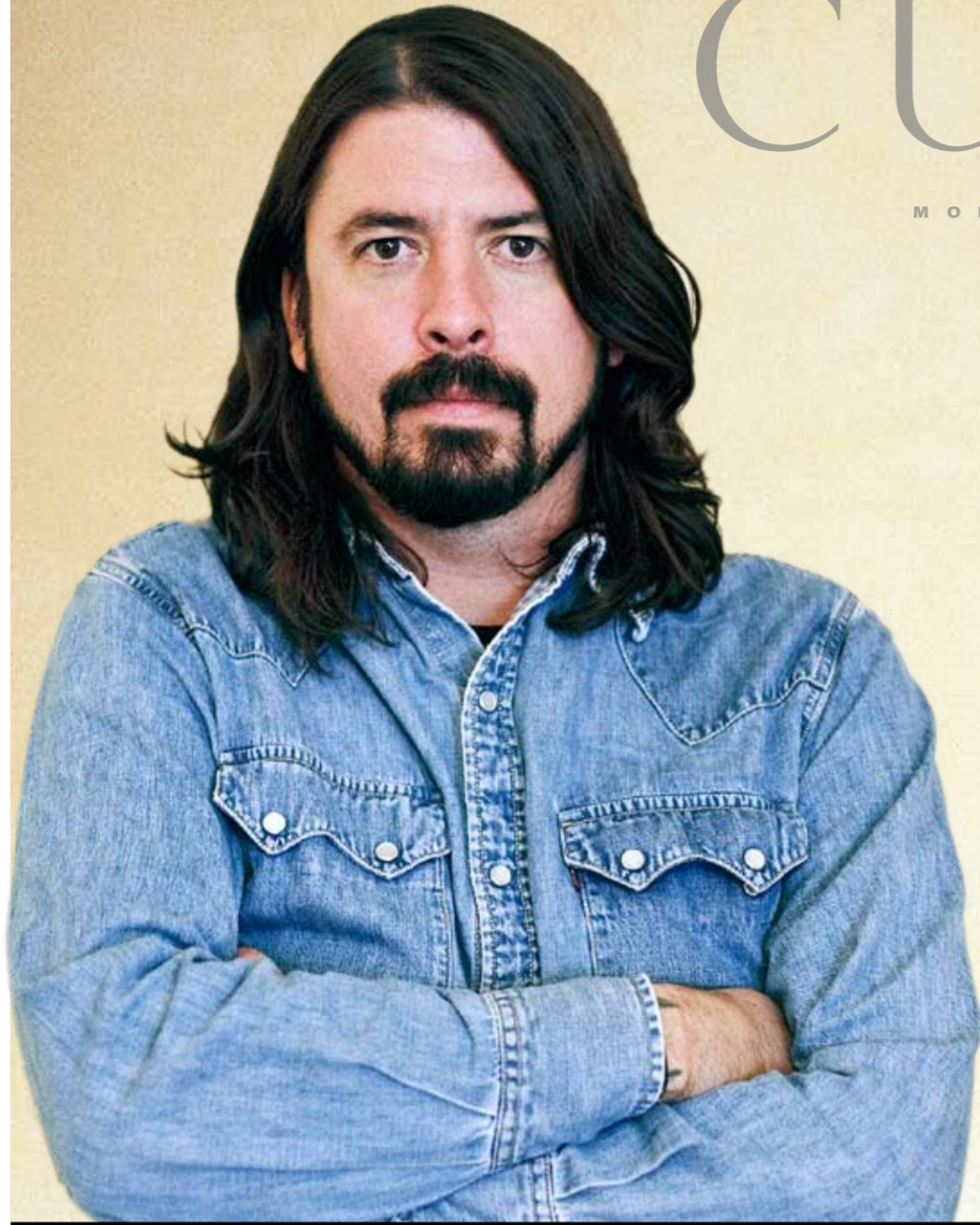


# CULTURE

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## Dave Grohl, Foo Fighters' pilot, roosts with vultures

Grohl's recently formed group, *Them Crooked Vultures*, puts him back behind the drums

BY ALAN LIGHT  
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, NEW YORK

In November 1991, Nirvana's *Nevermind* was beginning its climb up the charts. The album had not yet sold more than 10 million copies, had not yet knocked Michael Jackson out of the No. 1 slot on the Billboard album chart, had not yet become the defining moment of the alternative rock movement or given Kurt Cobain the "voice of a generation" status that would help prove his undoing.

