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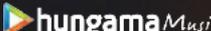
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“ALL THE NEWS THAT FITS”



SUPERWOMAN

THE MAKING OF A SOCIAL MEDIA STAR

The Internet's favorite sensation Lilly Singh gets real about the lack of women in comedy and why there are absolutely no shortcuts to viral fame

**BY RIDDHI CHAKRABORTY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUHI SHARMA**

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English singer-songwriter Lucy Rose will tour India this month



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ON THE COVER: Lilly Singh exclusively styled in Pepe Jeans. Photographer: Juhi Sharma; Art Director: Amit Naik; Fashion Director: Kushal Parmanand; Junior Stylist: Neelangana Vasudeva; Hair & Makeup: Jean Claude Biguine; Location Courtesy: G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture, Mumbai.

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Metal band Evil Conscience will play at The Pit V.8

ONLINE EXCLUSIVE

THE PIT V.8

After four years, The Pit is back with their eighth edition of the Kolkata metal gig series. The show, held in honor of the city’s late metal supporter Abhishek Bhattacharya, will feature some of the city’s finest metal acts. These include Chronic Xorn, Evil Conscience, Noyze Akademi, In Human and Orphic Cosmogony. The Pit V.8 will be held at Jadavpur University on May 7th.

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Love Letters e2 Advice



Feminism in Films

The interview with Alankrita Shrivastava in last month's issue really spoke to me.

As a feminist who was dying to watch *Lipstick Under My Burkha*, I was so disappointed when the CBFC didn't clear it. Just like the director said, after movies like *Margherita With A Straw* and *Pink*, I was finally beginning to think that Bollywood is taking a much-needed new approach to its movies. It is important to talk about the issues women face in society, especially when a

female director who wins so many international awards cannot screen her movie in her own country because the board thinks it's too 'female-oriented'. Really great interview to know her side of the story!

- Nikita Manihar, New Delhi

Aswekeepsearching All the Way!

I first heard of the post-rock band Aswekeepsearching when I went to watch Steven Wilson at the Bacardi NH7 Weekender. I really didn't know what I was in for when they came on stage because they blew me away! It's awesome to know that such talented musicians are growing out of India and touring abroad too. Considering that they're releasing their new album soon, I hope *Rolling Stone India* will feature a longer interview with them. I'm curious to know how the band came to be and their plans for the future.

- Vishesh Sood, Mumbai

Why Be Groovy When You Can Be Skrat!

The article on Skrat's new album 'Bison' has me really excited! I've been following Skrat for years and I really liked 'Queen.' Everyone in that band has crazy stage presence and they sound super! I can't wait to watch them live again.

- Parth Shah, Pune



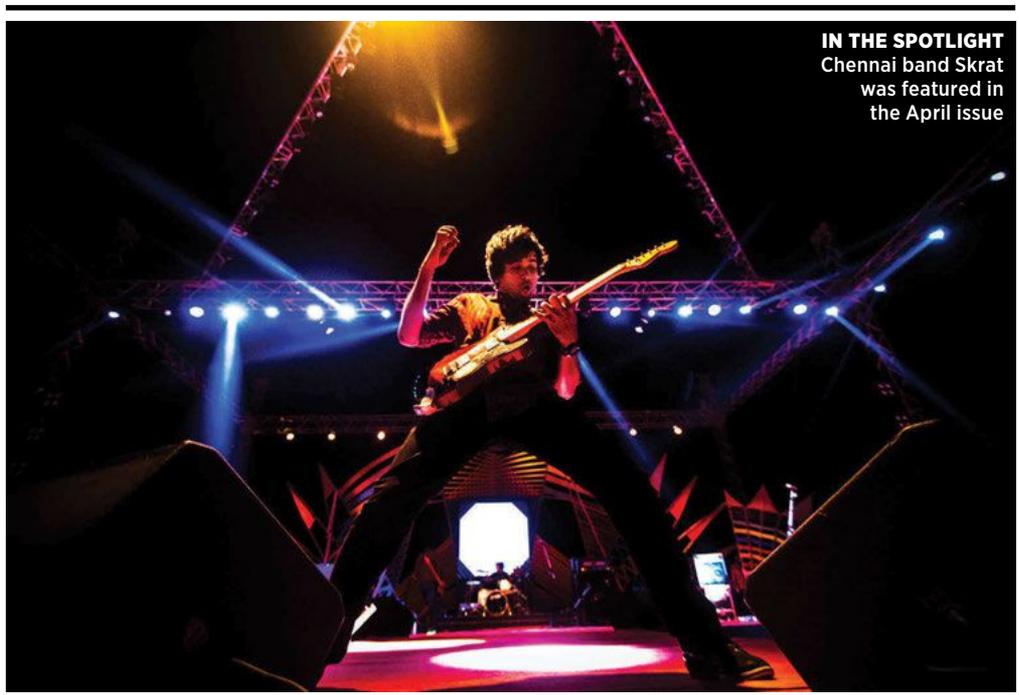
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IN THE SPOTLIGHT
Chennai band Skrat was featured in the April issue

RON BEZBARUAH (SKRAT)

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Rock & Roll

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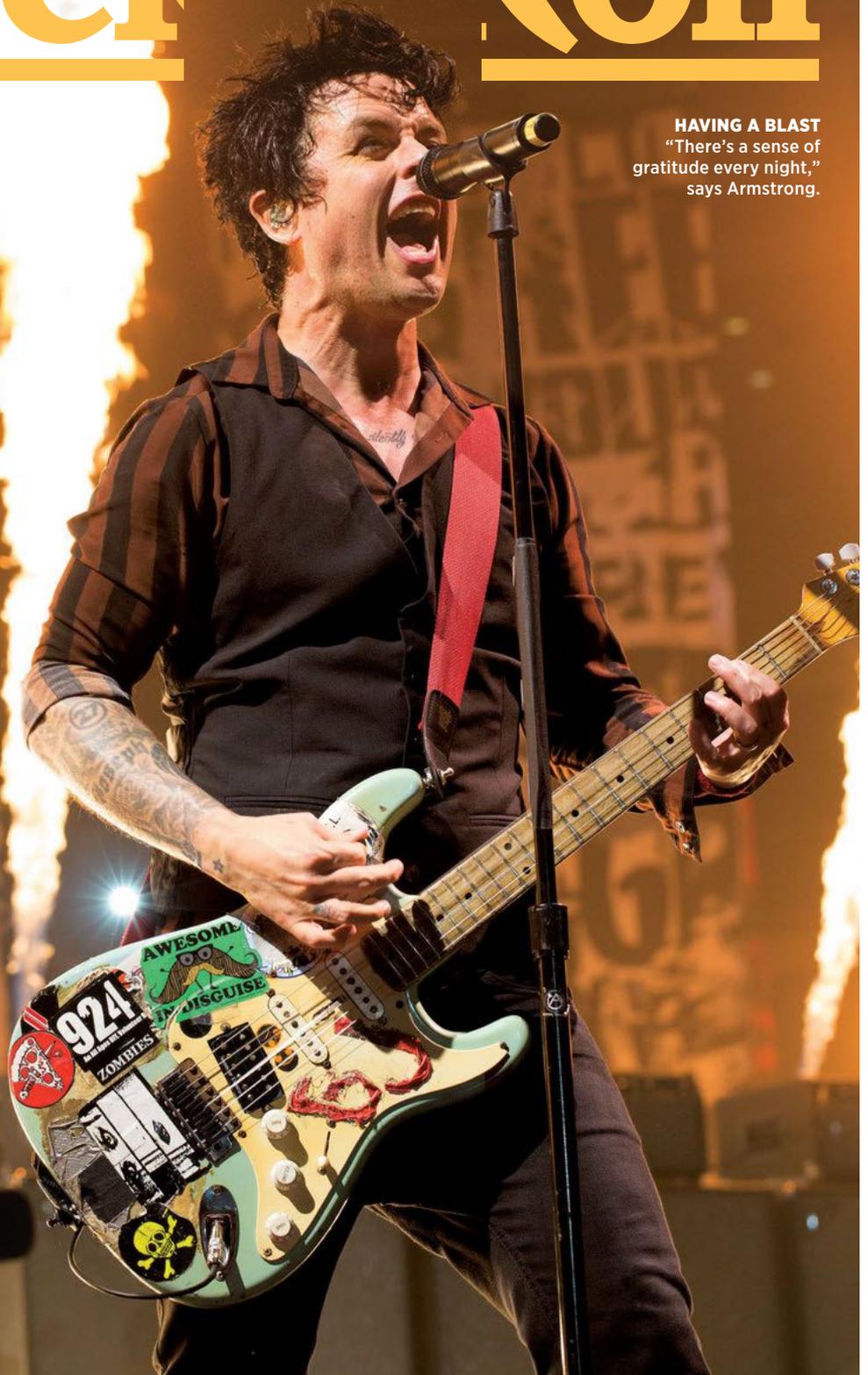
Arena tour includes marathon gigs, lots of 'American Idiot'

BY ANDY GREENE

BILLIE JOE Armstrong is sitting backstage at the Verizon Center in Washington, D.C., about a mile from the White House, where Donald Trump is currently meeting with Republicans about a health care plan that would rob 24 million Americans of their insurance. But Armstrong is not planning to talk about the news onstage. "I don't want to go negative," he says. "I feel like it's a way of throwing more fuel on the fire. We're in a bit of a crisis mode, and for me it's more important that people feel unity when they come to a show."

But once he hit the stage, Armstrong couldn't help himself. During "Letterbomb," one

HAVING A BLAST
"There's a sense of gratitude every night," says Armstrong.



CHRIS DUGAN/GREEN DAY



TIME OF YOUR LIFE
Dirnt (right), side musicians Jeff Matika and Jason White, and Cool (from left)

of seven songs Green Day play from their Bush-era protest LP, *American Idiot*, he launches into a rant about the Trump administration's assault on truth. "I can't stand any more of these goddamn conspiracy theories," he screams. "I'm sick of the blatant lies and the half-truths and the untruths! I want *the* truth!" He gets agitated when he sees a fan up front filming. "If you're looking through a screen, you aren't looking at me," he says. "You stare at that cellphone for 24 hours a day. *Not tonight!*"

It's just one cathartic moment during the arena set – a 33-song, two-and-a-half-hour marathon heavy on Nineties classics as well as the band's new album, *Revolution Radio*. The group is fully warmed up after a long club tour last year, its first gigs since Armstrong kicked an addiction to prescription drugs in 2013. "Sometimes I have to get a B12 shot just to keep up," Armstrong says. "But I actually have more energy now than ever. I have a sense of gratitude every night, and now that we're touring again, I have a reason to get dressed in the morning."

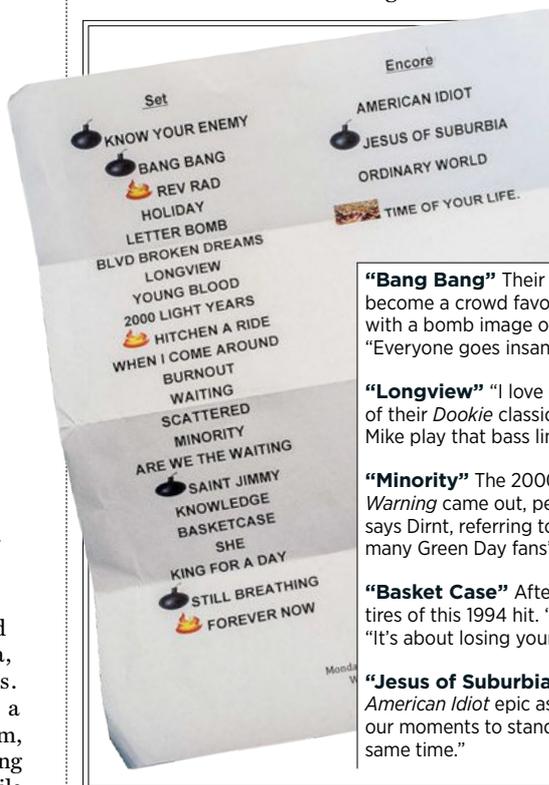
That sentiment was clear at soundcheck. After a long drive from Virginia, the band blasted through several songs for an audience of only two: bassist Mike Dirnt's kids Ryan and Brixton, age six and eight, respectively, who ran wild up and down the empty aisles of the arena, around bemused security guards. During the 1997 deep cut "King for a Day," Armstrong decided to join them, grabbing his wireless mic and chasing Brixton into the concession area, all while

nauling every word of the song. "We live an alternative lifestyle, but within that we find normality," says Dirnt, who is also happy to be touring again after a difficult hiatus in which his wife recovered from cancer. "I was doing these insane workouts, running around a lake in Oakland. I stopped one day and started walking, and I thought, 'What the fuck am I working out so hard for? I don't have anything coming up.' A good reason to tour is having a great record. We're playing half of it and the fans are loving it."

The show also includes a lot of old traditions. Armstrong invites a kid onstage to sing "Longview" (he does so well that Armstrong asks if he's trying to steal his job). He also brings up a 16-year-old girl to play guitar on Operation Ivy's "Knowledge." It's a stunt Green Day first tried in 1995, during a rough night. "It lit up the whole room and changed the show for me," says Armstrong. Dirnt says the move has backfired only once: "About 20 years ago, I let a kid play my bass, and he thought it would be cool to smash it at the end. It took everything I had to not knock his fucking teeth out."

But the *American Idiot* songs get the biggest cheers of the night – especially during the title track, when Armstrong breaks his no-negativity promise and shouts, "Fuck Donald Trump!" Backstage, Armstrong is careful to say that he's not buying into the idea that Bush is tame compared with Trump. "As far as I'm concerned, Bush is a war criminal," he says. "With Trump, we have no idea. Right now it's just a freak show."

The tour continues through September, when the band plays the 92,000-seat Rose Bowl in L.A. Despite being Rock and Roll Hall of Famers 32 years into their career, Green Day are still finding new ways to have fun every night. "Yesterday, we were playing and Mike looked over at me, and I flicked this imaginary booger at him," says drummer Tre Cool. "He caught the imaginary booger in his mouth. Little shit like that is still cool." **6**



Inside Green Day's New Set List

The band breaks down five highlights from the 'Revolution Radio' shows

"Bang Bang" Their new anti-gun-violence single has quickly become a crowd favorite. There are plenty of explosions, indicated with a bomb image on the set list (the fire signals "pyro"). "Everyone goes insane," says Dirnt. "It's like, now the show is on."

"Longview" "I love watching Mike and Tre play it," says Armstrong of their *Dookie* classic. "I like to watch the musicianship, hearing Mike play that bass line."

"Minority" The 2000 single has taken on a new life live. "When *Warning* came out, people were like, 'What the hell are you doing?'" says Dirnt, referring to the band's folksy sixth album. "Now, it's so many Green Day fans' favorite record."

"Basket Case" After thousands of performances, Armstrong never tires of this 1994 hit. "It's an anthem for weirdos," he says. "It's about losing your mind. Most people have had that experience."

"Jesus of Suburbia" All three members cite this nine-minute *American Idiot* epic as their favorite. Says Cool, "We all have our moments to stand out. It's pummeling and emotional at the same time."

Short Round Releases Sophomore EP

Singer-songwriter Jishnu Guha's seven-track record 'With Friends Like These' features Siddharth Basrur, Saurabh Roy, Mali and more

IN MARCH OF LAST YEAR, MUMBAI-BASED singer-songwriter Jishnu Guha aka Short Round released his five-track melancholic debut EP *Desperate Times*. Since then, the vocalist/guitarist has played a number of club gigs, a Sofar Sounds session and most recently, the Control Alt Delete 10 festival in Mumbai alongside his band, which is made up of keyboardist Rohan Rajadhyaksha (Spud in the Box), bassist Adil Kurwa (Last Remaining Light) and drummer Aditya Ashok (Ox7gen). With a whole host of new experiences under his belt, the singer-songwriter is now back with his second EP, *With Friends Like These*.

The seven-track EP is filled to the brim with features from the likes of vocalist/guitarist Siddharth Basrur from alt rockers Last Remaining Light, Saurabh Roy from punk rock outfit The Light-years Explode, Chicago-based singer Anna Holmquist, and Mumbai-based singer-songwriters Mali, Fat Yellow Moon and Rahul Pais (formerly of Guha's rock band The SOS).

On *With Friends Like These*, Guha cleverly incorporates the 'intro' and 'outro' formats with the delicate 40-second instrumental "Introvert" and its continuation "Outrovert," which feature minimal vocals. "Losing Day" features Basrur, and also doubles as Guha's ode to Basrur. "Nowhere To

Go" is built around a flash of inspiration that Roy brought into the studio with him. "It's a very indulgent song," says Guha. The folksy "Autumn" features Pais and Mali and is, in Guha's opinion, one of the stronger songs on the record. "This is a very vivid song about people waiting through thick and thin for somebody they love, trust and want back in their life," explains the singer-songwriter.

With Friends Like These was recorded at Guha's home studio and produced and mixed by Mumbai sound engineer Zain Calcuttawala and then sent to Midicore Studios where it was mastered by Mumbai-based producer Ayan De.

The singer-songwriter also shot a video series for the record, titled *With Friends Like These:: Acoustic Takes*. The videos showcase Guha and the featured artist performing the songs live in a homely and laid-back environment. "If I love a record, I need to hear a live rendition of it because I get suspicious of what went on during the recording process," says Guha, who is currently signed to Mumbai record label Kadak Apple Records. The musician has already started writing material for his next EP which he has tentatively titled *EP 3*. It looks to be far less collaborative than his last, though. "The current path is that my next record will be just me and Rahul Pais," says Guha.

DAVID BRITTO



Jishnu Guha

PALM Expo Will Showcase Light and Sound Tech for 17th Edition in Mumbai

The exposition for professional audio and lighting is back in June, this time with a focus on Indian manufacturers

THE PALM EXPO WILL HOST ITS HIGHLY-ANTICIPATED 2017 edition at the BEC in Mumbai from June 1st to June 3rd.

The expo, which is now in its 17th iteration, provides a platform for brands to showcase their state-of-the-art professional audio, lighting, installation and rigging technology. The expo is set to welcome over 500 brands this June. This year's event will also place a focus on Indian manufacturers, in support of the government's "Make in India" initiative.

Yamaha Music, the Sound Partner for the expo, will have a plethora of products on show, including wireless speakers, preamps, VXS Series M and S compact surface-mount speakers and subwoofers, MX series and Montage synthesizers and the RS 320 Series Yamaha Guitars.

In addition to all of the technology on display, the expo features the Palm Conference and Seminar Program, a three-day course consisting of product presentations, Q&A sessions, workshops and panel discussions. This year's speakers include expert visual & lighting designer Becket Tundatil and Oscar winner Resul Pookutty. Award-winning Bollywood composer Sanchit Balhora will also host a masterclass.

One of expo's most unique features in sound, The Demo Qubes, will return this year to enable audio companies to demo their sound systems within private cube structures built for uninterrupted listening. This year, visitors will be able to experience Bose, Pope Professional, RCF and Rivera Digitech sound systems from within the Demo Qubes. Similarly, the 'Open Air Line Array Demos'



PALM Expo

will showcase some of the best line array systems in realistic conditions.

The exposition will also feature live performances by artists and bands, and the PALM Sound & Light Awards and IRAA Awards will recognize innovation in technology and quality work, talent and skill of industry professionals. EDM buffs will also have something to look forward to at the expo: the Palm Soundscape, which is curated by DJ Championship Director Reiji, is a series of DJ-centric presentations, panel discussions and workshops on electronic music. Hip-hop artists Enkore, Shah Rule, and SEZ will also be participating, along with Tanseer Jabbar, the producer and DJ behind The Inventory.

ROLLING STONE INDIA

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST (SHORT ROUND); COURTESY OF PALM EXPO



HELLO AGAIN!
Lucy Rose returns to
India this month for a tour

Lucy Rose: 'I Just Needed to Write Songs Naturally'

The English singer-songwriter on her new album 'Something's Changing' and playing in theater spaces as part of her second India tour

YOU KNOW A MUSICIAN REALLY CARES about their followers when they take up a tour across Latin America just on the basis of fan interest. After expanding the sonic range on her second album *Work It Out* in 2015, UK singer-songwriter Lucy Rose admits she got "a little bit confused" about her sound, but touring Latin America on a crowdsourced, fan-organized run of shows with just her guitar inspired more "stripped-back" songs.

Rose, who is now readying her third album *Something's Changing* for release in July, says India too helped her shape the sound she was looking for. During her debut tour of the country last year, she got requests to play "Night Bus," the calm but uneasy song off her debut album *Like I Used To* (2012). She recalls over the phone from London: "I remember thinking, 'Night Bus?' and everyone was singing along in Bangalore. That gave me the confidence that I could write

that sort of music. That is actually what my fans wanted from me and I didn't worry so much about uptempo and modern-sounding music and that sort of stuff that I got caught up in. With the pressure taken off me, and me able to write the kind of music I wanted, and feel like it's what my fans wanted, it was really productive."

Fans are already getting a glimpse of Rose's new material off *Something's Changing*, from the encouraging lead single "Floral Dresses" to the poignant "Is This Called Home," which released late in April, with a video that Rose calls her favorite. She jokes, "The good thing about it is that I'm not in it. It's probably why I like it so much!" The video features dancer Jonathan Lutwyche interpreting freeform, on top of a mountain in Wales' famous Lake District. "I just think it's one of the most gen-

uine, honest and moving, sincere things I've ever seen," Rose says.

While working on her new bunch of minimalist songs, Rose also found a good way to pick tunes that would feature in the album. "I decided that if I couldn't play the songs with me on guitar or piano—then it wasn't going to go on the record." Having said that, Rose is still not taking a chance on playing noisy clubs and bar venues. She says, "It feels like choosing the right venues gives the right music the chance to be heard, in the right way."

Her Worldwide Cinema tour kicks off in Argentina in May and goes to India, U.K. and South-East Asia and Europe. It includes a screening of her mini-documentary that follows the chaos and happiness behind the Latin America tour last year, when she played free gigs booked by fans. That explains why the India shows—co-organized by Bengaluru venue the Humming Tree—includes the revamped Royal Opera House in Mumbai, two shows at the Odd-Bird Theater in New Delhi and coming back to the Humming Tree in Bengaluru between May 23rd and 27th.

She's fully aware that it "sounds terrible" to say her favorite part of India was the food, but she laughs it off and adds, "The people we spent time with, they were so amazing, open-minded and aware of everything." **ANURAG TAGAT**

"Choosing the right venues gives the right music the chance to be heard."



Why OML Dropped Artists From its Roster

Swarathma, Parvaaz, The F16s, The Ganesh Talkies and Sandunes are no longer managed by the company. Founder Vijay Nair says the company is “pulling back and rejigging” things

PLAN MAN

Vijay Nair, Founder and CEO, Only Much Louder

THE PAST FEW MONTHS HAVEN'T been the smoothest for bands and artists on Only Much Louder's (OML) roster. While most of the big-name acts have parted ways with the company, others are on their way out. Bengaluru psychedelic/prog band Parvaaz, who had been with OML for two years, announced their exit this week with the news that they're now signed to New Delhi artist management agency Big Bad Wolf. Acts like Bengaluru folk-rockers Swarathma, Kolkata's pop-rock band The Ganesh Talkies, Mumbai-based producer Sandunes and Chennai rockers The F16s have begun self-managing. Tej Brar, former Head of Artist Management division at the company, too, quit earlier this month. Arjun S Ravi, former Director, left OML and joined Red Bull India last year.

Swarathma frontman Vasu Dixit explains that the breakup was a long time coming. He says, “Basically, we saw that OML has been quite busy with a lot of bands. Also lately, their focus has shifted towards comedy and mostly EDM. We felt that we were not one of the main bands... So we met Vijay (Nair; Founder & CEO, OML) and discussed the matter. He was very upfront about the fact that if they aren't doing it right, maybe we should part ways. Later he got back saying it's not happening and that they were dropping all the other bands too because OML's managers needed training. Actually, we were quite relieved too because things weren't happening productively.”

Parvaaz frontman Khalid Ahamed, on the other hand, says things were going pretty okay till they got a call from OML “all of a sudden” this January. “They told us very frankly that

they weren't able to handle so many bands. But they assured us that they will help us in getting new management.” Josh Fernandez, The F16s' vocalist/guitarist reveals how things shaped out for them: “Our contract was nearing its end, and we were in two minds whether to continue or gracefully exit. OML dropping all their bands galvanized our decision.”

Suyasha SenGupta, vocalist of The Ganesh Talkies, feels the main reason was that a lot of bands were beginning to feel that OML wasn't invested enough in them. “We spent a little less than a year with OML and while things were very smooth in terms of gig bookings and logistics, we were starting to feel a little bit disillusioned by what is ‘the indie scene.’ We felt like outsiders in an essentially Bombay-only party.”

Nair, on his part, explains that OML decided to “pull back” because the company felt it

did not have enough managers to attend to the needs of the bands. He says, “We are in the process of rejigging things. We want to go double-down when it comes to music.” But till that happens, the company has decided to let go of pretty much all the bands on its music lineup. “We had conversations with the artists and explained the situation to them. It is not fair on our part to have them with us while we reassess things.”

Among the artists that continue to be on the roster are Mumbai pop-rock outfit Ankur & The Ghalat Family. Confirms frontman Ankur Tewari, “Our plan is still on course. We do monthly renewals and we have been reaching our target.” He says he isn’t sure why the company has dropped a chunk of its artists. “I don’t know what the reasons are but everyone seems like in a happy space. Whenever I meet these guys—Parvaaz and The F16s—everyone seems happy making music. Having said that, even the bands that aren’t with OML—we have always seen them as family, and that is how the independent music scene has grown in India.”

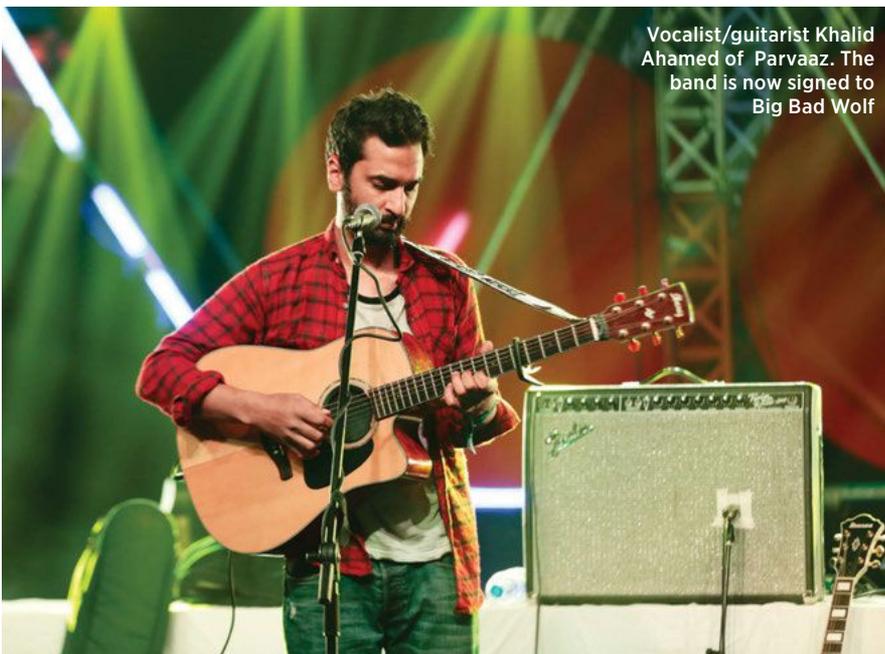
Goa-based DJ/producer Nucleya, one of OML’s most successful flagship artists, wasn’t available for comment but going by the information on his Facebook page, it seems he continues to be part of the OML family.

Mumbai rapper Naved Shaikh aka Naezy is currently in talks with the company on the future course of action. He feels that his association with the company wasn’t the best. “OML didn’t give me the attention and importance that I deserved. Our partnership seemed very slack.

And although I have communicated to them that I need a dedicated manager, they have expressed that they don’t have the resources for it. We will take a final call on whether to stay together or not in a week or so.”

New Delhi electronic music producer Sahej Bakshi aka Dualist Inquiry reveals that the news of OML dropping bands caught him by surprise. “It came as a shock and I was sad about it.” The musician, however, says he continues to have “a good understanding with my managers at OML”: a fact which could only mean that he isn’t leaving the company. “As an artist, I can attest to the significance of good management. I think it’s important to have a good team and nice, tight relationship with your manager and as long as that’s in place, all is good.”

Nair reveals that OML is the process of recruiting an “army of managers” before resigning new artists. “We are going to train 30-40 managers and there will be a team assigned for each act as opposed to having just one manager per artist,” he says, adding the indie music scene is currently in a state of management crisis even though the number of artists is significantly increasing. “The quality of management in India has gone down with most managers being just glorified booking agents...it’s



Vocalist/guitarist Khalid Ahamed of Parvaaz. The band is now signed to Big Bad Wolf

“We are going to train 30-40 managers and there will be a team assigned for each act as opposed to having just one manager per artist.”
— Vijay Nair, OML

done like an assembly-line. We can’t name five breakthrough artists that have come out in the past year—ideally there should be at least 15.”

OML is India’s premier media enterprise which boasts of a host of verticals including artist management (music, comedy and alternative culture), live events (Bacardi NH7 Weekender, Stage42), brand-funded digital and TV content (The Dewarists) and online ticketing (Insider.in). The company’s rapid expansion into previously untapped markets makes OML one of the country’s most ingenious enterprises which has not only helped organize the amorphous cultural scene in the India but also paved the way for more start-ups to follow suit.

Although letting go of some of its most promising acts might seem strange for a company that promotes new talent, according to Nair, when the new music strategy will be put in motion, it will benefit all. “We want to invest in an ecosystem where we produce quality content.”

Till then, some of the outgoing bands are relying on their own resourcefulness to secure gigs. Says Fernandez, “The fact that we are no longer with an agency that looks out for us, puts things in perspective and the weight on our shoulders is entirely ours to bear. At this

point, we have other things to worry about outside of this—things that deal closer to what a band is supposed to do i.e. make music.” SenGupta feels that given the current climate, it doesn’t matter if an artist has management or not. “While Bollywood artists have found their place in independent gigs and movements, there hasn’t been much of a crossover (except maybe for the Detective Byomkesh Bakshi, which featured an indie playlist). So till the

time we have access to mainstream media, I don’t see the point of management; a DIY approach works just as well.”

The fact that OML has dropped most of its multi-member acts and retained solo electronica artists and comedy acts/collectives points to the general lack of lucrative avenues for independent music-makers in India. Says Dixit, “From a client perspective, it makes easier for them (OML) to manage and promote a solo EDM artist or standup comedians. These acts are in trend and their logistical setup is simple too; there is no major soundcheck, and travel and accommodation costs are cheaper.”

The musician also explains that the presence of a burgeoning YouTube market among the audience that thrives on “content creators” like comedy and electronic producers makes things doubly difficult for ‘live’ bands. “The audience today is YouTube-savvy. And it’s not easy for a band like ours to release a lot of content every now and then. We are songwriters, not content-creators. If we get into content generation, we would be moving away from being natural artists.” Swarathma recently released their new single “Beta Sweater Pehno” and are currently looking forward to their multi-city tour starting this weekend.

NIRMIKA SINGH

RON BEZBARJUAH

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The Foxtrot Project's Second Innings

Kolkata label Amuze Records enlists a diverse lineup for their second compilation and a nation-wide tour



ALL THAT JAZZ Arunava Chatterjee-led Shonai Trio

At a time when Kolkata's musicians may feel a scarcity of support in their city, Amuze Records is pushing ahead to prove its mettle. For founder Arijit Chakraborty, it's about the supply of encouragement if he's expected to provide it back. After the first volume of his jazz compilation *The Foxtrot Project* released in late 2015, Amuze are set to release a new volume inviting previous and new artists from across the country for *The Foxtrot Project V2.0*, which releases on May 21st in Kolkata, followed by a multi-city tour through May and June.

The 16-track compilation features seven artists that range from the experimental to the traditional, including returnees from the first edition such as The Bodhisattva Trio and Srinjay Banerjee. There's also New Delhi jazz band Syncopation, Dutch-born and Chennai-based saxophonist Maarten Visser, Rohan Ganguli Quartet (led by rock & rollers The Supersonics' guitarist), The Neel Sarkar Project, singer-songwriter Rahul Guha Roy (from rockers Cassini's Division) and friends and contemporary jazz artist Shonai aka Arunava Chatterjee. "I made sure I only pick those artists who can invoke imagery in mind rather than requiring a visual support to make their compositions stand out," Chakraborty says.

