

LET'S GO! STREET SCENE

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MUSIC NOTES



CHRISTINA FUOCO

Missing Nirvana was pretty dumb

Everytime I see Nirvana's "Heart-Shaped Box" video I feel sick to my stomach. When Kurt Cobain rocks on the tip of his chair, sings "Hey, wait, I've got a new complaint!" and his bright blue-colored eyes stare at me I get this sinking feeling.

Maybe it's because I can relate to a lot of his lyrics. Maybe it's because I can relate to depression and suicide.

No, I think it's a little more selfish than that. I never got around to seeing Nirvana play live. Sure, I had plenty of opportunities to do so. When Nirvana played the Blind Pig, I could have gotten tickets, but I was living in Clinton Township and I really didn't feel like making that long drive to Ann Arbor.

They came back a few years later to perform at St. Andrew's Hall in Detroit. "Nevermind" had just taken off. My friend's brother talked endlessly about going to see the show. I figured I could make up for missing Nirvana, in my mind, by interviewing the band. So, I sat down in my parents' den and called Giffen. Their response to the interview request was, "Everyone wants to."

Thinking I probably didn't have a chance, I put the interview — and going to the show — in the back of my mind. I never called back. Maybe I did have a chance.

When Nirvana booked a show at the State Fair Coliseum after "In Utero" was released, I intended on going. We had tickets, but while my friend and I talked about the show, others told me about the poor sound quality at the coliseum. I guess acoustics aren't a top priority when you're designing a building to show farm animals.

A bad choice

Up until about an hour before the show, we planned on going. Then we got the chance to meet a hilariously cheesy metal star, who shall remain nameless, at The Ritz. We couldn't pass it up, but we could pass up Nirvana. After all, they were going to be back for Lollapalooza, and the sound would be better at Lollapalooza, our seats would be better, blah, blah, blah.

So off we went to The Ritz, where we were given backstage passes decorated with a drawing of a semi-topless woman. (How embarrassing.) We shook hands with this one-time mega-star, stuck around for a little while then went to the bar. Did we regret skipping Nirvana? Maybe a little, but the thoughts were fleeting. All my excuses kept running through my head as if to justify my decision to blow off yet another Nirvana show.

A couple friends of mine called me the next day and told me how great the show and the sound was. People are still telling me how great Nirvana's show was.

When Cobain killed himself in April 1994, I thought it was awful that he was so miserable that he took his own life. As the shock and sadness subsided, I clicked back into "selfish mode" and I scurried around my house, looking for all the Nirvana memorabilia I could. I also began kicking myself for missing Nirvana.

Easing the guilt

A few weeks ago, I went to the Mike Watt/Foo Fighters/Hovercraft show at St. Andrew's Hall. Sure, I wanted to see Pearl Jam's Eddie Vedder play with Hovercraft and Watt. But I also felt that if I saw ex-Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl with his new band Foo Fighters, some of the guilt about not seeing Nirvana would ease up.

I thought that when Grohl hit the stage as Foo Fighters' singer/guitarist, I would feel like a weight had been lifted. All I felt was more guilt about blowing off Nirvana. Grohl's vocal style resembled Cobain's, so I closed my eyes and tried to visualize a Nirvana show. I found it works better when you're hearing Nirvana songs.

As if to torture me even more, Grohl came back on stage — this time to play drums for Watt. As he started pounding away, I felt chills. This was the closest I would ever get to seeing Nirvana.

The next few days all I could think about was Nirvana. I re-read a book I have about Nirvana. I re-played in my mind the time I met Courtney Love at Pine Knob. I constantly flipped on MTV hoping to see a glimpse of "Nirvana Unplugged," one of their videos, or really anything about the band.

Last week I saw the "Heart-Shaped Box" video. I'm not sure why that video from "In Utero" stirred up all these feelings. A line in the song four tracks later more appropriately sums up my whole Nirvana experience, or lack thereof.

"I think I'm dumb."

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Bad Brains: Reuniting feels good

■ The seminal rastafarian hardcore band Bad Brains needed a little breather to "find" themselves. After a 5½-year break, they realized that a reunion was in the cards.

BY CHRISTINA FUOCO
STAFF WRITER



It's too bad that The Orb is calling their tour the "Happy Happy Joy Joy Tour." It would be the perfect name for Bad Brains' latest outing.

