The Sound of Seattle: Locating Grunge Heritage

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Samantha Martinez Ziegler
samazi [a] utu.fi
B.A. in Digital Culture, Landscape and Cultural Heritage
University of Turku

The roots of most popular music heritages can be traced to a specific geographical place. When it comes to grunge, its roots are well anchored in Seattle, Washington. As a hybrid music genre and a subculture, grunge emerged in Seattle's alternative rock scene during the mid-to-late 1980s and broke into the mainstream music industry in the early 1990s. Local bands like Soundgarden, Nirvana, Pearl Jam, and Alice in Chains brought grunge to the masses, and built their legacy as Seattle's Big Four. This essay centres on the origins of grunge, the impact its commercial success had on the popular culture of the '90s, and the presence of grunge heritage through official and unofficial cultural expressions in Seattle three decades later. By bringing forth examples of tangible and intangible popular music heritage and reviewing the most influential local musicians, this essay aims to explain why grunge has been dubbed the Seattle sound.

Introduction

Black hole sun

Won't you come

And wash away the rain

Black hole sun

Won't you come

***Won't you come*— Soundgarden, Black Hole Sun (1994)**

In May 1994, Seattle-based band Soundgarden released the single *Black Hole Sun*. The song, written by its lead singer and local musician Chris Cornell, helped launch the band into the top of the rock charts in the United States as well as internationally. Black Hole Sun would later be recognised as one of the songs that shaped the music of the 1990s, one of the first grunge classics to date. The commercial success and historical importance of Black Hole Sun helped establish *Superunknown* (1994) as Soundgarden's magnum opus, and according to the Rolling Stones magazine, is today recognised as one of the most important albums in the history of grunge music (Browne et al. 2019).

In May 2017, over two decades after the release of Black Hole Sun, musician Chris Cornell passed away. This was felt in the city of Seattle. Local fans gathered around different sites in the city to collectively mourn the passing of a musician that had helped give Seattle its sound. Some visited the *Sound Garden* (1982–1983) sculpture by Douglas Hollis at the Magnuson Park, which the band Soundgarden was named after. Others gathered at Isamu Noguchi's *Black Sun* (1969), located at the Volunteer Park in the Capitol Hill neighbourhood in Seattle. Although never confirmed by either Cornell or other members of the band, many have speculated the statue served as source of inspiration for Black Hole Sun, thus deeming it an unofficial landmark of Seattle's grunge scene and, more specifically, of Soundgarden's history. Both aforementioned sculptures were decorated with flowers and handwritten notes, creating spontaneous memorials in honour of Chris Cornell in his own hometown (see figure 1.).

Figure 1. Two photographs. Left: Douglas Hollis, A Sound Garden (1982-1983), photographed by Elaine Thompson, 2017, Seattle (AP News). Right: Isamu Noguchi, Black Sun (1969), 2017, Seattle (Do206).

The example illustrates how the heritage of grunge and grunge musicians are permanently linked to the city of Seattle, Washington, and is recognised as such by fans and the music industry alike. Starting from the mid-to-late 1980s, the grunge movement was born in the city. In the years to come, grunge music became Seattle's leading contribution to the history of rock music, both at a local and global scale. The heritage of grunge can not only be found through records and biographical books about the main names that cemented the movement; grunge heritage is present and alive in the city of Seattle. It can be seen in both official and unofficial sites, monuments, rock shrines, museums and archives, local venues, among other sites that help preserve and present the memory and heritage of grunge and those who had a part in the making of it.

In this essay, I will be discussing the history of grunge music, its movement and subculture as part of Seattle's music heritage. While looking at the '90s' phenomenon that is now known as *grungemania*, I will briefly go through the most significant Seattle-based bands and musicians that played a part in the creation and evolution of the movement and whose names became synonymous with the grunge genre, namely, Seattle's "Big 4", Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, Nirvana, and Alice in Chains. Through examining the heritage of grunge in Seattle, I will also talk about how the city preserves and presents grunge music both officially, for instance, through museums and official landmarks, as well as unofficially. The theoretical background for my essay consists of research articles from the International Journal of Heritage Studies dealing with music heritages and their preservation, and Stephen Tow's work on the history of grunge, *The Strangest Tribe* (2011).

