

### 13: he turned into “the fly”

On a scale of one to ten, my anticipation for *Achtung Baby*'s release hovered around eleven. The recording would be U2's most ambitious album to date. Like a caterpillar, turning into a butterfly, U2's sound and attitude was a metamorphosis. Bono was about to take on a new persona, The Fly, a leather clad, oversized sunglasses wearing rocker with more swagger than Frank Sinatra. The video, *The Fly*, would be a World Premiere Video on MTV. Sadly, I owned a hand held black and white television with four channels. Therefore, I had no cable television. I felt as though driving to my aunt and uncle's house in the suburbs was too far for a five-minute video so I worked my address book and found a neighbor, Erin, willing to let me watch the video.

Erin was a red-haired gal, whose mom taught my cousin, Nicholas, private piano lessons back in his hometown of Vinton, Iowa. Nicholas' mom, my Aunt Beverly, introduced her to me the previous spring and we formed a friendship. Erin lived only a stone's throw way from my studio apartment with two other

gals. The three of us, plus their on again off again boyfriends, would hang out until the late hours of the night in our post college splendor, during the weekends. Erin and her roommates were a good support system as I coped with life while getting used to living on my own.

Erin too was a fan of U2 and more than willing to let me come over. When I arrived at the gal's pad, I knocked on their back door with my arms laden with beers and a videocassette.

"Hold on, Eric, I'll be there in a minute," I heard Erin say.

"Okay."

I looked at my watch. It was exactly twenty minutes to the debut. I saw her silhouette come to the door.

"Come on in," Erin said with a smile as she pulled the door inward. The kitchen light flooded behind her.

"I brought beer!" I said, as I kicked the door behind me closed.

"Cool! I need to put the wash in the dryer. I'll be back," she replied, as she turned around and headed out of the kitchen to the hallway.

"Is it cold?" she asked, as her voice echoed down the hallway.

"Yeah, I just picked it up."

"Great, put it in the fridge. I'm going to heat up some leftover turkey chili. Want some?"

"No, I ate dinner at home," I said, as I rattled the rental apartment fridge door open. I peered inside. Several dishes of pizza, a leftover Subway sandwich and a half-eaten burrito had to be pushed out of the way in order to make room for my beer.

"Are you excited?" Her voice was louder as she was fighting the background noise of the dryer.

"Yeah, I'm pretty stoked! Couldn't you tell when you said you would let me come over? I brought a videocassette to tape the premiere," I shouted back.

“Great. I’ll be there in a minute to show you how to set up the VCR.”

Thirty-seconds later, we crossed paths in the hallway, which dumped us into her spacious living room. In the middle of the room, sat a couch and across from it, resting upon a couple milk crates, was the TV. While Erin shoved the videocassette into the VCR, I picked up the remote and reviewed it. She gently pulled it from my hands, changed the channel to MTV and proceeded to walk me through the recording process. I recorded many videocassettes in my life and was familiar with the workings of a VCR, but gave into Erin. I continued to make myself at home by throwing my coat on an adjacent chair and parking my ass on the couch. I looked at the clock on the VCR. If it were programmed right, I had fifteen minutes before the premiere.

“Wanna beer?” Erin asked with a smile.

“Yeah, please.”

She walked back to the kitchen.

“Glass or bottle?” she inquired from the kitchen.

“Bottle!”

Upon her return, time ticked closer to seven o’clock, the official hour of the debut of *The Fly* video. I was ready. I had the VCR remote in my right hand and ready to gently press the record button. Erin placed the beer bottle on the coffee table and returned to the kitchen to begin cooking. My eyes were transfixed on the digital time clock on the VCR. I looked back to the television. The last annoying commercial ended, as the clock revealed 7:00 p.m. in its window. I punched the record button just in time to catch MTV’s ten-second screen shot “World Premiere Video.” When the screen shot vanished, there was Bono, dressed head-to-toe in leather with wrap-around shades, walking out onto a city street and pushing a toy double-decker bus. The next image is Bono, running from a real double-decker bus. He

then began to conduct traffic. No one recognized him. People were looking at him strangely not knowing who he was. All of a sudden, the high-pitched falsetto-backing track stopped. Edge's heavy guitar pierced Erin's three-inch television speaker. The visuals became grainy with highly saturated images of the band on a nondescript studio set. Bono, still wearing the oversized fly shades, began to reel off the lyrics. Next, we saw the lead singer roam some city's streets at night, armed with a remote control. His journey was interspersed with the band playing on the soundstage. I was glued. U2 turned gritty, loud and looked tougher than ever. Gone was any reference to their previous decade's image. Bono's locks were chopped off. Adam's hair had grown out. Edge looked rugged in a tank top, sequin dotted pants and a skullcap. Larry wore a Ramones T-shirt while keeping time behind his drum kit. It was the visual version of what Jamie was speaking of weeks earlier.

