



Smashing Pumpkins

"Daydream"

Gish

05/1991

Caroline / Hut

On "Daydream" by Smashing Pumpkins

Neil Clark

Dear D'arcy Wretzky of Smashing Pumpkins fame,

You know when you bump into someone from the past? An old flame, maybe. Someone who at one time consumed every fibre of your conscience, but someone you hadn't thought about in a very long time. The present, colliding blindly with the past. The adrenaline from it. The pulses of nervous energy.

"Daydream" came up on my Spotify today. That's how it felt. Stopped me right in my tracks. Made me put the headphones on and sit and listen to it back-to-back another six times.

Allow me to indulge in a terrible analogy here, D'arcy. Sitting and listening to it another six times with the headphones on—it felt like agreeing to go for coffee together after the initial adrenaline rush wore off, after the nervous pleasantries were exchanged. It felt like swapping stories about the past and only the past, being completely at ease, without a mention of the mundanity of the years (the *decades*) that seem to have somehow occurred since.

Just the past. Just the highlights and the low points.

Highlights, like the time I discovered Smashing Pumpkins.

"Today, I'm going to listen to *Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness*." My classmate John used to go home every lunch hour, on his own. I had asked him what he got up to and that's what he said. Said it with such pride that I thought "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness" might be some kind of cult.

Cult or no cult, those words – "Mellon Collie", "Infinite Sadness." Just those words. They were enough to get me curious. It was the late nineties. I was thirteen. Early symptoms of teenage angst were starting to simmer below the surface. I liked the big bands in the UK at the time (Oasis being the main one, though they were past their prime). But lyrics were becoming important to me, and I just couldn't relate to Oasis's "Champagne Supernova" and "Rock N' Roll Stars" any more. I wanted something deeper than "All Around the World." I wanted words that could make you bleed. I wanted more of where REM's "Everybody Hurts" came from, but different, somehow. Edgier. Something my mother would hate. I wanted Mellon Collie. I longed for Infinite Sadness.

This was before Spotify or YouTube were a thing, D'Arcy. However, there was a small up-and-coming website that sold things. Books, predominantly, but also any CD you could think of. It was called "Amazon". I hear those Amazon guys are still just about managing to stay afloat these days. Good for them. Wish they paid their taxes. But that is to digress to the present. And we're here to talk about the past.

Back to the past.

When I typed “Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness” into this Amazon site, you and your band had me at the album art. It’s a great album cover. The Dream Girl, floating in space, hatching out of a star with her eyeballs rolled back. Who knows what’s going on in Dream Girl’s head - what she’s doing there, who/what she represents. I’m not an art critic. I just know that it blew me away. To this day, it’s still my favourite album cover. But, nothing—not that album art, not the moody words of your album title—could have prepared me for what happened five to eight days later, when I hit play on the CD player.

The hypnotic piano of the opening title track. The piercing strings on track two, “Tonight, Tonight”. It put me on a cloud. Floated me into the sky. Rolled my eyeballs back. Handed me over to Dream Girl, who took me by the hand and waltzed me around in the school disco of my dreams in outer space. Two CDs and twenty-eight tracks later, I understood why John always went home for lunch. I, too, had drank the Smashing Pumpkins Kool-Aid.

That was one highlight. Another was posting a cringe-worthily enthusiastic buyer’s review of your second album, *Siamese Dream* up on that website that sells things and doesn’t pay taxes. Someone commented on it and might have changed my life. They said I should think about becoming a writer. They probably posted it, forgot all about posting it within an hour and got on with their life. But I didn’t get on with my life. I took their advice on board, for better or for worse...

Yep. Many highlights.

But, low points.

Low points, too. Low points, like my high school breakdown, Valentine’s Day, 2001.

If you’re popular at school, I’m guessing Valentine’s Cards are like... pink, fluffy sugar clouds landing on people’s knees. Something like that. For someone like me, though...Someone all scrawny and hunched shouldered like me. All greasy haired and acne faced. Painfully shy. Eczema on my cheeks. Someone like me, for whom eye contact with another human felt like a dagger through the pupils. Shit, D’Arcy, for someone like me, those Valentine’s Card things are like heart-shaped hand grenades flying around overhead.

I’ll spare you the minute details—it’s actually a pretty boring story. Basically, I received my first ever Valentine’s Card. It landed on my lap at lunchtime. I got excited. Things were finally looking up. Someone had the seen hidden goodness in my heart. I had a secret admirer—someone who dug the weird uneasiness that emitted off me at the time like cartoon stink-rays. But, who? A shortlist was already forming in my head.

You can probably see where this one’s going.

Within seconds, I found out the card was never intended for me. There had been a clerical error in the admin department of Popular Kids HQ, and the returns policy was to snatch it back off me whilst laughing.

My unexpected sugar cloud had turned into a live grenade and blown up in my face.

