

August 25....Blossom Music Center....Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

By most reasonable measures, this should not have been my next show. Who ever could have guessed that, a year and a half after catching Guns N' Roses, that the following band I'll see live in concert is...Dinosaur Jr.? And not only that, but I technically should have *already* caught these guys, too. Or take even tonight: Blind Melon, the opening act, at least makes some twisted sense in this passing of the torch, considering the whole Shannon Hoon-Axl Rose connection, that Melon's lead warbler sang on a handful of *Use Your Illusion* tracks, et cetera. But no, we have gotten here too late for that set, also.

Everything is just this topsy-turvy, in this current musical climate where we now find ourselves. So much so that tonight's headliner, Neil Young, has gained a ton of critical steam in the past year and some change, much of it centered around his newly declared status as The Godfather Of Grunge. Which only took off upon the release of *Harvest Moon* last year, an album that evokes in name, spirit, and mellow tuneage his *Harvest* offering of two decades prior, i.e. the mostly acoustic, really mainstream one, with prominent background vocals by the likes of James Taylor and Emmylou Harris. *That* is somehow when this whole Godfather Of Grunge business really starts gathering momentum. So yeah, makes total sense, right about now.

Well, *Harvest Moon* is by a factor of dozens my most familiar work by ol' Neil, and let me state for the record that I'm not hearing a ton of grunge there. That album is also pretty much the only reason I'm here. As for Heather, my girlfriend (a development which seems about as outlandish as everything else, I must admit), she knows even less about Canada's answer to Bob Dylan. But is a good sport, and has never been to a concert, period, and figured why the hell not.

Unpacking all of '92 and most of '93, to this point, is an exercise in frustrating near-misses. Regarding tonight and the connective tissue of lost opportunities, these extend well beyond the Blind Melon set that I was working too late during this, a weekday afternoon, to catch. Last summer, my good friend Andy Carpenter, knowing that I'm as rabid a Cure fan as he and possibly more so, went ahead and bought two tickets to their closest show, without even a heads up, surmising that there was

no need to even ask me that question. And ordinarily, he would be correct. Except this just so happened to coincide with a planned family vacation, out of state, one from which no amount of pleading would convince my parents to exclude me. So much for that. In a desperate last minute move, Andy wound up having to take some classmate of ours named Earl instead, whom he barely even knows.

Yet the granddaddy of them all occurred just last month, this Lollapalooza debacle that I'm already regretting to no end. For this one I have a ticket in hand, purchased well in advance of the show. Heather and I were in the midst of some month long breakup at the time, but this was my consolation prize to myself, and I knew that with the lineup of acts, its proximity to our hometown – basically just a straight shot down state route 13 from Mansfield, barely over an hour – and the legions of friends who would also be in attendance, it mattered even less that this was, once again, a weeknight. But that morning arrives and in my charming little air-conditioned bank teller gig, I somehow come down with a fever, which has probably only happened three or four times in my life.

All I can think about for the entirety of my shift is going home and crawling into bed, despite the sweltering heat of this early July day. And that is precisely what I do. Only calling my friend Kenny the next day for a full recap, like learning that the irredeemably demented Layne Staley, his reaction to this 100 degree heat diametrically opposed to mine, had performed in a three piece suit. And there is photo evidence to bear this out as well. Other stories also begin to emerge, far more elusive ones, like how this one kid from our hometown allegedly took a bunch of acid, removed every last stitch of his clothes, then was busted by the cops in this clothing-optional fashion while running down the middle of some road. Making the evening news for doing so, in some regions, as a result. Amusingly enough, that kid just so happens to be the grandson of my bank's ultra-stuffy vice president. The one who's always getting on me for looking a bit too scruffy for her tastes.

That near miss with The Cure blows, but in many respects, this Lolla misstep feels more critical – and for reasons that have nothing to do with the money wasted. I love those gloomy Brits and everything, don't get me wrong. But Perry Farrell's traveling roadshow, now in its third year, is slightly more in tune with these modern times. In fact, far more than this belated credit thrown at Nirvana's feet, I would argue that Lollapalooza is the primary factor *creating* these modern times. A point which was all the rage from a few months there in the summer of '91, which everyone has somehow seemingly already forgotten in their frenzy to lionize Kurt Cobain. I really should have just sucked it up and drove down there that day, even for just the back half of the festival, because an opportunity like that will never happen again. In consideration of this, I think it makes as much sense to start here as it does anywhere else.

Those of us who became teenagers during some of the worst years in music history, we maybe have a tendency to over-gush about this alternative uprising. But who can blame us? Well before 1990 hit, even the best veteran acts had almost all uniformly lost the plot. There was almost *nobody* creating good music in 1980 and 1990 both, for example – it's difficult to find a similar ten year stretch at any other point you can think of. Unless perhaps you're talking about 1979-1989. Or 1978-1988.

Part of this suddenly slippery footing I think is due to uncharted territory, in that these dinosaur rock bands had pretty much formulated that beast in a laboratory themselves, with no other example to follow. So it's a bit unrealistic to expect that some of these characters such as the Stones or Who or Kinks would still be holding it together and cranking out top shelf classics at the 20 or 30 year mark. No other group really ever had before, and yet here all these 60s outfits were, seemingly hobbling together as one toward that same distant finish line. For one of them to issue a totally-actually-not-altogether-terrible album like *Steel Wheels* or something felt like a press-stopping achievement.

