

Me & U2

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Foreword

“Achtung Bono! It’s a long way down!”

I was in a large crowd blocking Regent Street in London on a cold Friday evening in March 2009. Rock and roll had stopped the rush hour traffic. U2 were playing their new single, *Get On Your Boots*, high above me on a balcony on the eighth floor of the BBC radio building. Bono, at a location named vertigo far removed from his audience in the street below, had climbed onto and was leaning out over the waist-high railing separating him from a fatal fall. Thankfully, he didn’t trip through the wires, the line stayed on the horizon, it wasn’t his last night on earth, he didn’t fall down.

I’d read online earlier that day that U2 were playing a free “secret” concert on the roof of the BBC. I had to be there. I live in London. I’m a U2 fan.

Fortunately I only had a short bus journey across London to go and see U2. I hate long bus journeys. In August 2008 I was on holiday in Indonesia and faced the dismal prospect of a bumpy eight-hour slog across the island of Sulawesi. I needed something that would help the time pass faster. I had an iPod with me, and I decided to listen to the entire U2 back catalogue in chronological order. To many people this would make a long, boring bus journey even more torturous; for me it was something to relish. I listened to every album in sequence from *Boy* to *Rattle And Hum*. The bus journey passed swiftly and pleasurably. And even better, as the drive had been shorter than anticipated, I could continue my U2 marathon from *Achtung Baby* to *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* on the return journey.

U2 had provided me with a musical time-machine. During my epic U2-athon on the bus, I started to reminisce about each album, where I was in my life when it had been released, and all the concerts I had attended on the subsequent tour. I realised that I’d been a U2 fan for twenty-five years. I also became aware of the many, many occasions that their music had given me profound inspiration, and had helped me cope with the toughest times in my life (including spiritual searching, and dealing with grief and heartbreak). And thus the initial idea for a book began to form. This

book is an exploration of the numerous times and multitude of ways that U2 and their music have touched me. It's my unremarkable story through the prism of their remarkable music.

I've never met Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton or Larry Mullen Jr. I've seen them in person, sometimes up close, but they were always on a stage whilst I was always in a crowd. The title of this book is a presumptuous, and perhaps misleading, misnomer. *Me and U2* may suggest that I have had some kind of relationship with U2. I have had a relationship with U2 in the same way that millions of people have had a relationship with U2, and millions more people have had relationships with Madonna or Manchester United: as a fan (and occasionally as a critic), drawing pleasure, inspiration and consolation from their art.

I've been a U2 fan for most of my life with varying levels of intensity: from borderline obsession in my teenage years, to sporadic outbreaks of techno-induced apathy in my twenties. From hearing *Sunday Bloody Sunday* for the first time in 1983, and being captivated by Bono at Live Aid in 1985, from the joyous rush of my first concert at the Point Depot in Dublin in 1989, through the Zoo TV, Elevation and Vertigo tours, U2 have been a constant and conspicuous element of my life. I have bought U2 CDs and DVDs, albums and singles, books and T-shirts, concert tickets and condoms. I bought the goods because I like the group. U2 have touched my life on several levels. Whether you're a U2 fan or not, I hope you will enjoy reading about how my life has been enriched by their music and by the men who make it.

Self Aid

U2 were frustratingly quiet after Live Aid, or so I thought. I was in the initial rush of a typical teenager's obsession with a rock group, but there was no daily news on my new musical heroes. Back then, teenage fans of boy or girl bands in the UK could read updates on the trivialities and goings-on of their pop idols almost every day in the tabloid press. There were weekly glossy magazines with posters and features of pop stars produced just for them. Teenagers have an insatiable need for pretty pictures and petty details about their favourite groups; bedroom walls don't get covered with homework. I wanted to know where each member of U2 was every day, and what he was doing: what he had for breakfast, what colour socks he wore, which was his favourite character in *The A Team*, what subjects he liked and hated at school - all the essential stuff.

Gavin bought *Wide Awake In America* on imported vinyl. I worshipped *Bad*, and devoured the Live Aid video and the *Wide Awake In America* record daily. U2 had started to represent something very big and very important to me. They had stopped being a band that my brothers listened to and instead had become icons that I looked up to. I instinctively recognised and unconsciously craved Bono's confidence and charisma. I even thought he looked extremely cool in his knee-high suede boots, leather trousers and mullet. I deified U2. Yet they were sitting in their cloud somewhere and weren't doing anything!

