

Me & U2 360°

Cathal McCarron

www.meandU2.net

Foreword

Thank you for your purchase of this little patty mashed up from the moldy leftovers in my U2 360° larder. This book is a collection of the various reports, reviews and other random witterings I cobbled together during the U2 360° tour between June 2009 and July 2011 for the *Me & U2* blog, or posts I threw onto the fan forums on U2 Interference and @U2.

When I set out in 2009 to follow the first two legs of the 360° tour to promote *Me & U2*, I had no real idea what I was doing beyond having a vague desire to pack a rucksack full of books, hit the road, and see what happened along the way. At the outset I only intended to follow the first two legs in 2009, and not the entire tour. However a month after the last show of 2009 in Vancouver, I decided to follow the full tour. I'd planned to write a book about following the tour (provisional name *Me & U2 Around The World*, hopefully out in summer 2012) and for this I would obviously have to follow the whole damn thing – at whatever expense.

I've been asked a few times how many concerts I saw on the tour. It depends. I entered the stadium and watched U2 perform in eighty-nine 360° concerts, not including Glastonbury. At Horsens 1, my couchsurf host and I snuck in and saw just the last two songs. I haven't counted this show in my total. In Glasgow, I only saw the last hour of the concert after going to see an hour of the Champions League qualifier between Celtic and Arsenal. I have counted this show. I entered the stadium during *Breathe* at three concerts (Amsterdam 1, Dublin 1, Gothenburg 1), and I left after *Streets* at two concerts (Sydney 2 and Montreal 1). So I saw anything between eighty-three and ninety shows on the U2 360° tour depending on your definition. I usually say eighty-eight, because Glastonbury wasn't a 360° show.

I had no notion at the start of the tour to write something about every concert. And I didn't – there are several gaps in the review fossil record. The concert reviews at the start of the tour were usually written quickly with no real forethought or afterthought.

Me & U2 360°

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Fortunately I managed to avoid writing “Streets was amazing!” thirty times. It took me an embarrassingly long time to spot the potential of using concert reviews on my blog for promotional benefit. Even then, I only began taking seriously the process of writing something about each concert later in the tour. Then at some point during the final tour leg in North America in 2011, I stopped calling the pieces ‘reviews’ because many clearly weren’t, some barely even mentioned U2 at all.

But enough disclaimers, except for this very last one: the book hasn’t been proofread beyond the spellcheckers in Microsoft Word and Firefox, so please excuse any errant typos.

Anyway, seeing so many spectacular U2 concerts around the world was a phenomenal adventure, and I hope you enjoy reading these little yarns about them.

Cathal
cathal@meandu2.net

Leg 1
Europe
2009

Barcelona 1

Nou Camp

30th June 2009

Close encounters of the 360 kind

It sometimes seemed over the years that U2 gigs were never a close enough encounter for Bono. He was famous for climbing out into the crowd in early shows, falling back into his fans mid-song at Red Rocks for example, or leaping from the stage to slow dance with a girl at Live Aid. As U2 grew to sell out huge stadiums on the Joshua Tree tour, so did the distance from their audience. They have been looking to reduce this distance since. They introduced a B-stage out in the middle of the audience in their Zoo TV tour, and have used different variations of this extended stage walkway on the PopMart, Elevation and Vertigo tours, to get themselves closer and to reach more of their audience.

U2 kicked off their 360° world tour in Barcelona last Tuesday with yet another radical and daring new stage production, from which they could launch themselves into the orbit of their fans – and apparently now also of the planet. When the old stages were always confined to one end of the stadium, some fans could be up to a full football pitch distance away from the band. The new round 360° stage is plopped proudly right out on the pitch, with a walkway circling it that reaches the halfway line, so a mere half a football pitch is now the furthest distance that anyone in the audience is from Bono at most points in the show. And of course the audience is now all-encompassing, all around the stage, engulfing U2 in their fervour from all angles. It must be quite flattering to have 20,000 people cheer your arse every five minutes.

However what's on the ground isn't what the new stage is all about. It's what is towering in the sky over it. Whilst old U2 stages would reach out, they would also reach up. This one certainly does. U2's 360° stage (affectionately called 'the Claw' on fan forums) is a mammoth, hulking, three-dimensional beast, searing upwards on four angular legs, creating a high-tech cathedral vault for the band to perform in.

My seat for the concert was on the fifth tier of the sky-scraping

Nou Camp stadium. I got a fleeting glimpse of the stage beast through one of the arena entrances on my arduous climb to the top of the stadium.

"Oh my God, it's Cloverfield!" was my first reaction, as it was like one of those all-too-quick snatches which should terrify but only intrigues, making me quicken my steps up the stairs for a proper look.

The alien invader theme continued when I finally entered the arena. It turned out it wasn't Cloverfield, it was War Of The Worlds! The stage is vast, monstrous and utterly alien-looking, appearing as if it could rise up at any moment and start stomping over or zapping the lucky souls inside the circular walkway that encompasses the central stage.

I entered the stadium around 9:30 pm when the sun was mercifully setting behind some mountains on my right, so I could avoid having to sit in the scorchio Spanish sun. The sights below, above and around me were breath-taking. The Nou Camp is a very, very large stadium. It was packed. And it was kicking. Although the sky was darkening, the temperature appeared to be rising. An atomic atmosphere was pulsing through the air, all around the arena, like there was a fusion reactor hidden somewhere inside the Claw leaking intense bursts of radio-friendly radiation, except neither Tom Hanks nor Ewan McGregor were on-hand to dismantle the atomic bomb and save us from the imminent explosion. What song would cause detonation to the night...?

Ok, enough hyperbole, breathe man, breathe, what about the concert? Well, it was a night of many surprises, both in the music and in the production.

The gig started with the lights falling, a fine dry-ice mist forming, and Larry walking onto the stage, taking his seat behind his drums and hammering out a tribal rhythm. He was followed by Adam and then Edge who donned their guitars and revealed the song was Breathe.

Ah! Breathe. But not many people did. After four long years, U2 were back!

It was a surprising choice of opening track (my money had been on No Line On The Horizon) and, whilst it is a great song, it didn't quite have the oompf to raise the entire stadium from the

start. My favourite for first actually came in second, allowing Bono to show off his vocal range, and to lead the first of many mass choir-athons, and garnering a huge cheer from the people in the seats “behind” the stage when he went to sing to them.

Get On Your Boots, showing it is a better song live, and the suitably named Magnificent completed the introductory quartet to the concert based on the new album.

After Magnificent, Bono was at the very furthest point on the walkway in the middle of the stadium. He got down on his knees, and offered his thanks to the crowd who had travelled from all over Spain, from all over the world, to come to see U2 in such difficult economic times, and for continually coming back to U2 again and again down the years. It may seem galling to some people to see a rock star put on such a show of gratitude, but I believe it’s sincere.

The band immediately launched into Beautiful Day, the first of U2’s great stadium blockbusters of the night, and the Nou Camp responded with raucous Latin zeal. I was surprised to see Bono proudly wear a Irish tricolour, which was thrown by the audience, around his neck. I’d always suspected, and previously written, that he probably wouldn’t be seen doing this for its potentially awkward republican connotations, but I’m happy to have that assumption smashed.

The sing-along continued when Bono dedicated Angel Of Harlem to Michael Jackson, including singing snippets of Man In The Mirror and Don’t Stop Till You Get Enough. He introduced I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For by thanking the people in Barcelona, the capital of surrealism, for letting U2 take over the neighbourhood around the Nou Camp for two weeks to build their Gaudi-inspired space station there.

The second musical surprise of the night was the gorgeous In A Little While, which Bono dedicated to the girlfriend of someone I didn’t quite catch the name of. I didn’t quite catch it partly because of the crowd cheering but also because the sound quality up on the fifth tier was quite poor at times. Edge’s guitar could barely be heard at all during the first four songs, and Adam’s bass was only slightly more discernible. As tall as the Claw is, my seat was still above it. Some of the speakers on the stage point upwards but the volume of the sound wasn’t quite loud enough, and the vocals

would occasionally be blown away by the light breeze.

The most ill-fitting sequence of the show was when Bono introduced a video link-up with the crew of the International Space Station. For five minutes I could only occasionally pick out snatches of what was said, partly because the crowd cheered at every mention of Barcelona, partly because of the poor sound quality, and partly because of the irritating eejit sitting beside me who was making a phone call. I did however have a quick glance skywards into a slightly cloudy sky when one of the astronauts said he could see Barcelona. “Really?” The entire sequence dragged on for over five minutes, and seemed quite pointless, imposing on the audience’s desire to enjoy U2’s music and deflating from the concert momentum considerably. And of course could lead to accusations of U2 considering themselves to be too big for the planet.

Unknown Caller was next. It clearly wasn’t the preferred choice of the man with the phone beside me, and his mate, as they both protested by leaving their seats, never to return. At the end of the song Bono tried to lead the crowd in a football chant by repeating a refrain with the closing lyrics “Bar-ce-lon-a, you know your name, so punch it in”, although it didn’t really catch on. Perhaps in an English speaking audience.

The third musical surprise was a glorious blast from the well-remembered U2 past with The Unforgettable Fire. Hopefully these two raids into their back catalogue mean U2 will be bringing back many of their older and less-known tunes for their dedicated long-time fans to enjoy alongside their must-play classics. One gripe some fans who travelled to see many shows had with the Vertigo tour was how static and predictable the set list was on some of the legs, with very few variations from night to night. Hopefully this new tour may see a bit more set list adventure.

One of the highlights of the show for me was enjoying the Spanish audience’s fun countdown for Vertigo “1, 2, 3 – 14!” City Of Blinding Lights followed to complete the set from the last album, and with a very blinding display of intense white lights swarming over the entire stadium.

The biggest highlight and biggest surprise of the show was the U2 disco. In Me And U2 I describe how the many dance remixes of U2 songs over the last twenty years haven’t quite hit the spot, and

how U2 should do a collaboration with another one of my favourite bands, The Chemical Brothers, to rectify this, and to introduce some dance-floor groove into their songs – but I assumed it would be in the studio. I didn't expect them to do it live. Well, they did. And it was fantastic fun.

A dance rhythm started, the lights all around the Claw went into disco hyperdrive, Larry got up from behind his drum kit and grabbed a bongo, slinging the strap over his shoulder, and a big fiesta started with a thoroughly unexpected but immensely enjoyable dance version of I Know I'll Go Crazy If I Don't Go Crazy Tonight. All four members of the band were parading around the full length of the walkway, strutting their stuff (we know that they can't dance, at least we know) and interacting with the audience below them. It was a glorious piece of kitsch disco cabaret which had everyone bobbing along in delight.

Larry ended up at the end of the walkway behind the stage, showing off his bongo skills, and then had to run back to his drum kit towards the end of the song to pick up his sticks to hammer out the intro to Sunday Bloody Sunday, one of U2's most overtly Irish songs, and with the stage bathed throughout in an Irish green. However, despite its connections to Derry, Sunday Bloody Sunday is one of the songs I wish U2 would play less frequently, as over-exposure diminishes the impact and meaning of what was a very important song. The same goes for Pride which came next. Two big, classic, crucially important U2 songs, which are guaranteed crowd pleasers, especially for the non-fanatics, but more play means less impact.

MLK followed Pride with Bono again demonstrating the power and emotion of his voice.

Walk On was dedicated to Aung Sun Suu Kyi, although the band's hope that fans would download and wear a face mask of her image during the song to demonstrate their support wasn't widely realised. I suspect many fans didn't know about this planned action, others like me may have known but didn't download and print the image from the U2 website. It would make far more sense for fans to be given a mask on entering the stadium which they could either keep or return at the end, to avoid having hundreds of masks littering the ground and getting trampled into the dirt with

cigarette butts. The band brought dozens of children holding the masks over their faces onto the walkway. Bono sang a snippet of You'll Never Walk Alone at the end which appealed to the Celtic supporter in me. The band then left the stage for a speech by Bishop Desmond Tutu to be played on the video screens.

