

I WENT TO YOUR CONCERT AND I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING

The first time I ever felt a stranger's boner was at an emo concert.

Or was it on the subway?

We called erections "boners" in high school. As a young teenager I used to take them as compliments, or if anything minor offences. I was a girl listening to boys scream about girls that did them wrong. They were sensitive, strange, tortured, and it was me who was responsible for restoring their lost fate in girls. I wouldn't lash out. I wouldn't get mad. I wouldn't cheat. I'd understand. I'd listen. I was as sad as they were, probably, and misery loves company.

I've read that emo music (which for me also could include pop punk, or emocore, or even metalcore in some cases) began in Washington, D.C. in the 90s, and by the early 2000s had shifted its base to the midwest. So when I started high school in 2002 in Chicago, I was surrounded by mostly white boys who called themselves emo. I lived in the city, but class envy made me lust the suburbs. This music brought the suburbs to me - air conditioning, family vans, mall parking lots, carpeted stairs.

I listened to emo music with my boyfriends (a new high school phenomenon for me) and their friends. The over-articulation of the lyrics in my favourite emo bands' songs - confessional, self-loathing, ecstatically miserable - provoked fandom. Prior to this music, I was singing and choreographing group dance performances to girl bands with girlfriends. Now that the genders of my friend group had diversified, knowing the lyrics and screaming them with these friends made me feel like a real fan, despite the singers nor any of the band members ever being women.

*...the truth
is you could slit my throat
and with my one last gasping breath I'd
apologize
for bleeding on your shirt*

(Taking Back Sunday, *You're So Last Summer*, 2002)

Our fandom was never without irony. We knew these lyrics were extreme, angst turned up to the max to attract our exact demographic. But it worked. I loved these bands. I still know all the words, I still jump when I hear them. I made videos of myself singing their songs in my bedroom and sent them to friends, or posted them on my LiveJournal, or my Xanga, or later MySpace.

I recently came across one of these video files, and was reminded of an interview with Kathleen Hanna where she describes her solo project Julie Ruin as music that "sounds like bedroom culture... like something a girl made it in her bedroom." (Film: *The Punk Singer*, 2013) I used to scream so loudly in my bedroom - the videos are proof.

In late 2017, two women accused band Brand New's singer Jesse Lacey of sexual abuse. Clicking through coverage about the accusations meant also inevitably re-listening to all my old favourite Brand New tracks. Still could sing most of the words. Still knew the harmonies, the breaks. Still wanted to sing them all out loud, with a group of friends or alone in my bedroom.

*I will lie awake
Lie for fun and fake the way I hold you
Let you fall for every empty word I say*

*Barely conscious in the door where you stand
Your eyes are fighting sleep while your mouth makes your demands
You laugh at every word trying hard to be cute
I almost feel sorry for what I'm gonna do*

(Brand New, *Me vs. Maradona vs. Elvis*, 2003)

My first boyfriend's name is Harry Kagan. He introduced me to some emo, but he also introduced me to Le Tigre, the band that followed Julie Ruin. He took me to a concert once and I screamed so hard I fainted, and we had to leave early. I remember feeling so deeply guilty for depriving him of the experience of the concert. I remember feeling so grateful he was there with me: that I wasn't alone.

I gave a lot of my attention and lungs to the words of pseudo sad men singing to young teen boys and girls. But I also gave my attention to Le Tigre. And as I ended the performance with Daphne Simons singing a Le Tigre track, I will end here with the same song written. Because how ever many times I hear it, it feels like a mantra, a call from the bedroom, a resistance via indifference:

*THE STARS ARE GETTING IN
AND OUT OF AUTOMOBILES
AND WE KEEP WONDERING
WHEN WE'RE GONNA FEEL SOMETHING REAL
KEEP WAITING FOR A SANTA THAT WILL NEVER COME
A REAL PARTY NOT JUST PEOPLE WHO ARE FAKING FUN
BUT EVERYTHING GETS ERASED BEFORE IT'S EVEN SAID
AND ALL THAT GLITTERS ISN'T GOLD WHEN INSIDE IT'S DEAD*

*(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)*

*I WENT TO YOUR CONCERT AND I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING
I WENT TO YOUR CONCERT AND I DIDN'T HEAR ANYTHING
I WENT TO YOUR CONCERT AND I DIDN'T FEEL ANYTHING
I WENT TO YOUR CONCERT AND I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING*

*(oh baby) WHY WON'T YOU TALK TO ME?
(oh baby) YOU JUST WANT ME EMPTY!
(oh baby) YOU DON'T SAY ANYTHING!
(oh baby) WHY WON'T YOU ANSWER ME?*

(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)
(all that glitters is not gold)

I SAT THROUGH YOUR MOVIE BUT I DIDN'T SEE ANYTHING
I WENT TO YOUR COMEDY CLUB AND
DIDN'T LAUGH
AT
ALL
WENT TO YOUR MOVIE AND I DIDN'T HEAR ANYTHING
WENT TO YOUR CONCERT AND THERE WAS NOTHING GOING ON

(oh baby) WHY WON'T YOU TALK TO ME?
(oh baby) YOU JUST WANT ME EMPTY!
(oh baby) YOU DON'T SAY ANYTHING!
(oh baby) WHY WON'T YOU ANSWER ME?

YOU DON'T
YOU DON'T
YOU DON'T
YOU DON'T SAY
ANYTHING
OH
YOU
DONT
SAY
ANY
THING

(Le Tigre, The The Empty, 1999)