

of Dublin City. And she is somebody who needs the support of every individual and every government around the world. She is the democratically elected leader of Myanmar-Burma, but it's not at the top of most government's priority lists to try and deal with the situation.

For those who might not be familiar with the situation, can you explain the background?

The military junta has basically stolen power and is still in control there. But, you know, it's really tragic that she is still under house-arrest after so many years and that the people of her country are denied the right to self-determination and democratic government. We are banned in Myanmar because of our support of Aung San Suu Ki - but because of her trial it seemed like this was the moment to get behind the campaign, first of all to get her out of jail, but also, ultimately to be in her rightful position as the Prime Minister of that country.

Is she aware of what you are doing?

I actually don't know. Amnesty International are very aware of what we are doing, so there is a strong chance she is.

People 'tweeting' outside the sound-check in Barcelona posted up the rehearsal set-list. You were trying out 'Drowning Man' [from War]. Have you played that yet?

No, we haven't. We are kind of looking at some older songs that haven't been in the last few tours. 'Unforgettable Fire' we haven't played for quite a while.

Onstage in Barcelona, Bono said it was 20 years.

He may be right. And we had never played 'Electrical Storm' which we did on the second night in Barcelona, and in Milan. So it's kind of in deference to the U2 fans who consider themselves the real uber-fans, who come to every tour. They love our better-known tunes, but they get really excited if we play something totally unexpected. And for ourselves as well, it's fun. As much as we all get a kick out of playing 'Where The Streets Have No Name', it's also huge fun to play something more obscure. It's a nice challenge, particularly in the case of say, 'Electrical Storm', where we actually re-wrote the song to some degree. Bono is coming up with new melodic ideas for 'Unforgettable Fire' - you get a chance to review a tune that you haven't played for a long time and update it.

What's your opinion on blogging?

I think it can be great but the majority of it is utter rubbish, and that's kind of the problem with the fact that anyone can publish their thoughts, ideas, feelings. Quite honestly, most people shouldn't bother! So I would say that there's some gems, there's some great stuff out there, but it is hard to find! That's the real problem. (laughs)

Do you go online every day? Do you check the news headlines from home online?

It really varies. Sometimes I get a chance to delve, and right now even keeping up with emails is almost impossible, so it varies hugely depending on what's going on. We don't really have a routine. There are kind of several different routines that we drift between, so we are in the touring routine now, which is hurtling along at break-neck speed, and hoping that we don't fuck up too badly.

What would happen if Larry breaks his arm or something like that?

Uh, we don't like to think about that, Olaf! (laughs) We are all pretty much indispensable. We'd probably find a way of getting by, but it would not be the same, that's for sure. No one really has a direct understudy. It's not like a theatre production where someone can take your place if you get ill, so we'd probably have to postpone shows.

What's the most annoying thing about touring?

Interviews! (laughs) Sorry! Joking! I suppose that

terrible sense of being wrenched from your life, where you end up running away with the circus. And then the other one is re-entering your life again, where you've been away for a while and it's just like nothing makes sense anymore and it takes quite a while to readjust when you get home. So those two experiences - I mean, once you are kind of into it and you are on the road - clearly it's not great to be in hotels all the time, travelling itself starts to become a bit boring, but the actual shows never become anything other than a thrill.

After I interviewed the band in February, a number of U2 fans got in touch asking me to pass on various crazy messages to you all. What's the strangest request you've had, or the maddest thing you've been sent?

Yeah. It can be a bit crazy. Like last night, there was a sign from a girl right in front of me that said, "It's my birthday, please adopt me!" (laughs) Probably written in jest, but yeah, you get the odd really crazy thing. But I think for each nut-bag, there's 10 or 100 genuine fans who just love the music. I am biased, but I think we have the best fans in music.

How do you choose your support acts?

We try and imagine the context. We try and imagine how a given band is going to go down in that context, and then also, what we like musically. We've had some amazing acts over the years. Kings of Leon did one of our recent tours. The Velvet Underground, one of their final shows, if not the final show that they performed as a band was with U2; Public Enemy; Stereo MCs, you know, we have had the full gamut, and we really just try and figure out what is going work and go down well.

