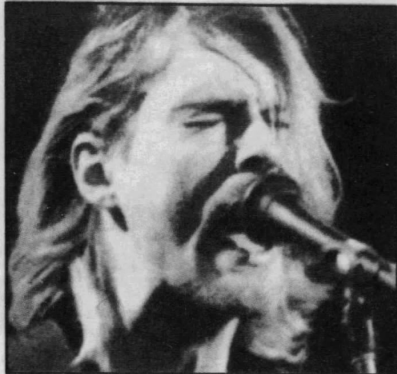




'The fact is, I can't fool you, any of you. It simply isn't fair to you or to me. The worst crime I can think of would be to put people off by faking it and pretending as if I was having 100 percent fun.'



The LEGACY

Lyrics for a grunge generation

By Natasha Kassulke

Poets utter great and wise things which they do not themselves understand.

— Plato in "The Republic"

It's likely that not all of the great songs have been written.

But to have contributed even one memorable line to the legacy we call rock 'n' roll is something to savor.

Kurt Cobain contributed many.

Cobain, who killed himself one week ago, was an artist, having painted the cover to Nirvana's "Incesticide" album. He was a musician, singer and spokesman for a generation of post-punk, alienated youth.

But most notably, Cobain was a word weaver.

In the lyrical land of songwriting,

he stood out, spitting in the mainstream's eye and churning out what has been dubbed by critics "rant & roll."

Cobain's music was painfully honest.

He wrote about rape, incest and suicide. He wrote about what it meant to be an angry young person, lumped under the label "Generation X."

It all drove him to be, night after night, "sleepless in Seattle."

Cobain once scribbled this message on a wall, alluding perhaps to the world that was crumbling around him: "None of you will ever know my intentions."

And now, with the writer no longer available to unravel his own mysterious writings, the message rings ever so true.

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'I thank you all from the pit of my burning, nauseous stomach for your letters and concern during the last years. I'm too much of an erratic, moody person that I don't have the passion any more. So remember, it's better to burn out than fade away.'

Excerpts from Kurt Cobain's suicide note



PRE-STARDOM Kurt Cobain (middle) with Nirvana bandmates at WORT/FM studios in 1990.

Early MADISON shows

'90 WORT interview reveals Cobain's humor and angst

By Tom Alesia

In April 1990, Nirvana performed for the second and final time in Madison — a show notable for Kurt Cobain's intentional backward tumble onstage as the change in his pocket scattered.

About 150 people attended the obscure Seattle band's co-headlining concert with cult fave Tad at Club Underground, a short-lived nightspot at Park and Regent streets.

The next day, Cobain and two

bandmates spent an hour at the studio of community-sponsored station WORT/FM, taping an interview — portions of which would be heard on an eclectic music show in the wee hours of a weeknight.

Although Nirvana already had spent a week in Madison's Smart Studios working with producer Butch Vig on what would become the benchmark album "Nevermind," Cobain and Co. were content to sit on rock's

edge and planned to remain in relative obscurity on the respected independent Sub Pop record label.

Madison's Tyler Jarmon was one of three WORT workers who handled that interview. His tape of the entire conversation indicates one major point:

Cobain was more prepared to walk on the moon than become a superstar rocker.

Listening to the rambling, giddy interview, it's shocking to

realize Cobain would spark millions of album sales and open the airwaves to grunge rock 16 months later.

During the WORT interview, which was dominated by Nirvana bassist Krist Novoselic, Cobain scoffed at major labels, MTV and music marketing.

"People are fed stuff," he said with scorn, "and they just eat it up."

Cobain, then 23, suggested

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GALLERIES



MADISON

ELVEHJEM MUSEUM OF ART, 800 University Ave. (263-2246) Hours: 9 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. — "Tandem Press: Five Years of Experimentation and Collaboration," through July 17; "Magdalena Abakanowicz: Crowd No. 2," through June 12; and "Winslow Homer: The Illustrator: His Wood Engravings, 1857-1888," through May 1.