The Origins of Grunge: How Seattle Found Its Iconic Sound

The common image of grunge has been shaped by its quick introduction to the mainstream media in the early 1990s with the success of Nirvana's second studio album, *Nevermind* (1991). Today, over three decades later, grunge is often seen as just a style, defined by flannels and worn-out denim. It takes only a quick search on Google to find words such as "aesthetic" or "fashion" next to the word grunge. In this case, we can see the effect the mainstream media has had over the way the genre is interpreted by younger generations, often through a visual outlet such as fashion (Hviid Mortensen and Westergaard Madsen 2015, 253). We can take a look at Nirvana's frontman and singer Kurt Cobain as he was featured on MTV programming during the peak of grunge in the

1990s, sporting thrifted shirts and ripped jeans, and be able to source where grunge as fashion was also introduced to pop culture. Take for example Cobain's green cardigan from Nirvana's memorable 1993 MTV Unplugged concert. In 2015, the sweater was sold at an auction for $137,500, and was later auctioned again in 2019, selling for $334,000 (Kreps 2019).

Figure 2. Kurt Cobain on stage at Nirvana's MTV Unplugged, photographed by Frank Micelotta, 1993, New York City, New York (Rolling Stone 2021).

Nowadays, it is not inherently wrong to interpret grunge as an international fashion or aesthetic, for heritage evolves through time along with the values and identities of the people who are involved in their production and safeguarding (Brandellero and Janssen 2014, 225). But in the city of Seattle, where the grunge movement saw its birth and global expansion, it is more than a fashion style; its music heritage is much richer and substantial to the image of the city than unquestionably anywhere else in the world.

In order to understand how Seattle became the birthplace of the grunge genre, its early movement, and its subculture, it is crucial to look at its origins and, equally as important, to the protagonists that have contributed to the genre from the start. Bands like Soundgarden, Mother

Love Bone, Pearl Jam, Nirvana, and Alice in Chains, as well as their frontmen have become synonymous with the grunge movement because of their contribution to the success and growth of the genre. Both the sound and the image of these bands are forever intertwined with the movement; young musicians with long hair in flannel, singing about ordinary problems and everyday angst in a way that had never been done before. However, the global reach and impact on the music industry can not only be attributed to local musicians, but also to Seattle's own record label Sub Pop Records, which became key in the birth and growth of the movement.

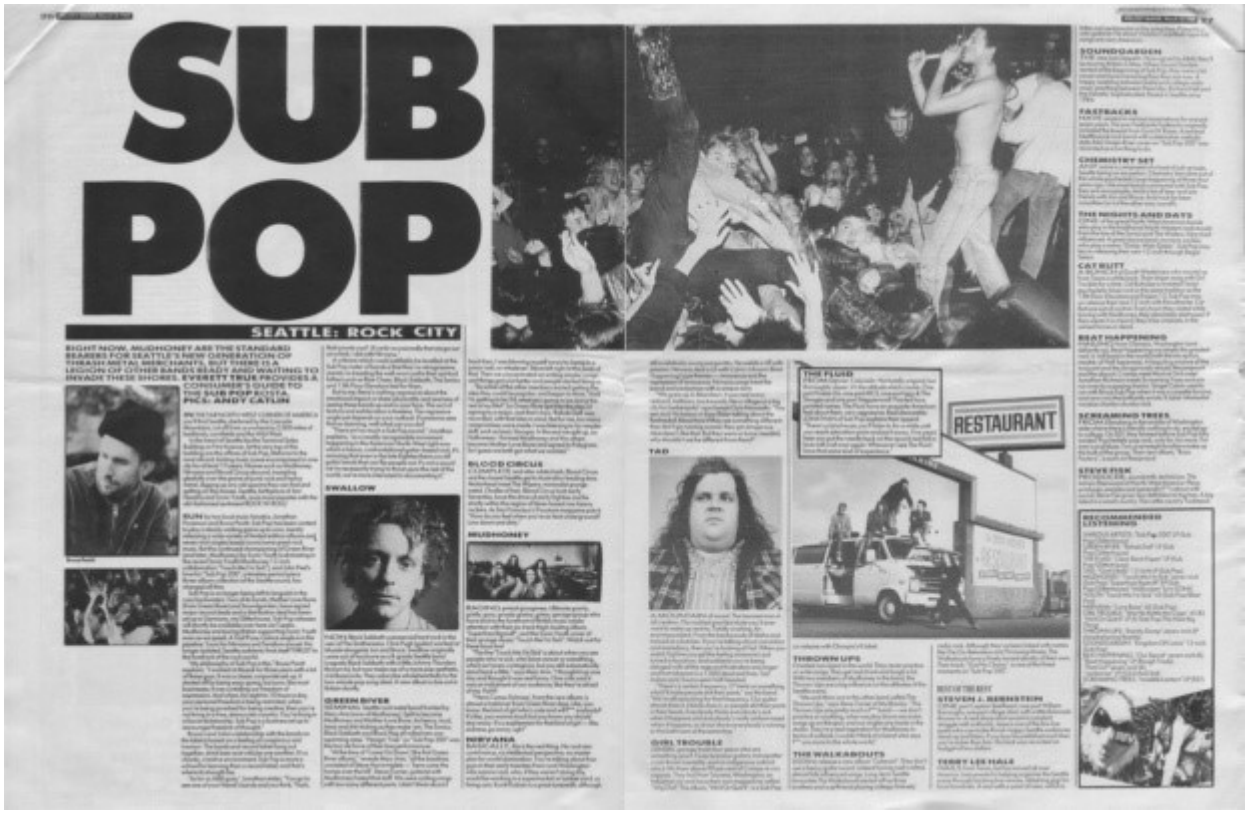
During the late half of the 1980s, the alternative rock scene in Seattle saw a musical shift that started when local bands began experimenting by fusing elements from American punk of the '80s and heavy metal. In this early scene, we find local bands like Green River, Mother Love Bone, and one of the bands that would become pivotal to the movement in years to come, Soundgarden. These bands reflected Seattle's youth culture of the mid-1980s; a generation born in the '60s struggling to find a place in society, that turned to music to speak about the collective angst and difficulties they experienced. By the year 1988, Mother Love Bone and Soundgarden were two of the most well-received bands in the Seattle music scene (Tow 2011, 124). The frontmen Andrew Wood from Mother Love Bone and Chris Cornell from Soundgarden were associated with the fusion sound that was starting to grow and gain popularity in the city (ibid.).