But another big piece of this malaise, and the aging solo artists were just as if not more guilty than those full-blown legacy bands, was leaning way too far into trends, in an effort to fit in with the era. Not that hailing from the 1960s was a prerequisite for falling into this trap. This phenomenon you

can break off into a pair of closely related smaller ones, which occasionally overlap. Some artists, like Rod Stewart for example, made a phenomenal go of it in shifting from rock to pop. The problem with this tactic, however – which isn't to suggest Rod The Bod is complaining, necessarily – is that pop fans are fickle, and eventually stop caring. By which point you've lost your rock crowd to some extent, and can't effectively make that switch back. Or at least not to where they care much about your modern day work.

The other, far greater and centrally damning blight, however, besmirching so much music from this era, was chasing the hot sounds of the day. Meaning that even solid groups that may have initially enjoyed some success with a slicker sound (ZZ Top comes to mind, though even a group like Rush became way too infatuated with synthesizers and other assorted studio gadgetry over the back half of the 80s) were rusting in gruesome fashion by decade's end. A smaller but nobler subset, of which our hero Neil Young here is the patron saint, moved violently in the opposite direction, to counterbalance this tendency – but I wouldn't exactly claim this was an overwhelming success, either, for most of them.

Into this void steps a band like Jane's Addiction, whose timing you might argue could not possibly have been better. They have certainly gotten a ton of mileage to date on a rather thin discography. People will not be listening to these guys a hundred years from now – or at least, they *shouldn't* be – but I get it. Perry Farrell is an interesting dude, and it's considered cool to like them. However, this neatly summarizes my overall take on what I consider an excessively praised outfit: interesting and cool to like (they even had *naked women* on their album cover! In America, in 1988!) more so than a great listening experience. They do have a few good songs, but a little Perry goes a long way, and Dave Navarro's guitar playing remains overrated to a baffling degree, as does their catalog itself.

Considering Ferrell was the primary brainchild behind Lollapalooza, however, his name will live on, I suspect, for that reason alone. And the band which initially made him famous makes for as good a case study as any, examining how we arrived at this point. In shades of a similar move made by Guns N' Roses at right around the same time, the Jane's Addiction "live" debut features overdubbed crowd noise from a completely different act. Unlike *GN'R Lies*, however, only half the material was cooked up in the studio, the rest was at least taken from real shows.

This would be the self-titled document issued in 1987, on tiny label Triple X. Regarding track-by-track particulars, Navarro does rip off some impressive fret runs on *Whores*, and drummer Stephen Perkins manages to throw in nifty fills of his own. But there's not much of a discernable *tune* here, just sort of this aimless groove that basically sounds like many, many others they will generate. I guess it's somewhat intriguing that they vaguely meld an artsier vibe to some straightforward metal, and paste it atop this soon to be trademarked Jane's groove. But it's even more remarkable that Warner Brothers would sign these guys a year later.

The next track, *1%*, stomps about 50% more than its predecessor, yet I detect even less of an actual song here. The chorus I suppose is somewhat memorable, and has Farrell sounding almost melodic - so take your victories where you can find them. *I Would For You* is more like it, though, the languid, keyboard drenched (!) pace better suited for Perry's relatively limited bag of tricks. As was the case during the slower moments of album opener *Trip Away*, I find that he has a voice better suited for balladry, which wasn't a discovery I expected to make at all. Though he's obviously quite fond of reverb laden barking atop a more frenetic beat, this slower tempo allows him to actually croon. Add in for example on *I Would* sweeter lyrics than you would have guessed him capable of up to this juncture, and this sum total represents his true wheelhouse. Even as I'm sure almost nobody whose identity is wrapped up in saying it's cool to listen to Jane's Addiction will admit as much.

Unfortunately, *Jane Says* arrives right on its heels. Not just that, but a bongo heavy take on what would eventually become an improbable radio staple, which does feature a sweet little guitar solo...but also some of Perry's worst yipping, and no steel drums. An annoying song to begin with, and

exponentially more with repetition. But then despite its beyond cliched title, *Rock & Roll* is a scuzzy little shuffle that might even have you clapping your hands along with theirs, like something a higher pitched Lou Reed might have come up with if he debuted in 1987- which I was thinking before even learning that this is, in fact, an old Velvet Underground song. *Chip Trip* meanwhile has him doing his echoey bark thing over top of what sounds like a high school marching band. *Pigs In Zen* is a musical rehash of what you've already heard or soon will, with lyrics that are mostly at *best* nonsensical trifles. The worst bits (example: *I just wanna fuck!*) call to mind Soundgarden's *Big Dumb Sex*, as in maybe purportedly some meta critique of mindless macho rock songs, yet winding up as one itself. The harmonica and acoustics on *My Time* are appreciated as much as the tempo shift, yessir, but I wouldn't say this cut has me scrambling to cue it up when I get home, either. And I'm guessing you already have a really strong idea of what they might do with the Stones' *Sympathy For The Devil*. Correct you are, except then slow it down a smidge, and have Perry sing like a gnome in select spots.

Stylistically, they are all over the map, which is expected of a brand new outfit, and somewhat commendable on its own. Yet I can't help but lament that the avenues they later chose to pursue, stemming from this fork in the road at the starting block, which is essentially seeing what might be done with the *Whores* template over and over again, were possibly the least interesting ones presented here. I suspect if you caught them in a club at this time, you would have considered a five or six song set to be seriously pushing it, and that even with a few swell ideas, this junk wasn't really cohering.