With Kings of Leon, the first few shows they did with us, you could tell that it was quite overwhelming - the size of the show and whatever - but boy did they grow quickly and figure it out, and now they are one of the most exciting live bands around.

Now they're snapping at your heels!

Absolutely! Yeah, they are really big. I love that. They learned a lot. They were asked in an interview, "What did you learn from U2?" and one of them said, "How to travel!" Great!

How to travel well!

Yes. How to travel well. But, you know, Snow Patrol are a band with great tunes, and the thing about an outdoor event is that, yes, you need energy, you need commitment from the performers, but also you need tunes because you can't get by really on just energy. If you don't have the songs that will fill the venue then it's just going to fall, and they have done incredibly well.

Is there tension between the band before shows?

Not really, to be honest. All arguments are reserved for sound-checks and rehearsals. By the time we get to the show, we all know what we are trying to do and it's a perfect alignment of our intentions and agendas - we just want a great show.

You once punched Bono onstage, didn't you?

Do I ever?

No, you did once, I believe.

Ha, ha! That was just to save Larry's skin, but not really, no. The only cardinal sin would be if anybody actually stopped giving a fuck, you know. But that's never happened. We all inherently know that the only way we can do it is by giving everything, and whatever temptation we might have to throttle back and just turn out a mediocre performance, it's just - that actually is no fun, that doesn't work. Very occasionally somebody just gets very tired, and it's like they don't have the gas in the tank, but that's different. I don't think anyone is ever guilty of just not caring. We do know how lucky we are to be in this band, we do know that it's sort of unique and our connection with our fans is very special.

There has been a bit of criticism in the Irish press about Croke Park and speculation that The Claw won't be able to function to the full 360 effect; what are your thoughts on Croke Park as a venue and the sound there?

Well, the sound system that we've put together for this tour is the best we've ever had, so on that front, I am confident that the sound in Croke Park will be the best we have ever been able to produce. That's not to say I can vouch for every single seat and say it's going to be perfect. That's impossible. But it will be the best, I'm convinced of that. With regards to the production suiting the stadium, I can only assume that it's going to be as it was in Barcelona, unless I'm missing something. I don't understand why Croke Park would present any particular problems. As a production, it is totally tailor-made for venues like Croke Park.

Do you think U2 get an unreasonably hard time in Ireland?

I think we, at times, get a very hard time but I'm not sure I would say it's unreasonable. I think sometimes it's probably perfectly fair, and I would say it's probably mostly a question of scale. We are a very, very successful band and we live in a fairly small country. So, people probably give us way too much attention, that's probably the truth. Sometimes I get annoyed by articles, but mostly I don't take it too seriously: it's just one person's opinion on any given day. Who knows what was happening that week at the paper, or in their own lives? I think in the last year people have been very grumpy in Ireland, particularly in the media, but there has been a lot of bad news around, so you don't really need to be a genius to figure out why.

There was talk of a possible new U2 album before the end of the year. Is that on the cards?

It is still on the cards, but we don't really have plans that we can sign up to that far out. We would love the idea of the next record being sooner rather than later. We certainly have the material for it, but it's about whether we have the time to finish it. It depends on how the touring progresses. And there's the *Spiderman* musical which will be early next year, starting in New York, so Bono and I have a fair amount of work to do on that early in the year.

It'll be a first for us. We are very excited about it, but it's a steep learning curve...

Brian Cowen has announced October 2 as the date for the second Lisbon referendum; what are your thoughts on it?

Well, I'm pro-Europe. I think Ireland's done incredibly well from Europe. I love the idea that national instincts and aspirations would be diluted into the idea of Europe. I think it's hugely helpful for Northern Ireland. I think there is a huge plus for Ireland being in the forefront of Europe, and I think there is a huge negative to us kind of withdrawing and going backwards, so I hope it passes.

