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MEET & GREET

["Talking about the passion." — R.E.M.]



in the flesh

THEY'VE CREATED SOME OF THE MOST PROFOUNDLY DEPRESSING MUSIC IN THE HISTORY OF ROCK, BUT ROGER WATERS AND TRENT REZNOR ARE JUST TICKLED PINK TO SHAKE HANDS.

story ALAN DI PERNA

illustration MITCHGREENBLATT.COM

ROGER WATERS IS WAITING FOR TRENT REZNOR.

"Presumably, they have to rouse him from a drug-induced coma," Waters remarks dryly. "These young rock stars..." • Just then Reznor turns up, and, far from being comatose, he seems well-rested and sharp. In fact, anticipation has driven him from bed at an hour most unbecoming a rock star. "I woke up at 7:30 this morning," he confides. "I was going, 'God, I'm gonna talk to Roger Waters today!'"

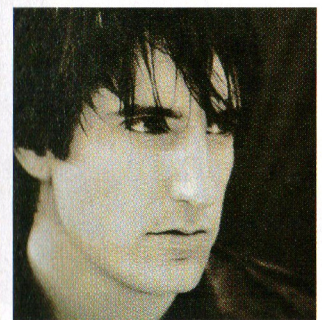




The dean of dramatic arena-rock drama meets the dark lord of industrial. As their conversation gains momentum, one can feel Waters' frosty reserve slowly melting. He and Reznor really are kindred spirits. • They're both the sort who see the big picture, albeit a picture painted in somber tones. As the brooding masterminds behind Pink Floyd and Nine Inch Nails, respectively, Waters and Reznor hold a special place in the hearts of rock and roll misfits from ages, oh, 15 through 50. Pink Floyd's 1979 opus *The Wall* and NIN's 1994 album *The Downward Spiral* each depict the slow, agonized unraveling of a psyche — Waters' and Reznor's own, in each case, although thinly veiled by a plot line. *The Wall*'s Pink and *The Downward Spiral*'s nameless protagonist ultimately lapse into bleak solipsism — complete isolation from their fellow humans.

• And that's how the public tends to think of both Reznor and Waters: Withdrawn, melancholic, a wee bit misanthropic. Waters' acrimony toward his former bandmates in Pink Floyd is as legendary

as Reznor's contempt for his former record label,TVT. • At the moment, they're also a couple of guys with a bit of product to flog. Both are preparing DVDs of their recent live tours, both of which were grand rock spectacles. Waters is also scheduled to release a live album of his *In the Flesh 2000* tour, while Reznor is coming out with *Things Falling Apart*, a CD of remixes from his most recent Nine Inch Nails album, *The Fragile*. • *Revolver*'s motive in bringing these artists together for the first time was to open a dialog between two of rock's major thinkers. Besides, who could pass up the opportunity of introducing the artist responsible for *Animals* to the man who wrote, "I want to fuck you like an animal"?



REVOLVER Trent, what role has Roger's music played in your own life and work?

TRENT REZNOR I grew up on a farm in the middle of nowhere in Pennsylvania. Not to sound too kiss-ass, but when *The Wall* came out, it was a turning point for me. I was in high school at the time, and I remember that music had always been my friend — a companion, the brother I didn't have, or whatever. I came from a broken home. I was alone a lot as a child. And when *The Wall* came out, that record seemed very personal to me, even though I was in a completely different lifestyle, place, and situation than Roger would have been in at that time. I'd never heard music that had that sort of naked, honest emotion. I had that sense of, "Wow, I'm not the only person who feels this way." When it came time to start writing my own music, after some failed attempts at generic lyrics, I realized that if I went inward and took journal entries and turned them into songs, it seemed to strike a chord in others.

And then when I made my second album, *The Downward Spiral*, I aspired to start with a story. I tried to write songs that fit into the slots in the plot line. I soon realized how hard that is. I tried to abandon it. But when I got toward the end of the record, I realized I had kind of done that anyway — what I thought I couldn't do.

ROGER WATERS Forgive me, Trent. I don't know your work. I tend not to listen to rock and roll very much — if at all. But it sounds to me as if what you're doing fulfills all the functions that you've described in my work. So there are still those kids on farms in the middle of Pennsylvania yearning to find some meaning in their own lives and discovering it — some of them at least — in music that could be described as underground, or at least not in the mainstream of popular culture.

