

Features & Arts

Glastonbury will be back — a pandemic can't kill it

Dave Grohl and Foo Fighters had to scrap their megatour, but they're ready to deafen America again, discovers Neil McCormick

Last month, Dave Grohl's band Foo Fighters performed at President Biden's inauguration. "It was an incredibly emotional day. I still haven't sunk in yet," says the 53-year-old American rock star.

Grohl has supported Democratic campaigns since going on the road with Senator John Kerry, who ran for the US presidency in 2004.

Nevertheless, he trades Trump supporters are welcome at his gigs. "It should be no surprise where the band lands, as far as our politics goes," he says.

"But I'm an eternal optimist. I try to inject a little bit of hope into everything I do. Music is something that can bring opposite sides of the spectrum into the same arena for a few hours of relief. That's where I'd rather be."

The band had to pre-record their inauguration appearance because of Covid restrictions. "Washington DC is my hometown," says Grohl.

"So seeing all these ceremonies and fireworks on stage I used to walk to find the local punk rock club was weirdly nostalgic."

A plot of all still considers our band to be a garage band, so to see us included in something so historic is strange. Especially if I'm watching it on TV, and on a couch with a beer and a big ol' T-shirt."

You can find the energy coming off Grohl, even on a computer screen via a Zoom call from Hawaii. He bounces up and down, shows his face into the

camera lens, wags a finger, sometimes bellows at the top of his voice as if addressing a crowd.

"It's been a bit of a shock to the system. The schedule of a year in which he has been unable to play his trade as an all-action, guitar-toting, drum-thumping stadium-rock frontman. "I miss the adventure, I miss people. But I try to keep the big picture, and not get lost in the weeds."

The Foo Fighters finished recording a new album, *Medicine at Midnight*, last February, and should have spent 2020 on a worldwide 25th-anniversary tour.

Indeed, like so many others during this past year, Grohl has spent much of his time home-schooling his children. "I tell with them and encourage them and try to keep their attention to the screen, while they know full well I'm a high-school dropout and the worst student that anybody ever knew."

Grohl and his wife Jordyn Blume, a TV producer, have daughters aged 14, 11 and 6, and it's the youngest who occupies most of his time. "She's like a Taranter devil, so I do my best to wrangle and entertain her."

The family were on vacation in Hawaii in March when the pandemic lockdown struck, and there they have remained. There are, clearly, worse places to be marooned.

"It's kind of paradise," he admits. But with the Foo Fighters' 10th album at last due for release this week, he has been flying regularly to Los Angeles to rehearse and film videos and promote with his bandmates.

"We show up in the parking lot of



our studio, we take a rapid test, no one even enters the front door till they get the all-clear. We also do a PCR test, the real brain scrub, every day. It's just testing, testing and testing, then basic hygiene, which is not something we're famous for, but we're learning."

This is the longest Grohl has gone without performing since he dropped out of school in 1986, aged 17, to play with punk band Scream.

He achieved global fame as the powerhouse drummer of grunge superband Nirvana in the early 1990s. Then, following the suicide of Kurt Cobain in 1994, Grohl managed an extraordinary second coming as a guitar-playing singer and songwriter. Over the course of 25 years, the Foo Fighters have become one of the most popular live rock bands in the world.

The band headlined Glastonbury in 2007. Recently it was announced that Covid had forced the festival to be cancelled for the second year in a row.

"I know what Foo Fighters' plans are for the rest of the year, and some of those plans include live shows," says Grohl. "And I'll be there, it's safe for

everyone to attend. Unfortunately, you have to take that into consideration, no matter how much everyone wants to kick down the front door and run to the nearest rock concert, there are some things that are beyond our control. It's heart-breaking."

"But of course it's not the last

Glastonbury! I don't think a pandemic can stop Glastonbury! It might hold it back a little while, but sh—!... I want my kids to see bands at Glastonbury, whenever that show happens again, and it will."

Grohl makes positivity, but he admits it's not the whole picture.



Still a Fighter: Grohl, above at Glastonbury in 2017, says reports of guitar rock's demise are exaggerated. Left: Grohl with Kurt Cobain (c) and Kurt Novakovic (r) during Nirvana's early-Punk heyday

"Am I like a f---ing sitcom all day long? No, of course not. I wake up at five in the morning, and I hit the critics, and think: how do I wipe away the black cloud today?"

"I try to approach problems one at a time, rather than be overwhelmed by all of them and have a total nervous breakdown."

Grohl's lyrics often hint at a darkness one might not associate with his persona. The Foo Fighters' anthemic new single, *Waiting on a War*, draws on anxieties about escalating political conflict. Another album highlight, *Shame, Shame*, is a fierce groove exploring the loneliness of negative emotions.

"I think one of the reasons why I'm so optimistic and hopeful and have the energy that I do is because I have something to put vulnerability, insecurity, the darkest corners, rather than just bottle them up," he says. "I reserve a lot of my innermost feelings... for everyone to hear."

He laughs with infectious gusto. But I get a rare glimpse of his other

'This year has been a shock to the system. I miss the adventure, I miss the people'

side the last time I interviewed him, in 2015, when my suggestion that we were witnessing the last days of the rock era seemed to drain all the energy from the room.

"That was YOUNG!" bellows Grohl, when I remind him. "The thing that I was most offended by was when you said the instrumentation we use could be considered obsolete. I took it personally, because I would hate to walk on stage and feel like I was doing something useless. And that's the way you made me feel."

Nevertheless, he admits to drawing inspiration from adversity.

"I will never forget that interview because there was a part of me that thought I might have to prove you wrong. I might have to come back and play a stadium, come back and play Glastonbury."

"I might have to come back 10 years from now, with that same f---ing guitar that you considered obsolete, and make 80,000 people sing a f---ing song! It's one of my great pleasures in life to be able to stand up and do something that someone tells me I can't be doing."

I am pleased to report that this time he's laughing. "Let's have this conversation in three or four years. You can come and sit at the side of the stage at Glastonbury, and watch us rip on our pedals, and go: 'Thank God we still love guitars!'"

Medicine at Midnight by Foo Fighters will be released on RCA on 7 May