A final question about the Irish shows: can fans expect something radically different?

Yeah. It's such a fluid thing we don't really have any idea right now what we'll be doing in Dublin, but I'm sure there will be loads of ideas for what we can do that will be special. I can't wait for the Dublin shows, I think they're going to be an incredible spectacle. And what I love about the Irish shows is, if you ask any American fans, if you ask any European fans, Australian fans, you ask them where they want to see the band and they all want to come and see us in Dublin. So as well as it being the local crowd, it is also a cross-section of the biggest U2 fans internationally, so it's always a very switched-on and knowing U2 crowd in Dublin. And we know that we have to be at the top of our game for them, and we will certainly be pulling out all the stops to try and make it a great series of shows.

U2: Do The Evolution

From Boy to manhood, from Lovetown to PopMart, from the dizzy highs of Elevation to the climbers' bends of Vertigo: on the eve of U2's 360 tour landing in Croke Park in Dublin, Peter Murphy digs into the Hot Press archives to chart the band's 30 year live evolution. EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS **Bill Graham, Declan Lynch, Dermot Stokes, Olaf Tyaransen, John Walsh** and a cast of thousands.



For sure, a team of boffins couldn't have genetically engineered a band more suited to wide open spaces than U know who. Right down to the bass drum, U2 were always built for scale.

A four-man outreach programme, there's little introverted about them. The collective posture is inclusive, the sound expansive. There's Mr Hewson's voice of course, which has undergone a maturation process from whiteboy shout to Irish gospelist to a soaring semi-operatic instrument, counterpointed by Edge's choirboy vocal lines.

Then there's Edge's swathing arpeggios and piercing breaks, like shards of light that bounce off the back of any football field, while down in the boiler room, Larry Mullen's polyrhythms tend to owe as much to African trance as four on the floor, nudging the tunes into the natural realm of rushing rivers and rolling thunder, pure devotional. As for Adam Clayton, an essential element of U2's live power derives from the fact that the bassist relentlessly holds the groove down, where a vainer player might start straying up the top end, mistaking himself for a lead guitarist, while the arse falls out of the song.

Earliest *Hot Press* reports snapped a band straining against the inner confinement of small venues, forever tugging at the leash. Bono always said U2 didn't make sense in small spaces (when this writer saw the band play the Astoria in London in early 2001 it was like watching Spielberg shoot miniatures in his old man's garage). But the core factor is connection. U2 were built to communicate.

Boy to Men

Reviewing U2's Trinity Buttery and McGonagles gigs in August 1978, the late Bill Graham, always the band's shrewdest critic, earmarked Bono.

"Undoubtedly, the best front-man since Geldof, he's a powerfully charged battery of energy, and utterly un-ignorable. His enthusiasm is such that even a potentially pessimistic song like 'Concentration Cramp' doesn't flounder in grim negativity, he and the band trampling underfoot all those confining restrictions of schooldays.

"Furthermore, except for one purloined Kinks riff, U2 owe no obvious debts to earlier styles. Their songs are uniquely their own, vibrant celebrations that are both direct in impact yet not so simple in style. It's U2's most enduring asset that they've taken only the ideals of the new wave, but not its licks, so that while their songs retain pop vivacity, their structures stretch towards more complex forms... U2 belong to a whole other league."

A year later, Declan Lynch attended the band's August Dandelion Green show and focussed on the singer too. "When Paul Hewson, once a prat, now the frontman he's always wanted to be, sprays 'U2' in black on the back wall, he's being deliberate and everyone knows it. Complete conviction and mastery of technique are slowly becoming his, and he doesn't have to bluff anymore.

"Their greatest strength, though, is in the songs, which now vindicate all the occasional obnoxiousness. 'Out of Control', 'In Your Hand', 'Concentration Cramp', 'Shadows & Tall Trees', 'Judith' and 'The Fool' will land them a record contract, which, when it comes will be richly deserved, if only for courage and tenacity in the face of such a volume of criticism from the very start. But then, the best are always the most envied, which may be close to the root of things."