On their studio debut, *Nothing's Shocking*, there are once again a couple decent tunes and a handful of compelling ideas elsewhere, but if you're not burned out on Perry's voice by the end of this, then you're a better man than me. *Up The Beach* is a vaguely muscular instrumental opener, but there's nothing much really happening here...although one of the *better* non-happenings is this precise lack of vocals. Once this gives way to *Ocean Sized*, however, we are firmly entrenched in the trademarked Jane's shuffle, albeit one which does feature an admittedly smoldering Navarro solo. I would compliment them for shaking things up and slowing them down on the faux reggae shuffle of *Ted... Just Admit It*, except there's not a ton going on here, either. Although listening to this song makes me think I finally get it, in particular where this effusive praise for Navarro is coming from: when people throw on a really boring album like this, having already convinced themselves that it must be amazing, given all the rave reviews, then an eventual halfway decent guitar workout like Dave's, about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way through this tune, does somewhat grab your ear. Still, if future historians want a compelling case study in what hipsters were inexplicably raving about circa 1990 or so, this might fit that bill. Judged on its own merits, however, I doubt few will be unwinding to this stuff after a long day at the office.

Summertime Rolls is one of the more seemingly endless slogs I've recently sat through, basically the complete antithesis of its title; the horns on *Idiots Rule* are a trifle unexpected, that's for sure, but whether they add much and/or represent a good idea is another matter entirely. Never would I have thought myself so capable of relief at eventually getting to *Mountain Song* and especially *Jane Says*. The short jazzy stylings of *Thank You Boys* are not bad, either – but see my comments on *Up The Beach*, as this also blessedly features just a quick dash of Farrell.

Well, despite the current misplaced, bloated hype over Jane's Addiction, Perry's greatest legacy, far and away, is going to wind up being Lollapalooza. No small feat, in that it basically revived the whole festival concept, which had lain dormant for at least half a year, and became one of the first ever traveling ones, period. But its key inspiration lies with A Gathering of the Tribes, this 1990, two day affair Farrell himself attended as a spectator.

I remember the first time I caught the word *grunge*, which was at the start of the 1991 school year. It occurred during Spanish class, when the teacher went around the room, making us tell a little bit about ourselves (in English). This one older hipster kid sitting in the back row mentioned that he listened to *grunge*, and the entire room exploded with laughter, including our teacher. Nobody else had ever heard this term before, so she asked him to explain it to us.

What's even more interesting about this now, however, which only just occurred to me while

working on this, was that the first ever Lollapalooza tour had been *over* for about a month by this point. And though MTV had been blasting constant news reports about it since the spring, word of mouth was fierce, and a bunch of kids from my school went to the nearest one...this *grunge* term was still unfamiliar to all of us. Here we are two years later, and although it's already turned into where this entire musical movement is being summed up as a grunge uprising, that's not the case. Nobody was summarizing Lolla in that fashion, and without even getting into a whole stupid debate about, "what's alternative mean, anyway, man? Alternative to what, heh heh heh?" I think we are selling ourselves and these musical movements short when we start equating the grunge movement, spearheaded by Nirvana, as being what instigated this chart and culture upheaval. Aside from the fact that it's just not true.

I had heard Jane's Addiction well before the summer of '91, of course. The release of *Ritual de lo Habitual* in 1990 marks their tipping point, and when the cool kids at school begin seriously discussing them, although most will naturally claim to have been listening to them all along. The album went gold in about a month's time, bolstered by somewhat of an actual hit song in the form of *Stop!* and then later kicked into even higher gear when the immortal *Been Caught Stealing* took off on MTV. With an interest buoyed by this song and in no small part the street buzz surrounding it, I will even take a plunge on adding this CD to my introductory basket at either Columbia House or BMG, one of those such notorious semi-scam deals (*11 CDs for 1 cent!!!*) and consider it a victory of sorts to have actually listened all the way through a few times. Yet apart from that iconic Bill Of Rights cover, Perry's little introductory spiel in the liner notes might be the most significant piece of art this group every generated.

Though titled *Preamble*, it's also often referred to as *To The Mosquitoes*. In whatever name, it's an impressive essay, a passionate call for reintroducing more kindness and humanity into our daily lives, whether toward one another or the planet itself. Beginning with the memorable phrase, *we have more influence over your children than you do, but we love your children*, it goes on to establish, as if there were any doubt, that Farrell is a deep thinker. I only wish a little more of this translated to the song lyrics, which are purportedly full of insight yet to my ears and eyes often fail to deliver.

It's possible I am overly influenced by the setting in which I was first made aware of this piece, a 10th grade Speech class. As in, entirely dedicated to getting up in front of everyone and delivering speeches. A classmate, Jason Lowe, had mentioned in the days leading up to one assignment, that he would be reciting a "poem" from the *Ritual* liner notes, which he referred to by its *Mosquitoes* alias. I had no idea what he was talking about, but found myself unexpectedly moved when he read this, transcribed onto some notebook paper, in front of everyone – an image made all the more poignant in that he was also the first fatality from our graduating class, in a car crash not even five years later.

But there are some beautiful passages here, and it features almost no hokeyness, which is a difficult thing to pull off. Even when presenting lines such as, *I used to wish sometimes that I was a woman*, or substituting *black man* in its stead, he comes off as not the least bit condescending or ridiculous, as you can sense the compassion and purpose behind every word. Some of the standalone sentences, separated in typeface, are most striking, which I'm sure is by design:

Would you ever have imagined there would be children swinging in polluted playgrounds?

Or, for another example:

Try to restrict our freedoms and we will fight even harder to preserve them.