In retrospect, U2 had been surprisingly busy. They had finished the tour for *The Unforgettable Fire* in 1985 and ordinarily would have had a year or two ensconced in a studio to record their new album. However, somehow, incredibly, whilst writing and recording *The Joshua Tree*, they still managed to do a short tour of America (alongside various other big-name artists for Amnesty International), play a benefit concert in Ireland, and Bono and Edge separately worked on two collaborations: Bono with Clannad, and The Edge with Sinéad O'Connor.

The world seemed to go mad for benefit concerts immediately after Live Aid. There was Farm Aid in the United States, in addition to Amnesty's *Conspiracy Of Hope* tour, and Self Aid in Ireland. At

the time, as a child, I didn't really understand what Self Aid was about. Now, as an adult, I struggle to see what the point was. It had been billed as a concert to help create jobs in Ireland as there was widespread unemployment. Benefit concerts raise money, awareness and let people get drunk whilst watching live bands. I don't know how they expected to create jobs. A job is for, well, a defined period of contracted time, not just for a gig. Self Aid raised Irish money, raised awareness of Irish musical talent and Irish unemployment, and let Irish people get drunk whilst watching Irish bands. Bizarrely, there were also over 1,000 jobs "pledged" (and presumably advertised and filled). It is easy to be cynical now, and whilst accepting and applauding the organisers' intentions, the real opportunity created was for Irish bands to come together and play to an Irish audience – which is an entirely noble cause in itself.

U2, predictably, were the big stars of the day, in a bill which included Van Morrison, The Pogues, Christy Moore, Thin Lizzy (with Bob Geldof on vocals – Phil Lynott had died earlier that year), Elvis Costello and Rory Gallagher amongst others. (I was actually related to Rory Gallagher although I never met him.)

Bono had clearly been enjoying the backstage all-star shenanigans and was a bit pished when U2's turn to play arrived. There was a hilarious moment when he stepped on Larry's drum podium before *Pride* but fell backwards onto his arse. He managed a surprisingly nimble back-roll before springing up onto his feet.

U2 had planned to play four songs, including rolling out two new cover versions: a suitably rough, disjointed *C'mon Everybody* and an angry, idiosyncratic mash-up of *Maggie's Farm* (thereby exposing me to my first Bob Dylan song). They also introduced a new version of *Sunday Bloody Sunday* which dropped Larry's militaristic drum intro in favour of a slower, more melancholic start with just Edge's guitar. When their fifteen minutes were up they left the stage, but they hadn't played *Bad!* And I badly wanted them to play *Bad*. If I had have been the stage manager I would have grabbed them and demanded, "Get youse back out there and play *Bad* right this very minute". Thankfully the unknown but completely venerable stage manager did just that. U2 had barely left the stage for a minute before they reappeared and Bono announced, "A man back there says we can do one more." And a few hundred thousand out here

say it too. I don't know whether any of this was planned or not, but Bono then turned to Edge and Larry and asked, "Can you do *Bad*?" Edge checked his gadgets and nodded. They could, they did, and it was good, very, very good.

The video cassette we recorded *Self Aid* on became the next victim of extreme overuse. I now had another thirty minutes to add to my daily U2 video diet. As much as I had loved *Live Aid* (which was an awful lot), it was knocked off my top spot by *Self Aid*. Five songs obviously beat two, especially as four of the five songs were surprises with enough variety, both between and within them, to demand repeat viewing. If *Live Aid* had been a dramatic and unexpected two-nil away win, then *Self Aid* was a much-anticipated, but still glorious, five-nil home victory.

The only, but quite major, U2 problems for me now were: what's next? And when?

The Joshua Tree

My long wait for a new U2 album finally ended in early 1987, just before I hit adolescence later that summer. I went from being a football fanatical boy, to taking tentative baby steps into the adult world. I discovered staying up late, talking to girls, and my first taste of independence. *The Joshua Tree* was released in the spring of 1987 and was the record that defined my summer of coming of age.

Conor had bought *With Or Without You*, the first single from *The Joshua Tree*, on seven-inch vinyl when it was released in March. I loved *With Or Without You*. I thought it was a very unusual song initially - it was like absolutely nothing else being made in 1987. (For example, it competed and lost against such worthy songs as *Respectable* by Mel & Kim for the number one spot in the UK singles chart. *Where The Streets Have No Name* was kept from number one by *Never Gonna Give You Up* by Rick Astley - before sarcastic viral marketing had been invented.) After a few listens I started to adore the haunting, powerful beauty of *With Or Without You*. It is a classic 45, one of the greatest singles of the 1980s.

