



All photos taken in Canada, 1980.

Calling themselves Feedback, because they were self-taught and it was the only musical term they knew, the students were eager to make themselves heard. The next thing was to find people who were willing to listen.

Making their public debut at a school talent show, Feedback performed a short set of covers, including Peter Frampton's 'Show Me the Way' and 'Bye Bye Baby' by the Bay City Rollers. Their inexperience and limited repertoire became apparent when, after the crowd chanted for an encore, Feedback returned to play a second rendition of 'Bye Bye Baby'. However, despite their nervousness performing in front of a crowd for the first time, the reception they received from their schoolmates was a revelation to the anxious adolescents. 'It was really a feeling of liberation,' said Bono. 'It's like you've jumped

into the sea and discovered you can swim.'

'After that, I think we were a band,' said Larry.

Their first concert at Mount Temple made them aware that they needed to rehearse a lot more to overcome their musical limitations. Thanks to their teachers, they were able to use one of the music rooms at school on Saturdays to practise. When they outgrew that rehearsal space, they relocated to a small cottage in the same graveyard where Bono's mother was buried. In this space they called the 'Yellow House', Feedback began to work on their musical identity. With the pain of his mother's death still lingering and her presence surrounding these rehearsals, Bono felt a kind of clarity. 'Everything changed for me,' he said in *U2 by U2*, 'because now I knew what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.'





Previous spread:  
The Edge and Bono in  
Chicago, 1981.  
Opposite: The Edge and  
Bono in California, 1981.

played nine shows throughout the north-east thanks to support from college radio stations playing *Boy*. During their first concert in America, at a New York club called The Ritz, Larry remembers the gig not going well because Bono's anxiety affected the rest of the band. Though, by the end of their stint in America, audience reaction was generous and positive, with Larry describing their gig in Boston being so well received that it felt like a homecoming.

*Boy* would go on to hit number 52 on the UK album charts and number 63 on the US *Billboard* 200. The success of the album led to another tour of the UK and Europe in early 1981 in January and February, with an extensive tour across the United States and Canada following shortly from March through May. It was a modest debut that had the young band optimistic about what lay ahead.

Though when U2 returned to the studio with Lillywhite to record their second album *October*, the mood had turned an autumn grey. There was a lot of pressure to record a successful follow-up to *Boy* after the tour, which made the experience difficult for the band. Coming back from the tour with no money, Larry recalled asking a former teacher at Mount Temple to provide a rehearsal space at the school, just as they had done a few years earlier. Adam described the experience like sticking ideas together with glue because they did not have enough time or money to focus on the music.

With the confidence they were feeling after ending their tour, the Edge assumed the songs would just naturally flow out once they rehearsed them. He believed U2 could work together quickly to develop a lot of improvised ideas, which would often include a guitar riff or drumbeat from those jam sessions, organizing the elements of a song around that. However, despite his trust that the band would form a cohesive framework for the album, the Edge said that they only ended up with pieces and fragments of musical ideas. 'We were running out of steam,' said Bono in *U2 by U2*, 'running out of enthusiasm for the world.'

There was also another reason why

recording became so stressful. Though the band felt triumphant coming back from their tour, one incident on the road would later create problems for them. On 22 March 1981, just one month before returning to the studio, Bono had lost a briefcase while performing at the Foghorn Tavern in Portland, Oregon. Inside the briefcase were scraps of paper containing lyrics and song ideas intended for their next album. Unsure of exactly how his briefcase went missing, Bono recalled being visited by two women in his dressing room. It was only after they had left that he realized his briefcase had gone missing and he frantically searched for it. The briefcase would go missing for 23 years until it was returned to Bono by two different women in 2004. Bono was relieved and called the return of his property 'an act of grace'.

However, just as was the case with



*Boy*, U2 still did not put much emphasis on lyrics when recording *October*, regardless of any missing briefcase. This can be heard throughout the album, with some tracks sounding more lyrically developed than others. 'Scarlet', an instrumental track save Bono repeating 'rejoice', reveals a beautiful melody that is elevated by the lyrical sparseness. 'Is

That All?' and 'Fire' offer a glimpse into U2's improvisational approach to songwriting, while 'I Fall Down' and 'Stranger in a Strange Land' feature snippets of abstract narratives.

