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Honors: US History 2
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Morrison, Jim. Personal interview with the author. Lancaster, PA. September 18th, 2016

Overview by Hannah Morrison:

Jim Morrison has a very abundant amount of knowledge about grunge music. At the time when grunge music erupted into the music scene Jim was a senior in highschool. He was also in a band with a couple of friends who tried to play this type of music. When he heard the album "Nevermind" by Nirvana he became extremely interested in it. Grunge music had a huge breakout after that album was released and stayed at the top of the charts for a couple of years. A lot of bands and artists became extremely popular and some even had overnight successes. This music affected many people's lives and was another significant event in the evolution of music. Grunge music is not that popular today and is heard very seldom. Even though there will be much more music to come, there will most likely never be a breakout like that again.

Question (Hannah): Hello thanks for taking the time out of your day to do this interview with me. I hope to gather much information that I can use about the genre of grunge music to help in completing this project and writing my essay. Could you start by telling me about how you are familiar or were involved with the grunge music or this topic?

Answer (Jim): Sure, sure I was in a band in high school actually and it was an alternative rock band with me and a couple of friends and it was in 1988 when we started it and we were in that for about 4 years and when the music was starting to pop out of seattle and no one ever heard that type of music before. There was a couple bands that come to mind, like Nirvana and Pearl Jam that were new out in like '90 around 1990. And we tried to get a sound that sounded like them and noone was really used to it and it didn't really fly. So, and this was after they started becoming popular. So yeah and bands to follow copied a lot of what they were doing. And some other big bands were coming out, Stone Temple Pilots, and Soundgarden, Soundgarden actually started changing their sound, they've been around since the early '80s. But yeah so me and my band mates and a lot of other bands saw the rise of this music.

Question (Hannah): Okay, so can you tell me about the type of music and artists that were playing before people and bands started to create the grunge music sound?

Answer (Jim): Well it's a very general question there's been a lot of genres of music for so many decades, even more than centuries actually. Cause you have jazz and the blues, disco, country, hip-hop nowadays which has been big for 20 years actually, latin, Punk rock so I assume your referring to rock since this interview is regarding the birth and the entry of grunge and into the rock, and pop rock and punk heavy metal scene in the late '80s and early '90s. So, as far as rock bands go you'll be looking at artists such as, alternative wise, The Cure, Depeche mode, duran duran, those are some big ones that i remember. Umm, INXX, Red Hot

Chili Peppers, Jane's addiction, they were big. And you have straight rock, rock and roll side of things the heavier bands such as, the heavy rock and roll bands per-say, like ACDC and Guns'n'Roses, there's a band called Queens Rike. Umm Metallica, Bon Jovi, of course there are many more, that's just a few, so

Question (Hannah): So how did this music and the sound differ from grunge music?

Answer (Jim): Right, I think that it would be easier to ask how grunge differentiated from that music instead of the other way around cause grunge is such a unique sound. Basically grunge rock sounded different I'd say due to heavier sounded distortions on the guitar and deeper, full bass guitar as well. Created much fuller and distorted sound honestly that no one was really used to. The drums were played louder too but I personally didn't really think that much of an effect. You know like I said earlier me and my band mates tried to come up with a sound like this and even though I played the drums even much louder, if the guitar and bass wasn't there with that sound, the drums didn't really have an effect on that so.

Question (Hannah): So why do you think that like that type of sound of music was so like big and attracted so many people and how the sound differed from earlier Rock'n'Roll? Why do you think that it was like people started to like that music better?

Answer (Jim): I don't think they like it better honestly, I don't know, at first it was a smaller group of listeners. Basically listeners, clears throat, because the full explosion of it was like '91, '92. And umm Nirvana's been around for a couple years before that so it was uh Pearl Jam but uh i don't think that it was uh, uh a bigger sound but it was a more unique sound. It was a more unique sound and people that first started getting into it were the punk rockers and stuff you know but then, clears throat, when it finally, clears throat, when it finally, excuse me, got radio play and MTV play umm i think that for some reason the sound was so unique and appealing to everybody, uh, it's hard to explain why but you'd have jocks listening to this music, you know chuckles, you'd have quote unquote nerds you know it uh, listening to this music. You'd have every clique, I say clique and I'm kinda using cliques because the main age group of the listeners to this stuff was you know, I'd say early teens to you know mid-20s so.

Question (Hannah): Do you have any idea why that was?

Answer (Jim): I really don't, I don't know, that's the phenomenon actually. Just a unique, new sound you know, I don't know if it was because because grunge music lyrics are about , lot of (not sure what he said)... and depression, unfortunately, feelings about issues. I hope that's not why, I hope that not a lot of the kids were depressed and feeling anxious but no it's a kinda a phenomenon why the sound caught on like it and the bands blew up like they did honestly.

Question (Hannah): Where did the sound originate from?