Happiness oozes from the Bad Brains camp now that the original lineup of vocalist HR (Human Rights), guitarist Dr. Know, bassist Darryl Jenifer and drummer Earl Hudson has realigned.

"It's all good, you know? It's good; it's good," said Dr. Know.

Musicians like Rage Against the Machine, Belly and Porno For Pyros' Perry Farrell are thrilled about it, too. Techno maven Moby recently told "Details" magazine, "Bad Brains are far and away the best hardcore punk band ever."

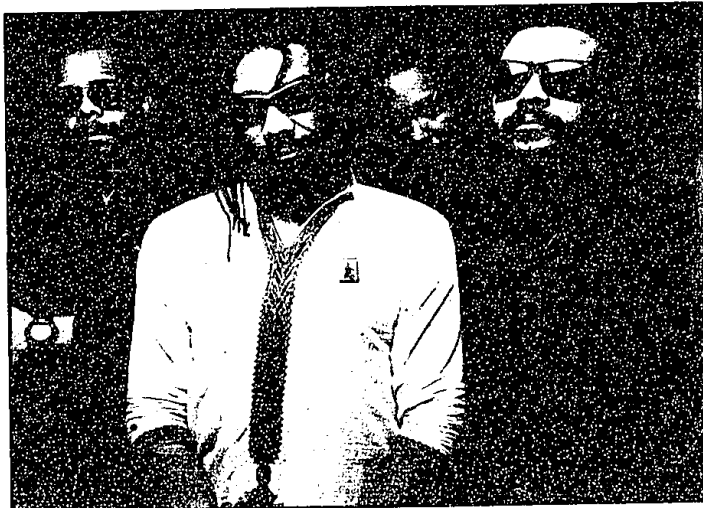
The now-defunct rock band Living Colour called Bad Brains their mentors. The Beastie Boys' Adam Yauch, known to fans as "MCA," thinks it's an honor to have the Rastafarian hard rockers open for them during their spring tour, which hits Cobo Arena for a sold-out show Thursday, May 18.

"Bad Brains influenced me more than any other band in the world, basically, one of the most powerful, innovative bands ever," he was reported as saying.

This reputation was tagged on Washington, D.C.'s Bad Brains soon after the band formed in the early 1980s. Their furious blend of hardcore, rock, funk and reggae sent rumbles throughout the music industry.

"We knew people would take notice, but I have to admit I underestimated the effect it would have," Dr. Know said. "We grew up in D.C., and black music was always a part of the environment there. Bob Marley, Earth Wind and Fire, Stevie Wonder and George Clinton were some of the first things we all listened to."

After nearly seven years with Bad Brains, HR and Hudson split to pursue solo projects.



Reunited: The newly reunited Bad Brains, featuring drummer Earl Hudson (from left), vocalist HR, bassist Darryl Jenifer and guitarist Dr. Know, opens for the Beastie Boys at Cobo Arena Thursday, May 18.

Dr. Know and Jenifer recruited new members and stuck it out. The revamped version of Bad Brains released a handful of albums on Epic until the label dropped them. "The bad news couldn't have come at a better time. Fate already had a hand in reuniting the original band."

"It wasn't planned. Actually, we were getting ready to call HR and he was getting ready to call us," Dr. Know said. "We thought, 'Let's do this.'"

Echoing the band's strong political stance, Jenifer came up with a more philosophical explanation for the reunion: "Ultimately, being in Bad Brains is like being a part of a lifelong mission that stops and starts, depending on the needs of the world. We did not come together out of a financial need or a desire for attention. The current state of the world is what

inspired us to reconnect. It was time for the mission to begin again."

Along with the newly reunited Bad Brains comes a new outlook, a new record ("God of Love") and a new label (Madonna's Maverick Records). "God of Love" carries the same enthusiasm as Bad Brains' earlier works like "Rock for Light." Bad Brains is one of those bands that truly can not be categorized and the album's schizophrenic personality is proof of that. Reggae, hardcore, rock — it's all in there.

"We've never operated under any preconceived notions like 'we need two hardcore songs, three reggae songs, one metal. What we do is just vibe it, take a style and put our own signature on it.'"

In recording "God of Love," they recruited the producer of "Rock for Light" — ex-Cars vocalist Ric Ocasek

who also turned the knobs for Weezer. They looked to a familiar face for "God of Love" but Bad Brains abandoned their past practice of recording albums.

"Usually, most of our records, before this, we spent like four days at the most doing the whole thing," Dr. Know said. "This one took a week and a half to record."