Erin could hear the tune over her chili's slow, boiling, pop sound in the saucepan on the stove. She asked from the kitchen, "Sounds heavy Eric! Do you like it?"

I said nothing. I was intoxicated and truly overwhelmed. I tried to figure out what the copy said as it scrolled across a background billboard in the shot. It read, "Watch More T.V." What did that mean? U2 set the bar high for cool because they were now a leather-clad band with a funk driven tune. I was interrupted as Erin arrived back in the living room, just as the video ended.

"So, what'd you think?" she asked.

I looked at the screen and hit the stop button on the remote, ending the taping process. The video play head retracted from the cassette. I still said nothing. I hit rewind on the remote.

"Hello? Earth to Eric. I asked you a question," she said, as she waved her hands in front of my glazed look.

I slowly turned and looked at her. She was now taking another long swig of her beer. I could see the liquid rolling in the green bottle.

"Awesome. Totally fuckin' awesome," I said, as I pointed the remote at the VCR and hit rewind, followed by the play button. "Wanna see it?"

"Heck yeah," Erin replied. "Don't you think I'm a fan too? I didn't invite you over for nothing. Let's see it."

She sat back on the couch and put her feet up on the coffee table. The smell of the chili was wandering into the living room. The video began. I started looking for more visual clues in the film – Bono tapping his chest with his fingers, a young looking Larry keeping the beat with his kit and Adam's cigarette, dangling from his mouth. The band was dangerous and looking cool. I was curious about Bono and his new persona. "Would we see this dude in concert?" I asked myself. The answer would be confirmed in a couple of months. As for now, I didn't want to read too much into it as the cassette came to the end of the video. Again, I hit the rewind button and began to play it once more.

"Let me go check dinner," Erin said, as she lifted herself off the couch and ambled towards the kitchen to finish the chili. I watched the video for a third and fourth time. I was ecstatic. The band's new look, and vibe, left me wanting more. Before I overstayed my welcome, I ejected the videocassette, got up off the couch and grabbed my coat. I could hear Erin making a plate of dinner as I grabbed the cassette out of the VCR.

"Erin, thanks so much," I said in a humble manner as I entered the kitchen.

"No problem. Come over anytime. I'm glad you could see your Irish boys."

"Say 'hello' to your roommates for me," I said, as I put my

hand on the doorknob.

“Will do,” she replied smiling.

I could feel the handle turn underneath my grip. The door then moved, towards me, almost in a jarring manner. From outside, Marissa, one of Erin’s roommates, was getting home.

“Hey!...Hello, Eric,” Marissa greeted me.

Marissa, a tiny gal with spiraling, curly red hair was a graphic designer who held a BFA from Southern Illinois. Like me, she was struggling with her creative career. She entered the kitchen.

“Erin, is that turkey chili?”

“Yeah, I heated up the whole batch thinkin’ Eric would partake, but he’s already eaten.”

“Dude, you splittin’ already? I just got home, man.” Marissa was now looking at me.

“Yeah, I taped the new U2 video and now, I’m headed out,” I replied with a smile.

“Stay man. U2? I wanna see the video. Also, I know you don’t have a VCR at your joint and you wanna see it again,” Marissa said, begging. “Let me throw off this heap of a coat and get some dinner.”

Marissa then clopped across the kitchen and down the hall. We heard her kick off her boots as they landed separately on the hardwood floor with a thud. Erin ladled a bowl of chili for herself and asked me again if I wanted a bite, however, I declined. We headed back to the living room where I shoved the videocassette back into the player, tossed my coat on the floor and seated my ass on the same spot of the couch where I was minutes prior. Marissa came to the doorway of the living room.

“I heard a rumor there’s a new U2 album coming out. What’s the name again?” she asked.

“Achtung Baby,” I said with spit hurling out of my mouth.

“That sounds fucked up, Eric,” she said. “Wanna beer?”

“Yeah, I could go for another.”

“Get me one too!” Erin shouted with a mouthful of chili. She began to wave her hand frantically to cool off her mouth.