Conor also bought *The Joshua Tree* on vinyl when it was released (my sole record purchase to date had been the soundtrack album for

The A Team). It was the first time I'd eagerly anticipated a new album by a band and I was nervous that I wouldn't actually like it, that my boys wouldn't be able to write songs that I liked as much as *Bad*, *Pride* or *The Electric Co.* My fears were smashed upon first listen. *The Joshua Tree* was U2's first masterpiece. I loved it. The first three songs (*Where The Streets Have No Name*, *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*, *With Or Without You*) caused the poor, abused needle on our bedroom record player to be constantly hooked up and placed back at the start of the record for considerable repeat playing. The last three songs (*One Tree Hill*, *Exit*, *Mothers Of The Disappeared*) were also huge favourites of mine. U2 had stepped up to and casually leaped over the mark in my (uncritical) hopes and expectations. The clouds they sat on received a shinier golden polish and rose even higher into the heavens of my veneration.

U2 were everywhere in 1987. They had set off on a tour of America in the spring and then Europe in the summer. They were on TV, on the radio, in the papers and magazines. My addiction to news and features about them was actually being met. I was overdosing weekly and I was becoming even more of a U2 obsessive. I scoured the TV schedules every evening in the Belfast Telegraph (an evening newspaper which was delivered to our house every day), for any mention of U2 in any of the shows. Gavin and Conor bought the Melody Maker, NME or Sound magazine most weeks and I would pore through those looking for any snippets of U2 news. Yet I was still looking at them through the awed eyes of pre-adolescence.

My little crew of muckers with Bugsy, Jason and Roddy began to expand. We had always known the other boys of our age in the area, and would often play football with them, but we rarely knocked on their doors to invite them to come out to play with us. Decky was my age, went to my school and lived just a few seconds down the road from my house. In the summer of 1987 he was a trailblazer for me into a whole new world. Decky was smart, charismatic and witty, and was very popular with the girls around our part of the estate. He also liked *The Joshua Tree*. He was an alpha male and I became his little beta mucker that summer, the Penfold to his Dangermouse. We used to stay outside talking, climbing trees, or just walking around for hours after all our friends were in bed. I felt like the trusted confidant of a very important and wise leader, and I

would look forward immensely to our private late-night chats. We would talk about which girls we liked, and speculate on our chances of getting a snog from them. We talked about the other boys in the area, and about what our elder brothers and sisters were doing. Decky had two older sisters who both seemed very beautiful and glamorous, and one older brother who lived and worked in London (which to me at that time appeared to be galaxies away, and certainly not part of the “same” country). I would feel disappointed if Decky went home in the evening at the same time as everyone else and we didn’t stay out analysing the day’s crucial events.

Some evenings we would sit in the kitchen at Decky’s parents’ house for hours. His mother and father were extremely friendly, laid-back and wise. As Decky was their fourth child to hit adolescence, they knew that they needed to give him and his friends some space. My parents were equally accommodating with providing space for my elder brothers’ and sister’s friends, but I was beginning to feel claustrophobic at home and I had started to crave my own privacy, my own space, my own liberation away from my family. Decky’s parents trusted him, and besides, I wasn’t exactly the sort of rebellious tearaway that parents become terrified their son might befriend. Decky’s kitchen had two benefits: it was indoors (and therefore warm and dry) and it had a stereo which could play cassettes. We recorded the top 40 charts off BBC Radio 1 every Sunday onto audio cassettes and played them back during the week.

My burgeoning adolescence began a little too late for me to consider going to see U2 on *The Joshua Tree* tour. U2 had announced four concerts in Ireland: one in Belfast, and two at Croke Park in Dublin in June; and one in Cork in August (interestingly, they have never played in Derry). Peter went to the first concert at Croke Park; Ciara, Gavin and Conor had all got tickets to the second gig.