REVOLVER Both of you have adopted the full-length concept album as your main medium. Your tend to make large statements about the human condition in your work. What is it like to do that in the current musical climate, so characterized by disposability, one-off hit singles, and short attention spans?

REZNOR It's very difficult, as I've discovered with my most recent record, *The Fragile*. It's a double album, and it's pretty dense. It takes about five or 10 listenings to really get into it. As a fan, that's what I want when I buy a record — to dig in and go several layers deep. That's the thing about your work, Roger. If you look deeper, you find things.

WATERS But not everybody wants to go that deep.

REZNOR I fully understand that, too. And I think there's something to be said for a nice, appealing surface. But when you want to go looking for a deeper meaning, it ought to be there too. But nobody seems to have the time for that anymore. I guess from hiding in my studio for the past five years, making *The Fragile*, I wasn't quite aware of how disposable the scene has become. It's a tough blow to withstand — just the way commercialism has turned music more into product than art. You're judged immediately by the first three weeks of your sales. And if it isn't what somebody at the record label said it would be, then it's a failure.

WATERS But don't you think it was always that way? All record companies are profit-oriented. The holy grail for them is to discover the motherlode of popular taste, in order that they should move huge numbers of product. And they were always that way, in my view. Ahmet Ertegun[Ⓢ] or anybody else. You know, there are these mythic kind of figures from the early days, like Sam Phillips. But Sam Phillips wouldn't have stuck with Elvis if people hadn't bought the records!

REZNOR But are the record companies really catering to what the public taste is? Or do they, to a degree, dictate that taste to the public? MTV pumps out their boy bands and their generic blonde teenage icons to the masses. And I wonder how much of that is the public saying, "What are we supposed to like?" And they're bombarded with that.

WATERS I'm sure you're right. MTV is pure Big Brother. It's pure *Brave New World*. And there's no question but that those who make decisions about the way society works become the arbiters of the quality of human life. In North America, the general trend has been this: You find a piece of wilderness. If there are people or animals living on it, you kill them. Then you build a strip mall that contains a number of the most obviously successful and recognizable icons of the culture you're trying to spread over the land. So, inevitably, there's a McDonald's, a Sam Goody, and all those things. I assume the reason for this is that it's convenient for the policy makers. It provides them with a system where there's plenty of cream floating around the top to be skimmed off. And I suppose the reason the human race goes along with it is that, as yet, we don't know any better. That seems to be enough for most human beings. Although, if you ask most people, they don't actually feel a great sense of satisfaction in their lives, buying that dream.

It's interesting, Trent, that you should be voicing these concerns about this kind of stuff. I find myself not caring about that, really, or about the way the record industry is or what's going to happen to it. Maybe that's very selfish of me. But it may be that that wall of unconcern is almost necessary to some of the rest of us, in order that we should have a reference point to develop against.

REVOLVER Speaking of the demands of the marketplace, you are both in the midst of preparing DVDs of your recent tours. What is it like to encapsulate something like a rock and roll tour in this new medium?

REZNOR Roger, is your DVD basically your live show?

WATERS Yeah, it's the live show — and a documentary, if we can get it all on. Well, actually, we can't get it all on. So I'm trying at the moment to persuade the record company to give the documentary away with the rest of the stuff. This particular DVD can be only two and half hours long, and our show is two-and-a-half hours long. So I'm under a lot of pressure to edit it — take stuff out.

REZNOR Make your product more appealing to the marketplace?

WATERS Yeah, exactly. We were under that pressure with the live album of the shows, as well. "You should really put this out as a single CD, because it's more marketable." And I confess I did have a look at editing. I wrote a few song lists and thought, "I can't do this. This is ridiculous." So we persuaded the record



company to sell a double CD at a reasonable price. I think live albums should be much less expensive than studio albums. The costs of making a live album are minimal compared to a studio album. You just take a mobile to two or three gigs, record them, and choose the best bits.

REVOLVER Are you taking the same kind of approach on your DVD, Trent — a straight document of the show itself?