There have been a few discussions on some of the U2 fan sites over which song should be used to lead into Where The Streets Have No Name, which is far and away still the most popular song in a U2 concert. In previous tours it's been Bad, All I Want Is You, Running To Stand Still or Pride. I posted that I'd like them to try it as an opener for the encore in a hark back to the dazzling version in Rattle And Hum when it was an extended concert opener (and also similar to the start of my first ever U2 concert in Dublin in 1989).

So when I heard the first subtle suggestion of synths towards the end of Bishop Tutu's speech, I recognised it immediately. Excellent! Except it didn't quite scale the heights that I'd expected or hoped. Edge cut back his jangling guitar intro and I think the song suffered from following on from the speech. Regardless, it's the song which most of the audience look forward to sharing during the concert, and doesn't seem to suffer from being overplayed. It was during Streets that I first noticed that there was a bunch of happy fans jumping around like loons in tennis court sized spaces behind and to the left and right of the stage. People inside the Claw can apparently either stand out front in the squash immediately below the stage or enjoy the wide open spaces behind it. Or alternate between the two.

The biggest talking point of the night though was the by now almost traditional U2 opening night feck up. Bono was out front on the walkway singing One (and now wearing a Barcelona FC football jersey given to him by Pep Guardiola, the team manager) when he seemed to lose his place in the song. He was fiddling with his earpieces and appeared to say something to one of his helpers in the pit below him. He called to the band to repeat a verse. He then told them all to stop playing entirely. "Edge, listen to me, Adam you may want to join us. I'll count you in." He ended up singing the verse three times, before he walked back to the stage to rejoin the band just as he was singing, "we're one, but we're not the same" which was a great live visual representation of the story of the song.

A short break before the band returned for the encore. And

there was another very welcome surprise for the dedicated U2 fan. I recognised the opening line immediately but couldn't quite believe what I was hearing. "Sometimes I feel like I don't know, sometimes I feel like checking out." The sumptuous Ultraviolet was back after a long break! Bono reappeared wearing a jacket which had dozens of short red laser lights emanating out of the sleeves that looked great in the smoky stage and on the large video screens. He was singing into a microphone which was like a small steering wheel and which was dangling from the roof of the Claw. I initially thought Bono was on a wire when he started swinging across part of the stage and thought, "No, Bono, noooooo", before I realised it was the microphone itself that was strung up.

The last of the classics followed, With Or Without You, before the show ended well past midnight on a fairly subdued note with the sweeping Moment Of Surrender, which, whilst I think is the best song on the new album, isn't in the same league as 40 or Love Is Blindness as a concert closer.

I loitered behind as the crowd dispersed to bask in the scene for just a little bit longer, after having been regaled so wondrously by U2's latest live concoction. U2 360° is yet another creative and technological leap up from previous U2 tours, showing the band's continual quest to bring their music, and themselves, out into their audience. The set list was a near perfect balance between the new album, forgotten oldies and classic hits. The production was dazzling, and the band were clearly enjoying themselves.

"Edge, look around look around! Adam Clayton, look around look around!" sang Bono gleefully during one song. U2 are now centre stage and centre stadium. It's U2 360°, giving them the latitude to explore new territory, and the attitude to enjoy seeing everyone around it.

Amsterdam 2

Amsterdam Arena

21st July 2009

It was my first time seeing two U2 shows back-to-back in the

same city and I think I jammed out on throwing a double six. As they may say in other parts of Amsterdam - what a pair!

Tonight was very different to last night on many levels, the shake up of the set list being the greatest. Bad! Bad is back! I was hoping it might appear later when I heard One brought forward. It was bloomin' great too mostly. Bono sang the first verses on his back. I thought I heard a slight change of tempo halfway through and Bono gestured something to Larry. The song itself seemed to fade away a bit at the end. I reckon they'll have it perfect if they play it in Dub.

Other random memories:

- UTEOTW: not a huge fav of mine usually but I loved it cos it was fresh, and the light show and imagery on the video screen were dazzling at the end, with Bono singing a snippet of Break On Through

- Edge pogoing during Elevation and the people in GA copying

- some new artistic video imagery of the Iranian election protests was used during the start of SBS, this seems to be the new issue for the tour, with a wee snippet of Rock the Casbah at the end

- I think Bono almost inadvertently walked backwards off the stairs at the back of the stage when he was singing Don't Stop Till You Get Enough at the end of Desire, he may have got a tap on the ankle from his minder behind him

- the crowd seemed a bit flat at the start, until Elevation, and weren't quite as raucous as last night, at least where I was sitting towards the back; I think there were more curious day-trippers tonight than hardcore fans, very few people near me took photos or recorded parts of the show, or even sang along

- the GA queues outside were MASSIVE - and soaked by the short but torrential downpour during the electrical storm

- up at the top and back of the arena was sweltering, proper sauna-like conditions

But from Elevation on it was a top U2 concert. I love their gigs even more when there's an element of "what's next?"

Oh, and just remembered, one for the snippet obsessives: Bono also spoke a few lines of Oh Come All Ye Faithful, or maybe it was the Black Grape version, at the start and end of Crazy Tonight (instead of Bowie's Let's Dance).

Chorzow Slaski Stadium 06th August 2009

“This comes close!”

Or so Bono said to the audience during ISHFWILF caught up in the emotion of the moment, after the biggest single stand-out highlight of all the shows I’ve seen so far: New Year’s Day live in Poland.

The flag flash mob was jaw-droppingly spectacular. I thought it would be good, I never imagined it would be that good. I don’t know how it compared to the last one four years ago but there were audible gasps around the audience where I was when Adam started the bass line and everyone responded as planned. The floor was a sea of red, the stands were waves of white.

It had been a slightly slow building gig, the audience didn’t really get into Breathe or NLOTH. I actually thought parts of the first few songs sounded a bit out of tune or off-key. Boots got the first really big cheer, and Magnificent maintained the pace. Beautiful Day and Elevation took things up another gear (Adam even had a bit of a run around the outer stage during BD!) before the explosion of NYD.

Bono said before One that he wanted to do a magic trick and turn the stadium into the Milky Way. That was the second bit of stadium conjuring of the gig. The first one was to turn it into a huge pulsating flag. I must say that was a privilege to both witness and be a part of.

After that the place was positively throbbing for the rest of the evening. ISHFWILF followed NYD and Bono told the audience about how special Poland was to U2, and that Europe needed more countries like Poland.

I don’t think any of this is sycophantic easy praise from Bono. He seemed touched by the collective, patriotic display. He put the Solidarity flag on the stage, readjusting it a couple of times during the show to ensure it was fully visible. He got down on his knees and kissed the stage at the end of NYD, I guess to show his love of

Poland, although it also was a vivid reminder of the many times the late Polish Pope John Paul II kissed the ground in countries around the world, including Ireland in 1979. (Bono even mentioned the Pope at the end of the concert.)

He also seemed a bit choked during the first couple of verses of Walk On (where he demonstrated his own hand gestures for each line). And he kneeled at the end of MoS, clearly praying for the audience, getting up after blessing himself with the Catholic sign of the cross (which was broadcast on the video screen). He also tried a few phrases of Polish which were obviously lapped up (despite my Polish host jokingly tut-tutting his pronunciation). A large image of the Poland flag was displayed on the video screen at the end of NYD to fully ram home the point. U2 love Poland. I’ve not seen such a full-on blatant love-in between band and country elsewhere, (and U2 do love Ireland, the US, Spain, Holland, Sweden, Germany ...)

Anyway, it wasn’t only an occasion for patriotic Polish pride. There was a concert too.

Edge had another couple of icky moments in some songs, I’m sure I heard a few duff notes. Although his playing and falsetto on Stuck were superb, as was Bono’s singing. The band shared a bottle of champagne to celebrate Edge’s birthday. Bono snipped The Waterboys ‘The Whole of the Moon’ at the end of Streets as there was a full moon rising up over the stadium. The full moon also made it onto the video screen during the spontaneous version of Stand By Me at the end of ISHFWILF.

Slaski stadium is probably my favourite stadium on this tour for two reasons: there is no roof, and it was completely dark apart from the stage lights. At other stadiums the view of the top of the stage is cut off by the stadium roof, or the stage gets lost in the scaffolding of a closed roof. Also, other stadiums leave the ceiling lights on inside the roof, and have very many emergency exit lights scattered around the stadium. Not in Slaski stadium. Once the house lights go off, there really are no house lights left on at all. Also, Poland must be very far east in the time zone and the sun had completely set before the gig began. Therefore there was no other light to detract from the dazzling 360 light extravaganza. The enveloping darkness and full panoramic vision of both stage and stadium made a perfect setting.

And the crowd helped too of course. The Milky Way during One was the most beautiful I've seen yet.

Anyway, I hope this hasn't been too rambling but has helped set the scene for what was a very special concert on many levels.

Leg 2
North America
2009

Chicago 1

Soldier Field

12th September 2009

This was my first concert in the US, I was very curious to see how it would compare to gigs in Europe. I'd had an amazing day loitering around Soldier Field but the actual concert was let down by appalling sound where I was in the nosebleeds (see, I'm learning the local lingo) and a strangely subdued atmosphere.

It was great to meet Anu and co for a lovely big brunch in the morning. I got down to Soldier Field about 1pm-ish I think. It was a scorching day and the guys in the loooong but very spaced out GA queue were baking in it for hours. The potential GA conflict seemed to have been resolved amicably enough, I think they just merged the stadium queue with the day-before queue by creating a double width line at the front.

I didn't actually have a ticket for last night's show. The ticket booths still had GAs available at about 5pm, and for \$57 too i.e. with no fees at all. I thought I'd use this info as a bargaining tool to haggle with ticket touts. I saw a "U2 fan" with four GAs in his hand. I asked him how much and he said £200. I told him I only wanted one, and he said that WAS the price for one. And he'd got them for cost. Others wanted \$100 for a GA. "But they're still available for \$57 at the ticket booth", "Really? Ok, have a nice day". Dearie me, profiteering quints.

I got a \$30 ticket for \$20 from a girl who had won four at her work and wanted to sell em to make some dosh back. But there were quite a few tickets available, many below face value.

I must say, my general impression so far is that Americans are extremely friendly and approachable. (They were giving away a free pint of Guinness to anyone in a little festival-like field, so I blagged some by cheekily asking people who didn't want one to get one for me. I'm contractually obliged as an Irish man to say it's better in Dublin, but I'm not really a connoisseur. But what is this hilarious system about having to show photo ID to the police before being allowed to buy a drink? I'm 36!)

I also gatecrashed my first ever tailgate party. That was a brilliant eye-opener for me: everyone in the car-park drinking and having barbeques. And there were a LOT of people doing it, the atmosphere was great, and the location was stunning, with the dazzling Chicago skyline and sun setting behind it.

Most of the people in the tailgate parties didn't go into the stadium till about 8:30pm, some preferred to stay outside partying and listening to Snow Patrol on their stereos instead of going in to see them play, which was a little bit daft.

And then to the concert.

Many people I'd met during the day commented that Bono had said Soldier Field had the best sound they'd had so far on the tour. Well, where I was it was by far the worst sound. There was an appalling echo which ruined any possible appreciation of the music. I don't know what people who were seeing the show for the first time thought of it but I'd be very disappointed if that was my only experience of this tour.

Also, the atmosphere all around me and elsewhere I could see was non-existent for the first hour or so. People were just standing with their arms folded or hands in pockets. No-one was clapping, singing along, or barely even moving. Mostly very stationery observing of the gig. It was very odd, especially for an opening night where I thought there'd be a lot of hardcore U2 heads in. Maybe the poor sound played a part but I'd put the atmosphere last night right down with the (comparatively) poorer atmospheres at Paris and Gothenburg. Even the GA didn't seem to be too lively.

To be fair, I thought U2 were clearly trying to play a great gig, although I was a bit disappointed there was nothing new in the setlist. The only difference was the stunning new spacey video intro for the encore which ended with a solid blue colour on the screen which bathed the whole stadium in blue and convinced me was gonna be Your Blue Room. But it was Ultraviolet again. I guess they played a "safe" set to impress all the media present for opening night.

Bono called Chicago the head and heart of America, dedicated CoBL to Obama, and played a little bit on the Irish card - not unlike myself I must say

Back again tonight, let's hope the sound is much better.

