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Defying the Stereotypes: Taking a Chance on a Morrissey Concert

(July 2015 – At the Ryman Auditorium)

The Beginning:

The earliest memories I have of my mother are all the same. I remember her dancing around to her music in the kitchen, in the car, or in her studio where she would paint flowers on big, white canvases. She was and still is beautiful. Back then she had long, brown locks that fell to her hips, she would wear the coolest vintage overalls, and she had a bright, blue dolphin tattooed on her ankle bone. Her trusty, purple CD player was always close by. She had various stickers slapped on the sides and pieces of the plastic color had flaked off the handle from overuse. To this day my mother has more CD's than anyone I've ever known. She would keep them in huge plastic containers in our living room or they'd be stacked strategically around the house. The windows in our small, two bedroom home were eternally open in the warmer months and wonderful music poured out into our lawn, across the street, and into the creek that babbled nearby. We'd listen to The Beatles, The Cure, Led Zeppelin, David Bowie, Fleetwood Mac and random, underground bands you'd never heard of. But, The Smiths was her all-time favorite band. I was forced to hear Morrissey's melodramatic voice throughout the entirety of my childhood.

Yet as I grew older, I started genuinely appreciating Morrissey, the lead singer of The Smiths, for the truly bizarre, creative genius that he was and still is today. I started stealing those holy, forbidden to touch CD's from my mother and I began to collect The Smiths/Morrissey records on vinyl too. By the time I was a teenager Morrissey had crept into my heart and became one of my favorite singer/songwriters.

He inspired me to stand up for creativity and art. His stance and opinions regarding animal rights was also a huge inspiration to me. Most importantly, Morrissey pushed me towards falling in love with writing. I've always had a deep and profound love for poetry, but Morrissey's lyrics and writing made me love it even more. He's quite frank and upfront with his

MORRISSEY

(STEVEN PATRICK MORRISSEY)

Born: May 22, 1959 in Davyhulme, Lancashire England. (Age: 57)

Nicknames: Moz, Mozzer.

Jobs: Lyricist, vocalist, poet, and author.

Genre: Indie Rock, Alternative Rock.

Net Worth: 50 million dollars.

Associated Bands: Slaughter & The Dogs, The Smiths, The Nosebleeds.

Well-Known Albums: Meat is Murder (1985), Hatful of Hollow (1984), Viva Hate (1988), Bona Drag (1990), Years of Refusal (2009).

Influenced by: Oscar Wilde, David Bowie, New York Dolls, WH Auden.

Weird Facts:

Morrissey almost killed his mother during childbirth due to his abnormally large head.

He once worked as a filing clerk and he said, "I would actually prefer prostitution."

Morrissey has been a vegetarian since the age of 11.

freezing outlook upon life. It's so hard to find someone that speaks the whole truth without a second thought. He just doesn't give a shit. I aspire to achieve speaking my truths in my writing in the same utterly successful and awakening way that Morrissey has. I'm forever in debt to my loving, endlessly creative, badass mother. She introduced me to so many prodigious and talented artists when I was young. The exposure she graced me with has left me with the ability to be open-minded to music and open-minded in general.

Background on Morrissey:

Steven Patrick Morrissey was born on May 22, 1959, in Davyhulme, which is in the UK. According to Morrissey himself, his life was always quite dreary and bleak. His childhood was borderline traumatic, which only helped him to delve deeper into his poetry and song writing. From his distant and utterly cold relationship with his father to the many horrific instances of death Morrissey encountered – family life wasn't exactly picture perfect. Then, in 1982,

Morrissey met Johnny Marr, who helped to form the legendary band, The Smiths. Johnny Marr had heard of Morrissey through the grapevine and was interested in his talents and flair. Marr literally showed up on Morrissey's apartment doorstep one afternoon looking to create new and cutting-edge music. Nothing was ever the same.

Morrissey chose the name, The Smiths, for the band because, "It was the most ordinary name and I thought it was time that the ordinary folk of the world show their faces." – Moz from an interview in 2006. Obviously the band's popularity took off. Critics labeled The Smiths as one of, if not the best and most important UK band from the 1980's.