There were two features on Northern Irish television evening news the day after the Belfast gig, which I recorded on our video and watched dozens of times. There was a fascinating snippet of the start of *Where The Streets Have No Name*. The Edge’s guitar wasn’t working properly during the first verse, so only Bono’s vocals and Adam and Larry’s instruments could be heard. Bono turned to The Edge as the chorus starts and asked, “Are ya ok Edge?” Finally his guitar started jangling again. Larry also dropped one of his sticks

during the song but quickly snatched another and kept playing, barely missing a beat. During *Sunday Bloody Sunday* some people in the audience started waving Irish tricolours, others began waving Union Jacks. In Belfast, particularly in the late 1980s, that could have turned into a very nasty situation. Bono somehow managed to defuse it by roaring, “Put down your flags, we don’t need any flags, we’re sick of ALL flags”.

U2’s next gig after Belfast was their big triumphant homecoming concert in Dublin. Coaches had been organised to take the concert goers from Derry to Croke Park. It was a five hours journey, most of which would have been used by all those aboard to get themselves very, very drunk. Gavin has told me some great stories about the day of his concert. He had to get up and leave the house at 6:00 am on the Sunday morning to catch the concert coach. Apparently, just as he was leaving the house, he spotted many other people leaving their homes at the same time, in an uncoordinated but spontaneously synchronised, tired eye-rubbing walk to the bus stop for the exodus to Dublin. U2’s concerts at Croke Park on the north side of Dublin in the eighties were big typical Irish homecoming celebrations: very messy and very drunken. However the shops in Northern Ireland weren’t allowed to sell alcohol on Sundays. Therefore anyone who didn’t have the foresight to buy their drinks on Saturday had to wait until the coach had made it through the border checkpoint at Aughnacloy in county Tyrone, and passed into county Monaghan in the Republic of Ireland where the licensing laws were not so strict. There was then a desperate rush to buy some booze to consume on the bus. Gavin was 16 years old; he bought a two-litre bottle of cider.

Someone brought the Joshua Tree tour programme back from the concert and I read it cover-to-cover (well, there wasn’t a lot to actually *read*). I was especially fascinated by the tour schedule and would often read through the list of gig destinations. It was an absorbing geography lesson to see all the places mentioned. I’d heard of some places like Las Vegas and Los Angeles, but I hadn’t heard of many others like Tempe and Connecticut. I couldn’t imagine what it would be like to travel around America or through Europe. It all seemed so glamorous and unattainable. U2’s international success, and their apparent comfort and ease with it, was both inspirational

and other-worldly.

Later in the year, a weekly ITV documentary series called *World In Action* broadcast an hour-long program about U2 called *Anthem For The 80s*, with fabulous footage from the first Croke Park concert. Again, I recorded it on video and devoured it numerous times afterwards. The first thing that struck me about the concerts was the almighty crush of people at the front of the crowd. It looked unbearable. The crowd was squashed so tightly and being jostled around so much that I was actually glad that I hadn't gone to the gig. And most of the crowd were completely pushed out of their heads, many with glazed eyes, swaying loosely, some only being held upright by the people next to them. I was a timid 14 year-old and I thought it would be impossible to enjoy a concert in a huge, drunken melee like that.

There is a superb moment in the documentary when Bono first walks onto the stage for the gig during the start of *Where The Streets Have No Name*. He walks over to the microphone when Edge's guitar intro is reaching its peak. He grabs the mic, says "How ya doin? Ok. Go!", as Larry starts to hammer out the rhythm. Thousands of pale Irish arms wave in the air like a field with the first shoots of snowdrops in spring. Bono leans away from the microphone but can still be heard shouting, "Up! Up! Up!" He waves his hand in time to the rhythm being pounded out by the bass drum, directing the crowd, controlling them like a puppeteer, to jump up, jump up and get down. The camera pans back to show the crowd, and there is a phenomenal shot of the squashed audience responding to Bono, jumping together in an anarchic orgy of flailing arms and cavorting bodies. It's like they're bouncing together on a massive beating trampoline on the Croke Park pitch.

That little clip became my new favourite U2 moment. It was so inconceivably cool. Imagine having the power to make a stadium of people go happily bonkers by repeating a little monosyllabic word three times and a few waves of your hand! Imagine! This was clearly a very powerful form of magic. I had my first personal rock star fantasy. I imagined that *I* was Bono on the stage at Croke Park; *I* had 80,000 people instantly respond to every noise or slight gesture *I* made; *I* basked in the waves of adulation that flooded over me from a huge adoring crowd; *I* was the one who swaggered onto

the stage last, and to the greatest cheer, because *I* was the star of the show. Every teenager has their rock or pop idol that they dream of becoming. I wanted to be Bono walking onstage at the start of *Streets*.