Chicago 2

Soldier Field

13th September 2009

Twittered this last night:

“Searing, towering concert in Chicago tonight, much better sound, much better atmosphere and a setlist to cream your pants to. Lift off USA!”

An amazing concert. The atmosphere and volume from the crowd towards the end was deafening. Bono was really fired up for this gig, got the crowd going from before NLOTH with a little speech about having old songs, new songs, songs we haven't played before and asking “are you with us?”

There were a gazillion references to Chicago, how they could have opened in New York but chose Chicago, it's ok to kiss Chicago's ass etc ... All lapped up by the crowd.

The outer stage was used a lot more by all the band but especially Bono, he did a couple of sprints of the whole ring, collapsing exhausted at the end of UTEOTW, but still managing to sing Stay very passionately from his back. He brought a young boy onto the stage from the pit for a little jog around the stage during CoBL, what an experience for a young kid!

Your Blue Room was absolutely mesmerising, beautifully lulling the stadium into a quiet trance. There were no cheers or applause at the end of it, but not because it didn't work, probably because it had such a calming effect (and many probably didn't know it). It was followed by Unknown Caller and these two worked gorgeously well together.

Amazing Grace was beautiful, although Bono did bottle trying to hit the REALLY high note in the middle, and the segue into Streets was perfect. I didn't miss Pride.

I wasn't very impressed with Saturday's gig, thinking it was one of the worst I've seen on the tour. Last night's was one of the best. Lift off USA!

...

That's good cos I was in section 445 on Saturday and the sound

was really bad with a terrible echo. So hopefully they were aware of the problem and fixed it for the next night.

I was in section 432 on Sunday and the sound was fine, just a slight echo during some songs, but not enough to spoil the music, unlike Saturday.

Leg 3
Europe
2010

Turin

Stadio Olimpico

06th August 2010

Just back from the gig. I'll try for a review with a bit more detail of the gig tomorra if possible. But it was sooooooo amazing to see the band walk out together onto the stage.

The opening track, with Bono parading himself around the entire outer stage as the band played on, skipping a few steps forwards, then backwards, ducking, diving, basically demonstrating that, yup, he's mended and ready to perform, was beautiful. He was centre of attention, showing off his moves, loving it, and everyone lapped it up. I was actually quite emotional, with a wee lump in my throat.

He didn't seem to have any problems at all with his movement, doing a few moves which had me thinking "Oh sweet jaysus, take it easy Bono!" He tried to kick a balloon off the outer stage, he was leaning down occasionally looking over the bridge, he was standing up legs spread apart on the two speakers behind Larry, he was hanging out on the steering wheel mic, he even sat on it and swung back and forward, leaning right back. It was almost, almost possible to imagine he'd never been away at all.

But Bono looked in absolutely great shape, I was amazed how comfortable and fluidly he was moving. And his singing was utterly sensational as well.

What exactly was our concern ...?

...

I'm currently at the home of a couchsurfer host in Frankfurt. I flew here from Milan this morning. And I went to Milan on a train from Turin on Saturday. And there was the first U2 concert of this year in Turin on Friday. And it was very great!

I successfully managed to avoid all news of rehearsals and rumours of setlists. Mainly by quickly telling anyone I met that I didn't want to know anything as I didn't want to ruin the surprise when U2 opened the show with Bono singing Acrobat whilst swinging on a trapeze from the Claw.

The actual show opening was only marginally less surprising. The band walked onstage together from the back of the stadium, with all the stadium and stage lights still on. Edge, Adam and Larry went to the centre stage and began playing a new song. Meanwhile Bono cavorted around the outer stage, busting out a nimble “alms for an ex-leper” shuffle around the entire perimeter, to show everyone that he could float like The Fly in his new leather trousers and sting like a BB for Bono’s Back.

The crowd erupted, putting those powerful Italian vocal chords to full use. It was wonderful. Everyone was pumped up by Bono’s personal parade around the stage, everyone knew the context, and what it meant. It was quite emotional. I had a wee lump in my throat and a little bit of welling in my eyes. A beautiful, touching moment.

Frankfurt

Commerzbank Arena

10th August 2010

Tonight’s fantabulotous show was back to U2 live business as usual, compared to watching the gig in Turin through a “Is Bono gonna be alright?” prism. I completely forgot about Bono’s injury for 90% of the show, it’d be hard to tell he’d had any back surgery just a few months ago! He was swinging on the steering wheel mic like a kid during the encore.

And as much as I loved the emotion and drama of the first-gig-back concert on Friday, tonight was just a bloomin great U2 concert. The German crowd were completely and raucously up-for-it, the whole stadium was bouncing, clapping and singing along from the start. I was in seats on the lower tier, slightly to Adam’s side, at the end of the stadium directly facing the band. Fantastic seats for €41 each! (I only got them online last night so I suspect they may have been moved down a few price categories to shift them.)

My couchsurf host here in Frankfurt brought a pair of quite powerful binoculars with him so we were able to take turns watching the boys onstage in stalker-like detail. It was lovely to spy

on some of the little band interactions that are usually impossible to spot from a distance, especially Larry’s little smirks and laughs with Bono, Adam and occasionally with his techie Sam.

Actually Larry got up and gave Bono a very hearty standing ovation just after Bono’s Lord Of The Prance around the outer stage during that new instrumental opener. So Bono gave Larry an ovation back.

Whilst it almost goes against standard U2 policy not to open (properly) with a song off their most recent album, Beautiful Day does get the entire stadium rocking from the start in a way that Breathe never could. And New Year’s Day was an inspired second choice, pumping some more fuel into the fire, with some extra Polish passion added to the mayhem in the pit. Six Poland flags were hoisted by fans in different parts of the pit, one was thrown onto the stage, and Bono draped it over one of his monitors where I think it stayed for the rest of the show.

The German crowd were LOOOOUD, very, very loud, and fully into the show, with the full stadium on its feet, singing and clapping along to ISHFWILE, and bopping away happily to Mysterious Ways.

The big highlight tonight for me was Miss Sarajevo, especially when Bono strains for and hits that astonishing operatic solo. And I’m finally starting to see what others rave about for UTEOTW, it is a superb bit of rock opera, with Edge dredging some filthy sounds from his orchestra. Streets had a lovely long intro (and the white lights even worked tonight too).

I’m sure Moment of Surrender has a new arrangement at the start, it sounds different, more melodic, to me. It still builds intensely, but why do they drop the third verse ...? Bono dedicated it to the people who died at the Love Parade in Germany recently. It was a slightly awkward dedication, I thought he’d bonovoxed himself into a corner for a second, but he got out of it eventually. But the crowd certainly appreciated the dedication.

I must say, the light show and production looks incredible from the lower tier at back of the stadium. I allowed my eyes to sorta diffuse into the video screen, the towering Claw and the light show, and blurry eyed some songs are gorgeously lush.

There were a few flubs, but nothing too flubby. Least fav songs

for me are Elevation, SBS, and Mysterious Ways, but they're three stadium blockbusters so I suspect they ain't going anywhere. I'm still not sure about Glastonbury yet after only two listens. Bono called it a 70s style rock out, I'm not convinced yet. I think they need to put on some wellies and tie daisy chains in their hair first

Leg 4

New Zealand & Australia

2010

Auckland 1

Mount Smart Stadium

25th November 2010

An emotional and poignant, but also a fun first show for this tour leg here in Auckland last night.

I've been in New Zealand for ten days now, currently staying with my old housemate Amanda. Thursday's gig was played against the background of Wednesday's mining tragedy at Greymouth, which has been quite harrowing for the people in NZ. The show did go on, and whilst it did have a few opening night flubs, it was an uplifting show in front of a passionate crowd.

Bono told the crowd that there are many ways to grieve for "an unspeakable loss", and that in Ireland people sing. Many U2 songs are forever tied to a specific location; One Tree Hill is the Auckland and New Zealand U2 hymn. As its original theme was the premature, accidental death of a New Zealander, it was perfectly suited for the band to make a visual tribute to the premature, accidental death of the miners, scrolling their names on the screen, and for Bono to make a lyrical tribute, changing the line "where poets speak their heart then bleed for it" to "where workers break their heart then bleed for it".

The audience below the stage held up red balloons during the song, and released them into the wind when Bono sang "and the moon has turned red over One Tree Hill". It was a windy night and the balloons blew all over the stage. My initial thought was that balloons were too frivolous for such a moving song and tribute, but watching hundreds of them being kept aloft by fans and then blowing around the stage as the song reached its peak was quite a stirring sight. It was one of those beautiful, affecting, communal goosebump moments that U2 and their fans mutually create with each other.

There were plenty of lighter moments too. Bono came out shouting "Kia ora" (Maori for hello) during Stingray Guitar to get the kiwis revved up. But for me it was a Larry show. I went into the inner circle after Jay Z with two old friends who now live in

NZ, and all their many mates. We managed to find a little channel through the crowd just inside the outer rail, and there was more space for us to find good spots in the centre than at the sides. It was the closest I've ever been to the stage on this tour. As a crappy ex-drummer I found myself indulging in some drumming geekery and watching Larry, especially the little patterns he plays on the high hat, like during Magnificent and Elevation.

Larry did a little drum roll to end Pride, then sprinted off the stage for a couple of minutes. "That's one large step for a little man", Bono cheekily commented as the band waited for him. At the end of the show, Bono asked the band for their opinions on coming back to New Zealand, and Larry said he's still hoping for Ireland to beat the All Blacks in rugby. (Rugby is the sporting religion in New Zealand and the All Blacks are the sporting gods.) Bono told Larry that the crowd didn't really want to hear that. I'd got up at 6:15 am here last Sunday morning to watch Ireland lose that match, so I fully agreed with Larry.

The other big highlight and major surprise was Scarlet. It took the place of MLK, so whilst its "rejoice" refrain could celebrate the release of Aung San Suu Kyi, Walk On is now dedicated to the 2203 other political prisoners in Burma. Larry pounded out the tribal rhythm on his floor tom and Bono roared out the refrain as Jay Z rapped about freedom. It's a superb, delicately powerful live song, and works perfectly in that slot in the setlist, just as much as Mothers of the Disappeared did in Istanbul.

Jay Z also rapped during Sunday Bloody Sunday, but he seemed to be a bit unsure what to do after his rap, and just said "yeah" repeatedly towards the end, which didn't add anything except rap-prod to the song.

I realised that this was the first gig this year in an English-speaking country when the audience joined in and sang Amazing Grace with fabulous, church-like gusto, which seemed to me to be another shared emotional response to the mining disaster.

There was new video footage during Moment of Surrender, which I took to be based around that scary "I did not notice the passersby and they did not notice me" line. Bono tried to sing MoS in different voices, rapping, speaking, and changing keys which didn't really work. It seemed like he was trying to freestyle, maybe

influenced by Jay Z.

Auckland 2

Mount Smart Stadium

26th November 2010

Racing & Railing at Auckland 2

Kiwis don't queue. In most cities during the tour, fans have camped out for at least one night before each concert. In some cities fans have camped out two, three, or four nights. Before Gothenburg 1 last year, some teenagers celebrated the end of the school year by camping out for six nights. And there are those often repeated legends about fans in Brazil and Mexico who queue for years just to hear a U2 concert rumour. (My only previous experience of GA camping was when I stayed out overnight with the GA queue in Cardiff last year – and then didn't even go to the gig.)

I've got an ongoing tradition, which began quite spontaneously back at Barcelona 1 last year, where I give a free copy of *Me & U2* to the person who is first in the GA queue at each concert (when possible – I haven't always been able to). So I've had the pleasure of meeting many of U2's most dedicated, loopy-tunes fans. I've also become slightly familiar with the vagaries of the different GA queuing systems in different countries. In cities where there have been concerts on consecutive nights, it's been common for some fans to begin queuing for the second gig before the first gig has finished (or started!), or for fans to leave before the end of the first concert to begin queuing for the second. Therefore I thought that I would be able to find a queue for the second Auckland concert after I left the first one. However, after Auckland 1 had finished, I walked around to where the GA queue had been earlier that day, but I couldn't spot any fans queuing for Auckland 2.