The scope with *The Foxtrot Project V2.0* has expanded for Amuze to include more than just jazz. Chakraborty says, "It's more like a modern instrumental album covering everything from swing to rock&roll. However, the concept is still rooted in jazz." From a piano ballad by Shonai that was written for the late bebop legend Carlton Kitto to the acoustic "Niffari" by Neel Sarkar Project, there's a lot more diversity on the album. Chakraborty is excited about Syncopation's laidback recordings: "They remind me of those Sixties and Seventies movies with upbeat music with a catchy tune that just gets stuck to your head."

The Foxtrot Project V2.0 will launch on May 24th at the Piano Man Jazz Club, followed by shows in Mumbai and Bengaluru, with a concluding show at Kolkata's mainstay jazz venue Plush Lounge, which will include six out of the seven artists (everyone except Visser) performing. Chakraborty says just as this project is a chance to achieve what he couldn't with the debut compilation, there'll be more in store. "Whatever I couldn't achieve this time, is fair, because that will probably drive me forward for the third edition."

ANURAG TAGAT



BY SUNIL SAMPAT

We are Celebrating!

KEEPING IN STEP WITH this recent trend of 'celebrating' a day as a tribute to routine, everyday matters, April 22nd was dedicated as International Record Store Day—since the only "records" sold in stores nowadays are vinyl LPs, it is de facto a day to applaud the bouncing back of the vinyl record. Also, April 30 is International Jazz Day. While I love the fact that both long playing microgroove vinyl records and the music called Jazz have an annual day to focus attention on them, I am amused that just one day is set aside to celebrate them. But then we have just one Mother's Day, Father's Day, Women's Day and the like. These, of course should be celebrated all year round.

Long playing records have made a remarkable come back on the horizon of the audiophiles. When technology came up with the Compact Discs, the whole concept of how people listened to their favourite sounds changed forever... or so it was thought. The crisper digital sound, the ease of storing the new medium and the natural feeling that "latest" had to be better, made the CD very popular in a short space of time. Record companies and stores were selling the same music on CD that they had already sold, perhaps to the same people on LP. Business was good for the record companies; for the consumer however, it got even better when it was discovered that the computer could record and store enormous quantities of digital sound. There was further joy when external hard discs and even pen, or zip drives, which stored music, could be carried in one's pockets!

Then, for those marketing the CDs and for Music Stores came a serious down turn; downloads from the Internet meant that the store could be bypassed and yet the music one purchased from them was available, sometimes for free, to the end user. Those geniuses of marketing who

had earlier made the LP sound obsolete in order to sell compact discs must have felt foolish when the digital genie they unleashed came back and bit them where it hurt. A very painful spin off from this was that the record or music store, became redundant, much like the shops that sold rolls of camera film in earlier years.

My all time type of store has been the record store. Having had the good fortune to have travelled to many countries, I would head out to record stores, hoping to discover some new music or hitherto unknown artists. The LP cover sleeve, with details of the music within told a story about the music even before one ventured to buy or listen to the LP. Mumbai's famous store Rhythm House, like others was a little museum, a place to unearth a wealth of recorded "information." Thus a personal music collection represented a well chosen spectrum of sound, almost reflecting the personality of its owner. It was a gourmet's delight. The "digital" collection on 'personal devices' was more representative of a gourmand's—a glutton's delight; anything and everything was in one's possession, whether one even knew it or not!

The LP has also its own following of esoteric connoisseurs, who insist—and always have—that it is the ultimate in sound reproduction. The analog sound is said to be warmer, more natural, and perhaps a lot closer to the "real" sound of its source. It is also said to be gentler on the listener and can be heard for long spells of time without causing aural fatigue.

The closing of music stores in recent times has been tragic. The prospect of their revival is a reason to rejoice for music lovers everywhere. The tiger we thought we had lost is back in the jungle! Time to celebrate.

SUNIL SAMPAT IS A JAZZ CRITIC AND CONTRIBUTING EDITOR OF ROLLING STONE INDIA. WRITE TO SUNIL AT JAZZWALA@GMAIL.COM

ON A SONG
Beth Hart made
her india debut
last month



Beth Hart: 'I Know What Makes Me Connect to My Music'

The American singer-songwriter discusses her influences, live albums and her upcoming India visit

LOS ANGELES BASED SINGER-songwriter Beth Hart visited India for the first time last month, playing two packed shows in Bengaluru. In this exclusive interview with *Rolling Stone India*, we found Hart to be frank, open and very honest in sharing her views with us. Here is our conversation with the singer-songwriter:

Your albums 'Fire on the Floor' and 'Live in Amsterdam' seem to have caught the imagination of this generation of listeners. To what do you attribute this special connect you have achieved across a spectrum of the audience, which has

enormous choices for a variety of music to choose from?

I never want to be presumptuous to assume why anybody connects with my music—as you say, there's so much to choose from. But I know what makes me connect to my music—it is knowing that I am not alone in my feelings and my thoughts. If I love Etta James, it's not just the voice and it's not just the song but it's the energy that connects me to her, so if she is strong, I can be strong too and if she is sad, I know I am not alone, or if she is joyous, I can connect with that joy. That's what connects me to singers. Yesterday, before I was going on stage,

I wasn't feeling very confident so I put on live, Dinah Washington—it's not just her singing but it's some incredible musicians in her recordings, especially in her live shows. There is something about live albums that I enjoy so much more than studio albums from all of my favorite artists. When I am listening to them live, I get to connect so much more to their truth, than in studio albums.

Do you think it is more difficult to reach listeners who, these days, have any and all music available so easily through technology?

You know, I don't even think along those lines! I think that I would be in trouble

if I thought along those lines, if I tried to analyze the music business and why people buy albums or come to shows to hear me. I don't think it's my place to go there. That has nothing to do with art. My job is to work at songwriting and singing and telling the truth in song writing. My job is to be courageous enough to go on stage and tell the truth, the same truth that's gone into my song writing. You know, being a human being, it's natural to be insecure—and when you are a performer, there is going to be even more insecurity. That's why there is the need to get the applause, get the connect to consistently remind you that you're not 'no good,' that you're part of the human race and that you are a somebody. That's at the core of almost all performing artists. Let's face it, if it's just about the music, you could stay at home and make music but there is the need to perform for people to remind you that you are not alone. Of course, I can't speak for other artists, but this is my little philosophy on it. So I am not going to think about how I can reach more audiences; I think of writing by digging deep under all those layers of denial and under all that false sense of security.

Most contemporary music owes its roots somehow to the blues—whether jazz, rock, swing or R&B. The British rock movement from the Sixties was heavily influenced by people like Muddy Waters. They adapted these roots for their own music. In which way have you taken the traditional blues for molding your music?

Well, I don't consider myself a blues singer! Throughout my career, I have written in many different genres and directions in what I call 'singer-songwriter music.' Songs like "Leave The Light On" or "L.A. Song" are just storytelling songs. I go into blues or jazz, gospel, soul music, rock&roll, old school rock&roll, soul rock&roll, so many directions. It just boils down to growing up, being turned on to a lot of great music, a lot of great artists from different genres from a lot of people from family, friends, teachers. It's only natural I am influenced by what I heard. The only way to be an inventor of music or your own genre of music is either be so suppressed that you don't hear any other outside influence—some form of serious suppression, but that wasn't my case. I was influenced by a lot of artists. I think that answers your question.

Music has been a terrific vehicle for protest, social and even political messages. In particular, the U.S. has encouraged this type of expression—Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and others in their anti-war protest songs in the mid Sixties exemplify this. Has this 'freedom of expression' in American music been a factor in your lyrics?

"I don't consider myself a blues singer! Throughout my career, I have written in many different genres and directions in what I call 'singer-songwriter music.'"

I do not consider myself a political writer at all. If you grow up during war—Dylan and Baez were young during the Vietnam war and what's going on around you is going to affect your feelings and emotions—so that's what will come through your writing. For me, what came about was that there was a lot of mental illness in my family. There was a lot of abandonment, a lot of drug addiction, my sister died of AIDS which she got from a needle, so it's natural that my narratives have a lot to do with the struggle, connection to god, feelings of worthlessness, shame etc. But there's a lot of hope in it too because if there wasn't hope, I'd be dead! So as much as a dark side of me exists, there is also a very strong light side, which has kept me alive so far and that's going to be what I write about.

The name of your album 'Don't Explain' suggests a connection with the great jazz singer Billie Holiday, who sang a song by the same title. In the rich spectrum of American women singers—from Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday through to Aretha Franklin and so many in between, a fine tradition has been established. Are you a continuation of this tradition?

I'm not black so I don't know how to come from that place, dealing with slavery as they dealt with it, of course. I remember hearing the song "Strange Fruit" as a little girl with my mother who was a massive Billie Holiday fan. There was something about the song "Don't Explain"—that's because my father left my mother for another woman. So I really connected to someone who was dishonored but you love them so much you swallow it. So that's a song I am connected to. But if you ask whether am I a continuation of this tradition of vocalists, I would say no.

Who have been your influences and inspirations in the style you have developed?

I have a lot of influences—Billie Holiday, Aretha Franklin, Otis Reading, Bob Marley, Black Flag, Black Sabbath, Ozzy Osborne, Rush, Led Zepplin, Carole King, Ricky Lee Jones, James Taylor, The Eagles. I love Latin music, native American music, all classical music, Dinah Washington, Ella Fitzgerald and then some!

Your popularity internationally, particularly in Australia and Europe is remarkable. Do you think the audiences in these countries react differently to audiences in the US?

Why you connect with certain audiences isn't like it sounds on paper. A big part of connecting with people comes from the label we record with or some promotion that get you to those audiences. In the early part of my career, I was promoted by my label on the East coast of the U.S. and in Africa—so that's where I connected with the audiences. My second label promoted me in Australia and parts of Europe and then in the U.S. I then screwed up my whole career with drugs and alcohol and illness and I was dropped by them and I didn't have a career for a year when I was trying to recover and get back. When I was back, nobody would touch me in the U.S. But I was accepted to perform in New Zealand and in Holland and that was it. It was a slow rebuilding process, very slow. It took me a number of years. Then my label just happened to open a new label in the U.S. so I have been doing the U.S. these last couple of years.

What do you see as trends on the American scene in the near future?

I don't know what's going on because I am on the road a lot. I don't listen to the radio. When I'm home, I'm writing or cooking or gardening or hanging out with friends. I think the music comes from some pocket of the world where there's some suppression going on and a group of people get together and they create a new sound and if they are lucky enough and it makes some buzz then the labels push it and it becomes the new scene. Anyway that's just my opinion.

Your music has become a powerful medium for communication; simply put, you sing something, we just listen. There is some magnetism in your voice and expression. Thank you for that.

Awww! That's nice of you to say!

From Rolling Stone India, thank you for taking this time to react to our questions.

You're very welcome. Thank you for interviewing me. I so look forward to coming to India. I am the biggest fan of Indian food ever and I love all the colors and all the movies that I have seen. I am so excited.

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Bob Odenkirk

The 'Better Call Saul' star on growing up Catholic, loving the Replacements, and late-breaking fame

You spent nearly 30 years as a cult-favorite comedy actor and writer before getting dramatic roles in *Breaking Bad* and *Better Call Saul*. How surprising was that turn of events?

I'm surprised at the opportunity I got. I really am. I'll read a *Better Call Saul* script and think, "Are they really trusting me with this?" *Breaking Bad* came out of nowhere. I thought I'd show up and they'd say, "Go home. You're not the Bob Odenkirk we're thinking of. It's the other one, from the Royal Shakespeare Company."

I did have a gut feeling, years ago, that in a dramatic context I could be really impactful. It's natural for me to get earnest and honest. I have comedy friends who congenitally can't do that, but I can. In fact, if there's a part of comedy I love, it's that it's a transmission device for honesty – sometimes brutal honesty.

What was your favorite book growing up, and what does it say about you?

Probably *On the Road*. It says I was a kid in Naperville, Illinois, with a desperate desire to see the world and be near interesting people and fringe-y scenarios. Kerouac was Catholic too, and there are Catholic feelings there I relate to.

How did being raised Catholic rub off on you?

I have normal biceps, but my conscience muscle is a fucking hammer that can crush me or anyone around me at any time. I can experience guilt, shame and a critical, even damning, point of view of myself and everyone around me.

There were times over the years when you couldn't get projects off the ground as a writer and director. Did that get under your skin?

There's a kind of frustration that anybody who spends time in showbiz gets to experience, outside of maybe Tom Cruise. There's an element of uncertainty and luck that runs through all we do. I had one pilot I wrote at NBC, and an executive called to say it was literally the best pilot he'd read. The same call was to tell me the pilot was not going forward. And he meant every word! You've gotta try not to get bitter. But yes, I've been bitter – and I will be again.

In the movie *Nebraska*, your relationship with Bruce Dern's character seemed to mirror your relationship with your father, an alcoholic who left your family when you were 12. True?

It mirrored it exactly. The things I got to say in *Nebraska* are the things I felt about my dad. Which is...fuck this guy. He wasn't there for us, and he doesn't get to be forgiven by me. He died when I was 22, but even if he was alive today I would still feel that way. It's not like I don't think that people should be forgiven. But you can't get it from everybody.

What music moves you the most?

There's no question it's the Replacements. I still play them all the time. I play it for my kids! Their music has got a lot of anger in it. A pissed-off, teenage or youthful anger. Also, there's a lot of pain. It's interesting that Bob [Stinson, the band's guitarist] was the one with the most aggrieved background, but Paul [Westerberg] wrote those lyrics that are really heartbreaking. "Go" is a great song, from *Stink*, that is full of alienation and sadness that I still find easy to access and probably always will.

What did you learn writing for *SNL* in the Eighties and early Nineties?

I was surrounded by amazing sketch writers, Robert Smigel, Jim Downey and Jack Handey in particular. Just observing them got me thinking about what a sketch is and what it can be. But *SNL* was a frustrating experience for me. The show has its own needs, and I always wanted my own show. I envied the first cast and first writers – like, you guys got to have your own show! And nobody else after you gets to have that.

Who are your heroes?

Not a lot of heroes. Pretty much only the White Rose folks, the German college students and professor who wrote resistance pamphlets against the Nazis in 1942. Most of them got put to death. Sorry to get serious on you, but the times call for it.

Who's the funniest person you ever saw perform?

Chris Farley was *crack* funny. Somebody explained to me how freebase felt, and that's what it was like to watch him. It was pure, unarguable, unquestionable.

It wasn't about cleverness. There was a lot of pain in Chris, but it was an expression of joy and humanity, and it was powerful.

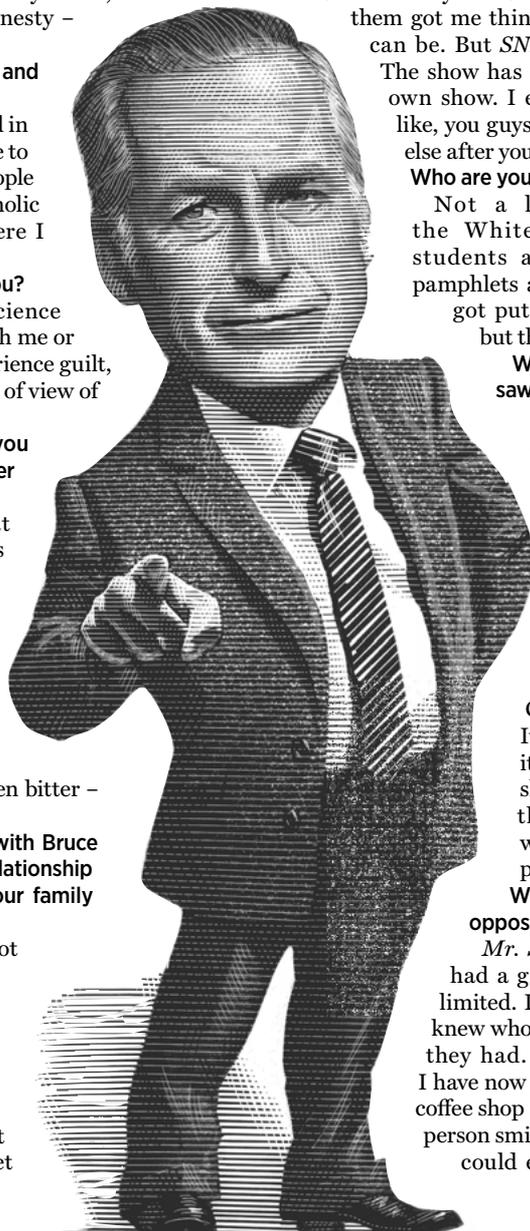
You had a hand in his Matt Foley motivational-speaker character, right?

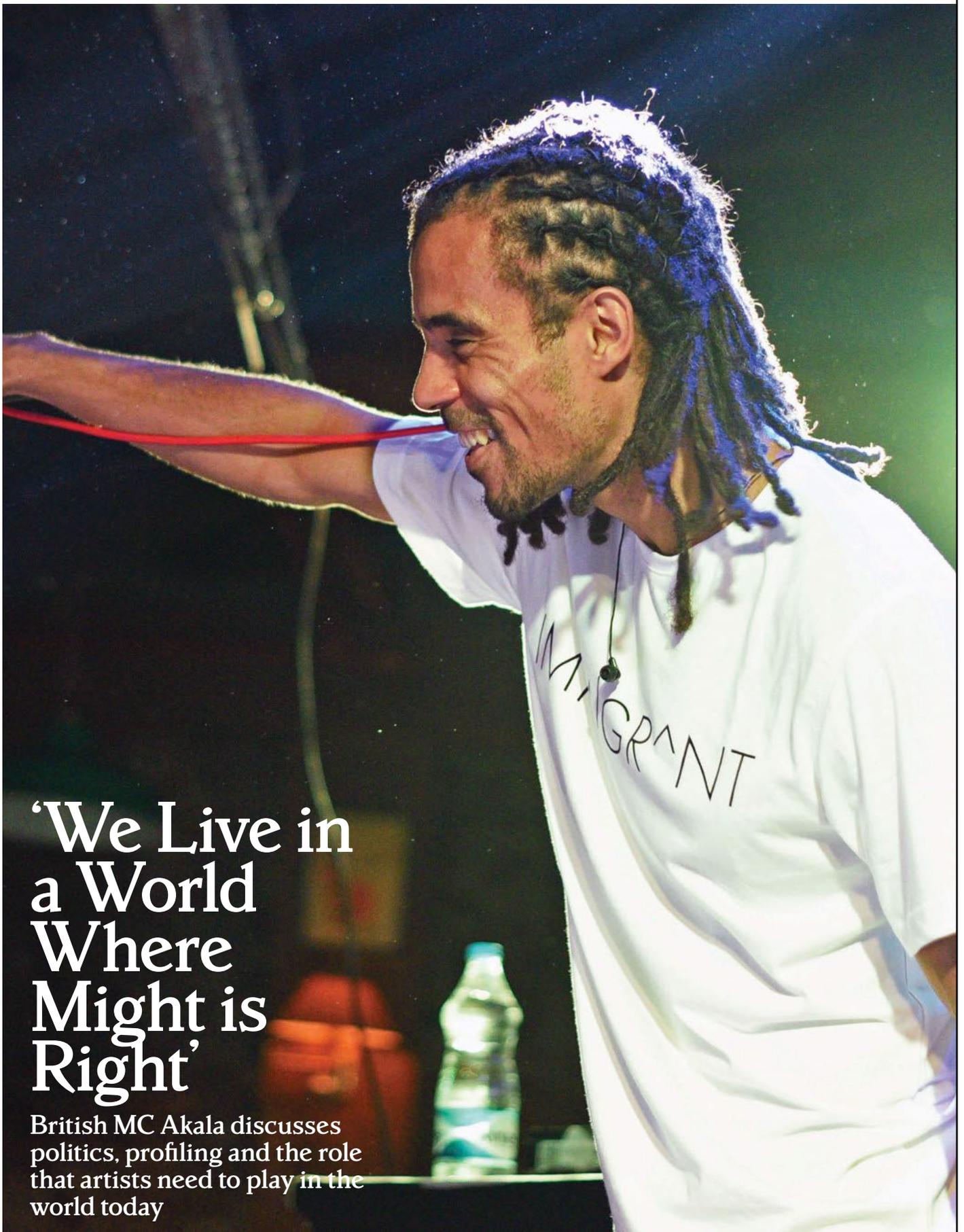
One night we did an improv [at Second City], and he did a coach-type character. It was the [Foley] voice – "You kids, get it together!" I went home and wrote that sketch as you've seen it. The catchphrase, the story behind the character – that was me. It was the perfect marriage of performer and concept and writing.

What's it like going out in public now as opposed to before *Breaking Bad*?

Mr. Show [Odenkirk's 1990s sketch series] had a great and special audience that was also limited. I could be in public and tell which people knew who I was by how many piercings and tattoos they had. The best thing about this bit of fame I have now is everyone smiles at you. You walk into a coffee shop and you're in your own head and you see a person smiling. "Is that for me? It is!" I wish everyone could experience that. Everyone in the world.

INTERVIEW BY CHRISTIAN HOARD





'We Live in a World Where Might is Right'

British MC Akala discusses politics, profiling and the role that artists need to play in the world today



Akala with DJ Uri in Mumbai

It's been 10 years since your debut album 'It's Not A Rumour' released, and the issues that you spoke about on it (and your subsequent albums) still exist. Have you become more cynical, or beaten down, over time or do you still harbor the energy and hope that's so essential to being a politically conscious artist?

I was always cynical about the state of the world. That's why I started talking about the issues that I felt needed to be addressed in the unjust world that I found myself in. I think any politically aware person knows that the world can be a pretty awful place and that there are no guarantees that political gains are permanent. You have to constantly organize, protest and

raise the consciousness of people and even then terrible things can happen. We live in a world where might is right. We live in a world that's not bound by morality—claims to morality by states are often just claims to bolster their own power. Despite the recent political developments across the world, I'm not despondent about the state of the world today. There have been some encouraging developments as well. But, at the same time, there's a certain amount of privilege to that. I have a degree of comfort that allows me to feel that sense of hope. I'm pretty sure that if I didn't have that comfort, if 'the boot was directly on my neck', I'd feel differently about the state of the world today.

In 2012, the London Metropolitan Police was widely called out for using Form 696 to discredit and dismantle cultural events organized by young black and Asian kids. In India, with the growth of our hip-hop movement, a similar kind of profiling has occurred where kids belonging to lower income communities are rarely granted access to the venues where rappers from their own communities are performing. In your opinion, how detrimental is it to a cultural movement when such kind of profiling exists and what can we (the Indian music scene) learn from the experiences of the grime and UK hip-hop movement?

Unfortunately, the idea that poor people are undesirable is pretty universal. However, popular culture is often driven by the cultures of those who are marginalized. I mean,

“Artists play a tremendous role in getting people to see things differently.”

the record labels, the media, etc. like to cherry-pick parts of this culture but they don't want to actually deal with the people. Hip-hop and reggae are tremendously popular across the world, but, that doesn't mean that the African diaspora that produced them are popular in those countries that celebrate that culture. So, what you're seeing in India is pretty typical. It's reflective of the larger society. It's like thoughtcrime. The artists and their audience are penalized for the possibility that something might happen at the event. In the U.K., this logic was never applied to football matches during the heyday of British hooliganism, and it isn't applied to music festivals where a number of sexual assaults are reported every year. I mean, if a bunch of rich kids trash a venue or do something like this, they'll pay and be forgiven. Their whole community will not be stereotyped. The crime is not the crime, the crime is poverty. Someone's background is not a good indicator of their morality.

Given the current political climate around the world and the strength of the 'respective' bubbles we find ourselves in—what role do you think do artists and cultural movements play in this climate? Do you think now is the time that artists can take a leading role in creating dialogue between the different sides?

Definitely. I mean, if you take a look at someone like Public Enemy, they were a group that for the first time managed to tell White America and White Britain what exactly it was that Black Americans were going through. We, as the Black community in Britain, could relate a lot to what they were talking about - whether it was segregation, police brutality, mass incarceration or unemployment. Public Enemy, through their music—with its infectious energy—managed to convey their anger and frustration to a wide group of people way beyond just those who could relate to it. Artists play a tremendous role in getting people to see things differently, and that's true for the current generation as well.

UDAY KAPUR

HARI OM

In an article titled “Notes on the Hip-Hop Messiah” which featured in *The New York Times* in 2015, renowned American journalist and writer Jay Caspian King discusses the legacy of hip-hop's biggest redeemers—artists that helped push hip-hop into the mainstream and changed its landscape every time the genre found itself in a rut.

Hip-hop has always been, and will always be, a voice for the voiceless. As we saw in the mid-Nineties, it can act as a force of nature in breaking down racial, cultural and political barriers. According to King, the hip-hop messiah, be it Rakim, Tupac, Eminem or Kendrick Lamar, has significantly shaped and in turn been shaped by the expectations that the title places on him.

For the past 10 years, Akala, whether he admits or not, has been establishing his claim on the very same title. The London-born MC's work with The Hip-Hop Shakespeare Company—a project that he launched in 2009—has expanded on the ethos laid down by the gatekeepers of hip-hop culture such as KRS-One. Hailed by many as one of the most important British artists of his generation, Akala has been at the forefront of putting UK hip-hop on the map.

We caught up with the British MC before his second tour of India—where he'll perform alongside DJ Cheeba and Selectah Si Chai—to chat about his politics, the similarities between UK's grime movement and the Indian hip-hop scene and the role that artists have to play in the world today.

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FLASHBACK

Dr. Hunter S. Thompson

He had a briefcase of drugs and a supreme command of language. He built much of his legend at 'Rolling Stone,' and he changed journalism in the process

IN JANUARY 1970, HUNTER S. THOMPSON WROTE JANN S. Wenner a letter praising ROLLING STONE's definitive coverage of the disastrous Altamont festival. "[Print's] a hell of a good medium by any standard, from Hemingway to the Airplane," Thompson wrote. "Don't fuck it up with pompous bullshit; the demise of RS would leave a nasty hole." A bond was formed, and over the next 30 years, Thompson would do much to redefine journalism in the pages of the magazine. He lived and wrote on the edge in a style that would come to be called Gonzo journalism. That term captured his lifestyle, but it didn't really do justice to Thompson's command of language, his fearless reporting or his fearsome intellect.

Thompson was born in Louisville, Kentucky, served in the Air Force, and worked as a journalist in Puerto Rico before moving to San Francisco, where an article about the Hells Angels turned into a book project. He spent almost two years riding with the outlaw motorcycle gang, and in 1966 he published a bestseller that took readers deep inside a subculture largely inaccessible to the outside world.

In that sense, Thompson and ROLLING STONE were kindred spirits. After he wrote to the magazine, Wenner invited him to the office to discuss a piece that would be called "The Battle of Aspen," about Thompson's effort to bring "freak power" to the Rockies. Thompson had tried to get Joe Edwards, a 29-year-old pot-smoking lawyer, elected mayor; Thompson himself was running for sheriff of Pitkin County, Colorado. "He stood six-three," Wenner remembered years later, "shaved bald, dark glasses, smoking, carrying two six-packs of beer; he sat down, slowly unpacked a leather satchel full of travel necessities onto my desk — mainly hardware, flashlights, a siren, boxes of cigarettes, flares — and didn't leave for three hours. By the end, I was suddenly deep into his campaign." Thompson and Edwards lost their bids by slim margins, but Thompson's fate as a self-described "political junkie" was sealed.

A year later, Thompson sent ROLLING STONE the first section of a new piece he was working on. "We were somewhere around Barstow on the edge of the desert when the drugs began to take hold," it began. "I remember saying something like, 'I feel a bit

lightheaded; maybe you should drive...' And suddenly there was a terrible roar all around us and the sky was full of what looked like huge bats, all swooping and screeching and diving around the car, which was going about 100 miles an hour with the top down to Las Vegas."

"Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" became Thompson's defining piece, and a defining literary experience for generations of readers. It had begun as an assignment from *Sports Illustrated* when Thompson was asked to go to Las Vegas to write a 250-word photo caption on a motorcycle race, the Mint 400. Introducing himself as a "doctor of journalism," he chronicled the fuel he brought along: "two bags of grass, 75 pellets of mescaline, five sheets of high-powered blotter acid, a salt shaker half full of cocaine, and a whole galaxy of multicolored uppers, downers, screamers, laughers... and also a quart of tequila, a quart of rum, a case of Budweiser, a pint of raw ether and two dozen amyls.... Not that we needed all that for the trip, but once you get locked into a serious drug collection, the tendency is to push it as far as you can."

The trip became less about covering the race and more of, in Thompson's words, "a savage journey into the heart of the American dream." When he submitted 2,500 words to *Sports Illustrated*, the piece was rejected, along with his expenses. But when Wenner read it, he seized on it. "We were flat knocked out," recalls then-managing editor Paul Scanlon. "Between fits of laughter, we ran our favorite lines back and forth to one another: 'One toke? You poor fool. Wait until you see those goddamned bats!'"

ROLLING STONE sent Thompson back to Vegas to expand the piece, reporting on the National District Attorneys Association's Conference on Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. The results were hilarious and electrifying. "Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas" ran in two parts, in the issues of November 11th and 25th, 1971, with illustrations by Ralph Steadman, and was published in book form the next year. (In 1998, it became a film starring Johnny Depp.)

Thompson was also reshaping what it meant to write about politics. He filed 14 dispatches for ROLLING STONE from the



"Fear and Loathing" began as a caption about a motorcycle race and ended up as his definitive piece.

1972 presidential campaign trail. He lacerated the “waterheads,” “swine” and “fatcats” of D.C. culture – a tone far different from the reverent approach of the time – and lifted the curtain on the mechanics of press coverage. He exposed “pack journalism,” puff pieces born out of schmoozing sessions between journalists and campaign aides. Many of Thompson’s observations ring true today: “It’s come to the point where you almost can’t run [for president] unless you can cause people to salivate and whip on each other with big sticks,” he wrote. “You almost have to be a rock star to get the kind of fever you need to survive in American politics.”

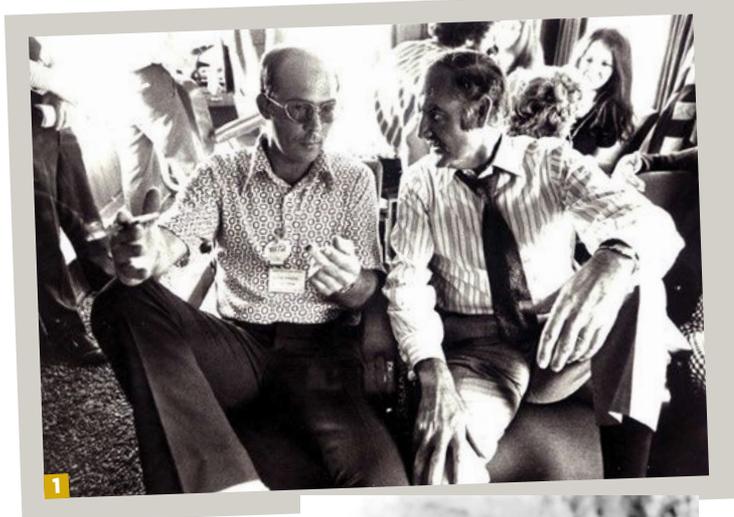
But getting work out of Thompson was becoming difficult. The magazine put him up at hotels in San Francisco or Florida, and stocked his room with booze, grapefruit and speed. A primitive fax machine, which Thompson called his “Mojo Wire,” was installed in the ROLLING STONE offices, and he’d transmit his copy a

few pages at a time at odd hours, adding the transitions and endings later. He would often call Wenner at 2 a.m. to discuss the pieces. “It was a bit like being a cornerman for Ali,” said Wenner. “Editing Hunter required stamina, but I was young, and this was once in a lifetime.”

In correspondence between Thompson and Wenner, Thompson demanded albums and speed; Wenner chastised him for blowing deadlines, keeping the staff late and even stealing cassettes from his house. (“I did a lot of rotten things out there but I didn’t steal your fucking cassettes,” Thompson wrote.)

Thompson had become a celebrity – and it slowed him down. He was immortalized as Uncle Duke in *Doonesbury*. “All that kind of trapped him, between the fame and the drugs,” said Wenner. “After the election and Watergate, he wrote small things for us. But he’d miss flights and never turn anything in.” In one memo from around that time, Wenner checked in on seven features, none of which ever came to fruition. In 1975, Thompson traveled to a failing Saigon for a planned epic Vietnam piece, but he spent most of his time there drinking in the hotel courtyard with other correspondents. He conducted several interviews with Jimmy Carter that the former president remembered as lengthy and revealing, but Thompson lost the tapes.

