

Extreme Volumes: Bazillion Points

By Brandon Stosuy

Brandon Stosuy talks with the founder of Brooklyn publishing company Bazillion Points, Ian Christie, about his comprehensive (and quite heavy) books on various strains of punk and metal, and surviving as an independent press in the digital age.

After interviewing the guys behind Brooklyn metal destination Saint Vitus a couple of months ago, I started thinking about people who contribute to the scene in ways other than plugging in a guitar. Around that time, my eyes happened to stop on my copy of Daniel Ekeroth's *Swedish Death Metal* on a bookshelf at home next to my copy of Tom Gabriel Warrior's *Only Death Is Real: An Illustrated History of Hellhammer and Early Celtic Frost*, and I figured out who I should talk to next.

Ian Christie is a Brooklyn-based journalist, metal historian (check out 2004's *Sound of the Beast: The Complete Headbanging History of Heavy Metal* and 2007's *Everybody Wants Some: The Van Halen Saga*), DJ (the Sirius show "Bloody Roots"), one-time musician, and head of Bazillion Points, the publishing company

behind the titles mentioned above as well as recent books like the gargantuan *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries* (it weighs five and a half pounds) and Tesco Vee's *Touch and Go: The Complete Hardcore Punk Zine '79-'83*. He's also published books on Southern California hardcore, Bay Area thrash, prog, and being a black woman in the world of heavy metal.

Bazillion Points celebrated its fifth anniversary this year, which seemed like another reason to sit down and talk with Christie about what it takes, in the digital age, to put out a 700+ page book about a Norwegian black metal zine, and to make it work.

How did you decide to start Bazillion Points?

It was a rebellion. I'd been through the big book publishing process twice myself as an author with [the 2004 heavy metal history] *Sound of the Beast* and then with my Van Halen book. I had a background in DIY music, so the big publishers were so frustrating to deal with. Five years after



A Bazillion Points publication.

THE
PITCHFORK
REVIEW



Brandon Stosuy is senior editor and director of events at Pitchfork. He works as a music curator for MoMA PSI, and is a contributing editor at *The Believer*. For the past number of years, he and the visual artist Matthew Barney have been collaborating on a series of live events and publications. Brandon curates the annual *Basilica Soundscape*, in Hudson, New York, with Melissa Auf der Maur, Brian DeRan, and Tony Stone and writes a monthly metal column at Pitchfork called *Show No Mercy*.



At the Bazillion Points office.

Sound of the Beast came out that frustration welled up into feeling like I had a good grip on what needed to be done to make a book work, so I contacted Daniel Ekeroth about putting out *Swedish Death Metal* in the States. He'd printed less than 2,000 copies of that book himself, and it cost 80 euros to get it here. I knew that wasn't working. There were a lot of people who would want to read it, and books like that don't have to be incredibly limited, precious things. That was it in the beginning, just like, "Damn, everybody's doing it all wrong. I can do this." And it

pretty much worked out through a really lucky succession of getting in touch with exactly the right people at the right time.

Being in New York, a lot of people I knew were top-notch copy editors or photo retouchers, so I had a good community around me that knew how to do the specialized stuff. All I had to figure out was getting the word out. It's not even so much about publicity, it's more just letting people know that things are available, because books aren't a flash in the pan thing. It's more like, "It took 20 years for this book to be done,

and now it'll be on a shelf for 20 years until the right person finds it." The thing that was much harder than I expected was figuring out what to do with 20 tons of books. That led to a lot of trying to move freight with a pallet jack—literally trying to shove a one-ton cube of books into a tiny space. The positive side about dealing with the logistics of moving books around is that it's better than a gym!

So you've become pretty buff by this point.

Huge! So strong.

When you first started did you have other small music-associated presses that inspired you, or were you looking more at record labels?

I had more experience with record labels, but when I saw Black Flag in 1986, Henry Rollins was selling the very first 2.13.61 pamphlets, so that idea of a literary tie-in to outsider music definitely planted the seed.