I got back to Mount Smart Stadium around 10am the next day to find the shortest GA queue that I've seen on the day of a show. There were nine people in the line. I wasn't too far from being first in the GA queue and having to give a free book to myself.

I didn't originally plan to join the GA queue as I had bought

a ticket for the cheap seats earlier that morning. Usually, I give GA queuer #1 a book, have my photo taken with them for the M&U Facebook page, and depart all those crazy fools in the line. But a very generous fan gave me a spare GA ticket that he had, so I was able to join the front of the queue, stay there, and experience a little bit of what many of my new U2 buddies go through on a regular basis.

It was quite an adrenalin rush.

It was a very short and a very relaxed line. There was no need for writing numbers on hands or making a list of names. By 2pm there were around 80 people in the line, sitting comfortably in groups in lots of space. Sitting in the queue was a major element of my enjoyment of the day; everyone was very friendly, and many strawberries, cookies and giggles were shared. I joined two guys from Interference (US Chris and NZ Dennis), and a few women from New Zealand (Meg, Heather, Jess and another whose name I've forgotten) at the front. There was also an Italian called Mirco (interestingly, the only other European I met that day). Of the nine people ahead of me in the queue, six of them wanted to go to the outer rail.

I had a big choice to make: front rail or outer rail. I wanted to see the concert with Chris and Dennis as I'd spent some time with them the day before, they were great guys, they were fellow Interferencers, and I had an additional self-interest in that they'd offered me a lift back to town after the show (my post-gig transport was still unresolved at this point). But they were going to go to the outer rail. I realised that this concert would be my only opportunity to get on the front rail on the whole tour. I'm far too lazy and impatient to queue for days, especially in a new city with much exploring to be done. I appreciated how easy I would have it at this concert as I've had the privilege to meet many nutjob fans who were used to waiting for two or three nights to get to the spot that I could hopefully get after waiting a mere six hours.

Another factor in my decision was my height. I think I hit around 6 foot 3 inches (1.88 metres) when I'm wearing my chunky tour shoes. If I was to stand at the rail in the front row, then I knew that I was going to block someone's view, maybe many people's views. I actually got to the second row on the outer rail at Dublin

2 last year, but I ended up six rows back, as shorter girls would continually doe-eye me into letting them go in front. It's difficult to be a selfish lanky bastard with some sweet, innocent and short U2 fan pitifully sobbing behind you as their heart's been sadistically broken because they can't see Bono.

At 4:28pm I came to a decision. I would go to the front rail, centre, and I would become as selfishly lankily bastardly as I could be to keep that spot until after U2 had played One Tree Hill (which had been about ten songs into the gig the night before). Anyone shorter than me who chose to stand behind me would just have to do their best to see around me. I would inconsiderately immunize myself against the requests of any shorter, puppy-dog-eyed girls who desperately wanted to skip in front.

I also decided that I would have to go to the back of the field after Streets, because I would need to find a phone signal to sort out some transport back. It had been impossible to send or receive texts from within the pit the night before, and I had a long journey back to Amanda's place (my Auckland host) to sort out.

So at 4:30pm, when security opened the gates, a plan had come together. I told Chris and Dennis that I was going to head for the front rail. I told Meg and her friend that I would like to join them at the front. I also told the girls how to get to the front, and then advised them to sit down when they'd got to the rail (as this is what fans did at other shows). This spiel must have either impressed them or confused them because they asked me to step in front of them in the queue and lead the way.

Other fans had told me many times before about how nervous they usually feel just before the GA gates open. I hadn't quite appreciated what they meant until around 4:15pm on Friday. I felt the butterflies as soon as Jay Z's soundcheck finished, and the fans behind us who had previously been seated, stood up and began to shuffle forward. Some fans behind me also commented on their nerves. We were like greyhounds on amphetamines in the traps before a race. People were jumpy; there was an anxious, jittery tension in the air. We were all about to enter a short dash, competing against other fellow frantic U2 fans for a prized spot on the front rail.

More burly security guards came over to the fence. They explained very calmly that they expected us to walk slowly behind

them down the steps and across the field when they moved the fence to let us through. Then they moved the fence to let us through.

Charge!

I was on the left of the crowd walking behind the line of security down the steps onto the field. The stewards were continually telling fans to "Slow down! Take it easy! Slow down!"

At the bottom of the steps the stewards and the fans ahead of me all veered right to aim for the centre of the outer rail. I quickly took a sharp left to speed walk onto the athletics track that led straight to the entrance to the pit on Edge's side. I could hear the security guys roaring "This way!" at me, ordering me to follow them onto the field. But I was aiming for the pit.

I was rebelliously leading the way, with hundreds of people behind me. Some fans behind me thought that they needed to go where the security were telling us to, and said that I was going the wrong way. However I knew the layout of the field too well for that. The shortest route to the front rail was this way.

"Keep walking!" I urgently told the people behind me. "Just keep walking!"

We speed walked along the athletics track. At the gates to the pit I was overtaken by Anna, a cute young Auckland girl who had been #1 in the GA queue the day before, and who I suspected had hopes to be taken up onstage by Bono that night. And then Mirco overtook me in the pit. So I was actually the third person to get to the rail.

Someone had told me earlier that I should aim for a spot slightly to the right of where Bono stands, as this spot offers the best views and photos of Bono, because he usually holds his microphone in his right hand and this can obscure photos taken from that side. So I plopped myself down on a spot a couple of feet to the right of the centre. Meg and her friend sat down next to me, like those who feel a touch of madness.

Charge over! Job done! Well done team! The front rail was grabbed!

Leg 5
South Africa
2011

Johannesburg

Soccer City / FNB Stadium

13th February 2011

Bono is Ireland's most famous African. There are hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Irish people (priests, doctors, nuns, nurses ...) working for charities, hospitals or religious missions all over Africa. If U2 are the musical wing of this Irish-African Volunteer Army, Bono is the undisputed commandante in mischief.

Bono's love for Africa was sweating from every leather-bound pore last night in Johannesburg. His very first word after arriving onstage was "Africa ...", like he was tenderly addressing a very dear old friend. And U2 seemed to be very excited to be back onstage, and back in South Africa; but then it is very easy to feel very excited to be here.

During the weekend I'd had fairly depressing conversations about prospects for Africa's development with some non-Africans who have lived here for years. They were cynical and pessimistic. It's so easy to knock him for it, and my new acquaintances did, but I still found Bono's radiant positivity about Africa captivating and inspirational. Perhaps naive, ignorant optimism is just easier for me to wear.

The stadium lights dimmed, and U2 walked to the stage to a remix of Get On Your Boots with an African twist. I was momentarily excited about the possibility of new year, new tour leg, new opening song. But no. Although I wasn't actually "disappointed" as such when I heard the first chimes of Beautiful Day as the show starter, Stingray Guitar is a more engaging and fun opener. I'd led my Joburg host and all his chums into the pit (just fifteen minutes before U2 came on), so I also missed Bono's and Edge's prances around the outer stage for them to go all star-struck ga-ga from the start.

The major highlights of the show were the frequent African or Mandela moments. Hugh Masekela, a famous South African trumpet player joined U2 during I Still Haven't Found for a lovely surprise jam. One of my new mates told me that he's quite a political musician, I guess in the same vein as the guys that U2

brought onstage in Moscow and Istanbul. Towards the end of the song Bono jiggled his fingers like he was playing an air trumpet to indicate to Hugh that the stage was all his. So Hugh went off on a very tasty trumpet solo.

I had my first bit of tingly goosebumpiness during Pride when Bono changed the lyrics to be about February 1990 and Mandela being free at last. Bono walked out onto the bridge near us during the song to peer up at a video on the screen of a Mandela speech about building a non-racial South Africa. My chills were multiplying logarithmically. It was yet another of those very special, very beautiful U2 time-and-place moments.

There were many other African-themes throughout the show. Bono's little "Where we going?" geography lesson at the start of Magnificent went continental to include Cairo, Dar es Salaam and Accra. There was footage of the protests in Cairo (or perhaps Tunisia) during Miss Sarajevo, and again during Sunday Bloody Sunday, when the Claw was bathed in an Egyptian red and not the Iranian green used last year. (I wonder if the text on the screen has changed from Farsi to Arabic.) The African flags montage from Vertigo tour was brought back for the start of Streets, which caused another lovely burst of tingly goosebumpiness.

Bono charmed the audience that South Africa felt like the future. He said that The Edge was from the future and asked Edge what it's like. "It's better" Edge was pleased to wittily report. Adam complimented South Africans for being beautiful people (after he, cough, met a girl at the airport), Larry said playing in front of 100,000 people felt better than winning the World Cup. (He could have said that in the Stade de France!)

I'd been curious to see what the ethnic balance of the crowd would be. This is obviously a complete licked-finger-in-the-air guesstimate but I'd say perhaps 5% were Asian, and 3% were black. (One curious aspect of this was that it was difficult to see the stamp, which fans received on leaving the pit, on black skin. I saw a few black fans get stopped for a closer stamp inspection when they tried to re-enter the pit during the show.)

It had been a long day of slow boozing around Joburg. My loop song was In A Little While (so I don't know if Bono brought a girl onstage). I ducked into an empty seat in the expensive seat

section close to the stage on my way back down the steps through the stand, and I stayed there until Hold Me Thrill Me. I liked getting an additional perspective of the whole gig. The atmosphere in the stadium was fantastic, especially during all the big singles, with slight lulls during the less well known songs. One lovely moment was when the whole stadium became silently entranced during the luscious screen-expanding segue between Miss Sarajevo and City of Blinding Lights.

I looked around and all the people in this section were white. I did hear one person behind me give a short but loud boo when Tutu first appeared on the video screen during the encore. The crowd all watched in complete silence for his speech. Nobody cheered when he mentioned people fighting against apartheid in South Africa, although there were a few isolated cheers when he mentioned the people who worked for peace in Ireland. After the show one of the South African guys in our group told me that he had no idea that Tutu was such an electrifying speaker, as he'd never heard him speak before.

There were no major opening-night flubs, apart from a few duff notes from Edge during Miss Sarajevo and Crazy Tonight. Although Larry did look amused when the steering wheel mic seemed to swing close to his head during Hold Me Thrill Me. A missed opportunity, 'drummer smacked in face with microphone' would have been legendary.

I love to see the reactions of people whose first 360 show it was, especially self-confessed non-U2 fans. Two of our group (who had received free tickets) confessed to me after that they'd been a bit cynical about U2 before the show, but had been absolutely blown away by the gig. One guy works for EMI Records in London and told me that he's completely gone off U2 since ATYCLB. He said it was the best U2 concert he'd seen out of twenty, going back to The Unforgettable Fire tour. Another guy raved about it after, saying it may have been his favourite concert ever. A few more doubters had been won over. And everyone else seemed quite ecstatic afterwards too.

So, a safe 2010 re-run setlist, but still a great performance and an electrifying concert. U2 grab historic victory in Soccer City!

Cape Town

Cape Town Stadium

18th February 2011

A breezy and breathless night in the Cape Town last night, and a show to match. There were powerful winds tearing through the Mother City on Thursday, like two ocean gales having a scrap. (I was almost blown over backwards crossing a road whilst wearing my rucksacks.) Whilst the wind eased up on Friday, U2 created their own stadium-sized tornado. There were even a few inflated condoms comically billowing around the stadium during the show.

The second show was as intense and as enjoyable as the first, with Bono clearly revelling in performing to an African audience. All of the great African touches from the Joburg show were there.

Still Haven't Found got the biggest crowd reactions at the two African shows, where it's become even more of a mass invitation-participation party piece. Bono's themed band intro speeches set the happy tone, then by inviting the audience to sing the first verse he draws everyone into the party. For the second verse at the second show, U2 again invited a local musician onto the stage. Last week was a trumpeter, this week was a singer, Yvonne Chaka Chaka. Bono and Yvonne shared a microphone for the first few lines, I thought Bono was guiding her through the song as if he wasn't confident that she knew the words. She did know the words though, and she blasted through the last verse with incredibly tonsil-tearing gusto.