Where The Streets Have No Name became my new favourite U2 song. The first two minutes of the song was the first piece of music I'd ever heard which possessed an inexplicable primal appeal; it seemed to nudge and awaken something very profound within me. The deep, murky intensity that resolves into the synthesised organs and then builds alongside the chimes of Edge's guitar at the very start of the song had the power to move me every time I heard it – especially when I listened to it through earphones with the sound turned up whilst lying on my bed with my eyes closed. The low rumble in the first thirty seconds sounds like a universe spontaneously forming itself out of a nebulous nothingness, and then deciding to create its own big bang afterwards. The searing, exponential crescendo that follows and then the arching vocals of the chorus are huge, sonic blast-offs into the heavens. The lyrics are full of yearning but the music is almost unbearably joyous, with the widescreen cinematic qualities that Brian Eno was encouraging U2 to aim for. *Streets* is an unashamedly big bastard of a song that grabs you by your lapels and propels you headfirst into the stratosphere. It's the U2 that their fans love, and it's the U2 that their critics hate.

(What I still can't get my head around is that *Where The Streets Have No Name* was written and recorded in 1986 when songs like Billy Ocean's *When The Going Gets Tough* and Europe's *The Final Countdown* were topping the charts.)

U2 released (a slightly modified) *Streets* as a single in August 1987. Derry City were playing a match in Cork around this time and my parents, Darragh and I set off on an overnight trip to see the game. I remember sitting in the back seat of the car as we drove across Ireland, listening to RTE 2 FM. Every hour or so, they played the single version of *Streets* and I would be totally absorbed in it for a few minutes. As soon as it had finished I started a (non-final) countdown until the next time it would be played. I passed the time on the long drive by keeping a close eye on the little digital clock on the car dashboard, counting down each hour: five minutes flew, fifty-five minutes crawled.

Rattle And Hum

I couldn't sing. I didn't know how to play guitar, and I wasn't particularly bothered about learning. I was drawn to drums, particularly invisible drums that I could take with me everywhere. I was an air drummer, and a U2 air-drummer to be more precise. And not only that, I was an excellent U2 air-drummer. I could play all of U2's songs on my air drums. But I didn't even need to move my hands. I could thought-drum every beat Larry Mullen had ever produced - or so I thought.

My U2 air-drumming career began when I borrowed *Under A Blood Red Sky* from the video rental shop in 1988 (the copy we had recorded off *The Tube* in 1983 had been taped over with something like *Cagney and Lacey*). I knew all the songs and all the words before I saw the video. After watching it a few times I knew all the songs, all the words and all the drum beats. It's an awesome video to use to teach yourself how to air drum. The clear, powerful drum beats in songs like *I Will Follow* and *New Year's Day* are fairly easy to pick up. Then there is the drumming intro to *Gloria* to extend your range of playing across the full kit. My main achievement though was to believe that I had mastered the rapid, intricate, tribal drum solo at the start *I Threw A Brick Through A Window* at full speed on the snare drum and tom-toms that I pictured in front of me. However, the first song I ever learned to air drum was *Sunday Bloody Sunday*, and all because of that unmistakable intro:

Duh-duh-duh-duh - -DUH

(bom bom)

duh-duh-DUH

(bom)

duh-duh-DUH

(bom)

duh-duh-duh-duh - -DUH

(bom bom)

duh-duh-DUH

(bom)

duh-duh-DUH

(bom)

DUH

(Cue Edge – *waoh-waoh-waoh-waoh*)

In Derry in the mid-to-late 1980s teenagers would be in one of three musical camps: metal fans, chuckies or fraggles. Chuckies liked pop music, wore tracksuits, played football and weren't very bright. Fraggles liked The Cure, The Smiths, and Joy Division, wore black clothes (goths were a subspecies of fraggle), and (similar to indie teenagers of every generation) considered themselves isolated and misunderstood. U2 transcended this divide and had followers in all three camps.

Gavin was one of the main boys in the developing Derry fraggle scene. When Conor became a goth he joined Gavin both socially and, later, musically. They would often bring their fraggle chums around to our house. Chuckies starting calling our house 'Fraggle Rock'. I often had fraggles in the older years at school tell me, "Oh you're Gav's wee brother". "No I'm not, I actually have my own identity", I would reply with earnest defiance.

