

“I need something to keep me from gagging and throwing up.”

Foo Fighter and all-around nice guy Dave Grohl dishes on his punk roots and the healing power of bubble gum.

By **Brent DiCrescenzo** Photo illustration by **Jamie DiVecchio Ramsay**

Dave Grohl is talking to me from his kitchen, in a swimsuit, chewing gum. I can tell. As much as he's itching to jump in the water with his daughter, Harper, he talks with me. A lot. Words gush out of the drummer and guitarist. He slips into character voices. He tells me about his childhood, mountain-biking injuries, eating buckets of KFC in the studio, crushes on D.C. indie rockers, home remodeling and first meeting his Nirvana bandmates, Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic (“They were like flannel and trailer-park dirtbags”). One of the biggest rock stars on the planet, Grohl is headlining the 20th-anniversary Lollapalooza with his Foo Fighters while celebrating the 20th birthday of Nirvana's revolutionary *Nevermind*. Hell, I'm pretty sure the 42-year-old would invite me in for a dip if this were face-to-face in his Virginia home.

You and Kurt Cobain went to the first Lollapalooza together.

Before then, Krist and Kurt and I all grew up going to punk shows. So if there were more than 250 people at a show, it was considered a big fuckin' show. You know the first show I ever saw was at the Cubby Bear?

What concert was that?

I never went to rock concerts when I was a kid. I had posters on my wall. I had Beatles records. Chicago gave me more music than any other city in America. My first Rush record was given to me by my older cousin, Trip. He gave me *2112* when I was seven years old. His room always smelled like incense [*Stage whispers*] because I think he was smoking pot. And then there was my youngest cousin, Tracy. I showed up in 1982, on a family vacation to Evanston, where they lived in a

fuckin' mansion down the street from the lake. I lived in a three-bedroom concrete box in Springfield, Virginia. Tracy was punk. I'd only seen punks on *Quincy* and *CHiPs*. This was the first time I'd seen one in the flesh. We went to Wax Trax! so I could buy a punk T-shirt, and then we went to the Cubby Bear to see Naked Raygun. That is the foundation of my musical being.

Back to that first Lolla.

That first Lollapalooza we were in L.A. recording *Nevermind*. Kurt and I got tickets and decided to go. When we arrived, there were more piercings, tribal tattoos and Rollins Band shirts than we'd ever seen in one place at one time. I thought, Well, this could only happen in Los Angeles... and I can't imagine that the rest of the world is gonna change into this. And it was a fuckin' epic day. I remember sitting in my seat, watching the Butthole Surfers. At a fuckin' outdoor amphitheater! The last time I saw them they were at the 9:30 Club and there were 45 people there and Gibby [Haynes] was shooting a shotgun into the audience. It was insane. It was like the revolution had just begun... [*Talking to Harper*] Hi, Boo. I know! I can't wait! After swimming we'll make Popsicles. You want to talk to *Time Out Chicago*, say hi? [*To me*] That's a big no.

Did seeing Lolla give you and Kurt a sense that a major shift was about to happen in pop music, that you were going to make it?

Back then, when your band became popular, your instinctual knee-jerk reaction was to try and make all of your friends' bands popular, too. None of us ever had career ambition, that we were going to be in the biggest band in the world. Once it started happening, you just wanted to bring all of your


friends with you. Some of 'em wanted to be there, some of 'em didn't. Finally, there was some musical justice. The bands that deserved to be heard were being heard, not the bullshit that was being forced down everyone's throats on the radio, you know? And once the floodgates opened, you know, it's like crashing a party. It was like a riot, like looting. [Lollapalooza founder] Perry [Farrell] smashed a window, and fuckin' all of us just ran in and stole as much shit as we could before the cops came.

Why do you chew gum while performing?

At this point it's become a superstitious habit. At first I started doing it because most of the songs, I'm screaming full tilt, the entire time. I need something to keep me from gagging and throwing up. I'm not kidding. I chew gum just to keep lubricated. It gets stuck on the mic, stuck in my hair, stuck on my lips.

Can you scream night in and night out?

Yeah, absolutely. [Foos drummer] Taylor [Hawkins] and I were on our daily mountain bike ride, and he was complimenting me on my voice. Which never happens. No one ever says, “Hey, Dave, your voice sounds really good.” Because, usually, it doesn't. Is it bad that that's the least of my priorities? That the last thing on my list in life is “have a good voice”? I quit smoking three years ago, and since then, I can scream five days a week no problem. Talk to me when I'm, like, 65. I'm gonna sound like Lemmy from Motörhead. We're gonna have a problem.

 Foo Fighters close out Lollapalooza's Music Unlimited stage on Sunday 7 at 8pm. Read the complete interview at timeoutchicago.com/music.