Still, there were flashes of brilliance, such as his coverage of the 1982 Pulitzer divorce trial in Palm Beach, Florida, which summed up the Eighties culture of greed just as it was still tak-



Life With Hunter

(1) Thompson and Presidential nominee George McGovern during the 1972 campaign. (2) For publicity for his book *The Great Shark Hunt*, August, 1979.



ing form. In 1992, he published “Fear and Loathing in Elko,” a surreal fiction piece in which he met future Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, stranded on a road with two prostitutes. “It was a remarkable comeback,” said Wenner, who saw “Elko” as a bookend to the 1971 classic. “‘Vegas’ is so fun and hopeful. ‘Elko’ is this bitter, very dark tale, kind of a descent into some of the worst impulses of the human spirit.”

Thompson wrote one final piece for ROLLING STONE, in 2004. In an uncharacteristically humble tone, he made a plea to readers to vote. By that point, Thompson’s back pain had become chronic, and he required a wheelchair. His book editor Douglas Brinkley recalled taking a trip with Thompson to New Orleans in January 2005, where he was humiliated when he couldn’t climb the stairs at a party thrown by James Carville. “He sulked at the downstairs bar, muttering cryptic things like, ‘My time has come to die, Dougie,’” Brinkley remembered. A month later, Brinkley reported that Thompson got into a shouting match with his wife, Anita, after he nearly shot her with a pellet gun. They made up the next day, but when she phoned Thompson from a nearby health club, she heard strange clicking noises. After

she hung up, he put a .45-caliber gun in his mouth and pulled the trigger.

Thompson left a suicide note, titled “Football Season Is Over,” which was printed in ROLLING STONE. “67,” Thompson wrote. “That is 17 years past 50. 17 more than I needed or wanted. Boring. I am always bitchy. No Fun – for anybody. 67. You are getting Greedy. Act your old age. Relax – This won’t hurt.” Thompson’s death recalled the suicide of his literary hero Ernest Hemingway. “Hunter had really gone from being a celebrity to being a legend,” Wenner said. “Part of that legend is his suicide, much like Hemingway.”

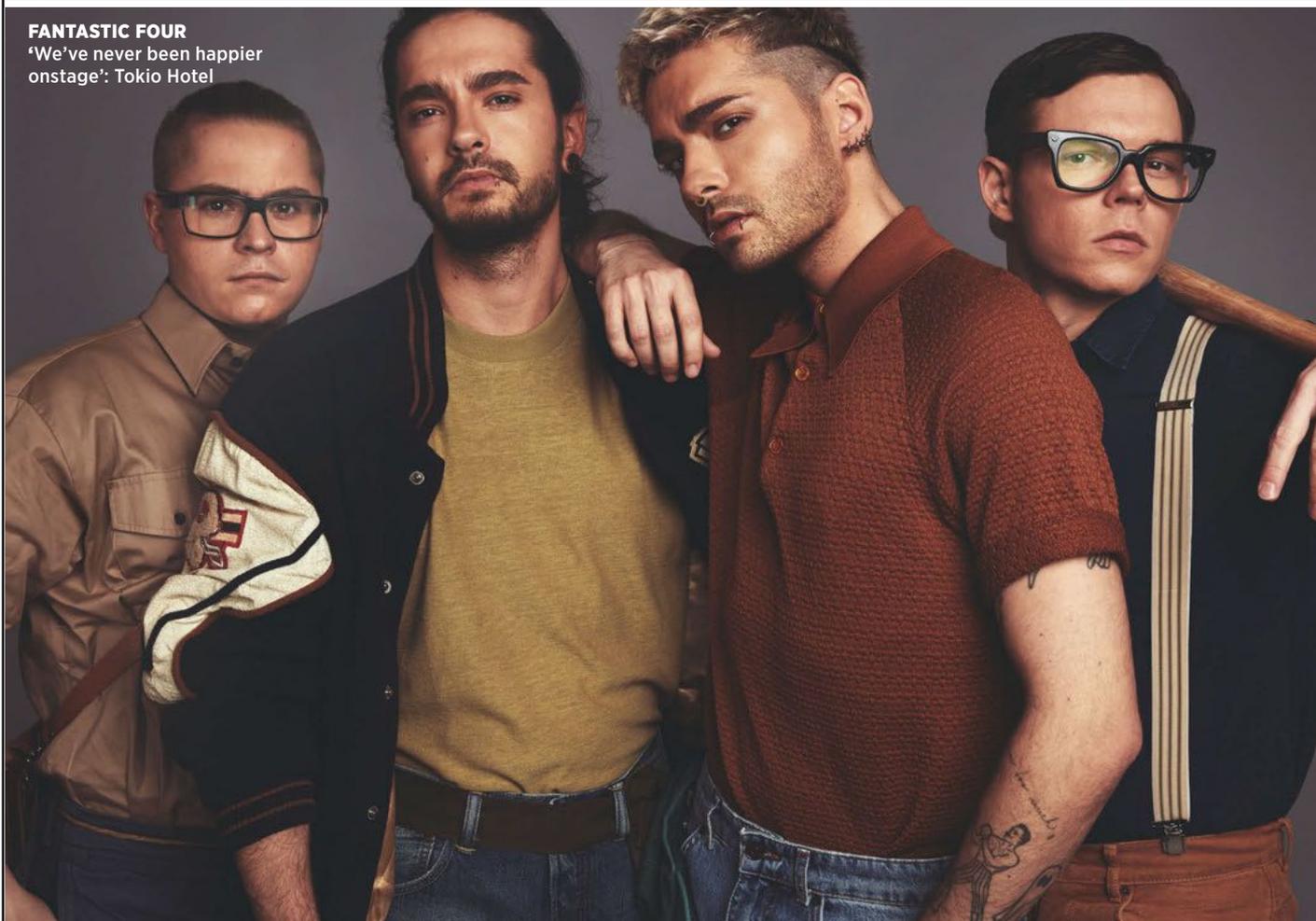
Thompson had one final wish. In August 2005, more than 200 friends, including Wenner, Jack Nicholson, John Kerry and Johnny Depp, gathered at Thompson’s Colorado home, where his remains were shot out of a 153-foot cannon under a full moon. In March 2005, Thompson appeared on the cover of the magazine, with remembrances from Depp, George McGovern and Thompson’s son, Juan, among others. Included was a letter Thompson wrote to Wenner in 1998, recalling his early days at ROLLING STONE: “My central memory of that time is that everything we were doing seemed to work.... Buy the ticket, take the ride. Like an amusement park.... Thanx for the rush.”

PATRICK DOYLE

Adapted from the book “50 Years of ROLLING STONE” (Abrams), which will be on sale May 17th.

FANTASTIC FOUR

'We've never been happier onstage': Tokio Hotel



Tokio Hotel: Back with a Bang

The German band return with a new electro-pop identity on their hard-won magnum opus, 'Dream Machine'

IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT TOKIO Hotel are somewhat of a veteran band. The German pop-rock quartet's looks belie their experience of 16 years and 10 million records sold worldwide. Currently on tour to support their fifth studio album *Dream Machine*, the band's schedule is tight but they are thrilled to be back on the road.

"The tour has been great so far. It was the 22nd show today—and no major fuck-ups," says frontman Bill Kaulitz with a smile over Skype from Warsaw, Poland. The band are in the European leg of the tour and will head to Russia the next day. "We had so much fun. I think we've never been happier onstage." Bill's twin brother and the band's lead guitarist Tom sits beside him while bassist Georg Listing is a silent but cheerful presence nearby. Drummer Gus-

tav Schäfer stays out of the frame save for a quick "Thank you!" when we congratulate him on the birth of his daughter.

Tokio Hotel's shows on this tour are more intimate and artistic, designed to match the band's new retro-synth sound on *Dream Machine* and help them connect more with the audience. However, as the conversation progresses, it becomes clear that the excitement around the record and touring was hard won; "With *Humanoid* and the last period of that time, we just weren't engaged with what we did," Kaulitz recalls about the exhausting tour for 2009's *Humanoid* album.

"It was more like a job, something we had to do and we weren't passionate about it as much." This led to the band's infamous five-year hiatus. Usually considered career-suicide for most, the break helped the

band build the bones of their current identity. While their big comeback with 2014's *Kings of Suburbia* opened the gates to change, Tokio Hotel embraced it fully only on *Dream Machine*. Released in March, the album brims with mature lyricism, retro-synth and echoing falsettos, all wrapped up in glimmering, crisp production. All in all, it's a more immersive experience than anything the band has done before.

In this exclusive interview, Tokio Hotel discuss their musical evolution, taking control of their own music and the journey to their magnum opus.

Is this tour more relaxed than 'Feel It All,' the tour for 2014's *Kings of Suburbia*?

Bill: I think onstage we created a set where we could enjoy ourselves and enjoy the

music a little more so it feels less stressed. I feel like the show before was a little more... let's say powerful, while this one is dreamy. **Tom:** But, musically it's a little more challenging. The show in itself got more advanced: we have more instruments onstage, we have more keyboards, more laptops... So it got more technical. But the set has a lot of long breaks, long intros and we just play music.

How do you begin translating *Dream Machine's* complex instrumentation and experience to a live show?

Bill: We were thinking of extending songs, going with the flow and making it longer than it is on the record. The album sounds cinematic so we wanted to support that with heavy light shows and big images, just get lost in the music and in the synth. Some parts we cut out—it's always a journey to create the final set list for the tour. We start off just putting down our favorite songs, the songs we definitely want to play live, and we kind of section it off and have different sections to keep it exciting. The worst thing that could happen is when you get bored. So we found a nice mixture of new songs and old songs. I feel like it's a good blend for all Tokio Hotel fans that discovered us as a band.

What's your take on fans who don't like your shift from rock to a more electro-pop sound?

Bill: I think it's understandable because it's so tough to let go of things and I know that's because if you like a band once, you just want them to stay the same. But as an artist, as a musician, that's impossible. At least for us, what is most important is that we are happy with our music and we are authentic with what we do. If we would stick to the same sound we were doing when we were 12 or 13 years old, that wouldn't be our sound—that would be a money-making machine, you know? And we are not about that. For us it's about fun, it's about enjoying ourselves and it's about the music we love to make. So we'd rather lose people on the way but make the stuff we really love.

I noticed you guys were much happier when you released *Kings of Suburbia* [2014] and *Dream Machine* in comparison to when you released *Humanoid* [2009].

Tom: Yeah you noticed that because with *Kings of Suburbia* we started to write a lot more and do a lot more. I remember when we started to work on *Kings of Suburbia* with our producers and we heard the first demos, the outcome wasn't what we thought was good. It didn't feel right and so then out of frustration, we decided to build our own studio and really go into production even

more than we did before. So that was like a turning point in our life and our career.

Bill: I think it was something that had to happen at one point and we were just like, 'Okay enough. Now we take charge of everything.' Artistically, I think we got too comfortable in our career; we got uninterested. With *Humanoid* and the last period of that time, we just weren't engaged with what we did. It was more like a job, something we had to do and we weren't passionate about it as much. It really took that change in our lives to be engaged again and be excited about the band and say, 'Wait a second, this is our band. We love to make music, so let's make music again.' We took the time to go in the studio and make music that means something to us and not only go with A-list songwriters and producers and do some-



“We've gotten great reviews on the album—the best we've ever gotten... People are more comfortable with us and they understand what the band is [about] now.”

thing that's hollow. We had to take that control in order to keep going and be excited about the band again.

When did you start working on *Dream Machine*? Did you have a clear idea of where you wanted to go when you began?

Tom: No we had no idea. We decided to go back to the roots. We started off in January 2016 in Berlin and it was just the four of us going to the studio and no one else. We said, 'Let's do music like we used to do, just the four of us.' We were in the studio for one or two months, just listening to music, writing new music. One of the first songs we wrote for this album was "Boy Don't Cry." In that time we wrote five to six songs that I took home to L.A., after that and I produced it. We finished writing the album in L.A. and then we came back [to Germany] and finished the record this

year in January, right before we put it out.

That's cutting it close!

Tom: Yeah! And when we announced the tour, we weren't even sure if we were going to put out the record before because we didn't know if we could finish it. It was really stressful, if I have to be honest.

Bill: It was a marathon. I think from December... Putting out "Something New" in December and shooting that video, until today, it's been a marathon. We've been working non-stop. But it worked out. We are totally happy with the outcome.

Now that the record is out and you're performing it live, how has the reaction been from fans?

Tom: It's been great. We've gotten great reviews on the album—I think the best reviews we've ever gotten for an album.

Bill: I feel like now people are more comfortable with us and they understand what the band is [about] now. Because with *Kings of Suburbia*, it was kind of a shock [to fans]. I feel like, with this record, we established the sound and what we are and how our live shows are.

Tom: The fans know what to expect and this is kind of our goal too. I just want to create something, a certain sound a certain signature to the band, you know what I mean? People know, 'Okay, I know when I buy this next record from them, without even listening to it, I know what I can expect.' I feel like we kind of started that with *Kings of Suburbia* and now did it with *Dream Machine*. We finally found that signature and that sound and we can move forward with it.

How does it feel being back on tour together? You both are based in L.A. while Georg and Gustav are in Germany—Gustav also just became a dad. Does it get harder to leave your private life each time?

Bill: I feel like now we understand this life and we accept it so much better than we were younger. For example, right now, you live in that bubble and you don't see or hear anything else. We are in this Tokio Hotel bubble; we don't know what time it is, we don't know what day it is, it's all about the show, the fans and it's just about the music. Anything could happen and we wouldn't hear about it. We enjoy that bubble, but only because we know we're going to get out of this and we all have our private lives that we are looking forward to going back to. But the entire year is just going to be a tour year and we're looking forward to just playing the record. And we're going to shoot two more music videos and put two more singles out... So yeah, we're going to work this record for a while. For us it's really about all these different facets we have in our lives right now and we enjoy each one fully.

RIDDHI CHAKRABORTY



Ferry Corsten: 'People are Done with the Simple Beats'

The Dutch trance artist on his full-length concept album, and why it's time for audiences to move over EDM and explore new genres

IT'S A MONDAY MORNING WHEN FERRY Corsten is back home in Rotterdam and already in his studio, adding finishing touches on his album *Blueprint*. Among the world's most popular DJs and producers in trance, Corsten understandably had a busy weekend—"I was in England Sunday and Estonia on Saturday," he says over the phone.

Plenty of DJs have the jet-set life, but how many of them are about to drop a concept album? And he feels that trance does lend itself to story-telling, both sonically as well as with a narrative. He says with a laugh, "So basically, long story short, what I wanted to do, was to create a whole movie without the actual motion picture."

Set to release this month, *Blueprint* features a sci-fi story, topline vocalists from across the world and was born out of Corsten's need to tell break out of the clutter of what he calls "Spotify Culture," the short, easy-to-consume tracks that are dished out week on week for instant approval. He says, "Release the tracks, make it as short as possible and move on to the next one. There's no more adventure behind it, it's gone. And that's such a waste, because I think there are so many amazing producers who can do a lot more than what they're showing right now because of this Spotify culture."

As much as he's irritated by it, Corsten is still diplomatic about the idea of releasing songs regularly as opposed to releasing full-length albums. Even his most recent collection of songs, *Hello World*, was released as a three-part EP across 2015. "But this is so different. There's no way you can do a narrative concept or story with two-minute tracks. Our whole approach of *Hello World*, was something I definitely agree with but there's no way I could do a story with that."

Excerpts from the exclusive interview with Rolling Stone India, Corsten talks about what has gone into making *Blueprint*, from finding a scriptwriter for the concept to vocalists and voice actors, to the revival culture in electronic music and his busy year.

What is it like crafting a concept album in electronic music?

It's a very different approach. There are different ways of doing a concept, but this story has been written specifically for

this album. I teamed up with a scriptwriter, David Miller, he does a lot of stuff for TV shows. Based on the story that came out, I wanted that to be the scenario for my music.

First of all, working in that, wasn't really easy. You launch yourself into a frame of mind which can work in your favor – for inspiration. After that, you have to develop certain emotions for certain parts of the story in the music, which is really interesting. Trance works really well for that, because it's kind of storytelling music in the first place.

And it's a sci-fi concept. What made you go with that?

I love that stuff, the mystery of the unknown. At the same time, it's the unknown, but in a second, everything can be possible. It's not [about] aliens from another world. It's a very realistic sci-fi [story] that could happen today. It's a love story with a sci-fi twist.

Usually when they say sci-fi, it's one of those dystopian worlds, a bleak future. But yours seems to be a positive story?

It has certain dark moments, because it has a cool sort of a timeline that you'd see in movies. It starts hopeful, gets intriguing, then shit hits the fan and it gets all dark (*laughs*) and then a happy ending.

What can you tell me about this concept?

It's about a signal beam that's received from somewhere and initially everyone thinks it's from outer-space and no one can decipher it. Until this loner kid, in the middle of nowhere, is able to do it. He finds out it's a blueprint to build something. That's where I'll leave it.

So how did you get David Miller (screenwriter from American TV show House of Cards) on board? And then (voice actor) Campbell Scott as well.

A lot of it was coincidentally, almost. For David Miller, I came up with the idea to do a story album. I told my management and they said, "This is amazing! Let's look for someone (to write it)". Then my manager was actually out the same night for a drink in L.A., he met an old friend of his, who happened to be David Miller. He hadn't seen him in a long time. While they were catching up, he mentioned the project.

Looking for people like this is really hard. So most of it came to me, in a way, by accident. Campbell Scott, I stumbled upon—it was the last piece in the whole process. The album was pretty much there and we had to find

a guy to do the voices. We reached out to a few voice actor agencies and got Campbell. He did a Chevron commercial that I'd seen and I remember thinking, "This is the voice I want". Not like a Morgan Freeman super-Hollywood, but yet there's a certain honesty in his voice where you want to believe him and that's what I wanted.

Something like this tells me that you know your fans – and EDM fans – are definitely an intelligent lot. Is that a misconception?

I don't know, it could be a misconception, but if I look at the general music listenership right now, I agree with you. That's not to say that the people listening to the music are a bunch of dumbasses (*laughs*). No, not at all. For a lot of people, they live in a complicated world and they just want to have something simple. I can imagine that. My own interpretation of it is that there's something lacking. Music in general, not just dance music or any genre.

I just felt like I should go against the stream here, when everyone else was saying, 'Yeah, albums are done. Why would you make your tracks longer than five minutes? No one cares.' But I think a lot of people do care. They want to have that journey... It's also something I wanted to do since the beginning of my career. To do something like this, so it's also a personal endeavor.

You were saying in an interview how there's a revivalist tendency in electronic music – fans want the old stuff back, DJs are playing old-school tunes. But you're fusing both of them. Do you think trance and house music will never get old?

Yeah, I do agree. They have ups and downs, waves and it comes and goes—it gets bigger and smaller, but that's the strength of it. It stands the test of time, if you will. Trance was always popular, but it lost a bit in numbers when the EDM numbers came up, but now it's coming up again now. Even house—and I'm not talking about big-room house—I'm talking about the real groovy house, the real stuff. Same thing with techno. I think that's where we are right now. A lot of people are done with the simple beats and 'Put your hands up' they want to explore other genres again. It's good that EDM came up and became so big, because it brought a lot of new people into it and now they can explore other genres.

What else is coming up for you all through 2017?

Right now, nothing beyond *Blueprint*. We're still in the final stages of the album, but once the album is done, doesn't mean I'm finished with *Blueprint*. Then we have to make all the edits for my live shows, radio shows. That's just the first bit. There are a couple of tracks that are not necessarily dance-floor-related, but I have to release them to make them fit that space. ANURAG TAGAT

**“I think there are
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Spotify culture.”**



UNTIL RECENTLY, MACHINE GUN Kelly was semifamous for dating model Amber Rose in 2015. But the rapper – who earned his stage name on the Cleveland hip-hop scene for his rapid-fire delivery – has just scored a pop smash with “Bad Things,” an Eminem-style duet with former Fifth Harmony singer Camila Cabello. The song recently hit Number Four on the Hot 100. “It’s crazy,” says Kelly, 26. “It’s the first love song I ever wrote.” The song will likely appear on his third album, *Bloom*, out this summer. But music is just one of Kelly’s hustles: He had a major part on Showtime’s *Roadies* and has walked runways for John Varvatos. At the moment, Kelly is in Mexico, but he won’t say why. “Put me on the cover and I’ll tell you what’s going on down here,” he says.

You’re one of the few rappers who play guitar onstage.

That’s why I first picked up the guitar. It seemed like that was missing from this generation. Is there someone who can play guitar better than me technically? One hundred percent. But does anyone look better playing a guitar in my generation? Absolutely not.

You’ve talked a lot about Nirvana and Radiohead. Why do you think the Nineties produced so many great bands?

I have Nineties music oozing out of my pores. What made rock & roll back then is that it was uncensored. It was raw and dark. Think of “Something in the Way,” by Nirvana – he was telling everyone how he felt. Now we’re in the age of politically correct. I hope to shave that down and bring purity back into things.

You’ve said your next album is inspired by Radiohead.

I was listening to a lot of *Kid A* when I made it. They use unconventional sounds to fill up the production. I have the same goal: to push people’s minds. **Your real name is Colson Baker. How is Colson different than Machine Gun?**

Colson was a fucking loser, man. He didn’t inspire me. He accepted judgment rather than lashing out against it. It took me maturing and being a father myself to accept “You were beautiful the whole time.” Colson lacked confidence, and Machine Gun Kelly is the cockiest motherfucker on the planet.

In your Colson days, you worked at a Chipotle in Cleveland. What was the best part?

The free meal they gave me every day. Or the fact that I killed the guac. Everybody was always like, “Damn, the

Q&A



Machine Gun Kelly

The Cleveland rapper on his journey from prepping guacamole at Chipotle to becoming ‘the cockiest motherfucker on the planet’

BY ANDY GREENE

guac is banging today!” I’d be like, “Oh, yeah. I made that shit!”

What were you like behind the counter?

When people said, “Yo, let me get a little more chicken,” and the person next to me didn’t want to give it to them, I’d tap them on the shoulder and say, “Bro, this is not our chicken. None of our family owns Chipotle. Give everyone as much chicken as they fucking want!” If you ever came through my line, you would have a bowl full of chicken. Also, they never let me roll the burritos because I always fucked the burritos up. They’d burst every time.

You have an eight-year-old daughter.

How has being a dad changed you?

It didn’t change me until she learned to Google. I don’t care what anyone else thinks, but I do care what she sees. So I cleaned up my act a little bit. And I’m speaking to a broader audience now. Not everyone grew up stoked on watching Mötley Crüe doing lines off the bar.

Two years ago you said you take mushrooms a few times a week. Are you cutting down on drugs these days?

No comment.

What’s the best concert you’ve ever seen?

I’ll tell you a recent one that blew my mind. I saw the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and their new guitarist, Josh Klinghoffer. Who the fuck is that guy? I think he’s an alien. I also saw Good Charlotte – seeing how much kids still connect to that shit shows you that the right song never really dies.

Why do you have a tattoo of the old man from *The Giving Tree* under your right armpit?

That’s what my idea of life is like. It’s like taking pieces off my own physical being. We essentially toured every shitty dive bar in the entire U.S. and Canada, every theater, every college arena, and weren’t seeing any returns. Emotionally, I was investing my trust in people and getting completely betrayed. You get fucked over and you realize, “Damn, I gave all my branches away.”

Are you getting any blowback from the underground scene for being on the pop charts?

I’ve given so much to the underground. For the underground to come up and say my music has changed? It’s like, “You fucking idiot, my formula has never changed.” How can the community that was hugely responsible for sparking a fire under me turn their backs on me? Fame is the weirdest thing ever.

At the same time, you seem to enjoy it.

One hundred thousand percent. Being a rock star rocks. 

TRAVELING TUNES

Bhayanak Maut; (inset) the band in Amsterdam



Bhayanak Maut's Love Letter to Amsterdam

The Mumbai metallers talk about recording a new set of songs that are inspired from peanut butter, the munchies and more

IT'S THE LAST TIME MUMBAI METALLERS Bhayanak Maut gather at That Studio, the recording and rehearsal space set up by drummer Rahul Hariharan five years ago that became a home located on the top floor of Sion's bus depot (of all the places) not just to his band, but to several other bands in the city. It was a business decision to close the studio, but the mood among one of Mumbai's best-known metal bands isn't very somber as such.

That's probably because they're saying a proper goodbye to That Studio, recording three songs that throwback to some wicked times the band – Hariharan, vocalist Vinay Venkatesh and guitarists Aditya Gopinathan and R. Venkatraman – had when they were in Amsterdam in late 2015. Hariharan says, "Our trip was by chance. I was going there to play a gig and I told them (the band) I was

going to be in Amsterdam for a few days and asked if they wanted to work around something. So we planned a vacation out in Amsterdam, we were together for almost two weeks. We got a house to ourselves and these guys carried gear and came."

With a portable rig to record riffs, BM now have three songs that are more or less inside jokes about their Amsterdam trip. When asked if there was a schedule the band adhered to, Venkatraman says, "We had planned a lot of things and we were going to go visit a lot of places." Gopinathan cuts in, "Yeah, but none of that happened. Songwrit-



ing did happen, though." At this point, Venkatesh adds, "And copious amounts of time was spent on eating peanut butter and chocolate milk."

Why is this important? Because of "Pindakaas," which is the Dutch word for peanut butter and also a song that's about finding the best variety in the world. Other songs born out of the Amsterdam trip include "Attack of the Roachsmokers" and "Shoreline." But the band is quick to say there's no other concept or overarching theme, like on their gruesome third album *Man*, which released in 2014. Gopinathan says, "Each song is very different. There's an epic-sounding song; there's a song with a very hardcore vibe, then there's a song that's a little more technical, death metal kind of song. It's more focused on the songwriting than the individual parts."

Bassist Ishaan Krishna and co-vocalist Sunneith Revankar weren't part of the Amsterdam trip, but they're still very much part of the writing process, one that started with riffs first. With drums and guitars in the can before That Studio closed, the vocalists are now working on their first set of lyrics since *Man*, which was, by their own admission, a universe they painstakingly brought to life. Venkatesh says, "Sunneith and I have kind of frozen on a space to be in, a universe the lyrical content should focus on. We've got one song down and we've got more. We're still in that process of putting content down."

Never one to miss a chance on a piss-take, Revankar adds that lyrics are going to be more direct. "Without going the 'Fuck society. Get the fuck up and revolt the Aadhaar card, you cunts' way. The concept is simple without it being one-dimensional. Some of it is very close to what Vinay wrote for some of the songs on the *Red* album." Revankar is that one-sixth of Bhayanak Maut who's telecommuting, ever since he moved to Bengaluru about two years ago. It's not something the band exactly wants to talk about, but Revankar does say that it's been difficult to miss out on the weekly rehearsals and not being as actively involved in writing.

But that doesn't in any way indicate BM are unhappy. Their headquarters might shut, the band members might be in different places, but the band has always been one of the most comfortable acts in Indian metal. Revankar says, "I think that's what we are like as individuals also. We've gone through the motions like most bands do. But I think we came to a point somewhere in the last decade where we said, 'Screw it. Let's just do what we want to do.'" With the three Amsterdam songs that the band worked on with longtime producer Anupam Roy, the band plans to release them either as singles or as an EP in the coming months, with the songwriting process continuing. Venkatraman adds, "As long as the ideas are coming out and we're making noise, we'll put down those ideas and work on them. I don't think the process will ever end."

ANURAG TAGAT

ROYCIN D'SOUZA; COURTESY OF THE ARTIST (INSET)

Harry Styles New Direction

By
Cameron
Crowe

A year in the life of the singer as he leaves behind his boy-band past, heads to Jamaica and comes of age

Photographs by
THEO WENNER

January 2016. There's a bench at the top of Primrose Hill, in London, that looks out over the skyline of the city. If you'd passed by it one winter night, you might have seen him sitting there. A lanky guy in a wool hat, overcoat and jogging pants, hands thrust deep into his pockets. Harry Styles had a lot on his mind. He had spent five years as the buoyant fan favorite in One Direction; now, an uncertain future stretched out in front of him. The band had announced an indefinite hiatus. The white noise of adulation was gone, replaced by the hushed sound of the city below. ❖
The fame visited upon Harry Styles in his years with

RIDE WITH ME
Styles in London
in February.



One D was a special kind of mania. With a self-effacing smile, a hint of darkness and the hair invariably described as “tousled,” he became a canvas onto which millions of fans pitched their hopes and dreams. Hell, when he pulled over to the side of the 101 freeway in L.A. and discreetly threw up, the spot became a fan shrine. It’s said the puke was even sold on eBay like pieces of the Berlin Wall. Paul McCartney has interviewed *him*. Then there was the unauthorized fan-fiction series featuring a punky, sexed-up version of “Harry Styles.” A billion readers followed his virtual exploits. (“Didn’t read it,” comments the nonfiction Styles, “but I hope he gets more than me.”)

But at the height of One D-mania, Styles took a step back. For many, 2016 was a year of lost musical heroes and a toxic new world order. For Styles, it was a search for a new

(The Rolling Stones, Kanye West, “Uptown Funk”). He’s full of stories about the two-month recording session last fall at Geejam, a studio and compound built into a mountainside near Port Antonio, a remote section of Jamaica. Drake and Rihanna have recorded there, and it’s where Styles produced the bulk of his new LP, which is due out May 12th. As we weave through traffic today, *the album no one has heard* is burning a hole in his iPhone.

We arrive at a crowded diner, and Styles cuts through the room holding a black notebook jammed with papers and artifacts from his album, looking like a college student searching for a quiet place to study. He’s here to do something he hasn’t done much of in his young career: an extended one-on-one interview. Often in the past there was another One D member to vector questions

made since I was 16 was made in a democracy. I felt like it was time to make a decision about the future... and maybe I shouldn’t rely on others.”

As one of the most well-known 23-year-olds in the world, Styles himself is still largely unknown. Behind the effervescent stage persona, there is more lore than fact. He likes it that way. “With an artist like Prince,” he says, “all you wanted to do was *know more*. And that mystery – it’s why those people are so magical! Like, fuck, I don’t know what Prince eats for breakfast. That mystery... it’s just what I like.”

Styles pauses, savoring the idea of the *unknown*. He looks at my digital recorder like a barely invited guest. “More than ‘do you keep a mystery alive?’ – it’s not that. I like to separate my personal life and work. It helps, I think, for me to compartmentalize. It’s not about trying to make my career longer, like I’m trying to be this ‘mysterious character,’ because I’m not. When I go home, I feel like the same person I was at school. You can’t expect to keep that if you show everything. There’s the work and the personal stuff, and going between the two is my favorite shit. It’s amazing to me.”

Soon, we head to the Beachwood Canyon studio of Jeff Bhasker. As we arrive, Styles bounds up the steps to the studio, passing a bored pool cleaner. “How are ya,” he announces, unpacking a seriously cheerful smile. The pool cleaner looks perplexed, not quite sharing Styles’ existential joy.

Inside, the band awaits. Styles opens his notebook and heads for the piano. He wants to finish a song he’d started earlier that day. It’s obvious that the band has a well-worn frat-house dynamic, sort of like the Beatles in *Help!*, as directed by Judd Apatow. Styles is, to all, “H.” Pomegranate-scented candles flicker around the room. Bhasker enters, with guru-length hair, multicolored shirt, red socks and sandals. He was initially busy raising a new baby with his partner, the singer and songwriter Lykke Li, so he guided Styles to two of his producer-player protégés, Alex Salibian and Tyler Johnson, as well as engineer and bassist Ryan Nasci. The band began to form. The final piece of the puzzle was Mitch Rowland, Styles’ guitarist, who had worked in a pizza joint until two weeks into the sessions. “Being around musicians like this had a big effect on me,” Styles says. “Not being able to pass an instrument without sitting down and playing it?” He shakes his head. It was Styles’ first full immersion into the land of musos, and he clearly can’t get enough.

OPEN DOOR

“I would never rule out anything in the future,” Styles says of One D.

“EVERY DECISION I’VE MADE SINCE 16 WAS made in a democracy. I felt it was time to make a decision - and I shouldn’t rely on others.”

identity that began on that bench overlooking London. *What would a solo Harry Styles sound like?* A plan came into focus. A song cycle about women and relationships. Ten songs. More of a rock sound. A bold single-color cover to match the working title: *Pink*. (He quotes the Clash’s Paul Simonon: “Pink is the only true rock & roll colour.”) Many of the details would change over the coming year – including the title, which would end up as *Harry Styles* – but one word stuck in his head.