MADISON ART CENTER, 211 State St. (257-0158) Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues.-Thurs., 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Fri., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat. and 1-5 p.m. Sun. — "Deborah Butterfield: Sculpture 1980 to 1992" and "Martha Glowack: Curiosities of Earth and Sky," both through May 1.

THE ARTS CO-OP, 122 State St. (257-4790) Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Tues.-Sat., noon-4 p.m. Sun. — "April in Bloom," stoneware pottery by Connie Westly, through the month.

BRODEN GALLERY LTD., 114 State St. (256-6100) — "Watercolor '94," a show featuring 25 nationally known artists, through Wednesday.

CAFE MONTMARTRE, 127 E. Millin St. (255-5900) — "Images from Triptych," prints by Jim Schwall, through today.

CAPUTO HOUSE GALLERY, 109 State St. (257-6060) — Opening today: "Transformations," mixed media works by Nancy Giffey, through May 15. Opening reception: 6-9 tonight.

GRACE CHOSY GALLERY, 218 N. Henry St. (255-1211) Hours: 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues.-Sat. — Robert L. Schultz drawings, through May 4.

COFFEE LAB, 1101 Williamson St. (255-6878) — "Stolen Fish," recent works in mosaic and mixed media by Laurel Neff,

through Monday.

COLUCCI GALLERY, West High School, 30 Ash St. Hours: 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Mon.-Fri. — 24th annual Fine Arts Week student exhibit, through April 29.

DERICCI GALLERY, Edgewood College, 855 Woodrow St. (257-4861) Hours: 8 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Fri. — Edgewood College student art exhibit, through April 23.

GEF-I STATE OFFICE BUILDING, 201 E. Washington Ave. Hours: 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m. weekdays. — Work by Andy Rolsum, Florence Goke, Fran Pagenknof, Lola Popany, Dory Rendahl, Margery Ross, Debby Kindinger and Elizabeth Norgard, through April 30; and 39 works by Cambridge artist Patricia Borchardt, through today.

FANNY GARVER GALLERY, 230 State St. (256-6755) Closed Sunday. — Opening Saturday: Collector's Choice, through May 5, and the annual Cat-Inspired Art Show, through May 6.

FANNY GARVER GALLERY, 7432 Mineral Point Rd. (833-8000) Open daily. — Cat and dog art show. Ten percent of sale donated to the Dane County Humane Society.

GALLERY 323, 323 E. Wilson St. (255-8998) Hours: 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Fri., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat., noon-5 p.m. Sun. — Hand-built porcelain by Mimi Dann and Donna Getsinger, through Monday.

LUTHERAN CAMPUS CENTER, 325 N. Mills St. Hours: 9 a.m.-9 p.m. weekdays. — "The Anxious Spirit: Recent Works on Paper by Jeffrey Eason," through April 29.

MADISON CIVIC CENTER, 211 State St. (third floor) — "Visual Music," watercolor paintings on sheets of music paper by Scott Lesh, through Sunday.

MEMORIAL UNION GALLERIES, 800 Langdon St. Hours: 10 a.m.-6 p.m. daily. — In the Porter Butts, Class of 1925 and Theater galleries: Opening today is the 66th annual student show, through May 8.

OLBRICH BOTANICAL GARDENS, 3330 Atwood Ave. (246-4550) Hours: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. daily. — "Lichens and Fungi of the Midwest," work by botanical illustrators Lucy Taylor and Laurie Boyer, through

June 4.

M.B. PERINE GALLERY, 1719 Monroe St. (256-4040) Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues.-Sat. or by appointment. — In the Cameo Room: still lifes and Madison street scenes by Tom Murphy, through April 25.

POSITIVE IMAGES GALLERY, 708½ E. Johnson St. (255-0277) Hours: 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Tues.-Fri., 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat. Closed Sun. and Mon.

HOPKINS AND CROCKER INC. ART AND ANTIQUES GALLERY, 807 E. Johnson St. (255-6222) Hours: 7:30 p.m. Thurs. and Fri. and 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat. — "19th Century Paintings and Prints," through April 30.