The latter of these has me thinking about the minor flap surrounding *Ritual's* album cover, which originally featured some crude Farrell artwork, until various major corporate retail chains objected (once again) to the bare female breasts, drawn or painted or whatever they are at that. In response to this, their second great non-song-related artistic move of the project was to replace it with a

section from the Bill Of Rights, which ultimately became much more iconic anyway. The original, which make no bones about it, probably took some skill to create – I have no doubt it’s approximately 10,000 times better than I could ever manage – is nonetheless kind of silly, not that remarkable, and would never be the highlight of any museum. By leaning into the controversy, they’ve not only come up with something better, and longer lasting, but also established a potential blueprint for future artists when facing the censorship Nazis: throw it right back at them, in mocking fashion.

Regarding the music itself, *Stop* is possibly their most fully realized composition. I know *Three Days* has its many adherents, but that one is more of a flowing, episodic, extended mosaic type composition. Perkins and Avery are the primary driving forces, and it presents some interesting dynamic shifts, but even so, I don’t quite get the hype. What are the selling points here, anyway? *During certain halfway decent passages, it totally sounds like Tool on their most boring ever day! Navarro even contributes some semi memorable shredding!* Mmm, not terrible, but mostly I think I’ll pass.

Stop, however, is concise yet clever, heavy as it is catchy, with a memorably jagged *stop...now go!* intersection popping up along the highway every half mile or so. But then *No One’s Leaving* arrives right on its heels, and whatever you would term this *new Jane’s* groove, which is a little more bruising and metallic, this second tune sounds like a carbon copy of the first, even reprising some shouted “go!” interludes from Perry. At the very least, you can’t but feel they should have slotted this track elsewhere on the album. The echoey reggae-esque intro to *Ain’t No Right*, meanwhile, sounds like a Police parody – your call as to which is the more debatable choice.

I’m sure it’s no coincidence that, as far as cassette versions are concerned, the strongest two tracks are side openers. Probably not much needs said about *Been Caught Stealing* at this point, aside from it being one of the more unlikely underground rock songs in recent memory to become a major hit. And was subsequently overplayed as a result, along with its memorable video, which cleverly uses a fake baby bump for shoplifting purposes. It does crack me up to read at least one interview where Farrell insists with a presumably straight face that only upon his playing hardball and Warner Brothers “agreeing” to not over-promote these guys to radio and MTV did they decide to sign this deal. This creates an especially vivid mentally image for me, of how this probably went down:

Record company exec (puffing on a cigar behind desk, feet propped upon it, blowing smoke rings into the air while staring absently at the ceiling): “Oh yes, of course, of course, boys, of course. We will give you \$300,000 as agreed upon and *not promote* your music very much. As you wish. That is quite naturally a standard request for a major record label such as ours. Sure. You got it.”

Farrell/Navarro/Perkins/Avery: “Great! Where do we sign!”

Then She Did flows along in perfectly tranquil fashion, and demonstrates once more why Perry’s voice is better suited for the slow stuff. But then again, if this exact same track were dropped into, say, *Use Your Illusion*, wouldn’t it find us remarking that this is somewhat disposable filler, six minutes plus of a not exactly essential track? Why does popping a track like this into a smaller project suddenly make it masterful? And many of the same comments apply to *Classic Girl*, which is slightly shorter but also slightly less memorable.

All in all, this is a solidly middle of the road effort, which the magnifying glass of hype has been blown up to the point of distortion. A few great tracks, the rest at least halfway decent and nothing truly terrible, easily the best of their three albums, but...let’s not get carried away, here. It also feels about a track or two short and isn’t the purported masterpiece you’ve been led to believe.

Well, despite its unexpectedly strong reception, boosted in no small part by the video for *Been Caught Stealing* that was in fact played relentlessly on MTV, *Ritual* is already out for a couple of months by the time Farrell takes in A Gathering Of The Tribes. This two day festival, coordinated by legendary promoter Bill Graham and our old pal Ian Astbury from The Cult, is held in Mountain View on the first day, Costa Mesa the second, in October of 1990. Like the proper obsessive Jim Morrison devotee he is, Astbury at some point became taken up by the plight of the Native Americans, and

dreamed up this fest himself, as a platform for raising money to support their cause. Astbury in turn enlisted the best promoter he could rustle up, in Graham, and together they set about to create an impressively diverse lineup, many straddling the fence between household names and the ability to headline an arena on their own: Public Enemy, Joan Baez, Iggy Pop, Ice-T, Steve Jones, Queen Latifah, Soundgarden, and the Indigo Girls, among others.

It's a noble effort that draws well and yet loses money anyway (although presumably, Astbury just had to foot the difference himself – I don't think this meant he got to pocket the charity dough raised), about which you can make a few important points. Despite the massive success of Live Aid in 1985, music festivals had flatlined almost immediately afterwards. You did have Monsters of Rock bearing the torch overseas, but this was mostly a stationary concert, which only toured sporadically, and only came to the United States once, in 1988. Second, as Farrell watched this show, something clicked and he decided in this moment that what was needed was not just a festival featuring an eclectic mix of alternative or underground or indie or marginalized groups, or whatever you chose to call them, but also that he should take this on the road. Oh yeah, and that it would also be a vehicle for the farewell to Jane's Addiction.

This last point is often overlooked, though curious, and telling. I'm not sure what this says and if it really says anything at all. But even though they have become more successful than even the most ambitious prognosticators at Warner Brothers could have ever wished, they are throwing in the towel. Considering that with his next project, Porno For Pyros, Farrell enlists the same drummer, Stephen Perkins, we can safely assume he was not the problem. So it could be Dave Navarro's escalating drug use, Eric Avery's pouting, or some other unspecified inner band turmoil. Or possibly nothing – though obviously never knowing any of these guys personally, watching, reading about, and listening to them regurgitates that vaguely queasy feeling in the pit of your stomach, that you would get from hanging around trendy types, teenage girls, and/or trendy type teenage girls, in the early 1990s, where they're being weird and dramatic for the sake of being weird and dramatic. You can't pin them down with any actual specific reason because there isn't one. All they know is they need to shake things up – but definitely not being dramatic just for the attention, man! – and that you can't pigeonhole them, for above all else they must be free. And so it is Farrell decides to pull the plug on Jane's Addiction after a handful of years, one live album, and two studio efforts.

