

5: the summer of introduction

Eight months after witnessing the Solidarity protest in Paris, mom enrolled me into Cascia Hall Preparatory School in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the fall of 1982. I was now a freshman in high school and knew no one in my class except for Kip Stockton. Kip's dad, Avery, sat on the Board of Trustees at Cascia and provided me acceptance into his Alma mater. I now had to wear a uniform to school, consisting of a blue blazer, tie and slacks. Gone was my individualism and showing up at school wearing jeans and a T-shirt. Now, my parents wanted me to have the best education one could receive. However, I didn't buy into the prep school ideals. I craved to keep my individuality among a sea of blue blazer wearing kids as AC/DC was still implanted in my tape deck at home.

Prep school also brought on new challenges. Not only did I have to make new friends, but also had to wear the right clothes when not on campus. The Stockton family assisted me during my adjustment period. Kip's sister Beth, a senior at our sister school Monte Casino, helped me shop for clothes. Since she was a preppy

fashionista, Beth contributed her insight into the Cascia lifestyle. Button-fly jeans, top-sider shoes, and button-down shirts were a must in my closet. I had to look the role in an already-established clique. However, I didn't adhere to the ideals of what-to-do and how-to-do it all the time. I found relief from the surreal world of preppiedom by hanging out in my bedroom with my stereo tuned to local FM radio or hijacking my cassette deck with various recordings, both in styles and performers, I collected over the years. Thanks to Kip's influence, my record collection began to expand with the likes of the Stray Cats, The Clash and more Who albums.

While I adjusted to high school, the musical panorama was changing as well. Rock radio was about to become a dinosaur. A new form of radio was invented for cable television. The station was named Music Television, or MTV for short. Over the next seven years, MTV would revolutionize the music industry. We didn't just listen to music. We watched it. Melodies and lyrics were not auditory anymore. Musicians now had to think differently about their promotion, which now included the addition of these music videos. Sometimes, the video would eventually compete with the single itself, as song lyrics came to life, in the tale told through these short films. A perfect example is The Clash's *Rock the Casbah*. Everything mentioned in the lyrical narrative, of the recorded song, was represented on screen: a sheik, a Cadillac, and fighter jets. As the medium moved on and more indie film directors were hired, the videos took on an art house style as well as the introduction of groundbreaking technology. Take, for instance, the band A-HA, who mixed cartoon-like drawings and live action in the video for their hit song, *Take On Me*. What they were doing, in those five minutes of film, was revolutionary. On the flip side, there were videos created from the silliness of the song. You need no examples here because they were a dime a dozen. MTV was the only vehicle playing music videos and had very little competition in their early days.

Sadly, I didn't have MTV. Our house was a no television zone. Mom and Stefano fell in love with BBC television while we were in Reading and threw the boob tube out the window shortly thereafter. They never looked back nor regretted their action. However, during the summer of 1982, thanks to some neighbors in Des Moines, I had been exposed to just enough MTV that I now had to find my fix in Tulsa. Kip was my connection. He was a fellow MTV junkie. We would stretch out on his parent's bed to catch rays from their Zenith television, watching rockers, like The Cars, Van Halen or Peter Gabriel, who became as familiar to us as the families portrayed in the television sitcoms of the day. We were video voyeurs with our hormones raging out of control. If music was the hook, then the gross displays of sexuality, or the over-the-top portrayals of masculinity, were the enticement. While radio produced a handful of Madonna fans, MTV created an army of Madonna wannabes who wore sexually provocative tops, disheveled blonde hair, short skirts and strutted around in torn-fishnet stockings while looking 'oh so coy' over their Ray-Ban sunglasses. The power of the image was the new thing of the 80s. Nothing could compare to the impact MTV was to have on our pop culture and it affected me.

During my high school years, I would land on my father's doorstep for every holiday and therefore, formed two peer groups, one in Des Moines and one in Tulsa. It was hard to make friends in a new school and even harder in a town where I lived for a handful of weeks during the year. I had no social network in Des Moines other than my parents. Dad, however, had the foresight to enroll me into ceramic classes at the Des Moines Art Center each summer. He signed me up for two reasons. The first was to foster the creativity I had inside me. The second was to introduce me to other kids, possibly leading to a friend or two. He was right in both cases.

