. Most public spaces – shops, bars, restaurants, reception areas, airports – impose a soundtrack on their patrons, and this usually consists of music believed to be, well, popular. This inevitably promotes a certain degree of boredom, complacency and even outright hostility regarding the music concerned. Try to estimate, for example, how many times you must have heard The Eagles' "Hotel California". Now ask yourself how often you've listened to it deliberately.

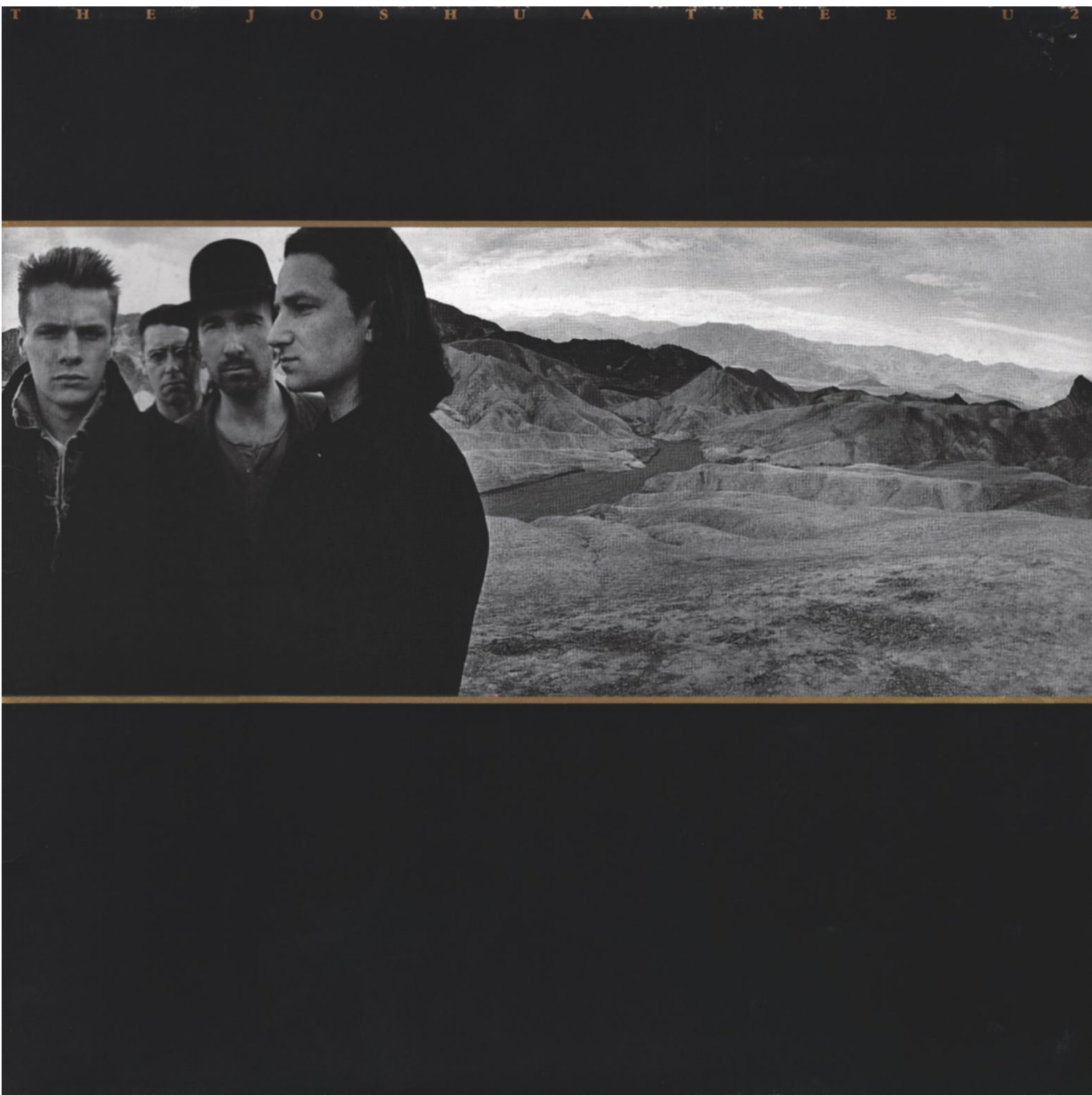
It's difficult to overstate how inescapably and how oppressively and annoyingly big a deal *The Joshua Tree* became very shortly after its

release in March 1987. It got U2 on to the front of every publication in explored space, up to and including *Time* magazine (the cover of the issue in question, April 27, 1987, relegated Mikhail Gorbachev to second billing). It was garlanded with more awards, titles and accolades than Idi Amin. It spawned a tour that ran for more than a hundred dates, none of them in venues incapable of hosting a Cup Final.

The album's trio of signature hits – "Where The Streets Have No Name", "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", "With Or Without You" – were thrashed like ginger mules by radio and TV. In the late '80s, any person who wished to avoid hearing *The Joshua Tree*, or even hearing about it, would have needed to dedicate themselves to hermitude with a zeal sufficient to show Saint Simeon up as a gregarious dilettante. There was no sanctuary for anyone – for U2 least of all. Every LP they've made since *The Joshua Tree* has been an attempt to emulate it, or obfuscate it.

For these reasons and more besides, appreciating *The Joshua Tree* on

CONTINUES OVER »



U2: THE ALBUMS

its own merits necessitates a ruthless divestment of baggage. Far from the lightest of the burdens that must be cast aside is the artwork – Anton Corbijn's grainy, black-and-white, gently blurred portraits of U2 regarding the Mojave desert, and the camera, with the air of dishevelled ascetics severely displeased at having their retreat interrupted. The unmistakable – and regrettably unshakeable – subtext of the photographs was, "This is a serious record. About serious things. By serious men." *The Joshua Tree* was most certainly exactly that, but it needed neither its epic ambition or solemnity of tone emphasised: not for the first or last time, U2 were overselling matters somewhat awkwardly.

It might have been nerves. Though *The Joshua Tree* was U2's fifth album, they were still very young when they began work on it, in Dublin's Windmill Lane studios, in July 1986 (the four members of the group were aged between 25 and 27). They were also, as they would have been well aware, stepping up to take their shot at the title. In 1984, *The Unforgettable Fire* saw U2 fashioning the intermittent inspiration flickering throughout their first three LPs into a coherent and singular vision. The subsequent world tour had confirmed their graduation from cultishly regarded post-punk act to major-league headliner.

Their appearance at the Wembley Stadium leg of Live Aid in July 1985 had overcome a mullet – Bono's – terrifying even by the standards of the time, to epitomise the guileless good intentions of Bob Geldof's era-defining charitable enterprise. Their place in the firmament of rock'n'roll aristocracy had been further cemented in June 1986 by their place on the six-date Amnesty International benefit, *A Conspiracy Of Hope*, alongside Sting, Peter Gabriel, Lou Reed, Bryan Adams and Joan Baez. They'd long had a home base (Windmill Lane) where they felt comfortable. They had assembled a production team (Brian Eno, Daniel Lanois, Steve Lillywhite) capable of

The practical result was that when you dropped the needle – as was the style at the time – on Side One, you were still 45 seconds of pensive keyboard meditation from hearing the first familiar jangle of Edge's guitar, and nearly two minutes away from the initial outpourings of a frontman rarely noted for his reticence. Any armchair psychologist leaning toward the diagnosis that U2 were at least slightly worried about what they were getting themselves into was likely to be further convinced when those opening words finally declared themselves: "I want to run... I want to hide."

"Where The Streets Have No Name" is, like *The Joshua Tree* as a whole – and like much of U2's canon, come to that – an escape fantasy, a farewell note from someone who doesn't necessarily know where he's going, but is getting out of here, fast and soon. It's U2's "Born To Run", an ecstatic, exuberant hymn to the possibilities of the open road. Its gestation was infamously troubled – Eno became so frustrated with it that he attempted to wipe the tapes – but there's no hint of that on the record. Given its eventual settling into U2's live set as a colossally grand finale, it's astonishing how sparse the recording of "Where The Streets..." now sounds, how wide the gaps are between Adam Clayton's shuddering bass, a characteristically propulsive Larry Mullen drum part, and Edge's shimmering arpeggios.

The motif of existential dissatisfaction thus established is reinforced by "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For". This lovely song's reputation would shortly be somewhat tarnished by its bombastic reworking, abetted by a gratuitous full-dress gospel choir, on *Rattle And Hum*. U2 got it right the first time. As is the case with the equally mighty track preceding it,



The 1987 sleeve shots by Anton Corbijn set the tone: "This is a serious record. About serious things. By serious men"

The feat of alchemy here is the conjuring of immense music from few and simple ingredients

coaxing them out of complacency while still honing their focus. All U2 had to do now was make the record.

And they did, although to the first-time listener, *The Joshua Tree* was a while in announcing itself. The album has a deeply weird running order. The cuts which one would normally expect to be deployed as middle-order big-hitters ("Where The Streets Have No Name", "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", "With Or Without You") were sent out to open the batting. Years later, Bono would claim that this was the decision of Steve Lillywhite's then-wife, Kirsty MacColl, who listed the songs in her personal order of preference.

there's somehow less going on here than you expect or remember: the feat of alchemy U2 perform repeatedly on *The Joshua Tree* is the conjuring of immense, overwhelming music from few and simple ingredients.

They do it again on "With Or Without You": a deceptively straightforward arrangement, an instantly memorable melody, and another lyric struggling to hedge the certainties of today against the possibilities of tomorrow. It is no criticism of any of these three opening tracks to suggest that their lyrics feel to a large extent

interchangeable. Each is a confession of terrified doubt, a postcard from someone who isn't sure where he is, and is even less certain he has any bright ideas about where he'd rather be.

U2 REVELATIONS

■ The scar on Bono's chin was sustained after he fell offstage holding a spotlight while rehearsing for *The Joshua Tree* tour in Arizona.

No such absence of spirit of place plagues "Bullet The Blue Sky". In 1986, while working with Amnesty International on the Conspiracy Of Hope tour, Bono had visited Nicaragua and El Salvador. At that time, both were Cold War frontlines, their populations crushed between thuggish Soviet-backed "liberation" movements and unpleasant US-supported governments (in El Salvador) and murderous US-backed reactionary counter-revolutionaries (in Nicaragua). "Bullet The Blue Sky", a vivid evocation of Bono's travels, deserves considerable credit on two levels. One, that it's

a staggering rock'n'roll song, a furious approximation of early Public Image Ltd played by Jimi Hendrix (tellingly, if gauchely, live performances of it were for a while cued by a recording of Hendrix's apocalyptic "Star-Spangled Banner"). Two, that it rises above the temptation to buy into the sentimental romanticising of the rebels (in 1980 the Nicaraguan Sandinistas in particular enjoyed a cachet similar to that now commanded by Hezbollah and Hamas – The Clash had named a bloody awful triple album in the Sandinistas' honour).

"Bullet The Blue Sky" is unmistakably a critique of the USA, but it's clear that the anger is rooted in a belief that America should be held, and should hold itself, to a higher standard than its enemies: 20 years later, for wearily obvious reasons, it remains a potent, pertinent staple of U2's live set.



It's at this point that the massively front-loaded nature of the album's sequencing becomes apparent. Scattered more evenly, the four bold, arresting songs that lead the album off might have created a more consistent momentum. As it is, *The Joshua Tree* isn't even halfway through before it starts coming down.

This is at least appropriate to the subject matter of "Running To Stand Still". The title is a perfect distillation of the dynamic of feeding an addiction – and, indeed, of the essential restlessness that has always animated U2. The lyric's evocation of a Dublin junkie – the line "I see seven towers" is a reference to the infamous, now largely demolished, Ballymun tower block estate – still stands as one of Bono's better character sketches.

U2 had considered the needle and the damage done before, on *Unforgettable Fire* high point "Bad", but the theme merits revisiting in the context of *The Joshua Tree* – it's the drug as another bogus escape, another fraudulent promise that there's ever any evading the truth that wherever we go, there we are.

Two other tracks are tied to specific places. "Red Hill Mining Town", an elegy for the collateral damage of industrial decline, was inspired by Tony Parker's book of (nearly) the same name, chronicling the 1984-85 UK miners' strike: the song is a throwback to U2's earlier records, Bono briefly retreating from the throaty croon he employs for most of *The Joshua Tree* in favour of an anguished, adolescent yelp, Edge's guitar trebly and brittle.

"One Tree Hill" appears on the lyric sheet with a specific dateline – Wanganui, New

Zealand, July 10, 1986, where U2 attended the funeral of Greg Carroll, a road-crew member who'd died in a motorcycle accident in Dublin, and to whom *The Joshua Tree* is dedicated. It's not a straightforward elegy for a friend, though – from the other side of the world, the record's vision turns back towards America, and the grief expands to mourn another of America's victims: Victor Jara, the Chilean folk singer tortured and executed in the aftermath of the CIA-sponsored coup d'état of 1973.

The working title of *The Joshua Tree* was *The Two Americas*, and while that would have been crashingly pompous, it would also have been apt. America's contradictions have always been invigorating fuel for U2. America is the vast, welcoming, continent-sized goldfield of "In God's Country", a tune like a road roaring past a bus window bearing an exuberant declaration of solidarity with previous generations of prospectors, Irish and otherwise ("She is liberty/And she comes to rescue me"). America is also the marauding,

hubristic, self-righteous (if generally well-meaning) leviathan that Arnold Toynbee was thinking of when he likened it to a big, friendly dog in a small room, knocking things over with every wag of its tail (and yes, were the famed historian a rock critic circa the late '80s, he'd have been within his rights to make a similar observation about U2).

On "Mothers Of The Disappeared", the album's closing track, U2 return to San Salvador, falling in with the vigil by women protesting the abduction of their children by the government's death squads. It's a wilfully downbeat finale. Either that, or Kirsty MacColl just didn't like it much.

Urging anyone to listen to *The Joshua Tree* feels somewhat absurd, akin to encouraging someone to go out and breathe air – you'll hear this album, or at least three tracks of it, a thousand more times whether you wish to or not. It's worth doing, though. Creative and commercial ambition are rarely so completely realised, and stadium rock less often so essentially – no, really – humble. **BB**

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "This will prove a better and braver record than anything else that's likely to appear in 1987. It's the sound of people confronting their own ghosts in a country where they can, if they wish, become a dusty speck on the landscape" **John McCreedy, NME, March 14, 1987**

■ "Massive but minimal, majestic, but free of pomp or flourish. There are no solos, power chords, curlicues even – just... an exhilarating shimmer. U2 are out of touch, and today, at least, I mean that as a compliment" **Simon Reynolds, Melody Maker, March 14, 1987**





“Once, we were asked to set up an audience with The Pope...”



MELODY MAKER, MARCH 14, 1987 The Pope and Bishop Desmond Tutu want to hang out. Muhammad Ali comes to the shows. Keith Richards teaches them gospel songs. And now, on the eve of *The Joshua Tree*'s release, U2 are also digging deep into America and the roots of rock'n'roll. COLIN IRWIN rolls up in Dublin for a heroic session of name-dropping, defiance, conviction – and boxing...



“Once, we were asked to set up an audience with The Pope. We were told The Pope wants to meet U2. We thought this is a good laugh – he must have heard ‘Gloria’. So we got the message and said, ‘Fair enough... I’ll meet *anyone*.’

“So I thought, ‘Yeah, I’ll meet The Pope, impress the relatives.’ In one way, I’m attracted to him because he’s Polish, and I like Polish people, and he has a tender heart. But on the other hand, he’s very conservative and some would say he’s put the Catholic church back a few years... So in the end I said, ‘OK, we’ll meet him privately.’ Word came back from The Vatican... ‘No press? No publicity? But *ees* the whole idea!’ I said, ‘Sorry mate, join the queue with the rest of the punters.’”

Bono needs a shave. It’s not a desperate need, but there is something incorrigibly Geldofian about him as he bustles about his business, showing early signs of inelegant wastage. Tossing his ponytail behind him, he grabs a mic and bends forward awkwardly, peering hard at unfamiliar lyrics heaped on the floor in front of him... “*In the town of Springhill, Nova Scotia...*”

He bounds over, all smiles and pumping handshakes, a kiss for Regine his publicist. “Sorry to keep you waiting... How are you? Very good of you to come over. Thanks for being patient. Can we get you anything? Tea? Coffee? Something stronger?”

A fleet of Filipino handmaidens? The freedom of Dublin?

No, nothing, Bono. Just an intro. And so U2 play The Dubliners’ “Springhill Mining Disaster”, a heartbreaking, deathly song the band are knocking into shape to play on Gay Byrne’s *Late Late Show* (which goes out in Ireland at 9pm!) as part of a Dubliners silver-jubilee celebration show, also involving the likes of The Pogues, Planxty and The Fureys.

The Edge painstakingly explains how U2 were groomed on Coca-Cola, American television shows and *Top Of The Pops*, and that it wasn’t until they left to start touring that they realised they were Irish. “And it wasn’t until then we realised how special The Dubliners were.”

Bono’s back, dazzling us with anecdotes, slipping into a series of impressions for which Phil Cool might find a use. “Ronnie Drew [*singer with The Dubliners*] came up to Larry in a bar once and said [*perfect Ronnie Drew voice*], ‘Are you wid the U2?’ Larry said, ‘Yes’, and he said, ‘Jeezus... my boy, he loves your band. It would give him such a thrill to say that a member of the U2 bought his old man a pint.’ So of course, Larry had to buy him one. That’s real class, that is.”

“See, there are two sides to The Dubliners’ music. One is the Paddy at the bar swigging out of a bottle and then, when it’s finished, breaking it over somebody’s head. The other side is ‘Springhill Mining Disaster’, and that’s why we’re doing that song.”

U2 are back in the fray. Their new album, *The Joshua Tree*, leaves the traps this week and the usual wheels of promotion and touring groan into action. Separately, they explain away the LP’s ideas and motives with a unanimity that is almost uncanny. Have they been rehearsing their lines? Have they been knocking this one around so long that they’ve finally come up with a consensus of opinion?

The album’s about America, a new-found awareness of its roots in R’n’B and country nestling in perfect disharmony alongside their old awareness of its political shame in Central America. They sing rendingly of the mothers of the disappeared, carrying a plug for Amnesty International on the sleeve, while deliberately leaving the flaws they all knew remained on “Trip Through Your Wires”, an anarchic shambles of a song rooted in 12-bar blues.

No accident. Bono regards it as only the second album they’ve ever made, that U2 only really started with *The Unforgettable Fire*. Suddenly they wanted to write songs where the lyrics weren’t scribbled down between takes. Suddenly Bono wanted to sing properly. Suddenly they wanted to become a real band.

“Have you heard the new album yet?” enquires Bono in the corridor, between further bouts of startling hospitality. “Not bad, is it?” He disappears, chortling.

The Edge: “Bono’s writing words in a way he hasn’t done up until now. He’s so much better as

“they’re just flying around. You may think you won’t be affected, you’ve only just arrived, but you will – I promise you will.”

And so we perch on two stools at the bar, the nods and greetings from staff and customers and the odd bit of U2 memorabilia discreetly decorating the walls suggesting the chaps aren’t entirely unacquainted with this particular watering hole.

Bono swiftly sinks an Irish whiskey in the manner of a real rock’n’roll star and bemoans the lack of good writers in the music press, while I keep half an eye on the progress of Terry Marsh on a TV in the corner. “You like boxing? I’ve got tickets for the [*Marvin*] Hagler fight in Las Vegas. I’m fascinated by boxing as a writer, but as a person... I met Muhammad Ali, you know, he’s a U2 fan.”

Whaaat?

“Honest injun. [*US comic and activist*]

Dick Gregory brought him to see us. I was completely blown away by it. I just thought, ‘This is one of the greatest sportsmen who ever stepped into the spotlight. A man with real class. A real sense of humour.’”

Was he in a bad way?

“Listen, even when Muhammad Ali’s in a bad way, he’s still good enough for me. We have some weird fans. We had Bishop Tutu ring us up. In America, I went to one of the Anti-Apartheid rallies, and the tour was having an effect on America – people were joining the

“We didn’t really discover our Irishness until we got out of Ireland. And in America, you find yourself totally alienated by it” – The Edge

a singer now. And we’re listening to different things now. We’re getting more interested in the classic songwriters, country singers and stuff. It’s all relative to our interest in America. It’s like we didn’t really discover our Irishness until we travelled out of Ireland. And then you go to America and find yourself totally alienated by it.

“Then, slowly, you realise there are different levels to it. The America of the great R’n’B and country performers, and in civil rights, people like Martin Luther King and Bobby Kennedy.

“We worked with T-Bone Burnett and Robbie Robertson, and Bono did a session with Keith Richards, people who are hooked up on that. And some of the writers, the new journalism of people like Truman Capote and Norman Mailer, the way they were able to bring you to a place – it’s almost cinematic. We tried to do that on the album.”

Bono drags me screaming to the pub round the corner, in the heart of dirty Dublin’s docks. We’d been in the management company boardroom, ducking out of the adrenaline firing the atmosphere all around as the heartbeat of the U2 operation hit peak cylinders of professional panic. *The Joshua Tree* readies itself for world domination.

“The molecules in this place,” he’d said,

Anti-Apartheid movement, which was a real thrill. The same thing happened with Amnesty International. They doubled their membership after that tour. We didn’t speak to Bishop Tutu, but we had a call from his daughter. She said, ‘My father wants you to know that your tour of America has consequences, and he appreciates the work you’re doing for the Anti-Apartheid movement.’”

A drunk has collared Larry Mullen at the bar, engaging him in an argument about Self Aid, before telling him the story of his life. U2 were used at [*1986 Irish benefit gig*] Self Aid, he insists. Larry regards the accusation with equanimity, explaining that, while they didn’t agree with all the principles of Self Aid and while it hadn’t worked out quite the way any of them had hoped, he had met an unemployed guy in a pub soon afterwards who’d thanked him for appearing on it and said it had given him encouragement.

That conversation alone, explains Larry, was ample justification for them playing the gig, irrespective of all the other shenanigans. They shake hands warmly and the drunk departs, impressed.

Larry Mullen is not only the youngest member of U2, he’s also the prettiest. We talk about Bono. Didn’t he ever feel the

CONTINUES OVER ►



teensiest surge of envy as Bono careered around, grabbing the adoring masses and vigorously dumping them into the palm of his hand?

"No, no, NO!" he says, horrified. "Being a singer is a terrible responsibility. I sometimes get the odd twinge that I wouldn't mind playing lead guitar, but that's about as near as I'd want to get to the front."

I'll have a word with The Edge.

"It looks so frightening being the singer. Especially from where I am. You know, Bono disappears into the audience and you don't know what is happening. You just have to play on and hope for the best, but it's very worrying. I trust his judgment. I really do, he has an instinct for these things... but it doesn't stop you worrying. I don't always understand it, but I trust it."

The Basildon fireman [*Terry Marsh*] has won the world title and Bono is off on a rant about violence, peace and stuff like that.

"People think the reasons I'm attracted to Martin Luther King or Gandhi or Jesus Christ are that, in some way, I'm a real man of God myself. In truth, the real reason I'm attracted to these peaceful men is I'm the guy with the broken bottle. I grew up that way and I despise violence, I despise the violence in me and that is why I'm attracted to men who've turned their back on it.

"I think I must be a very bad icon. People mistake the music for the musician. What's special about U2 is the music" – Bono

"There was a gig in America once where I threw Larry's drumkit offstage and had a go at the band. And Edge, who is my ideal – he's completely composed – he was so outraged by the violence in me that he gave me a severe dig in the mouth. It was amazing. I've known him all my life and it was a really good dig in the

a lot of people.

"I think I must be a very bad icon. People mistake the music for the musician. What's special about U2 is the music, not the musician. I and the others are just ordinary people and our trade is to make music. Somebody else's is to build houses or work in a factory or teach. We're just getting to grips with our trade as songwriters, that's all."

But surely you encourage it? All that flagwaving and wading into the audience – don't you feel uneasy about that?

"I do. We went onstage in front of 50,000 people at Milton Keynes and it had been raining all day and the field was like an Irish bog. We went on and I thought, 'How can I live up to this? These people deserve the best concert of their lives, how can we live up to that?' And I couldn't answer it, I can't come to terms with it.

"That feeling has led me to exaggerated gestures onstage, but I've since decided words speak louder than actions. I've got to put the actions behind me. I always resented being on a stage, I always resented that barrier between me and the audience, and this led to that infamous gig in Los Angeles where I ended up falling off the balcony and a riot ensued and people could have got hurt.

"The band took me aside backstage and said, 'Look, you're the singer in a band, you've just got to get up there and sing. People in the audience understand the situation, you don't

always have to remind them that U2 aren't stars to be worshipped – they already know that."

Do they?

"Oh, they do. But by doing that, it looked like a big star trip when it was exactly the opposite I had in mind. It was something that went back to what I was doing back at the Dandelion

mouth. It knocked me over. This was onstage, in front of Talking Heads and The B-52's. I think they all thought it was part of the show.

"You see, for me to sing onstage, the only way I can do it is if I'm really committed to it and, if I sense anything less than complete commitment from the others, then I get very antagonistic towards them and, occasionally, this has led to a bit of a fracas. Larry was having a bad night and I was having a bad night and – well, some people come to see U2 and expect to see me in saffron."

You are a bit of an icon to

Market in Dublin and received a good kicking on that occasion."

But by going into the audience, surely you're bound to incite them?

"Yeah, isn't it funny? I swear to God that was the last thing on my mind. It came out of the exact opposite feeling. We were born out of that punk-rock explosion. I was 16 in 1976 and in a punk band, and this idea of separating the artist from the crowd was the antithesis of what that explosion was all about. I carry that with me and I would end up in the audience as a result. But it was a big mistake."

It won't happen again?

"Nope. Scout's honour. If the band were here, they'd be groaning now, saying, 'We've heard *that* before.'"

The band confirm they have heard it before. The Edge seems positively bemused by Bono's behaviour onstage. "We used to sit him down before a gig and say, 'Listen, you're not going into the audience tonight, are you?' And he'd say, 'No', and he'd mean it. But he can't help himself. As a singer, he feels the need to physically get close to people. When he's onstage, he's in a different mental state. Performance for Bono is so total that he comes offstage sometimes and he's totally in space."

Don't you get embarrassed by some of his onstage exploits?

"Embarrassed? No, not embarrassed. Just petrified."

Greg Carroll was a Maori. U2 met him on one of their excursions to the Antipodes and he became part of the road crew, returning with them to Dublin to become involved in their personal management. One day Bono asked a favour of him and Greg duly went off to collect Bono's motorbike. On the way back he crashed it and was killed.

The Joshua Tree is dedicated to Greg Carroll, and one track on the album, "One Tree Hill", was written as a direct response to his funeral. A sort of therapy for the band, perhaps, as Bono can hardly bear to talk about him.

"He was almost flesh and blood with U2. We met him in Auckland, New Zealand. Auckland is a city set around five volcanic mounds and the smallest one is called One Tree Hill because there's a tree at the top of it. We met Greg Carroll there and he worked with us on *The Unforgettable Fire* tour. He was one of those guys you say is too good for this world. We haven't, and I don't think we ever will, get over his loss. And he died doing me a favour. I don't know what to

say. He further made 1986 the most paradoxical year in our lives. That's why the desert attracted me as an image. That year was really a desert for us. It was a terrible time.

"Death is a real cold shower and I've had a lot. It's followed me around since I was a kid and I don't want to see any more of it."

"One Tree Hill" is followed on the album by "Exit", another song of violence and death. Its positioning on the album would indicate conceptual programming, but U2 insist the song is about no specific person and is purposely vague.

The Edge, who had a hand in the lyric, says it's

the prime example of their new cinematic approach to constructing songs and was partly inspired by reading Mailer's *The Executioner's Song*. Bono, on the other hand, talks of Flannery O'Connor and black comedies from the Deep South of America.

"It's just a short story really, except I left out a few of the verses because I liked it as a sketch. It's just about a guy who gets an idea into his head. He picks it up off a preacher on the radio or something and goes out and... I haven't quite worked it out yet whether it was a suicide or a murder. The words just came out very quickly on the last day of the record. We had 30 songs for the album and chose 11 of them, but I wanted a song with that sense of violence in it, especially before 'Mothers Of The Disappeared'."

America, America. It dominates the world and thrills and appals U2. Adam Clayton was appalled when, halfway through their first major US tour, he noticed that they'd adopted the first signs of American accents. Panic set in. MTV and US radio was subsequently banned from their ears and an urgent SOS went out for a rescue dispatch of tapes of the John Peel and Dave Fanning shows, lest they become any more contaminated by the bile of American music.

Thus freed from the taint of American media brainwashing, they started to prod beneath the surface a little more. Asked who he is listening to now, Edge will reply, "Hank Williams,

Archie Edwards, Willie Dixon and Mel & Kim." And Bono talks wistfully of listening to Keith Richards playing gospel songs on the piano and he, Bono, being introduced to his first John Lee Hooker record at the age of 25.

"It didn't change my life, but it changed my attitude to music. I went home that night and wrote 'Silver And Gold'. I met T-Bone Burnett once in a bar. He said, 'I'm writing a song at the moment, it's called 'Having A Wonderful Time, Wish You Were Her', I'm in Room 5, would you like to join me?' How can you turn down an invitation like that?"

How indeed?

"So we went off and wrote that song. He'd then hand me the guitar and say, 'Now you play me one of your songs,' and I'd look at the guitar, turn it over and play the beat on the back and sing it unaccompanied because U2's music was without root.

"We, as a group, formed our own sound devoid of any background because our record collections started in 1976 with Tom Verlaine and Patti Smith and The Clash and The Jam. 'Silver And Gold' was my desperate attempt – and I wrote it in two hours – to write a song that belonged to a tradition. I was writing it about South Africa, about a man who was at the point of violence, which is something that fascinates me."

Cropped hair, allied to a jaunty pair of pince-nez, gives Adam Clayton the air of an eccentric American college professor.

An odd illusion for a man with such an urbane, even aristocratic manner, that itself seems at odds with a man who plays bass with U2 and uses the words "rock'n'roll" at any available pause in the conversation.

There's no specific U2 sound, he insists, because they keep changing it. At one point, they were working on the album and Bono interrupted Edge and said he was beginning to sound like U2. Edge took the point and wiped the slate clean. They wanted to make a live-sounding album because that's what rock'n'roll is all about. They know the album is technically flawed, but that's what rock'n'roll is all about. This album is rootsier because, shucks, that's rock'n'roll. And boy, those old '50s records; half of them are out of tune and the playing's awful, but it sure as hell is rock'n'roll.

One of the first things Bono greets us with, in-between offers of tea, coffee or perhaps something a little stronger, is a eulogy about Ben E. King's "Stand By Me" and its perfect right to be at No 1. [*A reissue topped the charts in 1987 after featuring in an advert for Levi's jeans.*]

"Adam Clayton... Adam Clayton," bellows Bono. "If it wasn't for Adam Clayton, I wouldn't be in U2. Adam Clayton found Paul McGuinness, our manager. Adam Clayton booked our first gigs. I owe so much to him. He's totally committed to being in U2.

"For a few years, I didn't know whether I wanted to be in a band and U2 didn't know. We thought we might break up. It was after *Boy*, which I thought was a great **CONTINUES OVER ►**



U2: ARCHIVE 1987

LP. I lost interest. I had less interest in being in U2 and more of an interest in other sides of me, whether I was talking to a Catholic priest in the inner city or a Pentecostal preacher, I was sucking up whatever they had to say. I was interested in that third-dimensional side of me and I thought rock'n'roll was a bit of a waste of space. I thought, 'OK, U2 were good at being a band, but maybe we could be better at doing other things, like getting involved in the inner city or something.'

"We were teetering on the brink of collapse. Adam was completely heartbroken about this. He was totally disillusioned because he was more interested in other spirits, like whiskey or tequila or anything else he could lay his hands on. I'm all right now, I've come to terms with being in a band. I think now that this is what we do best."

The next U2 single will be called "With Or Without You", a melodic ballad that sounds like a smoochy love song but, if it is, someone's put acid in the champagne. At the moment they're editing the video. Bono's face appears on the screen, harsh and cold, his hair swept cruelly back to emphasise this is no standard standard.

Bono is uncharacteristically immodest about the song. He thinks it's brilliant. He thinks it

fashioned. A hippy thing to do. I thought what I was doing in sketching away was... Iggy Pop had done it and he was a bit of a hero. I thought that, as soon as I had a pen in my hand, I was a dangerous man and..."

He suddenly stops dead mid-sentence and I wonder if it's a coronary.

"I hear U2! It is! It is!" He's very excited; they're playing his song. "It's 'Where The Streets Have No Name', it must be on a radio. There. Do you hear it?"

Either he's hallucinating or I am.

"I want to be a singer. I aspire to being a soul singer. My heroes are Van Morrison, Janis Joplin... but on the other hand, they're Scott Walker and Elvis Presley, and trying to work in between the two is where I am at the moment. The other interesting thing is that all the people that inspired me when I was growing up all had the same confusions of faith. Bob Dylan, Van Morrison, Patti Smith, Al Green, Marvin Gaye – this has been a real encouragement to me."

He pauses to reflect again on "With Or Without You".

"It's a great single. God almighty, I hope it gets into the Top 10, I really do, it's a classic 45."

Fighting talk, but who cares about singles when your album is almost guaranteed to go straight into the charts at No 1? And on St Patrick's Day.

hoard words and the Irish spend them. We're loose. Like James Brown – 'I'm a sex machine' – now that's not subtle. On one level, we're accused of being too subtle and, on another, we're not subtle enough. I'm interested in a certain language. On this record, I'm interested in a lot of primitive symbolism, almost Biblical. Some people choose to use red, some people choose turquoise. Some people like lavender. I like red.

"During this period, I was influenced by the John Lennon handbook. I had it in my breast pocket... 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'... after all, John Lennon wrote the first one. What upsets me is that when people see U2, they see only 'Sunday Bloody Sunday' and the guy with the white flag. They don't see 'Drowning Man', which was on the same album. There is another side to U2. Sure, we arrived with a placard in our hands – and bold placards – but that's not just what U2's about."

But you shouldn't be surprised when that's what the media pick up on.

"Oh, we deserve everything we get on that one. But *Boy* wasn't like that. Nor was *October*. It was simply one album, *War*, which was a reaction to the New Romantic movement, the cocktail-set mentality, and deliberately we stripped our sound to bare bones and knuckles and three capital letters – WAR – and we put these prime colours in. But we've stood accused since then for that one album. You could say the same thing about John Lennon, he went through a similar sort of period, or Bob Dylan on his earliest work, 'Masters Of War' and all that. It was just a period we went through."

Do you regret it now?

"No."

"Bono can't help himself. When he's onstage, he's in a different mental state. The performance for him is total" – The Edge

should go to No 1. He thinks the charts need U2 right now a hell of a lot more than U2 could ever need the charts. He *almost* believes the song has turned him into a half-decent singer.

"I don't think I've been a good singer, but I think I'm getting to be a good one. On *Unforgettable Fire*, I think something broke in my voice and it's continuing to break on *The Joshua Tree*, but there's much, much, much more there. At the end of *Unforgettable Fire*, Eno said, 'Bono has given me enough to get away with it, but he hasn't given me all he's got.' I've given him more on this record, but there's a lot more to come. I know that."

"See, I'm loosening up as a person, about my position in a rock'n'roll band, about U2, but for years I really wasn't sure about who I was or who U2 were or, really, if there was a place for us. People say that U2 are self-righteous, but if ever I pointed a finger I pointed it at myself. I was defensive about U2 and therefore I was on the attack."

"When I hear U2 records, I hear my voice and I hear an uptightness. I don't hear my real voice. A lot of it was to do with writing words on the spot, making them up as I went along. But Chrissie Hynde said to me, 'If you want to sing the way I think you want to sing and the way you can sing, then write words that you believe in.' I'd never done that. I was literally writing the words as I was doing the vocals."

Why?

"I thought writing words was almost old-

Clayton and The Edge still cringe as they recall the last time they were on *Top Of The Pops*. "We were the first group that went on that show and our record went down," says Edge, smiling. "We really felt pretty stupid doing it, though. We were on the same week as Echo And The Bunnymen – that was when Echo were still talking to us – and Mac suggested we swap guitar players. I actually thought it was a pretty funny idea, but somebody said there would be trouble from the unions, so we didn't do it."

But "Pride..." was a hit single and a damn good one.

"It's the highest chart placing we've had, but we're really terrible at producing singles. We're never prepared to work out all that remix stuff and all those other promotional devices, it's never been a priority with us."

"And ultimately," adds Clayton sagely, "I hope people will remember 'Pride...' for what it was about rather than the fact that it was a hit. It was important for us to have a single which said something, rather than just make a nice noise on the radio."

Bono is answering criticisms about his use of emotive phrases for easy dramatic effect. *Under A Blood Red Sky*, *The Unforgettable Fire*, *War*, "Sunday Bloody Sunday", "In God's Country"...

"I guess I'm just an over-the-top kinda guy."

Is that a plea of guilty?

"The Irish are great dramatists. The English

Last year, Bono went to Nicaragua and El Salvador, where he met some of the mothers of the disappeared, inspiring the album's final track. The Amnesty International tour hit San Francisco and Lou Reed took him to Mission Street, where the walls are covered in anti-American slogans. There he met the Chilean artist, René Castro.

"I was drawn towards Central America through meeting him. At first he didn't pay me much attention until he discovered the Amnesty connection. Amnesty saved his life. He'd been captured when Allende was killed and they had the military revolution. He was tortured. He had a hole in his chest. They bored a hole in his chest. He was in the stadium with Victor Jara when he had his fingers cut off and then, eventually, was brutally murdered."

"Amnesty International had got him out and people from the Latin American community came to our gigs and René Castro sent me some of his paintings and, eventually, I was asked to go to Nicaragua and El Salvador."

In Nicaragua it's, well, it's the sexiest revolution I ever saw. Women in khaki uniforms standing in corners and, well, I don't like *anyone* with an Armalite rifle, but they were standing there smoking cigarettes and looking like Miss World.

"And then going to Salvador, the difference in the air was incredible. You could feel the atmosphere of malevolence from the troops. It



was awful. I wrote 'Bullet The Blue Sky' out of the fear I felt there, using very primitive imagery. Because Salvador looks like an ordinary city. You see McDonald's, you see children with schoolbooks, you see what looks like a middle-class environment until you go 25 miles out of the city and see the villagers and the peasant farmers.

"I was outside on my way to a village, and the village was bombed and it scared the shit out of me. I didn't know which way

to run. They were mortaring the village and there were fighters overhead and it was completely... and this little farmer says to me, 'No worry, it's over *there*'. He was going through it every day of his life and he'd learned to live with it, whereas I was there just for a few weeks and I was really concerned with No 1 at that point. Troops opened fire above our heads while we were there, just flexing muscles, and I literally felt sick.

"The idea that people coming to our concerts in America... that their tax was actually paying for these instruments of torture was something that I hadn't quite come to terms with."

He turns to Larry Mullen. "Do you think I should be talking about this? Probably not."

Terry Marsh is world champion. The new album is called *The Joshua Tree*. And they wouldn't tell me why. 02

RATTLE AND HUM

“OK Edge, play the blues!” A vainglorious bid to join the rock’n’roll legends, or a misunderstood gem? BY JOHN LEWIS

TRACKMARKS

- 1 Helter Skelter ★★
- 2 Van Diemen's Land ★★
- 3 Desire ★★
- 4 Hawkmoon 269 ★★
- 5 All Along The Watchtower ★★
- 6 I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For ★★
- 7 Freedom For My People ★★
- 8 Silver And Gold ★★
- 9 Pride (In The Name Of Love) ★★
- 10 Angel Of Harlem ★★
- 11 Love Rescue Me ★★
- 12 When Love Comes To Town ★★
- 13 Heartland ★★
- 14 God Part II ★★
- 15 The Star Spangled Banner ★★
- 16 Bullet The Blue Sky ★★
- 17 All I Want Is You ★★

Release date: October 10, 1988
Produced by: Jimmy Iovine. All live recording by Remote Recording Services (The Black Truck)
Guest musicians include: Bob Dylan, BB King, The New Voices Of Freedom, The Memphis Horns, Benmont Tench, Van Dyke Parks
Chart position: UK:1 US:1

There's a speech that Bono makes during the outro of "Silver And Gold", recorded live in Denver and included on the *Rattle And Hum* album. It starts with a diatribe against "Apar-TIGHT!", goes on to praise Nelson Mandela ("This is a song about a man who grew up in a little shanty town outside of Johannesburg... A man who was ready to take up arms against his oppressor"), and ends with Bono asking, "Am I buggin' ya? I don't mean to bug ya... OK Edge, PLAY THE BLUES!" It's followed by The Edge playing one of the most hilariously unbluesy guitar solos ever committed to tape.