If the early shows were aspirational, they also took risks that constituted the best and worst moments of any given show. This, from a report on the Belfast date of the band's *Boy* tour in 1981:

"The high point of the night was 'Stories For

Boys', when ironically Bono's antics caused the only musical flaw of the night, his vocals being lost for long periods due to breathlessness and his mike lost to the audience."

As early as the Cork and Dublin dates of the *October* tour in '82, U2 homecoming shows had become rites of Spring.

"This was more than a gig, but it wasn't a party. It was the mutual celebration of an audience and a group. It was tribal in the way much rock can be but it had something more, a sense of community, which sent surges of anticipation and excitement through those present, even before the group went on stage."

War Stories and Trials by Fire

October came and went. Following that rushed, and in many ways unfocussed second album, U2 buckled down and forged their bolshiest sounding record, *War*, which set them up for their breakthrough 1983 US tour that gave them *Under A Blood Red Sky* and the live concert video, *Live At Red Rocks*. By now, Bono's live brinkmanship was driving him up speaker stacks and balconies, and on at least one occasion resulted in a mill with audience members. In fairness though, his instincts were just as often bang on the button. The *HP* review of the band's '83 Phoenix Park show cited the singer's "quicksilver instincts - whether showing his unerring sense and sensitivity in dealing with stage-invaders, dragging his father on for a swift jig, or generously dedicating a song to Jim Reilly, whose brother was shot the previous weekend in Belfast."

And it was a more mature quartet that took the impressionistic soundscapes of *Unforgettable Fire* on the road. This writer first saw them at Croker in '85, around the time they made *The Leap* at Live Aid. It was one of those shows. As Dermot Stokes observed: "The band and the audience had things to say to each other, a ritual dialogue of welcome and congratulations, their performance now is one of assurance and mastery - dare one say maturity. Big stages are made for Bono, his exuberance and mobility finding its natural extension in catwalks and large open spaces. But again one sensed pacing - he didn't gibbon around the scaffolding - and throughout their performance the band as a whole never overkilled, they restrained themselves to whatever was right, for the moment. They never blew it."

American Gothic to American Pastoral: The Joshua Tree to Lovetown

When they returned to the same venue two years later, *The Joshua Tree* had eaten the world. U2 scored a number one US album and made the cover of *Time*. It all seemed a little surreal. Bill Graham was at Croker for the two-night stand.

"It is an Event," he wrote, "Ireland's bi-annual opportunity to be awesome and I'm not certain that set details count. Still the gig reveals some stress between the old and new U2s, between the hypnotic, ecstatic drone band and the one now digging for roots 'n' roll, between the





one still sweeping over 'God's Country' and the one that binds together 'People Get Ready', 'Help' and 'Springhill Mining Disaster'. The nagging feeling is that U2 may not yet have achieved complete integration of these diverse strands.

"Pride" however is stunning and probably causes another small earthquake in Brussels while, at the first encore, 'Bullet The Blue Sky' finally lets the lighting crew loose as the Edge brutalizes his guitar and Bono angrily reworks the lyric for those who run into Irish brickwalls."

Following the sprawling *Rattle & Hum* live album and movie, the 1989 *Lovetown* tour saw the band recast themselves as a blues and soul revue with BB King in tow. 'Hawkmoon 269' notwithstanding, it was hard to see where they could go from here. But when they returned for a residency at The Point in December, culminating in a New Year's eve goodbye to the decade, Bill Graham saw auguries in the entrails.

"Once U2 may have claimed to be more than just a rock 'n' roll band," he wrote. "Now they were rephrasing and stepping back from such slogans. Introducing 'All Along the Watchtower', Bono gave his back-to-basics message and quipped 'rock 'n' roll, that's all folks'. Initially a cheeky choice for a free San Francisco concert and arguably the throwaway and least interesting track on *Rattle & Hum*, it had become furious and foreboding. 'Two horsemen were approaching and the wind began to howl' - probably it was all the unavoidable associations of the collapse of the East European regimes and the gruesome Gothic horror of Ceausescu's downfall that added to Dylan's ominous vision of a beleaguered city but U2 didn't flinch from an apocalyptic reading.