Rolling Stone called them one of the most influential bands of all time. Rolling Stone also called Morrissey, "a sexually ambiguous poet whose cranky yet delicate singing made most other British frontmen of the Eighties seem utterly normal and boring." - *Simon and Schuster*. Alas, after 5 years of success, fame, and fast-growing popularity, The Smiths split in 1987.

There were many controversies and gossip regarding the separation. Many believe the band called it quits due to Morrissey's and Marr's toxic relationship. Even today there is speculation towards Morrissey's sexuality. Many believe that he and Marr had a romantic relationship, but he denies the rumors, saying, "Unfortunately I am not homosexual." Moz is also known for claiming to be celibate which led people to believe that he is asexual. Personally, I think that it's pretty rad that Morrissey keeps that part of his life private. It keeps us parched and curious about him and his life, as we should be. Mystery only makes us all the more lustful.

So, after the band broke up, and broke their fans hearts, they all went their separate ways regarding music. They even had a little legal scuffle after the band called it quits – a royalties dispute. Alas Morrissey decided to do music on his own, confirming that he really did do best



The Smiths - Image taken from Google

when his life was enriched with loneliness... Morrissey went on to create music in the same encouraging and eye-opening way he had before and the way he still does today. He proves to us again and again that his light will never go out even after 3 decades of shining bright.

(There is A Light That Never Goes Out 1986)

“And if a double-decker bus

Crashes into us

To die by your side

Is such a heavenly way to die

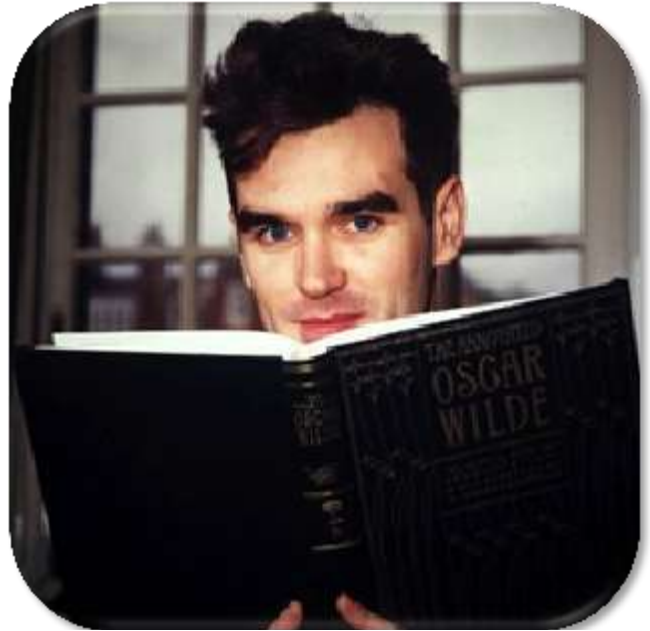
And if a ten-ton truck

Kills the both of us

To die by your side

Well, the pleasure – the privilege is mine”

- The Smiths



Morrissey with an Oscar Wilde book - Image taken from Google

The Surprise:

In 2015, I was graduating high school. While many kids my age would receive some money or a graduation party my mother decided to surprise me with tickets. They were tickets for a concert at The Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. Tickets for a Morrissey concert. Until that moment I had never thought that it would be possible for me to see Morrissey live. I'd heard from many souls that Morrissey tended and still tends to cancel many of his shows, without rescheduling. At the time he had recently been diagnosed and treated for cancer. He confessed to a Spanish newspaper, El Mundo, "If I die, then I die. And if I don't, then I don't." He wasn't as lively as he once was, which was understandable.

After having some mixed feelings about going to the show, I took to the internet. I researched and read reviews of Morrissey's performances or lack thereof. I found that a plethora of people had negative feelings and comments about his concerts. Most of them said that if he actually did not cancel his show, he would show up late, very late. Some said that his attitude was less than enthusiastic, which was not shocking considering his depressive and outlandish nature. I was still a little less excited than I had been before. After reading the reviews online I was sort of disappointed and conflicted. I was also sad. Sad that so many people felt this way about one of my idols and one of my favorite musicians.

My mother and I decided to persist. We stuck with our plans of going to the show. Instead of succumbing to other's opinions we put our faith in Morrissey and took a chance on his concert.