This, in a nutshell, embodies the prosecution's case against *Rattle And Hum*. It is an album that was supposed to be an off-the-cuff piece of simple music-making for its own sake. But it became one where every casual gesture quickly took on the mantle of Grand

Public Statement, where every stage aside became scrutinised, every note freighted with significance. Where every lighthearted jam session became a potential apostasy for the biggest band in the world.

One part studio album, one part travelogue, one part document of their 1987 world tour for *The Joshua Tree*, *Rattle And Hum* is used as Exhibit A for those who hate U2. *The Village Voice* described it as "an awful record", bogged down with "half-baked, overweening reality" and "know-nothingism". The *New York Times* thought the album was "plagued by U2's attempt to grab every mantle in the rock'n'roll hall of fame... each attempt is embarrassing in a different way." Neil Tennant, quoted by Chris Heath not long after *Rattle And Hum* was released, saw it as something only loved by "ghastly rock purists... who want it to be like 1969 again", declaring that, "We hate it for exactly the same reasons Johnny Rotten said he hated dinosaur groups in 1976... it's stultifying, it says nothing, it is big and pompous and ugly."

There was hubris: *Rattle And* **CONTINUES OVER ►**

U2: THE ALBUMS

Hum was the album in which U2 appeared to be inducting themselves into their own Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame, jamming with Dylan and BB King, covering The Beatles, citing Hendrix and playing in the same studios as Elvis. There was pomposity: a brief list of Bono's onstage banter can remove the enamel from the teeth of even the hardest U2 fan. Take your pick from: "This is a song that Charles Manson stole from The Beatles - we're stealing it back!"; "The God I believe in isn't short o' cash, MISTER!"; "Put El Salvador through the amp and see what comes out."

The album is, of course, inseparable from Phil Joanou's humourless monochrome rockumentary of the same name, which tanked at the box office and was savaged by critics (the *New York Times*, again, regarded it as an exercise in "pure egomania", one of the kinder remarks made). It was also, in retrospect, the first of many films to be regarded as an unwitting real-life recreation of *This Is Spinal Tap*. Larry Mullen's tearful visit to Graceland sees him all but perform a raga rendition of "Heartbreak Hotel" by Presley's grave.

However, it's important to remember quite how staggeringly famous U2 had become at this stage, particularly in the States, where 1987's *The Joshua Tree* had topped the charts, spawned two No 1 singles ("I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" and "With Or Without You") and sold more than

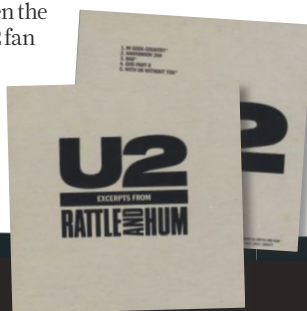
10 million units in America alone. So as America fell in love with U2, *Rattle And Hum* is the sound of U2 reciprocating that affection.

Although U2's Irishness played well there, very little of their output to this point seemed to betray any distinctively American traits. This made them unique among the panoply of other artists from the British Isles who had successfully crossed the Atlantic. All of them - from The Beatles and the Stones to Duran Duran and Wham! - always had a vestige of soul, blues or funk as part of their sonic armoury. For all Bono's rather cringeworthy claims ("As an Irishman I feel a real closeness to the black man because we were both the underdog, because we both have soul and the spirit to spit it out"), U2's music was always eerily white, a fusion of unsyncopated English post-punk and stolid Celtic mysticism.

So the notion of U2 paying tribute to their black American heroes seemed something of an oddity at the time. The Edge may be able to do lots of things on the guitar - make bleeps, whale noises and police-siren wails, play long ambient drones, play like he's not using his hands - but even the most ardent U2 fan will concede that he can no more "play the blues" than Bono can do stand-up.

As a result, *Rattle And Hum* sees U2 outsourcing the soul and the blues duties to more qualified professionals. On the live version of "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For", the backing vocals are provided by a Harlem gospel choir called The New Voices Of Freedom, who eventually take over the entire song as the band members drop out one by one. "Angel Of Harlem" is dominated by Stax veterans the Memphis Horns, whose swaggering arrangement transforms the song from an obvious retread of "Like A Rolling Stone". And on "When Love Comes To Town" the guitar and the vocal line on the chorus is delegated to BB King.

The last two tracks were recorded at Sun Studios, the home of Elvis' epochal early recordings. Two other tracks from these Sun sessions, "She's A Mystery To Me" (later recorded by Roy Orbison) and Woody Guthrie's "Jesus Christ", are both edited out of the album, but a fifth Sun-recorded track, "Love Rescue Me", does make it on, possibly because of its prestigious associations. It's a rambling blues shuffle co-written by Bono and Bob Dylan (who also provides harmonica and backing vocals on the track), and its execution seems almost wilfully ramshackle. Around 3'30 into the track, Adam Clayton changes chord a bar too early and ends up playing a series of hilarious bum notes. The fact that they kept this take on the album speaks volumes about the deliberately slapdash, warts-and-all



Bono with BB King, a man who categorically could play the blues, 1989



nature of the project, which also sees the band stumble through Dylan's "All Along The Watchtower" (the film suggests that they barely knew the song before going out onstage).

Dylan crops up several times throughout the album (also playing Hammond on "Hawkmooon 269"), and U2's fealty for him at this time was probably more eagerly reciprocated than one might imagine. By the late 1980s, Dylan was at his lowest ebb, professionally and critically, starring in the laughable *Hearts Of Fire* and releasing albums such as *Down In The Groove* and *Knocked Out Loaded*. If anything, it's likely that the association with U2 helped Dylan more than the band, introducing him to Daniel Lanois and eventually getting him out of his 1980s furlough.

Actually, iTunes now allows us to reassemble the album into several parts. There is a three-track EP we might call "The Sun Sessions", and there is the largely forgettable six-track live album (although John Lydon fans might be interested in the live version of "Bullet The Blue Sky", a lift from PiL's "Banging The Door").

The remainder – effectively a six-track studio mini-album – isn't anywhere near as bad as the haters suggest. Even when nearly paralysed by their status as the world's biggest rock'n'roll band, U2 could still write great songs. "Desire" is the album's one perfect pop moment, their first ever UK No 1 and a song that was probably meant to sound like an angst-ridden tribute to Bo Diddley, but which actually sounds more like a steelier take on George Michael's "Faith". The rest of the studio tracks are rather more introspective affairs. There's the creepy but moving "All I Want Is You" (strings orchestrated, quite beautifully, by Van Dyke Parks) and The Edge's solo statement "Van Diemen's Land", a moving song about Irish convicts being transported to Tasmania and

howling feedback guitar and Larry Bunker's thunderous timpani breaks.

"Angel Of Harlem", often dismissed as being U2's worst single, actually sounds like an above-average Dylan And The Hawks tribute. The only truly awful moment is the BB King collaboration "When Love Comes To Town", which really does play as a third-rate *Blues Brothers* pastiche. ("These are very heavy lyrics for such a young man," said BB King in the rehearsal. "Thank you, Mr King," replied Bono.) As Neil Tennant says: "We're supposed to take it seriously because BB King plays on some throwaway pop song that could have been written by Andrew Lloyd Webber." One infamous review by Mark Sinker – controversially unpublished by the *NME* for fear of losing the loyalty of U2 fans – describes U2 as "treating BB King like their butler". As it happens, U2 clearly aren't overly enamoured with "When Love Comes To Town" these days – it is rarely performed live, and neither is it nor "Angel" made it onto their most recent Greatest Hits collection, 2005's *U218*.

As an interesting aside, *Rattle And Hum* is also one of U2's most obvious declarations of Christianity. For all their fervent evangelical background, their previous flirtations with faith-based rock were generally shrouded in highly subjective lyrics that could easily slip into secular metaphor. By

leaning so heavily on African-American music – which has always found it easier to deal with devotion and spirituality – Bono allows religion to enter his lyrics more explicitly. On "Pride", "When Love Comes To Town", "God Part II", "Love Rescue Me", "Angel Of Harlem"

and "Hawkmooon 269", "love" is constantly used as a not-so-subtle codeword for "God". "When Love Comes To Town" talks of witnessing Christ on the cross, while "God Part II" might be dedicated to John Lennon, but plays as a riposte to Lennon's atheist anthem.

By the end of the album, it's clear that U2 had taken this flirtation with "roots", "authenticity" and "blackness" about as far as it could go. In a way, every subsequent U2 project has been a reaction against *Rattle And Hum*. It serves, then, as a curious alternative path that U2 could have entered. It was, for them, a warning as to the dangers of resting on your laurels ("A rock group is like a shark," said The Edge. "If you're not moving forward, you die"); a warning that the position as the biggest rock'n'roll band in the world has to be constantly earned ("If this isn't our best album," said Bono on the release of *No Line On The Horizon* in 2009, "then we're irrelevant").

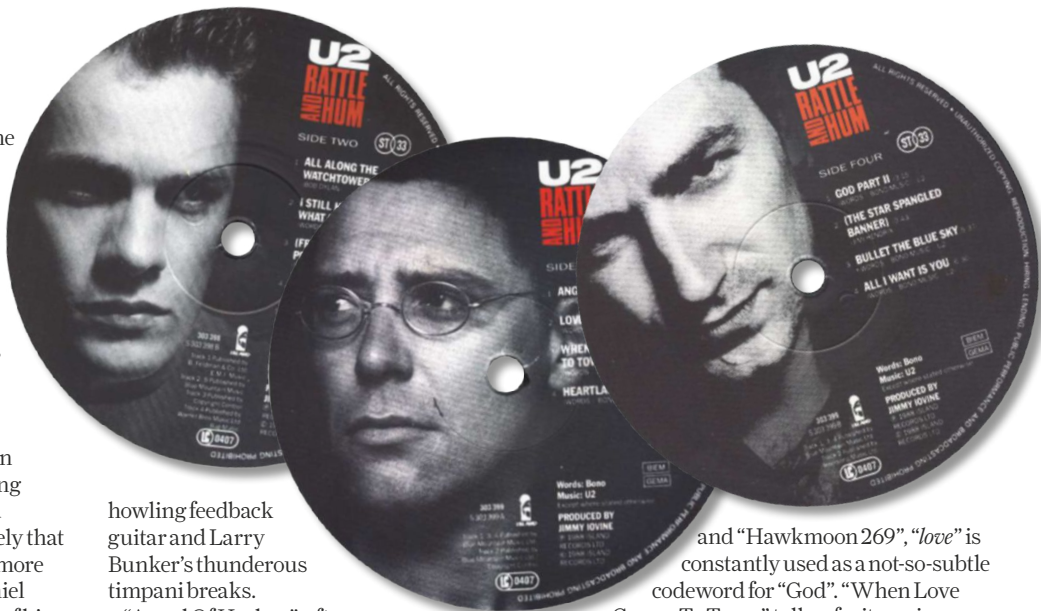
For the haters, it is U2's *Tales From Topographic Oceans* (a sluggish, self-indulgent multi-disc collection), it is their *Magical Mystery Tour* (an unfocused, self-indulgent, film-related release), it is their *Hot Space* (the stadium rock band immersing themselves rather awkwardly in "black music").

In its defence, you might also regard *Rattle In Hum* as U2's *London Calling* (a primal, slightly breathless, half-finished sprint through rock'n'roll history), their *Pin Ups* (there are cover versions of The Beatles and Bob Dylan, along with tributes to John Lennon, Billie Holiday, Jimi Hendrix, Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Miles Davis and John Coltrane); their *Young Americans* (a romantic love letter to an idealised America); or their *Exile On Main Street* (a series of hurriedly scribbled picture postcards sent back to the Old Country). Now it's up to you to programme your iPod judiciously and decide which. ☹☹

Every subsequent U2 project has been a reaction against this album, and its reception...

possibly the closest that the band have ever come to writing a Celtic folk song.

There are also precursors of the experimental edge they'd develop on later albums. "Heartland", a leftover from *The Joshua Tree* sessions, is the most Eno-esque track on the album (Eno himself turns up to play ambient keyboard drones), while "God Part II", a belated response to John Lennon's "God", has that trashy glitterball feel that would dominate later albums such as *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa*. "Hawkmooon 269" – so called because the band genuinely mixed it 269 times before they wearily decided on this recording – is one of the scariest songs that U2 have ever committed to record, based around Bono's growling lead vocals, pitched much lower than usual, the sensual backing vocals of Edna Wright, Carolyn Willis and Billie Barnum, The Edge's



WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "It's not meant to be taken as an artful, considered record set. Here, simply, is a vigorous soundtrack to a tour movie, a rush of impressions... a travelogue" **Stuart Bailie, NME, October 15, 1988**

■ "All bits and bobs, flawed, both confused and all too certain in its vision."

Yet even now, I cannot totally forsake U2. Listening to the great swabs of guitar, rolling back on itself in great banks of dark cloud, I too am intoxicated, with the intoxication further multiplied by the knowledge that this is the music of the millions" **David Stubbs, Melody Maker, October 15, 1988**

“I could hang my dick out onstage and people would think it was a statement.”



MELODY MAKER, OCTOBER 22, 1988 *The Joshua Tree* has made Bono a hybrid of rock star, saint and spokesman for a generation. **TED MICO** finds this sitting uneasily with him and U2, whose raw new album, *Rattle And Hum*, hopes to return them to the realms of rock'n'roll. And, as Bono puts it, “destroy the whole fucking U2 myth...”

Bono adjusts his pillbox hat and stares around the empty car park. Outside the gates, worshippers from Ireland, Italy, the US and Australia are surrounding the U2 management office, spraying fresh graffiti over last year's aerosol paeans of devotion. Waiting for a sign. Record shops in Dublin opened at midnight last Sunday in an effort to stop crowds from having to sleep on the pavement just to purchase a copy of the new U2 album. Outside Dublin,

the entire population of Mediaworld is begging for an audience with the man. And the man? Bono keeps staring around an empty car park.

“It's very... difficult at the moment. I don't know. If I talk for too long now, I'll say something I'll regret.” He shakes his head and his pillbox tilts off its axis.

Everyone wants to know Bono. More accurately, wants everyone *else* to know *they* know Bono. Most carry the same pocketful of missed conceptions: Bono the healer of lepers, Bono the man to swing elections, Bono the social conscience of rock, Bono the viceless Pope of Pop, Bono the invincible star.

CONTINUES OVER ►

Bono at the NEC,
Birmingham, 1988



U2: ARCHIVE 1988

"I remember what you said in your last piece, 'Bono will remain a star as long as he doesn't become a celebrity'. It's so true," he says. "Even Charlie Sheen had an imaginary conversation with me. He went on this TV show telling everyone he'd met me. He said 'I was wasted on booze and I asked Bono, 'How do you do it? How?' And Bono turned to me, pointed at the bottle and said, 'You won't find it in there.'" Can you believe that! It was the last date of The Joshua Tree tour last year, and I'd already drunk the whole bottle. I couldn't even speak, let alone preach. It's incredible. Everything gets twisted."

Bono is standing in an empty car park in Dublin. Smiling.

"It's important that I keep things together – family, the band. But it's not easy sometimes. Every fucking thing I say becomes some sort of statement, something of vast importance. I could go onstage, unzip my pants and hang my dick out and people would think it was some statement about something."

He looks genuinely amazed. He also looks pretty amazing.

It would be so ridiculously easy for Bono to wander off the reservation and never return. The perfect rock (soap) opera: the spokesman for our degeneration who cared too much, became too popular, and still carried the weight of the world on his shoulder-pads, spirals into a nervous breakdown – all because of the public's carnivorous appetite for idols. How neat and tidy. Drama fans are counting the days. Luckily for Bono, the rest of U2 refuse to allow him to play out the final scenes.

Edge: "He has his moments. As a character he's a little strange. We hold it together because we look after one another. If Bono gets too freaked out, there's always someone there to tell him to get it together."

There have been numerous comparisons made between Bono and the late John Lennon, but in fact he reminds me of Joe Strummer (although both will loathe the comparison). Just as Strummer led the charge for political consciousness in the late '70s, so Bono continues as a more open-handed humanitarian struggle in the late '80s. Both have been heralded as messiahs of rock just because they shouted questions from the back of class. But they studied their questions so carefully that by the time they reached the front of the class, they had no answers. The more they knew, the more they knew there was more to know.

At different times, both have sat in the bath and screamed, "I don't know!" That's OK. But when Strummer came out of the water closet and pronounced his uncertainty, his public called for his gizzards, so humiliated were they by such a naked display of agnosticism. Bono can be anything, but he *must be certain*. So he and Strummer both sigh, smile, grab a burger, tell another story and down a jar or two. Everything's OK again. There's always hope.

Adam: "Bono can go pretty far out there. It's not as simple as sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. You can lose your mind very easily under the pressure he's under sometimes."

I know how he feels. My Disney watch says

the little hand is on Dumbo's trunk and the big hand is at Mickey Mouse's elbow. It's a nerve-racking Olympic sprint. Bono is about to vaporise and as soon as that big hand tickles Mickey's shoulder, the Edge and Adam Clayton will disappear into the studio void to record the B-side for "When Love Comes To Town", the follow-up single to the raucous "Desire", and I'll be left up shit creek without a Paddy. Ouch. That was bad news. Couldn't resist it. The other piece of bad news is that I left my steroids at home. The good news is that I don't need them.

I do need a calculator, though. U2 is a small word, but as soon as it's mentioned, huge numbers start to crunch. Since 1980, they've sold well over 30 million albums and have been No 1 in almost every marketplace in the world, usually simultaneously. *The Joshua Tree* alone sold over 11 million copies, while last year's global tour grossed over £23 million. They are, without doubt, the biggest band of the decade.



It's all figures. And it all figures. The new double album, *Rattle And Hum*, is an attempt by the world's biggest rock band to become the world's biggest rock'n'roll band.

The usual thesaurus of epic adjectives used to describe the U2 sound has been shunted to the sidings. At the end of last year I asked Adam where U2 could go after *The Joshua Tree*, the LP now hailed as "the album of the decade", and the tour that played to over three million people in 15 countries. Adam's reply was simple, if inevitable: "Downwards."

Rattle And Hum is not only the soundtrack to their forthcoming live film. It's almost a deliberate bid to sabotage their position on the summit of the rock mountain, to undermine the U2 myth. If *The Joshua Tree* was, to use Bono's phrase, "the big picture", then *Rattle And Hum* is a slice of hurried graffiti, closing Chapter II of their mammoth saga, in the same way that *Under A Blood Red Sky* ended the first chapter.

The Edge is sitting in their favourite cosy dockers' pub. Smiling.

"This album, to be honest, is just treading water," he says. "I mean, I like the songs, but it's only a fraction of what we can do. It's like a little Polaroid of U2."

Adam: "What we could have done, is not put out this record and waited another year and a half and that would have been the end of what we are now. We wanted something more immediate."

Bono is still in the car park. Staring.

"That's the first thing I've learned from Prince. Just get the record out and fuck off."

And because it's *only* a film soundtrack, U2 don't have to compete with past triumphs.

Edge: "It's true. We never really thought about it like that, but you're right."

Bono: "We're going to keep releasing record after record until everyone'll be sick of U2."

In an age where everyone is striving to create the ultimate out-of-body experience, the surrender or drowning of the self in lustrous discord, U2 are trying to cram the human back into the song.

While most *Maker* cover stars try to lose themselves in their music, U2 are trying to *find* themselves. Sweeping artifice under the carpet, they quest for some kind of gungy, tactile reality. They now seem determined to exhibit their frailty, their vulnerability: "We're the biggest band in the world and we can get it wrong and it doesn't matter. It's thrilling."

Adam: "That's what rock'n'roll is. I mean, rock bands don't make mistakes. It's about playing the songs and not being too precious about them. Rock'n'roll isn't something you can just buy in a record shop. It's an attitude."

Bono: "What other band in our position would learn the chords of 'All Along The Watchtower' five minutes before they went onstage, play it live and record it? No-one."

No-one. The Edge stops smiling.

"I don't think it was a deliberate attempt to do anything other than record songs as straightforwardly and with as much feeling as possible. It was the music we were listening to at the time. It's as simple as that, really, right from 'Desire' to 'Love Rescue Me'. I think people can put a whole heap of significance on something that's incredibly straightforward and unpretentious."

Uh hum. For a pick-up truck without a destination, every road is the right road. Yet the "real" music they're out to lasso must reveal scars, and up until now U2 have hidden their pain carefully under a cumulus of all-consuming power and passion.

"But there's pain in doubt," offers Adam.

Edge: "From the beginning, most U2 songs have been riddled with doubt. That's the thing about faith. Faith is meaningless without the doubt. Without doubt, there is no faith."

Adam: "You always have to ask questions. Part of the problem with music today is that people are too fucking *afraid* to ask questions."

Edge: "This band is full of contradictions. The song 'God Part II' is really Bono trying to



The Edge with Keith Richards at charity concert 'Smile Jamaica' for the Hurricane Appeal, at the Dominion Theatre, London, October 16, 1988

“The reason we feel comfortable in the company of Dylan, BB King or Keith Richards is because they’re alive through having music in their soul...” – Adam Clayton

impress his own internal feelings of conflict.”

Bono sings lines like: *I don't believe rock'n'roll can really change the world*, yet Bono is one of the few people who really *does* believe. He *has* faith in the recuperative powers of his music; where there's a riff, there's a way.

“Of course I do, but not all the time. That's the point, you see.”

He also sings, “*You glorify your past when the future dries up*”. Yet most of the nine studio songs on the album paddle in other artists' pools, and employing the likes of Dylan, BB King and Billy Preston merely muddies the water. Conflict indeed, although two tracks still send

a shiver down the thigh bone. The cover and the song lyrics contain a lexicography of legends, from Billie Holiday, through Elvis, Hendrix, Lennon and Dylan (once again there's similarities with The Clash's *London Calling* album, which was also littered with icons of mythical Americana).

It's not U2 trying to become legends by association, more an escape from fame's quarantine. It's lonely. They're scraping the scales off pop's cistern. Scales that should have been flushed. Dylan has written *one* decent song this decade (and “Brownsville Girl” was co-written by Sam Shepard). He's not exactly

the inspired genius that will wave wands and turn masturbation into a masterpiece. Only Van Dyke Parks' string orchestration on the disturbing “All I Want Is You” adds to the flavour – a stew simmered smack in the centre of the American heartland.

Adam: “The reason we feel comfortable in the company of Dylan, BB King or Keith Richards is not because they're legends, but because they're alive through having music in their soul. Dylan still has it. You know it when you meet him. It's not because we want their name on our record. When we get to where they are, we want to be as much in love with music.”

U2 are surrounded by perpetual chatter: whirring cameras, curious star-spotters, jostling fans and ear-bleeding demands. Perhaps the only way the band can preserve their marbles is to make a louder noise, an impromptu racket to drown out the babble of fame. Bono may not be able to stop questioning his motives and actions, but at least he can blot them out occasionally with rampant noise – rock'n'roll as refuge from thought.

We need idols to aspire to because it proves that dreams can come true.

Bono is living proof that *anyone* can be *anything*. But if you're part of everyone else's dream, how do you keep a perspective on your own reality?

Adam: “There's something inside me that's now able to say no. I never could do that before. You start to realise how you want to live and ignore things like the LA bullshit. Who wants to look like a fuckin' eedjit? I have better things to do with my time. You hold on to your family. They're the people who will get you through it.”

“I don't know, I think drugs sound pretty interesting, too.” The Edge is

still smiling.

“A nod's as good as a wink, eh Edge?” Adam waits for a reaction.

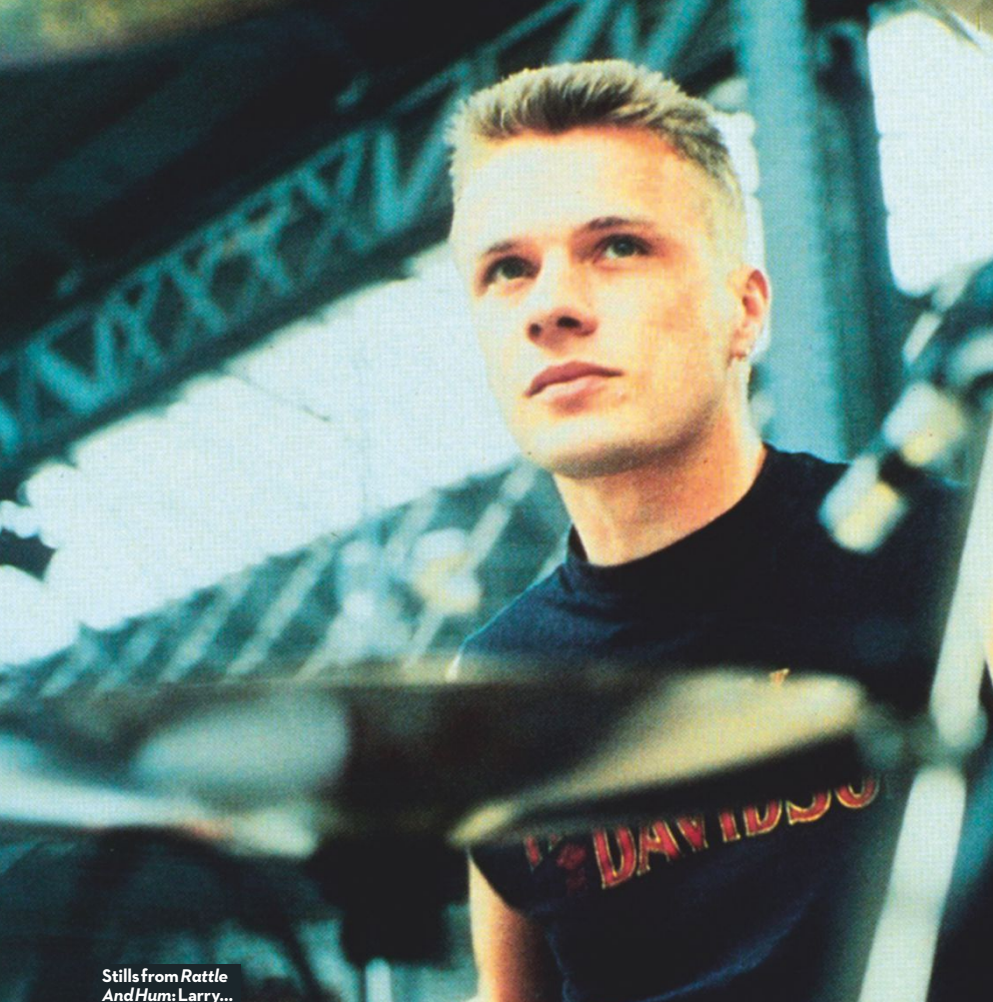
Edge adjusts his straw hat. Pop. Another myth bursts.

Ho hum.

Most of the icons U2 now embrace have all achieved success through excess. They touched the extremities because that's what their characters demanded – the Citizen Kane Syndrome. The strengths that forced them to become adored statues were also the weaknesses that toppled the totem.

Adam: “A lot of the people that say they created stuff when they were out of their brains probably weren't. That's the truth. The minute they finished the record, they were. If you're feeling *that* awful and *that* fucked up, you don't work. We work *because* we're fucked up.”

Edge: “We formed this band so that we could play and write music. Which, now that I think about it, is a pretty fuckin' stupid idea. Most people form bands because they **CONTINUES OVER**»



Stills from *Rattle and Hum*: Larry...

want to get laid, which is reasonable. Our idea is unfashionable, but there you have it."

Adam: "Our lives incorporate some of the same extremes as Hendrix and Lennon. Like how do you balance the work you do with your private life and how you deal with the rest of the world? You can get pretty strung out when you're on the road for three months."

So U2 aren't the much-vaunted anchor of moderation?

Adam: "If you've ever seen the look in Bono's eyes in the middle of a show three months into a tour, it doesn't feel stable at all! All this celebrity bullshit that you get when all you want to do is play fucking music. How do you deal with that?"

How *do* you deal with that?

Adam stares at an empty pint glass.

"We drink a lot."

What are you most frightened of?

Edge: "I never worry about writing better songs than we've written already. My fear is that people will find out that we're all basically charlatans."

Ho hum.

For the heroes U2 cherish, rock'n'roll without sex or seduction would be as fulfilling as rice pudding without raspberry jam (Jimi's favourite). Yet even U2 at their most rock'n'roll are virtually sexless. They have substituted sex and sensuality for celebration and elation. Hearing "Pride" live can make you *go* but can't make you *come*.

Adam: "No, no, we need it occasionally, too! I think you misunderstand how much sex there *is* on the record. There's a lot there, and sex is a very difficult thing to keep together."

Edge: "I think there's a very honest sexuality about the record, which I find more interesting than a blatant 'Spinal Tap' type thing. The

subtle sexuality of gospel music is what attracts me. It's strange and twisted, because that's far more what it's all about."

Surely people don't go to U2 concerts to get turned on. They go to feel a part of something, to hum to the chorus, to stroll peacefully through the medium wave, feel their ribcage heave and sporadically have their conscience twinged. They go to share in a communion where all faces are equal.

Adam: "No! It's all the same thing. Spirituality and sex are so close. If you try and have sex without spirituality it's not sex."

Isn't that just the difference between a fuck and making love? One is an exhausting one-night stand, the other an inexhaustible union.

Adam: "You have to be able to do both or else it's not a good fuck. That's what we saw in that roots music. The prim and proper people call it gospel, but the people who know what it's about call it sex music, because that's what it is."

If you're thinking of reaching for that brown-paper airline bag by the settee, remember that U2 are not the only people to find a chord binding carnal pleasure and celestial promise. "Lovesexy" is Prince's nickname for God. And what well-bred thigh-stroker could act without the Reverend Al Green spinning in the bedroom? You take my point.

With or without his dick on display, Bono's stardom allows him to lambast TV evangelists in "Bullet The Blue Sky", the South African regime in "Silver And Gold", and a host of other noble targets. But he also knows that this very same stardom reinforces the injustice he abhors. Idols are a testament to the fact that the system works. Small wonder that Bono's hat is off-kilter. It's not easy being Bono.

No other band benefited so much from the exposure of Live Aid, yet U2 themselves were apparently so unhappy with their performance or the reasons behind it, they came within an inch of parting company. It was supposedly Adam that pulled the band back from the precipice by demanding they record *The Joshua Tree* first and split later.

"We split up last week, but I think we're back together again," the Edge says, evaporating the suggestion while Adam rummages around for a gag.

"We always split up at closing time, but reform at four the next day."

Edge: "I must admit that we've been getting on much better recently. It used to be tougher. There used to be rows about everything. I think it's much easier being a big group because it allows you more freedom. It was much harder making our first few albums."

The collisions may have become less ferocious, but the band still compete with one another.

Edge: "Actually, deep, deep down, we're all very shallow people. Ask me a question, Adam. I'll answer it honestly... and lie."

"Are you as well hung as you lead us to believe?"

Edge: "Of course. It's the only thing Eno and I have in common."

The guitarist turns to embarrass his partner in crime: "When are you going to start writing again?"

Adam huff and puffs, adjusts *his* cap and orders another drink. Although U2 share the songwriting credits, this time Bono has written all the lyrics. Except for the two cover versions, "Watchtower" and The Beatles' single jewel, "Helter Skelter".

The Edge says it's the only Beatles song all four band members like. It's sloppy, turgid, all fluster and bluster, but that doesn't matter. For Bono, "It had to be there. Of course it was deliberate." Bono deals in ideals. It's the meaning of the song that mattered, not the means of delivering it. Yet here in Marshall McLuhan's global village, the medium is still the message. Unless, of course, your *humanness* is awesomely gruesome (or gruesomely awesome) enough to jam that medium. Last year U2 performed a live version of "Help" to prove just that. When I told Bono it was crap, he smiled and said, "Probably, but it's the idea of it being there that's important."

Edge: "Bono's always been into John Lennon and always liked 'Help', because he thought that at that moment in their career it was the most honest statement to make. The reason it's not on the album is because it *was* a crap version in the end. Well, not crap, but you had to be there to enjoy it.

"That's the thing about this album. It's just a collection of moments that we thought had something good about them, like 'Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' (complete with gospel choirs). We never ever did that before or since. We were in New York, we were sent a cassette of this gospel choir so we went along to their church, spent an hour rehearsing, it seemed OK, so we did it onstage that night and it's on the album. None of it's been touched up, it's literally just there.

"We had to decide what was worthy of being a live album that somebody was going to pay

10 quid for, and not just putting out the standard greatest hits and trading off the fact that people know and like these songs and producing the usual boring record. Who wants a live version of 'With Or Without You' anyway? On record it would have been a big, 'So what?' What we did with this album, we had about a dozen shows recorded, including a couple of off-the-wall shows like the Save The Yuppies Concert in San Francisco, and we thought, 'Right, what are we going to do, what's this album going to be about?' The criteria for this album was, 'Does it feel good?'

The band's musical isolation has been cited as the main reason why U2 have now adopted roots in American rock'n'roll. When in doubt, reach for the ethnic motherlode. Nowadays it's like *Gardeners' World*. Elvis Costello and The Waterboys' Mike Scott have both moved out of London to plant roots in Dublin, while Dublin's most famous sons have seemingly found roots in Sun Studios, Memphis.

Adam: "I think the journey starts here in Dublin, with what we have in our traditional music. We hear immigration songs and songs of exploitation within Irish culture, the same as went to America via the plantation supervisors, who were Irish, and then it mixed with the black blues and gospel music. It's not adopting. It is a part of us. That's really what this album is about. A return to simplicity."

Why steps backwards? Why *return* anywhere?

"Because who wants to play stadiums for the rest of their life? We really want to play a gig at the Marquee. That's really what it all comes down to, just enjoying playing in the band and seeing things happen when we come together. That's what's important. Not stadiums and lighting rigs and zooming around the country."

When U2 formed, they wanted to be the biggest band in the world. Having hit the target, they now want to be a garage band. Just like fame: people spend their life craving attention. When they get it, they spend the rest of their lives wearing sunglasses and avoiding recognition. U2 wear wigs, too. Irony, really.

Edge: "That's the irony of life. There's no way round it."

They've already had two singles at No 1 in the States, but the band are still pleasantly surprised the free-falling "Desire" straddled the top of the British charts. Very surprised.

Edge: "It's actually not a bad single to have at No 1 because it's so uncompromisingly rock'n'roll, and nothing to do with what's going on in the charts at the moment."

Adam: "If we were an unknown band and had put out that song it wouldn't have even been played on the radio. We're just so bored with what's going on. There's nobody saying anything and there's no-one playing loud guitar. There's no personality."

Edge: "As a big group, we feel it's our responsibility to fuck up the charts as much as possible. I'm finding it very difficult to find music that I can listen to at the moment. I don't like anything in the charts, so for me, at the moment, there's only the old stuff to listen to."

"I never worry about writing better songs. My fear is that people will find out we're all basically charlatans..."

— The Edge

What about all the new bands sparking tiny eruptions?

Adam: "We can't really comment on what's happening down there. We can only see what's happening in our particular world."

I give them a copy of The Young Gods' "L'Amourir" and feel like a Zulu offering the Queen Mum guilt-edged antelope antlers.

U2 are out of reach. Inevitably, they are also out of touch. Their currency in the "give it to me NOW" market may be devalued, but no-one can strike them off the bliss agenda yet. They're far too dogmatic in their pursuit of wayward spirits to keep trying to bridge the culture gap between '58 and '88.

Adam: "But it was always like that. Even in '76, we never had access to what was going on. We never had access to the latest punk releases in London. We've always lived in this strange world where things get to us eventually."

Edge: "It's said that rock'n'roll died in 1959, and there's something to that. I think the music

we tend to go back to all the time is something very fragile and hard to pin down. It's in the early Elvis records, it's in some country records, in The Band. You find it in obscure bands in New Orleans and places like that. You'll never hear it on the radio. I couldn't even begin to explain what exactly it is, but I know that people like T-Bone Burnett and even Dylan spent their life finding this music. We're just getting a feel for it now."

Adam: "It's freedom. That's what it is."

The band have spent most of this year in LA, editing their film and writing some of their studio tracks. Somehow LA, the capital of conflicting extremes, seems a natural resting place for U2.

Bono: "LA is strange. As long as you think it is strange then you're all right. I think it's strange, and I'm pretty damn strange too!"

Ain't that the truth. The more I meet Bono, the more I like him, and the more I like him, the stranger he becomes. The odd man out, even in a car park. Bono has moments of sparkling brilliance. He also has moments of utter idiocy. His great virtue is that he seldom can tell one from t'other.

The Edge is still laughing in LA (so to speak).

"We don't really belong anywhere. I really enjoyed being there for six months, because for me it was like being there live. It's the fringe of what's going on in the West and the most extreme example of where the world is going."

Yet even in the heart of Tinseltown, Bono and Co searched for the grubbier side of life, believing that "everyone has a story to tell", but you have to get your fingernails

CONTINUES OVER»





...The Edge...

dirty to find the truth. Not just any truth, but some unifying truth that will order and justify all the foolishness that surrounds them. For Bono, the key is still love. And why not? It opens most back doors. U2's quest for the truth is absurd, but that's all right by me. Most truth lies in absurdity.

Edge: "To write a song, you have to know about people. Some of the most interesting people I met in LA were doormen or street bums. That's one of the great things about Bono. He really understands and is interested. No matter how big or successful he gets he'll always be fascinated... especially by women, but we won't get into that now."

Adam: "He looks for truth in everything."

And *that's* the truth. It only remains to be seen whether the U2 myth is stronger than the men who created it. I hear pops in abundance and wait for the explosion.

Adam: "Perhaps some of that will come over in the film."

Ah yes, the film. But that's another story. Another story for another week. Next week, in fact.

MELODY MAKER, OCT 29, 1988



"WHAT'S my motivation in this scene?" Bono asked the director with a mocking smile. He was met with silence. No one could think of one.

That was 10 months ago in Fort Worth, Texas.

Last week in Dublin we confronted, or perhaps confounded the motivation behind *Rattle And Hum*, the album. This week, the album has already gone double platinum in Britain. Those numbers are crunching again. Double platinum? Before it was even released? For Christ's sake, it's a soundtrack! Next week sees the release

of *U2 Rattle And Hum*, the movie. Exactly how much rattling do you people need before your cage unhinges?

In case you missed last week's exciting episode, I'll set the scene and paint the set. Bono is standing in the middle of a car park outside U2's management office. The Edge and Adam are sitting in a smoke-laced pub, and I'm just passing through. Exactly what I'm passing through is still a bit of a mystery, but when I hear the bell I know it'll all be over.

"I thought I looked like Robert Wagner until I saw myself on the screen. I ended up watching this *thing* onstage." Bono looks wounded.

Somebody once said watching yourself on film is like watching pornography.

"I said that!" He now looks mortally wounded. "It is like pornography."

The Edge seems equally perplexed by the whole idea of U2 as motion picture stars.

"The idea of the film was that the director, Phil Joanou, would make us all look like movie stars. The deal was that we'd all look like Montgomery Clift."

Joanou obviously dealt them their cards from the bottom of the pack.

"Yeah, he double-crossed us, the bastard," The Edge concludes.

Evidently, the problem was that U2 never specified whether they wanted to resemble Montgomery before or after the car crash.

Adam: "There's really little point in trying to look that good anyway. This is the year of John Cleese as sex symbol. We've no chance. We won't even get a look in."

Cleese has become 1988's silver-screen heart-throb in the States and not even Bono, the singer voted the eighth sexiest man in America last year, can compete with a wrinkled 45-year-old Python whose body sags and bulges in all the wrong places.