‘H ONEST,” HE says, a year later, driving through mid-city Los Angeles in a dusty black Range Rover. He’s lived here off and on for the past few years, always returning to London. Styles’ car stereo pumps a mix of country and obscure classic rock. “I didn’t want to write ‘stories,’” he says. “I wanted to write *my* stories, things that happened to me. The number-one thing was I wanted to be honest. I hadn’t done that before.” There isn’t a yellow light he doesn’t run as he speaks excitedly about the band he’s put together under the tutelage of producer Jeff Bhasker

into a charmingly evasive display of band camaraderie. Today, Styles is a game but careful custodian of his words, sometimes silently consulting the tablecloth before answering. But as he recounts the events leading up to his year out of the spotlight, the layers begin to slip away.

It was in a London studio in late 2014 that Styles first brought up the idea of One Direction taking a break. “I didn’t want to exhaust our fan base,” he explains. “If you’re shortsighted, you can think, ‘Let’s just keep touring,’ but we all thought too much of the group than to let that happen. You realize you’re exhausted and you don’t want to drain people’s belief in you.”

After much discussion, the band mutually agreed to a hiatus, which was announced in August 2015 (Zayn Malik had abruptly left One D several months earlier). Fans were traumatized by the band’s decision, but were let down easy with a series of final bows, including a tour that ran through October. Styles remains a One D advocate: “I love the band, and would never rule out anything in the future. The band changed my life, gave me everything.”

Still, a solo career was calling. “I wanted to step up. There were songs I wanted to write and record, and not just have it be ‘Here’s a demo I wrote.’ Every decision I’ve



Styles starts singing some freshly written lyrics. It's a new song called "I Don't Want to Be the One You're Waiting On." His voice sounds warm, burnished and intimate, not unlike early Rod Stewart. The song is quickly finished, and the band assembles for a playback of the album.

"Mind if I play it loud?" asks Bhasker. It's a rhetorical question. Nasci cranks "Sign of the Times," the first single, to a seismic level. The song began as a seven-minute voice note on Styles' phone, and ended up as a sweeping piano ballad, as well as a kind of call to arms. "Most of the stuff that hurts me about what's going on at the moment is not politics, it's fundamentals," Styles says. "Equal rights. For everyone, all races, sexes, everything... 'Sign of the Times' came from 'This isn't the first time we've been in a hard

ble enough to put yourself out there. I'm still learning... but it's my favorite lesson."

The album is a distinct departure from the dance pop that permeates the airwaves. "A lot of my influences, and the stuff that I love, is older," he says. "So the thing I didn't want to do was, I didn't want to put out my first album and be like, 'He's tried to re-create the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties, Nineties.' Loads of amazing music was written then, but I'm not saying I wish I lived back then. I wanted to do something that sounds like me. I just keep pushing forward."

"It's different from what you'd expect," Bhasker says. "It made me realize the Harry [in One D] was kind of the digitized Harry. Almost like a character. I don't think people know a lot of the sides of him that are on this album. You put it on and people are like,

roll." He's not a heavy drinker, he says, maybe some tequila on ice or wine with friends after a show, but by the band's last tour there wasn't much time even for that. John Lennon once told *ROLLING STONE* that behind the curtain, the Beatles' tours were like Fellini's *Satyricon*. Styles counters that the One D tours were more like "a Wes Anderson movie. Cut. Cut. New location. Quick cut. New location. Cut. Cut. Show. Shower. Hard cut. Sleep."

Finding a table, Styles leans forward and discusses his social-media presence, or lack thereof. Styles and his phone have a bitter-sweet, mature relationship – they spend a lot of time apart. He doesn't Google himself, and checks Twitter infrequently. "I'll tell you about Twitter," he continues, discussing the volley of tweets, some good, some cynical, that met his endorsement of the Women's March on Washington earlier this year. "It's the most incredible way to communicate closely with people, but not as well as in person." When the location of his London home was published a few years ago, he was rattled. His friend James Corden offered him a motto coined by British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli: "Never complain, never explain."

I mention a few of the verbal Molotov cocktails Zayn Malik has tossed at the band in recent interviews. Here's one: "[One D is] not music that I would listen to. If I was sat at a dinner date with a girl, I would play some cool shit, you know what I mean? I want to make music that I think is cool shit. I don't think that's too much to ask for."

Styles adjusts himself in his chair. "I think it's a shame he felt that way," he says, threading the needle of diplomacy, "but I never wish anything but luck to anyone doing what they love. If you're not enjoying something and need to do something else, you absolutely should do that. I'm glad he's doing what he likes, and good luck to him."

Perched on his head are the same-style white sunglasses made famous by Kurt Cobain, but the similarities end right there. Styles, born two months before Cobain exited Earth, doesn't feel tied to any particular genre or era. In the car, he'll just as easily crank up the country music of Keith Whitley as the esoteric blues-and-soul of Shuggie Otis. He even bought a carrot cake to present to Stevie Nicks at a Fleetwood Mac concert. ("Piped her name onto it. She loved it. Glad she liked carrot cake.")

This much is clear: The classic role of tortured artist is not one he'll be playing. "People romanticize places they can't get to themselves," he says. "That's why it's fascinating when people go dark – when Van Gogh cuts off his ear. You romanticize those people, sometimes out of proportion. It's the same

“WHO’S TO SAY YOUNG GIRLS HAVE WORSE taste than a 30-year-old hipster? Girls like the Beatles. You gonna tell me they’re not serious?”

time, and it's not going to be the last time.' The song is written from a point of view as if a mother was giving birth to a child and there's a complication. The mother is told, 'The child is fine, but you're not going to make it.' The mother has five minutes to tell the child, 'Go forth and conquer.'" The track was a breakthrough for both the artist and the band. "Harry really led the charge with that one, and the rest of the album," says Bhasker.

"I wish the album could be called *Sign of the Times*," Styles declares.

"I don't know," says Bhasker. "I mean, *it has been used*."

They debate for a bit. Nasci plays more tracks. The songs range from full-on rock ("Kiwi") to intricate psychedelic pop ("Meet Me in the Hallway") to the outright confessional ("Ever Since New York," a desperate meditation on loss and longing). The lyrics are full of details and references – secrets whispered between friends, doomed declarations of love, empty swimming pools – sure to set fans scrambling for the facts behind the mystery.

"Of course I'm nervous," Styles admits, jingling his keys. "I mean, I've never done this before. I don't know what the fuck I'm doing. I'm happy I found this band and these musicians, where you can be vulnera-

"This is Harry Styles?"

Styles is aware that his largest audience so far has been young – often teenage – women. Asked if he spends pressure-filled evenings worried about proving credibility to an older crowd, Styles grows animated. "Who's to say that young girls who like pop music – short for popular, right? – have worse musical taste than a 30-year-old hipster guy? That's not up to you to say. Music is something that's always changing. There's no goal posts. Young girls like the Beatles. You gonna tell me they're not serious? How can you say young girls don't get it? They're our future. Our future doctors, lawyers, mothers, presidents, they kind of keep the world going. Teenage-girl fans – they don't lie. If they like you, they're *there*. They don't act 'too cool.' They like you, and they tell you. Which is *sick*."

STYLES DRIVES TO A QUIET dinner spot in Laurel Canyon, at the foot of Lookout Mountain Avenue, onetime home to many of his Seventies songwriting heroes. He used to have a place around the corner. As the later tours of One Direction grew larger, longer and more frenetic, he offers with irony, "It was *very* rock &



with music. You want a piece of that darkness, to feel their pain but also to step back into your own [safer] life. I can't say I had that. I had a really nice upbringing. I feel very lucky. I had a great family and always felt loved. There's nothing worse than an inauthentic tortured person. 'They took my allowance away, so I did heroin.' It's like – that's not how it works. I don't even remember what the question was."

Styles wanders into the Country Store next door. It's a store he knows well. Inspecting the shelves, he asks if I've had British rice pudding. He finds a can that looks ancient. He collects a roll of Rowntrees Fruit Pas-

tilles ("since 1881"), Lindor Swiss chocolates ("irresistibly smooth") and a jar of Branston Pickles. "There's only two shops in L.A. that stock all the British snacks. This area's kind of potluck," he says, spreading the collection on the counter.

The clerk rings up the snacks. In the most careful, deferential way, the young worker asks the question. "Would you...happen to be... Harry Styles?"

"Yep."

"Could I get a selfie?" Styles obliges, and leans over the counter. Click. We exit into the Laurel Canyon evening.

"Hey," shouts a grizzled-looking dude on the bench outside the store. "Do you know who you look like?"

Styles turns, expecting more of the same, but this particular night denizen is on a different track.

"River Phoenix," the man announces, a little sadly. "You ever heard of him? If he hadn't have passed, I would have said that was you. Talented guy."

"Yes, he was," agrees Styles, who is in many ways the generational opposite of Phoenix. "Yes, he was."

They share a silent moment, before Styles walks to his car. He hands me the bag filled with English snacks. "This is for you," he says. "This was my youth..."

HARRY EDWARD STYLES WAS BORN IN Worcestershire, England, in true classic-rock form, on a Tuesday Afternoon. The family moved to Cheshire, a quiet spot in Northern England, when he was a baby. His older sister, Gemma, was the studious one. ("She was always smarter than me, and I was always jealous of that.")

His father, Desmond, worked in finance. He was a fan of the Rolling Stones, Fleetwood Mac, a lot of Queen, and Pink Floyd. Young Harry toddled around to *The Dark Side of the Moon*. "I couldn't really get it," he says, "but I just remember being like – *this is really fucking cool*. Then my mom

STADIUM KILLER

With One D at Central Park, New York City in 2015

would always have Shania Twain, and Savage Garden, Norah Jones going on. I had a great childhood. I'll admit it."

But in fact, all was not perfection, scored to a cool, retro soundtrack. When Harry was seven, his parents explained to him that Des would be moving out. Asked about that moment today, Styles stares straight ahead. "I don't remember," he says. "Honestly, when you're that young, you can kind of block it out.... I can't say that I remember the exact thing. I didn't realize that was the case until just now. Yeah, I mean, I was seven. It's one of those things. Feeling supported and loved by my parents never changed."

His eyes moisten a little, but unlike the young man who wept over an early bout with Internet criticism, a powerful moment in the early One Direction documentary *A Year in the Making*, Styles tonight knocks back the sentiment. Styles is still close with his father, and served as best man to his mom when she remarried a few years ago. "Since I've been 10," he reflects, "it's kind of felt like – protect Mom at all costs.... My mom is very strong. She has the greatest heart. [Her house in

Cheshire] is where I want to go when I want to spend some time.”

In his early teens, Styles joined some school friends as the singer in a mostly-covers band, White Eskimo. “We wrote a couple of songs,” he remembers. “One was called ‘Gone in a Week.’ It was about luggage. ‘I’ll be gone in a week or two/Trying to find myself someplace new/I don’t need any jackets or shoes/The only luggage I need is you.’” He laughs. “I was like, ‘Sick.’”

It was his mother who suggested he try out for the U.K. singing competition *The X Factor* to compete in the solo “Boy” category. Styles sang Stevie Wonder’s “Isn’t She Lovely.” The unforgiving reaction from one of the judges, Louis Walsh, is now infamous. Watching the video today is to watch young Harry’s cheery disposition take a hot bullet.

“In that instant,” he says, “you’re in the whirlwind. You don’t really know what’s happening; you’re just a kid on the show. You don’t even know you’re good at anything. I’d gone because my mum told me I was good from singing in the car... but your mum tells you things to make you feel good, so you take it with a pinch of salt. I didn’t really know what I was expecting when I went on there.”

Styles didn’t advance in the competition, but Simon Cowell, the show’s creator, sensed a crowd favorite. He put Styles together with four others who’d failed to advance in the same category, and united the members of One D in a musical shotgun marriage. The marriage worked. And worked. And worked.

YOU WONDER HOW a young musician might find his way here, to these lofty peaks, with his head still attached to his shoulders. No sex tapes, no *TMZ* meltdowns, no tell-all books written by the rehab nanny? In a world where one messy scandal can get you five seasons of a hit reality show... how did Harry Styles slip through the juggernaut?

“Family,” answers Ben Winston. “It comes from his mom, Anne. She brought him and his sister up incredibly well. Harry would choose boring over exciting.... There is more chance of me going to Mars next week than there is of Harry having some sort of addiction.”

We’re in Television City, Hollywood. Winston, 35, the Emmy-winning executive producer of *The Late Late Show With James Corden*, abandons his desk and retreats to a nearby sofa to discuss his good friend. More than a friend, Styles became an unlikely family member – after he be-



GROWN UP ALL RIGHT

(1) Styles in Jamaica. He recorded much of his album there, turning the studio complex into a Caribbean version of *Big Pink*. (2) At age three. (3) At BBC Maida Vale Studios in London, 2015 (4) One Direction in 2011.

came perhaps the world’s most surprising houseguest.

Their friendship was forged in the early stages of One D’s success, when the band debuted on *The X Factor*. Winston, then a filmmaker and production partner with Corden, asked for a meeting, and instant-

CAL AUBRAND (1); COURTESY OF HARRY STYLES (2); TWOCOMBS/GETTY IMAGES (3); STEVE GRANITZ/REX USA (4); PHOTO AGENCY/SRUJITERS (5)

ship was soon tested. Styles had just moved out of his family home in Cheshire, an inconvenient three hours north of London. He found a home he liked near the Winstons in Hampstead Heath. The new house needed two weeks of work. Styles asked if he could briefly move in with Winston and his wife, Meredith. "She agreed," Winston says, "but only for two weeks."

Styles parked his mattress in the Winstons' attic. "Two weeks later and he hadn't bought his house yet," continues Winston. "It wasn't going through. Then he said, 'I'm going to stay until Christmas, if you don't mind.' Then Christmas came, and..."

For the next 20 months, one of the most desired stars on the planet slept on a small mattress in an attic. The only other bit of

what we enjoyed, because we'd be in bed like an old couple. We'd have our spot cream on our faces and we'd be in our pajamas and the door would go off. The stairwell was right outside our door, so we'd wait to see if Harry was coming home alone or with people."

"I was alone," notes Styles. "I was scared of Meri."

"He wasn't always alone," corrects Winston, "but it was exciting seeing the array of *A-listers* that would come up and sleep in the attic. Or he'd come and lounge with us. We'd never discuss business. He would act as if he hadn't come back from playing to 80,000 people three nights in a row in Rio de Janeiro."

STYLES IS AWARE AT LEAST TWO OF SWIFT'S songs are presumed to be about him. "She's so good, [those songs are] bloody everywhere."

house-dressing was the acoustic guitar that would rattle into the Winstons' bedroom. While fans gathered at the empty house where he didn't live, Styles lived incognito with a couple 12 years his senior. The Winstons' Orthodox Jewish lifestyle, with a strong family emphasis, helped keep him sane.

"Those 20 months were when they went from being on a reality show, *X Factor*, to being the biggest-selling artists in the world," recalls Winston. "That period of time, he was living with us in the most mundane suburban situation. No one ever found out, really. Even when we went out for a meal, it's such a sweet family neighborhood, no one dreamed it was actually him. But he made our house a home. And when he moved out, we were gutted."

Styles jauntily appears at the *Late Late* office. He's clearly a regular visitor, and he and Winston have a brotherly shorthand.

"Leaving Saturday?" asks Winston.

"Yeah, gotta buy a cactus for my friend's birthday," says Styles.

"My dad might be on your flight," says Winston.

"The 8:50? That'd be sick."

Winston continues the tales from the attic. "So we had this joke. Meri and I would like to see the girls that you would come back with to the house. That was always

LET'S GO TO THE beach," says Styles, pulling the Range Rover onto a fog-soaked Pacific Coast Highway. Last night was his tequila-fueled birthday party, filled with friends and karaoke and a surprise drop-in from Adele. He's now officially 23. "And not too hung over," he notes.

Styles finds a spot at a sushi place up the coast. As he passes through the busy dining room, a businessman turns, recognizing him with a face that says: *My kids love this guy!* I ask Styles what he hears most from the parents of young fans. "They say, 'I see your cardboard face every fucking day.'" He laughs. "I think they want me to apologize."

The subject today is relationships. While Styles says he still feels like a newcomer to all that, a handful of love affairs have deeply affected him. The images and stolen moments tumble extravagantly through the new songs: *And promises are broken like a stitch is.... I got splinters in my knuckles crawling 'cross the floor/Couldn't take you home to mother in a skirt that short/But I think that's what I like about it.... I see you gave him my old T-shirt, more of what was once mine....* That black notebook, you sense, is filled with this stuff.

"My first proper girlfriend," he remembers, "used to have one of those laughs. There was also a little bit of mystery with her because she didn't go to our school. I just worshipped the ground she walked on. And she knew, probably to a fault, a little. That was a tough one. I was 15."

"She used to live an hour and a half away on the train, and I worked in a bakery for three years. I'd finish on Saturdays at 4:30 and it was a 4:42 train, and if I missed it there wasn't one for another hour or two. So I'd finish and sprint to the train station. Spent 70 percent of my wages on train tickets. Later, I'd remember her perfume. Little things. I smell that perfume all the time. I'll be in a lift or a reception and say to someone, 'Alien, right?' And sometimes they're impressed and sometimes they're a little creeped out. 'Stop smelling me.'"

If Styles hadn't yet adapted to global social-media attention, he was tested in 2012, when he met Taylor Swift at an awards show. Their second date, a walk in Central Park, was caught by paparazzi. Suddenly the couple were global news. They broke up the next month, reportedly after a rocky Caribbean vacation; the romance was said to have ended with at least one broken heart.

The relationship is a subject he's famously avoided discussing. "I gotta pee first. This might be a long one," he says. He rises to head to the bathroom, then adds, "Actually, you can say, 'He went for a pee and *never came back*.'"

He returns a couple of minutes later. "Thought I'd let you stew for a while," he says, laughing, then takes a gulp of green juice. He was surprised, he says, when photos from Central Park rocketed around the world. "When I see photos from that day," he says, "I think: Relationships are hard, at any age. And adding in that you don't really understand exactly how it works when you're 18, trying to navigate all that stuff didn't make it easier. I mean, you're a little bit awkward to begin with. You're on a date with someone you really like. It should be that simple, right? It was a learning experience for sure. But at the heart of it - I just wanted it to be a normal date."

He's well aware that at least two of Swift's songs - "Out of the Woods" and "Style" - are considered to be about their romance. ("You've got that long hair slicked back, white T-shirt," she sang in "Style.") "I mean, I don't know if they're about me or not...." he says, attempting gallant discretion, "but the issue is, she's so good, they're bloody everywhere." He smiles. "I write from my experiences; everyone does that. I'm lucky if everything [we went through] helped create those songs. That's what hits your heart. That's the stuff that's hardest to say, and it's the stuff I

talk least about. That's the part that's about the two people. I'm never going to tell anybody everything." (Fans wondered whether "Perfect," a song Styles co-wrote for One Direction, might have been about Swift: "And if you like cameras flashing every time we go out/And if you're looking for someone to write your breakup songs about/Baby, I'm perfect.")

Was he able to tell her that he admired the songs? "Yes and no," he says after a long pause. "She doesn't need me to tell her they're great. They're great songs.... It's the most amazing unspoken dialogue ever."

Is there anything he'd want to say to Swift today? "Maybe this is where you write down that I left!" He laughs, and looks off. "I don't know," he finally says. "Certain things don't work out. There's a lot of things that can be right, and it's still wrong. In writing songs about stuff like that, I like tipping a hat to the *time together*. You're celebrating the fact it was powerful and made you feel something, rather than 'this didn't work out, and that's bad.' And if you run into that person, maybe it's awkward, maybe you have to get drunk...but you shared something. Meeting someone new, sharing those experiences, it's the best shit ever. So thank you."

He notes a more recent relationship, possibly over now, but significant for the past few years. (Styles has often been spotted with Kendall Jenner, but he won't confirm that's who he's talking about.) "She's a huge part of the album," says Styles. "Sometimes you want to tip the hat, and sometimes you just want to give them the whole cap...and hope they know it's just for them."

IN LATE FEBRUARY 2016, STYLES landed a plum part in Christopher Nolan's upcoming World War II epic, *Dunkirk*. In Nolan, Styles found a director equally interested in mystery. "The movie is so ambitious," he says. "Some of the stuff they're doing in this movie is insane. And it was hard, man, physically really tough, but I love acting. I love playing someone else. I'd sleep really well at night, then get up and continue drowning."

When Styles returned to L.A., an idea landed. The idea was: *Get out of Dodge*. Styles called his manager, Jeffrey Azoff, and explained he wanted to finish the album outside London or L.A., a place where the band could focus and coalesce. Four days after returning from the movie, they were on their way to Port Antonio on Jamaica's remote north coast. At Geejam, Styles and his entire band were able to live together, turning the studio compound into something like a Caribbean version of Big Pink. They occupied a two-story villa filled with instruments, hung out at the tree-house-like



were alone in that hotel room, because you chose to be alone?"

To wind down in Jamaica, Styles and Rowland, the guitarist, began a daily Netflix obsession with sugary romantic comedies. Houseworkers would sometimes leave at night and return the next morning to see Styles blearily removing himself from a long string of rom-coms. He declares himself an expert on Nicholas Sparks, whom he now calls "Nicky Spee." After almost two months, the band left the island with a bounty of songs and stories. Like the time Styles ended up drunk and wet from the ocean, toasting everybody, wearing a dress he'd traded with someone's girlfriend. "I don't remember the toast," he says, "but I remember the feeling."

GAME ON

Styles at a charity football match hosted by One D in London, 2014

CH R I S T M A S 2016. harry styles was parked outside his childhood home, sitting next to his father. They were listening to his album. After

Bush Bar, and had access to the gorgeous studio on-site. Many mornings began with a swim in the deserted cove just down the hill.

Life in Jamaica was 10 percent beach party and 90 percent musical expedition. It was the perfect rite of passage for a musician looking to explode the past and launch a future. The anxiety of what's next slipped away. Layers of feeling emerged that had never made it past One Direction's group songwriting sessions, often with pop craftsmen who polished the songs after Styles had left. He didn't feel stifled in One D, he says, as much as interrupted. "We were touring all the time," he recalls. "I wrote more as we went, especially on the last two albums." There are songs from that period he loves, he says, like "Olivia" and "Stockholm Syndrome," along with the earlier song "Happily." "But I think it was tough to really delve in and find out who you are as a writer when you're just kind of dipping your toe each time. We didn't get the six months to see what kind of shit you can work with. To have time to live with a song, see what you love as a fan, chip at it, hone it and go for that...it's heaven."

The more vulnerable the song, he learned, the better. "The one subject that hits the hardest is love," he says, "whether it's platonic, romantic, loving it, gaining it, losing it...it always hits you hardest. I don't think people want to hear me talk about going to bars, and how great everything is. The champagne popping...who wants to hear about it? I don't want to hear my favorite artists talk about all the amazing shit they get to do. I want to hear, 'How did you feel when you

lunch at a pub, they had driven down their old street and landed in front of the family home. Staring out at the house where Styles grew up listening to his father's copy of *The Dark Side of the Moon*, there was much to consider. It was a long way he'd traveled in those fast few years since "Isn't She Lovely." He'd previously played the new album for his mother, on a stool, in the living room, on cheap speakers. She'd cried hearing "Sign of the Times." Now he sat with his father — who liked the new song "Carolina" best — both having come full circle.

Styles is moved as he describes how he felt. We're sitting in Corden's empty office, talking over a few last subjects before he returns to England. "I think, as a parent, especially with the band stuff, it was such a roller coaster," he says. "I feel like they were always thinking, 'OK, this ride could stop at any point and we're going to have to be there when it does.' There was something about playing the album and how happy I was that told them, 'If all I get is to make this music, I'm content. If I'm never on that big ride again, I'm happy and proud of it.'"

"I always said, at the very beginning, all I wanted was to be the granddad with the best stories...and the best shelf of artifacts and bits and trinkets."

Tomorrow night he'll hop a flight back to England. Rehearsals await. Album-cover choices need to be made. He grabs his black notebook and turns back for a moment before disappearing down the hallway, into the future.

"How am I going to be mysterious," he asks, only half-joking, "when I've been this honest with you?"

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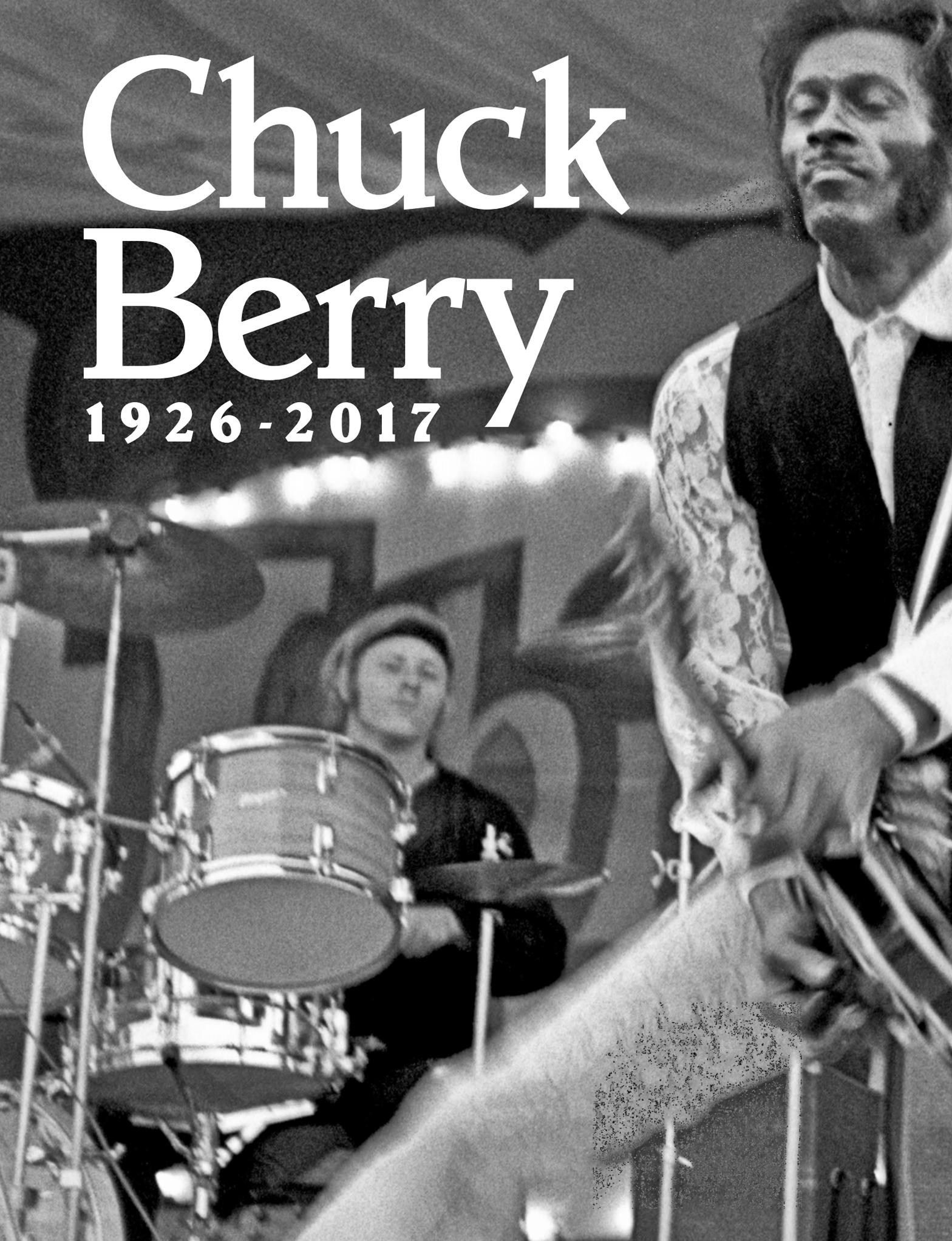
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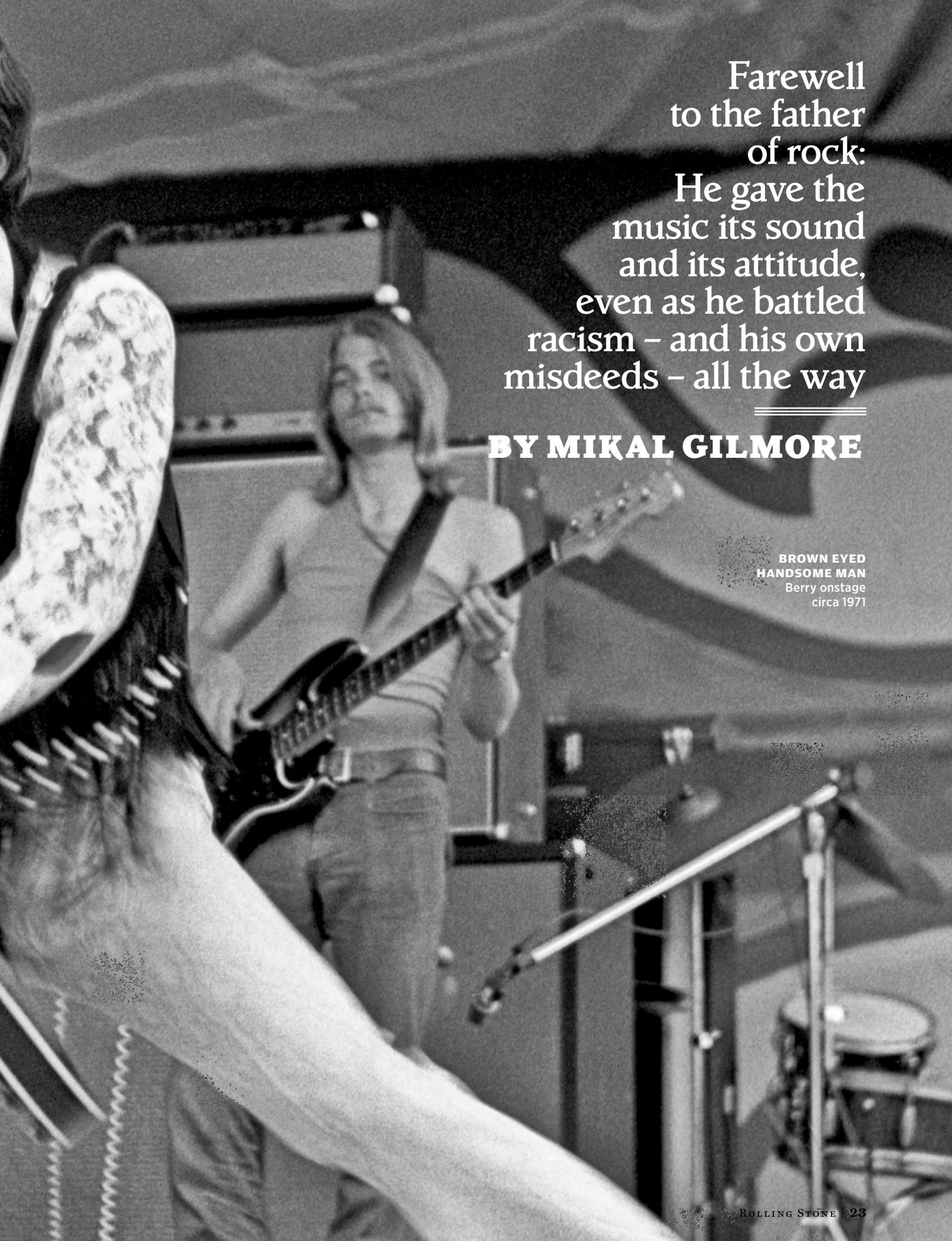
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Chuck Berry

1926-2017

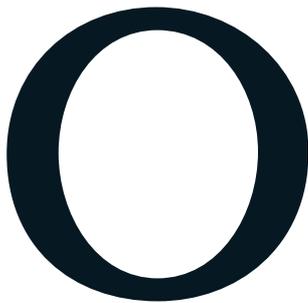




Farewell
to the father
of rock:
He gave the
music its sound
and its attitude,
even as he battled
racism – and his own
misdeeds – all the way

BY MIKAL GILMORE

**BROWN EYED
HANDSOME MAN**
Berry onstage
circa 1971



ONE NIGHT IN 1955, CHUCK BERRY PLAYED A SHOW in Mobile, Alabama. His revved-up and revolutionary first hit, “Maybellene” – a joyful story that romped through cars, sex and class – had recently taken Berry from a St. Louis nightclub act to a national star unlike any other. He was tall, limber, smart, sly, incredibly inventive, and animated onstage in ways that helped flex his musicianship rather than detract from it. Plus, he was handsome and black. These were the early days of rock & roll. What the music seemed to stand for – a youthful refusal to defer to adult authority, a preference for turbulent sounds made from outsider forms like blues, boogie and hillbilly, and a willingness among young whites and blacks to listen to and adopt one another’s music, to gather and dance to it – signaled social change that both anticipated and corresponded to the emerging civil-rights struggle.