In my ceramic's classes, I would make friends. Some would stick while others would fall by the wayside. Then there was Chad

Kaperak, whom I met in the summer of 1983, after my freshman year in high school. Chad, four years my junior, was a dirty blonde haired kid who stood out in class with his know-it-all mannerisms. He was advanced for his age, sitting on the potter's wheel throwing bowls out of raw pieces of clay with ease. Some days, when I sauntered into class, I thought he was the teacher by the amount of students standing around him, watching as he effortlessly threw pots. It was Chad's ability to creatively problem solve, his thirst for trying new things and his simply being different that attracted me to him. Also, Chad and I shared the same insatiable appetite for music and movies. His bedroom was a fine example. One step into Chad's room and you were transported to another place as he plastered his bedroom walls with subway movie posters, including *Mad Max* and *The Terminator*. Chad also had a thirst for indie bands such as The Smiths, The Cure, R.E.M. and the list goes on for miles. One of the bands in the mix was U2, an Irish post-punk group who barely made it onto a record label, but would make a big, musical footprint in the coming years.

Inseparable that summer, Chad and I were either at the Kaperak's house after our ceramic's class or on bike riding adventures into Water Works Park. Some afternoons after class, Chad would occasionally cart over his tapes of U2 to my house and we would play them on dad's recently purchased cassette deck. Dad was protective of his Hi-Fi system, which consisted of a tube amplifier, a preamp, a reel-to-reel tape deck and a turntable. The sound, emanating from dad's hand-built speakers, was the richest and most delicate sound one could ever hear. It had just enough bass that when the rhythm section kicked in, it would rumble the floor. Luckily, my upstairs bedroom was hotter than a swamp, which gave Chad and I the excuse to use dad's stereo in the air condition first floor of the house.

On this particular afternoon, I sat in dad's Corbusier chair about

arm's length from the volume knob of his stereo while Chad sat on the floor cross-legged next to me. He dug into his backpack for some cassettes as I flipped on the switches, just as dad had taught me, and let the stereo warm up. Chad handed me U2's *Boy* album. While waiting for the stereo to come alive, I put the cassette into the player. When the tubes started to glow, I hit the play button and began to stare at the speakers in anticipation.

The opening track, *I Will Follow*, began with an amateur band count in by the lead singer followed by a repetitive guitar riff. I recognized the instrument, yet the sound, emanating from the speakers, was foreign because I was more familiar with bands crushing a wall of six-string, distorted sound. The guitarists I listened to, Pete Townshend, Angus Young and Ace Frehley, sounded nothing like U2's guitarist, who was using a natural sounding guitar with a little echo. I wasn't buying into Chad's new band just yet. In fact, I wanted to know what attracted him to U2.

Eight bars into *I Will Follow*, the singer's voice appeared, again. Now, he was announcing the name of the tune; an added amateur practice I thought as I waded through another half-dozen or so bars of music before he began to sing. To me, the singer lacked enough guts, or grime, in his intonation to front this huge wall of sound, coming from the drums, guitar and bass, which was being projected from the back of the track. Chad had no album art for reference, just a generic plastic case. I relied on my imagination and conjured up an idea of what the singer looked like. I wasn't granting the dude any lead way as I stopped the tape mid-song. I then swiveled around in the chair and looked at Chad.

"Where's U2 from?" I asked.

"They're out of Ireland," Chad responded. He was a walking U2 encyclopedia.

"Where'd you hear about them?"

"Partly my dad, some friends and MTV." Chad was exactly like

me. He got his musical input from his peers and parents.

I turned back to the tape deck. Hit the play button and wallowed in the song some more. I let the tape roll for another minute or two and then hit the stop button. I swiveled the chair back around to Chad.

“What do you find so intriguing about them?” I asked, as I silenced the band.

“Oh, they’re awesome. Listen to the drummer.”

“Listen to the drummer? How can I listen to the drummer when the singer sounds like a girl?” I was irritated and hoping for something to grasp onto in the tune.

“Girl? The singer? What do ya mean, Shivvers?” Chad looked at me through his double-barreled, shotgun eyes.

“Your lead singer sounds like a fag, Chad, plain and simple,” I said. “He doesn’t sound like anyone I know in rock music. He ain’t no Bon Scott of AC/DC nor does he have the vocal range of Roger Daltrey in The Who.”

“Wait. Give ’em a chance dude! All you listen to is that metal crap. Okay. I give you credit for listening to The Police but that’s it.” Chad was now becoming defensive and agitated.

“What about The Who, Chad? What about Elvis? Give me a break. I listen to a lot more than just metal!” I retorted, knowing I wasn’t going to get anywhere with him.