As I mentioned last week, *Rattle And Hum*, the record, is an attempt by the world's biggest rock band to somersault from their epic podium and land in the frothy waters of rock'n'roll. It's an effort to dismantle the invincible U2's armour and somehow disenfranchise their public from the idea of magical U2 solutions, or, as Bono put it last week, "to destroy the whole fuckin' U2 myth".

Rattle And Hum, the movie, documents this transition with self-deprecating humour, some sparkling ideas and some bow-wow notions, at times beautifully erratic, at times downright irritating.

In the States, U2 have become a *brand name*, just like Levi's or Coca-Cola or Alka-Seltzer. Their name sells their product because their product is now seen to be *reliable*, constant. Like any industry, U2's monumental success is hewn from their acute attention to detail. Every last note and nuance is discussed and argued over until the right conglomeration of music and image is engraved. Would U2 wear this hat? Would U2 play that hit? Would this be a U2 thing to do? Even their fiercest critics have a thimbleful of admiration for the way this band has manoeuvred and manipulated their manifesto into a cogent and trenchant clarion call. But now they want to change direction and move out of earshot of Jericho's bugle blast.

Rattle And Hum is really U2 trying to untie the noose of responsibility and reason, aiming to cut loose, attempting to *let go*. As Hunter S Thompson said: "I hate to advocate drugs, alcohol, violence or insanity to anyone, but they've always worked for me."

For Bono, the film is a scenic diversion from the band's central concern, the music. The Edge is more dismissive and only Adam and Larry seem wholly satisfied with the fruits of their labour. The band may claim to have washed their hands of the film's editing, but their smudged fingerprints are certain to be found on every frame. Nothing is out of place, unless it's deliberately misplaced. Nothing is out of tune unless the pipers called for it.

For over three months, U2's every waking and wanton twitch was captured on celluloid. Bono couldn't even relieve himself without some voice in the next cubicle shouting, "Turn over". Every cavern of their private life was excavated and held under arc lights. But this film isn't designed to tell the truth about U2. The band financed the entire film and thus had a final veto over any potentially embarrassing scenes. It must have been the nearest a rock star has ever come to running as a US Presidential candidate.

Adam: "Oh no, no. Being a Presidential candidate is the closest thing to being a rock star."

After a while, waking up first thing in the morning with your Y-fronts round your ankles and an entire lighting crew focusing on the less exquisite parts of your anatomy must have become a trifle wearing.

Edge: "Sure, there were moments like that, but we were stupid enough to agree to do the film in the first place. We only had ourselves to blame."

In fact "the blame" rests on the shoulders of U2 manager Paul McGuinness, who

engendered the original idea for the film. He recognised that U2 would have to stay on tour for three years if they were to satisfy *all* their fans – fans that are still buying the *Red Rocks* video, which is now grotesquely out of date. A new full-length, wide-screen feature of the band live might sate the appetites of all those who missed The Joshua Tree tour. Especially if it was vivid enough to transport you from cinema stall to American stadium.

Edge: “I don’t even remember why we ended up doing it. It’s a good film for what it is, I suppose. For two years now we’ve had a lot of approaches from various directors with scripts, ‘How about U2 doing a movie?’ They were all *Purple Rain* kind of affairs. These producers would say, ‘We could set you in Dublin and you could play a band involved in the Troubles in Northern Ireland and suddenly you break out...’ It was all absolute shite.

“We didn’t give it any time at all, but then it occurred to us, or rather Paul McGuinness, that maybe there was something to the idea of the film trying to capture what the band was going through at the moment. We sort of absent-mindedly started talking to directors and Phil Joanou was one of them and we liked him. Then we started to spend money – a *load* of money, and we thought, ‘What the fuck are we going to do now?’”

The film eventually weighed in at around five million dollars. Cheap by Hollywood standards. Cheap at half the price. It took several tons of equipment to make this feature film. Sadly none of it landed on top of the right people.

BONO describes the movie as U2 “shedding a skin. We don’t know what we’re going to turn into.” There’s no narrative, no plot, as the band tried to emulate the finest moments of the Stones’ *Gimme Shelter*, Scorsese’s *The Last Waltz* and Jonathan Demme’s masterpiece of Talking Heads in concert, *Stop Making Sense*.

Initially, the band seemed keen to give the reins to Demme, but then they grew concerned that people would draw inevitable comparisons. Eventually they settled for the virtually unknown and untested Phil Joanou, who’d directed two episodes of Spielberg’s TV series *Amazing Stories* and one low-budget feature, *Three O’Clock High*.

Joanou arrived on the first date of the American leg of The Joshua Tree tour as a fresh-faced, mild-mannered workaholic who never touched liquor. After only three weeks on the road, U2 cajoled him into marauding through women’s college dormitories, turning the clean-cut director into a rabid extra from *Animal House*.

Adam: “The two married men of the band (Edge and Bono) corrupted him badly.”

Edge: “We’d read all about sorority houses in books and U2 have always had a great thirst for foreign culture, so we said ‘Let’s go out and suss out the sorority vibe’. We came in offering pizza because that’s what we thought we should do. U2 have always been keen on protocol. I can’t remember what happened after that.”



Phil Joanou directing *Rattle And Hum*

I’m sure you can’t.

Adam: “Can you imagine how boring it is being in the only hotel in a college town with nothing happening? We’d had a few bottles of tequila and these people kept ringing the hotel room all the time. What do you do? What would *you* do? *We had* to go for it. For us on tour, the only time we have to ourselves is the time between when we come off stage and when we go to bed. The bigger the distance is between the two, the more fun you can have.”

THE film captures equal portions of fun, frustration and U2’s epic fantasy. The Edge is unsure whether the elixir is heady enough to swallow whole.

“*Gimme Shelter* had got a real drama because of the shooting and the Hells Angels. That’s why it’s so stupid for a rock’n’roll band to make a film. There’s no drama in being on the road. The only dramatic thing was Bono breaking his shoulder. And where does that lead you? To the hospital and back again. So the fuck what?”

“Phil’s sewn it together so it’s like a rollercoaster ride. It’s not a question of bringing

you through dramatic sequences to reach a pay-off. It’s like a trip with the band. I don’t know whether it works, but I can sit through it and I like it.”

“I love it,” Adam offers. “*Except* when I’m on the camera.”

The Edge leaps across the pub table and raps the tarnished varnish.

“At this point I’d like to say that we have *no* interest in acting whatsoever. In fact, we’ve no interest in the film business whatsoever. I have to tell you that now. I did this soundtrack thing

for *Captive* and that was only a glimpse of the film industry, but even then I thought, ‘This is for the birds’. At least when you’re a musician you can write a song, record it with someone else and it can be a piece of plastic a week later. Making films is virtually impossible without an army of technicians and a huge budget.”

So how important is this film to U2?

Edge: “The only important thing about this film is that we’ve survived it.”

Adam: “That’s the moral of the story.”

Edge: “Of course, whether we survive the bullshit hype with our marbles intact remains to be seen. Having avoided a lot of the bullshit for so long, this film will mean us walking into a mountain of it. I’m actually beginning to enjoy it, though.

“We decided the theme for all the premieres was going to be completely over the top. The whole shebang. Our guest list includes all our favourite cabaret artists and torch singers like Engelbert Humperdinck. We’re going to really go for it: U2 seen as they’ve never been seen before.”

CONTINUES OVER »



...Bono

U2: ARCHIVE 1988

Adam: "For years, nobody has recognised the humour in U2 and this is the opportunity to show it off in all its glory."

SURPRISINGLY, there are moments in the film where I actually wished I was there. Then I wised up. There are moments in the film when I actually *was* there, along with a 40-strong film crew buzzing around the band like wasps around a jam jar.

The movie shows U2 on stage trying to catch lightning in Arizona, U2 in full flight in Denver, U2 off stage and without feathers in Fort Worth, U2 sifting through Elvis' sock drawers in Graceland, the band dusting off '50s microphones to record at Sun Studios, rehearsing gospel choirs in New York, and otherwise wrestling with American dinosaurs that lurk behind every bush. Throughout the voyage, we see U2 scrape away America's superficial candyfloss to reveal America's *real* candyfloss.

Some quarters have already described the film as a rockumentary, but *Rattle And Hum* is first and foremost a concert film, two-thirds of it shot in black-and-white and one third in colour. Bono had studied the fight scenes in *Raging Bull* where director Martin Scorsese filmed each bout in a completely different manner – one in brutal close-up, one panning around the ring, the next shot from the ceiling. Bono wanted to treat each song in a similarly disparate way. Despite numerous technical hiccups on the nights of live filming, a portion of that original idea remains intact.

Edge: "One of the things that interested us about Philip was that he was into the same films as we were. *Apocalypse Now*, *Raging Bull* and *Dog Day Afternoon*. The problem for him was that he was born 10 years too late. It's impossible to get finance for films like that. This was the closest he could get at the time. I just hope this film gives him the freedom to make a film he really wants to make. I know as a director he's shit hot, he could do it."

IN the end, Joanou filmed a quarter of a million feet of concert film and over 600,000 feet of documentary footage – possibly one of the most expensive home movies ever made. The film in its entirety would take over one week and nine hours to watch – a little harrowing for even the most ardent U2 fan. Although Joanou filtered off most of the dud footage, the band were still involved with the process, which could explain their less than enthusiastic response to the end result.

Edge: "Just imagine how we felt. We had to watch it all. Over and over again."

When Bono saw the final cut of the film, he walked out of the screening room uttering words like "crap", "bury it" and "never again". Joanou went back to the drawing board and it was only after the *final* final version that Bono at last gave his seal of approval.

Adam: "It's not a concert film from start to finish. You go from the concert to the studio into jamming here and there. The songs are all connected, but not necessarily in the concert."

Several splendid feet of celluloid hit the cutting-room floor. Like the footage of Bono's

now famous fall from grace in Washington, where he fell into the lighting pit and broke his shoulder. As he regained consciousness in the ambulance, all Bono saw was Joanou and his camera team peering over the stretcher. Bono tried to play Al Pacino playing a hammed-up Hamlet, using the oft-coined Shakespearian entreaty: "Get the fuck out of here."

"They kept trying to film me all over the place, but I could never keep still," he says. "The camera would have to chase after me down the street. It was ridiculous."

Bono's so fidgety and hyper he can't even act fidgety and hyper. He only appears in the film onstage.

Edge: "The only criteria for the film was, 'Do



Bono onstage, post-shoulder break, the Joshua Tree tour

"I thought I looked like Robert Wagner until I saw myself on the screen. I ended up watching this thing onstage" – Bono

we find this interesting?" The holiday film aspect of things like the ambulance was funny for a week, but it wears thin. The things that sustained our interest were the musical bits. Musically it's pretty much all over the place, but it's real, it's there. You see us trying to figure out what the fuck we're going to do with the songs. There's a lot of doubt around."

And how fierce were the arguments over which scenes to use?

"We argued a fair bit, but an argument with U2 goes like that." The Edge snaps his fingers. Adam's fingers snap at the same time. "We've known each other so long that it all happens very quickly."

A constant source of debate was that Larry Mullen completely out-poses, out-chills and otherwise upstages his compatriots – a James Dean amid a crowd of Benny Hills. There is nothing in life as depressing for a band then the realisation that their drummer has stolen clap-loads of their thunder.

Edge: "Christ, that's true. He *is* the star of the film. Larry always had the pose. The bastard. We were very untethered about that. Larry is really the Pete Best of U2. We should have thrown him out in the first month. He was far too good-looking to be in U2 then and still is now. The real problem with this band is that we never found our Ringo."

THE film is certain to do little to bridge the gulf between U2 fans and the band's detractors. Few groups have ever been revered so much by so many, and also reviled with such ferocious invective. A powerful idea communicates some of its strength to he who challenges it. Proust said that. "Bono believes he's sincere in what he stands for. Hitler was sincere, too." Sinéad said that. Julian Cope also thinks that Bono is evil, the blind leading the blind. In fact, you'd be hard-pressed to find a band that didn't condemn the awesome foursome, especially in Dublin. Even Phil Oakey reckons that the only reason U2 are so successful is because they've never written a brilliant song, a soundtrack for the year, so they've never become fashionable and therefore can't become unfashionable.

Adam maintains that most of the gripes stem from soured grapes. The Edge is more truculent.

"It just goes on and on. I used to think very differently about how people reacted to us. Now I don't care. I just think, 'Fuck it, I'll go and buy a white Cadillac and if people want to spray it with graffiti, let them.'"

"The only band I ever really envied was Duran Duran, because they always made their videos in Sri Lanka or on the beach in the Bahamas with leggy blondes. We always had to do ours in the fuckin' snow. It was a real pain in the arse."

Could U2 ever become a part of the film fraternity in Hollywood?

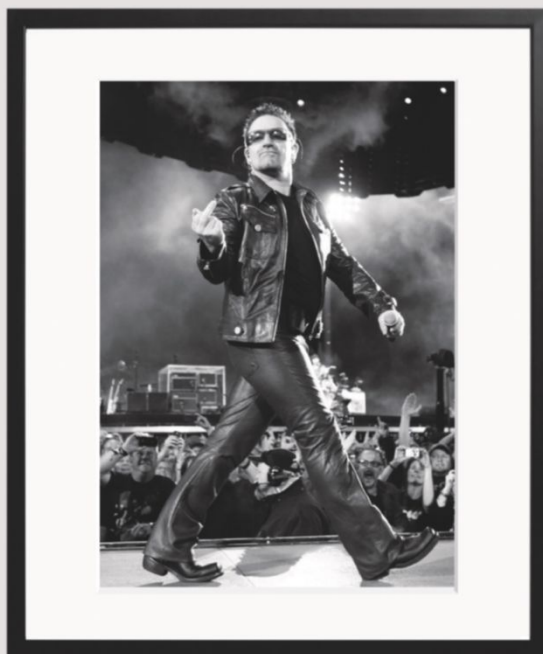
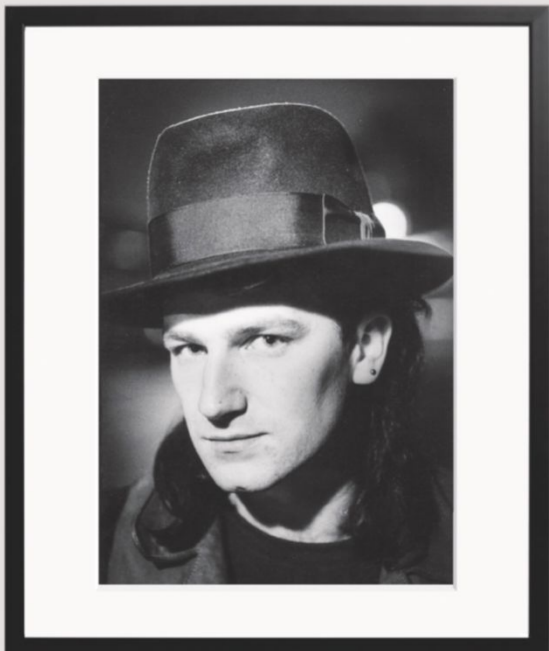
Edge: "LA is a very challenging place to live. Every morning you wake up and the world and all its blemishes arrives on your doorstep."

Bono: "Almost everyone goes to bed early there to go out jogging and stuff in the morning, so late at night the city is turned over to a very small percentage of people... And most of them are Irish."

Adam: "It's where all good Irishmen go in the end! LA eventually takes you over if you stay there for any length of time. We see Jack Nicholson every now and then and he doesn't seem to have life outside it. LA just looks in on itself the whole time."

Bono gazes at the horde of followers outside the locked gates.

"What's my motivation in this scene?" he asks, still mocking. He's met again by silence. I can't think of one. And I don't really think it matters any more. **02**



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ACHTUNG BABY

A glitzy rebranding proves “trashy”, “sexy” U2 can be even better than the real thing. **BY GAVIN MARTIN**

TRACKMARKS

- 1 Zoo Station ★★★★★
 - 2 Even Better Than The Real Thing ★★★★★
 - 3 One ★★★★★
 - 4 Until The End Of The World ★★★★★
 - 5 Who's Gonna Ride Your Wild Horses ★★★★★
 - 6 So Cruel ★★★★★
 - 7 The Fly ★★★★★
 - 8 Mysterious Ways ★★★★★
 - 9 Tryin' To Throw Your Arms Around The World ★★★★★
 - 10 Ultra Violet (Light My Way) ★★★★★
 - 11 Acrobat ★★★★★
 - 12 Love Is Blindness ★★★★★
- Released:** November 19, 1991
Produced by: Daniel Lanois and Brian Eno
Recorded at: Hansa Tonstudios, Berlin, Dog Town, Dublin, STS, Dublin, Windmill Lane Studios, Dublin
Chart position: UK: 2 US: 1

Dublin, The Point Depot, December 1989. As his three bandmates play out the final bars of the last show on the Love Town tour, Bono makes a declaration. “Now we have to just go away and dream it all up again,” he tells the audience. Thus, time was called on the first decade of U2 – and so began the often troubled journey that led to the artistic and commercial peak of *Achtung Baby*.

The experience of seeing *Rattle And Hum*, their first major studio movie, taken apart by critics and flopping at the box office had certainly shaken U2 to their core. Never shy of throwing shapes or waving flags, the band were no strangers to the critical firing line. But they had always faced down the rebukes by developing their music in often surprising ways.

Rattle And Hum had, however, drawn attention to their foibles, excesses and naivety, in what even the film's director, Phil Joanou, admitted

was “an overly pretentious” document. Left exposed, U2 came up against their own reflection and didn't much like what they saw. Significant musical and cultural realignments were taking place all around the band, and they risked becoming outmoded and irrelevant relics from a recently vanished past.

A serious rethink was in order and, with Brian Eno adopting the crucial role of guide/therapist/advisor, *Achtung Baby*, its absurdist title taken from Mel Brooks' *The Producers*, would radically recast the group's sonic template and image. In one of the most effective examples of rock rebranding ever undertaken, U2's air of pomp and ceremony – and even their songwriting – would be given a thorough makeover. Out of it would come a band still recognisable from their '80s incarnation, but now with a glitzy, though still passionate, new perspective.

Achtung Baby was planned and recorded in the shadow of such epoch-defining albums as The Stone Roses' debut, Nirvana's *Nevermind* and My Bloody Valentine's *Loveless* **CONTINUES OVER ►**



U2: THE ALBUMS



(a firm favourite with The Edge during the recording sessions). Wearing his Abstract Arbitrator Hat, Eno provided vital touchstones to mark the way ahead, buzzwords that amounted to do's and don'ts for the new LP. Out went the old – “earnest”, “righteous”, “polite”, “rockist” – and in came “trashy”, “throwaway”, “dark”, “sexy”, “industrial”. The new direction, embracing Dadaist soundbites (“*A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle*”) and trash aesthetics, presented a markedly different face to the U2 of the '80s.

That said, it'd be misleading to assume that the “EVERYTHING you know is wrong” instruction, later projected on the Zoo TV screens to thousands of fans, told the full story. The foundations for *Achtung Baby* had already been laid out months before Bono's 1989 farewell on The Point stage.

One of the new studio recordings on the *Rattle And Hum* album, “God Part II”, gave an indication of at least one musical path and lyrical approach the band would now pursue, with its cranky, pugnacious attitude and roughshod motorik beat. And, sidelined at the time because they were not considered “U2 enough”, two Bono-initiated songs from the *Rattle And Hum* sessions – “Love Is Blindness” and “Even Better Than The Real Thing” – would find full flight on the new album.

Indeed, the process of cultural assimilation that *Rattle And Hum* documented – albeit a little

too closely – continued in a much more sophisticated and rewarding manner on *Achtung Baby*. Where U2's big adventure had previously brought them to the blues, gospel and the wide, wild Americana frontier, now their attention turned to emerging, distinctly urban, sounds: techno, electro, the hedonism of Madchester and the eruptive anger of grunge. If *Rattle And Hum* investigated a rich and sprawling past, *Achtung Baby* looked to a

dystopian future, pulsed with the shock of the new.

In *The Joshua Tree* and *Rattle And Hum*, U2 had been pilgrims in a vast American landscape. Now, they were voyagers in a world where upheaval, chaos and disorientation were commonplace.

Relocating to Berlin to begin recording would prove key to informing the album's songs and lyrical themes. U2 took the last-ever flight into West Berlin in November 1990, and headed for the Hansa

Studios, where Eno had finessed the “*Heroes*” instalment of Bowie's Berlin trilogy. Before setting to work, they joined a march on the street outside the studio, presuming it to be a celebration of German reunification. Soon enough, though, they discovered it had been organised by the Communist Party – *against* the destruction of the Berlin Wall. It was a comical foretaste of the confusion that would ensue as U2 tried to find their own creative direction in the weeks and months ahead.

The collapse of communism and demolition of the Berlin Wall became symbolic – of internal band tensions and the personal dramas of individual members. Bono and The Edge, fresh from providing a loop-based soundtrack for a theatrical production of Anthony Burgess' *A Clockwork Orange*, were keen to forge ahead with a new sound featuring drum machines, dance rhythms and sleazy industrial beats. Initially, the plan caused Larry Mullen considerable consternation. “We were suddenly, musically, on different levels and it affected everything,” Mullen later admitted. “No-one knew what the fuck anyone else was talking about.”

As the sessions took shape, though, the band worked within their newly defined strictures and, as they always had, found a path through the internal dissent and frustrations. Eventually, the creative friction would produce dividends, with the pressure and flux in and around the band engendering two key songs before they returned to Ireland, completing recording at the band's Windmill Lane Studios in the spring and summer of 1991.

Taking its name from the transport hub close to Hansa, the opening “Zoo Station”, with its angry guitar squalls, distorted vocal and metallic groove, harked back to the grinding euphoria of Bowie's *Station To Station*. The words themselves marked out a feisty new manifesto (“*I'm ready for what's next*”), but it was undoubtedly hard won. “In Berlin doing *Achtung Baby* was definitely the most serious sessions we've ever had – terribly tormented,” Bono would later confess. Specifically, the personal turmoil that would provide grist to the lyrical mill included the disintegration of The Edge's marriage to Aislinn O'Sullivan,

U2 REVELATIONS

■ In 1992, Bono surprised diners at Russian eatery Nikita in London by taking off his clothes. “Sometimes people drink vodka and do strange things,” mused owner Sylvain Borsi.

■ The long-running rumour that the herd of buffalo seen in the video for “One” belonged to Neil Young remains unconfirmed.

and Bono's own marital difficulties.

"I've had my problems in my relationship," the singer told Bill Flanagan for his book, *U2 At The End Of The World*. "I think fidelity is just against human nature... I may or may not be writing about my own experience."

Codified in myriad ways throughout the album, marital disharmony and emotional desolation certainly underpinned the lustful and lustrous "So Cruel". Here, The Edge's looped five-note piano motif is encircled by a sabre-rattling guitar and a fine synthesised string part; lushly multi-dimensional, pregnant with poise and feeling. The lyrics of the song reinforce the idea of *Achtung Baby* as a kind of romantic masque, where images of love, debased or abandoned, abound. Those images recur on the rapturous and unsettling "Love Is Blindness", originally written for Nina Simone. With its stark, church-like organ intro, pulsating bass synth and guitar reverb stretched into a hallucinatory squall, it brilliantly describes the discord and dread that provide a constant undertow to *Achtung Baby*. And yet, through its alluring sonic palette and wounded but sensual vocal, "Love Is Blindness" also maps out a search for harmony and salvation – not unfamiliar goals in a U2 song, but now wrapped in vibrant new colours.

Consequently, perhaps the greatest achievement of *Achtung Baby* was the way it presented the band's well-established spiritual longings and preoccupations in illuminating or contrasting settings. Nowhere was this more brilliantly achieved than on "One", the other song that emerged from out of the dark days of the Berlin sessions. Still a prime candidate for the greatest moment in the entire U2 canon, this beautifully ravaged lament trawls the ashes of spent lust and faded love, ultimately revealing itself to be... what? A post-mortem on a failed marriage? A requiem for the AIDS epidemic?

band's artistry and their singer's image. The fraught but cinemascopic "Acrobat" may have recalled the grand vistas of "Bullet The Blue Sky", but now, amid references to Holy Communion and oral sex ("And you can swallow/ Or you can spit"), there was a deliciously dark, deeply allusive backdrop of synth drones and depth charges. Bono sounded fragile, wounded, seeming even to ponder the band's usefulness: "What are we going to do now that it's all been said?/ No new ideas in the house and every book's been read."

In such fashion, previously unlikely U2 bedfellows – doubt, vulnerability and black humour – now featured in the game plan. Framed with the fearful booming symmetry of Adam Clayton's bass, "Until The End Of The World" was a further subversion of the group's classic core sound, conforming to Bono's wily description of *Achtung Baby* as, "The sound of four men chopping down *The Joshua Tree*". A ferocious guitar attack from The Edge is telescoped into a brain-searing buzz. Using the exchange between Judas and Jesus in The Garden Of Gethsemane as a lyrical starting point, Bono affects a jaded crooner persona, so that the song resembles Jim Morrison sharing a small-hours heart to heart with Frank Sinatra.

Even the slight but silky "Trying To Throw Your Arms Around The World" emphasises the album's penchant for arrangements that were often endlessly, painstakingly remixed and reworked, band members and producers working separately before uniting for the final "committee approved" version.

Although Bono joked that someone had misheard him and that he had described *Achtung Baby* as a "dense" – not "dance" – album, the helter-skelter licks of "Even Better Than The Real Thing" and the snake-charmer riff of "Mysterious Ways" forged a convincing union with club culture – preserving U2's

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "Necessity is the smotherer of invention in big-league pop, yet U2 have just made an LP that's sparky and surprising and sulky, bristling with offbeat effects and guttural noises" **Andrew Collins, NME, November 23, 1991**

■ "By most standards this is a robust and scarlet record. By theirs, it's verging on the terrific. Against all expectations, U2 have evoked shivers and paradise, some anguish and much desire. Isn't that what they were always meant to do?" **Chris Roberts, Melody Maker, November 23, 1991**

integrity and identity, without falling into Grandad At The Disco embarrassment.

Significantly, the formerly disaffected Larry Mullen asserted himself, too, forming a dynamic rhythmic alliance with The Edge's astringent licks on "Mysterious Ways", while Adam Clayton provides melodic undertow, weaving between glowering electro shadows. Throughout the LP, lyrically and vocally, Bono is at his best – providing words that were poignant, and richly suggestive. Or pared-down and adornment-free, as on "One". "Force of will" was, according to Adam Clayton, what carried them through. "Everything was against making a great record. But no matter how people failed and became isolated, they saw what was good about it and followed that."

Having pulled through the most challenging period since their involvement with Charismatic Christianity around the time of *October*, the 18-million-selling *Achtung Baby* was a tribute to U2's cohesion as a unit, and to their determination to ensure their art overcame whatever obstacles lay in the way. True to their word, they had dreamed it all up again: the path for the next decade was now clear. **92**

Now U2's attention turned to emerging, urban sounds: techno, electro and the anger of grunge

Or even a meditation on U2 themselves finding each other at the brink of disintegration?

On the album's lead single, "The Fly", then, the new Bono emerged as a devilish underworld maven, taunting his former self with a sniggering, "It's no secret that a conscience can sometimes be a pest". Set against The Edge's temperamental guitar and jostling beats, Bono described the song "as a phone call from Hell – but the guy narrating likes it there". It was a canny piece of showmanship, providing the frontman with an alter ego to carry his band through the first leg of the Zoo TV/Zooropa tour that followed the album.

"The Fly" was not the only song that was delivered in an amoral voice, or which deconstructed the

Who's gonna ride your
Trabants? U2 got
some mileage out of
the East German cars





“I played Jesus for so long, I decided I needed a break!”



NME, JUNE 13, 1992 As the Zoo TV tour makes its way around the planet, Bono considers the appeal of playing Judas for a while. **STUART BAILIE** hitches a ride on their private jet to hear wild tales of fame and faith, Heaven and Las Vegas, the Pet Shop Boys and BB King, and – perhaps inevitably – Adam Clayton’s penis...

From the arms of America to the scabby old paps of Ma Europe, U2's Zoo TV tour has grown into a thing of rich proportions; groovy, elevated, sad but mostly just high on its own sense of the royal daftness of rock'n'roll.

At the Frankfurt Festhalle, I watch Bono singing "Mysterious Ways" – with feeling – to an inflatable dolphin. Later, during an encore, when the air-conditioning has packed in and he's withering with exhaustion, the singer will lie on his back in his silvery duds and croon "My Way" to the great amusement of his mates. The London show finishes with Bono wrapping a blindfold around a female fan, and reciting WB Yeats' "He Wishes For The Cloth Of Heaven" – the old charmer.

The television images have grown more adventurous now. "Desire" is a mass of 'cum shots' – pictures of actors' faces taken from porn movies, interspersed with images of Gazza, Thatcher and Jimmy Swaggart. "Where The Streets Have No Name" is underlined by a flashback to *The Joshua Tree* video shoot – the film speeded up to give the players a silly, Charlie Chaplin quality. Bono points up to the image of his younger self, out there in the desert. "Hey you!" he shouts, "I remember you!"

And then comes the really unusual scene. U2 are playing "With Or Without You" – two songs from the end – and [U2's manager] Paul McGuinness asks me if I've ever been under the stage. I tell him that I have had that pleasure. "But have you been under the stage *during* the show? Come this way."

So I walk past all the guitar racks and computers and stuff, and then I climb a few steps and stick my head above the parapet. Bono is a little way in front of me, and the scene out there – the fever, wailings and energised hormonal particles, cigarette lighters and stretchers and many thousands of German crazyheads (including members of Kraftwerk), is like nothing I've ever known; excellent in a sphincter-loosening, God-trip way. Wow.

"I like to come here at least once during every show," says Paul, smiling. I'll bet he does.

And yet 30 minutes later, I'm sitting on the plane with these same people, and they all seem pretty much unfazed by the job. Larry Mullen and Adam Clayton are getting dressed at the front (just before take-off, Adam will tug open his dressing gown to flash his appendage at some old friends). And then The Edge comes over, and they all start laughing about the evening's mess-ups and comedy turns.

"You know it's funny," says The Edge, "you spend the whole time trying to get it right. And then when it's right, you spend all your time trying to fuck it up again, so you can get back to the spirit. It's so hard to put your finger on what gets you revved up, but if it gets too good, you end up falling asleep."

They talk about the fun they've had with onstage phone calls; how Bono has ordered pizzas and phoned the speaking clock and

such. But the late-night calls to the White House were the best, they say, as the operators started to get unnerved by this regular, egomaniac hoaxer.

"After about the fourth call," Larry remembers, "she started to smell a rat. There was this funny guy with a weird accent who used to call at 10.30 every night, but there seemed to be a lot of people in the room with him. So by the end she was going, 'Who is this? What's going on? Who are all those people with you?'"

But altogether it's a great, liberating deal. The Edge feels. "The audience is a bit freaked out at first, and you can see their brains operating, and then they get to 'One' and it sort of clicks with them. Up until then, you're really wrongfooting the audience. We're enjoying that. It's taking liberties, but it's pretty cool."

Later, I talk to Adam about the grim side of the *Achtung Baby* experience, about the unhappy words and the tangled, claustrophobic shapes, and the way the guitar just starts howling in the middle of "Love Is Blindness". He tells me about some of the working titles for the record: *Fear Of Women*, *Adam* (hence the nude shot) and even *Man*. But they were all rejected because people would say it was another Big Statement from U2.

"There was a lot of unhappiness for various reasons," he reckons. "One of them being, I think, that we'd gone through our twenties in a bit of a whirlwind, and it was the first period of time when we'd actually spent time at home, being, I suppose, heads of our respective families. Plus a kind of musical revolution had taken place, and we were excited by that."

"Trying to reconcile the fact that we had responsibilities, and then going to Berlin and trying to make a great rock'n'roll record – something had to give somewhere along the way. Some people came under more pressure than others, so there was a bit of wailing and gnashing of teeth. I hope it's never that bad again, but if it is, I wouldn't be at all surprised, and I'm sure we'd get through it."

Larry talks about the old days, and while everyone is so positive about the fresh era, there is a tendency to dismiss their back

pages, to say it's all become redundant now. "I don't like the idea of actually disregarding the past and saying that it wasn't important, because that was important – that's where we learnt."

They mention Nine Inch Nails, the Mary Chain, Happy Mondays and Curve as acts they listened to as a prelude to recording *Achtung Baby*, involving visits to London to buy hard-to-find records and to check out some clubs. Adam spent a lot of time in New York in summer 1990, enjoying his anonymity there. "I realised that U2 wasn't necessarily the biggest thing in the world."

The Edge reminisces about his involvement with the soundtrack to the stage version of

A Clockwork Orange, how he was sampling the Liturgy, Beethoven, "Carmina Burana" and choral stuff.

"We sampled the same Public Enemy record that Madonna got in trouble with on 'Justify My Love'. Myself and Bono used the same loop, but ours never got released. It was very funny, because we were in this taxi in New York, and 'Justify My Love' came on, and the two of us looked at each other and said, 'Fuck! Someone's got the *Clockwork Orange* tapes, and they're playing it on the radio! And then Madonna's voice came on..."

I mention that after something like 15 years together, there's still a great deal of civility and friendship in the U2 camp. When they were this far into their careers, the members of The Who wouldn't even stay at the same hotels, they hated each other so much. Adam nods wisely. He looks like he's got something important to say.

"Well..." he says deadpan, "the band that prays together, stays together."

Bono is at the far end of the plane, holding an ice pack to his wrist – he banged his arm on the stage out of frustration during the gig. There was no air-conditioning out there tonight, and he was wearing a silver suit. "I felt like a turkey in Bacofoil," he moans. "I just couldn't breathe."

Bono points out an array of rock'n'roll wounds – the three ligaments he lost in his shoulder during the Joshua Tree tour in America ("That happened during 'Exit'"). Then there's an impressive slice out of his chin ("That was 'Bullet The Blue Sky'").

He tells me about the pains Larry gets in his hands – how Daniel Lanois says that Larry is the most powerful drummer he's ever heard, but the doctor predicts that if he doesn't ease up, he'll be in awful trouble. Still Larry slams away.

"Sometimes the songs bully you," Bono explains, adding that we'd be better doing the interview when we arrive in London.

So it's around two o'clock in the morning when I climb into an empty black limo with Bono, who seems a lot more composed. He's changed his clothes and got his fly shades on, and there's some of that onstage drama and ambiguity with him again. As the car rumbles through a nightful of rain to the city centre,

"We were uptight in the '80s. Now we've realised rock'n'roll is ridiculous, and that's why we're into it" – Bono

I lean closer and ask him about this strange new show. And this is what he says:

"It's hyperactive TV. We've mined the phrases from everywhere, from advertising, from the street, from slang, wherever we can find them. We found a great one in Italy, which was, 'Move close to her and she vibrates'. So we had this in Italian, and we thought it was pretty cool."

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Flying "Kitsch Airways": U2's private jet, 1992

NME: What was that an advert for?

Bono: Guinness. Isn't that something? You know while it's settling, it kinda hums a bit? That's how they sell sex in Europe. They are ads for *vaginas*. You don't even see what they're selling – they use sex so much to sell.

I think I have a kind of '80s sensibility that says this isn't cool, that this is an abuse of women. But there's a new breed of models and a new attitude out there, which is not at all offended by this. They're playing a role, and if men are stupid enough to be suckered by it, they're happy.

I've seen this, and I want to get it into the show. Have you been around Europe? Advertising has become a very combative artform. I mean Benetton, whatever you feel about those ads, it's extraordinary what's happening. I had a line in a song, I don't think it ever got on the album, but it was about "*staying in to watch the sneaker ad*". Some of the best moments on television are adverts.

I read an article by [*film director Bernardo*] Bertolucci where he said he could never have imagined a more ephemeral era than this one, and yet he found himself attracted to it; he found himself interested in the surface of things, whether it's women's magazines, or TV ads. I think it's the crux right now – this battle, or love affair, between commerce and art, and rock'n'roll is right at the centre of it.

You mentioned that the character in "Desire" is a heart-stealing preacher. How many characters are there on *Achtung Baby*?

As Edge says, I'm a nice bunch of guys.

You also say that the record is "a unified point of view from start to finish"...

Well, in that they're all love songs, even if they're fucked-up love songs. That's the unified thing. But the characters and the emotions are not – they're quite fractured. I think we're supposed to choose between the flesh and the spirit, when we're... both.

[*Writer/director/actor*] Sam Shepard said something along the lines of, "Right smack in the centre of a contradiction, there is a place to be." And I think rock'n'roll has more contradictions than any other artform. Whether it's between art and commerce, idealism and nihilism, it goes on and on – a fuzzbox versus a gospel choir. And the flesh versus the spirit is one of those contradictions.

We spent the '80s trying to resolve those contradictions. I think in the '90s we're just being carried away on them. Sort of enjoying watching them as they fight it out. There's an energy – maybe the very energy of rock'n'roll is that, you know, one on the minus terminal, one hand on the plus, and it just goes through you."

In William Blake's mad poem, "The Marriage Of Heaven And Hell", he tried to reconcile the two worlds...

I know it. I've just written a song for our next record called "Songs Of Innocence And Experience", after reading Blake. But there are so many contradictions in rock'n'roll; you're making the most personal music, and yet it's played through the biggest PA system you can find, and the loudest amplifiers, and it goes out on radio programmes around the world. It's literally a public address system. It's private and so public.

I think that's part of the energy, and I think that's one of the things that we sussed – we copped earlier, before a lot of our contemporaries. They wanted to make it a private party; we actually understood that rock'n'roll, by definition, was to be amplified. And that the Big Music was music that fed on those contradictions. Though we copped that early on, it's taken us until now to enjoy it.

Success to us was like the big bad wolf; I couldn't believe that I was actually getting paid for doing this thing that I'd do. I had to do it, and I'd do it for free, and we just didn't know what to do with it. And then in the end, we were getting a lot for it. So from where I was coming from, and the way I was brought up, I wasn't quite prepared for it, and all the shit that comes with it. I would have been a socialist in the way that I



was brought up, my father voted Labour, and... We turned success into the big bad wolf.

I think one of the reasons that we were so uptight in the '80s – we were kind of staring down the '80s and the whole Material Girl thing, greed-is-good and everything – and we were being photographed in this Amish-Shaker-Quaker kind of way, and just going the opposite way. And yet we were getting shitloads of dough for this, and it was kinda fucking us up a bit.

And I think that now we've realised that rock'n'roll is, in a way, ridiculous – and that's part of why we're into it. That's Marc Bolan on *Top Of The Pops* when I was 13 and I was turned on by him, and I'm not gay. The power of rock'n'roll is this thing that's obscene, absurd, obsessive, and now we're finding ourselves laughing at it.

The character in "The Fly" seems to know your game and what skeletons are in your cupboard...

There's a lot of those characters in Dublin, and I'm sure they're in London and Manchester and Glasgow. And they're sitting at the bar, and they *know* why the Gulf War was started, because really, you know, George Bush didn't go to Israel on his holidays, the whole thing was a nixer he did for [*Israeli PM Yitzhak*] Shamir so

represents "the infinite cynicism of adult life", which he uses to corrupt the castaway schoolkids...

That book blew my mind. There's a song on our first album, "Shadows And Tall Trees", which is a chapter from *Lord Of The Flies*. The whole thing of *Boy* was partly about that.

You used to have these two stage characters in the early days, The Boy and The Fool...

Well, that's quite interesting, because in a way, people may find some of what we're doing now a bit of a puzzle, but if you knew the group from playing the Dandelion Market in Dublin, and from the *Boy* sessions, you would actually see that we've played with that kind of alter ego before.

There was a lot of fun making the video for "The Fly" – it's a shame they had to cut out a lot of it. But once you put on the glasses, this thing just happens to you. We were in London and I walked out in the traffic – there's no fear – and I climbed up on a police van and got into all sorts of trouble. I was speaking German – I bought a German newspaper – and I was walking down towards the Eros statue at Piccadilly, just telling people shit in German. Until this German man stopped me and started to have a conversation with me. Which is a bit embarrassing, because I don't speak the language.