Already, though, the band's newest member, the drummer Dave Grohl, was expressing his concerns about the impact that the album would have on his future. "Everyone is always asking if I'm afraid of the band's success going too far," the 22-year-old told *Rolling Stone*, in the band's first interview with that magazine. "That doesn't really make any difference. I just don't want to be David Grohl of Nirvana for the rest of my life."

"What a spoiled brat," Grohl, 40, said with a laugh when that quotation was recently read back to him. "But I think any musician would say the same thing — there's a lot of ground to cover, a lot of work to do. I wouldn't want to be tied down to one project or defined by any one thing."

The odds, however, were certainly stacked against Grohl's leaving a legacy beyond his role in Nirvana. The trio became the biggest band in the world for a time, then ended in horribly dramatic fashion with Cobain's suicide in 1994. Grohl, who was known for having a personality as laid-back as his drumming was explosive ("He's so

easygoing, always fun to be around," the band's former bassist, Krist Novoselic, said in an e-mail message), was now permanently linked to one of rock's most public tragedies.

But Grohl was able to create a second act for himself as the singer, guitarist and primary songwriter for Foo Fighters. From its humble beginnings as a one-man project, an attempt to find an escape from the shadow of Nirvana, the band has become a commercial force, steadily racking up hit singles (*Learn to Fly*, *Best of You*) for the last 15 years.

Even more surprisingly, the affable drummer who hid behind his long hair became believable as a frontman. ("I feel more comfortable being Keith Moon than being Freddie Mercury," he said, "but my favorite lead singers all act like drummers, and my favorite drummers play like singers.") Few pop musicians have pulled off a comparable transformation; it's as if one of the biggest bands of the 1970s had actually been Ringo Starr and Wings.

And now Grohl has recently formed another group, *Them Crooked Vultures*, which puts him back behind the drums alongside the guitarist and singer Josh Homme of Queens of the Stone Age and the former Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones. "People's perception of Dave is that he's the nice guy of rock 'n' roll," said Homme, "and that's accurate. He's generous, comfortable in his own skin, but he's also ambitious. He's never really satisfied with what he's done."

This month offers the opportunity to consider the sweep of Grohl's history. Within a two-week period a Foo Fighters' *Greatest Hits* album (RCA), a DVD and CD of Nirvana's breathtaking performance at the 1992 Reading Festival (UME) and *Them Crooked Vultures*' self-titled debut album (DGC/Interscope) are all being released. "November is like *This Is Your Life* for me," Grohl said on the phone from Los Angeles. "It's very nostalgic, but at the same time I'm in this brand new band,

and a husband and a father. My life is pretty out of control right now, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

Nirvana was a struggling young band on the independent label Sub Pop in September 1990, when Grohl, a veteran of the Washington hard-core punk scene, became the sixth drummer to try working with Cobain and Novoselic. (A 20th-anniversary edition of the band's debut album, *Bleach*, recorded with the drummer Chad Channing, was also released this month.) He moved to Seattle and became Cobain's roommate; the troubled singer hardly said a word to him for weeks. In the spring of 1991 the band completed the sessions for *Nevermind*.

The *Live at Reading* performance shows the group at the peak of its power. It blasts through 25 songs in 90 minutes for an audience of 50,000, with Cobain's impassioned yelp and guitar splatter powered by Grohl's ferocious pounding. His memory of the show, however, focuses more on the chaos leading up to the festival.

"That was a pretty strange experience," he said. "Kurt had been in and out of rehab, communication in the band was beginning to be strained. Kurt was living in LA, Krist and I were in Seattle. People weren't even sure if we were going to show up." (Cobain was delivered to the stage in a wheelchair, dressed in a hospital gown, and collapsed on his back before getting up and starting the show.)

"We rehearsed once, the night before, and it wasn't good," Grohl continued. "I really thought, 'This will be a disaster, this will be the end of our career for sure.' And then it turned out to be a wonderful show, and it healed us for a little while."