RED OAK GALLERY, in Cafe Assisi, 254 W. Gilman St. (255-1816) Hours: 7:30 a.m.-8:30 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., 7:30 a.m.-10 p.m. Fri., 9 a.m.-10 p.m. Sat., and 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Sun. — Abstract watercolors by Julie Hayward, through today.

ST. BENEDICT CENTER, County M. Middleton. (836-1631) Hours: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Fri. (weekend hours vary; call for information). — Watercolor, oil and acrylic paintings by Madison Senior Center art students, through April.

SANTA FE STYLE GALLERY, 2608 Monroe St. (233-4223) Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Tues.-Sat., 10 a.m.-7:30 Thurs. — Opening today: work by Charles Dwyer Jr., through May 9. Opening receptions: 7-9 tonight and 1-3 p.m. Saturday.

SPAIGHTWOOD GALLERIES, 1150 Spaight St. (255-3043) Hours: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. Sat.-Sun. and weekdays by appointment — "Joan Gandy Artigas: Eroticizing the World," and "John Himmelstark: Images, Graves and Otherwise," both through May 30.

SUNPORCH CAFE AND GALLERY, 2701 University Ave. Hours: 7 a.m.-10 p.m. Mon.-Thurs., 7 a.m.-11 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 8 a.m.-9 p.m. Sun. — "Borrowing," oils, pastels and mixed media by Theresa Abel, and "Drawn Gold," an illustrated alphabet by Linda Hancock, through May 1.

TANDEM PRESS, 201 S. Dickinson St. (263-3437) Hours: 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Mon.-Fri. and by appointment.

Madison producer hit the big time after 'Nevermind'

By John Kovalic

Kurt Cobain and Nirvana hit the big time after Butch Vig produced their 1991 breakthrough album, "Nevermind."

Vig, co-founder of Madison's Smart Studios, did likewise.

"It may have been fortunate that they were both at similar stages of their careers at the time," said Anthony DeCurtis, senior feature editor of Rolling Stone. "They could treat each other like peers."

"But a producer is like a parent figure," he added, "although no band will ever tell you that."

"A producer will give a group guidance. There's a relationship of trust between the songwriter and producer."

And the relationship between Vig and Cobain clicked.

"Vig certainly knew Nirvana's sound," said Mike Barbier, music editor of Audio magazine. "He was able to find clarity in the band, and to instill dynamics in their sound."

"In Cobain's mind, 'Smells Like Teen Spirit' was not going to be 'Nevermind's' big single," said DeCurtis. "The next day, Nirvana came into the studio, and Vig said they had to hear what it sounded like."

The result was a multimillion-selling record and, as they say, music history.

"The frustration and anger Nirvana is known for came out in the sound," said DeCurtis. "Cobain's lyrics confirmed it, but it was the record's sound that brought it out."

The record's sound ... courtesy of Vig's production.

Before "Nevermind," Vig and Smart Studios co-founder Steve Marker were best known for their work with local groups like Spooner (of which Vig was drummer) and Killdozer.

Since his association with Cobain and Nirvana, Vig has been fed a steady production and remix diet of bands like Smashing Pumpkins, Sonic Youth and U2.

"Vig's name carries a lot of clout in the industry," said Barbier.

For good reason: the Vig/Cobain combination was potent,

producing an album of rare clarity and power.

"The dynamic range with Nirvana varies," said Barbier, "but Vig was able to isolate Cobain, and his vocals and his guitar."

And last year, Vig was named Rolling Stone's Critics' Choice Producer of the Year.

It was Spooner's debut album, 1984's "Every Corner Dance," that first pushed Vig and Spooner guitarist/vocalist Doug Erickson into the producer's chair.

"And that was only because we couldn't afford to get a big-name producer to do it," said Dave Benton, the group's guitarist.

"At that time, Butch was starting to do four-track recording in a studio in his Gorham Street apartment. He seemed to have something in him that was leading him to do that."

"Every Corner Dance" was sharp and smart, both lyrically and sonically. And soon, Vig was working on other local projects.

In part because of Vig's work with Killdozer, Seattle's independent record label, Sub Pop, started to funnel bands his way in the late-'80s — bands like Tad, Fluid, Laughing Hyenas and ... Nirvana.