Well, hopefully that all works out for them. In the meantime they seem to have locked up some hipster cred. But I don't know, though they hit the jackpot and are obviously way more popular than I probably ever will be in life, my whole outlook is, just grab some umbrella to operate under and run with it. This is way more impressive, and ultimately more substantial. You look at something like The Cure, and despite a dizzying number of lineup changes (as well as constant threats to release a solo album, which to this day has never happened), Robert Smith just keeps trucking along. He is pulling the strings and therefore whomever he plays with and whatever direction the music takes, either because of these new players or because he just felt like it, therefore that is what The Cure sounds like now. Deal with it. This is way cooler than forming some silly new band that is never going to be as good and far fewer people will care about. My hunch is that there was no actual need to blow up Jane's Addiction. Sometimes you get the feeling that certain bands *know* they are overrated, and that the best way to seal their legacy is to disassemble pronto, before that hallowed status is lost.

The irony about this to me is that Nirvana's ascendance has already chipped away at much of this anyhow. That didn't take long. One additional twist, though, which you can approach from both sides (pundits cannot predict how this will play out; the musicians themselves also cannot make calculated gambits thinking they know how this will play out) is that though a ton was made of Lollapalooza just two years ago, and its impact in raising awareness for this nascent quote unquote alternative scene...all anyone wants to talk about now is how Kurt Cobain allegedly made everything happen, and everybody is therefore riding on his coattails. Which means that, though I believe Lolla is the far more significant accomplishment and should rightly belong at the top of Farrell's headstone,

Jane's remains what people want to talk about the most. So maybe it's instructive to see how he arrived here.

After spending his formative years in major cities to the east (New York, Miami), Farrell eventually made his way out to L.A. in the early 1980s. As is so often the case with musicians Generation X embraces as its own, he is closer in age to our parents – born in the late '50s, this would make Perry a boomer. Various figures such as Kim Gordon of Sonic Youth, John Doe of X, and Mick Mars of Motley Crue are actually *older* than my parents, yet this is all thought of as our music anyway.

Then again, the boomer generation has held a curious stranglehold over creative culture, particularly when it comes to music, for over thirty years now. Meaning they have been able to lay claim to what is and is not theirs, what does and does not matter, by universal decree, unchecked and with no real challengers to the throne. I'm not sure where the cutoff is, date-wise, but although Elvis probably belongs to the preceding age group, everything from the British Invasion onward has a claim staked by the boomers, up through I don't know when. Punk is probably the dividing line there, for that whole glam era of T. Rex and Bowie *also* belonged to the boomers, so either way, you're talking at least a good fifteen years. With a total straitjacket around all media discourse, naturally, that extends even to this day. Whereas while I might reach back far enough to claim that early 80s acts like Sonic Youth are ours, even that is pushing it, and us Gen Xers were mostly too young for that whole original punk era – or at least, they fall under the purview of our older siblings more than they do us.

Not that Farrell has made enough noise to belong to *any* tribe, at this early point in his odyssey. Though briefly dabbling in college, a nervous breakdown leads to his dropping out, by which point he's already developed an unhealthy, all-consuming interest in the seedier elements the City of Angels has to offer, in particular its burgeoning punk scene. Perry then bounces around from menial job to job, until happening upon a cabaret club one afternoon, an encounter which instantly changes his trajectory. In this moment, watching these performers on the stage, something just clicks, at the intersection of his varying though aimless interests – punk music, art, and now putting on a spectacle drenched show in front of a crowd. Though still not singing, after bullshitting his way into the roster here, Farrell does unexpectedly discover he has some knack for *mimicking* famous individuals. Also for prancing around the stage in outrageous and/or skimpy outfits, sometimes even dressing in drag.

Making the jump from imitating rock stars to becoming one himself is only the most natural next step. Still lacking even the most rudimentary first contacts for forming a band, he begins singing and writing alone, at home, and screwing around with whatever equipment he can get his hands on. More than a year passes in this fashion before Farrell even seriously considers attempting to join a band, and upon doing so, he hits paydirt almost immediately, when responding to *Recycler* ad for a drummer – even though he does not play the drums.

Psi Com is the band in question, and as bassist Rich (“Not To Be Confused With The Black Crowes Dude”) Robinson fields this stab in the dark of a phone call, he admits they aren't too crazy about their current singer, as a matter of fact, and invites Farrell down to surreptitiously audition in this role. Which he immediately wins.

It's possible I might actually like this Psi Com stuff more than Jane's Addiction. If that's Perry singing lead on *Ho Ka Hey*, then I'm kind of wondering what happened to his voice. Accompanying this extremely atmospheric and vaguely menacing track, Farrell crones, yips, and otherwise bellows out the vocals - or any other sounds that strike his fancy - in convincing form. Here he exudes much more depth and is not nearly as nasal as his Jane's stuff, a feat I wouldn't have guessed possible. Who really cares what this is about? On this track and others, the band displays a loose, sprawling, though no less heavy postpunk sound that calls to mind certain acts like Wire.

