

19 November 2015

Tonight, Let me begin with a preface to a letter I wrote a few weeks ago from my hotel room in Berlin while on our final tour for this album. I felt the need to write this foreword in light of the heartbreaking tragedies of Nov. 13th, as this project has now taken on an entirely different tone. As has everything, it seems...

The Saint Cecilia EP was put into motion back in October of this year as a celebration of life and music. The concept being that, as our world tour drew to a close this week, we wanted to share our love of both with you in return for everything you have given us.

Now, there is a new, hopeful intention that, even in the smallest way, perhaps these songs can bring a little light into this sometimes dark world. To remind us that music is life, and that hope and healing go hand in hand with song. That much can never be taken away.

To all who were affected by the atrocities in Paris, loved ones and friends, our hearts go out to you and your families. We will return and celebrate life and love with you once again someday with our music. As it should be done.

Dave Grohl

8 November 2015

Hey.

Thanks.

For real.

It was in Austin, Texas March 14th, 2013, at the last show of the "Sound City Players" when I was given a small, but very relevant and perhaps prophetic gift from my Sound City movie producers Jim Rota and John Ramsay. An empty journal, with a note that said something along the lines of, "Congratulations on everything Sound City.....now get to work on the next project!" It was the most beautiful way to end something that I wanted so badly to last forever: with a new beginning.

The basic concept of the Sonic Highways album and series was born right then and there, in a small backstage room surrounded by mountains of Lone Star beer and Stubbs BBQ. 8 songs, 8 cities, 8 studios, and a musical road trip of a lifetime.

Removing the Foo Fighters from our comfort zone and challenging the process from top to bottom, it breathed new life into the band, and set us on a journey that unquestionably exceeded any of our simple expectations. And now it has led us here. To another beautiful ending.

So, where do I begin?

We owe it all to Mexico City.

Unbeknownst to them, the people who attended those two concerts back in December, 2013 at Foro Sol stadium helped fund the filming and recording of the bulk of the Sonic Highways project. They were the fuse that lit this little firecracker, baby. Without those gigs, many may have never heard the incredible and truly inspiring life stories of Buddy Guy, Steve Albini, Ian Mackaye, Tony Joe White, Zac Brown, Dolly Parton, Roky Erickson, Gary Clark Jr, Bruce Pavitt, Fred Drake, Terry Lickona, Joan Jett, Steve Rosenthal, Nora Guthrie.....a list too long to share here. But, beyond giving our band the equivalent of a rock and roll university year abroad, they gave the entire world the most priceless gift: Inspiration. So....Gracias a todos, Mexico....we couldn't have done it without you.

Before long, our rag tag crew of ne'er-do-wells was stumbling from city to city, coast to coast, taking in every drop (!) of 100 proof American culture we could squeeze. Dancing in a New Orleans second line parade, laying under the desert stars in Joshua Tree, walking the streets of Chicago in -30 degree weather...it was an American dream come true. Our only responsibility was to share it with you, and the brave people of HBO trusted us with that much. (very freely, I might add.) Blind faith? Perhaps. But, without Nina Rosenstein, we would not be the people who we are today. Looking back, she gave us something immeasurably generous: some of the greatest memories of our lives. These people and places that we experienced have filled our hearts...and ultimately our songs. So, thank you, Nina. We are yours. But, focused on the moment, we never in our wildest dreams could have imagined the whirlwind 23 months that lay ahead of us. We just put one foot in front of the other, and kept moving....

I must admit, I never looked at our schedule. I was too scared. I knew that this was it. This was the big one. There was talk of stadiums, and anniversaries, and TV shows. South Africa, Korea, Colombia. Letterman and Glastonbury. It all seemed too good to be true! But, as always, we kept our heads down and tried to appreciate every single moment as it fled. Because, you realize, none of this was ever supposed to happen. Ever. As we approached our twentieth anniversary, it was hard not to look back on all of those years and smile while shaking our heads in wonder and disbelief. From the Mike Watt van tour of 1995, to RFK stadium in Washington DC (my hometown gig) July 4th, 2015...those dots don't necessarily connect in real life, you know? It still boggles the mind. But, the spoils of these blessings are not lost upon us. We count every last one.

Even the disasters.

A lucky break? Yeah, you could call it that. Gothenburg was a swift reminder that life is short, and that we're all here to live it together, no matter what adversity you're faced with. (Music! The perfect remedy!) Sure, weeks and weeks of shuffling around hotel rooms on my butt with a cast on my leg, trying to pack my suitcase alone before lobby call got pretty fucking stale pretty fucking quick. But, as always, I just put one foot in front of.....well, the same one for a while there...

And then everything changed. The energy. The atmosphere. THE THRONE. I was no longer afraid to look at the schedule, I was glued to it. The challenge that we faced from there on out became more of a mission, or a dare, if you will. And it showed. Pat's smile got even wider (an infallible barometer of all things), Chris's solos got even faster (thank God someone knows what they're doing up there), Nate's stage moves more daring (I once noticed him just to the left of me) and Taylor's drum set....well....it got pinker. But not without the help of scores of hardworking bad asses that some might call the Foo Fighters road crew (we like refer to them as family, in a very Manson Family kind of way...) They ultimately deserve the lion's share of credit for keeping this old circus tent erect for the past 6 months. So, let's all have a nice, warm diet Coke for them tonight. They're the hardest working motherfuckers in the business. Cheers.

And so we trudged on. Any fatigue was met with an explosion of energy once the curtain went up. Any pain was met with the adrenaline of thousands of voices singing along. Every one of you kept us alive for a while there. One night, at a point where I felt like I was at the end of my rope, it came to me that these few hours we have together every night were something like a heavy blanket to retreat under. I could always rely on our time together to get me to the next stop. Again, and again. From Chicago to Cesena.

