



NIRVANA

Text Zachary Tang

about a band

Let's imagine, for a moment, an alternate universe where Kurt Cobain is still alive. What would he be doing in 2013? Settling aside repeated suicide attempts, given his heroin-addled lifestyle, chronic depression and misanthropic attitudes, he and Nirvana may have probably went on to produce one or two more good albums before his dogged morosity swallowed his creative genius entirely. And look how we regard our ageing rock stars today (Billy Corgan, anyone?), either hurling smug comments toward their new stuff or even pretending we never liked them in the first place; do we really want a world where Nirvana still exists physically?

The essence of that is purported most positively. Nirvana, for millions of us, has the poetic beauty of being embedded in the fabric of its own space, untainted by the harsh friction of time and emblemizing youth, rebellion, desolation and all types of angst felt in everyday life. No other album would ever go down in time quite like *Nevermind* did; it was like radiation from an atomic bomb diffusing over the mainstream and all of a sudden, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" flooded the ears of *everyone* and grunge became the biggest movement of the '90s. Not that Cobain could reconcile with that, though, shunning the labels attached to fame, leading to a much more inaccessible and experimental follow up rooted in alternative rock, *In Utero*, which would also be their final effort.

"Punk rock should mean freedom, playing whatever you want, As sloppy as you want as long as it's good and it has passion." – Kurt Cobain

Then again, Cobain couldn't really reconcile with anything. Staying underground drew unsubstantial crowds, which was disenchanting for him whereas rock stardom meant earning a giant fan base that could not identify with so much of the subversive ideologies the band constantly tried to present. He hated that his messages of sexism, racism and homophobia failed, or were refused to be understood by the masses. In that sense, he always failed *upwards*; the quintessence of this is captured perfectly on a particular cover of *Rolling Stones'* Magazine, the vanguard of music publications at the time, where Cobain ironically wore a t-shirt saying 'Corporate Magazines Still Suck' for its cover shoot. In his endeavours to stay true to his artistic vision, the authenticity was incandescent; it was an ethos that seduced even more people to the idiosyncrasies of Nirvana.

That inability to seek vindication through any worldly concept ultimately led to Nirvana's burning out. Cobain, for all the love he received from the world, found no way to love himself, wrought further into the macabre excesses of his mind by drugs and depression. In his suicide note, he agonised about the eternal loss of childhood and the enthusiasms that could only come with it, surmising that he'd become a "miserable, self-destructive, death rocker" and was "hateful towards all humans in general". It was in this mindset that a restless spirit, stuck in an empty shell, ended his life to seek higher meaning, leaving behind a mighty legion of fans and a timeless legacy. **J**

www.nirvana.com

KEY NIRVANA



Bleach (1989)

Bleach was Nirvana's first display of their skills, through the marriage of raging grunge with a staggering emotional vulnerability. Lyrics take a backseat here; Cobain preferred, as usual, to let the raw sound of guitar melodies do the talking.



Nevermind (1991)

Famously modeled after the Pixies' soft verse/loud chorus aesthetic most pronounced in hit single "Smells Like Teen Spirit", *Nevermind* was Nirvana's pop record. The dissonant guitar riffs lay the groundwork for much of the nineties music to follow.



In Utero (1993)

In contrast to the polished pop sheen of *Nevermind* which Cobain found unsatisfactory, he strived to return to their original dimensions, a more visceral and aggressive sound. With this also came lyrics that were more personal and built around themes.