

# Details

**Byte This**  
The Insider's  
Guide  
to Music on  
the Web

**EVERCLEAR / OZZY OSBOURNE / THE RAMONES / MARILYN MANSON / METALLICA  
PERRY FARRELL / BJÖRK / RADIOHEAD / SMASHING PUMPKINS / TOMMY LEE  
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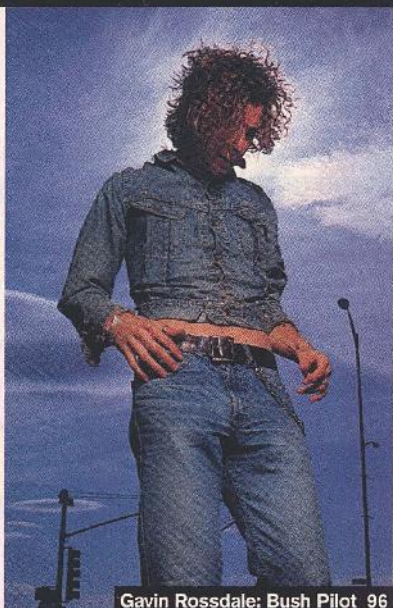
GAVIN OF BUSH,  
SHIRLEY OF GARBAGE

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Cover: Albert Watson. Fashion: William Mullen. Hair and makeup: Colleen Creighton for the Stephen Knoll Salon. All clothing by Calvin Klein.

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# Joni Mitchell

She's looked at life from both sides now, and she's mad as hell about Alanis, MTV, and simpleminded Americans like you

**Congratulations on your Grammy for *Turbulent Indigo*. By the way, I saw you at the awards with your new boyfriend and your ex-husband, producer/bassist Larry Klein. He is your ex now, isn't he?**

No, we haven't officially divorced yet. As a matter of fact, he broke up with his girlfriend, who was also with us, the day after the event. It's funny—when he's back with his girlfriend he pushes for a divorce, and when he breaks up with her, he slacks off again. (laughs) I call her "the mistress" when I see her, and she gets real upset.

**Very '90s of y'all to double-date.**

Isn't it? Actually it was for economic reasons: We had to split the cost of the limo.

**Oh, come on! After thirty years and seventeen albums, surely you—**

No! You don't understand. I don't make much money. I haven't seen a royalty check in twenty years. And at a certain point Geffen [her former label] dammed up my only income—which is my writer's income from my publishing company—so I had no money coming in. So I went to David Geffen and said, "Let me go." He said, "Joan, you're not gonna find a better deal out there than this, and I'll keep you here forever—I'll never drop you." And I said, "Slavery with tenure is not attractive to me."

**Why do you think it is that ever since 1974's *Court and Spark* you've been increasingly invisible?**

America is trained to the new, and Joni Mitchell has been around for a while, although each of my albums has been a brand-new ball game. But I spent most of my life out of sync. I mean, I've been blacklisted for a long time.

**Blacklisted?**

Yeah. Over a personal incident involving an asshole with some power at *Rolling Stone*.

**Has this got something to do with the time they named you *Old Lady of the Year*? What was that about, anyway?**

They made this elaborate diagram

charting all these hearts I broke. I mean, I can't date? Am I a sinner for dating? That was kind of shocking. And it was the men on the list who called me up and said they were gonna make a complaint. After that, I was told that the magazine had a policy not to ever say anything nice about me. Like, *The Hissing of Summer Lawns* was named Worst Album of the Year in *Rolling Stone*.

**And this affected your exposure in general?**

Well, a career goes up and down, and the press over the years has gotten more vicious, but my not being played became kind of...conspicuous. "Adult contemporary" wouldn't have me, "pop" wouldn't have me, so for twenty years I did not "fit." My argument was: Look, what Sting and Paul Simon are doing is coming from me—so why can't we play me where they play them? But those outlets were barred. MTV wouldn't play me at all, and VH1 only occasionally. All these doors were closed—no one would give me an explanation why.

**It's been said that Sting wouldn't have come up with his world-music/fusion bit if you hadn't done it first on *Hissing*.**

(laughs) Sting is a tributary of James [Taylor] and me and we call him our son, so whenever I'd see Sting I'd say, "Hello, son." Because for a long time he liked to think of himself as a pioneer blazing new territory, when in fact he wasn't. He did some bold moves, but blaze a trail? No.

