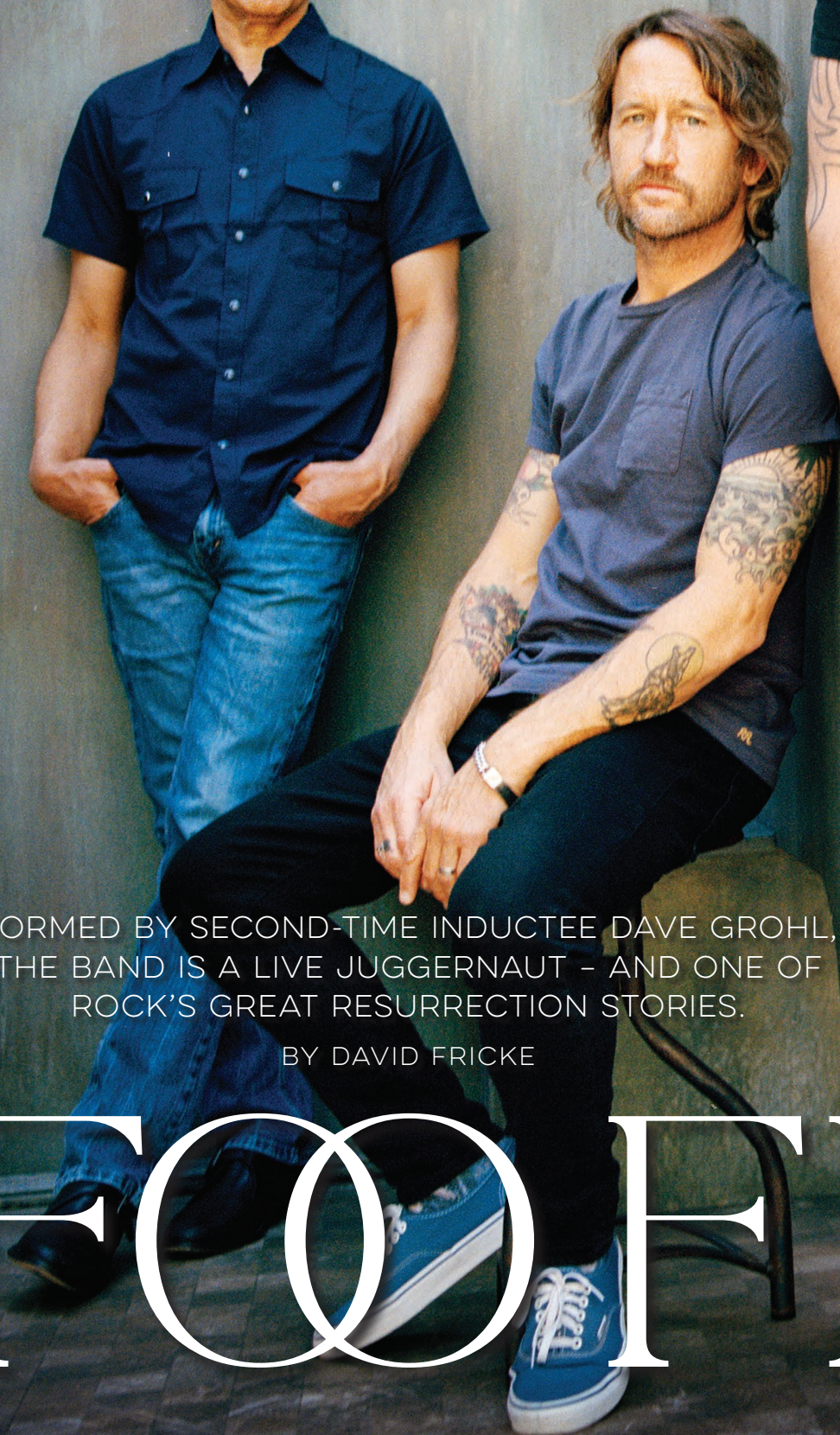


PERFORMERS



FORMED BY SECOND-TIME INDUCTEE DAVE GROHL,
THE BAND IS A LIVE JUGGERNAUT - AND ONE OF
ROCK'S GREAT RESURRECTION STORIES.

BY DAVID FRICKE

FOOFIC

Foo Fighters:
Pat Smear, Chris Shiflett,
Dave Grohl, Rami Jaffee,
Taylor Hawkins, and
Nate Mendel (from left)



KITTERS



THIS PAGE: Mendel, Hawkins, Grohl, and Shiflett (from left), 2002.

OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP

LEFT: Hawkins, 2021; Grammy winners, 2001; Grohl, 2008; Foo fans at Olympic Park, London, 2014; Grohl and Sir Paul McCartney at the Grammys, 2012; Jaffee, 2015; Smear, 2014; Shiflett, 2017; Mendel, 2006.

On November 19, 1994, former Nirvana drummer Dave Grohl joined a new band for one night on national television, performing two songs on *Saturday Night Live* with the show's musical guests Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers. Except for a cameo appearance at the *MTV Movie Awards* that summer, it was Grohl's first time behind a kit, in public, since Nirvana's sudden end in April 1994 with the death by suicide of singer-guitarist Kurt Cobain. Petty, then between drummers, reached out in solidarity. But after the *SNL* broadcast, he wanted more. Grohl's explosive attack – forged in punk, steeped in classic rock – was “from another world,” Petty later told *Rolling Stone*. He called Grohl and offered him a full-time job in the Heartbreakers.

But Grohl had “just started doing this thing,” the drummer said in February 2021, speaking to Howard Stern on SiriusXM. “I just felt weird going back to the drums because it reminded me of being in Nirvana. . . . So I was like, ‘Nah, fuck it, I’m gonna try this other thing.’”

The “other thing” was a collection of original songs recorded in six days at a Seattle studio in October 1994 with Grohl singing and playing virtually every part. He had one hundred cassettes made, credited to Foo Fighters, and gave them away to friends and random fans. The pseudonym came from Grohl's recent reading on UFOs; World War II pilots referred to mysterious or unexplained aerial phenomena as “foo fighters.” Leery of the spotlight so soon after Cobain's death yet seeking solace and direction in songwriting, Grohl “wanted people to think it was a group,” he claimed in 2010, adding that “had I actually considered this a career, I probably would have called it something else, because it's the stupidest fucking band name in the world.”

With their induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame, Foo Fighters – a fully operational band for more than twenty-five years – are now one of the institution's great resurrection stories, a continuing tale of the healing force and universal release that always come from music born in firmly held ideals, fired up with the urgency

of family, and shared without condition or compromise. Even before that solo cassette was issued as Foo Fighters' self-titled debut album in July 1995, Grohl – on vocals and guitar – took his first version of the group on the road, opening club shows for ex-Minutemen bassist Mike Watt. Over the next six albums, all gone gold or platinum, and epic-scale touring, Grohl built Foo Fighters into a live juggernaut and radio-hit machine combining the raw emotions and indie-rock purism of Nirvana and, before that, his experiences in eighties hardcore punk with the stadium dynamics of Led Zeppelin and Queen.

The lineup entering the Hall has roots going back to that 1995 band: bassist Nate Mendel, previously in the Seattle group Sunny Day Real Estate, and guitarist Pat Smear, who was in the Los Angeles punk band the Germs and first played with Grohl in the late stages of Nirvana. Drummer Taylor Hawkins joined in 1997, leaving singer Alanis Morissette's group in time to tour behind the Foo's Top Ten breakthrough, *The Colour and the Shape* (1997). Guitarist Chris Shiflett arrived in 1999, and Rami Jaffee, an original member of the Wallflowers, played keyboards on tours and albums for more than a decade before becoming an official Foo Fighter in 2017.

Grohl himself is a second-time inductee (following Nirvana's 2014 induction). But unlike repeat honorees such as Eric Clapton, Stevie Nicks, and the four Beatles, Grohl returns not as a solo artist but a band member – an indisputable leader with a collaborative will. As Hawkins told me for a 2014 cover story on Grohl in *Rolling Stone*, “Dave's always been like, ‘I've got some great fucking songs. I know what I want them to be. Let's do this.’”

“Dave has a vision,” Smear affirmed. “Our job is to meet that vision or do something that exceeds it.” In that spirit, Grohl has shared writing credits on all but that first one-man album with the other members of the group.

“I know the dynamics of this band,” Grohl said during an interview for that *RS* cover story. “Pat sounds like a bomb going off in your speaker. Chris is the most steady, perfect guitarist I've ever met. Nate prefers the high notes. Taylor is a fucking wild animal. And I'm the cheerleader.”





Smear, Shiflett,
Hawkins, Grohl,
Jaffee, and Mendel
(from left), 2021

“The great thing about being surrounded by people you love,” he noted, “is you can come to them and say, ‘I have an idea, trust me.’ And they say, ‘OK.’”