In 1987 Gavin and Conor had formed a band with three of their fraggle friends: Ciaran, Vinny and Gary. They called themselves The Hedonists, which was unintentional sarcasm on their part. Whilst all five of them were good, typical, underage drinkers who spent weekends getting drunk on very cheap or very strong lager in the unofficially allocated fraggle section of the city walls, they were *shoe-gazers*. They all had long, tangled, unbrushed hair which they would let fall over their faces as they stood motionless looking at their feet wherever they were. Live on stage they looked like bashful cavemen, swaying awkwardly and un-rhythmically to their songs, occasionally standing next to and facing into the walls. But they were good; very, very good.

Gavin played drums and Conor played guitar. They rehearsed in the newly-opened North West Music Collective, which was known imaginatively as 'The Collective' (there was an abject dearth of original names in the late eighties). The Collective was an old shell of a building just inside the city walls that had been opened as a place for teenagers in bands to use as a rehearsal space. The Collective provided all the equipment needed for rehearsals or for gigs for free. They ran guitar and drum lessons, and it was also possible to make and edit videos there. It was a one-stop-shop for

Derry bands wanting to become the next U2.

The Hedonists also rehearsed in the detached garage next to Fraggie Rock. They were allowed to redecorate and refit the garage, and to use it for whatever they wanted. They did it up fraggley and decided to call it The Parrot Club. Gavin bought his own drum kit and kept it there. This instantly fuelled my own wild notions of progressing from an accomplished thought-drummer to proper rock n roll mega-stardom. I would go out to the garage occasionally and thrash around on the drum kit, going through my Larry Mullen repertoire (*Gloria, Sunday Bloody Sunday, Pride*) – but ON REAL DRUMS! However, I quickly discovered that my attempts to play the drums from the start of *I Threw A Brick Through A Window* needed considerable work, or for U2 to re-record the song with Larry playing it at half-speed.

Sometimes I listened to a cassette tape of *Under A Blood Red Sky* at full volume on a walkman and tried to play along. I imagined I was Larry playing drums for U2 whilst wearing headphones like he did during *Bad* at Live Aid. However even a softly hit and muffled drum is much, much louder than the maximum output of a walkman, so I usually lost my place in the song completely, and then played far too fast or far too slow. I would have to stop playing entirely to check the song, only to discover that I was playing the chorus whilst Bono was singing the verse. The inconsiderate bugger always stubbornly refused to follow my lead, messing up our big performance at Wembley with his poor timing.

In 1988 I also joined the Collective. I attended some drum lessons but didn't stick with them as I got frustrated by the lack of progress. I could play everything the teacher demonstrated fairly easily but I had to sit and wait whilst some poor cack-handed and thoroughly un-rhythmic soul attempted for the seventeenth time to play a basic beat. "Looooook! It's fucking eeeeasy!" I would be silently screaming whilst ducking another drum stick ricocheting off a cymbal.

I could play a bit. But Gav could play a lot. I used to love going to see The Hedonists play live. Whilst not being the most visually exciting band in our garage, they were certainly the best musically. They made a four-track demo tape which was incredible. But not only could Gav play drums, he was also very creative with his beats.

You'll detect, and hopefully forgive, some brotherly bias here, but he wrote some fabulous, tricky-to-play drum beats which matched the songs very well. When The Hedonists played live I would often end up watching Gav, and not just because he was the only person on the stage actually moving. He threw his hands around his kit with such speed and precision I would be entranced – and quite jealous. I knew I could play, but I also knew Gav was better. And he had the confidence that I lacked. I had the usual teenage dreams of being in a successful band. But I had a fear of playing in public. I wasn't comfortable with the exposure and potential ridicule that could bring (and that it did actually bring on my one and only live show drumming in a band.)

U2 finally achieved their first number one single in the UK with *Desire* in October 1988. I actually felt some pride when it got to number one, feeling like I was a part of the grand U2 effort to top the charts, as I had bought it on seven-inch and, more importantly, I had then been willing the song there the whole week like a gambler at the Grand National. It was very important for me that U2 would get the top spot because it had been a major musical injustice worthy of a steward's enquiry that none of the singles from *The Joshua Tree* had made it to number one.

