

The Late-Blooming Fan

By Mary Warner

Fine and lovely. You discovered a band while its members were still slumming, swilling cheap beer and vomiting during their half-hearted garage rehearsals. You sacrificed your lungs in smoke-choked bars to cheer the band at its late-night weekend gigs. Now the band has made it big, humongous even, and women are throwing forty-dollar boutique thongs on stage at concerts and guys are smokin' weed and saying "Cool" in their coolest, doobie-induced voices.

You've got all the band's albums. (Heck, you even pre-order them prior to the release date.) You belong to the official fan club. You may have even started it. You follow the band's bus as it criss-crosses the nation, catching as many shows as your narrow life will allow. You'd even hop the oceans to see them in Japan or the U.K. if you weren't so damned broke. And, by God, you've got dibs on this band. It's yours and the rest of us better not forget it. Goody for you. Stay proud of your accomplishment.

As for the rest of us pseudo fans, we fair-weather birds who didn't offer an empty couch to the band member kicked from his parents' home, what right do we have to claim allegiance to your band? We who bought CDs and attended concerts in bright, shiny, cavernous arenas after the band made it big. Who do we think we are? You want to spit in our general direction and hope the saliva lands someplace disgusting. Our mouths, perhaps.

Come, come now. Put away the gutter-thoughts and daggers. Aside from missing out on holding the head of a band member as he puked his Jack into a toilet (if he made it that far) or avoiding those beer runs for the band where you picked up the tab, there are plenty of other benefits to being a late-blooming fan.

For one, we late bloomers have our pick of the band's music. Three, seven, ten CDs after they reached fame, we revel in the choices. We can check CDs out of the library, or borrow them from friends. Have a listen. Decide which albums are dogs and which are cats. The cats are the keepers, of course. We don't have to spend one copper cent on the dogs.

Our choices don't end there. As discerning collectors, we can rank the albums in the order in which we wish to purchase them. We can buy only the studio albums. Or, start with the live albums. Maybe we prefer the early stuff, or can only tolerate the finely developed later tunes. We can afford to be finicky. By the time we come on board, there may even be a compilation or "Best of" album.

And merchandise, oh, discounted merchandise! We can cull the band's older CDs from a used-music store. The band's website offers old t-shirts, calendars and posters at a cut rate. Being late to your band's music, we have painlessly passed through the waiting period and the deals are there to be plucked. We didn't sit on the edges of our seats, frothing and fretting over when band members were going to get their butts back into a

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studio and produce something new. They owe it to you, by God. You - the original fan. We late bloomers have too much catching up to do to worry our heads over the lack of new music.

Being as how we're so fair-weather, of course we must only like the hits of your band. We could never get the subtlety of the songs that didn't make the Top 100. Hey, why bother with albums at all? We interloping fans can just cruise the internet and download specific songs from the band. Skip the CD booklet with its art and lyrics. We can't possibly want to understand what's truly going on in the minds of the members of your band. Get your digs in now. That's it. But, at least we late-comers have identities that are not dependent upon the band, your band.

Further, it is the late-blooming fans that give you original "been-with-the-band-from-the-beginning" fans your status. Without us throwing wads of cash at your band, making them mega-super-stratospheric stars, you could not lay claim to your position in your band's life. So, sneer away at us late bloomers and know this: We'd like to be able to say we were there at the band's inception, even if it meant getting barf on our shoes.