Berry’s charisma and sexiness, his lyrical and musical brilliance and his early edge in the game (Elvis Presley had not yet ascended) made him a natural point man for this change. His blackness, however, made him a natural threat to some, even black critics who decried rock & roll as a movement that debased the race. Berry didn’t present himself as a subversive, but he didn’t need to. The young, both black and white, thrilled to him every time he took a stage. Berry knew there was both risk and opportunity in this. “I’d been hearing of this sort of racial problem for years from my father,” he wrote in his autobiography, “except his stories were more severe.”

At the Mobile show, Berry was worried. Ropes ran down the audience floor, separating blacks from whites. Could he truly play music that appealed across this division? Would one audience resent him more than the other? “I skipped onstage,” he wrote, “and belted out my song ‘Maybellene.’ I put everything I had into it: a hillbilly stomp, the chicken peck, and even ad-libbed some Southern country dialect. Contrary to what I expected, I received far greater applause from the white side of the ropes. . . . Determined to retaliate, I bowed longer to the bored black side than I lingered on the left, let my fingers crawl into the introduction, and poured out the pleading guitar passage of ‘Wee Wee Hours’ . . . I began hearing ‘uhhms’ and ‘awws’ as I approached the kissing climax and how beautifully the black side

began to moan. I knew I was getting next to them. It was just like we were all then boarding da’ ol’ ribba-boat about to float into a land of flawless freedom.”

That night, Berry reached across the great American divide. “The palms of black and white,” he later wrote, “were burning as the producer signaled me to exit. . . .” Outside the Mobile theater, though, Berry found himself facing the bigger and scarier enduring reality of the historical breach he’d walked into: “It seemed the whole police force had surrounded our bus.” Were the police there to protect the musicians, or to keep them from mixing with the excited audience members who had also gathered? “The isolation ignited ill feelings in the fans as well as the artists,” wrote Berry. “I watched the officers taking the abuse and I thought, do in Rome as the Romans do. Fears that the police would reciprocate led me to board the bus.”

That was Chuck Berry’s ideal: He wanted both sides of the ropes, wanted to achieve a freedom that had not come easily to others. He tried this in his music, and in both his public and private life – that is, he attempted to navigate the dividing lines, even the ones inside himself. Sometimes his efforts were immodest and disastrous. Berry was a complex man: ebullient, guarded, embittered and licentiously flawed. Even some who most admired him – who would have been nowhere without his influence – didn’t much like him. Keith Richards once said, “I couldn’t warm to him even if I was cremated next to him.” But Richards and others couldn’t deny Berry’s importance as the most innovative guitarist and lyricist in rock & roll history. Leonard Cohen once said, “All of us are footnotes

to the words of Chuck Berry.” Bob Dylan named him “the Shakespeare of rock & roll.”

The literary corollaries here are appropriate, because Berry himself was a literary figure, as a writer, as a character and as an idea. Though he took much from the music of T-Bone Walker, Louis Jordan, Hank Williams and Charlie Christian, among others, his true antecedents might be found in the work of poet Paul Laurence Dunbar and author Ralph Ellison. Dunbar was a late-19th-century black poet whose most famous work was “We Wear the Mask,” about how blacks

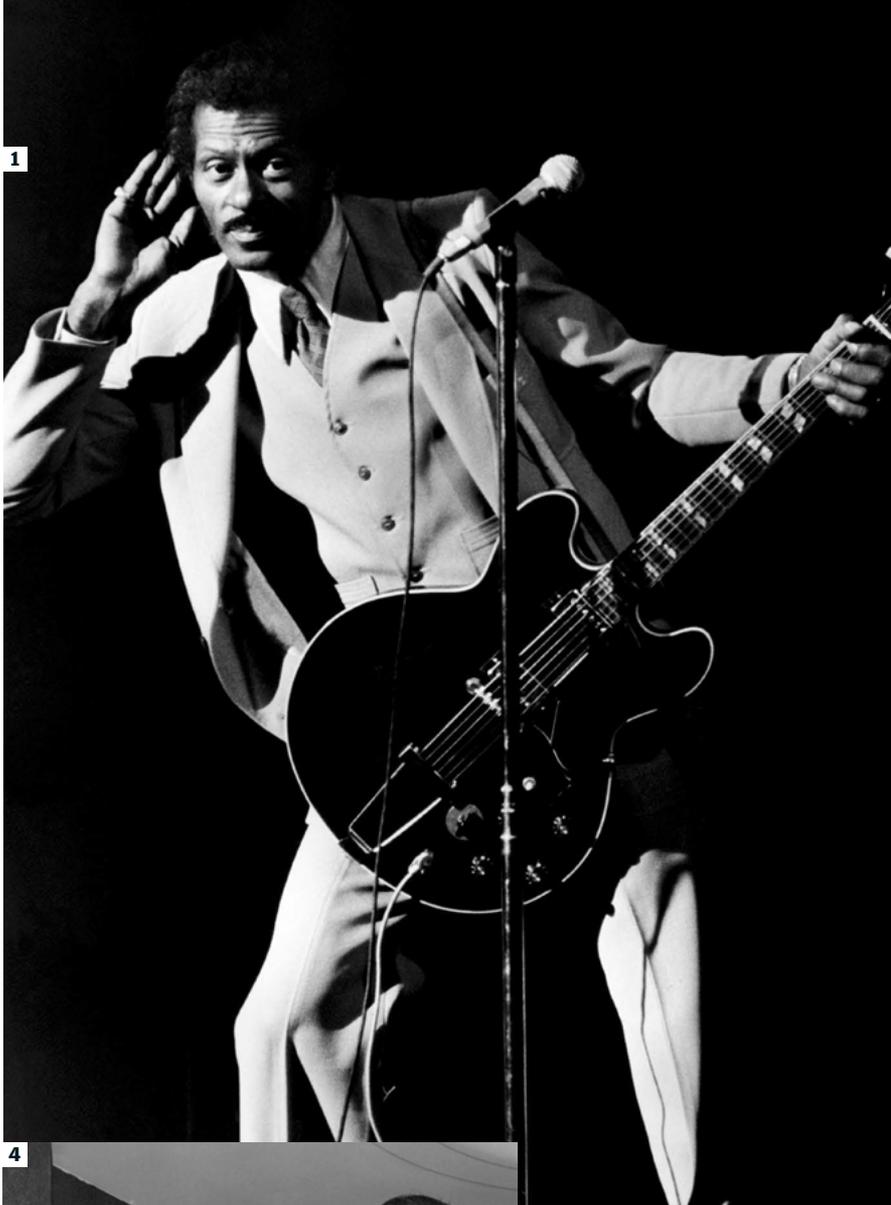
had to hide their true selves and realities from the rest of America. Ellison’s nameless hero in 1952’s *Invisible Man* had to navigate between racism and radicalism and his own needs in covert ways. Both Dunbar and Ellison were important and praised, but they were also rebuked by some other black artists who thought they catered too much to white ideals of culture and behavior.

It could be said that Berry wore the mask, though he did it in trickier ways. When that mask really dropped, at the end of the 1950s, he lost just about everything. Yet such was Berry’s importance that if not for him, the Beatles, Dylan, the Rolling Stones and countless others wouldn’t have had a model or map. This magazine wouldn’t be here without him. If ever there was an American who deserved the Nobel Prize in Literature, it was Chuck Berry. If ever there was an American who did not, it was Chuck Berry. If ever there was an American, it was Chuck Berry.

BERRY TRACED HIS FOREBEARS back to pre-Civil War days, at the Wolfolk plantation in southernmost Kentucky. The wife of Master Wolfolk, Berry wrote, inherited the plantation upon the death of her husband in 1839. She didn’t push the slaves, in comparison to other owners, and was lenient to her favorites. Berry, in fact, believed the woman had an affair with a house servant and gave birth to an illegitimate “mixed-blooded female child,” Cellie. Cellie served Mrs. Wolfolk alone. John Johnson, a young slave from the nearby Johnson House plantation, was attracted to the light-skinned Cellie and worked at

Contributing editor MIKAL GILMORE wrote about Leonard Cohen in December.

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You Can't Catch Me

- (1) Berry at a concert in Norrköping, Sweden in 1990. (2) Posing with his poster, circa 1990.
- (3) With his daughter Ingrid in 1991.
- (4) Berry carries model/child actor Brooke Shields at the Disco Awards in 1979.

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PREVIOUS SPREAD: RIC CARTER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; THIS PAGE: ROGER TILLBERG/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (1);
 GUY LAWRENCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (2); GUY LAWRENCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (3);
 SHAYE EUTLER/GETTY IMAGES (4)



both plantations to be close to her. Master Johnson, like Wolfolk, was what Berry called a “good master.” One day, he came home and told John that President Lincoln was likely to enact laws that would put an end to slavery. In a short time, the young slave and Cellie would be free. The couple moved to Ohio and married. They returned to Kentucky, but later fled to Missouri after drunken white men tried to rape Cellie. Living in a one-room cabin, they raised four children. The youngest,

Lucinda, was the mother of Chuck Berry’s father, Henry William Berry, born in 1895. Before he was even born, the rock & roll singer’s history had already moved between complex worlds of white violence and white benevolence, between black bondage and black hope.

In 1919, Henry William Berry was living in St. Louis when he married Martha Bell Banks. “My childhood was not so good,” the singer once said in an uncharacteristically candid moment. “My parents were

getting divorced.” That divorce never materialized, but the couple certainly had different ambitions for their family. Martha had studied to become a schoolteacher, but Henry effectively discouraged her from pursuing the profession by having a large family. Charles Edward Anderson Berry, the fourth of six siblings, was born October 18th, 1926. By then, Henry was working as a carpenter, as he would for the rest of his life. The family sang at the Antioch Baptist Church, and at home they heard



THE SHOWMAN
Berry's performance in a still
from the 1978 biopic
'Americamn Hot Wax'

country music on the radio, Gene Autry and Bill Monroe.

Berry's parents settled the family into the area known as the Ville, where working-class blacks lived alongside black elites, including owners of St. Louis' black newspapers, lawyers and doctors, heads of the NAACP. Yet St. Louis had long been a place of racial resentment and limitations. The first time Berry saw white people, as a child, he said, was when a fire brigade arrived in response to a burning building in

his neighborhood. Berry also long remembered the day he and his family were refused tickets to see 1935's *A Tale of Two Cities* because they were black.

Berry's parents shared two visions for their children. They wanted them to be literate – to be aware of poetry, classical music and proper diction. The poetry and diction became important to Berry. He later said that he had not been a good reader but had developed a natural flair for poesy – for how to construct lyrics – and his insistence on proper diction remained obsessive throughout his life. In part, this stemmed from a concern that many middle-class blacks shared: Proper enunciation worked against a stereotype that blacks were uneducated. In conversation, his locution was intentionally – even a bit haughtily – proper. In his songs, he would always sing clearly, but his voice was also true to the story – whether yearning, sly, sexy, blue, angry or euphoric.

The other thing the Berrys wanted for their children was religious propriety – perhaps not full-out piety, but Christian moral decency. The notion didn't appeal to Berry at all. He later said he felt church was a place he was always “dragged in.” He loved his parents, feared his father's discipline, but later, he wrote, “I began to wiggle from under what few restrictions Mother and Daddy had at home.” A nurse – a white woman – would sometimes visit when a family member was ill, and she scolded the young Charles when he would explore her medical bag. He worked to please her, to get a kiss from her. “The feeling of her lips,” he wrote in his autobiography, “the same lips that forgave me after once punishing, has yet to leave my memory. . . . My mother's nurse had a profound effect on the state of my fantasies and settled into the nature of my libido.”

To keep his son occupied, Henry would bring him along on carpentry jobs. Henry did repair work for a realty company, and the company's contracts often took him – as well as Charles and his brother Henry Jr., who worked for their father – to “the white neighborhoods.” Berry noted his father paid deference to white females, avoiding any glances or conversations that might be misinterpreted as an advance or insult. He once told Charles, “Black men have often dreamed their last dream where they thought they had a right to be.”

It was around this time that Berry's interest in music intensified. All his siblings listened to blues and R&B singers Lil Green, Buddy and Ella Johnson, to the jazz orchestra recordings of Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Count Basie, Henry James, Glenn Miller and Glen Gray. Berry developed a special liking for boogie-woogie, swing and jump

blues. Among his favorites at the time were pianist Big Maceo Merriweather, gospel singer and guitarist Rosetta Tharpe, blues player Arthur Crudup, bottleneck innovator Tampa Red, soft-toned and slow-paced pianist and blues vocalist Charles Brown, pianist and balladeer Nat King Cole, jump-blues bandleader Louis Jordan, and guitarists T-Bone Walker and Lonnie Johnson. The latter two – along with Jordan's guitarist Carl Hogan – had great impact on Berry's own later style, sometimes right down to the riff. (John Collis, in *Chuck Berry: The Biography*, cites Johnson's “left-hand playing [as] the unacknowledged root of the Chuck Berry sound.”) All of the music shared a corresponding backbone: the tonality, experience and melodic patterns of blues music, as it had been developed in different places, over decades, by black musicians and singers. Whether mournful, defiant, seductive or celebratory, blues was the American musical language of fortitude. For many who sang and played it, it was a lifting of the mask.

In 1941, Berry ventured to perform “Confessin' the Blues,” a hit by Jay McShann, at his high school revue. A friend, Tommy Stevens, accompanied Berry on guitar, and his driving effect inspired Berry. He borrowed a friend's four-string and practiced for hours, learning to match his voice with the instrument's mix of rhythm and harmonic construction.

He also went looking for a bit of trouble. Berry drank a half pint of whiskey one night, and though it didn't make him drunk, it did make him sick and he swore off alcohol for the rest of his life. By the summer of 1944, he had effectively dropped out of high school. He and two friends, Skip and James, piled into the 1937 Oldsmobile that Berry now owned and headed for California.

By the time the three reached Kansas City, their tires wore out. It was cold sleeping in the car, and they missed home, but had only two dollars between them. Skip told them he'd raise some money, and to wait for him in the car. In “less than half a minute,” Berry said, Skip came running back with money he'd robbed from a bakery. It was so simple, the three thought. Why not keep doing it? They would commit two more robberies and a carjacking, with Berry brandishing the remains of a useless pistol he'd found in a used-car lot, before state troopers grabbed them just outside Kingdom City, Missouri.

They spent five days in county jail before Berry was allowed to call his father. Berry told the authorities everything. Henry paid for his son's defense, as well as that of Skip and James. Twenty-two days later, their lawyer advised all three to plead guilty and

throw themselves on the judge's mercy. But these were young black men who had been terribly foolish. The trial lasted 21 minutes, and the judge sentenced each adolescent to 10 years, the maximum allowed. Berry ended up in Algoa, near the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City.

In Algoa, Berry made friends with a prison ringleader, and that helped keep him safe. Black and white inmates were housed in separate dormitories, governed respectively by black and white guards. It was compulsory to call the white guards sir, and black inmates received greater punishments for infractions than whites, and fewer privileges. One white guard, "from the lynching city of Sikeston, Missouri," scared even Berry's ringleader. Berry later wrote of the guard: "I could feel the noose around my neck that it seemed he so hungered for in his gazing gray eyes. He couldn't have loved me much less, but then

him in his new car, and though he couldn't take any into his room at his parents' house (where he again lived), he could take them into the back seat.

At the 1948 May Day festival in Tandy Park, he spotted Themetta Suggs licking an ice cream cone. He was immediately attracted. He spent all his spare money on her that day and, come evening, drove her around in his Roadmaster. He called her by the endearment Toddy. By this time, he had also acquired his own nickname: Chuck. He was taken by her kindness as much as her beauty.

They were married on October 28th, 1948, and lived for a time in the waiting room of his sister's beauty shop. Berry wrote that, early in the marriage, every night was a time of new sexual activities; he was able to indulge fantasies and fetishes with her. Chuck and Themetta's marriage has often appeared strange to some.

tually termed rhythm & blues. In the early 1950s, St. Louis was rife with music that moved around or into that style, though boundaries weren't clear-cut. Sounds became punchier, crooning turned much sexier, and both worked well in smaller dim-lit clubs where bands played for dancers and lovers.

In June 1952, Berry's old friend Tommy Stevens invited him to play with his trio on Saturday nights. Berry introduced a country style into their sets, singing songs like "She'll Be Coming Round the Mountain" and "Mountain Dew." He developed an animated style of performing – using his long frame and spirited facial expressions as an extension of the music. The shows drew big crowds – black patrons were curious about the guy who sang hillbilly songs. The day before New Year's Eve 1952, boogie pianist Johnnie Johnson called Berry and invited him to play with him and Ebby Hardy in a

“HE COULD NOT HAVE LOVED ME MUCH LESS,” Berry wrote of one white guard he encountered at Algoa prison. “But then I couldn't have hated him a little more.”

I couldn't have hated him a little more.”

Berry organized a singing quartet for church services (Berry sang bass) and took up boxing, traveling to St. Louis for a Golden Gloves tournament. He won a medal for being the heavyweight-novice runner-up from Algoa – but in the championship bout, he got knocked out by a bigger man, leading him to quit the ring. Back at Algoa, though, he did something even more dangerous: He danced with an assistant superintendent's wife, a white woman who showed Berry kindness and attention. When 30 white inmates noticed, they turned into a mob and rushed for Berry. He escaped through a hall, but he and the woman had to avoid each other after the incident. She sent him a verse: "I can never have you, darling/But I'll go on loving you."

A model inmate, Berry was paroled three years into his sentence, on October 18th, 1947 – his 21st birthday. He returned home to St. Louis and resolved to do better, to find work and romance. He started by doing carpentry with his father and made a down payment on a 1941 Buick Roadmaster. Berry was an automobile man – cars were central to the mythos he made (and that he installed permanently in rock & roll), and they represented freedom, luxury, standing in the world, as well as the allure of sex. Young women noticed

Though he was candid about it at points in his autobiography, he was also fiercely protective and private at other times. Berry, in fact, strayed from fidelity maybe countless times, and more than once, it led to the biggest troubles and humiliations of his life.

The encounters and affairs started early. Because Themetta worked some hours daily that Berry did not, the time apart left him free to ramble the neighborhood, where one woman caught his eye. "My regret started before the incident was even over," he wrote. He admitted it, in shame, to Themetta that same night. "I was overtaken," he would write, "with intentions to thenceforth live the full life of loyalty that her love deserved." It was not a promise he would keep.

Berry worked for a time as a janitor and later studied to become a hairdresser. But he also learned that playing guitar and singing alone at clubs and parties would make him \$4 a night. By the time Berry first played St. Louis clubs, big bands had largely faded, due in part to the expense of taking them on the road. Also, smaller ensembles could accomplish the same volume and effect with electric instrumentation. As they did, swing, blues and jump melded with other sounds, dance styles and audiences, resulting in what was even-

trio at East St. Louis' Cosmopolitan Club; Johnson's saxophonist had fallen through, and he needed a leading melodic instrument. He got more than that: He got Berry's big personality, his swagger, his desire to sing Nat King Cole songs, country songs and blues that could drive hard one moment, then turn rivetingly elegiac. Not long after, the trio were renamed for Berry, but he and Johnson would retain a crucial musical telepathy, a call-and-response style, trading lines, prodding or finishing each other's musical thoughts.

Berry knew he wanted to make records. In May 1955, he drove to Chicago with a friend. They visited blues joints, saw Howlin' Wolf and Elmore James, and ended the evening watching Muddy Waters at the Palladium. After the show, he asked Waters who he should see about making records. "Why don't you go see Leonard Chess over on 47th?" Waters replied. Chess and his brother Phil were Jewish immigrants from Poland and had made Chess into America's greatest blues label, with artists like Waters and Wolf, among others. The next morning, Berry approached Leonard as he was entering the studio building. Chess was impressed with his enthusiasm but told him he needed to hear some new music. Berry went back to St. Louis and tossed off four songs – including a nocturnal blues,



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“Wee Wee Hours,” and a revved-up rock & roll-style song with country overtones, “Ida May” (sometimes known as “Ida Red”). “Ida May” had been Berry’s most popular number at the Cosmopolitan Club. Writer Glenn C. Altschuler, in *All Shook Up: How Rock ‘n’ Roll Changed America*, believes it began as an improvised take on the country song “Ida Red,” recorded by Roy Acuff in 1939. There had also been a jazzy version by blues singer Bumble Bee Slim in 1952. *Brown Eyed Handsome Man* author Bruce Pegg wrote that Berry’s rendering may have been influenced by a 1949 recording by Bob Wills, “Ida Red Likes to Boogie,” which highlighted the sort of double-stopped guitar bends Berry learned from the music of T-Bone Walker.

Hail! Hai!

- (1) Onstage with Bruce Springsteen at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, 1995.
 (2) With Etta James in 1987.
 (3) Jamming onstage with John Lennon (left) and Yoko Ono (right) at ‘The Mike Douglas Show’ in 1972

Whatever the case, Berry returned to Chess a week later with a demo of his four new songs. In “Ida May,” Chess immediately heard a hit – an unusual piece of writing in all respects. It was a funny but complicated narrative about a man racing a woman in her Coupe Deville Cadillac with his V8 Ford. It’s also a tale about

class and maybe race: a dark horse trying to push past a symbol of privilege and haughtiness. Plus, it’s an allegory about the rhythms of dynamic sex.

The music, though, was a story all its own, opening with guitar clusters that sounded like the car’s honking horn, propelled by pushy and insistent drumming that was rock-steady yet anticipatory, launching Berry into a frenzied and slurry guitar solo that fused the economy of Carl Hogan with the feverishness of T-Bone Walker and the imagination of Lonnie Johnson. It would become the most famous and influential guitar break in history. It not only set a standard for all of Berry’s subsequent signature playing, but was also an inescapable template of form

MICHAEL BRITO/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (1); PICTORIAL PRESS LTD/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (2); ZUMA PRESS, INC./ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (3)

and style for artists that followed, from the Rolling Stones through Prince.

Chess knew straightaway it was unlike anything else on radio. But he thought the title – whether “Ida Red” or “Ida May” – sounded too rural. According to legend, either Berry or Chess spotted a mascara tube that had been left in the studio and changed “Ida May” to “Maybelline,” then finally to “Maybellene,” to avoid copyright troubles. The song’s relentless rhythm drove it to Number One on the rhythm & blues charts, and in September 1955 it reached Number Five on the pop charts.

In the days after Berry’s death, many writers and reports cited him as the man who invented rock & roll. The term had been around for several years, and many artists – including Fats Domino and Bill Haley – had already made music under its umbrella. In rock & roll, young listeners heard a sound made for them. It also inflamed cultural

groundwork for Dylan’s breakthroughs in “Maggie’s Farm” and “Subterranean Homesick Blues” – yet the genius of Berry’s lyrics hid in plain sight. “When I first heard Chuck Berry,” said Dylan in 2015, “I didn’t consider that he was black. I thought he was a white hillbilly. Little did I know he was a great poet too. ‘Flying across the desert in a TWA/I saw a woman walking ‘cross the sand/She been walkin’ 30 miles en route to Bombay/To meet a brown-eyed handsome man.’ I didn’t think about poetry at that time – those words just flew by. Only later did I realize how hard it is to write those kind of lyrics.”

‘MAYBELLENE” MADE CHUCK Berry a star, but he recognized that there were limits, and he always intended to work around them. He was a black man blazing a course in a white world, and it

Berry never wrote overtly about race in his songs, though he sometimes coded the subject cleverly. With 1956’s “Brown Eyed Handsome Man,” in some of his most outrageous and bold lyrics, he sang about the victorious allure of a black man for white women (“There’s been a whole lot of good women shed a tear/For a brown-eyed handsome man”), and ended the song with a celebration of baseball’s Jackie Robinson – who broke the game’s color barrier – hitting a home run. In 1958’s “Johnny B. Goode,” Berry essentially wrote a version of his own proud autobiography: A young black man dreamed of becoming a guitar hero with his “name in lights.” The original lyric ran, “Oh, my, but that little colored boy could play,” but, Berry said, “I thought it would seem biased to white fans to say ‘colored boy’ and changed it to ‘country boy.’”

Some listeners – especially black listeners – didn’t always know how

“I THOUGHT IT WOULD SEEM BIASED to white fans to say ‘colored boy,’” Berry would say of 1958’s “Johnny B. Goode.” “So I changed it to ‘country boy.’”

watchdogs who saw the music as incitement to crime and riots, and, more fearfully, as a gateway to race-mixing.

Berry tapped into rock’s sense of rebellion, but slyly. His songs were celebrations of youth’s new sovereignty; they were also demarcations. His lyrics didn’t flash switchblade imagery – rather, they drew lines by issuing rally cries: “Early in the mornin’ I’m a-givin’ you a warnin’/Don’t you step on my blue suede shoes/Hey diddle diddle, I’m a-playin’ my fiddle/Ain’t got nothin’ to lose/Roll over, Beethoven, tell Tchaikovsky the news.” Berry recognized other changes in youth culture (which had never been called a culture before). He wrote about cars as symbols of freedom and acquisition; they afforded autonomy and a private place to listen to the new music while also looking for, and making, love. Teenagers had more money, license, leeway, and that metamorphosed into political capital. An age of deference was ending. The moment was epitomized by that V8 Ford motorvatin’ over the hill in “Maybellene.” “Cadillacs don’t like Fords rolling side by side,” said Berry, “because they hide half their beauty.”

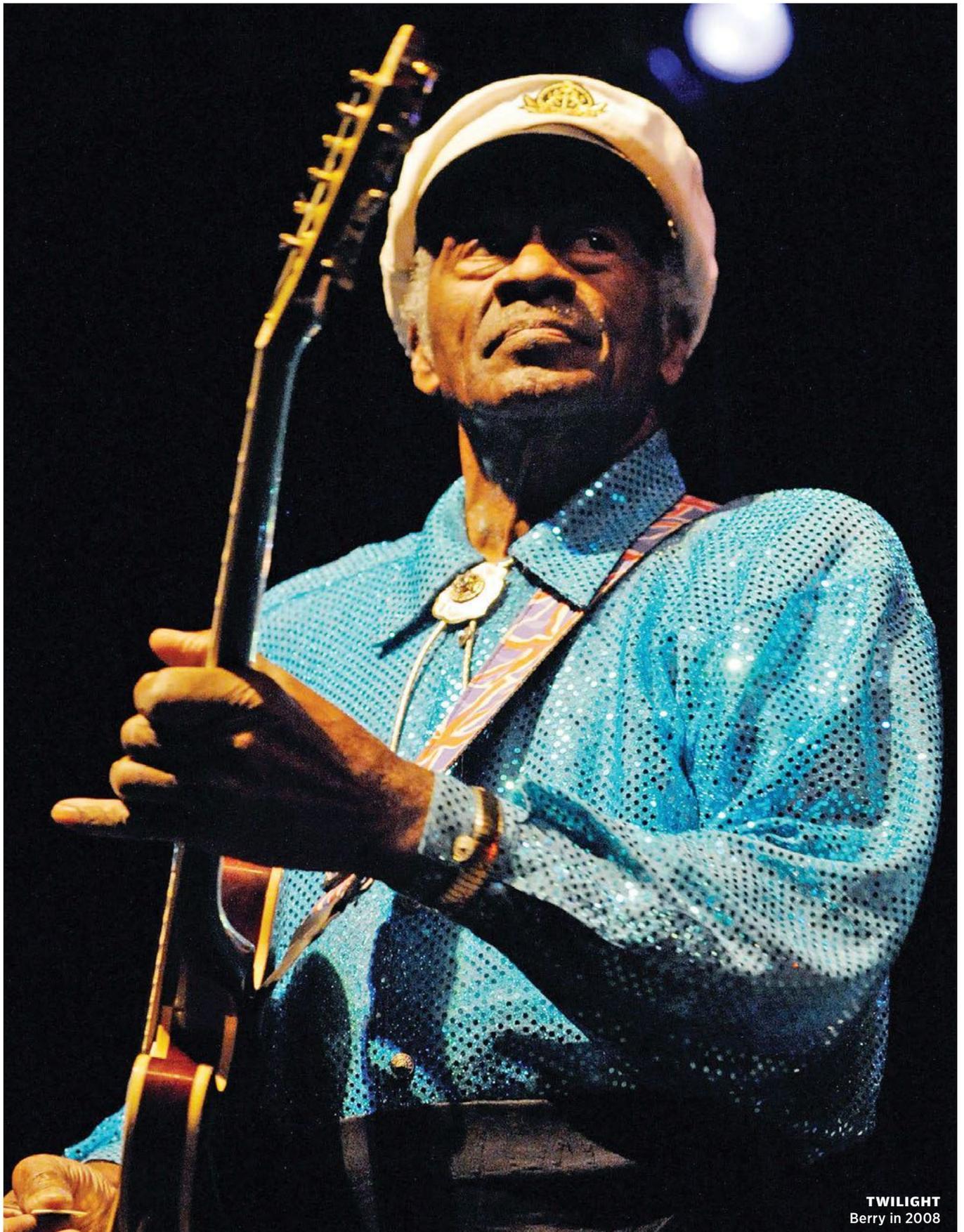
More important was how Berry said these things, the language he used. It was poetic, vivid, sometimes hilarious and sexy, but also implicitly threatening – and utterly original. His imagination and flair set the

wasn’t easy. Right out of the gate, before the song was even pressed as a single, he lost two-thirds of the songwriting credit to people who had nothing to do with its composition (though one of the people who appropriated credit, Alan Freed, also did a great deal to make the song a hit). He also found himself in a contract with Chess Records that he didn’t fully understand or trust. He said of Leonard and Phil Chess, “They weren’t honest, but they were very helpful in my career. They gave me the first chance. That’s a beauty. To rob somebody or to not give somebody what belongs to them is not honest. So they’re both, you know. But they were good to me and cool.”

Race, of course, was always the mitigating factor. In his autobiography, Berry recalled one incident early in his career when he showed up at a Knoxville, Tennessee, club where he had been booked to perform. The club’s manager was shocked to see him. “Maybellene” had melded its black and white identity so well that in some markets listeners assumed the singer was Caucasian. “It’s a country dance,” the manager told Berry, “and we had no idea ‘Maybellene’ was recorded by a nigger man.” He told Berry he couldn’t permit a black person to perform, as it was against a city ordinance. Berry left, then came back at showtime and listened to another band play his music.

to place or regard Berry. Critic Gerald Early, writing days after Berry’s death, commented, “Berry is, like, say, Jimi Hendrix, a curious artist in that I can never recall him being as beloved by blacks as he was by whites, cannot recall blacks finding his music essential to their understanding of black music. Berry’s was a kind of assimilationist music that the Ville, in the diversity of its blackness, inspired: a new way of seeing blackness as universal in its sources.” In real life, Berry wasn’t always so veiled on where he stood on the matter. He told a reporter, “You’re trying to say, ‘Is Chuck Berry black or white?’ Well, I’ll tell you, Chuck Berry is black, and he’s beautiful.”

In late August 1959, while playing an Army barracks in Meridian, Mississippi, Berry let a young woman hug and kiss him a moment too long onstage, and it brought everything to an immediate halt. Young white men, who’d been thrilled to meet him before the show, surrounded Berry after the show. “I’m a Mississippian,” one man told another who was trying to protect Berry, “and this nigger asked my sister for a date!” A policeman had to rescue Berry; then, at the station, a sergeant relieved Berry of \$700 he found on him, to “cover the fine for peace disturbance I was being charged for.”



TWILIGHT
Berry in 2008

RONALD WITTEK/OPA PICTURE ALLIANCE/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

But Berry wouldn't accept proscriptions about race and sex. Two months before the Meridian incident, on the night of June 2nd, 1958, he was driving a peach-colored Cadillac in St. Charles, Missouri, with a 17-year-old brunette, Joan Mathis, when he got a flat tire. As he was changing it, a state patrol officer pulled up, and after checking Berry's license, searched the car. He found \$1,900 in cash and a revolver that Berry brought along when he carried large amounts of money. Berry was arrested for the possession of a concealed weapon, and the police encouraged Mathis to make a statement that Berry had molested her. Berry believed that local authorities wanted to charge him with violation of the Mann Act – a 1910 law claiming to combat forced prostitution and “debauchery.” The law was seldom enforced, but it had been used to prosecute boxer Jack Johnson in 1913, and was now being used against Berry. Mathis, though, insisted that Berry had not molested her. On June 20th, he received minor fines, and the matter seemed abandoned.