The number one single was revealed in a two hour show on Sunday evenings on BBC Radio 1. Every song in the singles chart was played, from number forty down to number one. The DJs were very adept at building up the excitement whilst counting down the charts, withholding the identity of the number one song until the very final moment. It was sometimes possible to guess which song was number one by a process of elimination and I was hoping I could second-guess this for *Desire*. I listened impatiently to the show trying to pick up clues about how high up the chart *Desire* had entered. When the DJ had revealed what song was number two, and it wasn't U2, I knew immediately that the boys had done it. Yes! U2! Number one! De-si-i-i-i-er! I went to school the next day feeling as happy as if Derry City had won a cup final.

Adolescent boys need football teams and bands to help them form an identity and to obtain peer acceptance. Derry City and U2 were very large elements of my teenage identity. If you had asked me simply, "Who are you?" at various points in my life, how

would I have answered? Well, with my name obviously, but that's only a label to help you identify me from other people; my name isn't my identity anymore than a song's title is its tune (unless it's *Oops Upside Your Head*). There is a scale of transience for the other possible definitions I could offer for my identity. Some answers are particularly temporary like "a student" or "a teacher". Other answers e.g. "an Irishman", "a U2 fan" and "a Derry City supporter" occupy positions towards the permanent end of my identity scale. Just as I shared the joy of a big Derry City victory because I felt a member of that clan, I was excited and proud when U2 finally got to the top of the singles charts because I felt that they were my band - and my band was number one.

My little posse of chums had grown and was growing (including Smarties, Pete, Benson, Tufty, Micháel, Christy and Dok). We were starting to become rather naughty in our generally mild-mannered, undisaffected youth. We weren't quite a gang but we gave ourselves the moniker of the 'Foyle Springs Lads' (or FSL - we were also bound by the national moratorium on original names). Some of my more nationalistic chums called us the 'Foyle Springs Republican Youth' (FSRY). The FSL stayed up late, or camped out in tents in the grassy areas of the estate, threw the occasional petrol bomb (on a deserted road in a small warehouse area nearby - we didn't want anyone to get hurt), and sometimes ran across all the back gardens of people's houses from one end of the street to the other, climbing over the fences separating the houses in a mass, raucous scramble. Someone daubed "FSL" in paint on a wall nearby to mark our territory. We were clearly mad, bad and dangerous to the notion of teenage rebelliousness.

I was mostly well behaved when I was out and about with my muckers. I was an impeccably behaved and hard-working swot at school. Sadly, I saved all my teenage rebelliousness for home. I had started to drift away from my family. I became very taciturn and introspective when I was at home. I began to conceal what I was doing and where I was going from my parents. I loathed being asked to help out around the home (we all had assigned daily chores to perform). I regarded any kind of request, no matter how reasonable, as the unfair demands of evil slave labourers. I would often respond with irrational and disproportionate aggression, and talk back to

my parents quite nastily. I became selfishly, intentionally withdrawn and wouldn't even talk properly to Gavin or Conor even though I looked up to them immensely. Gavin has told me before that I was like a stranger living in the house. I hated having to account for my time. I detested having to share a bedroom. And I resented any unsolicited interference in my life - whilst still demanding the money or transportation that I needed to go out with my friends.

Rattle And Hum was released a month after *Desire*. I got a cassette copy and borrowed Ciara's cassette walkman to listen to it. Apparently the album received a few negative reviews as people saw U2 becoming a bit too big for their cowboy boots by recording cover versions of The Beatles and Bob Dylan, collaborations with BB King, snippets of Jimi Hendrix, name-dropping Billie Holiday and Elvis Presley, and flirting with blues, gospel and soul music. I didn't actually read any negative reviews, and I probably wouldn't have cared if I had. I just listened to the album and, whilst it didn't match *The Joshua Tree*, I thought it was phenomenal. It was a very educational album as I received my first exposure to many of the other acts. Remarkably, no-one in my family owned any Bob Dylan, Hendrix or Beatles records. U2 were my first musical history teachers. A large part of the criticism for *Rattle And Hum* came from U2's overblown marketing hype for the movie and I think the reputation of *Rattle And Hum* has suffered unnecessarily because of this. It's still a great album, especially the nine new studio songs. *Angel Of Harlem* is one of U2's few great pop songs. *God Part II* is a fabulous tune whose pounding synthesised electronic rhythm was my first suggestive, early hint of techno. (One lyric needs changing though: "Don't trust Lola Cashman, Her text is as a curse, The high courts will get his hat back, If Bono doesn't get it first".) *All I Want Is You* is a beautiful love song; it's one of U2's greatest songs. *Heartland*, *Hawkmoon 269* and *Love Rescue Me* are also great swirling epics.