Founded by Bruce Pavitt and Jon Poneman, Seattle's independent record label Sub Pop would be responsible for publishing the first two of Soundgarden's EPs in 1987 and 1988, thus becoming pioneers in the establishment of the genre from the start. More importantly, it was Pavitt and Poneman who originally coined the term *grunge* to describe the new, aggressive hybrid sound that was coming from Seattle (Tow 2011, 129). In 1988 Sub Pop Records signed the local band Mudhoney, which was formed by ex-members of Green River. Pavitt and Poneman made use of the term grunge to describe and hype the band at a larger scale (Tow 2011, 129). Thanks to Sub Pop's use of the word as means of advertisement, the city of Seattle and the newly fresh grunge genre would be intertwined with one another from this moment on.

After Mudhoney and the release of one of the songs that define the grunge genre, *Touch Me I'm Sick* (1988), Sub Pop signed a band from the city of Aberdeen, Washington that would soon relocate to Seattle and be pivotal to the movement: Nirvana. Led by frontman Kurt Cobain, Nirvana became one of Sub Pop's flagship bands and established themselves as one of the most important bands in the emerging grunge scene. The success of Nirvana was defined by the release of their

first album *Bleach* in 1989, and soon joined Mudhoney and Soundgarden as Sub Pop's poster bands of the music landscape in Seattle during the late 1980s into the 1990s (Tow 2011, 147).

In addition to the aforementioned bands signed to Sub Pop, another local act that gained popularity in Seattle's growing grunge scene is Alice in Chains. The band was led by frontman and lead singer Layne Staley, who was well-known and liked among the local metal scene at the time. In its early days, the band was originally called Alice N' Chains and was known for presenting a glam metal act, which would later be dropped to follow into the steps of bands like Nirvana (Tow 2011, 188). In 1989, following changes in its line-up, presentation, and sound, the band now known as Alice in Chains was signed to the record label Columbia. The following year the band would release its first studio album and grunge debut, *Facelift*, which includes the 1991 single *Man in the Box*. The song became widely popular once its music video was put on MTV's regular rotation, a turning point for Alice in Chains in terms of popularity in Seattle, and later, at a global scale (de Sola 2015, 148).


SUB POP

SEATTLE: ROCK CITY

RESTAURANT

Figure 3. Newspaper scan. Everett True, Guide to the Sub Pop scene, Melody Maker, 1989, London, Archived Music Press.

