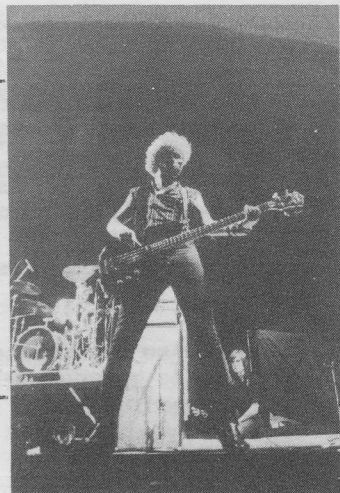




two days with U2

(all photos by Leslie except
top left photo by K. Snyder)



My interview with U2 (set up through the kind Chris of Island Records) was to be at 4PM at the Holiday Inn in West Palm Beach. I got there at 4PM, hoping I wasn't late. No U2. They arrived about twenty minutes later. Adam (Clayton, bass player) and Bono (singer) wearily walked into the lobby and slumped into chairs. The Edge (guitar player) and Larry (drummer) headed straight for the video games that were stuck in a corner glass room. "Hey, have you got a quarter?" Edge called to Adam who was buried in a newspaper. I quickly dug into my pants pocket and pulled out two quarters. "Would you like to play a game?" I asked. Edge had already started a game (he had had a quarter after all), but was flubbing it bad. The problem? No sound! I introduced myself and immersion into U2's world began. Edge's and Larry's faces lit up and we shook hands. They'd be glad to talk to me, just give them a few minutes to get settled in their rooms. I gave them several copies of Suburban Relapse to read later. Bono walked up and we met. With bright clear blue eyes, a frank direct gaze, and a sturdy handshake, Bono smiled and agreed to do an interview. "Talk to Barry to set a time. Is there a swimming pool here?" he asked. A dark haired, slim man whoosed by us to the desk. Gathering keys, he turned and dispersed them to the band. This then must be Barry Mead, tour manager. He certainly seemed official enough! "Oh yes, Chris did mention you to me." Barry's eyes were hidden by dark glasses, but he smiled encouragingly. "Sit tight, someone will come get you. Call if it's been too long a wait." He left, following the band to their rooms. In about ten minutes Adam came sauntering into the lobby. "Come on then. Let's go get dinner and talk. We'll join the others later." He motioned with his head toward the dining room. I grabbed my bag, paper, pen, and tape recorder and hurried after him.

We sat down to a red tableclothed booth and ordered dinner. "I'll take the English cut of roast beef," Adam ordered. ("What was English about it?" Edge asked later. "It was the worst cut!" Adam snorted.) "And I'll have the dolphin," said I. "Dolphin!?" Adam seemed surprised. "That sounds interesting. I'll have a bite!" So between bites, we talked. Adam, with his blond curly hair and blazing smile, was the picture of charm. With a few disarming words, he put me completely at ease. I asked him why U2 were opening for J. Geils, an odd match many people had wondered about. He explained that U2 didn't open for anyone, as a rule, but since Peter Wolf had personally asked them, they decided to try it out. They had to reschedule their tour to fit J. Geils' dates (which is why their Feb. 2nd show at the Agora was canceled.) Adam explained that a big fear opening bands have is that they'll have no control of their stage setup and, most importantly, their sound. They had talked this over with the J. Geils band and were assured they would have full control. After one gig (Ft. Myers) with J. Geils, Adam seemed pleased with how things were going. We discussed how lousy radio in general was. After I explained I co-operated a record store, Adam was keenly interested in finding out if radio people checked with us for the top selling albums. I told him we reported to Rock-pool in New York City and that local radio people thought we were too small to talk to. I asked him about his music; what kind of bass he used. "I use the same kind as Sting's, but without all the fancy gadgets. I like to play with Larry, echoing and supporting his bass drum. We're a unit." MTV (Music Television) popped up in a discussion of alternative ways to get music across to people. "MTV opened Texas up to us. People saw the "Gloria" and "I Will Follow" videos and discovered there was more to music than what was on their

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radios!" Adam explained. The Edge joined us for dessert. He ordered cherry cheesecake (a passion of his) and hot tea. As he took his first bite, Barry bustled up and exclaimed, "There you are! We've been waiting for fifteen minutes on the bus! I thought I asked you to tell Adam we were ready for soundcheck!" Adam and I looked at each other. "But he didn't say a thing!" Edge, looking as innocent as an angel, savored his cheesecake. "Come on now," Barry pleaded. Coffee and tea were gulped down and cheesecake inhaled in two bites. "Can I ride with you to the sound check?" I asked. "Don't see why not," Barry answered. Off we hurried to the bus, which was already running. As we scrambled up into the bus and headed for the back room, the bus lurched forward.