There was a rockabilly band playing at the Eros statue, and I actually pushed my way through the crowd, and found myself grabbing the microphone, and wailing into the microphone that the CIA had put a machine in my brain. The great thing was that nobody batted an eyelid. They just threw some money at me, and thought it was part of the act. I mean, I feel a great freedom in what we're doing now.

So where did those shades come from?

They were given to me by Fighting Fintan Fitzgerald. He's the guy that kind of buys clothes for us. He found them in some second-hand store. I don't know which came first, the song or the sunglasses.

"The bigger the cliché, I'll take it. If we're gonna have a limo, make it the longest. A private jet? Make it Kitsch Airways..." – Bono

that he could stay in his holiday home in the Red Sea. Those kind of guys just make it up as they go along, and have these great conspiracy theories. But sometimes they're right.

The way I saw "The Fly" was like an obscene phonecall from Hell, but the guy likes it there. He's like calling home, saying, I like it. It's a deranged kind of character. We have all these kind of people that we are, and there's some that you just don't want to let out in public. He's one of them.

In William Golding's *Lord Of The Flies*, there's a similar voice – it's the primitive god who

When you sing "One", you take the glasses off and perform it quite straight. Is that a conscious thing?

I don't know... It's the paraphernalia of rock'n'roll, that you spent so long avoiding, that I'm now enjoying playing with. It's like rent-a-cliché: the bigger the cliché, I'll take it. I have to have shades, get me the most ridiculous. If we're gonna have a limo, make it the longest, ugliest, son-of-a-bitch limo we can find. If we're gonna have a plane, make it Kitsch Airways. If you thought we were over-the-top in the past, check *this* out.

You've been sharing the use of your private plane with Guns N' Roses on this tour...

Well, you know how it is, you have to give these young bands a chance. It's like, you want a go on my bicycle? No, I mean that guy Axl Rose has really got something. There's something about him that rings true to me.

He came onstage with you in Vienna to sing "Knocking On Heaven's Door". Was that rehearsed?

No, that just kinda happened. We used to do a version of the song, and they do a big number on it on their last record. So we just did an acoustic version and he came onstage and sang it. He's got a very interesting set of pipes. I think he's been through the mill, and he's got a lot of spunk, and so do his band. I'm not familiar with the language of hard rock enough to know about everything they do, but a song like "November Rain" connects with me.

I heard a rumour that during the recording of *Achtung Baby* you were listening to My Bloody Valentine. Did you have tons of records to listen to?

Yeah, we had tons of records. I liked My Bloody Valentine very much. When we started out in '79 and '80, the press put this tag on us, 'The New Psychedelic Revival', you may remember this. They used to lump ourselves, Echo And The Bunnymen and The Teardrop Explodes into this. And I think that as well as writing songs, which at that stage we didn't know very much about, we were into pure sound and sonics. It's always been important to us to push out the sound barrier a bit, to find new sounds. What Edge is doing, he's a one-off in this respect – he's created his own sound, his own feeling.

I mean, if you stopped listening to records for songs or the style of a band, think about music as pure mood. A lot of music that's going around today is not new in this respect. It's a mood that you've heard before. It's just dressed differently. But a band is as great as the amount of moods associated with it, that are its own. And My Bloody Valentine have a mood that belongs to them.

There are other groups around that are copyists – like the Japanese make copies of guitars or motorbikes. And sometimes those copies can be better, but they're not an original of the species. And it's very rare in rock'n'roll – despite what you [*NME*] say every week, when you've got to get excited about it – it's rare that a new mood comes along. It's probably every five years.

It's sometimes a group that adds a new tone – a new colour in the spectrum of rock'n'roll. My Bloody Valentine have one of those colours. Now, if they don't develop more colours, they won't be as interesting in the future. But they have one colour, and that's one more than most people.

New bands like Kingmaker are saying they've got all the U2 albums. James from the Manic Street Preachers says he learned his first guitar solos off U2

CONTINUES OVER ►





Bono at the wheel in 1992: upgraded from the Trabant

records. A couple of years ago, people wouldn't have admitted that...

They had 'em, but they didn't admit to it. People are right to be suspicious of groups this big. But in the end, rock'n'roll *should* be this big. I am very sad when I think of groups that have fallen short of what they could have been, because they're just happy to be kings in their own head. I'm very sad, for instance, about the demise of The Smiths, because they don't mean as much outside the UK as they should have.

Some people say, 'So what', but I don't. I think The Kinks had this ambition where they

is fearless music, music that just wants to crawl out of its own backwater and knock on the biggest, shiniest knocker it can find and just say, "Open your fuckin' door, I'm comin' into your living room." Whether it's Texas or Tokyo or Madrid... I think that's part of it.

And we knew fuck all about rock'n'roll when we started out. We were from Dublin, and we were on our own trip anyway. People just looked at us and we'd have the wrong kind of shoes and haircuts, and they didn't see that actually behind the ugly face of the music, there was an intelligence, and that we were actually

dead and joined Kraftwerk. And I liked it.

If you listen to music and think, 'Have I heard this mood before?' Look at a lot of records you like and ask yourself, do you like them because of what they are, or because they remind you of something? Are they great, or do they remind you of something that's great?

The song "Until The End Of The World" has the lyric, "In the garden I was playing the tart/I kissed your lips and broke your heart." When I hear that, I think of Judas betraying Jesus in the Garden Of Gethsemane...

Yeah, well I played Jesus for so long, I decided I needed a break! Judas, from whatever way you look at it, is a fascinating creature, because in one sense, by committing his crime, he introduced us to Grace. It's bizarre.

With Scorsese - we've always been interested by filmmakers - and Scorsese's anger with Judas in *The Last Temptation Of Christ*, isn't exactly my own point of view, but I enjoyed it. It's like Judas kinda *bad* to do it.

Is the line in "The Fly", "The universe exploding 'cause of one man's lie," a reference to Original Sin?

We were going to call the album *Adam*, and that's why we shot Adam in all his glory. I

"We've been described as the biggest cult group in the world. I'm against that. I don't like the idea of a cult..." - Bono

wanted to take on the whole world, and they did so, and The Who and the Stones. Rock'n'roll wasn't afraid to take on big corporations and big businesses, the Mafia, stadiums, thugs... Even though we have been described as the biggest cult group in the world, I'm against that. I don't like the idea of a cult.

I think that the music that really turns me on

creating a new mood in music and going into new terrain emotionally.

Joy Division was another band you were twinned with...

Yes. But they were an original of the species. When I first heard a Joy Division record, I thought Jim Morrison had come back from the

thought that would have been fun. I think what we were trying to do with "The Fly" is to jam a blues verse, however industrial and distorted, up against a gospel chorus, however kitsch. Because the gospel and the blues are again the two sides of the same coin.

The blues was generally, "Me And The Devil Blues" – having an argument with you. And the Gospel is more affirmative. But they're still centred around the same axis, and that's interesting. I always believed that the blues were like the Psalms, where you had King David giving out to God – "Where are you when I needed you, my enemies have surrounded me, call yourself God? Where the fuck are you?" And I think that's incredible, that dialogue.

I'm very interested in music that attacks Christianity, because I think it's more real. Because at least it acknowledges the Third Dimension. It's entering the realm of the spirit. I find the music I'm least interested in ignores that element. The best stuff goes right through, from Jerry Lee Lewis to Patti Smith, to Dylan to Van Morrison to Einstürzende Neubauten...

"Acrobat" is dedicated to Delmore Schwartz, who had a big influence on Lou Reed. How does he interest you?

Well, he has this one book called *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities*, and it's a book that was on my mind when I was writing the words for "Acrobat". It's hard to wrap the book up in a few lines, but Delmore Schwartz is kind of a formalist, which is why Lou Reed is beyond all the wank that people write about him. He's a very sharp writer. He's very clean, and that comes from Schwartz, who taught him.

I'm the opposite. I'm in the mud as a writer, so I could do with a bit of Delmore Schwartz, and that's why I enjoy him. I enjoyed his short stories. I enjoy short stories as a medium, whether it's Raymond Carver, or whatever.

How did you feel when the Pet Shop Boys' version of "Where The Streets Have No Name" came out?

There's a lot of disco bands doing versions of our songs at the moment, which I think is very hip. Any band that has a song called "Shopping" is all right by me. But I would have to say if I was being a bitch that their music does have the personality of a Toyota commercial, musically speaking. I like some of the titles, and some of the words he writes. We were talking about Lou Reed – he's kind of a Ladybird Lou Reed.

But I have some respect for what they do. It's just the music in the end. If you didn't hear his voice, it could be anyone. That's fine, but that is why, in the end, I don't take it home.

There's a story about you sending Dublin band Power Of Dreams a BB King record and they sent you back a Dinosaur Jr record...

What I did was I sent them an ice-cream cake and a lot of Smarties and an *Achtung Baby* condom. He [*Power Of Dreams' Craig Walker*] had been giving out about BB King, and I just sent him a record because he obviously hadn't heard BB King. I, on the other hand, *had* the Dinosaur Jr record. That's the difference.

All the Dublin bands seem to have to measure themselves up to U2. It's like a ritual display of patricide when they start slagging you off...

God bless them. They have to put up with being called the new U2, and I don't blame them. I don't blame them objecting to having that hung around their necks. The only time criticism stings is when it's from people who are very smart, or people who you respect. And that isn't as common as the other kind.

The critics were quite negative about the whole raggle-taggle music scene in Dublin a few years back. It was mostly your friends, and people you'd been hospitable to – Maria McKee, Hothouse Flowers, The Waterboys, The Black Velvet Band...

Mike Scott is an extraordinary songwriter and singer. He's not a part, in my mind, of any trend. And the style fascists may decide if he's in or out, but the truth is, in 20 years' time, Mike Scott and The Waterboys will still be around, and a lot of the criticisms will have evaporated.

These are just handy bags that we put people in. The Hothouse Flowers have something very special, and Maria McKee is one of the most talented women I know, and she can make a pub full of hardened criminals cry into their beer as she plays an out-of-tune piano – I've seen that happen. But you put them all in a bag, and even I would hate them – I'd be throwin' stones at their windows, you know?

The Vegas element in the new live show seems to celebrate an image of the post-menopausal singer having a laugh with his old mates and fans. How do you see yourself drifting into old age?

Well, BB King and my father are the same age – they're both 66, and they're two of the coolest men I've ever met. When I get to that age, I want to be like that – I want to be a real motherfucker, never apologising, never explaining. And I'm going to hit you with my stick.

Now it's all done, and you think back over three months of bumming rides around this Zoo TV trip – from a hysterically fine night in Miami to the king-glory of Earl's Court. About epiphanies in Charlotte, North Carolina and rich comedy in Frankfurt. And you wonder, what's the ultimate flavour of all this? What are U2 doing right?

So you measure up the mangled emotions you've felt, and take stock of the important buzzwords in their camp – concepts and value systems like tacky, irresponsible, lazy and fun. And you recall the raps you had with them, about Heaven and Las Vegas, limos and Trabants, Fat Elvis and the Third Dimension. Still you're perplexed as anything.

But then you quit this style of reckoning, and you suppose, well, what *isn't* Zoo TV about? And then you get your insight – that in this ever-rolling shebang, not once did you feel there was a shrugging, flakey capacity with U2, any hint of a wet, nevermind cop-out. There's no neutral on this machine. That's why they're good. And it's something you feel glad about. ☺

WE WILL FOLLOW

Some notable cover versions of U2 songs

- **Bullet The Blue Sky** – Sepultura, Vieux Farka Touré
- **Desire** – The Polecats
- **Even Better Than The Real Thing** – Dead Or Alive
- **I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For** – Booker T & The MG's, Cher, Chumbawamba, Bonnie Tyler
- **Love Is Blindness** – Sixpence None The Richer, Cassandra Wilson
- **MLK** – Joan Baez
- **Miss Sarajevo** – George Michael
- **October** – The Divine Comedy
- **One** – Johnny Cash, Joe Cocker, Mica Paris
- **Please** – Elvis Costello
- **Pride (In The Name Of Love)** – C&C Music Factory, John Legend, Nouvelle Vague, The Persuasions, Barbara Dickson
- **Red Hill Mining Town** – Dream Theater
- **Sunday Bloody Sunday** – Funeral For A Friend
- **The Sweetest Thing** – New Voices Of Freedom Gospel Choir, St Fiachra's Junior School Choir
- **Two Shots Of Happy, One Shot Of Sad** – Nancy Sinatra
- **Where The Streets Have No Name** – Pet Shop Boys
- **With Or Without You** – Heaven 17, Keane, Henry Mancini

"I felt like a turkey in Bacofoil! I couldn't breathe!"



ZOOROPA

Vorsprung durch Technik – the oddest and most intimate album in U2’s catalogue. BY SAM RICHARDS

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **Zooropa** ★★★★★
- 2 **Babyface** ★★★★★
- 3 **Numb** ★★★★★
- 4 **Lemon** ★★★★★
- 5 **Stay (Faraway, So Close!)** ★★★★★
- 6 **Daddy’s Gonna Pay For Your Crashed Car** ★★★★★
- 7 **Some Days Are Better Than Others** ★★★★★
- 8 **The First Time** ★★★★★
- 9 **Dirty Day** ★★★★★
- 10 **The Wanderer** ★★★★★

Released: July 6, 1993
Producers: Flood, Brian Eno and The Edge
Recorded at: The Factory, Windmill Lane Studios and Westland Studios, Dublin
Chart position: UK:1 US:1



So U2 had pulled off one of the most audacious reinventions in rock history. In 1991, they’d successfully emerged as thrustingly contemporary cyberpunk vagabonds, brandishing a newly ironic appreciation of their self-made mythology, expanding the remit of stadium rock with their Zoo TV multimedia hullabaloo.

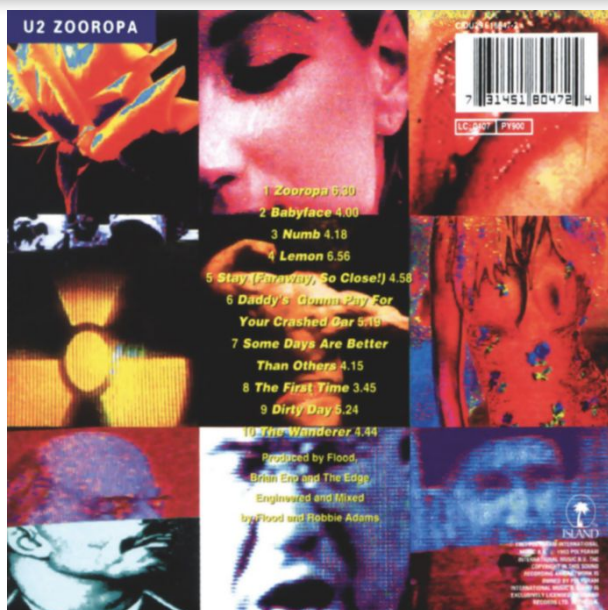
With the aid of Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, and guided by their new guardian angels Lou Reed and David Bowie, U2 had performed a thrilling volte-face. *Achtung Baby* was a critical and commercial triumph. Thanks to the shrewd inclusion of catch-all anthem “One”, U2 brought the flag-wavers with them, as well as impressing a new generation of MTV-reared brats.

And what if Zoo TV was really just a confused concoction of silly stunts, lame third-hand situationism and old-school stadium bombast?

It was, undeniably, a phenomenon – and a pretty entertaining one at that. U2 had willed themselves back into cultural relevancy.

Erstwhile contemporaries Simple Minds and The Alarm were left choking dust; U2’s new peers were the alternative generation of REM, Jane’s Addiction and Nine Inch Nails. As PVC-clad alter-ego The Fly, Bono even looked cool, for the first and only time in his career. Adam Clayton took U2’s new fixation with celebrity culture to its logical extreme by getting engaged to supermodel Naomi Campbell. *Achtung Baby* went eight times platinum. Five-and-a-half million people paid to watch Zoo TV. By the time U2 returned to Dublin in November 1992 after the third and most ambitious ‘Outside Broadcast’ leg of the tour, they were feeling invincible.

“Everybody’s head was spinning,” said Bono. “We thought: ‘Why not keep that momentum going instead of standing on dining tables at nine o’clock and throwing fruit around the restaurant? We’re up here on the moon so let’s stay here and make a record.’” **CONTINUES OVER »**



U2: THE ALBUMS

What started out as an experimental jam session and adrenalin substitute became a fan-club-only release, then a commercial EP, then – what the hell – a full-blown album. *Zooropa* took less than nine months from conception to release, with the band flying back to Dublin between the dates of the Zooropa '93 tour to get it finished. "There was no opportunity to mess around or second-guess ourselves," The Edge reflected later. "Because of the time problem, we really just had to go for it."

With Eno and Flood at the helm and The Edge's experimental instincts driving proceedings, *Zooropa* turned out to be the oddest and most intimate album in U2's catalogue. Advertising slogans for lyrics. Industrial dance beats. The Edge rapping. Johnny Cash crooning. The sound of U2, in Bono's words, "getting away from the weight" of being U2.

The Zoo TV tour had involved a few ugly contortions. Some were probably unavoidable – how to balance the cool, ironic distance of "The Fly" with the absolute sincerity required by "Pride (In The Name Of Love)". Some, though, were self-inflicted – how to balance the cool, ironic distance of Bono's MacPhisto character with the absolute sincerity required by linking live by satellite to Sarajevo. Inflated to stadium size, much of Zoo TV's ideology came across as fatuous. But, freed from the context of having to engage 50,000 people in a football ground simultaneously, *Zooropa* actually made a crazy kind of sense. At the eye

of the storm, *Zooropa* allowed U2 to survey the chaos they'd created with an eerie calm.

"Numb" was the first single, although the traditional 7in and CD formats were deemed passé for the new U2. Instead, "Numb" was issued in VHS format, with a deadpan video directed by Kevin Godley. The song matches the perversity of its release: with Bono confined to a manic falsetto cameo, The Edge intones "Numb"'s verses in a louche, dispassionate monotone over a tense, trip-hop-style beat.

If Bono viewed *Zooropa* largely as an

opportunity to maintain *Achtung Baby*'s momentum, his guitarist clearly had some issues to get off his chest. "Numb" unfurls as a litany of ironic commands, satirising passive consumerism and media saturation, as well as acknowledging the void at the heart of the celebrity existence: "*Don't move, don't talk out of time/Don't think, don't worry, everything's just fine.*" And then the straight-up admission in the chorus: "*I feel numb... too much is not enough.*" For the first time in a long time, U2 sounded small, vulnerable, hunted.

Then there's the elegant, ambivalent title track. Over

a *Blade Runner*-ish synthscape complete with radio-signal interference and Edge's familiar guitar figures treated to sounds like laser bursts, Bono begins crooning well-known advertising slogans: "*Vorsprung durch Technik*" (Audi), "*Be all that you can be*" (the US Army), "*Better by design*" (Toshiba) and so on. A cheeky piece of postmodern pop posturing, for sure, but nothing the likes of Devo, The KLF or even Sigue Sigue Sputnik hadn't explored before. It's the following verse that intrigues: "*And I have no compass and I have no map/And I have no reasons,*

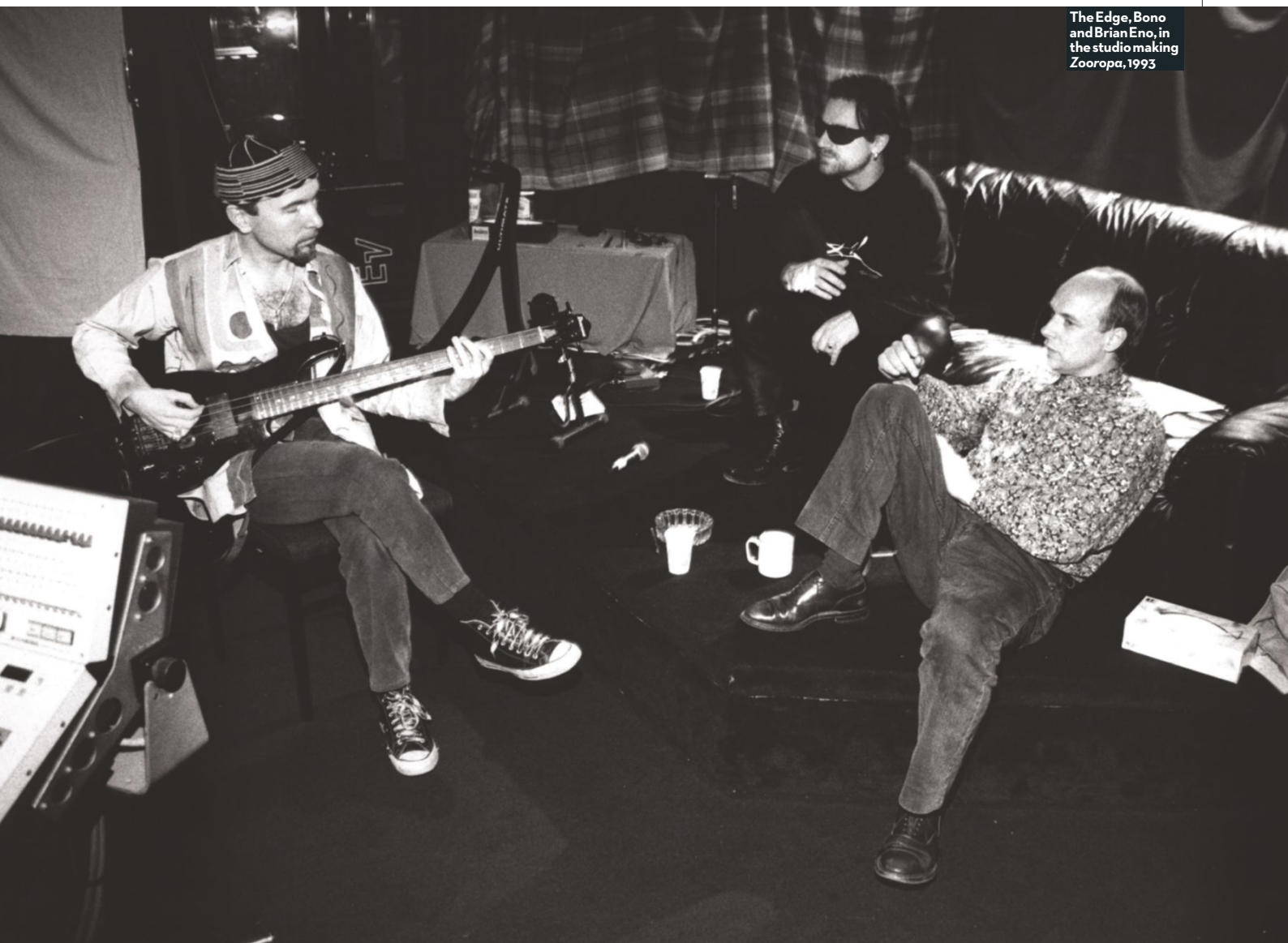
no reasons to get back/And I have no religion and I don't know what's what..." No reasons? No religion? For U2, the band of pious, unequivocal sentiment, these existential doubts sounded positively subversive.

Both "Mysterious Ways" and "Even Better Than The Real Thing" from *Achtung Baby* had been remixed by Paul Oakenfold, the latter with unprecedented success: released as a stand-alone single, it charted higher than the original and graced numerous club-mix CDs, Bono's voice merging seamlessly with the slick supplications of a thousand house divas.

U2 REVELATIONS

■ Adam Clayton was replaced by guitar tech Stuart Morgan for a gig in Sydney in 1993, Bono explaining to the audience that the bassist was ill. Clayton later confessed to Ireland's *Hot Press* magazine that he'd been nursing a hangover after a lengthy drinking session the night before.

■ U2 Way, the stretch of West 53rd Street in Manhattan renamed after the band for a week in March 2009, was similarly briefly renamed Tony Bennett Way in the 1990s.



The Edge, Bono and Brian Eno, in the studio making *Zooropa*, 1993

The Edge, by this point an enthusiastic clubbing convert, wanted to see if he could summon some of Oakenfold's liquid dancefloor magic by himself. The result was "Lemon", a transcendent pop single, whose lithe rhythms, shimmering guitar washes and limber dub bassline ensured it nestled on many of '93's big-name DJ comps without the need for a remix (although both Oakenfold and David Morales had a decent bash anyway). Sung terrifically by Bono in a lascivious falsetto – his "fat lady" voice – it also packs a typically stirring chorus reminiscent of "The Unforgettable Fire" proving that, happily for U2 plc, there were some instincts that just couldn't be quashed.

Bono wrote the lyric "*She wore lemon/To colour in the cold grey night*" after being moved by watching a Super-8 film of his mother as a young woman – a meaning rather trampled on the PopMart tour when the song was used to accompany the band emerging, Spinal Tap-style, from inside a giant mirrored lemon.

Zooropa also saw U2 finally embrace sample culture (although too late to intervene when Island Records crushed American sound collagists Negativland in 1991 for chopping and screwing with "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For"). After inviting Public Enemy and The Disposable Heroes Of Hiphoprisy aboard the Zoo TV juggernaut, U2 belatedly grasped the idea that the medium could also be the message. So the classical fanfare shunted on to "Daddy's Gonna Pay For Your Crashed Car" is not just any classical fanfare but, as the liner notes proudly trumpet, a classical fanfare lifted from an album called *Lenin's Favourite Songs*.

More problematic was Bono's revelation that "Numb"'s drum loop was sampled from a Nazi drummer boy in Leni Riefenstahl's *Triumph Of The Will*. Why? Was it really the best drum sound available? "We attempt to lampoon and therefore demystify the spectre of racial hatred," he blathered, unconvincingly, to *NME*. This brief fascination with fascist imagery was dubious at best. Luckily, *Zooropa* – unlike Zoo TV – doesn't amplify these lapses in judgement. The feeling that prevails is of a bold collage of ideas, sometimes clunky, sometimes

meandering, but never predictable.

"Daddy's Gonna Pay For Your Crashed Car" is a triumph of the band's mission to deconstruct their very U2-ness: part Prince, part "Warm Leatherette", it comes complete with a searing lyric about indulgence and alienation – "*You're a precious stone/You're out on your own/You know everyone in the world/But you feel alone*" – that could be as much about Bono himself as any cosseted princess.

"Some Days Are Better Than Others" is a deliberately glib, plastic pop confection, moulded to perfection. "The First Time", originally intended for Al Green, is a ghostly *Joshua Tree* throwback – "Running To Stand Still" in daguerreotype. Wim Wenders tribute "Stay (Faraway, So Close!)" is a twinkling '90s alt.rock ballad – a cousin of Radiohead's "High And Dry" and Smashing Pumpkins' "1979" – that just about manages to keep a lid on its impulse to seek out the nearest cliff-top.

Then there's "The Wanderer", easily the weirdest track U2 have ever deemed album-worthy. Again, there are no lead vocals from Bono, although Johnny Cash makes for a pretty acceptable substitute.

Adapted from Ecclesiastes, its lyrics were designed so that *Zooropa*, an album full of anxiety and uncertainty, ends with a resolution, of sorts: a realisation the journey is an end in itself. Cash is accompanied on his Biblical quest by a budget gospel ensemble and an insistent plastic bassline, like the auto-arpeggios of a cheap keyboard's line-dance setting. Were U2 privately smirking about having persuaded the man with the most harrowed voice in rock – the "ancient mariner" as Bono called him – to sing over a glorified Casio demo? Probably.

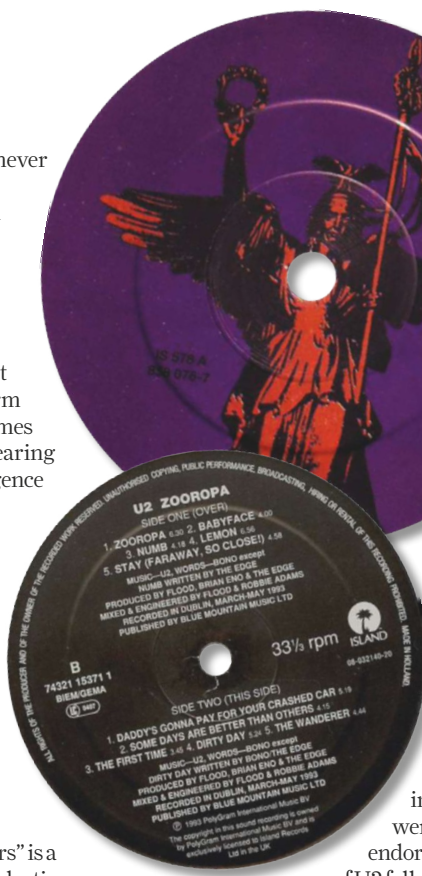
And yet the eerie juxtaposition justifies the wheeze. "The Wanderer" is *Zooropa* in miniature: seemingly a bit jokey and throwaway, but ultimately more real and affecting than most of U2's '80s output because it doesn't strive so desperately for power and purity. *Zooropa*'s deployment of irony is inclusive. Rarely do U2 seem to be winking conspiratorially at each other, as they would later on the *Pop* album. With the band's new-found self-awareness came

an understanding of pop music's subtle dynamics, a realisation that not every song has to slay stadiums or surge towards an obliterating climax, an

acceptance of haste and imperfection and an appreciation of playful experimentation for its own sake.

"Skeletons of U2 songs, flecked by static, understated, with their speaker stack-climbing finales castrated," concluded *Uncut*'s John Mulvey, writing in *NME* at the time. His words were meant as a cautious

endorsement, although plenty of U2 followers conversely viewed *Zooropa*'s lack of obvious anthems as an aberration. It sold only a quarter as many copies as *Achtung Baby*.



At the eye of the storm, *Zooropa* allowed U2 to survey the chaos they'd created with an eerie calm

Even The Edge, whose inquisitive musical vision propelled the whole *Zooropa* project forward, has since disowned its working methods: "We don't go down the road with a piece of music just because it's unusual. That's not enough for us now. We want something that's potent and some of the songs [*on Zooropa*] are not particularly potent. I never thought of *Zooropa* as anything more than an interlude... but a great one, as interludes go."

Zooropa rarely crops up on 'Best Rock Albums Of The '90s' rundowns, but it's got a lot in common with a record that regularly tops them. Look at the frightened cartoon face on the cover, the ironic monotone list song savaging modern living, the neutered anthems, the technofear, the evocations of dystopia... Yup, there's more than a microbe of *Zooropa* in Radiohead's *OK Computer*.

Some factions within U2 were never fully comfortable with *Zooropa*'s lower-key ambiguity, and none of the songs were subsequently installed as staples in the U2 live experience. Other factions evidently considered it not experimental enough: their next album was the Eno-driven *Original Soundtracks I*, credited to a different band altogether... **00**

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "There is enough here to justify the album's existence, but only just. What lodges in the memory are the sounds, not the songs... For all its wilfully zonked-out isolation, this succeeds best when snatching at something old-fashioned and human"

Stephen Dalton, *NME*, July 3, 1993

■ "U2 have finally hit upon some fundamental truths and gone and made a good record about them, dammit. This is a band we always castigated for "meaning it" too much with all their stadium bluster. Well, fair do's to the buggers. From where I'm standing it looks like Bono is having the last laugh" Peter Paphides, *Melody Maker*, July 3, 1993

ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACKS 1

A journey into the subconscious of U2. And Captain Eno. And Howie B. Oh, and Luciano Pavarotti. BY ALASTAIR MCKAY

TRACKMARKS

- 1 United Colours ★★★★★
- 2 Slug ★★★★★
- 3 Your Blue Room ★★★★★
- 4 Always Forever Now ★★★
- 5 A Different Kind Of Blue ★★★
- 6 Beach Sequence ★★★★★
- 7 Miss Sarajevo ★★★★★
- 8 It's Okashi ★★★★★
- 9 One Minute Warning ★★★★★
- 10 Corpse ★★★
- 11 Elvis Ate America ★★
- 13 Plot 180 ★★★
- 14 Theme From The Swan ★★★★★
- 15 Theme From Let's Go Native ★★★★★

Released: November 6, 1995
Produced by: Brian Eno
Recorded at: Westside Studios (London) and Hanover, Dublin.
Additional musicians include: Eno, Luciano Pavarotti, Holi, Howie B, Craig Armstrong, Paul Barrett and Holger Zschenderlein
Chart position: UK: 12 US: 76



Original Soundtracks 1 is not a U2 album. It is a collaboration with Brian Eno in which, unlike their other collaborations, Eno's influence is dominant.

As an album, it has more in common with Eno's *Another Green World*, or Byrne and Eno's *My Life In The Bush Of Ghosts*, than it does with the rest of U2's canon.

U2's more conservative fans would listen in vain for the qualities they have come to cherish. There are precious few choruses, hardly any guitar breaks, and the singing is muted, with Bono sounding distracted and distant rather than his usual exultant self. The drums, to the eternal chagrin of Larry Mullen – who considers the album to be an act of self-indulgence (if not outright folly) – are replaced by percussive loops. All of which, oddly enough, is rather refreshing.

Musically, *Original Soundtracks* is the sound of a band clearing its throat. It can be viewed as

the final part of U2's weird trilogy, which began with the brilliant *Achtung Baby* and was followed by *Zooropa*, before dissolving rather beautifully with a full-blown experimental album. *Pop*, the record that followed, was like an argument between the two versions of U2: it didn't know whether to be ironic or sincere, and was caught sonically in the no-man's land between the stadium and the nightclub.

On *Pop*, Bono was trying to be Prince. *Original Soundtracks* is a tribute of a different order. It is U2's take on David Bowie's *Low*, with Bono channelling Bowie and Eno's strangest phase. Just as Bowie had inhabited and abandoned the character of Ziggy Stardust, Bono had invented and discarded the character of MacPhisto as a vessel for the impulses of his exaggerated self.

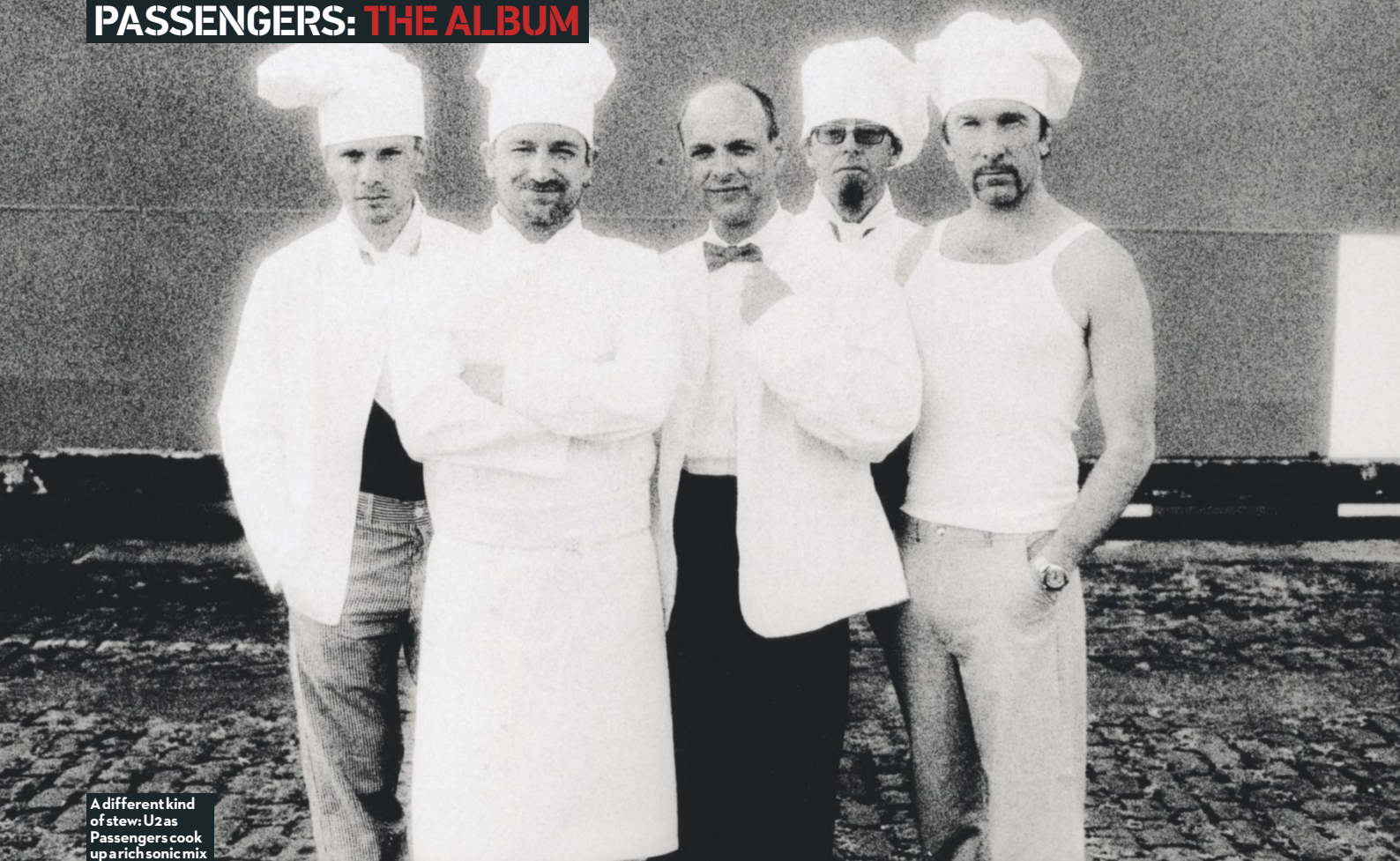
But postmodern irony is an enervating business, and towards the end of recording *Zooropa* in 1993, U2 hit a wall. Their perfectionism had become self-defeating. To overcome this, Dr Eno prescribed improvised recording sessions, where the group would turn on the tape machine and

CONTINUES OVER »

PASSENGERS: ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACKS 1



PASSENGERS: THE ALBUM



A different kind of stew: U2 as Passengers cook up a rich sonic mix

play without constraints. He described this as “working with a broad brush rather than the one-hair brushes we’d been using”.

This was an exhausting time in the career of U2. The Zoo TV tour had been a multimedia travelling art show that celebrated and satirised the bombardment of commercial imagery in the capitalist world. That was heavy freight for a rock’n’roll band to carry, and it split U2 in two. The Edge and Bono relocated to the South of France to do up their holiday homes. Larry and Adam moved to New York, where Larry learned programming, and the duo composed the theme to the new film version of *Mission: Impossible*.

Britpop was in the ascendant, and the boundaries between rock and dance were being blurred by the likes of Leftfield and the Chemical Brothers. On their long furlough, U2 had fallen in love again with the possibilities of music. They planned to warm up for the next U2 album by doing a film soundtrack, initially signing up for Peter Greenaway’s *The Pillow Book*.

After that fell through, Eno suggested that they stay in the zone, and record soundtracks for imaginary films. When the group convened, he stressed they were under no obligation to compose radio-friendly unit-shifters. U2 had always improvised in the studio, but here they indulged in free-form jamming, which Eno recorded and then cut down for use in later sessions.

“Listening to the original improvisations as they came off the floor, you feel the excitement of the process,” Eno told U2’s fan-club subscription magazine, *Propaganda*. “The dynamic between things falling apart slightly

The sound of a band clearing its throat... U2 had always improvised in the studio, but here they indulged in free-form jamming

and coming back together again is an important aspect of improvisation. You have to be careful not to disturb the organic flow of the thing.”

Eno was installed as “Captain” of the sessions, and assumed the role of choosing the material and deciding what music would be worked on. He employed various techniques to encourage improvisation. The studio had noticeboards with working song titles scrawled on them – “Tokyo Drift”, “Antarctica”, “Fleet Click” – most of which would be jettisoned. One of the boards sported a motivational slogan: “Make The Music Of The Future You Want To Live In.”

The futuristic sound of the record was inspired by the closing leg of the Zoo TV tour, when the group found themselves in Tokyo, basking beneath the neon in Electric City, inhabiting a kind of *Blade Runner*-inflected waking dream.

The early sessions involved jamming while film clips played, but with hours of jamming captured on tape, the creative process became more focused. The

Glaswegian dance music specialist Howie B was flown to Dublin to act as a catalyst and offer fresh inspiration.