The growing success and commercial attention brought to Sub Pop's bands was shadowed by the untimely death of Andrew Wood, the frontman and lead singer of Mother Love Bone in 1990 (Tow 2011, 173). Wood died of a heroin overdose after years of battling drug addiction. His unexpected passing had a deep impact in the tight-knit community of rock musicians in Seattle and became an example of the growing and alarming drug culture in the city at the turn of the decade (ibid.). Shaken by Wood's death, Soundgarden's Chris Cornell joined surviving members of the band, Jeff Ament, and Stone Gossard, to form Temple of the Dog as a side project to honour Wood's memory. While Temple of the Dog was in the early stages of recording the songs that would make their eponymous album at the end of 1990, members of the tribute band encountered an Illinois-born musician named Eddie Vedder (Tow 2011, 189). Vedder, who guest sang in Temple of the Dog's *Hunger Strike* with Cornell, would group along with Ament and Gossard to form a new Seattle-based band: Pearl Jam (ibid.).

Pearl Jam was a successful band in the Seattle grunge scene right from the beginning, establishing their spot at the top of the music industry with the release of their debut album *Ten* in 1991. Although Eddie Vedder was not originally from Seattle like Soundgarden's Cornell and members of the bands Mudhoney and Alice in Chains, he was soon welcomed into the city's flourishing grunge scene by fellow musicians and the audience alike, and Pearl Jam quickly gained local and global popularity.

Figure 4. A candid photograph of Cornell and Vedder of Temple of the Dog, photographed by Marty Temme, 1991, Hollywood, California (Tonedeaf 2017).

All these bands were growing locally in Seattle, but it was with the release of Nirvana's second album entitled *Nevermind* in the year 1991 that grunge was launched into the mainstream and took its first step into becoming part of the pop culture of the '90s. *Nevermind* gained national and worldwide success and made grunge accessible to a broader audience of listeners. With the growing popularity of Nirvana in the American music industry, other grunge bands from Seattle were caught in its trail, particularly Soundgarden, Pearl Jam, and Alice in Chains. These four bands came to be known as Seattle's "Big 4" (Tow 2011, 187). The year 1991 was thus the time in which the music explosion in Seattle known as *grungemania* took place (ibid.). The new genre that was created and defined by these bands in the late '80s and early '90s came to be known as "the Seattle sound." Ever since, the meaning of grunge became inseparable with the city of Seattle. It still is.

Following the success of records like Facelift, Nevermind, and Ten, the early '90s saw the publication of other iconic grunge albums, like Alice in Chains' *Dirt* in 1992, Nirvana's *In Utero* in 1993, and Soundgarden's *Superunknown* in 1994. The grunge movement was indeed thriving in the early '90s, and bands linked to it had an undisputed spot at the top of the charts. To illustrate, the music videos of grunge singles like Pearl Jam's *Jeremy* (1992) and Soundgarden's Black Hole Sun (1994) were often heavily featured on MTV daily programming, which, in a pre-YouTube era, allowed bands to gain large exposure and popularity (de Sola 2015, 148).

But despite this success, the history of grunge and Seattle's Big 4 is also tainted with sorrow and heartache. The first big blow the grunge scene had to face was the death of Mother Love Bone's Andrew Wood in 1990, and four years later, on April 5, 1994, Nirvana's frontman Kurt Cobain passed away in his home in Seattle, aged 27. Many claim that grunge died with Kurt Cobain (Browne et al. 2019), but despite the anguish felt by fans and musicians alike, grunge continued to grow during the mid-to-late 1990s after his death. The grunge movement may have been weakened by losing one of its key figures both in the Seattle scene and in the global mainstream, but the genre lived on.

The grunge scene would continue to be affected by the loss of those who led the movement. On the 8th anniversary of Cobain's passing in 2002, Layne Staley from Alice in Chains was found dead at 34, also in Seattle. Both musicians had struggled with depression and drug addiction throughout their lives, which was itself an unfortunate consequence of Seattle's drug culture of the 1990s and the ongoing opioids crisis in the United States. Over a decade afterwards, in 2017, despite years of success with Soundgarden and other musical side-projects, after struggling with substance abuse and severe depression for most of his life, Soundgarden's Chris Cornell passed away at 52. Cornell's death was undoubtedly one of the hardest hits the Seattle's music scene has taken, for he pioneered the invention of grunge from the very beginning.

Grunge has indeed faced grief from upfront, but it is rooted in its history (Tow 2011, 196). One cannot talk about the success of Temple of the Dog without mentioning the tragic death of Andrew Wood, or about Alice in Chains' lyrics without considering the constant battle against drugs Layne Staley (and other band members) went through [1]. There is angst in its honest lyrics, its loud and heavy music, and in the heritage it has left behind.