AT 8:15 P.M. ON June 20, 2021, Grohl walked up to his microphone at Madison Square Garden as Jaffee played church-like keyboard figures and the other Foo Fighters waited for their cue. Opening his band’s first major show since late 2019 and the first full-capacity arena concert in New York City after nearly fifteen months of COVID-19 lockdown, Grohl marked the occasion with “Times Like These” from *One by One* (2002), singing the initial verses and chorus – “It’s times like these you learn to live again / It’s times like these you give and give again” – like a prayer of gratitude and promise before the rest of the Foes erupted behind him.

Grohl has been making records about renewal, solidarity, and mission since “This Is a Call,” the bracing pop-punk kickoff of *Foo Fighters*, composed in the months after Cobain’s death. It was “a little wave to all the people I ever played music with, people I’ve been friends with,” he once explained. “It’s a hello and, in a way, a thank you.”

“I had no plan,” Grohl admitted in 2014, recalling his shock and depression after losing Cobain. Grohl took a break in Ireland, driving around “in the middle of nowhere, so happy to be away from it all” – until he passed a hitchhiker wearing a Cobain T-shirt. “In that moment, I thought, ‘I have to do something.’”

Born in Warren, Ohio, on January 14, 1969, David Eric Grohl grew up in Springfield, Virginia. His father, James, was a journalist and speechwriter; his mother, Virginia, taught English in high school. After the couple divorced,



SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY



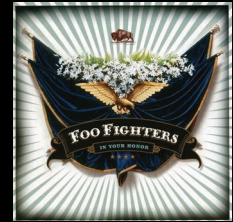
Foo Fighters
1995 (Roswell/Capitol)



The Colour and the Shape 1997 (Capitol)



There Is Nothing Left to Lose 1999 (RCA/Roswell)



In Your Honor
2005 (RCA/Roswell)



Wasting Light
2011 (RCA/Roswell)



Sonic Highways
2014 (RCA/Roswell)

Virginia raised Dave and his older sister, supporting her son's immersion in the nearby Washington, D.C., hardcore scene to the extent that she let him quit school at 17 to tour Europe with his group Scream. Grohl still draws on memories and lessons from that adolescence – the transformative fury and strict, underground ethics of bands such as Minor Threat and Bad Brains – for Foo Fighters songs. “Check yourself / Wreck our brains / Where is that P.M.A.?” he raged in “The Feast and the Famine” on *Sonic Highways* (2014), quoting an acronym coined by Bad Brains: “Positive Mental Attitude.”

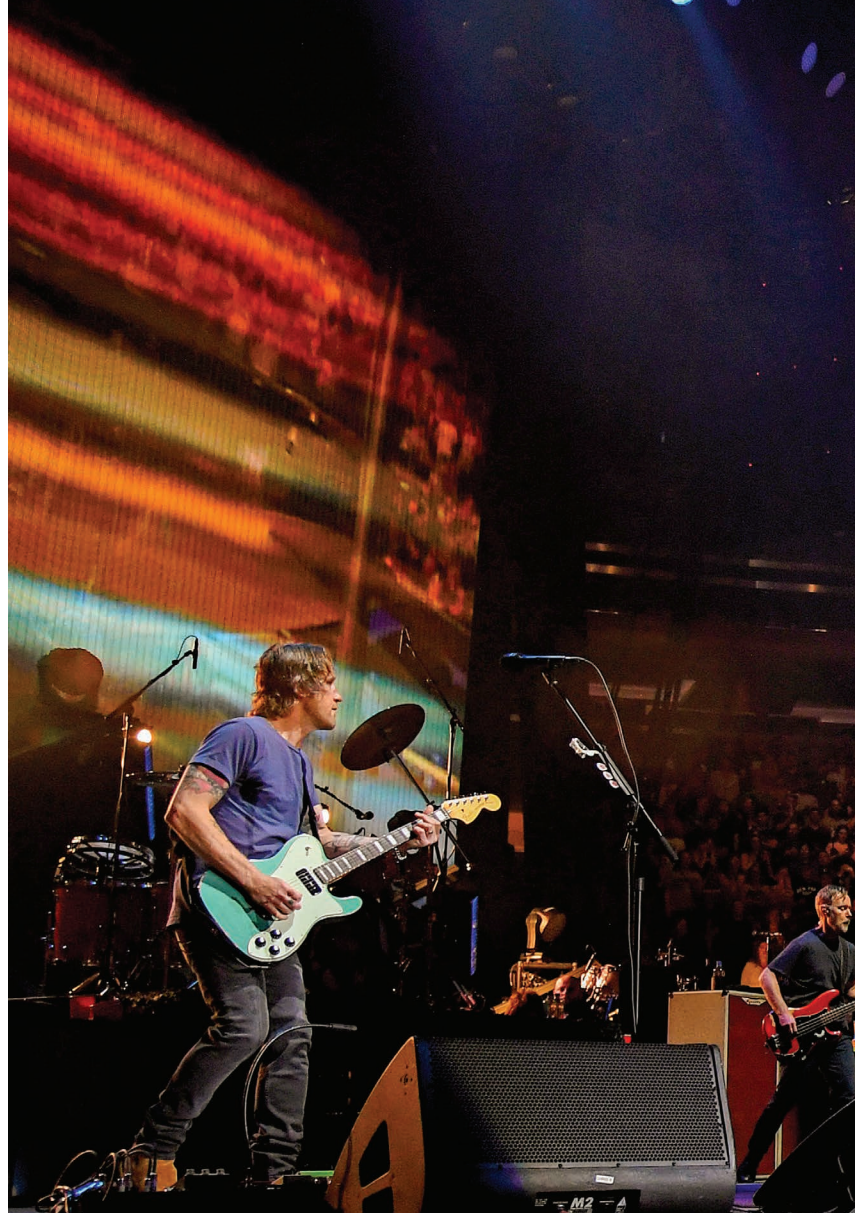
Grohl played guitar in his early bands before turning to drums and wrote and recorded his own songs after joining Nirvana in September 1990, quietly releasing an all-solo cassette as Pocketwatch in 1992. When I spoke to Cobain in October 1993 for what became his last

