

SPECIAL WEALTH SECTION WHY THE GOOD TIMES WON'T END SOON

GQ

MAY 2000

Silicon Valley Billionaires Get Some *GQ* Style

What You Should
Earn at Your Age

My Month as a
Day-Trader
BY ALAN RICHMAN

NBA Seers and
Spendthrifts
BY BOB DRURY

How to Eat
to Live Forever

The Foo Fighters &
Greil Marcus Go
Behind the Music

Estella Got Her Groove

THE WINSOME MS. WARREN
IS THE NEXT BIG THING

U.S.A. \$3.00
CANADA \$4.00
FOREIGN \$4.00



08436

THE FOO FIGHTERS GET BEHIND THE MUSIC

What's the lesson to be learned from *Behind the Music*, VH1's frighteningly addictive soap opera? Simple. That no matter where you are in your rock-and-roll life, you've got to have the right clothes. The Foo Fighters take time off from their U.S. tour supporting their latest album, *There's Nothing Left to Lose*, to stage their own mockumentary.

PHASE ONE: THE STRUGGLE The year is 1991; the locale, Hollywood. Fresh off the bus from their humble hometown of Oskaloosa, Iowa, their mullets freshly primped to impress the ladies of Paradise City, here come Davey and the Corn Boreers, as the Foos were originally known. Joined by the now forgotten "Fifth Foo," for left, they are, from left, Chris Shiflett (guitar; real name Wladislaw Blasczyk), Taylor Hawkins (drums; real name Moishe Abramowitz), Nate Mendel (bass; real name Nikki Sixx) and Dave Grohl (vocals, guitar; real name Grolier Davis). For fashion credits, see page 202.

★★PHOTOGRAPHS BY DEWEY NICKS★★





PHASE TWO: THE ASCENT *Yess!* After two years as the house band at Coconut Teasers, the ultraprestigious Sunset Boulevard nightspot, the Foo Fighters began to catch the attention of A & R men—and the ladies. On March 23, 1993, they inked an unprecedented \$10 million recording contract and later drove to Las Vegas to be simultaneously married to four Playmates—Brandy, Brandi, Brandii and Brandé. Dave: "It was, y'know, like, a great time, man. Top-ten hits, playin' Dodger Stadium, goin' to snake auctions with Slash, doin' three-ways with my woman and Taylor's." Taylor: "I wore nothing but leather in 1993. It chafed, but I was, like, y'know, 'Yeah! Y'know?'" *Previous pages, from left:* Forgotten Fifth Foo's clothes his own. Chris's own velour tracksuit by Adidas. Sneakers by Royal Elastics, \$100. Taylor's nylon jacket, \$640; and stretch-mesh warm-up pants, \$250; both by Prada. Nate's velour sweat suit by FilaSport, \$170. Sneakers by Royal Elastics, \$100. Dave's cotton jacket, \$395, shirt, \$265, and jeans, \$255; all

by Sandy Dalal. Sneakers by Royal Elastics, \$120. *Clockwise, from top, on Nate:* Wool- and-polyamide suit, \$1,820; and cotton shirt, \$235; both by Louis Vuitton. *On Taylor:* Wool jacket by Dries Van Noten, \$2,730. Cotton shirt by Marc Jacobs, \$310. Sunglasses, his own. *On Dave:* Cotton jacket, \$1,350, shirt, \$155, and pants, \$440; all by Tracy Feith. Loafers by Louis Vuitton, \$345. *On Chris:* Cashmere sweater, Polo by Ralph Lauren, \$495. *On women:* See Where to Buy It, page 276.

★★ ESSAY BY GREIL MARCUS ★★

In 1991 the director James Marsh of the BBC Television division Arena came to America to prepare a four-part series entitled *Tales of Rock 'N' Roll*. The idea was to uncover the "biographies" of four classic pop singles, among them Buddy Holly's 1957 hit "Peggy Sue." After tracing the history of the tune, recounting Holly's death in the same 1959 plane crash that took the life of singer Ritchie Valens, dropping in never-before-seen film of Holly onstage and cavorting in home movies, and intercutting interviews with onetime band mates and friends, the "Peggy Sue" episode concluded with a TV commercial for Rapid Rooter—a Sacramento, California, company run by Peggy Sue Geron Rackham, the real Peggy Sue. Of all people, the commercial centered on Ritchie Valens's real Donna—now Donna Fox, a businesswoman in the same town. For decades the two women were unknown to each other, except as icons in their songs; now they were friends.

