

**1) A 2-4 page essay describing how and why the collection as a whole was assembled.**

I think a lot of people assume that the years that make you into who you are happen when you're a teenager. And, I mean, certainly, the teenage years are really formative; I think a lot of who I am was shaped by experiences I've had in the past few years. But I think that we start being shaped into who we are well before the dark days of high school. I don't think we stop loving the things we loved when we were little kids, even decades later. My parents gave me a stuffed animal when I was a baby, and I still sleep with it every night, nearly two decades later. Similarly, the house I was raised in guided my interests. It's thanks to my parents that I have a collection of books on rock and roll.

There's a joke I've seen online that states that angsty teenagers' music taste is the same music their dad used to play in the car when they were kids. I find this joke funny, because it's true. My dad spent his teenage years - the formative years - in a small town in New Jersey, notable only because it's where Bruce Springsteen spent his own teenagehood. As a result, during my childhood, Springsteen CDs were playing constantly. This music bled into other similar artists; I was raised on classic rock. Inconsequential as it seemed, that music would stay with me to this day. A decade later, as a teenager, I had a playlist of all my favorite songs downloaded on my phone, and a shoebox of CDs that I lifted from my dad sitting in my car.

Likewise, my mother always loved reading. She also believed that reading is good for the brain, and therefore subjected me and my siblings to reading time every day. Not that I ever minded; I loved stories, loved losing myself in the pages of a good book, loved the characters, loved all of it. Weekly trips to the library were my bread and butter as a kid. I devoured books, burning through stacks of them and restocking every time I could. This habit, too, would stay with me permanently. I still carry at least one book in my bag everywhere I go, just in case.

I distinctly remember the day I discovered Nirvana. I was at work in a small dessert parlor, the summer before my junior year of high school. The shop was so small, only one person was required to be on shift at a time, which meant I had full control of the speakers. I put my playlist on shuffle, far from a refined mix, more of a synthesis of every song you might hear on any classic rock radio station worth its weight in sound waves. By pure happenstance, "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and "Come as You Are" played back to back, and I realized they were by the same band. I then decided that, hey, I *liked* this band. A quick rundown of Wikipedia gave me all the basic information I needed to know: the explosion of Nevermind, and the legend of Kurt Cobain. I added a couple more of Nirvana's biggest hits onto my phone, and googled the lyrics to "Smells Like Teen Spirit," a song made for teenagers drowning in their own angst. I may as well have been Cobain's prime target.

Like many depressed teenagers, Cobain's story (or what I read of it on the people's encyclopedia,) resonated with me. I had been lost in the dark waters of being sixteen years old, and out of nowhere came somebody who *got* it. Cobain's voice and lyrics buoyed me at a time when I needed it badly, and they hit like a lightning bolt, straight out of nowhere. I was obsessed. My obsession couldn't have come at a better time; It was summer 2019, and that April had marked 25 years since Cobain's life ended. Albums were being rereleased, and Cobain's previous manager, Danny Goldberg, had written a new memoir about his time with the legend, aptly titled *Serving the Servant*. My library had three copies, all hardback. I checked one out immediately, went straight home, and read the entire thing in two days. Everything Goldberg

mentioned that I didn't know, I looked up. Every song being recorded, I played as I read. And, thanks to the internet, I had access to photos and videos of concerts. It didn't take long for me to fall a little bit in love with Kurt Cobain. (Come on, who *isn't* a little bit in love with Kurt Cobain?) By the time I reached the end of the book, I was crying, and completely obsessed. I spent that entire summer listening to nothing but Nirvana, and I'm not ashamed to admit that I spent pretty much all of my money on Nirvana related products. I scoured bookstores for copies of Kurt Cobain's *Journals*, and then spent far too much money on a copy of my own, officially starting my collection of books on rock and roll. I also had one of my library's copies of *Serving the Servant* on lockdown. I was re-reading it pretty much all the time. Later that fall, my kind, God-fearing grandmother, possibly the least rock-inclined person on the planet, gave me a copy of my own. It was a gesture that I can't articulate, for her to get that book for me, and the book is one of the few that made the cut to come to college with me.

