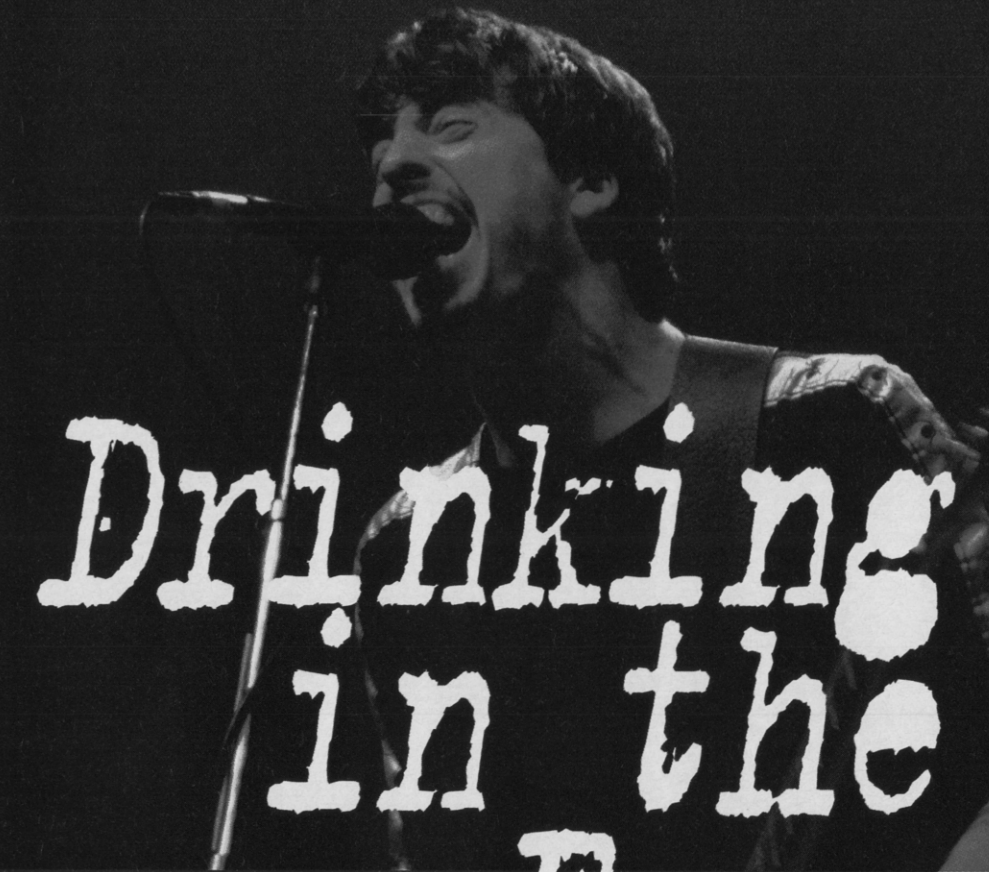


Dave Grohl
Auckland Town Hall



Drinking in the Free World

The first time Foo Fighters' Dave Grohl played in New Zealand was in 1992, when he was drumming for Nirvana. He returned in January 1996 — when Nirvana was still a sore talking point — as leader of the Foes, and toured with Sonic Youth. On his hat-trick visit in February 1998, Nirvana is on the menu, as is a personal revelation or two, and just a few drinks.

ON the afternoon of the Foo Fighters' Auckland concert, there's a media circus underway at the City Life apartment complex, situated just off Queen Street. In the lobby, interviewers from bFM, *Havoc*, *Lava*, and *Ice TV* are milling around waiting for the band to make an appearance. In fact, bassist Nate Mendel (who braved an early morning surf at Piha) is already present, sitting at a corner table, reading the newspaper and going unrecognised. Guitarist Franz Stahl steps out of the lift, and behind him drummer Taylor Hawkins appears, looking extremely dazed. He has dark shades on and a red baseball cap pulled down low. Spotting Mendel, Hawkins wanders over. "Hey Nate, have you seen Dave today? He was the drunkest I've ever seen him last night."

As if on cue, Grohl arrives, and he's not looking too great. The evening before, half of the Foo Fighters were out on the town celebrating. Hawkins had turned 26, and after a band dinner at a Ponsonby restaurant, he and Grohl stayed up, drinking and playing pool in a Queen Street bar until five this morning. With a big sigh, Hawkins sinks into a leather chair, tugs his cap down further, groans, and lights a cigarette. Right now, he is seriously hungover.