'October', the album's title track, is a commentary on the modern world told through the stark imagery of autumn slowly chilling into winter. It had formed during a rare moment of quiet reflection during the *October* sessions, with the Edge playing a graceful piano line that made him think about a beautifully grey European setting. Bono then added the lyrics of bare trees and falling leaves to describe the cultural and economic bleakness felt during the 1980s.

Some themes from *Boy* also return for *October*. Anxiety and self-confidence resurface in 'I Threw a Brick Through a Window', a song Bono says is really about smashing your mirror's reflection. 'Tomorrow', featuring Irish



As the Mirror Ball Man, Bono would perform outrageous stunts like making prank phone calls to the White House and asking to be put in contact with the president. He would also do other eccentric things like throw fake dollar bills into the audience, call a phone sex number and he even once ordered ten thousand pizzas, of which 100 were actually delivered and handed out to the front-row audience. The Mirror Ball Man was a critique of prosperity gospel with Bono saying in *U2 by U2* that the character's fortune was proof that God did not make mistakes.

The Mirror Ball Man was later replaced by another egomaniacal character for the European legs of the tour. Dressed this time in a gold lamé suit with platform shoes, Bono donned white make-up and devil horns to become MacPhisto. A flamboyant ageing European rock star, MacPhisto represented a darker comedy not expressed through the Fly's hedonism. Bono as MacPhisto would pester political leaders over the phone as well as regale the audience with monologues about his power, influence and fame. MacPhisto would make claims to the audience such as that he gave Americans president Bill Clinton, got Europe to quit arguing by connecting them to cable television and that he brought capitalism to the former Soviet Union. Bono would refer to MacPhisto as 'the Fly when he's old, fat and playing Vegas'.

Not just all irony, U2's music was still a platform for political activism. In Manchester on 19 June 1992, Zoo TV became an environmental benefit concert. Organized by Greenpeace, U2 headlined the Stop Sellafield concert to protest at plans to expand a reactor at the Sellafield nuclear plant which had been dumping waste along the coast of Cumbria in northern England. Supported by a trio of politically engaged openers that included Kraftwerk, Public Enemy and Big Audio Dynamite II, U2 used the full technical might of Zoo TV to shift the tide of power and public opinion, flashing words like 'fallout', 'plutonium', 'mutant', 'radiation', 'sickness' and 'Chernobyl' on its massive video screens. The day after the show, U2 joined other protesters on boats delivering radioactive sand to the beach at Sellafield as a protest message to the plant and the media.

After finishing the North American 'Outside Broadcast' leg of Zoo TV in November 1992,

U2 took a six-month break before touring resumed. Instead of resting up, U2 wanted to harness their energy coming off the tour to write and record new music they could promote throughout the summer of 1993 during the *Zooropa* leg that would take them around Europe.

U2 were energized to build on the momentum of their musical reinvention. As Zoo TV progressed, the industrial and electronic dance elements of their music came to the fore. The idea was to create an EP showing their musical evolution that they could use to promote the tour, but time was limited. Fortunately, U2 had recorded their concert soundchecks throughout Zoo TV and, to get things started for the EP they asked sound mixer Robbie Adams to use them to create loop samples. With Brian Eno and Flood returning to help produce, U2 began working on demo recordings using those soundcheck loops.

It became apparent early on that U2 had a lot of material to work with, but they had no vision for the music and were unsure of how long it would take to finish. The question then became whether U2 could release new music before going back on tour or if these sessions were drafts of something much bigger.

The Edge wanted U2 to stick with their original plan to record an EP, recalling in *U2 by U2* that they had enough musical ideas that fans would enjoy while also breathing new life into the tour. However, as the sessions continued and U2 recorded more material, there was growing interest in expanding the EP into a whole album. Encouraged by Bono, the Edge became convinced about the idea of recording an album after recognizing how this kind of challenge could push U2 out of their comfort zones as artists. 'We thought we could go into a decompression chamber and come out the other end normal,' Bono told *Spin* in 1993, 'but it turns out that your whole way of thinking, your whole body has been geared towards the madness of Zoo TV ... so we decided to put the madness on a record.'