Xiola is nearly as good, too, despite featuring more of the Perry sound that we have grown to know and...know. There's some interesting guitar work here, which comes across as jangly and loose all at once, whereby a grunge-y lurch gives way at times to brief, hair metal screeches. Rhythmically the track is permitted plenty of room to breathe, which serves to ratchet up the tension, even if once

again the subject matter proves elusive.

Pinning down exactly what happened to Psi Com is difficult, except that it's hard enough to keep a formative group together, and the first major setback commonly proves the last one. In their case, the pivotal episode is a print run of their lone EP, a pressing which arrives with approximately half the copies damaged.

Led by guitarist Vince Duran, and featuring Robinson's wife Mariska Leyssius on keyboards, the fledgling group puts not only Farrell's pipes to use but his drum machine as well, figuring good enough for now, as the *Recycler* ad continues to run. They'd only been around a couple of months before Perry joined, meaning he's on the ground floor, more or less, for whatever material they are eventually able to cobble together. To this end, he arrived from the outset with a clutch of lyrics in hand, not exactly convinced himself that they were worthy of his talents, unproven though they still were.

Soon enough, that classified ad does eventually land a real drummer, Aaron Sherer. Sonically Sherer provides them with added respectability, in that few groups have been able to pull off using a drum machine live and it seems unlikely they will be the next. With him in tow, though only playing out fitfully, the band has increased confidence for doing so, and in March of '84 they even hit Pacifica Studios to record a demo cassette.

Eventually clocking in at three songs and not quite fifteen minutes, this effort finds them already thinking big, more than most bands at a similar juncture. Its cardboard packaging stamped with the their triangle inside a square PSI COM logo, bassist Robinson, who at this point favors the moniker Rich Evac, attended to every detail of this promo's creation, down to including lyrics, a group photo, some quick notes about its production as well as a bold, swing for the fences type manifesto, which reads in part:

PSI COM is a band created from hyper-deviant elements of the international culture in Los Angeles in 1983. The result is a gestalt of individual, complementary drives and impulses focussed in common purpose. The music emerges suggestively, not in narrow statements but in textured layers of mood and image. PSI COM seeks to create questions, leaving each to his own answers. PSI = mind, COM = communication.

If the later *To The Mosquitoes* essay is any indication, this may also be Farrell's work. He is after all responsible for the words in the songs. I do love the bravado on display here from a group who have, let's not forget, barely been around a year, is after all recording its first three songs – yet can still boast here that *PSI COM remains an enigma for those who would categorize* and that *the most anyone can agree on is a positive darkness and subtle intrigue*. I would wager there are thousands of paid publicists who have never generated copy this good. At any rate, as this rant concludes *PSI COM engages image and reason in a dark new struggle. Neither loses*, though I think the whole “fake it ‘til you make it” axiom is a crass way of putting things, you do get the impression that whoever wrote this stuff means business – and that is usually a plus.

Well, as a matter of fact, I can see now that someone calling himself “E.C. Rhycarde” takes credit for these liner notes, and sources indicate this may be another alter ego for Robinson. But whatever the case, hand cranking out copies themselves which they then peddle at their shows (due to “popular demand,” this Rhycarde claims), they're doing their best to drum up interest on the club circuit, and it's somewhat working.

One such gig, in August, finds them as a warmup act for The Cult, who are playing L.A. for the first time themselves. Though well-regarded from the outset and with a stature that has only grown in time, I'm not a huge Cult fan. They've got a couple of great songs, but Astbury's attempted Morrison-channeling shtick grows stale pretty fast. Still, it's surprising how often their name has turned up in these chronicles, and after enough such mentions, you eventually have to conclude there must be a

good reason for that. I get the impression that Ian's an alright guy, and, much like Guns N' Roses eventually would, The Cult do to some extent cut across the currents of their time. They distinguish themselves by playing the same hair band clubs as a million other Sunset Strip type acts, though boasting a far less cheesy and often darker take than most of their contemporaries.

If nothing else, Astbury and company make a formidable impression upon Psi Com, who recognize that they would like to move in this direction themselves. *Ho Ka Hey* is one eventual attempt to all but recreate this sound, and in many respects they improve upon the template. But Psi Com haven't gotten here yet, as the *Worktape 1* cassette instead features three different early tracks – *Hopeful*, *Them*, and *Psi Com Theme*. Each comes with its own little explanatory spiel in the liner notes, along with those lyrics, which helps in deciphering Farrell's murky, echo drenched vocals. And once again there's a clear demarcation in styles between their essay writer and lyricist, as demonstrated by *Hopeful* – to say nothing of the gulf between intentions and results, at this early stage:

*One of the earliest of Psi Com songs, **Hopeful** has undergone several drastic transformations to reach its present quasi-final form. The music is deceptively happy, both cynical and optimistic. Perry attacks spiritual bombast and hypocrisy with a brazen, third world-style vocal, a hopeful chant in the wasteland.*

Contrast that against lines in the song itself such as *see the orange flame darken as the aramite*, which is cool, or even better, *follow me now take the crux profit from your suffering*, although you're confronted with just as many curious pronouncements such as *me sin-a-me weigh-a-me supper me pay for me lie* or *me take-a-me-hide away shake in de tonal imply* that I'm sure must mean something at least half the time, but sound more like someone trying to pull off an old Irish shanty or something more than this alleged "third world-style vocal."