Also, I played drums in a band with Soft Skull Press founder Sander Hicks called Poem Rocket, and all of those guys worked at the same Kinko's—Sander was abusing late-night copier access to make these little books by Lee Ranaldo and whoever else he could round up. I mean, I was abusing the same copiers to make 7-inch covers for Grouse Mountain Skyride.

Bazillion Points has been around for five years now. Has it been hard to make a press work in this very digital environment? People aren't used to paying for things.

I think it's worked because all of our books are filling a gaping need. There was nothing really

thorough about Midwestern hardcore—then all of a sudden there's this 576-page book about the entire revolution of hardcore from a Midwestern perspective and the rise of Detroit and Negative Approach in *Touch and Go*. It's definitely been hard, but I think that we're doing it right, so it's not brutal.

The hardest thing has been keeping everything in print. It's a whole new level of logistics—how to store things is becoming more and more of a puzzle. We have our own local warehouse, and the distributors keep a lot of the books in their big warehouse, along with probably over 50% of all independent presses—they're all stored in the same warehouse in Jackson, Tennessee. The hardest thing is dealing with massive, expensive reprints. It wasn't a problem when we had eight books, but now that we have 15, we reprint the book and it takes years for all of them to be sold. Everything happens so slowly, it's a whole different time frame.

As far as distribution goes, do a lot of the book sales happen online, or are people finding them in bookshops and record stores?

It's a mix of everything. We deal directly with as many music stores as we can, and that's definitely been hard in the last few years. But the newer ones that open up are less set in their ways and more flexible and also are coming up in an era where metal has been big for several years now, especially among actual record buyers. I feel like our books are right at the core of what a record store is, and every record store that sells a copy of *Metalion* should stock up

SOME OF OUR FAVORITE BAZILLION POINTS BOOKS

↓

SOUND OF THE BEAST: THE COMPLETE HEADBANGING HISTORY OF HEAVY METAL
by Ian Christe

Honestly, this book changed my life. It came out in 2003, when I was barely 15 and didn't know anyone else in the world who cared about the weird, aggressive style of music that I was just beginning to discover. Ian Christe's warts 'n' all genre memoir laid out the foundations clearly, and made connections between the bands, sounds, subgenres, and various other ephemera that make metal what it is. It was an invaluable resource for a nerdy kid who'd barely heard of Venom but knew she wanted more, and I'm sure it will continue to be just that for many more nerds to come.

—KIM KELLY



JOHNNY SAMPSON

SWEDISH DEATH METAL

By Daniel Ekeröth

Whereas Ian Christie's *Sound of the Beast* gives a sweeping, fast-paced overview of metal's evolutionary progression, Daniel Ekeröth's tome veers sharply down the left-hand path and arrives smack dab in the middle of one of extreme metal's most revered and influential micro-scenes: Swedish death metal. Jam-packed with interviews with the old gods themselves (Nihilist, At the Gates, Dismember, Morbid, and tons more), metal minutiae, and opinionated prose from Ekeröth himself, *Swedish Death Metal* is an insider's account of what really went down in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and all points in between. It's an exhaustive, encyclopedic resource for the death metal connoisseur and a true labor of love from someone who was not only there but also was kind enough to document it all for those of us who wish we had been.

—KIM KELLY

on hundreds of black metal releases because whoever bought that book is going to be back tracking all that stuff down. That was especially true with our prog metal book, *Mean Deviation*, because it included 1,000 pretty obscure, wacky bands, and not even their best-known records sometimes. But we're dealing with the rise of Amazon just like all bookstores and all record stores and all publishers.

In the past few years metal has definitely crossed over a bit more. Do you think the fact that more people are listening to more "underground" stuff now than a decade ago helps what you do?

I don't know, because my book *Sound of the Beast* came out 10 years ago and HarperCollins didn't really expect too much. It took me three or four years to get it done. When we first signed up, *The Osbournes* was on TV and they were stoked about that. Then that was gone by the time my book was done, and they were like, "Wait a minute! Where's the endless comedy about the stumbling rock star? This is about a bunch of bands and music. What is this?" But that book did really well and I think it's because it was needed. *Sound of the Beast* was just an attempt to capture as much as possible and make sense of it. Now, there's more of a glut. When we first started, we would routinely be in the top 10 metal books on Amazon just because there was nothing else. There's a lot of cash-in stuff coming out now—they always mention the backstage antics.