REZNOR That's the focus of this one. And I'm taking a very hands-on approach. In the past I've made the mistake of hiring "the guys who really know how to do this." What happens is your concert footage ends up looking just like everyone else's. So for this one, we just got seven good digital video cameras and filmed the last 10 shows of the tour from seven different perspectives — some locked-off shots, some hand-held, a lot from the audience — to give a sense of what it was like to be there, in a non-professional kind of way. We adopted that same kind of attitude in post production too. We thought we would edit it here in my studio on a Mac in Final Cut Pro. That led to, "Maybe we could adapt our studio for 5.1 Surround Sound," which we ended up doing. There have been a lot of hassles, but it's also been very educational.

WATERS You're lucky enough to be in a position where you can make those choices, which is great.

REZNOR Well, the timeline might be running out on that, given the sales of my last record. But I'm trying to keep as much in-house as possible. You see, I had a really bad experience with the first record label I was signed to. And when I finally got out of that situation and onto a new label, I said, "Here's the deal. You give me a chunk of money and I'll give you a record. I don't want A&R. I don't want any interference. I'll give you magazine ads. I'll give you a video. I don't want your help." So that provided me with an in-house situation where I could do what I want without meddling fingers from record label strangers.

And now I'm trying to get this DVD done to meet what is a pretty unrealistic deadline. And trying to get my head around the fact that almost nobody is ever going to listen to this with the right setup. Most people can't set a stereo up, let alone six speakers with the right level balance and the right distance between speakers.

WATERS I actually think you're fighting a losing battle, trying to recreate anything like the experience of being at a rock and roll show with a DVD. Basically, they're home movies. I regret not having made home movies of *The Pros and Cons of Hitch Hiking* and the *Radio K.A.O.S.* tours [1984 and '87, respectively]. And so I'm glad that I will have a home movie of the 2000 *In the Flesh* tour. I want to have it to put in a cupboard somewhere and maybe show to my grandchildren. But I don't know if it's something that interests me that much, I have to say. I don't really care about it. Frankly, I'd rather be fishing. Or reading. But you know, I'm 56 years old. How old are you?

REZNOR 35.

WATERS So it's kind of relative. There's 21 years' difference. I might have cared more when I was 35. Not that I'm saying that you will eventually achieve fishing.

REZNOR I'm looking forward to it, actually.

WATERS But from the tenor of this conversation, it sounds like you're more involved in this stuff than I am.

REZNOR I suppose I can't help it. My first record came out 10 years ago. It unexpectedly touched a nerve. The second record got 10 times bigger than we ever thought it was going to be. We just happened to be in the right place at the right time. It propelled us 20 levels higher than we should have been, really.

WATERS You mean 20 levels more popular.

REZNOR Yeah. You find yourself being referenced by popular culture now.

WATERS Well, you do. But you can either choose to reference yourself like that, or not. And we all chose to do that, to a certain extent. If you're in rock and roll, you have to accept that part of the reason why you're there is because you like being patted on the back. Probably didn't get enough of it when you were a kid. That's certainly true of me. If we didn't have those needs we wouldn't be in rock and roll anyway.

REZNOR That's true. But I disappeared for five years to get my brain straightened out. I came back with a really dense double album that I think is the best I can do. But it's substantially different from what I've done in the past. It's not as obvious. And it sold well, but it didn't sell great. So now I'm settling into this... When I first started out, I'd ride around the country in a van 10 times if I needed to. I'd do interviews all day if I needed to...

WATERS But you sound confused by this, slightly.

REZNOR Well, I'm getting over the hump of realizing that I'm settling into what is right for me, artistically. But it might not be accessible for mass consumption.

WATERS Well, okay. So it's not. So you've recognized that. All you need to do is recognize that and then forget about it. Because it's uncontrollable. I think the one thing we all have to understand is that you can't go chasing the audience. That would be a living death for anyone who is serious about what they do. It sounds like you're agonizing about this stuff. And this is now me being wise after the event. I've been through the same agonies. But at the end of the day,

I've had to understand that all you can do is your work. Maybe nobody will buy any of it. That could happen. You might make a record five years down the road and four people will buy it, you know?

REZNOR Right.

WATERS Modigliani* never sold any pictures. Van Gogh peddled his pictures for a bowl of soup. Some of these geniuses never got any reward at all in their lifetimes. Except the reward that comes from doing your work and understanding your connection with the mathematics of life, or God, or whatever you want to call it.