“Come on Shivvers, let the tape roll. You’ve only heard one song you fag!”

“You’re calling me a fag. Listen to your singer. He’s turning me off,” I replied and paused.

Now, I was stuck because I am, and always will be, a visual person who relies on album covers to give me insight into the band I am listening to. In this case, I had no images to refer to, not even a band photo.

“Chad, since we don’t have any album art, let’s go through the

band one member at a time. What's the singer's name?"

"His name is Bono."

"Bono? Like Sonny Bono? What the hell kinda name's that, Chad?"

The vision of U2 fronted by a cross dresser was becoming an ever brighter picture in my imagination. I knew bono was a Latin word for good, but good for what in terms of U2, I didn't know. I turned to start the tape in anticipation of a reply.

"I don't know. It's his stage name. By the way it's Bah-no. Who cares what the fuck his name is anyway," Chad replied. Now twiddling his fingers, Chad sat motionless and stared at the stereo.

"Well, it's your band. You should know how he got such an odd name, right? Not every band has members with stage names. What are Bahhhh-no's bandmate's names?" I stammered.

"Who cares Shivvers! Do you like them or don't you?" he interrogated me.

"Answer my question first. Again, what are his bandmate's names?" I asked with disgust.

"The Edge, Adam and Larry. Edge on guitar,..."

"The Edge?" I interrupted.

"...Adam on bass and Larry playing the drums. You happy?"

"No. Now, I'm even more confused. I got the Larry and Adam part, but now The Edge? Where did he get that name?"

"I dunno. Some name he made up. Like Sex Pistol John Lydon did by calling himself Johnny Rotten," Chad said while deflecting his disgust.

"Seriously Chad, I'm not sure if I'm in on U2 just yet. I know of no band that counts off their songs, on a record, nor do any of my bands announce their song's title at the beginning of the track. A little amateur, if you ask me...Secondly, I'm not sure the music's doing it for me...The singer, BAHHH-NO, is out."

"Fair, but keep listening. You cannot judge them on one song.

Play the next tune on the tape,” Chad said. He was now pointing to the tape deck and spurring on the debate.

“Fine, we’ll move on,” I said, as I leaned backward and blindly hit the play button while staring at Chad. The player head met the acetate tape and the cassette began to roll along once more.

With the contention behind us, Chad and I listened to the rest of the album. Not only was I having problems with the singer’s voice, but the lyrics were unfamiliar territory to me as well. The tunes were more ethereal than anything I listened to prior and the idea of singing about the adolescent shift from boyhood to manhood went way over my head. I liked the simplicity of heavy metal. Such genre stayed within a very limited scope of narrative, mostly on sexuality and heightened masculinity. None of that existed here. I couldn’t make the connection between the title of the album, *Boy*, and the main thrust behind the collection of songs. Bono, like me, had strife in his life when his mother died, which mirrored my struggles, dealing with my parent’s divorce. U2, and Bono, were speaking to me, through the album, and I didn’t know it.

By the end of the afternoon, the sun had cut through the gold-rod colored drapes and lit the living room. I was becoming a little less agitated. However, all I could see in the tape deck was the name of the band and album printed on the cassette. The songs were hidden. Again, I had no visual reference of the four members making up the band. At least when I was first introduced to KISS, Blake had an album cover to refer to, but as Chad sang his favorite song, *Shadows and Tall Trees*, which was now emanating from the speakers, I was slowly getting hooked. The song opened with a simple drum tap and an acoustic guitar as Bono sang in a much more acceptable vocal range for me. He lulled me into the tune, captivating me. I didn’t want to give into U2 after my harsh criticism. I held onto my feelings, but the song I was listening to was beginning to melt me inside as the guitar and drums danced together

without stepping on one another's toes. The lyrics floated above. I was now, for the most part, intrigued.

“Chad, is this the song you sing when you are at the potter's wheel in class?”

The song stayed with Chad and he began to sing the lyric alongside Bono.

“Yeah, it is. You like?”

“I'm interested. Not completely sold but interested.”

The song came to an end. The tape ran out of acetate and stopped. The play button popped with finality. I contemplated ejecting the cassette. The interest in the last song was still with me. I wanted to hear it again. I yearned for something in the tune and needed to go back for another listen. I swiveled around in my chair and hit the rewind button. The whirring of the tiny tape reels began. I found the song's beginning and hit play.