

The Reunion Tour



The very thought of a reunion of any type speaks to age.

That celebration of the aging process, the particular gathering of souls that once shared something common. It can be schooling or a work environment. It's my understanding that even plane crash survivors will occasionally gather up and knock a few back in remembrance of their shared event. All have gone on to new experiences, yet in their life's story there are people with whom they shared a certain moment of time that was significant enough to merit revisiting.

Of course, rock n' roll is its own unique animal.

Unlike your high school reunion, a seemingly requisite tradition - I applauded my high school class for forgoing the 5th year reunion: "What has anyone done? How has anyone truly changed?" - that fills ballrooms on the Friday after Thanksgiving each year, the reunion tour of a band is somewhat different.

There is an underlying sentiment that in some cases (Urge Overkill) the reunion of a band is an obvious cash grab. In others (My Bloody Valentine) there's an idea that there is a paragraph left to be completed in the story. While for some (the Pixies), that unfinished paragraph leads to inspiration to begin work on yet another chapter. In each case, for the listener or the joyous fan attending, there is a re-examination of one's youth. If not their youth, then the time in their lives when they discovered an artist and were moved by them. A time, perhaps, when life and its unrelenting demands had not stultified what had once been such a passionate pursuit.

These are not always nationally or internationally renowned artists. In every city on earth there are folks who whimsically ponder the idea of their favorite local band knocking it out one more time. I know this first hand. For my 40th birthday - some 100 years ago - I badgered and cajoled my favorite local band, the Gentlemen, to perform once again after a seemingly endless sabbatical. They acquiesced, mostly as a favor, and were glorious for the half-filled Middle East downstairs room that hosted us.

One of my favorite ever rock memories of my Dad -right up along with taking he and my Mom to see Springsteen - was his reaction to the Gentlemen. "Those guys are pro's," he said. Years later at my wedding reception - having been sentenced to a wheelchair -he grabbed my arm while looking at the band, the Pre-Nups.

"Those guys were in the Gentlemen, right?" I nodded and he reaffirmed. "Total pro's."

Gomez were total pro's when I met them. No, actually, they were not. They were a bunch of excited and enthusiastic kids from Southport, England, who had dropped a record that grabbed their native shore's ears and were now focused on getting the message over to the U.S. Which, they did, to varying degrees. Onstage, they were absolute pro's. Offstage they were excitable, albeit sensible, young men quite literally seeing the world.

They played the entire country, garnered some television and film spots, and always delivered a compelling live show that built a substantial audience. They were finding their footing in many ways, and as an aspiring and emerging music journalist, so was I. Perhaps therein lies the basis for a lasting friendship. But there's also those things that bond any group of friends.

A shared sense of humor is an essential. A pleasure from sharing experiences, a great gift for telling a story and the pleasure of hearing one, an enthusiasm for jumping into something new. Beyond simply loving music, and sharing our often similar but sometimes divergent opinions, Gomez and I became true friends. But, like that high school pal who moves across the country, our lives moved on and I saw less and less of them.

Which, of course, is where the reunion tour comes in.

We couldn't quite place precisely the last time we'd all been in the same room. Was it a Boston gig when one member had lost his voice, subsequently forcing the cancellation of the remainder of an American tour? Had they been back, following that? No one was quite sure but we'd remained in touch via social media and solo projects and side gigs and shared friends. Yet, here we were once again, in the same room.

Touring musicians meet a ton of people. I mean, literally, outside of politicians, very few people meet as many strangers who feel a connection with them as a band on tour does. I have long gone past expecting that anyone remembers my name, it's often an acknowledged nod of familiarity. "I remember that dude." It sort of comes with the territory, no offense taken given the nature of the interaction. I have become comfortable reintroducing myself to an artist with whom I have shared some sort of adventure, or misadventure, as the case might be.

But, there are also artists and acts with whom you strike a chord. From the beginning that was the case with Gomez, and to my good fortune that has been the case with a number of musicians. As I have often said, you will meet a lot of guys called, "Tom," but chances are - unless you go way back and have had the privilege of meeting my brothers - you're likely to only meet one, "Kielty." Brand marketing, I guess. Though it does lead to a remembrance in many cases.

In this case, it was sort of a given. But, like that girl at a high school reunion who immediately remembers your name, it's a bit of a reaffirmation. Years gone by, yet a familiarity. One that extended even to a longtime accomplice of mine when a member of the group commented, "I was wondering if we'd see Tony." Indeed, you would, and he too was very much welcomed.

So, you sit down and you put your feet up and you catch up. Twenty years of friendship seamlessly melts into a spot where it's as though you'd seen each other twenty days before. Within a mere twenty minutes all that time has melted away and you're there with the miles and the distance and the personal victories and losses. Shared, celebrated, commiserated. The big wins laughingly joked off, the losses providing the fire for darkly shared and humorous snarks, the way only long-time pals can appreciate. Bloody "Old Home Day" for middle-aged men who have all embraced this remarkable art form called rock n' roll music. All who found some sort of everlasting bond over it.

Then, they go out and play a show.

It's remarkable. You're delivered once again to the impetus of this friendship, the very reason you became acquainted with the people making this glorious noise. It's more than you expected yet it's exactly what you expected from a band that rarely ever came up short playing live. Fuck, man. You still know every single word! Every change in the melody. Every nod between them is personalized. God, they are still so fucking good. You're right there twenty years ago and you're right here now.

And, then it's done.



Like any reunion, it ends. It's too fast to take it all in, it's over in a minute and you drive home with every image from every moment of your life - when this became important to you - fighting for your mind's attention. You exchange farewell embraces and promises to stay in touch. You head home and they head down the road, loading onto the bus for a 1AM journey to Washington, DC to do it again, as you slide into your car and go back to your routine.

And, all you can think on your own drive is of how much this art form called rock n' roll has given you. I have personally sometimes cursed this addiction to rock that snuck up on me as a teen. I have immediate recall of my dearly beloved Dad pondering, "If you knew as much about Wall Street as you do about the lyrics of the Grateful Dead you could have bought me a house instead of still living in mine." Truer words, perhaps, were never spoken.

But he also very much knew what it did give to me. It gave me inspiration and encouraged a love of travel and art. A belief that those silly little ideas bouncing around my head might make sense to others. The true drive to share them with a wider audience, to write them down. I have made friends, seen things, heard things, that I might not - probably would not - have heard or seen without music as a driving force. It gave me a community. This thing that I always craved.

Gomez was a part of that for me. There are not a lot of people in my life that I can look at and say, "Remember that time in Los Angeles... or Nashville... or Chicago... or New York?" I can say that to these guys and get an immediate response. To a man, I get a smile and this, "I sure do."

My life - as has many of my friend's lives - has taken countless up's and down's. It's been "Alpine" in extremity: big highs and terrifying plummets. But my reunion with them reminded me of my good fortune in having crossed their path early. And, that I kept on going. I still do. So do they.

Thanks, Gomez.

Thanks music. You have been pretty good to me.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWThwfAfLf0>