"We're the other guys," Rackham said of her company as she stood next to a Rapid Rooter van. "I've recommended it to all my friends," Fox said from behind her desk, a secret smile on her face. It was unforgettable television: The notion that these two middle-aged women were both ordinary and immortal was as shocking as it was delightful. It was also cost-effective television, done quickly and on the cheap, using as much or more archival material as original footage.

Today the nuts-and-bolts aspects of Marsh's approach have been turned into a formula responsible for the highest-rated program on VH1, *Behind the Music*. The two-year-old show has been so successful that it dominates the network's schedule, typically airing twenty hours a week, and as many as thirty-five hours a week during VH1's *Behind the Music* marathons. To date there



PHASE THREE: THE COMEDOWN Their rock-and-roll fantasy appeared to have come true. But behind the music, the Foo Fighters were riven by ego clashes, petty jealousies and concern over Dave's increasingly erratic behavior. Nate: "Around the time of the *Colour and the Shape* tour, Dave started to...change. I'd try to bake Toll House cookies with him like we used to back in Iowa, but he wouldn't sift anymore." Dave's downward spiral culminated in his arrest on June 8, 1997, for exposing himself to the paramedics who revived him after he was found unconscious from a Yodels binge in the Griffith Park Observatory. Dave: "I'm told that my blood sugar was twelve times the legal limit—I was sweating honey." On Dave: His own tunic

shirt by Perry Ellis. Leather pants by John Bartlett, \$6,000. Far right, on Taylor: Leather button-front overshirt by Marc Jacobs, \$1,000. Cotton vintage T-shirt from Polo Sport SoHo, N.Y.C., \$95. Chamois-and-suede pants by Lost Art for Anna Sui, by special order.

have been 106 episodes (and VH1 has recently launched *Behind the Music 2*, an on-the-road spin-off): One after another, figures from the pop past and present come forward to ride the roller coasters of their careers with the viewer seated right behind.

The result is at once addictive and empty. The tag line of *Tales of Rock 'N' Roll* was "Every great song tells a story, and behind every great song there's a story to be told." If *Behind the Music* had a tag line, it would be "Every great song tells a story, and behind every great song there's a story to be told—the same story." Each episode, whether it stars Shania Twain or Def Leppard, Barry White or the Partridge Family, is constructed as part of a grand, overarching, all-encompassing thesis—what Marxists used to call a "totality." As the episode begins, the words FAME SUCCESS GLORY FORTUNE PASSION HEARTBREAK flash in a loop under the title, and the blur of nouns is then translated into a ritualized, regimented plot: the success, the excess, the near-death experience (bodily or commercial), the regeneration, the continuation.

Behind the Music isn't the only place you'll find this approved pop narrative these days. It's everywhere: in the endless, carefully researched, passionately written yet somehow interchangeable band histories in the fine British music magazine *Mojo*; in the booklets that accompany every box-set career retrospective; in the recent flurry of network pop histories or fictions, such as the TV movies *Mr. Rock 'n' Roll* (starring Judd Nelson as pioneering deejay Alan Freed) and *Shake, Rattle and Roll* (more or less *Jailhouse Rock* without the jail). The format feels so fixed, so preordained, that some critics can't imagine their way out of it. "The seemingly non-stop blur of young acts swamping the charts," David Browne wrote in *Entertainment Weekly*, "makes one crave an act destined to be a *Behind the Music* rather than a *Where Are They Now?*, someone whose life, music, and personal drama merit an entire hour rather than four minutes." Wow, an entire hour! In the mind of the writer following the formula, it seems that getting one's own *Behind the Music* is a triumph just short of being inducted into the equally dubious Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. Not that it really matters who you are: Lou Reed or 'N Sync, dead or alive, you can be sure the script to your *Behind the Music* has already been written.