Giggling and breathless, we slid onto the couches. Edge, Bono, and Adam sat on one side. Paul McGuinness, U2's manager, sat to my left and Larry sat to my right. Fooling with the light bulbs around a mirror, Larry was rather shy. I asked him if he had seen any of the Mardi Gras when they played New Orleans at the end of February. He said no, it had started after they left. Bono and I discussed current records: Delta Five, Fad Gadget, Au Pairs, O.J., Virgin Prunes. "Edge's brother is the guitarist for the Prunes,"

U2

Bono offered. "They're working on a seven part musical work." I asked him if he had gone swimming. "No, the sun went in," he sighed.

As we drove up to the West Palm Beach Auditorium, Larry pointed out the window at the marquee. "Look! It's sold out!" The parking lots were packed and people were heading to the entrance. The bus came to a stop behind the auditorium and all but Bono and I scattered. I asked if we could start the "official" interview and if I could use my tape recorder. "Oh, sure! Make yourself at home!" Bono said generously. Bono stretched his legs out on the couch and with his dark leather hat cocked on his head he looked quite the Irish rogue. He was relaxed, quiet, and attentive.

Leslie: Why are you opening for the J. Geils band?

Bono: Because...What we thought was this. We don't believe in opening up for anyone! We never have and suddenly, just instinctively we thought this is going to be a challenge. We don't want to be elitist in any way, don't want to be hiding away in these circles cuz we don't see ourselves like that. I think our music should be on the radio all over. I think that's the type of band U2 are. The people aren't going to know us or understand what we're doing...so we'll see what it's like when we play to people who are into RACK'n'ROLL.

Leslie: RACK'n'ROLL??? Is that just an accent or...?

Bono: You American people tend to call it RACK'n'ROLL, the money end of rock and roll. There's a lot of people who are just into the current album, whatever, and I think it would be interesting...I mean we don't know what's going to happen. We don't know if they're gonna bottle us. We don't know if they're gonna like us. I believe that they should like us. I believe our music is communicative, it's positively communicative. It makes people feel better. It makes me feel good singing. It's an experiment for us and if it means that a lot of other people get to hear about us that wouldn't have...well then it makes me happy. Peter Wolf asked for the band himself. He'd been asking for the band for awhile and we thought, well if he wants it, well then we need to go where people want us to be.

Leslie: Do you feel like you've gotten a lot of airplay on the radio?

Bono: No, not enough.

Leslie: I know down in Ft. Lauderdale the major rock stations play "Gloria" and "I Will Follow" and that's it.

Bono: Well, we get more airplay in Florida than we do in a lot of states. I know some people in sorta quite tightly programmed stations who've played things like "I Fall Down" and that impresses me. There are people down here in radio who are more on the case than up north. I'm quite serious. Look! I was listening to an MOR station down here...Tom Tom Club...This is a good place this Florida for music. Really!

Leslie: We feel like we're banging our heads against the wall!

Bono: No! Look! Radio will change when you make it change! People getting on the phone and saying, I want to hear U2. That's when it's going to change. It needs action 9)

from people. I think it's important that people don't enclose themselves in little groups, safe houses. They should ring up these radio stations that they never even think of listening to and say, hey, what about this?! Things are gonna change, believe me they will. There's a whole new blood rushing through the veins of radio that people are trying to cut off with a tourniquet. But seriously, it's not gonna last. It's gotta burst through.

Leslie: Last year when you played down at the Agora there were rumors floating around that you all might be moving to Atlanta. Is that just a rumor?