Grohl said that over time Cobain's tortured personality and violent end have determined too much of Nirvana's image. "For obvious reasons it's hard for people to understand that we actually enjoyed making music," he said. "It's easy to imagine that we were followed by a black cloud. But it wasn't all misery and doom. People know the biography,



Dave Grohl performs with Them Crooked Vultures at Roseland in New York on Oct. 15.

PHOTO: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

they've seen *Behind the Music*, but it's a little more complicated than that."

Grohl had been writing songs during his years with Nirvana, and in the months following Cobain's death he began to record them, playing all of the instruments himself. He planned to release 12 songs anonymously, under the name Foo Fighters (taken from a World War II term for unidentified flying objects), but record companies got wind of the project and began to pursue him.

"Had I considered it as a career, I would have spent more than five days on that tape," he said, "and I probably would have called it something other than Foo Fighters." The album was a moderate hit and lost the Grammy Award in 1996 for best alternative music to Nirvana's *MTV Unplugged in New York*. Grohl added musicians, so that the group could tour. (It went through a few lineup changes over the course of its six albums.)

With its steady stream of muscular, melodic singles — including 17 Top 10 hits on the Billboard modern rock charts — Foo Fighters became one of the dominant bands on rock radio. "From a programming standpoint I'm grateful for a band as consistent as the Foo Fighters," said Matt Pinfield, morning host on WXPX in New York City and a

host of MTV's *120 Minutes* in the 1990s. "You know that every new record will have a couple of undeniable songs on it."

The Foo Fighters' record company first asked them for a greatest-hits collection a few years ago. "We thought, 'Yeah, someday, that could be kind of funny, but let us have some hits first,'" Grohl said. "But now that we did it, I drove around listening to this album, and I got kind of emotional. Now I know where those 15 years went."

After the release of the album Foo Fighters will take a break, as Grohl begins his own next chapter with Them Crooked Vultures, which he formed with two of his numerous occasional collaborators. Since Nirvana, he has maintained something of a parallel career as a one-man bridge between the worlds of alternative rock and classic rock, performing with superstars like David Bowie, Tom Petty (who once asked him to become the permanent drummer in the Heartbreakers) and Queen.

"Dave is a great drummer and a fine fellow to boot," said Paul McCartney, who asked Grohl to play with him at a Liverpool concert and at the Grammy Awards in February. "It was totally fab working with him."

This year Grohl set up a "three-way

blind date" with Homme and Jones, to see what might transpire. "Only a few minutes passed before it felt like not only a band but a really good one," he said.

Them Crooked Vultures' music — long, twisting songs with multiple sections and tempos, shot through with a scuzzy menace and dark humor — is more complex than the sounds of the Foo Fighters. Grohl called it "the most musical band I've ever been in," and said that he was happy to be working as a drummer again: "You're the goattender, the buck stops with you."

Homme said that he considers Grohl a great frontman, but that "when he plays the drums, he always leaves my jaw dropped — that's really where the world needs him."

The band has been playing shows, even major festivals, for months prior to the album's release, leaking song snippets and hints on the Web as if leading some hard-rock scavenger hunt. "People had serious expectations but no clue what the band actually sounded like," said Grohl. "So it only made sense to take everyone by surprise and go stealth."

He said that spending these few weeks toggling between Them Crooked Vultures and Foo Fighters has illustrated more of the similarities in his various musical roles than their differences. "It's a good example of all the lessons I've learned," he said. "I know what it's like to be a drummer and what it's like to be a lead singer, what it is to sit down and shut up and what it is to make 80,000 people stand up and sing."

Grohl has made an unlikely life for himself by keeping all of his interests in play. Unlike the burning intensity of Jack White, say, who juggles different bands to keep up with the music pouring out of him, Grohl just seems to stay open to what he calls the "happy accidents" that have kept his career going.

"I wouldn't want the nostalgia to ever keep me from coming up with something new," he said. "I definitely look ahead more than I count trophies."