Sonically, however, while I'm maybe influenced by reading that they fell under the sway of The Cult, this entire short promo does have more of a UK feel to it than anything – if guessing, not knowing any better, I would have pegged these guys as British. I would rather listen to this any day than three randomly shuffled tracks from *Ritual de lo Habitual*, or expanding that dice roll even wider to the entire Jane's discography. And while Ferrell's belting out the first two tracks with impressive gusto, employing a much more muscular, less obnoxious style than that which made him famous, *Psi Com Theme* is the true highlight, its languid pace, bracketed by Duran's shimmering guitar work, the perfect sprawling palette for Perry's talents. Even when he's revving up to hit the high notes later on, he's doing so more fluidly than I would basically ever hear him manage again. Whatever echo box effect he's appending to smooth out the edges doesn't really matter, I would say he should have stuck with this sound.

They will go on to record a few more unreleased tracks, before Evac and Farrell suffer a falling out over, of all things (although it's probably more accurate to state there were surely many other issues as well, vocalized or not), who's designing the band's flyers. While in most groups this prospect fills the members with dread, if they don't farm it out elsewhere entirely, here we find two such stakeholders squabbling over the right to do so. Perry has an upper hand of sorts in that his day job involves developing pictures, thereby giving him darkroom access. Whatever the particulars, Rich and his girlfriend both leave the group, in the latter months of 1984.

Perry's roommate Kelly Wheeler steps in at this point on bass, and in January of '85, they play what is possibly their most significant gig to date, Gila Monster Jamboree. While not considered an especially good performance, this mini-festival does land them an early slot on a bill which also includes Sonic Youth and Meat Puppets. And hot on the heels of this, the now streamlined four piece books studio dates to record a proper EP.

With producer Ethan James as the helm, they book Radio Tokyo Studios (note: actually located

in Venice, California) for a weekend in March of '85, and bang out five songs. These are eventually pressed to 12" vinyl, of which 1500 copies are released by some outfit called Mohini Records. I've never heard of them otherwise, and maybe there's a good reason for that, as this is the notorious press run that winds up at least halfway damaged, the copies in many cases too warped to even play.

Unless you own one of these rare collector's items, that's a shame, because the material is once again mostly excellent. Side A has the slogan *You Take The High Road* engraved into its runoff groove and features the first three tracks; side B claims the last two, and its own, vaguely R.E.M.-esque inscription of *Still No Answer* instead. As for the artwork, this bare bones, black and white cover of a dancing skeleton isn't the most imaginative creation in the history of underground music, but is at least less dreadful than many of Perry's other pieces - for example the one found on the original *Ritual* pressings. It kind of looks like the cover of a Xeroxed zine if not some quarterly journal from a university, which in either case suits the release just fine.

Here is where you find *Ho Ka Hey* and *Xiola* rearing their heads for the first time, comprising 2/3 of the first side. *Human Condition*, sandwiched between the two, is possibly the album's highlight, as producer James earns his keep by sonically separating the instruments with a surgeon's precision. Wheeler's bass is the center around which everything else revolves, the drums almost tribal sounding in places, pounding out a propulsive beat to hurtle this song along. Once again whether howling or growling, accompanied by washes of Duran's effects laden riffing, Farrell leads his crew across this suspended I-Beam tottering somewhere between goth and postpunk. The lyrics are even more accomplished and coherent, with gems such as *the skin of the night is cover for the changing* and *join the immortal weeping* that you needn't strain much to picture Robert Smith or Ian Curtis singing.

Of course, the intro to *City of 9 Gates* I swear actually must *be* lifted from a Cure song, but it's of no great significance. Alternating between slower passages before it seamlessly revs into higher octane ones, this sounds to me like something from the soundtrack of an 80s vampire movie - and for all I know, that's what they had in mind as well. Though expecting some slapdash home recording, of this and even more so that *Worktape 1* cassette, I can't get over how polished and singular these guys sound, which makes me wonder all over again how you can put this much into something and then just chuck it when one bad break befalls you. Though racking your brain for common touchpoints in describing their material comes naturally, they nonetheless ooze originality, with for example a far more muscular approach than any of those bands I've mentioned, particularly when it comes to Sherer's explosive drumming. If not knowing better, you would guess they've been at this for years upon years, with a major label budget behind them. It all just hangs together as seemingly offhand yet brilliant at once, like Duran's simple, understated riffing and Wheeler's bass, which hold closer *Winds* together.

Still, if in June of '85 they are found selling the usable copies of this pressing at their shows, then the group collapses just a couple of months after that. And by year's end, Farrell has already assembled his next group, the one that will make him famous, with bass player Eric Avery. I know Jane's has gotten all the press, yet it remains completely fascinating, now that I've given this Psi Com stuff a chance, to think that Perry has a formative band this good who are somehow almost completely obscure, certainly much *less* well known than countless inferior undergrounds acts from this same era, if not the same scene.

But Perry's interests range far and wide, and he seemingly cannot focus upon any one project for a significant length of time - traits which nonetheless already have and will continue to suit him quite well. Still, again I believe it would have made for a much more impressive oeuvre if he just held his ground, let whoever wished to quit go ahead and do so, replaced them and kept going as Psi Com. Even if only to release the exact same material he eventually would under Jane's. Now, granted, you can make the argument that a name's just a name and it really doesn't matter. Except the entire point as I understand it is to get your music into as many ears as possible, and when you're continually band-hopping, some of this stuff winds up getting buried. Yet we're all just muddling along and figuring

things out as we go, so I get it, and it's entirely possible they didn't consider this a permanent end to Psi Com, that there was no big breakup scene before things just sort of fizzled out. Therefore maybe everyone involved might have wished to keep this door open, Farrell included. As indicated by a '93 reissue of this 12" slab on CD, cassette, and vinyl, though, it's at least apparent that they are still proud of this material and it isn't a case of wishing to kill the project.

