



*By John McGlasson - GJD Contributor*

If you're under 25, you've probably never known a Cobain-free world. At 41, thankfully I can remember the days before Nirvana's Kurt Cobain became the "voice for his generation."

So from my perspective, I can look around and see how the world contrasts before and after a music phenomena that took place during my adult years after I was unclouded by youthful willingness to be marketed to, and see the affects of it on society, on our youth, and on the world of guitar.

"What do you have against Kurt?" you ask. A guy so beloved by his generation that they call him, well, the voice if it...but the truth is, Kurt was from my generation, he would've turned 41 on 02/24, and he wasn't the voice of our generation, but of those which followed ours. Of course, it's not unusual for rock stars to be much older than the people they're writing for, but I'm a little confused as to how Kurt arrived where he did musically, growing up on much of the same music I did, in the same world I did.

I knew lots of guys like Kurt Cobain growing up, who were smart, fun, creative people, but just didn't seem to get better at their craft once they reached the point of being able to write, sing, and play a song. Especially when I moved to Denver at 19 and started playing with a band that I can't call punk, because the drummer and I were from the Rush/Iron Maiden/Testament/Exodus schools of thought, and we were joining a band that was very much punk before we got there. The results were, to say the least, angry and heavy. The drummer and I brought a precision to the chaotic punk thrashings, and I also brought...gasp...guitar solos, something that didn't always go over too well. The band was called Acid Pigs, we toured a lot, made some EP's and cassettes, and were the subject of a couple European documentaries on American underground music at the time. The music is still out there, and the singer/founder went on to found likely the original rebel punk band Hammerlock.

We played with a lot of bands who were all part of the same Western US movement toward a cleaner, heavier, more precise punk/metal that was a little more concerned about tone and musicianship, bands like Poison Idea, The Accused, and Crumbsuckers,

If you've ever heard Nirvana's Bleach album, you'll see how heavy they were early on, but precise they weren't. If you ever saw them live you can testify before God and Country to that fact. But they were a cool band, and got lots of buzz in the word-of-mouth world of underground music. But there were so many bands out West at the time that were so much more creative than Nirvana that I was very surprised when a major label released Nevermind. Why Nirvana?

My opinion, along with that of almost all the guitarists around me at the time, was that Kurt was an under-achiever. He played guitar like a singer/songwriter, like it was an afterthought, though he was surrounded by all the same great players I was, and left completely uninspired by them. While music in general was moving away from the hairspray-and-spandex days, guitarists like me who were angry with the direction in which Guns & Roses were taking music, left the pretty stuff behind, dumped all blues influence and played, well, ugly. But we took our fundamental knowledge of playing guitar with us, look to the great band Crumbsuckers' B.O.M.B. album to see what I mean. I once saw Crumbsuckers in a little club in Denver, then saw Nirvana a few nights later, even before Bleach was released, and the contrast was so vast. Nirvana was always a mess, literally falling all over each other and their gear, it was like watching some 8th-graders drunk for the first time, and holding instruments for the first time. Not musical, not precise, it was...ugh...artsy, as was their audience.

While of course music is an artform, when what we commonly know as art, and artsy people, mix their obscure, often crude art with music, it may not be, in the eyes of more practiced musicians, very good music. Think Yoko Ono. Artsy people are the ones at magazines like Spin who tell us the White Stripes are the next revolution in music, they find great virtue in amateur, even childish musicianship for whatever reason. (see Joanna Newsome) They find delight in the fact that Meg White really can't play drums at all. They called Green Day punk. One magazine declared on its cover that Outkast was the Greatest Band On Earth. They also anointed Kurt Cobain, unwillingly, as the "Voice of his Generation." I think they are probably not musicians.

Great guitarists, in my opinion, can be compared to great painters in their precision and constant desire to get technically better at their craft. Artsy guitarists like Cobain seem to throw paint against a wall. I have no problem with that, and can appreciate both. But when the world of music, especially the guitar mags, started to compare the two on equal ground, guitarists who work hard every day to be better musicians and write new and interesting music felt slighted, and with good reason, they were pushed aside. It became very cool to be a crappy guitarist, and very uncool to be a technically good one, at least in the eyes of the unsuspecting kid who's opinion of things was formed by what they saw, read, and heard.

Kurt's appeal was, and is, to the underachievers of society. It doesn't make those drawn to Kurt, or Kurt for that matter, dumb. Most underachievers I know are extremely intelligent, but lack motivation for a mountain of reasons. Drugs can of course be a huge contributor to underachievement, which I'm sure didn't help Kurt any, but the music scene we were in was practically a drug culture in itself, and I was seeing plenty of creativity and motivation around me. Underachievers have always fueled the underground music scene, and I was one of them in some areas of my life, but largely as a result of not being an underachieving guitarist. But Kurt's affect on mainstream society seemed to be especially huge among young kids, in that they now had a hero who was famous for being the anti-guitarist, the anti-singer, the anti-achiever, and in the end, a guy with such contempt for life, his achievements, and his audience, that he killed himself.

When your hero is a guy that plays directly into every 13 year-old's "why bother" mentality with depressing lyrics, sloppy, out-of-tune-but-who-cares playing, and then kills himself, without explanation, the affect on your outlook on life is bound to be huge, and carry over into

everything you do. The state of the music biz shows the affect this has had on the young guitarists who dominate it who have little or no technical knowledge of music, can't play a melodic solo, can't jam with others on the fly, and have no knowledge of music before they were born. There's no question musical advancement, especially in rock music, took a hit in the last two decades.

Of course I can't blame the problems with the music biz and society on Kurt Cobain, even if he is the "Voice of his Generation", but it seems that a kid that's been asking "why bother?" all his life and had that reinforced by heroes in mainstream society, is now an adult asking "why bother?" when it comes to education, knowledge of history, society, their country, and making new, original, technically interesting music, or even paying for the music they listen to. Thanks for reading!