There are common themes in what you've put out, but there's also variety. For instance, your new book is the photo journal *Experiencing Nirvana: Grunge in Europe, 1989* by Sub Pop founder Bruce Pavitt. How does that figure into everything for you?

A lot of these things have an innate connection. I had been riding that metal wave since 1980 with things getting more complex and heavier and darker. Around the time the photos in that book were shot, Morbid Angel's "Thy Kingdom Come"

single came out, along with Mayhem's *Death-crush* EP and the first Napalm Death album—there was a huge explosion and everybody in that wave started listening to The Stooges and MC5 and Blue Cheer, and taking a pause and looking at different dimensions of rockin'. [laughs]

Right as I got into that stuff, the first Mudhoney 7-inch came out, and I saw them in Chicago. It was super sludgy. You know, the bass player came from the Melvins, but it tied into old rock. A couple of years later, Nicke Anderson jumped out of Entombed and started The Hellacopters. There's a little bit of logic there connecting Sub Pop and metal. Supposedly, Nirvana was engineered to be a cross between R.E.M. and Celtic Frost. I'm still trying to find the perfect Nirvana song that's an example of that, but you do hear a lot of their songs start with an extremely emotional death grunt ... [imitates guitar]

It also ties in with Tesco Vee's *Touch and Go* ...

Sub Pop and Touch and Go are two powerhouse indie labels that began as fanzines, so there's a huge written component, too. It's not like they had to go back and write a label history. Tesco had been doing the zine for three years before the label ever started, so the underpinnings of Touch and Go are all spelled out in the first 20 issues of *Touch and Go*, and the same with Sub Pop, even more so because Bruce Pavitt had been publishing zines and he was doing a monthly column in Seattle's *The Rocket*.

Bruce Pavitt was so intent on being indie and regional that he was really into the tribal identity of the Seattle sound; he was so pro-indie that if X or Devo put out a new record in 1980 he wouldn't even cover it because it was a major-label release. Those kinds of politics. I don't think anyone was on that in a major way until 10 or 15 years later. Then all of a sudden the records start coming out, and you see how they have strong regional identities and there was a look—the look of Sub Pop the label was already tested out in the zine.



The bookshelf at Bazillion Points.

When I was younger, I would get anything on Touch and Go or Dischord. I trusted the labels and their vision. Sub Pop was like that for a time. Is this something you aspire to with the press?

Yeah. And Touch and Go had it over several eras, with hardcore and then with post-hardcore when all of a sudden it was Laughing Hyenas and Urge Overkill and Killdozer. It's different with books because these things are way more work and way more focused and personalized than a record. But as far as black metal and death metal go, the trio of *Only Death Is Real*, *Swedish Death Metal*, and *Metalion* is pretty much untouchable for really understanding how those movements were formed, who did it, where, the circumstances, the repercussions. *We Got Power!*'s funny. It's hardcore punk, but with almost no discussion of music. It's all about the

people and the settings and the social circumstances. And *Touch and Go* is almost purely music and attitude and humor. I feel like we already have some zones of total expertise and total authority.

You mention *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries*, which collected highlights of the long-running Norwegian metal zine *Slayer Mag*. How did that come about? Black metal zines aren't usually looking for that kind of exposure.