“Bono and The Edge were at a party on a Thursday evening and they’d heard a 12in that I’d done on [record label] Mo’ Wax,” he recalls. “They asked who did it. On Friday afternoon, I was out in Dublin meeting the band.”

Howie B describes his initial meeting with Eno and U2 as being like a “throwdown”.

“One of the first things that Eno did was he gave me a cassette. He said: ‘Look, Howie, I’ve made a cassette for you to listen to which has got a minute of each thing on it.’” There

were reportedly around 25 hours of jamming on tape. “He goes: ‘I’m going to play it to you right now, and I’d like your comment after each minute.’”

“There were tons of those minutes. I can’t remember how many there were. I was like, ‘Oh God, no! That was Eno’s throwdown to me. It was like, ‘OK, what have you got?’”

U2 and Eno continued in the band’s Hanover studio in

U2 REVELATIONS

■ Bono and Mel Gibson entered into a war of words after the release of the U2-financed movie *The Million Dollar Hotel*. Leading man Gibson said the finished movie was “as boring as a dog’s ass”, Bono later suggesting to journalists that the actor was too far out of his comfort zone of explosions and car chases.

Dublin, while Howie B was sent to another studio in Temple Bar. "I would take the tapes that they'd been working on and do my bit – add sounds, tweak their sounds. If I needed more drums or I wanted to change the groove then I got Larry over. A few basslines I replaced, some of the guitars I replaced."

The mood was relaxed. The band were enjoying the sense that they could create music without pressure – a feeling they hadn't experienced since the first rush of unself-conscious energy that produced *Boy*.

"I just went ahead and did stuff," says Howie B, "and then I presented it to them. Every evening I would go to their studio, we would have dinner, and I would play them what I'd been doing. Eno was coming over to my studio and doing little keyboard bits, and little vocal things."

Howie B says there was no preciousness. "It was very free and very un-U2ish, the way they did it: the song structure, instrumentals, the sound, the length of the tracks. Even not calling it a U2 album. There was no ego there. It was just, 'OK, let's go for some really interesting sounds, but not spend three weeks going for that sound.' Things moved very quickly. It was a lot of experimentation – but you can hear it. You can hear that there's something special about that."

With Eno's avowed interest in the beauty of things falling apart and being heard to do so, the only formula on *Original Soundtracks I* was that there was no formula. Bono talked approvingly about how in dance music, the songs had no centre. The tracks, says Howie B, "didn't have the verse, chorus, AB, AB, ABC pattern" that characterises most U2 songs. "It was AAAAAAABA. Or just A!"

What does this odd alphabet sound like? It sounds like a journey into the subconscious of U2. "United Colours" comes in quietly on a shrill breeze of metallic synths and a drum beat that morphs into a squelchy rhythm. It captures the futuristic sense that underwrites the album, sounding like a train speeding through an urban landscape.

"Slug" is propelled by a brushfire of percussion, with Eno's yen for melodic simplicity to the fore. There's a kind of clockwork melody over a textured rhythm – like a wobbleboard being played underwater – before Bono's somnambulist croon appears, running through a list of things the singer doesn't want to do. The words are more or less meaningless, but they do hint at a playful confusion between romance and faith that is more fully developed on the gorgeous "Your Blue Room". Yes, it could be an outtake from *Low*, but it really does have a lovely melody. The song – one of the few that actually made it on to a film soundtrack (Antonioni and Wenders' *Beyond The Clouds*) – is an

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

"Excellent, probably the best album to which U2 have ever had their names attached. If U2 were really interested in more than maintaining themselves as a vast, monolithic interest, they'd confound their audience with this stuff, rather than belt out their usual, surging bombast" David Stubbs, *Melody Maker*, October 28, 1995

"Hard work. The irritating thing is it doesn't really belong anywhere. As a project, this feels like a half measure, a conceit, a record made by a group that doesn't exist for a load of films that won't ever be released" Paul Moody, *NME*, October 28, 1995

electronic hymn in which sex and God are conflated.

Bono has explained that the lyric is based on the idea that sex is a conversation: "On one level it's purely carnal, but on another it's a prayer. It's an incredible thing to say to your lover or your maker: 'Your instructions, whatever the direction.'" Not that you need to know that. Eno has always favoured the sound of words over their meaning, and the song has an effortless grace, at least until the robotic coda about "zooming in, zooming out" breaks the spell, with the Edge's guitar threatening to skip the light fandango.

The sense of emotional distance is maintained on the following three tracks. "Always Forever Now" has Bono crooning at half-power over a neuralgic rhythm. "A Different Kind Of Blue" is a suggestive fragment, with a melody struggling to escape. "Beach Sequence" (also used in *Beyond The Clouds*) is a sunny piano figure with Bono's voice mixed low, fading into the sound of rain on metal. The mood is continued in "Corpse (These Chains Are Way Too Long)", which matches a crashing chain, the crackle of a vinyl

record, and some shower-stall singing by Bono. "One Minute Warning" is an ejaculation of propulsive electronic percussion, and "Ito Akashi", with a haunting vocal by the Japanese singer Holi, sounds like music from another movie entirely.

The last three tracks are all about moods and textures. "Plot 180" is an argument between percussive banging and washes of melody; "Theme From The Swan" is about rain and sawing strings; "Theme From Let's Go Native" a brisk interlude of thundering funk.

Then there is the hit, "Miss Sarajevo", an anomalous song on an anomalous record. The fact that it exists at all is a reflection of the strange environment in which U2 were travelling – an airspace where world celebrity and politics shared a parachute. The song was inspired by what Bono called "surreal acts of defiance" during the war in Bosnia, including a beauty contest in which the women wore sashes that read, "Do they really want to kill us?" It was filmed by documentarist Bill Carter, who also collaborated with the Zoo TV tour, broadcasting the voices of ordinary Sarajevans. It was written in response to the pleading of Luciano Pavarotti, who wanted a Bono song of his own to sing.

"Miss Sarajevo" shouldn't work. A brooding rock song with an operatic aria in the middle and a lyric borrowed from Ecclesiastes ("A time for everything under heaven") is nobody's idea of a good night out, but the reality is closer to one of Malcolm McLaren's mash-ups than it is to "Bohemian Rhapsody". And it's beautifully sung, by Bono as much as by Pavarotti.

The other anomaly is "Elvis Ate America", a Bono beat poem, in which Howie B encouraged the singer to rap over electronic backing, which he characterises as being "dirty Hawaiian". Actually, Bono's poem about Elvis isn't half bad. But as a rapper, he's more Chuck Norris than Chuck D, and the song is a car crash. It's also the most U2 moment on what is the best U2 album for people who don't like U2. Still, even in this moment of failure, there is something gloriously unembarrassable about it. **02**

Lend us a tenor: Pavarotti joins Eno and the Passengers, Modena, Italy, 1995



POP

A last dance with irony – but beneath the clubland kitsch, U2 remain true believers. BY STEPHEN DALTON

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **Discothèque** ★★★★★
- 2 **Do You Feel Loved** ★★
- 3 **Mofo** ★★★★★
- 4 **If God Will Send His Angels** ★★★
- 5 **Staring At The Sun** ★★★★★
- 6 **Last Night On The Earth** ★★★★★
- 7 **Gone** ★★
- 8 **Miami** ★★
- 9 **The Playboy Mansion** ★★
- 10 **If You Wear That Velvet Dress** ★★★★★
- 11 **Please** ★★
- 12 **Wake Up Dead Man** ★★

Released: March 3, 1997
Produced by: Flood
Recorded at: Hanover, Dublin, Windmill Lane Recording Studios, Dublin, South Beach Studios, Miami, Works, Dublin
Chart position: UK:1 US:1



When U2 released *Pop* in March 1997, Oasis and the Spice Girls ruled the British charts. Within months, the Irish superstars also found themselves competing for attention with Radiohead's *OK Computer*, The Verve's *Urban Hymns* and The Prodigy's *The Fat Of The Land*. Meanwhile, Tony Blair swept to power in Britain and Bill Clinton began his second White House term. Swaggering self-confidence was, it seemed, back in style.

Unveiling *Pop* in New York in February 1997, Bono was asked if the band's shiny disco-kitsch direction proved that he had finally dropped his messianic ambitions. "The truth is that U2 are still the bleeding-hearts club," he replied. "Our music is still painfully and insufferably earnest. We just got really smart at disguising that fact and throwing people off our trail."

Rather too smart, some might say, since *Pop* has subsequently gone down in history

as the biggest critical and commercial misfire of the band's career: a spinning mirror ball of irony that sacrificed spiritual depth for trendy surface zing. But this is neither fair nor accurate. The album sold seven million copies, after all, a figure nobody but U2 could possibly consider a poor showing.

Pop also marked the last chapter in U2's decade of heroic experimentation. It's on this album, perhaps, that their use of drum loops, dance beats, samples and electronic effects reached its creative peak. Or, arguably, cul-de-sac.

Significantly, *Pop* was U2's first album in 13 years with no input from Brian Eno or Daniel Lanois, the co-producers and co-writers behind all of the band's best albums to date. Instead, they worked with Mark "Flood" Ellis, who had engineered both *The Joshua Tree* and *Achtung Baby* before amassing a solid production portfolio that included Depeche Mode, Nine Inch Nails and The Smashing Pumpkins.

CONTINUES OVER »



U2: THE ALBUMS

Also part of the studio team was Howie B, a collaborator on the *Passengers* project, and superstar DJ Paul Oakenfold's production partner, Steve Osborne. Nellee Hooper of Massive Attack, Soul II Soul and Björk fame contributed musical ideas, too, although strangely he only ended up being credited with "snapshots" on the album sleeve.

The post-rave club boom was peaking just as U2 began preliminary work on *Pop* in Dublin and Miami in late 1995. Always hungry to stake a claim to the mainstream zeitgeist, Bono and Edge began citing Underworld, Leftfield and The Prodigy as key influences on the album. They even attempted a collaboration with Underworld during the Dublin sessions, but it came to nothing.

U2's infatuation with club music eventually passed, but it was clearly no bogus pose. They launched a dance label and opened a nightclub, The Kitchen, in the basement of their Dublin hotel, the Clarence. "It's wonderful to be in a rock'n'roll band but it is limiting in so many ways," Edge told *Muse* magazine. "There are so many more possibilities with dance music as a form. It's also hard for a rock'n'roll band to match just the sheer excitement of being in a club and hearing really good dance music."

But as it evolved, *Pop* did not turn out to be the techno-trance reinvention that some advance reports suggested, notably those who believed mischievous misinformation supplied by U2 themselves. Of course, the opening single, "Discothèque", initially wrong-footed fans with its stampeding disco beat and high-camp video, a garish Village People parody directed by Stéphane Sednaoui. Building to a butch "*boom cha!*" refrain, it was, even by U2's '90s standards, an unprecedented exercise in self-mockery.

Elsewhere on the album, though, club-friendly beats are scarce, with the notable exception of "Mofo"'s muscular electronic gallop, U2's homage to the Prodigy school of full-metal-racket techno.

Partly inspired by the singer's late mother, and sung in an affectingly husky croak, it still stands up as one of the Irish quartet's boldest sonic and rhythmic experiments.

Trip-hop drum loops and robotic funk rhythms are woven through the rest of the album, while The Edge's guitar treatments are arguably more artfully scrambled and less traditional here than on any other U2 album. On "If You Wear That Velvet Dress", written during the *Zooropa* sessions, the guitarist lays a shimmering heat haze of melody over a snaking, reggae-ish bassline, while Bono paints an opaque but emotionally intense picture of erotic psychodrama unfolding just out of shot.

Another high point is "Staring At The Sun", the pivotal power ballad that fills roughly the same function here as "One" on *Achtung Baby*, if not quite in the same league. Lolloping along on a sloppy, Stonesey strum, it sounds like "One" after a long night of bar-crawling.



"Our music is still insufferably earnest. We just got really smart at disguising it"

Hedonism and sunshine are key themes of *Pop*, on the surface at least. On the clanking, libidinous lullaby, "Miami", Bono worms his tongue into the ear of the city that partly inspired the album and U2's lurid new look as playboy disco-pimps. In an interview with *Max* magazine, The Edge called Miami "the capital of instant gratification", while Bono explained,

"We wanted to make a record that had some joy and some sunlight."

Before long, however, the sunny pleasures of *Pop* give way to nocturnal temptations and creeping doubts. Even celebrations of excess like "Gone" and "The Playboy Mansion", layered with whooshing keyboards and The Edge's palm-tree guitars, succumb to nagging guilt and dissatisfaction. Likewise

the crunchy rush of "Last Night On Earth", in which a young woman's hedonism numbs her against the spiritual void of the impending new millennium.

And not for the first time in their career, religious imagery is a major motif on what initially seems to be a secular and godless U2 album. References to prayer, Jesus and God abound. Sometimes they have a sarcastic edge, as in "Please", a bitter reflection on the "*holy war*" in Northern Ireland and the peace process that was finally reaching fruition while *Pop* was recorded. When the song was later

released as a single, it came in a witty remix of the album sleeve on which the four band members were replaced by David Trimble, John Hume, Gerry Adams and Ian Paisley.

But elsewhere on *Pop*, U2's sincere religious beliefs are as plain as ever. Perhaps this is the true, subversive message behind the album's glossy surface: even an earthly paradise only offers insubstantial pleasures. When Bono starts seeking signs of faith and devotion in this neon wilderness, he finds none. So on the choppy trip-hop shuffle of "If God Will Send His Angels", the singer's former hotline to heaven has been cut off: "*God has got his phone off the book...*" And the world-weary closing track, "Wake Up Dead Man", another *Zooropa* hangover, is an angry prayer to an absent Jesus who will not answer: "*I'm all alone in this world, and a fucked-up world it is too...*"

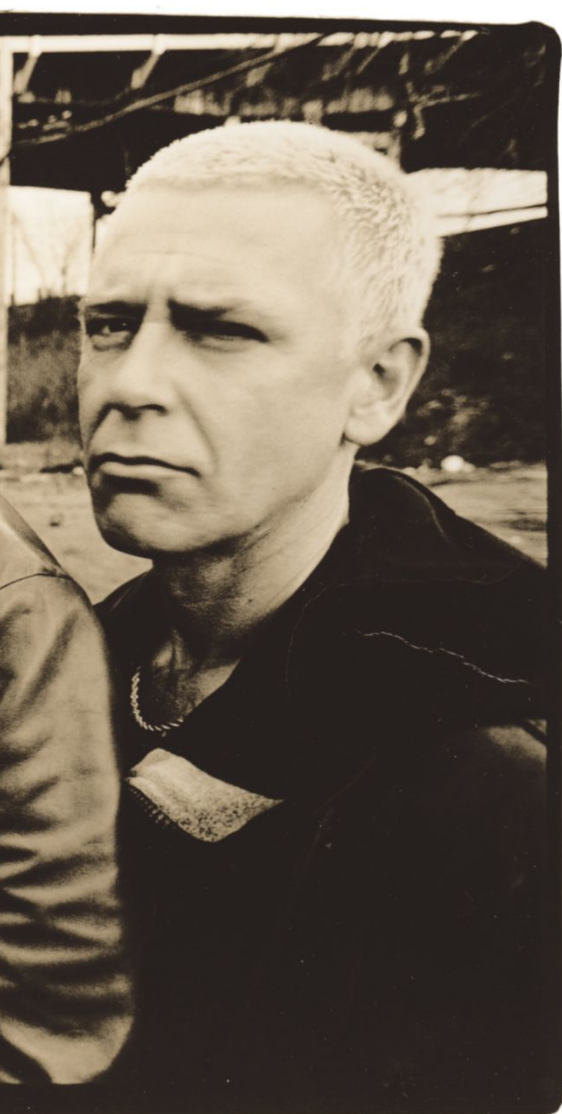
As invariably happens with U2 albums, the planned release date for *Pop* was moved back by several months, from November 1996 to March 1997. However, the band had optimistically booked a world tour to start in April, which meant the final recording and mixing sessions became a fraught race against time. Indeed, the vocal to "Last Night On Earth" was only completed hours before deadline on the final day of recording. Both the sound of the album and the early live shows ended up suffering as a result.

However, U2 appeared in bullish mood when they launched the *Pop* album and PopMart tour in February 1997, playing a mini-gig and hosting a press conference at a Kmart store in downtown Manhattan. "We called the album

U2 REVELATIONS

■ The "JJRIP" liner note on the *Pop* album refers to Larry Mullen's dog, which died during recording sessions.

■ U2's largest live audience to date was 150,000 in Reggio Emilia, Italy, on the PopMart tour of 1997.



WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ “Maybe this record is pop after all, in the sense that it’s seized the day by the short and curlies and spread its sleazy, infectious, insane juice all over the sound. They’ve successfully bastardised their own huge bastard vision of what rock’n’roll can look and sound like... After all these years, you can believe in U2. Now how ironic is that?” **Johnny Cigarettes, NME, March 1, 1997**

■ “A buckled belt of patient, loping grooves, free of action and incident, topped off with nasally dropped lyrics... U2’s failing is that they don’t see that ‘pop’ as opposed to *Pop* is not so debased an artform as they appear to think. Like true bores, they’ve missed the sizzle that sizzles in Iggy Pop, early Who, the Stones, all their supposed sources...” **Taylor Parkes, Melody Maker, March 1, 1997**

much as rediscovered themselves.” *Rolling Stone* agreed: “With *Pop*, they’ve defied the odds and made some of the greatest music of their lives.” Meanwhile, *Salon* magazine even hailed *Pop* as a natural marriage between club culture and religious faith. “How could U2 not be attracted to dance music? Dance is the most messianic of all pop music, aiming at transcendence through the relentlessness of the beat, abandonment of the self in ecstatic communion.”

Released in March, *Pop* was initially a strong seller, debuting at No 1 in 35 countries. “Discothèque” also topped singles charts around the world, but its ironic video and disco-funk sound alienated great swathes of U2’s trad-rock heartland. The band released a further five singles over the following year, a higher total than any other U2 album, all to dwindling sales and diminishing chart positions.

Pop because for the first time ever we felt we had made a contemporary record, a record that was saturated in the music of the moment,” The Edge explained.

“Pop is just a great word,” Bono announced. “It is an important point that ‘pop’ became a term of abuse during the 1970s and 1980s. In Europe, certainly, it was against the law to be No 1, and if you sold a lot of records you were regarded as having ‘sold out’. That was the attitude in the UK and Ireland, and I’m glad it’s over now because it led to a kind of

U2’s least loved album, but it’s also their most underrated. Flawed ambition is always more interesting than safe, predictable success...

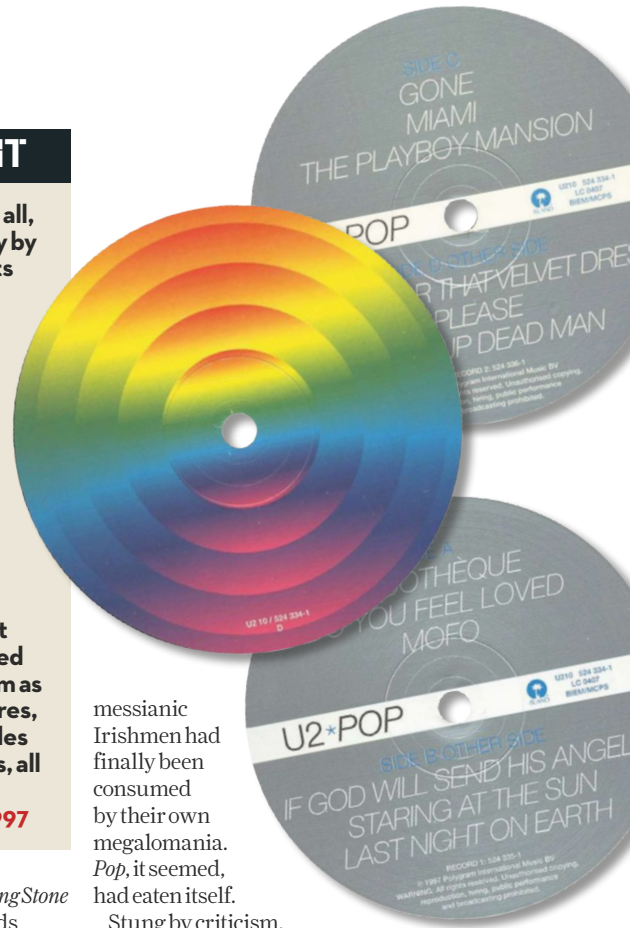
miserabilism. As a band, U2 have always wanted to Write It Large. We don’t share that dishonesty thing of white rock music where people just won’t own up to having a vision and ambition.”

He would say that, of course. These words would come back to haunt Bono as U2 suffered sluggish album and ticket sales in the months ahead. For a start, however, the critical reaction to *Pop* was very positive.

“After 20 years the Irish quartet have made their first great album,” gushed *The Sunday Times*. “U2 have not reinvented themselves so

The PopMart tour kicked off in Las Vegas in April, and was deemed a flop at first. Its technically dazzling stage set included a 100-foot-high yellow arch, a 150-foot-wide video screen and a giant revolving lemon. The band’s lurid new look included fluorescent overalls, glittery cowboy gear and flesh-toned muscle suits. They looked, frankly, like gay comic-book superheroes from the future.

But U2 were rushed and under-rehearsed, botching songs and missing cues. Press reports pointed to half-empty shows, cancelled dates and steep ticket prices as proof that the



messianic Irishmen had finally been consumed by their own megalomania. *Pop*, it seemed, had eaten itself.

Stung by criticism, U2 went on the defensive.

After smoothing out the technical glitches in the PopMart show, they delivered one of the most technically ambitious and eye-popping stadium-rock spectacles ever staged. In September, they took the full production to Sarajevo, the first major band to play there since the Balkan wars. By the end of 1997, they had notched up their most successful tour ever.

Pop, however, left them chastened. They have not risked being so brash or conceptually ambitious since. Several of the album’s tracks were re-recorded or remixed for future single or compilation releases. Very few have been played live again since PopMart shut up shop in 1998.

Which is a pity. *Pop* may be one of U2’s least loved albums, but it’s also one of their most underrated. True, the production feels muddy in places, and the songwriting quality uneven. But no album containing “Mofo”, “Staring At The Sun” and “If You Wear That Velvet Dress” can truly be considered a flop. And besides, flawed ambition is always much more interesting than a safe, predictable success.

Marking the culmination of a wild and wayward journey that began with *Achtung Baby*, *Pop* remains one of the most interesting dead ends in rock history.

“I don’t look at it as any kind of failure,” Bono told *The Guardian* three years later. “It sold seven million copies for a start. We had strong material and, though we worked everybody into the ground, I don’t think we finished the songs or cracked the arrangements. We simply ran out of time. The tour was booked and we had to do it.

“We won’t make that mistake again.” **02**

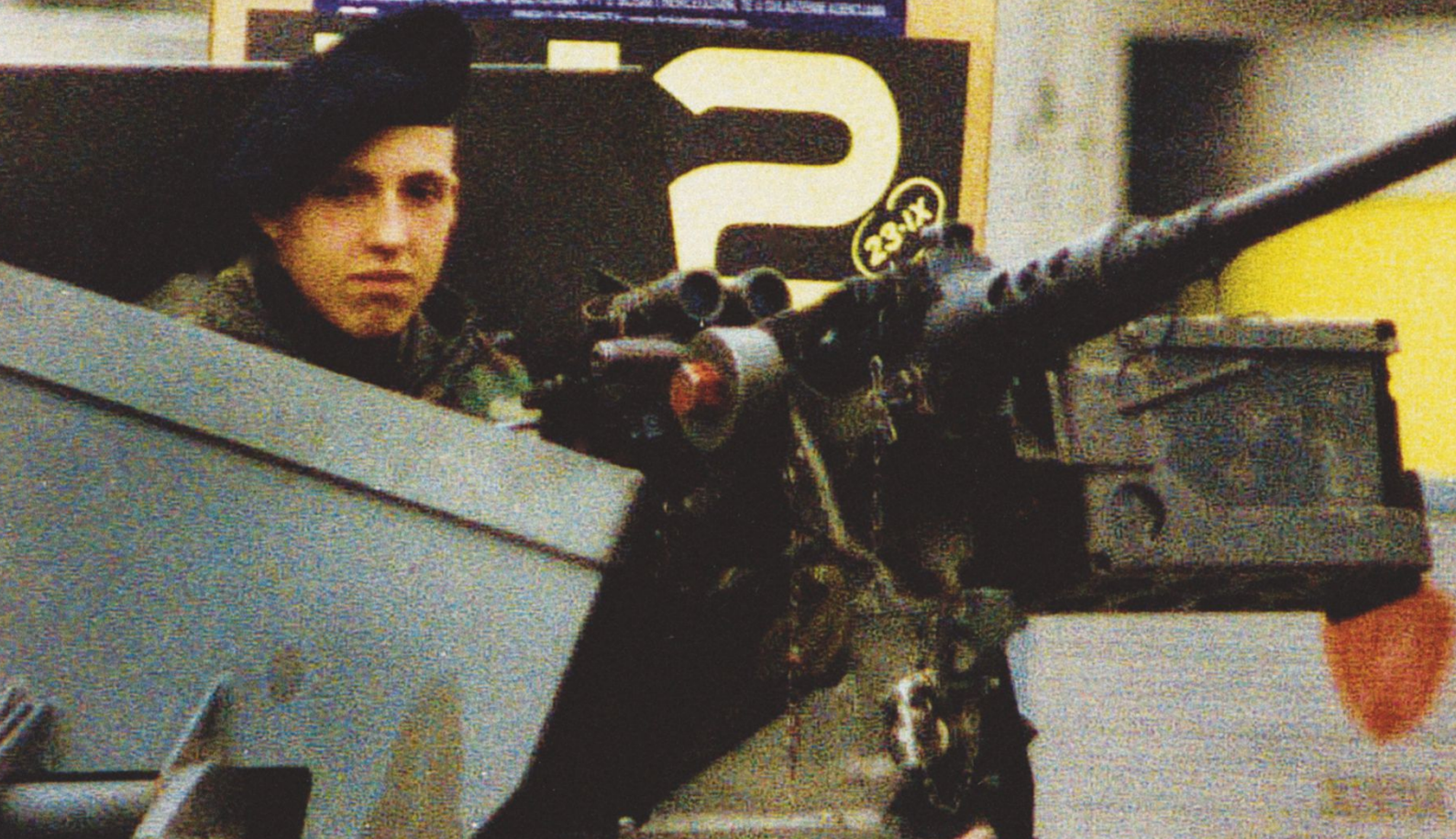
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“Viva Sarajevo!
Viva Sarajevo!
Fuck the past.
Let’s kiss
the future.”



NME, OCTOBER 11, 1997 U2’s PopMart extravaganza takes an emotional detour into Bosnia. Fifty trucks of gear, Miss Sarajevo, a giant lemon and **MAT SMITH** roll up in town, too. “I’d like to think the message,” says Bono, “is that music is beyond politics...”



As the U2 PopMart plane, with giant lemon on its tailfin and supermarket shopping trolley on its cockpit, comes into focus above the picturesque hills surrounding Sarajevo, the gaggle of domestic press huddle on the tarmac below and let out a cheer.

The plane lands and the passports are unloaded. A pile two feet high. Then come the band. A crowd immediately forms around Bono, and the soundbites begin.

"Thanks for giving us the lend of your city for the evening. I hope we treat it better than the rest of the world did during the war," he says.

"What is the message of the gig?" a local journalist asks.

"I'd like to think the message is that music is beyond politics."

"What do you expect?" enquires another, as the singer autographs the insignia of a French soldier's uniform.

"I expect a rocking town. Because before the war it was about music. After the war it's gonna be about music. That's why we're here. That's our job."

Bono introduces us to a woman who has alighted from the plane with the band. This is Miss Sarajevo, Inela Nogic, who reveals later that her presence today was her mother's idea. "She heard they were coming and said, 'Send him a fax.' So I did and here I am."

She's trying to pick up studies put on hold for years because of the war. "You have to finish some things in your life," she says defiantly.

For many, the plight of the Bosnian people was brought home as vividly by U2's Zoo TV tour satellite link-ups with the city of Sarajevo throughout the summer of 1993 as by years of Martin Bell's BBC broadcasts.

The link-ups were put together by Bill Carter, an American aid worker who contacted the band in the hope that their show could be used to highlight the destruction Sarajevo was facing under constant Serb bombardment.

"It was a case of me being angry and them being receptive," Carter explains. "They really wanted to come and play, but at that point it was out of the question."

This was in 1993, when any gathering was sure to attract the unwanted attention of snipers.

"Instead, I said, 'You have the biggest televisions in the world, let's go live to Sarajevo.'"

Each day, Carter scoured the city looking for locals to broadcast their reality into whatever stadium U2 found themselves in that night. His journalistic *coup de théâtre* occurred at Wembley Stadium on the second of U2's four-night stint in August.

"We'd been going two months. I was beat and I was running out of people. I found these three girls, a Muslim, a Croat and a Serb. One of the girls asked U2, 'What are you gonna do?' There was a pause, and before the band could answer, she said, 'I know what you're gonna do, you're not gonna do anything.'"

The mood in the stadium immediately degenerated. The woman's accusations had

fingered a shame in all present that nothing, least of a rock 'n' roll gig, could hope to dispel.

"On any great moment in a journey you have to hit a moment where you're being cynical," Carter explains. "The point isn't to end the war, though everyone can have that illusion once in a while. I had it, they [*the band*] probably had it. Then you take the next step, which is you do what you can do and you move on."

What U2 decided to do was to play in Sarajevo.

The bus to the hotel breezes past the rubble of the TV station (from where Carter sent his first fax contacting U2). It resembles a twisted metal and concrete concertina that's squeezed its last. In Sarajevo, the TV station, the parliament building and library are either destroyed or burnt out. But life goes on. The craters caused by shrapnel and shelling have been filled and painted red. Knee-high cardboard 'explosions' – part of a mines-awareness programme – rise from the pavements. Before planting their mines indiscriminately, the Serbs painted many of them bright yellows and reds in the warped hope that inquisitive children would stoop down to pick them up. SFOR, the multinational stabilisation force in Bosnia, scrape up the remains of three people a week thanks to these cheap but effective gadgets.

The Holiday Inn, like the Commodore in Beirut and the Continental Palace in Saigon, has achieved almost legendary status. It was here in 1992 that Serb leader Radovan Karadžić and 12 of his thugs took over the upper floors and began firing at a peace rally in the street below.

A story goes that visiting journalists would rent a room here then sleep in the corridor outside the bathroom, effectively putting three walls between them and anything raining in from the hills. In years to come, hotel staff will doubtless laugh at visiting rock bands' attempts to smash this place up. After all, it's been done over by professionals. The car rental desk in the lobby also offers "Armoured car rental".

"They wanted the whole fucking thing. They wanted the lemon!" – Bono

"When Bono visited the hotel on New Year's Eve in '95, there were sections where the whole wall was gone," laughs The Edge. "He said he'd be walking down the hall and suddenly he'd be staring into the abyss."

Two days before the gig, U2's trucking crew entered the city in a convoy, blowing their horns, cavalry style, as they

arrived. This was the first hard evidence that U2 were making good on a promise Bono had made that he'd be back and that next time he'd bring the band. Passers-by cheered.

"When the truck drivers arrived you could see that they were changed men," says Willie Williams, U2's stage designer. "They drove through [*nearby Bosnian town*] Mostar, which is just obliterated. But the only real hassle they had was with a jobsworth at the border control. This was the peak of his paper-stamping career – 50 trucks and a giant lemon. He held them up for hours."

Brian Eno, whose music school in Mostar has just opened, is no stranger to the bureaucracy and political chicanery that is the norm in Bosnia. "For this gig to take place is quite something," he says. "Every power in this city had to put their backs into it. And it's the first project here where that has happened. Probably because entertainment is a neutral enough quantity for people not to read political things into it. One sure way of nailing your power in a place like this is to dig your heels in and it seems that people haven't done that. It seems like there's been some real co-operation."

"We came here in March and we were thinking, 'This is going to be bollocks, it's just Bono's mad idea,'" says co-promoter John Giddings. "We were thinking, 'What can we do to make it not happen?' But then we met the people and really got into it, and we wanted more than anything to make sure it happened."

The show, though, was selling slowly until the arrival of the trucks.

"This is a city that's been disappointed so many times there were a lot of people who weren't prepared to believe the gig was going to take place until they saw the stage going up," Paul McGuinness says.

CONTINUES OVER ►



U2: ARCHIVE 1997

The day after the trucks rolled in, they sold 8,000 tickets. But even though U2 are taking sponsorship for the first time in their career, from Coca-Cola and mobile-phone company GSM, the show is making a hole around £500,000 deep in the band's finances.

"Yeah, we are making a loss on this gig," McGuinness admits. "But we knew that going in and getting the ticket price right was critical, 'cos there is huge unemployment here [50 per cent at the time]. People just don't have the money in their pockets. Even an expenditure of £8 is a major thing for the people of this city."

"We offered to do a benefit gig here," Bono says, "just turn up and do a scratch gig, but they wanted the whole fucking thing. They wanted the lemon."

Before the war, Sarajevo was a multi-ethnic city with a Serb, Muslim and Croat population, a famous centre of learning and culture. But when Yugoslavia started to break up in the early '90s, Sarajevo became an offensive image to those people who wanted separate states. Although U2's visit has been carefully stripped of overt politicising, Bono still managed a brief meeting that afternoon with the Bosnian president, the Muslim Alija Izetbegovic, at which they discussed the meeting point between Christianity and Islam.

"To some extent," McGuinness says, "we should stay out of politics. The history of this region goes back hundreds of years, all the way to the

Ottoman Empire. Those are the origins of this conflict. Remember, it was the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand and just down the road that precipitated WWI."

Back in Britain, the gig has spurred some cynicism. What, many wonder, is U2's real angle on this? What are they seeking to gain? Notoriety? Sanctimony? Surrealist kudos?

"I don't think you can exploit a war unless you're a black marketeer or a gun runner," McGuinness counters. "We were in touch with sufficient people here to know that it certainly wasn't offensive to the people of Sarajevo."

"I think the humour and the wit of it appeals to them," Bono says. "That was their last defence here. Humour is everything, you know. Laughter is the evidence of freedom in a way; there's a lofty thought for you. And they have such a black, black sense of humour. The first Sarajevans I met told me this joke: 'What's the difference between Auschwitz and Sarajevo? At least there was gas in Auschwitz.' I was like, 'Whoaugh!'"

"There's a long tradition of surrealism through the war here," McGuinness says. "The song 'Miss Sarajevo' commemorates something much more surreal than what we're

doing. They held a beauty pageant in a bunker in the middle of the shelling. Fingers up to the world: 'You may have forgotten us, but we're alive and we're having a beauty pageant.'"

The path to U2's visit was smoothed by the former Bosnian Foreign Minister and current ambassador to the UN, Muamed Sacirbegovic. Bono originally met him in Italy and, according to Sacirbegovic, "Bono said, 'Have a drink,' and I said, 'Sure,' and he said, 'Well, here's my glass.' Somehow in that passing of the glass I think a lot more passed, including what came about as this concert."

Rumours of his and Bono's behaviour in Sarajevo one New Year's Eve are legendary. Some even swear they heard President Izetbegovic decry Sacirbegovic and Bono during a new year address to the nation a few days later, referring to the pair as, "morons drunk under a bar-room table".

Sacirbegovic explains, "We spent one New Year's Eve here in Sarajevo. We had a few drinks, which, according to legend, has now become a few cases. It was a fun evening, but I think, more than anything else, he got a feeling of what Sarajevo is about."

"Before the war it was about music. After the war it's gonna be about music. That's why we're here. That's our job" – Bono

U2 rock Sarajevo: "Thanks for giving us the lend of your city... I hope we treat it better than the rest of the world did during the war"





stories you've heard from citizens that day, the people you've met who've cowered from snipers' bullets under parked cars. People like you and me, who fear for their sanity because they are able to talk matter-of-factly about picking up limbs from the paved areas of a market place where a shell has just landed. People who for three years awoke every morning and just wanted to sit in the basement until they felt an adrenalin rush that made them go out and carry on as close to normal a life as possible. People who to this day still can't fathom why NATO said the war was too complicated to stop, yet when NATO finally did get involved,

"There was no hint of a bad comment about how Bono and I behaved. What happened is that Izetbegovic made comments about what he considered to be inappropriately drunken and overly public celebration at a time when the war had ended and we had suffered so much."

Sacirbegovic is happy to see the singer back in the city.

"I've been involved in diplomacy and politics for a long time," he says, "And you're never quite sure of the consequences of the words you say or the documents you sign. One thing I'm certain of is that the U2 concert will only contribute to the good of Bosnia, to the integration of the country and to the happiness of its people. It's wild to see Bosnians enjoying themselves and, I think, having for the first time in a long time a sense of optimism about the future."

"The consequences are long felt and that's good. Too many politicians come in here and they wanna have a piece of paper signed and go out before the TV cameras and say they did something. But the type of feelings, the sense of security, normalcy, integration of the country that this concert contributes to – that can only reap benefits."

High above the Kosovo Stadium, the more-money-than-sense part of the show is about to begin. A gigantic silver lemon rises, lit by a dazzling barrage of runway landing lights. Inside this podlike 2001 contraption, the four members of U2 stand hidden from the crowd, arms folded in a kitsch Village People stance. Tonight, the conversation revolves around the gig. They're frantically trying to remember the intro to "Miss Sarajevo", a song they've rarely played live.

The show is more of a rollercoaster than ever they could have envisaged. Bono's voice gives out big time about four songs in. Two trips backstage for cortisone shots help, but put paid

to the singer's original desire to come in and "completely flash-bastard it".

As the full enormity of the situation becomes apparent during "New Year's Day", Bono appeals to the audience, "My voice is gone but your voices are strong. I ask you to carry me like you carried each other in those weeks, months and years." The resulting roar is enough to lift the place off its base.

Built on a hill, Kosovo is surrounded by cemeteries. The dead were transferred here from their graves in the stadium at the end of the war. The structure was the only place families could bury their loved ones without the risk of being shot at. Nevertheless, the depth of emotion that engulfs the place as The Edge sings "Sunday Bloody Sunday" and U2 drift into "Miss Sarajevo" can only be partly explained by location and circumstance. When Pavarotti's voice booms across the stadium and, on the video screens, the models in Bill Carter's *Miss Sarajevo* documentary unfurl a banner that reads, 'Please don't let them kill us', it's impossible to remain composed.

Maybe it's the accumulation of all the horror

it stopped almost overnight.

At the end of the gig, while U2 are in their dressing room, another perhaps even more meaningful exchange takes place as around 10,000 troops in the stadium stand and applaud the people of Sarajevo and the crowd reciprocate. Regardless of what you think of U2, the fact that they came and played here means more than any gig, however big or small, I've ever attended. For the people of Sarajevo, it's put their city back on the map.

And for us, and maybe U2 themselves, it's gone some way to assuaging guilt for a war that irreparably damaged the reputation of the UN, stained the name of virtually every European leader and, with it, the inhabitants of their nations.

But if you'd been here you'd have felt something different in the air, something triumphant, long after the words left Bono's mouth, blasted from the PA, filtered through the emotional mass of whooping, hollering life in the Kosovo Stadium and echoed throughout every corner of a damaged but undaunted city – "Viva Sarajevo! Viva Sarajevo! Fuck the past. Let's kiss the future." **02**

"AND THE GRAMMY GOES TO..."

■ **U2's haul of 22 Grammys is a record for any group, and only three individuals have received more: classical composer and conductor Sir George Solti (31), Quincy Jones (27), and Alison Krauss (26, either solo, with her group Union Station or in tandem with Robert Plant). Here's how**

another 20 artists with similarly lengthy careers have fared:

Stevie Wonder 22
Michael Jackson 18
Bruce Springsteen 18
Ray Charles 17
Eric Clapton 17
Paul Simon 17
Sting/The Police 16
Paul McCartney/The Beatles 13

Johnny Cash 13
Prince 11
Bob Dylan 10
Frank Sinatra 9
Madonna 7
Barry Gibb/The Bee Gees 6
Elton John 5
Elvis Presley 3
The Rolling Stones 2
David Bowie 1
Pink Floyd 1
Rod Stewart 1

ALL THAT YOU CAN'T LEAVE BEHIND

A new millennium, and a new phase. U2 re-examine their roots, and remember the true meaning of pop. BY BUD SCOPPA

TRACKMARKS

- 1 Beautiful Day ★★★★★
- 2 Stuck In A Moment You Can't Get Out Of ★★★★★
- 3 Elevation ★★★★★
- 4 Walk On ★★★★★
- 5 Kite ★★★★★
- 6 In A Little While ★★★★★
- 7 Wild Honey ★★★★★
- 8 Peace On Earth ★★★★★
- 9 When I Look At The World ★★★★★
- 10 New York ★★★★★
- 11 Grace ★★★

Released: October 30, 2000

Produced by: Lanois/Eno.