Their hypercharged live shows have always been Bad Brains' strong suit. Mosh pits abounded long before it was trendy and fans of the old Bad Brains can expect that at Cobo this week.

"Same as it ever was," Dr. Know said of the reunited band's shows. "The shows have been going really well. There's a lot of good vibes and good energy. Everybody's really having a good time and they're really appreciative."

"Everybody walks away smiling."

Botfly breaks through music categories

BY TODD WICKS
SPECIAL WRITER

Even over the telephone, Botfly bassist Jimmy Bauer's dismay is perceptible with the interview's opening question: "So, you guys are pretty much funk, right?"

"Uh, no," he answers flatly. "I don't think any funk band would call us funk. We have a lot of heavy grooves, but there are only a few songs I really slap and pop on. A lot of people just relate grooves to funk."

"Everybody has these little categories to put music in. We're trying to break throughout all that. It's all music."

But those familiar with Botfly can hardly be blamed for associating the popular East Lansing band with funk. Only months ago, anyone wandering the streets of the college town on a Friday or Saturday night was likely to hear an early, pulsating groove pumping from one house party or another, an unmistakable sound that always turned out to be the steadily rising Botfly.

These days, the four-man group, which includes the charismatic, denim overalls-clad Craig Griffith on vocals and harmonica-guitarist Mike Fehrenbach and drummer Quade Finnicum, is more apt to be heard blasting their sweaty brand of party music out of local clubs, and now, out of record stores. Botfly's first release, a self-titled collection of 10 originals, hit stores March 17. While the band hopes it will open even more doors to their unique sound, Bauer feels the best path to success is the longer one.

"We really just want to travel around the country, hopefully sell some CDs along the way, and slowly have the word spread," he said. "We're planning on taking the long road, where you get a following that stays with you."

Have a listen

To hear music by Bad Brains (message 2), Faith No More (message 3), All (message 4), Rusty (message 5), (message 6), Suddenly Tammy! (message 7), Slot (message 8), Kitchen of Distinction (message 9), Motor Dolls (message 10) and The Verve Pipe (message 11), you can call the Street Scene Music Line at (313) 963-2025 on a touch-tone phone. Fast-forward to the corresponding message by pressing 33. To repeat a message, press 4.



"A lot of good hands play for seven or eight years before they have a steady following or become big. It's the long way, but I think it's the better way, because the fans seem to stick with you. They don't come and go."

Botfly's take-it-allow approach extends to other areas as well. For instance, mention of the exalted rock'n'roll dream of the big record deal hardly excites Bauer.

"We haven't really pushed for any label interest," he said calmly. "We're not in a hurry to do anything. I'd rather get tighter as a band and expand on our music more before a serious label offer comes along."

But Bauer isn't crazy. "I mean, if one came along, we wouldn't turn it down," he said, "but we're not pushing it yet." Although officially in existence only two years, the size of Botfly's following is remarkable, second in East Lansing only to The Verve Pipe.

The band's beginnings were slightly rockier, routinely halted by that stereotypical problem band member, the drummer.

"Me and Griff met at a (Grateful) Dead show and found out that we both jammed and had the same ideas about what kind of music we wanted to do," Bauer said. "Then Mike came into the picture, but we couldn't find a drummer for a long while. We ended up starting with a drum machine and saying,

"Well, we'll start writing songs and find a drummer later."

The great drummer search became a major stumbling block.

"We were stalled for a long time," he said. "Really, we were standing still, because we had to learn the same songs over and over with each new drummer. Finally, we found Quade, who made it come together."

With Finnicum as the final ingredient in their eclectic sonic stew, band productivity has definitely increased.

Bauer is fuzzy about the details of the recording process, but his thoughts on the album are clear: "I'm really happy with it. There's something on it for everyone. If you're into heavy stuff, we play some of that. If you like funky stuff, we play some of that."

But he's right. Botfly is remarkably eclectic, and confident, for such a young band. That's why Rich Decadent from She's So Huge probably spoke for a lot of area bands a few weeks ago when he said admiringly, "Botfly is going to pass the rest of us by."

Botfly plays Saturday, May 20, at The Ritz, 17890 Frazho, Roseville, with Sons of Elvis and Vudu Hipies. For more information, call (810) 778-6404.

On the road: East Lansing's Botfly plays The Ritz in Roseville Saturday, May 20, with Sons of Elvis and Vudu Hipies.