I approached [*Slayer Mag* editor] Jon [Kristiansen] about that, and it definitely took some convincing, although it was an obvious thing, especially since *Slayer #10* was the most complete text about the Norway happenings of '92 and '93 [including a rash of church burnings, the suicide of Mayhem singer Per Yngve Ohlin

WE GOT POWER!:
HARDCORE PUNK
SCENES FROM
1980S SOUTHERN
CALIFORNIA
by David Markey and
Jordan Schwartz

I've read plenty of books on punk, metal, and other scenes, and aside from a couple exceptions (like *Rip It Up and Start Again* or *Our Band Could Be Your Life*) my favorites are the first-person autobiographies, memoirs, and oral histories, like *Please Kill Me*, *Lords of Chaos*, *Get in the Van*, *Lexicon Devil*, and *We Got the Neutron Bomb*. I grew up on zines, and burrowed deeper into underground music through them, so I have a special weak spot for those sorts of chronicles, with all their navel-gazing solitary weirdness. *We Got Power!* is one of these.

In the 304-page, large-format hardcover, you get reproductions of the five issues of early '80s zine *We Got Power!*, as well as an unreleased issue from 1984, each with a brief intro for context. The zine was originally edited by L.A. scenesters and contributors

(cont'd)

Jordan Schwartz and David Markey (who went on to do the documentary *1991: The Year Punk Broke*, among other things) and covered bands like The Vandals, Saccharine Trust, Adolescents, Black Flag, the Minutemen, Social Distortion, Red Kross, Descendents, Suicidal Tendencies, and D.R.I. To flesh things out, the book integrates essays from scene participants like Henry Rollins, Keith Morris, Mike Watt, Joe Carducci, The Vandals' Steve Human, Tony Reflex of Adolescents, and other artists, filmmakers, players, scenesters, and members of Black Flag. None of the essays are too long or too nostalgic or academic—they're quick vignettes from people who were there, and it feels more like an oral history than an anthology. It's about the zine—we get historical essays from both *Power!* editors—but it's more about what inspired them to make it in the first place.