Plus Steve Lillywhite, Mike Hedges, Richard Stannard, Julian Gallagher

Recorded: Dublin and South Of France

Chart position: UK:1 US:3

After the curveballs of *Zooropa*, the *Passengers* album and *Pop*, many U2 fans had started to wonder whether they'd seen the last of the rock band they'd fallen in love with. Nearly three years had gone by since *Pop* – an eternity as far as the flock was concerned, but standard for this world-touring unit – when the four band members got together in their Dublin rehearsal space to formulate the follow-up.

Not for the first time, they were aware of how their most recent record had been received, and tried to figure out how to respond to it; to come up with “a response to the response”, as AllMusic's Stephen Erlewine insightfully put it in his review of *No Line On The Horizon*.

After two straight albums without a fresh stadium rouser, the band knew they needed to

reassert their basic identity and their previous mastery of the pop charts. The plan was to work at home for the entire project, and also to bring back their reliable studio tandem of Eno and Lanois, who had introduced atmospheric to the sound and even integrated themselves into the line-up of the studio band. Banished was Flood, along with his sonic experiments. Then, at the tail end of the project, they brought back Steve Lillywhite to mix two of the key songs and to do whatever else “additional production” entails.

The buzz coming out of Dublin was that they'd made a back-to-basics rock album. The reality couldn't be nearly that pat. It never is with U2. They were, though, working outward again from a reliable foundation: playing face-to-face in a circular arrangement, with guitars, bass and drums, then plugging in Eno and Lanois and sending concentric circles outward from that rock-solid base.

CONTINUES OVER ►



U2: THE ALBUMS

"Pop music often tells you everything is OK, while rock music tells you that it's not OK, but you can change it," Bono said of the attitude the band took into the sessions. "There's a defiance in rock music that gives you a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Most pop music doesn't make you want to get out of bed, I'm sorry to say. It puts you to sleep."

Bono figured U2 possessed the wherewithal to have it both ways – using rock to build towering pop hits. "From the beginning, we were excited when music met the real world," he said, "and, going into this, we reckoned that people aren't buying rock records any more because of this progressive rock lurgy, which is on the rise, where the single has been forgotten. In our heads we've written 11 singles for this record." (He wasn't counting "The Ground Between My Feet", an add-on 12th track in the UK, Ireland, Australia and Japan but not in the States.) As it turned out, *All That You Can't Leave Behind* would yield three hit singles, two of them massive, and one signature anthem, all frontloaded – like *The Joshua Tree* before it – on tracks one to four.

The signifiers of renewal were all over the record when it appeared. Anton Corbijn's black-and-white cover and package photos made an unmistakable connection to *The Joshua Tree*. There they were with their carry-on bags in Paris' Charles De Gaulle Airport, about to go somewhere in a hurry – back home, perhaps, metaphorically speaking. Bono's doctoring of a sign listing the terminal gates to the apparent Biblical reference "J33-3" intimated an explicit return to the spiritual concerns they'd generally buried during their revelry at the discothèque. And the title was an uncoded message – a promise – that they were re-examining their musical roots.

Given all those indicators, it was somewhat perplexing to slide the CD into the slot and be greeted by yet more electronics – a heraldic string synth (Eno's apparent model for Coldplay's "Viva La Vida"), a tremolo keyboard and a beat blipping out from a sequencer. Ah, but it was only a tease. The Edge slips in almost unnoticed, like a tardy worshipper slipping into the back pew after mass has started, and if you listened really closely, you could make out the hint of a tambourine seconding the rhythm. And then, as the LED on the CD player hits 0:58, the band slams in like a sharp elbow to the ribs, and we're out of our seats.



The big songs were everywhere. U2 had the world by a string again. And then the world changed...

Though "Beautiful Day" was stunning on the first listen, the surprise is now so firmly embedded that you really have to listen to hear what's actually going on in the track any more. When you take the time to do so, you'll recognise the intricacy and effectiveness of the detail. The almost operatic chorale of overdubbed and Eno-treated Bonos that enlarges the scale of the track immensely without really calling attention to itself.

The climactic eruption, with Edge shooting off flares of billowing distortion and the rhythm section thundering mightily. Or the coda, where a spent sequencer putters out as a series of burnished electric guitar chords sends out a message: this will be a record about familiar sounds being made in unfamiliar settings, in keeping with the arrival of the new millennium.

Abandoning the 16th-note flurries that had

provided the overdrive to the Mullen/Clayton motor, The Edge found new and effective ways to play the conventional role of lead guitarist, starting on "Beautiful Day". He used his Gibson and lots of effects pedals, redefining the

shimmering sound that had been his trademark from the start.

Eno's synths are still very much in evidence here and throughout, but tucked into the mixes so that they become subtle if not quite subliminal thickening agents. His role on... *Leave Behind* parallels that of Garth Hudson on The Band's classic LPs: providing thickness, nuance, mystery and glue while staying in the shadows behind the guys upfront. Likewise,

"There's a defiance in rock that gives you a reason to get out of bed. Most pop puts you to sleep" – Bono

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ "There is no fat on this record, the lines are clean. Its beauty is in subtlety rather than extravagance – a feat for a band responsible for some of the most hyperbolic moments in the history of sound... Where do you go once you've gone over the top? If you're U2, you simply move on – sunglasses firmly in place – into the blue horizon" **April Long, NME, October 28, 2000**

■ "Book-ended with brilliance, this album's centre is hollow and overblown, and that's got everything to do with bad faith. You simply can't unlearn the lessons of postmodernity. It's like trying to become a virgin again" **Simon Reynolds, Uncut, December 2000**

Lanois plays additional guitar – largely acoustic – on atmospheric songs from the second half of the album such as "In A Little While", "Wild Honey" and "Grace". As for the shared production credits, Lanois' name appears first on seven cuts, Eno's on four – suggesting that Lanois' focal points of guitar and other human sounds took precedence over Eno's synthesised alchemy on this outing.

Eno, though, provides a sonar-like keyboard pinging through the second track (and second hit single), "Stuck In A Moment You Can't Get Out Of", as the band ventured into soul-gospel territory, with a resulting feel closer to Hall & Oates than Stax/Volt – and that's an altogether positive reference point in my book. Bono said the lyric was inspired by the death of INXS

frontman Michael Hutchence, as he recalled a conversation he'd had with Hutchence about suicide. "It's a row between mates," Bono offered. "You're trying to wake them up out of an idea. In my case, it's a row I didn't have while he was alive." The lyric also contains what comes off as a reference to another mysterious death – Jeff Buckley's, three years earlier: "*I was unconscious, half asleep/The water is warm till you discover how deep.../I wasn't jumping... for me it was a fall/It's a long way down to nothing at all.*"

With its pummelling groove, radically fuzzed-out guitars and mindless lyric, whose most eloquent passage is "Woo-oo", "Elevation" was designed to be a fist-pumping, shout-along showstopper, the forerunner to the next album's "Vertigo" and... *Horizon's* "Get On Your Boots", and it's a kick to hear them let their hair down and rock. "Walk On", whose lyric provided the album title ("*The only baggage you can bring/Is all that you can't leave behind*"), Bono solemnly intones during the spoken prelude), opens with the shimmer of a tambourine.

The track, with nary a hint of Eno-tronics, comes off as a counterpart to The Byrds' pumping take on Dylan's "Chimes Of Freedom", in the way that "*All that you fashion/All that you make/All that you build/All that you break...*" against The Edge's spiralling riffage echoes "*And for each and every person/In the whole wide universe...*" over the church-bell chiming of McGuinn and Crosby's 12-strings. Mullen's drumming is breathtaking, like one uninterrupted drum roll through the whole track. Edge's flock of soaring guitars also recalls the aerial acrobatics of Clapton and Allman on "Layla", a touch that carries over into the next track, "Kite", adorned with his swooping slide.

That extra-long pause between "Walk On" and "Kite" serves as a "turn the record over" gesture, because... *Leave Behind* really has the feel of a two-sided album, if not the balance (tracks 1-4 run 17:23; 5-11 run 31:56). The bang-bang pace of Side One juxtaposes with the largely reflective Side Two in a way that seems intentional in its contrast, split into a "Rockin' Side" and a "Dreamy Side".

The sonar ping of Eno's synth on "Kite" seems to continue into "In A Little While", with its Al Green-like falsetto vocal and swaying soul groove. The ringing acoustics and rolling rhythm of "Wild Honey" give it the feel of a '70s country rocker until Eno's synth crashes the hootenanny in the final minute. "Peace On Earth" is all Edge/Eno atmosphere, with bass and drums you feel more than hear, and "When I Look At The World" continues the spell, slide guitar and synthesisers wrapping around each other like strands of tinsel. A foghorn synth and a drum loop that sounds like a subway clattering down the tracks set the nocturnal mood of "New York", broken abruptly when the band erupts, summoning up the city's rushing vitality. And the hushed "Grace", which echoes the muted guitar tone in the coda of "Beautiful Day", closes the album proper with what might be interpreted as a personification of the mystical state of grace, as the title character "*makes beauty out of ugly things*".

"This tastes very sweet," said Bono when "Beautiful Day" hit No 1 all over the planet. "You think to yourself, you're a rock band, you don't need the pop charts, but you do need the pop charts. Singles are what makes rock sharp, and we've not been great at singles. I can't tell you how excited we feel; we've been around for a while, and to hear this song on the radio, it feels very special."

The album's big songs were everywhere. Feeling giddy about recapturing their position as the biggest band in the world, they not only allowed "Elevation" to be used in the video-game cash-in flick *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (complete with a crunchy new mix by the Butthole Surfers' Paul Leary), they got involved in the cross-marketing game, sharing face time with footage of Lara herself, Angelina Jolie, in the music video. The band had the world by a string once again.

And then, without warning, the world changed. Just like that, the infinite promise of the new millennium celebrated by "Beautiful Day" exploded with the towers, and U2's album instantly morphed from music to prophecy, along with its oracular companion piece, Dylan's "*Love And Theft*". Like "New York, New York" on Ryan Adams' *Gold*, U2's "New York" became a radio hit of the most emotionally complex sort, at once a remembrance of innocent times now gone for good, a tribute to

a scarred and wounded city and a conveyor of hope. Some of the lyrics seemed hauntingly prescient, especially: "*Voices on a cellphone – voices from home/Voices of the hard sell – voices down a stairwell...*"

If "Beautiful Day" and "Peace On Earth" took on a heart-wrenching poignancy and "Stuck In A Moment..." a bitter irony in retrospect, "Walk On"

mystically reshaped itself into an anthem as timely and powerful in its own way as Dylan's "The Time's They Are A-Changin'", Sam Cooke's "A Change Is Gonna Come" and Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth" had been in their own eras. When they played it on the healing TV special *America: A Tribute To Heroes* just days after the attacks, U2 met their unanticipated appointment with history with dignity and embracing humanity. "*I know it aches/How your heart it breaks*," sang Bono as the song reached its newly, almost unbearably stirring climax. "*And you can only take so much/Walk on, walk on/Leave it behind/You've got to leave it behind...*" ☺

U2 REVELATIONS

■ **All That You Can't Leave Behind was banned in Burma, after the government's State Peace & Development Council discovered the track "Walk On" was dedicated to Burmese human rights activist Aung San Suu Kyi.**

■ **The group were immortalised on an Irish postage stamp in 2002, as part of a set of Irish rock legends that also featured Van Morrison, Phil Lynott and Rory Gallagher.**

HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB

“Punk rock made on Venus,” reckoned Bono. But once again, the bravura masked a subtler, more personal message. BY STEPHEN DALTON

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **Vertigo** ★★★★★
- 2 **Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own** ★★★★★
- 3 **Love And Peace Or Else** ★★
- 4 **City Of Blinding Lights** ★★★★★
- 5 **Miracle Drug** ★★★★★
- 6 **Original Of The Species** ★★
- 7 **Yahweh** ★★
- 8 **All Because Of You** ★★
- 9 **A Man And A Woman** ★★
- 10 **Crumbs From Your Table** ★★
- 11 **One Step Closer** ★★
- 12 **Fast Cars** ★★

Released: November 22, 2004

Produced by: Steve Lillywhite, Chris Thomas, Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois, Flood, Jacknife Lee, Nellee Hooper and Carl Glanville

Chart position: UK:1 US:1

January 2009, and U2 play a freezing mini-gig in front of Washington's Lincoln Memorial as part of President Obama's inauguration bash. Besides the obligatory Martin Luther King homage “Pride (In The Name Of Love)”, the Irish rockers also belt out “City Of Blinding Lights”, listed by Obama in his iPod Top 10 alongside Aretha, Kanye West, Marvin, Springsteen and more.

No big surprise there. A pretty neutral, populist choice lifted from one of U2's more conservative albums. Certainly U2's first post-9/11 album is a thumpingly sincere and old-school record, which even many die-hard fans criticise for playing far too safe. But it is also one of the band's most soulful, understated and deeply personal records. It could even be considered Bono's answer to Obama's book *Dreams From My Father*.

How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb had a long and painful gestation throughout 2003 and 2004. Months of work with producer Chris Thomas, who'd previously worked with The Beatles, Pink Floyd and the Sex Pistols, eventually came to a dead end. In his place, the band summoned a small army of studio boffins from previous albums, including Mark “Flood” Ellis and Nellee Hooper.

They also recruited Garret “Jackknife” Lee, partly on the strength of his work with Snow Patrol. More significantly, they recalled Steve Lillywhite, who had returned for *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. For fans of the band's more progressive *Achtung Baby*/*Zooropa* period, this decision was taken as proof that U2 had lost their creative nerve and fallen back on old certainties.

Listening to *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* today, the first thing that strikes you is its boomy, upfront, guitar-heavy sound. Speaking in early 2004, Bono trailed U2's forthcoming album as “punk rock made on Venus”, full of “big tunes” dominated by

CONTINUES OVER ►

U2//HOW TO DISMANTLE AN ATOMIC BOMB



U2: THE ALBUMS

The Edge's powerful arsenal of guitar sounds.

"It's made by a man who is really sick of the sight of his singer shaking hands with dodgy politicians," the singer said. "When you've got as much spleen and suffused rage as The Edge has, I think No 11 was the only way to go. People forget just how extraordinary a guitar player he is."

Opening track "Vertigo" (originally titled "Full Metal Jacket"), a three-minute blast of crunchy fuzz-punk riffs and pop hooks, would become one of U2's biggest ever hit singles. "Unos! Dos! Tres! Catorce!" barks Bono in pidgin Spanish, ending on 14 rather than four in a wink-wink reference to this album being U2's 14th, including compilations and side projects – or so the "Paul Is Dead" conspiracy theorists claim.

"We've never really been a rock'n'roll band," Edge admitted in the promotional press notes accompanying the album release. "But with 'Vertigo', I was trying to come up with a sound and a guitar riff that was unashamedly rock'n'roll, full on, the best of that form which I love, like the Pistols or the Stones."

There are other meaty rock moments on *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*, notably the Who-ish power-chords of "All Because Of You" and the less successful "Love And Peace Or Else", a clumsy attempt at hip-grinding blues left over from *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. But "Vertigo" remains this record's rabble-rousing, pulse-racing calling card.

However, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* also contains a deep streak of melancholy soul-searching. One of its chief guiding spirits is

lyric, Bono explained in the notes, is a "portrait" of his father. "He was a great singer, a great tenor. A working-class Dublin guy who listened to the opera and conducted the stereo with my mother's knitting needles."

Bob Hewson is also a spectral presence on other tracks, notably "One Step Closer", a tender ballad about spiritual uncertainty, partly inspired by a Noel Gallagher quote. Bono had remarked in passing that he was unsure if his late father believed in God, and the Oasis mainman replied that at least he was now "one step closer to knowing". Gallagher gets a special thanks inside the album sleeve.

In its overall sound and mood, the majority of *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* harks back self-consciously to vintage U2. In-between Bono's opaque confessionals and reflections on mortality, there are references to war in the Middle East and the singer's campaigning work for African aid: "*Where you live should not decide/Whether you live or whether you die...*"

Sonically, the swoops and shimmers in "City Of Blinding Lights" are certainly indebted to the sky-punching peaks, grand vistas and monochrome emotions of the band's 1980s albums. Based on a seven-year-old outtake from *Pop*, the song's working title was "Scott Walker", a typically modest comparison point for Bono's soaring vocal acrobatics.

There are more classic Edge moments of chiming, bejewelled guitars on "Miracle Drug", a song partly inspired by a paraplegic contemporary from the band's schooldays. "Original Of The Species", "Crumbs From Your Table" and "Yahweh" also tap into a similar

recording. A strange inclusion, it makes more sense now as a kind of signpost to the Spanish and Middle Eastern travelogues woven into U2's next album, *No Line On The Horizon*. It also contains the sole lyrical reference to dismantling an atomic bomb.

On the eve of the album's launch, Bono was in boisterously confident mood, typically getting his pre-emptive defence in ahead of any attack. "If the record disappears down the toilet, never registers on the charts and people say U2 have had their time, they can fuck off now," the singer declared in the accompanying press notes. "We still know we've made a great record... the one part of the deal we can't blow is being crap, and I think we've kept our end of the deal."

Released in September 2004, "Vertigo" rocketed to the top of the singles charts in a dozen countries, including Britain, propelled by its appearance in a high-profile iPod commercial. U2 would spend the next 12 months defending this promotional "sell-out" in interviews, although they donated the profits to charity. (Their next marketing tie-in with Apple, a decade later, when *Songs Of Innocence* was automatically downloaded into iTunes libraries, would prove a more stubborn tarnish.)

When the album followed in November, reviews were broadly positive. *Uncut* hailed the return of U2's old-school statesmanlike swagger, cheering "the sense of a band flexing muscles they haven't used in years... at times you suspect that they took the much-trumpeted post-9/11 Death of Irony as a personal relief." All the same, the reviewer also noted this was "the first U2 record fully acquainted with Doom... even at their most glibly bombastic, there's a melancholy undertow that they can't shake."

Elsewhere among rock's chattering classes, opinion was divided. On the positive side, *NME* wrote, "Bono's genius is that his inner monologue is so huge and heroic that it matches the scale of the music." *Billboard* claimed, "The sound is bigger, the playing better, the lyrics sharper and the spirituality more compelling than anything the act has done in many years." Meanwhile, *Rolling Stone* weighed in with a double-edged compliment: "This is grandiose music from grandiose men, sweatlessly confident in the execution of their duties."

U2 took the album on the road for 131 shows in 2005 and 2006. Opening in San Diego on March 28, 2005, the stripped-down Vertigo tour was another nod to old-school U2 values. Opening and closing with the turbine blast of "Vertigo" itself, they performed on an unobtrusively high-tech stage, their most minimal in years. In comparison to the grand conceptual pretensions of their 1990s mega-



There is more hard-won humility in their bombast now, more genuine grief behind their tearful testifying...

Bono's father, Brendan Robert "Bob" Hewson, who died of cancer in August 2001. "His demise set me off on a journey, a rampage, a desperate hunt to find out who I was, and that resulted in a lot of these songs," Bono explained in the press notes. "It's a lot more personal than a political record." The singer even switched the title to "Atomic Bob" in some interviews.

The album's standout ballad, "Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own", is Bono's most overt homage to his father. Over a rippling stream of Edge's sparse guitar, it begins as a sombre lament but swells to a mighty roar. "*It's you when I look in the mirror/It's you when I pick up the phone*" the singer proclaims. "*You're the reason I sing.*"

The song was actually written in 2001, and U2 performed it at Hewson Sr's funeral. The

U2 REVELATIONS

■ **Plans for The U2 Tower, a €200m project to build Ireland's tallest skyscraper, were put on hold in 2008 due to the economic downturn. It was reported in July 2013 that a US firm was planning to buy the land to develop an 18-storey tower – half the height of the original proposed building.**

■ **The elephant seen in the "Sweetest Thing" video goes by the name of Rani.**

vein of florid, echo-laden, sonorous minimalism. After years of pushing his instrument to sci-fi extremes, it seems the U2 guitarist was happy here to rest on his laurels for once.

"You get into that thing where you're worried that you sound too much like yourself," The Edge confessed to *Blender* magazine. "But that's what I sound like. I can't help it, that's how I play the guitar. I think I just stopped worrying about it."

The album's

incongruously hot-blooded finale is "Fast Cars", a bonus track in Britain that did not even make the cut in some territories. An attractively deranged blast of flamenco-punk, jammed with free-form lyrics about drugs, pornography and CCTV, this feverish oddity was reportedly dashed off on the last day of

tours, U2 played very safe, but with the impressive muscularity of a stadium-sized garage band. Grossing \$389 million, *Vertigo* became the biggest rock tour of the year, and one of the most successful in history.

How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb crowned U2's mainstream comeback, consolidating the huge success of *All That You Can't Leave Behind* four years earlier. It earned eight Grammy awards, one more than its predecessor, and coincided with U2's induction into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame in March 2005. Bruce Springsteen gave a fantastic introductory speech, hailing Bono as "shaman, shyster, one of the greatest and most endearingly naked messianic complexes in rock'n'roll..."

And yet, for all its acclaim and awards, U2's 11th studio album is

burdened with an enduringly lukewarm reputation among fans and critics.

For some, it is a soggy slab of Coldplay-rock, which is ironic, considering Chris

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ **"A classic U2 album, for sure, but also a breathtakingly heavy modern fucker. And thanks to The Killers, The Walkmen and The Stills making them the influence du jour, one that finally makes them cool again..."** **Dan Martin, NME, November 13, 2004**

■ **"Their most unabashedly strident record since *The Unforgettable Fire...* but even at their most glibly bombastic, there's a melancholy undertow they can't shake"** **Stephen Troussé, Uncut, December 2004**

Martin's gang learned most of their tricks from the U2 manual.

Others claim it is too close in style to *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, little more than an exercise in treading water and re-establishing the U2 brand. But if that was the plan, it fell flat. *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* sold significantly less than its predecessor – nine million instead of 12 million. Not as low as *Pop*, at seven million, but a poor performance by U2 standards.

It is undeniable that this album falls short of the high expectations that U2 created with their best, most adventurous work. *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* is one of the band's most stylistically conventional releases, lacking the abundant exotic textures and tangents that the largely absent Brian Eno and Daniel Lanois would have brought to the table. Steve Lillywhite gives these songs a coherent and glossy sound, but also keeps them prosaic and earthbound.

But in fairness, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* offers plenty of treasures for fans of U2's more traditional, classic songwriting side.

"Vertigo" still stands out as a stadium-punk anthem unmatched in the band's history. "Sometimes You Can't Make It On Your Own" is a majestic tearjerker, "All Because Of You" and "City Of Blinding Lights" are both heart-stirring anthems, and "Fast Cars" an unexpectedly sexy beast.

At its best, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* is not a hollow pastiche of old-school U2 but a new take on former glories from an older, wiser, fortysomething perspective. There is more hard-won humility in their bombast now, more genuine grief behind their tearful testifying, and more soul in their rock'n'roll. Beneath their slick Obama-friendly polish, change had come to U2. **02**



Redrockers: The Vertigo tour hits San Diego's Sports Arena, March 2005



“There is no more independent group in the history of pop music than U2...”



NME, DEC 25, 2004 – JAN 5, 2005

A review of 2004 allows the band to pontificate on everything from Iraq to iPods, from George W Bush to the curse of indie bands.

DAN MARTIN listens in...





You join us in Hanover Quays, Dublin, in the living room of a man called Harry Crosbie. Part of the significant chunk of Dublin he owns is a share in The Clarence Hotel. By day the other partners, Bono Vox and The Edge, play in a band you may have heard of called U2, with two of their mates, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen. In order to dodge the autograph hunters every day when they go in to rehearse, they take a short cut up a spiral staircase in Harry's kitchen. Later on they'll lead 30 Radio 1 competition winners, *NME* and a select group of friends up those same stairs for an incredible five-song set. But first,

we're gathered here for a special state-of-the-universe address.

In one corner there's Bono, the original bloody-minded Dubliner who kept all the reading lists at the University Of Life. Edge, the most Zen-like guitar hero in the world. Adam, the reformed hellraiser and token posho. And Larry, the butch drummer whose single of the year is "Mary" by Scissor Sisters. You'd have to be a casting director on *I'm A Celebrity, Get Me Out Of Here* to assemble a more wildly differing group of people, but 25 years on, history's most robust rock'n'roll group find themselves closer than ever and still on the up.

It's been a momentous year for U2, even by their standards. Ask them their defining moment of 2004 and Bono will say the moment he discovered album number 11, *How To*

Dismantle An Atomic Bomb, was No 1 in 32 countries, beating their previous record of 31. Adam will say the thrill and relief of single "Vertigo" going straight in at No 1. For The Edge it was the night they finished the album and realised it was indeed an album, rather than just a load of songs they'd written. And for Larry, it was driving around New York on a big flatbed truck (one of only five moments he "really remembers"; another is Live Aid). Can you imagine REM being this excited about their band?

The whole of 2005 will be spent on the road, so Adam is off to see his parents in Malaysia for Christmas, Larry's doing the same in New York, and Bono and The Edge will spend the holiday at home, just like the old days.

"We had one new year in Dublin where we all went into the sea at midnight," recalls Bono. "You can't imagine how cold the Irish Sea is. We came out of the house, had shots of ice-cold Russian vodka, and I was higher than any kite you could fly on Killiney Hill, which is where I live. We all wrote out prayers, or wishes for the ones who didn't believe in God, tied them to fireworks, and set them off over the sea. We watched each one go out and how high it went. 'Yours is in trouble! What are you wishing for?!' I take New Year's Eve very seriously on that level, I have a thing that I feel like I'm missing and want. I haven't figured out this year what it is. It's usually some wisdom I need for a job that I have but can't do."

But before we worry about next year, there's the past one to set to rights. This is U2 and this was 2004.

The Libertines split



Bono: What I love about The Libertines [*who played their last show before a 10-year hiatus by the time this piece was first published*] is the sense of jeopardy. You feel

it could fall apart or they could love you. And I love that, I'm a fan.

What do you think was going on with Pete Doherty, his drug use, his behaviour...

Bono: I don't know. And I wouldn't dare comment upon people's very private places that they go to. There's been very little written about the psychology of being a performer and, you know, the kind of spin you get into when you try to be true to yourself, the cost of being a performer where you make yourself vulnerable. I'd never comment on drugs really, other than to say don't judge people too harshly. Because you don't know what they've been through. But neither can you make romance out of it. I think we know that much.

I grew up in Dublin in the '70s, when Dublin and Glasgow were the two capitals of smack. What happened was, when the Ayatollah took over from the Shah of Iran, people got out with white gold, as it was known. They smuggled their valued possessions in heroin, so the flooded market became really cheap. We were offered smack that was cheaper than grass. It was really, really cheap. So people smoked it, because they were like, "It's not the same as banging it up."

Did you ever take heroin?

Bono: No, I didn't, but my mates did, and they



got badly done in. So that's why I'm never gonna do it. You have to know when you're dealing with something that's bigger than you. Maybe you can do it once, maybe you can do it twice, maybe you can't, I don't know. But the arrogance of thinking that you can do it once is my worry with it. Pete Townshend said the first time he did it he couldn't live without it, he'd hit Nirvana, goodbye. I don't have the experience.

John Peel dies; a nation mourns



Bono: I called John Peel from a telephone box when I was 18, and I ran out of money, trying to bend his ear. He was going, "How did you get my home number?" He never really took to our band, and in a way that's what I liked about him. He had very individual taste. He didn't like us, didn't particularly warm to Oasis, yet loved The Undertones. You couldn't but respect that deadpan humour and a man who referred to his wife as The Pig in a PC era. God bless him.

The paid-for digital music revolution finally happens; file-sharers get sued anyway



Bono: It's changed things forever, and it could be very good. The music business is largely run by people who are afraid of the future. A lot of them are still calling themselves "record executives". It's taking the piss! In America the music business turned down ringtones – a \$3 billion a year business. They cry for help, "Piracy is ruining our lives." But they haven't found a way of giving people what they want when they want it for the right price. For me, downloading's like the paperback. And the CD is the hardback. But the jewel box that the CD comes in, for me, is not interesting enough to pay that price.

Do you feel file-sharers are robbing you personally?

Bono: People *sharing* our music, personally I have no problem with. It's when they're doing it as a *business*, I have a real problem with that. But at the end, I'm a big rock star. I can live with it one way or the other. But for people in small bands? The music business is down 20 per cent because of piracy... which it isn't, but they say it is. If that was true, that's really serious, because for somebody who's in a small punk rock group, that's the difference between renting or buying.

Larry: We did that Apple iPod advert and it was like, "U2 sell out", accepting sponsorship. But we took no money. We decided to do that, you know why? Because we knew that we would be on a TV station near you. Within the band there is a consensus about how you do this without looking like you're just taking the cash. Working with Apple, it's one of the coolest products around, they've got amazing designers, they have almost single-handedly saved the music industry, because the industry was going round suing Napster, scratching their heads, while Apple were busy figuring out a way of downloading music where people



"We were grilled by the French police. Literally interrogated, because I think they thought we were pulling a fast one" – The Edge

could pay for it. And surprise, surprise, people are happy to pay for the music!

And because it's not sponsorship, I'm happy to stand up and say, "Apple iPod, yeah, it's a cool product."

U2's new album is stolen; the world cries 'publicity stunt!'



Bono: It really did get stolen! It was in the South of France.

You do realise that nobody believes you?

It was stolen twice! Once again, along with Eminem's, they're both true. And the original time with *Achtung Baby* where it was stolen from my hotel in Berlin. But they both, together, do look like the perfect plan.

The Edge: We genuinely were grilled by the Nice police. Literally interrogated, because I think they half-thought it was a publicity

stunt as well. We have our suspicions. When it leaked – when you actually start sending out parts to the production facilities where they make the CDs, at that point there are literally hundreds and hundreds of people that have access to it, and it's almost impossible to lock down.

At least you got the publicity out of it anyway...

Bono: It would look better on us in a way if we did plan it, but we didn't. I missed Bastille Night with my kids because I was held for four hours by the French police, trying to explain to them why I would not rob our own album! Fair play to them, everyone was guilty till proven innocent! They took it very seriously and I kept saying, "Can I go now?" and they kept saying, "No." There was a little bit of Inspector Clouseau going on, and it says a lot about them that the rich rock stars were made to go through it the same as everyone else.

CONTINUES OVER ►

Transexual Nadia wins *Big Brother*; the nation doesn't bat an eyelid



Bono: We're tired of fiction. It's part of what's playing into The Libertines.

People are becoming aware of media and how it works, manipulation. And reality TV is the ultimate manipulation. But that's why people like it, they think it's unreal, they think they're getting it. The other thing that's going on is revenge. Revenge on celebrity. In whatever age, whenever a hierarchy becomes oppressive – be it the church, the crown, a government – revolution is never far round the corner.

To me the oppression of our time is celebrity, and it creates two things: envy and revenge. Envy is: "I want that – that body, that house, that car." But then, "I wanna see people fall, I wanna see those crowns get knocked off, I wanna see the other side." But then people look at *The Osbournes* and realise that they are a very loving family. And it doesn't fit.

Adam: I don't know if she was there as a kind of a freakshow-stroke-titillation or because it was a relevant representation of society, but I'm all in favour of everyone being represented. I think it's absolutely healthy. But the thing that's noxious about celebrity is that it upends God's order of things. The real romantic figures, surely, should be nurses, firemen, mothers, aid workers – not aid spokesmen – these are literally heroic people. People who run back into houses and pull out babies. In God's mind, they are at the top. The idea that a bunch of spoilt-rotten, self-indulgent artistes – and I include myself – who are overpaid, overnourished and overexposed most of the time... that we're more important than them, it's upside-down.

Iraq becomes worse than anybody could have imagined; George W Bush is re-elected



Bono: I didn't take sides [in the 2004 Presidential election] because I have to work with both sides. But when it comes to these issues I have to become a voice for

people who aren't in the room, above my own opinion. So, everyone's clear, Blair and Bush know my feelings about the war... but I don't go on and on about it because we work together. But just a couple of things about Bush which might be of interest. It's generally accepted that President Bush and his cabinet are all fundamentalists. They are not. No-one in the cabinet is, except for John Ashcroft, who's now left. Yes he's a religious man, but not that.

And one thing I'd also say is the left mocks



the right. The right *knows* it's right. Both ugly traits, actually. I've learned that some of the people who can be pretty scary upfront, religious conservatives, have some idealism about them, rather like a Muslim living that very strict life. You've got to respect people who can live to their code. I have great respect for conservative people that I didn't years ago. And I have found them very easy to deal with, not least on these Africa issues.

Adam: It's terrifying that so many nations can be drawn into such a flimsy excuse for a war, and we can sit by and see a civilian population continue to be abused. Horrendous. And it's the type of wound and abuse of a nation that is going to turn up and bite us on the arse. You just can't do that.

Being the band that patented rock'n'roll intervention, were you not concerned so few musicians voiced any oppositions?

Bono: It was very difficult to take a position

because what was being said was being presented in such a way that "the Iraqi people are already being abused by Saddam". I suppose that was factual, that regime was very harsh and cruel. I never really believed the weapons of mass destruction thing. I just thought after 10 years of UN inspectors and sanctions, does he really have the potential to wage nuclear war? But I thought maybe they could effect regime change in a way that would do very little harm and it would all be over in six weeks or so. But it was absolute lies and absolute spin and they went in there with no local understanding – it underlines to me that one should take very seriously the idea of going to war. There should never be a justifiable excuse for it except in your own defence. The idea was this was a righteous war, that we were gonna go in there and sort it out, and it's just bollocks.

But Bush won again!

Bono: That's the decision that the American people have made. They had the opportunity to change their minds, they had a lot of information available to them. It's good to know that's where they're at and you should never underestimate that.

Larry: I'm not anti-war, I'm not a pacifist, and I thought what America did in Bosnia was right. I know a lot of people say there were civilians killed, but I actually

think it was the right thing to do. It was when Africa went, 'Why aren't you fixing this?' People forget that America, not so long ago, were heroes to a lot of people in Europe when the European Union and the UN were basically sitting on their arse because they were impotent and still are. But as far as what's going on in Iraq, I just can't figure it out. It's completely mad.

Magic mushrooms are accidentally decriminalised



The Edge: There was one incident with the mushies in Adam's house in about 1992. I took a few too many, and went to bed before the effects kicked in. I woke up completely off my head at about three in the morning, in this completely dark, pitch-black room, having all these visions into the

"I'm not a pacifist, I'm not anti-war, and I thought what the US did in Bosnia was right. But Iraq? I can't figure it out. It's mad" – Larry

nature of the universe. So I got my Walkman out, stuck it on to record – the red light was pretty fascinating for the first 10 minutes – and started dictating all these great insights. And I woke up the next day, feeling a little poorly, as you can imagine, and remembered the Walkman. So I rewound, pressed play. And all I could hear was *moooooooooomph*. I'd been speaking into the battery compartment for four hours. Gone! All the secrets of the universe, lost forever! I was devastated.

Adam: They used to grow in the fields out near me, so I did like a magic mushroom in my day! However, I overdosed on them in Jamaica once and it was very unpleasant. As long as you don't eat too many of them they're a very interesting little psychedelic.

The Edge: Personally I think you've got to be a bit careful with all that stuff because all drugs end up taking the piss out of you if you're not careful.

Do you still have wild nights out?

The Edge: Yeah, they're fewer and farther between, but we still like to have a big night. If we're on a big night it can be quite a big night.

How big?

The Edge: Dublin big nights can be pretty big. The trick, I find, is to just keep going. The very few that keep going until the following day really hit the magic time.

U2 do another Band Aid single; it's shit, but we all buy it anyway



Bono: I think the piano hook is really great. It's much more... it's much more... I much prefer it. I much, much prefer it because the music is a little more about the lyric. It feels a bit more tense, which I think is what some people don't like. It's not so sugar-coated.

CONTINUES OVER »

WITH APOLOGIES TO...

Influences and inspirations behind U2 songs and lyrics...

"A picture in grey, Dorian Gray, just me by the sea"

"The Ocean", Boy

A reference to the Oscar Wilde story

"Shadows And Tall Trees", Boy

A chapter title in William Golding's *Lord Of The Flies*

"Stranger In A Strange Land", October

Title of celebrated 1961 novel by science-fiction writer Robert Heinlein

"40", War

A series of quotations from Psalm 40, *The Book Of Psalms*



"Seconds", War

Includes sampled dialogue from *Soldier Girls*, Nick Broomfield's 1981 documentary about female cadets in the US Army

"A Sort Of Homecoming", The Unforgettable Fire

Title taken from a quotation by German Jewish poet Paul Celan, who said "poetry is a sort of homecoming"

"The Unforgettable Fire", The Unforgettable Fire

Title thought to be taken from a touring art exhibition of paintings and drawings by the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs

"Seen them coming and a-going/ The captains and the kings"

"Silver And Gold", b-side of "Where The Streets Have No Name"

A nod to Brendan Behan's poem, "The Captains And The Kings"

"With Or Without You", The Joshua Tree

Bono has told the official U2 website that the song was inspired by Scott Walker's *Climate Of Hunter* album

"Red Hill Mining Town", The Joshua Tree

Inspired by Tony Parker's 1986 book, *Red Hill: A Mining Community*, about the effects of the miners'

strike and pit closures on the North East of England

"A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle"

"Trying To Throw Your Arms Around The World", Achtung Baby

Early 1970s toilet door graffiti by Australian feminist academic Irina Dunn, paraphrasing a philosophical text ("Man needs God like a fish needs a bicycle") she was reading for an English Literature degree



"Numb", Zooropa

Rhythm loop contains a sample from Leni Riefenstahl's 1934 Nazi propaganda film *Triumph Of The Will*

"Vorsprung durch Technik"

"Zooropa", Zooropa

Long-running advertising slogan ("advancement through technology") for Audi cars

"These days, days, days run away like wild horses over the hill"

"Dirty Day", Zooropa

The title of an anthology of poetry by Charles Bukowski

"Stuck together with God's glue"

"Staring At The Sun", Pop

Title of a 1990 album by fellow Irish rockers Something Happens, released seven years before the U2 song

"The Ground Beneath Her Feet", The Million Dollar Hotel soundtrack

Lyrics adapted from the Salman Rushdie novel of the same name, earning Rushdie a co-writing credit

"Vertigo", How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb

An earlier version had the working title "Full Metal Jacket" and was inspired by the Stanley Kubrick film of the same name





**Take it from a man who knows;
Bono's advice to young bands**



Legend has it that Bono has a speech which he hands down to up-and-coming rock stars, like the manual of how to survive in the eye of the storm.

This year, Razorlight, The Killers, Scissor Sisters and Snow Patrol have all been on the receiving end of his wisdom. Here, for the

first time ever, is what he tells them...

Bono: I say some really basic things. Like, if you go over and you tell Americans they're stupid, they're probably not gonna come and see you! Ha-ha! And the other thing, going abroad is not crap, OK? This is the sort of shit I'm talking about! This is not the work of a finely tuned mind! This is just the ABC. Waking up in Memphis, Tennessee, where Stax was born, or where Elvis Presley cut "Mystery Train" in Sun Studios, or where

Martin Luther King was shot dead, is NOT CRAP! That is interesting! You might turn on the television and it might be the moronic inferno. But you don't have to watch the television!

America, to me, was just full of possibilities. Just looking at the poetry of the place names. Detroit! I love Detroit. Detroit is fucking hard. Detroit's like Birmingham, I like that. An industrial town, Motor City... no-one buys their cars any more so it gets angry and... Eminem

happens! One of the great writers of the age comes out of Detroit.