But Berry eventually ran out of luck and demonstrated an appalling moral lacuna. On the afternoon of December 1st, 1959, during a visit to El Paso, Texas, he took his band to Juarez, Mexico, to visit strip joints. That evening, while he and the musicians were sitting in a cantina, Berry met a young woman, Janice Escalanti. He was attracted to her quietness and olive skin (he mistook her as black, but she was in fact Apache). He later claimed he believed he could employ her at his new venture, Club Bandstand, an interracial music spot he had opened in St. Louis. Berry took Escalanti back to the United States with him, and everything went to hell for a long, long time after that.

Escalanti was a runaway and a prostitute, which Berry claimed not to know. She was also 14, though Berry said he thought she was of age. In Denver, she slept nude with him in a hotel bed; Berry said he never had sex with her, though she claimed they had sex in four states. Back in St. Louis, he tried to launch Escalanti as an “Apache hostess,” but, by Berry's account, the young woman was never much interested in the work. She didn't show up at the job when he was out of town. He fired Escalanti, gave her money for a ticket home and left her at a bus station. But Escalanti didn't want to leave. She tried to return to the club, but Berry wouldn't accept her back. Finally, desperate, she went to the police. Detectives believed that Berry had carried the young woman across state lines for sexual purposes – a violation of the Mann Act – and arrested him on December 21st. The news went nationwide.

Berry went through three trials before the matter was settled. Much to his sur-

prise, he was convicted in the first trial and cried at sentencing. The judge told him to stand up. “I've seen your kind before,” the judge said. He handed down the maximum five-year sentence but said it wasn't enough for what Berry had done. He also imposed a \$5,000 fine and wouldn't allow bail. “I would not turn this man loose to go out and prey on a lot of ignorant Indian girls and colored girls, and white girls, if any. I would not have that on my soul,” the judge said, adding, “I've never sentenced a more vicious character.” The appeals court overturned the verdict – the judge had used the word “nigra” so constantly during proceedings that his judgment was seen as racially incendiary – and ordered a new court case. Then, on May 31st, 1960, Berry stood trial for another Mann Act accusation – this one involving Mathis, who never concurred with the prosecutor's charges. When the prosecutor asked if Mathis – who was then married – was in love with Berry, she replied, “Well, yes, I am.” By August, Berry was acquitted of all charges.

But Berry still faced retrial in the Escalanti case. “Remember,” the prosecutor said in his summation, “this is Charles Berry, Chuck Berry, an entertainer. His music and entertainment is directed to who? The teenagers of the country.” Berry was again found guilty, and sentenced to three years and a \$5,000 fine.

Berry never admitted to any sexual impropriety with Escalanti, and years later he would grow cold or angry when interviewers brought it up. He would sometimes go so far as to deny he'd done any jail time on the matter – but he did: He served one and a half years in federal prison. He believed he'd been targeted by the press and by Missouri powers that weren't happy with his interracial Club Bandstand in St. Louis. In early 1960, Berry closed the club, then in August the same year, opened a larger facility, Berry Park, to the public. Spread over 30 acres, conceived as a country club – with an amusement park, concert area and guitar-shaped pool – and located 40 miles northwest of St. Louis (out of reach of the bias and hostility the club had received), it was an expansion of Berry's vision of an integrated site. Berry Park thrived for years before closing in the mid-1970s. Years later, Berry sometimes lived there; it was his private refuge, and it's where he died.

Some obituaries said that after prison Berry never regained the remarkable momentum and creativity he had enjoyed in the 1950s. In truth, Berry certainly had a second life – if anything, more complicated than the first, though at moments at least as rich. In 1964 alone, he released four of the best songs he ever wrote: “Nadine (Is It You?)” (every bit as nimble musically and lyrically as “Maybellene”); “No

Particular Place to Go” (the title could have been taken as a summary of where Berry now found himself in life, plus it was a tale of thwarted sexual desire); “You Never Can Tell”; and “Promised Land.” The last title is maybe Berry's most paradoxical song. Written while in prison, it's a tour of America and a man's determination to seek a place and covenant in it. The singer is in flight in the lyrics, both running from trouble and to refuge: “Somebody help me get out of Louisiana/Just help me get to Houston town/There are people there who care a little 'bout me/And they won't let the poor boy down.” It is not a bitter song, especially coming from a man who believed the U.S. justice system had just railroaded him. It was full of fear, to be sure, but also brimming with strength.

After Berry left prison, he enjoyed unexpected recognition that restored his musical reputation. The Beach Boys scored a Number Three hit with “Surfin' U.S.A.,” so musically similar to Berry's “Sweet Little Sixteen” that Brian Wilson later gave Berry co-writing credit and royalties. Berry also enjoyed godsend from England: The Beatles recorded “Roll Over Beethoven” in 1963 and “Rock and Roll Music” in 1964 (“If you tried to give rock & roll another name, you might call it ‘Chuck Berry,’” John Lennon later said), and the Rolling Stones recorded several of his songs, including “Carol” and a terrific rendition of the song that Berry had failed to chart in 1961, “Come On.”

Berry's mid-1960s respite, though, was short-lived. He would score one more big hit, “My Ding-a-Ling,” in 1972. The single, a call-and-response song about masturbation, proved an anomaly: It was the biggest smash of Berry's career – Number One in the U.S. and U.K. – yet it wasn't like anything else he'd recorded: Both the melody and lyrics were juvenile, but Berry regarded it as one of his best songs because it made him newly rich.

He left Chess for Mercury in 1966, bounced back to Chess in 1970 with *Back Home*, then to Atco for 1979's *Rock It*. None of the music along the way, except “My Ding-a-Ling,” was a commercial success, but much of it was good nonetheless, especially *Back Home*, *San Francisco Dues* (1971) and *Bio* (1973); Berry's lyrical style stayed sharply poetic and original – “Tulane” (from *Back Home*), in particular, was as unexpected, dexterous and heartening as his best 1950s work, and there were gems, strewn and forgotten.

After prison, Berry seemed resentful. “Never saw a man so changed,” said guitarist Carl Perkins, talking about a 1964 tour of England he had shared with Berry. “He had been an easygoing guy before. In England, he was cold, real distant and bit-

ter. It wasn't just jail. It was those years of one-nighters; grinding it out like that can kill a man. But I figure it was mostly jail."

Berry would now grant few interviews. He had long before fired his trio members, Johnson and Hardy. They were heavy drinkers, and Berry didn't like alcohol users, plus he found it much cheaper to tour without the expense of a band. He insisted in his contracts that booking agents or tour managers provide him with a backing band at the venue, though he would never rehearse with – and barely spoke to – the other musicians. In the early 1970s, Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band were one of his backing groups. "It was five minutes before the show was timed to start," Springsteen later said. "The back door opened, and in he came. And he was by himself. And he's got a guitar case. And that was it. I guess he pulled up in his own car." Nervous, Springsteen asked, "Well,

Richards planned the shows for months, but one day, according to biographer Bruce Pegg, Berry's mood seemed to turn abruptly and he stormed off the rehearsal set at Berry Park, leaving people looking at pianist Johnson in dismay. "Hey," Johnson said, "you all know Chuck as good as I do; I've just known him longer." The bad temperament carried over to the first of two concerts at the Fox. Berry again got furious, at a sound adjustment, and yelled, "These are my songs! These are Chuck Berry songs! I'm Chuck Berry, we're going to do it my way!" One of the crew told Pegg, "At that point, all six weeks of rehearsal goes right out the window." Richards managed to salvage things for the second show, but nonetheless Berry came off terribly in the film, as unreasonable and capricious. Yet he was the most magnetic figure on the stage – the stage of a theater that he had once not been allowed to enter as a black person – and he

Of course, Berry went to prison for it; he suffered a fall that he never quite recovered from, yet later claimed himself a better person. It's hard to say, though, what he really learned about himself, or even to say what truly happened. Had he been railroaded in the Escalanti incident, or had he been, as some have described him, diabolical?

In December 1987, Berry was charged with misdemeanor assault in connection with an incident at New York's Gramercy Park Hotel. What is known, as Pegg pointed out, is that Berry hit a woman in the face, causing "lacerations of the mouth, requiring five stitches, two loose teeth, [and] contusions of the face." Berry never addressed the matter, though in November 1988 he pleaded guilty to a lesser degree of harassment and paid a \$250 fine.

That same year, Berry bought the Southern Air Restaurant outside St. Louis.

BERRY SHOWED UP FIVE MINUTES BEFORE showtime. "Well, Chuck, what songs are we going to do?" a nervous Springsteen asked. Berry replied, "Chuck Berry songs."

Chuck... what songs are we going to do?" Berry replied, "Chuck Berry songs."

So it went. Berry toured without bands and demanded cash in advance for years, until that cash policy landed him in trouble. In the 1970s, the Internal Revenue Service pored through Berry's earnings and accused him of having evaded income taxes. He pleaded guilty, and in 1979 he was sentenced to four months in prison and 1,000 hours of community service – performing benefit concerts. A month before entering Lompoc's Prison Camp in California, Berry played for President Jimmy Carter at the White House, for the Black Music Association. "A very warm feeling for my country came over me," said Berry. "I think I'm a different person." He began work on his autobiography while at Lompoc.

In 1986, he was among the first group of musicians admitted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. At the Hall of Fame dinner, Keith Richards, Berry and filmmaker Taylor Hackford began a conversation that resulted in *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, a documentary centered around Berry playing the Fox Theatre in St. Louis for his 60th birthday. Richards assembled and led a band that included Eric Clapton, Johnnie Johnson, blues guitarist Robert Cray, and vocalists Etta James and Linda Ronstadt.

was right: These were Chuck Berry songs, and he indeed was Chuck Berry. By the time the film was over, many came to hate Berry, but Richards was more sympathetic. "He's a very lonely man.... After living that secluded one-man show for so many years, he probably wasn't prepared himself for how he was gonna act." Richards also said, "He opened a door... and goddammit the whole world came in." Berry loved the film.

CHUCK BERRY HAD A WAY OF working against himself. He was not, like his heirs the Rolling Stones, somebody who pissed on gas-station walls in public or denounced the petty morals of those who would judge him. He was more circumspect, more closemouthed than that, but at the same time, he wanted to get by with what he could: keeping money for himself and taking pleasure in violating taboos against interracial sex. That last one was a big one: Fear of it had driven racial hatred in the antebellum South straight through the rise of Berry's initial stardom. Berry's ambition was a mix of fetishism and resistance – it could even be seen as idealistic, except it didn't seem to dissuade him when others, like his wife, got hurt, or when he exploited and then tried to cast aside the underage and lost-in-the-world Janice Escalanti.

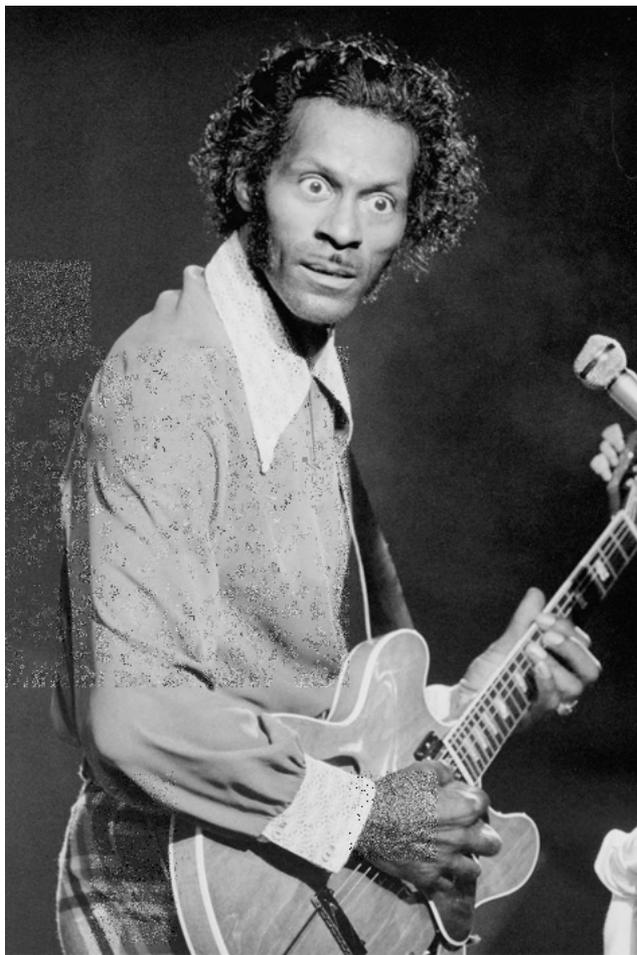
He had long thought of property investment as a means of income that might allow him to tour less. What eventually resulted was perhaps the worst disgrace of his life. Berry's application for a liquor license was denied, due to his record. He felt thwarted again by others' judgments and a community's bias. It developed, though, that Berry was accused of having installed cameras in the restaurant's restroom, secretly recording females – some quite young – in states of undress. Pictures also emerged of Berry posing nude with young white women. Berry sued the magazine that published them, claiming that the damning images had been stolen from him. Then, dozens of women who'd been caught unwillingly in the restroom videos sued Berry. He ended up paying settlements totaling roughly \$1.2 million.

A rock star's rogue sex adventures were hardly uncommon, nor was home pornography. But surreptitious taping had no license by anybody, and some of the images that made it out of Berry's collection were pretty unforgettable, even if they involved consensual activity. One video showed a young woman nude in a bathtub while he urinated in her mouth. When Berry was done, she asked him for a kiss. "Baby, I can't kiss you," said Berry. "You smell like piss."

Berry's treatment of women is the most problematic aspect of his life. In "Sweet Little Sixteen," the excitement of young women enabled the success of male rock & roll stars. By the time of the great "Tulane," in 1970, he was encouraging a woman to assert control over her own success: "Go head on, Tulane, he can't catch up with you/ Go, Tulane, he ain't man enough for you." In truth, Berry didn't seem to respect many women in the domain of his own desires, and combined with his well-documented volatile temperament, it could discourage those who romanticized his early heroism. This was ugly stuff. Could we still enjoy or respect his art knowing what we knew? In the days after Berry's death, academics Catherine Strong and Emma Rush wrote, "We often connect to music because we identify with something about it, and therefore with the people who create it. To acknowledge their misdeeds can detract from our enjoyment of music. . . . At the same time, however, there is a moral imperative to include the darker side of Berry's, like in historical accounts, obituaries and even discussion of his music. To exclude it sends the message that abuse of girls and women is unimportant and that it can be outweighed and perhaps even justified by claims of musical genius."

Berry played live well into his eighties. In November 1996, he began performing regularly – typically one Wednesday each month – at a friend's St. Louis restaurant, Blueberry Hill. He'd play an hour, and though he was getting older – and his style of guitar was more demanding than his vocals – he still proved matchless, given that he'd invented the music he was playing. Bob Dylan said, "If you see him in person, you know he goes out of tune a lot. But who wouldn't? He has to constantly be playing eighth notes on his guitar and sing at the same time, plus play fills and sing. People think that singing and playing is easy. It's not. It's easy to strum along with yourself as you are singing a song and that's OK, but if you actually want to really play, where it's important, that's a hard thing, and not too many people are good at it."

In his later years, Berry often played with his family – including daughter Ingrid and son Charles Jr. "He was not a tough bandleader," said Charles Jr. "Those shows were straight up, right on the spot, no rehearsals, nothing. We didn't know what my dad was going to do next. When we saw the guitar neck drop, everybody stopped. When



The Original Rock Star

Berry was a natural showman, animated in ways that helped his musicianship rather than detract from it. Pictured onstage in 1971.

he drops his foot on the ground, stop. My dad was an 80-year-old man, although he acted more like a 50-year-old.

"In January 2007, we did 17 shows in, like, 18 days. We started in Moscow. We were four hours late getting to the show. We're pulling up, and I'm not kidding, there were 3,000 people outside. I was like, 'They're gonna kill us.' But those were the people that couldn't get in. It was sold out. We do the show, we're worn out. We go from Moscow and do all these shows, end up on the Canary Islands – below zero to 80 degrees in two weeks. It would wear on him, but when it was time to do the show, he was rolling."

Berry gave his last performance on October 15th, 2014, at Blueberry Hill. He spent much of his time at Berry Park, doing yardwork like mowing the lawn and pouring cement. By then, it was more of a ghost town

than a proud dream. As *Hail! Hail!* showed, he didn't like prying eyes, or younger stars telling him what to do. In later years, he liked to watch the St. Louis Cardinals as Themetta sat reading her Bible. She, at least, proved loyal to the end. On March 18th, 2017, Chuck Berry was found dead of natural causes.

Most everybody thought Berry had already made his last new music decades before. But in October 2016, Berry announced the completion of his final album, *Chuck*, 38 years in the making. Even across such a span of time, there's a wholeness about it, beginning with the funky blues of "Wonderful Woman" (in an aged but proud voice) and culminating with two masterpieces. "Dutchman" is the account of an old man thought to be a derelict but who was instead a great artist: "In my day and time, my music was considered superb/I wrote a song about a poor kid, raised down in New Orleans." You come to realize that the narrator wrote that song about himself, how he squandered his genius and got destroyed. It is witty, like much of Berry's music, but the

narrative and atmosphere are spooky, almost like the man who's telling the story got blown in from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," another tale of a man haunted by his own deeds, in need of an absolution – or at least a hearing – before his end.

"Eyes of Man" is another blues groove, this time about vanity and impermanence, and derives from a poem that Berry's father taught him, by Civil War-era poet and abolitionist Theodore Tilton, that ends every stanza with "Even this shall pass away." Both of the latter songs are spoken, not sung, and they are shadow tales – that is, they navigate territories, just as Berry did all his life, this time between fall and rise, life and death. Berry anticipated his own shadow, his own legend, long ago. He knew what his final words and sounds would be. He measured his last gift, and its relationship to – and expansion of – his earlier gifts. On *Chuck*, he rages against the dying of his light, but in a vulnerable and tender way his earlier music had not prepared us for. In the end, there was only one of him, monumental in his beauty and transgression, in his creation and fall.

'The Granddaddy of Us All'

Chuck Berry's biggest fan – and occasional punching bag
– explains how Berry set the template for rock guitar

BY KEITH RICHARDS

CHUCK BERRY ONCE GAVE ME A BLACK EYE, WHICH I LATER called his greatest hit. We saw him play in New York somewhere, and afterward I was backstage in his dressing room, where his guitar was lying in its case. I wanted to look, out of professional interest, and as I'm just plucking the strings, Chuck walked in and gave me this wallop to the frickin' left eye. But I realized I was in the wrong. If I walked into *my* dressing room and saw somebody fiddling with *my* ax, it would be perfectly all right to sock 'em, you know? I just got caught.

He would do things like throw me offstage, too. I always took that as a reverse compliment, sort of as a sign of respect – because otherwise he wouldn't bother with me.

He was a little prickly, but at the same time there was a very warm guy underneath that he wasn't that willing to display. There were other times between us when we're sitting around and rehearsing, and going, "Man, you know, between us we got that shit down" – and there would be a beautiful, different feeling.

Chuck is the granddaddy of us all. Even if you're a rock guitarist who wouldn't name him as your main influence, your main influence is probably still influenced by Chuck Berry. He is rock & roll in its pure essence. The way he moved, especially in those early film clips; the exuberant ease when he laid down that rhythm was mystifying and something to behold. He used his whole arm to play. He used the shoulder and elbows. Most of us just use our wrists; I'm still working on the shoulder bit. Chuck was not one of those guitar players grimacing at every note he played, which is so common among us all. Chuck's *smiling* as he's playing that shit.

But his songwriting, man. I mean, who can come up with "Too Much Monkey Business"? "Jo Jo Gunne," "School Days," "Back in the U.S.A."? And "Memphis, Tennessee" is untouchable. It's got a beauty all its own, an intriguing tenderness. There's a sort of reality in the plea of it – a great, poignant story – and such a beautiful chord sequence, beautifully played. The drums are a wonder. It's one of those moments you only catch now and again on record, and he caught it. It's all there in two and a half minutes.

As a budding rock & roll guitar player, his music blasted you into another stratosphere. There is sort of a golden period for

Chuck's music. When he was at Chess, he was playing in the best studio, with the right players, with Willie Dixon behind him. I always come back to the word "exuberant" when I listen to those records. It was stunning all around – the production, the sound, the sheer energy of them. After that, he always seemed to me to be sort of searching. And doing time didn't help. He came out a different man.

He was incredibly versatile in his music. He would play everything. He was picking up guitar from the jazz guys – Charlie Christian, and definitely T-Bone Walker with that double-string work – and he was very much aware of songwriters of the standards. He was a real fan of the Nat King Cole Trio. I think he listened to everything, because he was just as adept at country music, too. His music is an incredible mixture of America. There's Spanish in there, bayou stuff, and swamp.

When the Stones were playing clubs, it was basically Chuck and the blues – which, to me, is not that different! We loved to play "Around and Around." Chuck's music is interesting to play because it's not as simple as it looks – and it's also a matter of how interesting you can make it. The swing beat he used gave a different flavor. That's the meaning of the roll in rock & roll: It bounced.

In 1986, when we made *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, I moved into his house in Berry Park for weeks. It was a childhood dream come true – I'm living at Chuck Berry's house, putting a band together with him! Steve Jordan, Chuck Leavell and [NRBQ's] Joey Spampinato were there too, and every day was an adventure. One night I woke up and found him outside the door with this

enormous machine, shampooing the rug at three in the morning: "It's gotta get done!"

The scene with "Carol" in the movie was a little bit of game-playing on his part. He was fucking with me. He was correcting me, but it can be slightly different every time. I thought, "Well, I'll just show how stoic I can be under these sorts of occasions and do it."

When I got the call that he was gone, it wasn't a total, unexpected shock, but I kind of got the strange feeling that I remembered when Buddy Holly died. I was in school, and this whisper started to go around the classroom. The whole class gave this collective gasp of horror. This was that same blow to the gut. It hit me harder than I expected. But Chuck certainly hung in there. There's another thing I hope to emulate.



"Chuck was not one of those players grimacing at every note he played. He's *smiling*."

Essential Chuck

The classic anthems, hits and oddities that defined the sound of rock & roll guitar and influenced generations of songwriters

Maybellene 1955

Rock & roll guitar starts here. Berry's first single perfected his pileup of hillbilly country, urban blues and hot jazz, flipping the groove from "Ida Red," a 1938 recording by Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys, into two manic minutes of car-culture vernacular, made-up hipster lingo and overdriven double-string leads. A motorvatin' masterpiece.

Wee Wee Hours 1955

It took Berry about an hour to write "Wee Wee Hours," the bluesy B side to "Maybellene." He was inspired by Big Joe Turner's smooth "Wee Baby Blues" and a woman named Margie, with whom he fell in love when he was a teenager playing USO dances.

Thirty Days 1955

Berry's upbeat call for a lover to come home displays both his dexterous soloing and his sense of humor; he promises to take it all the way to the U.N. if she won't return. "It shows that I have found no happiness in any association that has been linked with regulations and custom," he wrote of the song in his autobiography.

Roll Over Beethoven

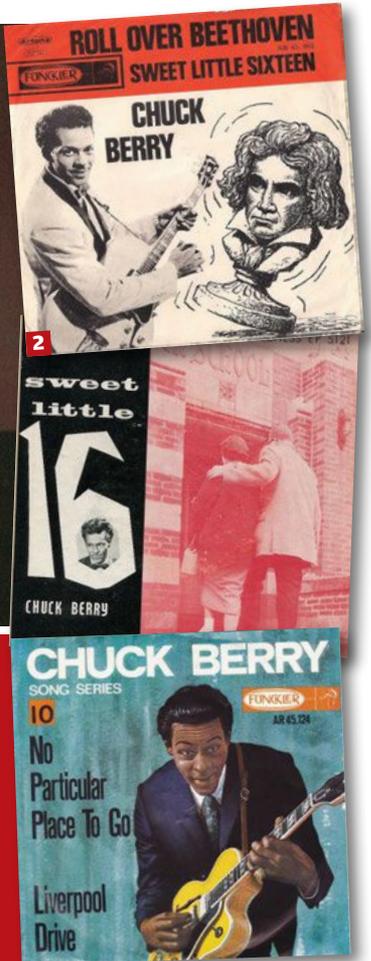
1956
Berry wrote this anthem as an affectionate dig at his sister Lucy, who spent so much time playing classical music on the family piano that he couldn't get a turn. But "Roll Over Beethoven" became the ultimate rock & roll call to arms, heralding a new age.

Too Much Monkey Business 1956

Tell Merriam-Webster the news: Berry invents another word, "botheration," a



3
Any Old Way You Choose It
(1) Berry in 1987 (2) The original covers of three classic Berry singles - 1956's "Roll Over Beethoven," 1958's "Sweet Little Sixteen" and 1964's "No Particular Place to Go." (3) The Chess 45 of "Sweet Little Sixteen."



catchall for modern hassles like work, shopping, dating, school and war. He later said he could've written a hundred verses without running out of things that bug people.

Brown Eyed Handsome Man 1956

Berry was inspired to write this song while touring through heavily black and Latino areas of California. "I didn't see too many blue eyes," he later said. He did see a good-looking Chicano man nabbed for loitering. In response, he penned one of the slyest racial allegories in rock history.

Havana Moon 1956

This story of a Cuban man missing an American woman had roots in Nat King Cole's "Calypso Blues," which Berry played while he was still slugging it out at St. Louis' Cosmopolitan Club. He tried writing his own Latin song, a novelty that turned out to be one of his most haunting records.

Rock & Roll Music 1957

"Rock & roll accepted me and paid me," Berry said. "I went that way because I wanted a home of my own." He celebrated the music

he loved with a passionate declaration of rock's transformative power - from its backbeat to its wailing saxes to the fact that it isn't mambo or tango. No wonder the tune was covered by everyone from the Beatles to REO Speedwagon.

School Days 1957

Berry was 30 years old when he wrote "School Days," but his evocation of the high school experience helped establish rock & roll as a chronicle of teen America. The lyrical details come from Berry's own memory of growing up,

and the quick rhythmic breaks mirror "the jumps and changes I found in classes in high school compared to the one room and one teacher I had in elementary school."

Sweet Little Sixteen 1958

"Sweet Little Sixteen" celebrated kids, America and the power of rock & roll - an ode to an underage rock fan that included a roll call of U.S. cities. The Beach Boys fitted the song with new words and called it "Surfin' U.S.A.;" Berry threatened to sue and won a writing credit. When Berry died, the Beach Boys'

Brian Wilson said, "He taught me how to write rock."

Johnny B. Goode

1958

"Johnny B. Goode" was the first rock & roll hit about rock & roll stardom – specifically his own. The title character is Chuck Berry – "more or less," as he told *ROLLING STONE* in 1972. Its foundational double-stop lead became a signature copied by everyone from Keith Richards on down.

Carol

1958

This hard-grooving advice song to a teenage girl was inspired by the young daughter of a woman Berry was involved with at the time. Berry's assistant Francine Gillium looked after the girl, and their conversations about "her teenage environment" helped him flesh out his lyrics about the intrigue and emotion of young love.

Around and Around

1958

The B side to "Johnny B. Goode" tells the story of a reelin'-and-rockin' all-night party Berry and his band played that had to be busted up by the cops. The hot boogie-blues guitar solo was born during a two-hour jam session they had one night before a show – "We almost had a concert before the concert started that evening," he recalled.

Almost Grown

1959

"Almost Grown" is pure sock-hop doo-wop, but it reads like a first draft of "My Generation": "Don't bother us, leave us alone/Anyway, we're almost grown." The song's background vocals come from Chess labelmates Etta James and the Moon-gloves – a group that at the time included a 20-year-old Marvin Gaye.

Little Queenie

1959

With a guitar intro that echoes "Johnny B. Goode" and another "Go! Go!" chorus, "Little Queenie" shows how deftly Berry could vary a theme; the song's lyrics mix romantic swagger with introspection and a touch of self-doubt. "It's just like me even today to wait around till

it's too late to latch on to the chance to meet a person I favor," he later admitted.

Back in the USA

1959

In 1959, Berry toured Australia and witnessed the mistreatment of its Aborigine population. Returning home, he quickly recorded this tribute to American life, including skyscrapers, drive-ins, burgers and cities from New York to L.A. "Very American, very Chuck Berry," said Paul McCartney, who cheekily copied it in 1968 as "Back in the U.S.S.R."

Memphis, Tennessee

1959

Recorded in his office, with Berry overdubbing minimal guitar, bass and drum parts and thinking of Muddy Waters' "Long Distance Call," this spare lament is one of his most lyrically vivid moments – the story of domestic disruption, a phone message and a six-year-old girl with "hurry-home drops" on her cheeks.

Let It Rock

1960

Berry revives the steel-driving myth of John Henry and spins a wild tale of a craps game in a teepee on a railroad track in which everyone involved almost gets killed – all in a heated minute and 43 seconds. Live, he often stretched it to 10 minutes. The Stones covered it as the B side to "Brown Sugar."

Come On

1961

His girl is gone, his car won't start, his phone rings with wrong numbers. Come on! One of Berry's most inventive arrangements, with sax, piano, bass and drums executing syncopated rhythmic steps while the guitar bounces off the walls. And that's Chuck's mom, Martha, joining in on the chorus.

Nadine

1964

Berry's playful sense of language was never more alive than in this song – describing a quest for perfection that's just out of reach. A man spots his future bride "walkin' toward a coffee-colored Cadillac" and gives chase. "I've never seen a coffee-colored

Cadillac," Bruce Springsteen says in the movie *Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll*, "but I know exactly what one looks like."

No Particular Place to Go

1964

The story of thwarted teenage desire was the first Berry single to benefit from his post-British Invasion visibility. Berry echoes each verse with rattling jangle. "He was singing intelligent lyrics when people were singing, 'Oh, baby, I love you,'" John Lennon said.

You Never Can Tell

1964

Berry wrote "You Never Can Tell" while in prison for violating the Mann Act. That didn't stop him from knocking out a ditty about a "teenage wedding" and skeptical old folks. Perhaps more interesting, the guitar hero hardly plays guitar on the song, which sports loads of piano and sax.

Promised Land

1964

A civil-rights parable about a freedom ride from the Deep South to California. Berry, who wrote it during his Sixties prison stay, struggled to verify the route in the lyrics. "The penal institutions were not so generous as to offer a map of any kind, for fear of provoking the route for an escape," he recalled.

Tulane

1970

In the late Sixties, Berry courted the hippie market (including a '67 live LP backed by the Steve Miller Blues Band). It didn't work, but "Tulane" – about a couple who run a head shop that gets busted – was an endearing attempt to keep up with the times.

Reelin' and Rockin'

1972

Originally the B side to "Sweet Little Sixteen," this is one of Berry's great boogie-woogie numbers, with its cascading piano lines and stop-on-a-dime verses. The song was inspired by seeing Big Joe Turner play "Rock Around the Clock" at a Chicago club. Reissued in 1972, it hit the Top 30.

Big Berries

Five great Berry LPs – from a Fifties classic to a forgotten Seventies gem

CHUCK BERRY IS ON TOP

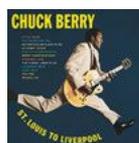
1959



Rock & roll's instruction manual. Berry's early Chess albums padded hits with instrumentals and also-rans. But on this one, the hits just never stopped coming – from "Almost Grown" at the start to the battle cry of "Roll Over Beethoven" on Side Two. Berry jumped styles – trickster-boasting on "Jo Jo Gunne," proto-metal stomp on "Around and Around," hop-scotch teen pop on "Anthony Boy" (written to appeal to Italian-Americans, at Phil Chess' request) – and rolled it all up into a music of limitless power.

ST. LOUIS TO LIVERPOOL

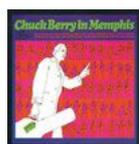
1964



Released in April '64 and titled to take advantage of his outside influence on the Beatles (and the Stones, Kinks and Yardbirds), this was the first of Berry's albums to chart. It's full of the wild jubilation of freedom – "You Never Can Tell" was cut just three months after he'd gotten out of prison, "Promised Land" a month after that. Soon enough, Berry was touring England and elsewhere in Europe, making good on his promise to "go around the world" in "Our Little Rendezvous."