—BRANDON STOSUY

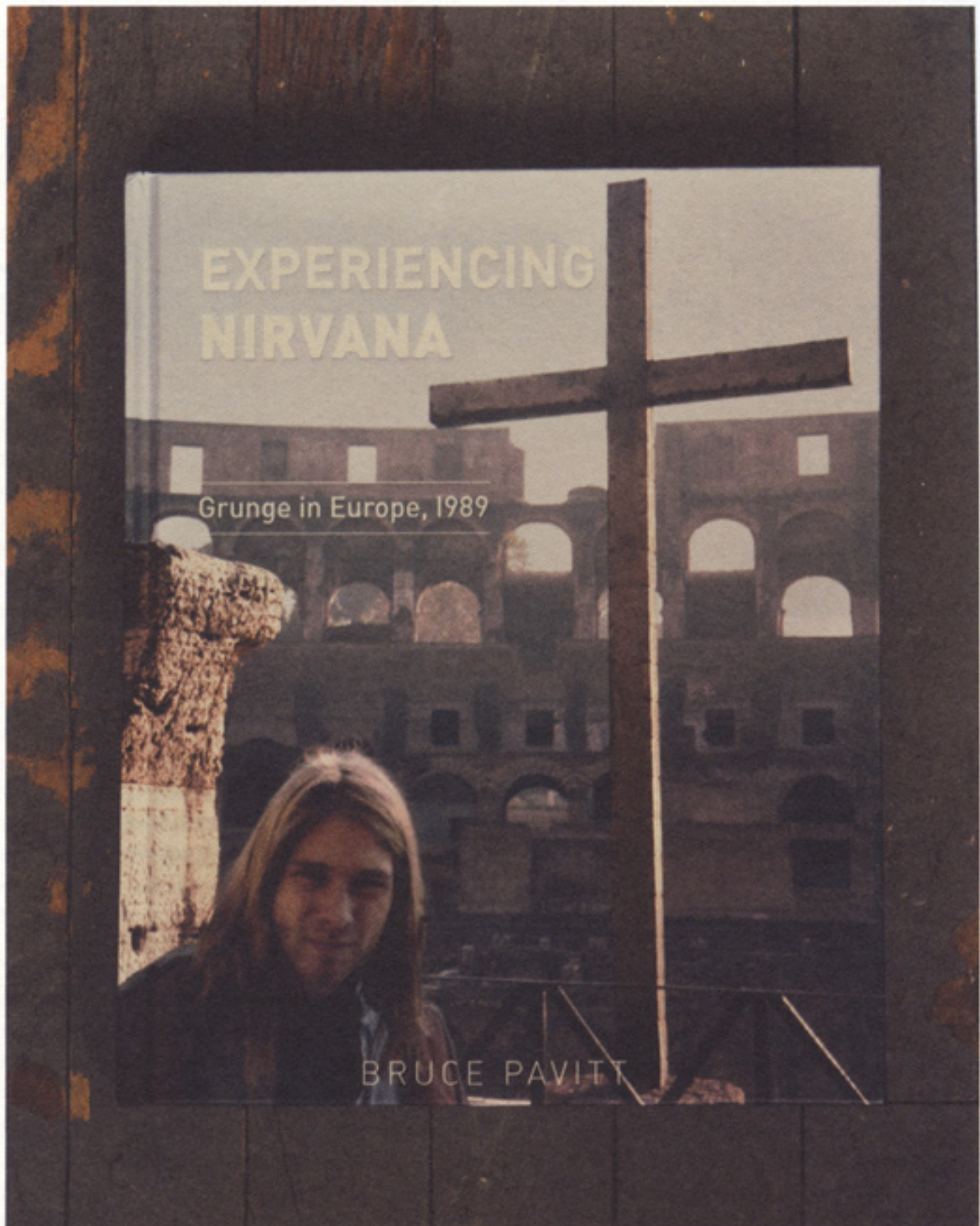


PHOTO BY EBRU YILDIZ

The massive hardcover edition contains over 200 full-color photos taken by Sub Pop co-founder during Nirvana's 1989 European tour.

(a.k.a. Dead), and the murder of Mayhem's Øystein "Euronymous" Aarseth by Burzum's Varg Vikernes]. Everything that's in the interviews is basically the entire story, but in way more detail with way more personal perspective than any of the books or documentaries that were thrown together years later.

Overall, though, that scene's super interesting for what it says about black metal, and also for European metal in the early days, when he was just an innocent kid, and then at the end when he's a grizzled veteran after seeing Sodom 40 times. Getting him to do it was tough. His close friend Tara kind of babysat him through the process—she took all the abuse, like, "Goddammit, I don't wanna talk about this!" Many packs of cigarettes and 30 cassette tapes later, they had talked it all out and that was the basis for the book's diary portion. It was very weird to have all of this material pass through my hands like letters from Dead and original Mayhem artifacts.

I could imagine him agreeing to do the book because it's a primary document that tells the story more accurately than the books by people who weren't there.

It's very personal and difficult, because when you look around at all of his stories, most of the people he knew as a kid discovering metal and having happiness in his life for the first time aren't around anymore. So it's majorly dark, and with the help of the book, actually, he came out on the other end, which is pretty amazing. Though the book that has the highest body count is definitely *We Got Power!* It was very sobering to realize how fast and wild the first wave of L.A. hardcore punks lived. Like, wow. That's some destruction.

A more recent book that's connected, but also feels very different, is *What Are You Doing Here?: A Black Woman's Life and Liberation in Heavy Metal*. Did the writer, Laina Dawes, pitch you on that?

Yeah, and she had a lot of great details and ideas. It was all tied together in a very concise and tight way, but that was the book that I worked the most on as an editor, just asking questions and helping her organize things. In the end, it's the perfect mix of theory and personal observation and anecdote.

Like the *Metalion* book or *Only Death Is Real*, it's an authoritative story by somebody—a black woman who's been into metal for a very long time and walked a road that nobody else really walked. I don't want to say you can't question her, but it's good for you to listen to that. She didn't start a genre-defining band, but she sure as hell knows what it's like to be a black woman at a show. All metal is so mature at this point that people are very comfortable in their understanding of what happens at shows and who other metalheads are and how to relate to other metal people. But it shakes things up to understand that here's somebody who's been going to shows for 20 years and some kid will take one look at her and literally say, "What are you doing here?" She is part of this. She's not an outsider to the metal world. She's just got a very different experience than a lot of people.