major interview, published in *Rolling Stone* in January 1994, he expressed concern about Grohl's insecurity. "He still feels like he can be replaced at any time," Cobain said – no surprise as Grohl was Nirvana's sixth drummer in three years. "I guess Dave is a person who needs reassurance sometimes."

But after launching Foo Fighters as a real band, Grohl made difficult choices in direction and personnel, even at the risk of losing friendships. Frustrated during initial sessions for *The Colour and the Shape*, he sidelined original drummer William Goldsmith, redoing most of the drum parts himself. (Goldsmith quit soon after.) When Smear left in 1997 (a hiatus that lasted until 2011), Grohl turned to an old Scream bandmate, guitarist Franz Stahl, but fired him when songwriting stalled for the next album; Grohl made *There's Nothing Left to Lose* (1999) as a trio with Mendel and Hawkins. The LP won a Grammy for Best Rock Album; the single "Learn to Fly" became Foo Fighters' first Top Twenty hit.

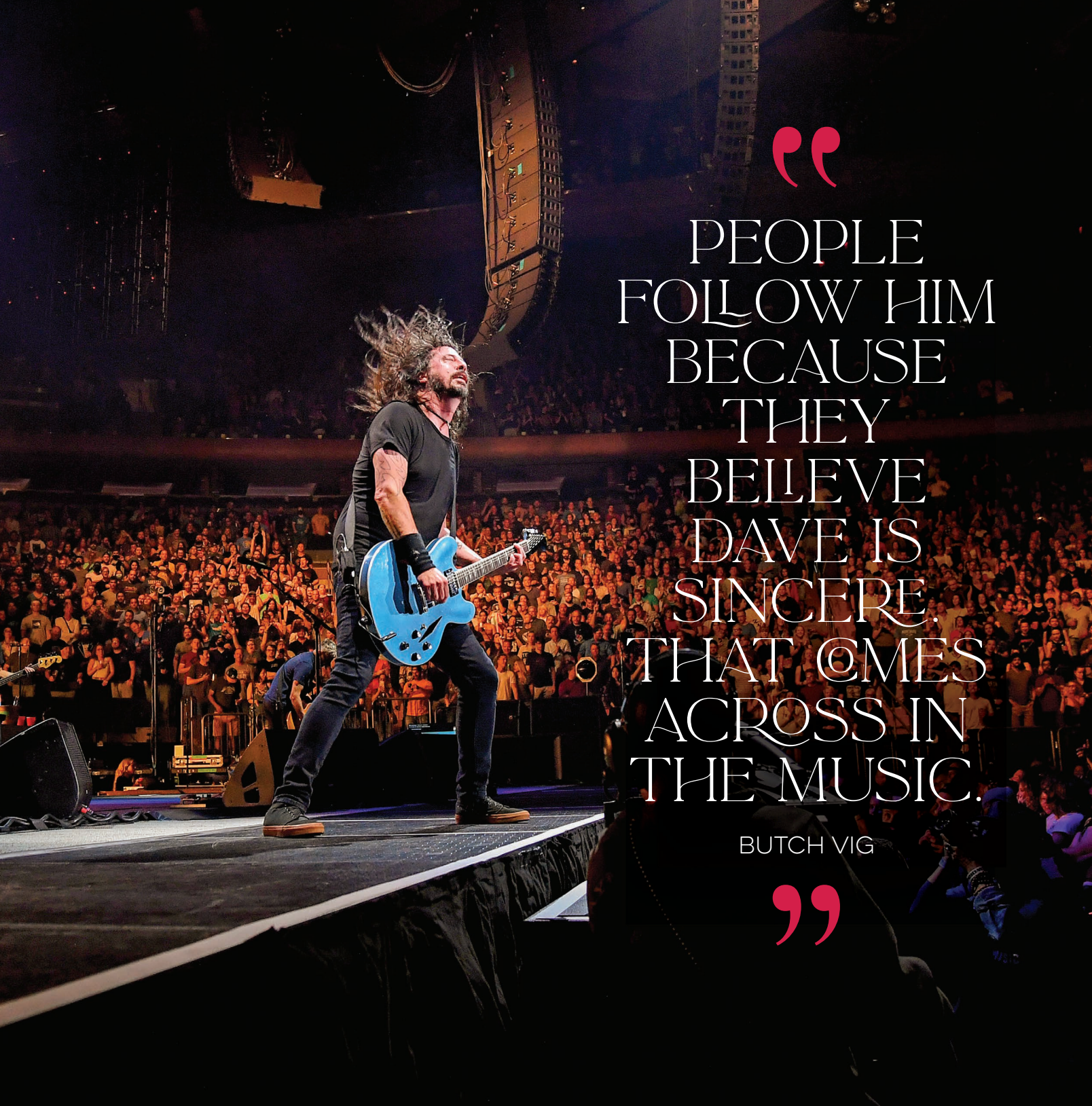
But "money was never part of the conversation," Virginia Grohl said in 2014, remembering talks with her son about music and his ambitions. "It was always about being with a band and getting to see other bands. He was determined then. He is driven now."