Bono: Well...no...(slowly, thoughtfully) We do love Atlanta, actually. We have some people there that we love. We like playing there and I said I wouldn't mind living there. It's a place I can feel at home in. People just took up that comment...It was a gesture of how I felt about the place more than a serious thought.

Leslie: Can you tell me about your very first single that you put out on vinyl?

Bono: It's called "U23". It was really garageland tape...fragile...but explicit...I feel... (sighs) It's very hard for me to talk about it. I hated it when it came out, but I love it now. I find that's what happens with a lot of the records. It's like it was ahead of its time in its time. I think it was even ahead of me. I didn't quite realize what we were doing. It was quite simple. "Out of Control", "Stories for Boys"

were on there in their root form and a song called "Boy-Girl", a sorta tongue-in-cheek song about luv and what's expected of each partner in the role, was on there too. It brought the English press to our doorstep. People talked about the record a lot. Even though it was released in Ireland, it got over there on import and it was our passport to what was going on in London. So we went to London and got a record deal and released an album, "Boy". People talked about that in Europe, so we went to Europe. Then people starting talking in the U.S., so we came over here. The same child that was on the single, "U23", is on the "Boy" cover except two years older. It shows progression.

Leslie: Is that record still available or was it just a limited pressing? And if so, will it ever be rereleased?

Bono: You can get it in Ireland. No, it will never be rereleased. We made a 12" of it as well. There was only supposed to be a thousand copies made. We found out that people had been printing it up all over the place...10,000 copies of it!

Leslie: You were talking about using three different producers for the next album. Have you recorded any songs for it yet? I guess it's still sorta soon.

Bono: Me and the band, we've just decided to stop. This is our last tour for a long time.

Leslie: You've done four in this last year.

Bono: A lot of people don't understand that U2 are going off the road. We tend to do a bit of living, get a bit of life in the music while on tour and the life has been there. We think now is the time to stop. It's like the way we recorded "October"... like, let's see what happens...working on the microphone...improvisation...That's one way, but we wouldn't like to do that way again. I wouldn't like to make "October 2" or make "Boy 2". We want a different environment. I get very, very angry when I watch the news and I read about what's going on in my own country. I don't mean a destructive anger, more a righteous anger. I feel I want to be at home. There's things I'm interested in that are going on at home. I want to be there. I want to be a part of what's going on in our country at this time, which I think will be the central issue of the next record. So there's no point in us being on the road, cuz I feel that's where the next record has got to go.

Leslie: After all, how long can you tour?

Bono: OH! I can tour! (Laughs) I CAN TOUR! I mean I sometimes think I'm gonna die, but I'll die laughing and I can't wait for the day! I still feel that excitement. Tonight, I'm not going through the motions or the emotions and really...it is special. It is a special band. It's a special chemistry between the four people and it works (snaps his fingers) every night (again) and to even talk about it like the way I'm talking about it is to take away from it. But it's true. And let me say this, we are here working because we do enjoy what we're doing. It is to the extent of our belief in the music that has us here. A lot of bands always say (goes into tough guy talk) "Aw yeah, we think people should buy our records and we think radio is in a terrible state, but we're not going to do anything as far as trying to communicate that to people."

Leslie: Unless you simply get up and do it and stop talking about it...

Bono: Oh, it was always the way when we were in the garage band. In Dublin there were all these circles where people talked about this and that, and they talked about all the things that they hated and all the rest of it. But while they were talking it



dawned on us that maybe we should be putting up posters and so we didn't go to bed at night. We used to put posters around the city and people would wake up the next day to this: Vote for U2, the Edge as president...I don't know. We went out, we worked and I think that's important. And that's why we're here. That's why we're on this bus. That's why I'm talking to you. It's not a chore for me to talk to you. I'm here as a truck because I believe in what we're doing and I think that you believe in it too and if you don't I hope that at the end of it you will. Seriously, I don't want you to ever think that playing live for U2 is because we're into making money because we're losing money being over here. We could have put the money we made on our records into buying Volkswagens or a new tennis racquet or something, but no. We spent our money reinvesting coming over again. We wanted to tour. And with a "See you, Leslie!" Bono, already late, bound off the bus and raced to his soundcheck.