Unfortunately, Nirvana only produced three studio albums. Fortunately, the drummer in the band, Dave Grohl, started his own band following Cobain's death, leading me to an entire new rabbit hole to dive into. Forged on the broken rocks of the late nineties, the Foo Fighters had a similar enough sound to my beloved Nirvana to get me hooked. It didn't hurt that the frontman had been in Nirvana. I'm not going to admit to having a crush on Grohl, but I will say that I have tickets to the Fighter's tour this summer, and a copy of Grohl's new memoir, which my father lovingly pre-ordered for me a few months ago.

Following the Foo Fighters came a quick and completely uncontrolled free-fall into all things alternative. The Red Hot Chile Peppers, from the same era, filled my headphones for the long winter I turned seventeen. Kiedis' autobiography, hailed by many as one of the greatest autobiographies of all time, particularly in the rock genre, was on my list to read for months, but my library, tragically, didn't have a copy. (Clearly they understood that Cobain was far superior, warranting three copies of his book to Kiedis' none.) Several attempts of an inter-library loan proved futile for one reason or another, and I had all but given up on ever getting to read the iconic book when I stumbled upon it in a discarded cart at a used bookstore. I scored the book, worn as it was, for a pittance, and stayed up far too late one night finishing it.

In the same bookstore, I found a surprising book: *Cobain: Montage of Heck*. For those unfamiliar, this would appear to be a biography of the late Cobain, but *Montage of Heck* is actually a documentary about the legend. The book was a comprehensive print of the documentary, filled with glossy pictures and transcriptions of the interviews. I snapped it up along with the Kiedis bio. Following those days, things started to happen very quickly, both in my life and my development of rock knowledge. The COVID-19 pandemic hit, sending me into lockdown, along with the rest of the country. Lucky for me, Spotify was still streaming hits, and the library developed a method to deliver books to patrons contactlessly.

That spring, my library browsing was limited to what I could find on the library website, or books that I already knew I wanted, leaving little room for discovery. However, on the front page of the library catalog were two small feature sections, one for new arrivals, and one for critically acclaimed books. The new arrivals page was where I stumbled upon *Sigh, Gone: A memoir of great books, punk rock, and the fight to fit in*, by Phuc Tran. Just looking at the cover online, it was like boxes were being checked off mentally: punk rock, check, great books, check, alienated teenager, check. Give it to me. Unfortunately, apparently a lot of my fellow countrymen had the same reaction; I had to wait for weeks on hold before I finally got to read the memoir.

When I did though, I discovered that it was so much more than the title made it seem. The author, now an adult, but writing about his teenage years, and I had a lot in common. We both had a passion for reading, and loved punk rock. Of course, Tran's punk rock pre-dated mine, his love being from before Nirvana broke the punk scene, and most of mine coming from after. But the book introduced me to so many new channels of music and literature. Additionally, the story of a misfit kid appealed to me; sure it had been a year, but deep down I was still that angsty teen that Cobain's music appealed to. And, similar to that initial book on Cobain, *Sigh, Gone* remained a steady player in my constant rotation of library books, until another relative finally gifted me a copy for Christmas. (That book, too, was one of the few to make the trip to college.)

That same Christmas, my parents, busy as they were, surprised me with an incredibly thoughtful gift: a record player. The gesture surprised me; I had never asked for a record player, never even really gave much thought to getting one. I had my collection of shitty CDs in my car, and was happy enough rummaging through the local used bookstore for new ones, dropping four or five bucks on a new one every few weeks or so. Maybe my parents were sick of trying to find specific CDs I wanted in the decade of 2020. More likely, they saw, detached as we were at the time, my growing love for rock music. And my father, lover of rock, product of the seventies, knew that the pinnacle of rock love comes when you have a collection of vinyl.