Last year, Nirvana enlisted controversial producer Steve Albini for its follow-up album, "In Utero." The result was well-written but suffered from a muddled, dirty sound.

"It was an anti-hit record," said DeCurtis.

"It wasn't a big shock that the band didn't use Vig again," said Barbier. "That kind of thing happens."

"And Vig moved beyond Nirvana. The work he's done is certainly great."

"You make a name for yourself as a producer because you're capable of creating a vision that nobody else can," said DeCurtis. "You work with a band at a transitional point in their career."

"I don't know if it was appar-

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'THE FENCE MENDER' — a lithograph by Thomas Hart Benton — is at the Rock County Historical Society.

Vig on Cobain: He was intense

Smart Studios record producer Butch Vig, of Madison, is vacationing in the Caribbean, but he faxed Rhythm reporter John Kovalic his thoughts about Nirvana's Kurt Cobain.

Here are Kovalic's questions and Vig's answers:

How will you remember Kurt Cobain?

As a very intense, confused kid. He was smart, sometimes manipulative, very funny and charming. And he could be bratty, moody, filled with rage and anger, or depressed and uncommunicative.

I knew him as a friend, but I never got to really know him. I don't think he really let too many people inside his head, except maybe for Courtney (Love).

He was never comfortable with the "spokesman for a generation" tag, but I do know he wanted to be successful, he wanted an audience to hear his songs.

Now everyone who loved his music will have to try to make some sense out of his senseless loss. It feels like he's left a black, numbing void which can't be replaced.

But even though he's gone, I think his music will continue to inspire people, to move people, to give the disaffected youth of

Generation X some hope.

What was your working relationship with Nirvana like?

We had a good working relationship. I had worked with the band before, when they came to Smart (Studios, in Madison) to work on an album for Sub Pop (Records).

That ended up getting them into a bidding war with the major labels, and eventually signing with Geffen.

Geffen originally wanted a "name" producer, but I got the call at the 11th hour because the band was afraid of working with someone who might not understand what they were about.

Dave (Grohl, Nirvana's drummer) and Chris (Novoselic, Nirvana's bassist) were both amiable and enthusiastic; Kurt could be witty, charming and articulate, and during the same session he would become moody, depressed and uncommunicative.

Sometimes he would put his guitar down in the middle of a take and say "I don't feel like doing this anymore," and walk out of the studio. He was very difficult to deal with when moody.

Even though I was very patient and supportive, I never knew what to expect on a day-to-day basis. After spending several

hours working on the basic track for "Lithium," in frustration Kurt launched into "Endless, Nameless" and screamed so loud he blew out his vocal cords.

In the middle of the take, he smashed his left-handed Mosrite guitar to bits, so I spent the next day scouring Los Angeles (where the "Nevermind" sessions took place) for another left-handed Mosrite.

Did the success of "Nevermind" come as a surprise to you?

Yes, it was quite a shock. We thought it would sell 150,000 copies, and maybe — if we got lucky — it would end up gold.

I began to get an idea of the buzz surrounding the band during mixdown, because everyone I ran into wanted to hear it even people in the music industry who I didn't think were Nirvana fans.

What has the success of "Nevermind" meant to you and your career?

It opened up so many doors to the industry it allowed me to pick and choose projects more carefully.

It also brought bigger budgets, more control and creative leeway.

The most important thing I did as a producer was to focus on

Nirvana's performances. I pushed them a lot further than they were accustomed to when we cut the basic tracks.

Kurt would always think the first cut was okay. Generally, it was good, but I would try and motivate them to push a little harder. I worked with the band to tighten up arrangements, and also really tried to make sure the vocal and guitar hooks were really focused.

I paid a lot of attention to Kurt's vocals, because his voice was ultimately the one thing that drew people into the music.

Butch Vig just finished a new album with Freedy Johnston for Elektra Records. He recently produced the new Sonic Youth album, coming in the fall, and several remixes from U2's "Zooropa" album.

Vig, Nirvana

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ent to Vig that "Nevermind" would sell millions and millions of records, but now he's thought of as a producer with commercial vision."