Grunge as Popular Music Heritage

During the first half of the 1990s, the music industry and media outlets put a spotlight on grunge. The genre was constantly dubbed as "the Seattle sound" on all traditional media, and the city was thus dragged into the main focus with the growing national success of bands like Nirvana and Soundgarden (Tow 2011, 193). Seattle would be flooded with waves of media, like MTV, the New York Times, and People magazine, with the intention of capturing the essence of the Seattle sound and offering an authentic experience of the genre at its very core (ibid.). This meant that other local bands, many of which were signed with Sub Pop Records, gained exposure at a national level that would not have been possible if it was not for the jump of grunge into the mainstream. At the time, Nirvana's album Nevermind (1991) was steadily topping the charts and shaking the foundations of the music industry with popular songs like *Smells Like Teen Spirit* from 1991 to 1992 (Browne et al. 2019). Unbeknownst to the members of the band, *Smells Like Teen Spirit* would become one of the biggest and most iconic songs of the '90s, the undisputed rock anthem of a new generation. And next to Nirvana in the charts were Pearl Jam, Soundgarden, and Alice in Chains. There was a new soundtrack of the 1990s, and it was composed by Seattle's Big 4.

Styles

Grunge: A Success Story

Slime. Sludge. It could have been any word like that. But grunge stuck. Now it's written everywhere.

Figure 5. Newspaper scan. Rick Marin, Grunge: A Success Story, New York Times, 1992, New York City, New York Times Archives.

Popular and mainstream music allows every generation to identify as "being part of a particular decade" (van der Hoeven 2014, 317). Every generation is influenced and able to relate to a different kind of style than others in the past (ibid.). If we look at music trends in the decades prior to the emergence of grunge, we find genres like rock from the '60s, disco from the '70s, and glam rock and metal from the '80s. In this context, the grunge explosion is drawn to the generation that grew up in the '90s, which ranged from pre-teens to young adults. There are some who argue that the bond between grunge and those born during the 1960s–1980s is influenced by the disconnection between pop music at the time and the struggles of their everyday lives (Tow 2011, 187). And maybe it was. Grunge was loud and heavy, and from a lyrical point of view, songs were much more sincere about the real life struggles of young adults than what pop music of the '90s offered. Grunge was thus not only innovative, but relatable.

The ties between grunge music and a generation of young adults born in the 1970s and 1980s weigh heavily in the making of grunge heritage, as well as the importance of the genre at a local scale in the region of the American Pacific Northwest. Because they shape the image of collective identities, both popular and rock music have become part of cultural heritage discourses for decades (van der Hoeven 2014, 317). The traditions and memories associated with specific music scenes are therefore preserved as cultural heritage (ibid.). Within this frame of reference, the grunge genre, namely the Seattle rock music scene of the time, and the subculture born out of it belong to the same discourse.

From the perspective of heritage studies, music has been subject of analysis and research, being a fundamental human expression across diverse societies. This includes popular music as well as rock music. Heritage is seen as a source of identity, and its value is given by communities, people, and institutions (Brandellero and Janssen 2014, 224). The different traces from the past that are considered cultural heritage often fall under two categories: tangible or intangible. Tangible cultural heritage refers to either movable or immovable physical remains of the past, while intangible cultural heritage refers to cultural expressions and traditions inherited from the past generations.

Music is commonly interpreted and categorised as intangible cultural heritage. For instance, in the year 2018, the reggae music from Jamaica has been added to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity for its vast importance to the people of Jamaica and their history. However, in the article *Talkin 'bout my generation: popular music and the culture of heritage* (2014), Les Roberts argues that although music is intangible by definition, there are tangible aspects about it that are worth being taken into consideration from the perspective of heritage studies (p. 272). Material environments like music venues, festivals, galleries, the media through which music is produced and consumed, including musical instruments, radio, television, portable media and record players, and memorabilia like album covers, concert tickets, autographs, photographs, among others, fall under the tangible heritage category and are to be recognised as such (ibid.).

Given what has been stated by Roberts (2014), and as is the case of popular music, Seattle's grunge falls under both categories as well. On one hand, by definition, we have the intangible heritage characteristic of music as a cultural expression, which in this context refers to the sound that was born out of the fusion of elements of punk and heavy metal in Seattle's music scene in the late '80s

and early ‘90s. On the other hand, we have all the materials that have been dubbed as tangible heritage of the movement, like the Black Dog Forge venue, which served as a practice studio for many local bands during the grunge explosion, including Soundgarden and Pearl Jam. Physical copies of cassettes and albums, guitar picks, and autographs from grunge bands and musicians that date back to the ‘80s and ‘90s also fall under this category. Due to their historical value as remains from the past, these items and materials are brought into museums and archives for their professional preservation (Roberts 2014, 271) and, thus, taking an active and important part in the “heritagisation” of music (Leonard 2014, 358).