CHUCK BERRY IN MEMPHIS

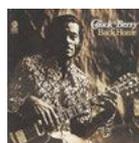
1967



Berry defected from Chess to Mercury for a \$60,000 advance and cut five albums in three years. This one – which finds him backed by members of the American Sound Studio house band and the Memphis Horns – is the best, with the tart twang of his guitar jumping out of bourbon-smooth soul and blues settings. "Back to Memphis" is the classic, a plea to return from the coldhearted North to the comforts of the South.

BACK HOME

1970



His return to Chess glides along on a funk-filled bottom that gives even instrumentals like "Gun" a bounce, thanks to house session man and bassist Phil Upchurch. "Have Mercy Judge" continues the story of the drug bust in "Tulane" – Tulane's man, Johnny, is locked up, "charged with traffic of the forbidden," and he wishes her well as the jail door slams shut. Berry had been trying this sort of tears-on-the-guitar-strings pleading blues since 1955. Here he finally nails it.

ROCK IT

1979



He'd written many coded responses to racial injustice, but here he went at it head-on – "I Never Thought" is about how much things have changed (though cops haven't), and in the amazing "Wuden't Me," our hero breaks out of a Delta county jail, evades a Grand Dragon posse and hitches a ride from a trucker – who turns out to be a neo-Nazi. Original piano man Johnnie Johnson goes the boogie, and Berry draws fresh power from the licks he was forever splitting like atoms.

CONTRIBUTORS: David Browne, Jon Dolan, Kory Grow, Brian Hiatt, Joe Levy, Hank Shteamer

JOE LEVY



SUPERWOMAN

THE MAKING OF A SOCIAL MEDIA STAR

The Internet's favorite sensation Lilly Singh gets real about the lack of women in comedy and why there are absolutely no shortcuts to viral fame

BY RIDDHI CHAKRABORTY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUHI SHARMA

LILLY SINGH COULD WELL BE CLARK KENT. THE SOCIAL MEDIA sensation who goes by the moniker of Superwoman has a quiet, dependable strength that Superman's alter-ego is famous for. There's also a sense of resilience that we're not privy to when she's on YouTube or onstage. It's interesting that while the boisterous Superwoman was the one who saw me through a lot in all the years I'd been a fan as a young adult, it's Singh who makes the grander impression when we finally meet.



Multi-colored embroidered top and white denims—both by Pepe Jeans; Shoes by Crocs
Art Director: Amit Naik; Fashion Director: Kushal Parmanand; Junior Stylist: Neelangana Vasudeva; Hair & Makeup: Jean Claude Biguine; Location courtesy: G5A Foundation for Contemporary Culture, Mumbai

The Indo-Canadian YouTube sensation claims she's more unicorn than human, and is effortlessly professional from the moment she arrives on the set for the cover shoot. For someone who has the world eating out of her hand, Singh is unfussy about everything ("A regular Margherita is good, thank you") and rarely ever gives the dutiful support staff a chance to fuss over her.

Superwoman simmers just beneath the surface, making appearances between flashes of the camera and then again when a couple of pre-teen fans visit the set. It quickly becomes apparent that while Superwoman is the one with the powers, Singh is the true hero. "Superwoman is a performer," she says when we sit down for a chat after the shoot. "Superwoman is onstage, so she's super loud, super animated, never gets tired and never feels scared. Lilly... is the business owner. She does get nervous sometimes, she gets scared and she gets tired. So personality-wise they're very similar but of course one is the performer and the other is the backbone of the business."

It takes quite the backbone to hold up the empire that Singh has built. The YouTube channel she started in 2010 and put her life and soul into now boasts over 11 million subscribers, almost 2 billion total views, making her the third highest-paid YouTuber of 2016 according to Forbes.

Singh is currently on tour to support the launch of her *The New York Times* best-selling first book, *How to Be a Bawse: A Guide to Conquering Life* and her schedule is packed with frequent flights, press conferences, fan meetings and more. Her show in Mumbai is later that night and the next day she will head to Hyderabad to begin the entire cycle again. There's almost no room to breathe but she remains determined to put every last bit of her energy into it all. "I want to put out content and products where I know that everything about this is true to me and I went through it," she explains at one point. "So if you read out any sentence from the book, I'll tell you which chapter it's from."

Her fans mean the world to her, but Singh explains that the book itself isn't just for them, it's for anyone who needs it most. "I feel like this book will speak to people from all walks of life. It's about being the best version of yourself and you're never too old or too young to be the best version of yourself." In this exclusive interview with *Rolling Stone India*, Singh talks about the business of social media stardom, the painstaking process of writing a book and why Internet fame doesn't come easy.

Congratulations on your first book! Can you tell me a little about the process of writing it? How did you know it was the right time for a book?
Thank you so much. Well, when all my fellow creator friends started writing books, a lot of publishers started to hit me up

like, "Write a book, it'll probably sell really well!" But I didn't want to write a book just to merchandise it as something my fans can buy. So when I was at this point in my career where I thought I reached a really good level of success and met a lot of really cool people, shot a lot of cool things, travelled and just learned so much, I thought, "Let me just extract the lessons out of these things and put them on paper." I feel like I want to share those lessons. That's why I decided to write a book when I did, when I felt ready to say something important.

The process of writing a book... I thought in my brain how it was going to go, like for four months I was going to be on vacation writing this book very calmly by a beach but that did not happen! [laughs] It was difficult to find time to write the book but essentially, I treated it like everything else: I wrote an outline and for weeks I would jot down chapter ideas throughout my day. Then I would pull all-nighters and literally after a long day, spend three hours on a



Superwomen
in a YouTube video

"Comedy is a good vehicle to discuss things that make us feel uncomfortable."

train of thought, just writing and revisiting over and over again—which is different from my YouTube scripts.

This was much more thorough and much more vulnerable and the stories are much more elaborate. I have read each chapter over and over again—I have the book memorized at this point because I went over all the chapters so many times to make sure it was exactly how I wanted it.

The book lays a lot of emphasis on onwards and upwards. There are chapters about climbing metaphorical ladders, there's pictures of you climbing

ladders and stairs; What was the key thought process behind including all that?

I think it has a lot to do with the fact that being a 'bawse' and achieving your goals is a very slow and steady process that involves a lot of work. I think especially in today's day and age, millennials are always looking for a quick way to do things, you know? They want viral videos. People always ask me, "How do you make a viral video?" They don't want to make videos, they want to make viral videos. They want to get a lot of subscribers very quickly. I want to bring back this idea that success takes time and you have to take it step by step, climb it rung by rung. There's no straight to the top scenario.

How important is it to stay genuine no matter what level of fame you achieve?

Well one, because nice humans are pleasant to be around [laughs]. But also, when you are trying to achieve things, it's people that are going to give you opportunities. People are on your team, people make up the world around you. So even if being a good human isn't important to you, to get ahead and be successful you need to make people feel good around you or they will not want to work with you or support you. I always try when I go to a shoot to make everyone have a good time. Make them want to support you and work with you again.

You've worked with many influential people—Michelle Obama, Malala Yousafzai, Bill Gates and more—and initiated important discussions. How effective is comedy as a tool for change?

I think as humans, we get a bit defensive when people address serious issues towards us. Comedy is a good vehicle to discuss things that make us feel uncomfortable. It's easier to talk about something if I'm making fun of myself or making fun of everyone as opposed to me sitting and making a five-minute video discussing a serious topic. People start to shut down when you get serious with them, you know? So I think when you can laugh at a scenario and discuss something serious in a light-hearted way, the message gets delivered better.

As part of #GirlLove (an initiative that helped fund the education of 800 girls in Kenya), you've also collaborated with a bunch of powerful women in the world including Priyanka Chopra, Selena Gomez and fellow YouTubers. As an artist, do you still see lack of girl love in YouTube or entertainment space?

I think the YouTube space or digital space is setting a good example for other platforms. Creators are actually very supportive towards each other. I could call any of my creator friends, male or female, and ask them for help with something and they would



Striped top & denim
dungarees—both by
Pepe Jeans;
Accessories by Shazé;
Shoes by Vans



Off shoulder top &
denims—both by
Pepe Jeans;
Shoes by Steve
Madden

help me. I've called many of them asking for help with deals and they would be like, "Yeah this is exactly the amount of money I got." They just don't want other creators to get screwed over, so yeah we're very much in it together. It might not be like that in Hollywood, I'm not really sure, but even equality... Men and women are given the same opportunities on YouTube. There's no massive divide that there is in Hollywood. The digital space sets a great example because there's no one monitoring the upload button. Anyone can upload stuff and anyone can have a voice.

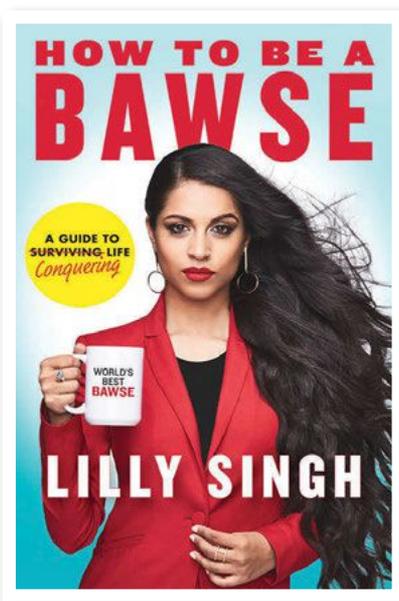
Why do you think there so few women in comedy in comparison to men? Do you think there's a certain fear to take on comedy?

I think it's a cultural thing, to be honest. I would like to believe people are more reluctant to give women a chance when it comes to comedy. Not only that, but culturally women are told from birth to not be outspoken and not talk about certain things and comedy is all about picking on those certain things that make people uncomfortable—things like periods and relationships. If I listened to everything my South Asian community told me, I would not be talking about those things. There's also a lot of issues related to how women are brought up and how we're encouraged to behave in certain scenarios and that's not good for comedy. But I think it's shifting; more and more women are doing comedy and women are really good at comedy whether people want to admit it or not.

In your 'How To Make A Sandwich: For Sexists' video, you brought up the whole 'women aren't funny' argument. People can't swallow it when women get real about things like sex, our bodies, our careers, independence and men in general. Why do people want to dictate what should or shouldn't be funny?

The thing is with comedy, it's hard to draw that line. Everyone goes like, "comedians shouldn't talk about this, it's offensive, they crossed the line!" What line? The line is imaginary. The line is different for everyone. Someone could say a joke right now and I could find it offensive and the person next to me could be laughing hysterically. With comedy there has to be some leeway of understanding that different people find different things funny. Honestly to some people, it actually alleviates some of the problems they deal with in life. If I deal with a lot of sexism and racism, hearing some comedy about people that deal with sexism and racism is going to make me feel good. I actually go through it so I think it's hilarious. It's kind of counter-productive to get so serious when you deal with comedy. If I watch a comedian and they're offending me, I just won't watch them. I can't con-

trol what other people think is funny. And when it comes to women doing comedy, I think that people should just stop trying to tell women what they can do and cannot do. Whether it's talking about periods, sex or whatever it is, a woman can talk about her experiences and no one should try to control that. I know it's a huge cultural shift that will have to happen, especially in places like India, but I hope that women are encouraged to try to make that shift.



"I want to make the first Bollywood movie that has absolutely no love story."

You mentioned in your "The Most Honest Q&A Ever-Part 2" video that you feel your opinion isn't taken into consideration for a lot of decisions about your own life. How hard is it to give up control over certain things? At what point do you feel you need to say, 'No, this is where I draw the line'?

I've had a very interesting mental journey when it comes to this because I am a very big control freak when it comes to my stuff. I started on YouTube by myself, I didn't have a manager, didn't have a team... it was just me making videos. But as I grew, I got a team. And even though I had a team, it was still me being like, "No, things need to be done like this" or "This is what has worked for me in the past." There's been times when I have had to give up control because I can't possibly do every job, but to this day I am still a really big control freak and I have

embraced that. I used to be made to feel bad about it—a lot of members of my team and people in the industry would be like, "Let go of the control, you're not doing this right" but I've decided that no one can tell me what I'm doing right or wrong because I have created my entire career from nothing. So I'm okay with being a control freak. Even when it comes to things like my book or the tour... I want to put out content and products where I know that everything about this is true to me and I went through it. So if you read out any sentence from the book, I'll tell you which chapter it's from. At the end of the day, my face is the brand, nobody else's.

You've mentioned in your book and previous interviews that you're looking at going into films and television. What do you want to do in particular?

I want to just make dope content. I obviously would love to do comedy—sitcoms like *Big Bang Theory*, *New Girl*. But I also really like fantasy. I love *Game of Thrones*, I love *The Walking Dead*; I love that creation of a world that exists separately. Like I would have loved to play Katniss from *The Hunger Games*. I also want to write and direct a little bit. But, if I ever get to make a Bollywood movie—I've said it before and I'm going to trademark it right here—I want to make the first Bollywood movie that has absolutely no love story. Like no love story whatsoever!

No matter who reads your book, what is the one key thing you want them to take away from it?

I want them to take away from it that everything in life requires work. Not just your success, not just your career or your goals, but your happiness, your confidence, your self-esteem, the way you think about things, the way your mind works... All of those things require work. And in school they don't really teach that. In school they teach you math and science but this book teaches you how to work on every part of yourself. I want this to be the lesson for life and everything you do.

Finally, what is the biggest difference between Lilly Singh and Superwoman?

Honestly, in my opinion, I think they're really similar. Lilly is weird like Superwoman, Lilly does weird things like Superwoman. They're both very quirky in the same way, but Superwoman is a performer. Superwoman is onstage so she's super loud, super animated, never gets tired and never feels nervous. Lilly... is the business owner. She does get nervous sometimes, she gets scared and she gets tired. Superwoman's just floating all the time! [laughs] So personality-wise they're very similar but of course one is the performance version and the other is the backbone of the business.



INDIA'S FUNNIEST WOMEN

THEY'RE BUSTING SEXIST LABELS, TALKING POLITICS AND MAKING US FALL OFF OUR CHAIRS LAUGHING. PRESENTING THE BADASS LADIES WHO ARE CHANGING THE FACE OF FUNNY

BY RIDDHI CHAKRABORTY AND URVIJA BANERJI

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JUHI SHARMA



On Mithila
Sleeveless yellow tee
& denim shorts by
Pepe Jeans

On Radhika
Off white top with
embroidery detailing
& denim dungaree by
Pepe Jeans

On Kaneez
Off shoulder top &
ripped denims by
Pepe Jeans;
Shoes by **Vans**

On Mallika
Printed white calf
length dress by
Pepe Jeans;
Shoes by **Steve
Madden**

Art Director: Amit Naik
Fashion Director: Kushal Parmanand
Hair & Makeup: Jean Claude Biguine
Junior Stylist: Neelangana Vasudeva
**Location courtesy: G5A Foundation
for Contemporary Culture**

INDIA SEEMS TO HAVE A LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP with funny women on the big screen. If you look back and try to recall women comics you saw in mainstream Hindi movies from the past half-century, only a handful of names come to mind: the iconic Tun Tun and Manorama from the black & white era, frumpy-funny Preeti Ganguly from the Seventies (remember Freni from Basu Chatterjee's 1978 laugh riot *Khatta Meetha*?) and Eighties' eternal college bully Guddi Maruti, who apparently got her first big comic break only because Ganguly's weight loss had rendered her ineligible for comic roles. The scanty number also made them some of the most recognizable faces in Indian cinema—women whose main role on screen was to be the punchline of a fat joke that would offend just about anybody today. In the Nineties, the chirpy Juhi Chawla, although not a comedian per se, won over kids and adults alike with her endearing, and often hilarious, roles. As did Upasana Singh, who is best known for playing a deaf-mute caricature in the 1997 potboiler *Judaai*.

Indian television, on the other hand, gloriously installed the careers of a bevy of actor-comedians, mostly due to the overall popularity of prime-time comedy shows. The heyday of post-liberalization television in India even saw trailblazers like Savita Bhatti, who produced and acted in the cult Doordarshan satire *Flop Show* with husband and director Jaspal Bhatti. Unlike their big-screen predecessors, Nineties TV actors like Shubha Khote, Bhavana Balsavar (*Dekh Bhai Dekh*, *Zabaan Sambhalke*), Archana Puran Singh (*Shrimaan Shrimati*) and the more or less entire all-woman cast of *Hum Paanch* were overall badasses, kicking misogyny in the bum even as they worked their comic magic on ROFLing audiences that couldn't get enough of cable television.

The last 15 years have seen such comic characters reduce to a trickle, thanks to the overwhelming success of 'K-serials' that continue to project women solely in the binary of *sanskaar* *saas-bahus* and conniving vamps in their noodle-strap saree blouses. The only funny women on the small screen today are mostly loudmouthed caricatures (Daya Jethalal Gada in the TRP-sweeping *Taarak Mehta Ka Ooltah Chashmah*), bumbling damsels in distress (Angoori Tiwari in *Bhabi Ji Ghar Par Hai!*) or the butt of sexist jokes (Sumona Chakravarti and Sugandha Mishra in *The Kapil Sharma Show*).

VJ and television host Anuradha Menon, who played the utterly hilarious Lola Kutty

in a number of vignettes for Channel V was a breath of fresh air, but with limited screen time and a short stint in TV, she couldn't really capture the imagination of the nation.

Bharti Singh is possibly the only legit 'mainstream' woman artist to have made her mark as a comedian who is adored by a wide section of Indian audiences. Hailing from Amritsar, Punjab, Singh was the second runner-up in the comedy reality show *The Great Indian Laughter Challenge* (Season 4) in 2008 and continues to host comedy and reality television today. Hers has been a story of battling discrimination at every level—from misogyny in television to body-shaming—to emerge as one of the frontrunners in mainstream Hindi comedy today.

Post-millennium comedy boom

It is not surprising that when stand-up comedy started putting down roots in India in the early Aughts (still well before the burgeoning comedy scene found its way into the mainstream), the face of funny was predominantly male. In that era, "you had your Sunil Pals and Raju Srivastavs, who did more slapstick," says Sohail Gandhi, co-owner of part music venue part comedy club

Tuning Fork in Mumbai. It was essentially a sausage fest, save for a smattering of women, many of who appeared on shows like *Laughter Challenge* but none whom you'd perhaps remember by name: Rajbir Kaur (Amritsar), Aarti Kandpal (Kumaon, Uttarakhand) and Seema Motwani (Mumbai).

And then, in a series of rapidly advancing trends in the past five years, comedy turned into the next big thing in Indian entertainment, marked by the rise in popularity of the stand-up style propagated in the West: "conversational, situational, idea-based comedy," as Gandhi describes it. Watching a stand-up show on a Friday or Saturday night has more or less become the thing to do. "Usually when people turn out for music gigs, they don't just go out for just the musicians. They come for the bar too, and the food," says Gandhi. "But with comedy, because of the comedy boom, people just head over in droves no matter which comedian is playing."

And it wasn't just stand-up. The so-called comedy boom in large part coincided with the rise of comedy collectives such as East India Comedy and All India Bakchod (AIB), among others, who laid down an infallible web presence, turning them into the digital behemoths they are today. AIB's platform paved the way for one of modern Indian comedy's first female faces: Aditi Mittal, who was the only woman on the panel of comedians at AIB's famously controversial roast, *All India Bakchod Knockout* in 2015.

The new wave of comedy has provided a platform for several more powerful new women on the scene, and a second wind for some of the more established women comics who've already been around. We've come a long way from the patriarchal humor of yesteryear—no more sandwich jokes to be found, thankfully; and even if some had lingered, our cover star Lilly Singh aka Superwoman's recent viral video, satirically titled "How To Make A Sandwich" probably put a quick end to them. That being said, gender discrimination exists on every plane

in India today, which raises the question as to whether comedy has remained impervious to systematic misogyny, or whether the environment mirrors the rest of the entertainment industry, where it runs rampant.

What's in a label?

Discrimination or otherwise, women in the comedy industry are powerhouses across multiple platforms and

“Female comedian’ is as idiotic as saying ‘female doctor.’ It is sexist to the core.”

RADHIKA VAZ

Radhika Vaz, 44

When it comes to using comedy to get real and smack in a message, Mumbai-based comedian Radhika Vaz takes the crown. Pussy farts, nipples and pubic hair are regular subjects of Vaz's comedy and she has no problem making audiences squirm. "All of us who publicly come out and incite people to talk about [sexuality] or at the very least listen to what we have to say—we are not going to be viewed favorably," she says.

Whether it's her improv, standup pieces, newspaper columns or her debut book *Unladylike, A Memoir* [2016] Vaz is all about using comedy to normalize conversations around women and their bodies.

Vaz was also one of the first to introduce one-woman-shows to the country with *Unladylike* and *Older, Angrier, Hairier*.

Now branching out into YouTube with plans of eventually writing for films, Vaz is everything she wants to be today: "I'm a standup comedian, I'm a writer, I'm a columnist, I'm doing a web series now... I kind of like the fact that I'm not one thing," she says.

White formal shirt with pleats, light wash wide leg denims with pocket detailing—both by **Pepe Jeans**; Shoes by **Rosso Brunello**; Ring by **Shazé**



Mallika Dua, 27

Mallika Dua's ascent to Snapchat and Instagram fame didn't happen overnight, but the actual time it took wasn't very long either. The actor and comedian saw an exponential rise in followers since she first started out on the Dubsplash app a year and a half ago. Today, she has over 170k followers on Instagram, where she also posts her Snapchat videos. Some of her funny-filter vignettes touch upon topics from the tax on pads, while others are short sketches based around her made-up caricatures like Makeup Didi and Shagz Di.

Dua studied as a theater major at U.S. liberal arts college Franklin and Marshall and later worked as a copywriter in New Delhi before she quit and moved to Mumbai to pursue her acting career. "It took me a while to decide [to quit my job in advertising], because I'm someone who's very risk-averse." Now that Dua's made the switch, she's looking to establish a foothold in the Bollywood scene (her debut film *Hindi Medium* releases this month). She also plans to venture into stand-up eventually, once she's worked up the chops. "Why I take great solace in comedy and acting is that I feel very awkward being myself," she admits. "I think I just need to get over my fear of open mics, and once I do that, I'll go on stage."

Cotton top with bow detailing on both sides, denim dungarees —both by **Pepe Jeans**; Shoes by **Clarks**

genres, but many are extremely resistant to the 'female comedian' label. Radhika Vaz, popular stand-up comic and author of *Unladylike: The Pitfalls of Propriety*, says: "It's as idiotic as saying 'female doctor.' It is sexist to the core."

The animosity towards the term is not uncontested, however. Stand-up comic Sonali Thakker takes no offense to the label. "I am a female. I am a comedian. If somebody wants to call me that, well by all means, please do so," she says, adding, "It really depends on what context it's been said [in]. Comedy is not a female-dominated industry... If someone calls me a female comedian, I would just give him the benefit of the doubt and assume it's been said [because] it's still a novelty factor in their minds."

Sumukhi Suresh, a stand-up comic who has appeared in a bunch of sketches with online platforms AIB, Vagabomb and Them Boxer Shorts, feels otherwise. She says, "I did not choose to be part of this industry to be the best in my gender. I chose to be a comic to be the best comic ever. The struggles maybe more for us, but the moment you brand a girl who is a comic as a 'female comedian,' it takes double the time for her to break out of that and be a good comic."

Kaneez Surka, who is one of the best-known faces in Indian comedy today, blames sloppy media for propagating sexist labels. "Journalists ask us about being a female comedian, but they don't talk to us for the work we're doing, you know? No one really sees Kaneez as an improv artist—just that label of female comedian. And that's the biggest challenge. People think

my brand of comedy is 'female comedy' but that's not a brand of comedy... Everyone defines me as a 'female comedian' and I do so much more."

Online comedy: The real playground?

As we enter the era of YouTube, Snapchat and Instagram, the Internet reigns as one of the key sources of entertainment to anyone connected to it. In addition to the sheer volume of content, the freedom the web grants has opened gates to not just new mediums of expression, but also new audiences.

"A few years ago, the only thing we were used to watching online were sketches by AIB and short videos," recalls Marathi actress Mithila Palkar, who initially gained viral attention for her cup song "Hi Chal Turu Turu" inspired by American actress Anna Kendrick's famous track. In the past two years, she has become a regular face in a series of mostly comedy videos produced by online media firm FilterCopy.

While working on the satire comedy show *News Darshan* in 2015, Palkar and her colleagues at FilterCopy realized they were on the brink of a new species of entertainment, a hybrid between television shows and shorter online content that caters to millennials thirsting for quick but fulfilling entertainment. Since then, Palkar has gone on to star in web series such as *Girl In The City* (presented by youth TV channel and now portal Bindass) and *Little Things* (which aired on digital production house Dice Media's YouTube channel).

Snapchat superstar Mallika Dua is perhaps the biggest success story that online comedy has witnessed in India of late. While her content is largely observational and women-centric—we can't thank her enough for the filter-fuelled caricatures like Makeup-Didi, Smylie Jenner and Shagz Di—Dua explains it was never about proving her mettle as a 'woman comedian.'

"I had never planned that 'Oh, I'm going to build up on this particular medium and now I'll make sure that people follow me here,'" she says, adding, "I literally just saw it as, 'I need to be someone that people know.' Even when I used to perform on stage, it didn't matter to me that I was the best girl performing on stage. I just had to be the best performer," says Dua, who studied theater and dabbled in copywriting in New Delhi before moving to Mumbai last year to take up comedy full-time. She is now signed to India's premier media enterprise Only Much Louder (psst! OML has dropped some of its biggest bands from the roster and is currently focusing on comedy acts).

Dua might want to stay away from gender labels but a quick Google search reveals that she is almost always the only woman on online stories listing must-follow Snapchat

"It didn't matter to me that I was the best girl performing on stage. I just had to be the best performer."

MALLIKA DUA

LAUGHTER QUEENS: INDIA'S FAVORITE FUNNY WOMEN ON SCREEN

MANORAMA
Ek Phool Do Maali (1969),
Seeta Aur Geeta (1972)



TUN TUN
Mr. & Mrs. 55 (1955),
Pyasa (1957)

PREETI GANGULY
"Khatta Meetha" (1978),
Jhoota Kahin Ka (1979),"



GUDDI MARUTI
Aag Aur Shola (1988),
Balwaan (1992)



JUHI CHAWLA
Hum Hain Rahi Pyaar Ke (1993),
Ishq (1997)



BHANVNA BALSAVAR
Zabaan Sambhalke,
Dekh Bhai Dekh

SAVITI BHATTI
Flop Show



SHUBHA KOTE
Zabaan Sambhalke



UPASANA SINGH
Judaai (1997),
The Kapil Sharma Show."



profiles. Usual suspects Varun Thakur, Tanmay Bhat and Kanan Gill pretty much rule all such recommendations.

In spite of inadequate representation in media, for women artists, the Internet offers a bigger space than that of television and film simply because there is no waiting around to be given an opportunity. "There is no one monitoring the upload button," says Superwoman, whose formidable position on YouTube (11 million subscribers!) makes her one of the most influential players in online content globally.

Apart from the freedom and democracy, the Internet also facilitates an easy interaction with fans that helps craft better content. Says Surka, "I personally have all the analytics at my fingertips so I can see what age group is watching my stuff online, what gender, from where in India or from where in the world." For the audience, comedy on a digital platform is definitely more relatable. "It's not the faraway land of television or movies. Those people are unreachable, they're unattainable; where there's digital comedians and stars, you get to interact on a personal level," she adds.

But for artists who started out as stand-up comics, writing for digital audiences can be a whole new ball game. Transitioning from monologue-style writing to structured screenplays requires a whole new skillset and getting used to. Vaz describes it as a "night and day" process. Plus crossovers don't always work and not every kind of comedy can guarantee success when adapted to television or vice versa. "There's an assumption that anyone big on YouTube can be good onstage and that's an incorrect assessment," says Vaz. That being said, there's no denying the power of online platforms. "It gives you the opportunity to reach a wider audience, to try new things," she adds.

"In digital comedy, you get to interact on a personal level. It is not the faraway land of television or movies."
KANEEZ SURKA

LADIES OF LOL: ARTISTS TO FOLLOW ONLINE



JAMIE LEVER

The young comic is a riot on stage and impersonates everyone from her dad, the veteran comic Johnny Lever, to the iconic singer Asha Bhosle.



NEETI PALTA

The comic is known for her feminist standup acts on YouTube that pick on everything from molestation, sexist deo spray ads and arranged marriages.



VASU PRIMLANI

When Primlani can't make sense of Mahabharata and demonization, she turns her confusions into hilarious standup material. Oh and she is deadpan diva!



SUPRIYA JOSHI

Joshi guarantees a hearty ROFL with everything she does—from AIB sketches to comedy writing.



NIDHI BISHT

This actor/director is best known for her work on The Viral Fever's *Permanent Roommates* and currently plays the lead in their new web series *Bisht Please*.

AAYUSHI JAGAD

A singer, poet and standup comedian, Jagad says she is currently pursuing her dream of becoming "a Sumukhi Suresh impersonator."



uch money I make being fat?



Kaneez Surka, 33

Kaneez Surka's work spans stand-up performances, television roles and online sketches, making her one of the most recognized faces in the scene. But she considers herself an improv artist at her core. "Improv is like my baby and my love," she says.

Born and brought up in South Africa to Indian parents, Surka made the move to Mumbai in 2005 to take a year off from studying law. The decision to change careers happened soon after discovering and joining Balancing Act Productions, a Mumbai based improv troupe which opened several doors—including her foray into television in 2006 with CNN-IBN's *The Week That Wasn't*, a satirical late night show helmed by actor and comedian Cyrus Broacha. "Cyrus and Kunal [Vijaykar] saw me in one of the [improv] shows," she recalls. "I played a weather woman who spoke bad Hindi and they loved the character."

Surka later gained viral fame on the Internet through her collaborations with comedy sensations All India Bakchod and *The Improvisers* (a group she formed comedians Kanan Gill, Abish Mathew and Kenneth Sebastian.) In addition to conducting improv workshops, Kaneez is currently working on expanding her YouTube channel and hosts her own online show, *The General Fun Game Show*.

Off shoulder top in cotton with embroidery detailing paired with light wash distressed denims—all by **Pepe Jeans** ; Shoes by **Vans**

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MISOGYNY AROUND THE GLOBE



American comedian Ali Wong's (right) comedy continues to be described as "lewd" and "raunchy"; Melissa McCarthy (above) says sexism in the media is "an intense sickness."



Gender discrimination is no joke

More freedom of expression is not necessarily considered a good thing by everyone; more traditional viewers could bristle at women taking bold and progressive stances, or cracking lewd jokes. "There's a lot of foul words when you're trying to make a joke, and a lot of people do think that's funny," says Palkar. "But also there's a belief in India that women can't be swearing." Online exposure has provided comedians a way to grow their audiences without compromising on their material, which would likely be necessitated by a television network or film producer. That same freedom can be a double-edged sword.

Trolls reserve extra ammunition of hate for women artists. "It all possible thanks to the mask of anonymity that some people enjoy," Suresh says about why she prefers live audiences. "The same person will not be able to throw muck at us live."

By now, most women artists are used to comments and remarks like 'She shouldn't be saying all this' and 'She shouldn't be talking about her bra in public' and 'She shouldn't be talking about her period in public.' Palkar believes that more exposure is likely the solution to that kind of backlash. "People need to get over [it] and I think [that's] what comedians right now are trying to do," says Palkar. "It's not just boy-centric humor."

Palkar's thought about "boy-centric humor" raises the point that comedy is an industry that has always been centered around men, and by default, hostile to women. Even on an international level, women are constantly criticized for not fitting into some mold—for example, American comedian Ali Wong, whose comedy continues to be described as "lewd" and "raunchy." Hollywood actress Melissa

McCarthy has been the target of several misogynist attacks in her career, with one unnamed critic even declaring in a review of her 2014 film *Tammy* that McCarthy was only good at acting when she looked attractive. The actress was later quoted in several interviews as saying that sexism in the media is "an intense sickness," and that as an artist, she was "trying to take away the double standard of 'You're an unattractive bitch because your character was not skipping along in high heels.'"

Closer home, Singh recounts the passive-aggression she'd face from her male counterparts while competing on *Laughter Challenge*. "A lot of men would say, 'Abhi chhoti ho. Lekin ek episode toh nikaal hi logi. [You're a novice. You'll last one episode max]. Funnily, those guys were the ones that got eliminated first." Today, Singh is one of Indian TV's highest-paid artists and it amuses her how her overwhelming success has changed the attitudes of people that previously branded her as "*woh moti ladki* [that fat girl]." "Now they call me 'cute' and say how wonderful I am on stage!"