Marissa spun around like a pixie and headed towards the kitchen. We could hear her open the fridge when the condiments in the door knocked against one another.

“Grolsch? When’d we get this?” Marissa’s muffled voice came from the kitchen.

“Eric brought it over!” Erin shouted, as we heard the fridge door shut with another rattle.

“Bitchin! Upscale beer. Momma likes it.”

I heard three bottle caps hit the countertop, along with the opening of cupboards, and the clanking of dishes. Marissa reappeared weighted with three green bottles of brew, each one was nestled individually between each of her fingers on her right hand as she carried her bowl of chili in her left. She slowly walked to the coffee table and unloaded her items. She grabbed one of the beers and then plopped herself down on the adjacent Papasan chair.

“Whew. What a fuckin’ day?” Marissa said, as she leaned back and let the beer coat her throat. She threw her feet up on the coffee table.

“God, I hate my job!” she exclaimed. “I’m a designer working for the biggest loser company. Does that make me a loser, too? Don’t answer Eric. It’s rhetorical.” She took another swig of her beer. “Yummy. Good and cold. Just exactly how momma likes her beer,” Marissa belched.

“Shall I hit play, Marissa?” I asked.

“Fire it up! How many times have you seen it, Eric?”

“This may be my sixth time tonight.”

“Six times?? That’s how many times you’ve replayed it!” Marissa said with astonishment.

"Ah yeah," Erin replied for me.

"Shit, you don't need to see it again, but I do! Roll the fucker because this must be one helluva video. I thought they were creatively dead after Rattle and Scum," Marissa said with her own spin of whacky love for U2's overambitious road movie covering the Joshua Tree Tour.

Marissa took another chug of her brew. She leaned forward and grabbed her bowl of chili. She was about to take a bite and looked at us over the rim of her bowl.

"I like them and all, but in my opinion, a little bit of Bono goes a long way," Marissa said, interrupting herself. "Didn't you say that you were sending them some painted jeans? Slides? Some shit like that?" she asked, as her chili-laden spoon went to her mouth after the question.

"Yeah, I sent 'em some slides two weeks ago. I've not heard a thing back. I'm hoping time is on my side," I replied.

"Well, you did a lot of work. I think you are crazy. That's just me," Marissa said, as she spooned another bite of her chili.

"I don't," Erin chimed in.

"Don't what?" Marissa said, as she was waving her hand in front of her mouth frantically trying to cool it.

"I don't think Eric's crazy, Marissa. I think he's following his passion."

"I give him props for going through with it. It'd be cool to paint jeans for U2," Marissa said. She leaned forward and rested the half-empty bowl of soup on the table.

"I've no idea if they're going to go for it. If they do Marissa, I'll hire you to help paint," I said.

"Cool. Maybe I can finally quit my crap job at DRG," she said with a smirk.

"I'd love to have a creative job right now, even if it was production," I said.



"I wouldn't give my worst enemy this job. Trust me. The owners are pains in the asses. Everyone wants to quit," she fired back. "Enough about work. I wanna see this damn video!"

I pointed the remote towards the television and hit play. I could hear the cassette reels begin to move and creak as they were forced to play *The Fly* one more time for our viewing pleasure. All of the visuals began to sink in from the previous viewings. I could now enjoy the montage of film clips strung together for what they were, art. Up to now, including the early ones, the narrative for U2's videos was pretty loose. For *The Fly*, Bono was now taking on a persona, which neither he nor the band had really done in any previous work. What Erin, Marissa and I were witnessing was a creative shift in U2. The three of us, regardless of what Marissa said about *Rattle and Hum*, were fans.

"Dude, check out those shades he's got on," Marissa said with amazement.

"Wonder where you can get them?" Erin projected her question towards the screen of the television.

"Oh, I'm sure they will sell them at the merch table," Marissa said, as she was visiting the last swallow of beer.

"I love the chair on the sidewalk and Bono with the remote," Erin replied knowing exactly where the scene was in the video.

"I cannot believe the change. I mean they're now rockers. Where's Edge's long hair? What the fuck is up with the skull cap?" Marissa was now intently reviewing the band.

After watching the video for the final time, I slugged down the last of my Dutch beer. I grabbed my coat and videocassette, all the while saying good-night. I headed out into the late October night under a moonlight sky. I was excited. Bono, Edge, Larry and Adam were coming back into my life at the right time, much like the way they did when I was in college.