

➔ **FUZZ BOX RIOT! 21 PEDALS REVIEWED**

# GUITAR WORLD

**5 SONGS**

GUITAR & BASS TABS!

MOLLY HATCHET  
"Flirtin' with Disaster"

FIVE FINGER  
DEATH PUNCH  
"Under and Over It"

NIRVANA  
"Rape Me"

EVERCLEAR  
"Santa Monica"

SOUNDGARDEN  
"Black Hole Sun"

**20<sup>th</sup>**

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**IN UTERO**

# NIRVANA

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# HOWL

*Experiencing Nirvana: Grunge in Europe, 1989*—coming from Bazillion Points books in November—is an inside look into a crucial eight-day period in the touring life of Nirvana and two other Seattle bands, Tad and Mudhoney, as seen through the eyes of Bruce Pavitt, the cofounder of Sub Pop Records, the Seattle label that first signed Nirvana in 1988. The 208-page deluxe hardcover book can be ordered via [bazillionpoints.com/nirvana](http://bazillionpoints.com/nirvana).

In the following excerpt, Pavitt recounts when he and Sub Pop partner Jonathan Poneman arrived in Rome to meet up with Nirvana. The group was almost finished with a grueling six-week tour of Europe. Although Nirvana were determined to promote their grungy, riff-heavy debut album, *Bleach*, their travels with fellow Sub Pop act Tad had left them exhausted. Kurt Cobain, in particular, was frustrated, downcast and, as would become common, in danger of hurting himself.

## DAY ONE

**PIPER CLUB, ROME**  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1989

Jon and I arrived in Rome to connect with two of the new Seattle groups we were working with: Nirvana and Tad. Our mission was to assist in any way possible prior to their big Sub Pop showcase in London, *LameFest UK*, where they were to perform with their headlining labelmates Mudhoney. The British media were notorious for launching music careers, and we hoped that this event would be a defining moment for the artists.

In particular, we were concerned about Kurt Cobain, as we had heard that he was feeling resigned and

NIRVANA'S ASSAULT ON ROME, ITALY'S PAPAL CAPITAL, IS RECOUNTED BY SUB POP RECORDS COFOUNDER BRUCE PAVITT IN HIS NEW BOOK ABOUT THE GROUP'S 1989 EUROPEAN TOUR.

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homesick and was suffering from exhaustion. Jon and I were hoping to help raise his spirits with a show of support. Everyone knew that it was crucial for the bands to arrive in London in good shape, as the three-band *LameFest UK* was by far the biggest show of the tour, with the potential to have a huge impact via the influential British press.

That afternoon, after taking some time to explore St. Peter's Square, we met up with Nirvana and Tad at the legendary Piper Club, where the bands were finishing up their soundchecks. After almost five weeks on the road, the artists were tired but glad to see us. We went out for some pasta and then headed back to the venue as fans started to show up.

Tad got onstage and started their aggressive, lumbering set, showcasing tracks from their debut album, *God's Balls*. Taunting the crowd, bass player Kurt Danielson fell into the audience, yelling, "Fuck the Pope!" while drummer Steve Wied kept the beat. After 40 minutes of provoking the Rome citizenry, the world's heaviest band retired upstairs to recuperate.

Nirvana's turn came next. Kurt approached the mic, made a few comments and then started screaming, testing the limits of the microphone. As the crowd rushed toward the stage, Nirvana broke into "School." The song had a great hook, and the band often used it to open their shows.