My mouth quivered. People stared. People giggled. Tears formed, trickled down, stung my eczemic cheeks. People giggled some more. Then, worse, they went all “Aw, bless. What a shame.” Talking about me as if I wasn’t in the room. As if I was some orphan boy on some charity appeal TV advert, flies buzzing around my face.

Seems so stupid now, over something so trivial. But this was 2001. That simmer of teenage angst had developed into a spilling, rolling, boiling cauldron of despair. Dark thoughts formed in that moment, D'Arcy. Dark, violent thoughts. "I'm gonna wipe those looks off all your faces. With a meat cleaver," type thoughts. The sort of thoughts kids are encouraged to talk about these days, but not so much back then.

Despite my shell shock and ringing ears, everyone did get home safe after school. In reality, I wouldn't know how to cleave my way out of a wet paper bag. In reality, I just wanted to go to bed and listen to music.

By this point, I had acquired your whole back catalogue. I had your B-Sides collection. I was the one person in the world who bought James Iha's solo album (if you're still in touch, tell him "You're Welcome").

Something compelled me to put your underrated debut album *Gish* on and skip to track ten, "Daydream". It's the track you sang the lead vocals on, D'arcy. But you probably knew that already.

Headphones on, head under pillow, trying to calm my breathing, I listened to it on constant repeat—way more than six times. The repetition of that chorus... the soothing repetition... the absence of any verses to interrupt it... Your voice, tempering my rolling waves of angst... quelling the pain like rhythmic intakes of nitrous oxide. You were lying next to me that afternoon, stroking my hair, singing into my ear directly... telling me not to worry... banishing the dark thoughts.

"My daydream seems as one inside of you; Though it seems hard to reach through this life; Your blue and hopeless life"

That's what I meant. That's what I meant when I said words that could make me bleed.

Thanks to you, it turned out to be a not bad Valentine's Day. I mean don't get me wrong, I've had better. But it could have been far worse.

So thanks, D'arcy. You'll never read this, but thanks. Thanks to you and your band for getting me through a tough day. Other tough days, too. Other low points. A couple of years later, the Iraq War on the news and the song "Disarm" spring to mind.

So, that was our past.

Now let's talk about the less romantic bit—the present day.

The bit today where my thirty-one-year-old self—all grown up, angst completely cooled—stopped listening to "Daydream" on Spotify, took the headphones off and got on with the rest of my day. The bit (back to my coffee analogy. I know you love the coffee analogy) where we stopped talking about the past and started finding out about each other's lives now.

We don't actually know each other, so I can't look you up on Facebook. I can't scroll through all your photos and observe your figure changing, or your face slowly drooping over time.

However, because you were in a band called Smashing Pumpkins and they were quite big, I was able to look you up on Wikipedia.

You couldn't have known this when you were slaying bass in your Smashing Pumpkins heyday, but that's what people can do now. They can look you up on Wikipedia. They can

see what you've been up to. They can scroll down to the juicy headings. Headings like "Personal Life" and "[Insert Whatever] Controversy/ Misdemeanour".

Your page has a heading "Life After the Smashing Pumpkins". It says that you like Star Trek. It says space travel and aliens are a recurring influence on your creative ideas.

It says that you, D'arcy Wretzky, spent six days in jail for "failing to control her horses". This is one of my favourite sentences (no pun intended) in the whole of Wikipedia. I have images of you skipping down a busy urban street alongside a stable of wild horses, letting them run free. Letting them shit on cop cars and trot merrily down subway station steps. Encouraging them to neigh into the night sky with gay abandon. You set fire to bales of hay and threw them at anyone who would dare to accuse you and your wild horses of disturbing the peace.

I hope this was the case, D'Arcy. I could easily find out what really happened by clicking on the cited article. But it's 2018. Your President addresses your nation in two hundred and forty characters or less. He gets his briefings about complex foreign policy in single page documents, 24 font size. It's just not the done thing any more, to seek out truth and context.

But I digress, again.

I don't have a Wikipedia page myself. But if did, my "Life After Teenage Angst" section wouldn't be as interesting. Don't get me wrong—I've lived and all that. One time I failed to control my kid cousin's pet gerbil. It escaped from my hands, ran around the house and eventually shat on an iPad. But no arrest warrants were issued, no jail time served.

Anyway, enough about me. I thought I'd write this down while I still could. World's a messed-up place right now. Looks like Mr. 24 Font might plunge us all into a nuclear apocalypse and blow us all into outer space at any minute.

There I go, digressing again. Must be time to go.

Good luck to you, D'Arcy. Follow your dreams. Go to Star Trek conventions. Do the aliens and space travel thing. Let more of your wild horses run loose and free.

One day you and I will bump into each other again, and we'll definitely go for another coffee. I'm looking forward to it already—whether it happens on CD or on Spotify or on some other medium. Whether it takes place on this planet or the next.

Peace out.