At the end of ISHFWILF Bono instantly launched into Stand By Me (there was a full moon over the stadium). Edge followed Bono's lead and started strumming, and Yvonne happily joined in the vocals. Adam and Larry watched the jam as usual. When Bono started the second verse, Adam turned to Larry, and they counted themselves in to join the party. The atmosphere cranked up yet another notch. It was a fabulous, fun, stadium singalong. U2 were just playing, jamming outside their restrictive, predictable set. It was a rare reminder of the incredible extra energy that U2 can bring to their music when they break the routine of an elaborate production to change it into a fresh, raw gig. (I haven't heard if Stand By Me was

on the printed setlist, but it all looked spontaneous to me.)

Green Point stadium was hyperventilating after Stand By Me. Bono was pumped up by it and looked like he was going to call for another spontaneous song. Larry sat at his kit waiting to see what Bono would do. Then Edge started North Star, Bono said "ok", and Larry got up from his drum stool. Curses! North Star is a lovely song, but it did bring everyone right back down again. If only Edge had given Bono a moment or two more then there could have been a second big spontaneous surprise.

Pride would have kept the breathless pace going. As it was, it wasn't their best version. Like at Wembley 1 in 2009, Larry inadvertently cut Pride short early, perhaps he forgot about the Mandela speech that had been cued on the video screen. Bono gestured to Edge to keep on playing and the whole band managed to almost seamlessly restart it to include the Mandela speech. (There was a curious moment during Pride when Edge looked quite concerned that one of the guitar amps behind him wasn't working. He climbed up to look at something on top of the amp and gestured urgently to Dallas. Dallas went below and returned quickly indicated that the problem could be with Edge's in-ear monitor.)

The gorgeous 'Questions' segue between Miss Sarajevo and City Of Blinding Lights is evolving into a medley of ambient intros from obscure U2 songs. The intro to Fez has now joined the intro to Zooropa. The video screen itself opened fully, and was only about two foot off the stage at full length (trapping U2 inside their own video screen) before closing a fraction at the start of COBL.

My one gripe about the show was during Scarlet. As in Johannesburg, Bono talked his way through the song without singing at all. It was stunning in Auckland when Bono sang it so powerfully; too much talking and no singing is spoiling its impact.

Bono made a short speech before Moment Of Surrender praising someone who has been involved in distributing retroviral drugs in South Africa. (I didn't catch the person's name.) When they heard the name, four people in front of me started screaming and bouncing excitedly as if they'd just won the National Lottery, Pop Idol and South Africa's Next Top Model rolled into one. They looked like they were teenagers, but 'old' teenagers. Perhaps it's inappropriate to speculate, but I couldn't help wonder if they

had been recipients of the drugs. It was quite a humbling wakeup to consider that after hearing Bono thank the people in the Red Zones in America and Europe “for buying drugs for people with HIV in faraway places”, to perhaps be standing behind some of the people that the drugs had been bought for. The money, drugs and people Bono mentions before MoS at shows has always seemed abstract, elsewhere. Those four kids’ joy at hearing someone’s name last night was a clear reminder that the people involved are real - really real. (Actually, the girl that Bono brought onstage during IALW was holding a large yellow sign saying “HIV+ Music” or something which I couldn’t quite fully read.)

After that little train of thought, Moment Of Surrender was far and away my favourite song of the night.

Oops, internet time is almost up. So two huge performances, and two huge successes in South Africa. Roll on South America!

Leg 6
South America
2011

Santiago Estadio Nacional 25th March 2011

My first concert in South America last night, and it was quite an explosive introduction. I don't know what level to generalise to, but these Santiagoistas / Chileans / South Americans sure don't hold back in enjoying themselves. The atmosphere in the Estadio Nacional probably caused the Andes to quiver. Beautiful Day started the show with a kick, but the stadium really exploded at the start of I Will Follow. The band felt the energy, with Edge throwing his guitar around like it was 1980.

There were far more people jumping around and openly enjoying the gig here compared to other countries. One woman near me was bouncing around and singing during Elevation like she was possessed. People were also pogoing during Pride and other songs. Chileans must like All That You Can't Leave Behind. There was a huge cheer for In A Little While, and another for Walk On. (And apparently Chileans are regarded as the most reserved people in South America, so I'm looking forward to seeing how raucous the Argentineans and Brazilians are.)

I saw the show with a Kiwi guy called Damon. We got into the pit on Adam's side, but foolishly left it (remembering to collect a stamp on our exit), as we planned to watch Muse from out on the field, and then go into the pit on Edge's side.

The entrance to the field was about halfway back on Edge's side. There was a ridiculous bottleneck at the entrance, as fans didn't spread out across the field. People were squashed up like they used to be at the front of the crowd at pre-crush barrier stadium gigs in the 1980s. We slowly fought our way through, surviving a few crowd surges, to find that the pit could only be entered on Adam's side. I didn't fancy battling the crowd again so we watched the show from behind the Red Zone on Edge's side, which has the advantage over the pit of being able to see all the band as well as the screen.

Bono had his most amnesiacal night yet. Most U2 fans usually laugh off Bono's lyrical memory lapses, but he had a few more

than normal last night. Miss Sarajevo, Crazy Tonight, One Tree Hill and others I've, er, forgotten had their lyrics freestyled. (I actually thought Bono was doing the "Aaaafricaaa!" chant at the start of Beautiful Day that he did in South Africa, but he morphed it into something else.)

The funniest lyrical lapse was during Until The End Of The World. During the "bass and drums ... ring those bells" part, Bono was out on Adam's bridge as usual. He rambled into some improvised lyrics as the band jammed the little lull in the song. Bono looked like he'd completely forgotten the next line ("In my dreams, I was drowning my sorrows") to lead the band back into the big closing of the song. He continued his Bongoleese as the band softly played on. They were waiting for Bono's lyrical cue - Bono had forgotten it. There was deadlock. It looked like Until The End Of The World was going to go on until the end of the world. Bono realised he needed to get the band to help him out, and he started gesticulating urgently towards them to take the song up. They got the message and managed to lead themselves out of the jam. Although to be honest, I really enjoyed the extended breakdown in the song as a dreamy little interlude.

(After the show last night I checked U2gigs for the news of the rehearsals from the previous evening. Most of the rehearsed songs were listed "No Bono", which could be a statement of sorts.)

I had been looking forward to seeing Mothers Of The Disappeared played. Bono began playing its melody on his guitar after One, and I excitedly thought it was going to be another one of those magical song-n-place moments, and perhaps even more special than others given the history of the stadium itself. But maybe the two previous performances of MOTD here did the job, because it was only a teasingly short snippet to lead into Streets.

Instead, U2 had skipped two tracks back on the B side of The Joshua Tree, and played One Tree Hill earlier in the show. They brought a female Chilean singer onto the stage, but she seemed to be more interested in showing off that she was onstage with U2 than actually singing the song. The song descended into a jokey, matey karaoke piece which destroyed its usual beauty. The previous guest artists have been great, last night's was the wrong person for the wrong song, perhaps Party Girl would have suited her better.

The other girl onstage last night seemed far more natural. I'm inordinately biased though because she's my very fabulous n gorgeous Chilean friend Karina. Karina lived just up the road from me in Hackney in London for the last few years, but unfortunately moved home last month. We caught up in the GA queue the day before the gig; she was #25 and was hoping for the front rail. I was therefore very curious to see who Bono had selected to bring onstage during In A Little While, and cheered when he chose Karina, in her home town. (Karina was onstage in Zurich last year but I missed that show.)

Karina and I have had a few very nice n messy pub crawls around East London in the last couple of years, and I know how mischievous, sarcastic and piss-taking she can be. So I was quietly urging her to behave herself with Bono last night. She seemed relaxed (although I'm sure she was nervous as hell) and played the cute-Spanish-eyed-girl-onstage role wonderfully. I did have one "Karinaaaaa! Noooo!" moment when she pointed at Bono as he sang the "My how you've grown" line. Thankfully Bono took the joke and laughed. But I was very pleased to see Karina catch up with her second favourite Irishman last night.

One of my brothers got me proper concert earplugs for Christmas. I dunno if I'm now hearing even more bizarre things in my head than usual cos of these earplugs, or if I'm hearing things which have always been in the songs that I just haven't noticed, but I thought I heard new little elements to some songs: Bono's voice warping during Crazy Tonight, bongos being played at the start of Sunday Bloody Sunday, and also Adam play a new little bass part during the chorus of Streets. (But please excuse me if these are just the warped bongo bass parts in my imagination!)

Some quickie random observations:

- the segue between Miss Sarajevo and City Of Blinding Lights is getting longer and including more random elements. (The best part is the female computerised voice which says "What - the - fuck?")

- Bono charmed the crowd with some good "Spanish lessons" like "buenos mozos" which apparently is a local idiom for "good looking", and "ha sido maravilloso" which I'm guessing means "it's been marvellous"

- someone's got a new smoke machine and knows how to use it, there was a forest fire of dry ice bellowing out from the stage before HMTMKMKM,

- During Vertigo (I think) Bono had dragged his microphone stand out to the edge of the stage and left it just behind Edge. Luckily Dallas saw the looming accident and rushed out to bring it in, a few seconds before Edge took some steps back

- Bono commented on the Chilean's strength, referring to the miner's rescue and the recovery from the earthquake last year

- There were a lot of Chilean flags thrown onto the stage and bridges. One was draped over a speaker onstage. Actually, Muse's drummer came out and left wearing one as well.

- One of the leaders of Chile's revolution against Spain was called Bernardo O'Higgins, whose dad was Irish. So Larry became Larry Bernardo Mullen, and Adam was Adam O'Higgins Clayton.

Buenos Aires 2

Estadio Único

02nd April 2011

"Wow! Wow!" Bono has often said after UTEOTW at many shows, to lead into his first bit of crowd banter before Still Haven't Found. He didn't actually say it tonight; but, my word, he could have said it after every song. The atmosphere tonight was way off the scale compared to other shows. I saw the entire concert, unobstructed, from a seat in the back row of the stand behind the stage.

Like Wednesday, the view of the field going completely nuts in unison was breathtaking, and it continued for the entire show. The action on the field was like a turbulent sea in a storm, rising up with everyone jumping around, and swaying to and fro with great crowd surges across the main field beyond the outer stage. There's no standing neatly in your own space and respecting the space of others on the field here. If you're on the field, bring a lifejacket. I was eyeing the field a bit enviously as I thought it would be great fun to empty my pockets and dive into the melee. I'd probably crawl out two hours later missing some useful appendages but declaring it

the best U2 concert ever.

As it was, I think it was easily one of the best U2 concerts of the 360 tour, and purely cos the crowd's madness gave such a tremendous jolt to everything going on. U2, and Bono in particular, looked more loose and spontaneous than during recent shows. But, bizarrely, it all started very quietly and tamely.

Someone in the crew must have had their U2-branded iPod nicked. The pre-gig tunes before the two concerts here have been ice-skating classics, and have acted very effectively as a mass sedative for the stadium. I've never seen a stadium so quiet just ten minutes before U2 hit the stage. Even the Mexican Waves were half-hearted. I thought that Wednesday's crowd was obviously the hardcore crowd, and that Saturday's would be a tame bunch of observing tourists.

I forget what those things which doctors use to restart someone's heart are called, but the DJ found the musical equivalent, and managed to kickstart the eerie morgue into a pulsating fiesta in one press of an 'Add Popular Local Classic Song To Playlist Instead Of More Torvill n Dean Music' button. They played 'De Musica Ligera' by Soda Stereo whose singer is Gustavo Cerrati whom Bono namechecked from the stage on Wednesday. He has been in an accident and is currently in a coma. I hope he felt the incredible and instant surge of life created in his honour in El Estadio Unico when his song was played. The stadium transformed from lifeless to lively in milliseconds. This crowd wanted to party, this was the tune they were waiting for.