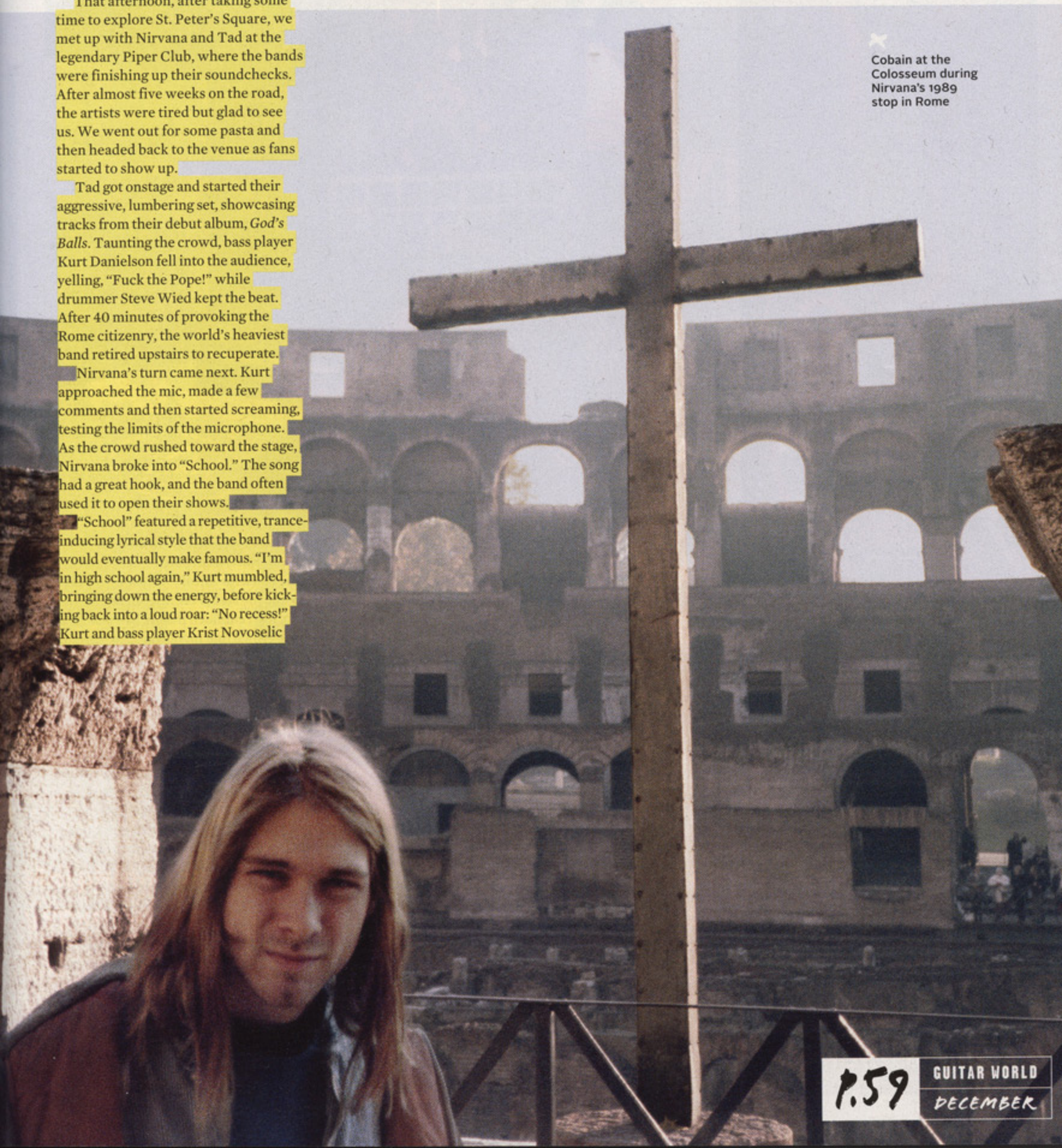
"School" featured a repetitive, trance-inducing lyrical style that the band would eventually make famous. "I'm in high school again," Kurt mumbled, bringing down the energy, before kicking back into a loud roar: "No recess!" Kurt and bass player Krist Novoselic

