

# Does Nirvana smell like teen spirit?

By MEDWIN PREGILL

Columbia Daily Spectator, Columbia U.

Fast, thrashy, hairgod band makes brilliant debut album on hot, trendy independent label, tours like crazy, gets big contract on big label (big money?). Long-anticipated second album arrives: well-produced, slick, catchy choruses, cool lyrics, really melodious harmonies ballads, strings even. Shock and indignant cries all around. Critics, fans say sellout.

Screw you, says Nirvana.

This is what happened when Nirvana released *Nevermind*, their major-label follow-up to *Bleach*, a stunning 1989 debut on Sub Pop. In the fall of 1989, Seattle became a hot city, grunge was harder and cooler and faster than ever and Nirvana became one of Sub Pop's most popular acts. They hit the road, toured the whole universe (twice) and then, last spring, they were signed by the David Geffen Company. The April issue of Spin reported that they got \$750,000, the biggest contract ever received by an independent band.

A while ago, Nirvana's bassist Chris Novoselic was nice enough to let me interrogate him by phone. We spent the majority of our conversation discussing the significance of what appears to be, at least superficially, the symptoms of The Big Sellout. The biggie is the DGC contract, the rumored sum of which is "absolutely not true," Novoselic assured me. Their primary motive for signing with a big label was "just to know we could actually have our records in stores."

"We're totally aware that we're a commodity for the label," Novoselic admitted. But rather than feeling pressure from the label to conform to some executive's conception of commercial, he thinks that the band has the upper hand. "They know it works, so why would they fuck with it? They're there to help us, to put our records in the store. We're satisfied 'cause they work for us. Besides, the worst thing they could do is drop us," he said.

Now, people are kind of evil, and they do lie sometimes, but Novoselic plays it straight — no way has Nirvana sold out, and the best proof is the album. The band has refined its songwriting and

playing, and no doubt somebody is going to protest because of one ballad — but *Nevermind* is a great next album.

Musically, the big change from *Bleach* is that several of its best songs are more accessible than those on the first record. Singer-guitarist Kurt Cobain always wrote cool songs, but a lot of the lyrics and melody on *Bleach*, frankly, were incomprehensible due to the production, an astounding amount of feedback, and the fact that Cobain just used to scream a lot.

But *Nevermind* sports fairly good production, and rather than washing out the band's raw edges, this album focuses attention on the songs' killer arrangements. Nirvana's greatest talent lies in building thrashy, muscular riffs on top of great, catchy pop songs, placing them with the likes of Screaming Trees, Dinosaur Jr. and Lemonheads. Nirvana believes that pop music is an art, that a song written a certain way, verse-verse-chorus-verse-verse-chorus whatever, can achieve something beyond disposable entertainment. They seek to produce what Novoselic called "three minutes of bliss" — gorgeous, stunning, captivating... liberating.

Cobain claims that the album's name is a commentary on the fake, affected apathy of youth, as is the first song, "Smells Like

Teen Spirit," with the telling lyric, "I find it's hard it's hard to find/oh well whatever never mind" before breaking into the chorus, "Well the light's out this is dangerous/here we are now entertain us/I feel stupid and contagious/here we are now entertain us." A lot of Kurt's lyrics are annoyingly ambiguous, as in "Come As You Are," which is purportedly "an old-fashioned love song," the chorus of which is simply, "And I swear that I don't have a gun."

Novoselic refused to comment on the meaning of their songs, saying that their music is "just all energy and cool lyrics." (I insisted, and was told, "Well, we're just kind of drunk and stoned most of the time.")

*Nevermind* is like an incredibly contagious disease. Perhaps a better allusion is to the spiritual state of self-annihilation the band's name evokes, chosen deliberately to describe their music. It encompasses an impressive range: freedom, escape, and most of all, total release.



PHOTO COURTESY OF GEFEN RECORDS

Nirvana: "We're just kind of drunk and stoned most of the time."

## Top 10 reasons to hate The Wonder Stuff



PHOTO COURTESY OF POLYDOR RECORDS

The Wonder Stuff — *Never Loved Elvis*, definitely never loved America, but seem to love themselves quite a lot. "Anything else is merely secondary," they say.