So, y'know, waking up in Lisbon. Waking up in Madrid. Go and see where Keats died, there's still a chill in the room and letters of him bumming money off his rich relatives.

I generally want to shoot whingeing rock stars. But unfortunately they often want to shoot themselves. And I'm just saying STOP! I just tell people that, as good as they think it is, the life, it's even better if you don't fuck up. Take it on and kill and make murderous pop songs, and burn down awards shows, and set fire to your imagination. And set fire to my imagination. When music is going off, there's nothing like it. When Nirvana were around. When The Beatles were around. This is what we're all waiting for. And you complaining about your PDs [*daily cash allowance on tour*] and being away from your mates for three months on a tour bus really isn't... SHUT UP!"

NME tells Bono a joke about Bono



So, on the way out of his final, successful visit to rehab, Pete Dinklage is run over by a bus. And he gets up to Heaven, and St Peter gives him the guided tour and shows him where all the dead rock stars hang out. St Peter points out to Pete all his new friends: there's Kurt Cobain, John Lennon, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix – all the greats, yapping away. And then in one corner there's a bloke with jet-black hair and wraparound shades, bellowing in a thick Dublin accent about Africa and the AIDS crises. And Pete looks at St Peter confused and says, "Is that Bono? But he isn't dead!" And Saint Peter chuckles and shakes his head. "Oh no, that's God. He just thinks he's Bono..."

"I generally want to shoot whingeing rock stars. But unfortunately they often want to shoot themselves. And I'm just saying STOP! This life is better if you don't fuck it up..." – Bono

Bono: Hah HAHAAH! Guilty, your honour! I fully understand it. Because if you've got big ideas and your head is big enough to think you can pull them off, there must be some megalomania. But that's not how I see it. The way I see it is, there's opportunities that I would be just a jerk not to take. I don't see it as megalomania, it's the curse of having an idea. I'm one of those people who has an idea and once I've had it, I have to see if there's a way of executing it.

In Ireland, our very constitution was dreamt up by a combination of poets, revolutionaries, priests, mad drunk people. You can't tell Irish people to shut up about politics or religion, they

never talk about anything else. And you don't even have to know what you're talking about! I really believe that. You shouldn't think, 'Oh I'm not an expert so I can't voice off'. Hold on. We have these antiviral drugs. OK? And they don't. And they don't like us, and apparently that makes the world more dangerous. Now, I haven't been to university, but can't we just take those two problems and put them together? And I've got a loudhailer. I've got a fuzzbox and I'm gonna use it.

The curse of indie underachievement; why U2 never cared about being cool



During the interview, I discover that U2 really don't see themselves as bloated, overblown rock tarts. They see themselves as punks.

And in the '80s, U2's real contemporaries weren't stadium pomp bands like Simple Minds but art-rock eccentrics like The Teardrop Explodes. To Bono, and to U2, the only thing that separates them is that they're the ones that survived, because they didn't fall for the same "bullshit" as everyone else...

Bono: The indie '80s. And it went through into the '90s, too. Only Oasis were the first to just call the cops on this bullshit. This idea of 'independent'; indie versus corporate. The idea that if somebody is signed to a different label, one's round the corner in this office, and one's round the corner in that office, one's better than the other. It was like Mao, it was like the fucking cultural revolution. You couldn't be big in America.

Are you saying that because you went massive you weren't allowed to be cool?

Bono: We didn't care! We didn't even go there,

to the US. We'd just got out of 10 years of this, and then it went over to the US and you had that kind of mentality in some of the grunge groups, which nicely fucked them.

And then you had that heartbreaking moment where the bass player in Hole [*Kristen Pfaff*] topped herself, took her own life [*Pfaff was found dead in her bath in June 1994 with drug paraphernalia by her side. An autopsy failed to establish the cause of death*]. And her father was interviewed on the television and he said she was really agonising over having signed to a major label.

It's like... six and a half thousand kids dying every day of AIDS in Africa. There's a lot to be depressed about, there really is. And of course selling out your own values is one of them. But she hadn't! Independence... there is no more independent group in the history of pop music than U2. Never has been. There's never been a group that had less record company ever telling them what to do. There's never been a group that owned their masters, their recordings and their copyrights for publishing. We designed, from our marketing to our album sleeves, to our videos – that's why a lot of them are so shite. There's never been a more independent group.

So, are U2 still relevant?



There are a few other things that might surprise you about U2. They've never accepted sponsorship for their tours [this changed with 2009's 360 Tour] or sold their music for adverts, and none of them has ever cut a solo album...

Adam Clayton: If being in U2 was creatively frustrating, then people would go and do other things, but it's fulfilling enough that you don't need to have a reggae band for the weekend.

Do you think that you've managed to redraw those punk rock battle lines with your new album, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*?

Bono: Going into this album, I had to ask myself a few hard questions. One, what can we contribute? You know, 'cos if you've nothing to say, shut up. Two, I kind of thought, what made me want to be in a band? I wanted to check where I was to where I am. So I went back and listened to all the music that made me want to be in a band, right from the Buzzcocks, Siouxsie And The Banshees, Echo & The Bunnymen, all that stuff. And what was interesting is, that was what a lot of people in bands now are listening to anyway. So in a funny way, it made us completely contemporary.

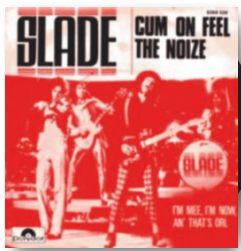
Adam: Obviously our musicianship is a bit more polished than it was, but our technical knowledge is probably as rudimentary as it always was. Ultimately we tend to just bash it out until it sounds and feels right.

But do you understand why, to many people, you might be considered the enemy?

The Edge: I'm sure there are a lot of young bands that are just not into us because we're successful and because we've been around for a long time. I would just say turn that into a positive energy and try and write some great songs. That's the way – if you want to take U2 out, the only way you're gonna do it is by writing better songs than us! **00**

THE EDGE

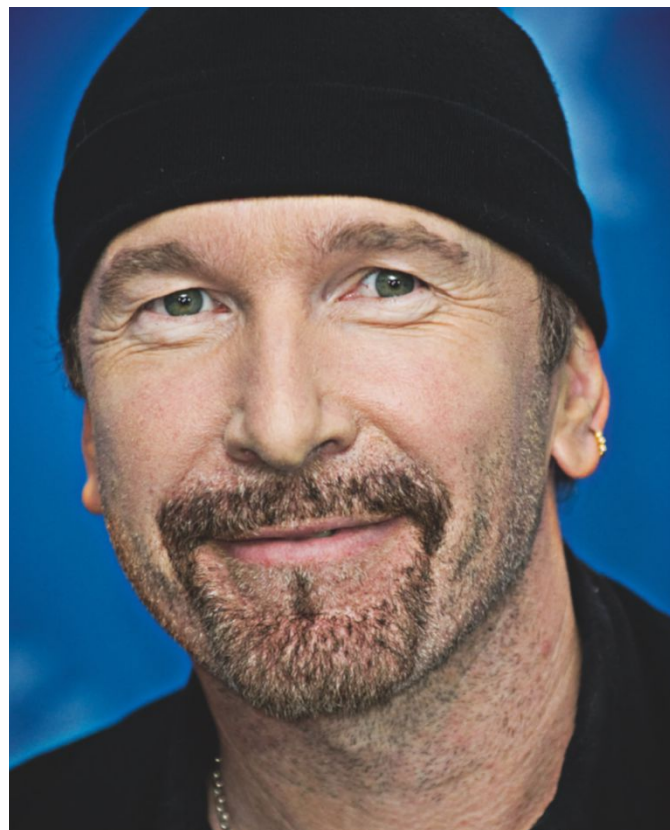
August 2007. The Edge reveals his 10 favourite records to *Uncut*.
We present the full “amazing” interview...

THE FIRST SINGLE
I BOUGHTCUM ON FEEL THE
NOIZE 1973
SLADE

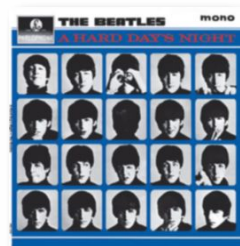
The first record I ever bought, which was something I bought with my brother, was *Sgt Pepper*. The first single I ever bought was Slade's “Cum On Feel The Noize”. I'm not sure exactly how old I would have been, probably about 10 or 11. It was like a big deal, going into the record shop, because that's where all the big boys were and there you were going in with your whatever it was in those days, two shillings, to buy your first single. It was a monumental experience. There were some good pop songs around in those days. Soon after, I bought Alice Cooper's “School's Out”, which was a great piece of songwriting.

THE RECORD THAT
REMINDS ME OF BEING
A TEENAGERHOT LOVE 1971
T.REX

T.Rex was around at the same time. Bolan was a little effeminate for me in those days, I wasn't in touch with my feminine side, I was too into boys' music. But later on I really learned to appreciate T.Rex. I think when I started learning guitar, which was a couple of years later, we had the *Top Of The Pops*



compilations, which were the ubiquitous Christmas present back then. I was working on “Hot Love”, realised I could play it, and I thought ‘great’, so I reassessed T.Rex at that point.

THE RECORD THAT MADE
ME WANT TO PLAY
THE GUITARA HARD DAY'S NIGHT 1964
THE BEATLES

The Beatles film. It was on every single Christmas for five years at least. I was really taken by the music, the guitar playing, the whole package. I thought, “That is

very cool, I'd love to be able to do that.’ I had a guitar at that point, but it was miniature, like a Spanish guitar brought home by my dad from Spain. I'm not sure I learned how to tune it even, let alone play it. But later my brother got a guitar that we learned to tune. And that was the instrument I actually started learning how to play chords on.

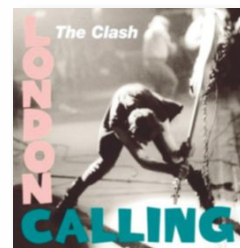
THE RECORD BY A LOCAL
HERO THAT INSPIRED METASTE 1969
TASTE

Rory Gallagher was a big local

hero. As were Thin Lizzy. I guess I would have been listening to Rory's records from the age of 12 in among all the other standards, David Bowie and maybe some Led Zeppelin. Rory's guitar playing first inspired me to really go after the instrument at the point where there was one in the house I could play. There was a connection in the sense that the local boy had done good – this was something that's not a closed shop, so to speak, it's something you can do.

Not that I had any ambitions at that point, other than just learning how to play. I saw him live in 1976, I think, so I would have been maybe just 15 at the time. Again, that was a big moment, very inspiring to see him play live. I love his early stuff with Taste. His album just called *Taste* has got some great songs – “Blister On The Moon” is one I always liked. Just the pure energy. That was the era of the rock trio, the Jimi Hendrix Experience and Cream. And Ireland had Taste.

They played the Isle Of Wight Festival, I think Hendrix might have played there that year. So they were, like, right up there. That was Rory's first band.

THE RECORD THAT
REMINDS ME OF WHEN
WE FIRST BROKELONDON CALLING 1979
THE CLASH

That was a very important period in music. There were a lot of new things coming through that were really great. The Clash would have been a band that was really important to me at the time for a couple of reasons. First of all, they were our era, this was part of our movement, so there was a certain

ownership that we felt. But the political aspirations that they had gave it another angle, and coming from Ireland as we did, one of the first punk shows I ever saw was Stiff Little Fingers, so to me the music I cared a lot about had a political element. And The Clash would have been foremost for me at that moment for that reason.

London Calling is the one everyone cites as their masterwork and it's probably their finest hour, although I love *Combat Rock* as well – that's a great record.

It may be stating the obvious, but *London Calling* was such an amazing piece of songwriting. I love songs that condense it all and sum it all up as that album did. It was at a time they were being called sell-outs, because they were experimenting more in American music forms, the rockabilly thing had come in, and it was already starting to backfire a little bit on them. But I never cared about all that shit, this is just an amazing band, an amazing record.

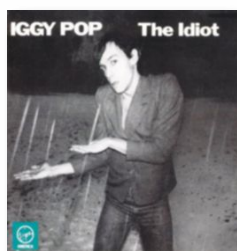
A RECORD THAT INFLUENCED U2



HORSES 1975 PATTI SMITH

There certainly were records that I would think of as being important to us as a group, and me personally, in terms of what they managed to put across. Patti Smith's *Horses* became a really important record for the band because it had the energy that we were trying to achieve. But the poetic quality of it was also important. And the way it was musically arranged, the economy that they were able to achieve with such effect. I've always considered myself as something of a minimalist in terms of musical arrangements, that the least necessary is the best approach; and certainly that record is the perfect example of that. John Cale did an amazing job of production, all the players managed to create this amazing collection of songs without ever breaking their cool. And that whole album from "Gloria", "Kimberly"... they're just incredible songs.

THE RECORD THAT RESTORED MY FAITH IN ROCK



THE IDIOT 1977 IGGY POP

There's so many! I like a great riff. Like "Train In Vain" from *London Calling* is just mesmerising. And maybe as a guitar player, I do sometimes think, 'Fuck, I wish I'd written that.' And Television's *Marquee Moon*. There's stuff on that. "Elevation". That was a very important record to me at the time. It seems like that period was an amazing period for debut albums, and also solo albums. Iggy Pop, *The Idiot*, was really important for me. Again, I suppose sonically and stylistically it sounded totally new to me. And lyrically, like Patti Smith, Iggy Pop was one of the best in rock'n'roll. Lou Reed is the über-lyricist – he kind of stands outside of rock'n'roll, with one foot in the literary world. But Iggy is amazing and *The Idiot* has got some amazing songs, from "China Girl" to "Dum Dum Boys" and "Funtime".

They were all quite dirty albums. It was real. There was the connection to something that was going on out there, these people were part of a scene and a movement and you just wanted to know more about it. A lot of music up until that point had lost, I think, any ability to engage, it was so self-absorbed and distant, it didn't draw you in. It was not really inspiring in any way for me.

Probably the first artist I heard who really started to draw me in more was Bowie and his early records. And Iggy. It was a fascinating world they were able to conjure up and I just wanted to be part of it. We're *in* – that was the vibe – we just want to know everything about this. It just felt like this is the authentic thing, these people are just writing about what's going on in their lives. And to us that was the throwdown to do the same, to start writing songs and trying to express what was going on here.

THE LAST RECORD I FELL IN LOVE WITH



NOW HERE IS NOWHERE

2004

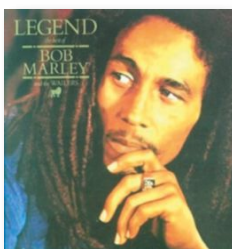
SECRET MACHINES

Arcade Fire are amazing. A band called Secret Machines I really rate. They're a very exciting group. I think they're out of New York. We searched them out and they did a couple of shows with us at the end of the last tour, one in Mexico. It's not like anything else that's happening out there. I'm trying to remember the name of their first album... *Now Here Is Nowhere*. It's amazing. The opener is like nine or 10 minutes long, and the drummer refuses to do a drum roll. I said, "What are your influences?" I thought they'd be fans of Magazine or some of that early post-punk sort of goth stuff. But they're big fans of Neu! and Krautrock.

I don't really get to see many gigs. I saw Arcade Fire here a couple of months ago. I see whatever is good, but Dublin isn't like London where everything comes through early on – it tends to be like second album time when people make it here. So mostly from the radio or word of mouth I hear about things.

Has the smoking ban had any effect on live music? No, the snorting ban, now that's been a terrible influence! No, I don't think so. It's probably easier for the venues than for some bars, particularly the bars down the country. But there's as good a scene here as ever. There's more venues and I think it's a great period for live venues.

THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT



LEGEND 1984 BOB MARLEY

It would probably be Bob Marley. Out of all the artists out of all time,

that's the music I keep going back to. It's like the benchmark on every level, musically, spiritually, it's in a different league. And just in terms of its impact on me physically, some music just puts you in a very dark place, but Marley lifts me out of any funky mood I'm in. *Uprising*, maybe. But unfortunately, it has to be *Legend*, because it's got all the great songs. I say unfortunately, because sometimes compilations are a different thing. But *Legend* is one of the greatest compilations of all time.

THE RECORD I'D LIKE PLAYED AT MY FUNERAL



BEGINNING TO SEE THE LIGHT 1969 THE VELVET UNDERGROUND

That's a hard one. Maybe "Beginning To See The Light". For so many reasons. One of my proudest moments was doing a gig with The Velvet Underground, and it turned out to be one of their last – if not their last – shows together, because Sterling Morrison passed away sadly not long after. How did we hook up with them? I think at the time they were starting to do some shows together and we heard about it. We were trying to find artists to play with us, and we rang them and said, 'Would you be up for it?' There was a couple of European shows they said they'd do with us.

One of the great things about being in a big band is that you occasionally get the chance to ask one of the bands that you personally really love to come and play with you.

We were lucky enough to have Patti Smith come and play with us at Madison Square Garden and that was a massive honour. Tom Verlaine played with her, which was great. It was a bit weird going on after The Velvet Underground – how do you follow that? I felt like going out and saying, "You shut up and listen!" to the front row. They were a U2 crowd, so not all of them understood the significance of The Velvet Underground playing, but a lot of them did. They got a great reaction. ☺

NO LINE ON THE HORIZON

**Magnificent! Thirty years on, a suitably immense statement
from rock's great survivors. BY BUD SCOPPA**

TRACKMARKS

- 1 **No Line On The Horizon** ★★★★★
- 2 **Magnificent** ★★★★★
- 3 **Moment Of Surrender** ★★★★★
- 4 **Unknown Caller** ★★★★★
- 5 **I'll Go Crazy If I Don't Go Crazy Tonight** ★★★
- 6 **Get On Your Boots** ★★★★★
- 7 **Stand Up Comedy** ★★★★★
- 8 **Fez - Being Born** ★★★★★
- 9 **White As Snow** ★★★★★
- 10 **Breathe** ★★★★★
- 11 **Cedars Of Lebanon** ★★★★★

Released: February 27, 2009

Produced by: Eno and Lanois

Recorded at: Fez, Morocco, and other locations

Additional musicians include: Terry Lawless and will.i.am

"It's very hard to be relevant, so there's a lot at stake for us on this album," Bono told the *New York Times* on the day before *No Line On The Horizon* was released. "I know the quality of the work is there, but will it be taken? I really don't know. I'm genuinely curious. I think it might have a bumpy start."

Meanwhile, co-producer Daniel Lanois, interviewed in Canada's *National Post*, reckoned, "We wanted to revisit the values of *Achtung Baby*. We wanted to build something that had never been heard before. And I think we succeeded at a few turns in the record... In these fast times of reference, it's nice to break some new sonic ground."

As we finish our dissection of U2's massive CV, it makes sense to dolly back and look at

No Line On The Horizon in the context not only of U2's body of work but of rock history in general. For some years now, U2 have made history every day merely by remaining intact.

Think about it: rock bands simply don't last three decades in one piece... except for this one. Young and Crazy Horse: on again, off again. Springsteen and E Street: ditto. Stones: a veritable revolving door of personnel. The fact is, no band comes close to U2 in terms of sheer survivability. And when you consider that U2 have not only survived but remained at the pinnacle of commercial success, while also continuing to challenge themselves, album after album, the appearance of any new recording project from this band bears close scrutiny. Simply because, like the crew of the *Starship Enterprise*, they're going where no man has gone before.

As an added wonder, they've somehow persevered as a sincere crew

CONTINUES OVER ►





Taking the band out of Dublin: much of ...*Horizon* was recorded in Fez, Morocco

ploughing through the meteor storms of a grindingly ironic age. Because of their very indefatigability – “*the right to appear ridiculous*”, as Bono puts it in “I’ll Go Crazy If I Don’t Go Crazy Tonight” – U2 have taken more abuse than any band other than the Stones, and this despite the fact they’ve done little or no resting on their laurels. Those in the blogosphere looking for reasons to justify their desire to savage *No Line* – or U2 generally – revealed

rock’n’roll band been so polarising an entity, so adored and abhorred, so blessed/cursed with the ability to inspire and capacity to infuriate, as U2.” This statement could also serve as a one-sentence synopsis of this entire set of album-by-album essays.

Initially, *No Line* resists quick judgment or easy analysis. The most enduring records tend to be the deepest, and for that reason they can only be fully experienced over time. The first

Now that the dust has settled and we’ve had a chance to live with *No Line*, how is it holding up? My own experience with the record has been one of deepening involvement. “Get On Your Boots,” which seemed at first to be a mishmash of a “Pump It Up”-derived adrenaline rush and a stab at Bowie-esque grandiosity, failed as a lead single because it wasn’t cohesive enough to be sticky and lacked an uber-hook. In that sense, it came across as a

lesser “Vertigo” or “Elevation” – a riff rocker that keeps pulling the chair out from under the riff.

On the other hand, as an introduction to – and microcosm of – the album as a whole, it’s right on the money. You need to hear the track in context to fully appreciate it, but once you do, “Boots” becomes infectious in any

context. I have it in the second slot of my first 2009 compilation CD, right behind Beck’s fuzzed-out dive-bombing of Dylan’s “Leopard-Skin Pill-Box Hat” and, placed side by side, the two rockers totally complement each other.

If “Boots” wasn’t slippery enough as a way in

Unequivocally U2’s most Eno-esque record since *Achtung*, a reconfiguring of the familiar with strategic injections of new mysteries to explore

more about their own prejudices than they did about the music or the band. Given the crushing weight of media scrutiny here in the Age Of Snark, Andrew Mueller had every reason to begin his *Uncut* review with the basic truth from which all opinions follow: “Never has any

few times I tried to get through *Exile On Main Street*, it sounded like a cacophonous mess, but because it was the Stones I kept playing it, and one day it not only snapped into place, it captured me. When it was time to make up our Top 10s of 1972, I had it at No 1.



to the album, there was the similarly elusive title track, placed first in the sequence in a break with the band's latter-day custom of opening things up with a bang: "Vertigo," "Beautiful Day," "Discothèque". Here, in an opening chess move that intimates the extent of

Eno's imprint on the album, the band appears in the most claustrophobic setting, rattling away surrounded by white noise, as if they're playing in a wind tunnel lined with corrugated aluminium, the echoes ricocheting like AK-47 shells, with Bono sounding suitably agitated.

And in a sublime turnabout-is-fair-play twist, he almost immediately lets loose an unhinged "Whoawhoawhoawhoawho", absolutely nailing the baleful wail of Caleb Followill from the Kings Of Leon. I dismissed the track as being slapped together the first few times I heard it, but then the eureka moment arrived. What had struck me as an annoying incongruity between the band's hammering attack and Bono's reach-for-the-sky histrionics turned out to be shorthand for the album's sonic force field, its embrace of apparent incongruities and contradictions: the churning, serrated bottom and the majestic, vaulted ceiling.

In the *National Post* interview, Lanois recounted the genesis of the title song: "Brian Eno's station was right next to Larry's – we have little stations in the studio – so at any

point Brian could record what Larry was doing, and manipulate it and sample it and so on. He did that, and it started out as a little Bo Diddley sample beat. Kind of jazzy, but it had a vibe to it. As soon as Eno sampled that, we jumped right on top of it and started playing over it, including Larry. And we came up with what I think is space-age rock'n'roll – space-age rockabilly. Bono had this idea – where the sea meets the sky and you can't tell the difference between the two."

The metaphor of the title couldn't be more apt: it's right there in the sounds. With Eno more integral to the band's process than ever before (Passengers excepted, of course), manning the controls from Captain Kirk's chair, they're on a voyage toward the end of the rainbow, where the ocean's turbulence meets the sky's majesty. And when they find that sweet spot, there's no better word to describe the sound of it than "Magnificent". Given that this is a metaphysically attuned foursome, the intimations of immortality are there for the taking throughout. But the spiritual is a dimension of this record, not its mandate. And it doesn't hurt that Clayton's earth-moving

bassline on "Magnificent" echoes the one on "Billie Jean".

The ocean/sky dynamic is at play in the album's sequence. There is the glorious first act of "No Line", the instant classic "Magnificent", the sonic panorama of "Moment Of Surrender" (Lanois describes it as a tribute to The Band) and the epic "Unknown Caller". The meat-and-potatoes second act consists of "I'll Go Crazy...", "Boots..." and "Stand Up Comedy". Then, a third act you can get lost in, like a novel by Le Carré or McEwan: "Fez – Being Born", "White As Snow", "Breathe" and "Cedars Of Lebanon". Within the songs are connections: "Snow" and "Cedars" form a sort of cinematic trilogy with "Moment..." The line "let me in the sound" from "Boots..." recurs in the staticky first section of "Fez".

Eno's shell game – his Oblique Strategies – is so deep in the grain of the album that you can easily envisage the band members drawing cards from the deck he's offered, the ensuing multiplicities guiding the expanded band toward the gradually unfolding "plan" that some critics have dismissed as no plan at all. That *No Line* rebuffs quick judgment turns out to be its greatest strength, as layer upon layer of sonic intrigue reveals itself incrementally, and perhaps endlessly. This is unequivocally U2's most Eno-esque record since *Achtung*, a reconfiguring of the familiar with strategic injections of new mysteries to explore, bringing on the requisite cavalcade of reference points: Roxy's mission statement "Re-make/Re-model", the quartet beginning with *Here Come The Warm Jets* and ending with *Before And After Science*, Low's "Heroes", *Achtung* and, as an oblique reaffirmation/rejiggering, *All That You Can't Leave Behind*. "He's a great man for giving you an opportunity to look at your work in another manner," said Lanois.

The more I listen to it, the more I want to keep listening, so I completely buy into Bono's mantra, "Let me in the sound." Like Eno, I'm more interested in the sounds of words than the meanings, and Bono delivers lines that pop out of the weave like The Edge's guitar riffs, complete with an array of "effects". For me, the most compelling part of the album is the visceral interaction of the band – the attack and

serrated tones of Edge's guitar, Clayton's incredibly full and aggressive basslines and Mullen's relentless, in-the-pocket drumming – as the instrumental aggressiveness locks together with Bono's similarly Eno-enhanced attempts at big-sky orchestral grandeur. This is one of rock's greatest instrumental units to begin with, and Eno's treatment of the players' shared sense of time and feel, tone and texture on *No Line* renders its sonics endlessly enthralling.

Given U2's unprecedented run, history is always chasing them, and vice versa, meaning self-consciousness is a given. So here, with Eno waving his magic wand, they've made it part of the plot – but the self-referentialism is fleeting and often playful, from Bono's lyrical zingers to Edge's calibrated employment of 16th notes. Of course, every idea, every decision, is reflected off the prism of the band's body of work – 12 studio albums' worth of accumulated ideas and decisions, which is both the albatross around their necks and the force field out of which they've been making music all along.

The point is, no major band have ever been in this position before – this is a partnership extending in an unbroken line from the post-punk era to the end of the first decade of the next century – which makes anything they do necessarily intriguing. Really, how can anyone with a sense of history *not* be drawn to this dense, intricate real-life narrative, chapter by chapter? This is one classic rock'n'roll story that's still unfolding. Let's savour it while it lasts. **BB**

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

"A grand, sweeping, brave record that, while not quite the reinvention they pegged it as, suggests they've got the chops to retain their relevance well into their fourth decade as a band"

Ben Patashnik, NME, February 28, 2009

"More than anything else they have done, this record requires and rewards checking in without baggage. Their least immediate album – but there's something about it that suggests it may be one of their most enduring"

Andrew Mueller, Uncut, April 2009



"More integral to the band than ever before..."
Brian Eno, flanked by Bono and Adam

SONGS OF INNOCENCE

Mid-life catharsis! The rueful grandees reconnect with their teenage selves **BY ANDREW MUELLER**

TRACKMARKS

- 1 The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone) ★★★★★
- 2 Every Breaking Wave ★★★★★
- 3 California (There Is No End To Love) ★★★
- 4 Song For Someone ★★★
- 5 Iris (Hold Me Close) ★★★★★
- 6 Volcano ★★
- 7 Raised By Wolves ★★★
- 8 Cedarwood Road ★★★
- 9 Sleep Like A Baby Tonight ★★★
- 10 This Is Where You Can Reach Me Now ★★
- 11 The Troubles ★★★

Released: September 9, 2014

Recorded at: Electric Lady Studios, NYC, Pull Studios, NYC, The Church Studios, Assault And Battery London, Shangri-La, LA, The Woodshed, LA, Strathmore House, Dublin

Produced by: Danger Mouse, with additional production from Paul Epworth, Ryan Tedder, Declan Gaffney and Flood

Highest chart position: UK: 6 US: 9



U2's 13th studio album was never going to be judged entirely on its own merits: the price of their pre-eminence has been the demise of any hope of being heard without prejudice. U2 have long known this, of course, and have even been known to have fun with it: the *Achtung Baby/Zooropa/Pop* period of the 1990s was in large measure a gesture of iconoclasm directed at themselves.

Even U2, however, were startled by the degree to which the release of *Songs Of Innocence* became less a discussion of the first album for five years by the world's biggest rock group, and more a test of the maxim that any publicity is good publicity.

On September 9, 2014, anyone whose phone or computer contained the requisite Apple software discovered that *Songs Of Innocence* had been added to the "purchased" section of their iTunes library. The combination of U2 with the

hyper-sensitivity of the online universe proved spectacularly combustible. In response to what was, essentially, a popular band saying "Here's a free copy of our new album, which you're under no obligation to keep or even listen to", a bemusing number of theatrically aggrieved folk reacted as if U2 had first pitched the thing through their front window tied to a brick, and then compelled them to endure it at top volume while Bono personally held a revolver to the head of their whimpering dog.

The singer subsequently apologised. "I'm sorry," he said in a Facebook interview by fans, "I had this beautiful idea and we got carried away with ourselves." He shouldn't have. Not just because the stunt was, on its own merits, successful – 81 million people listened to at least some of *Songs Of Innocence* in the first month, six times as many as had bought U2 songs from iTunes since it opened in 2003 – and not just because there's little point in attempting to placate the self-regarding wrath of the virtual mob. While not quite among U2's greatest albums, and any too-expensive- **CONTINUES OVER ►**



Disc 1

1. The Miracle (of Joey Ramone)
2. Every Breaking Wave
3. California (There is no End to Love)
4. Song for Someone
5. Iris (Hold Me Close)
6. Volcano
7. Raised By Wolves
8. Cedarwood Road
9. Sleep Like a Baby Tonight
10. This is Where You Can Reach Me Now
11. The Troubles

Disc 2

1. Lucifer's Hands
2. The Crystal Ballroom
3. Acoustic Sessions
4. The Troubles (Alternative Version)
5. Sleep Like A Baby Tonight (Alternative Perspective Mix by Tchad Blake)

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U2: THE ALBUMS

at-half-the-price jokes aside, it was one that was well worth keeping.

The physical incarnation of *Songs Of Innocence*, made available a few weeks later, included a rambling essay by Bono explaining the album's thematic context – Dublin in the 1970s, when he and three friends formed a band initially called The Hype, eventually U2. Bono's snatched flashbacks recall a time of tumult, political and personal, and the escape he sought, and found, in music. The moment of revelation, as he tells it, was sneaking into a Ramones gig at Dublin's State Cinema in 1978, and finding himself liberated by the counter-intuitive vulnerability of the lead vocalist ("You could hear an echo of your pain in his voice... after the Ramones, I could try and be myself as a singer. I just needed to find out who that was... emancipation.")

The album is, then, explicitly a chronicling of what occurs when four middle-aged umpty-millionaires attempt to reinhabit their ambitious, anxious, awkward teenage selves, to recapture the bewildering thrill of seeing, feeling and doing things as absolute beginners, emboldened by both the ignorance and the confidence of youth. This is far from unusual behaviour for men in their fifties, but U2 at least acknowledge an element of mid-life crisis ("First journeys are exhilarating," Bono also writes, "geographically, spiritually, sexually... the first time you see an orchid or a freeway or a rock'n'roll band in full flight, it stays tattooed under your skin.") The cover image sums it up: Larry Mullen Jr embracing his teenage son, Aaron Elvis.

Songs Of Innocence opens, appropriately given the subject's central role in this fable, with "The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)", a rousing hymn to the leather-jacketed Moses who – as Bono clearly sees it – led his tribe towards some sort of freedom. Wisely, U2 rise above what must have been considerable temptation to frame it as a three-chord ramalama Ramones pastiche. Instead, "The Miracle" sounds something like Pixies playing T.Rex, a rollicking post-modern, post-punk glam

U2 in 2014: "Four middle-aged umpty-millionaires attempting to recapture the thrill of beginners"



Volunteer Force, and the deaths of his grandfather and mother, days apart.

Bono has spoken and sung often of the effect of losing his mother while still a teenager, most notably on "I Will Follow" – the first song on the first U2 album, and the one they have played live more than any other. *Songs Of Innocence* contains his most direct accounting with her memory to date, however. "Iris (Hold Me

"Iris" arrives at about the mid-point of *Songs Of Innocence*, is the longest song on the album at nearly five and a half minutes, and feels an obvious pinnacle. It's not certain that this is intentional. The two preceding tracks, "California (There Is No End To Love)" and "Song For Someone" are also mid-tempo ballads with big choruses, but not quite as good, as if U2 are trying something until they

get it right. "California" begins with a Beach Boys-ish vocal fanfare, and secretes a defining lyrical trope of the series – and, it could be argued, U2's career as a whole: that the limitlessness of grief

confirms the infinite nature of love. "Song For Someone" is a stock U2 lighter/phone-waver on which – not for the first or last time on *Songs Of Innocence* – the curious decision has been made to pickle Edge's guitar in glutinous keyboards. There is not much mistaking the song's meaning, though – the "someone" is Alison Stewart, who Bono recalls, in the sleeve notes, taking on their first date the month he joined the band; they have been married since 1982. His opening entreaty, "You got a face not spoiled by beauty", is an affectionately ambiguous backhand of positively Springstonian standard.

As is often the case with U2, after the release of their new album, they spent a goodly proportion of the interviews they gave promoting it regretting its predecessor ("To go

When they get it right, U2 still get a lot more right than many recipients of *Songs Of Innocence* acknowledged

stomper that manages, musically and lyrically, to be both naïve and self-aware, acute especially on what the young, restless and clueless need music for – "so I can exaggerate my pain, and give it a name".

The earlier lines "I was shaking from a storm in me/ Haunted by the spectres that we had to see", are also a key signpost for the path the album plots. Bono's sleeve notes stress the significance of traumas that befell his city and his family in 1974, the year the then Paul Hewson turned 14: the bombing of Dublin city centre by the Ulster

Close)" is not only named after her, but seeks to reckon the legacy of her absence, tempting an avalanche of guilt by wondering what the fortunate and successful man owes to the boy's

tragedy ("The ache/In my heart/Is so much a part of who I am"), as it seeks to absorb this early lesson in the indifference of the cosmos ("The stars are bright but do they know/ The universe is beautiful but cold"). It's a pretty song as well, buoyed by Edge's trademark echo-laden guitar and one of Adam Clayton's gently urgent bass parts.

U2 REVELATIONS

■ The building that housed U2's original Windmill Lane studios, where the band recorded *Boy*, *War* and *The Joshua Tree*, finally fell victim to gentrification in April 2015. The graffitied exterior off Dublin's Sir John Rogerson's Quay was demolished to make way for shops, offices and flats.



down in flames on *No Line On The Horizon*,” shuddered Mullen to *Rolling Stone*, “that, I was not prepared to do”; “Pretty fucking miserable,” was how the drummer described it to *The Guardian*. As is also often the case, U2 were marking themselves unduly harshly – *No Line On The Horizon* was far from a dud. But as was singularly the case in this case, the apologies sounded, if not insincere, then somewhat oblivious to the lessons that should have been learned – because quite a lot of what was flawed about *No Line On The Horizon* is also flawed about *Songs Of Innocence*.

For much of the album, it’s difficult to suppress the wish that U2 had learned something from their transatlantic peers REM, who followed a ponderous rock’n’roll aristocrats’ album (2004’s *Around The Sun*) by returning to the garage and making an itchily terrific punk record (2008’s *Accelerate*). Not only would this have furnished an appropriate soundtrack to the period in their lives that U2 revisit on *Songs Of Innocence*, it might have spared a few potentially nimble songs some cumbersome baggage.

“Every Breaking Wave” is lovely, an elegant descendent of “With Or Without You”, though, again, it might have been nice to hear more of Edge’s guitar, and less of an oppressively AOR keyboard riff. “This Is Where You Can Reach Me Now” is dedicated to Joe Strummer, and follows The Clash’s example inasmuch as it alchemises rock from reggae and disco riffs, but the choruses are jarringly reminiscent of

the kind of blouse-clad preeners with over-shoulder keyboards who would once have prompted a dismissive curl of Strummer’s top lip. “Cedarwood Road”, named for Bono’s childhood address, and dedicated to the artist/ex-Virgin Prune/long-time Bono compadre Guggi, starts promisingly, suffused with “Bullet The Blue Sky” swagger, but is unable to restrain itself from yet another predictably solemn chorus. Vexingly, when they do pare things back, they do on the one song that needs the most help: “Volcano” is merely the (very distant) second-best Pixies homage with a three-syllable title beginning with “V” and ending with “O” that U2 have recorded.

When they get it right, though, U2 still get it a lot more right than many recipients of this gift were willing to acknowledge. “Sleep Like A Baby Tonight” is a bold and effectively vitriolic indictment of a predatory priest (“Your eyes as red as Christmas/Purple robes folded on the kitchen chair”) and the church that protects him (“Where there’s no daylight/There’s no healing”) set to a prowling goth lullaby. “Raised By Wolves” addresses the other pre-eminent menace of 1970s Ireland, The Troubles, with particular reference to May 17, 1974, when UVF car bombs in Dublin and Monaghan killed 33 people. It’s recreated here as through the eyes of a childhood friend who witnessed the attacks – one whose subsequent heroin addiction would also inspire “Bad” – and set to a backdrop recalling the queasy electro boogie of *Pop*. Closing track “The Troubles” is – sensibly – not about The

Troubles at all. Fanfared and anchored with a lilting chorus sung by Lykke Li, it’s a more stately and sombre bookend to “The Miracle (Of Joey Ramone)”, a humble statement of gratitude for deliverance.

The first *Songs Of Innocence...* was published in 1789, the ruminations of William Blake on the prelapsarian stainlessness of childhood (coincidentally or otherwise, Blake’s “The Little Boy Found” scans pretty well as alternate lyrics for “I Will Follow”). In 2001, this correspondent interviewed Bono in the singer’s New York apartment. He mentioned that he’d recently visited an Anton Corbijn exhibition in Holland, which had included an entire room of the photographer’s portraits of Bono. “A horrifying thought, I know,” he conceded, but said he’d been struck by the clearness of the younger man’s eyes. “Part of me,” he said, “must have thought our critics were right, and that beautiful naïvety – that I now see in my own children’s faces – I went about killing off. I thought it was something that you had to get rid of, and it’s not true. Innocence is much more powerful than experience, especially when it has that teenage fearlessness beside it. That’s really something.” I responded with the stock hack’s question of asking what the man he’d become would tell the kid he was. “That he was right,” said Bono. “That’s what I’d tell him.”

Songs Of Innocence is not an entirely successful recapturing of (with apologies to Blake) the “sweet moans, dovelike sighs” of wide/wild-eyed youth. This isn’t surprising. Like *No Line On The Horizon* before it, it was the result of several rethinks or abandonments. The extra disc included with the physical album can be interpreted as uncertainty as easily as generosity – it contains different versions of several tracks, and two extra songs, the pugnacious, *Achtung Baby*-ish “Lucifer’s Hands” and the rather paint-by-numbers “The Crystal Ballroom”. As ever with U2, the question of what they will do next remains an unusually interesting one. It would be fascinating to hear the consequences if the answer was: book a studio with a bare minimum of equipment and adjuncts, a blank drawing board, and a deadline. ☞

WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ “This contains only a handful of standouts. ‘Iris (Hold Me Close)’, about Bono’s mother, is by far the best track, a wistful and pining ode that recasts the band’s best moments in timeless sonics... it’s one of the few moments where Bono doesn’t sound like he’s trying too hard. The tender ‘Song For Someone’ manages to stay within the lines, as does ‘Every Breaking Wave’.... It’s subtle and sensitive, and it shows that U2 are still capable of true wonder. Closer ‘The Troubles’ creeps along with paranoid dread, but fatally misses the opportunity to blossom into something beautifully dark...”