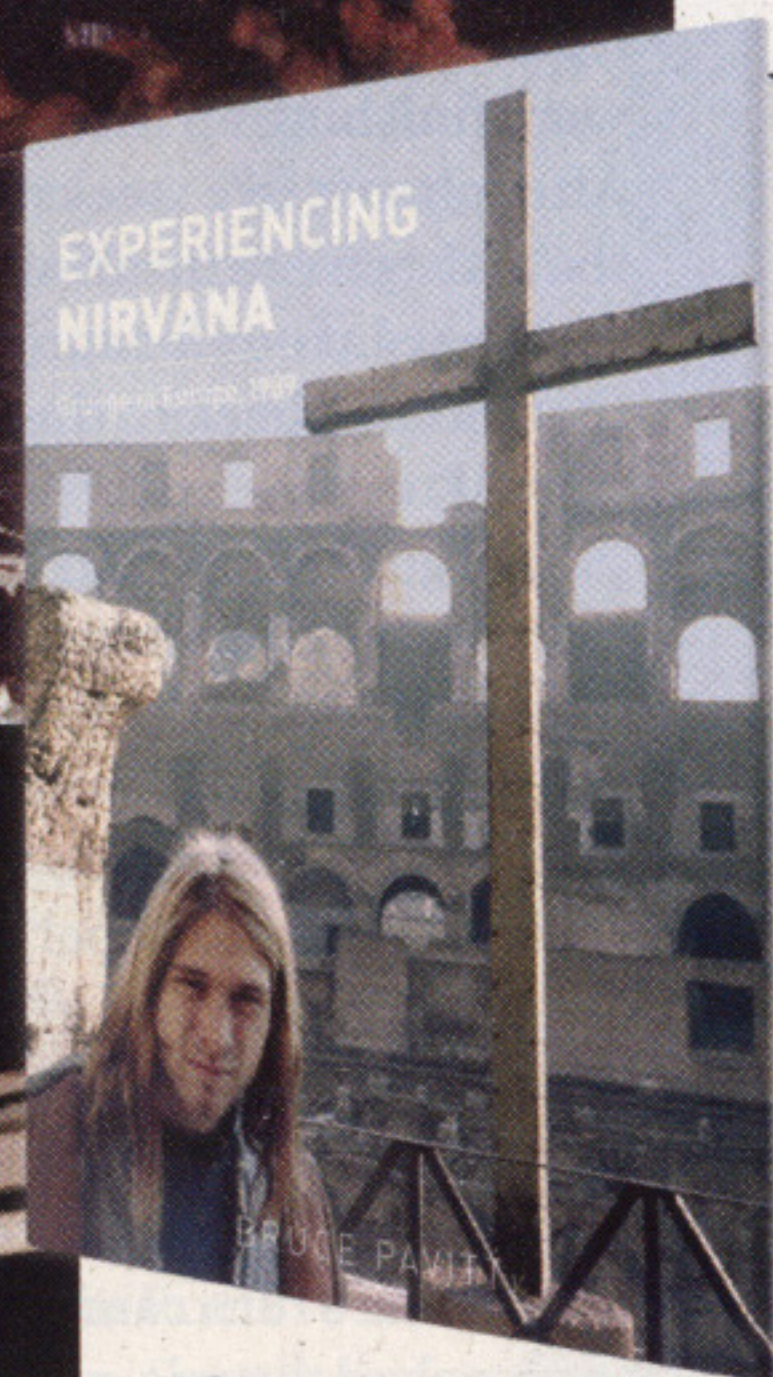
were loose, moving across the entire stage. Despite their exhaustion, the band found some energy.

Their frenetic performance, clearly influenced by Mudhoney, had come a long way since the first time I saw them in Seattle. They were much more animated and intense. The band played more songs from *Bleach*: "Scoff," "Floyd the Barber" and their Beatles-esque pop

tune "About a Girl." They roared into "Love Buzz" and "Big Cheese" from their first Sub Pop single. A few newer tunes were in the mix as well: "Polly," "Imodium" (later released as "Breed"), and "Been a Son," as well as an ultra-heavy track called "Dive." With more than 30 European shows now behind them, the band looked and sounded ferocious.

★  
Cobain at the Colosseum during Nirvana's 1989 stop in Rome





(left) Nirvana performing in Rome; Cobain and Tad Doyle backstage; the cover of *Experiencing Nirvana*

Then it happened.

Ten songs into their set, Kurt, frustrated with his guitar, smashed it completely and climbed a tall stack of speakers. The crowd looked on, with many drunk spectators yelling, "Jump!" It was a dramatic moment, potentially harmful. I witnessed the event from the club floor, stunned, while Jon and Tad looked down from the artists' area on the second floor. Everyone was holding their breath, not sure if Kurt would actually jump. We were panicked, and extremely concerned for Kurt's well being.

Several minutes went by while Kurt kept threatening to jump. Finally, after much cajoling from the security staff, he climbed back down to safety. He was then immediately confronted by the sound tech, who claimed that Kurt had trashed the club's vocal mic. As is now legend, Kurt grabbed the microphone and exclaimed, "Damaged? Now it's damaged!" and threw it to the floor.

Kurt, distressed, hung out backstage and spent some time talking to his friend Tad [Doyle, Tad's singer and guitarist], processing the night's events. A while later, after checking in with Krist and drummer Chad Channing, the band decided the stress was too much and decided to break up. Kurt had reached his limit.

After some time, Jon, who had a close relationship with Kurt, went outside and walked around the block for a heart-to-heart with his friend. While the rest of the musicians loaded up the van, Kurt confided that he had looked out into the crowd that night and seen "the kind of guys who used to beat me up in high school."

Playing to friends in Olympia and Seattle was a different experience, marked by camaraderie and crowd surfing. Being on the road was more challenging, as the band often performed for crowds that were more metal (or macho). Despite the muscular power of Nirvana's punk-pop, Kurt was essentially a sensitive guy who did not feel comfortable in high-testosterone social environments. That night he questioned everything and simply wanted to go back home and be with his girlfriend.

Hoping to keep the band together, Jon offered Kurt a train ticket to Geneva so that he could arrive at the next show refreshed. By taking the train instead of packing into the van, Kurt could take a day off in Rome, go sightseeing with us and relax before playing the next show in Switzerland on Wednesday night. Jon also offered to buy Kurt a new guitar. After these overtures, Kurt chilled out and decided to continue on with Nirvana. **GW**