“THERE’S ROOM FOR
THE BOY BANDS AND
ALL THE SOFT PORN
THAT’S OUT THERE
MASQUERADING AS
ROCK AND ROLL.”

— ROGER WATERS

REZNOR That's obvious to me. But it's really nice to hear you say that.

WATERS I've been through some of the same things, clearly. I've had a couple of big hit singles in my life, when I was with Pink Floyd. And I feel good about the work that I've done since then, particularly *Amused to Death* [1992]. I've sold a few records. Not big numbers. But that's just the way it is. The cool thing is the moment when you put that last brush stroke to the painting, stand back and go "Ahhhh." You know you've done good work. That's all you can expect.

REVOLVER All these concerns about how your work is received by the public — do they become more acute, more stressful, when you're touring?

WATERS Not any more for me. On my last tour the audiences were ages 15 through 50, but more 20-year-olds than anything else, as far as I could see. And they knew the songs. They like them. The songs have meaning to them. It was kind of a warm, touchy-feely experience for me. And I'm ashamed to say that I loved it. I'm now in a state emotionally where I can recognize, absorb, and enjoy that connection with the audience. Whereas maybe 10 or 15 years ago I couldn't.

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* Italian artist **Amedeo Modigliani** (1884-1920) developed a unique style characterized by an elongation of form and a purity of line that went largely unrecognized during a short lifetime plagued by poverty and disease.

Because I was still essentially the tall guy in black, standing in the corner scowling at everyone: "Stay away. Leave me alone."

REZNOR I know that guy.

WATERS And I don't feel like that now. So it was fun. And we have really good relationships within the band, so I wasn't going through all that muck I went through with Pink Floyd.

REZNOR It's gotta feel good to look out and see an audience of some young people who are just discovering your music, realizing that it has a timeless quality to it.

WATERS It's great. We're only just beginning to discover that about rock and roll. It didn't really start until the mid-Fifties, so it's still a very young thing. And it may be that some of us will eventually turn into Duke Ellington or Louis Armstrong. The artists involved in rock and roll only have to get old enough for people to say, "Hey, what a big surprise. They lasted. It wasn't just an overnight teenage rebellion thing. It was jazz!"

So there's room for what you and I do, Trent, and there's room for the boy bands and all the soft porn that's out there masquerading as rock and roll. Actually, it doesn't masquerade as rock and roll. It calls itself pop music. And I guess it was always that way.

REVOLVER Do either of you resent being portrayed in the media as gloomy purveyors of depressing music?

REZNOR When Nine Inch Nails first got big, I got labeled as the most gloomy person in the world. I realized in time that my own self image was starting to become what I'd read about myself. Or how I was being treated by people around me, who only knew what they'd read about me. So it became a self-fulfilling prophecy, because there was no time for rational thought amidst the madness of touring and not having a home. No time to get a perspective of how my life was changing — from poverty to wealth, from obscurity to being some sort of icon. In the end, it took some time to say, "Okay, who is really underneath all these layers of shit that have been built up?" From that point on, you realize that the media's just a game. The celebrity thing means nothing to me. It's more of an irritant than anything else.

WATERS About the time Pink Floyd really got popular — which was after *Dark Side of the Moon* [1972] and during *The Wall*, I guess — I just distanced myself from everything. On the *Animals* tour [1977] and the one before that we had a publicist, and his job was to say no [i.e., to interview requests]. Just politely say no to everything. I did that for years and years. Looking back on those days, I'm so glad I refused to do *The Tonight Show*, refused to speak to Barbara Walters or do the covers of magazines. Particularly the chat show TV thing. I think if

you start doing that stuff, you're saying to people, "Okay I'm yours. Take me."

But hey, guys, *il faut partir*. I must go.

REVOLVER Thanks for doing this, Roger.

WATERS Hey, it's been a pleasure. And nice talking to you, Trent.

REZNOR Really nice, Roger.

WATERS Now I'm going to have to buy one of your records to see who you are.

REZNOR Maybe I'll even send you one.