Answer (Jim): You could ask a lot of people this question and the same answer would be Seattle, Washington is where it came out of. Solely because one of The biggest bands, Nirvana ,came from there. Pearl Jam was also out of that area. They were, the two known bands to have the sound, that's where it, it came out of.

Question (Hannah): Who would you say were the main people or what mainly started the genre of grunge music?

Answer (Jim): oh with like Neil Young or something. The “godfather of grunge” well I think some people say that because he had one album I forget which one it was and it was actually in the late 70s. It had some heavier guitar distortions. So maybe that's why they related it you know some people say that he was the “Grandfather of Grunge.” But then he got together with Pearl Jam and played with them later as well so maybe he was tied in like that they kind of listened back, yeah he's the, “Grandfather of grunge,” But it really came out of the late 80s and early 90s out of Seattle Washington.

Question (Hannah): How did the public respond to the rise of this music?

Answer (Jim): Well it's like I was listening to a show not too long ago on Siriusxm, channel 34 lithium and are they were saying when they did the first printing of the Nirvana teen Spirit album they only press like 50,000 copies and but, they are there were definitely people rushing out to buy the albums that was because of the radio exposure and of course it was plugged on MTV, a show called *120 Minutes that* aired on Sunday nights. I can almost remember the time because I used to stay up and listen to it it started at 10 and I was getting in trouble for staying up that late but, clears throat, but yeah once it, once it hit the radio waves and especially MTV it was widespread very widespread and and a yeah the album sales increased tremendously and of course with album sales and popularity bands, these bands you know, they're going on tour and selling tickets and that's it. They blew up basically overnight. Nirvana did anyway. Pearl Jam did really two in '92 with the 10 album so, yeah no band's ever blown up like those two bands, that quickly. So again I go back to it's a weird phenomenon that does sound matched the listeners ears, of all types of people. You know and not all types of people probably appreciated the music because of the lyrics and some of the the undertones of the, of the music and lyrics.

Question (Hannah): Actually my next question was were there people who are opposed to the music?

Answer(Jim): Right yeah I would say the religious groups of course but you know it's always about censorship. There's a lot of vulgarity in the grunge music and in other rock music too. Of course parents, parents don't like, parents don't like their Young teens listening to you know depressive music or you know lyrics that are negative in someway so there's always that censorship that needs to be addressed. So you know besides that I'd say that's probably the only opposition, really, that goes for all music though.

Question (Hannah): So back to what you were saying about how some parents didn't really want their kids listening to this and there was some vulgar lyrics and stuff, do you think that's why that was there was not many older people connected with it as much and liked it as much?

Answer (Jim): Oh yeah for sure and there was probably a cool aspect to it too with the teens yeah, it's cursing. It's like unfortunately a lot of circles, cursing and vulgarity is kinda cool at a young age for some reason, it's appealing, so yeah that could have something to do with it.

Question (Hannah): What was your opinion when you first heard the music like what officially started it for you?

Answer (Jim): I was 16 years old first time I heard Nirvana actually. I was getting on A class trip bus and this kid I knew from electronics class, was listening to his Discman player with these big styrofoam headphones but I said, "hey, what are you listening to Mikey?" he goes on this new band called Nirvana. I was like let me listen to it so he hands me the headphones. At first and I was like man that sounds really cool because I had been I was into alternative music anyway and some like punk music and I was like well this is a whole other sound. So I asked him if I could listen to the rest of the album. He didn't really want me too but I kinda took it from him, he was a smaller guy so I was like, I'm gonna listen to this and I listened to the whole album up to New York and ever since I listened to that album that pretty much led me into listening to all the types of music that I did for like the next 5 years. Which would be like Stone Temple Pilots and Soundgarden came out with even better stuff and Jane's Addiction. Jane's Addiction got a little grungy there on the Habitual Album but then they steered clear of that one but I'd like to bring up the Clash. If you've heard of the band The Clash they were out even earlier and some considered them to be pretty grungy but that label wasn't set yet for that sound. There was a few, if you dig and do your research and you listen to the music in the earlier 80s, like punk music you might be able to find stuff that sounds a lot similar and you could probably come up with your own opinions as to, hey but wait, what about this band maybe they were actually the the deliverance of grunge but it's all opinion when it comes to that. But mainstream grunge definitely Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden, and Stone Temple Pilots were the big 4.

Question (Hannah): So how did record labels and recording studios respond?

Answer (Jim): Well once the sound came out every producer probably in rock, in the rock industry was like alright we gotta either find bands that sound like this or we can change some sounds of current bands we have signed because of course, corporate wise, they're looking for the money trail so that's what was going on I'm sure. Again I think it was the actual producer of Nirvana's first album said that his label was coming to him kinda trying to get him to do that type of thing and he was like I don't have time for it. Of course he probably didn't at the time because he had an overnight success like that, you don't have time to be going out and listening to bands and changing sounds of bands and stuff like that.

