

Where Did fun. Go?

The Answer Lies in Nate Ruess's *Grand Romantic*

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After the success of their hit album Some Nights in 2012, the band fun. disappeared from the public eye. Three years later, Nate Ruess, lead singer of fun., releases his solo album Grand

Romantic which is received by mixed reviews from fans and leaves everyone asking,

“Where did fun. go?”

The following albums are referred to in this review.

The Format	fun.	Nate Ruess
<p><i>Interventions and Lullabies</i></p> <p>Released: October 21, 2003</p> <p>Genre: Rock</p> <p>Length: 45:25</p> <p>Label: Elektra</p> <p><u>Singles</u></p> <p>“The First Single” Released: October 14, 2003</p>	<p><i>Some Nights</i></p> <p>Released: February 21, 2012</p> <p>Genre: Indie pop rock</p> <p>Length: 45:55</p> <p>Label: Fueled by Ramen</p> <p><u>Singles</u></p> <p>“We Are Young” Released: September 20, 2011</p> <p>“Some Nights” Released: June 4, 2012</p> <p>“Carry On” Released: October 23, 2012</p> <p>“Why Am I the One” Released: February 27, 2013</p> <p>“All Alone” Released: May 19, 2013</p>	<p><i>Interventions and Lullabies</i></p> <p>Released: June 16, 2015</p> <p>Genre: Pop, stadium rock</p> <p>Length: 46:17</p> <p>Label: Fueled by Ramen</p> <p><u>Singles</u></p> <p>“Nothing Without Love” Released: February 23, 2015</p> <p>“AhHa” Released: February 23, 2015</p> <p>“Great Big Storm” Released: May 11, 2015</p> <p>“What This World Is Coming To” Released: June 1, 2015</p> <p>“Take It Back” Released: January 12, 2016</p>

“I’d do it. I’d do it right now. Any part of my body. Hell, left buttcheek, I don’t care,” I proclaimed to my sister over the phone in February of 2018. We were deep in a conversation about hypothetical tattoos for our ink-free bodies. I insisted that first tattoos must be meaningful. After that, you can get anything, but the first must have a story.

After she expressed an interest in putting the symbol from her favorite band, Collective Soul, on the bottom of her foot (so her husband would not see it and for the great opportunity for a pun), I came up with the idea that my first tattoo should be dedicated to my favorite band as well, the 2000s hit known as “fun.” No caps, always ends in a period.

“So you’re saying the most meaningful thing you could get would be from a fun. song?”

“Yea, of course. They’ve been my favorite since middle school.”

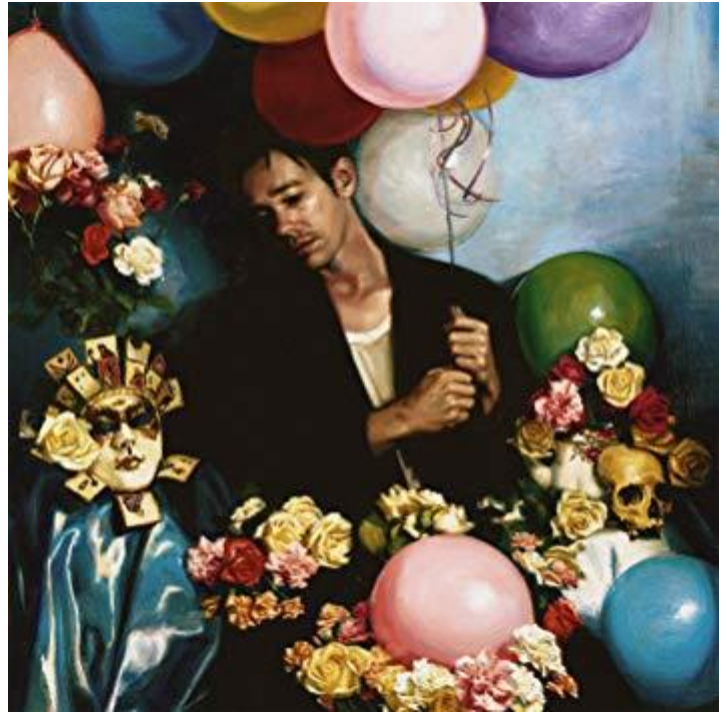
“What would it be?”

“Dunno. Maybe a balloon for *Grand Romantic*?”

“But that’s not really a fun. album is it?”

Well, not really. The last we heard of the group fun. was from a vague message left on their website. “First and foremost, to answer the question that has been raised most often: fun. is not breaking up,” they promised. The message was posted in February of 2015, two years after the release of their latest music. Now in 2018, the website remains untouched. For the math whizzes, that’s almost five years without a single sound from the band. I had remained firm in my hopes that fun. was still a band despite their disappearance and abandonment of fans. As such, her last statement stung like a needle in the hands of a tattoo artist with a tremor.

Nate Ruess (pronounced ROO-se), the lead singer of fun. and previously The Format (2002-2008), released *Grand Romantic* later that year on June 16, 2015. To my disappointment, the album did not receive much air time. The only song the casual fan might recognize is “Nothing Without Love” which reached a modest #31 on the iTunes charts. However, I used a quote from the song on one of my Instagram posts from my trip to St. Augustine in 2017. The post received 92 likes, so that must count for something.

