

They didn't read Pitchfork or Stereogum or Gorilla vs. Bear or Hipster Runoff

by Josh Spilker

The line was not like a snake, instead it was like a pond. A circular mass of various densities were outside the door, gangly kids in stripes and neon sunglasses, new plaids and high-top sky blue Nikes. Irony upon irony, to where they became what they were making fun of, so much so that the only outlet was to make fun of themselves. Which they did, over and over, the simulacrum of insults and self-doubt rippling and unrippling itself back, so no one was sure if it ever existed. So many cool hunters, they had become their own demographic--one as easily marketed to as upper middle-aged grandmothers and their lululemon yoga mat toting daughters. Nothing alt or alternative or hipster about me or them or any of us, just another facsimile of a fax soaked in ditto machine purple. Their influences were not worn on their sleeves, their influences were their sleeves.

They didn't read Pitchfork or Stereogum or Gorilla vs. Bear or Hipster Runoff, only glanced at them, not enough blaise in reading, but skimming kept your credibility, thank god those sites now posted more and more videos. They didn't subscribe to VICE, but looked through the pictures quickly at Borders when they were sure no one saw them a) walk into Borders or b) pick up VICE or c) glance longingly at the cover of Glamour. So everyone loved Panda Bear but conveniently could not remember where they first heard it. When they did read, it was Octavia Butler or field manuals to rare Alaskan muskrats, prepping themselves for the day they could say "and you will know the muskrat's color by their trail of shining guard hair."

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I did not have the heart to tell Nathan that he finally was one of them, despite his best efforts, he had done it.

Across the street, in a wide alley was a huddle of guys with beards and sideburns in various degrees of accomplishment. They were spinning a frisbee on its edge, an improvised top, or maybe this was the newest version of spin the bottle--I, for one had no idea. Maybe it was a new game of chance and skill, a game never known to them three months ago, before they saw the video online of someone spinning a frisbee in an alley, and now they were certain there was meaning in the spinning. There were no girls in their tight circle.

I made a mental note to tell Nathan about the frisbees, that those were needed in his stage show.

The gray door of the venue shut behind me, my arms full of a bass drum. Nathan was on the stage arranging his set of foot pedals, he was humming to himself, something I had never seen him do, maybe Kristen introduced him to that habit as well.

"Nice crowd out there," I said huffing, placing the bass drum at Nathan and Court's preferred angle of right of center stage and slightly inward. I would not mention the frisbee now, it would be better served for the idle conversation of tomorrow or the next day, at the backyard grill maybe. The drums usually held a place at the front of the stage, even with Nathan's set up--Court's frenetic energy had multiplied over time, his anxiousness had grown show by show, now deserving a place of center attention.

"Oh yeah?" Nathan said with a grin. He had seen them, their neon interposed on black, a fashion that would be gone the next time he played here, whenever that would be. Maybe he already knew about the frisbee game, had seen the frisbee game video himself, maybe even had made the frisbee game, filmed it and thrown it on Vimeo

and sent an obscure email with the link to College Humor. Coyness was Nathan's modus operandi.

"Yeah, don't screw it." I said.

"Nope, that would be horr--eeee--bull," he said. The pull on those last two syllables something I had never heard, like the sound of an airbag filling during your first wreck.

After unloading the gear, I looked for Nathan to see if he wanted something to eat, but he was in his usual meditative Karate Kid pose so I ventured down the street in Toledo by myself. There was sure to be a quick pizza slice place, every town had this, every town wanted this. I must've been in the wrong block, because I had to settle for a hibachi express place instead, the chicken cooked quickly over a thin sheet metal griddle.

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Wetness in his hair, in his brow, in his shirt. The blue of it, now a deep purple, his jeans even wet and the backpocket torn, ripped from his impromptu crowd dive when he had them yelling, "There's a pelican in my briefs! There's a pelican in my briefs!" perhaps the most complicated crowd chant ever engineered, yet Nathan--this Nathan who even played Wii Bowling nonchalantly, had moved this crowd, focused this crowd. He gave them his all. None of his movements were planned I was sure of that, but a deep well of confidence had sprung in him--he knew that when he hit the stage, his body would follow, not because he told it to, or convinced it to, but because that's what it was supposed to do.

As if the stage had always waited for Nathan, searched for him and then this show, every show was the killing of the fatted calf--a perfect celebration. It was coming to an end, a crescendo had passed or was surely nigh. I knew there was no more songs for them to play, except for one. Nathan adjusted his guitar strap and warbled

into the mike.

“This is our last song. Remember, we're The Runaway Chamber and we've got stuff in the back. This one's a favorite. It's called 'Whatever happened to Chris O'Donnell, I hope it doesn't happen to me.' Here we go.” Yells, whistles, bouts of laughter. The crowd had found what they did not know they were searching for, like a \$20 bill on the ground.

Court picked up the gear, Nathan always down in the semi-crouch greeting well-wishers, even signing the occasional album cover. Back at the merch table, there was not a rush, but a tasteful blend of purchases and inquiries.

Yes, here's our myspace page, here's our facebook page. No money tonight, no prob. It's on iTunes. Yes, this is the only shirt we have. This was a fun show, I'm sure we'll be back.

After about 25 minutes, Nathan's crowd was not letting up, I went to the stage and gathered Nathan's pedals and amp for him. A group of lithe girls hung to the side of the stage, their hair in creative do's, and various shades of blue and black plaid. One had an old-school Detroit Lions polo shirt over a long-sleeved gray shirt, over a ruffled puffy cream skirt. Another carried a My Little Pony purse and a high-set bun and heavy-hung bangs with turtle shell glasses. The third wore a collared shirt and bow tie, her long black hair halfway down her back, complemented by size 3 jeans. Nathan still sidled the stage, hanging above them, not ready to yet make his descent.

“Hey guys, going on with them. They're from school.” Nathan called and jumped from the stage.

“You need a ride back? Or you want me to wait?” I asked.

“Can you guys take me back?” Nathan asked his newly formed group. They nodded in unison.

“They got me, they got me,” he called.

“Hey,” I said. “Don't do anything I wouldn't do.”
His eyes were sugar-high wide with a small smile.
“Brother,” he said. “I always do what you wouldn't do.”