But apart from jetting to New York or Los Angeles at the drop



BUTCH VIG: "Nevermind" threw him into the big time.

of a hat to help out another band in the studio, Benton said that Vig basically remains the same person he ever was.

"He's still an adventurous person with a sense of humor," said Benton. "He just seems like the same guy who came to play drums for us years and years ago."

Madison

From Page 3

that the band would break up before signing with a major label and promised to never sell out musically.

He also displayed a wicked sense of humor.

Asked about the band's influences, he sarcastically cited ex-Styx member and then-Damn Yankees' singer/guitarist Tommy Shaw.

When the conversation turned to the band's songs, he insisted that "we have the lead singer of the Miami Sound Machine, Gloria Estefan, write all of our lyrics."

On the heels of Cobain's suicide, Jarmon — who still hosts the WORT show ("Nocturnal Emissions," airing from 2 to 5 a.m. Fridays) that ran the Nirvana interview — said Nirvana's popularity exposed many to "mangier" rock.

"I have friends who listen to

only mainstream music and if I would try to play them something different or unusual, they'd say, 'What's this? Put on some real music.' Then I'd see people like that listening to Nirvana — that in itself was a pioneering thing."

In 1989, Nirvana made its first Madison appearance as the opening act for the Tragically Hip, a Canadian pop band that hardly meshed with Nirvana's raucous brand of punk, at O'Cayz Corral.

About 40 people watched Nirvana's set.

Tom Layton of Madison's Lamebrain Productions promoted the show and said Nirvana's booking agent asked him to help fill an open date on the band's haphazard tour.

And Nirvana, touring by van, needed the \$100 it received for the gig.

Nirvana's booking agent told Layton, "Please, throw 'em on whatever bill you have that night."

Cobain

From Page 3

But there are clues in his part-punk and part-ballad poems.

Most Nirvana songs begin with a slow simmer and then open into a festering blister with a beat to match.

A familiar fervor is found in every album Nirvana produced. From the band's debut, "Bleach" (1989) to "Nevermind" (1991) to "In Utero" (1993), which was originally titled "I Hate Myself and I Want to Die."

"Kurt was such a great songwriter," Charles Cross, editor of Seattle rock magazine "The Rocket," told USA Today.

"He was meant to write a lot more great songs. He put so much personal passion into his music, you knew it was authentic, not filtered down or manufactured and shoved down kids' mouths."

Hearing of his death, however,

Cobain's mother said he had gone to join "that stupid club," referring to dead rockers Janis Joplin, Jim Morrison and Seattle-born Jimi Hendrix, who all died at the same age as Cobain — 27.

Michael Azerrad, author of the book "Come As You Are: The Story of Nirvana," has said that Nirvana's songs, like those of Cobain's rock club predecessors, are so popular because they speak to the worries of young people.

"The divorce, the violence, the drugs, the diminished opportunities for an entire generation — that is so crucial to the sound of their music and the success of their music," Azerrad said in a 1993 Associated Press interview.

"The band translated that pain and anger and confusion into musical soundwaves very directly that hit a nerve among a large amount of kids," he said.

Perhaps no where was that more true than on "Nevermind" when Cobain wrote: *I'm worse at*

what I do best/And for this gift I feel blessed/I found it hard/It was hard to find/Oh well/Whatever/Nevermind.

But few lyrics hit as hard as the bludgeoning first words out of Cobain's sneering mouth in "Serve the Servants" (the opener to Nirvana's "In Utero"): *Teenage angst has paid off well/Now I'm bored and old/Self-appointed judges judge/More than they have sold.*

From "In Utero" Cobain also leaves us with "All Apologies" (performed on "MTV Unplugged"): *I wish I was like you/Easily amused/Find my nest of salt/Everything is my fault/I'll take all the blame/Aqua seafood shame/Sunburn with freezefurn/Choking on the ashes of her enemy/All in all is all we are.*

For his poetic prose, Cobain has been graduated in the press from the same self-taught songwriting school as Jim Morrison, John Lennon and Bob Marley.