I tried to use *Rattle and Hum* to describe my escape to a world away from Derry, far from the confines of my meddling family. At the time, blinkered by my own sense of injustice, I didn't see any contradiction between listening to U2's music and treating my parents so poorly. Instead, I occasionally listened to *Rattle And Hum* to try to find a justification for my moodiness, or to rationalise my isolation from my family, not to find yet more arguments

highlighting how I was being unreasonable and that I was in the wrong. Of course, I couldn't really justify myself with music like this, but I still tried. I probably should have become a goth.

Rattle And Hum is the U2 album with my favourite lyrics. Every new song has pithy lines; there is an abundance of inventive imagery and a multitude of great metaphors (*Hawkmoon 269* alone has a long litany of metaphors about our need for love). Bono had cracked open a rich creative vein and was writing lyrics which were a lot less obtuse than his lyrics for *The Joshua Tree*. There wouldn't be any need for a repeat of the Spitting Image sketch from 1987 where Bono sings to the tune of *I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For*, "And nobody knows what I'm on about".

I actually had one heart-stopping moment when I first heard *Love Rescue Me*. I had written some truly terrible, angsty teenage poems and had sent them in early 1988 to Bono at U2 Central Command in Dublin. (St. Columb's then had the distinction of having produced both the greatest, and the worstest, living English language poets.) In my accompanying rambling, sycophantic fan letter I generously informed him that he could use my poems freely as lyrics in his songs, as well as asking him some probing questions. I forget what my questions were (I think I've subconsciously blocked them from recall) but I'm sure they were crucial issues for a ginger fourteen year-old that required urgent resolution. To add egotistical icing to the cringe-making cake, I then thought that I had inspired the line in *Love Rescue Me* where Bono sings about disaffected teenagers discovering themselves in him, and how they want Bono to tell them the secrets that they themselves would hide. Had my embarrassing teenage anxieties and unreasonable requests been immortalised in a song by the biggest band in the world? Whoops!

I made friends with two other passionate U2 fans that were in Decky's class at school just after *Rattle And Hum* was released. These two boys introduced me to an addictive new hobby of collecting and trading bootleg recordings of U2 concerts on cassette, mostly from The Joshua Tree tour. These tapes were an endless source of fascination for me. I loved to listen to the gigs, especially to Bono's little speeches or jokes with the audience. There were some lovely, surprising moments during the gigs. Larry sang *Tequila Sunrise* by The Eagles on one bootleg, from Hampton in Virginia, before

forgetting the words and claiming to be really embarrassed. On a bootleg of the last concert on The Joshua Tree tour in December 1987 in Tempe, Arizona, U2 played a very merry version of *Christmas (Baby Please Come Home)*. For my favourite songs like *Streets*, *Bad* or *With Or Without You*, I would time the length on my flash digital watch to see which were the longest, as a longer song obviously meant a better concert. This hobby gave me even more exposure to the power and drama of U2 concerts. I decided I was now ready to make the big step up and attend one myself. But U2 weren't touring, so I didn't know when the opportunity would arise. I didn't have long to wait.

Lovetown

Derry City had a spectacularly successful season in 1988 – 1989. The Brandywell was arising and a historic treble was on the way when City became the first (and still the only) Irish team to win all three trophies in the Republic of Ireland's domestic football tournaments. U2 had a successful year with two more singles from *Rattle And Hum* making it into the top ten in the UK (but not the elusive number one spot). Glasgow Celtic (who I'd also started supporting) had a successful season by beating their old enemies Glasgow Rangers in the Scottish Cup Final. I had a successful year at school by passing my GCSEs at St. Columb's and returning there to start my A levels in the sixth-form. As great as all of these achievements were, none of them could compete with my greatest accomplishment in 1989: getting a ticket to my first U2 concert.

And as keen as I was to pop my U2 cherry, I couldn't just do it with absolutely any old concert; it had to be a meaningful event for me, it had to be special. It had to be an occasion that I would look back on fondly for the rest of my life. I wanted to be able to bask in a perpetual afterglow of a fabulous night of rapture and awe. There was no other option: it had to be at their New Year's Eve gig in Dublin ...