"It was a big night, we were just raging, we were out partying, it was incredibly loose. I don't go out every night, but every couple of nights we go out and have some drinks, especially after shows, sometimes we have to unwind a little bit. I don't remember much of last night [laughter]."

As a kid, Hawkins grew up in Laguna Beach, a small surfing community in California. Encouraged by his next door neighbour, and much to his father's annoyance, Hawkins took up drumming shortly after turning 10.

"My father felt it was a big waste of time. Instead of doing my homework I wanted to play drums. Now, he laughs about it, now he thinks it's amazing that I get to do what I wanna do."

By his early 20s, Hawkins had played drums in a succession of failed bands in Los Angeles, then one day he "fluked" a meeting with the manager of an as-yet unknown singer, Alanis Morissette.

"I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, and I met Alanis's manager. Alanis had put [Jagged Little Pill] together already, and she was looking for a drummer to do a tour — it wasn't a big deal 'cause the album wasn't out yet — and that was really cool, she let us do what ever we wanted to do musically, and it was fun. Then it blew up from there."

While Hawkins was a member of her backing band, Morissette toured the world and gained superstardom, selling over 24 million albums. Describing himself as an observer, Hawkins says he was stunned by the Alanis phenomenon.

"It was really weird, it was unbelievable to watch. It was like being on the outside looking in 'cause it wasn't my band, I was still just part of the mechanisms. It was scary watching something grow like that, I don't think I ever want to be part of something that huge again. We were a good live band and as a musician I felt like I grew a lot, but in the end I wanted to move onto something that was more what I was into, and something that I could more be a part of. I think if it got to a point where I had to become a 'hired gun' again, I'd rather play in a local band in town and deliver pizzas."

The Foo Fighters first met Hawkins on tour in Europe, where Grohl and co. shared the same bill as Morissette at several outdoor festivals. When the Foo's original drummer

William Goldsmith quit the band, Hawkins joined up. Immediately he loved the camaraderie of being part of a gang.

"Playing in this band is totally different from being someone else's drummer. I don't work for Dave and I don't work for the Foo Fighters, I'm in the Foo Fighters. I can tell Dave to fuck off if I want to, that's the difference. There comes a bit more responsibility with that, but I'm not just picking up a cheque at the end of the week for my job. This is less a job and more of a band, which is why I wanted to join in the first place. It's definitely more my trip to be doing this, and I'm happy with the level we're at, I don't want the band to get any bigger."

To his surprise, Hawkins made an easy transition into the band. Old school punk rockers were obviously not too precious about Alanis Morissette's drummer hanging out with Dave Grohl.

"I thought I would get more grief, but I think people realised that I wasn't necessarily from that scene, that I'm just a drummer. I think that once they saw us play, that other stuff got thrown by the wayside. I can play the stuff and that's what's really important."

Holding his heads in his hands, Hawkins says he needs to retreat to his room and nab a few more hours sleep before soundcheck. He apologises if he's "incoherent today" and gets up to leave. You feel like shit, and you've got to play a gig tonight. How does that feel?

"It's fucked! [Laughter] I'm fucked! But I'll get through it, I've done it many times. You just wake up for the show, and get it together for it. It'll be okay, we'll rock," he says with a grin.

A shrill, sustained scream greets the Foes as the house lights go down at the Auckland Town Hall. They burst on again to reveal Hawkins and Grohl seated behind drumkits, bashing their way through a spastic wigout that segues into a solidly raucous version of 'Monkey Wrench'. Up the back, Hawkins is all flailing limbs and flying blonde hair, while Grohl, now front and centre and armed with a guitar, looks pained as he musters up some vocal power. Four songs in, he steps to the mic and announces: "I am thoroughly, 1000 per cent hungover."

It's a 'big-hits' show that the Foo Fighters perform this evening; an even mix of abrasive, metallish tracks like 'Weenie Beenie', 'My Poor Brain', and 'This is a Call', and singalong pop/punk tunes such as 'Big Me', 'For All The Cows', 'I'll Stick Around', 'Alone + Easy Target', and an especially memorable, uplifting take on 'Everlong'. "I feel like shit," says Grohl after stepping down from his kit after a second drum dual with Hawkins.

Tonight the Foes were good, but not great. Despite knocking out a powerful version of Killing Joke's 'Requiem', they lacked the endurance required to totally pull this one off. Needless to say, the Foo Fighters had an early night, in preparation for their big day in Wellington.