By LINDA MEMMER

University Times, California State U., Los Angeles

In the lobby of the Hyatt in West Hollywood, I nervously wait for the hotel operator to connect me with Miles Hunt's room. When he picks up the phone, I tell him that I am on my way up to talk to him.

Without hesitation, and in the type of bratty voice usually restricted to sibling squabbles, he says, "No you're not." My introduction to the Wonder Stuff's leader was neither informative nor enjoyable....

One cancelled interview and three days later, I try again. The Wonder Stuff, who recently completed a 20-city U.S. tour to promote the band's third release, *Never Loved Elvis*, was taking a short break before beginning tours of Australia and Japan. From his home in London, Hunt and his attitude problem are quick to say that the best part about touring is "going home."

The lead singer and chief songwriter of the sharp-edged English pop band is brutally opinionated about American concert-goers. Compared to easily pleased European audiences, Hunt finds Americans "a great

deal more critical" than their jolly Brit counterparts. Furthermore, he whines, Yanks "want you to prove yourself to them."

Considering his negative attitude toward everything even somewhat related to American culture, it's no surprise that he and the Wonder Stuffers named their album *Never Loved Elvis*. Like many things, it's the idea of Elvis that doesn't agree with him. Hunt has said he doesn't like "the whole marketing machine that turned [Elvis] into a god."

But despite Mr. Hospitality's... er... Mr. Hunt's sentiments, the band has created some truly great music on *Never Loved Elvis*. They hurl traditional Celtic sounds with violins, acoustic guitars, mandolins, and soul. Songs like "Caught In My Shadow" and "Mission Drive" are pleasantly catchy, whereas "Size Of A Cow" and "Welcome To The Cheap Seats" are undeniably witty.

But even though fans here and abroad may appreciate this band's records and live shows, Hunt boasts the Wonder Stuff is around for the sole purpose of making its five members happy. "Anything else," he says, "is merely secondary."

Gee, sounds almost American, huh?

## The Farm: Freakin' out over a little success

By CHIP PHILLIPS

Daily Bruin, U. of California, Los Angeles

"It always puts a smile on me face to think that I'm in America and Mick Jones invited me," nods a smiling Carl Hunter, The Farm's blithe bassist, backstage before a gig with B.A.D. II at the Hollywood Palladium.

"When The Farm first formed eight years ago, probably nobody in the band dreamt that we would be sitting in a dressing room now, in Los Angeles, about to play to 3,000 people," Hunter continues, musing at the thought. "We try to take it in stride, you know, day to day and all. But it sort of comes as a shock; playing so many gigs in so many new and different places. The other day I called me mum and she says, 'Are you all right? Where are yuh?' And I said, 'We're in the Arizona desert! How are you?'"

Things have been hot down on The Farm in 1991, a year consumed with the completion of the band's first full-length studio album. The yield is *Spartacus*, a U.K. chart-topping album sensation, featuring the two U.K. top-five singles "All Together Now" and "Groovy Train," as well as a strong harvest of eight additional rations of original Farm fodder.

Drawing on the creative energies of musical pioneers such as the Jam, the Clash, and the Buzzcocks, The Farm has gained notoriety for unashamedly embodying the working class ethic of its listeners, a percipient political sensitivity, a healthy contempt for hypocrisy, a love for soccer and a tight, groovy musical style and sound.

"Throughout the years, record companies had shown a bit of interest but they never thought they could market the band," Grimes says. "They always thought that we were too scruffy, that we had no image. It's ironic now, because a lot of record companies are looking for bands that look like us. Four years ago they didn't want to have anything to do with us and now they're looking for bands that look like The Farm!"

And they're listening for bands that sound like them.

"'All Together Now' has been a hit in about seven or eight European countries, all at different times of the year," Grimes says. "We would get phone calls saying, 'You're doing well in Spain. You've got to get over there!' and we would. It's been crazy!"

And what better way to follow up a crazy year but with another album, due out next spring. It seems they grow hits big down on The Farm.

"We've got to record the new LP," confides Grimes with a grin, obviously knowing what the new season holds. For now, they can reap what they have sown.