WATERS That would be great. Why not all of them? That would be good. I look forward to hearing them. ✨

U2 continued from page 86

diums that had, for better or worse, become its accustomed live setting. U2 had never shown any instincts for moderation — pushing further and getting bigger had always been the group's guiding principles. But the *Pop* album foundered on half-digested concepts drawn from dance-club culture, and the *Pop Mart* tour — with its huge hydraulic lemon, gigantic vidi-walls, and gleaming golden arches — may have set out to comment subversively on commerce and show business, but ultimately seemed only to be particularly depressing symptoms of the problem.

Audiences in general had already begun to grow more fickle, and the possibility loomed that even U2 fans — the loyalest of the loyal — might be losing interest. After nearly 20 years of mad ambition — and extraordinary achievements — it seemed like U2 had finally overreached.

"*Pop* hurt us here, in the U.S.," Bono admits. "It was difficult with the tour and the hoopla. I'm not sure all our fans knew or cared about Andy Warhol and what we were trying to do — all our concepts, and pop as the death of God, and whatever. It was, 'Phoooo! Let's hear the songs, Bono.' And the songs were special, but we didn't bring home every arrangement. People had to work at it a bit too much. And some of the sneakers-and-short-pants crowd didn't see the bright colors of what we were doing with *Pop Mart* as vivid. They saw it as lurid."

"We made some fundamental errors in our planning," adds Mullen. "We'd planned to go on the road before we finished the album, so we went straight out of the studio and onto the road. We were using a lot of technology, and we didn't have the time to get it together. It took us a while to figure it out. That didn't help."

"And there was the other thing of having that quiet little gig to start up with — in Las Vegas," Bono says, laughing, about the *Pop Mart* tour's wildly publicized opening date. "I wasn't singing well. Everyone turned up, and they heard the sound of a balloon being burst. And I remember Los Angeles, a place where we had never played a bad show: It was the first time I could feel, 'They're eating popcorn out

there.' It's weird being a performer — you can sense stuff. Like, 'They're buying T-shirts during this song?' And yet, beneath all that pomp and color, there was humor and heart and soul, but it was not coming through.

"I think people were on irony patrol, and it wasn't at all ironic," Bono insists. "We'd come in through the crowd and come walking up to the stage, and 'Mofo' would kick off. The band stops, and the opening lines go, 'Looking for to save my, save my soul/ Looking in the places where no flowers grow/ Looking for to fill that God-shaped hole/ Mother, mother-sucking rock and roll.' I mean — that's hardcore. Not at all effete or smart-ass. But it maybe looked smart-ass. So there you have it."

Yes, there you have it, indeed. And here you have the new U2 working hard to undo the damage that was done. The band will not be hitting the road until the spring this time, and there are no plans for any stadium shows. "This time we want to go indoors," says Bono, "play for like four months and see if we want to go on from there. We're really going to rock the house. We're going for lift-off, and our band in full flight is something to see."

"I'm so looking forward to playing indoors," says Mullen, "to be able to look at people and see the whites of their eyes."

Intriguingly, U2's move toward simplicity began during the *Pop Mart* tour, inspired by an unlikely figure. "It was a DJ that may have sent us down this road," Bono says. "When we weren't tight enough at the start of the last tour, we had to find time to rehearse. So we ended up at one point in the basement of a hotel in Washington, D.C. Howie B., whom we'd worked with on *Pop* was DJing on the tour, and also helping out front during the shows with effects and mixing with our own sound guy. Howie was at the rehearsal, acting as a kind of producer.

"We couldn't get all the gear in," Bono goes on, "because it was all in the trucks on the road. So we just had a rented bass guitar, drums, a Vox AC30 and a PA at this rehearsal — nothing else. Howie walks into the room as we're playing, a three-piece and a singer, and he just starts going, 'What's going on here? What is that sound that you're making?' And we just go, ahem, 'Howie, this is rock music.' And he's like, 'Wow, the sound of the drums and the bass is incredible.' So he started removing effects at the live shows, and by the end of the tour there were very few loops and treatments. He said, 'It's really odd. The more I'm taking out, the bigger the sound is getting.' And then he said, 'That's the kind of record you should be making next.'"

Talk about getting back to all that you can't leave behind — or maybe, more appropriately, "Tonight a DJ Saved My Life." Whichever, U2 are back at full strength — and we sure can use them. ✨