That being said....we've always been pretty good at knowing when to call it a day. You just....know. You get that feeling that, if you're not careful, you'll run out of bread crumbs to find your way home and be lost in the woods forever. It hit me a few months back, crept up on me and tapped me on the shoulder as if to say "Hey...don't spend it all in one place, asshole." A sobering reminder that all good things must come to an end. Of course...we could keep going. After all, we'd made it this far, right? What's another 20 years?

Around that time we arrived in Austin, Texas for the Austin City Limits festival. A massive gig, two weekends and hundreds of acts, it was to be some of our final American performances for this album. There's a certain bittersweet relief to that. On one hand, you're carrying these monumental experiences under your wing as you anticipate life outside of a tour bus. On the other hand, you fear that the thrill and joy of sharing music with people all over the world will leave you like an empty shell when it's gone. It becomes your everything. And that's terrifying.

The Saint Cecilia Hotel, named after the patroness saint of music, is known as “A lush retreat from the world”. And, believe me, that it is! 14 rooms and a small bar, it’s tucked away in the trees within a bustling, Austin neighborhood. As our van pulled up in the wee hours of September 30th, 2015, I was struck with a rather impulsive idea: to record some songs on our days off to give to the world as a “thank you” for the last 2 years. Though there’s a world class recording studio just on the other side of the fence (Arlyn Studios, look it up.), the hotel manager, Jenny offered that we record in the hotel. A most generous, but unrealistic offer. Though, after rolling it around in my head a few times, it made perfect sense! Returning to the city where the entire Sonic Highways concept was born, loading in one last time to a room that was never designed to be a recording studio a la Sonic Highways, and making some music! Fate? Destiny? I was too tired to figure that kind of shit out, so I hit the sack, woke up the next morning and started making some calls...

By 6 pm the next day, the office was transformed into a control room and the bar was littered with microphones and cables. Amps were in the kitchen. Drums in front of the fireplace. Instant studio, courtesy of the legendary Kevin Szymanski! (Those fancy computer things are pretty convenient! More on that another time....) Margaritas were made, friends came to visit, the sun went down, and before long we started making enough noise to drive the neighbors to start drinking along with us. Riffs and ideas were thrown around, songs that were lost in the shuffle over the years, songs that were left unfinished. Like a musical retrospective, we were going through decades of songs no one has ever heard, pieces left on the cutting room floor from every album. Our own sonic scrapbook. (The Neverending Sigh is 20 years old! Was once called 7 corners for all you die hards out there...) Without the usual pressure or expectation of making an “album”, we sat happy and relaxed as we played. A virtual “This Is Your Life” of the Foo Fighters. It was so good, but again, bittersweet knowing that it was all soon coming to an end.

By midnight, the Preservation Hall Jazz Band had arrived, and the “session” turned into a full on party. Guitars were abandoned for horns and the room started swinging (spinning?). People danced between the cables and microphones, dancing behind the bar, strumming acoustic guitars on the patio. Danny Clinch did what Danny Clinch does, capturing the moments in his beautiful pictures between cocktails. Gary Clark Jr. sat on the patio in the candlelight, jamming along with friends from a couch. As the hours passed, the atmosphere had reached exactly what every recording experience should be: A celebration. “Always record! Always record!” said Jack Black in that infamous Tenacious D episode from years ago. Truer words have never been spoken. Because you just might miss something that you’ll never get back again. Moments that happen once in a lifetime. By the time that weekend was over, we had recorded 5 songs in that tiny room.

Weekend two was spent recording vocals and guitars in my bedroom, room 4. More friends, more margaritas, a fire in the fire pit. The most fabulous Cambria Harkey floated in, slinging her camera to insure that this wasn't all just a dream. The porch was buzzing with activity as I did vocals in my bathroom, stepping in and out to listen to the previous takes. The coffee table became a pile of guitar pedals and scribbled lyrics, beer bottles and ashtrays. At one point, a familiar face walked in and said, "Dave.....it's Ben Kweller....." It had been years! Such a talented young man. We hugged, hit play to listen to the last vocal take, and he instinctively started singing the perfect harmony to my line. Without hesitation, I immediately said, "Get your ass in there and sing it right now." So he picked up the coffee stained piece of hotel stationery with my lyrics penciled on it and banged out his part in two glorious takes. Always record, ladies and gentlemen. Always record. The night faded, friends and family scattered, and I fell asleep with my still glowing amp at the foot of my bed.

It was heartbreaking to leave that place, to say the least. I honestly feel like we left a piece of our band there as we were being torn away from it. The perfect unity of life, and love, and music is something that only comes around so often and in certain circumstances. When you feel it coming on, you have to take hold of it. That place and those people made it possible for our band to take one, big final breath before the curtain closes. Thankfully, we have evidence of this in these songs that we're giving to you today. Thank you, Saint Cecilia. You made us feel right at home.

And, the music? Maybe these songs are the breadcrumbs that will help us find our way back when it's time. We could use a nice wander through the woods right about now. Another empty journal, another tap on the shoulder...those things are never far behind. It's what lies ahead in those woods that excites me now....

So tonight, as I sit in my Berlin hotel room on our final tour for this album, counting down the days until we return home, I can't help but wonder when we will see each other again. Who knows? But, with everything Foo Fighter related, it will only be when it feels right. And that's a feeling that's easy to feel.

To each and every one of you that made the past few years the best our band has ever had, thank you. You have all given us so much, and we are eternally grateful.

For real.

One foot in front of the other....

Dave