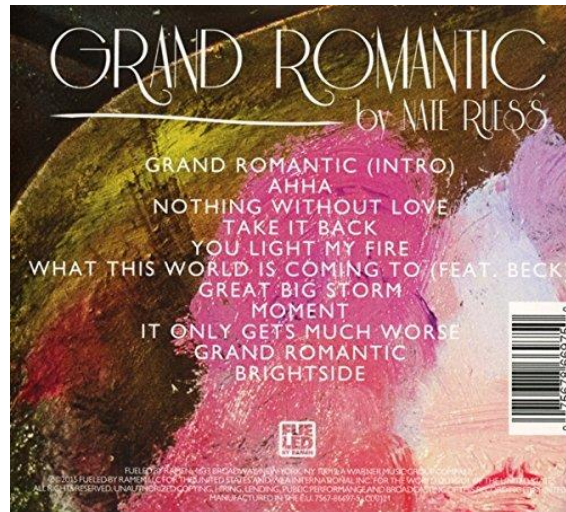


The cover for Nate Ruess's first solo album, Grand Romantic.

Overall, the album received mixed reviews, but fun. haunted them all. “I loved Nate Ruess back in fun. and I still admire his voice, but this album really had no "oomph" like *Some Nights* did. Really disappointing,” writes one fan. “If you liked fun., you will like this,” writes another (Metacritic). It makes sense that Nate Ruess would be followed by fun. After all, the media did not even know his name until “We Are Young” topped the charts in 2011.

Even though Ruess owes fun. his success, it’s unfair to judge a solo artist based on his past performances in other bands. That’s like comparing your current relationship to past ones- everyone does it, but you have to keep your conclusions to yourself. With that in mind, I still believe there are similarities to the fun. albums and *Grand Romantic* that go beyond having the same lead singer.





Like many of the albums Nate Ruess has worked on, *Grand Romantic* begins with a short introduction. In this case, it is appropriately named “Grand Romantic (Intro)” and epically welcomes listeners with a choir repeating the haunting words “Step right up for the grand romantic. Always tragic, broken bones. Step right up, it’s the grand romantic. Karma, leave these kids alone.” Technically, the first song on the album is “AhHa” where we first hear Ruess’s powerful voice in the shrieks that often turn closed-minded listeners away. In response to “AhHa,” the Rolling Stone called Nate Ruess “the Freddie Mercury of freaking out” for his moody lyrics and high-pitched voice (Dolan).

The next track is the cause for most of *Grand Romantic*’s success, “Nothing Without Love” followed by “Take It Back.” Besides from being neighbors on the album, these two tracks could not be more different. “Nothing Without Love” mimics the pop aspects of its competitors on the charts while “Take It Back” is commonly regarded as soft-rock. The album continues this alternation between slow rock sounds and pop from “You Light My Fire” all the way to the last track, “Brightside.”

In a short Apple Music film starring Nate Ruess, his vocal coach tells him “Your voice is your life.” Nate replies, “If my voice is my life, then I hate my life” (Mandler). It’s true that

some music critics would agree with Ruess. The New York Daily News felt so strongly against Ruess's voice in *Grand Romantic* that they elected not to award it any stars. "Ruess' voice has great volume, but no body," New York Daily News writer Jim Farber said. "There's no roundness, or richness, to his tone. It's all hard angles, offering no cushion for the screech. Worse, he often pushes his voice beyond its bounds, in the process making him sound as pinched as Alvin or one of the Chipmunks." Ouch.

On the other hand, fans that have been with Ruess since his debut in the indie band The Format can't get enough of his voice. It's easy to see the progress of experimentation in Ruess's technique. In The Format, he watches his boundaries and sings powerfully but gentle to grant the band the Indie rock title for which they were known. On Ruess's terms, The Format's most popular album, *Interventions and Lullabies* (2003), is tame. By the time Ruess records *Aim and Ignite* (2009) with fun., he's getting reviews like "Nate Ruess doesn't really care about traditional structure, tempo, and instrumentation" (Offitzer). Finally, after *Some Nights* (2012), he's screaming his feelings on every radio in the country. According to the reviews of *Grand Romantic* (2015), Ruess might have pushed the critics to their limits, but fans are still hoarse from trying to be Ruess's backup singers. Listening to Ruess's vocal history is like gaining a tolerance for alcohol. The first swig might sting, but in time, you're singing along in AA.



I wasn't always so receptive of Ruess's attempt to go solo. After being obsessed with the fun. album *Some Nights*, I splurged and bought their previous album, *Aim and Ignite*. I now have every word to every song on both albums engraved into my head. That's eighty-eight minutes and fifteen seconds of material I can use if I ever find myself alone at a karaoke bar. In fact, my CD of *Some Nights* is so well worn that it starts skipping in the middle of "Carry On."

Therefore, when I heard “Nothing Without Love” in 2015 while sitting in my Chevy Cruze and blaring SiriusXM’s Hits 1 in the high school parking lot, I changed the channel. Like any self-absorbed high school senior, I believed that every word fun. ever recorded was written specifically for me. Disbanding fun. was disbanding my life, and it was all Nate Ruess’s fault.

When I finally downloaded *Grand Romantic*, I had the album on repeat for days. It was like listening to a voicemail from a long-lost friend. The conversation between artist and listener picked up right where it left off.

To answer my sister’s question, *Grand Romantic* is not a fun. album, and it’s possible we may never see another song from the band again. That being said, diehard fun. fans should not cry over the loss. Nate Ruess is still writing beautiful lyrics and setting them to equally melodic sounds. If you put aside your own grudges and listen,



fun.’s iconic musical identity is present in *Grand Romantic*, just as The Format, Ruess’s earliest band, was present in *Aim and Ignite*. There’s not a clear beginning, middle or end to Ruess’s career. Each album is a continuation of his story, one that I hope is just getting started.

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