Ben Patashnik, NME, 10/9/2014

COMPILATIONS AND LIVE ALBUMS

All that you shouldn't leave behind. The rest of U2's albums catalogue, evaluated. BY PETER WATTS

If you're a band who have been recording for almost 40 years, there's a surprising sleekness – possibly even sketchiness – to U2's body of live albums and compilations. The band have only released three proper compilations throughout their career, with commendably moderate overlap between them, although that in itself is not entirely without problems. There's also a remarkable dearth of live CDs on general release – *Under A Blood Red Sky* notwithstanding – which seems astonishing given the importance of the live show to the U2 experience, and considering in particular how vital *Under A Blood Red Sky* was to establishing their reputation. But with U2, almost uniquely, what's true for casual megastore browsers isn't necessarily the same for hardcore fans. Since the late 1990s, the band have released bespoke albums for their fanclub, and this includes a couple of compilations and live albums that occasionally pop up for sale at reasonable prices, several of which are worth a listen for anybody hoping to get a more holistic take on the band than that offered by their studio releases.

While this makes the live album experience somewhat frustrating, there's less confusion when it comes to comps, which begin in 1998 with the masterful **The Best Of 1980-1990** ★★★★★, the deluxe version of which contains

a second disc filled with the decade's B-sides, making it close to essential for many fans. As this was U2's first attempt at a compilation, there was nothing in the way of internal competition, so U2 were free to stick 14 songs of significant import across the first CD without worrying about overlap.

That makes for a fairly uncontroversial run through the band's decade of hits arranged non-chronologically and kicking off with "Pride" and roaring on past the likes of "With Or Without You", "Sunday Bloody Sunday" and "Desire" before closing with "All I Want Is You". The only curveball is the presence of a re-recorded former B-side, "Sweetest Thing", that the band released as a single to promote the compilation. You can complain about some absent songs – no "Gloria" or "Two Hearts Beat As One", for instance – and ponder why they included an alternative version of "New Year's Day", but essentially this is a sound disc in that you'll find nothing on it that shouldn't be there.

Deeper treats came with the 15 B-sides included on the limited second edition second disc. While it's not all gold – few could claim to love the triptych of covers of "Everlasting Love", "Unchained Melody" and Patti Smith's "Dancing Barefoot" – there are diamonds to be

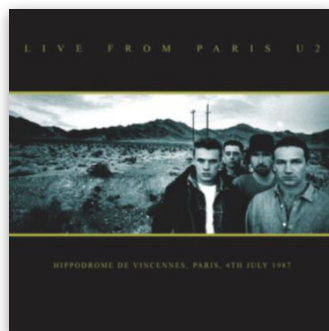
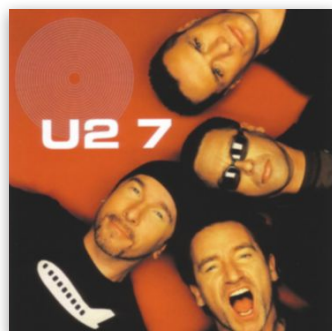
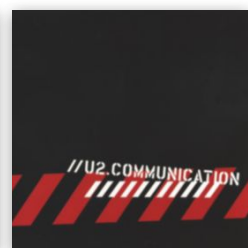
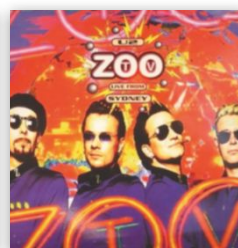
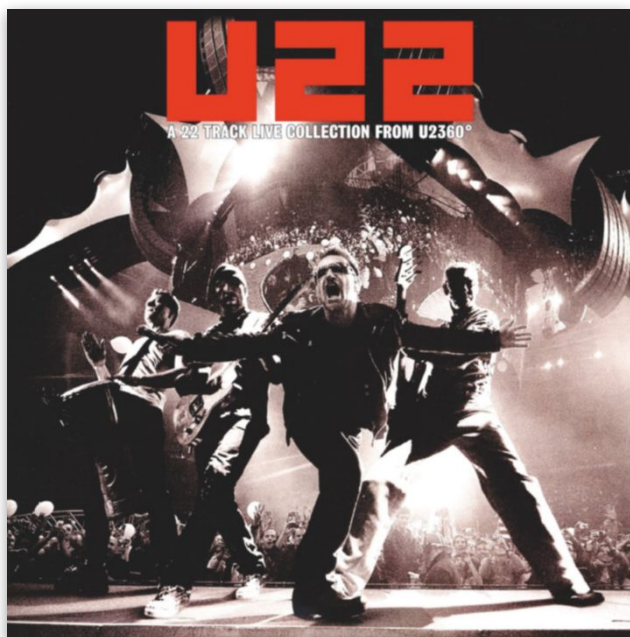
found. "Walk To The Water" is almost spoken word, with Bono, sounding a bit like Jarvis Cocker, stalking a girl as she walks home with "*white canvas shoes around her neck*". "Love Comes Tumbling" has the epic sparseness of prime 1980s U2, while less characteristic are "Silver And Gold", with its acoustic Suicide vibe, and the unusually vulnerable Echo And The Bunnymen-esque "Trash, Trampoline And The Party Girl", which was written in the early '80s but has some of the flavour of U2's more experimental '90s output.

With that success behind them, the band attempted to repeat the trick in 2002 with **The Best Of 1990-2000** ★★★★★, but this time they didn't quite get it right even if it neatly divided the band's career thus far into pre-and-post *Achtung Baby* slices. Again, there are some

The dearth of live CDs seems astonishing given the importance of live shows to the U2 experience

oddish omissions – no "Lemon", "Last Night On Earth" or "Walk On", but there's also a weird tinkering with history. Several songs – "Numb", "Staring At The Sun", "Gone", "Discotheque" – are presented as remixed versions, as if the band weren't

CONTINUES OVER ►



U2: THE ALBUMS

happy with the ones the public actually bought. There are also two new songs: the excellent “The Hands That Built America” from the *Gangs Of New York* soundtrack, and the meandering William Orbit mix of “Electrical Storm”, which has no place on a greatest hits album. On the plus side, the record gathers up a couple of excellent strays, “Miss Sarajevo” and “Hold Me, Thrill Me, Kiss Me, Kill Me”, that deserve their moment. The result is an incomplete take on this post-modern U2, which suggests not so much that the band had lost their way in the 1990s but that, from the surer ground of 2002, U2 weren’t quite sure what they’d been up to during the strange days of *Pop* and *Zooropa*.

Again, the album came as a limited-edition 2CD version featuring B-sides and sundry waifs, including some strong efforts like “North And South Of The River” and “Your Blue Room” from *Original Soundtracks 1*, but many of these are remixes – including several of the songs that already featured on the first disc, including “Even Better Than The Real Thing”, “Numb”, “Mysterious Ways” and “Electrical Storm”. This may reflect the fashions of the ‘90s as well as the band’s taste for house and dance, but it also betrays an unexpected lack of conviction. Indeed, the treatment of “Electrical Storm” says a lot about the LP as a whole. This is a new song, remember, which is always a slightly odd concept for a greatest hits CD, but adding to the sense of confusion we are given two versions of it, with the band’s original version reduced to the odds-and-sods second disc and William Orbit’s remix getting the more elevated position on CD one.

Next came **U218 Singles** ★★ in 2006, one of several numerically titled albums by major artists that followed in the wake of The Beatles’ *1* by rounding up all the band’s best-selling singles in one place. But whereas the success of *1* was partly down to its simplicity, U2 again confused matters by adding two new songs, one of which was a collaboration with another artist (a cover of The Skids’ “The Saints Are Coming” with Green Day, the other new song being “Window In The Skies”) meaning there were only 16 tracks left in which to pack 25 years of music. It was also compromised by good intentions as the band tried to do three things at once – fill in the post-2000 gaps, avoid too much overlap with the 1980-1990 and 1990-2000 collections, and feature enough big songs from across their entire career to appeal to casual fans. It’s no wonder the whole thing is a bit of a mess, with several great songs missing and a heavy bias towards recent albums – there are six songs from *All That You Can’t Leave Behind* and *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb*, but none from *Pop*, *Zooropa* and *October*, with some regional releases also omitting *Boy*. That makes it a curious beast, with tracks such as “Elevation” and “Sometimes You Can’t Make It On Your Own” replacing established classics, the experiments of the 1990s erased entirely and the whole thing coming

On the *The Joshua Tree* tour, Nassau Coliseum, Uniondale, New York, October 9, 1987



off as rather uneven. The deluxe version comes with a great sounding live set recorded in Milan on the 2004 Vertigo tour. The upshot is that there is still plenty of room in the market for a better balanced, career-spanning greatest hits album.

Finally, an interesting footnote comes in the form of **7** ★★★, a limited-edition EP of outtakes and B-sides that was sold via Target stores in the US. It’s not officially an album, but clocks in at more than 30 minutes and includes

“Always”, which was an early take of “Beautiful Day”, an acoustic “Stuck In A Moment You Can’t Get Out Of”, and “Big Girls Are Best”, which is almost as bad as it sounds.

By comparison, live albums aren’t so much a mixed bag as a non-event. **Live From Paris** ★★★, a concert from 1987, was released digitally in 2008 after appearing the previous

year as a bonus DVD on the box set version of *The Joshua Tree*. It finds the band starting to hit their stride as a stadium act, delivering a strong set with confidence but not doing anything particularly earth-shattering. U2 have released several live DVDs, a handful of live EPs (“Elevation”, “Wide Awake In America”, “Please: PopHeart Live” and the Record Store Day release “Wide Awake In Europe”) and they’ve also used the odd live track to pad out recent deluxe reissues of most of their studio albums. But there are no other full concert shows available on general release.

To get anything more, you have to start digging. For instance, the 1977-1984 limited-edition collectors’ box contains the first three albums plus their rarities, including some tracks from an early show at the Marquee. There were also a couple of good live CDs on the excellent *The Complete U2* boxset, 2004’s digital-only retrospective that included studio albums plus singles, live tracks, odds/sods and outtakes – but this can only be purchased as a whole box. Packed in there were two live sets – *Live From Boston 1981*, featuring an entertaining

U2 REVELATIONS

■ In February 2015, fans making the pilgrimage to the Mojave Desert to visit the tree that featured on the cover of the band’s *Joshua Tree* album were dismayed to find it had been vandalised. One branch had been hacked off, perhaps by an over-enthusiastic souvenir hunter.



WHAT THEY THOUGHT

■ “This ‘Best Of...’ is an unsurprisingly scattershot experience... 14 tracks crashing in with the spiritually hyperbolic ‘Pride’ and ‘New Year’s Day’ and swaggering out around the time of ‘Angel Of Harlem’ and ‘When Love Comes To Town’, which are a bit funky, like *The Commitments*, only slightly more credible... Good fun for all the family, U2 have always had a splendidly askew take on reality and, while scarcely balancing on the tightrope betwixt coolness and glory à la *New Order* or *Smiths*, at least this part of their legacy resonates with a degree of authority and amiability.”

NME, 12/9/05 – *The Best Of 1980-1990*

Sydney DVD, plus a track from the Zoo TV telly special concert in New York. The sound is superb, the songs are powerful and the band are clearly in their element for what was a brilliantly conceived and executed tour. This could be the best encapsulation of the U2 experience, both in terms of the songs, but also in the razzmatazz and inventiveness of their live persona.

That’s not all. Other live fanclub releases include 2002’s **U2 Go Home: Live From Slane Castle ★★★★★**, a fine homecoming concert in 2001 that was also given a general release on DVD; **U22 ★★★**, which was released in 2012 and featured 22 live tracks from the latest tour as voted for by fans; and **From The Ground Up: Edge’s Picks From U2360 ★★★**, also released in 2012 and this time featuring Edge’s favourite 15 tracks from the 2009-2010 tour. The last two albums are both slightly disjointed as they come from numerous different live shows recorded over a couple of years, but they do include live performances of several songs you’d otherwise rarely hear and are beautifully packaged. It’s also worth mentioning a couple of other fanclub releases as they count as compilations: 2011’s **Duals ★★★**, featuring 15 collaborations with everybody from Mick Jagger and Allen Ginsberg to Rihanna and Johnny Cash; and 2009’s **Medium, Rare & Remastered ★★★★★**, which contains a bunch of songs that had previously appeared in other places including

The Complete U2 box set (which included an excellent out-takes collection called *Unreleased & Rare*). It includes several good unreleased songs like the psychedelic “Flower Child”, “Xanax And Wine” and “Beautiful Ghost”, which features Bono

reciting William Blake.

Almost any one of these fanclub albums would be worthy of a full CD release, but U2, for better or worse, have chosen instead to limit their availability to their hardcore following. It’s an interesting decision, possibly one that should be applauded, but it does mean there are significant gaps in the catalogue that are yet to be filled. Until that happens, there’s only one thing you can really do: join the club. **02**

show from a club in Boston while touring *Boy*, and *Live From The Point Depot*, a great era-ending New Year’s Eve show from Dublin in 1989 that fans had been encouraged to bootleg from radio – U2’s fanclub magazine even cover-mounted a cassette so fans could make their own recording.

Year’s Day” and a touching tribute to Bono’s friend Michael Hutchence who had died a few weeks previously. *Pop* isn’t U2’s strongest album, but in the live environment and when surrounded by established favourites, some of its songs are better able to show their value.

In 2005, the band released another fanclub

Many of the fanclub albums are worthy of a full release, but are limited to U2’s hardcore following

And it’s the fans who get the best of the U2 live experience, thanks to a series of albums released via the official fanclub, originally the *Propaganda* magazine and later the U2.com website. Second out the blocks (following *Melon: Remixes For Propaganda*) was **Hasta La Vista Baby! U2 Live From Mexico ★★★★★** in 2000, which captured a show in Mexico City during the 1997 Pop tour. It’s a great concert, featuring a wonderful singalong of “New

album. **U2.COMmunication ★★★**, which featured songs from Chicago and Milan (both concerts were also released as a full DVD). It’s a fine, if truncated, live album, with Bono movingly dedicating the Milan performance of “Miss Sarajevo” to the victims of the recent 2005 London bombs. The following year came **Zoo TV Live ★★★★★**, which could be the best live U2 album (sort of) available. It’s the same concert that features on the *Zoo TV: Live From*



MISCELLANY

NOTHING BETTER THAN THE REAL THING: U2 COLLECTABLES, RARITIES, MEMORABILIA AND VIDEOS. BY MARK BENTLEY

U2 ON FILM A SELECTED VIDEOGRAPHY

U2's sound is cinematic; here is a band that belong on your TV screen as well as on your stereo. These following (widely available) DVDs survey the band's live trajectory from Red Rocks through to the 360° tour, via striking work with serial collaborators Wim Wenders and Anton Corbijn. In chronological order, they make for a fine visual history of a supremely visual band...



UNDER A BLOOD RED SKY - LIVE AT RED ROCKS

Recorded: June 1983, Red Rocks Amphitheatre, Colorado

A crucial stepping stone in U2's conquest of America, this captures the rising superstars in their pre-Live Aid rawness. It lacks the broad musical and emotional spectrum of later U2 shows, but it is still a decent souvenir of the power of their early incarnation.



RATTLE AND HUM

Recorded: 1987-1988

An ambitious, myth-making document of the Rattle And Hum world tour. Although the band later disowned its ambition, the film looks utterly terrific and immortalises some potent, dramatically staged performances, in sumptuous monochrome.



FROM THE SKY DOWN

Released 2011

Davis Guggenheim's intense, compelling rock-doc was commissioned by the band to celebrate the 20th anniversary of *Achtung Baby*. Via new footage (shot at Hansa Studios in Berlin) and unreleased archive material, the director skilfully pieces together the tale of a superlative album. The handling of the gestation of "One" – illuminated via multiple demo versions – is stunning.



ZOO TV - LIVE FROM SYDNEY

Recorded: November 1993

A bold reinvention, the Zoo TV mega-tour that straddled U2's *Achtung Baby* and *Zooropa* albums was a futuristic orgy of superstar self-parody and multimedia overload, both technically dazzling and admirably ambitious.



POPMART - LIVE FROM MEXICO CITY

Recorded: December 1997, Foro Sol Autodromo

The Pop tour remains the most visually stunning enterprise of U2's career – bright, bouncy and screamingly camp, symbolised by that giant disco mirrorball lemon. This set is still great: weird, daringly frivolous and an awful lot of fun.



THE MILLION DOLLAR HOTEL

2000

A sprawling sci-fi thriller, conceived by Bono and directed by Wim Wenders. It looks delicious, though the dialogue is less successful. Stars Jeremy Davies, Tim Roth, Milla Jovovich. Producer Mel Gibson later slammed the film as "boring as a dog's ass".



ELEVATION 2001 - U2 LIVE FROM BOSTON

Recorded: June 2001, Fleet Center, Boston

Minimal techno trickery helped the band win back their heartland audience on The Elevation tour. This disc captures vintage U2, but with extra sleazy swagger. A second DVD – shot in Ireland three months later (*U2 Go Home - Live From Slane Castle*) – captures an emotional show, as Bono honours his father, who died a week before.



Stuck in a moment:
a still from 1988's
Rattle And Hum

STILL HAVEN'T FOUND WHAT YOU'RE LOOKING FOR?

A brief guide to U2 collectables

If you're reading this, you're a fan, so you'll know that U2 are one of the most collectable bands ever. Good news if you've got an extensive U2 collection, too – for the rarest, most desirable items, prices are in the Beatles/Stones/Zepplin bracket, and far outstrip '80s/'90s contemporaries such as REM. While prices are not as keen as five or six years ago, there is still a huge industry in U2 collectables, and an army of die-hard collectors out there.

As a brand, U2 have long understood the power of the promotional giveaway. And so there are a number of high-profile, hard-to-value premium items: the "Discotheque" glitterball (£500+), the *Achtung Baby* Berlin Wall fragment (£250+) or the inflatable Trabant (£200). Later U2 promo items are next-level odd. Branded condoms were issued for the Zooropa tour, and – bafflingly – *The Best Of 1990-2000* was commemorated with a silver hygro-thermometer cube, offering temperature and humidity readings.

But what of the music? Because of the sheer volume of sales, bog-standard single, LP and CD releases are not rare, and won't command high prices. One bloke is selling 11 U2 CDs on eBay at a Buy It Now price of £20, and no-one's biting. (It might be different if they were really early '80s CD pressings of the pre-*Joshua Tree* albums. If there's no barcode on your copy of *War*, you might be in luck!)

On the same auction site, 11 copies of the 2LP *Rattle And Hum* are on sale for an average price of a fiver. The vinyl revival means that original issues in mint condition are making decent money. One superb original copy of *Joshua Tree* (never played, no creases) recently

sold for over £30. Interestingly, more recent albums on vinyl are rarer: *No Line...*, *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* and the *Best Of* releases on wax are valued around £30 each. U2 signatures are not wildly rare, but fully signed and authenticated albums – whatever the period – are probably worth £200-£300.

The secret to U2 collecting is scarcity. There's a lot of product out there, and, from the mid '80s onwards, many releases arrived in a variety of formats – 12ins, 7ins, CD singles, as well as myriad promo versions.

Let's start with standard issues. The most collectable (and valuable) releases are the early Irish-only singles. Look out for *4 U2*

Play, a four-single set in presentation pack, with cardboard insert.

Coloured vinyl issues fetch £600+ but a standard black vinyl issue can be picked for around £100.

Early UK pressings (up to "A Celebration") of the singles are collectable, but not in that bracket:

"A Day Without Me" is much easier to find at £15.

U2 were always generous

with B-sides and extra track material, so the 12in singles are

quite sought after. But they're still cheap – £15 tops for the standard picture sleeve versions, but again, only in superb condition. Picture discs are desirable, and well-known examples include the *War* album (£250, beware counterfeits!), or the 12in of "Pride" (£20). An *Unforgettable Fire* logo-shaped picture disc is worth £75+ – find its uncut form (ie, before it got shaped!) and the value spikes to over £1,000.

And this tells you what you need to know about U2 rarities. You're looking for the promo versions, mispressings, limited issues. The list of three-figure U2 collectables is huge – well into the hundreds – and spans all periods of the band, and many international territories. Some examples at random: the Mexican promo of "New Year's Day" is worth £500, the French promo "The Fly" 7in box makes £250; the Argentinian "Beautiful Day" promo has sold for £150, the 2013 UK Record Store Day "Ordinary Love" over £100. But below are the really big guns...



U2 3D

Recorded: 2006, South America and Australia

The second concert film from U2's 2005-6 Vertigo tour is much more technically ambitious than its Chicago predecessor, deploying cutting-edge 3D cameras to strong effect. Great, rousing versions of "Miss Sarajevo" and "One" lift a solid selection.



U218 VIDEOS

UK release: November 20, 2006

Two greatest hits video sets – *Best Of 1980-1990* and *1990-2000* – tell the chronological story of the band's promos. But unless you still have a VHS, you'll be better served by a slimmer, but powerful *U218*, a neat anthology of 19 videos, that veer from stark and moving ("Pride", "One") to Grammy-winning spectacular ("Vertigo"). Myriad extras seal the deal.



U2360° AT THE ROSE BOWL

Recorded October 2009

The visual celebration of a record-breaking show, in front of 97,000 in the Pasadena auditorium, and 10 million users streaming live on YouTube. This is a better souvenir of the joyous, *No Line On The Horizon* period than the roughly contemporary film *Linear*, which was directed by Anton Corbijn. A 57-minute companion to the album, *Linear* is elliptical and ambitious. As Corbijn says, it was intended not as a music video but "a new way to use film to connect to music".

[With thanks to Stephen Dalton.]

OBJECTS OF DESIRE



THE "3" EP ON 12IN

U2's first Irish-only release, issued on CBS, this version was limited to 1,000 and individually numbered. A must-have for die-hards, it's valued at around £2,000. No1, signed by all members, made \$6,000 in 2007.

SWEDISH RARITIES

Scandi collectables include claret-red vinyl issues of *Under A Blood Red Sky* (£3,600) or the clear test pressing of *The Unforgettable Fire* (circa £2,000).

AUSSIE COLOURED VINYL

...such as the clear vinyl

"Pride" 12in, limited – our sources tell us – to five copies. One sold in 2009 for £6,000.

See also "All I Want Is You" on purple vinyl (£2,000), or "Mysterious Ways" on oily red vinyl (£1,800+).

SOUTH AMERICAN ODDITIES

A Venezuelan Sono-Rodven label pressing of *Achtung Baby* made £2,300 in 2012; the Peruvian 7in of "Pride" –

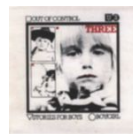
aka "Soberbia" is valued at just under £2,000, while the Ecuadorian *Joshua Tree* made £1,400 in 2014.

CONTINUES OVER ►



THE SINGLES DISCOGRAPHY

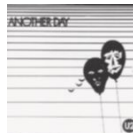
The band's UK and Ireland singles and EPs, listed by release date



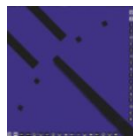
U2: THREE EP
CBS Ireland only,
limited to 1,000
copies. Oct 1979
Tracklisting:

Out Of Control/Stories For Boys/
Boy/Girl.

Highest chart position:
Did not chart.



**ANOTHER DAY/
TWILIGHT (DEMO)**
CBS Ireland only.
Feb 1980
Did not chart.



**11 O'CLOCK TICK
TOCK/TOUCH**
CBS (Ireland)/
Island (UK).
May 1980

Did not chart.



**A DAY WITHOUT ME
/THINGS TO MAKE
AND DO**
CBS (Ireland)/
Island (UK and

Europe). Aug 1980
Did not chart.



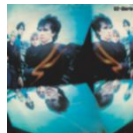
**I WILL FOLLOW/
BOY/GIRL (LIVE)**
CBS (Ireland)/
Island (worldwide).
Oct 1980

Did not chart.



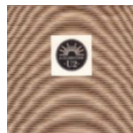
FIRE/J SWALLOW
CBS (Ireland)/
Island (worldwide).
July 1981
UK: 35.

US: Did not chart.



**GLORIA/I WILL
FOLLOW (LIVE)**
CBS (Ireland)/
Island (worldwide).
October 1981

UK: 55. US: Did not chart.



**A CELEBRATION/
TRASH,
TRAMPOLINE AND
THE PARTY GIRL**
CBS (Ireland)/

Island (worldwide). March 1982
UK: 47. US: Did not chart.



**NEW YEAR'S DAY/
TREASURE
(WHATEVER
HAPPENED TO PETE
THE CHOP)**

CBS (Ireland)/ Island (worldwide).

January 1983

UK: 10. US: 53 (Billboard Hot 100).



**TWO HEARTS BEAT
AS ONE/ENDLESS
DEEP**
CBS (Ireland)/
Island (worldwide).

March 1983

UK: 18. US: 12 (Billboard Top
Tracks).

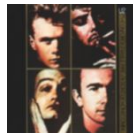


**PRIDE (IN THE
NAME OF LOVE)/
BOOMERANG II
(VOCAL)**
CBS (Ireland)/

Island (worldwide).

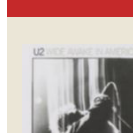
September 1984

UK: 3. US: 33 (Billboard Hot 100);
3 (Billboard Mainstream Rock
Chart).



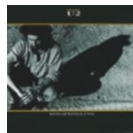
**THE
UNFORGETTABLE
FIRE/A SORT OF
HOMECOMING**
CBS (Ireland)/

Island (worldwide). April 1985
UK: 6. US: Did not chart.



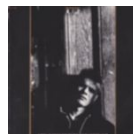
**WIDE AWAKE IN
AMERICA EP**
Island. May 1985
Tracklisting: Bad
(Live)/A Sort

Of Homecoming (Live)/
The Three Sunrises/Love
Comes Tumbling
UK: 11 (UK albums chart).
*U2 experience the Live Aid
effect. This was originally
intended to be issued solely in
North America and Japan, but
so many copies found their way
to the UK that this four-track EP
managed to make the UK
albums chart in July 1985,
peaking just outside the Top 10,
and spending 16 weeks on the
chart. The version of "Bad" was
recorded in Birmingham the
previous November, and Tony
Visconti produced the Wembley
version of "A Sort of
Homecoming".*



**WITH OR WITHOUT
YOU/LUMINOUS
TIMES/WALK TO
THE WATER**

Island. March 1987
UK: 4. US: 1 (Billboard Hot 100).



**I STILL HAVEN'T
FOUND WHAT I'M
LOOKING FOR/
SPANISH EYES/
DEEP IN THE HEART**

Island. April 1987

UK: 6. US: 1 (Billboard Hot 100).

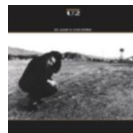


**WHERE THE
STREETS HAVE NO
NAME (SINGLE
VERSION)/SILVER
AND GOLD/
SWEETEST THING**

Island.

August 1987

UK: 4. US: 13 (Billboard Hot 100).



**IN GOD'S COUNTRY
/BULLET THE BLUE
SKY/ RUNNING TO
STAND STILL**

Island.

November 1987

UK: 48. US: 44 (Billboard Hot 100).



**DESIRE/
HALLELUJAH HERE
SHE COMES**

Island.

October 1988

UK: 1. US: 3 (Billboard Hot 100).



**ANGEL OF HARLEM
(REMIX)/
A ROOM AT THE
HEARTBREAK
HOTEL**

Island.

December 1988

UK: 9. US: 14 (Billboard Hot 100).



**WHEN LOVE
COMES TO TOWN
[WITH BB KING]
(ALBUM VERSION)/
DANCING
BAREFOOT (LONG VERSION)**

Island. April 1989

UK: 6. US: 68 (Billboard Hot 100).



**ALL I WANT IS YOU
(SINGLE EDIT)/
UNCHAINED
MELODY/
EVERLASTING LOVE**

Island. June 1989

UK: 4. US: 83 (Billboard Hot 100).

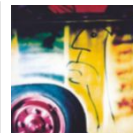


**THE FLY/ALEX
DESCENDS INTO
HELL FOR A BOTTLE
OF MILK**

Island.

October 1991

UK: 1. US: 61 (Billboard Hot 100).



**MYSTERIOUS WAYS
/MYSTERIOUS
WAYS (SOLAR
PLEXUS MAGIC
HOUR REMIX)**

Island.

November 1991

UK: 13. US: 9 (Billboard Hot 100).



**ONE/LADY WITH
THE SPINNING HEAD
(UV1)**

Island. March 1992

UK: 7. US: 10

(Billboard Hot 100).



**EVEN BETTER THAN
THE REAL THING
(SINGLE VERSION)/
SALOME**

Island.

June 1992

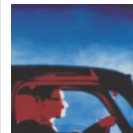
UK: 12. US: 32 (Billboard Hot 100).



**EVEN BETTER THAN
THE REAL THING
(THE PERFECTO
MIX)**

Island. July 1992

UK: 8



**WHO'S GONNA RIDE
YOUR WILD HORSES
(THE TEMPLE BAR
EDIT)/PAINT IT
BLACK**

Island.

August 1992

UK: 14. US: 35 (Billboard Hot 100).



**STAY (FARAWAY SO
CLOSE)/I'VE GOT
YOU UNDER MY
SKIN**

Island.

November 1993

UK: 4. US: 61 (Billboard Hot 100).

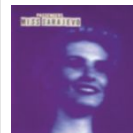


**HOLD ME, THRILL
ME, KISS ME, KILL
ME (SINGLE
VERSION)/
THEMES FROM
BATMAN FOREVER**

Island/Atlantic.

June 1995

UK: 2. US: 16 (Billboard Hot 100).



**MISS SARAJEVO
(SINGLE VERSION)/
ONE (LIVE FROM
MODENA) [AS
PASSENGERS]**

Island.

November 1995

UK: 6. US: Not released.



**DISCOTHEQUE (12IN
VERSION)/HOLY
JOE (GARAGE MIX)**

Island.

February 1997

UK: 1. US: 10 (Billboard Hot 100).



All because of U2: Bono and band in 2005

GET ON YOUR BOOTS/NO LINE ON THE HORIZON 2
Island/Mercury/
Interscope. February 2009
UK: 12. US: 37 (Billboard Hot 100).

MAGNIFICENT/BREATHE (LIVE)
Island/Interscope.
May 2009
UK: 42. US: 79
(Billboard Hot 100).

I'LL GO CRAZY IF I DON'T GO CRAZY TONIGHT/REMIXES
Mercury/
Interscope.
September 2009
UK: 32. US: 2 (Billboard Adult Alternative).

I WILL FOLLOW (LIVE FROM GLASTONBURY)
Interscope-download.
August 2011
UK: 78

ORDINARY LOVE/BREATHE (MANDELA VERSION)
Interscope-Record Store Day release.
November 2013
UK: 82. US: 84 (Billboard Hot 100).

INVISIBLE
Island-download.
February 2014
UK: 65. US: 1
(Billboard Adult Alternative).

THE MIRACLE (OF JOEY RAMONE)
Island.
September 2014
UK: Did not chart. US: 1 (Billboard Adult Alternative).

EVERY BREAKING WAVE
Island.
December 2014
UK: Did not chart.
US: 28 (Billboard Adult Contemporary).

SONG FOR SOMEONE
Island.
May 2015
UK: Did not chart.
US: 19 (Billboard Adult Contemporary).

STARING AT THE SUN (ALBUM VERSION)/NORTH AND SOUTH OF THE RIVER
Island. April 1997
UK: 3. US: 26 (Billboard Hot 100).

LAST NIGHT ON EARTH (SINGLE VERSION)/POP MUZIK (POP MART MIX)
Island. July 1997
UK: 10. US: 57 (Billboard Hot 100).

PLEASE (SINGLE VERSION)/DIRTY DAY (JUNK DAY)
Island. October 1997
UK: 7. US: Did not chart.

IF GOD WILL SEND HIS ANGELS (SINGLE VERSION)/MOFO (ROMIN REMIX)
Island. December 1997
UK: 12. US: Did not chart.

SWEETEST THING (SINGLE MIX)/STORIES FOR BOYS (LIVE)
Island.
October 1998
UK: 3. US: 63 (Billboard Hot 100).

BEAUTIFUL DAY (ALBUM VERSION)/SUMMER RAIN
Island.
October 2000
UK: 1. US: 21 (Billboard Hot 100).

STUCK IN A MOMENT YOU CAN'T GET OUT OF/BIG GIRLS ARE BEST
Island.
January 2001
UK: 2. US: 52 (Billboard Hot 100).

NEW YEAR'S DUB [AS MUSIQUE VS U2]
Serious/Polygram Records. May 2001
UK: 15. US: Not released.

ELEVATION (TOMB RAIDER MIX)/LAST NIGHT ON EARTH (LIVE FROM MEXICO)/DON'T TAKE YOUR GUNS TO TOWN
Island. July 2001
UK: 3. US: Not released.

WALK ON/VARIOUS
Island.
November 2001
UK: 5. US: Not released.

ELECTRICAL STORM (WILLIAM ORBIT MIX)/NEW YORK (NICE MIX)/NEW YORK (NASTY MIX)
Island/Interscope. October 2002
UK: 5. US: 77 (Billboard Hot 100).

TAKE ME TO THE CLOUDS ABOVE [AS LMC VS U2]
Universal/Ultra.
February 2004
UK: 1. US: Did not chart.

VERTIGO (SINGLE VERSION EDIT)/VERTIGO (JACKNIFE LEE 10)/NEON LIGHTS
Island. November 2004
UK: 1. US: 31 (Billboard Hot 100).

SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN (RADIO EDIT 96 BPM)/FAST CARS (JACKNIFE LEE MIX)
Island. February 2005
UK: 1. US: 97 (Billboard Hot 100).

CITY OF BLINDING LIGHTS (RADIO EDIT)/THE FLY (LIVE FROM 'STOP SELLAFIELD')/EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING (LIVE FROM 'STOP SELLAFIELD')
Island.
June 2005
UK: 2. US: Did not chart.

ALL BECAUSE OF YOU/VARIOUS
Island.
October 2005
UK: 4.
US: Did not chart.

ONE (RADIO EDIT)/CAN'T HIDE FROM LOVE (LIVE) [AS MARY J BLIGE & U2]
Geffen.
April 2006
UK: 2. US: 86 (Billboard Hot 100).

THE SAINTS ARE COMING (STUDIO VERSION)/THE SAINTS ARE COMING (LIVE) [AS U2 AND GREEN DAY]
Mercury.
November 2006
UK: 2. US: 51 (Billboard Hot 100).

WINDOW IN THE SKIES/VARIOUS
Mercury.
January 2007
UK: 4. US: 86
(Billboard Hot 100).

THE BALLAD OF RONNIE DREW / EASY AND SLOW [WITH THE DUBLINERS, KILA & A BAND OF BOWSIES]
Universal Ireland.
February 2008



Stop Me

if you've heard this one before

NEW YORK, OCTOBER 2001: Bono grants *Uncut*'s Andrew Mueller an audience...

What do you think?" It's a common and reasonable question, upon showing someone around your new place

for the first time. It's just difficult to assemble an entirely satisfactory answer when the place you're looking at has a lounge roughly twice the size of your entire flat, and a vast balcony commanding a vista of Central Park and midtown Manhattan. It's even harder to make anything heard over the sound of your teeth gritting when the apartment in question isn't even your host's home, but his weekend. I think, I tell him, that any time he feels like he wants to look out of a lounge room window at a car park behind an East End bingo hall, he should drop round.

"It is amazing, and I thank God for it," says Bono, regarding New York.

On U2's current album, *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, a song named after the city contains the lines "The Irish been coming here for years/Feel like they own the place". I feel it safe to assume that it's one of the singer's more explicitly autobiographical couplets. We park ourselves on a couple of deck chairs on the balcony with a bottle of wine and contemplate the view. Which, in one sense or another, the whole world has now been doing for six weeks or so, since New York's loftiest peaks were felled by a gang of God-addled yahoos armed with passenger aircraft.

"I want," says Bono, "to be able to adore this city, and grieve alongside it, but at the same time, if artists are not standing up and talking about tolerance... I think that's our gig, and I'm ready to take the criticism for it."

The night before, U2 had played the second of three shows at Madison Square Garden. The dates had obviously been booked months in advance, part of the worldwide Elevation tour. Though many people, famous and not, had cancelled engagements in the city after September 11, U2 hadn't considered it: tickets for the shows went on sale, as planned, on September 12. The first night had been nervy, edgy, U2 trying to find their range, trying to figure out if there were places New York wasn't yet prepared to



Connecting with post-9/11 New York, 2001

"I do understand that singing about peace and love right now will lead to a certain... fuck-off factor" Bono

be taken. If they embraced the flag too ardently, they'd look like gatecrashers at a funeral. Overdo any encomiums to forgiveness and tolerance, and they could find themselves facing a barrage of fixtures and fittings.

"The first night was a punk-rock gig," agrees Bono. "Very bare-knuckled, a bit coarse. We really didn't know. I thought it was more musical the second night, and I thought there was a tenderness in the crowd that wasn't there the first night. The first night was just... please, please don't patronise us."

I thought they'd negotiated the tightrope adroitly: Bono's soliloquies had been understated and wry ("What we love about New York is that no-one looks at nobody else funny. If you're a Muslim, if you're a dignified follower of Islam, you belong in New York City. Catholics, Jews, blacks, weirdos, rock stars, megalomaniacs, peanut sellers...") The explicit tribute to September 11 – a

blue screen scrolling the names of the dead and missing to a soundtrack of "One" – had been the more moving for its simplicity.

That morning's *New York Post* begs to differ. "So liberal," thunders the *Post*'s correspondent of Bono, "so politically correct, he made you want to puke green... you wanted to hit him upside the head."

"Yeah, I saw that," smiles the object of the invective. "I do understand that singing about peace, love and understanding right now will lead to a certain, ah... fuck-off factor."

Isn't the first or the last time that Bono would be the recipient of such a suggestion. Right at this moment, though, the intersection of pop and politics has never looked a stranger place to be standing. We're still a few months from the cover of *Time* magazine asking "Can Bono Save The World?", but it's clear this afternoon

that, if he doesn't, it won't be for want of trying.

"It all comes from curiosity," he insists. "Curiosity has gotten me into a lot of trouble."

But why is saving the world his problem?

"I don't think it should be

mine," he replies. Earlier in the conversation, he'd described his celebrity – any celebrity – as "silly", but noted that "it is currency, of a kind". A couple of hours and a few glasses further on, he attempts a more elaborate analogy.

"You find yourself on a football field," he explains, "and the ball lands at your feet, and the goalie is looking elsewhere, and..."

He laughs. The metaphor, like so much of the singer's career, has swiftly become an act of well-meaning hubris. But, as has generally been the case, it works out OK eventually.

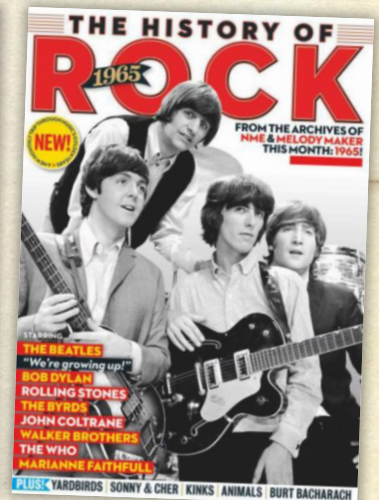
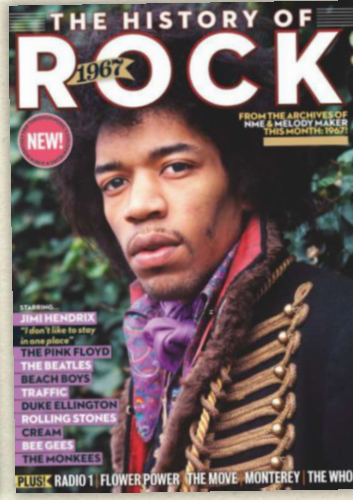
"I'm not that quick," he says, "and I'm not that fast. But I might be able to put the ball in the net."

Andrew Mueller

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