Preserving Grunge in Seattle

Following the discourse of popular and rock music as cultural heritage, having both tangible and intangible aspects related to it, many questions regarding its care and safeguarding appear. As mentioned above, in terms of preservation, museums and archives become important actors of heritage. Archives, regardless of their official or unofficial status, act as a way to document cultural products (Khabra 2014, 346). If it was not for people who actively seek to collect, record, and preserve popular music information through settled or personal archives, a lot of important memorabilia, written texts, and documents would easily be lost or forgotten. Likewise, museums also play a crucial role in the conservation of materials related to popular music and their subsequent interpretation for the public (Leonard 2014, 358). Through temporal or permanent displays and exhibitions, museums have gathered sounds, images, information, and artifacts “in order to communicate ideas about musical past and to offer interpretations of history” (ibid.). We can thus infer that caring for music heritage is not the work of one but several actors of heritage, and it is through their combined efforts that the massive loss of music history and heritage has been avoided.

In terms of grunge heritage, the Museum of Pop Culture (MoPOP) in Seattle plays an important role in the preservation of the city’s popular music heritage. Originally known as *Experience Music Project*, MoPOP opened its doors in the year 2000, founded by Microsoft’s Paul Allen with the intention of building an institution “for the rock fan, by a rock fan” (Fairchild 2018, 481). The museum presents themes and numerous exhibitions regarding contemporary popular culture, but also offers a series of music exhibits throughout the years, seeking to link the past to the present (Fairchild 2018, 482). Not only does the popular and local music of the Pacific Northwest have a

place in the museum, but the grunge scene of the 1980s and 1990s is also on display as a contribution to rock and roll history (Reissing 2001, 502). Often featured in these exhibits are musical instruments, personal artifacts, handwritten notes and lyrics, photographs, and articles of the time, among others depending on the exhibit in question. By displaying these artifacts and materials, museums seek to bring to life an intangible aural history and personal, cultural, and collective memory (Baker et al. 2016, 79).

Figure 6. Two photographs of Nirvana: Taking Punk to the Masses at Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, @MoPOP official Twitter account, 2017, Twitter post.

As of 2022, the museum offers two large exhibitions about two bands from Seattle's Big 4 that have contributed to the making of grunge: Nirvana and Pearl Jam. First opened in 2011, *Nirvana: Taking Punk to the Masses* is the world's largest exhibition of memorabilia to celebrate the history and legacy of Nirvana and honour the memory of Kurt Cobain. The exhibition consists of over 200 artifacts, including personal items and musical instruments of members of the band, photographic materials, as well as over 50 oral history interviews about the band, which has been updated in the year 2018 when it reopened in Seattle after a nine-month tour in Brazil. This is one of MoPOP's largest and most acclaimed exhibitions (Fairchild 2018, 481).

Likewise, *Pearl Jam: Home and Away* presents the history of Pearl Jam from its birth in 1990 all the way to the present day and shines a light on the early success of the band. This exhibition opened in 2018, and as is the case with *Nirvana: Taking Punk to the Masses*, it features a cornucopia of artifacts and memorabilia from Pearl Jam. Many of these items come directly from the band's warehouse in Seattle. The exhibition is full of nostalgic and memorable artifacts that are relevant to the band's history, including personal items from the pre-Pearl Jam era. In 2020, MoPOP made

the exhibition available as a virtual 3D tour, offering people all over the world to have an online experience of the exhibition.

Figure 7. Two photographs of Pearl Jam: Home and Away at the Museum of Pop Culture. Left: the band's logo on exhibit. Right: Mark Walker, Andrew Wood bronze sculpture. Photographs by Jim Bennet, MoPOP, 2018, Seattle (HeraldNet 2018).

In addition to these two exhibitions in the Museum of Pop Culture, the heritage of grunge is also present in the monuments and memorials erected in the city to remember its icons and the legacy they built. The legacy of Chris Cornell, who has often been referred to as "Seattle's son", is commemorated with a real-life bronze statue made by Nick Marra. The public statue is located outside of MoPOP, and was commissioned by Cornell's surviving wife, who then donated it to the museum. The bronze statue was unveiled in the year 2018, and MoPOP used this occasion to celebrate the legacy of the artist by screening a special Soundgarden live concert in the museum.