Question (Hannah): Do you have any idea why “grunge” was the name?

Answer (Jim): It’s just a word. It’s just a label. I mean grungy, dingy, heavyish, grungy kind of sound. Cause a lot of the songs are heavier and it’s like, (makes beat of music) that grungy sound. It’s just a label. They could’ve called it apples, apple sound, the apples.

Question (Hannah): How would you say this affected the history of rock’n’roll and artists to come?

Answer (Jim): Well the history of Rock’n’Roll I don’t think it affected. I think it affected artists and artists to come and currently that were upcoming. I think it affected a lot. Cause everybody went for that sound. Every band went for that sound but not many were able to stick out and become something huge with it. I mean there were a lot of other bands in the early 90’s that were coming out right after Nirvana’s- Nirvana made it big. I think it kinda transformed because you don’t hear quite that sound anymore. You’ll hear grungier guitar sounds and stuff but there’s always like clean leads with it. So yeah I mean there’s only a few large bands from the time that even today are still pulling it off and Pearl Jam’s still jamming, man, and they still sound the same. They still have the same grungy sound. Maybe it’s because it tapered off from new artists, grunge artists, because they realized its been done, were never going to live up to these bands and the stature of these bands. It’s like how do you start a band and think your gonna be a Nirvana or Pearl Jam so maybe that’s part of it. Maybe everyone’s looking for something new to create instead of playing on the old. Which is kinda the name of the game, always looking for a new sound but I don’t think there will ever be a breakout like that again and it was short lived for the burst. It was 4 or 5 years and it was done. A lot of people seem to think when Kurt Cobain died so that’s why but I don’t think that’s why because his drummer, Dave Grohl, formed Foo Fighters. They’re pretty grungy. So he kinda took the torch on that one in my opinion and that band’s enormous. Any band that sells out Wembley stadium is pretty big. But there’s only a handful of bands that have been able to carry it on and they still have the sound.

Comment (Hannah): Yeah I listen to the Foo Fighters and Nirvana but the Foo Fighters songs always seem to skip around and have more complex parts than Nirvana’s music does

Answer (Hannah): Yeah the arrangements are a little different. As far as the musical arrangements go the grunge- I think many of the more popular grunge songs were typical 3 1/2 to 5 minute songs like rock-pop, like rock and pop songs are, you know radio songs. Nothing like the classic rock bands of the 70’s like Led Zeppelin and like Pink Floyd, Allman Brothers, to just name a few. They’d play for like 10-15 minutes and it be really really complicated. Grunge was more like simple, to the point. It would be like I feel this way about myself or this issue, repeat it and so on and so on and so forth, the end. So I think grunge bands were playing more for themselves and their own opinions and thoughts and views more than or the fans honestly. And maybe that had something to do with why the sound kinda went away. The mainstream and more money. Kinda like the punk bands were in the late 70’s early 80’s. They left the songs open to more interpretation for the listener.

Question (Hannah): So do you think that's possibly why it was such a big thing and it was so unique?

Answer (Jim): Well yeah they pulled out their own emotions and their own thoughts so that could be, good point, maybe I should interview you.

Question (Hannah): How do you think the music affected people's lives not just in a musical way?

Answer (Jim): Well society, and keep in mind we're talking about a younger audience. I personally noticed a lot of people picking up the guitar and starting to learn these songs, like all the hit songs. So it might have inspired a lot of the youth to play some instruments, not only guitar but probably even bass and drums. And the way teen were dressing like flannel shirts, ripped jeans, and some kids started growing their hair out that you never thought would. From personal experience I saw it in my high school, kind of amazing. Basically it affected the youth as far as taking action and changing themselves and changing their appearances or what they did. I know it probably didn't influence kids to go to college more or anything like that. I mean if you think that music is a popular thing then it possibly influenced kids to play instruments

Question (Hannah): Would you say that it had any negative effects on people and kids?

Answer (Jim): It probably did cause there was a lot of, you know-everyone knew that a lot of these bands, a couple of these big names, grunge artists were doing drugs. I hope it didn't lead many to do drugs but with all music it comes with territory. It's going to affect some. I'm sure it caused some deaths. Some overdoses and things like that but that's with all music. Well not all music, I guess Christian Rock and Classical music it doesn't cause that but when you get into the punk and the heavy metal and rock'n'roll scene some people get caught up in the lifestyle I guess. I personally don't know anybody that had a bad effect like that but I'm sure it happened.

Final Comment (Hannah): Well thanks again for taking the time out of your day to sit down and talk with me. Its greatly appreciated and I definitely learned a lot from you.

Final Comment (Jim): Oh well thanks for choosing me to be the interviewee and I'm glad I could help out, thanks.

Link to my audio interview:

Please right click "Save Link As"

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