Second time hearing it and I'm completely smitten by this new version of EBTTRT. It's really very rather fab, with new jolting synthy things n everything. And it's a surprise and strong challenger to Crazy Tonight as the second best-looking song in the show, with a dazzling disco light display on the Claw. But whilst it's a good opener (far better than Breathe), I'm not convinced it's a truly great concert opener for the whole stadium (whereas I think Stingray Guitar was). I'm sure EBTTRT is an absolutely amazing concert opener in the pit, and I'm sure it's an amazing opener on YouTube. However (and this will probably be heresy to the online setlist spods) I reckon Beautiful Day was actually a better opener on a whole stadium level. (I can almost hear the 'Unlike' clicks already.)

The back of the bus is in a huff.

There were a few setlist changes. Three songs had their 2011 debuts: New Year's Day, Stuck In A Moment, and Ultraviolet all of which were superb, especially Ultraviolet. They were as good as having your first three pints after total abstinence during Lent.

But more than these little surprise treats, Bono seemed a bit freer, with more of a spontaneous spark, mixing up his banter with the crowd. He brought a girl onstage to read the lyrics to a song by Mercedes Sosa (my wonderful host here informs me) called 'Gracias Por La Vida'. The girl actually began by shouting into the microphone, then talking too quietly, but Bono coached her into reading the poem to a backing track of that crescendic Celtic music they used before Beautiful Day in 2009. Bono also teasingly played "eeny meeny miny mo" during In A Little While (perhaps with my Chilean and Brazilian amigas down in the front row who were probably Spanish-eyeing him), but he was just flirting, and didn't actually invite any girl onto the stage. Instead he brought someone from the main field onstage during City Of Blinding Lights, which I liked cos some of the girls at the front rail (some of whom I know) secretly hope to be brought up, and there isn't always such a lovely OMFGly response from them.

And Bono's singing last night was superb, with the opera piece of Miss Sarajevo even more stunning than usual. He also provided me with more useful Spanish lessons. I learned that Adam has been "probando los bombones argentinos" which my host Augusto has just translated as "tasting the flavour of beautiful Argentinian women". And he shouted "aguante La Plata" which means a very strong "Come on La Plata". (Back at the GA queue after the show, some guys from the Argentinian U2 fanclub asked me to say "Aguante U2 todo piola" into a video camera, which I hope isn't a naughty swearie.)

I must have been enjoying the gig cos I even really liked Crazy Tonight for the first time in a while. Bono told the crowd that "crazy is a Spanish word", and I thought I heard him say "I know loco crazy". I think I mishear a lot thought, cos he was spelling something during Crazy which I heard as "P-U-P-L-I-N". What the hell does puplin mean? Then I thought it might have been B-U-B-L-I-N, i.e. bubbling. But after many pints during a very fun La

Plata pub crawl late last night, it occurred to me that it must have been D-U-B-L-I-N. But it could have been pubbin, or boppin, or ... who knows.

The only prob was a screen protest. There's only half a spike above the Claw here because of the stadium roof. The video screen staged a protest in solidarity with its pointier colleague by refusing to open beyond halfway during City Of Blinding Lights. So we got to peak inside the stage during the Questions / Fez segue. Bono improvised a rap which may have included references to a stuck screen.

Anyway, time's up. Bloomin incredible gig last night. And for tonight, I'm considering doing a Glasgow ...

Sao Paulo 1

Estadio Morumbi

09th April 2011

Gotta be a real quickie of random notes and observations from Sao Paulo 1.

I was in the seats in the top tier behind the stage with Marty from Holland (who's usually a front-railer). I had my first bit of commercial success in South America before the show (obrigado to Nick and Karina for pimping me), and had been indulged with wonderful Brazilian generosity (megabrigado a Beca for the ticket). So Marty and I indulged a few cervejas before the show, and I had a very merry glow when the show started.

Matt from Muse has become the first support artist to make it out onto the bridges during their set. He walked halfway out onto each of the uncovered bridges during songs, (uncovered perhaps cos of the rain during their set). I was egging him on to go the whole way to the outer stage. Someone suggested to me afterwards that perhaps he ain't allowed to, but if his lyrics are anything to go by, that's hardly going to stop him.

There was lightning before and after U2, which made for a very dramatic setting. And I haven't noticed such a constant barrage of camera flashes being maintained throughout the entire show

before, from photo-frenzied crowd. The 'play-a-local-hit-before-Space Oddity' theme carried over from La Plata, with a samba song providing the stadium sing-a-long. I finally clicked that the new porthole on the video screen during the opening is related to the spaceship theme.

The field didn't look as wild and in such a sweeping tumult as it did in Argentina, perhaps as there was an extra barrier across the width of the field beyond the outer rail, and another barrier down the centre of the field, so everyone was broken up in different sections. They couldn't create a heaving mosh, but the Sao Pauloians could create a fearsome noise. I found myself nudging my earplugs deeper into my ears to protect my hearing from the manic roars around me.

It also seems very weird to remember that people in Europe and Australia sit during the show, no chance of that here. This felt like how U2 concerts should be, with fans roaring for each song, and more fans here recognising Magnificent, for example, than in other places. I was surprised that they also knew the words to In A Little While and Miss Sarajevo, which was almost the perfect version. (Bono didn't have a girl onstage with him after IALW so he was able to have a sip of water before instead of during the song.) Actually, Bono's singing was superb throughout.

There was mad excitement around the stadium during the day, especially when the gates opened, when fans began chanting and bouncing their way onto the field, with the frenzied sprints obviously. Some fans passed out green and yellow balloons after Muse. I blew mine up and released it during Stingray Guitar, I should have kept it for Streets as that was the planned flash mob which was pretty cool.

Bono made a reference to "13 years old, St Patrick's Cathedral" with a bell-ringing gesture during the "ring those bells" part of UTEOTW. I'm not sure where that church is from my patchy memory of Dublin. Was he revealing a secret past hobby as a ... oops, what's the proper name for people who ring bells in churches? (Just checked Google, a 'campanologist' apparently.)

Larry carried his djemba drum right down to the bottom of the steps behind the stage during Crazy Tonight, to show off to all the samba lovers present. But strangely, Crazy didn't really take off, most

people watched instead of bopping along. (Bono name-checked DJ Redanka who was present.) And perhaps the Brazilian culture is influencing me, but I thought the visuals during *Mysterious Ways* were getting a bit more, um, intimate than before.

There was a hilarious prolonged scene of hundreds of people in the pit bowing down to Adam in a “we’re not worthy” manner during Sunday Bloody Sunday. He stayed put for the whole song.

I discovered an amazing new trick to enjoy slower parts of the show, to stop my attention from wandering: closing my eyes and just listening to the music. This really revealed just how luscious the tones in *Scarlet* are, but Bono doesn’t alf spoil it with what a Scottish friend of mine calls “his speechifying”. It’d be lovely to hear it played through as on the album. One was also even more powerful with the eyes closed effect. And it was especially stunning to keep my eyes closed during *With Or Without You* for a minute or so, and then open them to see the spectacular beauty of the Claw and stadium all lit up. Although it was too intense to keep my eyes closed during *Moment of Surrender* after Bono’s dedication to the children killed in school in Rio on Thursday. A very moving, choked-up version.

I’m ticketless for tonight as yet, but hope to score one outside ...

Leg 7
North America
2011

Mexico City 2 Azteca Stadium 14th May 2011

Qué espectáculo increíble! What an incredible show!

“Incredible, crazy people with a love of life” as Bono said last night at the end of the show.

It's impossible to do a gig like last night's justice in a rushed review. (I'm ticketless for tonight's show, a familiar situation – it's the last show I'm ticketless for until Anaheim 2. So I need to get down to the stadium to try to find me one. And I'm rather exhausted after only getting three hours kip cos I got up at 6:30am to watch Celtic not win the Scottish Premier League. Walk on Neil Lennon.)

I was down on the field last night, about two-thirds back on Adam's side. There were 93,000 people at Wednesday's show, and I thought it was the loudest audience I'd heard on this tour. Today's newspaper here says there were 111,200 people at last night's show. They may have saved the really loud fans for Saturday night (which was originally the first of the three gigs). I'm sure Joe O'H turned the music up to try to compete with the fans (boy and girls) screaming their faces off. My ears were ringing badly after the show even though I was wearing my earplugs. (It's my own fault mind, I did take them out occasionally to wonder at the insane volume, I won't make that mistake again tonight – if I get in.)

The first half of the show was a pounding sprint of rocky jump-arounds or raucous sing-a-longs, with the crowd responding noisily to every small incitement. Everyone roared for EBTTRT, but the stadium really exploded at the climax of Out Of Control, after Bono charmed the crowd during the little lull with some Spanish.

I don't like this new Soweto Gospel Choir version of Magnificent. It's gone from being my fav song in the show to one that I think is, well, quite poor. It seems to be all choruses, is more wishy-washy and, bizarrely, seems less joyful. Bono was standing at the back of the stage looking up and applauding the Tutu video snippets during the intro, but it was all downhill from there.

So Boots and Moment Of Surrender are the only two remaining

'original' songs from NLOTH in the show. And I don't think Boots fits the mood of NLOTH anyway (I've deleted it from the album on my MP3 player, along with Stand Up Comedy and Crazy Tonight). So by this contorted line of reasoning, Moment of Surrender is the only survivor of NLOTH. And it's missing a verse.

Actually, there are more verses being dropped in my fav songs. Bad lost a verse many years ago, Moment Of Surrender lost one in America in 2009, and now Zooropa and Magnificent have both lost verses. Perhaps U2 think a shorter song has more impact, or perhaps they need to shave some time off the show. Who knows. But I'd be a happier punter if they brought them all back. Release the verses!

Winge over, nobody else in the stadium let such pedantic matters bother them. Mysterious Ways, Elevation, UTEOTW (with some Sinatra snippets) all pushed the barometer up and up. Bono talked the Saturday night fiesta even higher before Still Haven't Found with a rambling, but very funny and effective band intro speech based on Mexican footie players. The fans sent the mercury through the glass during the first verse.

There was an awkward moment afterwards when Bono said they were going to sing a song for the people who live over Mexico's northern border, which raised a few half-hearted boos, but once Edge had changed guitar and started Stand By Me, it was right back into a happy sing-a-long. Bono said something about how the USA should close 9000 gun shops, although I may have misheard him.

Desire, and Stay were more massive communal singsongs, I was actually surprised how many fans knew all the words to Stay. Stay especially was very fab.

After the prolonged band-crowd love-in during the first half of the show, Zooropa is a severe jarring break. The band vanish, cocooned inside their honeycomb screen, and the song is a full-frontal, psychedelic aural assault, which leaves the audience to fend for themselves minus the band for five minutes. The video screen is screaming for some f*cked-up visuals, leaving it blank is like drinking a tequila cordial.

Right, gotta get a move on. Some random observations:

- Adam was busting out some new and quite ridiculous moves, like the unashamedly worst dancer at the primary school disco.
- Bono comically tried on an oversized sombrero during, er, I

forget, maybe Mysterious Ways.

- As well as screaming, Mexicans also like to snog their faces off. There are randy couples all over the city, and there were plenty at the show. I even saw one couple manage to keep a passionate kiss going whilst walking through the crowd towards the end of the show.

- There may have been some screen probs. The pre-gig countdown vanished early. Some of the images looked a lot grainier (e.g the nodding faces in Crazy Tonight). And COBL didn't have the explosion of colour it usually had, although it did have some new digital clock images towards the end.

- The crowd broke out a fabulous n loud "U2! U2!" chant during the encores.

- Apparently Snow Patrol gave Bono £4 for his birthday

- That Discotheque sample is such a tease, it needs to be played

- Was last night the most album-varied setlist? One song (or snippet) from every album except Unforgettable Fire? A career-spanning, all album-inclusive setlist could happen somewhere along the road.

- I was down outside the band's hotel earlier in the day when Bono and Edge came out to meet the hundreds of screaming, hyper-excitable fans. There was pandemonium when Bono came out, as the crowd ran around the barriers and mobbed him. Some order was restored and Bono and Edge both gamely did a full circuit of the fans. I don't know if their security has had to work so hard for a while.

- There is an incredible array of different (unofficial) merchandise being sold all around the stadium. Some of the T-shirt designs are very cool. I picked up a couple of U2 360 tour shot glasses at 10 pesos (60p) each.

Denver

Invesco Field

21st May 2011

A fun, fascinating return to America last night, with a different

perspective for me, and some new show elements.