The heritage of grunge is not only found through official media. Unofficial sites around Seattle have been dubbed by fans as grunge sites because of their association with the history of the movement and of Cornell's life. The earlier mentioned Sound Garden art sculpture at the Magnuson Park, as well as Isamu Noguchi's Black Sun in the Volunteer Park in Seattle have been sites where grunge fans often visit to honour and remember Cornell's memory. On the anniversary of his death, many remember him by visiting these sites around Seattle and leaving presents behind, such as flowers, handwritten notes, and numerous tokens.

Figure 8. Nick Marra, Chris Cornell's bronze statue located outside the museum, photograph by MoPOP, 2018, Seattle (SeattleWeekly 2018).

Along the lines of unofficial sites, one of the two benches in the Viretta Park in Seattle has been used as a "rock shrine" in the memory of Kurt Cobain for years (see figure 9). Cobain's former home was located north of the park, and he used to frequent the place. For over two decades, fans have visited the park and used the bench as an unofficial public memorial site to remember Cobain and the legacy left behind. The bench is often full of scribbles, notes, packs of cigarettes, among other items, and is often visited on the anniversary of the singer's passing. In terms of official memorials, the Kurt Cobain Memorial Park can be found in Aberdeen, Washington, which was the musician's hometown.

Figure 9. Photograph of the Viretta Park bench turned into a Kurt Cobain Shrine. JohnWad. 2018, Reddit Post.

Although not in the form of a physical monument, the memory of Alice in Chains' frontman Layne Staley is honoured by the city of Seattle. Since 2019, Seattle has celebrated "Layne Staley Day" on August 22nd, the day the musician was born. In addition to paying tribute to Staley's contribution to local music and the grunge movement, the Layne Staley Day also brings awareness to the Layne Staley Memorial Fund, which offers education, support, and treatment funds for heroin and opioid addicts in Seattle and especially in the city's music community (Layney Staley Memorial Fund n.d.).

At last, there are several tours and projects to promote and offer creative ways to discover and visit important grunge sites around Seattle. Because of the modern link between heritage practices and tourism, heritage can be found and experienced in physical spaces (Strong et al. 2017, 85). Along these lines, the global and cultural reach of popular music amplifies the touristic possibilities of

music heritage sites. As I have been discussing throughout this essay, since the grunge movement saw its birth and growth in Seattle, several places around the city that have become intertwined with the history of grunge and are tourist attractions for grunge fans from the entire globe.

For instance, the *Stalking Seattle* sightseeing tour covers the former houses and apartments where many grunge musicians used to live, including Mother Love Bone's Andrew Wood, many of the most influential and important local clubs, record studios, and venues where the Seattle rock scene saw the birth of grunge, as well as a visit to the Museum of Pop Culture and the previously mentioned unofficial memorial sites.

Figure 10. Grunge heritage mural in Seattle. Left: Son Suong, Chris Cornell mural. Right: Jeff Ament, Mother Love Bone mural. Photographs by Chona Kasinger, 2019, Seattle (Curbed Seattle 2019).

In West Seattle, the Easy Street Records café and shop is often a tourist attraction for grunge fans to visit, for Pearl Jam's bassist painted a Mother Love Bone mural outside the store. More grunge icons, including late Chris Cornell have been added to this mural (see figure 10). Another unofficial site in Seattle that has become a tourist destination for grunge fans is the West Point Light lighthouse in the Discovery Park, where the video for Temple of Dog's single *Hunger Strike* was

filmed in 1991, featuring Chris Cornell and Eddie Vedder (see figure 11.). The lighthouse is a national landmark, included in the National Register of Historic Places since 1977.