My mother got the player at a local department store. My father got me a small collection, maybe half a dozen, of LPs to start my collection. As I opened each one, he would smile. "That one is a classic. Every collector has to have a copy of that," he would explain, or "That's a good study album right there. I used to play that one when I was in college and do my homework." The past few years, my relationship with my father had grown strained; both of us were caught up in our own problems, and we couldn't relate to each other much anymore. The fact that he recognised my love of this new entity, recognized it in himself, and took the time to reach out to me through it, broke some of that ice away. In the months following, I went to local record shops often, and somehow amassed almost every album by Bruce Springsteen into my collection. The stuff of my childhood, translated into my formative years.

In the time since, my collections of vinyl, and of books on rock music, along with my love for the genre, have only grown. I'm happy to say that I have a Nirvana album on vinyl, though there is a tragic lack of Foo Fighters and Chile Peppers on my shelf. My father continues to give me new albums every year, and when new memoirs of rock legends come out, he's the first to pre-order me a copy. Much like my old collection of CDs, my bookshelf had become populated with books of my father's, including his copy of *Born to Run*, written by the Boss himself.

There are many who would say that rock is dead, a thing of the past. Many would say similar things about print literature. In an age of smart devices and soundboards that can make synthetic beats, these loves of mine seem antiquated. I refuse to believe they are a thing of the past, though. There are so many incredible artists who have spoken about this that choosing one to quote here would be nearly impossible, so I'll leave it to another childhood great of mine, because I believe in the circular nature of life and of writing. "No cause is lost, as long as there is one fool left to fight for it," proclaimed Will Turner in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. And so, as long as there are people alive who still love the smell of a used bookstore and the quiet flipping of a paper book, who still love the crackle of a needle on a vinyl, or the crackle of Kurt Cobain's voice, these things will never die. As long as I'm still alive, rock music will never die.

**2) An annotated bibliography of at least twenty representative items from the collection. The annotations should reflect the importance of each item to the collection as a whole.**

1. *Serving the Servant* - Danny Goldberg
  - a. This book was really the impetus of my rock and roll obsession, and the inaugural book in my collection. I read this book because I liked Nirvana, but this book is what took that feeling to the next level, and sparked a real interest in the rest of the genre for me. I reread this book a couple times a year because I love it so much. It's fabulously written, compelling, and very interesting.
2. *Journals* - Kurt Cobain
  - a. The closest thing we will ever get to a memoir or auto-biography from the late Nirvana frontman. Cobain was known to regularly "journal" in cheap spiral notebooks. I use the term journal loosely here; the book is less a linear collection of events than a haphazard collection of song lyrics, grocery lists, doodles, rants, and so on. However, for any Nirvana fan, this book is a must, because it included first-hand versions of song lyrics and designs for shirts and guitars, all in Cobain's handwriting.
3. *Cobain: Montage of Heck* - Brett Morgan
  - a. *Montage of Heck* is an old documentary about Kurt Cobain's life and death. It's the most revered documentary about the artist for it's comprehensiveness and for the people interviewed in it. I stumbled upon a book that contains all the transcripts of the interviews and beautiful still photos from the documentary; it's essentially the documentary in book form.
4. *MTV Unplugged* (LP) - Nirvana
  - a. The first and only Nirvana record in my collection. There used to be a ripped video of the entire MTV Unplugged performance on YouTube. (It got taken down because of copyright issues.) In the early days of my Nirvana obsession, I was watching it constantly. There was something so raw about the performance, particularly the last song. There is a moment, during that last song, when Cobain pauses to take a breath, and the camera cuts to a close up of his face. His eyes had been screwed shut as he sang, but he opened them for a second, and they're piercingly blue. It's such a small thing, but it's striking, brutal, and sealed my love for this album, the first ever album I listened to start to finish without any skips.
5. *Scar Tissue* by Anthony Kiedis
  - a. This autobiography of the Red Hot Chile Peppers singer and frontman is considered to be one of the best autobiographies in rock and roll. Honestly, a lot of it is about drugs and sex, but Kedis is a skilled writer, and has a wry sense of humor that makes it's way onto the page. That humor was my favorite thing about this book.
6. *Born to Run* - Bruce Springsteen