This was the first of the shows that were rescheduled from 2010 because of Bono's back surgery. Bono told the audience that "some of you were two years younger when you bought your tickets". The immeasurably lovely Rosa told me during the day that she'd had her ticket for the Denver concert for 560 days. I'm sure for most fans it was more than well worth the wait.

The pent-up craving from US-based U2 fans was evident as it seemed that almost everyone that I met in America in 2009 had all come to opening night USA 2011. It was wonderful to catch up with many people who had travelled to Denver from all over the States to get their overdue U2 fix, especially the glamorously crazy New York and Los Angeles crews.

It's bizarre how the only country in the world which prohibits fans from camping outside stadiums overnight before the show is 'the land of the free'. Some fans started queuing the day before the show, but were moved on three times by three separate people who called themselves "head of stadium security". There were pedantic explanations over exactly which part of the pavement near the stadium was public or private property, with an imaginary line even once being precisely drawn across. In the end, one of the fans who started the queue called the Denver police to clarify exactly which sidewalk fans would be permitted to sit on for 36 hours without breaking any regulations. It's such a contrast to what happened at stadiums in Mexico, South Africa, Australia, South America and Europe, where the queues are not only permitted, but facilitated.

I was down in the pit for the first time this year (mega thanks to Alice for the ticket). Brad and I trailed a couple of helpful crowd-breakers through the inside of the pit's perimeter rail during The Fray's set. We stopped at a spot on Adam's side around the 5 o'clock position about three rows in from the back rail, where we hoped we wouldn't block anyone's views (we're both over six foot).

Unsurprisingly, the pit is the best place for a lanky git to see the show from, compared to the nosebleeds (I'm learning American), or the seats behind the stage, where I'd been for most of the Latin American shows I saw.

There was a good atmosphere in the pit around us, with many fans launching themselves into expressively enjoying the show. But

there were quite a few statically observing arm-folders, mainly blokes. It seemed like anything more than a rhythmic nod of the head might be too much for them. Applause was eventually dragged out of most of them by the end of the show.

One measure of the difference between the atmosphere at the shows in Latin America and the show here in Denver was during Miss Sarajevo. When Bono sings “here she comes”, in Latin America the crowd would loudly sing back “oh oh”, whereas in Denver I didn’t hear the same response. Also, very many fans in Mexico knew the words to Stay, for example, and sang along. There were far fewer people singing along last night. But there was still a good atmosphere in the stadium, just not as nuttily frantic as south of the border.

The green n orange countdown clock didn’t appear before U2 hit the stage. Instead, the current time in cities around the world was rotated around the screen. And lots of eye-popping world facts were also displayed (“number of barrels of oil produced this year”, “amount spent on illegal drugs”, “births today”, “deaths today”, “number of Google searches”). These included “height of the 360 tour stage structure” which is clearly a misspelt anagram of ‘The Claw’.

I whinged after the La Plata shows about Even Better Than The Real Thing not being the most effective show opener. Anyone who has ever been in the pit to see it performed will profoundly disagree. It’s a fantastic, glitzy, boppy opener for fans down the front, it’s quite exciting and great fun. (But I still think its effect wears off quickly in further reaches of the stadium.)

The tinkering with songs continues. There was cool new flashing coloured “The future needs a big kiss” and “Let me in the sound” text on the screen at the start of and during Boots. I think there’s also a slightly longer intro too. It’s odd how I really love the dreamy, Balearic intro to Magnificent, but I’m still missing the old version of the song, although the band are still piling into it with the same old drive, especially Larry.

One of my favourite aspects of being down towards the centre of the pit is to be able to watch Larry up close. I loved watching him hammer several shades of sugar out of his kit during Magnificent, UTEOTW, Pride, Vertigo etc. Seeing Larry pound his drums so

ferociously is one of the reasons that I never agree with some of the fans on the forums who claim that U2 sometimes “go through the motions” during a show, or “phone it in”.

And it’s also fab to see just how much Adam enjoys playing live, with his continual smiles, winks and nods to people in the audience, and his unique, dinky style of bopping around the stages.

UTEOTW was a big highlight last night. Bono dedicated it to the mad reverend who predicted the Rapture would be yesterday. He then proved that people were still firmly on the ground, and gravity still worked, by chucking loads of white roses out into the audience.

I tried the ‘keeping my eyes closed’ trick during All I Want Is You. I think the phrase ‘achingly beautiful’ was invented for this song. It’s very powerful live. I think it’s also Edge’s best solo in the show. (Although I missed the Saturday night party atmosphere that Still Haven’t Found always catalyses.)

Bono made a heartfelt speech before AIWIY about his recovery from his back surgery a year ago, and then some hilarious band intros e.g. in a Broadway-topical blurb, Edge was introduced as a superhero bitten by a spider and turned into a nerd.

I was very excited when U2 played All I Want Is You, and Pride, as I believe last night’s show may have been the first 360 concert to include one song (or substantial snippet) from every album. Full career coverage is quite remarkable. The Discotheque snippet after Crazy Tonight was also even better down in the pit. They’ve just *got* to do the full segue, and play the full song. And play Please too.

Bono remembered Red Rocks at the start of Sunday Bloody Sunday, and said “her majesty at Croke Park ... beautiful” at the end. (The British army murdered fourteen people at Croke Park, the great symbol of Irish nationalism, on Bloody Sunday in 1920.) I completely agree. It was a great day for Ireland. In fact, I think she should go to Ireland far more often. I’d be very pleased if she could eventually make it to Derry some time for a pint of Guinness in the Bogside Inn.

Nick and I did the U2 pilgrimage up to Red Rocks on Thursday evening. There was a high school graduation starting when we arrived, with the school orchestra and choir warming up. It was a

cold, dank, damp evening, with low-lying clouds smothering the hills, just like when U2 performed there in 1983. It was nostalgically weird walking around the amphitheatre, as watching Sunday Bloody Sunday from the Under A Blood Red Sky video is one of my earliest U2 memories. There was a lot of talk about that song, and that performance of that song was a big influence on my road to becoming a U2 obsessive teenager.

The Tutu speech has (finally) been replaced by a quietly inspirational speech by Aung San Suu Kyi to introduce One. It was my first time hearing her speak and I was surprised by her perfect English; it even sounded a little bit like Received Pronunciation (wot the Queen of England speaks). Bono was clearly very proud of the new video, introducing it as something he couldn't have imagined possible two years previously. "Campaigning works" Bono said later.

Hold Me Thrill Me was another song much better seen from the pit, with Bono swinging out over the crowd. There is a stunning visual effect when the spotlights fighting through the thick dry-ice create ghostly triple shadows. Up to three wispy shadows appear like an ethereal aura around Bono and then quickly vanish as the smoke drifts away.

Before Moment of Surrender, Bono asked Dallas (the fifth most popular person on the U2 stage) to come up and take a bow in front of his home audience.

And then it was time to go and meet my Denver host Travis (who's a punk fan) and hear his dazzled ravings about how incredible the show was. I love it when people (especially non-U2 fans) who have seen the show for the first time are so impressed. And rightly so.

Edmonton Commonwealth Stadium 01st June 2011

When I went to South America in 2000, I took clothes, toiletries, a cheap wind-on camera, and a book. These days when

I travel I bring an MP3 player, a digital camera, phone, Flip cam, netbook, and various other gadgets. I'm, like, totally gadgeted to the max. And they're all essential.

One gadget I haven't yet seen a need to pack is a Personal Video Recorder. I don't watch much TV; I don't have any can't-miss series. It's starting to seem like U2 are generously now providing a concert PVR. The last four gigs have had identical setlists (allowing that Moment of Surrender was on the printed setlist in Winnipeg). The North America tour could be sponsored by Tivo - the U2 360 DVR, for that favourite concert you love to watch again and again. Except, of course, that the many U2 fans travelling to these shows would prefer the 360 plot to change.

It seems daft to criticise a U2 setlist with Even Better Than The Real Thing, All I Want Is You, Zooropa, Scarlet and Hold Me Thrill Me. But even a good static setlist can still become a frustrating setlist for the U2 fans travelling to more than one concert. Some dedicated fans travelled from Salt Lake City to Denver, or from Winnipeg to Edmonton, to see two or more shows. U2 played thirty-one songs across the three concerts in Mexico City. So far in the four shows in the US and Canada they've played the same twenty-four songs.

I reckon they should consider the shows as pairs: Salt Lake City should have been viewed as Denver 2, Edmonton as Winnipeg 2. The casual U2 fans who see one show in their hometown will hardly lose out by seeing New Year's Day instead of I Will Follow, Still Haven't Found instead of All I Want Is You, or Ultraviolet instead of Hold Me Thrill Me. Yet the hardcore U2 fans who take time off work and spend their money on travelling to more than one show in geographical or temporal proximity would gain so much more enjoyment from such apparently simple setlist variations. This fixed setlist seems needlessly lazy, and it has caused some (minor) irritation to the U2 fans who have followed this slice of the tour.

Seattle will be the second Saturday show in the States this year, after the Denver show two weeks ago. There are many big U2 fans who came to the show in Denver who will be coming to Seattle. So Seattle should have a Denver 3 setlist, with even more setlist changes. I'm not accepting bets on this happening. It could be the Denver show rerun, but shifted a few states west.

Just as the band were going through their setlist motions, I was

also going through my own motions last night, As in Denver, Salt Lake City and Winnipeg, I was down in the front circle, on Edge's side, a few rows from the back rail. However one fab change from previous shows was that I accompanied by a hilarious and rather drunk Hungarian chap, a friend of my host. He was a perfect picture of an excited, animated fan. He was singing, roaring and bouncing around with a huge, happy grin, like every U2 fan seeing the show for the first time should. (Although quite a few fans down in the pit seemed to enjoy the proximity of the band far more than the music they were playing.)

The setlist wasn't the only static feature of last night's show in Edmonton. Edge and Adam both seemed much less energetic compared to previous shows. Bono, however, more than compensated. Last night was a Bono show. He was as hyper as I can recall seeing him for a while. He's always lively, perhaps occasionally 'professionally' so. But last night he was fizzing about the stages and bantering with the audience like he was on a Red Bull drip. A hyper Bono always makes for a good concert.

"Welcome to the 3-25 show" he joked during I Will Follow, referring to the lack of seats behind the stage. "Your eyes almost make a circle" he sang moments later.

I suspect a mischievous Canadian had played a sneaky practical joke on Bono before the gig. He started a rambling yarn about hitchhiking in Vancouver. It reminded me of a best-man's speech at a very big wedding. It was a convoluted lead-in to ice-hockey themed band intros. (Bono correctly called it 'ice-hockey', whereas it's just 'hockey' to those error-strewn English speakers in North America.) "Just like rolling the check (cheque / Czech)", Bono said, believing it was a well-known ice-hockey phrase in Canada. There was no response from the crowd. "Rolling the check, is that right?" Silence. "I was told it would be a cool thing to say." Tumbleweed. Someone somewhere was peeing their padded, protective ice-hockey pants.

Fans had passed out red and white balloons before the show, which were waved when the band walked onstage. Bono grabbed one before Elevation, "MY ball. MY ball. I don't have to sing if I don't want to", he mock tantrumed. During Pride he took an Irish tricolour from someone in the pit, kissed it, and said "Peace is possible". "Don't break me", he told the girl he'd brought onstage

to read the lyrics to Heart of Gold by Neil Young, as she squeezed him in her over-excitement.

There was aggressive, over-zealous security shouldering their way through the pit below the bridges as they swung around the stage. If a fan jumped up to touch the bridge as it passed overhead, a burly female steward gave the fan a firm warning shove. One guy actually jumped up, grabbed the bridge, and chin-upped his head to look through it during Until The End Of The World. I'm not sure he actually intended to climb up on the bridge, but he was instantly dumped onto the ground by the steward, although he wasn't chucked out of the gig. My biggest peeve though, was to have security force past me when I'd my eyes closed during Miss Sarajevo, killing the enjoyment of the song. Time for keeping your distance and all.