Do you have a dream book?

I've already worked on at least a dozen dream books. I'm definitely not starving for something, like, "Agh, if only!" Its the opposite. At the moment, I'm right in that sweet spot. The dream book is always the next book, and that's how it's been for five years now.

Do you see *Bazillion Points* as lasting another five years?

Yeah. It's important to over-deliver on the quality of the books as far as depth and content. It's not worth it to cut out 50 pages just because it would be a little bit cheaper. And I know that if any of these books go out of print, they'll instantly become super valuable and super rare. To a certain extent that's unavoidable for periods of time, but I'd like to see everything

METALION: THE SLAYER MAG DIARIES

by Jon Kristiansen

Several years ago, I went on a five-hour, government-sponsored tour of Oslo's black-metal landmarks. Satyricon bassist Anders Odden, one of Norway's heavy-music demigods (if we're being generous), led the trek to the basement of Euronymous' record store, Helvete, and the once-burned but now-rebuilt Holmenkollen Chapel. Here's a tip: Don't venture to Norway just for a guided tour of black-metal landmarks. Save a rather considerable sum by instead picking up *Metalion: The Slayer Mag Diaries*. These 744 pages collect back issues of *Slayer*, the long-running Norwegian metal zine produced in rather primitive fashion by Jon "Metalion" Kristiansen. Its collected interviews, photos, reviews, adverts, drawings, and philippics offer an exhausting and wonderful diorama of the evolution of heavy metal across a quarter century. It's as entertaining as it is informative, and vice versa—equally necessary assets for a book about something that champions its grim and enigmatic tendencies.

— GRAYSON
HAVER CURRIN

EXPERIENCING
NIRVANA: GRUNGE
IN EUROPE, 1989
by Bruce Pavitt

In the fall of 1989, Sub Pop co-founder and indie-zinester Bruce Pavitt spent a week touring Europe with Tad and Nirvana, two young bands signed to his grunge-defining label. Sensing the potential significance of the journey—which culminated in a Sub Pop label showcase headlined by Mudhoney in London—Pavitt snapped over 500 grainy, spontaneous, and amateurish photos with his simple Olympus pocket cam. The result is an intimate, diaristic look at a pivotal moment for 22-year-old Kurt Cobain. Pavitt puts the Nirvana story in reach for those of us who didn't experience it firsthand, and makes myth feel human.

—JENN PELLY



Ian Christie's desk

stay in print as long as people are still willing to read them because it took a lot of work on my part, and the authors put in so much, compiling everything. But yeah, I will definitely be here in five more years. How dare you ask! *[laughs]*

You're keeping up with metal, doing the radio show, writing about metal. As someone who's doing a lot of historical work, what's your take on today's metal scene?

Daniel Ekeroth was just here from Sweden, and we went tubing on the Delaware River and discussed this. Basically, it seems to me like everything is super-saturated right now, and we ran through all of the unfinished business. Like, thrash metal didn't really get a chance to develop before it was killed off by death metal, but it got its chance in the last five years and has run itself through. That's been true of a lot of different varieties and flavors of metal. Now, the youngest metal kids are less impressed by tradition, so you get metal that encompasses ev-

erything. It's not a defining kind of lifestyle and look—if you go back five or 10 years ago, there were so many 20-year-olds way into Pentagram and Saint Vitus, or even just on the mainstream level going to Ozzfest and seeing Slayer and Black Sabbath every year. But that kind of respect for the lineage is dwindling because things change. It was an amazing streak for us grizzled old folk to be able to have anybody under the age of 900 to turn to us and say, "What was it like seeing Saxon?" *[laughs]*

But, at the same time, there are so many bands doing the opposite of what I'm saying, like these *super* focused, *super* intense bands from Southeast Asia. This is where metal is just catching on now, where you can see Metallica and Iron Maiden for the first time. That's like a wildfire in a totally pretty much untapped terrain. So that's more exciting than seeing a bunch of young American bands that seem like they bought one thing from every store in the mall and they're making a record out of it. ☞



Ian Christie of Bazillion Points