

POP-PUNK PERSISTS

Carly Tagen-Dye

Originally published in *Heart Eyes Magazine*, Issue 15, October 2019

Time hasn't always been kind to pop-punk, the genre that defined a good amount of my generation's coming of age. Today, the kids with the fluorescent dyed hair and eyebrow piercings have grown up, the mad rushes to Hot Topic have greatly decreased, and the bands that once reigned supreme have somewhat fallen under the radar. With 2019 bringing a Brendon Urie/Taylor Swift collaboration, as well as an official end to Warped Tour, one would think it's safe to say that this genre is a goner.

Growing up, I watched pop-punk from afar. Though I tried, I could never *really* get into the bands that I saw scribbled on my peers' notebooks in middle school or jam out like my friends did when My Chemical Romance or All Time Low came on the radio. I had a brief phase with Twenty One Pilots, and spent a summer dabbling with Panic! at the Disco's *Pretty. Odd.*, but I could never honestly call the scene home from the start. I was a hesitant visitor into this weird and wonderful world. Though nice, it now feels like nothing more than that.

So, it was definitely surprising when I began to really appreciate pop-punk and watch it thrive this summer, many years after its supposed peak.

While staple pop-punk artists are still making new content (see blink-182 or supergroups like Frank Iero and the Future Violents), there's a new generation emerging who are keeping the movement alive. Take "I Think I'm OKAY," a single from Machine Gun Kelly's latest album "Hotel Diablo": it was my first real encounter with the rapper, but also with one of the newest faces of the alternative scene, Yungblud. His eyeliner and jet black locks scream early 2000's Gerard Way, while his voice is racked with the atmosphere and angst recognizable in Way's earlier albums. Other acts, like PUP and Chief State, bring the attitude that was once so prominent on FM stations: their new-age take on breakneck drums, vocals that seem more akin to screeching, and lyrics that transform into declarations bring pop-punk archetypes back from the dead.

Like the lyrics, the subject matter of these songs also strikes a chord. Words like "You don't get me high anymore," and "I hurt myself sometimes, is that too scary for you?" will always mean something, no matter who sings them or when. Pop-punk is typically regarded as especially emotional, and that remains true with this new era: these are songs that speak to paranoia and mental health, anger, and understanding (on top of a range of other topics). That characteristic teenage angst eventually becomes adult frustration. The hopes and fears expressed and realized in these songs, however, still remain the same. They are available for anyone who might be searching for their own place in the world, no matter how old they are. As someone who is, this is comforting to see.

That timeless sentiment has also made it clear that pop-punk is still alive in its fans - even if they've "grown up." I've worked at a concert venue for the last two years, and I've seen firsthand that people will do almost anything for the bands that they love. It's a familiar feeling, but solely within the context of my own experience. I had a very interesting conversation with a kid at a blink-182 show recently who told me that he'd waited ten years for that night. This was *his band*; their music had gotten him through some of the most harrowing years of his life. Of course he'd wait.

It was a simple statement, but enough to start a spark. I've since gone back and revisited songs like "Missing You" and "The Kids Aren't Alright," more than inspired by the meaning that lies

beneath the surface. I've hit replay on the music videos for "I Think I'm OKAY" and "Car Radio" more times in the last few months than I can count. There are many similarities within the jerky camera movements and footage of packed venues, but the smiles of both the artists and the fans share the most striking resemblance. That is one thing that doesn't change.

Getting to meet those fans personally, however, takes the emotionality of this music farther than just records and videos. Greeting people decked out in their old band t-shirts and hearing their stories, watching them line up to catch bands like Neck Deep or Waterparks on a scorching summer day...it put a human face to the craze that I now understand better.

I'm not a pop-punk expert. From my perspective on the outside, however, I can see that this genre isn't going anywhere. It's lodged in the vocals of the new bands on the rise and is cemented in place by the old ones. It's on the faces of fans who will do anything to catch a glimpse of their teenage idols, and to scream the lyrics that have helped them out of their darkest depths. That goes for any genre, I guess. However, if I have come to appreciate anything about pop-punk, it's that it is persistent. For music that has stuck with and helped so many people, it's not time to say goodbye just yet.