Taken from StraitsTimes.com: *“Probably no one goes to a Morrissey show to escape or feel better about the state of the world. For one would quickly be reminded of what a depressing place it is – whether it’s the sorry state of world politics, wars, police brutality, or animal cruelty.”* – Marina Barrage.

The Trip:

That fateful day arrived. The morning we left, I remember that my mother and I were acting like children while we packed for our overnight trip. We danced around in our pajamas and shoved too many clothes in our suitcases. I packed my favorite shirt that has a picture of a young Morrissey on it. It’s a black t-shirt and Morrissey looks like he’s laying down, holding his head up with his hand. On the back, in big white letters, it says, “YOU HAVE KILLED ME.” It’s my favorite shirt to wear to the grocery store to offend the little old ladies shopping for their Sunday dinners. I think Morrissey would be proud.

The show hadn’t been cancelled, the date hadn’t been changed, nor had Morrissey fallen too ill to perform. It was the perfect beginning to the perfect day. We travelled, windows down, in our bright blue, 1999 Jeep Wrangler on I40. It was a five hour drive to Nashville from Johnson City, Tennessee. It was July 3rd, the sun was shining, and our hair was tangled from the interstate wind. We listened to Morrissey, The Smiths, The Cure, Joy Division, and others to prepare ourselves for later that evening.

When we finally got into the city the traffic was at a standstill. It was the day before Independence Day and apparently everyone had decided Nashville was the place to be. We sat on the interstate for a while, cooking in the sun that was shining in the open windows. As we sat, waiting, I felt my phone buzz in my pocket. I yanked it out of my shorts and saw that I had gotten an email from the venue that Morrissey was supposed to play at that evening.

My heart sank to the floor of the car. I ever-so-carefully clicked on the email and read it aloud to my mother. “VENUE CHANGE: We are sorry to inform you at such short notice that Morrissey at The Grand Ole Opry will be moved to The Ryman Auditorium.” Thank God. Nothing else had changed. After what felt like an eternity, we finally found our way to our hotel. We ate a quick snack and got ready to for the show.

The Concert:

The Ryman Auditorium is a music venue that’s located in downtown Nashville. The inside of the building looks like an old, cathedral. Huge stained glass windows line the walls and pews run along the floors in a symmetrical fashion. It was an absolutely perfect scene and setup for a Morrissey show. That night my mother and I found our seats (right up front) and could hardly sit still due to excitement. We sat in a crowd of mostly older, gay men and young hipsters with handlebar mustaches and combat boots on their feet. As we waited we chatted with the strangers that surrounded us and watched the curious

MORRISSEY’S SHOW AT THE RYMAN

Date: July 3, 2015.

Venue: The Ryman Auditorium, downtown Nashville, Tennessee.

Ticket Price: \$30

Concert Running Time: 1-2 hours.

Venue Amenities: Venue offered many options and varieties of nonalcoholic beverages, alcoholic beverages, and vegetarian friendly snacks.

Other: Morrissey had no opening bands and did not make the crowd wait an extended period of time before the show.

montage video of drag queens that played on the screen above us.

After a little while it seemed as though everyone had found their seat. The monotonous buzz of the crowd's conversations swirled around the room like a soft breeze. As the lights began to dim, the crowd's soft breeze soon turned into a tornado. Everyone stood up all at once. We all screamed like children until the music started playing. Morrissey pranced out onto the stage and without saying a word to his audience he immediately began jamming out with his band. He was wearing tight black jeans and a silky black shirt with a shining golden collar. His graying hair was gelled to fit his timeless, signature style. He had a little belly that protruded out and jiggled while he danced.

The first song he played was the ever popular, 'Suedehead.' He was the Morrissey I pictured he would be. His voice was deeper and somehow smoother than how I'd heard it for years through my speakers. Despite the rumors, he seemed quite happy and genuinely content to be performing. My mother and I danced around in a state of spiritual bliss while being serenaded by THE Morrissey. Does it get any better than that?