"Understandably, U2 have been reacting against earlier pontifications and magnification of themselves. They began with well-nigh heroic aspirations towards an ideal state of rock - but, now, maturity has brought a realization of their own fallibilities. Meantime, they've redrawn their boundaries and retreated back into private worlds of love, doubt and musical fascination. Love can never be abandoned as a theme but the next batch of songs may need to include some that without sloganeering, are social, peopled and perhaps even stories in the third person. In other words, how will the next record translate live?"

From Zoology to Pop Art

Bill's closing paras might have been the conceptual

template for *Achtung Baby*. At the dawn of the '90s, U2 decamped to Berlin, had a sort of collective nervous breakdown and emerged reborn with their broken hearts masked by leather, flyshades and metallic chrome. When they brought the bonkers *Zooropa* burlesque back home to Cork's Pairc Uí Caoimh and Dublin's RDS in August 1993, they were a whole other band. The vidwall set looked like a *Neuromancer* sprawl, and for the first time, a U2 stadium show felt Dionysian. Big ideas met head on with audience's preconceptions, and for the first 20 minutes of each *Zoo* set they risked alienating their faithful, both parodying and exploding rock star pageantry, supermodels and all. The show, not to mention the social swirl around it, was a mass of contradictions, and no better man to unravel them than BC.

"At the start, U2 do really look as if they're going to be snowed under," he observed. "From the stand, the audience seems to be gorging themselves on the hail of imagery and their own collective idea of U2 - which may not necessarily be that of the four small figures on stage who almost seem to be surrendering to all the million contradictory images of themselves. It's almost Kraftwerkian. U2, you momentarily think, could put four robots or impersonators on stage and watch 'themselves' from the sound-desk... It's also Lypton Village goes to Las Vegas, for there's echoes of the Virgin Prunes and Gavin Friday in both Bono's goose-stepping entry and the fruity grandiloquence of McPhisto.

"But is the spectacle so overloaded and saturated as to be ultimately devoid of meaning? Are we watching faith being sucked into the black hole of nihilism? Are U2 caught between their previous explicitness and their recent embrace of chaos? For me, each night, one song, one performance, 'Running To Stand Still' fights against those currents. And it does fuse at the end. 'Love Is Blindness' powerfully summarises the whole *Zoo* TV experience, a song that works both as a personal statement and as a commentary on celebrity and the profanities of media politics. And is it just my imagination, or do Eno's star-maps drifting across the vidwall include both the constellations, Crux and Chameleon?"

"Now," Bill concluded, "no U2 show can be small."

No kidding. U2 exploded the format to an even more deluded extent with the *PopMart* extravaganza in 1997, bells, whistles, giant lemons and all, at once a Lichtensteinian shazam cartoon of stadium rock ludicrousness and a day-glo soul revue that

opened with a fusion of two very different songs about the same thing: the techno-rock primal cry of 'Mofo' bleeding into 'I Will Follow', two takes on the god/mother shaped hole, written decades apart. But when the set climaxed with the full-houselights-on tour de force of 'Where The Streets Have No Name', Spielberg was back in the building. Bill might have translated and contextualised the whole shebang for the rest of us, but he'd passed away the year before. The band acknowledged the loss of their best critic and mentor by dedicating 'One' to him, and as John Walshe reported, it was a moment that "seemed to wring every last drop of emotion from the band and audience alike."

The Book of Elevations

From then on, the band ditched the props and concentrated their brainpower and budgetary muscle on making the vast seem intimate through staging innovations such as walkways that extended into the crowd and the heart-shaped pit at the front of stage. In keeping with a return (or retreat) to the more traditionalist sounds and stylings of 2001's *All That You Can't Leave Behind*, the *Elevation* show was all about life and death and rock 'n' roll.