In the library that holds all the attempts to get the story of postwar pop music down on film, there is no cataloging system; half the film cans and videotapes have fallen off the shelves, and the labels long ago peeled off half of those. A lot has been lost, and even much of what's been preserved has been forgotten. James Marsh's work, and that of like-minded filmmakers, was a fan's work, reflective of a fan's desire to enter the stories told by songs and singers. Whether it was Christopher Münch's flinty film *The Hours and Times* (1991) about a trip that John Lennon and his manager, Brian Epstein, took to Barcelona in 1963, or Floyd Muttrux's deliciously fast feature *American Hot Wax* (1978), in which a whole cosmos of wish and fear came into focus every time Tim McIntire's Alan Freed changed his expression, the work came out of obsessions that could not be relieved. The evident passion underlying these obsessions is what makes these films obvious and crepuscular, immediately accessible and permanently mysterious. The films try to answer a question: Why do incidents in pop history seem like keys to a locked book—not merely to history as it is officially recorded, but to a secret history, a history that has been lived but can hardly declare itself, let alone write itself?

Behind the Music is a relief from all that. You relax, learn the game and wait for the payoff. The format breaks down into portents, warnings and wrap-ups from the unseen narrator. He speaks in a neutral, authoritative voice, part Walter Winchell, part Walter Cronkite. The "multiplatinum party played on until the good times got ugly," he says. "Just as his dreams came true, his world fell apart." "Then, just when their future looked brighter than ever..." "By the time he was 23, [he] had all the fame, fortune and fans a man could ever want. But behind the music, he was a boy, tortured by troubled love...seduced by drugs...surrounded by death." "He had gone from anonymous to famous to notorious.... [It] left him humble, and thankful to be alive." "He's learned fame isn't all it's cracked up to be." "Next: Out of pain comes enlightenment." "Now they balance creative pursuits with the demands of raising children."

PHASE FOUR: THE REDEMPTION Today the rehabbed Dave finds his release in spiritual pursuits and a new, stripped-down sound. "I wear white," he says, "because white is the color of polar bears, and polar bears have this awesome, like, serenity, man." His trip back from the dark side has made him realize what matters most to him: "My music, man! I'm just back to makin' my music." Taylor echoes this sentiment: "Now we're just back to makin' our music, man." Nate is similarly optimistic: "Now we're just back to makin' our music, man." As is Chris: "Now we're just back to makin' our music, man." *Top row, from left:* 1. His own clothing. 2. Linen embroidered shirt by PS-Paul Smith, \$330. Cotton trousers, Polo by Ralph Lauren, \$60. 3. Leather zip jacket by Giorgio Armani, \$2,675. Stretch-cotton trousers by BCBG Max Azria, \$118. 4. Cotton three-button suit, Polo by Ralph Lauren, \$895. Cotton T-shirt, Nova USA by Tony Melillo, \$57. 5. Cotton-voile-and-lace shirt by Anna Sui, by special order. 6. Cotton shirt by Govinda's, \$20. 7. Cotton collarless shirt by Govinda's, \$14. *Bottom row:* All clothes by Govinda's, except where noted. *On woman, far right, and boys:* T-shirts by Calvin Klein. *On girl, center:* Dress by Michelle Mason. Hair by Clyde Haygood for J.F. Lazartigue for AGM. Makeup by Kymbra for Artist Group Management. Where to buy it? See page 276.



These lines come from shows on the '80s hair band Poison ("Every Rose Has Its Thorn"), '60s surf 'n' cars duo Jan & Dean ("Dead Man's Curve"), '80s glam queen Boy George ("Do You Really Want to Hurt Me," with Culture Club), '60s chanteuse and '70s punk avenger Marianne Faithfull ("As Tears Go By," "Broken English"), '80s face Rick Springfield ("Jessie's Girl") and '80s sex 'n' violence combo Mötley Crüe ("Dr. Feelgood"), but it hardly matters—it could be anyone, except you or me. As one story leads into the next, the weight problem of Ann Wilson of Heart is really no different from the heroin problem of Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx. The fall of Fleetwood Mac into drugs and confusion is the same as Poison's; so are their happy onstage reunions after years of estrangement. One by one, the stars and the former stars take their places in the chair in which all *Behind the Music* interviews are conducted, facing the unseen interviewer, speaking soberly of mistakes that were made or uproariously of good times and no regrets. The static, formatted shots turn the chair into a witness stand; the earnestness

THE COMEDOWN

As one story leads into the next, the weight problem of Ann Wilson is really no different from the heroin problem of Mötley Crüe's Nikki Sixx. The fall of Fleetwood Mac into drugs and confusion is the same as Poison's.