During March 1993, with only two months left before they continued their tour, U2 went back to recording using lessons they learned from making *Achtung Baby*. To maximize the time to achieve their ambitious album goal, U2 set up dual sessions at the Factory and Windmill Lane Studios which became



but it was also used to link up with the International Space Station and featured a recording of astronaut Mark Kelly holding up the words, 'It's a beautiful day' as well as another that featured astronauts singing lines from the Passengers' song, 'Your Blue Room'.

Running from June 2009 through July 2011, the U2 360° Tour included 110 shows across seven legs throughout five continents. By the end of it, it earned the record of highest-grossing tour ever at that time, with ticket sales exceeding \$736 million. However, due to the costs of transporting the large stage, U2 barely turned a profit.

During the U2 360° Tour, U2 performed two concerts that highlighted other aspects of their legacy. On 11 November 2009, to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, U2 performed a short set at Brandenburg Gate in Berlin. A free event that was broadcast as part of MTV's Europe Music Awards, U2 performed 'Magnificent' and 'Moment Of Surrender' as well as some older songs, including Jay-Z guest rapping on 'Sunday Bloody Sunday'.

Two years later, U2 played a headlining show at the 2011 Glastonbury Festival for their first appearance there. They were originally scheduled to headline in 2010 but cancelled when Bono had back surgery. The setlist contained songs throughout their career, but featured more from *Achtung Baby* than any other album. During rehearsals for their Glastonbury gig, U2 filmed footage of them returning to Hansa Studios in Berlin to commemorate the album's 20th anniversary for the documentary *From the Sky Down*.

Both the festival concert and documentary capped a period that lasted longer than a decade in which U2 had looked back on their legacy while exploring new creative dynamics as a band. After playing together for over 30 years, they had a storied history that they could trace the path of their musical evolution through. They continued transforming themselves as artists, even while being celebrated for their contributions to music during the 1980s and 1990s, showing fans old and new alike that U2 never wanted to repeat themselves. U2 had spent the 2000s looking back on their own history as a band and how their music evolved, but now they were thinking about how far their lives had come since before there was even a band. By

the 2010s, with the landscape of the music industry so changed from when they started out, U2 were reaching back further to see the journey of innocence becoming experience.





In addition to *Spider-Man* and *Songs of Ascent*, press reports also circulated about other potential U2 projects, including a traditional rock album produced by Danger Mouse and a dance album produced by RedOne and will.i.am. During October 2010, Bono claimed that U2 had finished recording 12 songs with Danger Mouse before realizing they were not going to complete the album before going on the final leg of the U2 360° Tour. Mixed messaging about the different albums continued until it was confirmed they were either shelved or cancelled altogether. In December 2011, Adam told Q that U2 initially thought they had enough songs left over from *No Line on the Horizon* to finish *Songs of Ascent*, but now they felt 'a long way from that material'. On the dance album, Adam told *Rolling Stone* that the recordings they did with RedOne were very exciting but that they did not feel like the right fit for U2, adding that he believed the Danger Mouse sessions came closest to capturing the essence of the band.

U2 continued recording with Danger Mouse throughout 2011 and 2012, with Bono telling RTÉ's *The Late Late Show* that they 'have to do something very special to have a reason to exist now.' By 2013, U2 went to Electric Lady Studios in New York to finish mixing the album, but were still not satisfied with the songs, with the Edge telling *Mojo* the songs were falling apart during mixing, saying, 'We'd allowed ourselves to think that "interesting" was enough.' After two years of recording, Danger Mouse stepped away from the album, with U2 then bringing in Ryan Tedder, Paul Epworth, Declan Gaffney and Flood to help complete it.

Though U2 did manage to release a song during this time, the band had a long-standing friendship with Nelson Mandela by the time they were approached in 2013 to contribute a song to the film based on his life, *Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom*. This chronicled his pursuit for equality during apartheid South Africa. U2 recorded 'Ordinary Love' while working on their new album, but Mandela had already been the subject of their music, with 'Breathe' for *No Line on the Horizon* being originally about him. 'Ordinary Love' was released during November 2013 and included the Mandela version of 'Breathe' as its B-side. It would go on to earn U2 their second Golden

top of that list,' said Letterman when he heard the song.