And when U2 returned for two Slane shows in August and September '01, the circumstances were intense and emotionally charged. The first show took place the day after the funeral of Bob Hewson, Bono's father.

It was a cathartic event. U2 lit a fire under 'Elevation', all war whoops and noise loops, Bono's plea of, "I need you to elevate me here" ringing out over the designer Stooges/Mary Chain din generated by Edge. The singer seemed to locate new sense in old lines ("I will be with you again" from 'New Year's Day'), and when his voice cracked, "I know that this is not goodbye" in 'Kite', it was hard to look, but harder not to. Ditto their rendition of 'One', the song that saved U2, a heart to heart between lover and lover, father and son. Bono prefaced it by thanking his old man for his voice, before putting it to good use with that "Can you hear me comin'?" refrain, and from there, acoustic fragments of 'When will I see you again', a sigh of a love song reinterpreted as gospel. One last time, Bono invoked his old man's name as the band struck up their last song, 'Walk On'. "Leave it behind," he sang, as the litany of the song's final section got caught and tossed by the breezes: "You've got to leave it behind."

Olaf Tyaransen caught the second show a week



A fan's eye view of the U2 360° Tour

I'll Go Crazy If I Don't Go Crazy In Milan!



It was rockets at the fun fair time in Milan tonight: U2's return to the plains of Lombardy, 24 years after their first gig in Italy's most fashionable city, was truly

magnificent. The San Siro, one of Italy's most famous stadiums, was filled with energy, joy and anticipation.

There is hardly anything more exciting for me than seeing U2 play in my home country – but I almost didn't make it! As a result of various heart-stopping delays, I only got to the stadium at the very last moment, literally a couple of minutes before Larry Mullen introduced the opening number with a powerful tribal beat. I will never forget the emotion, entering the stadium to be confronted with the gigantic structure they've nicknamed The Claw, and surrounded by a delirious and exultant crowd that jumped and danced in unison to the driving rhythm of 'Breathe', one of my favourite tracks on *No Line On The Horizon*.

It was probably the first gig I've ever seen where the crowd could truly feel part of the show, with the band located in the centre of the stadium spreading their musical pearls in every direction.

Bono was in great form: his voice was clear and joyful. As the power of the music took hold, it was like being unburdened of mundane reality to revel in two hours of pure and utter magic.

After 'Breathe' came 'No Line On The Horizon' and the wonderfully catchy 'Get On Your Boots', its infectious rhythms inspiring everyone to dance at once! The "Let me in the sound/ Let me in the sound" chant echoed through the night-time heat of Milan, while above us the sky was becoming ever more dark and menacing.

'Magnificent' was one of the highlights: brilliantly performed, it evoked so many musical memories, the guitar sound in particular taking us back to the early days of U2.

Unlike a lot of more cynical or lazy rock bands, U2 believe in making a connection with the audience. Bono kept interacting with the crowd throughout the whole concert, hinting more than once at the difficult economic and political situation that Italy is facing at present. He quoted the Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's commitment to help Africa, which he has not honoured. "He still has a few days to keep his promise. Do you think he should?... I write songs, but he gets to write history."

The speech triggered one of the longest, loudest roars of consensus I have

ever witnessed. The people's emotional participation was remarkable, even on a revamped 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For', during which Bono got it wrong at one stage and the crowd started singing along rapturously, while he improvised a funny, self-deprecating dance. It was a moment that emphasised the humanity and vulnerability of the band that ended with a splendid version of Ben E. King's 'Stand By Me', which made my heart sing too.

The atmosphere was emotionally intense during 'Angel Of Harlem', dedicated to Michael Jackson, and 'Sunday Bloody Sunday', during which Iranian writings were displayed on the huge illuminated panel. The whole graphic element was visually stunning. Nothing was left to chance: even the lyrics and the speeches were often translated into Italian and projected onto the stage. It was like being catapulted onto a musical spaceship, where time stops, even if just for a couple of hours.