of the narration turns the testimony into therapy. ("I love *Behind the Music*," a friend of mine said. "It's all Twelve Step.") Specific testimony aside (Vince Neil of Mötley Crüe: "I bought my way out of jail. I was the O. J. Simpson of the early '80s"), that's the language everyone speaks in this courtroom, which is simultaneously a church basement full of folding chairs and cigarette smoke. "My name is Stevie," says the Fleetwood Mac singer, "and I'm a rock star." "Hello, Stevie!" say Rick James, Iggy Pop, Joe Cocker, Vanilla Ice, Alice Cooper, M. C. Hammer and everyone in Duran Duran, and the evening begins.

An hour or two into one of VH1's *Behind the Music* marathons, you fall into a stupor. No energy is required to keep up; no thought is necessary to question any judgments. It all seems preordained. Still, there are weird matches and correspondences that, while perhaps intensifying the boxed sense of fate that drives the series, make you think fate has a very perverse sense of humor. Here's Linda Blair talking about her love affair with clean-cut Rick Springfield (today she's unrecognizable as the daughter in *The Exorcist* or the Hollywood party girl she became after that; she looks like a happy chipmunk, or a 40-year-old version of Lacey Chabert from *Party of Five*).

And here she is again, talking about her love affair with funk 'n' sleaze king Rick James! Here's Vince Neil DUI, killing a friend riding shotgun, causing permanent brain damage to somebody else and paying \$2.6 million in damages. And here's teen idol Leif Garrett DUI, paralyzing a friend riding shotgun and paying \$7 million! (Jan Berry smashes up his car and causes permanent brain damage, too, but it's to himself, so he doesn't have to pay, and he wasn't DUI, so it sort of pales in comparison.) Here are Bret Michaels of Poison and Tommy Lee of Mötley Crüe each with a bootleg tape of himself fucking Pamela Anderson! (Vince Neil also has a bootleg sex tape, but it's not with Pamela Anderson, so who cares?)

There are, as well, odd little moments of individuality peeking out of a construct meant to obviate any such thing. These incidents are more than anomalous. Glassy-eyed and slack-jawed, you rouse yourself. What was that? Did C. C. DeVille of Poison really say, "I had all the right influences to become a really great guitar player. For some reason, from the record player to me, it just never came through"? Amid the queasiness produced by the spectacle of people interacting solely by means of received images, gestures and catchphrases, living their lives according to a script they didn't write—"I think Poison kicks serious ass," says a fan, as if the words are her own, as if the poses Bret Michaels strikes onstage are his—is C. C. really seeing right through it? "As crazy as that is," he says as we see pictures of how he traded his cocaine addiction for daytime TV and got fat, "I think it's more acceptable to be a junkie than it is to be overweight."

As a teenage Marianne Faithfull speaks in grainy footage from a long-forgotten British interview show, has an era, a time of ideas and deeds peculiar to it, come into focus, even if the focus is a haze of drugs and megalomania? "If everyone did what you seem to be advocating," an overstuffed man says to the thin blond girl with the angel's face and convent voice, "do you not agree that the whole structure of society would just collapse?" "Yes," she says with a gay smile, her tone summing up a kingdom of indulgence, pleasure and freedom her interrogator will never know, "wouldn't it be lovely? I think I'm really powerful. They could—they'll smash me, probably. But I want to try."

Moments like this appear and disappear like interference from another station. Almost nothing connects; not even the tales of degradation and self-destruction take on any flesh. Mötley Crüe guitarist Mick Mars looks like a long dead Fu Manchu, or the spectral creature described by William S. Burroughs in *Junky* ("What is his lost trade? Definitely of a servant class and something to do with the dead, though he is not an embalmer. Perhaps he stores something in his body—a substance to prolong life—of which he is periodically milked by his masters"), but as he speaks of his band's ups and downs, he could be describing

traffic patterns. You forget that the same story can be told differently, as in a passage from Luc Sante and Melissa Holbrook Pierson's recent anthology *O.K. You Mugs: Writers on Movie Actors*. Here Robert Polito describes Barbara Payton, a glamorous actress of the 1950s, ten years past her heyday: a 34-year-old \$5 whore "who oozed alcohol even before she ordered a drink...she carried an old man's pot-belly that sloshed faintly when she moved." In those few words, Polito, in 1962 a kid helping out in the bar where Payton drank, tells you more than you could ever want to know. On *Behind the Music*, musicians one after the other testify to their time in hell ("Death is almost welcome"), yet the gutter they invoke never actually smells. Being a junkie is just what a rock star...does.

