

Dave Grohl

THE

STORYTELLER



Tales of Life and Music

The Storyteller

TALES OF LIFE AND MUSIC



Dave Grohl



DEY ST.

An Imprint of WILLIAM MORROW



Courtesy of the author's personal archives



Courtesy of Magdalena Wosinska

Dedication

FOR VIRGINIA GROHL.

Without her, my stories would be very different.

FOR JORDYN BLUM.

You made my story so much more exciting and beautiful.

FOR VIOLET, HARPER, AND OPHELIA.

May each of your stories be as unique and as amazing as you are.

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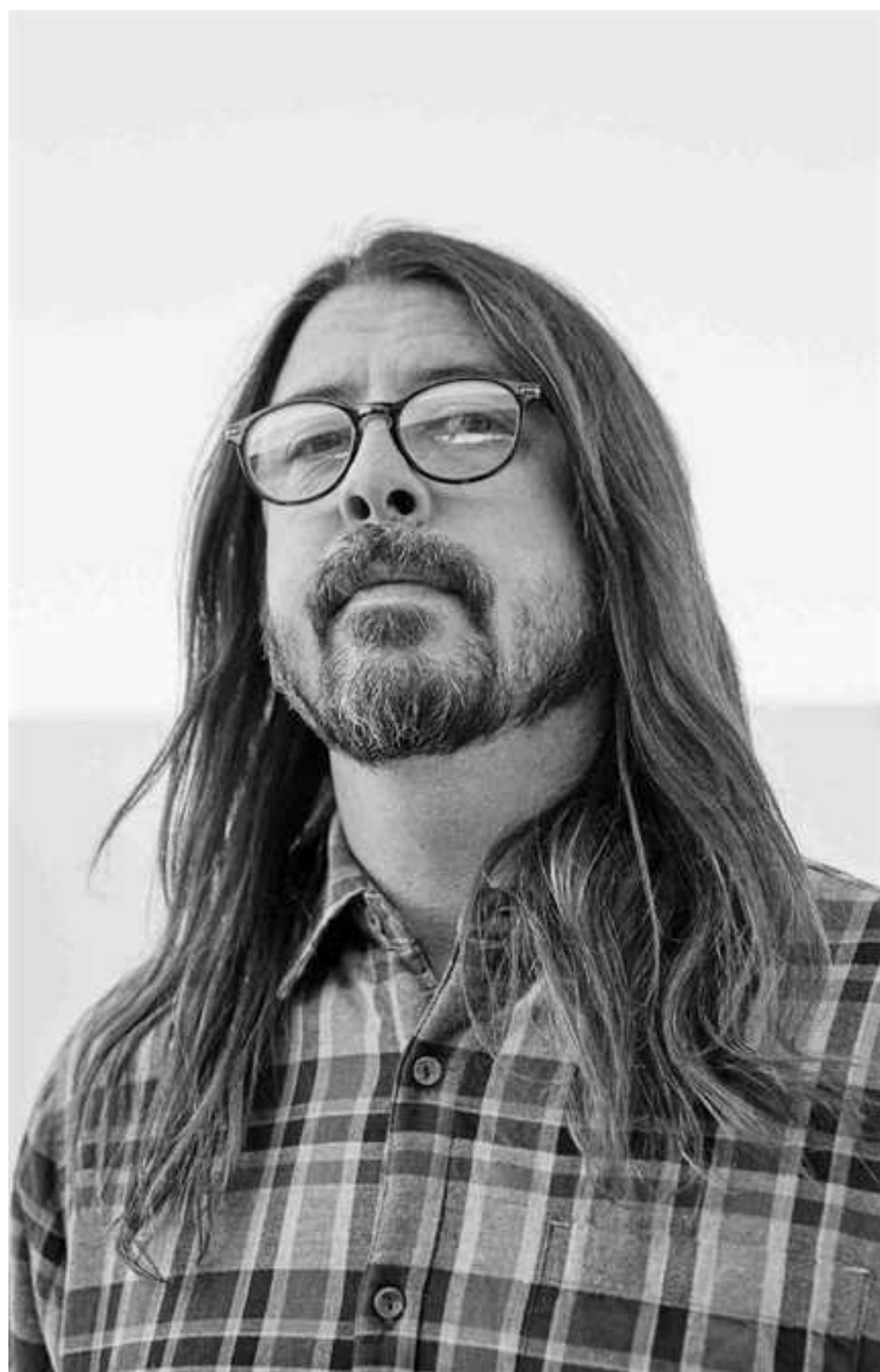
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Courtesy of Magdalena Wosinska

Introduction

Turn It Up

Sometimes I forget that I've aged.

My head and my heart seem to play this cruel trick on me, deceiving me with the false illusion of youth by greeting the world every day through the idealistic, mischievous eyes of a rebellious child finding happiness and appreciation in the most basic, simple things.

Though it only takes one quick look in the mirror to remind me that I am no longer that little boy with a cheap guitar and a stack of records, practicing alone for hours on end in hopes of someday breaking out of the confines and expectations of my suburban Virginia, Wonder Bread existence. No. Now my reflection bares the chipped teeth of a weathered smile, cracked and shortened from years of microphones grinding their delicate enamel away. I see the heavy bags beneath my hooded eyes from decades of jet lag, of sacrificing sleep for another precious hour of life. I see the patches of white within my beard. And I am thankful for all of it.