There was a strange silence after Miss Sarajevo (and the video screen failed to open). Bono was clearly determined to get through his big glory note, as he's not quite made it at the last few shows. He strained, held it, and got there. Then the song ended in silence. Bono looked quite emotional after diving into the challenge of singing his solo. He walked back onto the stage and put his hands onto Phil's shoulders, as if he needed some human contact. I think he really needed a hug.

If there was an 11:00 pm curfew in Winnipeg which caused Moment Of Surrender to be dropped, then there are more relaxed regulations in Edmonton. Last night's show finished around 11:30 pm. Perhaps Alberta is more tolerant of late noise than Manitoba. Yet the stadium in Edmonton is in a residential area, whereas in Winnipeg it ain't, so perhaps the cold just got to U2 in Winnipeg.

Right, gotta go, just landed in Seattle. It can't be five setlists from five, can it ...?

Anaheim 2

Angel Stadium

18th June 2011

The BBC began its first television broadcast on 2nd November 1936. Britain got its second TV channel, BBC2, on 20th April 1964. That was almost thirty years of single setlist telly. I think I may have felt the same deep excitement of creative possibility at last night's show in Anaheim that people may have felt when BBC2 launched. For an exhilaratingly delicious time during the first hour of the show, anything seemed possible. And despite being formed of mostly the same rerun songs just rearranged into a different order, the sheer elation and emotional effect was far in excess of the musical causes.

Bono said in Seattle two weeks ago that being able and allowed to begin again is an important element of the U2 philosophy. I wish they'd do it in their concerts far more often. The first hour of the show last night was almost as exciting as the first shows in Barcelona in 2009, and in Turin in 2010. But then, gigs can't help but become exciting when the usual encore comes at the start.

There had been lots of speculation amongst fans during the last few days over what changes, if any, U2 would make to the setlist for Anaheim 2, after the stultifying lack of variation at the preceding seven shows. I was being cynical, believing they'd swap in New Year's Day for I Will Follow, and perhaps Angel of Harlem (the shows were in Angel Stadium) for Stay, and leave it at that.

Well, I got that one wrong.

Only one song actually received its 360 tour premiere last night (although three more had their first plays since Mexico). But it was a twangy, twisted, exhilarating belter, with Larry giving his poor drumkit its biggest battering yet. I was out in the spacious area behind Edge's Red Zone with my lovely new Mexican-American buddy Jovita. She's seen several shows so far this year, including in Mexico City. After Even Better Than The Real Thing, she turned to me and said "The moment of truth ...". We both waited. I expected to see Edge walk up to his piano for New Year's Day. When he didn't, I then expected to hear Adam and Larry start Out Of

Control. When they didn't, I had my first exciting "Wow! TWO TV channels!" moment. I recognised The Fly immediately from the first chord, as it had been rehearsed several times before both concerts. Jovita didn't click it at first, then suddenly turned to me with a huge grin, "THE FLY!" I couldn't help but give her a happy hug.

The band were all pumped up with adrenalin by something. Cod psychology theories abounded afterwards last night. I became Cathal Jung. I speculated that the band were full of nervous energy from playing a new setlist outside their familiar, safe, same-old 360 routine: "Where are we? What? WHAT?! Can't be! That's the encore! What the feck?! Larry, help!"

I theorised that perhaps U2 gigs these days really become dazzlingly alive when the band are full of that nervous energy. By making the setlist more familiar and comfortable for themselves, they could end up making the show a bit duller and less dramatic for their fans – certainly for the hardcore eejits who travel to multiple shows.

Every single one of the dozens of nutjob itinerant U2 fans I caught up with after the show were positively beaming, zipping about and raving about "best" this and "favourite" that. Several of the fans who had travelled to many shows during the entire tour had their (theoretical) last show last night. They all still have time to get tempted to return for more, and they probably will if U2 can keep playing shows like last night's. The cynically easy point to make was that there should be more than a little of the collective euphoria everyone felt last night after every concert. After all, the BBC have dozens of channels these days.

Another piece of wild speculation was that the show was a Glastonbury rehearsal. I imagined the band huddled together for a Braveheart pre-gig pep talk from Larry: "Right lads! COME ON! THIS is Glastonbury! Tonight! Let's do it! Let's have these bastards! COME ON!" They'll completely destroy Glasto if they just maintain the same energy and intensity.

My usual method for these little gig yarns is to make a mental note during the show of anything novel, different, exciting or whatever, and make a bulletpoint list in a Word file after. It's easy with a familiar setlist. My memory had no chance of keeping up last night, especially with Bono. It looked like Bono had been studying

the 'Lenny Kravitz Guide to Cheerleading a Stadium Concert'. Lenny had worked hard to successfully get the entire stadium on its feet, dancing and clapping. Bono was continually making even more of his usual quips, asides, and piss-taking the band (e.g. Larry is to play a Chrysler in the new Transformers, Edge would be a very sensitive Malibu neighbour who would take your trash out). However he also tried Lenny's trick of focusing on individual sides of the stadium to whip them up, but he's a bit out of practice at that trick as it didn't work so well. (And I hope to God he doesn't try that at Glasto ...)

U2 are clearly still a big Saturday night out in LA. I walked around and across the back of the field from behind the Red Zone on Adam's side to Edge's side before the show. Everyone was looking at everyone to see if anyone was someone. Unfortunately for them I was no-one. I'm a bit of a people watcher anyway, but last night far, far more people returned my eye contact than usual. And they very often held it too, clearly trying to work out if this scruffy, lanky, scraggly beardy chap with the chiselled, rock star looks was your man from the Kings Of Leon. Then they looked away quickly, probably cos they saw Cindy Crawford going in the opposite direction. (Cindy didn't recognise me either, but then I'm a bit hairier than our last 'U2 LA' date.)

But the beautiful party people were out in designer droves. They sure know how to enjoy themselves, and to express their enjoyment. Many were very merrily drunk. It was easily the best atmosphere yet at the shows in the States and Canada. Almost unbelievably, the stadium was literally, structurally, bouncing. And I swear this is not Hollywood hyperbole. During I Will Follow (which was easily the bestest ever I Will Follow), and again during Vertigo, the small overhanging middle tier of seats in front of the executive boxes, was rocking up and down. It actually looked a little worryingly unstable. I've used the phrase metaphorically countless times, but I've never actually seen a stadium physically bounce during a show. (I took some video, but haven't checked it yet. I hope it comes out clear enough to view the movement.)

Gosh, too many words already. BBC3 at Baltimore please!

Random observations:

- I had some texts just after gates opened that the GA entry was again a huge mess-up. Happily everyone was distracted from complaining afterwards (except for one friend whose elderly mum got injured in the rush and didn't receive any attention for too long).

- Bono had an on night, Edge did too.

- No nostalgic Joshua Tree video during Streets, nor Berlin video during One. Instead, One had coloured images of bison running across the screen.

- The video team had a very lovely little new setlist flub. Someone pressed the button for the Magnificent video (when it wasn't on the setlist), then realised their mistake and switched it off again.

- There was a very fun disco going on in the spaces behind the Red Zone during Crazy Tonight.

- No special video or text effects for The Fly - yet.

- I thought I heard some new melodic intro to City Of Blinding Lights, but no-one else I asked remembered hearing it.

- Bono asked for flowers during an even more intense, extended UTEOTW. Sam brought some out to Bono on the bridge. Bono grabbed Sam for a very brief but funny dance. Edge seemed to be riffing more during the "ring those bells" part of UTEOTW too.

- Edge played a bit longer at the end of Moment Of Surrender as Bono read a poem.

- I've just been bribed with a \$500 American Airlines voucher to wait from 3pm to 11pm for my flight from Los Angeles to DC! Sorta makes up a little bit of the losses from last year - yay! Maybe I can get from Pittsburgh to Moncton now. I think it must be because the Claw's mommy is parked outside the LAX terminal :)

Moncton Magnetic Hill Music Festival 30th July 2011

It's a well-known feature of human psychology that we want what we don't have, and don't fully appreciate what we do. Moncton was the 88th U2 360° show I attended. And the last. Knowing you're

going to do something again may detract from your enjoyment. Knowing you're not, adds to it. How much more would you enjoy a sherry, a shrimp or a sh ... whatever, if you knew it was the last one you would ever have? I'd sometimes found it easy to opt out of fully relishing a 360 show cos I knew I'd be seeing a few more later. Moncton wasn't a place for such (or any) luxuries. Every song had to be picked up, sniffed slowly, and then delicately nibbled on and savoured as a delectable, final treat. It could be the last time that I would see some of these songs performed. It could be the last time some of the songs will be performed. And it was the last time U2, crew, and fans would see the Claw (in its U2 360° outfit at least).

Whereas farewells can often be difficult, and weepy, it was a muddy goodbye to U2 360 in Moncton on Saturday. It had rained all day from early morning. When the gates opened, the ground got churned over by thousands of fans hithering and thithering.

Sean, Nikki and I sat in a cafe in downtown Moncton until 3:00 pm, watching the torrential rain outside. I wondered how the hardy fans in the GA line were faring, as they had to sit or stand for around ten hours in the rain.

I got into the arena around 5:00 pm, just as the rain was easing off. I had a ticket for the cheap seats behind the stage. Strangely, there weren't any separate ticket checks or wristbands for fans with GA tickets, so anybody could walk from the seats onto the field. I walked into the pit on Adam's side, then wiggled through the surprisingly thin crowd, and left the pit on Edge's side, collecting the blue paper wristband which replaced the usual stamp for pit access.

I met three refined Brits (Brendan, Kevin and Martin) in the bar field at the top of the hill. We had a few beers during Carney, then moved down into the pit for the tour's second best support act, Arcade Fire.

Dutch Paul was bouncing around at the back of the pit on Edge's side.

"Look, Bono's in the tunnel behind you," he told me.

I turned around and there he was. Bono, standing on his own, in full stage clobber, was watching Arcade Fire from the front of the tunnel that passed underneath the stand behind the stage. Around ten fans had noticed him, and were dancing or standing around, casting occasionally glances back to see if he was still there. I sneaked

a peak back during 'Rebellion' and Bono was having a little bop to what he later called Arcade Fire's "miraculous event, chaos" warming up his audience. Larry was also watching, leaning back against a stack of tour storage boxes.

After Arcade Fire, Brendan, Kevin and I filtered through the crowd towards the centre back of the pit. We found space about three rows in from the back rail around the 7 o'clock position, which is my favourite spot to see the show from, as I can see the whole band and screen, there's some Edge and Bono action on the bridge overhead, and there's plenty of action on the nearby outer stage too.

My criteria for enjoying a show are to see it with friends, to have a few beers first, to have a great spot in the pit, and to see Bono dancing during the support band. All criteria were fully met. I even ticked off a spontaneous new criteria: to have two fighter jets roar past a few times. It looked like it was going to a tippety top show. And it was.

Even Better, The Fly, Until The End Of The World, Zooropa, Vertigo, Out Of Control were all propane-fuelled blasters. Stay was quite gorgeous, with Bono freestyling an extra verse at the end about the end of the tour. I even loved Sunday Bloody Sunday, when U2 played it like it was one of the the first times in 1983, and not the thousandth time in 2011.

Some favourite moments of the show were when Larry played an extended drum outro to Elevation, with Bono egging him on; when Bono sang a lovely surprise snippet of Springhill Mining Disaster after Still Haven't Found (Maria, Joanne, Suzie and I stopped off briefly at the Springhill Music Festival, just fifty miles from Moncton, on Sunday evening after a fun day-trip and scrumptious lobster dinner in Nova Scotia); when Larry burst out laughing when he noticed the new U2 crew version of the 'nodding heads' video during Crazy Tonight and pointed it out to Adam.

The show and the tour closed with an emotive, introspection-inducing version of 40. As Edge's bass warbled and Adam's guitar wahed, I closed my eyes let my thoughts drift back to 30th June 2009, opening night in the Nou Camp in Barcelona. Larry had opened the 360 tour, as he had been the first member of U2 onstage in Barcelona, before hammering the intro to Breathe. So it was

fitting that Larry closed the 360 tour with his short drum solo at the end of 40, and then said thanks and farewell on behalf of the band, before U2 left the stage together. U2 360 was over.