**But you have. In 1971 you created your trendsetting confessional masterpiece, *Blue*. What's its power?**

I was beginning an emotional descent at the time of *Blue*—they'd call it a nervous breakdown in this country—and when you're depressed, everything is up for question. You see how unbelievably phony the world is and most of your survival mechanisms fall away. So that album was made at a time when I had no defenses at all. As

many a person has pointed out, *Blue* works really good if you're really low. These five girls came up to me once in a bar and said, "Joni, before there was Prozac, there was you." (laughs)

**Your popularity took a nosedive with your jazz experimentation on *Hissing* and *Mingus*. Why do people hate jazz?**

Because they don't understand it and they're scared of it. Also, I think Americans are simple—they like their tragedy in the minor key and their happiness in the major key. But if you give them anything more emotionally complex than that? No. Because emotionally complex chords make you feel emotionally complex things, and I don't think Americans are very emotionally complex.

**What do you think of music these days?**

It's appallingly sick, for the most part. It's boring chord movement and bad acting.

**So how good do you think you are?**

If you want to be a songwriter and see what the standard is, you have to take a look at Dylan and me. Dylan tremendously upgraded the American pop song in terms of content, and I...well, musically I'm further out than Dylan, and as a result less popular. But I'm a musical *explorer* and not just a pop songwriter or an *occasional* writer of a song or *half* a song, like these other women. Alanis Morissette writes words, someone else helps set it to music, and then she's kind of stylized into the part. To me, Sheryl Crow is a style invention, and I know some of her inventors.

A lot of these women are *made*, they're not...well, Laura Nyro was not like that. She and I were composers and *poets*. Of the women who have come up after that, I can't think of anybody who...well, let me put it this way: If you take me to a concert, it'd better be great enough to make me forget that I want a cigarette, and I haven't seen anybody lately who can do that.





I have to say you're sounding rather like something David Crosby once said about you: "Joni's about as humble as Mussolini."

I am an arrogant artist! And I'm sick of the false humility in this business! (*thinks about it*) And I get really arrogant when they start pitting me against people and saying something or someone's like *me* when that something is *mediocre*! And talk about *arrogance*—Crosby has no right to call... I mean, I'm fond of Crosby. In fact, when I thought he was gonna die I actually

prayed for him. And then when I got my recent *Billboard* honorary award, I'm sitting in the audience and there's David going, (*in a nasal, mocking tone*) "I'll tell ya, man, what a great songwriter she is: We came back from Woodstock babbling about it and she wrote that song from our babbling." I thought, "You bastard!" I had that song written *before* they got back. So when Crosby says I'm as humble as Mussolini, let us please put it in context that he's always ready to take credit where it

isn't due, and that's typical—get a man within four feet of me and he's gonna say *he* did it.

**You've written long and eloquently about relationships through the years, but I'm sure having one with you must not be very easy.**

It couldn't be. I'm not a normal female. **You've got one of the greatest voices in pop and you're a chain-smoker. What would get you to quit?**

I can't think of anything... And anyway, I'm singing better than ever. Don't you think?

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**Interview by Brantley Bardin, who's been through one eight-track, three vinyl records, and two CDs of Blue.**



# David Geffen

It's David's world—we just listen to it. The DreamWorks honcho discusses the illusion of power, the power of persuasion, and being a Keanu Reeves fan.

**The day you sold Geffen Records you made \$700 million. Did it occur to you at the time that you'd never enjoy making money again?**

The day that happened, a good friend of mine said something like that to me and I thought, "Boy, is he wrong!" Unfortunately, he turned out to be right. In life, the journey is everything, and so to suddenly have "arrived" can be a little disappointing. When you have as much critical mass, so to speak, as I have, even if you do nothing it makes a gigantic amount of money. I have no interest in it anymore. I make it whether I think about it or not. I'm not trying to be arrogant, that's just the way it is.

**What are you worth?**

More than enough.

**Does it concern you that people might be attracted to you only for your power?**

If they're attracted to me because I have money or because they imagine I have power or 'cause they think I'm cute or hot sex, it doesn't matter. In the end they're gonna get *me*, whatever that is.