Years ago, I was asked to perform at the 12-12-12 Hurricane Sandy relief concert in New York City. Held at Madison Square Garden, it featured the Mount Rushmore of rock and roll lineups: McCartney, the Rolling Stones, the Who, Roger Waters, and countless other household names. At one point, I was approached by a promoter who asked if I would join some of these most iconic artists in the greenroom to take photos with some fans who had donated large sums of money to the cause. Honored to be involved, I happily obliged and made my way through the maze of backstage corridors, imagining a room full of rock and roll history, all standing in an elementary school photo formation, nothing but leather jackets and British accents. As I entered, I was surprised to find only two of the performers, standing at opposite ends of the space. One had the shiny appearance of a brand-new luxury car. Perfectly dyed hair, spray tan, and a recently refurbished smile that had the look of a fresh box of Chiclets (an obvious attempt at fending off the aging process, which

ultimately had the adverse effect, giving the appearance of an old wall with too many layers of paint). The other had the appearance of a vintage, burned-out hot rod. Wiry gray hair, deep lines carved into a scowl, teeth that could have belonged to George Washington, and a black T-shirt that hugged a barrel-chested frame so tightly, you immediately knew that this was someone who did not give one flying fuck.

Epiphany may seem cliché, but in a flash I saw my future. I decided right then and there that I would become the latter. That I would celebrate the ensuing years by embracing the toll they'd take on me. That I would aspire to become the rusted-out hot rod, no matter how many jump-starts I might require along the way. Not everything needs a shine, after all. If you leave a Pelham Blue Gibson Trini Lopez guitar in the case for fifty years, it will look like it was just delivered from the factory. But if you take it in your hands, show it to the sun, let it breathe, sweat on it, and fucking PLAY it, over time the finish will turn a unique shade. And each instrument ages entirely differently. To me, that is beauty. Not the gleam of prefabricated perfection, but the road-worn beauty of individuality, time, and wisdom.

Miraculously, my memory has remained relatively intact. Since I was a child, I have always measured my life in musical increments rather than months or years. My mind faithfully relies on songs, albums, and bands to remember a particular time and place. From seventies AM radio to every microphone I've stood before, I could tell you who, what, where, and when from the first few notes of any song that has crept from a speaker to my soul. Or from my soul to your speakers. Some people's reminiscence is triggered by taste, some people's by sight or smell. Mine is triggered by sound, playing like an unfinished mixtape waiting to be sent.

Though I have never been one to collect "stuff," I do collect moments. So, in that respect, my life flashes before my eyes and through my ears every single day. In this book, I've captured some of them, as best I can. These memories, from all over my life, are full of music, of course. And they can be loud at times.

TURN IT UP. LISTEN WITH ME.

Part One

Setting the Scene



Courtesy of the author's personal archives

DNA Doesn't Lie



Courtesy of Kevin Mazur

“Dad, I want to learn how to play the drums.”

I knew this was coming.

There stood my eight-year-old daughter, Harper, staring at me with her big brown eyes like Cindy Lou Who from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, nervously holding a pair of my splintered drumsticks in her tiny little hands. My middle child, my mini-me, my daughter who physically resembles me the most. I had always known that she would someday have an interest in music, but . . . drums? Talk about an end-of-the-trough, entry-level mailroom position!

“Drums?” I replied with eyebrows aloft.

“Yeah!” she squeaked through her toothy grin. I took a moment to think, and as the sentimental lump began to balloon in my throat I asked, “Okay . . . and you want me to teach you?” Shifting in her checkered Vans sneakers, she shyly nodded and said, “Uh-huh,” and a wave of fatherly pride instantly washed over me, along with an enormous smile. We hugged and headed hand in hand upstairs to the old drum set in my office. Like a weepy Hallmark moment, the kind those hyperemotional Super Bowl commercials are made of (the ones that would leave even the hardest monster truck enthusiast crying in their buffalo chicken dip), this is a memory that I will cherish forever.

The moment we entered my office, I remembered that I had never taken any formal lessons, and therefore I had no idea how to teach someone to play the drums. The closest I had ever come to any structured music instruction was a few hours with an extraordinary jazz drummer by the name of Lenny Robinson who I used to watch perform every Sunday afternoon at a local Washington, DC, jazz joint called One Step Down. A tiny old club on Pennsylvania Avenue just outside of Georgetown, One Step Down not only was a hotspot for established touring acts but also hosted a jazz workshop every weekend where the house band (led by DC jazz legend Lawrence Wheatley) would perform a few sets to the dark, crowded room and then invite up-and-coming musicians to jam with them onstage. When I was a teenager in the eighties, those workshops became a Sunday ritual for my mother and me. We would sit at a small table ordering drinks and appetizers while watching these musical masters play for hours, reeling in the gorgeous, improvisational freedom of traditional jazz. You never knew what to expect within those bare brick walls, smoke hanging in the air, songs from the small stage the only sound (talking was