Grohl's road to the Rock Hall with Foo Fighters has included an extended web of detours and explorations: the acoustic half of the group's 2005 double album, *In Your Honor*; his spells as the drummer in Queens of the Stone Age; a 2009 album and touring with Them Crooked Vultures – a supertrio of Grohl, Queens of the Stone Age singer-guitarist Josh Homme, and Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones. In 2013, Grohl made his debut as a filmmaker: He directed *Sound City*, a documentary about the legendary studio in Van Nuys, California, where Nirvana made their overnight sensation in 1991, *Nevermind*. For the soundtrack, Grohl gathered friends and musicians that he interviewed for the film to record new songs in assorted combinations, one of them a reunion of surviving Nirvana members – Grohl, Smear, and bassist Krist Novoselic – fronted by a Beatle: Paul McCartney on vocals.



FROM TOP: The Day the Music Came Back, Madison Square Garden, New York City, June 20, 2021; backstage at Madison Square Garden for their post-lockdown show.





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A year later, Grohl took Foo Fighters on a road trip for television: *Foo Fighters: Sonic Highways*, an HBO series that examined the history and vitality of eight American musical capitals (Chicago, Nashville, and Seattle, among them) via conversations with local icons and recording sessions in legendary studios. Each episode concluded with Foo Fighters performing a new song written in that city, drawn from Grohl's observations and interviews there. "Dave doesn't want to go into a studio and make a record the usual way," producer Butch Vig, who worked on the companion album, *Sonic Highways*, said at the time. "He wants a story behind it."

And Vig, who first worked with Grohl when he co-produced *Nevermind*, noted this: "People follow him because they believe Dave is sincere. That comes across in the music. It's like the guy down the street made it."

Like everyone else, Foo Fighters expected to spend the last year and a half doing more than waiting out a

pandemic. A 2020 Van Tour marking the twenty-fifth anniversary of that first jaunt with Mike Watt was postponed, then canceled; a new album, *Medicine at Midnight*, finally came out in February 2021. But two days after that ecstatic June 20 return to rock & roll life at Madison Square Garden, Foo Fighters announced a similar party for Los Angeles, adding to an itinerary running into the fall and to Cleveland for their Hall of Fame induction.

"We were the least verbal band of all time," Grohl said of Nirvana in 2014. "We wouldn't voice our frustration or anything with each other." Foo Fighters, in turn, are like "friends hanging out with each other . . . strapping on our instruments and coming up with new songs." They "still do it," he insisted, "the way we were when we were fucking kids."

Tonight, the kids take over the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame. And be assured: The van won't stop there.