Kelly Wheeler is apparently the first to throw in the towel on Psi Com, at which point Eric Avery is brought in as a potential replacement. Only when the rest of the theoretical band collapses around them – Avery is never officially hired – do Perry and Eric eventually decide to just form a new group. Settling upon the name Jane's Addiction in "honor" of an inspirational friend with a heroin problem, they eventually land Stephen Perkins as their drummer, but only when the first guy stops showing up for practice. Perkins in turn suggests guitarist Dave Navarro, and after many false starts, they finally have a workable lineup.

Though this doesn't necessarily disprove Duff McKagan's theory about famous musicians rarely coming *from* L.A. – Farrell after all is the propulsive, driving force, and he did indeed move here from elsewhere – the other three do hail from this region, and have known one another for years. Navarro went to school with Avery and Perkins both, at one point or another, and was even in the marching band with Stephen. Perkins dated Avery's sister, and it was she who recommended him to Perry and Eric in the first place, as their potential drummer. None of them really did much of note musically, however, until joining forces with Farrell, which is a similar pattern displayed by Slash and Steven Adler from Guns N' Roses, bumming around town and not really getting anywhere until the more motivated outsiders arrived and brought them into the fold.

In the case of some of these guys (Slash, Perkins, possibly Navarro even as I consider him mighty overrated) I would say they are too skilled on their respective instruments not to have secured some important gigs, sooner or later, assuming they didn't give up or die of a drug overdose first or something. Then again this is precisely what has happened to who knows how many other thousands of gifted players that nobody has ever heard of, whether from Los Angeles or anywhere else, who never put a significant project together and are unknown to this day. Actually, it's even possible that Avery might be more technically proficient than McKagan is on the bass, but there's something about this Jane's Addiction material I find lacking, even while admitting that the sound this foursome has cobbled together is nonetheless *different* from pretty much anything else you've ever heard.

Key among the problems for me is this sudden nasaloid vocal sound Perry's going for, as unrelentingly unvarying but not nearly as cool as Ozzy Osborne's monotone, which becomes extremely off-putting before too long. Why he didn't just stick with the much richer and more palatable style from Psi Com is a mystery for the ages. Avery has gone on record saying he was shooting to cover both bass and rhythm guitar with his playing, to open up Navarro for strictly playing lead, and to me this is a salient tidbit. Once again using GN'R as a handy yardstick – an apt enough comparison, considering Axl Rose did after all hunt Dave down as a potential placement for Izzy – I don't really hear anything in Navarro's playing to particularly rave about, though, and it's difficult for me to imagine him hanging with Guns as a lead *or* a rhythm guitarist.

Whoever is responsible, the Jane's songwriting itself is generally not that remarkable, either, particularly on the independently produced debut "live" effort. Despite all this, while *Appetite For Destruction* is obviously considered a timeless masterpiece, by the moment of Jane's ascension in 1990 or so, Guns N' Roses are already thought of by the "cool" kids as somewhat of a flash in the pan, and the hipsters have moved on to these guys instead. Let's get real, though. Even if we're talking about the bloated *Illusions* project that Dave would have theoretically at least toured for, while imagining him playing on those songs instead of Stradlin is an interesting thought experiment, I don't think this would have worked. It isn't just that they're more technically proficient as a band than Jane's, but the songwriting to me is more original, structurally, and the lyrics are even typically better, to boot.

Yet they experience no problem attracting suitors anyway. And don't get me wrong, I'm not

going as far as to claim that they suck, because they do have some material I enjoy. At their worst they are still a far sight better than most of the dreck we were stuck listening to from 1989-91. And their climb to still higher and higher popularity and critical acclaim – even managing to somehow not blow their street cred by signing to a major label, which was not at all the easiest thing to accomplish, pre-Nirvana – is accepted as proof by all their early champions that they were right all along, that Jane's should be enshrined as legends. But no, overrated things punch through to the mainstream all the time, and some of it even endures.

These are some interesting dudes, though, and Perry's vision is certainly unique, so it's great that they're given this opportunity to just rip, a highly visible platform upon which to do so. The world is certainly a more vibrant place when videos such as *Been Caught Stealing* are airing constantly on national TV, as opposed to one without it. Although the runaway success of that lone song (*Jane Says* is slowly becoming a radio staple, too, though this has only picked up steam retroactively, despite being an older track) surely does irk them to some extent, considering that, according to a Farrell quote in *Propaganda* magazine, they were kind of hoping to avoid the whole popularity thing:

"I've made a request that our records never get Top 40 radio airplay, and that the videos don't get heavy rotation on MTV. I don't want to see myself sandwiched between Tiffany and Milli Vanilli," he says.

Well, we can see how that worked out regarding *Stealing*, which became a daily staple for months on end. I also find it hilarious, and not sure whether to categorize this as naivete or pompous blowhardiness, that a guy like Perry is totally serious, and believes he can make lofty announcements that will dictate radio and/or television strategy for these major media corporations. That whole attitude – assuming you take it at face value, that is, and consider it *not* a total horseshit tale, a proposition I'm generally willing to be equitable toward and peg at 50/50 – is a curious one, though, in that even if genuine, it highlights a paradox Michael Stipe once mentioned, which I think about constantly, whenever comments like that come to light. Someone once asked him about that whole hand-wringing concept of "selling out" regarding R.E.M.'s own progression from college radio darlings to global juggernauts, and his response was a perfect one. To lightly paraphrase his argument, he threw this question back at the interviewer: if you truly believe you have something important to say, what is more revolutionary? Playing the same shitty club to 200 people the rest of your career, or getting that message out to millions?