In the capital city, the band and crew are staying at the Plaza International Hotel, several minutes walk away from the Town Hall where they'll play tonight. At two in the afternoon, there's already a bunch of excited kids waiting outside the main door of the venue, clutching Foo Fighters' albums and posters.

Looking considerably more healthy than he was 24 hours ago, Grohl exits the elevator at the Plaza foyer, and takes a seat in a quiet corner of the room. He's tall, skinny, and gangly, and as every single interview he conducts reports, a *really* nice guy.

As he gets settled, Grohl good naturedly disputes Hawkins day-old evaluation of his state of inebriation. "I think that's probably the first time I've ever been drunker than Taylor, that's what he meant to say. But yeah, we had a big night on his birthday, so the Auckland show was an uphill battle."

I was a little disappointed that you didn't play 'My Hero'.

"Yeah, sometimes we do it, sometimes we don't, it depends on how the show's been or how we feel. More often than not we'll leave it out of the set. To be perfectly honest, one of the reasons why we don't play it, drumming wise, it's pretty taxing, so if

Taylor's had a really difficult show he won't want to do it, and if I've had a really difficult show then I don't want to do it because I have to do the drums first, then I jump down to the guitar. So, that song's really hit or miss."

When you were a kid, did you ever meet people that you looked up to, and then feel let down?

"Not really. I can't think of many famous people I considered heroes when I was a little kid. I really liked the Six Million Dollar Man and I really liked Steve Martin, but I don't know if I'd consider them heroes. My idea of a hero, and what the basic idea of the song is, is that heroes are ordinary people that don't necessarily receive mass adulation and attention. Family members, friends of the family, friends of mine, people that travel with us, they're people that I consider heroes just because they're really grounded, strong, responsible, and respectable people."

"It's weird because we sometimes get the chance to meet these famous musicians who we've always really looked up to — and I don't think I've ever been let down by meeting someone — but when you greet someone it definitely takes the mystique away from them. And I think that's a good thing, because even the movie stars, or the sports stars, or the TV stars, or the rock stars that a lot of kids consider heroes, everyone is just an ordinary, average human being. The concept of a hero is just kind of weird."

Do you still find it difficult to cope when you're treated as celebrity, and not another human being?

"Sure, but I can understand it, because when I was a kid, if I walked up on the street to someone that I'd seen on TV, there'd be this initial shock. But when people freak out, the first thing I do is tell them to fuckin' relax, because after awhile it gets to be annoying. I don't blame anyone for not knowing any better, and I know that sounds awful, but I don't wanna be someone that everybody really looks up to, I just wanna make music, and I want people to come to shows and jump around. And I'm sure that 75 per cent of the people that come to our shows are more responsible and smarter, and more well adjusted and twice the person that I am, so why the fuck should anyone look up to me. I'm just supposed to be the soundtrack to their evening."

Do you resent that rock star/hero worship thing that record companies seek to create?

"I don't resent it, but it's annoying when you have a human being and they become treated as a product, and in order to capitalise on a product like that you have to fully exploit it, and in doing that you create this cult of personality. But, I also believe that if you do something like this you're asking for it. If you don't want to be approached on the street and have people say they love your band, or they love your movies, or they love your football team, then don't do it. There are days when I'm fed up with it, and I think, I wanna go home to Virginia, I wanna be a farm and hang out with my family, and learn to fly planes, and that's it, that's all I wanna do. And on those days, someone will ask, 'do you wanna do this show called *Hey! Hey! It's Saturday*, it's the biggest TV show in Australia, great exposure, you'll sell thousands of records,' and I'll say, 'no, fuck it, I don't wanna do it.' Then there are other days when you're sitting at home and you hear that Tony Iommi [Black Sabbath] wants you to go in the studio with him, well 'fuck yeah!' The more you give into something like this, the more it's gonna come round and bite you in the ass. I don't wanna seem like I'm coming off as the reluctant rock musician who doesn't feel happy with success, it's awesome, it's great, it's just the type of adulation that comes with it seems a little weird."

Taylor said the Foo Fighters are as big and successful as he wants the band to be. Do you feel the same way?

"I think that Taylor knows because he played with Alanis Morissette. He knows what it can be like touring in stadiums that hold 10, 15, 20,000 people, with the biggest female artist of all time, and standing on the sidelines and watching what's going on with