**So then power is just another characteristic, like blond hair?**

Power is an illusion. No one is powerful, really, finally. In my business, you often end up a beggar: "Please sign with us." I don't believe in the concept of power, if power is your ability to make people do something that they don't want to do. I have no interest in being oppressive. Everything connected with that idea is unpleasant.

**How do you define success?**

(laughs) I'm successful.

**Are there still dark voices in your head that tell you that you are a failure?**

I can quiet my mind. I've gone through *est* and *Lifespring* and *A Course in Miracles* and so many things that helped me deal with my demons and dark voices. They don't get that much attention anymore.

**What do they sometimes say?**

The most profound manifestation of

these crazy voices occurred when I was driving to see my mother in the hospital just before she died. A voice said, "When your mother dies you can sell the house—you'll get \$1.3 million. I started to laugh.

**Laugh?**

Yeah, because there was not a cell in my body that didn't adore my mother. I'm not responsible for the voices—I'm only responsible for my behavior.

**Did you ever call up Keanu Reeves and have a laugh over the marriage rumor?**

I remember laughing when I first read it, but I thought it was very *unfunny* for one reason: I felt it was spread to hurt Keanu Reeves. When I finally did meet him at the opening of the Geffen Playhouse, I looked at him and said, "So was it as good for you as it was for me?" He laughed. If Keanu Reeves was gay and interested in me, I'd be thrilled to death. I've always been a fan—but I wasn't flattered by this rumor, simply because it's impossible to be flattered by a lie.

**Unless you believe it. When you walk into a room of straight execs, are they thinking, "Oh, here's the fag"?**

No. I think they say to themselves, "Here's a very talented, very successful man who's gay." It doesn't matter. I mean, I had a dinner here for the president of the United States. I'm sure that somewhere in the paragraph of things about me is one that says I'm also a fag—so what?

**When I told people I was coming to interview you, the ones who know you wanted me to find out if David Geffen is happy.**

From time to time. I'm also *not* happy from time to time. I am also interested and I'm bored, up and down, and I laugh and I cry and I have what's called a real life.

**What do you want that you don't have?**

You're asking if I want a relationship. I have relationships and they last as

long as they're supposed to. Some last for an hour and some for years. Let me answer it differently. I wouldn't trade places with anybody I've ever met. My life may not look like what I hoped it would look like when I was younger, when I had all kinds of silly illusions. ... My idea of success then was to make \$1,000 a week, have a Cadillac convertible, and live in an apartment on Ocean Parkway in Brooklyn.

**Cher once said, "People are terrified of David—of his temper, his intelligence. He's not afraid of anybody."**

That was twenty-three years ago. At this point in my life I don't have a bad temper, I'm pretty smart, and it's true: I'm not afraid. That's not to say I couldn't be put in a situation where fear would come up.

**Here's one, courtesy of Joni Mitchell: If David Geffen would spend more time being fair, he would spend less time being generous.**

I think that statement says more about her pain than it does about me. Joni, who I really do have ultimate respect for as an artist, is very comfortable playing the part of the victim, but I'm certainly no victimizer. If you ask around, you won't find a lot of people I've been in business with who think I'm unfair. The fact is that Joni was in business with me from 1968 till 1994, through three different record companies and many, many contracts—obviously I was both fair and generous to her. I've been a really good friend, a strong supporter, and a believer in her for decades, so I feel no guilt relative to my relationship with Joni.

**Elsewhere in this very issue she says that she hasn't "seen a royalty check in twenty years" and that at one point you "dammed up" her writer's income.**

It's simply not true. Joni saw no royalty checks because of the many millions of dollars in advances she took over the years, which even to this day have not



been recouped by the sales of her records. Not one of her records since 1978 has been profitable. Fortunately, she is a very wealthy woman.

**You strike me as a kind of guilt-free zone.**

Of course I've had guilt—I'm a Jewish kid from Brooklyn. But it isn't the overriding factor in my life.

**Does anything keep you up at night?**

You mean do I sleep regularly? I have no problem sleeping, although if I want to go to sleep early, I take Excedrin P.M., the world's greatest drug.

**Do you still go to pop concerts?**

I loathe them. I hate when everybody in front of me stands up, because I'm short and I can't see the fucking stage.

**True or false: The more repressive the political climate, the better the music.**

Put it this way: If Pat Buchanan got elected president, the music would get pretty fabulous. The world might suck, but the music would rock! I'm happy music doesn't have to get better at this price.