- a. Written by the Boss himself, this book is another of the most highly acclaimed autobiographies in rock. Rolling Stone ranked it sixth on their list of top 50 Rock and Roll Memoirs, higher than Keith Richards *Life*. This book actually belonged to my father, life-long fan of Springsteen, before I borrowed it. I loved it for Springsteen's disposition throughout the book - relaxed and candid - and never did return it to my father.
7. *Born to Run (LP)* - Bruce Springsteen
  - a. Bruce Springsteen, as previously stated, has been the soundtrack to a majority of my life. When something is important to someone close to you, be it music, sports, movies, and so on, I think it becomes a part of you too. This vinyl was the first that I purchased for myself, after stumbling upon it on a used music store. The cover was in rough condition, and I got the LP for less than it's worth because of that, but the vinyl still plays beautifully.
8. *Born in the U.S.A (LP)* - Bruce Springsteen
  - a. We all exist as victims of circumstance, and my circumstances led to Bruce Springsteen being the only artist that I have more than one album on vinyl. This album, considered by some to be Springsteen's best work, (certainly, it contains the most hits) is my favorite by him. This is the album my father played the most when I was a kid, the songs he would sing in the kitchen on Saturdays, the music we would listen to in the car. This is the album I play when I miss home.
9. *Times Like His* - Dave Grohl
  - a. This memoir just came out in October of the last year. I had known it was coming out for a while, and was eagerly awaiting its release, though I figured I probably wouldn't get my hands on a copy until Christmas. On a random Wednesday afternoon, I was sitting outside, eating my lunch, when my father texted me, randomly. He's a fantastic cook, and sent me a picture of his own lunch, just to brag that his food was better than mine. We texted for a bit, then he told me to be on the lookout for a package from him. A few weeks later, it finally came in; he had preordered me a copy of Grohl's new memoir. Again, I was struck by the bigness of such a small gesture. He knew I loved Grohl and his music, he saw in the news that the book was coming out, thought of me, and took the time to send me a copy. The book was incredible - funny, interesting, thoughtful - but this book matters to me because of the story around it, not the one between the pages.
10. *Rumors (LP)* - Fleetwood Mac
  - a. This album was given to me in my initial collection, because it's a classic album, and because my father listened to it while studying when he was in college. As such, during the long months of virtual classes, I would put the record on when I was studying. My brother would often do his classwork in my room, and so I would ask him sometimes which album he wanted me to put on while we worked. His top choice was almost always

*Rumors*, but he always requested that I play the B-side first, because his favorite song was on side B.

11. *Sour (LP)* - Olivia Rodrigo

- a. Rodrigo was a breakout artist last year, with multiple hit songs off of her debut album becoming popular, largely thanks to the app Tik Tok. I honestly think the album is incredible for a lot of reasons, but I was always a little too embarrassed to buy this vinyl for myself. It was too trendy. Luckily, nine year old girls have no concept nor concern of “trendy,” and my little cousin gifted me this album for Christmas. So I get to enjoy it, and I have an excuse if anybody tries to judge me.

12. *Does the Noise Inside My Head Bother You?* - Steven Tyler

- a. If I had to pick my father’s favorite band (barring Springsteen and the E-Street band) it would be Aerosmith. Much like Springsteen, Aerosmith’s songs were playing throughout my childhood years. My favorite ride at Disneyworld for a while was the Rock’n Roller Coaster, because my dad liked it, and I thought it was cool that they played Aerosmith music. This book was originally his, but was stolen first by my sister, and then by me.

13. *Rocks* - Joe Perry

- a. Where Steven Tyler is, Joe Perry must also be. Not really, but any Aerosmith fan would be remiss to not have the other half of the story on their shelf. Again, this book is one my father owned for years, and got passed around the family. (Sorry Dad.)