Unfortunately, the night took a sharp, left turn when he began to sing, 'Meat Is Murder.' The screen behind him turned from the cheerful, funny videos and pictures of drag queens into a video montage of absolutely horrid animal abuse. We watched as pigs were hung up from their feet, cows and chickens were slaughtered, and the worst of them all was a video of baby chicks being shoved through what seemed like a meat grinder. If you know Morrissey then you know that he bestows his opinions upon others, most times political, without consideration of how people will react or respond. My mother and I stood and hummed along to the gruesome and saddening song. As I looked around me I noticed that quite a few people were not only confused but completely mortified. They obviously disagreed with how Moz decided to perform *his* song. Everyone in the audience went through the trouble of purchasing a ticket to see Morrissey live. They should have known what they were getting themselves into. You are going to experience triggering moments during a Morrissey concert. It's quite plain to see that if Morrissey offends at least one soul during his performance, he calls the night an utter success. While I enjoyed the mature content of his song, many did not. And surprisingly enough, the vibe was not completely destroyed because he continued on and played many more wonderful songs from his set. The crowd began to dance and sing along to the songs once again. During his song, 'Alma Matters,' a young man saw that Morrissey was flinging around the microphone cord like a jump-rope. Apparently he wanted to double-dutch with Morrissey, so the man climbed onto the stage and started running over to Moz. He was promptly kicked in the stomach by an enormously large security guard and plummeted back down into the sea of fans. Morrissey did not blink twice.

I remember watching Morrissey dance around happily on stage and I thought to myself that all the reviews I read online were absolute garbage. It was an amazing show. Morrissey seemed so excited to be right where he was, in Nashville, performing for all of us. Each song he



Morrissey with a turkey - Image taken from Google

sang sounded like pure magic, the band was over-enthusiastic, and I didn't even mind that PETA had set up a table in the lobby of the venue and were shoving pamphlets into the faces of the people that walked by. I've seen plenty of live music, but the Morrissey concert lands in my top five list of favorite shows. He concluded his performance by saying this to his crowd: "Thank you for being so... lusty. But, before I retire to the cellar with the rest of the asbestos, I would like to say, from what's left of my heart – thank you so much and ciao." Then, he ripped his silky, black shirt off to reveal his sweaty belly. He did a little twirl and then tossed it into the deafening crowd. Finally, he walked off stage, forever leaving a place in my heart a little empty.

Conclusion:

Morrissey's attitude and performance was as fervently hot as I hoped it would be. The concert was gut-wrenching, hilarious, and insanely entertaining all at once. I remember telling myself that it would be okay if I died from here on out because I got to see Morrissey live. Risking thirty dollars on a ticket and a five hour drive with my mother to take a chance on Morrissey's show was one of the best things I've ever done. The show not only confirmed my undying, probably unhealthy love for Morrissey, but that he's still got *it*. He dares to age, he will never care what you think of him, and he still pretends he's the same ol' Moz from 1982, which of course, he always will be to me.

(I'm Throwing My Arms around Paris 2009)

"In the absence of your love

And in the absence of human touch

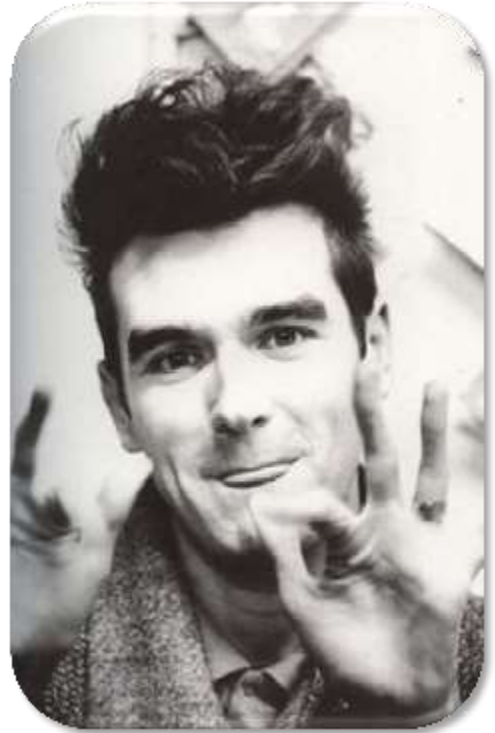
I have decided

I'm throwing my arms around,

Around Paris because

Only stone and steel accept my love"

- Morrissey



A Young Morrissey - Image taken from Google