While they did not tour for *Songs of Surrender*, one was already in the works. Just as they did for *The Joshua Tree* in 2017, U2 had the idea of revisiting *Achtung Baby* on a tour for the album's 30th anniversary in 2021. However, with the pandemic still ongoing, they decided to wait, instead shifting their attention a couple of years later towards the anniversary of Zoo TV. With how the culture had shifted due to global politics over the last few years, U2 realized the themes of that original tour were still relevant. On modernizing that concept, Adam told *Esquire*, 'How do you update the Zoo TV concept? Because all the predictions of Zoo TV have come to pass: fake news, media overload, the MTV generation, wars fought on television with camera systems that could follow a missile down the street, as it was in the Iraq-Kuwait war at that time.'

During February 2018, the Sphere was announced as a new venue project collaboration between the Madison Square Garden Company and the Las Vegas Sands Corporation, which boasted a unique and innovative immersive experience. Construction began in September 2018 and was later temporarily halted in March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, finally opening three years later in September 2023. The Sphere was a technical marvel due to both its exterior and interior visual technology. A 366-foot-high and 516-foot-wide LED screen inside the venue wraps around the walls and ceiling, projecting 16K resolution imagery and 4D visual effects, with the outside featuring nearly 600,000 square feet of LED components that cover the building's entire exterior with full motion video.

Rumours that U2 agreed to perform a concert residency at the Sphere surfaced as early as July 2022, but the shows were not confirmed until February 2023 when U2 announced the residency in a commercial that aired during Super Bowl LVII. In the commercial, a spherical object hovers above several cities before landing in the desert, revealing a baby's face to all the people gathered there and confirming the residency as U2:UV Achtung Baby Live at Sphere. U2:UV would feature U2 playing *Achtung Baby* in its entirety, although not in sequence, as well as

several of their classic songs. In the lead-up to the Sphere residency, it was announced that Larry would not join his bandmates as he would need to recover from surgery, which would be the first time he had not played with the band since 1978. As U2 were committed to performing, Bram van den Berg from the Dutch band Krezip filled in for Larry. 'It's going to take all we've got to approach the Sphere without our bandmate in the drum seat,' said his bandmates, 'but Larry has joined us in welcoming Bram van den Berg who is a force in his own right.'

Many of the visual elements for U2:UV paid homage to Zoo TV. With the Sphere's interior screen projecting the inside of the Roman Pantheon before the concert, the show began with the band breaking through the walls while performing 'Zoo Station', a call-back to the opening of the earlier tour. The onscreen graphics of the Zoo TV version of 'The Fly' were supercharged in the Sphere, with the screen flashing words not just in front of the audience but above them as well. Effects also made the screen appear to change shape and dimension, making it seem like the ceiling was coming down.

However, U2:UV did more than just pay tribute, including breathtaking visuals not connected with Zoo TV that heightened the emotion and sensory experience of the songs. A kaleidoscopic art piece dedicated to Las Vegas icons during 'Even Better Than the Real Thing' created the sensation that the stage was lifting. Helicopters appeared on the screen to shine a spotlight on U2 during 'Vertigo', highlighting how the Sphere could blend live footage with produced video. During 'With Or Without You', the desert on the screen filled up with water as an orb floated towards the audience, surrounding them with a massive sepia-toned display of endangered species from Nevada that then burst into full dazzling colour during 'Beautiful Day'.

Even within a building designed to achieve maximum visual stimulation, U2 managed to find the intimate spaces within the concert. During a semi-acoustic segment in the middle of the show, the imagery on the screen was minimized with the attention then placed on the band members and the stage. Designed to resemble a record player, modelled after one designed by Brian Eno, the stage consisted

Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Bram Van den Berg perform at the Sphere, Las Vegas, 2023.



as their story was being written, while others are new to the party. Regardless of when and how one comes to discover U2, the effect their music has had has been truly immeasurable.

However, at some point, U2 will end. When that will be and how far U2 still has to go on their journey, we can only wait and see. In the meantime, we still have a lot more great music to look forward to, and even when they do eventually stop, U2 have already left so much for us and future generations to enjoy. In that sense, will U2 ever really end? Depends on how you look at it.

**But for myself,  
and for many  
others, U2 will  
be there until  
the end of  
the world.**