**All right, Time Warner stops distribution of Dr. Dre and Interscope Records, and yet they continue to earn money off the publishing rights to his stuff. What's up with that?**

tigating him—that's a lot of pressure. According to the right wing, it's okay to have ads in newspapers of women in bras and panties, but it's not okay for a guy to be leaning against a ladder in a room with cheap paneling and a shag carpet? That's bullshit.

**So you tried to convince him that he shouldn't pull those ads?**

I did, but he was genuinely concerned that stores might stop stocking his product, and he couldn't afford not to.

**Does selling Green Day or Nirvana to twelve-year-olds trivialize the music?**

No, the music can't be trivialized by the consumer, it can only be trivialized by the creator. By the way, you can't compare Nirvana and Green Day.

**Why's that?**

Because Kurt Cobain was an incredibly gifted artist who spoke to his generation as Bob Dylan spoke to his. Green Day is a terrific band and they're commercially successful.

**A lot of artists need to retreat at a certain arc in their fame. Do you think that this disjunction between art and commerce may contribute to it?**

Success is difficult to deal with. I think

pany was going to come out with a book about him. He actually told me that he didn't want the book to come out and that if it did he'd kill himself. I didn't think for a minute that he was serious because one doesn't think that, but I did call up Jeff Katzenberg, who was at the Walt Disney Company at the time, and Michael Eisner, and they didn't put the book out. I never knew what was in the book, but Kurt was clearly disturbed by it.

**But David, if your power is just an illusion, how do you explain your ability to pull that off?**

I persuaded Michael that it wasn't good for Hollywood Records and the Walt Disney Company to do something that would make Kurt Cobain and Nirvana so unhappy. It wasn't about power, it was about *persuasion*.

**Let's talk about your most brilliant career move—changing the ending of *Risky Business* before the film came out.**

That's not the most brilliant moment of my career.

**Whether intentionally or accidentally, you defined the '80s, because Joel Goodsen had the party and got into college as well. He got it all.**

It just didn't make sense to me that if you got the admissions director of Princeton laid, you wouldn't get into the school. And I didn't believe that the audience would believe it either. ... You know what made me decide to do that movie? I had passed on it three times, but there was a line in it where Joel has the brothel going, and one girl sits down next to her girlfriend and says, "My pussy feels like Hamburger Helper." And it made me laugh so much that I really had to make this movie. By the way, that line didn't make it into the final version.

**What would you most like to be remembered for?**

I don't really give a shit. I'm sure that to some degree, for at least a small amount of time, I will be remembered for making some contribution to the culture. Maybe DreamWorks will be a great success and I'll be remembered in the same way that the pioneers that built the six major studios are. But you know, I still wake up every morning and say to myself, "What the fuck am I doing?" And then I get up and attempt to do it.

"It's okay to have newspaper ads of women in panties, but it's not okay for Calvin to have a guy in a room with cheap paneling and shag carpet?"

Hypocrisy. It's impossible to be uninvolved and involved at the same time. Is it surprising that they're full of shit? Not at all. I once had a record by the Geto Boys come up which talked about cutting off women's breasts and fucking dead bodies, and I refused to release it. I don't want to make money putting out something I find so objectionable. I don't say other people shouldn't do it, but I'm not going to.

**How do you square that with the Christian Right trying to get your good friend Calvin Klein to pull his so-called kiddie-porn ads?**

I thought those ads were smart and clever, and by the way, they caused his jeans sales to go through the roof. I begged him not to bow to the pressure, but he became the target of a bunch of small-minded jerks. The FBI was inves-

most creative people grow up with self-loathing and insecurity. You put out your first record, which you probably think isn't that good, and all of a sudden you're the biggest star in the world and many many people want to fuck you and you're making millions. I would say that's very disconcerting.

**Uhhhh... sounds okay to me.**

There's nothing that prepares you for that level of stardom.

**Okay, Jewish boy from Brooklyn, here's one: Did you feel any guilt when Kurt Cobain committed suicide? Did you think that by encouraging him to spill his guts—**

Kurt became a songwriter and a singer all by himself. I met him after he'd made his first record. (pause) He once called me up and told me he was very, very upset because the Walt Disney Com-



