



The first time I saw the Killers they were not good.

They were hugely successful for a band playing behind a debut record, and “Hot Fuss” was fairly undeniable. From the urgent introduction of, “Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine,” eyebrows had raised. Rarely had a jumping-off record, much less than one from the decidedly non-contemporary rock locale of Las Vegas, spawned four even bigger singles (“Mr. Brightside;” “Somebody Told Me;” “All These Things That I’ve Done,” and “Smile Like You Mean It”) and this bunch of Sin City New-Wavers struck a chord internationally. “Hot Fuss” was declared the 33rd best of Rolling Stone Magazine’s “100 Greatest Debut Records.”

Yet at Boston’s Roxy (now Royale) playing an “MTV \$2 Show” - with support from Secret Machines - they were showing the signs of an exhaustive touring itinerary that is not uncommon when a record breaks beyond a band’s, and in the big scheme of things more importantly, a record label’s expectations. They were tired, and they looked it. Even Brandon Flowers’ distinct pompadour now sagged into bangs.



Meh. So, they'd conquered the world for a longer cycle than expected. They wouldn't be the first to smash into the international pop zeitgeist only to disappear with tales of what Tokyo is actually like when you can't leave your hotel, only to eventually not be able to get a decent table at a good Japanese restaurant on a Saturday night back in Vegas. That shit happens.

The first time I met Flowers I told him pretty much exactly that. Brandon Flowers is an exceedingly charismatic and surprisingly approachable rock star. He nodded and smiled. "We sucked that night," he said, with the honesty of the best of them. The best of them only slightly celebrate the success of slaying an audience, but don't forget the inevitable clunkers. Those are the ones that stay with you and drive you forward.

And, in this case it drove he and his band back home to "Sam's Town."

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For anyone who lives in Boston, the Orpheum Theatre is where a band that has achieved national, or often international, acclaim on a first record makes their bones playing the second. The list is endless, far too lengthy to list. The room is intimate, artists might sometimes say, "On top of you." When the sound is good it rings as true a forum to deliver your sound as imaginable. You want to give it the way you want it heard? This place can do it for you. If you can deliver.

In that setting, the Killers made me a fan. My friend, Mark Kates, had invited me and exhorted me following my middling response, "You're not going to be sorry you saw this." He could not have been more right. The band was dynamic, expansive on those initial influences of the Cure and New Order and the Smiths; somehow had they found Springsteen's thematic inspirations in their synth and guitar driven ideas? Was there ELO in those synths? Did they actually pay homage to Dire Straits with a B-Side cover?

By the point I actually met the Killers, they were established international stars. That conversation where I'd first told Brandon Flowers that they weren't very good my first night having seen them was following a show at Boston University's Agganis Arena where they were very good. That night the thoughtful Flowers had performed the theme song to perhaps the Hub's most emblematic television show, "Cheers," including the rarely hear second and third verses and then explained the impetus for it to me.

"Glen and Les Charles (the show's creators) were from Vegas," he explained. "They were proof you could take ideas from beyond the strip." He smiled at the unexpected darkness of this beloved local tune's seemingly true theme. "Maybe it takes it takes a kid from Vegas to really get it."

"All those nights when you've got no lights,
The check is in the mail;
And your little angel
Hung the cat up by it's tail;
And your third fiancee didn't show;

Sometimes you want to go
Where everybody knows your name,

And they're always glad you came;
You want to be where you can see,
Our troubles are all the same;
You want to be where everybody knows your name.

Roll out of bed, Mr. Coffee's dead;
The morning's looking bright;
And your shrink ran off to Europe,
And didn't even write;
And your husband wants to be a girl;
Be glad there's one place in the world

Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came;
You want to go where people know,
People are all the same;
You want to go where everybody knows your name.
Where everybody knows your name,

And they're always glad you came;
Where everybody knows your name,
And they're always glad you came..."

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Fast forward to Boston Calling 2018.

My brother, Kevin, and I have a longstanding love of rock n' roll music. He's seen the Grateful Dead with me when prior to leaving to go see some shows away from home, my dad would nod, and look up from the sports page and say, "Don't do anything stupid. Stay together. You have AAA."

As we packed the bus my mom would give her own admonition. "Just be careful," she would say with pleading eyes in her look before they brightened. "And, have fun." My mom had a great mischievous smile. At times, she still does.

We had a lot of fun. I was with my brother, Kevin, at a lot of Dead shows and then later shows by enough bands that Kevin has probably seen more than the rest of his then and current neighborhood combined. He tells me about bands that I don't know about. He has three active and amazing kids and a great wife yet somehow will find time to text me about a band and say, "Hey, this really good, have you heard it?"

And this year, for a graduation gift to his oldest, he gave Sean the gift he wanted. He took him to Boston Calling. Where the headliner the first night was going to be... the Killers.

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Everything I just told you about was things I told my nephew, Sean, about. Now, he was finally going to see them. Right in Boston. I had to...

Step away. Because this wasn't about me. I suppose in a sense I could convince myself it was; because of my shared love of music with my brother. But it wasn't. It was about my brother and his amazing son.

I wished that I could be there, but ultimately was glad that I could not. I would have been a third wheel that they didn't need. They ran around Boston Calling and had the sort of father-son bonding that wasn't possible in my generation. They didn't need me. They were two dudes who love music, who just happen to be a dad and son. It simply would not have been possible for my dad to have known my passion for the Replacements or Camper Van Beethoven or Meat Puppets like my brother gets Sean digging so many beats and The Oh See's and St. Vincent and their mutual joy of Jack White and Eminem... and the Killers.

A band they both saw. Together. For the first time.

-This post is dedicated - the first time a post has been devoted to anyone on this site - to my nephew, Sean. An amazing person, a great athlete, and a listener with great ears to great music. Congrats on finishing up high school, and know the world has even more that it can't wait for you to listen to, look at and read about. I love you, kid. You're the best.