The quintessential *Behind the Music* episode is the one devoted to '70s teenage pinup Leif Garrett. The series title *Behind the Music* is a misnomer, since music hardly features at all; almost never does a song play through a scene, giving you a sense of why anyone cared in the first place. (Nikki Sixx's heroin overdose, which briefly left him clinically dead, inspired Mötley Crüe's best song, "Kickstart My Heart"; it's never mentioned.) Garrett's music barely existed to begin with, and today it is unheard-of—which is to say, several steps past unlistenable. He seemed 10 at 14, 12 at 16 and never more like a boy than a girl, or vice versa: a pedophile's dream, so undeveloped, so unformed, his eyes so blank, that as one sees him prancing onstage in footage from twenty years ago, he looks more like vanilla custard poured into a black leather sausage casing than anything human.

Today he looks like a real person: bluster, pudgy, wearing a do-rag to hide his baldness. He looks like a porn producer. We see footage of Garrett at age 11 on *The Dating Game*. He talks in the present about being "rebellious," about his producers stifling his need to be "creative," about being out on the road, "partying with the girls—and sometimes their mothers." Neither Garrett nor anything he ever did is of the slightest interest, but the story behind this music is the same story behind the music of whomever you might actually care about, so you're pulled in; you want to see the tumblers fall in the lock as they always do. The only difference is that the bar has been set too low. When you watched the *Behind the Music* episodes on other figures—Boy George, perhaps, or Marianne Faithfull—you did so because you had some feeling invested in their music, even while you were aware that their messy, unique lives were being tailored to conform to the approved script. But with Garrett you are merely responding automatically, and with a sense of disgust, to the manipulation of the narrative, its subject and yourself.

Garrett and his friend Roland Winkler leave a party to get more drugs. When the car finally comes to rest, Garrett doesn't have a scratch and Winkler is paralyzed for life.

(The show is very cute about this: Winkler is shown a number of times speaking about his friendship with Garrett in the pre-accident days, but strictly from the waist up; only after the accident is recounted does the camera pull back to reveal he's in a wheelchair.) After the crash, Garrett pledges his friendship, but the Winkler family sues, and along with the \$7 million payout—not a word on where it came from; if it, you know, put a crimp in things—there's a breach that can't be healed. So Garrett's career ends, and he turns to heroin. He's rescued by Nicolette Sheridan, his old girlfriend (Linda Blair was busy), and, as the narrator says, "for the first time, he's taking control of his life." Only one thing remains undone. Garrett must somehow settle things with Winkler—but, as the narrator tells us with feeling, he "has no idea how to find him." It's *This Is Your Life* time. "We found Roland," the unseen interviewer tells Garrett. So now, with any sense of privacy, intimacy or life lived outside a script suspended, Garrett and Winkler are heading off to their own version of the reunion of the band that hasn't played together for years—

THE REDEMPTION

Neither Leif Garrett nor anything he did is of the slightest interest, but the story behind the music is the same story behind the music of whomever you might actually care about, so you're pulled in; you want to see the tumblers fall in the lock as they always do.

Fleetwood Mac, Mötley Crüe, Rick James's Stone City Band. It's even more of a self-violation than Carnie Wilson's putting her stomach-bypass operation on the Internet, but we're watching. There's a camera crew in the cars as each man drives himself to the rendezvous, and as you feel sick at your own voyeurism for watching what you should not be seeing, a certain thought strikes: For a moment, you break through the script and write your own. Of course! The perfect ending! A head-on collision!

It doesn't happen—they hug, they talk, they ask for privacy, and then both give immediate on-camera follow-up interviews—but it should have happened. The great mystery of pop music is that often the songs that lodge themselves in your heart are made by people who, as a matter of life as people live it, have nothing interesting to say. They get the money, but you get to keep the song. And the rest is really nobody's business. ■

Greil Marcus's new book *Double Trouble: Bill Clinton and Elvis Presley in a Land of No Alternatives* will be published this fall by Henry Holt.