During 'Walk On', a troupe traversed the catwalk around the stage wearing masks representing Aung San Suu Kyi, to whom the song was dedicated. The combination of powerful music and imagery was so intense and moving: it was one of those moments that you can only experience at a U2 concert.

Painful, deep emotions alternated with powerful, liberating feelings of a kind that only rock and roll can give you. You quote 'Breathe', you die during tracks like 'MLK', and then you are reborn when songs like 'Vertigo' kick in. That is the unique power of a U2 gig. The latter song was accompanied by an amazing storm of energy: lights blinded us during this delirious, kinetic moment of pure rock. The same kind of electrical storm hit the stadium during 'City Of Blinding Lights', 'Ultraviolet' and a marvellous disco version of 'I'll Go Crazy If I Don't Go Crazy Tonight' – an incredible boost of energy that could have resuscitated the dead.

The show may have got bigger and more audacious technically, but U2 still sing their hearts out after 30 years, and tonight they make Milan go crazy. This is what makes all the difference: that they still have the ambition to make the greatest noise and give it everything they've got in the pursuit of that goal.

There is no other band in the world that could possibly have me wake up at 4am to go see one of their gigs, but – on the basis of their performance tonight – I would do it willingly again for U2. As we say in Italy, "tanto di cappello" ("well done")!

VALENTINA MAGLI

later: "This was U2 at their best under the circumstances," he wrote, "something that everybody completely understood and, in many ways, made the gig one of the most special we'd ever witnessed. Even more than usual, all eyes were on Bono tonight. There were moments when it felt almost voyeuristic being there, like watching the aftermath of a car crash. His father's name was invoked on more than one occasion and each time it happened there was a collective intake of breath as we wondered would the singer crack under the weight of the emotion, and then a huge and joyous cheer as we helped carry him through the lowest moments."

All Systems Vertigo

Following the release of *How To Dismantle An Atomic Bomb* in 2005, the *Vertigo* jaunt was a natural extension of – rather than a reaction to – the previous campaign. Groups like Coldplay and The Killers were openly name-checking U2 as an influence, and the band had allowed themselves to become looser and more self-referential than ever before. Even their entry to the Croke Park show that June seemed like a replay of 18 years before at the same venue when they snuck on and segued with the 'Stand By Me' intro.

So, beaming down to the sound of Arcade Fire's 'Wake Up', they got stuck into the opening triptych of 'Vertigo', 'I Will Follow' and 'Electric Co.' with a marked lack of – in U2 terms at least – pomp and circumstance.

But when they plugged the big screens in, the lenses were switched from grainy verite to magic realism. 'City Of Blinding Lights' was a self-conscious but still sparkling reworking of old-school 'Unforgettable Fire' panorama-lama. U2 hadn't surrendered to their own back catalogue a la The Who or The Stones, but they weren't above plagiarising their younger selves. And, it must be said, it was the only time I came away from a U2 show never wanting to hear 'Streets' or 'Pride' ever again.

The *Vertigo* show didn't reconcile the two U2s; it alternated them. It was a different band that returned to play an encore of 'Zoo Station' and 'The Fly' (Bono looking like a leather-fetish bullwhip cop patrolling the beat for white meat), and to be honest, it was a band I liked better – dirty, furtive and doubtful.

So, from *Vertigo*'s déjà voodoo to this year's 360 tour in support of *No Line On The Horizon*: when you get to the bottom you go back to the top of the ride, and what goes around comes around again. Reports from the band's opening shows indicate that U2 are taking chances, not just with the stage design, a rather staggering in-the-round configuration that looks more like a surrealist spaceship sculpture than your standard amp stacks and lighting trusses set up, but also the set-list, which has featured rarely played tunes like 'Unforgettable Fire' 'Party Girl', 'Electrical Storm' and 'MLK', plus the expected swathe of *Horizon* stuff. More importantly, it sounds like they're cranking up productivity, with another album due in the autumn. The last time U2 hit such a purple patch was with the *Achtung/Zooropa* one-two, for my money their career-high. The auguries are interesting. Let's see what transpires.