### TOP FIVE MANDARIN ALBUMS

NOV. 6 TO NOV. 12



1 Elva Hsiao (蕭亞軒) and Diamond Candy (鑽石糖) with **19.42** percent of sales

2 Yoga Lin (林宥嘉) and *Senses Around* (感官 / 世界) with **13.11%**

3 Landy Wen (溫嵐) and *Dancing Queen* with **10.98%**

4 Genie Chuo (卓文萱) and *1+1Play n Fun* with **10.1%**

5 Jade Liu (劉力揚) and *Forward* (轉彎) with **5.09%**

ALBUM CHART COMPILED FROM G-MUSIC (WWW.G-MUSIC.COM.TW), BASED ON RETAIL SALES

### PLANET POP

award-winning Chinese director Zhang Yimou (張藝謀) has

engineered another career shift with his latest movie — a comedy remake of a Coen brothers thriller with a theme song rapped by the filmmaker himself.

*Amazing Tales: Three Guns* (三槍拍案驚奇) — set for release in China early next month — is Zhang's first film in three years and a rare comedy from the director of such films as *To Live* (活着), *Raise the Red Lantern* (大紅燈籠高高掛) and *Red Sorghum* (紅高粱). The film is based on the Coen brothers' 1984 murder-laced *Blood Simple*, but swaps the US film's Texas bar setting for a noodle shop in ancient China, while adding an ample dose of comedy, Zhang said in an online interview.

"This is the first time I have done a film like this," Zhang told leading Internet portal Sina.com.

"We have added a lot of things and changed the whole feeling (of *Blood Simple*) ... we brought in a lot of comedic elements and changed the relationship and personalities of the characters."

Zhang, who is currently promoting the film, was shown on state television this week rapping out the lyrics to the

film's theme song, which he wrote.

The film stars actor Sun Honglei (孫紅雷) and comic Xiao Shenyang (小瀟陽), who soared to fame after his appearance on China Central Television's Spring Festival Gala earlier this year.

According to Xinhua news agency, the film cost US\$11.7 million and will be distributed by the Beijing New Picture Film Co for the lucrative December moviegoing season.



Film director Zhang Yimou returns to the big screen with *Amazing Tales: Three Guns*, a comedy based on the Coen brothers' *Blood Simple*.

PHOTO: AFP

After an early career directing award-winning art house films, Zhang embarked on martial arts blockbusters in 2002 with his grandiose *Hero*.

His last film, *Curse of the Golden Flower* (滿城盡帶黃金甲), was released in 2006.

Rolling Stones guitarist Ronnie Wood was on Wednesday divorced by his wife Jo after 24 years on the grounds of his admitted adultery. The couple split last year after the former Faces star began a relationship with Russian cocktail waitress Ekaterina Ivanova, who is in her early 20s.

Neither Ronnie Wood, 62, nor his former model wife, 54, was at the London High Court as decree nisi — the first stage of a divorce — was granted.

The couple were married in January 1985. They have a son and a daughter together.

US pop icon Britney Spears has broken her silence on the lip-synching "controversy" surrounding her first Australian tour, saying she was only here for her fans.

Spears acknowledged there had been some bad press over her part-timed Circus show, including reports that disgruntled fans walked out of her



Britney Spears is in it for her fans.

PHOTO: AFP

Perth concert after just three songs.

"I hear there is a lot of controversy in the media about my show," the star said in a statement late Tuesday.

"Some reporters have said they love it and some don't. I came to Australia for my fans!"

Promoter Paul Dainty earlier said Spears was "extremely upset" by the walk-out claims, which he labeled the "biggest lie I've ever heard."

"It's unfortunate that one journalist in Perth didn't enjoy the show last

night. Fortunately the other 18,272 fans in attendance did," one of Spears' staff wrote on social networking sites Facebook and Twitter.

Spears, 27, is performing 15 concerts in Australia, in Perth, Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane as part of the tour which kicked off in New Orleans in March.

British-Australian star Peter Andre won "substantial" libel damages on Tuesday over an "offensive" press report that he had lied by portraying himself as a loving father and husband.

British celebrity weekly *Now* reported in July that the 36-year-old singer had been to blame for two accidents involving the disabled son of his former wife Katie Price, aka the model Jordan.

In addition, "Mr Andre was also said to have demanded sick sexual threesome from his wife, which horrified her and which she did not enjoy, feeling used and like a sex doll," his lawyer Gordon Williams told the High Court in London.

"As a result, Mr Andre was said to be lying in portraying himself as a loving father and husband," he added.

Judge David Eady found in his favor.

—AGENCIES