Back home in Amritsar where gender-based violence continues to plague society, Singh is a inspiration to many. But it irks her no end that more women don't want to pursue comedy. "I know so many talented girls who can have a career in comedy but all they want to do is either model or act. They think comedy is all about making faces and being the butt of jokes!"

Singh's comedy is hardly political or provocative by any standards—it is rooted largely in small-town experiences and borrows heavily from her own household issues. It is her clean, 'family entertainment' brand of comedy that has made her an instant hit among the middle class.

But every time women comedians have attempted to incite people to talk about touchy issues like, say, female sexuality, they have faced a severe backlash. "[We're expected to] sit at home and wash *bartans* [the dishes]. And that's where they want us: barefoot and pregnant," says Vaz.

In an effort to progress the conversation on female sexuality, several comedians, including Dua, Surka and Suresh, released a video on AIB's YouTube channel, titled "A Woman's Besties." In the video, Dua stars as a woman who suspects she might be pregnant, while Surka, Suresh and others play the role of her personified body parts: her vagina, clitoris and breasts. While Suresh notes that the response to that video was "mostly positive," she says, "I had some followers send me messages online that they don't want me to do 'such videos.' That they like me cute and clean and not in 'cheap' videos." Her response? "I did them a favor and blocked them."

**“A lot of men would say,
‘Abhi chhoti ho.
Lekin ek episode
toh nikaal hi logi.
[You’re a novice. You’ll
last one episode max].”**

BHARTI SINGH

Live audiences can be equally harsh, especially if they arrive at a comedy club expecting an all-male bill—which they often do. “It’s that shock element and a certain amount [of] preconceived notions they’ve come along with that leads to the difference,” says Thakker. “But hey, if you get over that and make them laugh, they’re with you through and through.”

Thakker has the optimistic outlook that if you can make someone laugh, they’re on your side. But, as Suresh notes, you can’t always make them laugh—and it’s not because your jokes aren’t funny. “The judgement and discrimination creeps in from the audience,” says Suresh. “I have had my fair share of great audiences to enjoy my sets, but there have been times when a certain joke or a certain remark has not gone down well thanks to my gender.”

Audience judgment is an immediately apparent evil, but does more insidious discrimination seep into employment and opportunities like it does in other career paths? In India, the comedy scene is in its nascent stages, which makes it even harder to compare the treatment of genders, but some women are already seeing an uneven playing field.

Vaz, for one, sees the gender imbalance as an extension of the film and entertainment industry. “They may not think you’re as good and that general attitude, even in the entertainment industry, is the same reason Ranveer [Singh, actor] gets paid more than Deepika [Padukone, actress], his own girlfriend,” says Vaz. “Because the producers have decided that the audience they’re looking at will come to watch him and not her.”

Other comedians disagree with Vaz. “I’ve never faced discrimination in comedy,” states Dua. “Firstly, one year is too short a time to even know where you stand, and in an industry where there are only 10-12 women, and most of them are friends with each other.” Dua, along with her peers at AIB, Surka and Suresh, believe that within the community, they have faced no



Mithila Palkar, 24

There's a moment during my Saturday afternoon chat with actor and musician Mithila Palkar where I leave our table to fetch our drinks from the counter. In those few minutes, I forget to switch off the tape recorder, and you can hear Palkar humming a classical Hindi tune to herself over the hubbub of people gossiping over their chai. The moment would feel almost voyeuristic, if Palkar wasn't otherwise prone to bursting out into song every so often regardless of who's listening.

Her Instagram, where she has amassed almost 245k followers, is filled with short and sweet videos of her singing into her front-facing camera. A few years ago, she achieved viral status with her "'Hi Chal Turu Turu'" YouTube video, where she sings a Marathi song over a groove she taps out with a drinking glass, à la the acappella style popularized by *Pitch Perfect's* Anna Kendrick.

Despite her obvious musical streak, Palkar is first and foremost an actor. She played a part in the 2015 Bollywood film *Katti Batti* before discovering the online space. Palkar has acted in a series of sketch comedy videos for FilterCopy's YouTube channel, including news satire show *News Darshan*, which is modeled after John Oliver's *Last Week Tonight*. She acts in the web series *Girl In The City* and is also active in the Marathi language space, both online and on the big screen—she has a starring role in upcoming Marathi film *Muramba*, which is set to release next month.

Multi-colored light jacket in jacquard fabric, white cotton sleeveless tee, distressed denim shorts—all by **Pepe Jeans**;
Shoes by **Crocs**



challenges. “There are no men stepping on our shoes, and in fact a lot of men have helped me get far,” says Dua. “Be it Tanmay [Bhat, AIB Co-Founder], be it Vijay Nair [Founder & CEO, OML].”

As Dua points out, there aren’t that many women in the Indian comedy circuit yet. Right now, they all know each other—and get compared to one another constantly. As a result of the close quarters, a tentative community has emerged. Thakker lets on that there is a WhatsApp group made of the women in comedy. “It’s always a delight to see more female comics in the green room and on the line-up with you,” she says. “But eventually, whether male or female, you’re responsible for your own progress.”

All of the women echo Thakker’s thoughts: there is a community, but at the same time, comedy is a business, and in business, it’s every woman—and man—for herself. “The number [of] women in the comedy space is increasing and we have each other’s back,” says Suresh. “But I also think women believe in being the best at whatever they do and thus sometimes wish to consciously fend for themselves. As long as we all know that we are there for each other!”

Earlier this year, video content streaming platform Amazon Prime Video came under fire in India for its recent partnership with OML. The deal involved 14 comedians on OML’s roster receiving hour-long slots on Amazon Prime Video for special segments. Not one artist on the lineup was female.

“How does that happen? How does your development team for such a big platform ignore completely the fact that there are no women on the lineup?” questions Vaz, who had discussed the topic in detail in an interview with *NDTV* earlier this year. Mittal, who chose not to speak with us for this story, too expressed her disappointment about the entire thing in the same interview. Regardless of whether or not it was Amazon Prime’s conscious decision to avoid women artists, the damage has been done with the reinforcement of a ridiculous notion: that only men can be really (and lucratively) funny.

Surka, who is signed to OML herself, presents a different side of the argument. She states that it wasn’t about exclusion but more about content. “The thing is, OML represents three female comedians; Sumukhi, Mallika and myself,” she says, adding that while she and Suresh are working on stand-up, neither of them have a one-hour set, and Dua does not do stand-up at all. She does, however, agree that perhaps Amazon could

WITTY WOMEN BEHIND THE SCENES



In addition to the rising number of funny women on the screen, there are a multitude of ladies who make it all tick behind the scenes. Whether it’s a dose of sass from East India Comedy (Anisha Raisurana) and AIB (Anuya Jakatdar, Manaswi Mohata), the massive surge of content from TVF’s *Girllyapa* channel (Bhavini Soni, Shruti Madan) or the viral mini web series *Ladies Room* (Ratnabali Bhattacharjee, Neha Kaul Mehra), women are taking control and making their voices heard.

have been more inclusive in its approach by attempting to reach out to more women in the scene, but since it was a deal with OML, it couldn’t be helped. “I don’t think it went to, ‘No we can only put men on the roster,’” she says.

Indian comedy breaking class, language barriers yet?

Leaving aside the Hindi and vernacular comic performers that have risen to popularity thanks to the mainstream comedy boom on TV, one factor in

particular unites the current crop of comedians, male and female alike, that perform mostly in English: many come from places of educational and economic privilege. This is not like India’s other burgeoning entertainment scene, hip-hop, which has heralded the rise of artists from working class backgrounds, and in some cases, literally the streets. Comedians doing the club circuit today, by comparison, are a mostly sheltered lot—although you’ll be hard-pressed to find one who admits to it.

I wouldn't say all, but most [comedians] do come from educated backgrounds, but I wouldn't use the word privileged so loosely," says Thakker. "Because every stand-up comic... has had a day job running parallel to him or her doing stand-up for at least the initial years of them doing stand-up."

Singh is probably the only woman artist among her circle who has broken class barriers. She recalls the time when she was offered the signing fee of her first TV show and she didn't even have a bank account. "They said they would transfer Rs 10 lakhs immediately and requested for an account number. I didn't know what to say!" Although her primary audience is the TV-watching middle class, her humor has takers across age and socio-economic strata—from, say, an elderly housewife in a Tier-3 city to the Internet-crazy, English-speaking millennial in a metro.

Ask Singh about what she makes of the flourishing comedy scene online and she says, "Internet wala comedy toh pade-likhe logon ka khel hai. [Online comedy is a playground for the privileged.] The real audience lies in their own homes, watching TV." Singh doesn't follow the stand-up scene closely but is happy to know from us that a lot of women are now seen on stage. "Mujhe bahut, bahut proud ho raha hai yeh sunke! [I feel a sense of pride!]"

For Singh, comedy is the best thing to have happened to her. Gone are the days when her family struggled to make ends meet—now there's a certain unassuming pride in her voice when Singh narrates how each and every member of her family is well-settled now thanks to her lucrative career. She even shares how her mother initially objected to her relationship with fiancé Harsh Limbhachiya because she felt he was no match for her high-income daughter. "Thanks to comedy, I earn more than I could have ever imagined—I am living a Cinderella-life."

On the other end of the spectrum, the audience you might find at a comedy club come from certain backgrounds—they may not all be Ambani-wealthy, but most have higher-level education and access to

resources. Almost all are urban and based out of big cities. Vaz points out a similarity between comedy club audiences and an acting class she took once in the U.S. "There were only two women in the whole class and there was only one person who was not white and that was me, and there were two people over the age of 35 and it was me and another guy," she says. "So it was a very particular kind of group, which is what you see in the comedy clubs here: a straight, male, of-the-majority kind of profile."

The rural and working classes are left out of the new, urban wave of comedy almost entirely—in part because comedy now happens online or in comedy clubs that have rights to admission and cover charges, and in part because most of the comedy scene is rooted in an understanding of English.

Vaz explains, "I think there are a couple of barriers that I face. Number one: language. Hindi is not my first language and I think in English." She adds, "I feel like I am in a niche with an English-speaking audience. Whether you're urban or not urban, that's not really an issue. It's just the language for me." At the same time, while Vaz admits her English-only comedy does provide a barrier

to non-English speaking audiences, she also says that she hadn't previously considered expanding her audience. "To be honest, I've never tried to appeal to anybody outside of who I appeal to," admits Vaz.

Palkar, whose mother tongue is Marathi, has actively tried to bridge the language gap via Marathi-language content. She's currently associated with a Marathi YouTube channel called Bharatiya Digital Party, which seeks to provide the Marathi community with an online entertainment portal, partially in an effort to soften the class divide. "I've learned very recently that in fact South Indian projects online are picking up quite fast," Palkar adds. "Somebody told me Telegu web series are doing quite well, so the regional space is really, really picking up."

Bollywood dreaming?

Dua has got to be the one person in her comic circle with the widest array of work in the shortest span of time. In the past few months, she has officially endorsed films on Instagram (*Noor*, starring Sonakshi Sinha and fellow comic Kanan Gill), walked the ramp at Lakme Fashion Week, appeared on an online kids' art and craft show (*Mad Stuff With Rob*) and interviewed Bollywood A-listers for a fashion magazine, among other projects.

This month, she will make her Bollywood debut with a cameo in the Irrfan-starrer *Hindi Medium*. Is she actively auditioning for film roles at point in her career now? "Absolutely," she says. "I don't go to just about any audition, because there's no point doing that. But I generally do for the ones I'm called for. That too just specifically called for, not like a general audition call, I don't show up for those ones."

Dua is certain she won't ever play an "insignificant supporting character. "And being a comic means there's the usual trap of typecasting that she has to avoid too. "I get typecast all the time. Every day I get at least one call for some kind of casting. I could have made all kinds of money and I could have just overexposed myself had I said yes to every opportunity that came to me."

Palkar, who identifies herself as an actor first and foremost, already has a few films to her name, from 2015's



"Most comedians do come from educated backgrounds, but I wouldn't use the word privileged so loosely."

SONALI THAKKER

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST



comedy *Katti Batti* where she played a support role to the Marathi short film *Majha Honeymoon* in which she was the lead. Come June she will appear as the female lead in another Marathi film, *Muramba*. “I was 12 when I knew that I wanted to act,” says Palkar, adding, “I would like to do a lot of films. I would like to do Bollywood, I would like to do Hollywood, though it’s a long shot.”

With Vaz, things take a different turn; stepping into acting on television or in Bollywood isn’t a goal she has in mind. “Not unless it’s an item number,” she deadpans before adding with a laugh, “I’m just kidding!” She says there’s no vendetta against Bollywood. “The truth is, I want to write for films and that’s definitely because of my web series [*Shugs & Fats*] getting an encouraging response—not in India, sadly, but internationally. I want to take that to the next level.”

She does add, however, that while many comedians are preparing to jump platforms,

not everyone is made for multiple mediums. “I’m not entirely sure every stand-up comedian makes a good actor. I definitely know that not every actor makes a great stand-up comedian. But having watched a lot of the online stuff that’s happening in India, the writing is so good sometimes but the acting quality is not. And it’s difficult to get comedians to act.”

Surka, despite not engaging in the chase for Bollywood’s twinkling lights, is a comedian with one of the largest presences across several platforms. “I’m really living my dream. I know it sounds lame, but I’m doing what I want to do,” she says with a laugh. She already stars in a TV show [the satirical late night show *The Week That Wasn’t*], runs her own YouTube channel and collaborates (online and live) with fellow comedians. She cites her new game show on YouTube as the turning point of her career and life. *The General Fun Game Show with Kaneez Surka* is indeed special: not just because it is downright hilarious but it’s also

“Some fans messaged saying they like me cute and clean and not in ‘cheap’ videos. I did them a favor and blocked them.”

SUMUKHI SURESH

the only show hosted by a woman that does not automatically focus on women-centric comedy; it explores so much more of what Surka is capable of as an improv comedian.

Fighting the good fight

When it boils down to it, most women in comedy agree on one point: there is a need to normalize their presence in what has so far been a male-dominated space. According to Surka, the only way to achieve this is to involve and encourage more women to get involved. “It’s good for all of us when more girls come into the scene because then we up our game. We start being seen as a cool bunch of people rather than a small group of ‘female comedians.’”

Both Vaz and Surka point out the effectiveness of platforms like ladies’ special open mics that give women who are new to comedy a warmer audience—online they face trolls and it takes experience to take on hecklers in live audiences. “I know a lot of female comedians who got into trouble for saying a lot of things,” Surka says, adding that women are often asked to stop doing comedy because their family or their boyfriend didn’t appreciate it. Safer spaces with more women present and encouragement from both women and men in the comedy community can do wonders. “I was so impressed with the level of comedy,” Surka says about her most recent experience hosting a ladies’ special open mic. “They had good jokes, more confidence; it’s a great sign.”

Having said that, there’s a lot more work to be done before women artists are seen as equals rather than the ‘other,’ with their hard work exoticized and shoved under one label. “It’s the reason why we’re all doing what we’re doing,” says Surka firmly. “It’ll take time, but I think we’ll get there.”

WITH INPUTS BY NIRMIKA SINGH

Reviews

they sing along.

As many of us navigate between headline-driven panic attacks and insomniac social-media tantrums, *Pure Comedy* distills terabytes-worth of doomsaying Facebook rants into a 75-minute comic-existential opus that functions like a despair inoculation. The humor is strictly gallows, even when it seems quipped. "Total Entertainment Forever" begins, "Bedding Taylor Swift/Every night inside the Oculus Rift," soon becoming an apocalyptic vision of a culture amusing itself to death. Our dystopian future is a through line. "Things It Would Have Been Helpful to Know Before the Revolution" describes global warming apparently giving way to a new ice age: "The tribe at the former airport/Some nights has meat and dancing/If you don't mind gathering and hunting/We're all still pretty good at eating on the run."

What makes this more than glib is a golden-era songwriting craft evidently shaped by Tillman's tenure with Fleet Foxes, and his unsparing self-examination. See "Leaving L.A.," a 13-minute antihero epic for voice, guitar and strings spiritually perched between "Desolation Row" and "It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)." At one point, someone issues the singer a takedown: "Oh, great, that's just what we all need/Another white guy in 2017/Who takes himself so goddamn seriously." That he can't help but agree is one more nail in his coffin.

Tillman has spoken about his struggles with severe depression, and you can read *Pure Comedy* as his attempt to wrestle with psychic malaise. On the finale, "In Twenty Years or So," the singer orders more drinks while some pianist plays "This Must Be the Place," Talking Heads' classic paean to home as a psychological state. "There's nothing to fear," Tillman sings, soaring up to falsetto on the last word, lying through his teeth, maybe, but understanding how music keeps us sane.



Drake in London

Drake's Playful World Tour

The rapper's sprawling 'More Life' is his best record in a long time

Drake *More Life* Young Money/Cash Money ★★★★★



Drake calls his superb new *More Life* a "playlist," not an album or even a mixtape, yet that might be why it sounds so quintessentially Drake-ian. When you get down to it, Aubrey Graham is a playlist – a pop visionary with a raging appetite for his next favorite sound. This is a masterful tour of the grooves in his head, from U.K. grime ("No Long Talk") to Caribbean dancehall ("Blem") to South African house ("Get It Together"). The further he roams, the deeper he taps into the heart of Drakeness.

Drake generously includes solo tracks for artists like Sampha and Skepta, providing killer showcases for London newcomers Giggs and Jorja Smith, as well as Atlanta gods 2 Chainz and Young Thug, who shines in totally different modes on "Sacrifices" and "Ice Melts." *More Life* might flaunt Drake's internationalist outlook, but wherever he goes, he's still stuck being Drake. "Passionfruit" is the pick of the litter, a Nana Rogues production with a vintage disco throb; Drake gallantly tells his special lady, "You got issues that I won't mention for now." (Of course he won't – he'd have to stop brooding about his own.) That's why one of the most effective guests here is Drake's mom, who leaves a voicemail warning, "You know, hon, I'm a bit concerned about this negative tone that I'm hearing in your voice these days." The woman has a point. Even Drake knows he's most inspired when he looks beyond himself. Here, he's wearing less and going out more – and it does his music a world of good.

ROB SHEFFIELD



Nelly Furtado

The Ride Nelstar

★★★★½

Folky former hitmaker tries a successful reboot

On her first album in five years, Nelly Furtado finds a balance between her folky history ("I'm Like a Bird") and her pop desires. The singer sets crunchy melodies to emotional synth-pop that takes cues from Dev Hynes (a.k.a. Blood Orange), who had Furtado sing on last year's excellent *Freetown Sound*. The influence of producer John Congleton (St. Vincent, Explosions in the Sky) is also clear. Some of the ballads are a little too wispy, but alluring songs like "Paris Sun," a menacingly sexy track reminiscent of Nine Inch Nails' "Closer" but with a softer touch, suggest an artist defying the odds on the way to a career rebirth.

BRITTANY SPANOS



Future Islands

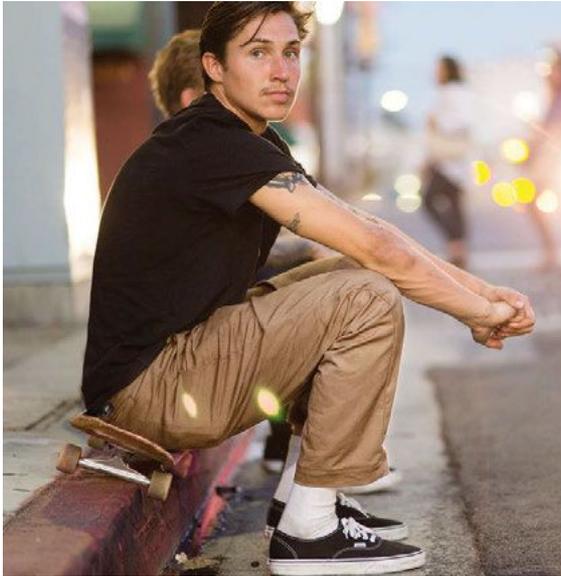
The Far Field 4AD

★★★★½

Synth-pop crew opens up its New Romantic heart

On the fifth album from Baltimore's Future Islands, frontman Samuel T. Herring continues to put a begging, pleading soulman spin on the moony affliction of the Cure and New Order – slathering his gangly sandpaper croon all over songs like the dance-pop gallop "Ran." The results are comically over-the-top but still warmly moving; he's the kind of guy who can make the line "we were the candles that lit up the snow on dusty roads" seem poignant. Debbie Harry of Blondie swings by to help moan the tenderly gloomy "Shadows," and the whole thing nicely evokes a rainy Eighties afternoon awash in heartache and MTV. JON DOLAN

On the Shelf



Authentic Chinos by Vans

As part of the Spring 2017 Men's Apparel collection, Vans presents the Authentic Chinos. The pants feature Vans' Sturdy Stretch twill fabrication, highlighting a purposeful innovation that embraces timeless style and skateboard functionality all-in-one. Hidden features include flat felled seams, sewn bar tacks for reinforcement, curved slant pockets and a hidden coin pocket. The chinos are available in classic colors including black, dirt and dark slate.

Mon Guerlain

This sultry fragrance unites the contrasts expressed by the strength of taut lines, evoking a strong, free and sensual femininity. The perfume infuses fresh and audacious Carla Lavender, an exceptional variety grown in Provence, with Vanilla Tahitensis. Sambac Jasmine, gathered at sunrise, and Album Sandalwood come together to seal the Mon Guerlain fragrance in finesse, strength and mystery.



Adidas Originals NMD_XR1

The evolutionary NMD_XR1 model steps out in a striking tonal treatment, elevating the shoe's signature Primeknit upper with a textured approach. A tonal white color palette is brought to life with an engineered 'Stripe Noise' motif woven into the Primeknit textile, adding subtle texture to the shoe's profile. Finishing touches include white laces and a molded TPU heel-tab, placed atop the shoe's trademark BOOST midsole with tonal white EVA plugs, creating a truly minimalist take on the next generation NMD model.



Spectra Expandable by Victorinox

Travelling becomes functional and stylish with the renowned Spectra 2.0 collection, which allows an unprecedented 47% more packing capacity in checked luggage and the ease to adjust the depth for carry on styles. The new cases are all equipped with an integrated expansion system, and with multiple styles. Travelers can customize the case to the size they need. The checked styles feature an eleven cm expansion with exterior compression straps, while the carry-ons feature a three cm expansion. The Spectra 2.0 collection is available in red, navy blue and black.

Rebound by Liberty Force 10

Rebound from Liberty has an attractive and youthful mix of colors for the uppers. The shoe is lightweight for better comfort, offers superior cushioning, strong durability, supreme flexibility and enhanced performance. It has high tensile strength, high coefficient of friction and good ventilation properties. Rebound is a perfect combination of style and comfort, suitable for workouts, running and walking without causing any trouble, and will put a spring in your step.



Victorinox Special Outrider DAMAST Limited Edition 2017

Victorinox announces the launch of its limited edition 85-millimeter blade made of corrosion and wear-resistant Damascus steel. The blade is fashioned to guarantee exceptional cutting performance. Manufactured using environmentally-friendly wood fiber material that accentuates the elegant design. Each piece will also be laser engraved with a serial number to add a touch of exclusivity. The gift packaging incorporates a window and a holding magnet and includes a certificate with a detailed description of this latest piece from Victorinox.



Audio Production Technology by Sennheiser and Neumann

At their joint booth at NAB 2017, Sennheiser and Neumann will showcase audio technology for productions of any size. An innovative range of products will be displayed, which are ready to support and capture professional audio at every level, whether visitors want to produce movies or focus on mobile journalism. The booth also features solutions for radio and TV studios, for fully immersive virtual reality productions, and even for personal use, with the MKE 2 elements action microphone for GoPro HERO 4 cameras.



Banrock Station Wine by Aspri Spirits

The Banrock Station Shiraz is a full bodied, rich wine that allows you to indulge in the flavors of plum and blackberry infused with clove and aniseed spices. Taste the intense blackberry fruit and let the aroma of coffee, oak and cinnamon sink in with every sip you take. The Banrock Station Chardonnay exhibits the fresh aromas of citrus fruit and the delicate overtones of oak. A combination of peach, melon and honeydew, all put together to bring you the soft and light texture of one of the finest white wines in the world.



Pepe Jeans Spring Summer Collection 2017

This 2017 Spring/Summer collection by Pepe Jeans is a journey through a contemporary man's wardrobe, played through its four large capsule collections. The first, Only Play, delivers a strong casual sport influence using classic British colors. Viva Cuba, a treat from the tropics, draws inspiration from the vibrant Caribbean. The collection also includes Blue Soul, a fresh palette of blue with new fabrics that have been introduced into the denims and chinos. And last but not least, Super Ego is the young grunge look for the new age rebel.



Calvin Klein Minimal

The new Calvin Klein Minimal watches are inspired by vintage timepieces. The model is available in six chromatic versions - tone on tone stainless steel, yellow gold PVD, black and logo contrasted on blue or stainless steel bracelets. The other options include black and pink gold PVD completed with a mesh bracelet or leather strap for ultimate comfort. The exquisite watches are crafted for both men and women and are also water resistant.

Baby-G Watches by Casio

Casio has announced the release of four new additions to the BABY-G line of women's shock-resistant watches, as part of the "for running" series for women. The watches feature solid lines and colors that make great accessories for sportswear. The design is reinforced by great detail in the case and the band as well as the color ring around the dial. Clean-cut hands, bar index marks, and large digital displays make it easier to read as you run. The BGA-240L model comes with a useful stopwatch feature to clock lap times and is available in four different colors.



SKIN Collection by Swatch

Swatch's SKIN collection introduces eleven minimalist styles in two new case sizes for men and women. The look achieves simple, easy-to-wear elegance, featuring new jewel-cut crown designs and sophisticated dial features. The watch is available in SKINSKIN, a subtle "nude" watch and SKIN- NOIR, following the eye-catching black and white color scheme. This versatile collection is available in both regular and big sizes, employing the striking wave element with every timepiece.



GIG CALENDAR

JUSTIN BIEBER- THE PURPOSE WORLD TOUR

Grammy Award – winner and global pop sensation Justin Bieber is making his way to India this month to play his debut concert in the country. Bieber's tour is in support of his fourth album, the 'Purpose,' on which he has experimented with more adventurous electronic sounds. Norwegian DJ/producer Alan Walker will be one of the opening acts at the concert.

May 10th,
D.Y. PATIL STADIUM,
NAVI MUMBAI



Justin Bieber

LUCY ROSE INDIA CINEMA TOUR

British singer-songwriter Lucy Rose will be returning to India this month for a multi-city tour and a screening of her documentary 'Something's Changing,' which is also the title of her upcoming third album. After her inventive and many-hued first two albums, she has been pushing emotional boundaries with new releases.

May 23rd,
OddBird Theatre,
NEW DELHI
May 24th,
OddBird Theatre,
NEW DELHI
May 26th,
The Royal Opera House,
MUMBAI
May 27th,
The Humming Tree,
BENGALURU

TIME WISE

Ahmadabad-based experimental jazz fusion band Time Wise have been instrumental in setting up

the jazz and blues scene in their city and also in the other parts of Gujarat. The band have also been organizing the highly successful and appreciated Ahmedabad Jazz & Blues Festival. Time Wise will be performing at New Delhi's The Piano Man Jazz club this month. The group performs jazz standards with a twist and experiments with crisp rhythms and mellow tunes in their music.

May 12th,
The Piano Man Jazz Club,
NEW DELHI

BLUETREE SHOWCASE

The first edition of the Bluetree Showcase gig series will feature New Delhi/Uttarakhand electronica duo IJA comprising Ashhar Farooqui aka Toymob and drummer-producer Sahil Mendiratta, New Delhi-based

electronica-experimental-rock outfit Sundog Project and electronica/rock pair Fuzz Culture also from New Delhi.

May 11th,
Antisocial, Hauz Khas
Village, NEW DELHI

FOXTROT PROJECT TOUR

Kolkata-based record label Amuze Records will be promoting their annual compilation CD on a multi-city tour featuring some of the country's finest jazz artists. The lineup consists of versatile jazz outfit The Neel Sarkar Project, jazz band The Rohan Ganguli Quartet, avant-garde jazz/rock group The Bodhisattwa Trio, funk/jazz trio Syncopation and more.

May 24th-28th,
The Piano Man Jazz Club,
NEW DELHI
June 1st,
Antisocial, MUMBAI
June 4th,
Antisocial, MUMBAI
June 3rd,

Blue Frog, BENGALURU
June 8th,
Plush Lounge, KOLKATA

THE YUVA TOUR

Premiere South Asian a cappella group Penn Masala are coming to India to promote their 10th full length album 'Yuva.' On the new record, the band celebrates youth, illustrating the natural progression from innocence to independence with songs comprising ballads and party anthems. The group, who have previously performed at The White House, will perform in five Indian cities this month.

May 19th,
Vineyard Rooftop and Club,
HYDERABAD
May 20th,
Dublin Square, Phoenix
Marketcity, Kurla, MUMBAI
May 21st,
Phoenix Market City,
CHENNAI
May 27th,
TBD, BENGALURU
May 28th,
GD Birla Sabhaghar,
KOLKATA



Fuzz Culture

THE PLAYLIST

OUR FAVORITE SONGS, ALBUMS AND VIDEOS RIGHT NOW

MY LIST



Jon Anderson Five Songs That Inspired Me

The Yes frontman – on tour with the Yes offshoot band Anderson, Rabin and Wake-man – is part of the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame’s 2017 class.

The Beatles “Eleanor Rigby”

The Beatles were a very progressive band. It’s a very interesting lyric, dark and strange. No matter how many times you hear it, it still sounds amazing.

Nina Simone “I Put a Spell on You”

In the early days of my career, I would always carry around a Nina Simone tape. She went through hell to become a great artist.

Jimi Hendrix “Purple Haze”

I saw him play at a pub in Munich right after his first album came out. This song was really the beginning of powerful rock.

Rickie Lee Jones “Magazine”

She’s definitely one of the greatest singer-songwriters of all time. My wife and I saw her play recently, and I was an emotional wreck by the end.

Randy Newman “In Germany Before the War”

This is an incredible, powerful, sad, lonely song. Not many people go there. He’s just magic, and I love his songwriting.



1. Kendrick Lamar “The Heart Part 4”

The rap god at his most gloriously pissed off, ripping into everyone from Trump to Kevin Durant: “No peers, no scars, no fear, fuck y’all, sincere.” Can’t front on that.

2. Gorillaz feat. Popcaan “Saturnz Bars”

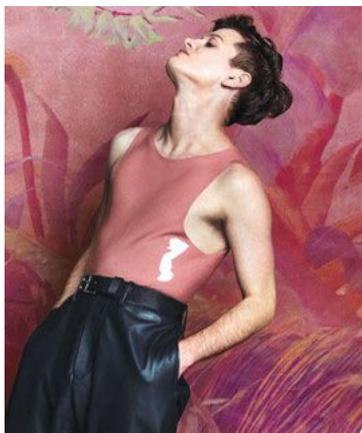
Damon Albarn’s cartoon crew is about to release its first LP in six years. Here they team up with Jamaican dancehall singer Popcaan for some awesomely spacey dub-hop swagger.

3. Craig Finn “Jester & June”

The Hold Steady frontman keeps getting closer to his Springsteen ideal, but this darkly majestic tale of dive bars, religion and drug deals gone weird is more *Nebraska* than *Born to Run*.

4. Perfume Genius “Slip Away”

Singer-producer Mike Hadreas (a.k.a. Perfume Genius) specializes in turning his insecurities into sly synth-pop anthems – and this bright anti-hater banger is the best one he’s ever done.



5. Feist “Pleasure”

If you haven’t checked in with Feist since she was a warm indie folkie, this quietly grueling song might surprise you. It’s like classic PJ Harvey if she only wrote deranged lullabies.

6. Todd Rundgren feat. Robyn “That Could Have Been Me”

Contrarian 68-year-old power-pop wizard meets cool Swedish diva, and Cyndi Lauperesque Eighties greatness ensues.



7. Brad Paisley “selfie#theinternetisforever”

A hilarious anti-social-media screed from the country star’s forthcoming album. “Spring-breakin’ in Daytona, in the middle of a keg stand/It’s all fun and games till your daddy follows you on Instagram,” he sings. He’s truly given us a folk song for our unashamed times.



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