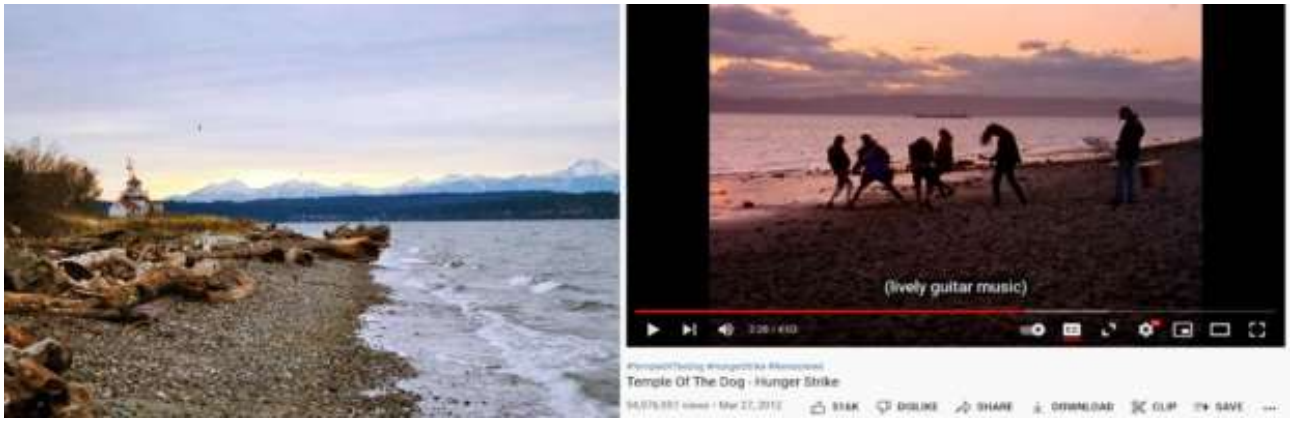


Figure 11. Left: A photograph of the Discovery Park landscape, Friends of Discovery Park, 2017, Seattle. (TCLF) Right: screenshot of Temple of the Dog's video Hunger Strike featuring its band members, Temple Of The Dog, 2012, YouTube video.

Popular music heritage is embodied in spaces and sites where visitors can relate and connect to music and memory (Roberts 2014, 276). In Seattle, these music heritage sites can be found in interactive environments such as museums and music venues, in memorial sites, be they official or not, and in spaces that were once meaningful and vital to the Seattle music scene of the '80s '90s. Therefore, in this context, music heritage becomes a physical and emotional experience full of personal, and often, nostalgic meanings (van der Hoeven 2014, 329).

Conclusion

In brief, the grunge movement was started in the mid-1980s within the underground Seattle music scene. The movement was led by a handful of local bands like Mudhoney, Soundgarden, and Mother Love Bone. As a music genre, grunge was a fusion of elements from punk and heavy metal music, characterised by lyrics loaded with angst and real-life experiences that were relatable to a generation of teenagers and young adults. The grunge scene began to grow thanks to the record label Sub Pop Records and saw its peak in Seattle at the turn of the decade, with Seattle-based bands Soundgarden, Nirvana, Alice in Chains, and Pearl Jam gaining popularity both locally and nation-wide. These bands were soon known as Seattle's Big 4. In the early 1990s, it was Nirvana's second album *Nevermind* that launched grunge and the bands involved in the movement into the

mainstream. Consequently, grunge became a major part of popular music from the ‘90s and earned the nickname of “the Seattle sound.”

Because of the great value given by a certain community, popular music heritage is seen and studied as cultural heritage. Notedly, this includes not only “pop” music, but other genres that have occupied a space in the landscape of mainstream at a time, including grunge. In this context, popular musical heritage has elements that make it possible to view it as both tangible and intangible heritage. Musical heritage itself is intangible, for it conveys a series of cultural expressions and representations linked to personal and collective memory. At the same time, because of the artifacts and materials associated with it, the heritage of music therefore is also tangible.

The heritage of grunge is uniquely intertwined with Seattle, and vice versa. Grunge shares a one-of-a-kind bond with the city, where its heritage lives in the form of commemorative dates dedicated to pioneers of the genre, as well as official and unofficial sites around the city. From the Museum of Popular Music, where permanent exhibitions celebrate the contributions to rock history by Seattle-based bands, including the Nirvana and Pearl Jam exclusive exhibitions, to erected monuments, memorials, among other heritage sites where people are able to connect to the history and memory of the movement, grunge is present in the city. Although many of the iconic musicians that were the face of grunge have unfortunately passed away, their lives and all their contributions to music are forever remembered and celebrated in Seattle.

It is interesting to think how Seattle will keep preserving the heritage of grunge in the future. There have been calls to, for instance, officially rename the Viretta Park into “Kurt’s Park” and preserve the bench that fans have turned into a rock shrine, due to the meaning it holds for the local community and the grunge scene. Another question that comes to mind is how Seattle will keep remembering Chris Cornell’s legacy in the upcoming years. While a public bronze statue of Chris Cornell is located outside of the Museum of Pop Culture and there are several unofficial places to visit in his name, his music and art contributed not only to the grunge movement in Seattle but to the history of rock and roll. Certainly, MoPOP could soon be unveiling a new exhibition dedicated solely to “Seattle’s son” and the legacy he built.

For now, one thing is certain: if Seattle does have a sound, it is grunge.

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Notes

[1] In Alice in Chains’ 1992 album *Dirt*, the songs “*Sickman*”, “*Junkhead*” and “*God Smack*” center around heroin use.