After U2's soundcheck the auditorium doors opened and the crowd came pouring in. M.C. Kostek (of WCEZ) and I managed to grab second row seats. I took a moment and looked around. The auditorium was a barn, big and round. I looked at the people and figured the average age to be seventeen. It was an excited, lively crowd, with some in stark black and white U2 tee shirts that stood out like buoys in the sea of the J. Geils tee shirted throng. The sudden darkness heralded U2's arrival to the stage. The lights flashed up and there they were. Bono shouted greetings. Larry began a furious drum roll. Adam's bass entered, setting the beat. Then with the Edge's spine thrilling guitar chords shooting over our heads, U2 burst into "Gloria"! This could be (is?) their theme song, for in it they praise that from which they receive their power. "Oh Lord, if I had anything, anything at all, I give it to You". Next, "I Threw a Brick Through a Window", a sultry melodic song with an easy going walking beat, featured the Edge echoing Bono's calls of "He was my brother!". This band is family. Another furious drum roll from Larry and they plunged into "A Day Without Me". People got up and danced on their chairs. A slower tempoed song, "An Cat Dubh" (which is Gaelic for "a black cat", as explained by Bono) was performed next. The Edge's back up vocals matched his guitar's harmonic flow, adding layer upon layer of ringing swirls of sound. Slower yet, "Into the Heart" stirred tender emotions. The crowd roared its approval to Bono's "glad to be here with J. Geils" speech. Wasting no time, U2 blasted into "Rejoice". I looked around and saw faces full of wonderment and some confusion. Who is this guy dancing around, telling us to rejoice?

they seemed to say. "The Electric Co." went by fast. Bono talked-yelled the lyrics, while the Edge chopped the air with very fast chords. The Edge sat down to an electric piano and opened "I Fall Down" with a delicate melody. Bono strapped on a guitar to fill in the missing rhythm chords. Shedding the guitar at the end of the song, Bono announced "This is something, something for you! It's called 'I-WILL-FOLLOW'!" At last, a song the whole crowd had heard on their rack'n'roll station. Adam added his voice to the chorus of this their most accessible song. The spooky "Twilight" followed. With a thundering three chord progression, the Edge led U2 into their closing number, "Out of Control". Though the people up front screamed and yelled their approval, U2 did not come back for an encore. It wasn't enough. The crowd wanted J. Geills.

That night (March 4th), Adam and the Edge were guest DJs at WCEZ-FM in Jupiter. Adam brought a bottle of wine. The station provided coffee and tea which we drank to keep awake. M.C. asked them to pick out their favorite songs, which they announced over the air, and had them answer the phone for requests from listeners. After about two hours, they sadly said they had to get some sleep. Since I was heading south, I offered to drive them back to the motel. All the way back, M.C. played U2's music. Edge commented on how differently they played it in concert. At the motel they thanked me for the ride, and after saying I'd see them again in Tampa, they responded with a cherry "See you there!"

It rained lightly the night of the Tampa concert, leaving a silver sheen to the streets. Explaining we were photographers for Suburban Relapse, Karen Snyder and I got our cameras into the concert. Curtis Hixson Hall filled fast, another sell out. We hurried to the stage and threaded our way to the front. U2's Tampa show had the same song order, but was much tighter than West Palm. They seemed rested and more in tune with the audience. There was no excess in the show. It was a lean, trim, short concert, about forty-five minutes to an hour. Bono was so up for the Tampa show that he was in front of himself. He called out his "Thank you!" long before each song was over, seemingly thanking the people for being there. Laughing, tripping, stumbling in urgent ecstasy, wanting to embrace everyone there with the love they feel for their music, their vision, this is the essence U2 expressed in concert. And the band was in top form to do it. The crowd called for and received an encore. "11 O'Clock Tick Tock" was a thrilling end to a great performance.

Make no mistake, U2 is a band on the move. They're eager for recognition, airplay, press...to "make a living". Yes, but more...to spread joy. Yet for all their zeal, they are completely down to earth. They look you straight in the in eye, listen to what you have to say, and make you feel special.



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