14. *American Idiot (LP)* - Green Day

- a. *American Idiot* came out two years after I was born. My parents were fans of the band, and burned a couple of the songs onto CDs to play in the car. I became obsessed with ‘Boulevard of Broken Dreams,’ calling it the “Walk alone song.” (For those unfamiliar, during the refrain, singer Billie Joe Armstrong whines the lines “I walk alone, I walk alone.”) Once my parents finally figured out what I was talking about, they would play the song at my request, which became frequent. In fact, they bought the music video for the song on iTunes, and would let me watch it as a kid. Now, nearly two decades later, I’m just as in love with Green Day, and I consider this album to be one of few perfect albums, from start to finish.

15. *The Blue Album (LP)* - Weezer

- a. Last summer, Green Day, Weezer, and Fall Out Boy joined together to go on a tour, with each band performing for about ninety minutes at concerts across the United States. My sister is a life-long fan of Fall Out Boy, and for her birthday, my parents surprised her with tickets to the show in our hometown. I was lucky enough to get to tag along. Growing up, my sister played Fall Out Boy’s music constantly, so I was familiar with that, and I was equally obsessed with Green Day. Weezer on the other hand, I didn’t know as well. The band closed their portion of the show with the iconic “Buddy Holly,” a song I had never heard before. I remember looking over during the song to see my dad absolutely going *wild* during this song. For

the next week, I couldn't get the chorus of it out of my brain, and I took myself down to Target and got a copy of the album on vinyl.

16. *Guitar for Dummies* - Mark Phillips, Jon Chappelle

- a. Once I got really into rock music, I started wanting to learn how to play guitar. I saved up money for months, until I had enough to buy my own guitar. Unfortunately, excitement only gets you so far, so I ended up picking up a copy of *Guitar for Dummies* to get me going. Now, I truly believe in the learning power of books, but at the end of the day, a book can only teach you so much. But this book was surprisingly helpful. It was easy to understand, explained things in an entertaining way, and included lots of helpful diagrams. I learned the first chords I know thanks to this book.

17. *Cleopatra (LP)* - The Lumineers

- a. Once I got my guitar skill going, I learned a couple of easy songs. One of the first few songs I learned was "Cleopatra" by the Lumineers, off the eponymous album. The rest of the album is incredible as well; it gives off this sort of nostalgic, modern, longing feeling, perfect for traveling or journaling, or pretending to be the main character in a coming of age movie. But the greatest joy I get from this vinyl is from playing my guitar along with the record. It just feels so classic, so cool, to have the record spinning along, music scratching from the tiny speakers, while also pouring from an instrument in my lap, perfectly in tune.

18. *Eruption: Conversations with Eddie Van Halen* - Brad Tolinski and Chris Gill

- a. Eddie Van Halen is a guitar legend, and when he passed away last year, the whole world felt the loss. This book came out a few months later. Aptly titled, it mostly contains a series of transcribed conversations with the late legend, as well as telling his biography. This book was given to me by my father this past Christmas, and I'm still working my way through it's chapters, but it's incredibly interesting, and I'm enjoying learning more about Van Halen, both the man and the band.

19. *Greatest Hits, Volume II (LP)* - Bob Dylan

- a. I firmly believe in the power of Bob Dylan, both as a musician and as an idea. I think he's one of the most influential people of the sixties, maybe of the twentieth century. I also love his music. I was lucky to find a tattered copy of this album on vinyl at my record shop, and despite it being volume two of the greatest hits, every song on each of the four sides is good.

20. *Hesitant Alien (LP)* - Gerard Way

- a. Gerard Way was the frontman of emo punk band My Chemical Romance. After the band's breakup, Way released one solo album, *Hesitant Alien*. The album didn't sell many copies, and was only released on LP in one issue. I adore the album, and hunting down a copy of it on vinyl was a pastime of mine for a while. It's pretty easy, with the internet, to find rare items for sale, but because it only was issued once, the record is incredibly valuable to collectors. A few weeks ago, I was listening to the

radio, and heard the DJ announce the date for International Record Store Day. Record Store Day is a date every year, similar to Small Business Day, when people support independent shops and stores. A lot of artists release exclusive albums to sell, or offer earlier release dates for upcoming records to the stores, to support them and drum up business. Curious, I looked up the website for this year's date, and pulled up the list of exclusive albums. Way down towards the bottom of the page, I saw it: "*Hesitant Alien* - Gerard Way - Record Store Day Exclusive Re-Release." I immediately emailed every record store in the area, asking if they would have copies for sale. My hopes were crushed in a matter of days, when I heard back negatives from every single one. However, the same day, I found on eBay a listing for an original pressing of the album, with no bids, priced at forty dollars, which is less than a quarter of the price of any other listing I had seen. I ended up being the only bidder, and got the album for a fraction of what it's worth. It's been shipped to me from California, and should be here, the newest item in my collection, in a week.

**3) An annotated "wish list" of at least ten other book titles that you would like to add in the future to complete or enhance your existing collection.**

1. *Please Kill Me: The Uncensored Oral History of Punk* by Legs McNeil, Gillian McCain
  - a. This book is a history of the rise of punk rock (my favorite sub-genre.) More excitingly, it's told by leading figures in the punk rock scene - the Ramones, Iggy Pop, and many others all lent their voices to this book. I think it would be a really interesting read, both for the content, and the people helping tell the story.
2. *The Heroin Diaries* by Nikki Sixx
  - a. This book is written by Motley Crue bassist Nikki Sixx, about the year he hit rock-bottom due to struggles with drug addiction. Much like *Please Kill Me*, several other notable figures also contributed to the story. Reviews of this book are killer, and based on the premise, it reminds me of Anthony Kedis' book *Scar Tissue*.
3. *Me* by Elton John
  - a. The newest addition to my vinyl collection is Elton John's greatest hits album, a gift from my father. The two of us watched the *Rocketman* movie when it came out, and now that John has an autobiography out, I'm excited to read it as well.
4. *High School* - Tegan and Sara
  - a. This is a book about growing up in the late nineties, teenage angst and loving rock and roll. The experiences that the authors talk about strike a resonance with me; we love the same bands, and are trying to figure ourselves out. I think this book would be similar to *Sigh*, *Gone*, and I feel like I would love this book as well.
5. *Girl in a Band* - Kim Gordon
  - a. Gordon was a singer and bassist in the band Sonic Youth, and has worked with other punk-era artists such as Courtney Love. This book made Rolling Stone's list of best rock biographies, and it sounds interesting to me.
6. *Chronicles: Volume One* - Bob Dylan

- a. Again, I'm a big Bob Dylan fan. This book is critically acclaimed, largely for Dylan's writing style, which is supposedly very poetic, much like his lyrics. The book actually won a Nobel Prize in literature, so even if I didn't love Dylan's work, I'd still want to read it.
7. *The Rest is Noise* - Alex Ross
  - a. This book is essentially a survey of the music of the twentieth century, examining its effects on pop culture, politics, and mass society. I have an interest in history, so I think this is a really interesting lens to examine the twentieth century through.
8. *The Birth of Loud* - Ian S. Port
  - a. This book chronicles the rise of the electric guitar, and the competition between Fender and Les Paul to become the dominant electric guitar brand. This is a subject I know very little about. In fact, before hearing about this book, I didn't know the two companies had any sort of history of competition at all, so I'm excited to learn about this.
9. *Sellout: The Major-Label Feeding Frenzy That Swept Punk, Emo, and Hardcore (1994–2007)* - Dan Ozzi
  - a. This is pretty much my niche interest inside the rock category. The punk and emo music from the early nineties to the late two-thousands is my favorite genre to listen to. I also think the concept of the sellout is very interesting, because it is so nuanced, so I really want to read this book and explore these ideas more.
10. *Everybody Loves Our Town: An Oral History of Grunge* - Mark Yarm
  - a. Again, the grunge scene in the late nineties is my jam, so any book on that era is already something I'm interested in. However, this book is similar to *Please Kill Me*, in that it features input from members of some of my favorite bands, like Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Soundgarden. I think this book would be fascinating, and really would like to read it.